Working-class women, local networks and philanthropy.

Charity in the Women's Co-operative Guild in 1890s London.

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Table of Contents

Abstract

This dissertation uses a combination of prosopography and traditional archival research techniques to re-examine aspects of working-class women's history from the perspective of the Women's Co-operative Guild members. With a focus on the branch secretary at local level in the London branches of the 1890s, themes of neighbourhood, mutual help, and charity towards each other and their community emerge. The resulting analysis of their charitable work advances our understanding of the impact of working women in public life beyond the traditional narrative of political activism.

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List of tables and figures

Introduction

The Women's Co-operative Guild (WCG) started in 1888 as an auxiliary of the consumer-led Co-operative movement. Its membership had grown to over 18,000 members by its twenty-first anniversary in 1904,[1] making it strongly placed to promote the interests of its predominantly working-class members. The Guild is remembered by historians, primarily for its campaigns for maternal health, its promotion of women into public roles such as Poor Law Guardian, and its leaders, who have been the subject of a number of monographs.[2] However, in-depth scholarship of the rank and file membership, mainly characterised as working-class married women, has been neglected. This dissertation undertakes more detailed research into the everyday Guild life of the early members, for two main reasons: firstly, to expand existing scholarship on the WCG as an important feminist organisation, bringing to the fore previously unexplored aspects of Guild work and culture; secondly, to contribute to the history of Victorian working-class women who are still largely under-researched. The records of the Guild are a primary source of evidence for the lives of these working-class women, providing an opportunity to gain insight at a level of detail rarely found outside oral histories and the notebooks of the social investigator. A prosopography based on these records has created a group biography of the lowest level official of the organisation, the branch secretary in 1890s London. From this, a detailed picture emerges of the women and their personal circumstances. These biographical records, combined with Guild sources, and additional sources from other organisations, give a picture of working-

[1] Gillian Scott, *Feminism and the Politics of Working Women: The Women's Co-Operative Guild, 1880s to the Second World War* (London: UCL Press, 1998), p. vii.
[2] Ibid.; Naomi Black, Social Feminism (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989); Barbara Blaszak, *The Matriarchs of England's Cooperative Movement: A Study in Gender Politics and Female Leadership, 1883-1921* (London: Greenwood Press, 2000); Ruth Cohen, *Margaret Llewelyn Davies: With Women for a New World* (Dagenham: Merlin Press, 2020).

class women in public life beyond the expected political and activist campaigning.[3] Themes with which we are familiar from social and cultural histories of this group, such as female self-help networks and friendship emerge within their public Guild work, with the addition of a new dimension of participation in philanthropy. These will be explored through a focus on case studies of two very different types of branch. First those struggling to succeed within poorer neighbourhoods of London which operate from settlements, focussing on the interrelated networks of religion, philanthropy and the Co-operative movement and how these interplay with Guild work and the women working in the branches. The second, located in the artisan worker area of Plumstead, were working within an established Co-operative area, allowing women to move with confidence into charitable and philanthropic work alongside politics and Co-operative propaganda. Although facing different challenges, in both cases the women working together in the branches and within their neighbourhoods rely on female self-help networks and friendship, and become involved in more traditionally middle class philanthropic work. This gives us a valuable new perspective on women's history of this time, where stereotypically we have come to expect to see public roles for women divided into middle-class women as philanthropists and working-class women involved in organised labour. This study draws out these themes in preference to the Guild's better-known political work in order to reveal an aspect of their history which has been largely unexplored.

[3] This dissertation was completed during the Covid-19 pandemic. Amongst other issues, the full closure of archives, libraries and other university spaces, resulted in several months of extremely limited access to primary and secondary sources, many of which were not available online. At the date of submission this access was still limited and, in many cases, not restored.

Historiography

A recurring theme in scholarship around women's history in general, and the Guild specifically, is a lack of close study of the membership in favour of the (often middle class) leaders. Reasons for this include the availability and type of sources, and public interest. One consequence of this is that—for a less well-known organisation such as the Guild—there are few monographs, and these concern the broad history of the organisation, creating a 'foundation' on which more focused scholarship can build. The primary historian is Gillian Scott, whose *Feminism and the Politics of Working Women* examines the Guild's history during the tenure of General Secretaries Margaret Llewelyn Davies and Eleanor Barton. Its primary focus is the Guild as a political organisation and does not focus in detail on the social or cultural life of the membership. Due to her interest in the leadership Scott uses almost exclusively Guild publications and the writings and personal papers of Davies. Additional publications such as *Maternity*[4] and *Life as we have known It*,[5] although based on personal accounts by Guild officials, were both edited by Davies and so give us both working women's testimonies but also the editorial viewpoint of Davies. This assessment is echoed in Shelia Lewenhak's criticism of Scott's approach in her review of the book, commenting that the focus on the two main leaders creates a lack of analysis of the interests of the 'grass roots' membership.[6]

[4] M. L. Davies ed., *Maternity: Letters from Working-Women* (London: G Bell and Sons, 1915).
[5] M. L. Davies and V. Woolf, *Life as We Have Known It* (London: Virago, 1931).
[6] S. Lewenhak, 'Review of Feminism and the Politics of Working Women. The Women's Co-Operative Guild, 1880s to the Second World War. Gill Scott', *International Review of Social History* 44:3 (1999), 487–490 (p. 488) <https://www.jstor.org/stable/44582542> [accessed 17 January 2019].

Barbara Blaszak[7] is interested in the leaders of the Guild, their struggles with the patriarchal Co-operative movement and the subsequent effect of gender politics. Blaszak relies primarily on the 'Woman's Corner' of *The Co-operative News* as her primary source, which she correctly identifies as the closest to member experience in the 'absence of surviving private papers'.[8] However, this inevitably narrows her perspective; the source itself and what is says about the Guild's place in the movement becomes the focus of her work, looking at gender and space within the *Co-operative News,* in the context of feminist geography. Other scholarship on the Guild tends to be concerned with individual figures of note,[9] with one study of the Guild in South Wales being relevant but chiefly concerned with local industrial issues.[10] Co-operative academics on the whole tend to treat the Guild as a separate area of study[11] and have been content to note Guild involvement without detailed reference to their influence as women within the movement.[12]

This reliance on 'official' Guild sources, largely under the control of Margaret Llewelyn Davies, has resulted in a public representation of the Guild members that contains several omissions and a curious contradiction. Davies's mission for the Guild was to steer it away

[7] Blaszak, *The Matriarchs of England's Cooperative Movement*.
[8] Ibid., p. 22.
[9] Caroline M. Tilghman, 'Autobiography as Dissidence: Subjectivity, Sexuality, and the Women's Co-Operative Guild', *Biography* 26:4 (2003), 583–606 <http://muse.jhu.edu/content/crossref/journals/biography/v026/26.4tilghman.html> [accessed 29 April 2019]; Victoria Middleton, 'In the "Woman's Corner": The World of Lydia Lawrence', *Journal of Modern Literature* 13:2 (1986), 267–288, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3831495> [accessed 25 June 2019]; B. Blaszak, 'Martha Jane Bury (1851-1913): A Case-Study of Class Identity', *Labour History Review* 67:2 (August 2002), 131–148, <https://online.liverpooluniversitypress.co.uk/doi/10.3828/lhr.67.2.131> [accessed 29 April 2019].
[10] Helen Thomas, '"A Democracy of Working Women": The Women's Co-Operative Guild in South Wales, 1891-1939', *Llafur: The Journal of the Society for the Study of Welsh Labour History* 11:1 (2012), 149–169
[11] One exception is this edited volume which includes two chapters on women in the movement, S. Yeo, ed., *New Views of Co-Operation*, (London: Routledge 1988).
[12] Peter Gurney, *Co-Operative Culture and the Politics of Consumption in England, 1870-1930* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996); Nicole Robertson, *The Co-Operative Movement and Communities in Britain, 1914-1960: Minding Their Own Business* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010).

from traditional 'Mothers' Meeting'-style groups, explicitly discouraging time spent on charity in favour of educational and political work. Under her direction, the organisation mainly promoted the fitness of women for roles in public life. However, simultaneously, the Guild was campaigning for women's rights and improvements to state support, inevitably emphasising the plight of the working classes and—more specifically—portraying working-class women as broken down and needing help to raise their families and manage their homes, using the testimony of its own members to powerful effect. These two ideas of the Guild woman, both one dimensional in their own way, belie the complex reality of day to day branch work and individual agency in the lives of members who had identities beyond that of Guildswoman. When we revisit sources that discuss Guild work, there is education and political activism, but there is also a substantial amount of charitable action; both towards other Guild members and participation in organised charity, which extends the public work of the Guildswomen in an unexpected direction. A further review of other relevant historiography will suggest further focus for the research in hand and its significance as more than just a subset of Guild or Co-operative history, but a contribution to histories of women, working classes, London and philanthropy in the nineteenth century.

Guild scholarship as a subset of women's history has followed a similar arc to that outlined by June Purvis in 2018, with the 'Digital turn' being the most recent, and in many ways most revolutionary development, Purvis commenting that this 'widening access to sources in British women's history must be welcomed'.[13] In *The Emmet's Inch: Small History in a Digital Age* Julia Laite suggests that

[13] J. Purvis, '"A Glass Half Full"? Women's History in the UK', *Women's History Review* 27:1 (January 2018), 88–108 (p. 94) <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/09612025.2016.1250544> [accessed 10 June 2019].

> With digitized historical records now numbering in the billions, and with increasing sophistication of search technologies and machine learning, we have more and more ability to know the lives of individuals in history, even those who were humble, marginal, and obscure.[14]

This exemplifies what is possible when we re-visit sources using the modern tools available. This dissertation seeks to use these techniques to extend accepted histories of Guildswomen.

Working-class history was the focus of the 1970s development of 'history from below', which resulted in a number of new surveys of the working classes in London based on analysis of data sets such as *Decennial Census Returns for London* and *Annual Reports of the Registrar-General*.[15] However, these were limited to aggregate data, partly due to the legal restrictions on the census.[16] They additionally tended to focus on men as the economic head of the household and the person described in the census who can be categorised and compared with sources such as Booth,[17] leaving women under analysed in these important works. Where women's history has been much more developed, it is largely in the context of oral history, and the emerging themes of concepts of community and neighbourliness are

[14] J. Laite, 'The Emmet's Inch: Small History in a Digital Age', *Journal of Social History* (February 2019), 1-27 (p. 2) <https://academic.oup.com/jsh/advance-article/doi/10.1093/jsh/shy118/5315914> [accessed 27 May 2019].
[15] Key examples of which are G. S. Jones, *Outcast London: A Study in the Relationship between Classes in Victorian Society*, reprint, A Peregrine Book (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984); G. Crossick, *An Artisan Elite in Victorian Society: Kentish London, 1840-1880* (London: Croom Helm, 1978).
[16] Census records are embargoed up to one hundred years meaning that work in the 1970s could only look at individual records from the 1870s and before, with the first significant national census as we know them only starting in the 1840s.
[17] C. Booth, *Life and Labour of the People in London*, *Series 1-3* (London: Macmillan, 1902).

important to theories around working classes of the late Victorian era. Key works based in oral history, by Elizabeth Roberts[18], Ellen Ross[19] and Anna Davin[20] all find evidence of unofficial networks of help and neighbourliness, although we need to be alert to the risks of these memories being amplified by nostalgia into a false remembrance of community in the reminiscences of later oral histories.[21] Other historians such as Joanna Bourke[22] and Melanie Tebbutt[23] identify community and shared working-class identity as a much more fragmented concept with friendship a very different, rarer concept than neighbourliness. Tebbutt reduces the extent of a neighbourhood to the street where you lived rather than the broader area, and Bourke identifies community less as a geographical concept than a cultural one. An underdeveloped theme of interest in women joining the Guild was friendship. Caine's *Friendship. A History,*[24] outlines the popular usage of the word and the notion that the working classes were not able to have friendships on the same intimate terms as other classes due to lack of domestic space. In this concept, the public clubs and groups, such as the Guild, were important environments for working-class women to meet and interact. This study finds evidence that supports these ideas with the identities of these

[18] Elizabeth Roberts, *A Woman's Place: An Oral History of Working-Class Women 1890-1940* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1984).
[19] Ellen Ross, 'Survival Networks: Women's Neighbourhood Sharing in London before World War I', *History Workshop* 15 (1983), 4–27, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4288457> [accessed 27 May 2019]; Ellen Ross, *Love and Toil: Motherhood in Outcast London, 1870-1918* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).
[20] Anna Davin, *Growing up Poor : Home, School and Street in London, 1870-1914* (London: Rivers Oram Press, 1996).
[21] Influential studies by anthropologists in the 1950s and onwards highlight this issue; R. Firth and R. Firth, *Two Studies of Kinship in London.* (London: Athlone Press, 1956); M. D. Young and P. Willmott, *Family and Kinship in East London*, 3rd edn (London: Penguin, 2007); J. Lawrence, 'Inventing the "Traditional Working Class": A Re-Analysis of Interview Notes from Young and Willmott's *Family and Kinship in East London*', *The Historical Journal* 59:2 (June 2016), 567–593, <https://www.cambridge.org/core/product/identifier/S0018246X15000515/type/journal_article> [accessed 8 July 2019].
[22] Joanna Bourke, *Working Class Cultures in Britain, 1890-1960: Gender, Class, and Ethnicity*, (London: Routledge, 1994).
[23] Melanie Tebbutt, *Women's Talk? A Social History of 'gossip' in Working-Class Neighbourhoods, 1880-1960* (Aldershot: Scolar, 1995).
[24] Barbara Caine, ed., *Friendship: A History*, Critical Histories of Subjectivity and Culture (London: Equinox, 2009).

women as co-operator and Guildswoman, in addition to working-class wife and mother, gaining importance. The Guild branch work created female communities within communities, contributing to the debate around what constituted a working-class neighbourhood and what—if anything—gave the working classes a sense of common identity.

A final key theme is that of philanthropy. In the Victorian era this was largely provided 'from above' with organised, professional bodies proliferating. Academics have not traditionally viewed the working classes as protagonists but rather, subjects of charity. Important work has focussed on the middle classes, partly—as Prochaska admits[25]—because it is difficult to do a systematic survey of working-class involvement, although it undoubtedly existed, both at individual level with working-class women workers within religious organisations and as organised giving via Friendly Societies and the Co-operative itself.[26] In her survey of middle-class *Independent women,* Vicinus mentions the Guild only in passing as in existence at the settlements.[27] Another area of dispensing charity is through visiting, but a survey of visiting cultures in hospitals and institutions[28] does not cover working-class organisations in any detail. Even historians who have made a study of women's contributions to social work and

[25] F. K. Prochaska, *Women and Philanthropy in Nineteenth-Century England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), pp. 42–43, <http://archive.org/details/womenphilanthrop0000proc> [accessed 2 June 2020].
[26] Both of these works concentrate on the male organisational support for members and participation in charitable work N. Robertson, 'Collective Strength and Mutual Aid: Financial Provisions for Members of Co-Operative Societies in Britain', *Business History*, 54:6 (October 2012), 925–944, <http://0-search.ebscohost.com.catalogue.libraries.london.ac.uk/login.aspx?direct=true&db=buh&AN=82575191&site=eds-live> [accessed 16 February 2020]; C. J. Prom, 'Friendly Society Discipline and Charity in Late-Victorian and Edwardian England', *The Historian*, 72:4 (2010), 888–908, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24454754> [accessed 26 March 2020].
[27] Martha Vicinus, *Independent Women: Work and Community for Single Women 1850-1920*, (London: Virago, 1985) p. 234.
[28] G. Mooney and J. Reinarz, eds., *Permeable Walls: Historical Perspectives on Hospital and Asylum Visiting*, (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2009).

welfare, such as Jane Lewis, have tended to focus on middle-class women, or the very few working-class women who worked as Poor Law guardians.[29] The Guild in the 1890s became involved in three significant projects that were rooted in philanthropy; The People's Co-operative Society in London, the Sunderland Settlement and the Mrs Ben Jones Convalescent Fund. The first two were outward facing projects to bring Co-operation to the poor, an idea which was discussed at length by the Co-operative and pushed into action by the Guild. The third was a fund created to benefit their own members who were in need of rest or recuperation, and operated for the life of the Guild. All three projects are noted, but given little significance by Guild or Co-operative historians. In addition to these very public, Guild-wide works, we find multiple examples of charitable work at local branch level. The women of the Guild were working in the local community with involvement in formal philanthropic organisations such as the Charity Organisation Society (COS) and local workhouses. There are also examples of charitable funds and action towards their fellow branch members in need. This demonstrates a little discussed working-class expression of participation in charitable work at this time.

These gaps in scholarship prompt a number of questions which this dissertation attempts to answer. What female agency existed beneath the label of wife and mother? As neither very poor nor affluent, where do the women of this movement fit in when they start to occupy the same public, political spaces as middle class women? How does the charitable and philanthropic milieu of London affect them, and become in turn affected by these women

[29] Jane Lewis, 'Gender, the Family and Women's Agency in the Building of "Welfare States": The British Case', *Social History* 19:1 (January 1994), 37–55, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03071029408567891> [accessed 26 February 2020]; Jane Lewis, 'Women, Social Work and Social Welfare in Twentieth-Century Britain : From (Unpaid) Influence to (Paid) Oblivion?', in *Charity, Self-Interest and Welfare in the English Past,* ed. by Martin J. Daunton (London: UCL Press, 1996).

becoming involved in work that was the preserve of the middle and upper classes? What does this reveal about the working-class communities and neighbourhoods with which we have become familiar through the accounts of observers, but rarely through contemporary primary sources?

Sources and methodology

Prosopography is a method of investigating groups of individuals who have a common feature, such a profession, but who do not necessarily know each other.[30] The creation of a 'questionnaire' to systematically interrogate disparate sources means the resultant database can suggest otherwise hidden patterns and connections.[31] It is therefore particularly suitable for study of those who are usually 'hidden' from history due to limited archival presence. The Guild was not a centrally managed organisation, but a volunteer-led, federation of branches. This means that, whilst published material has survived, few local organisational records, such as accounts, minutes and (crucially) membership lists have been preserved in archives. Thanks to their published 'Directory of Branches', however, there remains access to lists of names and addresses of the branch secretary.[32] As the lowest level of official in the Guild, drawn from the branch members, the role of secretary lends itself to systematic study of working women involved with local Guild work. This

[30] L. Stone, 'Prosopography', *Daedalus*, 100:1 (1971); K. S. B. Keats-Rohan, ed., *Prosopography Approaches and Applications: A Handbook*, Prosopographica et Genealogica, v. 13 (Oxford: Unit for Prosopographical Research, University of Oxford, 2007).

[31] Two recent examples using this methodology are Sue Hawkins, *Nursing and Women's Labour in the Nineteenth Century : The Quest for Independence* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010); Midori Yamaguchi, *Daughters of the Anglican Clergy: Religion, Gender and Identity in Victorian England* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

[32] The 'Directory of Branches' was a section of the *Annual Report of the Women's Co-operative Guild* between 1891-1904, although two examples of a standalone directory have been discovered for 1910 and 1923.

record set is limited to 1891-1904, which is the timespan during which branch level directories were published and have survived in the public domain. Although this is a seemingly limited set of data, there are upwards of three hundred women a year in the role nationwide by 1904, making a full survey beyond the resources of this project. To add focus, whilst allowing for data that is varied enough to facilitate meaningful analysis, it was decided to limit the scope temporally to the decade of the 1890s and geographically to the London Metropolitan region as it was defined in Guild literature.[33] This partly recognises that Guild and Co-operative scholarship has often focused on the North East where the movement was at its strongest and more records survive.[34] London was popularly known as a co-operative desert but during this decade it had several areas of success (Stratford, Woolwich and Edmonton), allowing comparisons between the Guild experience within very different socio-economic areas such as the East London slums and relative prosperity of Woolwich. This decade was an important one in the history of London, with rapid development and change in terms of housing, transport and industry, which affected the work of Co-operation and the Guild. In Guild history, 1891 was the start of the General Secretary Margaret Llewelyn Davies' twenty-one year tenure, making the 1890s a decade of importance to the Guild's ultimate structure and work.

The following chapters will examine branch secretary life and work through the prosopography of the women, combined with the local areas and networks within which they worked. Chapters one and two will focus on the public image of the branch secretary,

[33] Often branches that were slightly outside areas we would recognise now as Greater London were grouped within North or South Metropolitan while branch numbers were still growing.
[34] See particularly J. Liddington and J. Norris, *One Hand Tied behind Us: The Rise of the Women's Suffrage Movement* (London: Rivers Oram Press, 2000); J. K. Walton, *Lancashire: A Social History, 1558-1939* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1987).

the reality of the work involved, and what this means in the context of the detailed prosopography findings. Additionally, it places the women in the context of local branch work, where they meet, and the communities in which they work are influential on the work they do. As Guild scholarship has been focussed on the leadership these general findings of the prosopography are important to create a basis for further study. The third chapter examines the work of the Guild in the London charitable sphere and the influence of the settlement movement on the early work of the Guild through the London branch secretaries and their involvement with key settlements and workers. The final chapter uses a micro-study of the Plumstead branch as an opportunity to trace in detail the local networks of the branch members and their charitable work towards each other and within their local area.

Chapter One—'Love of the work should carry her over all obstacles': the branch secretary

The publications and writings of Guild officials, and the campaigns for which they are remembered in the Women's movement, all contribute to our idea of a Guildswoman. We can use these representations to explore what was expected of a branch secretary, and how this compares with the experience of women whom we know performed the role in London. The starting point for this is the Guild's published work which describes the 'membership' constantly but represents them simultaneously as victims in need of help from the state and credible future politicians and leaders. These contradictions, evident within the Guild's own published material, highlight issues with representations of working-class women who were prevented by their material situation and contemporary social conventions from leaving their own written testimonies.[1] This then has a direct effect on the archive and the histories written, perpetuating the notion that the lack of written evidence means an absence of action.

A significant challenge in studying the work of the Guild is to gain insight beyond its carefully constructed image. The leading architect of this image was Margaret Llewelyn Davies, in her capacity of General Secretary between 1889-1921. Davies understood that one of the campaigning strengths of the Guild was that it was composed of a group of women who were easy to define by their socio-economic circumstances. In her 1904 Guild history, Davies summarised the members as follows;

[1] There were few recognised working class writers before the twentieth century. For example, Ethel Carnie Holdsworth was the author of the first working class women's novel *Miss Nobody* in 1913.

> The members who form the Guild are almost entirely married women belonging to the artisan class, and are associated through their husbands and relatives with all the prevailing trades of the localities in which Guild branches are situated. We find husbands of Guild members among weavers, mechanics of every kind, miners, railway men, Co-operative employees, dock labourers, country labourers … .It will thus be seen that the Guild stands for the organised purchasing or consuming power of the working class community of the country. As regards the Guild women themselves … for the greatest number their homes are their workshops.[2]

Davies was at pains, through her writing, to establish the authority of the Guild to speak for, and to improve the lives of, all working-class women. She widens the scope beyond the artisan class to encompass all manual occupations, listing a number of jobs that were not of the artisan sort for contemporaries or historians, i.e. dock labourer. She also firmly relegates her members to the role of wife in the home, despite spending much of her career encouraging them to look outside this role. In subsequent chapters, Davies substantiates her positive narrative of the Guild further. She uses many examples of women whose poor start to life had been counteracted by their 'raising up' and consciousness through their membership of the Guild. The short description above, however, encapsulates the dominant public identity and reinforces the popular conception of the Guildswoman, defined as she is by her relationship to husband and his employment.

[2] Margaret Llewelyn Davies, *The Women's Co-Operative Guild, 1883-1904* (Kirkby Lonsdale: WCG, 1904), p.149.

This strongly defined identity of the members underpinned the authority of the political work by the Guild. Well before their campaigns in support of the Divorce Bill and maternity provision in the pre-war period, the Guild campaigned on a number of labour-based, women's equality issues, both within and outside the Co-operative movement.[3] Throughout the 1890s they were involved in campaigns such as their 'Enquiry into Women's Pay and Conditions in the Co-operative',[4] Anti-credit campaign,[5] a published WCG Policy on Female Employment,[6] and their campaign for the incorporation of laundries into the Factories Act of 1894[7] (a subsequent Factories Bill of 1900 was withdrawn and resubmitted with considerable amendments in response to Guild campaigning).[8] The question of women's emancipation, often described by the Guild as Citizenship, was another area of constant campaigning by the Guild. The opportunities under the Local Government Act of 1894,[9] were seen by Davies as a key opportunity for working women, and the Guild aggressively pursued the election of their members to Poor Law Guardianship and School Boards. In terms of widening the franchise, their position settled with a 1904 official resolution to support universal adult suffrage. Their largely married membership would only gain increased rights by the extension of the franchise to all without a property qualification.

[3] For a more detailed overview of these see Chapter 3, 'Issues and Campaigns: 1883-1918', J. Gaffin and D. Thoms, *Caring & Sharing: The Centenary History of the Co-Operative Women's Guild* (Manchester: Co-operative Union, 1983).
[4] *Women's Co-Operative Guild Tenth Annual Report* (Manchester: Women's Co-operative Guild, 1893), p. 10.
[5] M. Deans, *Credit and High Prices in Co-Operative Stores* (Manchester: Women's Co-operative Guild, 1898).
[6] Co-operative Women's Guild Central Committee, *Report of Investigations into the Conditions of Women's Work, 1895-6.* (London: Women's Co-operative Guild, 1896).
[7] R. Nash, *Reduction of Hours of Work for Women: Some Points in the Time Regulation of the Factory Act.*, 1895 (Manchester: Women's Co-operative Guild, 1895) <https://www.jstor.org/stable/60215041> [accessed 10 July 2019].
[8] Gaffin and Thoms, *Caring & Sharing*, p. 61.
[9] G. Abbott, *How, as Guild Women, Shall We Most Fully Use Our Powers under the New Local Government Act?* (Manchester: Women's Co-operative Guild, 1894) JSTOR <https://www.jstor.org/stable/60225177> [accessed 10 July 2019].

These WCG campaigns to improve the lives of working women, are now often just footnotes to the greater story of women's suffrage in the history of the Women's movement. This is despite a legacy of early feminist achievements by an arguably, well-managed, dynamic organisation of politically engaged women. This may be partly due to the contradictions caused by the publication of autobiographical writing by members, which in many ways have become its defining legacy, and is in contrast to the activist identity. The evocative life writing by Guild members in *Maternity; letters from working women,*[10] is chiefly remembered for harrowing tales of childbirth, child loss and even abortion from the contributors, who were all past or present officials of the Guild. Never out of print, and still available today, it is the most referenced Guild publication, by historians and others, and was used constantly in the Guild's own work. The leading historian of the WCG, Gill Scott summarises the use of such testimony as a 'double edged weapon',

> Potentially, the images thus evoked—of women as passive victims, patiently suffering hardship—were corrosive of the strong, capable and assertive version of working-class womanhood the Guild wished to project. Thus the price of proving need could be negation of agency: these women obviously required help but equally obviously were incapable of helping themselves. It is important, therefore to notice that the Guild inflected this material in ways that buttressed its demands for women's rights, its claims about women's aptitude for public life, and its insistence on the value of autonomous women's organisations.[11]

[10] Davies, *Maternity*.
[11] Scott, *Feminism and the Politics of Working Women*, p. 85.

Here Scott acknowledges the issue but claims that the Guild offsets its, sometimes negative, use of autobiography with its positive work for equality. However, paradoxically, the tool for many of these campaigns was the autobiography that created the weak image.

The writing which portrayed the members as capable administrators and public campaigners was primarily addressed to its own members through the 'Woman's Corner' within the *Co-operative News*, a paper with relatively poor circulation and readership even within the Co-operative movement. Guild-sponsored histories of the movement, whilst not solely aimed at the Co-operative and Guild readership, were dominated by hagiography of the leadership.[12] The combination of autobiography, newspaper reports and organisational histories means that, whilst there is a large body of source material to be mined for anecdotal evidence about the members, there is an absence of systematic studies of the membership at local level. This is partly due to the lack of surviving organisational records, as few early minute books or other documents survive. However, records of the branch secretary, the lowest level official of the Guild, enable us to use prosopographical techniques which yield a surprising level of detail. The thousands of women doing this job were the lynchpin of every branch—no matter how small—were usually drawn from the local membership, making them representative of both branch and neighbourhood.

[12] Davies, *The Women's Co-Operative Guild, 1883-1904*; Catherine Webb, *The Woman with the Basket: The History of the Women's Co-Operative Guild, 1883-1927* (Manchester: Women's Co-operative Guild, 1927); Gaffin and Thoms, *Caring & Sharing*.

The Women's Co-operative Guild as an organisation

To place the branch secretary in context, we need to understand the background of both the WCG and the Co-operative movement of which it was an auxiliary.[13] The position of the Guild in London was one that varied both in number of branches and membership due to a number of factors. By the late nineteenth century, Co-operatives had failed to gain a secure foothold in London, and it has been suggested that the eager early adoption of the Guild in this region, was an attempt by the metropolitan Co-operatives to strengthen the movement.[14] It is true that London dominated the early Guild, partly as a natural result of many of the Central Committee members being based there. However, by 1904 this section had become numerically smaller, due to great advances in the north-western industrial areas of Lancashire and Yorkshire, whist still holding a disproportionate influence on the Central Committee. This diminishment of the south also reflects the status in this region of the Co-operative as a movement. A Guild branch was tied to its local Co-operative Society and, if the store closed, so did the branch. We see the effect of this dependence in the fluctuating number of London branches, sometimes closing from lack of local support, sometimes through consolidation of several struggling branches, with a few strongholds of London co-operation coming to dominate.[15]

By 1904, over 175 different women had worked as branch secretary in the Metropolitan region. These women were spread across 99 distinct branches; some of these branches

[13] See Appendix A for a summary of the organisational structures and their relationship to each other.
[14] B. Blaszak, 'The Women's Cooperative Guild, 1883-1921', *International Social Science Review* 61:2 (1986), 76–86, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41881697> [accessed 16 January 2019].
[15] See Appendix B for an overview of the total London branch list indicating start and end dates for branches.

were stable across the time span in question, some started and stopped within the space of a few years, and still others may have merged into each other, all of which leaves us with a complex set of changes to be understood. Accurate membership reporting in the *Annual Reports* started in 1891, these show that London Guild membership climbed evenly from 394 women in 1891 to 1,378 in 1904. This number will not accurately reflect the total number of women entering and exiting the Guild, as we have no centralised membership records to track this; however, the number of women involved over time will have been much greater than the static count of members in 1904.

Table 1 Branches of the WCG by London area 1891, 1899 and 1904

	1891		1899		1904	
Metropolitan area	**Total members**	**Total branches**	**Total members**	**Total branches**	**Total members**	**Total branches**
East London	102	5	230	8	283	7
North London	64	3	221	6	422	12
South London	102	6	410	11	538	11
West London	96	3	156	5	135	3
Total	**364**	**17**	**1017**	**30**	**1378**	**33**

To support analysis at a more detailed level, the branches have been grouped by north, east, south and west London.[16] This helps contextualise the growth of the Co-operative movement and the Guild in tandem with trade and industry factors in these areas.[17] West London was a much more dispersed area for the locations of the branches, and this reflects the low Co-operative activity in the area. Higher numbers in east London initially, were

[16] This division can be supported by matching the Branch to the postcode boundaries which use N, NE, S, SE, SW, E, EC, W. For more detail see N. Barratt, *Greater London: The Story of the Suburbs* (London: Random House, 2012), p. 532.
[17] Barratt, *Greater London*. For an overview of how the city has developed and different areas have adapted.

centred on the Tower Hamlets area but, by the end of the period, this activity has moved to the new industrial zones of West Ham.[18] The increase of Co-operative strength in south and north London by the end of the period strongly reflects the changes in industry and residential use of London. This is evident both in the new suburban housing and railways but also co-operative strongholds developing around the Arsenals of Woolwich in the south and Enfield in the north and the Stratford Co-operative which was supported by the railways industrial centre in that area.[19]

The work of the branch secretary

Within this picture of rapid political and socio-economic change in London we see the fledgling women's organisation of the Guild, growing and involving increasing numbers of women to run its grass roots organisation. As will become clear, the branch secretary—more than any other role—was the lynchpin of this activity. It is necessary to have a good understanding of the duties before looking at the women who performed the role. The Guild explicitly recognised the role of the branch secretary within a number of pamphlets it produced to support the branches. The 1896 *How to Start a Branch* summarised the key elements of the job as prescribed by the Central Committee, including a number of administrative tasks such as keeping minutes, membership records, attendance,

[18] J. Marriott, '"West Ham : London's Industrial Centre and Gateway to the World", 1 : Industrialization, 1840-1910', *London Journal* 13 (August 1987), 121–142.
[19] Enfield Highway Cooperative Society Educational Committee, *A Brief History of the Enfield Co-operative Society July 1872 to April 1896* (Leicester: 1896) <https://www.jstor.org/stable/60217923> [accessed 10 July 2019]; W. T. Davis et al., *The History of the Royal Arsenal Co-Operative Society, Ltd., 1868-1918 : Being a Record of Fifty Years' Progress and Achievement Prepared on the Occasion of the Jubilee of the Society* (Woolwich: 1921).

correspondence and financial records.[20] These tasks required a relatively high degree of organisation and numeracy. This was in contrast to the branch President whose role was to keep order at meetings and chair decisions. A branch usually had weekly members' meetings, and these were really the educational and social life of the branch. The Branch Committee, in its administrative capacity, was recommended in addition to meet every two weeks and create the forward plan for the speakers and meetings; organisational work which was likely to fall to the branch secretary, especially in smaller branches.

By 1927, an entire publication explaining the role in detail was in circulation. *The Work of a Branch Secretary* opens with an unambiguous statement on the role: 'The office of secretary ranks next to that of President, but in many ways, it is an even more important post than that of President.' [21] The pamphlet lists the essential qualities for the role which were similar to 1896,

> She should have good organising ability: be able to set her Committee to work; to think out new developments; she should read the Co-operative News (especially the 'Woman's Pages') and Woman's Outlook; she should make herself acquainted with all the new pamphlets brought out by the Guild; she should be always on the lookout for the newest things to bring before her Branch.

[20] Co-operative Women's Guild, *How to Start and Work a Branch with Model Branch Rules* (Manchester: Women's Co-operative Guild, 1896) <http://www.jstor.org/stable/60215025> [accessed 10 July 2019].
[21] Women's Co-operative Guild, *The Work of a Branch Secretary* (London: Women's Co-operative Guild, 1927) p. 1.

This assumes she has both the time to keep up to date with these and other relevant news, plus an ability to synthesise and present the issues at hand back to the branch. The final quality might be summarised best as the 'life of the branch', or leadership.

> She should be friendly, tactful, enthusiastic: endeavouring to know personally as many of her Guild members as possible, to promote feelings of comradeship in the Branch; she should be reasonable and conciliatory, and her enthusiasm and love of the work should carry her over all obstacles.

This opening section set up extremely high expectations for the role and the woman who filled it; however the only real qualification for being a member or an official of a branch was that they should be Co-operative members, or more likely, the wives or daughters of the shareholding member of the family.[22]

A less formal source for assessing the actual work done by the branch secretary is their appearance in the 'Woman's Corner' pages of the *Co-operative News*.[23] The overall tone of the 'Corner' changes, depending on the editor, and the prevailing political climate. There is often campaigning content; equal pay for women, fair working conditions and the suffrage issue feature from the very start. Letters of support or dissent from the local branches create a public debate that, in theory, all women co-operators can follow. This is significant, as for most women in the larger Co-operative movement it was possibly the main source of

[22] Branch secretaries were rarely paid or remunerated with an honorarium, and this was a Guild level policy to retain the perceived enthusiasm of volunteerism within the organisation.
[23] This two-page section in the weekly *Co-operative News* was established in 1883 by the first Guild president, Alice Acland. The Guild once established was editorially responsible for the content.

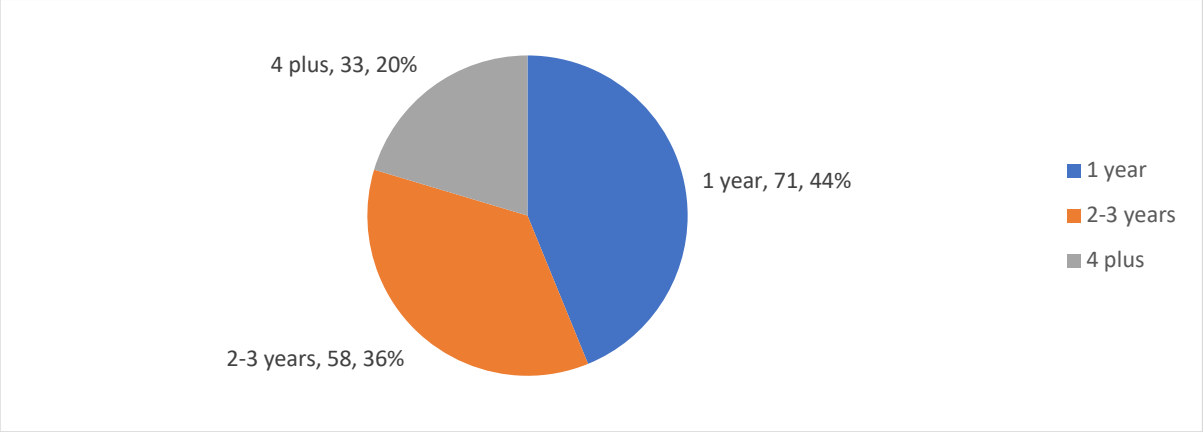
political propaganda from women about these issues. The circulation was not large considering the size of the potential readership, at 50,000 per week by 1900[24] but it was held in reading rooms for reference in every Co-operative society, so may have had a further reach than indicated. Both the *News* and other pamphlets have been identified by Gurney as being particularly read by, and useful for, women as 'they made it possible for them to learn about the wider movement within the home.'[25] This acknowledges women's lack of access to education and politics except via the papers their husband brought home, despite the wider commitment of the movement to education for all. We have evidence that the 'Corner' was read by a wider audience than the Guild members, as the amount of print space devoted to Guild business, versus how much for general 'women's' interests, was often the subject of debate in its pages during the 1890s. It continued to be used until the 1920s, and a survey of the references to the branch secretaries as well as their input into its pages can tell us about the role as it is seen and performed. It is important, when assessing these contributions, to keep in mind the editorial role of the Central Committee: all submissions were (of course) filtered, and the extent to which submissions were re-written or edited is impossible to determine. Whilst all areas of 'Woman's Corner' hold interest, the branch reports are particularly relevant for this study, as they were authored by the Secretaries and often capture the minutiae of branch work.

The officially-described work of a branch secretary does not adequately explain what they did or the impact on home life. We find from the records of the 'Branch Directory' that 44% of the women in this period only did the job for a single year, the prosopography that

[24] Gurney, *Co-Operative Culture and the Politics of Consumption in England, 1870-1930*, p. 34.
[25] Ibid.

follows in Chapter Two will help to suggest reasons for this in the home, but as we see here the demands of the role itself are almost explanation enough.

Figure 1 Total years served as branch secretary 1891-1904



In addition to the local work described above, there was participation in the work of the Guild overall. An average year could include: inspection visits to local factories, Co-operative production sites, attendance at District and Sectional Committee meetings as well as the significant three-day Annual Conference. Aside from these duties they were encouraged to attend Co-operative conferences in London and represent their branch at political meetings. All these events involved travel and time away from home and hearth, using public transport and traversing London, or even the country in ways that were much more expensive and less convenient than the present day. The District meetings were held monthly, usually at the Leman St offices of the Co-operative Wholesale Society (CWS) in Whitechapel, with additional conferences quarterly. Mrs Layton of Cricklewood branch (later Guild President) recalls 'I attended nearly all the Guild Conferences, which were often held on a Thursday, the end of my financial week. I have walked six miles to a conference and back because I had no money to pay fares.'[26] This anecdote is reflective of the difficulties for working people in London using the evolving but expensive public transport

[26] Davies and Woolf, *Life as We Have Known It*, p. 46.

system.[27] These issues may help explain why there is more detailed debate around delegates being reimbursed for travel than there is around the practicality of leaving their homes: the women had the will but not the means.

The Annual Conference of the Guild was often outside London and local branches raised the money to send delegates. The conference would be three days, with travel either side potentially meaning five days away. Accommodation would be organised by the branches of the host city, with local members often offering free lodging to keep costs down. A branch secretaries' account of the 1892 conference in Derby, describes meeting delegates at the train station who were quoted as saying they had never been away from home before and were 'making a week of it'.[28] These additional opportunities to travel and gain a political education were no doubt a draw to the role but they were an additional commitment of time and labour as well as inevitable domestic compromises. This then raises questions for the prosopography about what kind of women were really able to manage this in 1890s London and how this might challenge our perceptions of the working-class housewife.

One final element of the branch secretary role was its potential as a route into a career in public life. One of the aims of the Guild for Margaret Llewelyn Davies was that it should act as a training ground for women to realise public roles. Beyond the Branch Committee, there were opportunities to take District, Sectional and National Committee positions by election. Within the broader Co-operative movement, women were eligible for election to

[27] See Barratt, *Greater London* pp. 184-187. London Transport, costs and efficiency were still an issue into the start of the twentieth century. A standard return fare on the Metropolitan Railway was 9d in the 1870s when it opened.
[28] *Co-operative News*, 20 August 1892, p. 931.

Management Boards. These were most commonly on the Education Committee, but also onto Society Management committees and even the National Executive. Outside the world of Co-operation in the 1890s, local municipal roles such as School Board and Poor Law Guardian, were the main possibilities.[29] The branch secretaries would, at first glance, seem like those best trained for this transition. In reality however, it does not seem to have been an automatic progression. The four women from this study who did become Guardians had only served as branch secretary for one year each. Those who did not become Guardians were quite likely to progress within the Guild or the larger movement, taking roles on Education Committees and occasionally the Management Board of Societies.[30] This suggests that the Guild itself offered sufficient opportunities and was, in its way, a public career. The idea and practical reality of the branch secretary as a job (albeit volunteer job) for married working women will be analysed in the next chapter in the context of the prosopography.

[29] Later, the Qualification of Women (County and Borough Councils) Act 1907 meant Local Government roles and, the 1918 part-franchise of women opened up parliament.
[30] Eleven of the working-class married women took on further roles such as District Secretary, two of whom became Guild President.

Chapter Two—a prosopography of the London branch secretaries

The story of the Women's Co-operative Guild involves more than the headline achievements and traditional leadership narrative, but the detail of its members' actions has been obscured by lack of archival evidence. Most written testimony by Guild members was anonymous or made by individuals of no historical note in the traditional sense. Uncovering their histories requires an approach which utilises techniques that trace detailed individual histories, and—where they cannot be found—group level histories, to help establish socio-economic trends. As such, this chapter will examine the London branch secretary as a previously unstudied group. The branch secretary was the most 'grass roots' official of the Guild, elected and chosen from within the ranks of the local branch, and as such, she is likely to be representative of both her branch neighbours, and more generally, working women in public life at this time.[1] The following prosopographical analysis of the women who performed the role will focus on their geographical, educational, family and employment background to better understand what type of woman they were and their socio-economic status. Overall, we will see that this challenging role was being performed in many cases by women who were managing a number of competing demands on their time, equipped with only basic education and skills.

[1] We will see in the Plumstead members study later that the branch secretary is very similar in background to the other non-office holding members.

Summary of prosopography approach[2]

In order to understand the branch secretary as a more three-dimensional character, a prosopography has been undertaken of the London secretaries. This has been accomplished by creating a database of names and addresses from the 'Directory of Branches' which was appended to the *Annual Reports* between 1891 and 1904.[3] From this it has been possible to trace their biographical details using Census and other records. Although not all women have been located, 126 of a possible 164 women have been traced this way.[4] In this section, we will analyse the high-level demographic findings, and look at the women as a group in the context of 1890s London and their unpaid work as branch secretary of the Guild.

The 'typical' branch secretary

Looking at the 126 women located in census records and their common characteristics, a 'typical' branch secretary emerges. She was a married woman born in London or the South-East in a working-class household. She would have left school at a young age,[5] and worked as a domestic servant or dressmaker before being married by 23 to a skilled worker, also

[2] See Appendix C for a full outline of the methodology used.
[3] There were a few ad hoc attempts to create a list in the *Co-operative News* before 1891 and these women have been included where possible, but the main data set is from 1891 onwards. After 1904 the directory ceases to be part of the *Annual Report* and was probably printed separately, only two examples have been located but at later dates which makes opportunity to use the Decennial Census extremely limited.
[4] The Census records as the primary dataset are available from 1841 up to 1911.
[5] Over half of the married women were above the age of ten when compulsory education came in and so were likely to have had limited schooling. Even then the value of schooling for working class girls was often limited, aimed as it was at skills such as cooking and needlework to make good servants and housewives rather than academic achievement. Attendance was often low despite it being compulsory. See Chapter 3, Carol Dyhouse, *Girls Growing up in Late Victorian and Edwardian England* (London: Taylor and Francis Group, 2012) <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ulondon/detail.action?docID=1101357> [accessed 1 October 2020]; Davin, *Growing up Poor*, 1996; Roberts, *A Woman's Place: An Oral History of Working-Class Women 1890-1940*.

from London or the south east. When she started working as a branch secretary, she was in her thirties or early forties with small children, but had no paid occupation outside the home. She had multiple children and may have lost at least one child in infancy. She was likely to be nominally Christian, as was her husband.[6] Where her address has been located in Charles Booth's 'London Poverty Maps'[7] it was likely to be a 'mixed' or 'fairly comfortable' street.

As we might expect from an aggregate account, this sketch is very close to the image of the Guild membership portrayed by Margaret Llewelyn Davies. It does, of course, mask a multitude of women who were not typical and did not fit the trends. It also ties in very closely with the stereotype of the ordinary working-class woman. However, as we have seen above, Guild work exerted a number of demands of the branch secretary which were hard to reconcile with working-class family life, raising questions around the veracity of either the work or the lives of the women as popularly understood. To evaluate this in more detail we can use the prosopography database to drill down into a number of themes. Family background, husband's employment and the area in which they live, are all indicators of their potential access to neighbourhood networks and their economic status. Occupational status and employment background give us a sense of how equipped they were for the numerate and literate role of branch secretary. Domestic obligations, such as children and other dependents, is another relevant factor in how much 'free time' they would have had

[6] The 1851 Religious Census had found that the majority of working-class people were not regular church attendees which was a concern for contemporary observers. Historians have come to see a more nuanced picture of informal religious practices as culturally important if not displayed in church attendance, see Hugh McLeod, 'New Perspectives on Victorian Class Religion: The Oral Evidence', *Oral History*, 14.1 (1986), 31–49 <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40178888> [accessed 27 July 2019]

[7] C. Booth, 'Maps Descriptive of London Poverty', LSE <https://booth.lse.ac.uk/map/16/-0.0694/51.5193/100/0> [accessed 11 June 2020].

for Guild work. Finally, the single woman accounts for a noteworthy minority of the women, and her economic status is of particular interest in order to analyse the level of involvement that middle class women had in the grass roots of the organisation.

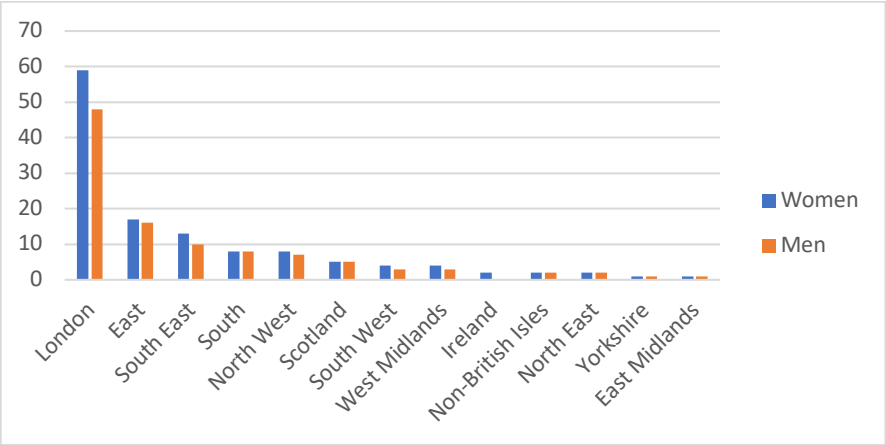
Neighbourhood networks

Social cohesion and questions of local communities and networks within the working classes have been a focus for academics interested in the changes wrought by the Industrial Revolution, and subsequent changing migratory patterns of labour. Consequently, the birthplaces of the women and their husbands, as well as when they came to the city, is of relevance to questions around how established they were in their communities. As we see in Figure 2 below, there is a clear south-east bias, the members being mainly from southern counties.[8] Although a significant number of the women and their husbands were from London, more women than men were from London. One likely explanation is that London-born women and girls could find employment readily available in the most prevalent jobs of domestic service and dressmaking without having to migrate far from home.[9]

[8] Two women and one husband have birthplaces of India and Malta. Research into their background indicates that the women were born to UK born parents serving in the British Army abroad and returned to England early in life. Mary Smith's husband had a Scottish born father and seemingly British mother in India (the mother was fourteen when married but no other information has been found). As ethnicity was not recorded on the census at this time there is no indication there (or in other sources) that any of the branch secretaries or their spouses were BAME, even when born in British colonies, but it is of course possible. For more information on issues with finding black histories see Caroline Bressey's work, in particular C. Bressey, 'Looking for Blackness: Considerations of a Researcher's Paradox', *Ethics, Place & Environment*, 6:3 (October 2003), 215-226 and *Black Londoners 1800-1900* at https://www.ucl.ac.uk/equiano-centre/projects/black-londoners-1800-1900

[9] For a discussion on enumerating domestic service accurately see E. Higgs, 'Domestic Servants and Households in Victorian England', *Social History* 8:2 (1983), 201–210, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4285250> [accessed 24 June 2020].

Figure 2 Region of origin, branch secretaries and husbands 1891-1904



The stage of life at which the women moved to the city or settled in the neighbourhoods in which we find them, is partly dependent on their age at marriage. 56 of the 99 women whose age at marriage has been calculated, were married by an average age of 23, the most popular age being 21 (see figure 3 below). This is younger than the mean age for marriage of women in England, which stood at 25 between 1861 and 1901.[10] This figure had risen from 23 in 1851, and rose still further to 26 by 1911, a continuing trend upwards, which is matched by a declining birth rate. Booth refers to most London women being married by 20, but also acknowledges that continual migration into the city up to the age of 30 distorts the figure.[11] The ages the women married does seem to have been affected by where they were from. Women who migrate with their husbands marry slightly younger on average (22.9) than those who met in London (23.1) but both groups are younger than those marriages where both parties are from London (24) suggesting that marriage was needed for practical reasons, both to move to, and live together in the City.

[10] N. L. Tranter, *Population and Society, 1750-1940: Contrasts in Population Growth*, (London: Longman, 1985), p. 52.
[11] C. Booth, *Life and Labour of the People in London. Final Volume: Notes on Social Influences and Conclusion* (London: Macmillan, 1902), p. 52.

Figure 3 Branch secretary age at marriage 1891-1904

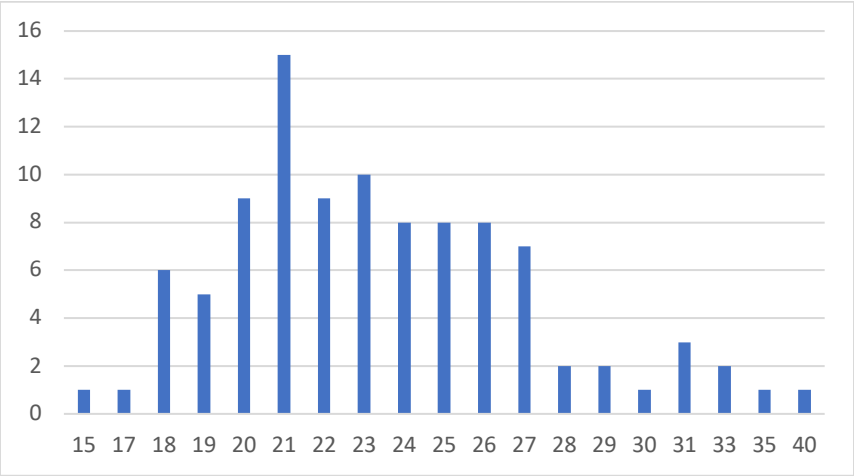


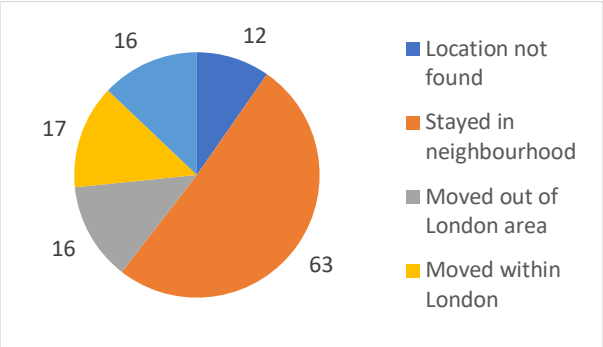
Table 2 Relationship to London 1891-1904

Relationship to London	
Both from London	33
Met and married in London	39
Migrated to London as a couple	31
Total	**103**

One of the questions raised from the analysis of the work of the secretary is why the women might take on such a level of commitment. The marriage records and census comparison start to suggest how migration to the city may affect the lives and motivations of Guild members. Around a third of couples move as a family to the city and are therefore not living in their established kinship networks. The higher proportion of London-born wives than husbands suggests men moving to the city for work and then marrying a 'local' girl. Even within the cases where one or the other are from London very few are both from the same neighbourhood. This indicates that they have not grown up together and remained in their childhood area, this is partly reflective of the migration within the city for work. However, once settled, it seems that a very high proportion stay in the communities where

they have settled and raised their families, with at least half still to be found in the same neighbourhood by the most recent available Census of 1911.

Figure 4 Location of branch secretaries in 1911



The importance of neighbourhood and community networks, even above kinship networks, to the survival of working-class women, has been considered by numerous historians.[12] The fact that over two thirds of the women in this study were away from their kin and close networks (either moving into London or around London, for example Bermondsey is far removed from Bethnal Green) suggests that they would need to establish new neighbourhood connections. Elizabeth Roberts quotes leading sociologist Botts who made a study of this in the 1950s

> Localised networks are most likely to develop in areas where the inhabitants feel that they are socially similar to one another; such feelings of solidarity appear to be strongest in long-established working-class areas where there is a dominant industry or a relatively small number of traditional occupations.[13]

[12] Roberts, *A Woman's Place: An Oral History of Working-Class Women 1890-1940*; Ross, *Love and Toil*; Bourke, *Working Class Cultures in Britain, 1890-1960*; Davin, *Growing up Poor*.
[13] Roberts, *A Woman's Place: An Oral History of Working-Class Women 1890-1940*, p. 194.

This description captures almost all the neighbourhoods where the Co-operative flourishes. In her study of the social history of gossip, Melanie Tebbutt closely examines the connections formed by neighbours, rather than just neighbourhoods. This definition of neighbour is more specific than the broad concept of a neighbourhood, encompassing even more locally the important few streets where you lived, and identifies the local shop as a key element of the exchange of gossip and neighbourhood networking.[14] This takes on new significance in the context of the Co-operative movement, where identity as a Co-operator is focussed on the local store. The importance of buying almost exclusively at the store and the expansion of the store into the hub of educational and social opportunities is a constant theme of the work of the Guild, reinforcing the bonds of the Co-operative community through the interactions there.

In this light, membership of the Guild seems a natural echo of the benefits derived from neighbourhood networks. It was a matriarchal organisation, rooted in very small, close community groups who had in common a local trade or focus in the Co-operative membership. In addition, their work centred around the accepted hub of information and 'gossip', the local shop—in this case the Co-op store. Guild meetings, with their licence for women to meet in single-sex groups and talk, can be seen as a natural extension of these localised networks. Around half the secretaries are found to stay in these neighbourhoods, some as elderly lodgers living with their own children, suggesting that they found security and longevity there. This theme will be considered in more detail in subsequent chapters as more detailed sources can help to explain the depth of the local networks of the women of

[14] Tebbutt, *Women's Talk?*

the Guild, and the effects this may have on the success of both Guild and Co-operative in these areas.

Class and economic status

The assumed background of the members was frequently used in Guild literature to establish its authority as a working-class organisation. For historians assessing the historical reality of nineteenth century life the most frequently used source of socio-economic status is the Census, usually centring on the occupational status of the head of the household. The use of the same occupational data as a means of establishing social and economic status for women is problematic.[15] Due to their employment status being more closely attached to their life events, and social conventions around women working after marriage (which will be examined in more detail later) data on occupation for women is sketchy. This means we must rely on the status of their fathers and husbands, combined with their own employment history (where it is available), and create a somewhat composite picture.

Class categorisation in itself involves decisions relating to the period under discussion, as well as the work of other historians, so that we can be confident of being able to use the research in the correct historiographical context. For this reason, Occupational Class has been defined in reference to the work of W. A. Armstrong[16] but also with consideration of

[15] Higgs, 'Domestic Servants and Households in Victorian England'; E. Higgs and A. Wilkinson, 'Women, Occupations and Work in the Victorian Censuses Revisited', *History Workshop Journal* 81:1 (April 2016), 17–38, <https://academic.oup.com/hwj/article-lookup/doi/10.1093/hwj/dbw001> [accessed 13 February 2020].
[16] W. A. Armstrong, '6. The Use of Information about Occupation', in E. A. Wrigley, ed., *Nineteenth-Century Society; Essays in the Use of Quantitative Methods for the Study of Social Data*, (London: Cambridge University Press, 1972).

the work of Steadman-Jones.[17] Both historians largely based their classification on the 1951 Registrar-General Social Classifications as used in Table 3. Using this categorisation leads to an overall assessment of the husbands of the branch secretaries as follows:

Table 3 Class of occupation, husbands

Class of Occupation	Description	Husband's Occupation %
Class I	Professional occupations	3
Class II [18]	Intermediate occupations	8
Class III	Skilled occupations	69
Class IV	Semi-skilled occupations	11
Class V	Unskilled occupations	9

As can be seen from the table above, the husbands' occupations fall mainly into Class III and below, accounting for around 90% of occupations found. Notably, around 20% are class IV and V, which is below the level of the skilled artisan class most closely identified with the Co-operative and the Guild. The Class IV men were mainly employed in railway jobs which, although lower status, were probably relatively stable in terms of income. The majority of railwaymen's wives became involved with the Guild towards 1900, reflecting the growing dominance of the railways in and around London. Those in Class V would be the type usually thought of as 'the poor', and not the customary Co-operative member; at least three of those identified were dock workers who would be likely to be on the casual system. Despite this, only one of the men with a Class V occupation has a wife who declares an occupation on the Census (Jane Gander of Grays was a dressmaker), although three more had formerly

[17] Jones, *Outcast London*.

[18] The work of Armstrong reconciles this 1951 classification with samples from earlier Census tables from 1861 and finds it largely applicable. Steadman-Jones, however, is attempting to analyse the skilled labourer class in London between 1861 and 1891 which prompts him to move Clerks into Class II from Class III where Armstrong would have them. As this study is similarly interested in the different experience of a clerk and an artisan, clerks and writers have been classed as Class II.

worked as dressmakers and could presumably find piece-work when necessary. The fact that these families are not only members, but produced Guild officials, one of whom Emily Hunt was a District Secretary, signifies a much greater diversity of membership than is usually accepted.

Branch secretary—occupations

A key issue for this study is the motivations of the women giving their limited time to Guild work. One suggested explanation, is that—as the wives of skilled men who have less need for paid work—they had time on their hands.[19] The findings of this study largely contradict this assessment, supporting later academic studies that suggest that the hidden work of working-class women is much more significant than usually understood.[20] It is generally accepted, in line with the paradigm of 'separate spheres',[21] that the vast majority of married women in the late Victorian era stayed in the home instead of going out to work at a paid job. Bourke finds that higher wages for men at the same time as decreasing wages for women created a household economy that needed to be run and managed to extract the best from the greater wage.[22] At the same time, women's low wages meant that they were better off managing the home economy full time than paying for childcare to go out to work. When combined with the status a 'good manager' has in the neighbourhood, and the power balance in the home when fully relied upon by husband and children, it is clear that

[19] Gaffin and Thoms, *Caring & Sharing p. 21*.
[20] Higgs and Wilkinson, 'Women, Occupations and Work in the Victorian Censuses Revisited'.
[21] For an overview of how the debate around the separate spheres paradigm has developed see Leonore Davidoff, 'Gender and the "Great Divide": Public and Private in British Gender History', *Journal of Women's History*, 15.1 (2003), 11–27 <https://doi.org/10.1353/jowh.2003.0020> [accessed 10 April 2019].
[22] Joanna Bourke, 'Housewifery in Working-Class England 1860-1914', *Past & Present* 143 (1994), 167–197, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/651165> [accessed 29 April 2019].

there were significant advantages to staying at home.[23] Lewis largely agrees with this, whilst emphasising the impact of expectations from social commentators and the State that working-class women should be at home looking after their families[24] (it was popularly believed that infant mortality was higher amongst working mothers[25]).

We also have apparently straightforward data evidence from the census in relation to the branch secretaries which, on the surface, indicates that the vast majority of these women had no employment. However, there are risks in relation to using census data on women due to under-recording, particularly of occupation. A key work on this issue is by Higgs and Wilkinson with their reappraisal of the census as a source for women's occupation. Here they modify Higgs' earlier warnings about its unreliability with strategies for using the census data to produce more accurate results.[26] Other work contributed by feminist historians Alexander, Davin and Hostettler in their essay from the 1970s, reminds us that the census can rarely tell us more than the beginning of the story.[27] For these reasons, even within the confines of the census return, cross-referencing has been used where possible with data such as number of children and household composition which—when analysed—tells us more about women's actual lives than their sole entry in the census return.

Wilkinson, in her London studies of married women's employment, estimates 30% of married working-class women declared an occupation on the census in central east

[23] Bourke, *Working Class Cultures in Britain, 1890-1960*, p. 64.
[24] Jane Lewis, *Women in England 1870-1950. Sexual Divisions and Social Change* (Brighton: Wheatsheaf, 1984) p. 12.
[25] Roberts, *A Woman's Place: An Oral History of Working-Class Women 1890-1940*, p. 194.
[26] Higgs and Wilkinson, 'Women, Occupations and Work in the Victorian Censuses Revisited'.
[27] S. Alexander, A. Davin, and E. Hostettler, 'Labouring Women: A Reply to Eric Hobsbawm', *History Workshop Journal* 8:1 (October 1979), 174–182, <http://academic.oup.com/hwj/article/8/1/174/560843> [accessed 13 February 2020].

boroughs, and this matches Booth's findings in the same area.[28] This study's data on branch secretaries, taking a broad London geographical span, but mainly looking at 1891 and 1901 for their married occupations, finds that these women have a much lower declared employment level of 4%. This is extremely low in comparison to the average. It may be that the declared work is less, because higher paid artisan husbands made it unnecessary to work, but it is more likely that part time and piece-work was going unrecorded for social reasons of 'respectability' or enumerator bias. This does not mean that these women are leading a life of leisure or are from a higher class than expected. Using the broader view recommended by Alexander *et al*. to take into account women's hidden work, a more nuanced picture emerges. Of the married branch secretaries who do not declare an occupation, 46% had one or more children under 10, and seven of this group additionally had lodgers (which, although generating income, are also a source of increased domestic work). An additional seven had no young children but did have lodgers and/or elderly dependent relatives in residence. None of the women with young children declared an 'Occupation' on the census. When we account for these additional domestic burdens, we find that over 45% of our branch secretaries have occupationally busy lives and households.[29]

[28] Higgs and Wilkinson, 'Women, Occupations and Work in the Victorian Censuses Revisited'.

[29] There is no indication of why these particular women work when others do not. They are married to a mixture of skilled and unskilled working men.

Table 4 Type of occupation, branch secretaries 1891-1904

Type of Occupation	No of women
Occupation declared on census	4
With children under 10	29
With children under 10 and lodgers	7
With lodgers or dependent relative	7
Total with paid or unpaid occupation	47
Total married women found	**104**

Table 5 Age range—branch secretaries 1891-1904

Age range	All	Single	Married	Widow
Under 30	24	12	12	
30-45	75	7	66	1
45+	27	2	25	
Total	**126**	**21**	**103**	**1**

This is in sharp contrast to the popular perception that Guildswomen were older, with grown children and free time. One explanation is that, as Andrew August has identified, working-class women expected and wanted to work at all times in their lives and, although the need for paid work may have been highest when children were small, it was not always possible.[30] He does not consider work within voluntary organisations but perhaps a flexible, volunteering 'job' was more acceptable to both the woman and husband. Their identity as Co-operators may be a relevant factor: they are part of a movement that endorses communal action. The universal satisfaction of doing useful occupation and in the growing context of a labour and women's movement, contributing to a greater good, may also have been motivation. Deeper investigation into specific examples will help with this question but

[30] A. August, 'How Separate a Sphere? Poor Women and Paid Work in Late-Victorian London', *Journal of Family History* 19:3 (September 1994), 285–309, <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/036319909401900305> [accessed 29 April 2019].

it is clear that any working-class married woman had a large burden of work in the home, whether it was paid or not, making an additional job such as branch secretary a very deliberate choice to work outside the home.

Previous experience and work

Analysis of the jobs the women have had outside the home, both before and during marriage, can help our understanding of their ability to work successfully as branch secretary. If we again use Steadman-Jones as a guide for classification, we find the women's occupations, current and past, fall mainly into Class IV. He argues that women working in trades, that for men are classed as skilled, are usually really assistants and therefore the same job should be classed as unskilled work. Additionally, this class is split into three parts so that the very common work of domestic service and dressmaking (or other sweated trade) can be distinguished from the rest of Class IV jobs, and these are by far the largest employment for Guild women. It can be seen that for over half of the women no occupation has been traced.[31] Dressmaker and domestic service otherwise dominate the table. Dressmaking was far from a genteel trade at this time and often meant sweated labour in London workshops or the home. Less than ten percent had jobs requiring literacy and numeracy, such as teaching, even at a low assistant level. From this we can conclude that the majority of the married women working as branch secretaries were of limited education. They were also unlikely to have supplemented their lack of education through work experience. The majority of jobs were not the sort that would give them skills in

[31] This is partly a quirk of birth date in relation to census years. If a woman was under 14 or so on the 1881 census and married by the 1891 census, we have no insight into the period when she was likely to be working and declaring that work.

writing, public speaking and reading in the sense described by the descriptions of the job. All of which makes the accomplishment of working as branch secretary even more surprising and speaks to the efforts that must have been made to do so.

Table 6 Married and widowed branch secretaries' occupation before marriage

Occupations by Class	**Total**
Class II—Teaching	5
Class III—Nursing, shop work	4
Class IV—Manual	3
Class IV B—Dressmaking	11
Class IV—Domestic Service	20
Class V—Charwoman	1
Multiple occupations	2
Sub Total	**46**
No occupation found	57
Illegible on census	1
Total	**104**

Single woman sketch

A significant minority of branch secretaries were unmarried.[32] Typically, she lived at home with her family. She was likely to be under 30 and from London or the south east. Around half were living on private means or had no work outside the home. The other half worked for their living and were more likely to be from working-class homes. She was most likely to

[32] 27 of the potential 164 use the title Miss which equates to 16% of branch secretaries. Of these twenty were located on the census, which is 16% of 'found' women.

only be a branch secretary for a year but to progress to another role in the Guild at regional or national level. Of the five discovered on Booth maps, four lived on middle-class or upper middle-class streets, and one on a 'fairly comfortable' street.

Table 7 Unmarried branch secretaries age range 1891-1904

Age range	Number
30 or Under	12
30-45	8
45+	2
Grand Total	**22**

Table 8 Unmarried branch secretaries' region of origin 1891-1904

Region of Origin	Count of region
East	1
Ireland	2
London	14
North West	1
South East	3
West Midlands	1
Grand Total	**22**

The single women who held leadership roles in women's organisations during this period are often characterised as middle-class women assuming the leadership of lower-class women. This is to some extent acknowledged by the Guild, but played down in favour of its insistence that it is a working-class organisation run by working-class women. The influence of these women is most pronounced at the start of the Guild, where for the first few years, the London branches (who also dominated the central committee) were represented by young middle- or upper-class women in the mould of Octavia Hill. These early Branch

Secretaries include Margaret Llewelyn Davies, Catherine Webb, Mary Spooner, Ada Mocatta, Florence Grove and Emily Greening who are all daughters of prominent Co-operators or philanthropists with links to London society.[33] All these wealthy single women live in and work at West London branches. The working-class single women are of the same socio-economic background as the working-class married women, but typically stay involved for less time, and none of them have been found to have gone on to other roles in the Guild or public life locally (although change of name due to marriage may be obscuring records).

Branch meeting place summary and analysis

The identity of the branch secretaries, and their standing as Co-operators and working-class women was an important emblem within the Guild. By extension, their links to the local store and Society were important to their work within the Co-operative movement, in particular as their role in propaganda and education was part of their *raison d'être*. Therefore, the regular meeting places of the Guild branches are signifiers of their local credibility within the Co-operative, and beyond that, community structures. To help assess this, an analysis of the meeting places of the London branches has been made. Guild branches were tied to Co-operative stores and it is to be expected that the majority of branches would have met at the stores or reading rooms belonging to its local Co-operative Society; however, we see that there are many exceptions to this with most areas displaying a very split picture between Co-operative premises and independent venues for their meetings.[34]

[33] See Appendix D for brief biographies of these women.
[34] Although out of the scope of this paper a brief survey of other regions in England suggest a similar pattern of use of Co-operative buildings where co-operation was strong and other meeting rooms where it was weak.

Figure 5 Branch meeting places 1891-1904

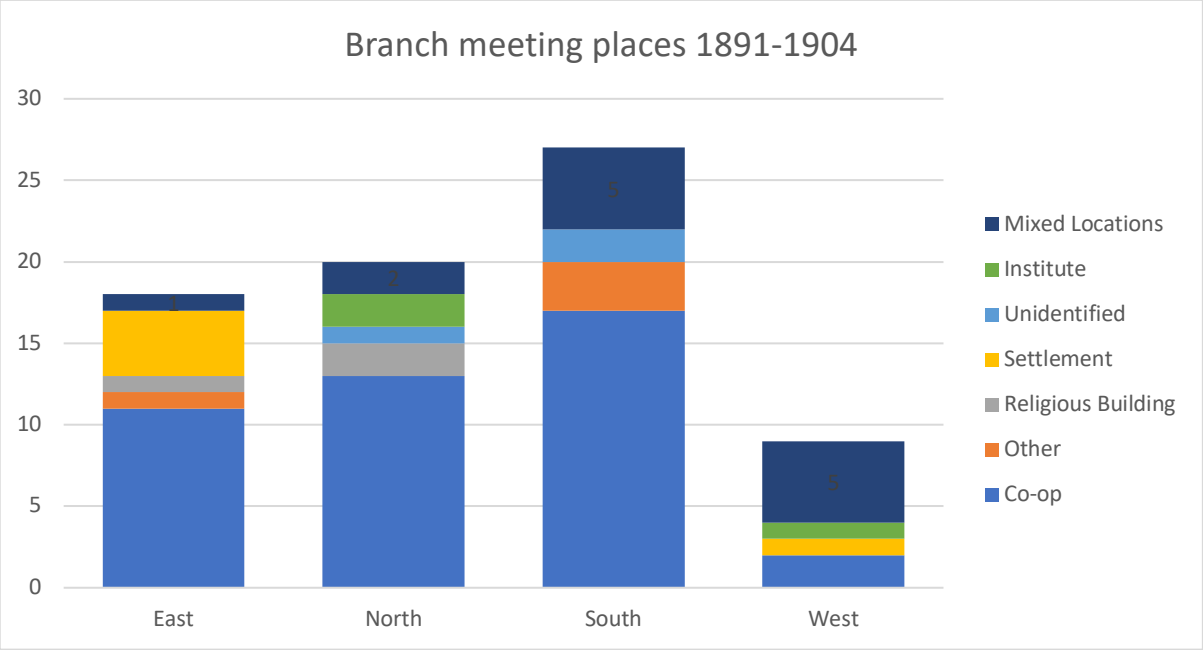
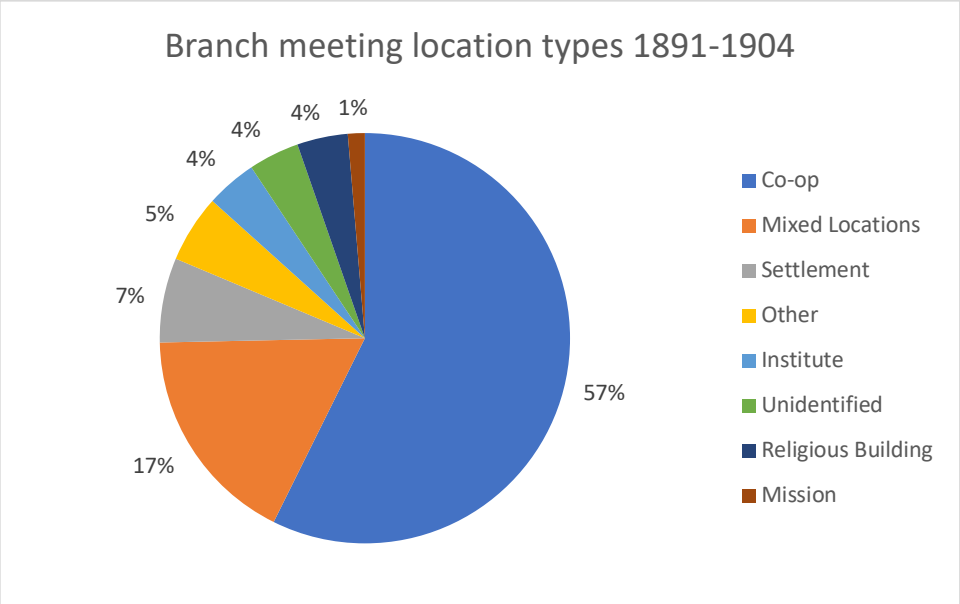


Figure 6 Branch meeting location types 1891-1904



However, these other meeting rooms appear to be less indicative of any organisational links between Guild and host than will become apparent in London.

There are a number of potential explanations for this trend. Notable by their absence from this list of locations are pubs, working men's clubs and other places where drink may be served or where women would be unlikely to want to spend time. There is a respectability to all of the selected locations, with religion or education being their dominant function. Putting aside Co-operative settings, which will be looked at in subsequent chapters, and those that are not identifiable, over twenty-five percent were using settlements, missions and institutes, or buildings such as church halls and schools. Some of this was undoubtedly out of convenience, as a small store may not actually have had a formal meeting room and sitting in a dusty store-room was far from ideal.[35] The use of institutes, many of which had links to the Co-operative and Trades Union movements, is relatively sporadic and there is nothing to suggest a long term relationship between organisations. Of significance to this study are the meeting locations that were not directly Co-operative premises, but were used long term, suggesting a relationship between the host organisation and the Guild that went beyond room rental. There are several examples of this to be found in settlements, and this ongoing relationship resulted in the Guild finding its way into the records of its host, for example, mentioned in a settlement newsletter or *Annual Report*, adding to our understanding of the view of Guild work and the women involved from 'outside'. The working classes of London are usually described only as the subjects and objects of philanthropic attentions: here we have an opportunity to restore some agency and even equality to these relationships, with participation from the working-class branch secretaries, described and recognised. This is particularly relevant in terms of female networks where research around the intersection of women's settlement work and Guild branches furthers

[35] As late as 1901 Annual Reports identify poor room provision as a barrier to success *Women's Co-Operative Guild Eighteenth Annual Report* (Manchester: Women's Co-operative Guild, 1901), p. 6.

our understanding of the way in which working-class political movements and the middle-class philanthropy movement influence each other from a perspective of gender.

Chapter Three—'Darkest' London: The Women's Co-operative Guild and the influence of the settlement movement

The next two chapters build on the findings of the prosopography to focus on the influence branch secretaries had on the places where they lived and worked, and in turn the effect upon them by those with whom they were working. The result of this is that we find new themes amplified, in addition to the familiar political activity, some of which were previously relegated to a minor role in the story of the Guild. Specifically, in this project it has prompted a re-examination of the charitable and social work activity of the Guild, which although recognised, has been treated as trivial compared to its political work.[1] This chapter will argue that, contrary to previous assessments, their philanthropic endeavours were both integral to the identity of the organisation and important as evidence of working-class women participating in charity. The branch secretaries in the prosopography have come to our notice because of their identity as Guild members, with which comes a number of assumptions about their class and motivation to join the Guild. However, when we look at the London story in the 1890s with its rise and fall of Guild branches tied to Co-operative stores, we are powerfully reminded of the identity of Guild women as Co-operators first and foremost. Another striking finding is the depth of involvement with individual philanthropists and groups such as the London settlement houses, with the settlement workers often going beyond patronage to become members of the Guild. This puts the Guild into the position of both a subject of settlement work, and also engaged in informal

[1] The three main monographs on the Guild give no more than a page or two each on this subject. Gaffin and Thoms, *Caring & Sharing*; Scott, *Feminism and the Politics of Working Women*; Blaszak, *The Matriarchs of England's Cooperative Movement*.

and formal philanthropy of its own. During the 1890s London branch secretaries were instrumental in initiatives which contributed to the movement's attempts at 'Taking Co-operation to the poor', and as will be seen their work in this area bore the influence of both the London settlements and the women who worked in them, both middle class and working class.

'Taking Co-operation to the poor' recognised and sought to remedy the exclusion of the poorest from the movement, a situation which had come about through prohibitive high prices and the entry tariff of the Co-operative stores. Most Co-operators had a level of social conscience in relation to this issue although some were more willing to act on it than others, as it meant compromises to profitability and the ever present 'divi'. The Guild pushed the Co-operative movement on the issue and actively worked to further this cause with resources going into 'People's stores' accessible to the poorest in the London slums, and the Sunderland Settlement, which saw Co-operation venture into settlement work. Although achieving differing levels of success, these projects are important, as they demonstrate working-class women not simply as the subject of charity and social work style philanthropy, but as the provider of both. This has been an area which is notoriously hard to study in a systematic way due to the inequalities in relation to gender and class in the archives.[2]

[2] Prochaska, *Women and Philanthropy in Nineteenth-Century England*.

Women and philanthropy—historiography

The themes that intersect in this chapter—late Victorian charity, gender and working-class movements—have all been the subject of separate studies but rarely have they come together. The key works on philanthropy[3] and women in philanthropy in this period largely fail to investigate the contribution of working class women.[4] Studies of the settlement movement and the few that look at women within them, focus on individual biographies of leaders[5] and general organisational overviews rather than their position in the local networks of the communities they are there to help.[6] Work by Prom on Friendly Societies and charity, suggests many parallels with the way the Guild and Co-operative approached charity, particularly the issue of encouraging self-help versus pauperising charitable giving. However, he does not examine any women's friendly societies, or the women involved in the male-dominated societies.[7] Detailed local studies of working class movements by historians such as Crossick or Steadman Jones focus on culture and municipal involvement but do not delve into this important aspect of Victorian public life from the perspective of working-class women. Co-operative and Guild histories focus on the cultural elements of charity but do not investigate it as a structure within the movement.[8] Gaffin and Thoms do comment that the middle-class leadership of the Guild was influenced by the philanthropic world but decide that the Guild was 'too radical for the bulk of their middle-class sisters'.[9]

[3] For a broad overview see M. J. Daunton, ed., *Charity, Self-Interest and Welfare in the English past* (London: UCL Press, 1996).
[4] Prochaska, *Women and Philanthropy in Nineteenth-Century England*.
[5] J. E. Lewis, *Women and Social Action in Victorian and Edwardian England* (Cheltenham: Elgar, 1991); Vicinius, *Independent Women*.
[6] K. Bentley Beauman, *Women and the Settlement Movement* (London: Radcliffe Press, 1996); S. Koven, *Slumming: Sexual and Social Politics in Victorian London* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004).
[7] Prom, 'Friendly Society Discipline and Charity in Late-Victorian and Edwardian England'.
[8] Robertson, *The Co-Operative Movement and Communities in Britain, 1914-1960*, p. 34.
[9] Gaffin and Thoms, *Caring & Sharing*, p. 54.

This conclusion is somewhat refuted by the active Guild membership of several settlement workers, as well as other elements of their work such as Poor Law Guardianship, which are in common with Guild priorities around Citizenship.[10] They also identify the intellectual heritage of settlements in Davies' thinking, but go no further in terms of the involvement of the London Guild branches, or the women working in them.[11] Therefore we can see that there is some work of synthesis to be done to locate the working-class women of the Guild within the ideology and practical public work of late Victorian London, which was so dominated by notions of charity and religion, but has predominantly been examined from the perspective of men or middle-class women.

The ideology of the relatively short-lived Christian Socialist movement[12] reached into numerous areas of London public life. This included many of the men and women who became active in London philanthropy, as well as a key figures in the Co-operative movement, most importantly Edward Vansittart Neale.[13] Many had been inspired by the Unitarian publication in 1883 of *The Bitter cry of Outcast London*[14] and had a common goal of helping the deserving poor lift out of poverty though self-help and the collectivism of ideas such as Co-operation.[15] A key part of this work which brought together education,

[10] Miss Elder, very typical of a settlement woman on the surface was actually the Girton representative for the University Association of Women Teachers (UAWT) 1887-1894, as well as Guild branch secretary, suggesting radical leanings. Miss Cheetham, Warden of Canning Town Women's Settlement served as Poor Law Guardian for West Ham.
[11] Gaffin and Thoms, *Caring & Sharing*, p. 66.
[12] The lifespan of the original group was 1848-1854, for an overview see E. R. Norman, *The Victorian Christian Socialists* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).
[13] Neale was the architect of the legal framework for Co-operative Societies, later he became General Secretary of the Co-operative Union. P. N. Backstrom, *Christian Socialism and Co-Operation in Victorian England: Edward Vansittart Neale and the Co-Operative Movement*, (London: Croom Helm, 1974).
[14] G. Ginn, 'Answering the "Bitter Cry": Urban Description and Social Reform in the Late-Victorian East End', *The London Journal* 31:2 (November 2006), 179–200, <https://doi.org/10.1179/174963206X113160> [accessed 11 December 2019].
[15] Norman, *The Victorian Christian Socialists*, p. 3.

social work and improvement through self-help or Co-operation, was the settlement movement. This was founded by Revd Samuel Barnett and his wife Henrietta in Whitechapel with the creation of Toynbee Hall and inspired a diverse number of loosely connected institutions seeking to emulate his example of helping the poor by living amongst them in friendship and seeking to improve their lives.[16]

It is accepted that middle-class women who worked or volunteered in places such as the settlements were doing so for a number of reasons which included self-fulfilment, career advancement and a genuine religious or otherwise conscience-based desire to help the poor.[17] The satisfaction and opportunity they gained from this work is described in many publications and memoirs from the time.[18] Less understood and documented is the idea that working-class women, such as those involved with the WCG, may have had similar motivations and responses to the work. The majority of branch secretaries were more or less anonymous, even with the biographical details we have been able to discover. However, those who worked in the branches located in the settlements leave more traces in the archive, and the records of the settlements can help us create a more rounded picture of the factors that influenced Guild work and policy. Whatever their differences in background, the settlement workers and Guild branch secretaries had common ground in the fact that they were working outside the role assigned to them by family and society, and

[16] Literature on the movement and particularly Toynbee Hall can be found in contemporary Victorian descriptions onwards, all make a contribution to our understanding of their work, see: W. Reason, ed., *University and Social Settlements*, (1898); A. Briggs and A. Macartney, *Toynbee Hall : The First Hundred Years* (London: Routledge, 1984); N. Scotland, *Squires in the Slums: Settlements and Missions in Late-Victorian London*, (London: Tauris, 2007).
[17] Lewis, 'Women, Social Work and Social Welfare in Twentieth-Century Britain'; Vicinus, *Independent Women*.
[18] E. Ross, ed., *Slum Travelers: Ladies and London Poverty, 1860-1920* (London: University of California Press, 2007).

in some cases trying to professionalise that new public role.[19] Also in common, are the causes they supported with their work: better working conditions for women and girls, public roles for women such as the Poor Law Guardianship, and alleviation of poverty. Although improvement through friendship was the goal of the Toynbee Hall and others, there are few references to any friendships that may have developed between settlement workers and the working-class women who frequented the settlements. Henrietta Barnett habitually invited members of the various groups she worked with to her cottage in Hampstead, for example, but we know little about how relationships may have developed at an individual level. As a result, the published newsletters, reports and manuscript sources of the minute books must be interrogated for the conscious and unconscious displays of public and private opinion relating to each other. The suggested relationships in these texts, once contextualised with the other known biographical information, build up a much fuller story. As Todd describes it, the lack of self-conscious autobiography by the working classes does not have to be a stumbling block if we accept that 'we might instead think of the self in late modern Britain as semi-public; as affected by people's relations with others—by their experience.'[20]

As mentioned above, the organisational connection between settlements and the WCG has been little studied apart from brief references. Part of the reason for this may be the

[19] The following works deal with this subject in detail; L. Davidoff, 'Gender and the "Great Divide": Public and Private in British Gender History', *Journal of Women's History* 15:1 (May 2003), pp. 11–27, <http://0.muse.jhu.edu/article/43083> [accessed 17 February 2020]; M. Tebbutt, '"You Couldn't Help but Know" : Public and Private Space in the Lives of Working Class Women, 1918-1939', *Manchester Region History Review* 6 (1992), 72–79; P. Levine, *Feminist Lives in Victorian England: Private Roles and Public Commitment* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990).

[20] S. Todd, 'Class, Experience and Britain's Twentieth Century', *Social History* 39:4 (October 2014), 489–508, <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/03071022.2014.983680> [accessed 28 January 2020]. Here Todd outlines evidence-based use of sources where class and gender are involved.

individualism of the settlements themselves. Each settlement had a different focus and model for working and they were not centrally run, although loosely connected through federations. Almost all of them had an interest in Co-operation, with an actual Co-operative being run from University Club (part of the Oxford House settlement), in Hackney, east London. Six of the London Guild branches from the 1880s and 1890s have clear connections to a settlement.

Table 9 Settlement based Branches

Branch name	Meeting place	Years of existence
Tower Hamlets	Toynbee Hall	1888-1896
University Club	Oxford House via University Club	1894-1900
Canning Town	Canning Town Women's Settlement	
	Part of Mansfield House	1893-1923[21]
Stratford	Trinity Mission	1893-1897[22]
Bermondsey	St Luke's Mission	
	Women's University Settlement	1885-1893
Esperance	Esperance Club, Fitzroy Square	1900

All of these were branches which were active in the formative years of the WCG and produced branch secretaries who would be influential in the Guild at sectional and national level. At least three of these branch secretaries go on to a regional role in the Guild, Mrs Elliot (University Club) and Mrs Hunt (Tower Hamlets) both worked as District Secretaries, and Mrs Green (Canning Town), served on the Guild Central Committee, becoming national president in 1902. Rather than examine each settlement in turn, a thematic approach will be used to analyse elements of the relationship between the organisations and members.

[21] The latest reference available is in the 1923 branch list, it may well have continued beyond that date.
[22] After this date it removed to the Workman's Hall under a new branch secretary indicating a change of emphasis.

In many ways the settlement movement mirrored Co-operation in its use of women as auxiliaries who would take care of the softer, feminine needs of the organisation. There was one completely independent women's settlement[23] but it was more usual to find male houses that had a women's 'colony' or house to complement the men's work. This male work, reflecting the masculine Christianity of the time, often focussed on boys' sports and university extension classes;[24] the women's houses took a different approach. As Ellen Ross highlights in her anthology of writing by *Slum Travellers*, women writers had brought a new sensibility in relation to the portraits of the poor: 'they thus superimposed the stoic mother sitting up with a sick infant … over more traditional slum figures like the wily pickpocket'.[25] This different focus of the female gaze within the slums manifested itself in a more social work-based interest in the needs of the local women and children, and would foster useful clubs and even political groups to support women in sweated industries and other areas of public concern. Martha Vicinus argues that the women's settlements had more in common with the Charity Organisation Society (COS) of Octavia Hill than the male world of Toynbee Hall,[26] but this underestimates the role and the actions of Mrs Barnett (herself trained by Octavia Hill) in the day to day activity of Toynbee Hall. This activity, in common with all settlements involving women, included hosting groups like the Factory Girls, Mothers' Meetings, the Metropolitan Association for Befriending Young Servants (MABYS), and a branch of the Women's Co-operative Guild, although it is rarely mentioned along with the

[23] The Women's University Settlement (WUS) in Bermondsey, later Blackfriars Settlement, founded 1887.
[24] The Christian Socialist run Oxford House in particular led the way in this. M. Ashworth, *The Oxford House in Bethnal Green 100 years of work in the community* (London: Oxford House, 1992); Oxford House, *The Oxford House in Bethnal Green, 1884-1948* (London, 1948).
[25] Ross, *Slum Travelers*, p 13.
[26] Vicinus, *Independent Women*, p. 216.

well-rehearsed list of the other groups. This omission of Guild work is a curious one, and common to histories of the women's settlements. In a number of cases it is probable that the Guild has been omitted from the history of the settlement organisations because sources only mention them in passing as if merely renting a meeting room. A brief paragraph on them in Vicinus does recognise their place in the settlement world and describes the Guild as 'less colourful, but no less important'[27] than other groups. The Guild is different to most other groups meeting or run by the settlements which are in the main focussed on helping the sick, vulnerable single girls or children. The Guild wanted the expertise and the resources of the settlement workers in terms of education but had an external agenda from the national organisation, which may be at the root of the difference in relationship with the settlements as we will see below.

Settlement women in Guilds

The influence of the Christian Socialists crossed into the work of a number of individuals and organisations, so much so that the 1890s saw twenty-two Guild branches that were supported by individuals or groups influenced by the ideology of Christian Socialists and philanthropy in London. This includes settlement or Co-operative initiatives, but also sustained support from middle-class branch secretaries who were part of the network of influential philanthropists. Despite this well-meaning work, these Co-operative stores and with them their Guild branches, with one or two exceptions, had ceased to exist by 1900.[28]

[27] Ibid., p. 234.
[28] The rules of the Guild meant that when a store ceased to trade the attached Guild branch also had to cease. This was a controversial rule as often the Guild branch would have happily continued but it was one of the ways that the Guild remained focussed on its Co-operative roots and mission and the rule stayed.

The migration of industry from the traditional centres of East London combined with slum clearance saw the removal of the traditional customer base of the Co-operatives to the new suburbs in the north and east of the city, the result for Co-operation was that often the stores failed to thrive. Co-operation became strong in London, but it was in three core areas: Woolwich, Stratford and Edmonton, where the local industry created favourable conditions, as will be explored in subsequent chapters. Broadly we can divide the London branches that were supported in their work by philanthropy into three groups.

Firstly, the settlements: eleven branch secretaries across six branches were involved in missions or settlements, and for a number of these, this is without doubt beyond the rental of a convenient room. It is not always clear how the involvement comes about, but in the case of Bermondsey and the Women's University Settlement (WUS) we have evidence that the WUS was asked to become involved. Both the WUS minutes[29] and the 'Woman's Corner' record that the WUS has been asked to help with this branch in 1888 when Bermondsey

> having almost ceased to exist, has been fanned into fresh vigour, and, by the aid of some of the ladies of the Women's University Settlement, will yet, it is hoped, prove equal to its opportunities of far-reaching influence in this populous neighbourhood.[30]

Although the Guild had asked for help it seems that they regarded it as a natural part of the WUS remit to be involved in such an endeavour. At Tower Hamlets (Toynbee Hall) and

[29] The Women's Library at the London School of Economics, 5WUS/1/A: 'Minutes of the Women's University Settlement Council 1887-1949', p. 77, 18 February 1888.
[30] *Co-operative News,* 2 June 1888, p. 558.

University Club (Oxford House), the President of the Guild branch was (at least for a time) the wife of the founder of the settlement or Co-operative Society, Mrs Barnett and Mrs Buchanan[31] respectively. In addition, at Toynbee Hall, the first secretary was a settlement worker, Miss Boyle. In Bermondsey and probably Esperance settlements, workers were the branch secretaries for the life of the branch. At Canning Town, whilst the branch secretaries were working-class women, the President and main supporter was the Warden of the settlement, Miss Rebecca Cheetham.

A second type of branch was one that had a middle-class branch secretary who, although not formally attached to a settlement, was of independent means and in the mould of Vicinus' *Independent Woman,*[32] and many had direct links to Christian Socialists. These are no doubt some of the women GDH Cole had in mind when he stated that

> The Women's Guild was fortunate from the very outset in the quality of those who were attracted to it in the spirit of unpaid service … who saw in it an ideal instrument for carrying to the working-class housewives the message of the movement for emancipation of women and for helping such women to win self-confidence and the habit of acting together.[33]

[31] There is a full description of the work of Mr Buchanan in the Co-operative at University Hall in R. A. Woods, *English Social Movements* (London: Swan Sonnenschein & Co, 1895), p. 105.
[32] Vicinus, *Independent Women*.
[33] G. D. H. Cole, *A Century Of Co-Operation* (Manchester: Co-operative Union, 1944), p. 217 <http://archive.org/details/in.ernet.dli.2015.28371> [accessed 27 July 2020].

They worked in Battersea and Wandsworth, Marylebone, Chelsea and Fulham, Hammersmith and Deptford.[34] These are branches that are attached to Co-operative Societies that thrive but are not the heartlands of traditional working-class industry that can sustain an expansion of the movement, which leads us to suspect that the heavy involvement of local influential figures is supporting Co-operation in these areas. Including Margaret Llewelyn Davies at Marylebone, most of these branch secretaries became quickly influential within the organisation as regional and national officers, and we often see them later active as Fabians and suffragettes. They dominate the pages of the 'Woman's Corner' as they become Sectional Secretaries, for example Miss Spooner for the Southern Section, and their financial independence—plus single status—leaving them free to work and travel meant they could quickly become useful in the organisation. As we have seen, married working-class women also progressed but not as quickly, and there were many obstacles to overcome to commit to Guild work in the same way.

A third group of branches which were supported by philanthropic ideology were the seven People's branches,[35] which were attached to a new venture called the People's Society. Co-operative failure to take root in London had inspired an initiative to try to embed co-operation in poor neighbourhoods through a different type of store: one which was more accessible to the poorer workers economic circumstances, with lower joining fees and smaller, more affordable, quantities of goods for sale. An additional measure to support the new stores was to educate the new members in the Co-operative way of life using the Guild for propaganda. The People's Society ran between 1896 and 1899 as a partnership between

[34] See Appendix D for full list of these branch secretaries and their brief biographies.
[35] The branches were located at Deptford, New Cross, Old Kent Road, Rotherhithe, St Pancras, Stoke Newington and Willesden Green.

the Co-operative Wholesale Society and Productive Societies, with the WCG appointed to create Guild branches which would support the propaganda work of the new stores. This saw working-class women run Guild branches under Miss Spooner, originally of Hammersmith and by now Southern Section Secretary and author of a number of pamphlets on the direction of the movement. Here we see Miss Spooner acting in the mode of settlement worker to coach the fledgling branches. She authored a paper called *Co-operative light in darkest London* which was read and discussed at a number of dranch and district meetings. This prompted supportive responses such as Miss Mayo commenting that 'Miss Spooner was our electric lamp in the South' and exhorting the support from members.[36] The profile of the branch secretaries from these areas seems to be similar to the general working-class profile of others at this time. However, they were in very poor areas with less of a stable artisan class, and consequently the membership overall is less educated and receptive to the Co-operative message. One report comments diplomatically that these branches face challenges because

> They are not formed of women who have perhaps been co-operators all their lives, but of women who have hardly heard of the word 'co-operation'. The men, too, are very much in the same position.[37]

[36] *Co-operative News,* 7 March 1896, p. 235.
[37] *Co-operative News*, 9 January 1897, p. 4.

In common with other projects of this sort to impose co-operation from above,[38] all but one of the Stores failed to survive once funding was removed. A report from 1899 summarises the situation:

> It is very difficult for our branches to hold together in spite of the amount of work put into them when the stores are not prosperous, and there is hardly any money to work with. Willesden Green is the most thriving.[39]

Although the primary motive from the CWS for this project was commercial, it engaged the Guild in direct propaganda and practical work within neighbourhoods previously untouched by Co-operation in a meaningful way, and involved them working much more closely with poorer women. They were also able to experience first-hand how Stores aimed at the poor could work or fail in terms of commercial incentives. Given that it ended only months before Margaret Llewelyn Davies launched her campaign for the movement to focus on the poor, it is surprising that there were no specific links made between the two initiatives either by Davies or subsequently by historians.

Settlement views of Guildswomen

We can see that the ideology of settlement life informed both Co-operative and settlement, but we are left with questions around how in reality did this affect the individual workers

[38] Vansittart Neale had used much of his personal fortune funding early London Co-operative Societies in the 1860s. Cole, *A Century of Co-operation*, p. 113.
[39] *Co-operative News*, 25 February 1899, p. 186. Willesden Green survives but mainly thanks to the new railway which meant a Co-operative store had independently sprung up at Willesden Junction, demonstrating the need for the right sort of conditions to be available for Co-operation to work.

involved and what relationships developed both with individuals and the local communities. The relationship between the women of the settlements and the Guild—when taken from their own words—was one of patronage. The primary source for these opinions are often *Annual Reports* which have their own purpose and forms. The reports partly served as a fundraising manifesto and were concerned with accounting for the good work of the settlements for their middle-class benefactors, meaning they often sound patronising to modern ears. At the Canning Town Women's Settlement (CTWS), the description of the WCG branch in 1893 is interesting as it differentiates between these Guild women and the general attendees at the settlement as follows

> Another illustration of the spirit manifested by some of our more intelligent women, is the fact that they have themselves organised a branch of the Women's Co-operative Guild and hold weekly meetings arranged for entirely by themselves.[40]

There is a tone of surprised approval at the women displaying the independence and organisational ability to manage their own meetings. It is revealing of the general expectations of both settlement worker and their reading audience that there will be no 'light' of intelligence or independence in the poor areas. This 'intelligence' is commented on afresh in almost every CTWS *Annual Report* but they also highlight progress. The Guild women were reported to become improved by their work at meetings: 'All these outside interests have done much to widen the lives of our women, and we can safely say that they are not only more intelligent, but better wives and mothers in consequence.'[41] In contrast,

[40] *Settlement of Women-Workers, Canning Town East London, Second Annual Report*, September 1893, p. 14.
[41] *Settlement of Women-Workers, Canning Town East London, Seventh Annual Report,* September 1898, p. 12.

Miss Elder of the WUS reports that when work towards an examination on *The Laws of Every-day life* was attempted at the Bermondsey it was abandoned as 'The number of attendances became smaller, and it was darkly hinted that the "Laws" had to do with the falling off'[42] implying a rebellion at the more intellectual content of the meetings. Average attendance here was twelve, which is very low.

A more unqualified, glowing response to the women she met when she was a settlement worker comes from Emmeline Pethick, the co-founder of Maison Esperance, a Co-operative which had been set up for dressmakers by Pethick and Mary Neale.[43] We have little from the Guild on this particular branch, but Pethick wrote an account of her work with the group who form the Co-operative.[44] She opens by saying that 'There was a time when I thought of working girls as a class. Now I am more inclined to think of young ladies as a class, and of working girls as individuals.'[45] Pethick goes on to enumerate the values of the girls including their work ethic, truthfulness and loyalty, whilst excusing rough manners pointing out that you have to understand the working girl, and 'to understand people, is generally, to love them'.[46] She is unusual in the passionate manner she describes her feelings towards the girls, but the depth of feeling suggests that she really has worked to understand them and develop genuine relationships beyond the boundaries of class and custom.

[42] *Co-operative News*, 28 June 1890, p. 667.
[43] Both Pethick and Neale had been settlement workers in the West London Mission and would go on to be involved in the suffrage campaign.
[44] 'Working Girls Clubs' Emmeline Pethick in Reason, *University and Social Settlements*.
[45] Ibid., p. 101.
[46] Ibid., p. 103.

There is no record of the response of Oxford House, Trinity Mission and Toynbee Hall towards the Guild as they omit almost all mention of the WCG apart from the listing of meetings in calendar schedules. The male dominated element of these organisations seemed indifferent to the work of the Guild, although they do consistently report on Co-operation in general and the content of clubs of which they felt ownership.

Guildswomen's view of settlements

We see a reflection of how the settlement workers are seen by the Guild branch members, again at a generalised level, in branch reports. Special events and meetings where a presentation was made were often the time for more personal sentiments to be expressed. A tribute to Miss Boyle when she leaves Tower Hamlets reads 'We are truly sorry to part from her … Miss Boyle has always been so sympathetic and kind, and has brought so much cheerfulness into our midst.'[47] Henrietta Barnett features constantly in the branch reports for Tower Hamlets, often in relation to an outing she has organised for the branch. These reports employ language such as 'our ever good friend', or emphasising Barnett's 'kindness' agreeing to give talks to their meetings, and inviting them to her home in Hampstead. The work of the Mrs Buchanan is acknowledged at University Club, 'University club, through the kindness of its President has moved into a "handsome accommodation at University House".'[48] The overall sentiment towards the settlement workers is to note their kindness, and role as friend. As Barbara Caine has pointed out in one of the few historical works on

[47] *Co-operative News*, 28 May 1892, p. 571.
[48] *Co-operative News*, 4 September 1897, p. 985.

friendship, this meant less personal, intimate friendship and more a supportive, patronage which was expected in inter class 'friendships' of the time.[49]

None of the accounts above were personal memorials or written to invoke personal relationships, but rather an expression of the forms of politeness. The one example where the influence of the settlement might be understood more deeply is in the long-term relationship between the Guild and the Canning Town Women's Settlement which continued well into the twentieth century. The branch meetings continued physically at the settlement throughout this period, despite the growth of the local Stratford Society which was more than able to offer support and a more natural 'home' for the Guild. It is difficult to avoid forming the idea that this was due to the personal relationship of the Warden Rebecca Cheetham to the Guild, and by extension to the women of the branch, particularly the first secretary, Jane Green, with whom she worked for over seven years in her capacity as branch President. In the absence of first-hand testimony, we must hesitate to characterise the relationship as a personal friendship. However, the effect of the CTWS on Jane Green's views of settlement work are publicly evident in her writing and work, and the lives and careers of these two women deserve greater attention.

In 1902, whilst President of the WCG, Mrs Jane Green, makes a speech in which she states

[49] Caine, *Friendship,* pp. 223-277.

> … knowing as I do the success of women's settlement work, I have great hopes that a co-operative women's settlement will be even more successful; for I would not encourage charity but help the people to help themselves.[50]

A later speech in 1905 adds an endorsement to the type of work done by settlements when, as part of her summary of the 'great strides in the movement', she is reported to have 'referred to the missionary work done among dwellers of the slums and the manner in which they were raised to a higher standard of life.'[51] Both these statements came towards the end of a long career as a Co-operator and Guildswoman, but also as someone who had been on intimate terms with the settlement movement in London. Born in Suffolk but raised in Sunderland, Jane Green (née Crabtree), was the daughter of an engine driver in a large family and later the wife of a joiner. In many ways she was the epitome of the Guildswoman demonstrated in the prosopography, as she was married at 19 and became involved in Guild work after having six children, five of whom survived. At the stage she became involved in the Guild in 1893 she still had two children at home under ten and a lodger in residence. In a profile from 1902, she describes being a long-term Co-operator having joined the Leeds Society in 1875 and then Sunderland Society in 1879 when the family moved there. In 1882 they settled in Canning Town where she joined the Store and was an ordinary member for 10 years. In 1893 she decided to attend some lectures at the Mansfield House settlement because she 'began to take some interest in Social Questions.'[52] In April she heard Miss Spooner speak at a meeting of Co-operative Builders and was introduced to Guild, and decided to start the Canning Town Branch at the settlement, making her one of the

[50] *Co-operative News*, 21 June 1902, p. 776.
[51] *Co-operative News*, 17 June 1905, p. 744.
[52] *Co-operative News*, 22 November 1902, p. 1416.

'intelligent women' mentioned in their *Annual Report*. This was the start of a long career in the Guild, with a number of regional roles culminating in election to the Stratford Society Educational Committee in an 'Unexpected triumph' in 1898, followed by Guild Central Committee work and the Presidency in 1902. For the longest part of her work however she was still she was branch secretary at Canning Town (1893-1899) and lived at 418 Barking Road, the same street as CTWS. This long spell as the branch secretary is interesting as the start of her work there coincided closely with the CTWS itself which opened in 1892, and also the work of the Warden, Rebecca Cheetham. Both through her Guild work and her residence in the local community she would have first-hand experience of the settlement work in the neighbourhood which included a hospital for women and children.

The career of Warden Rebecca Cheetham was similarly unusually full for women settlement workers at this time. She, like Jane Green, was from a modest background. Born in Manchester her mother was widowed early and supported the family with a number of jobs including boarding housekeeper and school mistress. Miss Cheetham worked as mathematics teacher at Manchester High School[53] for three years and then in 1892 aged thirty nine became the first Warden at CTWS in a job that became a lifelong vocation.[54] She spent a life of public service to the people of Canning Town, holding roles as Poor Law Guardian, West Ham School Board and as Justice of the Peace. Her work was recognised in later life with the award, in 1931, of a Civil Pension which was commented upon at the time

[53] This was also the school the Pankhurst girls attended but there was no overlap in their time there.
[54] When she finally stepped down after 21 years she volunteered as treasurer, she died aged 87 at the Settlement House. 'Obituaries', *The Times*, 12 January 1940, p. 9, <http://0.link.gale.com/apps/doc/CS153040428/GDCS?u=ull_ttda&sid=zotero&xid=199f5c84> [accessed 1 October 2020].

as unusual as social service was little recognised.[55] Although Branch President was often an honorary role, Miss Cheetham was energetic, and stood for Guild Southern Section committee (although not elected) and her election as West Ham Guardian in 1894 was claimed as a Guild victory. This experience was used to encourage other branch members, as Jane Green records

> Our president (Miss Cheetham), being a member on the West Ham Board of Guardians, has been able to enlighten us as to the work required of them. This has been very beneficial.[56]

She remained President of Canning Town branch until well into the twentieth century and a mark of the esteem in which the branch held her is shown when she was presented with a 'handsome inkstand and spectacle case in recognition of her services of nine and a half years.'[57]

It is necessary to dwell on some of these details as Miss Cheetham—unlike better known social reformers—did not author essays or pamphlets of her own, and there are few accounts of her public speaking although her name comes up in various contexts.[58] Any personal relationship with Jane Green again is undocumented; however, they worked

[55] *Common Cause,* 24 July 1931, p. 2.
[56] *Settlement of Women-Workers, Canning Town East London, Fourth Annual Report*, *September 1895*, p. 44
[57] *Co-operative News,* January 17 1903, p. 707.
[58] For example she gave evidence on working conditions of girls as part of the Webbs' *Minority Report of the Poor Law commission* in 1909. S. Webb et al., *The Public Organisation of the Labour Market: Being Part Two of the Minority Report of the Poor Law Commission: Edited, with an Introduction by Sidney & Beatrice Webb*, vol. 2 (London: Longmans, Green and Company, 1909), p. 206, <http://0.link.gale.com/apps/doc/WRXVAM377326904/MOME?u=ull_ttda&sid=zotero&xid=e8e92b7a> [accessed 1 October 2020].

together as president and secretary for seven years, during which time much was achieved by both women and Mrs Green was paid the unusual compliment of writing the Guild report in the CTWS *Annual Report*. As a result of the close relationship to the CTWS, we see Jane Green, a working-class woman, fully endorsing settlement work and philosophy in poor neighbourhoods. She becomes a leading supporter of Margaret Llewelyn Davies' plan for a settlement as part of the work to bring Co-operation to poor neighbourhoods.

Taking Co-operation to the Poor

The two problems of Co-operation and the poor and Co-operation in London were the subject of intermittent debate within the Co-operative press throughout the 1880s and beyond. Sidney Webb gave a paper at the 1891 Co-operative Congress in Lincoln, castigating the movement for its apathy in promoting Co-operation.[59] He went on to identify opportunities in using the cultural offerings of Co-operation such as the Reading Rooms and social aspects to tempt working men into the movement. As Co-operative principles did not allow them to use credit or substandard business practices to compete with private trade on the same terms, they needed to focus on structural issues and 'raise the poorest of the population within reach of co-operation', foreshadowing his work with Beatrice Webb on the Poor Law reform and welfare state. His practical methodology for this was to work municipally and parliamentarily to improve the situation of the poor who would then become customers. 'Co-operators are now rightly coming to insist that the advantages of their movement must and shall be extended to the very poorest of their fellow-citizens.'[60]

[59] S. Webb, *The Best Method of Bringing Co-Operation within the Reach of the Poorest of the Population*, (Manchester: Co-operative Union, 1891).
[60] Ibid., p. 11.

Additionally, to this call to arms, in the 1890s the two issues start to intersect as the national political focus was drawn to London through the work of Charles Booth (amongst others) illuminating the plight of the urban poor. It was both a Christian duty for Co-operators to help their poorer neighbours with the benefits of Co-operative life, as well as an economic reality that Co-operation did not flourish in the south. This was blamed by contemporaries on the nature of the metropolis, where fast urbanisation had created a fragmented society of extreme wealth and desperate poverty living side by side, but without the deeply rooted community ties of obligation, resulting in ghettoization. Towards the end of the 1890s the Co-operative Central Board developed the opinion that the WCG—with their feminine predisposition to charity work and kindness—would be the ideal group to solve the problem. From the constant campaigning in the 'Woman's Corner' and at District conferences we see that Margaret Llewelyn Davies herself was the driving force behind the resulting plans which established the Guild's reputation as the radical wing of the movement, and was according to Scott, its 'boldest attempt to build into the movement and explicit project of social reform'.[61] The two experiments that followed were the People's Co-operative Stores, described above and shortly afterwards the establishment of a fully formed Co-operative settlement in Sunderland. It is arguable that the experience of the London experiment in People's Stores combined with a leadership composed of women, both upper and working class, with first-hand experience of settlement work in London meant an almost inevitable creatin of a Guid settlement.

[61] Scott, *Feminism and the Politics of Working Women*, p. 97.

At a Southern Section Guild conference held at the CWS, Leman Street in November 1899, Davies introduced a paper outlining a number of measures that a Co-operative Society could take to allow poorer neighbourhoods to participate and benefit in the movement, crucially including a settlement house.[62] Gill Scott draws out Davies' settlement inspiration as new, coming from the American settlements and the writing of Jane Adams whom Davies does cite in her history of this time.[63] However, given the Guild association with settlements, as well as her personal relationship with the movement, it seems extremely unlikely that the idea was new to her. It is much more plausible that this had been a more long-term idea stemming from the example of women's settlements in London. From the report of the debate that followed it is clear that a number of questions such as 'the divi', pawn shops and extending credit, all of which were already under universal debate for the movement, were raised. At the heart was a general agreement that a rich Society would be able to support a store with no entry fee and pricing that would allow purchases in smaller quantities. The resolution was made to take this plan to the main Co-operative conferences with representation from the WCG to support its adoption.

Later the same month, Mrs Green responded to the scheme with a featured piece in the 'Woman's Corner' entitled 'Co-operation for the London Poor' which centred on the stories and problems of her own neighbourhood of Canning Town.[64] This piece, clearly written in support of Davies' plan, in many ways capitalised on Mrs Green's working-class background, and first-hand knowledge of an area as poor as Canning Town, lending credibility to the

[62] M. L. Davies, *Co-Operation in Poor Neighbourhoods*, (Manchester: Women's Co-operative Guild, 1899) <https://www.jstor.org/stable/60218077> [accessed 10 July 2019].
[63] Davies, *The Women's Co-Operative Guild, 1883-1904*, p. 95.
[64] *Co-operative News*, 25 November 1899, p. 1294.

plans. She is critical of the pricing of the Stores, which seek to ensure a profit and a high dividend straying far from the principles of the Rochdale Pioneers. She makes it explicit that even artisan members of the Co-operative cannot afford to shop exclusively at the higher-priced stores, and the wives of the engineers who make up the bulk of the local artisan class in Canning Town are forced to take the divi and spend it elsewhere when times are hard. A realist, she sees that the Co-operative movement has strayed too far towards 'respectability' and forgotten the realities of the poor. For example, she points out that

> Drink we all know is a curse … [but] the public house gives warmth and comfort to the class we don't touch. And before we deprive them of it—such as it is—let us be prepared to serve them something better. It's no use looking to the State or the Church for help in this direction.

She recommends the Store in the slum be one with plenty of air and space not a 'small, low ceiling sort of shop' and also wants to see a lodging house attempted. She does not love pawn shops but thinks of them as a necessary evil which should work as cash not tickets to be spent at the store, showing a sensitivity for the self-respect of the poor: 'if we want to help people to help themselves, let us make it easy for them, and not brand them.' She also advocates more education on the meaning of the Movement and that it is not just a savings mechanism. She ends by calling on the two strongest societies in the South, Woolwich and Stratford to take on the offer and with the help of the Guilds' women to take on what is a municipal role within their districts.

Mrs Green went on to take Davies on a tour of the Canning Town area and Store in 1901, which was described in detail in an article in 'The Corner'. At the Congress of 1902, although Davies was there to lead the discussion on the report of the Guild investigation, it was Jane Green as Vice President who gave an address on the subject of Co-operation and the poor, giving the settlement idea her warmest support. Here we see many of the ideas that Mrs Green and other working-class members of the movement as well as many of the Co-operative stores themselves had been testing, put together in one Utopian experiment. The Sunderland store and settlement opened in October 1902 only to be ended by the Sunderland Society in November 1904, much to the regret of the Guild.[65]

In many ways the 'failure' of the Sunderland efforts in Co-operation to the poor foundered on the point of the settlement House. Most of the measures suggested by Davies, such as reduced entry fees or sale of smaller quantities, were in place in many of the Societies around the country already. The addition of the settlement was the biggest innovation and the one that ideologically was a step too far for the Co-operative which saw it as too close to what G. D. H. Cole described as a 'soups and blankets' charity approach to the problem.[66] Not to be deterred, Jane Green and Margaret Llewelyn Davies continue to champion the approach and use the opportunity of the 'Coming of Age of the Guild' in 1904 to focus the creation of a new fund to support poor area work and a new project was set up in Bristol.

Seen in the context of the London Guilds of the 1890s and their connections with settlements and London philanthropy it seems natural that the Guild championed the idea.

[65] Gaffin and Thoms, *Caring & Sharing*, pp. 62-67.
[66] Cole, *A Century Of Co-Operation*, p. 223.

Its leaders—both middle class and working class—were closely connected with that world and confident that this was work the Guild should do. Taken as a group in this chapter we see a number of connections and interests from the branch secretaries that set up a broad context for the campaigning work of the Guild. Although Gill Scott in particular credits Davies with being the 'dynamic force behind its most progressive achievements'[67] we see many able women who no doubt contributed to the content of the policies. The work of individual branches as their involvement in systematic charitable work however is also an underlying trend in the Co-operative heartland branches such as Woolwich as will be seen in the following chapter.

[67] Scott, *Feminism and the Politics of Working Women*, p. 35.

Chapter Four—'Kentish' London: Community, self-help and charity in Plumstead

We have seen the ways in which the Guild as an organisation participated in the structures of London philanthropy and, particularly with the settlement movement, adopted them into their own work. At local branch level, priorities were influenced by community needs, often seeing the branch members active in local charitable public work such as workhouse visiting. There is also evidence, through the members' charitable acts towards each other, that traditional values of working-class mutual help and community networks were carried into the formal environment of the Guild. This chapter will use a case study of the Plumstead branch of the Guild to examine the work of a local branch; initially by constructing a picture of both the members' personal circumstances and their Guild work. This has been achieved by studying the 'Plumstead Co-Operative Women's Guild Minute Book 1888-1897'[1] which contains a combination of meeting minute, branch membership and financial data, and reveals a group of largely economically stable, artisans' wives who spent a significant amount of time engaged in fundraising for both Guild and non-Guild charities. When analysed in the local context of 1890s Woolwich, we gain a much better understanding of why charitable work was infused throughout branch work and its significance in the local community. This branch charitable work will be analysed across two areas: firstly, towards their own members in need, and what these actions contribute to our understanding of working class networks and traditions of mutual help; secondly their involvement in formal charity, such as workhouse visiting and bodies such as the Charity

[1] London, Bishopsgate Institute, WCG/8/75/1 'Plumstead Co-Operative Women's Guild Minute Book 1888-1897'

Organisation Society (COS), which were more usually associated with middle-class women. From this we will see how the Guild as a fledgling working-class women's organisation, used existing networks and traditions to help negotiate an emerging political and social landscape where working-class women could have a voice in the public sphere.

Historiography

The dominant theme of academic interest in the Women's Co-operative Guild has been the politics of working women through their involvement with the organisation, and Woolwich is no exception. For example, in a 1998 paper, Stenberg uses Woolwich, as a well-documented area of women's activism, to investigate the roots of working women's political engagement, using the Guild as part of her study. However, alongside her main interest in the political action of women, she notes that an important element of Guild branch activity in that area was charity

> … guildswomen formed an active female network, serving the interests of women, children and the community. They fulfilled functions performed in many other working-class districts by middle-class social workers, charity organisations and women's university settlements, but always with a strong emphasis on self-help and dignity.[2]

[2] K. Y. Stenberg, 'Working-Class Women in London Local Politics, 1894–1914', *Twentieth Century British History* 9:3 (January 1998), 323–349 (p. 339) <https://0-academic-oup-com.catalogue.libraries.london.ac.uk/tcbh/article/9/3/323/1645134> [accessed 8 July 2019].

Here, Stenberg helps to encapsulate the themes that we will see raised by the Plumstead Branch Minutes. There is evidence of charitable work and participation in public life, an accepted route to political work for middle-class women, but in this instance involving the wives of working men, raising a number of questions about attitudes to gender and class in Woolwich. However, there are also records of charity towards members of the branch, in a 'public' expression of the usually informal network of help in the working-class neighbourhood. Evidence of this sort of working-class mutual help has been scarce, as Ellen Ross highlights in her studies of working-class women's networks. Ross' arguments are convincing, but as she acknowledges, due to the sparsity of sources, are by necessity a 'composite', and 'it is barely possible with the resources we have to distinguish between communities.'[3] In this context the actions of this local WCG branch provide an opportunity to observe what happens to historic social customs of working-class communities when formalised and documented.

As we have seen in the previous chapters, the public identities of middle-class women have often been chiefly understood by historians in relation to their charitable work[4] and those of working-class women in relation to politics and organised labour representation.[5] Any discussion of working women and charity has been in the context of informal networks of

[3] Ross, 'Survival Networks' (p. 5).
[4] E. J. Yeo, 'Social Motherhood and the Sexual Communion of Labour in British Social Science, 1850-1950', *Women's History Review* 1:1 (March 1992), 63-87; Vicinus, *Independent Women*; J. E. Lewis, 'The Voluntary Sector in the Mixed Economy of Welfare', in D. Gladstone, ed., *Before Beveridge : Welfare before the Welfare State* (London: Institute of Economic Affairs Health and Welfare Unit, 1999); Prochaska, *Women and Philanthropy in Nineteenth-Century England*.
[5] P. Thane, 'Women, Welfare and Local Politics, 1880-1920: "We Might Be Trusted"', *The English Historical Review* CXXIII:501 (April 2008), 491–492, <https://0-academic-oup-com.catalogue.libraries.london.ac.uk/ehr/article/CXXIII/501/491/397066> [accessed 24 May 2020]; P. M. Graves, *Labour Women: Women in British Working-Class Politics, 1918-1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); S. Lewenhak, *Women and Trade Unions: An Outline History of Women in the British Trade Union Movement* (London: E. Benn, 1977).

mutual help,[6] with little written about the presence of working-class women in the formal charitable sphere: some of the reasons for this may be explained by the case of Plumstead branch. It has been observed that 'men controlled finances and committees in the world of nineteenth-century charity, while women raised funds through bazaars and balls and visited the poor.'[7] What makes the Plumstead branch and the Guild unique in this space is that they—as not only women, but working-class women—did both. They controlled their own committees and funds as well as undertaking the practical fundraising work. The main Co-operative movement, in the form of the local Society, does, however, exert a paternalistic influence upon their work. We see the effects of this primarily through the annual grant which is discretionary and must be requested from the male-dominated education committee. There is also a suggestion from the sources that the dominant Co-operative priority in Plumstead of municipal respectability affects the work the Guild is doing in terms of engagement in visible charity. This means that although there is a measure of autonomy, the greater Co-operative cause dominates and Guild efforts become absorbed into the Co-operative Movement, meaning that—over time—their contributions have become obscured.

Plumstead—local area

The economic and social landscape of 1890s Plumstead is central to understanding this branch. Woolwich had been one of the earliest sites of Co-operative activity in London and

[6] Ross, 'Survival Networks'; E. Ross, '"Not the Sort That Would Sit on the Doorstep": Respectability in Pre-World War I London Neighborhoods', *International Labor and Working-Class History* 27 (March 1985), 39-59, <http://www.journals.cambridge.org/abstract_S0147547900017087> [accessed 1 May 2019]; Davin, *Growing up Poor*.
[7] Lewis, 'Gender, the Family and Women's Agency in the Building of "Welfare States"', p. 47.

the local Society grew along with the Royal Arsenal itself,[8] becoming known as the Royal Arsenal Co-operative Society (RACS). By 1888, when the Plumstead Guild started, RACS membership stood at 6,108, producing a suggested annual dividend of £39 per family,[9] making it the twenty-first largest Society in the UK and the largest in the Southern Section. Plumstead, with its primary source of work and local trade centred around the Royal Arsenal, had earned a reputation for being populated by the stratum of the working classes known as the 'aristocracy of labour'.[10] These men were skilled workers on steady wages from the government-funded Arsenal, unlike the military in-service men dominating neighbouring Woolwich and Charlton. Woolwich had a reputation as economically stable, but there were significant public health and social problems in the district.[11] This situation had been significantly improved by the time of the First World War, thanks to the combined efforts of the Municipal Council and local trade and charitable bodies, among whom we may count the RACS. The Society was not without its challenges; the monoculture of the economy meant that the slump at the Arsenal after the end of the South African War in 1902, led to several years of commercial downturn for the RACS. Unemployment within the community, and the knock-on impact on retail meant the Society did not recover its position until 1910. This contrasts with the impression of the socio-economic status of the area in key sources such as Booth and the 1901 Census.[12] Created during the preceding boom

[8] For a summary of the history of the Woolwich Royal Arsenal, see P. Guillery, ed., *Survey of London, Volume 48: Woolwich* (London: Yale University Press, 2012).
[9] Davis et al., *The History of the Royal Arsenal Co-Operative Society, Ltd., 1868-1918*, p. 45.
[10] For a summary of the debate around this term see R. Gray, *The Aristocracy of Labour in Nineteenth-Century Britain, c.1850-1900* (London: Macmillan 1981).
[11] Woolwich had no Medical Officer of Health until 1899, and its poor municipal management has been blamed for its appalling record on sanitary health and extreme pockets of poverty. See Guillery, *Survey of London, volume 48: Woolwich* pp. 22-25.
[12] Booth did no detailed walks or investigations in Woolwich until 1900. A street classification map was then produced which was only published in *Religion* and never became part of the canonical map set—this Woolwich map is known as Map 13 (Booth/A/49) in the LSE archive as it would have been the next and final map of London.

period of the same South African War, they present a detailed picture of the area during a time of security and optimism. The subsequent depression is a reminder of the precarious nature of working-class employment in even supposedly stable areas and trades.

This combination of economic security and single industry created a different kind of working-class district to other areas, such as East London. An overall assessment of the character of the area was made in one of the Booth investigator's walks from 1900,

> Plumstead is dull and ordinary outwardly but it is remarkable in many ways … The women are at home and busy but they are busy in the yards and small gardens behind and not in front. Street life is not amusing … New houses, newly married couples, young families, wives at home, daughters not yet grown up and expecting marriage and home life not factory work as a career, husbands and sons in full and steady work, earning more money than they really know how to spend. Where in London is there another such place?[13]

Here the investigator highlights the change to street life which develops from workers gaining improved circumstances, and better housing; where communal life is less public, and—to this investigator—more respectable. Ross assesses this respectability as a change in community behaviour, involving a calculated risk to turn towards networks outside the neighbourhood mutual help for support, to organisations such as Friendly Societies.[14]

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[13] C. Booth et al., *The Streets of London the Booth Notebooks. South East* (London: Deptford Forum 1997), p. 305 This volume contains published extracts from the *Notebooks* in this case referring to Notebook B371, Walk 81.

[14] Ross, '"Not the Sort That Would Sit on the Doorstep"' (p. 52). Here Ross summarises a typical Woolwich labourer family living in exactly this way.

However, it may not be such a simple linear progression. With less obvious street life comes privacy and also less readily available indications of culture to aid the social worker to categorise the subject, which in this case is the working-class family. In the Plumstead branch we will see that the members of the Guild adopt the customs of the neighbourhood, for example their Help-in-Need Fund, and other acts of support to their members; they also reach beyond the Guild into the formal charitable structures of the area. This implies that at local level, membership of organisations such as Guild and Co-operative was not so much to exclude the neighbourhood or community but an extension of it.

Branch members' socio-economic analysis

Beyond the overall economic state of the area it is important to analyse the income levels and resources of the members of the Plumstead Guild, to establish the financial significance of their commitment to the Guild in the household budget. In addition to the branch secretaries with whom we are familiar, the members are listed by name and address in the 'Minutes'[15], which allows us to conduct two key pieces of research. Firstly, we can use Census data to identify the types of occupations they and their husbands declare, by which we can build up a picture of typical income. Secondly, we can locate their homes and cross reference that to evidence in the Booth street maps and other sources. This will give an indication of the prosperity, and character of the streets they inhabited, as well as the general types of housing and average rents; A third important survey that can be made is

[15] Bishopsgate Institute, WCG/8/75/1 'Plumstead Co-Operative Women's Guild Minute Book 1888-1897'

where they lived providing a physical map of the neighbourhood and community they have emerged from.

There are three branch secretaries in the scope of this study; Mrs Annie Dent (1891-1892), Miss Zipporah Underwood (1893-1896) and Mrs Jane Mills (1896-1904). All three broadly fit the expected profile of the branch secretary from the prosopography, being relatively stable of income but not middle class or wealthy.[16] Of the other members located in the 1891 Census, we find almost all the members' husbands recorded an occupation reflective of the type employed at the Arsenal, with the vast majority in skilled or semi-skilled trades.

Table 10 Plumstead branch husbands' occupations 1888-1897

Job type	Total
Labourer	3
Retired	1
Arsenal skilled trade	33
Clerical	2
Grand Total	**39**

It is complex to estimate average levels of pay for the workers; one contemporary historian, W. T. Vincent, made a survey of the jobs and pay at the Royal Arsenal in 1886.[17] From this we can see that the fitters, turners and carpenters at the Royal Gun Factories, which are the most likely fit for the jobs described by Members' husbands in the census, are paid significantly more than the average labourer wage of 19s a week.

[16] Annie Dent for example had been a worker at the Arsenal before marriage being recorded in the census at 17 as a cartridge maker.
[17] W. T. Vincent, *The Records of the Woolwich District* (Woolwich: J. P. Jackson, 1888).

Table 11 Average weekly wages at the Royal Arsenal 1886

Job Type	Average weekly wage (1886)
Fitters, turners, carpenters etc	£2 6s—£1 6s
Engine drivers	£1 3s—£1 8s
Labourers	£1 8s—19s

The costs and risks to be set against this apparently healthy wage, however, were many. Rent inflation and other rising living costs, were set against static wages,[18] and combined with a number of strikes, and the depression following the South African War, created uncertainty and unemployment. From Booth's street level study of the area, thirty members lived on streets which were pink (Fairly comfortable. Good ordinary earnings), forty-three on purple (Mixed. Some comfortable others poor) and two on light blue (Poor. 18s to 21s a week for a moderate family), confirming an expected bias towards the more comfortable end of the working-class scale. Within this, we find that fourteen members' households lived in homes that were of five rooms or less, which suggests that money was not so plentiful that size of house would be put above other needs.[19] It is noted by Booth that married women rarely worked in the Woolwich district, meaning women's supplements to the household income would have been difficult. His explanation was that they were more or less prevented from working due to the absence of clothing factories and other places to

[18] *Woolwich Gazette*, 12 August 1892 p.5. This newspaper article suggested rent of around 10s a week for a four roomed cottage in central Plumstead; four rooms was a relatively mean dwelling, although by no means a slum.

[19] It was the view of social reformers such as Octavia Hill that the working classes should prioritise good housing above all else, applying a higher portion of wages to rent.

obtain piece-work.[20] The value of Co-operative membership may have come to the fore in these times for the estimated fifty percent of Arsenal workers who were RACS members, and had the dividend to rely on.[21] We may characterise the overall economic situation as precarious. The wives of Arsenal workers, whilst comfortable by working-class standards, were unlikely to have their own sources of income and so any contributions to Guild funds would come from the man's wage. Even in an area of stable working-class employment, and slightly higher than average wages, there were economic risks to comfort and prosperity that no-one could afford to forget.

Branch Finances

The financial records of the branch give us a detailed insight into how the branch raised its money, what expenditure it prioritised, and how this fits with the economic lives of the members. A few overall points are worth noting; the Plumstead branch was new and growing, its ability to generate income and spend its proceeds as it chose would mature and grow as the branch gained members and expertise. It had differing priorities from year to year, depending on the demands of the local Society and the Guild overall. This resulted in some annual fluctuations in both the level of income and expenditure focus. Fortunately, the Help-in-Need Fund was included in the accounts, with its donations totalled separately from the general fund, allowing us to gauge its impact in detail. Some funds, i.e. The Outing

[20] C. Booth, *Life and Labour of the People in London. 3d Series: Religious Influences* (London: Macmillan, 1902), p. 134.
[21] Although, almost invariably, a period of financial hardship for the members resulted in a lower dividend in following years, as Society profits diminished as less is spent in store.

Fund, Christmas Fund and Sick Benefit Fund, were accounted for separately, and these records are either unavailable or only partially available.

Table 12 Plumstead branch accounts 1891-1895

Financial Year[22]	Total Income	Total Expenditure	Balance in Hand	Number of Members
1891-1892	£10 6s 9d	£9 5s 6¾d		34
1892-1893	£13 12s 4½d	£9 14s 4d	£3 18s ½d	35
1893- 1894	£9 1s 8d	£8 1s 1¼d	£1 0s 9¼d	52
1895- 1895	£29 8s 17 d	£24 10s 6d	£4 18s 5d	70

Table 13 Plumstead branch income by category 1891-1895

Financial Year	Donations —Help in Need fund	Donations —Special Funds	Income— Fundraising Events	Income —Grant from RACS	Income— other	Subscriptions Membership fees
1891-1892	5s 2d	£1 4s 10d	£7 0s 4d	11s 8d		£1 1s 11d
1892-1893	17s 6d		£9 1s 3d		£1	£2 11s 8d
1893-1894	10s 12d		15s 2d		£3 18s 2d	£3 8s 10d
1894-1895	11s 10d	13s 0d	£14 12s 1d	£7 9s 0d	£1 10s 0d	£4 16s 11d

It can be seen that income varied from year to year, which was due to the way it was generated. Members' subscriptions are one income stream which fluctuates, both with the number of members and the subscription charged,[23] as well as how many are paying regularly. As we can see from the membership fees income (Table 13) these fell far short of the expenditure recorded in the accounts (Table 12) and would not have been enough to fund the work of the branch. Fundraising was required to make up the shortfall and was

[22] There are other pages of expenditure for different years but only the full year accounts are listed here as reliable. The 1888-1890 period was a 'false start' for this branch which restarted in 1891 and continued without interruption. Not all of the itemised accounts data was dated accurately or legibly, so there are occasional approximations, however it has been possible to reconcile the line by line accounts with the audited totals to within a few shillings. The financial year in this case ran from May to May.

[23] This began at 1d a month but increased in mid-1892 to 2d to cover the cost of salary to the secretary.

managed primarily through sales of their sewing work, and entertainment such as teas, where tickets were sold, the profits then used for branch costs. In some years the RACS Education Committee granted them up to £2 towards their work, but this was decided annually and does not appear to have been consistent.[24]

Table 14 Plumstead branch expenditure by category

Financial Year	Costs— Branch overheads	Costs— Fundraising outlay	Costs— Members Travel/ Conference	Central WCG Costs	Paid out Help-in-Need fund	Local Charity	Central WCG Charity
1891-1892	£4 19s 8d	0	£1 14s 10d	7s 6d	10s 9d	£1 4s 3d	
1892-1893	£3 7s 5d	£1 18s 4d	£2 8d	£1 1s 0d	14s 0d	4s 0d	
1893-1894	£3 3s 8d	9s 2d	£2 2s 4d	14s 6d	6s 2d	11s 10d	11s 0d
1894-1895	£11 7d	15s 1d	£5 2s 7d	£3 8s 7d	4s 8d	19s 3d	7s 6d

Branch expenditure was primarily on the business of branch work, a large proportion of which was running costs such as stationery, postage, and the small salary paid to the secretary. Expenses were also incurred when investing in materials and other set up costs for fundraising, which were then recouped. The next significant branch cost was participation in wider Guild activity: sending delegates to conferences, talks and other branches. The branches were required to send subscriptions to the Central and District Committees of the Guild as part of their membership of the organisation. These were a key part of branch work, without which they would have been marginalised in national debate and a less vibrant place for women to meet. The remainder of the expenditure was a mixture of Guild and non-Guild causes. Beyond the direct work of the Guild, they also contributed to national and local charities as well as their own members via the Help-in-

[24] This was a constant problem across all branches as highlighted by the Central Committee in *Annual Report Thirteen, 1896* and *Annual Report Fourteen, 1897.*

Need Fund. The absolute monetary value of these charitable contributions is less important in many ways than what they represent. A small, self-financed women's group was making constant evaluations about how to spend their limited resources. That charitable giving was a priority—and one which grew as they became more successful—is an indication of their position within the community and relationships to other organisations beyond the confines of Co-operative life.

As membership fees were insufficient to support the activities of the branch; other sources of income and fundraising needed to be found, and—apart from donations from the RACS Education Committee—this meant fundraising amongst their own members and the community. The numerous teas, musical *soirées* and *conversaziones* staged by the branch were a source of both practical charitable fundraising and an opportunity for social networking. In a respectable, temperance-influenced, Society these occasions served for local entertainment for Co-operative workers and their families, and other local branches. The propaganda role of these events as a draw to new Co-operators was important, as social occasions were an opportunity of attracting new members. The branch also used the opportunity to invite 'old women' from the workhouse and poor children from the neighbourhood. It seems likely that, rather than propaganda towards the poor, this was a direct charitable act or even some influence of the settlement ideas of improving the lives of the very poor by befriending them. Woolwich was a district known for its lack of religious engagement and there is little mention of religion in the branch life here.[25] One exception was the use of the vicarage lawn for events, loaned by the Revd Escreet, who acted on the

[25] For an explanation of the lack of engagement with religion amongst the artisan class in Woolwich see G. Crossick, 'The Labour Aristocracy and Its Values: A Study of Mid-Victorian Kentish London', *Victorian Studies* 19:3 (1976), 301–328, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3826130> [accessed 17 February 2020].

board of the COS and was instrumental in local radical politics, and so was not necessarily a signal of religious affiliation.

As we have seen, the branch secretaries and committee members can sometimes be financially independent and influential in charity and society. Plumstead is an example of an area where the women are not wealthy but may still gain local influence via their Co-operative work. Due to the detailed nature of the 'Minutes; we have an opportunity to assess their contribution or influence by observing where they may propose motions or volunteer for tasks, in particular we may note their contribution to the charitable work of the branch.[26] Mrs Dent took a special interest in the Sick Benefit Club as a 'visitor' and then treasurer. She also volunteered on the infirmary rota. Miss Underwood is somewhat overshadowed by the activity of her mother, Mrs Underwood, who had been active in Guild work from the start, being Branch President in Woolwich before Plumstead was formed and on the committee at Plumstead from its inception.[27] Mrs Underwood is recorded proposing women for the Help-in-Need fund relief, and also being the 'visitor' appointed to take relief on another occasion. Their relationship may cloud the issue of Miss Underwood's contribution, but she appeared to spend more time on 'political' work and is not recorded as visiting the infirmary although their personal loss of Mr Underwood (father and husband) may have contributed to a break in their involvement. Mrs Mills joined the branch in 1893,

[26] All three appear in the *Co-operative News* Mrs Dent, became Branch President after secretary, and was often nominated to represent the Branch externally. Miss Underwood served on the South Metropolitan District committee in 1895 and in 1898 achieved first class mark in the WCG Co-operation examinations. She was also author to the 'Corner' of a letter on behalf of the Branch which is impassioned in its support of the Miner's wives.

[27] Mrs Underwood had also stood (unsuccessfully) for Guild Central committee in 1899 and served on the Society Education Committee, as a family they appear to be influential.

and is recorded volunteering for the workhouse visitor rota and as sick visitor on several occasions.[28]

Branch Networks and community

Members of the branch worked together to create an effective fundraising body, but also became involved in activities beyond those required of them as Guild members. The answer to why they did this and how they were so effective, can be partly answered by network analysis of the members. Branch membership was managed by a system of new members being nominated by an existing member; they were then accepted or not by the committee. This process suggests they were likely to be known personally to their nominator, or at least known within the community. The list of members from the 1890s bears this out and reveals the close community in which this branch operated. Mapping around eighty members, recorded over the course of nearly ten years, we find that they were mainly drawn from the neighbourhood south of the Arsenal, with seven streets accounting for nearly thirty of the listed members, while several more had more than one member in residence (see Figure 7). This emphasises the significance of the close geographical proximity of the main employer and the workers and their families. Living clustered around the Arsenal as they did, the common focal point of the local industry and Co-operative is likely to have been one explanation for the success of this branch.[29]

[28] Mrs Mills is noted to have failed the Co-operative exam in 1896, only answering six questions. We can see from the 'Minutes' that her handwriting is the poorest of the three secretaries, these factors suggest that she was less confident in her education and public speaking outside the branch whilst obviously being competent enough to keep the role for at least eight years.
[29] See Appendix E for a brief biography of the branch secretaries and full membership list for Plumstead.

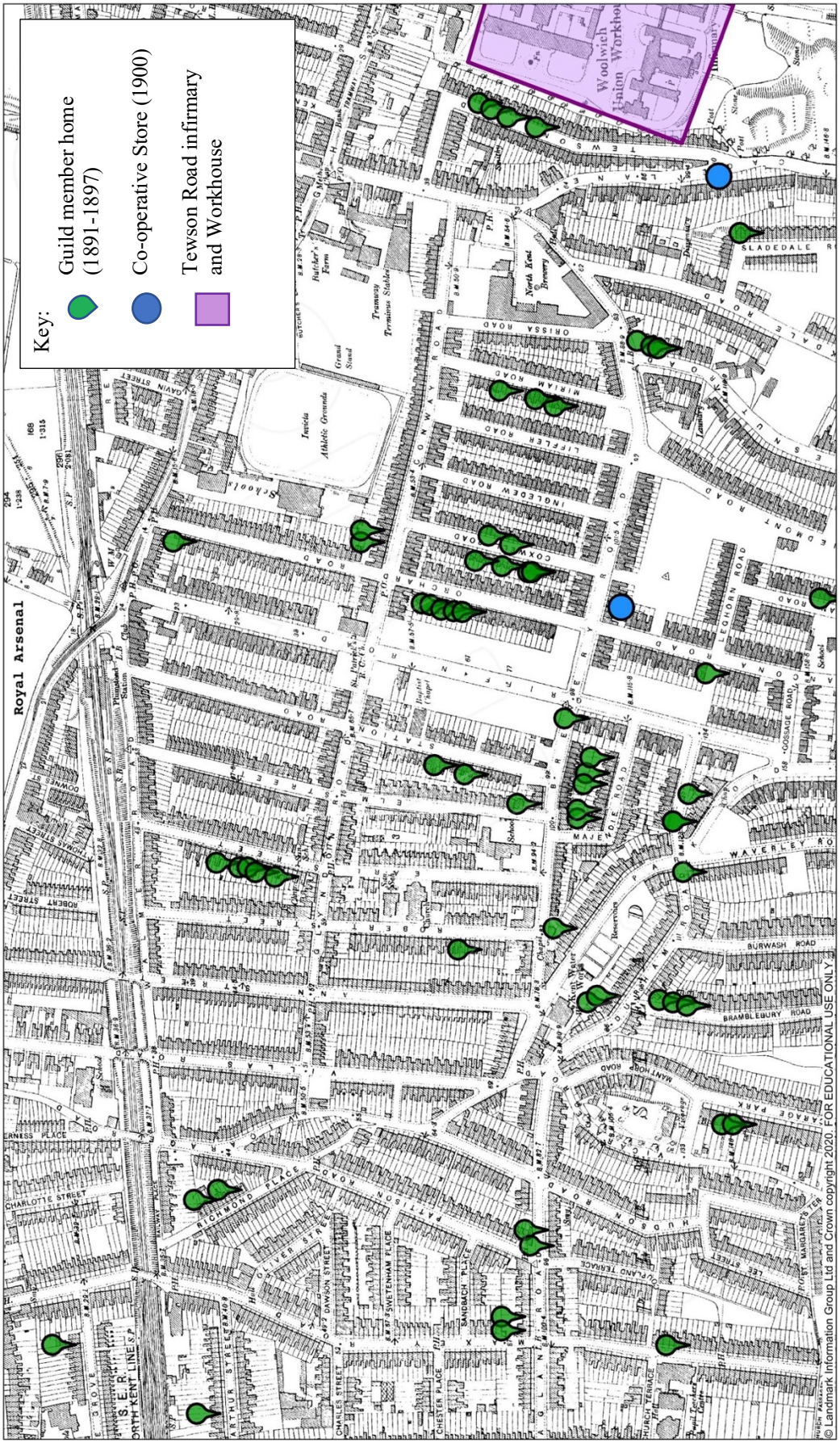

Figure 7 Map of Plumstead members' homes (British National Grid, 1890)

This physical neighbourhood of course does not on its own prove friendliness or community feeling. In this case we also have other sources to support our assumptions. The real sense of a community is demonstrated in the minutes of the branch meetings which provide a useful narrative to explain the reasons behind some of the decisions around charity and concern for members. They publicly exhibited this through funds for Guild members, their donations to other funds such as COS, and visiting the workhouse and infirmary. Many of these actions are both illustrative of their charity but also the bonds and local networks that are possibly driving their actions. The RACS Jubilee history notes that

> … there has been much practical, sympathetic helpfulness in all the branches. Such funds as Mrs Ben Jones' convalescent fund, Help-in-Need fund, grants to sick members etc. bear strong testimony to mutual kindliness.[30]

The language here, 'practical', 'sympathetic', 'mutual kindliness', is very different to the public assessment of the COS at this time, which had earned the nickname 'Cringe or Starve' in recognition of its strict conditions of personal behaviour and hygiene before help would be dispensed.[31] This underlines the 'emphasis on self-help and dignity', mentioned by Stenberg above and is not a new concept in relation to working-class culture. The propensity for the poor and working classes to help each other was observed by contemporary authorities and social investigators. Anna Davin cites an 1870s Poor Law report which summarises reciprocal neighbourhood help: ' … they assist each other to an

[30] Davis et al., *The History of the Royal Arsenal Co-Operative Society Ltd., 1868-1918*.
[31] D. Burnham, 'Selective Memory: A Note on Social Work Historiography', *British Journal of Social Work* 41:1 (January 2011), 5–21 (p. 9), <https://academic.oup.com/bjsw/article-lookup/doi/10.1093/bjsw/bcq114> [accessed 18 February 2020].

extent which is little understood, and for which they receive little credit.'[32] Davin goes onto observe that this type of charity was acceptable because

> This kind of help was not almsgiving and could be accepted without shame because it was part of a network of reciprocal favours, given and received amongst people who were aware that on another occasion positions might be reversed.[33]

Charles Booth also briefly records this phenomenon in the 'Minor Notes' chapter of the final volume of *Life and Labour,* Booth lists several findings of investigators on this matter:

> 3. Resources of the Poor
>
> (a) […] The poor help each other more than any other class, and there must be resources to a greater extent than is realised
>
> (b) How the poor live (says a nurse) when they are helpless remains a mystery, save for their great kindness to each other … It is nearly always the neighbours.
>
> (c) It is only the poor that really give (says a Nonconformist witness). Personal help and timely relied are the key notes of the charity of the poor. They know exactly the wants of one another and give when needed.[34]

[32] Local Government Board Report, 1873-4 (Appendix B, report 14, Henry Longly on Poor Law Administration in London), p. 186. Cited in Davin, *Growing up Poor*, p. 59.
[33] Ibid., p. 59.
[34] Booth, *Life and Labour of the People in London. Final Volume*, p. 86.

This final point is borne out by the evidence of the Help-in-Need Fund, funeral donations and membership fee 'holidays' in the Plumstead example. These measures illustrate the value of help given in a sensitive way that would not embarrass the recipient, and an appropriate amount. It is possible that this was only really manageable by a group such as a Guild branch, where the members stood on an equal social footing with the leadership and could accept help on the same equal terms of the neighbourhood.

Charity towards members

In the 1892 Margaret Llewelyn Davies reserved a section of the *Annual Report* to address the issue of charity.

> Charities.
>
> We notice a tendency among some Branches to devote a good deal of time and money in special charitable directions, such as maternity bags, free breakfasts, free teas, help to poorer members, etc.; all this shows such excellent feeling that it seems hard to warn Branches that such methods have not always been found beneficial. We would urge that much discriminating care be used, remembering that we have to look not only to the *intention* but to the *result* of our actions.[35]

Here Davies (italics author's own) aligned herself with the COS attitude against indiscriminate giving and is very much in line with Co-operative views on charity, as self-help

[35] *Women's Co-Operative Guild Ninth Annual Report* (Manchester, 1892), p. 14.

is the overriding mantra. It is also likely that the Central Committee were understandably concerned about fundraising and other activities being used for Guild work first and foremost. However, when we delve into the mentions of charitable work in the Guilds, it seems that—in reality—the boundaries between 'pauperising' charity versus organised charity and self-help funds are flexible. We find a number of Help-in-Need Funds being run by branches as well as *ad hoc* giving in multiple instances. We can use the detailed minutes and accounts of the Plumstead branch to investigate more fully how these charitable actions were determined and practised. The Guild *Branch Rules* suggest that various funds for the support of members, including a sick fund are useful but not required; an Outing Fund, Sick fund, Clothing Fund and Coal Fund were all suggested, however, these were all funds which paid out in proportion to input as a way of saving or insurance.[36] Our interest here is in the ways in which the branch supported members with charitable actions or giving, their motives and the results of their actions on the members and wider community.

Firstly, and perhaps most importantly, we can examine their fund for Help-in-Need. Plumstead was not unique in setting up this fund: other new branch reports of the time also mention a members' Help-in-Need fund.[37] However we have no detail on what it entailed except for Plumstead.[38]It was not an insurance scheme, but a charitable fund which was managed through *ad hoc* contributions to a donation box at meetings. The proceeds were distributed according to need, determined as 'any person recommended by 3 of the

[36] Co-operative Women's Guild, *How to Start and Work a Branch with Model Branch Rules*, p. 11.
[37] Woolwich, Battersea, Brighton and Plymouth all mention such funds being of use to their members in Branch Reports to 'Woman's Corner'.
[38] Although the annual balance sheet for Woolwich does contain the total income and expenditure for its Help-in-Need fund in 1885 and 1886 and shows similar amounts as Plumstead. (*Co-operative News*, 5 September 1885, p. 882 and *Co-operative News*, 2 February 1886, p. 138.)

committee be relieved'.[39] The annual income and expenditure recorded for Help-in-Need at Plumstead was relatively small, 13s or 14s with the income being slightly less than the amount paid out, suggesting it was supplemented from other funds on occasion.[40] The donations were made along with member subscriptions at the weekly meetings, and were meticulously recorded in the 'Minutes'. There is no mention of members being encouraged to donate more, or censured for failing to donate: the presence of the donation box seems to be just an established fact of branch life. Mrs Deans and Mrs Underwood of the Plumstead branch were previously members of Woolwich and it is likely they brought the idea with them from there. Certainly, Mary Lawrenson, as President of the WCG (and also Woolwich branch), specifically recommended this type of fund on at least one occasion to a new branch,[41] and was influential in the London area until her resignation in 1889.[42] At least one member is recorded as writing a letter of thanks to the committee and suggests that charity in this form is both given and received in the spirit of self-help.

Another important provision made for members is a resolution in 1895 that 'in future any member shall not be expected to pay subscriptions during the time her husband is out of work.'[43] This recognises the finely-balanced nature of the household finances involved where even the 2d monthly subscription to the Guild would be an unwelcome burden during periods of unemployment. The year that this rule was introduced did see a dip in membership revenue: we see a shortfall of around 8s in membership subscriptions,

[39] Bishopsgate Institute, WCG/8/75/1, 12 October 1888.
[40] See Branch accounts Table 12 above.
[41] *Co-operative News*, 4 February 1888, p. 114. Finsbury Branch Report "an address by Mrs Lawrenson which showed the desirability of reserving our 'Help' fund for the special object of its formation, i.e. relief of cases of unforeseen or pressing need."
[42] Lawrenson may have set the tone for some of the charitable work: she also advocated children's education as a key aim of the Society
[43] Bishopsgate Institute, WCG/8/75/1, 10 November 1895.

suggesting that some members at least took advantage of the offer. In the long term it may have proved a shrewd decision, the *Annual Reports* of 1901-4 record only a small dip in the membership levels for Plumstead, despite the depression after the end of the South African War.

It seems then that this type of *ad hoc* charity fund was popular with the members and used in a number of branches. On the surface, such charity seems at odds with the popular conception that the working classes disliked handouts of this sort. If we look at the actual circumstances of the help given, detail emerges which can explain the differences between the Help-in-Need Fund and other charity handouts. The process to decide relief was recorded in the minutes, and in practice usually one or two members raised an issue to the Committee. Investigating the names of the 'proposers' and recipients, and locating their homes, we see the close neighbourhood networks that are important here, in the vein of those identified by Tebbutt in *Women's Talk*.[44] For example, on 17 October 1892 Mrs Moriarty proposes, and Mrs Tipp seconds, that Mrs Smith receive 3s.[45] Mrs Smith was a close neighbour of Mrs Moriarty on Tewson Road, her husband was a general labourer and she had ten children listed on the 1891 census, with no occupations recorded for herself or the older children. A period of unemployment would have been a serious blow, which a neighbour would notice,[46] and through the Guild, be able to offer formal help. Another described in the minutes as 'an old member of our Guild in great need'[47] but listed in the

[44] Tebbutt, *Women's Talk?*
[45] Bishopsgate Institute, WCG/8/75/1, 17 October 1892.
[46] For examples of the variety of neighbour responses to unemployment see Roberts, *A Woman's Place: An Oral History of Working-Class Women 1890-1940*, p. 199; Also, for the dramatic effects of unemployment Davin, *Growing up Poor*, 1996, p. 23.
[47] Bishopsgate Institute, WCG/8/75/1, 27 March 1893.

accounts as Mrs Cotton, lived on the same street as two other members and in the next street to the president Mrs Anderson, who was then appointed to take the money to her. On another occasion, Miss King has 10/- donated to her upon the committee 'hearing … that her father was out of work',[48] again the father was a labourer not an artisan. The language here is sympathetic and anecdotal, there is no formal investigation process, just the neighbourhood 'gossip' filtering through to the committee. It is also interesting to note that there is also no record of discussion around the worthiness of the recipient unlike the more clinical process of the formal charities such as COS. Other anonymous recipients were given bags of coal and other small help that was needed in the season.[49] The women in need and their family circumstances were already known within the community of the branch precluding any need for explanation, harking back to the Booth investigator's observation that 'They know exactly the wants of one another and give when needed.'[50] It was likely that their membership of both Co-operative and Guild acted as a marker of respectability that means they were not suspected of being indolent poor but rather temporarily in need.

The women deputised to take the donations may have also been performing the role of visitor to ensure that the recipient was comforted, and that further help is not required. The suggestions of help from member to committee are strongly reminiscent of the examples of local help we see in another Guild source, *Maternity.*[51] Here, women (all past or present Guild officials) described their experiences of childbearing and privations caused by lack of adequate care. The primary concern of this collection of writing was to support the political

[48] Ibid., 23 November 1896.
[49] Ibid., 4 February 1895.
[50] Booth, *Life and Labour of the People in London. Final Volume*, p. 86
[51] Davies, *Maternity*.

campaign for maternal benefit, but a number of the recollections include references to the women without whom the author would have failed to survive, '… the neighbours came in and did what they could for me,'[52], 'I did what I could … I had him most of the time before her last illness.'[53] These examples and numerous other references to local help are mentioned both by those receiving and giving help in close neighbourhoods.

Other less formal signifiers of mutual help and giving include the importance placed on funerals and the loss of a husband or family member. Five different funerals were dealt with by the committee. These were the husbands of members and the branch responded with, letters of condolence, collections for wreaths and of course attendance at the funerals. Links with the broader Co-operative community are also displayed. The funeral of Mr Murray from the Educational Committee of RACS, demonstrates the close links between local Guild branches. Plumstead and Woolwich joined together with a collection for a shared wreath and mourning coach, as well as joint representation at the funeral. Mr Murray had been a supporter of the Plumstead branch, being the Education Committee Member who paid the costs of the room hire and grant. He had lived on Orchard Road, making him a close neighbour of several branch committee members. The branch response to funerals was entirely in line with contemporary custom. The respectable burial was an important part of working-class culture at this time with most people, even of the slimmest means, subscribing to funeral insurance to ensure that this cost is covered for the family.[54] Maud Pember Reeves pays this particular attention in *Round about a Pound a Week* when she

[52] Ibid., p. 19.
[53] Ibid., p. 68.
[54] P. Johnson, 'Conspicuous Consumption and Working-Class Culture in Late-Victorian and Edwardian Britain', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 38 (1988), 27–42 (pp. 36 and 40) <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3678965> [accessed 7 February 2020].

observes the debt people were willing to get themselves into to ensure a respectable send-off for loved ones.[55] This may also explain the branch making efforts to financially support members when a funeral is needed.

The community of the Guild and the sisterhood of the women involved was most publicly expressed by the foundation of the Mrs Ben Jones Memorial Fund, which became the Mrs Ben Jones Convalescent Fund. Annie Jones (always known as Mrs Ben Jones) was the wife of the Managing Director of the Co-operative Wholesale Society (CWS), and as branch secretary of West Norwood, was one of the founding members of the Guild in 1883. Mrs Jones was twice president of the Guild, her second term being cut short by her premature death in May 1892 aged 42. The reaction to her death was an outpouring of emotional, personal loss from members, especially in the South. In life she had been held up as the ideal Co-operative wife and had gently advocated for women to retain their place in the home, and base their power there, whilst also pursuing public life. In death, she became virtually canonised in the mythology of the organisation. The letter of condolence to her husband from the Central Committee describes her 'perfectly refined, pure nature' and personality with an 'entire absence of anything like self-assertion'.[56] Mr Jones' reply to this letter becomes much quoted;

> It is a great consolation to my children and to me that she succeeded so well in making our home an earthly paradise while at the same time she was able to do so much to promote the happiness of others.[57]

[55] M. Pember Reeves, *Round about a Pound a Week* (London: G Bell and Sons, 1913), pp. 58–65.
[56] *Co-operative News*, 12 May 1894, p. 515.
[57] *Co-operative News*, 19 May 1894, p. 559.

Both letters were printed in the 'Corner' and inspired a number of responses from members, all similar in tone.[58] There followed the creation of the Mrs Ben Jones Convalescent Fund in her honour. The Plumstead branch shows itself in no way immune to this response, being one of the first branches to write to the 'Corner' to support the Fund.[59] They held bazaars and sales of work to fundraise and prioritise it over other causes such as the Lifeboat Association. In the list of subscribers printed in the 'Corner', their contribution to the initial fund at £3 2s 6d, was one of the largest branch donations, after Norwood and Battersea. In October 1896 there was a note in the minutes recording '… that mem. (sic) accept the offer of a framed photo of Mrs Jones in recognition of our contributions to memorial fund.'[60] There is no doubt that Plumstead had energy and commitment to fundraise and were inspired by this cause. As a south London Guild, they had met Mrs Jones on more than one occasion, and it is evident that the influence of this almost perfect Co-operative wife was lasting. The Convalescent fund sent members on short holidays, often to other members' houses, it continued for the entire life of the Guild, becoming a symbol of the larger community of mutual support. Poignantly, part of its remit was to look after the 'Evergreen Book' where members were memorialised after death, an action which contributes to the community and fellowship of the thousands of Guild women who were unlikely to be remembered publicly elsewhere.

[58] See Blaszak for a discussion of differing treatment of the leadership at this time in reference to their perceived femininity. B. Blaszak, 'The Gendered Geography of the English Co-Operative Movement at the Turn of the Nineteenth Century', *Women's History Review*, 9:3 (September 2000), 559–583 <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/09612020000200252> [accessed 16 January 2019].
[59] *Co-operative News*, 23 June 1894, p.724.
[60] Bishopsgate Institute, WCG/8/75/1, 26 October 1896.

Public charity

The second strand of charitable work is public charity, both in the local community and in support of national Co-operative efforts. Plumstead records donations to COS, District Nursing Fund, MABYs and the Workhouse as well as committee work and visiting activity. They also fundraise for the Lifeboat Fund, the Miners' wives[61] and a number of *ad hoc* local lockout and strike funds. It is here, in particular, that a careful comparison between the 'Minutes' and the other sources show the ways in which these women's contributions to local charitable work has been obscured. The well-known patriarchal methods of committee work, with men running the financial and policy decisions on the committee while women take a silent supporting role, are compounded in relation to working-class women.[62] The Guild was seen by the Co-operative as an auxiliary arm which was there to support the educational and propaganda aims of the Co-operative proper and not act as an independent organisation. In contemporary eyes there would be no reason for donations and monies raised by the Guild to be accounted for separately from the RACS.

The reputation and standing in the Woolwich community of the RACS itself was also at issue. In his overview of municipal life of the borough of Woolwich, prominent local Co-operator and veteran of Toynbee Hall, C.H. Grinling, observes the 'remarkable' activity of the RACS in the area of social welfare.[63] When we start to investigate the nature of this activity, it becomes clear that there are tensions between the RACS and the local Trade

[61] The Miners Lock Out of 1893 was supported by a fund for the wives and children which by its end in 1894 had raised over £45 from national donations by the Guild. *Co-operative News*, 13 January 1894, p. 58.
[62] F. K. Prochaska, 'Charity Bazaars in Nineteenth-Century England', *Journal of British Studies* 16:2 (1977), 62–84, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/175360> [accessed 7 February 2020].
[63] Davis et al., *The History of the Royal Arsenal Co-Operative Society, Ltd., 1868-1918*, p. 240.

Council who see them as a threat. One battleground for the two organisations is that of municipal activity. It has been hypothesised that in Woolwich there is no local gentry and therefore the leading tradesmen can gain status that would be denied to them in a country town.[64] If we accept this then the great emphasis put upon an organisations' actions within the community, makes more sense in terms of power structures. One notable exchange in the *Woolwich Gazette* sees a small item by the Trade Council criticise the RACS for not contributing to the Diamond Jubilee celebrations.

> A complaint was made that though the Arsenal Co-operative Society claim to have a turn over of half a million, they take no share in bearing the expense of such celebrations, or indeed in any charitable of benevolent work ...

The article goes on to suggest that the local people are better off spending their money with local private traders who would use their profits to

> … be brought much more into contact with the life of the people, and would tend to raise the tone of public spirit far more than the mere agents and employees of a co-operative society.[65]

Grinling, wrote a robust rebuttal in the following week's edition, which listed—among other things—the RACS's charitable donations to the same list of bodies that the Guild are active

[64] Crossick, 'The Labour Aristocracy and Its Values'.
[65] *Woolwich Gazette*, 17 June 1892 <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/BL/0001019/18920617/109/0004?browse=true> [accessed 30 April 2020], p. 4.

in supporting. It is likely that the Plumstead branch was supporting the RACS in its charitable efforts both practically and financially, but without taking credit. This incident shows both the importance of charitable work in the local community as well the identity of the Guild as primarily Co-operative.

More detail on this activity is found in the Plumstead 'Minutes' where we find records of expenditure and donations from the branch local charities as follows

Table 15 Plumstead branch expenditure on charitable causes

Cause	1893-1894	1894-1895	1895-1896
Subscription to COS			5s
Subscription to District Nursing Fund	2s 6d	5s	£1
Subscriptions to MABYS		3s	6s

The amount donated to charitable causes increased with the strength of the branch as did the involvement of the members, the 'Minutes' record numerous examples of their involvement. In 1895 Mrs Underwood and Mrs Moriarty are appointed to represent the branch at the annual meeting of the District Nursing Association conference,[66] and on another occasion delegates are sent to the annual meeting of the Children's Country Holiday Fund.[67] The work across the external committees is distributed between committee members: in March 1896 we see Mrs Watts resigning her place on the COS board as she is on too many committees but Mrs Deans takes it up.[68] There are limited surviving records of

[66] Bishopsgate Institute, WCG/8/75/1, 25 March 1895.
[67] Ibid., 23 November 1896.
[68] Ibid., 2 March 1896.

the recipient organisations for this period, but there are occasionally names on the donor lists that are likely to have been branch members, although in the absence of other identifying information we may not be certain.[69]

Another key area of work for the branch, closely aligned both with ideas of community and formal charity, was their involvement with the infirmary and workhouse.[70] From 1896 this is a new focus for the Committee who set up visiting rotas, a donation box and donations of newspapers. One likely explanation for this was to gain experience in the area as there was a push by the central Guild for Poor Law Guardian elections;[71] Mrs Deans and Mrs McIntyre from this branch would become Guardians by 1901. However, although the push for Guardians was national Plumstead does not appear to be typical in pursuing this visiting work. There are few references to this type of visiting by other branches, and, Grays who were active in other charity work, complained that they, 'cannot get the members interested enough in outside work (guardians, workhouse visiting &tc) to take it up.'[72] The ongoing relationship between branch and workhouse is at a level of involvement usually seen in middle-class women visitors rather than working-class women and merits closer analysis.

[69] Woolwich, Plumstead, and Charlton Nursing Association, *The Second Annual Report ... from January 1 to December 31, 1892* (Woolwich: J. Molyneux, 1893); Family Welfare Association, *Aims and Work of the Charity Organisation Committee in the Woolwich District, Oct. 1st 1891-Sept. 30th 1892* (Woolwich: J. Molyneux, 1892) <http://0.link.gale.com/apps/doc/QCPNMR678195059/MOME?u=ull_ttda&sid=zotero&xid=fff31a5d> [accessed 4 March 2020].

[70] Part of the Woolwich Union, the Tewson Road workhouse had been established in 1870. Peter Higginbotham, 'The Workhouse in Woolwich, London: Kent' <http://www.workhouses.org.uk/Woolwich/> [accessed 17 February 2020].

[71] After removal of the property qualification for women in 1894 allowed working class women to be elected.

[72] *Co-operative News,* 4 September 1897, p. 985.

The visiting rotas involved many branch members. The 'Minutes' record discussion of the nominations for the weekly visitors to the Infirmary, usually a pair of women from the committee, with an additional initiative to take donations of magazines and papers, especially 'The Illustrated papers and the graphics as they would be so interesting for the old people.'[73] A collection box is set up to allow donations to fund their 'weekly subscription' to the workhouse alongside the Help-in-Need Fund. They also occasionally invited some of the 'old ladies' or children[74] from the workhouse to their teas as an act of charity. These activities are difficult to detect in the official records of the workhouse, illustrating some of the issues of gender and class that we face when trying to trace working-class women in the archive. Surviving records for the Woolwich Workhouse do generally record gifts and entertainments, as well as other visitors.[75] These are most often donated by men and women who were on the board of the workhouse, as well as numerous local charities, and so this may be why their benevolence is more noteworthy. Other sources such as the local papers, may be also searched for evidence of Guild contributions, and this can be a revealing process. Occasionally gifts of periodicals and papers are attributed to members of the Guild, but these are often by the individuals' names not the organisation, or once or twice the donor is listed as the RACS or Co-operative Society.[76] This means any link to the work of the Guild is lost without detailed cross referencing. There is no record of the cash donations which are suggested by the Plumstead minute books or the invitations to parties for the children.

[73] Bishopsgate Institute, WCG/8/75/1, 30 November 1896.
[74] Ibid., 27 January [February in minutes but was January] 1896.
[75] London Metropolitan Archives, WOBG/051/003, 'Woolwich Board of Guardians, Board and Committee Minutes', 14 May 1896.
[76] *Kentish Independent*; Several of the reports between 1896-1897 mention individuals who are likely to be Guild members.

It was far from usual for working-class women to be so involved in hospital and workhouse visiting. These had their own conventions around visiting and management, dominated by the largely middle-class organisations of Louisa Twining's Workhouse Visiting Society, church involvement and the elected Guardians and management board. Other visitors would usually have been personal, to visit family or friends, the day for this was generally Sunday when working people had the day off. The motivations and effect of visitors in hospitals and asylums are examined by Mooney and Reinarz, who define four types of visitor to workhouses and hospitals at this time; the patient visitor; public visitor; house visitors and official visitors; or more succinctly 'Tourists, entertainers or reformers of the soul'.[77] It is hard to define the branch members as visitors in a single one of these groups but the political element of their Guild interest sees them as visitors in the 'reformer' arena as they attempt to improve the lives of the workhouse inmates on an individual level as well as by starting to participate in municipal work.

A final element of charitable work is the branch contribution to Co-operative and Guild causes at national level, where we see the same pattern of hidden recognition continues. Responding to Central Guild appeals in the 'Woman's Corner', Plumstead contributed to the funds for the coal miners' wives during the strike of 1893 and Lifeboat fund in 1896. By 1897 the records for the Royal National Lifeboat Institute (RNLI) list lifeboats provided by subscription by almost three hundred organisations or legacies from across the country. There are three funded by the Co-operative and named after them, but despite regular

[77] Mooney and Reinarz, *Permeable Walls*, p. 15.

contributions from the Guild (and other Societies) the Manchester Central Co-operative Board are credited on behalf of the donor organisation.[78]

Scholars have made much of the notions of respectability in the Victorian attitudes to the poor, and links have been made to ideas of conspicuous consumption and its use by the working classes to create outward symbols of respectability and relevant prosperity. Hobsbawm saw this as a display that denoted internal competition, identifying the parades of friendly societies and miners' festivals as being a public display of one-upmanship within the strata of working-class community life.[79] Little of this work focusses on women's membership or groups independent of the male organisations. However, there is arguably another way to view these symbols in the context of female networks and community. Consciously or not, the Guild women were starting to establish themselves as equal with the middle-class women who traditionally ran the life of the local charity and public works. The Guild local activity displays their ability to support their members and community, but always it seemed rooted in the community ties that existed outside the Guild. They evolved their existing networks in a number of ways; through charitable giving, visiting, and with combined work to create events and teas and even the display of Mrs Ben Jones' photograph. All of these were more minor expressions of their public life than official appointment to office such as Poor Law Guardianship but were nonetheless crucial to the occupation of new territory for working women moving into the realm of citizenship.

[78] *The Life Boat Journal of the Royal National Life-Boat Institution*, vol. Vol. XVI, No. 184, 1897. <https://lifeboatmagazinearchive.rnli.org> [accessed 18 June 2020]. Women's groups do not seem to have sponsored a boat directly although numerous individual women are named in honour of legacies.
[79] Johnson, 'Conspicuous Consumption and Working-Class Culture in Late-Victorian and Edwardian Britain' (p. 41).

Conclusion

This dissertation has argued that previous scholarship has neglected the detailed experience of the members of the Women's Co-operative Guild, in favour of the narrative of the leaders. Academic works on the Guild, Women's Movement and Co-operation have been content to refer to the one-dimensional portrayal of a body of working-class women activists with political aims limited to their experience as oppressed wives and mothers, that is the lasting legacy of the Guild. The intent of this study has been to supplement this identity rather than refute it. The study of the branch secretaries has found that many of the women involved appeared to fit the stereotype; but in addition to that they had personal lives, achievements and interests in Co-operation and their local community which were often expressed through their charitable work in parallel with better known political achievements.

Although they are women who were identified because of their membership of the Guild, the women of this study carry the additional burdens of being in many ways representative of their gender and class as working class women at this time. The 1890s had a foot in both the past and the future with the pre-state welfare system of private charity and poor houses dominating day to day life of the poor and working classes; whilst also being on the cusp of the greater legal rights and freedoms which would be brought by suffrage and the upheavals of total war. This made it a critical time for women to be negotiating entry to public life. The biographical approach and prosopography, in particular, has become accepted, along with microhistory, as valuable tools for the study of marginal and oppressed

groups.[80] As can be seen in the mixed approach taken in this dissertation, no single method would have been sufficient to create a history of the women in this particular group. Their lack of visibility as individuals in the historical record demanded that a broader survey, such as the prosopography, was critical to create a sense of who they may have been beyond those who claimed our attention in sources such as *Co-operative News*. Many of these women were still not found, and more still were limited to the most basic biographical detail from the census. However, some sense of agency is restored when we analyse them together as a group and their small stories contribute to a bigger picture supplementing our knowledge of the challenges and opportunities of home and work (hidden and visible) for this overlooked group.

The women of the 1890s Women's Co-operative Guild in London had much in common with modern working-class women; unacknowledged work in the home, caring responsibilities, the gender pay gap, and work in insecure jobs, to name but a few of the elements highlighted by the prosopography. The Guild offered them a means to fight for equality in political and economic terms, and as we have seen, this extended to charitable work which was less direct but could still be political. It also gave them a voice when working-class women, even if they had the time and inclination, were still unlikely to be published and listened to. The attractions of the Guild to any woman who wanted to move out of the private and into the public sphere seem obvious. However, as the detailed analysis of the role of branch secretary demonstrates, we should not underestimate how great the obstacles were and how much real effort it took to make that move. The women who

[80] B. Caine, *Biography and History*, Theory and History (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p. 24.

worked as branch secretary proved that it could be done, but when we look at their backgrounds and home responsibilities, we are better able to appreciate the consequent sacrifices they made. The 44% who only did the job for a short period of time, and then often disappear from the historical record, are almost the more comprehensible group, as pressures of small children, domestic work, and probably paid work too, all took their toll.

Taking the less well-known elements of Guild work, where they are involved in charity, we see an extension of the infamously difficult to document, informal mechanisms, that helped working women survive. In Plumstead we witness the neighbourhood networks of mutual help replicated in the sisterhood of the branch, and the helping hand they give to their fellow members, without penalty or reproach. The more public work they did for charitable causes, such as the Infirmary and District Nursing Fund, or national campaigns such as Miners' Wives, suggest a more complex set of motives. As women wanting to claim their place in public life it is natural that they appreciated the political dimension of charitable work and chose carefully the causes they supported in public. Beyond that, their Co-operative identity encouraged collective action and collective responsibility; they could not stand idly by while they saw the poor in need, and the Guild offered them a way to become involved which may have been barred to a lone woman of their class. The financial element of collective action is also important here. The women who have so little to spare are constantly donating money, time and skills to the variety of charitable causes they support as a branch and an organisation and must have felt that their efforts achieved more when they did so together.

Women such as Jane Green, and others who took advantage of the patronage of the settlement movement; who pushed through and wrote and travelled and led with conviction were the exceptions in many ways, as leaders often are. However, every branch had a number of Jane Greens working hard in a quieter way in their own communities and contributing to the greater mission of the Guild, but also to their own local neighbourhood. It is important to recognise the contribution of these women who are hard to find and whose contribution is difficult to measure. The limitations of scope placed around a dissertation project mean that it can only start to suggest the number of ways that the women under debate have worked and lived beyond their generally accepted story as wives and mothers. The women whose work in the charitable world has been uncovered by this dissertation remind us of the important histories that still need to be told about working-class women.

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annotated with in-year changes to addresses and names, so it is likely that her collection was the branch secretary 'working' versions.)

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Wheatsheaf

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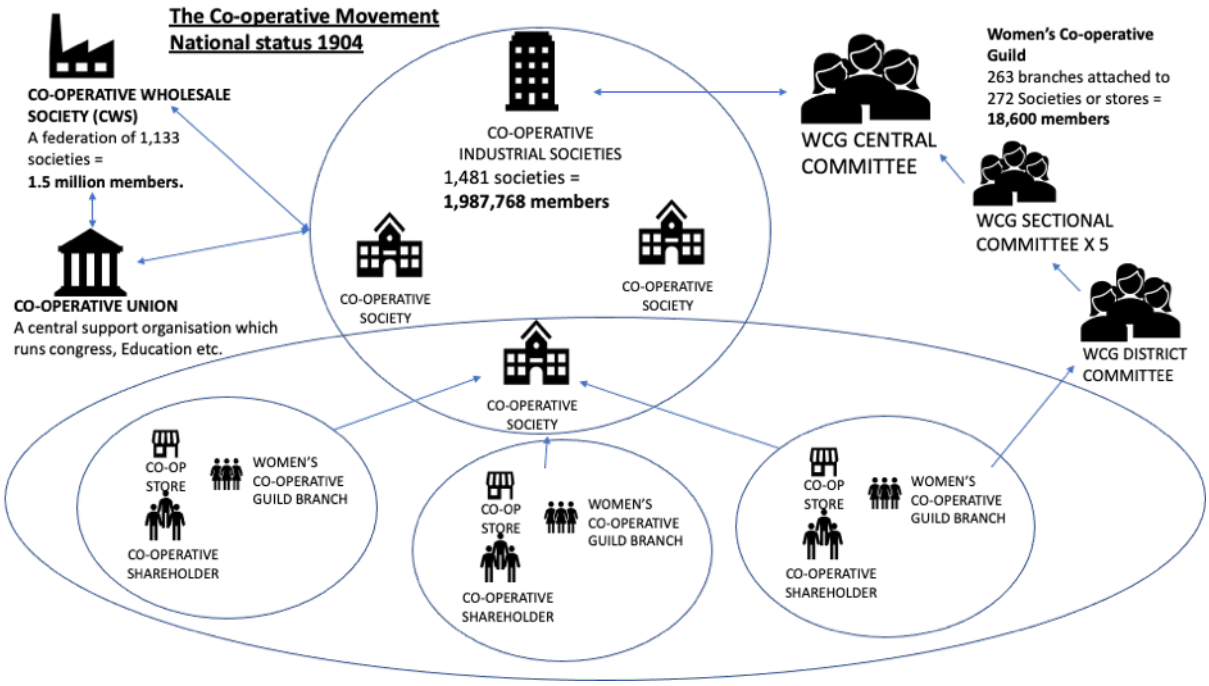
Appendix A—Organisational Structures and Glossary



Co-operation was not inherently affiliated to a political movement and links with socialism or what would become the Labour Party, seem natural to the modern observer but were far from a foregone conclusion. The symbol of the movement is the Wheatsheaf, a bundle of weak straws bound together in strength, which summarises Co-operative ideals. These Co-operative ideals are based on the founding principles of the Rochdale Pioneers: justice, truth and fellowship. The Co-operative movement became a viable business model after members of the Christian Socialist group lobbied parliament for a legal status which would protect the shareholders in law with the Industrial and Provident Societies Act of 1852. This allowed the movement to start building in strength. Of course, an organisation changes and evolves; by around 1900 the movement has matured to a position that is represented here.

It is important to note that Co-operative retail was not the exclusive domain of the movement, anyone could run a local business on Co-operative principles but to benefit from the organisational structure they had to affiliate and adopt the rules developed by the Union, within these rules there were still variations at Society level for example open membership which was recognised and approved by the Union but not mandated for all. The following section outlines each main element of the Co-operative movement in the late nineteenth century and its relationship with the Women's Co-operative Guild.

Shareholder

A shareholder was the person who had bought into membership of the local Co-Operative Society. A share entitled a member to a dividend in proportion to how much they shopped at the stores; and a vote in the running of the Society as well as an opportunity to stand for election to the local committee. In the interest of equality in the Society, to stop people accumulating shares and 'buying' influence, many Societies restricted the membership to one member per household, usually the man. This was called closed membership. Open membership meant that other household members, i.e. wives and daughters could also be members in their own right, it was more usual for the society to have closed membership.

In the 1880s, when the WCG began, few women were shareholders and even if they were it was extremely rare for them to serve on local or regional committees. It became a key aim of the Guild to enfranchise the women by campaigning for open membership in Societies. Another option was for the shareholder to be the wife not the husband thus transferring the vote to the person likely to have the best consumer knowledge. The Guild gave women a voice within the movement whilst this process is happening.

As it gained influence the elected Guild leadership was able to formally represent the women's interests at the Co-operative Union and Wholesale Society conferences and later on committees and joint committees.

Store

Co-operative stores were owned and managed by the members who share the profits in the form of a dividend of say 2s. on the £ on purchases. Most co-operators left this 'divi' in the store to accumulate as a form of savings. The divi was contentious as the temptation was to make prices higher to guarantee a higher divi, this could make stores too expensive even for Co-operators. The store was where women were key. They were the managers of the household budget and if they did not see fit to buy there on price, quality or loyalty then the store with its potentially higher prices would fail. This is the 'Basket power' that Margaret Llewelyn Davies wanted to harness, and it is why the symbol of the Guild became the woman holding a basket.

Society

This was the localised management body of the store or group of stores and was run by a Management Committee responsible for procurement and overseeing the retail operation including the membership. In tandem with this was the Educational Committee which managed a share of the profit of the Society to invest in facilities for the members. The Guild as an organisation saw itself as the third element of running the Society. From the start it wanted to have parity with the Management and Educational Committees and in its role of educating the women it often relies on the Educational Committee for financial

support and the provision of rooms for meetings. This meant that the local relationship with these committees and their attitude to the Guild dictated the rate at which the local branch thrived. Without the sponsorship of these local committees the Guild struggled, often the founder of the Guild branch was married to a key local Co-operator.

Industrial Co-operative Societies

This was the collective body of the Societies. By 1904 there were 1,481 societies with 1,987,768 members.[81] This was the main organisation with which the WCG was aligned and was structured as Societies of stores which grouped into districts within five regional bodies called Sections which are represented on a Central Committee. A Society put forward representatives from its local area on the various committees which were then voted for to create the democratic structure of the organisation.

Co-operative Union

The Co-operative Union Ltd was a central support organisation which ran congress, education and other areas.

Co-operative Wholesale Society (CWS)

Formally known as the English Co-Operative Wholesale Society Ltd (CWS), was composed of wholesale, manufacturing, shipowners and a bank. The headquarters is in London
By 1904 this is a federation of 1,133 societies with 1.5 million members.[82]

[81] Margaret Llewelyn Davies, *The Women's Co-Operative Guild, 1883-1904* (Kirkby Lonsdale: Women's Co-operative Guild, 1904), p.5.
[82] Ibid.

Profit Sharing Societies

These did not have the dividend but shared all profits. In 1904 there were 126 of these societies.[83]

[83] Ibid.

Appendix B—Branch operational years[84]

Branch name	1891	1892	1893	1894	1895	1896	1897	1898	1899	1900	1901	1902	1903	1904
Battersea and Wandsworth	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	
Bermondsey		■	■											
Child's Hill and Cricklewood		■	■	■	■	■								
Clapton Park													■	■
Co-Operative Builders, Brixton			■	■										
Deptford (One and All)					■	■								
Deptford (Progressive No 1)					■									
Deptford (Progressive No 2)					■									
Edmonton		■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	
Edmonton (Bowes Park)				■	■	■	■					■	■	■
Edmonton (lower)	■													■
Edmonton (Tottenham)											■			■
Enfield Highway					■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
Enfield Highway (Ponders End)														■
Enfield Highway (Waltham Abbey)														■
Enfield Town														■
Finsbury	■													
Grays			■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
Hackney (Borough of)	■	■	■											
Hackney (University Club)				■	■	■	■	■	■	■				
Harlesden		■												
Kentish Town		■												
Kings Cross	■	■												
Loughborough Junction		■												
North-East London	■										■			
Norwood			■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■				
Peckham	■	■	■											
People's (Deptford and New Cross)							■							
People's (Deptford)			■	■		■		■						
People's (New Cross)						■								
People's (Old Kent Rd)						■	■	■	■	■				
People's (Rotherhithe)						■	■	■						
People's (St Pancras)						■	■							

[84] These are derived from *Annual Report of the Women's Co-operative Guild* which published this detail between 1891 and 1904.

Branch name	1891	1892	1893	1894	1895	1896	1897	1898	1899	1900	1901	1902	1903	1904
People's (Stoke Newington)														
Poplar														
South London														
Stratford														
Stratford (Beckton)														
Stratford (Canning Town)														
Stratford (East Ham)														
Stratford (Upton Park)														
Tilbury (Grays)														
Tower Hamlets														
Walthamstow														
Westminster														
Wood Green														
Woolwich														
Woolwich (Abbey Wood)														
Woolwich (Belvedere)														
Woolwich (Charlton)														
Woolwich (Erith)														
Woolwich (Herbert Road)														
Woolwich (Plumstead)														
Woolwich (Well Hall)														
Woolwich (West Greenwich)														
Total London branches per year	**14**	**20**	**22**	**20**	**20**	**24**	**21**	**20**	**15**	**16**	**15**	**15**	**16**	**21**

Appendix C—Methodology and Data Quality

Source selection:

The first directory of WCG branches appeared as an appendix to the published *Annual Report* of 1891. This was titled the *Tenth Annual Report*; previous reports had been published in the *Co-operative News* and not as a separate publication. This 'Directory' contained the contact details for the branch secretary of each branch for that year and the address of branch meetings plus the number of members. It is evident from other sources that this information was collected by a return submitted from each branch via the branch secretary and occasionally information was omitted or had been transcribed slightly wrongly in the spelling of names or addresses.

For the contemporary member it was a handbook for the national network of branch secretaries to be able to contact each other; and also act as a barometer of where the movement was flourishing and where less so. It was not included in all versions of the *Annual Report* and the versions in the archives that do include it bear the signs of daily use. These versions are more used and dog-eared and often have handwritten annotations to update or correct the entries. The version of the *Annual Report* containing the Directory has no difference in title or format except length and there is no mention of there being differing versions in the WCG records, but it is possible to conclude that they were meant for use by the organisers in the movement and as 'working' documents have survived in fewer numbers. It has only been possible to locate this version of the *Annual Report* including the 'Directory' for the years 1891-1904 in the versions held at the Bishopsgate

Institute in London. It is possible that after that date the organisation had grown in size to the point that the appendix in this format was discontinued but this decision is not recorded. Searches for other directories have uncovered two further separate pamphlets from 1910 and 1923, held at in the Women's Library at the LSE. These are separate publications obviously intended for contact purposes.

As may be expected from a growing and evolving organisation there are slight variations and amendments to both the information presented and its format. The core information that can be traced consistently, however, is the Branch Name, Branch Secretary Name and Address, Meeting Place and day/time and the number of members. This content gives us two main types of information, personal and organisational, cross-referenced with other sources the information within these provides the base 'questionnaire' of the prosopography.

Personal Information–Listed in the Directory is the title, surname and home address of the branch secretary which gives potential access via census records to the full biographical, demographic and family information of the individual.

Organisational information–The 'Directory' also details the annual return regarding the branch details for the name of Branch Secretary, name of the Branch, address, time and day of meetings, and Branch membership numbers.

Data consistency:

One issue with the 'Directory' is that it was recording a changing and growing organisation. Branches are created, cease and merge sometimes year to year for several years in the same area. In order to manage to analyse the data additional fields have been used within the database to 'normalise' the data and sometimes to add a more convenient grouping. For example, the Tower Hamlets and Bethnal Green branches change name but are meeting at the same location with the same branch secretary and so are given an alias that can be used to group them. The same process is required when addresses or names contain errors, in this case an additional field is used to make sure that it is possible to analyse Mrs Williams as Mrs Williamson if the two seemingly different people have been identified as actually the same person.

Geographical parameters – London

To be able to use the data consistently across even this comparatively short timescale London has to be taken at its broadest definition. The WCG structure grouped the branches in Sections and Districts mirroring the Co-operative itself and so defines London as the Metropolitan area (dividing quickly into North and South Metropolitan) as a District within the Southern Region. To this end, although many of the branches are within what we would recognise as the current Greater London Authority, there a number of outlying branches which are further into Surrey or Essex than one might expect. The story of these areas and their affiliation with the capital and its industry are relevant to overall picture, however, and as the WCG counted them they have been left in the study.

Research methods

Process:

The first step was to transcribe the Directories from their print source of the Annual Reports into a database so that the records can be analysed and searched, creating over four hundred unique records.

Census research:

The next step was an initial search of the census nearest to the year of the Annual Report (i.e. 1891 or 1901) using the address of the branch secretary as the initial search term. If this search produced a result with a woman of the correct name she was considered 'found' and her census record transcription copied into the database as well as that of her household (usually her family). Additionally, the image file of the page in the census was downloaded.

This process was attempted for all 164 of the women listed in the directories. This number has been arrived at by some data rationalisation. There is not a 1:1 number of branches and branch secretaries as often they would serve for more than one year. There were also odd instances of women acting under their maiden name and then their married name which appear to be two different people until the research has concluded otherwise.

Success rate:

126 women were firmly identified using this process. For the unidentified women we still have the information on whether they are single or married (via their title) and the are they lived in which can support some analysis when used in conjunction with the main findings.

Issues with data:

The main barrier to finding the women was transcription errors relating to names and addresses in either the source WCG 'Directory' or the search database being used (these were findmypast.com and ancestry.com, they have different sets of transcription data and so can turn up different results using the same search terms). This was overcome in most instances by using varying search terms or occasionally an address or name being corrected in a later edition of the Directory.

Another barrier which was of historical interest was the changing existence of an address in the elapsed time of the decennial census. It is testimony to the speed of change within the urban areas of London during this period that very often an address which does not exist in 1891 is there by 1901 and an address which exists in 1891 has changed or ceased by 1901 or 1911. This pattern corresponds with the slum clearance, development of new areas such as East and West Ham, and new further out suburbs including developments around Tilbury and Grays to support the docks.

Other women have proved untraceable because the personal address is not in the Directory, they have used the Co-op store as a contact address for example. Some have proved inconclusive as they have ambiguous details which mean they cannot be definitively identified without additional archival research which in the case of working-class women at this time is not likely to yield a result.

Detailed Biography:

For the women that have been firmly identified it has been possible to uncover a wealth of detailed information about their household around the time of their involvement with the Guild. The next steps in research terms are slightly different for married and unmarried women (widows are here counted as married as they usually go by their married name). For married women to find records of their life before their marriage we need to find the marriage records detailing the maiden name which are not always available depending record keeping. In the circumstance of two people with very common names such as Mary and John Smith it is sometimes hard to be certain that it is the correct couple on the marriage register and so the record cannot be pursued.

Once identified as firmly as possible it is relatively simple (if time consuming) to trace their lives as far forward as the latest available census of 1911, and as far back as 1851 in some cases. Then cross referencing with other sources such as marriage certificate we can compile a wide spread of data for a high proportion of the women.

Issues with data sources

Census:

The census changed every time it was carried out depending on the needs of the government and Registrar General.[85] Combined with varying methods of census collection there are various potential pitfalls and issues with the quality of the data even once it has been 'found'. This is detailed in other studies and is particularly relevant when analysis of occupation is done. In terms of method however the different versions of the census can have its uses for this prosopography, especially with the version of 1911. A feature of the 1911 census which is useful here is the question that asked women to detail the number of children born alive, still living and dead. This summarises what would otherwise be an incredibly intricate research process to locate birth and death certificates for all children to create the same data to gauge motherhood and its effects. Where a return for 1911 is not available we can estimate from their other census returns how many children they have had.

Marriage certificates:

Other data variables are whether a parish marriage entry is available as the church entry has much more detail than the civil registration lists available. It would not be practical in the

[85] Reference was made to the following work detailing the various elements of the census, Edward Higgs, *Making Sense of the Census: The Manuscript Returns for England and Wales, 1801-1901*, Public Record Office Handbooks, no. 23 (London: HMSO, 1989).

scope of this project to visit in person the multiple archives holding detailed marriage records for each couple. Fortunately, the London Metropolitan Archives have partnered with Ancestry to make available their records for London as searchable records.

Death Certificates:

Date and place of death is available at index level but this does not give the full cause of death.

Some initial derived or enrichment data has also been created based on the transcribed data from the other sources. For example we have the year that the branch secretary was first in post (from the Directory) and the year of birth from the census so her age when in post can be calculated.

Qualitative Data:

Other primary sources are listed in the Bibliography and are wide ranging from local and national newspapers to specialist press and the publications of other organisations.

Appendix D—Middle-Class branch secretaries, biographical notes

Margaret Llewelyn Davies b. 1862

Branch Secretary–Marylebone 1886-1889

The most famous and influential of these early branch secretaries was, Davies. Analysing her in the same vein as the other branch secretaries, we can see several biographical details that were likely to affect her work.[1] Despite her choice to work in an avowedly secular organisation, Davies was in many ways a very traditional clergyman's daughter of this time. Her father John Llewelyn Davies was a leading Christian Socialist as well as the rector of the parish of Marylebone for over thirty years before moving to Kirkby Lonsdale in 1889. Midori Yamaguchi's work on the *Daughters of the Anglican Clergy*,[2] includes Davies as an example of this breed of mid- to late Victorian women, who learns charitable work through the public spaces of the parsonage and are adept at public speaking, having a lifetime example of preaching to emulate.[3] Davies was extremely close to her father living with him until his death and had worked with him in his impoverished parish area of Lisson Grove running a youth club.[4] Most significant for her work in the Guild is that she was connected closely to

[1] Despite her fame this is in some ways easy to do. Her own writing rarely dwelt on her background and influences and she purged her correspondence and papers before death. This leaves us with limited autobiographical evidence for the motivations and private thoughts on the public work and actions that are her legacy.
[2] M. Yamaguchi, *Daughters of the Anglican Clergy: Religion, Gender and Identity in Victorian England*, Genders and Sexualities in History (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).
[3] This point is also drawn out by Scott. G. Scott, *Feminism and the Politics of Working Women: The Women's Co-Operative Guild, 1880s to the Second World War*, Women's History (London, 1998), p. 40.
[4] R. Cohen, *Margaret Llewelyn Davies: With Women for a New World* (Dagenham, 2020), pp. 30-31.

the Christian Socialists, Charity Organisation Society and the Working Men's College through her father's work with all three. His parish of Marylebone was also the home of the COS.

Sophia Boyle b. 1861

Branch Secretary–Tower Hamlets 1888-1892

Miss Boyle was the unmarried sister of a vicar working at Toynbee Hall, and as such she complemented his parish work with her involvement in the Guild; she was aged 27 when she became involved. She left the Hall to help him set up his new parish, to the regret of the branch and her friends in 1892.[5] We have no record of how difficult this may have been for her but she had worked diligently as a branch secretary, mainly on local charitable work and had been under the close influence of Henrietta Barnett in the nexus of the settlement movement at Toynbee Hall.

Gertrude E Vaughan b. 1867

Branch Secretary–West London 1896-1899

A clergyman's daughter, Vaughan worked as a teacher before becoming involved in the Guild indicating that her family was of the more typical, late Victorian impoverished gentility.[6] She did not have a particularly notable career in the Guild, a single report which mentions her just notes that she has passed the book-keeping exam in 1901 and announced

[5] *Co-operative News*, 2 February 1892

[6] Yamaguchi differentiates between the earlier wealth of 18th century clergy which rested on plurality of parish livings in contrast with the economic restrictions that church reform imposed on later victorian clergy. Yamaguchi, *Daughters of the Anglican Clergy*.

stepping back from some of her Guild work due to other responsibilities.[7] However we find that her feminism has developed as a primary motivator, she appeared later in *Votes for Women* which records that she wrote propaganda plays for the WSPU and was also imprisoned for the cause. In 1912 she was sentenced to 3 weeks in Holloway; in 1913 she was sentenced to 21 days for trying to present a petition to the king.[8] This made her, along with Ada Mocatta, one of the few radical suffragettes to emerge from the London branch secretaries although, as Liddingon and Norris have demonstrated, there were close ties between the working-class women's movement in the north and the suffrage campaigns.[9]

Miss Ada Mocatta b. 1859

Branch Secretary–Marylebone 1891-1896

Mocatta was the niece of Charity Organisation Society (COS) founding member and prominent philanthropist, Frederic Mocatta. No doubt his influence in the charity world helped her take her path but he was unconvinced by both the Guild, Co-operation and working class organisation in general, as he makes clear in a letter to her in 1892,[10] suggesting that Guild work was not necessarily approved of within the family. No record remains of Ada's letter to her uncle but she included his response to her account of a WCG meeting in her edited volume of his writing, possibly to illuminate some of his ideas on charity and social movements. In 1898 Mocatta started the Grafton Club, for working girls

[7] *Co-operative News*, 24th August 1901
[8] *Votes for Women*, March 14th 1913.
[9] J. Liddington and J. Norris, *One Hand Tied behind Us: The Rise of the Women's Suffrage Movement* (London :, 2000).
[10] No record remains of Ada's letter to her uncle but she included his response to her account of a WCG meeting in her edited volume of his writing, possibly to illuminate some of his ideas on charity and social movements which were not in favour of collective action. F. D. Mocatta, *F. D. Mocatta. A Brief Memoir, Lectures, and Extracts from Letters.*, A. Mocatta, ed. (London, 1911), p. 45.

and there is evidence she was involved in COS Marylebone. Later *Votes for Women* records she was arrested and imprisoned as a suffragette.

Miss Elizabeth Tournier b. 1850

Branch Secretary–Chelsea and Fulham 1889

President of Guild–1892

Elizabeth Tournier was not of a wealthy background. We may view her as middle class as her father was a secretary at Chelsea College. However, she and her sisters worked for their livings as governesses. She was very active in London charity and was proprietor of a Home for Friendless Girls which was given positive notice in the *Charity Organization Review*.[11] She went on to be a memorable president of the Guild, and was an influential speaker travelling to branches across the country. Her personal experience in working with young girls would have been a valuable addition to the Central Committee.

Miss Elder b. 1858

Branch Secretary–Bermondsey 1889-1891

Miss Elder was actually a settlement worker at the Women's University Settlement and had been at Girton College Cambridge 1882-1884, meaning that she was there at the same time as Davies.[12] As well as her work at the settlement, Elder was secretary to the University

[11] *Charity Organisation Review*, July 1892 p276.

[12] Davies spent two years at Girton 1881-1883 but left early through a combination of family pressure and a dislike of the academic side of college life. Her aunt Emily Davies was founder of the college but there is no evidence that they were close.

Association of Women Teachers (UAWT) 1887-1894[13] indicating an interest in collective action above straight forward social work.

Miss Florence Grove b. 1848

Branch Secretary–Chelsea and Fulham 1895

Florence Grove was a short-term branch secretary but extremely active in politics, a Fabian from 1892, as well as working as Guardian on the Chelsea board for three years as an Independent Labour Party (ILP) candidate. Miss Grove also stood for the Fabian Executive in 1901 months before her sudden death.

Miss Mary Spooner b. 1861

Branch Secretary–Hammersmith 1891

Southern Section Secretary

It has not been possible to find detailed background on Miss Spooner, apart from her being of independent means as indicated in the census. However, she quickly became Southern District Secretary and had responsibility for establishing the Guild branches that supported the People's Co-operative Society in the mid-1890s, and worked in the Sunderland Settlement. She also worked as Guild representative on various external bodies. In 1894 she stood as Fabian Candidate for the London School Board, Hammersmith.

[13] *Girton Review*, August 1894, GCCP 2/1/1, Girton College Archives.

Rosalind Shore Smith (later Nash) b. 1862

Branch Secretary–Kensington and Notting Hill 1889

Attended Girton at the same time as Margaret Llewelyn Davies (1881-1884) and the two formed a close relationship. She married to become Rosalind Nash, and worked as editor of the 'Woman's Corner' and the originator of the notion of the Guild as a Trade Union for Working Women.[14] She is also remembered as niece and biographer to Florence Nightingale.[15]

Co-operative Establishment

A different type of influence from the women described above may be characterised as 'Co-operative establishment'. All were connected to leading intellectuals and businessmen within the Co-operative movement, and were all London based and married to, or daughters of, Co-operators and spent time as branch secretaries in the Societies to which they were connected. Effectively working class by birth but lower-middle class by economic status by this time, they fall between the two worlds but are of definite privilege compared the majority of branch secretaries. All of these women independently made a huge impact on the Guild and Co-operation,

[14] G. Scott, 'A "Trade Union for Married Women' : The Women's Co-Operative Guild 1914-1920", in S. Oldfield, ed., *This Working-Day World : Women's Lives and Culture(s) in Britain, 1914-1945* (London; Bristol, PA, 1994), pp. 82–83.

[15] M. J. Lee, "Nash, Vaughan Robinson (1861–1932), journalist and public servant journalist." *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. (January 03, 2008. Oxford University Press.) < https://0-doi-org.catalogue.libraries.london.ac.uk/10.1093/ref:odnb/58468> [accessed 4 March 2020].

Mary Lawrenson b. 1850

Branch Secretary–Woolwich 1883-1886

General Secretary 1886-1891 and founder member of Guild

Father was John Molyneux a printer in Woolwich and known radical and Co-operator. Her husband was a 'Government Writer' and also a Co-operator. Unusually Lawrenson was a member of the Woolwich Society board. She both suggested the Guild as an idea in 1883 and was one of the founder members and first General Secretary. Her ideas focussed more on the education of children and it seems that divergence with other such as Margaret Llewellyn Davies on this saw her step back from Central Committee work whilst remaining active in the Woolwich area.

Catherine Webb b. 1860

Branch Secretary–Battersea 1883-1888

Later Central Committee member, Guild Historian and Secretary of the Mrs Ben Jones Convalescent Fund.

Daughter of Thomas Webb, founder of Co-operative Wholesale Society. Miss Webb was an intellectual force within the movement, second only to Margaret Llewelyn Davies herself. Webb steps across for a time to the Women's Industrial Council (WIC). She authored many campaigning pamphlets and her history of the Guild, *The Woman with the Basket.*[16] She also

[16] C. Webb, *The Woman with the Basket: The History of the Women's Co- Operative Guild, 1883-1927* (Manchester, 1927).

became a member of the Co-operative central board in 1897, the first woman to do so and was the secretary of the Mrs Ben Jones Convalescent fund

Emily O. Greening b. 1864

Branch Secretary–Deptford 1895-1899

Daughter of Edward O Greening who founded the agricultural Co-operative in Deptford.

Mrs Ben Jones b. 1849

Branch Secretary–Norwood 1886 and 1893

Guild President 1893-1894 and founder member

Annie Jones, a factory worker from the 'north' married to Ben Jones who was a leading Co-operator, writer within the movement, and manager of the CWS. She was a founder member and early President. Her untimely death in 1894 lead to an outpouring of grief across the movement which results in the establishment of the Mrs Ben Jones Convalescent Fund which for the next hundred years was a self-funded charity within the Guild used to send members on convalescent holidays.

Appendix E—Plumstead branch secretary biographies and branch members gazetteer

Mrs Dent 1891-1892 133 Chestnut Road, Plumstead, SE

Annie Dent was born Annie Whitmore in 1854, her father James was a turner and although she was born in Poplar the family moved to Woolwich before she was 17. At this age she was living with the family and had an occupation of cartridge maker, which must have been at the Royal Arsenal. Annie married Henry Dent a metal turner from Bexhill in 1877. They had no children but had a niece and nephew living with them. Annie was 37 when she became branch secretary for two years and then branch President. She was vocal at meetings, being quoted in the branch reports within 'Woman's Corner' giving her account of the annual congress in Leicester and proposing mergers of local branches to create more efficiency. She died in 1902.

Miss Z E Underwood 1893-1896 Springfield Villa, 44 Park Road, Plumstead London

Zipporah E Underwood was the unmarried daughter of James an iron moulder from Gloucestershire, her brother was a blacksmith's apprentice. She was only 20 when she took on the branch secretary role and had no stated occupation before this. Her mother was locally influential in the Guild. In addition to branch secretary she served on the South Metropolitan District committee in 1895. In 1898 she achieved a first class mark in the WCG Co-operation examinations. She married in 1899 to James Pepperell and died without children in 1907 in Woolwich.

Mrs Mills 1896-1904 106 Earl Street, Plumstead, London, SE

Jane Millward Mills was born Radford in Staffordshire in 1859, her father Thomas was a carpenter. She married Stephen a steam launch driver from Plumstead in 1880, they had one child. She was 38 when first a branch secretary. In 1898 she did not do very well in the Co-op exams only answering 6 questions, which suggests a poor level of background education. Despite this she was branch secretary for at least eight years during which time the membership rose to over 100 so she must have been an effective secretary.

List of members names and addresses transcribed from Plumstead Minutes:					
Name		Street Address and Booth Classification			
Mrs	E Holbrook	32	Ancona	Road	Purple
Mrs	F Heard	6	Arthur	Street	Purple
Mrs	Ambler		Bloomfield	Road	Purple
Mrs	Baker	6	Bramblebury	Road	Pink
Mrs	Nicholson	28	Bramblebury	Road	Pink
Mrs	Davies		Bramblebury	Road	Pink
Mrs	C Byford		Brewery	Road	Pink
Mrs	Everett	13	Brewery	Road	Pink
Mrs	Tillett	112	Brewery	Road	Pink
Mrs	E Hall	137	Burrage	Road	Pink
Mrs	Dent	8	Chestnut	Rise	Pink
Mrs	Holland	10	Chestnut	Rise	Pink
Mrs	Kent	54	Chestnut	Rise	Pink
Mrs	E Humphris	72	Conway	Road	Purple
Mrs	Holmes		Conway	Road	Purple
Mrs	Joynes	13	Coxwell	Road	Purple
Mrs	Mackie	14	Coxwell	Road	Purple
Mrs	Parker	18	Coxwell	Road	Purple
Mrs	Bunting	48	Coxwell	Road	Purple
Mrs	Watt	57	Coxwell	Road	Purple
Mrs	Rider (Riden)	100	Crescent	Road	Pink
Mrs	Patchett	10 or 6	Durham	Rise	Purple
Mrs	Roberts	28	Durham	Rise	Purple
Mrs	Pell	61	Earl	Rise	Purple
Mrs	Parr	66	Earl	Rise	Purple
Mrs	Pickering	96	Earl	Rise	Purple
Mrs	(indecipherable)	90	Earl	Rise	Purple
Mrs	Mills	106	Earl	Rise	Purple
Mrs	Lampheir	1	Frederick	Place	Pink
Mrs	Roberts		Garibaldi	Street	Light Blue
Mrs	Mann	Essex view	Griffin	Road	Pink
Mrs	Johnson	69	Heavitree	Road	Pink
Mrs	Lynch	285	High	Street	Pink
Mrs	Petley	13	Hudson	Road	Light Blue
Mrs	Tipp	1	Majandie	Road	Purple
Mrs	McIntyre	14	Majandie	Road	Purple
Mrs	J Bass	30	Majandie		
Mrs	E Smith	48	Majandie		
Mrs	Beck		Majandie		
Mrs	Wren	218	Maxey	Road	Pink
Mrs	Bradbury	13	Miriam	Road	Purple
Mrs	Kennedy	16	Miriam	Road	Purple
Mrs	Mather	50	Miriam	Road	Purple

Mrs	?	22	Orchard	Rise	Purple
Mrs	Ferrol	91	Orchard	Rise	Purple
Mrs	Thomas (Tommas)	95	Orchard	Rise	Purple
Mrs	Harman	104	Orchard	Rise	Purple
Mrs	Morley	104	Orchard	Rise	Purple
Mrs	Leonard	106	Orchard	Rise	Purple
Mrs	Anderson	6	Park	Street	Pink
Mrs	Cotton	7	Park	Road	Pink
Mrs	Underwood	Springfield Villas	Park	Road	Pink
Miss	Underwood	Springfield Villas	Park	Road	Pink
Mrs	Cormick	58	Park	Road	Pink
Mrs	Illidge	143	Parkdale	Road	Purple
Mrs	Roberts		Parry	Place	Pink
Mrs	Roberts	55	Piedmont	Road	Purple
Mrs	Cooper	5	Raglan	Road	Pink
Mrs	Turnbull	77	Raglan	Road	Pink
Mrs	Dunston	124	Raglan	Road	Pink
	Hudson		Raglan	Road	Pink
Mrs	Collins	38a	Rectory	Grove	Pink
Mrs	Breeze	1	Richmond	Place	Purple
	H Byford	29	Richmond	Place	Purple
Mrs	Cooper	112	Robert	Street	Purple
Mrs	Moriarty	120	Robert	Street	Purple
Mrs	Tyler	2 Norfolk Villas	Saunders	Road	Pink
Mrs	Hendry	31 Lawn Terrace	Slade Dale	Road	Purple
Mrs	Noakes	99	Station	Road	Purple
Mrs	Ward	101	Station	Road	Purple
Mrs	Smith	43	Tewson	Road	Purple
Mrs	South	65	Tewson	Road	Purple
Mrs	Barrow	67	Tewson	Road	Purple
Mrs	Moriarty	97	Tewson	Road	Purple
	C Pearce		Tuscan	Road	Pink
Mrs	Phillips	30	Vicarage	Park	Pink
Mrs	Brockbank	32	Vicarage	Park	Pink
Miss	King	8	Waverley	Road	Pink