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# EDINBURGH SUFFRAGISTS: EXERCISING THE FRANCHISE AT LOCAL LEVEL<sup>1</sup>

Esther Breitenbach

## Key to principal women's and political organisations

|       |                                                   |
|-------|---------------------------------------------------|
| ENSWs | Edinburgh National Society for Women's Suffrage   |
| ESEC  | Edinburgh Society for Equal Citizenship           |
| EWCA  | Edinburgh Women Citizens Association              |
| SFWSs | Scottish Federation of Women's Suffrage Societies |
| WSPU  | Women's Social and Political Union                |
| WFL   | Women's Freedom League                            |
| ILP   | Independent Labour Party                          |
| SCWCA | Scottish Council of Women Citizens Associations   |
| SWLF  | Scottish Women's Liberal Federation               |
| NUSEC | National Union of Societies for Equal Citizenship |
| ESU   | Edinburgh Social Union                            |

## Introduction

The year 2018 witnessed widespread celebrations across the UK of the centenary of the partial parliamentary enfranchisement of women in 1918. In Scotland this meant 'women 30 years or over who were themselves, or their husbands, occupiers as owners or tenants of lands or premises in their constituency in which they claimed the vote'.<sup>2</sup> A woman could also be registered if her husband was a local government elector; the local government franchise in Scotland was more stringent than the first criterion, and this franchise was therefore more restrictive than that which applied in England and Wales. In effect,

By 1921 some 79.2 per cent of Scottish females 30 years or more held the vote, more or less the same as the 79.5 per cent that did so in England and Wales. The major exclusions within the age limit were 'living-in domestic servants, and non-householder spinsters'.<sup>3</sup>

It took a further decade – until 1928 – for women to get the vote on the same basis as men, when it was afforded to all adults 21 years or over fulfilling a three-month residential requirement.

In the centenary year, the focus of commemoration was, of course, the parliamentary franchise. Yet this was never the sole focus of suffrage campaigners' activities. They sought to extend women's rights in many ways, through a variety of organisations and campaigns, often inter-related and with overlapping memberships. Of particular importance were the forms of franchise to which women were admitted prior to 1918, and the ways in which women responded to opportunities to vote and to seek public office at local level. This local activity should be seen, however, in the wider context of a suffrage movement which functioned at UK level, as well as having distinctive Scottish networks. Over time, it came to be an international movement, and Edinburgh activists were well aware of developments such as the enfranchisement of women in New Zealand in 1893. This was a complex movement, operating at many levels and negotiating divisions from time to time, over issues such as married women's right to the franchise, and over constitutional and militant tactics.

The campaign for the parliamentary enfranchisement of women had begun formally

in 1867 and was to continue until 1928. There was organised support for the campaign in many parts of Scotland, yet the history of this movement in Scotland still remains patchy, despite ground-breaking work in the late 1970s by Elspeth King, followed by further work by King, Leah Leneman, Jim Smyth and Norman Watson at the start of the 1990s.<sup>4</sup> More recent works on the movement in Scotland include those by Megan Smitley and Sarah Pedersen, and local histories, such as those on Stirling and Shetland.<sup>5</sup> To date, the key organisation in Edinburgh, the Edinburgh National Society for Women's Suffrage (ENSW) has not been the focus of an in-depth study, although aspects of its activities were covered by King and Leneman. This neglect is perhaps surprising, given that it was the first suffrage society to be formed in Scotland, and was in continuous existence from 1867 until 1919, when it transformed itself into the Edinburgh Society for Equal Citizenship (ESEC). In 1918, suffrage campaigners had already created the Edinburgh Women Citizens Association (EWCA).<sup>6</sup> Related women's rights campaigns centred in Edinburgh have received some attention, such as the campaign for entry to higher education and to medicine; leading figures in these movements appear in the *Biographical Dictionary of Scottish Women*.<sup>7</sup> Sophia Jex-Blake, the central figure in the latter campaign, was a member of the ENSWS and publicly active in its support in the late 1870s and early 1880s.<sup>8</sup> Also the subject of several histories are the Scottish Women's Hospitals of the First World War, founded by Elsie Inglis.<sup>9</sup> Inglis herself was a long-time suffrage campaigner, and was secretary of the Scottish Federation of Women's Suffrage Societies (SFWS) from 1910–1914.

At the core of the Edinburgh Society were several women who were already seasoned campaigners through their involvement in the anti-slavery organisation, the Edinburgh Ladies' Emancipation Society.<sup>10</sup> They included Priscilla Bright McLaren, married to Duncan McLaren, MP, and Agnes McLaren, daughter of Duncan, and step-daughter of Priscilla.<sup>11</sup> Quaker activist Eliza Wigham was also one of the Society's founder members. Shortly afterwards, they were joined by Flora and Louisa Stevenson; the former was to go on to have a prominent career in education, and was one of the first two women members of the Edinburgh School Board, while the latter was a leading activist in the campaign for women's access to higher education. The newly

formed committee of the Edinburgh Society had around twenty members, all women.<sup>12</sup> They worked closely with male supporters, as, indeed, they had to in order to have petitions presented to Parliament by MPs and councillors. As well as already having campaigning experience to draw on, they were well networked with Liberal political circles, both in Edinburgh and in London. The ENSWS was also active in outreach work in other parts of Scotland, organising meetings and speaking tours. At its AGM in 1874, it was reported that there were 62 allied committees in Scotland.<sup>13</sup>

While the ENSWS had a continuous existence from 1867 to 1919, the organisation's surviving records are incomplete, and it thus remains unclear what levels of vitality the organisation sustained after the early years.<sup>14</sup> Suffice it to say here, that there were many Private Members' bills put forward attempting to gain the parliamentary franchise for women, and it can be assumed that ENSWS continued its petitioning of MPs and councillors in relation to such bills. One piece of evidence is a circular from the ENSWS, dated 1886, to the Town Clerk of Dornoch, urging the council in Dornoch to petition in support of a current Bill.<sup>15</sup> It noted that the number of women to be enfranchised in Dornoch would be twenty-one. This suggests that the Edinburgh society had done its homework about the potential number of women electors in Scottish constituencies and had probably sent similar circulars to many town clerks across Scotland.

The extension of the municipal franchise to women in Scotland in 1881 and 1882 seems to have generated much optimism that the parliamentary franchise would quickly follow, but this was not to be. In the following decade, women became increasingly involved in party political organisations, through which the demand for women's parliamentary enfranchisement was pursued, alongside other political aims. The ENSWS actively encouraged women to participate in such organisations, across the political spectrum. By the early 1900s constitutional suffragism was experiencing renewed growth,<sup>16</sup> and when the Liberal Government came to power in 1906, with Henry Campbell-Bannerman as Prime Minister, there was much optimism about a government-supported Bill for women's enfranchisement. A deputation of women's organisations met with Campbell-Bannerman in May 1906, at which the

ENSWs was represented by Louisa Stevenson. The failure of the Liberal Government to deliver at this point met with the response of increasing militancy by the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU), which had been formed in 1903.

Edinburgh had its WSPU and non-violent militant Women's Freedom League (WFL) branches.<sup>17</sup> Some ENSWS members joined militant organisations, but may have left again, while some were members of both, at least for a while.<sup>18</sup> The WSPU split when the WFL was formed in 1907, and, according to Pugh, WSPU strength in Scotland was reduced to three branches by 1912.<sup>19</sup> Little is known about membership figures; indeed, the figure given by Pugh for total membership at its peak of 4,831 for 1912–13 suggests that numbers in Scotland would have been small.<sup>20</sup> Other ENSWS members may have moved in and out of organisations; this appears to be the case, for example, of Mary Carr Lees, long-serving member of Edinburgh City Parish Council. On her death in 1929, it was recorded that Lees had for many years been 'a prominent member of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies, and later entered whole-heartedly into the more aggressive policy of the Women's Social and Political Union.'<sup>21</sup> Lees was later to become a leading member of the EWCA, as were two other militant women, Agnes Macdonald and Alexia Jack. Macdonald had been Secretary of the Edinburgh WSPU, while Jack was Secretary of the Edinburgh WFL.<sup>22</sup>

Although constitutional suffragists such as the ENSWS did not support militant tactics, with some being outspoken in their criticism of the tactics as they escalated, there was co-operation between suffragists and suffragettes over events such as the demonstration in Edinburgh in 1907.<sup>23</sup> In general, the much publicised militancy seems to have benefited the suffragists, as their numbers grew far more than did those of the militants.<sup>24</sup> During this period, the number of women's suffrage societies in Scotland increased substantially, leading to the formation of the SFWSS in 1910. Edinburgh suffragists played an active role in this, and the ENSWS took on again the outreach role evident in its early years, organising speaking tours and sending speakers to meetings during by-elections, such as that in Stirling in 1908.<sup>25</sup> When the First World War came, the Edinburgh based suffragists played a key role in organising support and fund-raising for the Scottish Women's Hospitals,

with several members also serving in the field.

An important point to note with respect to the demand for the parliamentary franchise was that it was always that women should get the franchise on the same terms as men. This was a restricted franchise, dependent on a property qualification, which was somewhat widened by the 1884 Reform Act. A property qualification did not mean only ownership of property, but included renting a property of a specified value. Women's suffrage societies, whether constitutionalist or militant, were not demanding universal adult suffrage, although individual women in parties such as the Social Democratic Federation and Independent Labour Party (ILP) would have supported this principle. The differences between suffragists and suffragettes were not over the nature of the demand, but over tactics. There was also the question of whether married women, as wives of householders, should be given the vote, an issue on which suffragists themselves had been split, and it was only at a very late stage that married women were included in the franchise Bill. Restrictions on married women's rights at local level, where the property qualification had meant they had to be ratepayers in their own right in order to be electors, were also removed.

#### Local government and women's representation

The key bodies with which this article is concerned are the School Boards, Parochial Boards, their successor, Parish Councils, and Town Councils. It focuses in particular on School Boards and Parish Councils, in which Edinburgh women had a notable profile from an early period, while it took longer for them to find a place on the Town Council. While, ultimately, women were able to vote and stand for all these bodies, the franchise and eligibility to stand for election was not identical for all bodies, and they were also amended in various ways over time.

Local government in Scotland went through a process of considerable change in the nineteenth century, responding to the challenges of industrialisation and urbanisation, and taking on increasing responsibilities of service provision and regulation. There was a great volume of legislation relating to local, particularly urban, governance,

much of it driven by the public health imperatives of tackling epidemic diseases.<sup>26</sup> Responsibilities and powers were defined and redefined over time, as were the administrative units: parishes, burghs, police burghs, town and county councils. Not all legislation was Scotland-wide in scope, as there were many local Acts governing the powers of burghs.<sup>27</sup> Some of the administrative units overlapped, and, over time, there was a process of redrawing of boundaries and amalgamations. In the cities, the police commissioners created by the earlier Police Burgh Acts were successively replaced by the Town Councils between the 1840s and 1870s.<sup>28</sup> By the early twentieth century, the chief public bodies in Scotland were the County Councils, Town Councils, School Boards, and Parish Councils.<sup>29</sup> Responsibilities of local authorities included poor law administration, public health and sanitation, policing, housing, elementary education, prevention of cruelty to children, burials, bridges and roads, as well as registration of births, marriages and deaths.

At the same time as the powers of local authorities were extended, systems of governance changed, and local bodies were progressively subjected to more democratic processes of election, which gradually eroded the power of landed gentry and churchmen. The new forms of local government evolved in a piecemeal way out of old long-established forms of urban and rural governance at burgh and parish level, and out of Scottish poor law traditions, which were different from those existing in England and Wales. While the general trends in the development of municipal governance may have been similar throughout Britain, neither the forms of administration nor the franchise were identical. As a consequence of the requirement for separate Scottish legislation, the enfranchisement of women at local level in Scotland was not contemporaneous with that of women in England and Wales. Thus, for example, the Municipal Franchise Act of 1869 in England and Wales enfranchised women ratepayers,<sup>30</sup> but comparable enfranchisement was achieved in Scotland only with the passage of the Municipal Elections Amendment (Scotland) Act, 1881, and an 1882 amendment to the General Police and Improvement (Scotland) Act, 1862.<sup>31</sup> This disparity in municipal enfranchisement was well known among suffrage campaigners in Scotland and formed a plank in their campaigning for the municipal franchise north of the border.<sup>32</sup> The

key player in putting amendments to Parliament to include women in the municipal franchise was Dr Charles Cameron, Liberal MP for Glasgow.<sup>33</sup> He was also the leading promoter in Parliament for the reform of Parochial Boards.<sup>34</sup> By contrast, the right of women to vote and stand for School Boards came into place in Scotland, as a result of the Education (Scotland) Act 1872, very shortly after this right had been conferred in England and Wales by the Education Act of 1870.

In 1889, women ratepayers were given the right to vote for the newly created County Councils. The 1894 Local Government (Scotland) Act gave women the right to vote and stand for Parish Councils, where they qualified for registration on County Council and municipal registers. Women had been able to vote in Town Council elections since the 1881 Act; in 1907, they were given the right to stand. If elected chairman or provost, however, they were not allowed to act as baillie or Justice of the Peace (JP), an office open to their male counterparts. The right of women to be JPs and baillies was conferred in 1920.

### School Boards

The earliest form of public office for which women in Scotland could vote and stand was the School Board, as enacted by the Education (Scotland) Act, 1872. The powers of the Boards encompassed the provision and equipping of schools, and appointment of teachers and other paid officials. The first election was held in 1873, and elections were every three years thereafter. As a populous burgh, Edinburgh had a board of the maximum size of fifteen members (the size of the Board was increased to twenty-one members in 1909). Voters had as many votes as there were Board members, and if they wished, could use all their votes for one member, known as 'plumping'. The purpose of this method of cumulative voting was to protect minority interests and allow their representation on Boards. In the context of the 1870s, this meant religious minorities – dissenting churches and Catholics.<sup>35</sup>

Edinburgh suffrage supporters took action to promote women candidates. A committee was set up to support 'lady candidates', advertised in the *Scotsman* on February 14th, 1873. A subsequent advert listed the members of the Committee, a total of 62 men and

women, including politicians, councillors, university professors, their female relatives, and many other women. There were four men and nineteen women on the Executive Committee. The chair was Professor David Masson, and also on the Committee was the Rev Robert Blyth, brother of candidate Phoebe Blyth. Several of the women on the Executive Committee were members of the ENSWS: Agnes McLaren, Eliza Wigham, and Louisa Stevenson. The candidates, Phoebe Blyth and Flora Stevenson, were duly elected to the Edinburgh School Board in March, 1873. Stevenson later recalled that she was persuaded to stand, because 'As the canvas for a lady member went on, it soon became evident that with the cumulative vote there was more than enough voting power to return at least two women'.<sup>36</sup> She went on to note that 'The election was said to turn on sects and sex'. The Roman Catholic priest, Rev. Rigg, later Bishop Rigg, came in at the head of the poll, followed by Blyth and Stevenson.

At the ENSWS AGM in 1877, Eliza Wigham commented that, despite women in Scotland still being excluded from municipal elections, the School Board elections of the previous year had 'again proved that there is no difficulty in women recording their votes'.<sup>37</sup> The elections 'also proved the capacity of women to act as members of boards, and their power to give accounts of their stewardship'.<sup>38</sup> The successful candidates, Miss Blyth and Miss Stevenson were 'largely indebted to the votes of women householders' for their positions.<sup>39</sup> Needless to say, women's effective participation in the School Board elections was advanced as an argument for their exercise of the parliamentary franchise. The committee was active at succeeding elections in 1879, 1882, 1885, and 1888, when 'the committee formed to promote the return of ladies to the School Board' was still being referred to in the *Scotsman*, still with Professor Masson as chair.<sup>40</sup> Subsequent coverage of School Board elections made little reference to the Committee, though gave many reports of public meetings by women candidates. However, the views of the Ladies' Committee still carried weight with the Board following Stevenson's death in 1905. The Committee 'which promoted Miss Stevenson's candidature' had written to the Board nominating Lady Steel to take Stevenson's place, and her name was therefore put forward for election.<sup>41</sup> She was elected by eleven votes to two, defeating the ILP candidate, Mr Young.

When the Committee to support 'lady candidates' was set up in 1873, the arguments put forward in favour of their membership of the Board by Baillie Cousin were that this was not a question of 'any sect or party' but that 'it was the cause and interest of every girl in Edinburgh'.<sup>42</sup> Furthermore, the women candidates had a 'real interest in education', whereas others 'were the supporters of sects and opinions', or 'held public offices which left them no time for the School Board'.<sup>43</sup> At another meeting earlier that month, it was stressed that there were as many girls to educate as boys, and the youngest children in schools were already entrusted to women to educate. Given this, it seemed advisable that there should be 'at least two wise and prudent women, who would superintend especially that portion of education relating to girls'.<sup>44</sup> Similarly, it would be good to have women on the Board to superintend women teachers. Phoebe Blyth was then praised for having made education the study of her life, while Flora Stevenson, although not as experienced as Blyth, 'still had sufficient experience to prove that she was entitled to their confidence in the matter'.<sup>45</sup> As well as the fitness of candidates being reaffirmed at subsequent elections, the argument about the need for women members to supervise the education of girls and to superintend women teachers were repeated in the 1880s, although it was also the general aim of the Boards to 'promote good education in elementary schools for children of both sexes and of all classes'.<sup>46</sup>

On Phoebe Blyth's death in 1898, the School Board recorded 'their sense of the loss caused to the community'.<sup>47</sup> 'Her practical experience as a teacher, as well as her deep interest in all social and philanthropic work', had 'eminently fitted her for the work' of the new system of Boards.<sup>48</sup> Among other things, Blyth promoted the teaching of cookery and household management for schoolgirls, the educational value of which was something that had to be argued for in order to get ratepayer support.<sup>49</sup> Flora Stevenson's services to education were recognised through a school being named after her in 1899, by the award of an honorary degree from the University of Edinburgh in 1903, and by the award of the Freedom of the City of Edinburgh in 1905. She was praised for her role in supporting higher education for women, for her 'unique' relationship with the Edinburgh School Board in the form of continuous service and chairmanship, for promoting

Day and Industrial Schools, for service on 'important Departmental Committees on Habitual Offenders and Reformatories', and for her association with 'other public bodies too many to enumerate'.<sup>50</sup> On receiving the Freedom of the City in 1905, the second woman to be so honoured,<sup>51</sup> Stevenson accepted it:

not only as a personal honour, but as a recognition of the principle now universally accepted that there is administrative work on public boards which can be and is fittingly and successfully carried on by hundreds of women in all parts of the Kingdom.<sup>52</sup>

She also used this occasion to publicize her position on school meals, declaring that 'it will be an evil day for Scotland if the Legislature puts on School Boards the duty of providing meals out of public funds for underfed school children'.<sup>53</sup> As John Stewart has pointed out, the organisation that Stevenson founded, the Committee for Feeding and Clothing Destitute Children, was, by the turn of the century, the most important provider of meals to poor children in Edinburgh.<sup>54</sup> Her opposition to state intervention was grounded in the belief that it would undermine parental responsibility.

Another ENSWS and School Board member, Helen Leslie Mackenzie, along with her husband, William Leslie Mackenzie, the first medical inspector of schools at the Local Government Board for Scotland, was 'dedicated to the improvement of the physical condition of Scottish schoolchildren'.<sup>55</sup> In the early 1900s, the Leslie Mackenzies conducted a 'pioneering investigation into the physical state of Edinburgh schoolchildren'.<sup>56</sup> As a result of the findings, which showed poorer children suffering defective health, they called for systematic medical inspection of schoolchildren and training of teachers in health and hygiene. In 1908, a bill providing for medical inspection of schoolchildren, and also for state-sponsored school meals, passed into law, in contrast to a previous attempt in 1906.<sup>57</sup> Helen Leslie Mackenzie also campaigned for instruction of girls in nutrition, hygiene and care of infants, and for continuation classes for young women. She went on, in the inter-war years, to become a leading campaigner for facilities for mentally handicapped children, a campaign that was taken forward through the EWCA and Scottish Council of Women Citizens Associations (SCWCA).<sup>58</sup>

In the early years of School Board elections, the arguments for the need for women Board members were reiterated, but thereafter, women's candidature does not seem to have been particularly controversial. Rather, the issue that caused most controversy and contestation of elections was that of the nature of religious education in schools. There was denominational competition between different Protestant denominations, and between Protestants and Catholics for representation on the Boards. In this context, it was probably an advantage that the 'lady candidates' were not participants in sectarian controversies, although Lady Steel's support for free books for voluntary as well as state schools in 1909 elicited some criticism from those who feared the spread of Catholic teachings. The questions at issue were the cost to ratepayers in paying for provision to Catholic and other voluntary schools, and what kind of books would be provided.<sup>59</sup> Along with other supporters of free books, Lady Steel lost her seat on the Board at the election.<sup>60</sup>

How does the Edinburgh experience fit in the wider Scottish context? The Education (Scotland) Act, 1872, created a system of 986 elected School Boards.<sup>61</sup> Women played a high-profile role in a number of these, with Edinburgh being the outstanding example. Andrew Bain's study of School Boards in Fife, West Lothian and Grangemouth is indicative of local variation in the composition of Boards, but also shows that women's prominence on Boards was not exclusively an urban phenomenon.<sup>62</sup> Their participation was one element of a process of democratisation achieved over the period of the Boards' existence. Yet, if women had come to be a recognised presence on School Boards, when the Boards were reorganised into thirty-eight county and burgh Education Authorities in 1918, they formed only five per cent of all elected members.<sup>63</sup> Moreover, it was largely middle-class women who benefited from this opportunity for public service. One exception to this was Clarice McNab [later Shaw], who was elected to the Leith School Board in 1909.<sup>64</sup> Her father, Thomas, who had previously served on the Board, was a weaver, and her mother, Mary Deas, was a compositor.

What the Edinburgh experience indicates is that women saw the need to actively organise to get women on to School Boards and to keep them there. As Board members, they saw themselves as having a

responsibility for the interests of girls, and of women teachers, but this did not preclude their involvement in more general debates about the nature of educational provision, and in particular, how to ensure an adequate education for poor children. Over the period from 1873 to 1918, fifteen women served on the Edinburgh School Board, and thereafter, eight women served on the Education Authorities created in 1918, between 1919 and 1929, when the Education Authorities were absorbed into Burgh and County Councils.<sup>65</sup> Some were long-serving members; others only served one term of office, and some stood unsuccessfully for re-election. Existing evidence suggests that at least half were subscribers to the ENSWS, and some were members of the later EWCA; there was clearly a substantial overlap, and this may have been greater than the fragmentary evidence indicates. Flora Stevenson, Mary Burton, Lady Steel, and Helen Leslie Mackenzie were committee members of the ENSWS, while Louisa Gulland was a subscriber. Burton, Steel, Mackenzie and Gulland were all also members of the Scottish Women's Liberal Federation (SWLF); Steel and Mackenzie campaigned for the 1906 election together, holding public meetings in various parts of the city.<sup>66</sup> Mackenzie was subsequently on the committee of the EWCA, while Minna Cowan was a member, actively supported by the organisation when standing for elections, including for the Education Authority. At least three other women elected to the Edinburgh Education Authority were EWCA members: Mrs Alice Ross, Mrs Isobel Morgan, and Mrs Marion Baird-Ross.<sup>67</sup>

What were the issues that women concerned themselves with as members of the School Board? Newspaper coverage suggests that they projected themselves as efficient managers, conscious of the costs to ratepayers, but they were also concerned about the position of poor children in the city. The views of some leading individuals, such as Flora Stevenson, Phoebe Blyth and Helen Leslie Mackenzie, have attracted the attention of historians.<sup>68</sup> More generally, issues and campaigns that Edinburgh School Board women were associated with, in addition to their support for women's suffrage, included education in domestic skills and household management for girls, access to higher education for women, relief of child poverty, children's health, infant and maternal health, and play facilities for children. In addition, Minna Cowan was the author of a study on women's

education in India, and Helen Leslie Mackenzie was the driving force behind the EWCA's and SCWCA's campaign in the inter-war years for the establishment of facilities for mentally handicapped children.

#### Parochial Boards/Parish Councils

During the period under consideration, there was both a structural reorganisation concerning Parochial Boards and Parish Councils, and a change in the constitution of boards. Essentially, Parochial Boards, and their successors, Parish Councils, were concerned with the administration of the Poor Law in Scotland. This encompassed not just the conditions of support to be given to poor people, but also to those who could not work for reasons of illness or disability, including mental illness, and therefore, as well as handling indoor and outdoor relief for poor people, the Parochial Boards/Parish Councils also dealt with medical relief, and with mental illness through the 'Lunacy Board'. This included powers to confine people suffering from various conditions.

Both before and after 1845, the year of the Poor Law Amendment (Scotland) Act, each parish was responsible for the care of its poor; in smaller parishes where funds were raised by voluntary contributions, Kirk session and heritors remained in control of poor relief. Under the system of Parochial Boards, if funds were raised through the rates, the Board was required to have some elected members, while, after the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1894, which replaced the boards with Parish Councils, all members of Parish Councils were elected. Prior to the 1894 Act, poor relief in Edinburgh was administered by the City of Edinburgh Parochial Board and the St Cuthbert's Combination Parochial Board, with which the Canongate Parochial Board had been merged in 1873. After 1894, it was the responsibility of the City of Edinburgh Parish Council.

Women appeared in Edinburgh as 'Managers of the Poor' on Parochial Boards in 1883. This appears to have been a direct result of women ratepayers being given the right to vote in Burgh (Town Council and Police Burgh) elections in 1881 and 1882. It is not clear that prior to this, women were specifically excluded from membership of Parochial Boards, and it would seem likely that, in rural areas, women from the landowning class would have sometimes played



an active role in poor relief, of at least a charitable nature, if not as part of local administration. There was a controversy in the early 1870s over the attempt to appoint a woman as an Inspector of the Poor in Stromness.<sup>69</sup> The Stromness board appointed Miss Margaret Corston as Inspector of the Poor, a paid official post, to succeed her father, whom she had aided in his duties. The Board of Supervision disallowed this appointment on the grounds of sex, and despite the opinion of an advocate that it was not against the law, the Stromness Board complied. However, it accepted another woman, a Miss Cruikshank, as a Board member. The claim of the ENSWS that Edinburgh's women managers of the poor were the first in Scotland is thus perhaps inaccurate, and it would require further research to establish women's involvement in any Boards elsewhere. It could, however, be claimed that they were the first to benefit from women's participation in Parochial Board elections.

As noted, the Municipal Franchise was granted to women in England and Wales by the Municipal Franchise Act, 1869, which had been amended by Jacob Bright (brother of Priscilla Bright McLaren) to include female voters.<sup>70</sup> Members of the ENSWS were certainly aware of this, not least because of the Bright family connections, but also because of reporting of the issue in the *Women's Suffrage Journal*. Naturally enough, the argument that women were already permitted to be members of School Boards in Scotland and to be Poor Law Guardians in England and Wales, was used to support the case for Scotland. In England, there had been some debate around whether the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834 specifically excluded women from serving as Poor Law guardians; it was conceded in the late 1830s that women were eligible to stand as guardians. However, it was not until 1875 that the first woman was elected as guardian of the poor, Martha Merrington in Kensington.<sup>71</sup> Following in her footsteps shortly afterwards was Eva McLaren, in Lambeth, in 1882. McLaren was the daughter-in-law of Duncan and Priscilla Bright McLaren, married to their son Walter, MP for Crewe.

In Scotland, there was a great deal of campaigning activity at the time when Dr Cameron was putting forward the legislative amendments which included women in the municipal franchise. In the year following the passage of the Municipal Elections Amendment (Scotland) Act, 1881, there was a series

of public meetings in Edinburgh and Glasgow, and other parts of Scotland, and in particular a series of 'preliminary meetings' leading up to a Scottish National Demonstration of Women in Glasgow in November 1882. Coverage of these in the *Women's Suffrage Journal* suggests a mood of optimism about the rate of change, not just the achievement of the municipal franchise for women ratepayers, but also a sense of momentum towards the achieving of the parliamentary franchise for women ratepayers in the foreseeable future.<sup>72</sup> At the Glasgow meeting, a capacity audience of over 5,000 women were addressed by Elizabeth Cady Stanton, veteran of the US anti-slavery and women's suffrage movement, and by Priscilla Bright McLaren, Flora Stevenson, and Jessie Craigen, among others.<sup>73</sup> Mrs McLaren drew her hearers' attention to a speech by Professor Caird of the University of Glasgow, who had urged women to get themselves placed on School and Parochial Boards. Thus, while the parliamentary franchise was the main theme addressed in speeches, due recognition was paid to the role women were already playing on School Boards, and that they could play on Parochial Boards.

It did not escape the notice of the ENSWS that there was here another opportunity to enhance women's representation. At its 1882 AGM, Eliza Wigham remarked:

the great importance of having women as members of the Poor Law Guardians, - to watch over the interests of the women and children, and the economical departments of the parochial administration.<sup>74</sup>

She hoped that, in another year, 'such an appointment may be made in the parish elections of this city'.<sup>75</sup> As in the case of School Boards, a committee was formed to promote 'lady candidates'. Established in March 1883, with Eliza Wigham as convener, the Committee put forward Louisa Stevenson and Jane Miller as candidates for St Cuthbert's Parochial Board. It also issued a circular to electors, outlining the reasons 'why it is most desirable that some women should be elected members of the Board'.<sup>76</sup> Women were seen to have a particular role in looking after the interests of children who were either in the poorhouse or boarded out in the country, in considering the interests of women whose cases came before the parochial authorities, and as being

qualified to give advice and assistance on the domestic arrangements required for managing the poorhouse. Stevenson and Miller were duly elected, and claimed by the ENSWS as the first women Parochial Board members in Scotland. The *Scotsman's* coverage of 'the Association for promoting the return of ladies as members of Parochial Boards' noted that its president was the Rev Dr Cameron Lees,<sup>77</sup> and that it had many prominent male supporters, as well as leading figures in the suffrage and wider women's movement, such as Mrs Duncan McLaren, Mrs Forbes, Miss Wigham, the Misses Stevenson, and Miss Blyth. Dr Lees was the sole man on the Association's Executive Committee; the others were all women, several of whom were members of the ENSWS.<sup>78</sup>

Coverage of subsequent meetings of the Association repeated the argument that women brought practical skills to bear on efficient management of poorhouses, and that they were needed to look after the interests of children. It was also stressed that they brought kindness and sympathy to this task, and even, in the words of Professor Blackie, their 'superior power of moral fragrance'.<sup>79</sup> At its 1893 AGM, the ENSWS reported that 'the representative qualification of women is increasingly recognised in many directions, as inspectors of the poor, inspectors of parks, members of school boards, &c, &c'.<sup>80</sup> The city's record was emphasised: 'In Edinburgh we have eight women managers on parochial boards,' but it was much regretted 'that no other Scotch parishes have women managers', since poor women and children needed 'the intelligent sympathy of guardians, and this can scarcely be accorded by men'.<sup>81</sup>

As well as the ENSWS members, women active in the temperance movement and in Women's Liberal Associations, also promoted women's representation on Parish Councils.<sup>82</sup> In 1887, Mary Carr Lees outlined to readers of the *Scottish Women's Temperance News* their voting rights at municipal level, urging the 'large numbers who might vote' for the 859 Parish Councils in Scotland to claim their right to do so.<sup>83</sup> Women temperance campaigners believed there was a strong association with drunkenness and poverty, and that restricting the former would provide a solution to the latter. This made representation in local government particularly important, as local councils had the capacity to control licensing.

The 1894 Local Government Act transformed Parochial Boards into Parish Councils, of which all

members were to be elected, and allowed married women to be registered if they had a separate property qualification from their husband, while there was no disqualification of sex or marital status to standing as a candidate.<sup>84</sup> In April 1895, not long after the new Act came into force, the Association for promoting women candidates was dissolved, 'its object having been accomplished'.<sup>85</sup> That the Association had indeed been successful is indicated by the continuous representation of women on Parochial Boards, then Parish Councils up till 1929.<sup>86</sup> When Parish Councils were abolished in that year, there were eleven women members out of a total of forty-six on the Edinburgh City Parish Council. From 1883 onwards, there were always women representatives on the City of Edinburgh Parochial Board and the St Cuthbert's Combination Parochial Board - two on the former, and six on the latter. After the Edinburgh City Parish Council was created, there were usually around six women representatives on the Committee up until 1918, with the number increasing in the 1920s. Over the period between 1883 and 1918 (when the parliamentary franchise was obtained for some women) there were twenty-eight women who served on Parochial Boards and the Parish Council; this figure rose to a total of forty-two, taking the period up to 1929. Some of them were very long-serving members, for example, Mary Carr Lees and Margaret Johnston Boémé, who both served for twenty-five years or more. Phoebe Blyth served for about sixteen years, and several others put in ten years of service. Some also held positions on the Lunacy Board, for example, Mary Carr Lees and Mary Ann Steedman. Some women served on both School Boards and Parochial Boards/Parish Councils, for example, Phoebe Blyth, Mary Burton and Jane Hay. Parish Council member, Ethelinda Hadwen, stood as an independent candidate for the School Board in 1906, but was unsuccessful.<sup>87</sup>

As noted, the women elected to the Edinburgh Parochial Board in 1883 claimed to be the first in Scotland. Other areas were to follow: the *Scottish Liberal Women's Magazine*, in February 1911, printed a list of all women Parish Councillors in Scotland, listing twenty-nine councils with women members (this was not quite complete, as some elections had not taken place at the time of publication).<sup>88</sup> This indicated that there were five women councillors for Edinburgh; one for Aberdeen; five for Dundee; three

for Glasgow, and two for Govan; while Dunoon and Kilmun, St Andrews, Kirriemuir, Blairgowrie, and Paisley each had two women members. In Dollar, Mrs Lavinia Malcolm was a Parish Councillor; she was already a Town Councillor, and was to become Scotland's first woman Provost in 1913.<sup>89</sup>

Campaigners for women to be elected to Parish Councils emphasised their concern for women's and children's interests.<sup>90</sup> Issues which came up in discussions of women's work as Parish Councillors included their support for the boarding out of poor children, which was thought to prevent them growing up to be paupers like their parents.<sup>91</sup> Women Parish Councillors who sat on Children's Committees would have shared responsibility for the supervision of boarding out; this practice was generally considered by Parish Councils to be both beneficial and successful. A further concern was the plight of elderly couples, and their commitment to keeping them together outside the poorhouse was voiced by several women Parish Councillors.<sup>92</sup> The provision of adequately trained nursing staff was also taken up by women Parish Councillors, particularly by Louisa Stevenson, and 'pauper' nurses selected from among poorhouse inmates were gradually replaced by trained nurses.<sup>93</sup>

Edinburgh Parish Council had a number of standing committees.<sup>94</sup> In 1902, for example, these were the House, Law, Finance, Relieving, Medical, Children's, and Chairman's Committees. In that year, Ethelinda Hadwen was on four committees: House, Relieving, Medical, and Children's. Mrs Emily Fox, was on all but the Finance Committee, and was co-Convener of the Relieving Committee. Mrs Margaret Boémé was on all but Law and Finance, and was Convener of the Children's Committee. Mary Carr Lees was on all but Finance and Medical, and was co-Convener of the Relieving Committee. Such committee memberships are indicative of the concerns of women members, and also of the level of responsibility they carried.

Of the women who served on the Edinburgh Parochial Board and Parish Council, only a few have been included in the *Biographical Dictionary of Scottish Women*<sup>95</sup> or other biographical records. Mary Burton, who also served on the School Board, persuaded the Watt Institution and School of Arts (forerunner of Heriot Watt University) to open its classes to female students, and she became its first

woman director, and subsequently a life governor of Heriot Watt College. Jane Hay also served on both School Board and Parish Council, worked with Armenian refugees in Greece in the late 1890s, and subsequently served on Coldingham School Board and Parish Council. Mary Carr Lees was active in the temperance movement, for many years was the only woman member of the board of the Magdalen Asylum, served as Vice-President of the EWCA, and was made a JP in 1922.<sup>96</sup> As well as their membership of the ENSWS and/or the EWCA, these women were often connected to other women's organisations, such as the Edinburgh Society for Promoting the Employment of Women, the Edinburgh Ladies Debating Society, the Edinburgh Ladies' Educational Association, and the National Union of Women Workers (later, National Council of Women).<sup>97</sup> As in the case of the School Board women members, there was a considerable overlap of Parochial Board/Parish Council women members with the ENSWS; twelve women definitely were members, another three possibly were. In the period after 1918, six were definitely EWCA members, and another five possibly members. Certainly in the latter cases, they obtained support from the EWCA when standing for public office.

Drawing on their organisational networks, suffrage campaigners and other supporters of women's rights clearly had the capacity to make an impact in Edinburgh, combining effectively to ensure their representation in the administration of poor relief and related medical relief. The interest of Edinburgh suffrage campaigners and women's movement activists in local government was taken forward after 1918 by the EWCA, in particular. What the experience was elsewhere over this period requires further research. It is notable, however, that Leith lagged behind. Between 1896 and 1902, Leith Parish Council had three women members, but between 1902 and 1920 had no women members, with three women being elected in the latter year.<sup>98</sup> In an address given in 1913 on 'Women on Public Boards', Helen Leslie Mackenzie noted that there were six women on the Edinburgh Parish Council out of a total of thirty-one members, while 'On 930 Parish Councils throughout Scotland there were only 43 women; and on the same number of Parish School Boards there were only 100 women.'<sup>99</sup> From the early 1920s, many more women came forward as

candidates for Parish Councils in the main Scottish cities. By 1928, as Kenneth Baxter has shown, the proportion of women on Parish Councils in the four main cities was as follows: Aberdeen – 20.8 per cent; Dundee – 11.8 per cent; Edinburgh – 23.9 per cent; Glasgow – 29 per cent. Edinburgh had lost its lead to Glasgow by 1925.<sup>100</sup>

### Town Councils

As noted, women ratepayers were given the right to vote for Town Councils in 1881, and for County Councils in 1889. Also as noted, in 1907 women were given the right to stand for Town and County Councils. Lady Steel stood at the first Town Council election after women had obtained the right to stand, in 1907, but was unsuccessful. By then she was already serving on the School Board, having replaced Flora Stevenson,<sup>101</sup> and she continued on the Board till 1909. Barbara Steel (née Paterson) was married to Edinburgh Lord Provost James Steel, who was made a baronet in 1903. Widowed in 1904, she appears to have become increasingly active politically. A member of both the Scottish Women's Liberal Federation and the ENSWS, she adopted the tactic of tax resistance, on the grounds that there should be no taxation without representation. As a result of her refusal to pay tax, she had her furniture seized and sold at auction. She had the support of ENSWS in doing this, as is evident from the report in the *Scotsman* of a public meeting held to discuss the question of tax resistance in July, 1907.<sup>102</sup> After Lady Steel's defeat in the 1907 election, there was a vituperative editorial in the *Scotsman*, which accused her of bringing 'sex prejudice' into local politics. Effectively this was saying she was unfit for office because of her tax resistance.<sup>103</sup> A subsequent letter to the editor indicated that Lady Steel had 'placed first on her programme the question of infantile mortality, a glaringly neglected duty of our health authorities'.<sup>104</sup> In 1908, there were 'rumours' that 'one or more lady candidates may present themselves'.<sup>105</sup> Lady Steel's name had been referred to, while 'the Women's Social and Political Union and the Women's Freedom League may also have a candidate'.<sup>106</sup> But in the event, there was no woman candidate in that year, nor did any woman stand again until 1919. In Leith, where the record of women's representation was

generally poorer than in Edinburgh, Clarice McNab succeeded in being elected to the Town Council in 1913, the first Labour woman to be elected to a Town Council. As noted above, McNab had already been serving on the Leith School Board since 1910.

As Kenneth Baxter has noted, it was only after the First World War that women began to contest municipal elections regularly.<sup>107</sup> Edinburgh was the first city in Scotland to elect a woman Councillor in 1919, but it was not until 1937 that all four cities had women Councillors simultaneously. Ella Morison Millar was elected in January 1919 and Euphemia Somerville was elected later the same year. Subsequently, Millar and Somerville continued to hold their seats unopposed. Councillor Millar became Edinburgh's first woman Baillie in 1923. Martha Eltringham Millar was elected as a Labour Councillor in 1924; in 1929 Janet Swan Brunton, also Labour, was elected; and in 1930 Mrs Mary Graham (Labour) and Mrs Elizabeth McIntyre (Moderate) were elected.<sup>108</sup> It is notable that a number of these women were members of the ENSWS or EWCA and had their support, while others, such as Martha Millar and Elizabeth McIntyre, had experience of Parish Councils. Ella Morison Millar had the support of both the ENSWS and the EWCA in 1919, and Somerville had the support of the EWCA.<sup>109</sup> Although common at the time for candidates in local elections, apart from Labour, not to stand as party candidates, Morison Millar was a Unionist Party member, who was to become identified with the Progressive group on the Council. Somerville, who was an Independent, was Progressive in her sympathies.

As noted, there were two organisations which emerged out of the ENSWS, the EWCA and the ESEC. It is not clear what exactly were the relations between the two, although it is possible that there was something of a division of labour relating to local and parliamentary lobbying.<sup>110</sup> Nonetheless, they co-operated with each other (and, indeed the EWCA affiliated to NUSEC in 1920), as well as with other women's organisations, on a range of issues, including supporting women candidates for parliamentary and local government elections. In 1920, the EWCA had 1,160 members, with membership rising to a peak of 1,647 in 1930.<sup>111</sup> By 1919, fourteen towns in Scotland had formed WCAs, and the EWCA appears to have taken a leading role in the formation of the SCWCA, which was established in 1921.<sup>112</sup> By 1929 there were

nineteen WCAs in the Scottish Council. WCA records indicate a strong local focus, with support given for women to be elected to local government office, and women councillors as members.

The EWCA regularly sent questionnaires to election candidates on a range of issues affecting women. They also maintained regular contact with councillors, and held receptions with MPs and Scottish Office ministers. Among the issues taken up by women's organisations in this period were women jurors, women police, temperance legislation, housing, child assault, regulation of prostitution, and birth control, although opinion on such subjects was not always unanimous.<sup>113</sup> Some of the issues raised came within the scope of the Town Council and others related to parliamentary legislation or commissions. At local level, housing was an issue taken up by Councillor Somerville, who supported housing improvements and was a founder of the Edinburgh Welfare Housing Trust. She was also the convener of the EWCA's Housing Committee. However, Councillor Somerville's favouring of the Edinburgh Social Union (ESU) as a manager of local authority tenants was resisted successfully by working-class tenants who resented the 'intervention of busybodies'.<sup>114</sup> The ESU was long associated with ENSWS member and suffrage supporter, Elizabeth Haldane, who came from a leading Liberal family, and was made Scotland's first woman Justice of the Peace in 1920.<sup>115</sup> Helen Leslie Mackenzie was also an Executive Committee member of the ESU.<sup>116</sup> Among other issues raised by Councillor Somerville was that of equal pay for work of equal value at the Corporation, an issue which continued to be raised by the EWCA in subsequent years.<sup>117</sup>

During this period, the EWCA worked to educate newly enfranchised women about their rights, to explain the still complicated franchise, which was not identical at parliamentary and municipal level, and to encourage women to stand for elected office and to understand how local government worked.<sup>118</sup> This included the organisation of visits to local institutions and departments. One of the leading advocates in this regard was Helen Leslie Mackenzie, who, among other things, chaired the Local Elections Committee.<sup>119</sup> The EWCA claimed that it was this committee which 'by focussing the work of the various women's Associations in the city, was mainly responsible for the return of Councillor

Mrs Somerville to the Town Council, and Parish Councillors Mrs Inglis Clark and Mrs Melville to the Parish Council.'<sup>120</sup> Women Councillors and Parish Councillors were among those giving public talks on EWCA's behalf.

With the change in local government structures in 1929, the EWCA convened a study circle on the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1929, securing a 'crowded attendance at all lectures'.<sup>121</sup> The EWCA Committee also stressed how important work at this level was, given the greater powers being placed in the hands of local authorities. At the same time, the EWCA kept up its interest in parliamentary matters, lobbying for changes in Scottish legislation along with NUSEC, hosting receptions with MPs, keeping in close contact with the Duchess of Atholl, MP, over issues such as child assault, and also meeting with local MPs to discuss issues of key concern. But they clearly saw what was going on at local and at Scottish level as just as significant, if not more so.

### Conclusion

As noted, the ENSWS had a continuous existence from 1867 to 1919, and its members played a role in the foundation of the EWCA in 1918, as well as in the organisation's formal successor, the ESEC, in 1919. The parliamentary franchise was, of course, their central demand, particularly until 1918, although ENSWS successor organisations included campaigning for the equal franchise in their wide range of activities. The ENSWS also played a significant role in initiating and supporting committees elsewhere in Scotland, and in organising speaking tours. This is particularly evident in the early years after the Society's formation in 1867, in its close connections with Glasgow activists at the time of women's enfranchisement in municipal elections in the early 1880s, in the period after 1900 when the membership grew rapidly, and in fundraising for the Scottish Women's Hospitals during the First World War.

The ENSWS also took the lead in mobilising support in Edinburgh, including from male allies, to take advantage of women's progressive enfranchisement at local level, initiating and organising committees in support of women candidates to School Boards from the early 1870s, Parochial Boards/Parish Councils from the early 1880s, and carrying this

through to support for women candidates for the Town Council and for Parliament in the 1920s. The committees established for this purpose may have been formed only to contest elections, rather than to have been permanent committees, or may have been of a limited duration. Coverage in the *Scotsman* of the Association for Lady Candidates for School Boards did not mention the Committee from the early 1890s, until the Ladies' Committee surfaced again in the newspaper's pages in 1905, when Flora Stevenson died and a replacement was being sought for her on the Board. The Association for Promoting Ladies as Members of Parochial Boards existed from 1883 until 1895, when the degree of success achieved rendered it unnecessary, in the opinion of its members. It is clear, however, that ENSWS members continued to perform a campaigning and canvassing role at elections throughout the period discussed here, whether through enduring formal associations or otherwise. Certainly, annual reports frequently referred to the importance of women's role on these bodies, and ENSWS members actively promoted the need for women to stand for public office, with Louisa Stevenson, Mary Carr Lees and Helen Leslie Mackenzie, for example, being vocal advocates.

In a similar way, after 1918, the EWCA and ESEC were involved in an alliance of organisations supporting women as Council candidates, although efforts to support Parliamentary candidates sometimes resulted in tensions between women affiliated to different political parties. Both organisations continued to be active in the inter-war years, had overlapping memberships, and often worked together. The membership of the EWCA also overlapped with the Edinburgh Branch of the National Council of Women, with whom they also worked closely. However, it was the EWCA which took the lead in promoting women's representation and in supporting candidates, in particular at local level.

Some, perhaps most, members of the ENSWS were involved in other campaigns, and in charitable, philanthropic, and political organisations. These were often overlapping or complementary, although individuals made different choices about where to put their energies. For example, Phoebe Blyth, who served on the Parish Council, devoted her energies mainly to educational work and to the Edinburgh Society for Promoting the Employment of Women, rather than playing an active role in the ENSWS, although

she was a suffrage supporter. Another prominent Edinburgh campaigner, Sophia Jex-Blake, was an ENSWS member, although seems to have been less active after setting up a school of medicine for women and running a clinic for women. By contrast, Elsie Inglis, who initially worked with Jex-Blake in the medical school for women, but left to set up her own medical school, maintained a commitment to political activity in the Scottish Women's Liberal Federation, ENSWS and SFWSS. Between them, the ENSWS members on School Boards and Parish Councils had links to many campaigns and organisations. ENSWS members were also involved in founding and developing institutions, such as schools of medicine for women, clinics for women, the school of domestic science, a student residence for women, and so on.

Jane McDermid has noted that there are only a few entries on women School Board members in the *Biographical Dictionary of Scottish Women*, an absence she attributes to lack of surviving personal papers.<sup>122</sup> Women Parish Councillors are even more rarely represented. Yet it is clear from the numbers of women who held office, and the lengthy years of service given by some, that the presence of women in public life in Edinburgh was more extensive than the public recognition of a few celebrated names would suggest. Furthermore, this presence was underpinned by women's active engagement in a wide range of political, charitable and voluntary organisations. These were the women who turned out to vote, who subscribed to women's journals, and attended public meetings. In the decades following ENSWS's formation, women came to be part of the Edinburgh establishment through their experience of public office at local level, gaining public recognition for their work, and contributing to policy debates on education, public health, and maternal and child welfare.

Edinburgh suffragists were successful in their efforts in securing women's representation on the School Board and on the successor Education Authority, Parochial Boards and the successor Parish Council, and on the Town Council.. They were among the first in Scotland to succeed in doing so, and had higher levels of women's representation than was the case elsewhere. The achievement of electing a woman to Parliament eluded them, however, despite several candidates standing in the 1920s and 1930s, and it was not until 1997 that Edinburgh elected its

first woman MP, Lynda Clark, for the Edinburgh Pentlands constituency. The movement in Edinburgh appears to have been stronger than in the other main Scottish cities, with the constitutional movement in Edinburgh achieving organisational continuity over decades and across generations. A number of factors are likely to have contributed to this success: the class composition of Edinburgh, the complexion of local élites, and the political culture of the city. As Morgan and Trainor have shown, Edinburgh was by far the most middle-class of Scotland's four main cities.<sup>123</sup> In Scotland generally, the second half of the nineteenth century witnessed a rapid growth of the middle classes. In Edinburgh this increased from 29.3 per cent of occupational groups in 1861 to 37 per cent in 1911 (the comparable figures for Glasgow were 17.6 per cent in 1861 and 27.6 per cent in 1911).<sup>124</sup> In Edinburgh, middle-class occupations included not only the university professors and lecturers, ministers, doctors and lawyers, among whom were prominent female suffrage supporters such as Professor Masson and Rev Dr Cameron Lees, but also businessmen, industrial managers, white-collar workers, and members of the building trade, such as Lady Steel's husband, Lord Provost Sir James Steel, 'property developer extraordinaire'.<sup>125</sup> At the same time, the MPs for Scottish cities were largely middle-class, rather than from the landed gentry, as MPs for rural constituencies often tended to be. Duncan McLaren, who had a draper's business and other commercial interests, had been Lord Provost from 1851–1854, and served as Liberal MP for Edinburgh from 1865–1881, is a key example here. The Town Council, too, was led by businessmen and professionals, and Edinburgh's local élites had strong connections to London networks.

All of these factors were at play in facilitating the work of the ENSWS: its middle-class membership; the many family and social connections of leading activists to local élites; and the political networks connecting suffragists to Parliament and Town Council. Furthermore, the crowded philanthropic landscape of middle-class Edinburgh offered many opportunities of service for women, and such practical experience of philanthropic work provided a bridge to elected office. In line with their class position, many women activists were well-educated, even before women had access to higher education. Some would certainly have had the best education available to girls, such as Phoebe Blyth, who attended Mr Andrews' school, considered one of the best private schools for girls in Edinburgh at the time.<sup>126</sup> Barbara Paterson, the future Lady Steel, was the first dux of Edinburgh Ladies' College (subsequently the Mary Erskine School) on its opening as a day school in 1875.<sup>127</sup> Others later supplemented their school education with attendance at extra-mural university classes.<sup>128</sup> Flora and Louisa Stevenson, for example, were among the 265 women who, in 1868, enrolled in Professor Masson's first course on behalf of the Edinburgh Association for the University Education of Women.<sup>129</sup> And as the first cohorts of women graduates began to emerge, they took their place within the ranks of the ENSWS and EWCA's membership and committees. Education thus not only enabled women to articulate their support for many causes, but also consolidated links with Edinburgh's intellectual and civic leadership. For such women, the lack of the parliamentary franchise constituted an injustice and a handicap to the full exercise of citizenship, but it was not by any means an insurmountable obstacle to an active presence in political and public life.

## NOTES AND REFERENCES

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- 5 Megan Smitley, *The Feminine Public Sphere: Middle-Class Women in Civic Life in Scotland, c. 1870–1914* (Manchester 2009); Sarah Pedersen, *The Scottish Suffragettes and the Press* (London 2017); Lynn M Brewster, *Suffrage in Stirling: the Struggle for Women's Votes* (Stirling 2002); Marsali Taylor, *Women's Suffrage in Shetland* (2010). See also Women's History Scotland, *The Women's Suffrage Movement in Scotland, 1867–1928: A Learning Resource*, at <https://womensuffragescotland.wordpress.com>
- 6 The first Women Citizens Associations were established in Liverpool and Manchester in 1913 as a result of initiatives by Eleanor Rathbone. The National Union of Women Workers promoted their further formation from 1917, with the first local branches being established in 1918. See Sue Innes, 'Constructing Women's Citizenship, the Inter-War Period: the Edinburgh Women Citizens Association', *Women's History Review*, 13: 4 (2004), pp. 621–647.
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- 11 See entries in *BDSW*.
- 12 See, for example, ENSWS, Seventh Annual Meeting, 1875: Women's Library, (formerly Fawcett Library), London School of Economics [hereafter WL].
- 13 'Edinburgh National Society for Women's Suffrage', *Evening News*, 25 February 1874.
- 14 Annual reports are available for only 20 years out of 52 between 1867 and 1919. Many of the surviving reports are now held in the Women's Library. A small number are held in the National Library of Scotland (NLS) and Edinburgh Public Library.
- 15 ENSWS circular to Town Clerk of Dornoch. The circular was a standard letter, with the number of electors inserted by hand. National Records of Scotland [NRS]: B15/6/1/27.
- 16 For example, at the ENSWS AGM in 1905, it was reported that eleven new societies had been formed in Scotland in the last year. *Scotsman*, 16 January 1905.
- 17 The Edinburgh branch of the WSPU was listed in the Edinburgh Post Office Directory from 1909 until 1915, although the branch had been founded in 1906. Although established in 1907, the Edinburgh branch of the WFL was not listed until 1914, and was still being listed in 1921.
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- 19 Martin Pugh, *The March of the Women* (Oxford 2000). There had been ten branches in 1907, but most of these were lost to the Women's Freedom League.
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- 27 Rodger, 'Scottish Cities'. According to Mabel Atkinson, there were six burghs which had private Acts – this included the four main Scottish cities of Aberdeen, Dundee, Edinburgh and Glasgow. Mabel Atkinson, *Local Government in Scotland* (Edinburgh and London 1904)
- 28 Rodger, 'Scottish Cities'.
- 29 D. Oswald Dykes, *Scottish Local Government: Lectures on The Organisation and Functions of Local Bodies* (Edinburgh and London 1907)
- 30 Sarah Richardson, *The Political Worlds of Women: Gender and Politics in Nineteenth Century Britain* (Abingdon 2013). W. H. Marwick was in error in suggesting this Act applied to Scotland. W. H. Marwick, 'Municipal Politics in Victorian Edinburgh', *Book of the Old Edinburgh Club*, vol. 33 (1969), pp. 31–41.
- 31 According to an article in *The Englishwoman's Review*, the Act of 1881 applied only to Royal and Parliamentary Burghs, but not to Police Burghs; hence, a further legislative amendment was required. 'Another Franchise for Scottish Women', *The Englishwoman's Review*, July 15 1882.
- 32 Although the *Women's Suffrage Journal* mistakenly refers to the Act as the Municipal Franchise Act, which is what it was called in England and Wales.
- 33 For an account of Cameron's political career, see Ewen A. Cameron, 'Sir Charles Cameron', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* [ODNB] online.
- 34 See, for example, the record of Dr Cameron's contribution to the House of Commons debate on the Parochial Boards (Scotland) Bill, 1891, *Poor Law Magazine and Local Government Journal*, 1891, p. 184 ff.
- 35 Andrew Bain, 'The Beginnings of Democratic Control of Local Education in Scotland', *Scottish Economic and Social History*, 23:1 (2003), pp. 7–25; see also R. D. Anderson, *Education and the Scottish People, 1750-1918* (Oxford 1995).



- 36 *Scotsman*, 12 January 1905.
- 37 ENSWS Ninth Annual Meeting, 1877, p. 2: WL.
- 38 *Ibid.*, p. 2.
- 39 *Ibid.*, p. 2.
- 40 *Scotsman*, 30 March 1888.
- 41 *Scotsman*, 17 October 1905.
- 42 *Scotsman*, 28 March 1873.
- 43 *Ibid.*
- 44 *Scotsman*, 6 March 1873.
- 45 *Ibid.*
- 46 *Scotsman*, 14 February 1882.
- 47 *Scotsman*, 25 February 1898.
- 48 *Ibid.*
- 49 See entry by Helen Corr on Phoebe Blyth in *ODNB* online.
- 50 *Scotsman*, 10 April 1903.
- 51 Baroness Burdett-Coutts had been awarded the Freedom of Edinburgh in 1874.
- 52 *Scotsman*, 23 May 1905.
- 53 *Ibid.*
- 54 John Stewart, “‘This Injurious Measure’: Scotland and the 1906 Education (Provision of Meals) Act”, *Scottish Historical Review*, Vol LXXVIII, 1: 205 (1999), pp. 76–94.
- 55 Entry by Tom Begg on Dame Helen Carruthers Mackenzie (nee Spence) in *ODNB* online.
- 56 *Ibid.*
- 57 Stewart, “‘This injurious measure’”.
- 58 The records of these organisations are held at the National Records of Scotland [NRS].
- 59 *Scotsman*, 16 March 1909.
- 60 *Edinburgh Evening News*, 3 April 1909.
- 61 Lindy Moore, ‘Education and Learning’, in Lynn Abrams, Eleanor Gordon, Deborah Simonton and Eileen Janes Yeo (eds), *Gender in Scottish History since 1700* (Edinburgh 2006), pp. 111–139.
- 62 Bain, ‘Democratic Control of Local Education’.
- 63 Moore, ‘Education and Learning’.
- 64 See *BDSW*.
- 65 Information on the numbers of women serving on the School Board and Education Authority has been compiled from the listings in the *Edinburgh Almanac and Post Office Edinburgh and Leith Directory*. The new Education Authority had 23 members, which increased to 34 from 1921, after amalgamation with Leith. The Education Act (Scotland) 1918 abolished the cumulative vote, and replaced it with a Single Transferable Vote. See Anderson, *Education and the Scottish People*.
- 66 See, for example, coverage in *Evening News* of the 1906 School Board election.
- 67 See records of EWCA. NRS: ED. 333/2/1.
- 68 Some feature in the *BDSW*: Flora Stevenson, Mary Burton, Jane Hay, Helen Leslie Mackenzie, and Minna Cowan. Phoebe Blyth has an entry in the *ODNB*. See also Jane McDermid, ‘Blurring the Boundaries: School Board Women in Scotland, 1873-1919’, *Women’s History Review*, 19:3 (2010), pp. 357–373; ‘Place the Book in Their Hands: Grace Paterson’s Contribution to the Health and Welfare Policies of the School Board of Glasgow, 1885–1906’, *History of Education*, 36:6 (2007), pp. 697–713; and Helen Corr, ‘Reclaiming Scottish Women’s Lives in Education: The Life of Flora Stevenson’, in Alexandra Howson and Esther Breitenbach (eds), *Gender and Scottish Society: Politics, Policies and Participation* (Edinburgh 1998), pp. 123–126.
- 69 There were a number of articles about Miss Corston and the Board of Supervision’s refusal to let her serve, in the *Scotsman* and *Women’s Suffrage Journal* over the period from May till October 1872. In the latter case most of the articles were reprinted from the *Northern Ensign*. See *Scotsman*, July 6, July 26, August 9, August 10, August 13; *Women’s Suffrage Journal*, July, August, September, October 1872.
- 70 Richardson, *The Political Worlds of Women*.
- 71 Richardson, *The Political Worlds of Women*
- 72 *Women’s Suffrage Journal*, October, November, December 1882.
- 73 *Women’s Suffrage Journal*, 1 December 1882.
- 74 ENSWS, Fourteenth Annual Meeting, 1882: WL.
- 75 *Ibid.*
- 76 *Scotsman*, 1 March 1883.
- 77 The Rev. Cameron Lees was minister of St Giles, Edinburgh.
- 78 *Scotsman*, 23 October 1883.
- 79 *Scotsman*, 14 January 1888.
- 80 ENSWS, 25th Annual Report, 1893, p. 5: WL.
- 81 *Ibid.*
- 82 Smitley *The Feminine Public Sphere*.
- 83 *Scottish Women’s Temperance News*, 1887
- 84 J Patten MacDougall and J M Dodds, *The Parish Council Guide for Scotland* (1894). As previously, the parish electorate paid a special rate to be placed on the parish council register; failure to pay this rate resulted in disqualification from voting. ‘Disqualification for Non-Payment of Rates’, *Poor Law Magazine and Local Government Journal*, Aug, 1893. People in receipt of parish relief were also disqualified from voting.
- 85 *Scotsman*, 30 April 1895.
- 86 The information that follows, on the numbers of women on Parochial Boards and Parish Councils, has been compiled from the listings in the *Edinburgh Almanac and Post Office Edinburgh and Leith Directory*.
- 87 *Edinburgh Evening News*, 10 March 1906; 31 March 1906.
- 88 *Scottish Women’s Liberal Magazine*, February 1911.
- 89 See *BDSW*.
- 90 See, for example, *Scotsman*, 23 October 1883; 14 January 1888; 17 January 1889.
- 91 The boarding-out system was initially a system of fostering for orphaned or deserted children, but came to be increasingly used in the later decades of the nineteenth century as a means of separating children from parents who were in the poorhouse. Many of the children were illegitimate, thus the separation was often of children from lone mothers. Children were often sent some distance away to be fostered by families in rural and coastal locations. See Helen J Macdonald, ‘Boarding-Out and the Scottish Poor Law, 1845–1914’, *Scottish Historical Review*, LXXV:2 (1996), pp. 197–220.
- 92 See, for example, *Scotsman*, 30 March 1895.

- 93 E. T. McLaren, *Recollections of the Public Work and Home Life of Louisa and Flora Stevenson* (Edinburgh 1914). See also Ian Levitt, *Poverty and Welfare in Scotland 1800–1948* (Edinburgh 1988)
- 94 These are noted in the *Post Office Edinburgh and Leith Directory*.
- 95 There are entries on Mary Burton, Jane Hay, Louisa Stevenson and Marjory Kennedy-Fraser in the *BDSW*. In the case of the latter, only her contribution to music and the collection of folksong is covered, and not her service on the Parish Council.
- 96 *Scotsman*, 19 December 1919; 23 December 1929.
- 97 The National Union of Women Workers was not a trade union, despite its name, but a network of local associations of largely middle-class women committed to philanthropy, education and other forms of public service. It emerged out of the coming together of local associations, such as the conference organised by Lady Aberdeen in 1888, to become formally constituted in 1895. Linked to the International Council of Women from the 1890s, it changed its name to the National Council of Women in 1918. See Julia Bush, ‘The National Union of Women Workers and Women’s Suffrage’ in Myriam Boussahba-Bravard (ed), *Suffrage Outside Suffragism: Women’s Vote in Britain 1880-1914* (Basingstoke 2007), pp. 105–131.
- 98 As in the case of the Education Authority, the Parish Councils for Edinburgh and Leith were amalgamated after 1920, which increased the membership from 31 to 46.
- 99 *Scotsman*, 7 November 1913.
- 100 Kenneth Baxter, “‘Estimable and Gifted?’: Women and Party Politics in Scotland c1918-c1955 (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Dundee, 2008).
- 101 ‘School Board of Edinburgh’, *Scotsman*, 17 October 1905.
- 102 *Scotsman*, 3 July 1907; ENSWS Annual Report, 1907: NLS: HP1.82.1728.
- 103 *Scotsman*, 6 November 1907.
- 104 *Scotsman*, 12 November 1907.
- 105 *Scotsman*, 25 September 1908.
- 106 *Ibid.*
- 107 Kenneth Baxter, “‘The Advent of a Woman Candidate was seen... as Outrageous’”: Women, Party Politics and Elections in Interwar Scotland and England’, *Journal of Scottish Historical Studies*, 33: 2 (2013), pp. 260-283.
- 108 Baxter, “‘Estimable and Gifted?’”.
- 109 Baxter, “‘Estimable and Gifted?’”.
- 110 See comment on ESEC withdrawal from the Local Elections Committee in 1920/21 on the grounds that there should only be one programme of questions for local government candidates. EWCA Annual Report, 1920–21. NRS: ED. 333/2/1.
- 111 Figures compiled from Scottish Council of Women Citizens Associations records. NRS: GD1/1076/5; ED. 333/2/1.
- 112 Records of the Scottish Council of Women Citizens Associations, NRS: GD1/1076/1.
- 113 For a more detailed account of women’s organisations’ activities in the inter-war years see Innes, ‘Constructing Women’s Citizenship’; and Esther Breitenbach and Valerie Wright, ‘Women as Active Citizens: Glasgow and Edinburgh c. 1918-1939’, *Women’s History Review*, 23:3 (2014), pp. 401–420.
- 114 *Scotsman*, 6 February 1925.
- 115 See *BDSW*.
- 116 *Edinburgh Evening News*, 19 March 1906.
- 117 EWCA Annual Report, 1925–26. NRS: ED. 333/2/1.
- 118 As explained in the *Scottish Women Citizens Yearbook, 1923*. NRS: GD1/1076/16.
- 119 The Edinburgh Local Elections Committee had the co-operation of ESEC, EWCA, NCW (Edinburgh Branch), Voters’ Council, Women’s Co-operative Guilds (Morningside, and Northern Branches), and the Women’s Freedom League. See *Scotsman*, 28 October 1919.
- 120 EWCA Annual Report, 1919/1920, p. 5. NRS: ED. 333/2/1.
- 121 EWCA Annual Report, 1929-30, p. 11. NRS: ED. 333/2/1.
- 122 McDermid, ‘Blurring the boundaries’.
- 123 Nicholas Morgan and Richard Trainor, ‘The Dominant Classes’ in W. H. Fraser and R. J. Morris (eds), *People and Society in Scotland: Vol II, 1830-1914* (Edinburgh 1990), pp. 103-137.
- 124 Morgan and Trainor, ‘The Dominant Classes’, p. 106.
- 125 *Ibid.*, p. 107.
- 126 Entry on Phoebe Blyth, *ODNB*.
- 127 *Scotsman*, 30 July 1934.
- 128 Moore, ‘Education and Learning’.
- 129 Corr, ‘Reclaiming Scottish Women’s Lives’.