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**DISSENT, DISCUSSION AND DISSEMINATION: THE STRATEGIES OF
THE KENSINGTON SOCIETY IN THE MID-VICTORIAN WOMEN'S MOVEMENT**

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That from Discussion's lip may fall
What Life, that, working strongly, binds -
Set in all lights by many minds,
To close the interests of all.

Lord Alfred Tennyson, Love Thou Thy Land, 1842,
as quoted in the *English Woman's Journal*, Vol. II, No. 9 (Nov. 1858) 159.

ABSTRACT

This thesis investigates the strategic communication of mid-nineteenth century British feminism through the activism and networking of the Kensington Society (1850-1890). Collectively and individually, the sixty-eight members of Britain's first female-only discussion society practised a range of intellectual communication strategies to reform the position of women in society. In combining literary historical and communication approaches, it also aims to readdress the intellectual heritage of the Kensington Society, asking why it was established, and how it was utilised to spark a wider discussion on women's rights in mid-nineteenth century Britain. To do so, the thesis investigates the political and religious dissenting heritage of the sixty-eight members; their *English Woman's Journal*; discussion through private letters and publications, and their involvement in founding Britain's first women's tertiary college, Girton College, Cambridge. Through a historicist examination of the communication of the Kensington Society, it specifically examines the pivotal role the Society played in the individual reforms of its members, and the wider women's movement of Victorian England. The first chapter argues that the Kensington Society was in debt to the 'intellectual culture' of their heritage. The second chapter examines the purpose behind their unified work in the earlier *English Woman's Journal*, their initial attempt to enter the public press and the moderate success this allowed. The third chapter explores their subsequent decision to embrace the private realm open to them and establish a discussion society. To illustrate the fulfilment of this decision, the fourth and fifth chapters articulate the flexibility of intentions achieved, and the broad range of discursive communication traversed through nineteenth-century women's activism. The final chapter considers the impact of the Kensington Society: women empowered by functional and informative discussion who utilised the skills and tools they learnt to bring about change in Victorian society.

DECLARATION

This thesis comprises my own original work towards the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (Arts). Due acknowledgement has been made in the text to all other material used. The thesis is fewer than 100,000 words in length, exclusive of tables, maps, bibliographies and appendices.

R. J. Curren

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This effort is in no small way the legacy of my own intellectual heritage, as a daughter and granddaughter of historians whose examples have testified to the value of academic discussion. To my father, thank you for instilling in me a love of history and truth. To my mother, thank you for being my compass and wise counsel. I have always seen many similarities between you and the intrepid women of the Kensington Society. In all this, I am equally indebted to the standard set before me by my sisters - Johanna, Catherine, Susannah and Esther – treasured members of the Ebenezer Discussion Society.

It is also a labour of gratitude to the Kensington Society women, the centrepiece of my tertiary history research. I have been inspired and rewarded by examining their lives and words over the past four years.

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ABBREVIATIONS

BC	BEDFORD COLLEGE, LONDON.
BFASS	THE BRITISH AND FOREIGN ANTI-SLAVERY SOCIETY.
BL	THE BRITISH LIBRARY, LONDON.
BNF	BIBLIOTHEQUE NATIONALE DE FRANCE, PARIS.
EWJ	THE ENGLISH WOMAN'S JOURNAL.
FMCES	THE FEMALE MIDDLE CLASS EMIGRATION SOCIETY.
GC	GIRTON COLLEGE, THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE.
LAS	THE LADIES ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLMISTRESSES.
LSE	THE LONDON SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS.
MWPC	MARRIED WOMEN'S PROPERTY COMMITTEE.
NAPSS	NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR THE PROMOTION OF SOCIAL SCIENCES.
NSWS	THE NATIONAL SOCIETY FOR WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE.
ODNB	OXFORD DICTIONARY OF NATIONAL BIOGRAPHY.
SPCK	SOCIETY FOR PROMOTING CHRISTIAN KNOWLEDGE.
SPEW	SOCIETY FOR PROMOTING THE EMPLOYMENT FOR WOMEN.

INTRODUCTION

THE KENSINGTON SOCIETY:

‘ABOVE THE AVERAGE OF THOUGHTFULNESS AND INTELLIGENCE’¹

In 1928 Virginia Woolf delivered a series of lectures at Girton College and Newnham College, Cambridge. To the predominantly female audience she declared that ‘a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction.’² She celebrated how much more accessible this luxury was now to the women in her audience:

For women have sat indoors all these millions of years, so that by this time the very walls are permeated by their creative force, which has, indeed, so overcharged the capacity of bricks and mortar that it must needs harness itself to pens and brushes and business and politics.³

Little did Woolf realise that her sketch was more accurate than even she may have envisioned. Born in Kensington in 1882 to Leslie Stephen and Julia Prinsep Duckworth, Woolf attended the University of London, and as a visiting guest of Girton College, was indebted to one particular group of women who ‘sat indoors’ and ‘overcharged the capacity of bricks and mortar.’⁴

¹ Alice Westlake to Helen Taylor, March 20, 1865, Mill-Taylor Collection 14/102, The Women’s Library, London School of Economics (hereafter LSE).

² ‘A Room of One’s Own’ is an extended essay that was a compilation of lectures delivered at Girton College and Newnham College, Cambridge, in October 1928. A year later, in 1929, it was published: Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One’s Own*.

³ Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One’s Own* (London: Penguin Books, 2004), 101-2.

⁴ Ibid.

In 1865, sixty-three years earlier, thirty-two women met in the living room of Charlotte Manning at 44 Phillimore Gardens, Kensington, London and fashioned Britain's first formal female discussion society. Their discussion meetings continued over three years, and soon bore fruit in the establishment of Girton College in 1869, the first university college for women in Britain.⁵ Those who had met in Kensington were not, perhaps, the first to discover the power in women having a 'Room of One's Own' to hold discussions, but they were the first to act upon the knowledge that intimate discussion and open debate would fundamentally empower women.⁶ Their shared objective set them apart. They were an assembly of like-minded, upper middle-class women, brought together by a shared frustration, namely their unequal status in society and the slow progress of their various petitions for women's rights. In hindsight, their meetings marked the first emblem of Victorian women's organised feminism.

.....

Isa Craig had assumed her seat in the living room at Kensington on a pleasant spring evening in May 1865. She was the daughter of a hosier and glover from Edinburgh, and at twenty-three was the first woman to publish poems and short-writing in the well-

⁵ Bedford College was established in 1849 as the first women's higher education college, but unlike Girton, which was established under the University of Cambridge, Bedford was not attached to a university until 1900 when it became a constituent of the University of London. The close association between Bedford, the Kensington Society and Girton will be demonstrated in Chapter One.

⁶ There are also several similarities between the Kensington Society's meetings, and 'Thursday evenings' that Woolf (née Stephen) and her sister, Vanessa, hosted at 29 Fitzroy Square, London, which later became the Bloomsbury group, or 'Old Bloomsbury' group. The group hosted 'innovative men...[from] Cambridge: Leonard Sidney Woolf (1880-1969), a stubborn, passionate man, alert to the ills of society and with the practice sense to combat them; the biographer Lytton Strachey; the art critic Clive Bell [who later married Vanessa]; the artists Roger Fry and Duncan Grant; the novelist E.M. Forster; and the economist John Maynard Keynes.' Gordon Lyndall, "Woolf, (Adeline) Virginia (1882-1941)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (2005) online edn.; Hereafter, the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* online edition will be abbreviated to *ODNB*.

established Edinburgh newspaper, *The Scotsman*. She was now thirty-three and the owner of her own ‘Telegraph School’ which educated young women in operating new technology. Until this meeting, she had met few of the women surrounding her. In January 1863, the first seeds of the official Kensington Society were sowed with rules drafted by the ‘committee’: ‘Ms. Sergeant Channing, Miss Isla Craig, Miss Emily Davies (Hon. Sec.)’⁷

Their hostess and president-to-be, Charlotte Manning, welcomed the thirty-two women present. They were an odd group, because unlike many societies, the women belonged to a diverse range of professions. The two journalists, Frances Power Cobbe and Sophia Dobson Collet, were there, as was an MP’s wife, Emma Fitch, and quite a number of headmistresses of girls’ schools, including Frances Buss, Dorothea Beale, Elizabeth Bostock and Elizabeth Wolstenholme. Three future doctors were also in attendance, Elizabeth Garrett Anderson, Sophia Jex-Blake and Emily Bovell. Some members were not present at the first meeting. The artist, Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon, for instance, was a founder of the Society but was currently in France, as was Emelia Gurney, wife of the radical MP Russell Gurney, who was in Jamaica in 1865.⁸ The first meeting saw thirty-two women sign the members list, and by their fourteenth (and last) meeting, sixty-eight members had joined.⁹

Helen Taylor, stepdaughter of the MP John Stuart Mill, was there. Although Craig and Taylor did not know many of the women in the room, they would have been familiar with several of their names. Indeed, they no doubt had the foresight to recognise that this Kensington house, a mere thousand metres from Kensington Palace, hosted many of the

⁷ “Kensington Society Rules,” 1 January 1865, Archive of the Kensington Society, GCPP Davies 10. Girton College, Cambridge. See APPENDIX I.

⁸ Bodichon was a corresponding member until she attended the July 4, 1865 meeting. See “List of Members of the Kensington Society,” Archive of the Kensington Society, GCPP Davies 10/1. Girton College, Cambridge. See APPENDIX II.

⁹ Ibid.

leading female reformers of their time. Jessie Boucherett, Elizabeth Adelaide Manning, Frances Martin, and Annette Akroyd, and many others joined them to create the first women's debating society in Britain.¹⁰ Like Isa Craig, Taylor had been invited by a close friend, Alice Westlake. On 18 March, Westlake had enticed her in a letter with the commitment that:

none but intellectual women are admitted and therefore it is not likely to become a merely puerile and gossiping Society, and the questions which will probably be asked will be some of those, I think which you have especially studied.¹¹

Later, on 28 March, she continued to encourage her:

There are very few of the members who you will know by name – Miss Cobbe, Miss Collet who writes in the Spectator, Miss Garrett and Miss Boucherett who founded the Society. The object of the Society is chiefly to serve as a sort of link, though a slight one, between persons, above the average of thoughtfulness and intelligence who are interested in common subjects, but who have not many opportunities of mutual intercourse.¹²

The discussion group named itself the Kensington Society, although they are often confused with the Langham Place circle.¹³ The Kensington Society members shared a

¹⁰ "List of Members," APPENDIX II.

¹¹ Alice Westlake to Helen Taylor, 18 March 1865. Mill-Taylor Collection 14/102, The Women's Library, LSE.

¹² Alice Westlake to Helen Taylor, 28 March 1865, Mill-Taylor Collection 14/103.

¹³ The 'Langham Place circle' has been incorrectly used as a synonymous term for the Kensington Society. The 'Langham ladies', however, encompassed a larger group of women associated with the Society for the Employment of Women and the *EWJ*, who met at 19 Langham Place, London. In this thesis, both circles are relevant, and the work of the Langham circle was vital to the ideals of the Kensington Society. However,

passion for discussing how the position of women might be improved in Victorian Britain. Thus, in quarterly meetings, members were encouraged to present proactively prepared answers or submit written papers on subjects that they would later circulate amongst members, including the absentees. Intellectual discussion through written argument was a practice that they had previously promoted in the *English Woman's Journal* (hereafter *EWJ*). This journal had been previously established by founders of the Society and their colleagues in the Society for Promoting the Employment of Women (1859). Essentially, the Kensington Society offered these women an informal setting for discussing the contentious topic of the 'subjection of women', as Helen Taylor's stepfather, John Stuart Mill later termed it, in his significant 1869 essay.¹⁴

RESEARCH QUESTION

The purpose of this thesis is to establish the specific relationship between the Kensington Society and the women's movement in Britain from 1850 to 1890. Historical scholarship has devoted all too little attention to the seeds of this women's debating society, despite the fact 'The Woman Question' has been an extensively researched field in Victorian studies. What has been less analysed is the consciousness of a few Victorian women, fully

it is centred on the Kensington Society as the catalyst for open communication and discussion amongst these women and consequently, mid-nineteenth century British society, as opposed to the more deliberately limited aims of the 'Langham Place circle.'

¹⁴ Although it was not published until 1869, John Stuart Mill had begun developing *The Subjection of Women* manuscript much earlier with his wife, Harriet Taylor Mill, and it was completed by 1861. After her death in 1858 he published their collaborative work *On Liberty* in 1859, and then later, *The Subjection of Women* (London: Longmans, Green, Reader, and Dyer, 1869).

aware that they were endeavouring to change history through strategic, intelligent planning. The ‘advancement of women’ was the generic focus of the Kensington Society but little is known about this remarkable and unusual Society, and its organisational tactics. The Langham circle has been commonly misrepresented as a suffrage group, despite the fact that the vote for women constituted one of its more minor campaigns.¹⁵ There were also other societies more proactive in employment and suffrage campaigns. In 1863, for instance, the Ladies’ London Emancipation Society was formed by Clementia Taylor (including Harriet Martineau and Elizabeth Malleson – the aunt of Kensington member, Alice Malleson). In 1859 the Society for the Employment of Women included a register for employment as well as publishing the *EWJ*, the first feminist journal Britain had ever seen, published by a female-owned and run printing house.¹⁶ The vote was a cause that only a handful of Kensington individuals championed, some of whom joined the Women’s Suffrage Committee in 1865, and it was only after the Kensington Society had annulled its meetings that the suffrage movement gained momentum.¹⁷ In fact, suffrage barely featured in the questions raised at their meetings, and when it was, the tone of the question betrayed their caution to the cause: ‘Is the extension of the Parliamentary suffrage to women desirable, and if so, under what conditions?’¹⁸ The question immediately following in the meeting records suggests that

¹⁵ Ann Dingsdale extensive research on the correlation between the Kensington Society and the 1866 Women’s Suffrage petition, that was presented by Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon, has highlighted the fact that there were at least twelve members of the Society that did not sign it, suggesting that the Kensington Society were not united in support of suffrage for women at that time. Ann Dingsdale, “‘Generous and Lofty Sympathies’: The Kensington Society, the 1866 Women’s Suffrage Petition and the Development of Mid-Victorian Feminism,” (Phd, University of Greenwich, 1995), 98.

¹⁶ The complete *English Woman’s Journal* has been sourced from “English Woman’s Journal (1858-1864),” *Nineteenth Century Serials Edition* (hereafter, *NCSE*): <http://www.ncse.ac.uk/headnotes/ewj.html>

¹⁷ In fact, the mid-nineteenth century suffrage campaign was largely championed by Anne Knight, who was not a member of the Kensington Society. In 1847 Knight founded a Female Political Association. See Edward H. Milligan, “Knight, Anne (1786-18162),” *ODNB* (2004).

¹⁸ The “List of Questions for Discussion in the Kensington Society” have been sourced from The Kensington Society Archive, GCPP Davies 10/2, Girton College, Cambridge. See APPENDIX III.

the reason for their hesitation was education: ‘How far are the errors and miseries of the lower class of people dependent upon defects of education and how may such defects be remedied?’¹⁹ Although individual members of the Kensington Society were active campaigners for the suffrage cause, this thesis will demonstrate that the Kensington Society as a whole saw education, of all classes, as the most deficient area of women’s social concern in nineteenth-century Britain.

However, despite these more pressing priorities, suffrage has long dominated this stage of mid-nineteenth century women’s history to the occlusion of these equally important achievements. This thesis argues that the Society’s strategically-minded women understood that the best road to enfranchisement would come first through improved marriage laws, employment, and particularly education, and a wider involvement in political reform movements. As Emily Davies wrote in 1865:

Some people are inclined to begin a subdued kind of agitation for the Franchise. I have rather tried to stifle it...I don’t see much use in talking about the Franchise till first principles have made more way. The scoffers don’t see how much is involved in improved education...²⁰

Davies’ admission that she ‘tried to stifle’ agitation for suffrage evidences her underlying belief that suffrage was not desirable for women until education had been improved. It is the contention of this thesis that this belief was paramount to the Kensington Society’s collaborative activism. In light of their own efforts, which endorsed self-education through discussion, and intellectual activism through published pamphlets and journals,

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Emily Davies to H.R. Tomkinson, 14 November 1865, quoted in Barbara Stephen, *Emily Davies and Girton College*, (London: Constable & Co., 1927), 109.

they prized education as their greatest weapon. After their final meeting in 1868, the women's emphasis on girl's education became their hallmark, as the majority of Kensington members joined the burgeoning movement for educational reform of the late-nineteenth century.²¹ Their manifest preoccupation with educational reform became increasingly evident in the years during and certainly beyond their meetings. Members enacted their ambition, arguing that the barriers of education and then employment should be first amongst those breached. The most telling demonstration of this ambition was the group's paramount influence in founding Girton College, Cambridge.

CRITICAL SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

There has never been an extensive study of the Kensington Society. Ann Dingsdale's short 1995 thesis is the closest yet to a complete study, but it remains unpublished.²² Dingsdale examined the Society in the light of the 1866 House of Commons women's

²¹Davies' hesitation regarding women's suffrage bears similarity to the debate surrounding the emancipation of West Indies slaves at the turn of the nineteenth century. In a debate on William Wilberforce's motion for abolition (which had passed the House of Commons, but eventually lost in the House of Lords on 5 July, 1799) George Canning, for instance, made an address that supported the motion but asserted the need for 'education among the slaves' as 'the effect of the exertions of the colonial assemblies had been to make many good subjects among the blacks...Let the House consider existing circumstances – an army of blacks, under Toussaint, in a neighbouring island...It had been alleged, that the effect of this sort of slavery on the human mind was to extinguish intellect...'. Canning's address highlights the British tendency to political caution in the emancipation of slaves, which was replicated in the suffrage emancipation of women: education was the first issue to address in each of these radical movements. This is an extract from Canning's speech on the "Debate on Mr. Wilberforce's Motion for the Abolition of the Slave Trade, 1 March 1799," in *The Speeches of the Right Honourable George Canning: With a Memoir of his Life*, ed. George Canning and Sir Roger Therry, Vol. 1, Second Edition (London: James Ridgway, 1830), 159.

²² Dingsdale, "Generous and Lofty Sympathies."

suffrage petition, presented by John Stuart Mill, MP. Although several members of the Kensington Society, including Barbara Bodichon, Helen Taylor, and Elizabeth Garrett were instrumental in collecting 1,499 signatures, it was not in fact a cause actively promoted by the Kensington Society. Dingsdale approaches her analysis ‘statistically’, using ‘information from census, directories, etc. as well as biographical resources’ to establish the origins of the petition.²³ While this approach yielded valuable insight into the origins of the Society, Dingsdale neglected the majority of the Kensington Society’s principal initiatives. She placed undue emphasis on suffrage when, in fact, as we have seen, Emily Davies actively depreciated the suffrage cause, and it was only the concern of a small, informal sub-committee at the time.²⁴ Dingsdale’s thesis is nevertheless distinguished by her thorough investigation of the personal details of every woman who signed the 1866 suffrage petition and was also in the Kensington Society, including their family backgrounds, marital status, place of work, and class. In her opinion, this approach would illustrate the ‘identity’ of the women who signed the petition and were also in the Kensington Society, and elucidate the overall character of the nineteenth-century women’s movement.²⁵

The methodology utilised in the construction of this thesis is empirical. It argues that an empirical methodology allows us to create an accurate history of a movement and group. The history of the Kensington Society is found in the lives and papers of its members, including the Society’s archives. Thus, an attempt has been made to understand the ambitions of the Kensington Society and its members through the historical sources they have authored. This method anticipates that through their writing, published or unpublished, insight into their ambitions and strategy will emerge. Situating a text within

²³ Ibid. See also Ann Dingsdale, “Kensington Society (*act.* 1865-1868),” *ODNB* (2007).

²⁴ Commonly called Women’s Suffrage Petition Committee.

²⁵ Dingsdale, “Generous and Lofty Sympathies,” 10.

its historical and intellectual context will help to illuminate the intentions for which it was composed. The chief proponent of this methodology, and former Regius Professor of History at Cambridge, Quentin Skinner, has noted ‘the way to get at...texts is to try to find out not the social but the intellectual context in which their doctrines were worked out.’²⁶ For the Kensington Society, the intellectual context of these women has equal bearing to their social context in nineteenth-century Britain. Without an assessment of this context, an objective understanding of their aims would be impossible. The professor of Intellectual History at Cambridge, Mark Goldie, has also shed light on empirical historical methodology:

The intentions of social actors, in writing and in other kinds of doing, have meaning in relation to the linguistic and normative conventions within which they operate. The task of the interpreter is to ‘see things their way’, to understand what meanings historical agents intended in writing their books and enacting their principles.²⁷

Consequently, this study argues that the intentions of the Kensington Society women are clearly elucidated through their writing. This thesis will seek to utilise this nuanced and critical methodology to assess the origins, functions and ramifications of the Kensington Society members through their communication. The primary purpose of this historical method is to recapture the layers of the Kensington Society’s communication strategy. It will allow us to understand, at a more sophisticated level, the strategic muscle and strength of journals, letters, pamphlets and literature for women in Victorian England. This

²⁶Maria Lúcia Pallares-Burke, *The New History: Confessions and Conversations*, transcribed by Christopher Tribe (Oxford: Polity Press, 2002), 215; 219.

²⁷Mark Goldie, review of Quentin Skinner, *Visions of Politics*, Vol. I-III, in *English Historical Review* 119, no. 484 (2004): 1344-1346.

historical method will also illuminate the origins of Britain's Victorian feminism. By understanding the birth of the Kensington Society's campaign for women's empowerment, this thesis will shed light on the wider, universal network of nineteenth-century organized feminism.

The Kensington Society's entire crusade for broader reform demands more focussed attention. While the leaders have each had biographies and historical studies written, the vast majority of its sixty-eight members have never been given the analysis they deserve. Barbara Caine's well-esteemed *Victorian Feminists* made a study of four principal feminists and members of the Langham Place Circle - Emily Davies, Frances Power Cobbe, Josephine Butler, and Millicent Garrett Fawcett – renewing interest in the British feminist 'doctrine' and providing greater insights into their leadership of women's social and political agitation. However, the Society as a collective and buttressed agency of women, has not had the attention it deserves.²⁸ Kathryn Gleadle's 2001 study *British Women in the Nineteenth Century*, for example, has only one reference to the Kensington Society.²⁹ Moreover, Isa Craig, celebrated poet and the first female Assistant Secretary to the National Association for the Promotion of Social Science, has been almost entirely overlooked in historical scholarship.³⁰ The same is true of Elizabeth Wolstenholme who has been largely overshadowed by Josephine Butler, her colleague in the *North of England Council for Promoting the Higher Education of Women*. Elizabeth Garrett Anderson's subsequent role as the first Englishwoman to qualify as a physician and surgeon in Britain has been well acknowledged, however, her activist connection to the Kensington Society has been all but forgotten. She also founded the London School of Medicine in 1874,

²⁸ Barbara Caine, *Victorian Feminists* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).

²⁹ Kathryn Gleadle, *British Women in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 66.

³⁰ Candida Ann Lacey has pointed out that the Association's appointment of a woman for this position was a 'radical development which delighted' the Kensington Society. See Candida Ann Lacey, *Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon and the Langham Place Group* (London: Routledge, 2001), 11.

together with fellow Langhamite, Sophia Jex-Blake. Jex-Blake, and another Kensington Member, Emily Bovell, were later to become members of the Edinburgh Seven, the first group of matriculated women to graduate from a British university, all in medicine.³¹ This thesis maintains that there is much to be learnt about these pioneers of women's employment by looking back to their impressionable years as some of the youngest members of the Kensington Society.

On the other hand, plenty of light has been shone upon a few key members of the Society. Emily Sarah Davies (an original committee member and subsequent secretary of the Kensington Society), Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon and Jessie Boucherett - are easily recognisable from the mid-Victorian feminist network. Each has had at least one biography devoted to them. Bodichon is a favourite of women's history, probably because of her engaging personality, her reputation as an artist, her unconventional beauty, her well-connected family (she was a cousin to Florence Nightingale and daughter of radical MP, Benjamin Leigh Smith) and the wealth that allowed her to become the patron of several radical social factions. One biography is Candide Ann Lacey's study, *Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon and the Langham Place Group* (1987).³² Oddly, this thorough

³¹ At the University of Edinburgh these women also met another Kensington Society member, Harriet Cook, whose father was a professor at the University. M.A. Elston, "Edinburgh Seven (act. 1869-1873)," *ODNB* (2015).

³² Lacey, *Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon and the Langham Place Group*. Other prominent studies on Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon include: Hester Burton, *Barbara Bodichon, 1827-1891* (London: J. Murray, 1949); Jacquie Matthews, "Barbara Bodichon: Integrity in Diversity", in Dale Spender, ed. *Feminist Theorists: Three Centuries of Women's Intellectual Traditions* (London: Women's Press, 1983); Sheila Herstein, *A Mid-Victorian Feminist, Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985); Jane Rendall, "Friendship and Politics: Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon and Bessie Rayner Parkes", in Susan Menus and Jane Rendall (eds.) *Sexuality and Subordination: Interdisciplinary Studies of Gender in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Routledge, 1989); Pam Hirsch, *Barbara Bodichon: Feminist, Artist, Rebel* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1998); Pam Hirsch, "Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon: Feminist, Leader and Founder of the First University College for Women," in *Practical Visionaries: Women, Education and Social Process, 1790-1930*, eds. Pam Hirsch and Mary Hulton (New York: Routledge, 2000); Pam Hirsch, "'Bodichon, Barbara Leigh Smith (1827-1891)," *ODNB* (2004); Meritxell Simon-Martin, "Letter Exchange in the Life of Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon: The First Female Suffrage Committee in Britain Seen through her Correspondence," in *Exchanges and Correspondence: The Construction of Feminism*, eds. Claudette Fillard, Francoise Orazi (Newcastle-on-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010), 188-213.

study of Bodichon and ‘her colleagues’ makes little mention of the Langham Place Group despite its prominence in the title.³³ Lacey does, however, recognize the common strategy of these women: ‘most of the women at Langham Place accepted as axiomatic the need to convert their opponents by persuasion rather than by direct confrontation.’³⁴ Pam Hirsh’s study of Bodichon falls into exactly the same category, emphasising Bodichon’s ‘peculiar vibrancy and glamour’ without examination of the Kensington network of women she often relied upon.³⁵ On the other hand, Pauline Nestor has highlighted the importance of ‘Female Friendships’ in Bodichon’s life, and the important role that her relationship with George Eliot played in her activist ideology, but makes little reference to the Langham Place circle.³⁶ Emily Davies is most renowned for her role as the founder, alongside Bodichon, of Girton College in 1869. The college has understandably commemorated her work by preserving her entire collection of family papers. Barbara Stephen, in 1927, was one of the first to analyse Davies’ contribution to women’s education. Her lengthy biography has twenty-two chapters spanning her ‘Evangelical home’ to the later period when she founded and oversaw the development of Girton College.³⁷

RELEVANCE OF THE STUDY

³³ Lacey, *Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon*, 1.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 2.

³⁵ Pam Hirsch, *Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon: Feminist, Artist and Rebel* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1998) x.

³⁶ Pauline Nestor, *Female Friendships and Communities: Charlotte Bronte, George Elliot and Elizabeth Gaskell* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), 198.

³⁷ Barbara Stephen, *Emily Davies and Girton College* (London: Constable & Co., 1927).

This thesis therefore aims to investigate why a cohort of educated and idealistic women saw it as a strategic advantage to meet together in the front room of a friend's house in London, to discuss their ideas and opinions on social and political matters that affected them closely, and how they subsequently campaigned for change within the restrictive social parameters of womanhood in Victorian Britain. Central to the study will be an examination of the inner workings of the Kensington Society: how it began and how it recruited members, what its purpose was, and how it went about achieving its ends. Analysis of the 'wings' of the Kensington Society's activism presents perhaps the clearest indicator of how incredibly interconnected and influential these women were. A leading reformer for women, Bessie Rayner Parkes, was intricately connected to the Kensington Society as the founder of the *English Woman's Journal* (and her lifelong friendship with Bodichon), though she did not appear on the members list.³⁸ However, because of the extensive correspondence between Parkes and Kensington Society members, her opinion on the burgeoning women's movement in Britain in 1864, a year before its first meeting, expresses the escalating excitement of the movement:³⁹

people interested in the question were brought into communication in all parts of the kingdom, and the germs of an effective movement were scattered far and wide.⁴⁰

³⁸ Parkes' full name is Elizabeth Rayner Parkes, but she is commonly referred to as Bessie, and will be hereafter.

³⁹ Although Parkes was not a Kensington Society member, she was so intrinsically linked to their work that it has been necessary for her and her correspondence to regularly feature in this thesis.

⁴⁰ Bessie Rayner Parkes, "A Review of the Last Six Years," in *Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon and the Langham Place Group*, ed. Candida Ann Lacey (New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1987), 217.

Parkes' statement is almost prophetic in light of the Kensington Society. Although the feminist network had been growing throughout the nineteenth century, it was in the 1860s that it exploded. The expansion of the network was both triggered, and generated by the Kensington Society, as its members operated on the principle that a 'movement' bore more influence than individuals. To rectify the limitations of this earlier scholarship, this thesis focuses on the 'multifaceted activism' of the entire Kensington Society (1865-1868).⁴¹ The chief evidence we have for their collaborative activism is the original members list of the Kensington Society, and the Kensington Society's rules, which lists the original committee members: Charlotte Manning, Isa Craig and Emily Davies, which are both held at Girton College, Cambridge.⁴² This list establishes the fact that every woman listed joined the Society in Charlotte Manning's living room in May 1865, or later meetings, or agreed to be corresponding members.

The connections between their intellectual heritage and family will be explored in the first chapter, including a chart which places them at the centre of a rich web of radical British social reformers and Protestant Evangelicals. A collective approach will bring to light the similarities between the women that eventually brought them together. Many recent scholars of women's history and social history have utilized the methodology of collective biography as an approach that replicates the integral collective nature of women's history. As a methodology it aims to rectify the focus of women's history on

⁴¹ This term was originally employed by Maritxell Simon-Martin to describe Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon's activism through letter writing, in "Letter Exchange in the Life of Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon: The First Female Suffrage Committee in Britain Seen Through Her Correspondence," in *Exchanges and Correspondence: The Construction of Feminism*, eds. Claudette Fillard and Francoise Orazi (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010), 190.

⁴² "List of Members," APPENDIX II; "The Kensington Society Rules," APPENDIX I.

notable individuals, a practice that has a long tradition in feminist literature.⁴³ It focuses instead on activist movements which relied on friends and associates to gather momentum.

Originally, this study planned to encompass all sixty-eight members of the Kensington Society. However, over the course of its research it became superfluous to continue with this objective, when a sample of its members would allow for a more detailed study of their communication. It became clear that it would also be impractical to encompass every member in the study when some have left very little trace of historical evidence. Thus, a focused research sample of the more intellectually connected Society members would more informatively represent the extensive Kensington network. Furthermore, the members who were the more prolific writers naturally deserved more consideration for their links to current political debate, and their representation of powerful reforming communication in nineteenth-century Britain. Some, from whom we can gather very little material, naturally appear less in this study. For instance, we have very little information about Anna Swanwick's involvement, except her name on the members list, as she requested for her few papers to never be published.

This thesis will disclose how they were empowered to achieve their goals by an energetic network of public and private communication, dexterously using letters, articles, petitions, speeches and their own periodical to develop and disseminate their intellectual and legal arguments. These sources all point to their considered, calculated employment of the written word. Firstly, through the publication of the *EWJ*, the Kensington women rebelled against the unspoken segregation of the sexes in the Victorian public sphere, confidently engaging in the male-dominated world of journalism, periodicals, and printing. The majority having been privately educated, recognized their common ability

⁴³ Krista Cowman, "Collective Biography," in *Research Methods for History*, eds. Simon Gunn and Lucy Faire (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), 83; see also, Vivienne Larminie, "Early modern Women: the Rediscovery of Public and Private Life," *ODNB* (2016).

and the potency of their collaborative arguments. Thus, this thesis is also especially interested in the specific modes of public and private communication that empowered these women and, subsequently, Britain's nineteenth-century community of female reformers. I agree with Janice Schroeder's estimate that the Journal chiefly served as a platform to practise 'Better Arguments...[in] the Game of Public Opinion,' but I would add that this was just the first step in their communication strategy for the achievement of long-term social reform.⁴⁴ When the journal had limited success, they revised their strategy, not retreating from public debate, but turning to their network of like-minded women and testing their ideas and exclusive arguments in their quarterly meetings in Charlotte Manning's living room. Similarly, they employed the private letter to share their thoughts and garner a wider network of enlightened women. Through these methods of proactive functional communication, the Kensington Society members became increasingly confident in their abilities and powers of persuasion. They also came to collaboratively project them into the public arena through individual publications and pamphlets. It is the argument of this thesis that the Kensington Society intentionally utilized a fluid combination of public and private communication as a strategic tactic aimed at improving, controlling, and strengthening their message.

Structurally, this thesis will follow a chronological path, dictated by the Kensington Society's own trajectory in activism. The first chapter starts with the intellectual inheritance of friends, family and associates, and their consummate development of strategic communication in past reform movements. In the second chapter, this study will make a close analysis of women's first joint foray into public activism with the establishment of the *EWJ* and assessing their vision for the first British

⁴⁴ Janice Schroeder, "Better Arguments: The *English Woman's Journal* and the Game of Public Opinion," *Victorian Periodicals Review* 35, Iss. 3 (2002): 243-271.

feminist journal. The *EWJ* was a significant publication in nineteenth-century social activism, but especially so for the women who contributed to it. Although it was a relatively short-lived, amateur publication, lasting six years from March 1858 to August 1864, the *EWJ* was extremely influential in the formation of the Kensington Society, and thus, a catalyst of women's empowerment in Victorian Britain. The next question to be asked, in Chapter Three, is why they chose to then retreat from the public eye and seek private discussion by initiating the Kensington Society meetings in 1865. Palpably, the meetings of the Kensington Society were a self-educative stimulus for communication. Once the strategic nature of these meetings has been established, the thesis will explore members' private correspondence, and their employment of this powerful tool to educate, inspire, stir and encourage each other in the fourth chapter. It was with a similar intention that the Kensington women subsequently launched into the fierce world of the public press through a variety of forms, such as public letters, essays, pamphlets, books, poetry and literature – to educate, inspire, stir and encourage the escalating women's movement of the late-nineteenth century. Their public writings will be the focus of the fifth chapter. Finally, the sixth chapter will assess the concrete legacy of the Kensington Society and its meetings, through individual members' work in educational reform, in both Britain and abroad.

The lives of reforming women have garnered enormous attention in later twentieth and early twenty-first century scholarship. Our understanding of the roles of women and their experiences has been deepened by such studies, many of which draw attention to the divergent roles played by these women in the 'public sphere' and the 'private sphere.' The focus here will be on the Kensington Society's use of communication within both the public and private spheres, demonstrating their fluid movement between intimate correspondence and civic engagement. In many ways this reflects a greater understanding

of the sociability of Britain's nineteenth-century society. Gillian Russell and Clara Tuite have highlighted the 'Romantic sociability' of the long eighteenth century, facilitating 'for example, the dense network comprised by the reform societies, publisher's dinners, theatre-going and supper parties of the Goodwin circle in the 1790s'.⁴⁵ Considering the Kensington Society's engagement with British print culture in this period, it is appropriate to consider the women's 'publicity' rather than their engagement in the public sphere. Their advertisements, publications and movement in society demonstrate their aim to construct a public image carefully.

Marianne Van Remoortel has claimed that Victorian women had multiple motives to engage with the press and create a public image. One of their primary motives, she argues, was to reinforce publicly 'the very gender ideologies that paradoxically served to restrict their lives to the private sphere of home and household.'⁴⁶ While there is some truth in this claim, this thesis suggests that the periodical press permitted women a small but increasing opportunity to challenge public opinion. Women were aware of their power in constructing their own image in society through publicity. By embracing such publicity through private publishing and their *EWJ*, the Kensington Society confirmed the pivotal importance of the press.

The separation between Victorian women's public and private spheres forms an inevitable part of this discussion. Jurgen Habermas' *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit* and his dialogue on the bourgeois public sphere has some bearing on this area, especially as he focused his theory on Britain's eighteenth-century society.⁴⁷ His philosophical-historical critique of England, France and Germany's public spheres, from the

⁴⁵ Gillian Russell, Clara Tuite, eds. *Romantic Sociability: Social Networks and Literary Culture in Britain, 1770-1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 2.

⁴⁶ Marianne Van Remoortel, *Women, Work and the Victorian Periodical: Living by the Press* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 4-5.

⁴⁷ Jurgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into the Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger (Cambridge, MA: Polity Press, 1989).

Renaissance to the twentieth century, has sparked widespread debate on the position of women within the public sphere. Feminist scholarship has also argued that Habermas' critique has misunderstood women's position in the bourgeois public sphere. Joan B. Landes, in Meehan's 1995 collection of essays, *Feminists read Habermas: gendering the subject of discourse*, argued that 'Habermas's ideal representation of the public sphere or his normative description of the subject are perhaps too tame to accommodate the dilemmas raised by feminist critics.'⁴⁸ Landes quoted Iris Young, who contended that 'the Enlightenment ideal of the civil public where citizens meet in terms of equality and mutual respect is too rounded and tame an ideal of the public.'⁴⁹ She concluded that 'an idealisation of the universal public conceals the way in which women's (legal and constitutional) exclusion from the public sphere was a constitutive, not a marginal or accidental feature of the bourgeois public' in the French Revolution.⁵⁰

Consequently, Hugh Cunningham has argued in his influential *The Challenge of Democracy: Britain 1832-1918*:

The ideology of separate spheres for men and women was underpinned by a new development in the first half of the nineteenth century, the separation of the workplace from the home. This made it much less likely that women would play any significant part in the running of the business, but, on the other hand, it gave them a clear field in which to exercise their talents

⁴⁸ Joan B. Landes, "The Public and the Private Sphere: A Feminist Reconsideration," in *Feminists read Habermas: Gendering the Subject of Discourse*, ed. Johanna Meehan (New York: Routledge, 1995), 91-116. See also Joan B. Landes, ed. *Feminism, the Public and the Private* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998) and Maria Pia Lara, *Moral Textures: Feminist Narratives in the Public Sphere* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998).

⁴⁹ Landes, *Feminism, the Public and the Private*, 143; Iris Marion Young, 'Impartiality and the Civic Public: Some Implications of Feminist Critiques of Moral and Political Theory,' in Seyla Benhabib and Drucilla Cornell, eds. *Feminism as Critique: On the Politics of Gender* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 76, as quoted in Landes, *Feminism, the Public and the Private*, 143.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 143

as homemakers...This ideal undoubtedly had impetus and force behind it, but the strict public/male, private/female distinction was violated both in practice and as an ideology.⁵¹

As Cunningham points out, the alleged dichotomy of the public and private spheres when it came to the Victorian era was more ambiguous than is often believed. His critique of the widening distinction between the home and workplace, however, is significant in the case of the Kensington Society women, who rather than become homemakers, exploited their homes for strategic activist work.

The Kensington Society was undoubtedly aware of the sharp distinction between their opportunities in the public or private sphere. Tactically the women gained agency through intimate forums for discussion. The living room of M.P.'s wife, Charlotte Manning, as the meeting place of the Kensington Society, offered a unique, obtainable situation for the women to engage in political affairs from a predominately feminine space. For these women, meeting in the privacy of a friend's house offered an accessible and legitimate form of intellectual dissemination in a society in which they held very few legal rights. Consequently, the separation of Victorian women's individual private and public lives has been somewhat overstated. The Kensington Society was constituted by women who engaged with the hitherto 'masculine' public sphere by entering the entirely male-dominated sphere of the mid-nineteenth-century British press whilst simultaneously retreating to the private sphere of the home to collaborate with like-minded women. The fact that the Langham Place offices, which housed the headquarters of the Society for the Employment of Women (SPEW), also contained a private reading room and library

⁵¹ Hugh Cunningham, *The Challenge of Democracy: Britain 1832-1918* (Harlow: Pearson Education Limited, 2001), 23.

illustrates the intertwined nature of their communication, utilising all convenient public and private realms for their social activism.

Furthermore, in the case of the Kensington Society, it is a false dichotomy to view communication as only functional, when there were layers to their strategy. Functional communication, such as letters, speeches, publications and journals were utilised to disperse their ideology. However, the education of a young girl is an equally powerful communication strategy. Assessible and satisfactory education enabled a wider proportion of women to communicate. These two layers illustrate the pivotal trajectory of the Kensington Society, which began by publishing a functional feminist journal and ended with a fixation on reforming women's education in both Britain and internationally.

It is the contention of this thesis that the Kensington Society's activism demonstrates the calculated use of the public and private spheres in Victorian Britain. In part, this is due to its members' position as primarily upper middle-class, privately educated, and Dissenting (in religion and politics) women. Due to their education, their connections, and their disregard for convention, these women were able to move in both public and private realms. This study will argue that it was communication that empowered this fluid movement. As opposed to the common assumption that women were trapped in the private sphere of Victorian society, the Kensington Society women were able to move fluidly between private and public spheres through the empowering nature of communication, in which education and intelligence were the only key requirements. It is vital to recognise that behind the pen women were becoming increasingly emboldened to contribute to social and political activism in Victorian Britain. In the lives of the Kensington Society women, the written word became a miscellaneous private and private instrument for social change.

When it comes to questions of class, this thesis has made deliberate choices. It admits to taking a similar approach to Cambridge scholar, Geoffrey Best, who stated that he ‘used the language of class more as it was used by Mid-Victorians than as it is used by any ancient or modern school of social theorists; i.e., I have used it continually and confusedly.’⁵² Of course class was an important identifier and characteristic for the Kensington Society but this thesis argues that too much emphasis has been put on the Kensington Society as an upper middle-class women’s association. The Kensington Society women were indeed privileged by their social class, which gave them freedom to travel and socialise, to purchase literature and magazines and fund their campaigns. Nevertheless, they were also, as will be evident, deeply invested in the rights of all classes of women.

There was undoubtedly a self-education facet to their meetings. In many ways the women replicated men’s university debating societies, aiming to practice, test and improve their arguments. In this style, Kate Kelman has considered the ‘Self-Cultures’ of the Ladies Edinburgh Debating Society, which met monthly between 1865 and 1936 ‘to discuss the books they were reading and to debate prearranged issues.’⁵³ She believes that this practice of reading led to an ‘awakening of women.’⁵⁴ Rebecca Earle’s concept of ‘Epistolary Selves’ has also explored this notion of females writing for self-improvement.⁵⁵ Letters served a similar purpose for the Kensington members. This thesis will demonstrate the remarkable epistolary connections between them and other

⁵² Geoffrey Best, *Mid-Victorian Britain, 1851-1875* (New York: Schocken Books, 1972), ix.

⁵³ Kate Kelman, “‘Self-Culture’: The Edinburgh Reading Pursuits of the Ladies of Edinburgh, 1865-1885,” *Victorian Periodicals Review* 36, No. 1 (2003): 59-75.

⁵⁴ Sarah Elizabeth Siddons Mair, “Foreword”, in *Ladies in Debate: Being a history of the Ladies’ Edinburgh Debating Society 1865-1935*, ed. Lettice Milne Rae (London & Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1936), 7, as quoted in Kelman, “Self-Culture’: The Edinburgh Reading Pursuits,” 59.

⁵⁵ Rebecca Earle, ed. *Epistolary Selves: Letters and Letter-Writers, 1600-1945* (Farnham, Surrey and Vermont: Ashgate, 1999).

influential feminist idealists of the mid-nineteenth century.⁵⁶ This well-established ‘correspondence culture’ was both internal and external to the Society. The mid-nineteenth century was the great era of letter-writing; during this period there was an dramatic increase in the volume of letters sent across Britain. Not only were there more routes and access to postal services, there was also a remarkable increase in the speed of communication. A letter written in the morning in London could now be delivered that very same day.⁵⁷ Over the course of the Society’s meetings (across three years in total) a large number of letters advocating for women’s greater public participation in society was disseminated among family and friends.

Friendships and mentors, composed through correspondence, were a crucial vehicle of inspiration and advice. As Carroll Smith-Rosenberg puts it: ‘The female friendship of the nineteenth century, the long-lived, intimate, loving friendship between two women, is an excellent example of the type of historical phenomena which most historians know something about, which few have thought much about, and which virtually no one has written about.’⁵⁸ Analysis in the thesis of the correspondence of the Kensington Society will also investigate the people from whom they adopted these

⁵⁶ According to the *Oxford English Dictionary* the term ‘feminism’ appeared in 1895 in a review for the *Athenaeum* of Mrs. Andrew Dean’s novel *The Grasshoppers*. As noted in Karen Offen, *Debating the Woman Question in the Third Republic, 1870-1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 170. However, I have chosen to use the term ‘feminism’ even though it is anachronistic for this period, in agreement with Philippa Levine and Barbara Caine’s viewpoint, that ‘No other term suggests adequately the extent or the intensity of their concern about the situation of women or their sense of the need to remove the injustices, the obstacles, and the forms of oppression which women faced.’ Barbara Caine, *Victorian Feminists* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 6; See also Lucy Delap, “The ‘Woman Question’ and the Origins of Feminism,” in *The Cambridge History of Nineteenth-Century Political Thought*, ed. Gareth Stedman Jones, Gregory Claeys (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 319–348.

⁵⁷ For more on the revolutionary postal services of the Victorians, see Catherine Goldon, *Posting It: The Victorian Revolution in Letter-Writing* (Gainesville, FL: Florida UP, 2009) and Susan Donovan, “How the Post Office and Postal Products Shaped Mid-Nineteenth-Century Letter-Writing,” *BRANCH: Britain, Representation and Nineteenth-Century History, Romanticism and Victorianism on the Web*, ed. Dino Franco Felluga. Published 2017, https://www.branchcollective.org/?ps_articles=susan-donovan-how-the-post-office-and-postal-products-shaped-mid-nineteenth-century-letter-writing

⁵⁸ Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, “The Female World of Love and Ritual: Relations between Women in Nineteenth-Century America,” *Signs* 1, No. 1 (1975), 1-29.

strategic ideas. Apart from their parents and family members, five mentors who proved particularly instructive to the Kensington women were Anna Jameson, Mary Ann Evans, Julia Wedgwood, Harriet Martineau and Harriet Taylor Mill. Taylor Mill was the mother of Helen Taylor and the author of *The Enfranchisement of Women*, published in July 1851.⁵⁹ Martineau's article on 'Female Industry', which was published in the *Edinburgh Review* in April 1859, was particularly influential for Jessie Boucherett: her assertion that there was a surplus of women who were able to provide for themselves was the inspiration for Boucherett 'to form a society which should have for its object the opening of new employment for women and their more extensive admission into those businesses already open to them.'⁶⁰ Subsequently, Boucherett founded SPEW. Likewise, Emily Davies and Barbara Bodichon sustained a long and instructive correspondence with Mary Ann Evans, who was known by her pseudonym George Eliot.

It is the further contention of this thesis that letters provided a twofold purpose for the Kensington women. The first purpose was to transmit news. Their habit of distributing meeting papers to absent members is an example of this immediate and practical purpose. Equally, letter writing was arguably the most strategic form of collective activism in Victorian England and a fundamental tool of persuasion and networking for these well-connected women, who were vigorously aware of the reforming power of epistles. Laura Rotunno, in her study of readers of female fiction, has likewise illustrated the letter's driving power as revealed in contemporary British fiction. Rotunno argues that the novel employed letters to 'question social norms and suggests that their texts could wield power. The hope was that correspondence could stimulate change – that writing could inspire

⁵⁹ First edition: Harriet Taylor Mill, *The Enfranchisement of Women* (London: Westminster & Foreign Quarterly Review, 1851).

⁶⁰ "History of SPEW," Society for Promoting the Training of Women (previously SPEW). The SPEW records and archives are held at Girton College Library and Archive, Cambridge. GB 271 GCIP SPTW.

social progress'.⁶¹ Similarly, Sarah Poustie has used the letters of Olive Schreiner, an active member of the Men and Women's Club, to highlight the complex but instrumental power of letters within networks, and crucially, the 'future-orientated' aspect of 'letterness'.⁶² The Men and Women's Club was a debating society in London that was radically discussed such issues as marriage, homosexuality and prostitution.⁶³ Schreiner wrote, with others, to provoke thought, test ideas, and ultimately, facilitate change.⁶⁴

Women also wrote to connect. Although the concept of epistolary intent is not a new one, its utilization as a tool of the first feminist society of Britain to build and sustain networks is pivotal to historical understanding, despite the fact it forces yet another anachronistic term upon an unknowing Victorian society. However, the term 'network' is the most accurate representation of enthusiastic 'sociability' and the remarkable circles of intellectual, political and social leaders within which they lived. This image aligns itself to Tony Ballantyne's approach to 'webs' of empire, illustrating the advantages of studying history in terms of its networks and circles rather than in individual terms.⁶⁵ The interwoven networks of the Kensington Society's letters across Europe and the US undeniably created a 'web' of ideas that focused on ideas of radical progress and change.⁶⁶

⁶¹ Laura Rotunno illustrates this 'delight' in the novel of Wilkie Collins, in her chapter, "Feminized Correspondence, the Unknown Public, and the Egalitarian Professional of Wilkie Collins's *The Woman in White*," in *Postal Plots in British Fiction, 1840-1898: Readdressing Correspondence in Victorian Culture* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013), 69.

⁶² Sarah Poustie. "Letters and Networks: Analyzing Olive Schreiner's Epistolary Networks." PhD. University of Edinburgh, 2014, passim.

⁶³ Sarah Wiggins has assessed how debating and discussion societies in colleges empowered women in "Gendered Spaces and Political Identity: Debating Societies in English Women's Colleges, 1890-1914," *Women's History Review* 18, No.5 (2009): 739.

⁶⁴ Likewise, Bonnie S. Anderson has espoused the critical importance of the letter for Victorian woman reformers in her article "From Letters to a Movement: The Creation of Early International Feminism, 1830 to 1860," in *Exchanges and Correspondence: The Construction of Feminism*, eds. Claudette Fillard, Francoise Orazi (Newcastle-on-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010): 8-22.

⁶⁵ Tony Ballantyne, *Webs of Empire: Locating New Zealand's Colonial Past* (Wellington: Bridget Williams Books, 2012).

⁶⁶ To some extent, Meritxell Simon-Martin has demonstrated this in "Letter Exchange in the Life of Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon," 188-213.

In doing so, the Kensington Society was a central player in the creation of the mid-Victorian feminist network. However anachronistic this term may be to Victorian women the concept of communication networks fits neatly into the practices of the Kensington Society. At its core is the theme that small networks feed off larger ones – much like the way members of the Kensington Society interwove and fed off the group as a large network. This also aligns with Lindsay O’Neill’s four-point process of networking in Early Modern Britain, as outlined by Jessica Parr:

- a) similar people coming together,
- b) influence within these groups making its members more alike,
- c) people winding up in the same place, and
- d) shared space making people more alike.⁶⁷

This recent concept closely reflects the associations of social reformers - the close family or acquaintance connections in Victorian Britain that have linked together the most precocious activists of nineteenth-century social reform.

The relevance, or otherwise, of the concept of class relations to an analysis of the Kensington Society must be addressed. There is some truth to R. S. Neale’s classic sociological study of *Class and Ideology in the Nineteenth Century* (1972), in which he asserted that the women’s movement was, to an extent, propelled by those in a class of intelligentsia:

⁶⁷ Jessica Parr, “Careful Hands, Epistolary Spaces: Review of *The Opened Letter*,” review of *The Opened Letter: Networking in the Early Modern British World*, Lindsay O’Neill, Early Americanists. Published September 2015, <https://earlyamericanists.com/2015/09/15/careful-hands-epistolary-spaces-review-of-the-opened-letter/>; See also Charles Kadushin, *Understanding Social Networks: Theories, Concepts and Findings*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), and Rebecca Dingo, *Networking Arguments: Rhetoric, Transnational Feminism, and Public Policy Writing* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2012).

although it is possible to trace some interest and participation in working-class women, it seems unlikely that they exerted any sustained or active demand for women's suffrage. This demand when it came, as an extension of Radicalism, was inspired by the writings of William Thompson, intensified by the agitation started by the Manchester Women's Suffrage Committee over J.S. Mill's amendment to the 1867 Reform Bill, and extended through the logistic clash over the definition of the word 'man' as used in the Bill. Therefore the initiative remained with women from the middle classes, and the intelligentsia.⁶⁸

The term 'intelligentsia' was an eighteenth-century Russian coinage for a certain class of educated people, including academics, writers, poets, artists, teachers and journalists. This thesis will argue that it was education that separated the Kensington women from uneducated women. If there was a single social 'group memory' between the Kensington women, it would be their shared heritage in predominantly Nonconformist homes that consisted of fathers and family members who valued education highly. This emphasis on education was accompanied by an equal enthusiasm for vigorous letter writing.

There is one critical element of this heritage that has been almost entirely overlooked in the historiography of the Kensington women. Scholarship (perhaps, unwittingly) has continually underplayed the religious imperatives of these women, despite their largely shared religious Non-conformity (such as Unitarianism) and their passion for reform. Bonnie S. Anderson, for example, suffers from this misapprehension:

Their first rebellion was usually against the religion they had been raised in. By rejecting traditional religion, they also discarded both women's confinement to the household and their mother's

⁶⁸ R. S. Neale, "Women, a Depressed Class," in *Class and Ideology in the Nineteenth Century* (Abington, New York: Routledge, 2016), 148.

conventional lives... Becoming free thinkers, atheists, Unitarians, and agnostics, these women went on to join with like-minded others in radical groups which challenged basic precepts of their societies.⁶⁹

Anderson's statement illustrates a general misunderstanding that religion was a conformist ritual for Victorians, and therefore, something to toss aside for Nonconformist reformers. Instead it was Christian belief that drove a desire for social reform. Kathryn Gleadle is a notable exception in arguing that radical Unitarians were amongst the first to recognise women's oppression.⁷⁰ Mary Carpenter, an associate of the Kensington Society and educationalist, for instance, was the daughter of Lant Carpenter a Unitarian minister in Exeter who later led the Lewin's Mead Unitarian Meeting House in Bristol. In both Bristol and Exeter he also worked as a school teacher, naming amongst his pupils Harriet and James Martineau. In turn, he established a boarding school, St. Brandon Hill, run by his wife and daughters, and Mary Carpenter eventually founded a ragged school. William Johnson Fox, the radical Unitarian minister, was also a close associate of many Kensington women. It is abundantly clear, and will be demonstrated in this thesis, that the Kensington Society's letters, journals, and public writings exhibit strong ties to Nonconformist thinking, signifying that Christianity (be it evangelical, Church of England, Unitarian or Catholic), was a direct source of impetus for their activism, just as it was in the anti-slavery movement.⁷¹

⁶⁹ Anderson, "From Letters to a Movement," 10.

⁷⁰ Kathryn Gleadle, *The Early Feminists: Radical Unitarians and the Emergence of the Women's Rights Movement, 1831-1851* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994).

⁷¹ One such example is Adelaide Anne Procter, whose poems were eventually made into hymns due to their religious fervency. Habermas perhaps comprehended this when he stated in an interview: 'Egalitarian universalism, from which sprang the ideas of freedoms and social solidarity, of an autonomous conduct of life as emancipation, of the individual morality of conscience, human rights and democracy, is the direct heir of the Judaic ethic of Katich and the Christian ethos of love. This legacy, substantially unchanged, has been the object of continual critical appropriation and reinterpretation. To this day, there is no alternative to it.' Jürgen Habermas, *Time of Transitions*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2006), 150-151.

This impetus is manifest in their public writing as well as in their private epistles. The second part of this dissertation will address all forms of public communication in which the Kensington Society engaged, in which they honed their arguments against the social inequalities of British society. Two domains of publishing are particularly important to this study: individual published works of the Kensington Society members, and the Langham circle's *EWJ*, commonly considered 'the organ for the circle's ideas.'⁷² Probing the Kensington Society's strategic, conscious public sphere engagements will allow us to better understand Victorian women's activism and mid-century Britain's growing feminist publishing culture.

Robert Darnton noted thirty-five years ago that the study of books could be termed 'social and cultural history of communication by print...because its purpose is to understand how ideas were transmitted through print and how exposure to the printed word affected the thought and behaviour of mankind during the past five hundred years.'⁷³ Much the same could be said of the printed press in Victorian Britain. In the last ten years historians have emphasised the importance of emerging media in the late-nineteenth century British culture of reform. Most now accept that publications, including pamphlets, newspapers and public letters were imperative to these changing times. More importantly, we have also now recognised that the Victorians were acutely aware of the paramount power of the public pen. The reading public, for one thing, was rapidly expanding, largely as a result of the Elementary Education Act of 1870, and as the working class gained increased access to education their collective literacy slowly grew. This was particularly the case for women. R.S. Schofield's 1973 study suggested that in

⁷² The *EWJ* was first established by women who created the Society for the Employment of Women (SPEW), but due to the close overlap of members, the *EWJ* became an organ for the Kensington Society. Papers delivered to their meetings that were considered exceptional often appeared in the periodical printed by Emily Faithfull's printing house. See Felicity Hunt, "Faithfull, Emily (1835–1895)," *ODNB* (2009).

⁷³ Robert Darnton, "What Is the History of Books?" *Daedalus* 111, No. 3 (1982), 65.

Bedfordshire, to cite just one instance, the female illiteracy rate was 72% in 1754-1764, but by 1833 to 1844 had improved to 67%.⁷⁴

The body of contemporary scholarship on the feminist movement in the nineteenth century has been dominated by the work of Jane Rendall and Philippa Levine. Rendall has provided invaluable insight into the entire women's movement and its correlation to the industrialisation and modernism of politics in the nineteenth century.⁷⁵ Levine has perhaps overstressed the importance of class distinction in how Victorian feminists campaigned in her *Victorian Feminism, 1850-1900*.⁷⁶ This was achieved by separately assessing the 'Employment and the Professionals: Middle-Class Women and Work,' and then 'Trade, Industry and Organization: Working-Class Women and Work.'⁷⁷ Levine however acknowledged the 'demonstrable relationship' between the periodical press and feminism in Victorian England. More recently, Michelle Tusan has developed scholarship on the history of female journalism. In her 2005 study, *Women Making News: Gender and Journalism in Modern Britain*, she rightly acknowledges the 'rise of a woman-identified publishing community' and its significant role in the growing feminist network in mid-nineteenth century Britain. A close analysis of a network like the Kensington Society would have strengthened her argument.⁷⁸

⁷⁴ R. S. Schofield, "Dimensions of Illiteracy, 1750-1850," *Explorations in Economic History* 10, Iss. 4 (1973), 447; See also Jayne E. Marek, *Women Editing Modernism: 'Little' Magazines and Literary History* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1995).

⁷⁵ See Jane Rendall, ed. *Equal or Different: Women's Politics, 1800-1914* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987); Jane Rendall, *The Origins of Modern Feminism: Women in Britain, France, and the United States, 1780-1860* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1985); Catherine Hall, Keith McClelland and Jane Rendall, eds. *Defining the Victorian Nation: Class, Race, Gender and the Reform Act of 1867* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Karen Hagemann, Gisela Mettele and Jane Rendall, eds. *Gender, War and Politics: Transatlantic Perspectives, 1775-1850: War, Culture and Society, 1750-1850* (Basingstoke, Palgrave MacMillan, 2010).

⁷⁶ Philippa Levine, *Victorian Feminism, 1850-1900* (London: Hutchinson, 1987).

⁷⁷ Philippa Levine, "Employment and the Professionals: Middle-Class Women and Work" and "Trade, Industry and Organization: Working-Class Women and Work," in Levine, *Victorian Feminism*, 82-104; 105-127.

⁷⁸ Michelle E. Tusan, *Women Making News: Gender and Journalism in Modern Britain* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2005), 60. See also, Michelle E. Tusan, 'Reforming Work: Gender,

Barbara Onslow has provided a wide coverage of the issues facing women in the publishing marketplace of Victorian Britain.⁷⁹ Onslow's analysis deploys a feminist perspective, with a detailed, comprehensive exploration of more than one hundred individual women in mid-nineteenth-century British activism. In Janice Schroeder's opinion, the most valuable aspect of Onslow's study is 'its examination of the daily lives of women journalists.'⁸⁰ However, Onslow's assessment of the British women who were involved in nineteenth-century press culture is approached from an explicitly feminist perspective.⁸¹ In doing so, she pays less attention to historical factors such as social position, or religious distinctions, the heritage of the women and their additional social causes. All of these factors are central to their thought and actions as individuals and as a collective group. Janice Schroeder has notably criticised this approach, suggesting that the 'scope of Onslow's study means there is little room for a particular set of arguments to develop about the larger cultural meanings of women's involvement with the press.'⁸² Despite this, Schroeder acknowledges that Onslow's work on nineteenth-century women in the world of journalism has yielded fresh insights into the fascinating 'daily lives of women journalists.'⁸³

Mirroring the overall neglect of the Kensington Society, scholarship on the emerging print press in Victorian Britain has given meagre consideration to the *EWJ*. In 2005 Sarah Dredge published 'Opportunism and Accommodation: The *EWJ* and the British Mid-Nineteenth-Century Women's Movement,' but she argued that the women

Class, and the Printing Trade in Victorian Britain,' *Journal of Women's History* 16, Iss.1 (2004): 103–126; Michelle E. Tusan, "Not the Ordinary Victorian Charity": The Society for Promoting the Employment of Women Archive," *History Workshop Journal* 49 (2000): 220–230.

⁷⁹ The weightiest of Onslow's publications is Barbara Onslow, *Women of the Press in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000).

⁸⁰ Janice Schroeder, review of *Women of the Press in Nineteenth-Century Britain*, Barbara Onslow, *Victorian Review* 28, No. 2 (2002), 123.

⁸¹ Barbara Onslow, *Women of the Press*, passim.

⁸² Janice Schroeder, review of Onslow, *Women of the Press*, 122.

⁸³ Ibid., 123.

behind the journal were far too accommodating politically, perhaps because of their evangelical Christianity and social position: ‘they were also susceptible to, and willing to exploit, popular ideas on women that was derived from a different political position-evangelical Christianity.’⁸⁴ Dredge argues that the *EWJ* editors were confused by the amalgamation of their evangelical beliefs with their feminist ideology, and in consequence, ‘aired many voices rather than pursuing a coherent editorial line.’⁸⁵ Her argument falls into the trap of valuing consistency over diversity in feminist activism. The Kensington Society were united in a mutual understanding, but each member was valued for the divergent insights they brought to the discussion table. In its essence, this principle explains the Kensington Society’s meeting structure and their emphasis on participation from all members. It was not a lecture, but a discussion circle. Similarly, the *EWJ* was their first exercise in diversity. It was never intended to be a single dictated voice, but rather a platform for a range of women to express their views. Although some contributors adhered to traditional, evangelical models of womanhood and espoused them in their articles, others offered counter cultural viewpoints on women’s place in Victorian Britain.

The final aim of this thesis is to highlight the international scope of the Kensington Society. Hitherto, their web of connections has led scholarship to regard them as a purely United Kingdom based reform Society. On the contrary, the Kensington women were far more universally minded. Indeed, the significance of the Society lies largely in its wider connections in France, America and the British Empire. A more comparative, transnational and transatlantic lens in the first and final chapters will expose the significant sources from which the Kensington Society obtained its ideas and strategy,

⁸⁴ Sarah Dredge, “Opportunism and Accommodation: The *English Woman’s Journal* and the British Mid-Nineteenth-Century Women’s Movement,” *Women’s Studies* 34, Iss. 2 (2005): 134.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

drawing upon the example of earlier women's groups in France and then sharing these ideas with radicals in the Atlantic world. This outlook was initially established through their letters. As Lindsay O'Neill has argued, a writer's epistolary world can be seen by pinpointing the origins of their letters on a map.⁸⁶ Increasingly, the Kensington Society looked to empower women through communication and education in the new world through letters, travel and intellectual contribution.

The imperative of ideological consistency is perhaps a modern feminist fiction. Entering an almost entirely male-dominated press culture, these Victorian proto-feminists were empowered by their unique position. They strategically utilized the benefits of their education and upbringing, consequently disseminating their ideas throughout the press to a wider collection of women 'to create the country's first effective feminist network.'⁸⁷ Beth Palmer has also proposed that the *EWJ* was the Kensington Society's method of promoting reading to its subscribers, arguing that the 'editors of the magazines...cared deeply and thought carefully about readership. They asked themselves how they would engage and maintain readers and how the seemingly passive act of reading might be converted into, or re-imagined as, a dynamic feminist activity.'⁸⁸ It was sold for 1 shilling per monthly instalment, a relatively high price, revealing its target audience as middle-class educated readers. The journal, much like their meetings and correspondence, was a training program to test the tone, arguments and judgements of its women. Thus, the journal was more than just an organ of their ideas; it was a strategic tool of education. The journal also advocated for individual intellectual stimulation through reading. By encouraging reading, and therefore education, the *EWJ* and the Kensington Society

⁸⁶ Lindsay O'Neill, *The Opened Letter: Networking in the Early Modern British World* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), 78.

⁸⁷ Sheila R. Herstein, *A Mid-Victorian Feminist: Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 24.

⁸⁸ Beth Palmer, "Reading Langham Place Periodicals at Number 19," in *Reading and the Victorians*, eds. Matthew Bradley and Juliet John (New York: Routledge, 2015), 48.

disregarded the need for uniformity of thought. In fact, the objective behind every facet of their communication remained discussion, not coherence. This, perhaps, is one of the greatest misconceptions regarding the Victorian feminist movement. It was not conceived to entrap women in homogeneous thought. Equally, the Kensington Society never intended its members to be duplicates. Discussion and open council were the pivotal strategies of the Kensington Society. Its members were convinced that the emancipation of women, mentally and physically, would be channelled through communication.

The seeds of the Kensington Society were gathered from disparate sources of intellectual inspiration, and in turn, they sowed their own crop of radical reform. The evidence we can discern from the Society's archives, and its members' letters, publications and literature, suggests a mutual commitment to powerful, transformative written communication and private discussion. All these have been hitherto neglected in feminist historiography. This thesis argues that these important historical and literary documents are more than sufficient to confirm the primary intentions behind the hitherto elusive Kensington Society. Communication was their vehicle of change.

CHAPTER I. AN INTELLECTUAL INHERITANCE IN DISSENT

A glance at the family trees of the Kensington Society members reveals a rich network of nonconformist predecessors and nineteenth-century radicals. The influence of this liberal heritage should not be underestimated.¹ Within this web, and accompanying circles of political and religious dissent, the Kensington Society women were emboldened to strive for the realization of their own early feminist vision for social reform. For families such as the Smiths, Davies, and the Gurneys, consolidated and interrelated circles of nonconformist and evangelical conviction empowered and united them in endeavours for social, parliamentary, municipal and educational reform. This chapter will explore the debt these mid-Victorian British feminists owed to the established 'liberal' reforming tradition of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and the interrelated traditions of dissent and reform that defined the background of the Kensington women and ignited their purpose in forming a discussion society in 1865. In doing so, it will demonstrate the remarkable web of networks and associates into which the Kensington Society women were born. The ideas and ambitions of radical politics, dissent, abolitionism, Unitarianism and evangelical theology were synthesised in the campaign of the Kensington women.

The purpose here is twofold: to establish the social circles and 'intellectual inheritance' as it may be termed, that encompassed the Kensington women and cultivated their reforming zeal as young women; and secondly, to demonstrate the ingrained

¹ For a diagram of the Kensington Society Network, APPENDIX IV.

‘communication consciousness’ that they inherited from their extensive associates.² This ‘intellectual inheritance’ shaped their methods of communication and social activism. In the political dissensions of the eighteenth century, strategic communication methods were tried and tested, providing a useful example of how to network through letters, and publish and promote radical ideas through print. Whilst the question of ‘class consciousness’ is a one-dimensional issue for the Kensington Society, this thesis argues that the term ‘communication consciousness’ is more apt. It is a term that defines their use and awareness of the need to use communication to empower reform.

The connection between the Kensington Society - and subsequently the Victorian women’s movement - to religious dissent has been an underplayed aspect of feminist history. Dissent or legalised non-conformity to the established Church of England was a common heritage for a number of its members (Unitarians, Quakers and Presbyterians). Although many were also part of the Church of England, they were collectively ‘Evangelical,’ a theological branch tradition which was similarly a product of earlier religious dissent, one which furthermore maintained a theological affinity with Dissenters over two centuries.³ It is the contention of this thesis that the religious Dissenting and Evangelical roots of their private lives empowered the Kensington

² The term ‘communication consciousness’ has been adopted to express the awareness of the Kensington Society women, who saw the strategic potential in communication for social change, and consciously utilised it for this purpose. The term has been loosely adopted from the research of Peter Simonson, Janice Peck, Robert T. Craig, and John P. Jackson Jr., eds. *The Handbook of Communication History* (New York: Routledge, 2012) and in particular, Karen Ross, in her chapter “Gender and Media: A Very Short Herstory,” 347-360. See also Stacey K. Sowards and Valerie R. Renegar, “The Rhetorical Functions of Consciousness Raising in Third-Wave Feminism,” *Communication Studies*, 55, Iss. 4 (2004): 535-552, *passim*.

³ ‘Evangelicalism’ with a small ‘e’, ‘evangelicalism’ refers to a common theological strain within both Dissent and Church of England Evangelicalism that emphasised the Bible, salvation by faith alone, and evangelism. Evangelical with a capital ‘E’ refers to the sub-group of the Church of England with historic (seventeenth and eighteenth-century) ties to Dissenters. ‘Dissenter’ with a capital ‘D’ has been used to refer to officially non-Church of England (Anglican) Christians. Dissent with a small ‘d’, ‘dissenter’, refers to a more general political or religious inclination. See D.W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London: Unwin, 1989); M. A. Haykin, K. J. Stewart, eds. *The Emergence of Evangelicalism: Exploring Historical Continuities* (Leicester: Intervarsity Press, 2008).

members. In a sense, the groundwork was laid for them; the very practices and actions which Dissenters historically endorsed had a significant influence on their own subsequent intellectual and reforming lives. Correspondingly, the strategy of religious Dissenters was reflected in the social activism of the Kensington women; this was particularly apparent in their efforts to reform and establish educational institutions.

In exploring these issues, the nature of gender equality in these traditions is called into question. Within circles of Quakerism, Unitarianism, political radicalism and Evangelicalism, there was a nurtured equality between male and female supporters, and ‘egalitarian’ strands in both politics and religion.⁴ This is an area of feminist history that has been largely misunderstood. Laura Swartz’s *Infidel Feminism: Secularism, religion and Women's Emancipation, England 1830-1914*,⁵ for instance, has looked at a number of Victorian female activists and argued that the Secularist movement was at the heart of their protest. Swartz has overlooked the fact that evangelicalism was a common source of their radicalism. Anna Letitia Barbauld, for instance, was a prominent ‘woman of letters’, and celebrated poet and author of educational children’s literature, as well as political pamphlets, and was closely associated with Hannah More and Maria Edgeworth.⁶ She may not have lobbied for women’s political progress, but her life and work revealed her eager belief that women were gifted by God and therefore, fully equipped to partake in all avenues of public life. Similarly, the writer and art critic Anna Jameson, who became a mentor to Barbara Bodichon and Jane Crow, had a deep affinity

⁴ The topic of Evangelicalism and women’s equality is given more attention in Rendall, *The Origins of Modern Feminism*, 73-77.

⁵ Laura Schwartz, *Infidel Feminism: Secularism, Religion and Woman’s Emancipation, England 1830-1914* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013).

⁶ Felicity James and Ian Inkster have explored the dissenting connection between the Barbauld and Aikin families, as well as the similarity between their views on women’s emancipation. See Felicity James, Ian Inkster, eds. *Religious Dissent and the Aikin-Barbauld Circle, 1740-1860* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Anna Letitia Le Breton, *Memoir of Mrs Barbauld, Including Letters and Notices of Her Family and Friends* (London: George Bell and Sons, 1874), 61; William McCarthy, “Barbauld [née Aikin], Anna Letitia (1743-1825),” *ODNB* (2016).

for the social progress of women. She was also adamant that, in her words: ‘It is for women I write.’⁷ This intention was evident throughout her career, as she published works such as *Memoirs of Celebrated Female Sovereigns* (1831), *Characteristics of Women* (1832), *Sisters of Charity* (1855) and *Legends of the Madonna* (1852).⁸ From a young age her radical thoughts portrayed a rebellious mind that was akin to nonconformist theology. In her recollections, the

letter of the Scriptures, the words, were familiarised to me by sermonizing and dogmatizing long before I could enter into the spirit. Meantime, happily, another religion was growing up in my heart which, strangely enough, seemed to me quite apart from which was taught...[it] had gradually taken root in my life even from the moment my mother joined my little hands in prayer.⁹

In a letter to Lady Byron in 1840, Jameson also implies that the faith of women around her influenced her own:

My pious feelings I owed to my mother – to Mrs. Barbauld’s Hymns...and parts of the gospel of St. Matthew.¹⁰

⁷ Anna Jameson, *Memoirs of the Loves of the Poets* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Co., 1900), 23.

⁸ Kimberly VanEsveld Adams has explored the development of feminist thought through the Christian ideal of the Madonna, including the work of Anna Jameson. See Kimberly VanEsveld Adams, *Our Lady of Victorian Feminism: The Madonna in the Work of Anna Jameson, Margaret Fuller, and George Eliot* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2001).

⁹ Her italics, as quoted in Anna Jameson, Geraldine Macpherson, ed. *Memoirs of the Life of Anna Jameson* (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1878), 14-15.

¹⁰ Anna Jameson to Lady Byron, undated, Box 75, Letter 36-40, of the Lovelace Papers, Western Manuscripts Collection, Bodleian Library, Oxford University, as sourced in Judith Johnston, “The Hero as Woman of Letters: Anna Jameson Revises Her Girlhood,” *Biography* 22, No. 4 (1999): 523. For more on Jameson, see Judith Johnston, *Anna Jameson: Victorian, Feminist, Woman of Letters* (New York: Routledge, 2016).

Judith Johnston has rightly recognized that Jameson's correspondence with Lady Byron, who was 'stern and strictly evangelical,' demonstrates the solidarity between two women who viewed their faith as ultimately sympathetic to their radical nonconformity and feminism.¹¹ Margaret H. McFadden has also recognized the unifying nature of the evangelistic strand within evangelism for nineteenth-century feminism.¹² McFadden traces the influence of a Christian evangelistic perspective on feminists such as Frances Willard, the leader of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union and Catherine Booth, the founder of the Salvation Army and author of *Female Ministry; or, Woman's Right to Preach the Gospel* (1859). McFadden argues that along with other women, Willard was inspired by experiencing the 1866 revival in Illinois led by Phoebe Palmer, woman evangelist and 'lifelong Methodist.'¹³

Amongst their predecessors and mentors, the Kensington women were taught to question and seek amendment to nineteenth-century British values and practices. Entwined in this rich heritage of Dissent was a consciousness and respect for public and private society organisation and networking. Above all else, the religious dissent (both within Dissent and the Church of England) of the eighteenth-century harnessed the written word through publication and letters. The effect of this heritage on the Kensington women is evident from the extraordinary amount of published works by their family members, associates, and in turn, the Society women themselves. They undoubtedly recognised the power of published communication, and modelled it in their own actions, including their *English Woman's Journal*.

¹¹ Judith Johnston in "The Hero as Woman of Letters," 523.; For more on Lady Byron, full name was Anne Isabella Noel, see Joan Pierson, "Noel [nee Milbanke], Anne Isabella [Annabella], s.v. Baroness Wentworth, and Lady Byron (1792-1860)," *ODNB* (2006).

¹² Margaret H. McFadden, "The Ironies of Pentecost: Women Religious and Evangelistic Outreach," in *Golden Cables of Sympathy: The Transatlantic Sources of Nineteenth-Century Feminism* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2009): 49-66.

¹³ *Ibid.* 61.

Within the confines of this chapter, it would be impossible to establish this inheritance for every member of the Society (there were over sixty in 1868).¹⁴ In light of this, this thesis will highlight the more well-connected women of the Kensington Society in Victorian Britain's political and philosophical society. In so doing, this will allow further opportunity to demonstrate the depth of their relationship to prominent intellectual British notables. The focus will be on the religious circles which united the Kensington women - to demonstrate their mutual web of historical origins and connections and highlight their common ties with radical and reforming figures. Similarly, this chapter will examine the more significant influences on the Kensington Society women, exploring their intellectual and social presumptions. To achieve this, the chapter will separately investigate the religious associations of the Kensington women within Evangelicalism and the dissenting tradition, including the Church of England, Quakerism and Unitarianism, and the influence of Christian Socialism, as well as the Enlightenment's Rational Dissent movement, and Philosophic Radicals of the nineteenth century.

EVANGELICALISM, ANGLICALISM AND DISSENT

¹⁴Ann Dingsdale's 1995 thesis attempted to make a rough survey of the women and the 'part its members played in collecting the signature for the petition in 1866 and looks at the age, marital status, class and geographical distribution of both Kensington Society members and those women who signed this petition.' Ann Dingsdale, Abstract, *'Generous and Lofty Sympathies.'*

The origins of evangelicalism were in the Puritan faction of the Elizabethan Church. The Puritan movement began in the late sixteenth century when, rather than separate from the Established church, it endeavoured to reform the church from within. The purpose of these reforms was to rid the church of any remaining Roman Catholic practices that were not sufficiently abolished in the Elizabethan Settlement of Religion in 1559. After the English Civil War (1642 – 1649), however, many Puritans left the state church, in protest at the Restoration's 1662 Act of Uniformity. They formed Presbyterian, Baptist, Quaker and Congregationalist churches, all of which were illegal if meeting within five miles of an Anglican church. Although they were never defined as denominations, because of this 1662 dispersion of puritan ministers and laity, puritan ideals can be traced in many Protestant and Dissenting theologies of the nineteenth century. Puritans (who then became Dissenters after 1662) rejected the unconditional conformity to the Book of Common Prayer of the Church of England in the Act of Uniformity 1662, and consequently, withdrew from the restored post-Oliver Cromwell Anglican church. In doing so, they stated their belief that their actions should be governed by individual judgement.¹⁵ It must be noted, however, that many Puritans remained within the Anglican Church, and were the genesis of its Evangelical wing.

Puritans had traditionally recognised the strength of women in championing their causes. Writing on 'Female Agency' in the 1590s, Richard Hooker, the Elizabethan Church's opponent of Puritanism, commented that their Puritan women were:

deemed apter to serve as instruments and helps in the cause. Apter they are through the eagerness of their affection, that maketh them, which way soever they take, diligent in drawing their husbands,

¹⁵ For more, see N.H. Keeble, ed. *'Settling the Peace of the Church': 1662 Revisited* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

children, servants, friends and allies the same way; ... finally, after through a singular delight which they take in giving very large and particular intelligence how all near about them stand affected as concerning the same cause.¹⁶

For Hooker, these were noteworthy characteristics of the late Elizabethan Puritan women. In many ways he was prescient of the future proclivity of Dissenting women for intellectual engagement with the social and political issues of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century reform (sometimes termed the ‘Whig’ or ‘Dissenting tradition’). Johanna Harris and Elizabeth Scott-Baumann’s collection of essays suggest that the historiography on Puritan women has denied them their place in cultivating the intellectual culture of early modern Puritanism.¹⁷ As Harris points out, for women such as Lady Brilliana Harley (1598-1643), letter writing was a central ‘puritan cultural “style” (as some literary scholars have phrased it) geared to the pursuit of rigorous theological, intellectual and spiritual edification.’¹⁸ Katherine Gillespie has also stressed the pivotal role that Puritan women played in public life through pamphleteering, looking at Katherine Chidley, Elizabeth Poole, Anne Wentworth and other seventeenth-century English Puritan women’s published sermons and petitions, during the lead-up to the mid-seventeenth century English Civil War.¹⁹

English Dissenters, in disagreement with aspects of the Prayer Book theology and mandated ceremonies of the Church of England, formally separated from the state

¹⁶ Richard Hooker, “Female Agency” in *The Works of That Learned and Judicious Divine, Mr. Richard Hooker with and Account of His Life and Death by Isaac Walton*. 3 Vol., ed. John Keble. Seventh Edition. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1888., 153.

¹⁷ Johanna I. Harris and Elizabeth Scott-Baumann, eds. *The Intellectual Culture of Puritan Woman, 1558-1680* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

¹⁸ Johanna I. Harris, “‘But I thinke and believe’: Lady Brilliana Harley’s Puritanism in Epistolary Community,” in *The Intellectual Culture of Puritan Woman, 1558-1680*, 108.

¹⁹ Katherine Gillespie, *Domesticity and Dissent in the Seventeenth Century: English Women’s Writing and the Public Sphere* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

church in the mid- to later-seventeenth century.²⁰ Over the next two centuries they emerged into different denominations of Protestant Christianity, the largest being Baptists, Presbyterians, Methodists and Unitarians. As the Dissenter Andrew Kippis put it in 1772:

We dissent because we deny the right of any body of men, whether civil or ecclesiastical, to impose human tests, creeds, or articles; and because we think it our duty, not to submit to any such authority, but to protest against it, as a violation of our essential liberty, to judge and act for ourselves in matters of religion.²¹

Because of their ‘separatist’ mentality (legalised after the 1689 Act of Toleration), they were excluded from state establishments. The more conspicuous of these were the pinnacle of British educational establishments, the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge. In light of this, many Dissenters concentrated on business and professions, such as banking, to create a position for themselves in society through industry.²² It also became necessary for Dissenters to establish their own schools and educational institutions. David Reid has pointed to the emergence of ‘education as a philanthropic enterprise’ in the eighteenth century, in which leading Dissenters became increasingly convinced that education was the solution to poverty and provided financial

²⁰ In the seventeenth-century, Ireland saw a similar wave of dissent among Protestants. Ulster Protestants, for instance, were an ethnoreligious group that was born in Ulster, Ireland. One of the few titled members of the Kensington Society, Lady Eleanor Nicholls (along with Lady Emma Fitch) was married to General Sir Edward Nicholl, a fervent Ulster Protestant. They were generally either Church of England (Ireland) or Presbyterian. See David Hempton, *Religion and Political Culture in Britain and Ireland: From the Glorious Revolution to the Decline of Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

²¹ Andrew Kippis, *A Vindication of the Protestant Dissenting Ministers, with regard to their late Application to Parliament* (1722), as quoted in *Anna Letitia Barbauld: Voice of the Enlightenment*, ed. William McCarthy (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 2008), 8.

²² *The Oxford Companion to British History*, s.v. “Dissent,” accessed October 2019, <http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780199567638.001.0001/acref-9780199567638-e-1338?rskey=psiWSZ&result=1301>

support to help found ‘Dissenting academies’ for non-conformist students.²³ Prominent academies were established in Lancashire, Hackney and Exeter and Warrington.²⁴ John Aitken, a Presbyterian Dissenter was a superintendent at Warrington. His daughter became Anna Barbauld.²⁵ Barbauld’s memoir notes that Warrington was born out of ‘no inconsiderable anxiety to the more thoughtful and earnest among the liberal dissenters. Where could those ministers be educated in theology unshackled by creed and doctrine?’²⁶ When eighteenth-century Dissenters were precluded from the established church and its institutions, they turned to their own network to create educational academies.

By the nineteenth century, evangelical radicals were amongst the leading social reformers. One of the most prominent was political reformer and Tory MP, Lord Shaftesbury. Shaftesbury was at the centre of an ‘extensive’ range of philanthropic societies, including the Society for Improving the Condition of Labouring Classes, as well as a vocal campaigner for the ragged schools movement.²⁷ Recent research by David Furst-Roberts has argued that he was indebted to a ‘paternal’ evangelical heritage for the impetus of his significant career in political activism, contending that ‘the prominent Anglican layman’s evangelical Christianity’ was ‘the great impetus behind his

²³ David A. Reid, “Education as a Philanthropic Enterprise: The Dissenting Academies of Eighteenth-Century England,” *History of Education* 39, No. 3 (2010), 299-300.

²⁴ For more on the dissenting academies, see David A. Reid, “Rational Dissent and the Rhetoric of Educational Philanthropy in the Dissenting Academies of Lancashire, Hackney and Exeter,” *Northern History* 47, Iss. 1 (2010), 97-116.

²⁵ In Anna Barbauld’s memoir, she recollects that ‘under my father’s superintendence’ there was a Warrington Press, a publishing house for dissenting tracts. Anna Letitia Le Breton, *Memoir of Mrs Barbauld, Including Letters and Notices of Her Family and Friends* (London: George Bell and Sons, 1874), 61.

²⁶ This reflection was by ‘Mr. Henry A. Bright of Liverpool to the Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire,’ as quoted in Le Breton, *Memoir of Mrs Barbauld*, 27-28.

²⁷ For more on Shaftesbury, see John Pollock, *Shaftesbury: The Reformer* (Eastbourne: Kingsway Publications, 2000).

philanthropy and social reforms.’²⁸ Similarly, the evangelical heritage of feminist and philanthropist, Josephine Butler, has been recovered by Lisa Severine Nolland.²⁹ Butler was especially energetic in the abolition of child and adult prostitution, and in her support for women’s education and suffrage. She was closely associated with the Kensington Society and a key partner in the wider nineteenth-century feminist network. According to Nolland, Butler’s impetus was a combination of ‘elements of Victorian feminism with Christian views on the necessity and value of duty and service.’³⁰ The reflections of her memoir also evidence a deep, spiritual understanding of Christian sacrifice, demonstrating the significant impetus of evangelical Christianity on her understanding of duty and service to society:

the Saviour imparted to the child wrestler something of the virtue of His own midnight agony, when in Gethsemane His sweat fell like great drops of blood to the ground...there dawned upon me the realities of those earthly miseries...Looking my Liberator in the face, can my friends wonder that I have taken my place...by the side of her, the ‘woman in the city which was a sinner,’ of whom He, her Liberator and mine, said... ‘this woman hath not ceased to kiss My feet.’³¹

Not all Kensington members were from a Dissenting religious background. Those who ascribed to the Church of England evangelical wing, however, were equally as

²⁸ David Furst-Roberts, *The Making of a Tory Evangelical: Lord Shaftesbury and the Evolving Character of Victorian Evangelicalism* (Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2019), 1.

²⁹ Lisa Severine Nolland, *A Victorian Feminist Christian: Josephine Butler, the Prostitutes and God* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2004).

³⁰ Nolland argues that this belief was largely influenced by her aunt, the author Margaretta Grey, who contended that Christian women were obliged by their faith to reform, and thereby, serve God and society. *Ibid.*, 182.

³¹ Josephine E. Butler, George W. and Lucy A. Johnson, eds. *Josephine E. Butler: An Autobiographical Memoir* (Bristol: J.W. Anderson, 1909), 16.

reformist in their social ideals. In the case of Dorothea Beale, Anglican evangelicalism was a key theological differentiation. Dorothea Beale was the daughter of a surgeon, Miles Beale, and Margaret Beale (nee Complin) and adopted her family's Church of England faith.³² Her mother's cousin, the feminist and author Caroline Frances Cornwallis was acutely influential in the life of Dorothea Beale.³³ Cornwallis was the daughter of an Anglican clergyman and a devout member of the Church of England. However, she rejected the sacramental emphasis of High Church Anglicanism, and in particular, the teaching of Edward Bouverie Pusey, declaring: 'We have an abundance of technical terms but have we the spirit of the Gospel?'³⁴ Astonishingly, given the lack of academic opportunities for women, she educated herself in Greek, Latin, and Hebrew, and published a number of studies in ancient history, with particular interest in early Christianity and ancient Greece.³⁵ In 1854, Cornwallis published *On the State of Man Subsequent to the Promulgation of Christianity*, in which she aimed to emphasise the rational and practical nature of the Christianity.³⁶ Over her career, she grew increasingly interested in contemporary social advocacy, and in particular, was frustrated by the repression of women in Victorian society and academia, in which she felt stifled as a woman.³⁷ Her frustrations were vibrantly expressed in two anonymous articles for the

³² Jacqueline Beaumont, "Beale, Dorothea (1831-1906)," *ODNB* (2007).

³³ Cornwallis' mother, Mary Cornwallis (née Harris) was also an author, and amongst other tracts, published a four-volume *Observations, Critical, Explanatory, and Practice, on the Canonical Scriptures* (1817). Kathryn Gleadle, "Cornwallis, Caroline Frances (1786-1858)," *ODNB* (2004). For more on Cornwallis' relationship with her mother, see Marion Ann Taylor, "Mary Cornwallis: Voice of a Mother," in *Recovering Nineteenth-Century Women Interpreters of the Bible*, eds. Christiana de Groot and Marion Ann Taylor (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007): 31-44.

³⁴ Caroline Cornwallis, *Philosophical Theories and Philosophical Experience*, as quoted in Madeline Barber, *Scholar Daughter of the Rectory: The Life of Caroline Frances Cornwallis* (Oxford: Holywell Press Limited, 2007), 25.

³⁵ These included Caroline Frances Cornwallis, *A Brief View of Greek Philosophy up to the Age of Pericles* (London: W. Pickering, 1844) and *Christian Doctrine and Practice in the Twelfth Century* (London: W. Pickering, 1850).

³⁶ Caroline Frances Cornwallis, *On the State of Man before the Promulgation of Christianity* (London: W. Pickering, 1848).

³⁷ Gleadle, "Cornwallis, Caroline Frances", *ODNB*.

Westminster Review in 1856 and 1857, addressing ‘The Property of Married Woman,’ and the ‘Capabilities and Disabilities of Women.’³⁸ In ‘The Property’ Cornwallis published the 1855 petition circulated by the Married Women’s Property Committee (MWPC) – which was created by the Kensington members, Elizabeth Wolstenholme and Jessie Boucherett, and Josephine Boucherett.³⁹ Her name was one of the 26,000 signatures on the list that was presented to Parliament in 1856 by Lord Brougham and Sir Thomas Erskine Perry MP. Cornwallis paved the way for the next generation of female activists by publishing. In Dorothea Beale’s 1908 biography, Elizabeth Raikes emphasised the influence that the Anglican Cornwallis also had on Beale and her progressive female contemporaries, in light of harsh criticism:

Miss Cornwallis reflects the thought of her day with regard to women’s work. It was one of the tasks of her cousin, Dorothea Beale – whose ‘fagging’ in the next generation did so much for her own sex and the world – to show that the best work is done when the question of what will be said about it does not affect it one way or the other.⁴⁰

There is little doubt that Cornwallis’s commitment to a literary career and intellectual training for women played a role in Dorothea Beale’s own career and commitment to education. Like Cornwallis, she became passionate about widening the subject range for girls’ education and including Latin and Mathematics. After becoming a tutor at Frederick Denison Maurice’s Queens College, she became Head Teacher at Cheltenham Ladies

³⁸ Caroline Cornwallis, “The Property of Married Women,” *Westminster Review* 66 (1856): 331-360; Caroline Cornwallis, “Capabilities and Disabilities of Women,” *Westminster Review* 67 (1857): 42-72.

³⁹ For more on the committee and petition, see Mary Lyndon Shanley, “One Must Ride behind’: Married Women’s Rights and the Divorce Act of 1857,” *Victorian Studies* 25, No. 3 (1982): 355-76.

⁴⁰ Elizabeth Raikes, *Dorothea Beale of Cheltenham* (Edinburgh: T. and A. Constable, 1908), 5.

College in 1858, and eventually founder and headmistress of St. Hilda's College, Oxford in 1897.⁴¹

Educational reform was at the heart of both Nonconformist and Kensington Society activism. During the active years of the Society, and as its members dispersed, education increasingly spearheaded their campaign to improve the position of women in Victorian society. Their view of education as the path to greater communication was the result of intellects that were the culmination of generations past. Through the convictions of their predecessors, the Kensington women were destined to be political dissenters who employed education as a powerful vehicle of reform. Education was also what set the Kensington women apart. Most had been privately educated by their parents, or at Nonconformist institutions. It is hardly surprising therefore, that several Kensington Society members were, or became headmistresses.⁴²

In fact, it was through education circles that many Kensington women became connected. Bedford College, London, the first tertiary education institution in Britain (though not attached to a University, unlike Girton College) was the common bond between a number of Kensington members. The college was founded in 1849 by Elizabeth Anne Bostock and Elizabeth Jesser Reid. In 1865, Elizabeth Bostock was the first listed on the Kensington Society's member list. Annette Akroyd, another member of the Kensington Society, and her father, a Unitarian industrialist, were also instrumental in Bedford's foundation.⁴³ Several members were amongst the first students at Bedford, including Annette Akroyd, Ellen Nichols, Anna Swanwick, and Adelaide

⁴¹ Queen's College was founded in 1848, in Harley Street London, by Frederick Maurice, a Christian Socialist; other staff included Charles Kingsley, John Hullah, and Henry Morley; Jacqueline Beaumont, "Beale, Dorothea (1831-1906)," *ODNB* (2007).

⁴² For more on the instrumental position of a headmistress in Victorian society, see Joyce Senders Pederson, "Schoolmistresses and Headmistresses: Elites and Education in Nineteenth-Century England," *Journal of British Studies* 15, No. 1 (1975): 135-162.

⁴³ M. A. Scherer, "Beveridge [née Akroyd], Annette Susannah (1842-1929)," *ODNB* (2004).

Manning, as were notable associates of their circle, such as Elizabeth Blackwell, the American feminist and doctor, and Mary Ann Evans (the author, George Eliot). At least five other members of the Society became headmistresses of schools, including Elizabeth Wolstenholme, Frances Buss and Emily Harrison, who each ran private schools for girls.⁴⁴ Mary Eliza Porter eventually became the headmistress of a new Bradford Girl's Grammar School in 1875. Equally, the wider network of the Kensington Society supported their educational labours. Emma Fitch, who was present at their first meeting, was wife to Joshua Girling Fitch, a women's education supporter from a very early stage who sat on both the North of England Council for the Higher Education of women, the Girl's Public Day School Company, and was involved in founding the London School of Medicine for Women, before eventually supporting Girton College.⁴⁵

The Religious Society of Friends has been frequently entwined with social reform throughout its history in Europe and across the Atlantic, due to the strict adherence of its members to the teaching that 'Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone.'⁴⁶ Scholars have long recognised that Quakers were one of the first English Christian groups to denounce the slave trade.⁴⁷ They were equally prominent in the first women's marriage petition of 1866, which was signed by over forty Quaker Women – including Charlotte and Isabella Ellis and Mary Crudelius.⁴⁸ Carole Spencer argues that 'The Quaker vision of sexual equality was diametrically opposed to the doctrine of separate spheres.' Amid nineteenth-century British and American Quakers, Gurneyite Quakerism was particularly

⁴⁴ For more on Buss and Beale's time as headmistresses, see Josephine Kamm, *How Different From Us: A Biography of Miss Buss and Miss Beale* (London: Routledge, 2012).

⁴⁵ A.B. Robertson, "Fitch, Sir Joshua Girling (1824-1903)," *ODNB* (2004).

⁴⁶ James 2:17, The Bible: King James Version of 1611.

⁴⁷ English Quakers were emboldened after German and Dutch Quakers in Pennsylvania, US released the first official anti-slavery statement in 1688.

⁴⁸ See also, Timothy Larsen, *Friends of Religious Equality: Nonconformist Politics in Mid-Victorian England* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell Press, 1999).

strong.⁴⁹ As Spencer acknowledges, two journals advocating the theology of John Joseph Gurney, the *Christian Worker and the Friend's Review*, 'published numerous articles on "women worthies" (both Quaker and non-Quaker), eloquently reminded readers of the distinct role of women in Quakerism, and kept readers informed of the current debate on women's roles in other churches.'⁵⁰

The entire Gurney family demonstrated a strong dedication to reforming society and encouraging women while maintaining ties with a multitude of strands of evangelicalism. They were known as the most prominent and wealthy Quaker family in Britain in the early nineteenth century.⁵¹ Joseph John Gurney inherited the Gurney's Bank in Norwich, which was established by his predecessors in 1770.⁵² As an esteemed minister of the Religious Society of Friends, he travelled in 1836 to America, publicly touring numerous Quaker churches 'to enliven the Evangelical Christian faith within the Society of Friends... [and] examine slavery first-hand to see whether he might not find some way of strengthening the forces of the moderate abolition party.'⁵³ Although slavery was his main focus for political reform, he was also an advocate for moral reform issues such as teetotalism. He also published his own tract on prison reform, amongst many religious and political published works.⁵⁴ Although his prolific body of letters, diaries and pamphlets has received very little historical attention, Gurney demonstrated the correlation between epistolary endeavours and social reform, disseminating his ideas in a

⁴⁹ Carole D. Spencer, "Evangelicalism, Feminism and Social Reform: The Quaker Women Minister and the Holiness Revival," *Quaker History* 80, No. 1 (1991), 25.

⁵⁰ Spencer, "Evangelicalism, Feminism and Social Reform," 31.

⁵¹ Joseph John Gurney's son, John Gurney married Catherine Bell, and together they had eleven children. Bell was the great-granddaughter of the eighteenth-century Quaker apologist Robert Barclay. See Robert Barclay, *Apology for the True Christian Divinity* (London: Robert Barclay, 1678), first edition.

⁵² It was later merged with two other prominent Quaker-owned banks, becoming Barclays Bank.

⁵³ David E. Swift, *Joseph John Gurney: Banker, Reformer, and Quaker* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1962), 186.

⁵⁴ In 1819, Joseph John Gurney published *Notes on a visit made to some of the prisons in Scotland and the north of England, in company with Elizabeth Fry* (London: A. Constable and Co., 1819).

private mode. Evidently, this was a practice that was encouraged in the Gurney family. The numerous ‘letters of advice’ he received from his elder siblings throughout his life, aiming to constantly improve his character, were emulated and reflected in his own letters. The power of this communication strategy not only fostered humanitarian ideas in Gurney’s writings, but also enacted them.

Elizabeth Fry, nee Gurney (1780-1845), who dramatically reformed women’s prisons in Britain, was Joseph Gurney’s sister. At Newgate Prison in London, she pioneered a school for prisoners’ children, and drastically improved the conditions of female inmates. In 1817 she began the Ladies’ Association for the Reformation of the Female Prisoners, which later evolved to become the Ladies’ Society for Promoting the Reformation of Female Prisoners in 1821, a society that garnered international support from sympathisers in Russia, Italy, Switzerland and the Netherlands.⁵⁵ It is evident in her 1827 *Observations on the Visiting, Superintendence, and Government, of Female Prisoners* that her religious beliefs inspired much of her reform ideas, placing a strong emphasis on the Quaker principles of kindness, virtue, purity and the innate goodness of humanity.⁵⁶

Equally, she preached these principles from a pulpit, becoming a Quaker minister in 1811. In allowing women to be elders and teachers of the church, Quakerism demonstrated a willingness to consider women as equal under God. In 1798, for instance, Priscilla Wakefield, the sister of Catherine Bell, wrote a *Reflection on the Present Condition of the Female Sex; with Suggestions for Its Improvement*, voicing her opinion that women should be enabled to become financially independent, reflecting the Quaker belief in usefulness to this world, and argued that ‘their sex cannot free them from the

⁵⁵ Francisca de Haan, “Fry (née Gurney), Elizabeth (1780-1845),” *ODNB*, (2004).

⁵⁶ Elizabeth Gurney Fry, *Observations on the Visiting, Superintendence, and Government, of Female Prisoners* (London: John and Arthur Arch, 1827).

claim of the public for their proportion of usefulness’ and criticised ‘major part of the sex, especially of those among the higher orders, [who] neglect to fulfil this important obligation’.⁵⁷ Educational reform was also important to the Gurney family. Louisa Hoare (née Gurney), became a prominent writer on early education practice.⁵⁸ Another sister, Hannah Gurney married Thomas Fowell Buxton, first baronet and political leader of the anti-slavery campaign. Their daughter Priscilla Buxton was the co-secretary of the London Female Anti-Slavery Society. In 1833 a petition signed by 187,000 women was presented to Parliament to spur on an end to the slave trade. Priscilla’s name was at the top of the petition, together with Amelia Opie, the Romantic author.⁵⁹

The Gurney family is one of the strongest examples of Dissent and Quakerism united in social reform. Sandra Holton has used two other Quaker families, the Brights and Priestmans, to demonstrate the “networked family” that might variously serve the pursuit of business interests, humanitarian campaigns, the reform of the Society of Friends, and middle-class radical politics which included the campaign for women’s rights.’⁶⁰ Holton argues that it was the ‘papers’, such as diaries, letters and memoirs of

⁵⁷ Wakefield’s work was published by Joseph Johnson, a London based publisher who was prominent in the second half of the eighteenth century and an advocate for religious tolerance, publishing Anglican and Jewish tracts. Johnson printed the works of Mary Wollstonecraft, Anna Laetitia Barbauld, Mary Hays, Maria Edgeworth, and William Godwin, to name only a few. It was weekly dinner parties that grew the ‘Johnson Circle’ of young liberals and radicals. Wakefield wrote seventeen books. See John Bugg, *The Joseph Johnson Letterbook*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016); Priscilla Wakefield, *Reflection on the Present Condition of the Female Sex; with Suggestions for Its Improvement* (London: J. Johnson, 1798), 2.

⁵⁸ Louisa Gurney Hoare’s most celebrated publication was *Hints for the Improvement of Early Education and Nursery Discipline* (London: Hatchard, 1819). See also Susan Drain, “Hoare, Louisa Gurney (1784-1836),” *ODNB* (2008).

⁵⁹ It is worth noting that Opie was a close associate of Mary Wollstonecraft, John Philip Kemble and William Godwin. She was also a friend of the Gurneys, living near them in Norwich, and it is through their influence that she is believed to have become a member of the Society of Friends. Hugh Chisholm, ed. “Opie, Amelia”, *Encyclopaedia Britannica* 20. Eleventh Edition. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1911), 129.

⁶⁰ Sandra Stanley Holton, *Quaker Women: Personal Life, Memory and Radicalism in the lives of women Friends, 1800-1920* (London: Routledge, 2007), 2.

these families that formed ‘bonds of kinship, despite physical separation and the passage of time.’⁶¹

English religious nonconformity has always had close ties to social reform. Wesleyan Methodists, under the teaching of John Wesley from the mid-eighteenth century, placed paramount importance on education and opened countless schools across Greater Britain. Congregational churches, which were autonomously run by their congregations, formed a ‘Social Questions Committee’ in 1891, an assembly designed to draw attention to the needy and to report on trade unions. Unitarians were equally as fervent in social reform.⁶² As a significant Nonconformist religious group from the early eighteenth to the nineteenth century, they had an optimistic belief in the purity and capacity of humankind to improve itself. In rejecting the idea of a divine Christ and adopting a more rationalistic belief that God created humans to govern themselves using their better qualities (justly, and with empathy), it was imperative that they demonstrate and harvest these better qualities in social outreach.

The more complicated relationship between feminism and Protestant nonconformity, however, has only been studied in the last two decades. Sue Morgan was amongst the first to give more attention to this relationship, hitherto characterised as incompatible.⁶³ Despite their conservative views on the roles of men and women in families, they were often more egalitarian in their practice. Richard Greaves has pointed out that women were ‘often prominent numerically’ in the early English Nonconformist churches and ‘bore their share of suffering for their spiritual ideals.’⁶⁴ They were also

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² See K.S. Inglis, “English Nonconformity and Social Reform, 1880-1900” in *Past & Present* 13 (1958): 73-88.

⁶³ Sue Morgan, ed. *Women, Religion and Feminism in Britain, 1750-1900* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002). See also her more recent work, Sue Morgan and Jacqueline DeVries, eds. *Women, Gender and Religious Cultures in Britain, 1800-1940* (London: Routledge, 2010).

⁶⁴ Take, for instance, Sara Jones, imprisoned for her non-conformity in 1632, who also published several religious tracts that year. Greaves also believes her to have co-authored petitions for other imprisoned

instrumental in founding numerous churches and providing patronage thereafter.⁶⁵

Notably, Greaves argues that female printers of non-conformist tracts have not had the attention they deserve:

Of the approximately 383 publishers and patentees in Elizabethan England, 17 – all widows – were female. Of them, at least one, Mrs. Joan Aldee, was active in the nonconformist cause, for in 1632-1633 she was one of the printers of William Prynne's *Histriomastix*, the *Players Scourge*, a well-known Puritan attack on the theatre. Two of her apprentices...were cited before the High Commission in 1637 for attempting to publish Prynne's *Brief Instructions for Church Wardens*, and four years later...published John Milton's *Of Prelatical Episcopacy*, a castigation of the bishops.⁶⁶

This thesis follows Morgan in arguing that Protestant Dissenters, and particularly Evangelicals, have been largely overlooked in terms of their pivotal work in promoting women's intellectual powers.⁶⁷ Printing, writing, and translating religious works by early Dissenting women were 'manifestations' of their 'growing desire to participate more fully in the life and work of the church,' and equally participate in the reform of human society.⁶⁸

dissenters. Richard L. Greaves, "The Role of Women in Early English Nonconformity," *Church History* 52, No. 3 (1983), 301-6.

⁶⁵ Greaves, "The Role of Women," 302.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 306.

⁶⁷ The role of women in the English Reformation, on the other hand, has not been overlooked. Patrick Collinson, for instance, has emphasized the role of women in financing and supporting the church as patrons in the English Reformation. Patrick Collinson, "The Role of Women in the English Reformation illustrated by the Life and Friendships of Anne Locke," *Studies in Church History* 2 (1965): 258-272. See also, Patrick Collinson, *The Birthpangs of Protestant England: Religious and Cultural Change in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 1988).

⁶⁸ Greaves, "The Role of Women," 306.

The Dissenters strategically employed the burgeoning print culture of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries to disseminate their ideas. Allen Sell has established that lay philosopher theologians were heavily influenced by leading Dissenting philosophers such as David Hume, Ellis and John McTaggart, and John Stuart Mill, and that their ideas are traceable through the writings of these minor Dissenters.⁶⁹ More recently, Tessa Whitehouse has explored the textual culture of a circle of ministers and educators who were also Dissenting Protestants.⁷⁰ In her opinion, for prolific writers such as Isaac Watts, their focus on editing and publishing created ‘sites for social and cultural transmission, for inculcating traditions, and for promoting philosophies and pedagogies which, through print, reached audiences beyond the students for whom the texts were originally intended.’⁷¹ Whitehouse argues that they created an eighteenth-century English ‘tradition within dissent that was learned, sociable, moderate, and orthodox, which was self-sustaining but outward looking and which generously embraced diversity: a tradition which was influenced by and could participate in the polite world of letters.’⁷²

The desire to educate the public, and particularly children, was also born out of the desire to educate them in the Christian faith. Intellectual Dissenter sought social reform through literary means. Isabel Rivers argues that evangelicals in the eighteenth century were the predecessors of religious publishing operations for this reason. Religious tracts and other publications were distributed by groups such as the Society for Promoting Religious Knowledge among the Poor (founded by Dissenters in 1750) to engage in both social reform – teaching children to read while disseminating Christian

⁶⁹ Alan P. F. Sell, aims to recapture the nondenominational life of many academics of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries who were not in the vicinity of Oxford, Cambridge or theological colleges. Sell, *Philosophy, Dissent and Nonconformity: 1689-1920* (Cambridge: James Clarke, 2003).

⁷⁰ Tessa Whitehouse, *The Textual Culture of English Protestant Dissent, 1720-1800* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

⁷¹ Ibid., 2.

⁷² Ibid., 9.

edification.⁷³ A key example of the correlation between education, publishing and Protestant evangelicalism was the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (SPCK).⁷⁴ This Society was founded by Thomas Bray in 1689 and thrived in membership during the nineteenth century. In 1697 Bray's 'Constitution' for SPCK stipulated the one of the key purposes of the society was to provide schools:

for the Education of Poor Children in Reading, Writing, and more
especially in the Principles of the Christian Religion.⁷⁵

John Wesley was one of the first Dissenters to voice his Thoughts upon Slavery in a pamphlet published in 1774. Like the 'woman question', abolitionism was a cause based on the presupposition of absolute equality among human beings. Wesley was initially an ordained Anglican minister, and a leader of the Evangelical Revival of the 1730s and 1740s in Britain, and out of his teaching developed the Dissenting Wesleyan Church. For Wesley, evangelicalism 'denote[s] a form of Protestantism where strong emphasis is placed upon the need for conversion, which might be gradual, but was frequently instantaneous.'⁷⁶ However, it was not until 1787 that the Wesleyans officially joined the abolition movement through membership of the Society for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade. Amongst Wesley's converts was John Newton, a midshipman on a slave-trading ship. His renowned conversion saw him become a vehement anti-slavery activist

⁷³ Isabel Rivers, "The First Evangelical Tract Society," *Historical Journal* 50, No. 1 (2007): 1-22.

⁷⁴ Dorothea Beale, original Kensington Society member, was a supporter of the SPCK, as was the Tory evangelical, Lord Shaftsbury. In 1920, the Society published Elizabeth Helen Shilito's admiring memoir on Beale, *Dorothea Beale: Principal of the Cheltenham Ladies' College, 1858-1906* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1920).

⁷⁵ Sion College M.S.S., 342, as quoted in Samuel Clyde McCulloch, "The Foundation and Early Work of the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge," *Historical Magazine of the Protestant Episcopal Church* 18, No. 1 (1949), 5.

⁷⁶ John Wolffe, *God and Greater Britain: Religion and National Life in Britain and Ireland, 1843-1945* (London: Routledge, 1994), 21.

and a founder of the Clapham Sect in 1792.⁷⁷ Mostly, the Clapham Sect was made up of evangelical Anglicans, including John Thornton, MP, Hannah More, Granville Sharpe, Thomas Clarkson and its most prominent member, William Wilberforce. However, John Wolffe argues that the Clapham Sect also embraced like-minded Unitarians such as William Smith, Whig politician and dissenter, because ‘the group was defined and united above all by shared commitment to “practical Christianity” and by opposition to slavery.’⁷⁸ It was this reformist religious teaching and social activism that, despite theological incongruities, united the denominations. The Kensington Society is an example of close alignment between abolitionism, Dissent and Evangelicalism, and women’s rights activism. The correlation between abolitionism and early feminism has been well established, and has been emphasised by Clare Midgley, who argues that ‘female anti-slavery activism’ should be considered ‘as a form of feminism.’⁷⁹ Similarly, Julia Roy Jeffery has also traced the path of abolitionist women who became leading women’s rights activists, attributing it down to a general nonconformist predisposition: ‘to embrace abolitionism was to embrace radicalism.’⁸⁰ This was also the case for Kensington women and their supporters. The evangelical Quaker, Anna Richardson, for example, was a key member of the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society (BFASS), which began in 1838.⁸¹ Her family published their own abolitionist newspaper, *The Slave; His Wrongs and Their Remedy from 1851-1856*.⁸² Richardson was also a close friend, and

⁷⁷ He became a leading evangelical preacher and hymn writers, publishing the hymn, *Amazing Grace*, in 1779.

⁷⁸ John Wolffe, “Clapham Sect, (act. 1792-1815),” *ODNB* (2005).

⁷⁹ Clare Midgley, “British Abolition and Feminism in Transatlantic Perspective,” in *Women’s Rights and Transatlantic Antislavery in the Era of Emancipation*, ed. Kathryn Kish Skylar and James Brewer Stewart (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007): 121-139.

⁸⁰ Julia Roy Jeffery, *The Great Silent Army of Abolitionism: Ordinary Women in the Antislavery Movement* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 6.

⁸¹ See James Heartfield, *The British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society, 1838-1955: A History* (New York: Oxford University Press 2017).

⁸² Anna Vaughan Kett, “Quaker Women and Anti-Slavery Activism: Eleanor Clark and Free Labour Cotton Depot in Street,” *Quaker Studies* 19, Iss. 1 (2014), 8.

regular correspondent of Emily Davies, supporting her work in reforming women's education and eventually establishing Girton College. In 1868, Richardson wrote to Davies, encouraging her:

Dear Emily,

I am sure we, maligned Quakers, ought to try to do something for this College, if it were only by way of obeying George Fox's mandate, when he ordered girl's school to be set up. 'It is fit that women should be taught all kinds of civil and useful knowledge' – so he was well enlightened on that point.⁸³

Anglican Evangelical women also established a significant intellectual heritage of socially engaged progressive movements. Hannah More, like Barbauld, entered the public sphere of social reform through her literary work. Using their pens, these two women were perhaps two of the most revered women from 1770-1800. Predominantly, it was More's educated upbringing that gave her an entry to intellectual debate of the late-eighteenth century. Her father, Jacob More, became an Anglican clergyman with High-Church inclinations, despite his own mother's strong Presbyterianism. He was master of a 'free school' in Fishponds.⁸⁴ Along with her four sisters, More received a thorough education in Latin and mathematics at home, until her father set up a boarding school for girls in Bristol.⁸⁵ In 1799, More published *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education*.

⁸³ Richardson's letter continued, highlighting how Quaker theology, which allowed women to preach, required them to be educated: 'A Friend was remarking the other day on the wisdom of *making provision* for any function you want to see working, and instanced woman's preaching. He said, if it had not been provided for, a woman here and there might have preached, but there would not have been the large and most useful exercise of their gifts in that line which we have been blessed with.' Her use of italics. Anna Deborah Richardson to Emily Davies, *Memoir of Anna Deborah Richardson, with Extracts from Her Letters* (Newcastle-on-Tyne: J.M. Carr, 1877), 213-214; George Fox was the founder of the Religious Society of Friends, and thereby, Quakerism. See H. Larry Ingle, "Fox, George (1624-1691)," *ODNB* (2004).

⁸⁴ 'Free School's' were state-funded and non-fee paying.

⁸⁵ The school was based at 6 Trinity Street, Bristol. Eventually Jacob More also established a boy's school nearby, at Stony Hill. S. J. Skedd, "Hannah More (1745-1833)," *ODNB* (2014).

In the first chapter, entitled ‘Address to women of rank and fortune, on the effects of their influence on society,’ she asserted that ‘The general state of civilised society depends... on the prevailing sentiments and habits of women, and on the nature and degree of the estimation in which they were held.’⁸⁶

Reformers such as More were instrumental in the abolitionist and later women’s rights causes.⁸⁷ More was one of only two female members of the Clapham Sect, a collection of predominantly Evangelical Anglicans who met at the homes of William Wilberforce and Henry Thornton to orchestrate the campaign to end the slave trade. During the early-nineteenth century More was better known than Mary Wollstonecraft, but she has since been largely overlooked, despite also being a keen advocate for improving girls’ educational standards.⁸⁸ However, she was not alone in her commitment to the anti-slavery movement as an Evangelical woman. Martha Gurney (not related to the Quaker Gurneys), a Baptist printer, was ‘the only woman’ of ‘approximately sixty-five printers and booksellers in London who printed or sold at least one work related to the slave-trade controversy in the 1780s and ‘90s.’⁸⁹ Claire Midgley has also highlighted the role that Elizabeth Heyrick played by publishing her pamphlet, *Immediate, Not Gradual Abolition* in 1824.⁹⁰ Midgley argues that Heyrick’s tract was an example of a larger assortment of Dissenting British women who, ‘less willing to conform to restrictive

⁸⁶ Hannah More, *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education*, 3rd Ed. (1799: Oxford, 1995) 2, as quoted in Simon Morgan, *A Victorian Woman’s Place: Public Culture in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Tauris Academic Studies, 2007), 37.

⁸⁷ For more on women in the anti-slavery cause, see how Elizabeth Clapp and Julie Roy Jeffrey have made it their purpose to illustrate ‘how religious ideas, values, and practices [of dissenters] contributed to female anti-slavery campaigns’ in Elizabeth J. Clapp, Julie Roy Jeffrey, eds. *Women, Dissent, and Anti-slavery in Britain and America 1790-1865* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

⁸⁸ For more on More, see Anne Stott, *Hannah More: The First Victorian* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

⁸⁹ Timothy Whelen, “Martha Gurney and the Anti-Slave Trade Movement, 1788-94,” in *Women, Dissent, and Anti-Slavery*, ed. Clapp, Jeffrey, 45.

⁹⁰ Claire Midgley, “British Abolitionism,” in *Women, Dissent, and Anti-Slavery*, 89.

notions of female roles', were prepared to engage in the public sphere through their writings.⁹¹

In the late eighteenth century, the Anglican Church of England underwent an Evangelical shift, partly in response to the challenge posted by the birth of the Wesleyan renewal movement. This shift entailed a rediscovery of the fundamentals of their faith, placing renewed emphasis on the teachings of the Bible, above all else. Since this development, Evangelicalism has been considered the 'most dynamic religious force in the English-speaking world' during the nineteenth century.⁹² It also entailed an awakening to a sense of the church's responsibility to society. In 1846 the Evangelical Alliance was formed. Its purpose was to bring together all Protestants in order to recover their shared heritage in past evangelicalism. David W. Bebbington has pointed out that for these Evangelicals, the guidance of the Bible was their imperative. Thus, 'the distribution of the Bible was one of the chief evangelical enterprises of the period. During the fifteen years from 1854 onwards, the British and Foreign Bible Society, which had been founded in 1804 to print and disseminate the Scriptures, issued an average of nearly two million copies annually of Bibles...' ⁹³ Evangelical reformers were committed in their resolve to create a 'holiness revival' in British society, which would then engender a social conscience.⁹⁴ According to Bebbington, the holiness movement shifted 'the

⁹¹ Ibid., 93.

⁹² John Wolffe, *The Expansion of Evangelicalism: The Age of Wilberforce, More, Chalmers and Finney* (Nottingham: Intervarsity Press, 2006), 33.

⁹³ David W. Bebbington references William Canton, *The Story of the Bible Society* (London: John Murray, 1904), 354-355, in David W. Bebbington, *The Dominance of Evangelicalism: The Age of Spurgeon and Moody* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 2005), 23.

⁹⁴ Pink Dandelion argues that the 'holiness revival' in Quakerism caught by just a few Quakers who read evangelical journals, and then became part of an interdenominational social reform movement. In fact, Joseph John Gurney is often cited as a leader of 'Gurneyite Quakerism and Holiness Revival.' Pink Dandelion, *An Introduction to Quakerism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 102. See also Spencer, "Evangelicalism, Feminism and Social Reform," 24-48.

fulcrum of Christianity from the head to the heart,' focusing on personal perfection and the outward embodiment of this aim in society.⁹⁵

We have only to look at the reformers involved in the abolition of the slave trade to recognise the strategic collaboration of Nonconformists and Anglican Evangelicals in philanthropic efforts. After all, many Dissenters were also 'Evangelical.' Emelia Gurney, one of the earliest members of the Kensington Society, came from an Evangelical Protestant background. She was married to Russell Gurney, MP, a Queen's Counsel and the Recorder of London.⁹⁶ It was Gurney who presented the Married Women's Property Bill to Parliament in 1869, a Bill that was largely inspired by Barbara Leigh Smith's published pamphlet, *A Brief Summary of the Laws in England Concerning Women: together with a few observations thereon* (1854).⁹⁷ Emelia Gurney's father was Reverend Samuel Ellis Battan, assistant master at Harrow. She was also the great-granddaughter, on her mother's side, of Reverend Henry Venn, a prominent Evangelical Anglican theologian and preacher. He was Rector of Clapham from 1792, and during this residency became an influential leader of the Clapham Sect, as they lobbied parliament on issues such as the abolition of the slave trade.

In past scholarship, the social conservatism of Evangelical Protestants has been overemphasised. Many early historians of Victorian feminism were convinced that Unitarian and 'rational dissent' circles were alone in advocating women's intellectual

⁹⁵ David Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 179.

⁹⁶ See M.C. Curthoys, "Gurney, Russell (1804-1878)," *ODNB* (2004).

⁹⁷ His obituary in *The English Woman's Review*, June 15, 1878, proclaimed his 'unflagging interest...in any scheme having the welfare of women for its object.' Frances Power Cobbe's article in *Daily News* on June 7, 1878, is quoted in the obituary: "Among all our generous friends and advocates, none have been more warm, more consistent than he, and his memory must ever be cherished." Frances Power Cobbe, "Daily News," (July 7, 1878) *Englishwoman's Review*, as quoted in "Becoming Part of History: Retrieving the Lives of Emily Davies and Victorian Feminists," Ann B. Murphy, *Victorian Review* 27, No. 1 (2001), 45; See Lee Holcombe, *Wives and Property: Reform of the Married Women's Property Acts in Nineteenth-Century England* (Oxford: Martin Robertson, 1983).

ability, and that Evangelicals stressed ‘abnegation of the self as the ultimate aim of female education.’⁹⁸ Yet a succession of women who demonstrated the power of individual female initiative to forge Victorian social improvements were all Evangelical Protestants, such as Josephine Butler, Elizabeth Fry and Florence Nightingale.⁹⁹ Butler was married to an Anglican clergyman, Rev. George Butler, who joined her in fighting the injustices of society. In her biography of her husband, she recalled that they often ‘prayed together that a holy revolution might come about and that the Kingdom of God might be established on the earth.’¹⁰⁰

The Davies family is also a case in point. Emily Davies, founder of the Kensington Society and later, Girton College, was the daughter of an Evangelical Anglican minister who was well respected amongst both Anglican and Nonconformist congregations. The Rev. John Davies went to Queens College, Cambridge – an evangelically influenced college, at the age of twenty. In 1832 he married Mary Hopkinson, the daughter of a businessman. Together they set up a boarding school for boys in Chichester, and in 1827 moved the establishment to Southampton.¹⁰¹ Approached to become Professor of Moral and Political Philosophy at the University of London, a newly established university, he withdrew his candidature when he could not be assured of a stipend of £300 a year. Nonetheless, the calibre of the men who promoted his application demonstrates his esteem in Evangelical circles. He was supported by

⁹⁸ Simon Morgan, *A Victorian Woman's Place: Public Culture in the Nineteenth Century* (London; Tauris Academic Studies, 2007), 35.

⁹⁹ Anne Summers, *Female Lives, Moral States: Women, Religion and Public Life in Britain, 1800-1930* (Newbury: Threshold Press Ltd., 2000): 119-129.

¹⁰⁰ Josephine Butler, *Recollections of George Butler* (Bristol: J.W. Arrowsmith, 1892), 102.

¹⁰¹ During this time, he published two philosophical tracts – *An Estimate of the Human Mind* and *Splendid Sins*. The later was a pamphlet about the Sabbath that admonished the breaking of it. When his fourth child, Sarah Emily was born, in 1830, the Davies moved back to Chichester, and Rev. Davies published, *The Ordinances of Religion Practically Illustrated and Applied*.

Zachary Macaulay, a leader of abolitionism, member of the Clapham Sect, and editor of the *Christian Observer*, the organ of London Evangelical circles from 1802 to 1816.

The Davies parents were also radical in their approach to their daughter's education. John Davies's high standards of intellectual rigour were expected from all his children. In 1837 they moved to Gateshead Rectory. The Davies children would play at holding missionary meetings, signifying the impact of their cultural heritage and appreciation for religious calling. At nine, Emily Davies briefly attended a small day school for girls before her parents arranged for a French master for language and music. But mainly, her education came from her mother and elder sister, Jane. When she was younger, she and her brother wrote 'Themes, i.e. bits of English composition, once a week, looked over by my father.'¹⁰²

The associations of the Kensington women were often dictated by the physical geography of their homes: at Gateshead, Davies became closely acquainted with Jane Crow, who became a Kensington member.¹⁰³ It was through Crow that Davies met her schoolfellow, Elisabeth Garrett, who visited Gateshead with her sister, Millicent Garrett Fawcett in 1854. Over the years before the establishment of Kensington Society, the relationship between the Davies and Elizabeth Garrett became close as they both sought entry for women into medicine. Because of this closeness they were inclined to openly discuss their qualms with the clerical establishment, and the opinions of her mentors bore significant weight for Davies. In 1861, she wrote to her friend Anna Richardson, seeking her opinion on the Garretts' criticisms of the clerical order:¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² Emily Davies, *Family Chronicle*, as quoted in Barbara Stephen, *Emily Davies and Girton College*, (London: Constable & Co., 1927), 25.

¹⁰³ Jane Crow is occasionally spelt 'Jane Crowe', however, in this thesis she is referred to as 'Jane Crow' as she was on the Kensington member list. See "List of Members," Appendix II.

¹⁰⁴ Anna Richardson was a Quaker until 1866 when she was baptised into the Church of England. She had been active in the abolitionist campaign. For more see J.W. Richardson, *Memoir of Anna Deborah Richardson, with extracts from her letters* (Newcastle-on-Tyne, 1877).

There are a good many things that I should like to consult you about, if you would leave conscience out of the question for a little while. I fancy lay people see things from a point of view other than the clerical, and might give good advice if they would. The Garretts have bestowed a great deal of admonition upon me, mingled with wholesale abuse of the clerical order, which does not hurt my feelings at all, but when it comes to a definite question of what ought to be done, they pull up.¹⁰⁵

As Davies grew older, she often wrote that her faith was the source of her drive to see women's rights improved, employing Anglican liturgy to evidence the fact that women were equal in the eyes of the Anglican catechism.¹⁰⁶ In her 1866 treatise, *The Higher Education of Women*, Davies intriguingly applauded John Milton's radical 1646 treatise *On Education*, but criticized how skewed his theory on education was towards males, despite his express belief that 'the end of learning is to repair the ruin of our first parents by regaining to know God aright, and out of that knowledge to love Him, to imitate Him, to be like Him.'¹⁰⁷ Through her private education, Davies became a vocal and knowledgeable opponent of an educational system that privileged boys. Furthermore, in 1841, Emily and her brother William established their own amateur newspaper for family circulation: their paper, the *Herald*, featured advertisements, current affairs – political, domestic, and foreign issues – and reviews of books and letters. In likely imitation of her father, she espoused conservative political opinions, and not a few criticisms against Popery. A few years later, she began her own paper, the *North of England Record*, in

¹⁰⁵ Emily Davies to Anna Richardson, April 1861, as seen in Ann B. Murphy, Deirdre Raftery, eds. *Emily Davies: Collected Letters, 1861-1875* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2004) 1.

¹⁰⁶ Ben Griffin, *The Politics of Gender in Victorian Britain: Masculinity, Political Culture, and the struggle for Women's Rights*, (Cambridge: University of Cambridge, 2014) 124.

¹⁰⁷ Davies quotes John Milton, *On Education*, in Emily Davies *The Higher Education of Women* (London: Hambledon Press, 1988), 3.

which she wrote in English, French, Italian, German and Latin, alluding to the *Record*, a notable evangelical paper.

UNITARIANISM AND DISSENT

Literary scholarship has long been fascinated with the connection between Dissenting culture and the revolutionary writing of movements such as Romanticism. After all, Dissent was also prominent in the doctrine of Romanticism and its pioneers, including William Godwin, Mary Wollstonecraft and Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Literary studies scholars such as Daniel E. White have explored the dissenting literary expression of ‘authors who were viewed by others, and who are viewed themselves, as representing religious beliefs, practices, values, and tastes from within Dissenting communities to various reading publics.’¹⁰⁸ White draws a fascinating link between the Dissenting practice of ‘extempore’ preaching and ‘the early Romantic engagement with the minute particulars of both the internal and external worlds, the spontaneous feeling of the individual heart as well as the fine distinctions of specific and local nature.’¹⁰⁹ Thus he argues that Romanticism was perhaps not so much a product of progressive secularism, but of Dissenting culture. Drawing a comparison between the literary style of the essayist, poet and author, Anna Letitia Barbauld (née Aikin), and the ‘extempore’

¹⁰⁸ Daniel E. White, *Early Romanticism and Religious Dissent* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 2.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 51.

preaching format that was often practised in dissenting church services, White illustrates the impact of her Dissenting background on her writing.¹¹⁰ Her literary career propelled her to become one of the most notable polemical writers of the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries. Barbauld came from a prominent Dissenting family, the Aikins, and was therefore well known in the Dissenting circles of Victorian Britain.¹¹¹ Her father was superintendent of the Dissenting school, Warrington Academy, and Barbauld inherited his interest in education, tutoring several girls throughout her career, including Louisa Gurney.¹¹² She was also strongly influenced by William Godwin in her faith.¹¹³ In 1790, after Charles James Fox failed for the third time to pass a bill through the House of Commons that would give Dissenters full citizenship, Barbauld wrote a powerful pamphlet, *An Address to the Opposers of the Repeal of the Corporation and Test Acts*.¹¹⁴ Barbauld was also a spokeswoman for the abolitionist cause, publishing a poem, *Epistle to William Wilberforce, Esq. on the Rejection of the Bill for Abolishing the Slave Trade* in 1791.¹¹⁵

Coral Lansbury argues that to ‘be born a woman in the Victorian era was to enter a world of social and cultural deprivation unknown to a man. But to be born a woman and a Unitarian was to be released from much of the prejudice and oppression enjoined upon

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 43.

¹¹¹ See Felicity James, Ian Inkster, eds. *Religious Dissent and the Aikin-Barbauld Circle, 1740-1860* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

¹¹² Through the Warrington Academy she met and married her husband, the Rev. Rochemont Barbauld in 1774, a graduate of the college who had converted to Unitarianism from the Church of England. See James, Inkster, eds. *Religious Dissent and the Aikin-Barbauld Circle, 1740-1860* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

¹¹³ For more on Godwin, see Peter Marshall, *William Godwin: Philosopher, Novelist, Revolutionary* (Oakland: PM Press, 2017) and Peter Marshall, *Romantic Rationalist: A William Godwin Reader* (London: Freedom Press, 1986).

¹¹⁴ Anna Letitia Barbauld, *An Address to the Opposers of the Repeal of the Corporation and Test Acts* (London: J. Johnson, 1789).

¹¹⁵ Anna Letitia Barbauld, *Epistle to William Wilberforce, Esq. on the Rejection of the Bill for Abolishing the Slave Trade* (London: J. Johnson, 1791).

other women.’¹¹⁶ Ruth Watts has recently supported this statement, but noted that ‘On the surface at least, evidence would seem to show clearly that Unitarians played a prime role in the emancipation of women from the late eighteenth century onwards.’¹¹⁷ The large number of revered women in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Unitarian circles would support this view. Harriet Martineau, although a Unitarian for a time, was raised in a home with both Calvinist and Methodist convictions.¹¹⁸ Like Barbauld, Martineau supported herself by her writing. Her work encompassed radical views on education, slavery, and more directly on women’s rights. She wrote frequently for the Unitarian periodical, *Monthly Repository*, and published her first book, *Illustrations of Political Economy* in 1832.¹¹⁹ She later sparked controversy with her *Society in America* (1837) which critiqued the institution of slavery and the poor state of women’s education in America.¹²⁰ Martineau was a committed Unitarian, along with her brother, James Martineau, who was an influential Unitarianism minister who held educational classes for girls in theology while he was minister of Paradise Street Chapel in Liverpool from 1832 onwards. Anna Swanwick, who joined the Kensington Society on March 30, 1866, was one of his pupils. Swanwick was a direct descendent of Philip Henry, the famous Puritan Nonconformist who was evicted from his church and home in North Wales for refusing to sign the Act of Uniformity in 1662.¹²¹ She was acutely influenced by the philosophy of her tutor in mathematics, James Martineau, from the age of eighteen.¹²² His teaching

¹¹⁶ Coral Lansbury, *Elizabeth Gaskell: The Novel of Social Crisis* (London: Paul Elek, 1975), 13.

¹¹⁷ Ruth Watts, *Gender, Power and the Unitarians in England, 1700-1860* (Longman: London, 1998), 2.

¹¹⁸ Ralph Waller, “Martineau, James (1805-1900),” *ODNB* (2006); Harriet Martineau and her sister, Rachel Martineau, established and ran a highly respected school for girls in Leeds, endeavouring to improve the education of young girls. It was a Unitarian school that taught the subjects such as Latin and mathematics, usually reserved for boys. Watts, *Gender, Power and the Unitarians*, 129.

¹¹⁹ Harriet Martineau, “Life in the Wild: A Tale,” *Illustrations of Political Economy* 1 (Philadelphia: E. Littell, 1832).

¹²⁰ Harriet Martineau, *Society in America*, 2 Vols. (New York: Unders and Otley, 1837).

¹²¹ Barbara Dennis, “Swanwick, Anna, (1813-1899),” *ODNB* (2004).

¹²² *Ibid.*

had opened a door to her that she had hitherto thought impossible: 'I often longed to assume the costume of a boy in order to learn Latin, Greek and mathematics.'¹²³ By 1840, Swanwick had established her own school for working-class girls in London, and was instrumental in the creation of Bedford College, also enrolling as one of the first students.¹²⁴ Charlotte Manning, née Sully, the President of the Kensington Society, and her sister, Elizabeth Adelaide Manning, were also the daughters of a Unitarian minister in Exeter. Elizabeth's husband was also from a prominent Unitarian family.

Kathryn Gleadle argues that radical Unitarians began the feminist movement of the 1830s and 1840s.¹²⁵ During the 1830s, in London's South Place, congregations of 'radical Unitarians' were gathering under the leadership of William Johnson Fox, whose daughter, Eliza Bridell-Fox, became a close friend of Bessie Rayner Parkes and Barbara Leigh Smith.¹²⁶ William Fox was brought up as a strict Calvinist, and whilst he was young published poetry in *The Iris*, a radical Norwich newspaper.¹²⁷ However, during 1812 he converted to Unitarianism, with radical leanings.¹²⁸ 'Radical Unitarians' were a reaction against the limitations of religious beliefs in Unitarianism, and a turning towards more humanistic teachings.¹²⁹ Gleadle suggests that William Fox took 'the Unitarian propensity for freedom of thought to new extremes...'. Under his leadership, his published journal, the *Monthly Repository* 'revealed what was to most distinguish the radical Unitarians from their mainstream Unitarian counterparts: their feminism.'¹³⁰ John

¹²³ M.L. Bruce, ed. *Anna Swanwick: A Memoir and Recollections* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1903), 19-20, as quoted in Dennis, "Swanwick, Anna," *ODNB*.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

¹²⁵ Kathryn Gleadle, *The Early Feminists: Radical Unitarians and the Emergence of the Women's Rights Movement, 1831-1851* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994).

¹²⁶ Eliza Bridell-Fox was also an artist and friend of Harriet Martineau and Harriet Taylor-Mill. See Brenda Colloms, "Fox, Eliza Florence Bridell (1823/4-1903)," *ODNB* (2009).

¹²⁷ R.K. Webb, "Fox, William Johnson (1786-1864)," *ODNB* (2009).

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*

¹²⁹ As a result of this teaching the 'ragged school' tradition for extremely poor or vagrant children, was born.

¹³⁰ Gleadle, *The Early Feminists*, 33-34.

Stuart Mill, the MP liberal philosopher and the author of *The Subjection of Women* (published 1869) was one of Fox's closest lay parishioners, as well as an eager supporter of the Kensington Society's reform campaign for women's rights. His wife Harriet Taylor Mill was herself a radical Unitarian and close friend of Fox; their daughter, whose full name was Helen Taylor, was one of the youngest members of the Kensington Society.¹³¹

Elizabeth Bostock's commitment to education was instilled in her by her father, John Bostock, a Unitarian doctor who frequently accompanied his young daughter (and only child) to lectures and encouraged her in her reading and languages.¹³² She was also sent to a day school in Upper Bedford Place in London from the age of six, before the family moved to Paris in 1829.¹³³ Through her friendship with Elizabeth Jesser Reid (nee Sturch), who was also Unitarian, Bostock established Bedford College as well as a new *Bedford College Magazine* in 1849, in which Elizabeth often published essays.

The Unitarian radical tradition also produced a foundation member of the Kensington Society, Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon. It was the connection between two progressive Unitarian families, the Smiths and the Parkes, that brought Bodichon and Parkes together, and arguably, instigated the Kensington Society. The uniqueness of Bodichon's family, the Smiths, can be traced back many centuries, but it was most probably the philosophical interests of her father and grandfather that had the greatest impact on her life. Her paternal grandfather, William Smith, was born in 1759 on the Isle of Wight, to Samuel Smith, founder of a large London tea shop, and Martha Adams, a

¹³¹ In letters to her daughter, whom she affectionately called Lily, she often wrote of him: 'I went out yesterday and called on Mr. Fox' and the next day announced that he was coming to stay for two days.' Harriet Taylor Mill to Helen Taylor, December 1856, as quoted in *The Complete Works of Harriet Taylor Mill*, eds. Jo Ellen Jacobs, Paula Harms Payne (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), 529-30.

¹³² Sophie Badham has noted that Bostock took Elizabeth to lectures by Michael Faraday, the English scientist. Sophie Badham, "Bostock, Elizabeth Anne [Eliza] (1817-1898)," *ODNB* (2004).

¹³³ *Ibid.*

wealthy Dissenting heiress. William Smith was educated at the Daventry Dissenting academy, a college which produced several notable Unitarian ministers.¹³⁴ He married Frances Coape, who was also part of a well-known Dissenting family. As Pam Hirsh has noted, ‘The important Dissenting families – Smiths, Coapes, Carters and Shores – formed a significant part of the liberal intelligentsia. The Smiths, in particular, were a ‘Liberal reforming dynasty.’¹³⁵ ‘The men were well educated and capable but, as Dissenters, were denied Oxbridge degrees, and therefore access to the professions.’¹³⁶ William Smith, unusually, was a member of Parliament from 1784 to 1830, championing several reform causes.¹³⁷ There were two causes which were supremely important to him: firstly, the demand for the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts (which essentially barred Protestant Nonconformists and Catholics from municipal offices) and secondly, the abolition of the slave trade.¹³⁸ Although he is often misrepresented as a member of the Clapham Sect, he was never officially part of them but was instead a close associate of the Evangelical Anglican William Wilberforce, and the first MP outside of the Clapham Sect to denounce the slave trade in 1787. In 1807, he published a pamphlet entitled *A Letter to William Wilberforce*, the Evangelical Anglican MP who promoted the end of slavery in the British parliament.¹³⁹ In this open letter, Smith wrote of his frustration he had felt at how long this issue had been toiled over in parliament:

¹³⁴ The most famous being Joseph Priestley (1733-1804), the theologian who was also keenly interested in natural philosophy, science, education and politics, and published over 150 works on these subjects.

¹³⁵ Pam Hirsh, “Bodichon, Barbara Leigh Smith (1827-1891),” *ODNB* (2004).

¹³⁶ Hirsh, *Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon*, 2.

¹³⁷ For more on Smith’s politics, see Richard W. Davis, *Dissent in Politics, 1780-1830: The Political Life of William Smith, MP* (London: Epworth Press, 1971).

¹³⁸ One of the final triumphs of Smith’s political career was when he presided over the successful 1828 repeal of the Test Acts - the Sacramental Test Act 1828. It was a bill introduced by Lord John Russell, against the requirement that all government officials take communion in the Church of England. Russell’s bill argued that the Church of England would be better protected by upholding of religious liberty and preserving the sanctity of communion as a religious practice, not a secular requirement.

¹³⁹ William Smith, *A Letter to William Wilberforce on the Proposed Abolition of the Slave Trade, at Present under the Consideration of Parliament* (London: Printed by Richard Taylor and sold by Longman, Hurst, Rees and Orme, 1807).

the question took somewhat of a different turn; and instead of taking our stand in the impregnable position of the radical taint, the primary injustice of the African part, - the making man, bought or stolen, into a merchantable commodity; we got entangled in the lower questions of degrees of treatment in the conveyance and working, of those, whom it was manifestly immoral to convey at all.¹⁴⁰

Evidently, Smith was not shy of being labelled as a political radical. In 1823 he took the abolition cause further, founding the London Society for the Abolition of Slavery in our Colonies with Zachary Macaulay, much like Granville Sharp's first abolitionist group in 1787, the Society for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade.¹⁴¹

William Smith's son, Benjamin, and Bodichon's father, followed his father into parliament, and also had radical inclinations. Averse to marriage, he lived with Anne Longden, an apprentice milliner who was also the mother of his five children. In living out of wedlock with a working-class woman, Smith was shunned by some circles. Although they were not received in the most upper-class circles, they were financially very well off. His family shuttled between their London home at 5 Blandford Square, Marylebone and Hastings. Similarly, rather than sending his children off to a Dissenter's school, he began his own Owenite school for impoverished children in Vincent

¹⁴⁰ His use of italics. William Smith, *A Letter to William Wilberforce on the Proposed Abolition of the Slave Trade, at Present under the Consideration of Parliament* (London: Printed by Richard Taylor and sold by Longman, Hurst, Rees and Orme, 1807), 20.

¹⁴¹ Sharp published the very first tract to condemn slavery in Britain in 1769, titled *A Representation of the Injustice and Dangerous Tendency of Tolerating Slavery*. Significantly, nine out of the twelve first members of the *Society for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade* were Quakers, including John Barton, William Dillwyn, Joseph Woods, James Phillips, John Lloyd, Joseph Hooper, Richard Phillips and George Harrison. See Leo D'Anjou, *Social Movements and Cultural Change: The First Abolition Campaign* (New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 1996), 198.

Square.¹⁴² Bodichon's father privately educated his children, partly on account of their Nonconformist status, which excluded them from Anglican establishments. When they reached twenty-one, he made the unique decision to give his daughters the same inheritance as his sons, namely an annual income of £300. This alone placed Barbara Leigh Smith in an atypically independent position for a mid-Victorian woman.¹⁴³

In Hastings and Norwich, Bodichon was entrenched in the radical Unitarian circles of the early nineteenth-century. Octavia Hill, who became a social reformer in housing, was also part of a family who were at the centre of nineteenth-century radical Unitarianism, and frequently hosted the Leigh Smiths, the Howitts, the Foxes, Hans Christian Anderson and Charles Dickens.¹⁴⁴ In 1845, Anna Howitt introduced Bodichon to Bessie Rayner Parkes, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Anna Jameson and William Johnson Fox, the Unitarian minister.¹⁴⁵ The Howitts frequently hosted notable nineteenth-century literary figures including Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Anna Jameson and Elizabeth Gaskell. It was through her friendship with Anne Howitt that Bodichon met Anna Jameson, the author of two powerful essays on the social position of women in early

¹⁴² In a decision that furthered Barbara's connections in Europe, in her late twenties Barbara Bodichon father moved their family to France for the health of her sister, Isabella. They settled in Algiers, where Barbara met and married Eugene Bodichon (1810-1885), a French physician and scholar, in 1857. Bodichon spent the first six months of each year in France, and devoted herself to her art, and the remainder of the year in her father's London home. During this half of the year she concentrated on her vigorous social reform schedule, including the running of the Kensington Society.

¹⁴³ From 1850s, this allowed Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon to live between Hastings and London. In London, she met Elizabeth Stanton and Lucretia Mott, out from America, Harriet Martineau, Mary Somerville, and frequently associated with Eliza Fox Bridell, Gertrude Jekyll, Marianne North, Miss Bayley and Ann Samworth.

¹⁴⁴ Gillian Darley, "Hill, Octavia (1838-1912)," *ODNB* (2012).

¹⁴⁵ The Howitt family denounced their Quakerism in 1847 and became Unitarians (although the heritage was not entirely abandoned). See also Margaret Howitt, ed. *Mary Howitt: An Autobiography*, 2 Vols. (London: W. Isbister, 1889) II, 34-5; Hirsch, *Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon*, 22. The Howitts published their own periodical, *Howitt's Journal of Literature and Popular Progress* from December 1846 onwards, which championed countless social causes which they could not financially sustain themselves. Anna followed in her parents' footsteps as a writer and painter and eventually published her own book, *An Art-Student in Munich* (1853), which described her professional art studies in Munich under Wilhelm Kaulbach. Anna Mary Howitt, *An Art-Student in Munich* (Boston: Ticknor, Reed and Fields, 1854).

nineteenth century Europe: *Characteristics of Women* (1832) and *The Relative Social Position of Mothers and Governesses* (1844).¹⁴⁶ Correspondence reveals how she supported them in their artistic ambitions.¹⁴⁷ It was in Hastings that a lifelong friendship between Bodichon and Bessie Rayner Parkes, the feminist activist, was begun. Parkes was the daughter of Joseph Parkes, lawyer and politician and Elizabeth Rayner Priestley. Her grandfather was Joseph Priestley, a Unitarian minister, natural philosopher, and prominent figure of the English Enlightenment.¹⁴⁸ He was also one of the first students at the Dissenting Academy, Daventry, and eventually, a prolific writer, publishing over 150 works (including books and journal articles).¹⁴⁹ Bessie Rayner Parkes recounted in *In a Walled Garden* (1895) that the Howitts, Smiths and Parkes ‘were almost as one family’ in Hastings, presumably because of their shared heritage in Unitarianism and radical politics.¹⁵⁰ Thus from a young age, Barbara Bodichon was introduced to the rich intellectual and radical heritage of Victorian Britain. It was in these early interactions that she inherited a passion for political, social activism and faith. In 1856 she published *Women and Work*, arguing that women were obligated to seek public life not only by the needs of society, but by God also:

Our duty in this world is to try and make it what God intends it shall become: we are his tools... To do God’s work in the world is a duty of all, rich and poor, of all nations, of both sexes... Women must, as children of God, be trained to do some work in

¹⁴⁶ Jameson’s publications included: *Characteristics of Women, Moral, Political and Historical* (London: Saunders and Otley, 1832), *A Commonplace Book of Thoughts and Memories* (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1855), *The Communion of Labour* (London: Longman, 1856), *Legends of the Madonna* (London: Longmans, 1885), *Memoirs and Essays* (London: R. Bentley, 1846) and *Memoirs of the Loves of the Poets* (London: Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Co., 1900), first published in 1833.

¹⁴⁷ See Judith Johnston, *Anna Jameson: Victorian, Feminist, Woman of Letters* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1997).

¹⁴⁸ Robert E. Schofield, “Priestley, Joseph (1733-1804),” *ODNB* (2013).

¹⁴⁹ Priestley also tutored at the Dissenting academy, Warrington, between 1761-1767, in languages and ‘belles-lettres.’ Robert E. Schofield, “Priestley, Joseph (1733-1804),” *ODNB* (2013).

¹⁵⁰ Bessie Rayner Parkes, *In A Walled Garden* (London: Ward and Downey Ltd., 1895), 83.

the world. Women may not take a man as a God: they must not hold their first duty to be towards any human being...¹⁵¹

In 1850, when they were 21 and 23, Bessie Rayner Parkes and Barbara Bodichon travelled unchaperoned around Europe, with a walking tour of Belgium, Germany, Switzerland and Austria. They also visited Anna Mary Howitt in Munich. In *An Art Student in Munich* (1858), Howitt claimed that this visit, plus the friends they made on their journey, inspired Barbara to create an unofficial group of women who were writers and artists. Bodichon was especially passionate about the professionalization of female artists, as she was one herself. Through her friendship with Howitt, Bodichon was exposed to the contemporary art of the Pre-Raphaelite artists and became a close confidante of Christina Rossetti and Elizabeth Siddal and became part of an elite art club. The Portfolio Club, as it was known, included Christina Rossetti and Elizabeth Siddal, as well as Ellen Heaton, a patron of Rossetti and a future member of the Kensington Society.¹⁵² Their stated purpose was to create a monthly, thematic collection of artworks contributed from each member, to distribute amongst themselves and discuss. Later on, she established the Society of Female Artists, and campaigned for the Royal Academy schools to open their doors to women.

It was through her brother, John Llewelyn Davies, that Emily Davies learnt to admire Christian Socialism, a movement from the 1840s initially espoused by Frederick Denison Maurice.¹⁵³ In 1854, Llewelyn was instrumental in establishing the Working Men's College, an employment focused college, along with Frederick Denison Maurice,

¹⁵¹ Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon, *Women and Work* (New York: C.S. Frances & Co. 1859).

¹⁵² Dianne Sacho Macleod, "Heaton, Ellen, (1816-1894)," *ODNB* (2007).

¹⁵³ Llewelyn attended Trinity College, University of Cambridge in 1844, and eventually entered ministry himself before becoming a prominent Christian Socialist. A.F. Hort, revised by H.C.G. Matthew, "Davies, (John) Llewelyn, (1826-1916)," *ODNB*, (2006).

John Westlake (husband of Kensington member, Alice Westlake), John Stuart Mill and Dante Gabriel Rossetti, amongst other contemporary notables.¹⁵⁴ Llewelyn's wife, and subsequently Emily Davies' sister-in-law, Mary Llewelyn Davies (née Hopkinson) attended the first Kensington Society meeting.¹⁵⁵ Christian Socialism believed it was the essence of Christianity to prioritise social justice in the name of the Church. They aimed to create a society that was based upon equality, condemning capitalistic society.¹⁵⁶ Barbara Stephen has argued that it was Christian Socialism along with her father's Evangelicalism, that played a part in sparking Davies' interest in social activism, especially since this allowed her to network with people who were motivated 'to improve the position and education of women.'¹⁵⁷ Emily Davies was not alone in her connection to the fledgling Christian Socialist movement. The ideas of Christian socialist F.D. Maurice were particularly influential on Elizabeth Garrett Anderson. At twelve years old Garrett moved to London with her sister and attended the sermons of Maurice, the politically engaged minister of the Church of England.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁴ See also John Llewelyn Davies, *The Working Men's College, 1854-1904* (London: Macmillan, 1904); Mary and John Llewelyn Davies had two children, a daughter, Margaret Caroline Llewelyn Davies, who became a leading suffragist; Mary Scott, "Davies, Margaret Caroline Llewelyn, (1861-1944)," *ODNB*, (2006).

¹⁵⁵ Listed as 'Mrs Llewelyn Davies,' on "List of Members," APPENDIX II.

¹⁵⁶ F.D Maurice was also a prolific writer. See his *Reasons for Not Joining a Party in the Church: A Letter to the Ven. Samuel Wilberforce, Archdeacon of Surrey* (London: J.G.F. & J. Rivington, 1841), *The Sacrifices Which We Owe to God and His Church* (Cambridge: Macmillan, 1862).

¹⁵⁷ Stephens, *Emily Davies and Girton*, 28.

¹⁵⁸ Garrett's other sister, Millicent Garrett Fawcett, wrote that Maurice 'awakened in me new thoughts and, I hope, partially at all events, new reverences'.¹⁵⁸ In her opinion, Maurice also taught her the 'human error in matters of science' in the Bible. At nineteen, when she heard a lecture by John Stuart Mill expounding the practical reasons for women's rights on the basis of utilitarianism, she also became an active supporter of his philosophy. Her husband, MP Henry Fawcett was fourteen years her senior. Because of his blindness, she became instrumental as his amanuensis, and they often published together. In 1891, she wrote the introduction to Mary Wollstonecraft's newly published *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. Wollstonecraft's publisher and supporter, Joseph Johnson was also a progressive Unitarian. Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (London: J. Johnson, 1792); Lyndall Gordon, *Vindication: A Life of Mary Wollstonecraft* (Great Britain: Virago, 2005), 521.

RATIONAL DISSENT AND PHILOSOPHIC RADICALISM

In the last decade of the eighteenth century, British people witnessed the French Revolution and the ferocious demolition of tradition and law and social parameters in a society linked by history and culture to their own. The vulnerability of these bulwarks, and indeed civilization itself, shocked many, but for others, these changes were liberating. Laws could be questioned, and the status quo usurped. Women of the nineteenth century recognized the intense change that society had undergone. They were living in the midst of the repercussions of industrial and commercial revolutions, in a culture in which radical dissent flourished. Andrew Stauffer argues that ‘the periodical press began a phase of rapid expansion that transformed the substance, style, and reach of the public voice’ leading to the ‘democratization of anger’.¹⁵⁹ In this climate, the philosophical basis of rationalism grew rapidly. Knud Haakonsen, in his study of *Enlightenment and Religion: Rational Dissent in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, argued that ‘rational dissent’ is ‘often taken to be more or less synonymous with intellectual Unitarianism’.¹⁶⁰ He maintained that rational dissent developed a religious strand in Unitarianism. If this is so, it is hardly surprising that the homes of rationalists and Unitarians not only offered a robust intellectual environment for men, but for female members as well.

¹⁵⁹ Andrew Stauffer, *Anger, Revolution, and Romanticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 1.

¹⁶⁰ Knud Haakonssen ed. *Enlightenment and Religion: Rational Dissent in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 4-5.

A number of Kensington Society women had significant links to Victorian rationalism. Frances Power Cobbe initially supported herself by journalism. Although she was from a strongly Anglican background (her grandfather was Archbishop of Dublin, and Primate of Ireland from 1743 to 1765), Cobbe later expressed a deep appreciation for rationalism and moralistic philosophy. Susan Hamilton proposes that in her 1872 pamphlet, *Darwinism in Morals*, Cobbe saw ‘moral thinking as an evolutionary adaptation.’¹⁶¹ Indeed, in the paper, she criticises those ‘chained to the Hebrew cosmogony’ to whom Darwin’s theory of evolution ‘disturbs the roots of the old theology and dispels the golden haze which hung in poetic fancy over the morning garden of the world.’¹⁶² ‘But that, beyond all these prejudices,’ Cobbe remarks, ‘there should lurk in the any free mind a dislike to Darwinism on religious grounds, is wholly beyond comprehension.’¹⁶³

A particularly close ally of Cobbe was Sophia Dobson Collet, a published feminist rationalist. Collet came from a Dissenting background, and her political radicalism was shared by her brother, Collet Dobson Collet. In 1849 he became Secretary of the People’s Charter Unions whilst also campaigning for the Newspaper Stamp Abolition Committee, a cause that sought to erase the Stamp Act of 1712 which placed a taxation on publishers, and particularly on newspapers. In 1851, he was Secretary of the Association for the Repeal of the Taxes on Knowledge. The cause became even more pertinent to him when he became the editor of *The Free Press* in 1866.¹⁶⁴ During his editorship, he changed the

¹⁶¹ Frances Power Cobbe, *Darwinism in Morals* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1872); Susan Hamilton, ‘The Practice of Everyday Feminism: Frances Power Cobbe, Divorce, and the London Echo, 1868-1875,’ *Victorian Periodicals Review*, Vol. 35, No. 3, (2002) 155; See also, Susan Hamilton, *Frances Power Cobbe and Victorian Feminism* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2006).

¹⁶² Frances Power Cobbe, *Darwinism in Morals* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1872), 2.

¹⁶³ Her italics. Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ Prior to Collet, *The Free Press* was edited by David Urquhart, a Scottish diplomat and politician. During his editorship, he encouraged his wife, Harriet Angelina Fortescue, to contribute to his newspaper under the signature of *Caritas*.

name of the newspaper to *The Diplomatic Review* and invited celebrated radicals to contribute. Karl Marx was a notable contributor and friend, so much so that they started to host weekly meetings in their homes to discuss and share interpretations of Shakespeare. Eventually, they formalised the gatherings and called themselves the Dogberry Club. Sophia Collet wrote under the pseudonym Panthea for *The Reasoner*, *The Spectator*, and *The Movement*, and became a sympathiser with the views of George J. Holyoake, editor of *The Reasoner* and later developer of the concept of ‘secularism’ in his periodical, *Secular Review*, founded in 1876.¹⁶⁵ Through Holyoake, Collet became acquainted with the journalist, William T. Stead.

Other members of the Kensington Society were even more connected to the network of nineteenth-century rational philosophy. During the years of the Kensington Society, Emelia Gurney’s niece, Frances Julia Wedgwood, was embarking on her literary career as a biographer, a feminist critic, a novelist and a historian.¹⁶⁶ The two women were intimate correspondents and friends, and Wedgwood often looked to her aunt for advice.¹⁶⁷ Like many of the leading founders of the Kensington Society, Julia Wedgwood was part of a vast network of intellectual circles in nineteenth-century Britain.

Her great-grandfather, Josiah Wedgwood, potter and entrepreneur, was an active campaigner for the abolition of slavery, and close friend of the movement’s leader, the evangelical William Wilberforce. Apart from the continued success of his ceramic business, perhaps his greatest legacy was his design of the Slave Medallion of 1787. The

¹⁶⁵ George Holyoake was the editor of *The Reasoner* from 1846 to 1861, and after, a Co-operative sympathising paper, *The English Leader*, from 1864 to 1867. He is also known as the man who invented the term ‘secularism’, advocating for the separation of the state from religious institutions. He was a close correspondent of Sophia Dobson Collet for over a decade. See Joseph McCabe, *Life and Letters of George Jacob Holyoake*, 2 Vol. (London: Watts & Co., 1908), and Holyoake’s 1896 pamphlet, *English Secularism: A Confession of Belief* (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1896).

¹⁶⁶ She was known as Julia Wedgwood. José Harris, “Wedgwood, (Frances) Julia (1833-1913),” *ODNB* (2011).

¹⁶⁷ Julia Wedgwood developed an inquisitive mind and taught herself Latin from a young age. She also attended Rachel Martineau’s day school in Liverpool. Harris, “Wedgwood, (Frances),” *ODNB*.

medallion had an image of a slave in chains with the words ‘Am I not a man and a brother’ emblazoned across the top.¹⁶⁸ As well as a close friend of Thomas Clarkson, Wedgwood was a friend of Erasmus Darwin, the grandfather of Charles Darwin. In 1839, Charles Darwin married his daughter, Emma Wedgwood. Julia Wedgwood was the daughter of another of Josiah Wedgwood’s children, Hensleigh. In her youth, her London home in Cumberland was a hub for literary figures. Her mother, Fanny Mackintosh, was a committee member of the National Association for the Promotion of Social Science and hosted a salon, which was regularly frequented by F.D. Maurice, William Thackeray, John Ruskin, Thomas Carlyle and Thomas Babington Macaulay, men who were more often than not sympathetic to the plight of women in Victorian Britain. F.D. Maurice was the son of a Unitarian clergyman, Michael Maurice, although he eventually became a Church of England clergyman, theologian, and as noted, the chief proponent of Christian Socialism.¹⁶⁹ In 1848 he founded Queens College, an independent girls school in London which was the first institution in Britain to offer academic qualifications to women.

¹⁶⁸ This phrase was the motto of Britain’s Committee to Abolish the Slave Trade. Used as a fashion accessory, it became a badge advertising one’s support for the abolitionist cause. In using a fashionable consumer item to communicate social reform, Wedgwood demonstrated the power carried by a unique statement, particularly when underpinned by a wider social and appeal. John O’Brien, in his recent study of *The Cultural Unconscious of the Business Corporation, 1650-1850* has noted that ‘the emblem stands as a nearly singular example of an aesthetic object that accrued value in the moral economy.’ John O’Brien, *Literature Incorporated: The Cultural Unconscious of the Business Corporation, 1650-1850* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), 162; Wedgwood’s friendship with Thomas Clarkson – leading campaigner of the abolition movement, fuelled his interest and involvement in the campaign. Thomas Clarkson, a leading campaigner against the slave trade, and author of the enormously influential tract, *An Essay on the Slavery and Commerce of the Human Species, particularly the African*, (London: J. Phillips, 1786) later described the popularity of the medallions: ‘Mr. Wedgwood made a liberal donation of these, when finished, among his friends. I received from him no less than five hundred of them myself. They, to whom they were sent, did not lay them up in their cabinets, but gave them away likewise. They were soon, like The Negro’s Complaint, in different parts of the kingdom. Of the ladies, several wore them in bracelets, and others had them fitted up in an ornamental manner as pins for their hair. At length the taste for wearing them became general, and thus fashion, which usually confines itself to worthless things, was seen for once in the honourable office of promoting the cause of justice, humanity and freedom.’ Thomas Clarkson, *The History of the Rise, Progress, and Accomplishment of the Abolition of the African Slave-Trade by the British Parliament*, Vol. 1 (London: R. Taylor and Co., 1808), 417.

¹⁶⁹ Bernard M.G. Reardon, “Maurice, (John) Frederick Denison (1805-1872),” *ODNB* (2006).

At thirty-three, Julia Wedgwood had already garnered a reputation as a ‘brilliant conversationalist with a passion for scientific and theological debate’ and ‘at once a powerful reasoner and an inexorable critic of reason.’¹⁷⁰ José Harris has rightly pointed out that the houses which she frequently visited during her childhood, including the Darwin household, ‘shaped her future interests and outlook in different ways.’¹⁷¹ This is certainly the case for her friendship with her uncle, Charles Darwin. In a collection of correspondence with her aunt, Emelia Gurney, that spans eleven years, she acknowledged:

I have been enjoying a visit so much to my uncle, Charles Darwin. He has one of the few minds I ever knew that can understand and philosophise upon its own limits; e.g. he was speaking of his great love of Poetry as a young man, and how completely it has given way to his taste for science and there was something so very accurate and subtle in his description of his incapacity; it seemed wonderful to me his keeping the knowledge of what poetry was, and yet losing his taste for it.¹⁷²

As she grew older, Wedgwood continued to associate with many literary luminaries of the day, including Thomas J. Huxley, Elizabeth Gaskell, James Martineau and Thomas Erskine.¹⁷³ Julia had by this stage begun to publish her own writings. In 1861 she wrote

¹⁷⁰ Wedgwood also studied Bible theology and published *The Message of Israel in the Light of Modern Criticism* (London: Isbister, 1894). For more on Wedgwood’s religious writing, see Marion Ann Taylor and Heather E. Weir, eds. *Let Her Speak for Herself: Nineteenth-Century Women Writing on the Women of Genesis* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2006); Harris, “Wedgwood,” ODNB.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² Wedgwood to Emelia Russell Gurney, 3 March 1866, as seen in *Letters of Emelia Russell Gurney*, ed. Ellen Mary Gurney (London: James Nisbet & Co. Ltd, 1902), 31; For more on Darwin, and his religious beliefs, see Sandra Herbert, “Between Genesis and geology: Darwin and some contemporaries in the 1820s and 1830s,” in *Religion and Irreligion in Victorian Society: Essays in Honor of R.K. Webb*, ed. R. W. Davis, R.J. Helmstadter (London: Routledge, 1992).

¹⁷³ Elizabeth Gaskell’s husband and father were both Unitarian ministers and ‘her social and family life was enmeshed in Unitarian connections.’ Jill L. Matus, *The Cambridge Companion to Elizabeth Gaskell*

an anonymous article entitled ‘The Boundaries of Science. A Second Dialogue,’ published in *Macmillan’s Magazine* in July.¹⁷⁴ As she corresponded with Emilia Gurney, Julia worked on her own volume titled *The Moral Ideal: A Historic Study*.¹⁷⁵ The study was a history of ethics through civilizations past, from antiquity to Victorian ethics, including scientific positivism, theological modernism, and rationalism.¹⁷⁶

In light of how closely the interests of Kensington Society mirrored their communication networks, the connection of the Kensington Society to Victorian political dissent has been underappreciated. There was one political doctrine, however, that was more deeply entwined in the Kensington Society’s intellectual heritage than any other. The ‘philosophic radicals’, a circle of radical politicians and journalists who emerged in the 1830s, were a unifying heritage for a significant number of Kensington women. Publishing, discussion and social reform were the hallmarks of the philosophic radicals who sought to question rather than just accept, and provoked discussion in mid-nineteenth century Victorian society. As William Thomas has put it: ‘when they are discussing means, begin by considering the end, and when they desire to produce effects, think of causes’.¹⁷⁷ The concept of a discussion or debating group was close to the heart of John Stuart Mill, along with Jeremy Bentham, the founder of the political Utilitarianism. In the

(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 134; Julia Wedgwood also began a close friendship with Robert Browning that continued via correspondence between 1863 and 1870. On 28 July 1864, he wrote to her: It is one of the facts of my experience that one limits sorrowfully one’s pretensions to influence other people for good: I live more and more – what am I to write? – for God not man – I don’t care what men think now, knowing they will never think my thoughts.’ Browning to Wedgwood, 28 July 1864, as quoted in Richard Curle, ed. *Robert Browning and Julia Wedgwood: A Broken Friendship as Revealed by their Letters* (London: John Murray, 1937), 33-34.

¹⁷⁴ The first half was published earlier, in the June 1860 issue.

¹⁷⁵ Frances Julia Wedgwood, *The Moral Ideal: A Historic Study* (London: Trübner, 1888).

¹⁷⁶ Revealingly, in 1870 she also published *John Wesley and the Evangelical Reaction of the Eighteenth Century* (London: MacMillan and Co, 1870), demonstrating her continued interest in Dissenting beliefs and defence of the Methodist church.

¹⁷⁷ William Thomas, *The Philosophic Radicals: Nine Studies in Theory and Practice, 1817-1841* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 2, as quoted in H.S. Jones, “Philosophic radicals (act. 1830-1841),” *ODNB* (2008).

1820s Stuart Mill campaigned for, and utilised, the London Debating Society as a platform for his radical politics. Equally, the philosophic radicals employed the burgeoning press to ‘produce effects’, especially during John Stuart Mill’s proprietary control of the *London and Westminster Review* from 1837-1840.¹⁷⁸ The impact of the philosophic radicals was huge in the Dissenting circles of nineteenth-century Britain, including in educational institutions. The University of London founded in 1826 as a Dissenting academy, is widely considered to be inspired by the philosophy of Mill and Bentham, and their belief that education should be accessible to all ranks of society. To an extent, the Kensington Society adopted this philosophy. However, they also believed that improving the education of middle-class women was the most strategic step towards social progress, an inclination that was perhaps linked to their own mostly middle-class upbringing. The Kensington Society’s Helen Taylor, as the daughter of Harriet Taylor Mill and stepdaughter of John Stuart Mill, was born and raised amongst the philosophic radical associates. She was invited to join the Society by Alice Westlake, a daughter of the political agitator Thomas Hare. Within these circles, Helen Taylor met Harriet Grote, the wife of George Grote, a prominent supporter of John Stuart Mill and fellow famous philosophic radical. In her own right, Harriet Grote, née Lewin, was a British socialite at the centre of radical politics.¹⁷⁹

Ellen Heaton, a more mature Kensington Society member, moved amongst similar circles of philosophic radicals. Heaton had become an enthusiastic art collector after receiving her father’s inheritance, and whilst living in Leeds, and often travelling

¹⁷⁸ Jones, “Philosophic radicals,” *ODNB*.

¹⁷⁹ In 1866, Harriet Grote published *The Philosophical Radicals of 1832, comprising the Life of Sir William Molesworth and with some Incidents Connected with the Reform Movement from 1832 to 1842* (London: Savill and Edwards, 1866). She was also an advocate for women artists and in 1856 founded the Society of Female Artists, which was later advertised in the *EWJ*, Vol. 1, Iss. 3, (March 1858): 205-208. See also Harriet Grote, *Collected Papers (Original and Reprinted) in Prose and Verse, 1842-1862 by Mrs. Grote* (London: John Murray, 1862).

abroad, became a generous patroness of the artistic circles of nineteenth-century Britain.¹⁸⁰ The most notable relationships she formed within these circles was a close friendship with John Ruskin, Robert Browning, and his wife, Elizabeth Barrett Browning. Through Ruskin's suggestion, Heaton established a collection of Pre-Raphaelite artworks, and patronised Dante Gabriel Rossetti and Edward Burne-Jones, amongst others.¹⁸¹ It was through these circles that Heaton also came into contact with Barbara Bodichon.¹⁸²

This chapter has established that the Kensington women developed their socially progressive ideas amid this milieu of political and religious radicalism; it was their ancestors' radical example that gave them the confidence and legitimacy to challenge the male bulwarks of Victorian society. This intellectual inheritance included a culturally material inspiration in the uninhibited publishing of their forebears. The significance of these inherited communicative platforms must not be underestimated, nor the pervasive influence of religious inspiration, whether Dissenting or Evangelical. As social activists of Dissenting and Evangelical heritage, the Kensington Society women were not pioneers amongst their friends and family. Significantly, their diverse and dissenting traditions did not fracture the Kensington Society, but bound them together in their challenge to the status quo. The Kensington women, in step with their predecessors, harnessed that power, and were united in their social and political objectives.

¹⁸⁰ Dianne Sacho Macleod, "Heaton, Ellen, (1816-1894)," *ODNB* (2007).

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁸² Bodichon's close friend, Mary Evans (George Eliot) was a subscriber to Victorian rationalism, and spent years translating D.F. Strauss's *Das Leben Jesu kritisch bearbeitet*, or *The Life of Jesus Critically Examined*, which had been published in three volumes in 1849, which became a manifesto of English rationalism.

CHAPTER II. THE ENGLISH WOMAN'S JOURNAL:

'ON THE TERMS THAT SOCIETY ALLOWS.'¹

In 1858, thirty-three-year-old Jessie Boucherett was travelling by train when she glimpsed a new periodical, the *English Woman's Journal*, on the railway bookstall:

She bought it, attracted by the title, but expecting nothing better than the inanities commonly considered fit for women. To her surprise and joy she found her own unspoken aspirations reflected in its pages. She lost no time in repairing to the office of the journal, where she expected to find some rather dowdy old lady. But instead a handsome young woman, dressed in admirable taste, was seated at the table. It was Miss Parkes; in a few minutes another young lady, also beautifully dressed, came in, of radiant beauty, with masses of golden hair. Such is the description given by Jessie Boucherett, long years after, of her first meeting with Barbara Leigh Smith and Bessie Parkes.²

This account was written by Helen Blackburn, a suffragist and later co-editor with Boucherett of the *Englishwoman's Review*.³ The significance of the quotation is twofold: firstly, it conveys the deep yearning of women such as Boucherett for a public voice that expressed the 'unspoken aspirations' of intelligent women in mid-Victorian Britain; secondly, the account exemplifies the dominant role the *EWJ* played in generating an

¹ "The Profession of the Teacher," *EWJ*, Vol. 1, Iss. 1 (March 1858), 6.

² Helen Blackburn, *Women's Suffrage: A Record of the Women's Suffrage Movement in the British Isles, with Biographical Sketches of Miss Becker*, first printed in 1902 (New York: Kaus Reprint Co., 1971), 50.

³ The *Englishwoman's Review* was a revised version of the original *English Woman's Journal*, which had caught Boucherett's eye in 1858. Boucherett and Blackburn edited it together from 1880-1895. The *Englishwoman's Review* ran from 1866-1910. However, this study is primarily interested in the years of the *EWJ*, the journal with the closest relationship to the Kensington Society.

early network of reforming women. This network developed into the ‘Langham Place Circle’ and in turn, was the progenitor of the Kensington Society. As a result of this chance reading of the *EWJ*, Jessie Boucherett became a formidable champion of Victorian women’s activism and a founder of Britain’s first women’s discussion society.⁴ Although the *EWJ* was launched seven years before the first Kensington meeting, it was the first public vehicle of discussion for the Kensington Society women.

The ‘Langham Circle’ was a wider circle of activist women, amalgamating all women associated with the three organisations that were based at 19 Langham Place, London: The Society for the Employment of Women, the *EWJ* and the Victoria Press. All of these organisations were formed in the 1850s, ten years before the Kensington Society, which was organically formed from a group within this circle of associates, and their wider network. For the Kensington Society women, the *EWJ* should be seen as the first phase in the timeline of their activism, beginning their collaborative rebellion against the segregation of the sexes in nineteenth-century Britain. It is the contention of this chapter that prior to the Kensington women coalescing in a deliberate strategy of discussion meetings, they were united in the belief that a periodical was the best initial means of provoking discussion and communicating their ideas to Victorian society. Upon the public platform of the journal, the members first grasped the potential of public communication to reform nineteenth-century society. Thus, the *EWJ* was the initial embodiment of the Kensington Society’s strategy – to transform society through intellectual discussion. With many of the same staff and contributors involved in the *EWJ*

⁴ The advent of regular railway travel was an interesting prospect for nineteenth-century women. Amy G. Richter argues that in America, as a sphere which was neither completely public nor private, the railway allowed women a unique setting. The same could be said for publications at the railway station. Stephen Colclough has also assessed the power of the railway to disseminate ideas and literature in nineteenth-century Britain. Amy G. Richter, *Home on the Rails: Women, the Railroad, and the Rise of Public Domesticity* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 6; Stephen Colclough, “‘Purifying the Sources of Amusement and Information’? The Railway Book-Stalls of W. Smith & Son, 1855-1860,” *Publishing History* 56, (2004): 27-51.

as well as the Kensington there is a close correlation between the issues that the *EWJ* and the Kensington Society discussed. Education and employment were the most frequent recurring topics, as both associations sought to reform girls' schools, promote the opportunities for women in entering colleges for medicine and art, and ask, 'What Can Educated Women Do?'⁵

The *EWJ* was a vital precursor to the Kensington Society, positioning its members in the public arena. As the prompt for their tireless exertion to effect change, however, it also forced them to question how they were going to communicate and validate their aims in Victorian Britain. This was the dilemma they found themselves faced with in 1864. In the six months between the closure of the *EWJ* and the first Kensington Society meeting in March, the circle decided to turn their strategy on its head and pursue the avenue of private discussion and networking. While aware of the strengths and hopes of the *EWJ*, they nevertheless gave up on it, for reasons that will be explored in this chapter. For although the *EWJ* allowed them a conduit for their public concerns, and a vehicle for expressing their views, the Kensington Society was a strategic addition to their communication channels. It was no retreat on their behalf. The private meetings allowed them to better rally and refine their arguments before they were engaged in fierce public debate.

Ultimately, the Society attracted a large and varied circle of women who were like-minded in their reform ideals but who differed in their ideas of how best to achieve them. Many preferred a private organisation of reform, a preference that arguably reflected their middle-class status and financial position. Following the *EWJ*, and many other interventions into the public sphere, the circle of women realised that they needed to establish a private meeting place for their discussions if they were going to effect

⁵ Bessie Rayner Parkes, "What Can Educated Women Do?" *EWJ*, Vol. III, Iss. 21 (1859).

change. The foundation of the Kensington Society was the maturation of this strategy. In light of this, it is crucial to first investigate the monthly pages of the *EWJ*. Its articles, reviews, and literature demonstrate a deep veneration for the art of public communication. It also bears witness to the sharpening of their swords for the growing political and educational challenges they were facing. In practical terms, the *EWJ* provided the future members of the Kensington Society with an empowering entry into the professional world of journalism and public debate.

As the only explicitly feminist periodical published in mid-nineteenth-century Britain the *EWJ* could be considered a compelling declaration of the Victorian women's movement. Across its six years in print it observed a number of significant events in British women's social progress including marriage reform, radical educational activism, and the burgeoning of the suffrage movement. Its establishment, scope and ambition reflected the women's movement's limited horizons by the 1850s. However, in the annals of Victorian women's journalism, the *EWJ* deserves more concerted attention, especially as very few studies analyse it as a significant literary tool of the mid-nineteenth century women's movement.⁶ Some scholars, such as Solveig Robinson and E. M. Behnken, have used a predominantly feminist lens to concentrate on the role of gender in the *EWJ*, highlighting the lives and careers of female journalists and publishers.⁷ Other works have overlooked the *EWJ* on account of its narrow preoccupation with the role of women in

⁶ To date, the most comprehensive study of the *EWJ* is Jane Rendall's "A Moral Engine"? Feminism, Liberalism and the *English Woman's Journal*," in *Equal or Different?: Women's Politics 1800-1914*, ed. Jane Rendall (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987): 112-138, which thoroughly canvasses the facts around the beginning and running of the *EWJ*.

⁷ See Solveig C. Robinson, "'Amazed at our success': The Langham Place Editors and the Emergence of a Feminist Critical Tradition," *Victorian Periodicals Review* 29 (1996): 159-172; E. M. Behnken, "The Feminine Image in *The English Woman's Journal*," *Ball State University Forum* 19, Iss. 1 (1968): 71-75; Another notable example is Hilary Fraser, Stephanie Green, and Judith Johnson's *Gender and the Victorian Periodical* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), which examines the construction of gendered discourse in nineteenth-century women's periodicals. The study is valuable for its investigation into the depiction of women and femininity in the Victorian periodical, and more importantly, how gender constructs shaped nineteenth-century British magazines.

the press during the suffrage campaign. Michelle Tusan, for instance, has heightened our understanding of how the press enabled nineteenth-century women to attract the attention of the public sphere (between 1856-1930) but fails to clarify the *EWJ*'s intention to avoid becoming a suffrage periodical. Its remit was wider: to rouse public discussion on what was considered by the editors to be achievable progress: women's education, employment, and social position.⁸ An analysis of the pages of the *EWJ* reveals that it offered virtually nothing on the suffrage issue. Yet this did not stop the periodical from becoming a trenchant instrument for women's social progress. Janice Schroeder has argued that our understanding of Victorian women is accentuated by the *EWJ*, with its 'time-lapse record of changing meanings of womanhood and publicity' across its six years of publishing.⁹ Schroeder is one of only a few to have made a focused study of the *EWJ*, contending rightly that the editors of the *EWJ* used their 'space in the public sphere' strategically.¹⁰ Furthermore, 'Language was not simply a tool to be used in the service of a greater argument but was rather its own argument.'¹¹

This chapter will focus on the careful choice of language, tone and rhetoric in the *EWJ*. Likewise, it will demonstrate that the topics and themes of the articles all bear witness to a strategic public vision. This strategy was constructed to further three crucial objectives of the *EWJ* and the future Kensington Society: to elevate their audience of middle-class educated, and progressive women, create a network of like-minded women, and ultimately, advance the position and opportunities for all women in Victorian Britain. In light of this, this thesis aims to reinstate the *EWJ*'s position as a missing link in the

⁸ Michelle E. Tusan, *Women Making News: Gender and Journalism in Modern Britain* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2005).

⁹ Janice Schroeder, "On the *English Woman's Journal*, 1858-64," *BRANCH: Britain, Representation and Nineteenth-Century History*, ed. Dino Franco Felluga, Published October 2012. http://www.branchcollective.org/?ps_articles=janice-schroeder-on-the-english-womans-journal-1858-62

¹⁰ Ibid., 245.

¹¹ Janice Schroeder, "Better Arguments: The *English Woman's Journal* and the Game of Public Opinion," *Victorian Periodicals Review*, 35, Iss. 3 (2002), 245.

history of the Kensington Society's women's strategic use of communication in Victorian Britain. Given the overlapping membership between the *EWJ* and the Kensington Society, the *EWJ* was a journal of great significance in the socio-historical context of mid-nineteenth century Britain.

With the correlation in membership, the *EWJ* was more than just a precursor to the Kensington Society, aiming to self-educate and increase the network of progressive women in Victorian Britain. It also employed similar strategies to achieve the aim of intentional and calculated communication. To further understand the impetus of the journal, this chapter will pay close attention to why and how the Kensington Society women ventured into this initial form of mainstream publishing. It will also assess the functionalities of the journal, including its contributors, publishers, and distribution. In doing so, this chapter will closely analyse the textual form of the *EWJ*, and what this form signified for its female editors. However, the main aim of this chapter will be an analysis of the instrumental communication of the *EWJ*. Through close textual analysis of case study articles, it will illustrate the carefully crafted tone and rhetoric of this provocative women's journal and its calculated ambition to persuade its limited but eager audience of the moral agenda of social and political reform in Britain.

In August 1858 the journal was officially launched with an advertisement which announced the editors' belief that it was an 'experiment in which the majority of thinking women are more or less interested.'¹² In this explicit hope, the *EWJ* and the Kensington Society shared a common stratagem. They believed that intelligent or 'thinking women' were in need of a platform for communication and that reforming communication would form an essential constituent of women's progress. Clearly, the multifarious nature of the periodical made it the most expedient medium for this 'experiment.' Their decision to

¹² "A Few Words to our Friends and Subscribers," *EWJ*, Vol. II (February 1859), 1.

launch a periodical as their first foray into public discussion was not unheard of and it did follow a radical literary tradition - the editors of the *EWJ* seized upon the thriving market for periodicals across Britain and an emerging enthusiasm for intelligent women's magazines to circulate reforming ideas beyond their own circle. Like the Kensington Society's living room meetings, the periodical was a tool of communication that was, relatively speaking, allowed for women in nineteenth-century Britain. After all, women had been well-documented contributors to domestic and household journals throughout the earlier nineteenth-century.¹³ Their entry into this publishing venture in 1858 was articulated in the *EWJ*'s first issue with the somewhat feisty proclamation: 'Let us work hard while we have strength, on the terms that society allows'.¹⁴ Notably, the proclamation conveys a sense of sacrifice, hinting to a belief that they were likely to be individually burdened and worn down by the 'work.' To an extent, this pessimism is also directed to the current political climate, in which women were still largely prohibited.

The Kensington and *EWJ* women were uniquely placed in a network of Victorian intellectual publishing, with connections having played a key role in eighteenth and early nineteenth-century activist publishing. However, the history of the concept of a female-only journal is worth highlighting. They were not, of course, the first to experiment with this model. In 1804, the novelist Maria Edgeworth had invited Anna Letitia Barbauld to contribute to an archetype journal that her father, Richard Lovell Edgeworth had propositioned; a 'periodical paper, to be written entirely by ladies...the literary

¹³ See Kay Boardman, "The Ideology of Domesticity: The Regulation of the Household Economy in Victorian Women's Magazines." *Victorian Periodicals Review* 33, No. 2 (2000): 150-164, and Margaret Beetham, *A Magazine of Her Own: Domesticity and Desire in the Woman's Magazine, 1800-1914*. London: Routledge, 2005.

¹⁴ "The Profession of the Teacher," *EWJ*, 6.

ladies...invited to take a share in it.’¹⁵ However, Barbauld was cautious about the venture, questioning how the women would agree:

There is no bond of union among literary women, any more than among literary men; different sentiments and different connections separate them much more than the joint interest of their sex would unite them. Mrs Hannah More would not write along with you or me, and we should probably hesitate at joining Miss Hays, or if she were living, Mrs. Godwin.¹⁶

Barbauld’s concern about the lack of a ‘bond of union’ between eminent women confirms that early nineteenth-century Britain nurtured a less unified circle of women. Fifty years later, the ideological climate in Britain had changed, and ‘union’ had grown amongst progressive women, suggesting that the time was ripe for an *EWJ*. In France, women had set the precedent in female-run and feminist-leaning periodicals.¹⁷ In 1832, the journal *Tribune des femmes* reflected an amalgamation of Fourierist and feminist ideas with the slogan: ‘Liberty for women, liberty for the people through a new organization of the household and industry.’¹⁸ The journal made the radical decision to not only contest women’s liberty, but the division of labour in the home and industry for men and women. In the same year, John Stuart Mill confessed to being a reader of Jeanne Deroin’s *La Voix des Femmes* (Women’s Voice), another radical newspaper in France. Having been

¹⁵ Anna Letitia Le Breton, *Memoir of Mrs Barbauld, Including Letters and Notices of Her Family and Friends* (London: George Bell and Sons, 1874), 84, as quoted in Daniel E. White, *Early Romanticism and Religious Dissent* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 35.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 35.

¹⁷ For more on French women’s periodicals, see Rachel Mesch, *Having it All in the Belle Epoque: How French Women’s Magazines Invented the Modern Woman* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013); Joyce Elizabeth Dixon-Fyle, *Female Writers Struggle for Rights and Education for Women in France (1848-1871)* (New York: Peter Lang, 2006).

¹⁸ Claire Goldberg Moses, *French Feminism in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1984), 97.

enthused by the newspaper, Mill encouraged Harriet Taylor to finish ‘Enfranchisement of Women’, which he then published in his *Westminster Review*. Around that time, Harriet Martineau wrote to Mill to encourage his own work in the *Westminster*, believing that his public work was thoroughly worthwhile:

I have put your Magazine into the hands of one ministerialist, and hope to do so to many more, for I am in the very middle of them just now. I do think, on looking back a few years, that great things have been done for the people; and I know that others are in full contemplation, and have therefore more heart and hope than ever. We must be patient and courteous as well as strenuous, and then we can ‘all move together,’ and each leave the world in a better state than we found it in.¹⁹

Likewise, in Germany, a feminist network had produced a weekly paper, the *Women’s Newspaper (Frauen-Zeitung)* from 1849 to 1852. It was the first German periodical to focus on the political and social issues facing women in the aftermath of the 1848 revolution. Its editor, Louise Otto, faced substantial antagonism for her liberal views, subjected to house searches and threatening declarations from government forces.²⁰

Although the political climate was less tense in Britain, the concept of a women’s reform magazine was still radical. Hitherto, domestic women’s periodicals reigned. While the earliest examples of women’s activist publications date from 1832, with Eliza Sharples Carlile’s feminist periodical *Isis*, it was a short-lived publication, not even lasting a year. Eliza Cook’s *Journal* (1849-1854) was also short-lived, suggesting that

¹⁹ Harriet Martineau to William Tait, 10 November 1832, as quoted in Valerie Sanders, *Harriet Martineau: Selected Letters* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 38.

²⁰ For more on Otto, see Carol Diethe, *The Life and Work of Germany’s Founding Feminist, Louise Otto Peters, 1819-1895* (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 2002).

readers were not yet ready to embrace a feminist periodical. In middle-class circles, the most successful publications were *The New Monthly Belle Assemblée* and *The Ladies' Companion*.²¹ In 1852, however, both of these magazines merged with *The Ladies' Cabinet* to become one publication. Jeffrey Auerbach has used this amalgamation to assert that the market for household periodicals was lessening, capturing 'a critical moment in the transformation in women's magazines from the Romantic fiction-dominated magazines of the 1830s to the more practical and political magazines of the 1860s and 1870s.'²²

A 'RENOVATED PERIODICAL'

The first seeds of the *EWJ* were sown in October 1856, when Bessie Rayner Parkes visited Edinburgh and observed the *Waverley Journal*, a Scottish women's fortnightly periodical, edited by Eleanor Duckworth.²³ In format this periodical was mainly literary with occasional articles on moral topics. Parkes and Bodichon joined the staff of the *Waverley* and contributed several articles, including Parkes' 'French Algiers', and the 'Physical Training of Females.' In the *Waverley*, Bodichon published the first drafts of her essays on the topic of Woman and Work which she later published as a book in 1857. Both

²¹ For a comprehensive bibliography of British women's periodicals, see E. M. Palmegiano, *Women and British Periodicals, 1832-1867: A Bibliography* (New York: Garland, 1976).

²² Jeffrey A. Auerbach, "What They Read: Mid-Nineteenth Century English Women's Magazines and the Emergence of a Consumer Culture," *Victorian Periodicals Review* 30, No. 2 (1997), 121.

²³ Although Parkes was not a Kensington Society member, her initial role in creating the *EWJ* and the central role she played in the Langham Place Circle makes her integral to the discussion of this chapter.

women felt, however, that the *Waverley* was not reaching its full potential, and with the financial backing of Bodichon, they offered to buy the journal and relocate it to London. On 28 October 1857 an advertisement was placed in G. J. Holyoake's *The Reasoner* which read:

THE WAVERLEY. A Working-Woman's Journal: devoted to the legal and industrial interests of women. Edited by Bessie Rayner Parkes. Published fortnightly. Price 4p. To be had from the office, 14A. Princes Street, Cavendish Square; and from Tweedie, 337, Strand. Also at 147, Fleet Street.²⁴

The advertisement's invitation to 'working women' and the relatively cheap price of the *Waverley* suggests that the intended readership of the journal was not only wealthy or middle-class women, but those who did not have a high income, and even those who were living independently.²⁵ It also highlights the original focus of the journal on the 'legal and industrial interests of women', both of which were areas of the workforce dominated by men. However, within a year Parkes had abandoned the title and format of the *Waverley* in favour of a fresh start. As Anna Jameson wrote to her: 'I am really glad you have done with the *Waverley* – and I am not the less glad for your sake that you have commenced another understanding with your active energetic mind and strong convictions on certain subjects you will do well.'²⁶ In the letter, Jameson declined to be a contributor mainly on account of her health, but also because she was not in full agreement with their standpoint

²⁴ Advertisement for *The Waverley*, in *The Reasoner* (28 October 1857).

²⁵ However, as Laurel Brake and Marysa Demoor have pointed out, the *EWJ* 'posited the middle-class woman as having a special responsibility to further opportunities for women in these spheres. It supported middle-class philanthropy and provided models of work and education from which, it hoped, working-class women might learn.' Laurel Brake, Marysa Demoor, eds. "English Woman's Journal (1858-1864)," *Dictionary of Nineteenth-Century Journalism in Great Britain and Ireland* (London: Academia Press and The British Library, 2009), 204.

²⁶ Anna Jameson to Parkes, 2 March 1858, GCPP Parkes 6//A/23. Girton College, Cambridge.

on the recent marriage and divorce reforms, which would ‘be a matter of difference between us in feeling and opinion – but I am glad that these things should be fully and fairly discussed.’²⁷

Parkes and Bodichon resolved ‘not to spend money and effort over a property which did not appear to be worth either but to start afresh with a new journal of our own in London.’²⁸ A letter from George Eliot to Parkes in 1857 betrays her concern for the strategy of the *EWJ*. Parkes had asked Eliot if she approved of the *EWJ*’s proposed head notice ‘Conducted by Women’ and Eliot replied:

Every new or renovated periodical should have a spécialité – do something not yet done, fill up a gap, and so give people a motive for taking it. But I do not at all like the spécialité that consists in the inscription ‘Conducted by Women,’ and I am very glad you are going to do away with it.²⁹

Eliot’s suggestion that the new journal should have a speciality signified the early hope that the journal did not fall into the exclusive category of a female magazine, and consequently, limit its audience and wider impact. In its revamp, the editors wanted to liberate it from the usual expectations of women’s magazines, especially those of domestic-orientated ideology and direction. They were keen to emphasise that they were concerned with wider issues in Victorian society, and to that end they aimed at a broader market. As Solveig Robinson has clarified, ‘to proclaim that a publication was

²⁷ Ibid. Jameson, however, continued to advise Parkes on the journal in numerous letters.

²⁸ Parkes, “A Review of the Last Six Years,” *EWJ*, Vol. II, Iss. 12 (October 1859) as quoted in Michelle E. Tusan, *Women Making News: Gender and Journalism in Modern Britain* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2005), 30.

²⁹ George Eliot to Parkes, 1 September 1857, as quoted in Gordon Sherman Haight, *The George Eliot Letters: 1836-1851*, Vol. 2 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1954), 379.

“Conducted by Women” would be to immediately marginalize it and thus impede its ability to effect change.’³⁰

In March 1858, therefore, the new monthly periodical, the *EWJ*, appeared. The first edition included a telling article: ‘The Profession of the Teacher’ projecting the journal into the centre of middle-class, educated society.³¹ With the second volume was attached *The English Woman’s Journal Advertiser*, which promoted an article with ‘A Few Words to our Friends and Subscribers.’³² In what was essentially a subscription drive, it included a letter asking readers to share the journal amongst their associates:

We will conclude by earnestly requesting our subscribers in the provinces to make the Journal known as widely as possible in the towns where they reside, and to endeavor to add to our list by engaging the interest of every lady devoted to benevolent pursuits...³³

In ‘A Few Words’ the editors also positioned themselves as a force for social reform, from a middle-class perspective. After all, only a ‘lady’ with a moderate income and self-sufficiency could afford to pursue ‘benevolent pursuits.’ The price of the journal, 1 shilling for each monthly instalment, also advertised the fact that they were targeting a middle-class audience, charging three times the price of the *Waverley*. They also described the journal as so ‘serious in character’ that it ‘cannot rival amusing periodicals in its circulation.’³⁴ Their monthly productions, as opposed to the *Waverley*’s fortnightly,

³⁰ Solveig C. Robinson also notes that many female run periodicals did use the masthead ‘Conducted by Women’, such as Annie S. Swans’ *Women at Home*, and Helena B. Temple’s feminist *Women’s Penny Paper*, which ran from 1888-1893, “‘Amazed at our success’: The Langham Place Editors and the Emergence of a Feminist Critical Tradition,” *Victorian Periodicals Review* 29 (1996), 159.

³¹ “The Profession of the Teacher,” *EWJ*, 1-13.

³² “A Few Words to our Friends and Subscribers,” *EWJ*, Vol. II (February 1859), 1.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Ibid.*

implied their intention to spend more time in developing the quality of their journal rather than its frequency.

In Spring 1858 they opened informally the London office of the *EWJ* at 14A Princes Street. This soon became the initial headquarters for the British mid-nineteenth-century women's movement. In a later article in the *EWJ*, Boucherett described in her own words her first visit to Princes Street:

I called at once on the Editor of the English Woman's Journal, then personally unknown to me, and was introduced by her to the circle of ladies connected with the Magazine. On that evening so memorable to me, I found some twenty ladies seated round the very primitive apartment which then formed the Reading Room.³⁵

By 1859, the *EWJ* had moved its headquarters to 19 Langham Place, London, the first official office of the journal.³⁶ Around this time they enlisted the help of Matilda May Hays, a writer, journalist, and companion of Adelaide Procter.³⁷ While 19 Langham Place was first established purely for *EWJ* purposes, the offices became known as the Langham Place Circle, and eventually, a functioning Ladies Institute. The Institute had been an early dream of Parkes, who had written to Bodichon in 1857 of the hope that along with the journal, 'we can have our own book shop and the beginning of a Club' in London.³⁸ The house not only offered a quiet reading room and coffee shop, but also a closer connection to the centre of upper-middle class women's activism, with the headquarters

³⁵ Jessie Boucherett, "Adelaide Anne Procter," *EWJ*, Vol. 2, Iss.12 (March 1864), 17.

³⁶ These premises were paid for by Theodosia Monson, Lady Monson, who was a friend of Matilda Hays. See Jane Rendall, "Langham Place group (act. 1857-1866)," *ODNB* (2005).

³⁷ Hays dressed as a man and lived in an open relationship with a female American actress, Charlotte Cushman. Although she was active in the early years of editing, Hays was more radical in her opinions than Parkes and often disagreed with the direction of the journal. Lisa Merrill, "Hays, Matilda May (1820?-1897)," *ODNB* (2005).

³⁸ Parkes to Bodichon, 19 May 1857, GCPP Parkes 10/85.

of the newly established Society for the Promotion of the Employment of Women operating from the same house. By materially combining these two enterprises under the one roof, the collaboration between the two establishments is evident. Arguably, this proximity influenced the direction of the *EWJ*, with a disparate number of articles preoccupied with employment issues. Another organisation that was closely affiliated with the *EWJ* was the National Association for the Promotion of Social Science (NAPSS) of which Isa Craig was secretary.³⁹

William Johnson Fox was appointed auditor of the private English Woman's Journal Company in 1858 which, until then, had been supported financially almost entirely by Bodichon.⁴⁰ However, by February 1859, half of the available shares (400) had been purchased.⁴¹ When the first volume was published in August 1858, the title page detailed its publishers: 'English Woman's Journal Company, Limited, at their Office, 14a, Princes St., Cavendish Square, London, W; and for the Company, by Piper, Stephenson, and Spence, Paternoster Row.' Printed in 'London: Odell and Ives, 18 Princes St., Cavendish Square.'⁴² The same details reappeared in the second volume in February 1859.⁴³

The twenty-five-year old Emily Faithfull, an early enthusiast of the *EWJ*, was enlisted to orchestrate the printing of the journal from November 1858.⁴⁴ As the daughter

³⁹ A.B. Robertson, "Fitch, Sir Joshua Girling (1824-1903)," *ODNB* (2004). The NAPSS's *Transactions* were published by Emily Faithfull's Victoria Press.

⁴⁰ According to *Nineteenth Century Serials Edition*, 'The company was registered on 13 February 1858 with £1000 capital in 200 shares. Parkes and Hays took five shares each, and Maria Rye... also took one. Three men also took shares: Samuel Curtailed and James Vaughan took four each; and William Cookson – who also served as chairman – too five. By November 1858 the Company had expanded, with more interest from various representatives of the Unitarian community (W.J. Fox, former editor and proprietor of the *Monthly Repository* served as auditor) and, significantly, Helena Comtesse de Noailles, who took a further sixty shares.' De Noailles was a noblewoman who was associated with the Langham Place circle. Jim Mussell, "English Woman's Journal," *NCSE*, accessed 2019, <https://ncse.ac.uk/headnotes/ewj.html>

⁴¹ Jane Rendall "A Moral Engine," 119.

⁴² *EWJ*, Vol. I, Iss. 1 (August 1858).

⁴³ *EWJ*, Vol. II, Iss. 1 (February 1859).

⁴⁴ See Maria Frawley, "The Editor as Advocate. Emily Faithfull and The Victoria Magazine." *Victorian*

of Surrey clergyman Ferdinand Faithfull, she was part of the Langham Place circle through Jessie Boucherett's Society for the Employment of Women (SPEW), although she was never listed as a Kensington Society member.⁴⁵ Without any prior experience in publishing, her first foray into printing was sponsored by Bessie Rayner Parkes, and SPEW, who believed that women should be trained as compositors. In a letter to Bodichon, Parkes described Faithfull as 'a most hearty young worker... who has brought us a host of subscriptions,' indicating that her recruitment was strategic as well as practical.⁴⁶ Parkes purchased a printing press in 1859, and with Faithfull, employed Austin Holyoake to train female volunteers.

On 25 March 1860, Faithfull also began the Victoria Press at Great Coram St., London, using her own income along with other SPEW members' financial support.⁴⁷ Initially, she employed men, but she also hired nineteen young working-class women to train as female compositors. Often, these women were recruited through SPEW's catalogue of women seeking employment. One of her first employees, taken on as an experiment, was both deaf and dumb.⁴⁸ Once their skill set was sufficient the Victoria Press became a female-only workplace. Significantly, this indicates that the Press was established not only as a platform for debate on women's issues, but as a training tool, allowing women entry into the publishing professions.⁴⁹ Thus the *EWJ* was published through a female employee only publishing house.⁵⁰ By June 1862, Faithfull had become

Periodicals Review 31, No. 1 (1998): 87-104.

⁴⁵ Felicity Hunt, "Faithfull, Emily (1835–1895)," *ODNB* (2009).

⁴⁶ Parkes to Bodichon, 5 January 1859, GCPP5/86, Girton College Archives, Cambridge.

⁴⁷ Hunt, "Faithfull, Emily," *ODNB*.

⁴⁸ Emily Faithfull, "Victoria Press," *EWJ*, Vol. Iss. 6 (August 1858), 32.

⁴⁹ For more on Faithfull's *Victorian Press* and her editorship of the subsequent *The Victoria Magazine*, see Frawley, "The Editor as Advocate. Emily Faithfull." For more on Faithfull's view on the opportunity that a publishing career could afford for women, see Marianne Van Remoortel, "Back-Room Workers Stepping Forward: Emily Faithfull and the Compositors of the Victoria Press," in *Women, Work and the Victorian Periodical* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015): 115-132.

⁵⁰ The archives of Emily Faithfull are held at the Women's Library, LSE.

acclaimed for her work, and was named Printer and Publisher in Ordinary to Queen Victoria.⁵¹

This early circle of future Kensington Society women believed that there was a gap in the market for contemporary women's periodicals. The 'ripeness of the public mind' for change was decreed by Parkes in a 1859 article, which energetically focused 'On the Best Means of Forming Local Sanitary Associations.'⁵² In Teja Varma Pusapati's opinion, Parkes saw it as a radical fortnightly magazine that 'would reflect the interrelatedness of the various issues raised by mid-century women's movement.'⁵³ Marion Diamond has noted the deficiency many women felt about the Victorian market for female periodicals, but argues that this did not necessarily lead to a growing demand in more informed women's journalism:

It was a taste made possible by the conjunction of several factors: better education, increased leisure, and higher levels of disposable income established a habit for light reading amongst the middle classes that was met first by the circulating libraries and increasingly by the new variety of periodical literature

⁵¹ Faithfull used the *EWJ* to advocate women's involvement in the publishing industry in several articles. In 1860, she presented a paper at NAPSS and later published it under the title 'Victoria Press' which stated: 'it has often been urged against the Association that it does 'nothing but talk'; but those who fail to see the connection existing between the promotion of social science and the development of that science in spheres of practical exertion, must acknowledge that if all discussions led to as much action as followed that which took place upon the employment of women, the accusation would fall to the ground.' Emily Faithfull, "Victoria Press," as reprinted in Candida Ann Lacey, ed. *Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon and the Langham Place Group* (New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1987), 281. Faithfull also contributed an article on "Women Compositors," a paper given to NAPSS in August 1861. "Women Compositors," *EWJ*, Vol. 2, Iss. 8, (October 1861), 43.

⁵² Parkes, "On the Best Means of Forming Local Sanitary Associations," *EWJ*, Vol. I, Iss. 4. (June 1859), 115.

⁵³ Bodichon, and other members, were closely involved in the magazine as a close friend of Parkes. Teja Varma Pusapati, "Novel Networks: The "Specialite" of the *English Woman's Journal*," *Victorian Periodicals Review* 47, No. 4 (2014), 597.

designed to cater to this growing demand for light entertainment.⁵⁴

Diamond rightly recognised the growing demand for domestic and juvenile journals for Victorian women. However, she also pointed out that the editors of the *EWJ* were not morally opposed to domestic magazines. Indeed, the ideology of domesticity was not something publicly shunned in the *EWJ*, but one upon which it was notably silent. As Emily Davies later commented on *The Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine* (1852) and its sister periodical, *The Queen* (1861):

‘Queen’, now published by Crockford, the publisher of the Critic, is a very remarkable periodical. It is in the form of the Ill[ustrated]: News. It gives crochet & embroidery patterns, cookery receipts, the fashions, papers on dress, on sports, skating, riding, flower-making & all sorts of things, & with all that, recommends the study of politics to women as a duty, & sticks up for their rights unreservedly. It is very curious & significant, that so intensely vulgar a manufacture, appealing to what one would call the lowest popular taste, yet thinks it expedient to take our side.⁵⁵

In this telling letter, Davies critiques the disparity of Victorian women’s periodicals. Domestic journals were most popular amongst women readers. However, as Margaret Beetham has highlighted, some domestic women’s magazines covered current affairs amongst their household pages, illustrating that fact that a portion of British women

⁵⁴ Marion Diamond, “Maria Rye and “The Englishwoman’s Domestic Magazine,” *Victorian Periodicals Review* 1, No. 1 (1997), 6.

⁵⁵ Davies to Bodichon, 3 January 1863, GCPP Bodichon 2/5.

yearned for news, information and discussion.⁵⁶ Indeed, Boardman has conceded that ‘1850s debates about domestic ideology permeated literary and visual representational practices at every level,’ rightly arguing that the rise in social discussion, and ‘anxiety about the maintenance of separate spheres’ was especially conspicuous in the Victorian middle class, who placed the family at the core of society.⁵⁷ She cites two of the most popular mid-Victorian magazines for women as examples of this ‘cultural currency’: *The Ladies’ Treasury* and *The Englishwoman’s Domestic Magazine*.⁵⁸ However, the peripheral focus upon domesticity in the *EWJ*, a periodical targeted at middle-class educated women challenges this assertion. If anything, the *EWJ* condemned domesticity. In their fourth issue, a short poem titled ‘Lines Suggested By More Than One Recent Domestic History’ evinces a reformist outlook:

Full many a sorrowful and tragic tale
Enfolded lies beneath the semblance frail
Of wedded harmony and calm content!⁵⁹

The poem continues, issuing a scathing account of women’s domestic position in Britain, and the current laws of marriage rights:

This, our belauded humanizing age,
Leaves woman prisoned in her “legal” cage:

...

⁵⁶ Beetham argues that women’s domestic periodicals did engage with contemporary issues and discussion in *A Magazine of Her Own: Domesticity and Desire in the Woman’s Magazine, 1800-1914* (London: Routledge, 2005), passim.

⁵⁷ Kay Boardman, “The Ideology of Domesticity: The Regulation of the Household Economy in Victorian Women’s Magazines,” *Victorian Periodicals Review* 33, No. 2 (2000), 150.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 151.

⁵⁹ “Lines Suggested by More Than One Recent Domestic History,” *EWJ*, Vol. 1, Iss. 4, XXXIII (June 1858), 244.

A serf in all but mind, yet mocked with show
Of gilded chains – poor solace to her woe.⁶⁰

It is also interesting to note that the *EWJ*, which was established six years after *The Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine* (1852-1879), replicated its title, whilst removing the weighty word Domestic, which suggested a dynamic shift in their view of the appropriate sexual division of labour. Instead of focusing on the everyday 'Englishwoman' who stayed at home, they embraced the concept of an everywoman who was not shackled by the domestic ideal.⁶¹

'AS SALT TO SOUP'

The *EWJ* yields significant insight into the strategic intentions of the Kensington Society women and the wider network of nineteenth-century women's activism. Before the Kensington Society was formed, the *EWJ* trialled these women's ideas. Since the *EWJ*'s writers were the nucleus of the Kensington Society, this was their first collaborative foray into the public sphere. Essentially, because the Society was formed from the *EWJ*'s contributors, we cannot understand the Kensington Society's later achievements without first understanding the journal's early ambitions. As Bessie Rayner Parkes reflected in her February 1864 article in the *EWJ*, 'A Review of the Last Six Years,' the wider

⁶⁰ Ibid., 245.

⁶¹ *The Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine* was instigated and published by Samuel Orchart Beeton. From 1859 his wife, 'Mrs. Beeton', gained popularity by writing a regular feature article in them – which was later compiled into her *Book of Household Management*. Kay Boardman, Margaret Beetham, *Victorian Women's Magazines: An Anthology* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001): 32-26.

community of progressive women did not have a collective base until the *EWJ*, and ‘though efforts were being made in many directions for the bettering of the condition of the mass of single women in this country, there was no centre of meeting, not any one work which could be said to draw together the names of the ladies so actively employed.’⁶² Parkes’ reflection highlights the fact that mid-nineteenth century women were aware of the looseness of their associations, but did not have the means to ‘draw together the names of the ladies’ until the *EWJ*. This could be in reference to a material location for these ‘names’ to converge (a need that was ultimately met in the Kensington Society), but it could also refer to the need for a public platform in which the noteworthy ‘names’ of women could be gathered and displayed to the wider public eye. As an 1859 article on ‘The Ladies Sanitary Association’ reasoned:

The chief value of an association for the accomplishment of any reform lies far less in the particular items of the practical reform it is able to accomplish in itself than in the thorough discussion of the idea on which it is based. Once let this be worked into the public mind, once let it be considered in domestic conversation and expanded in penny periodicals, and taught as a commonplace in schools; once let it come in as salt to soup... and the mission of the association is complete.⁶³

The *EWJ* was an intellectual outlet for the initial Langham Place circle, and the traceable progression of its topics and opinions make the *EWJ* a valuable indicator of how feminist activists viewed the slow progress of women’s rights in Victorian Britain before the Kensington Society was founded in 1865 as an extension of the journal’s activism. It also

⁶² Parkes, “A Review,” *EWJ*.

⁶³ “Ladies’ Sanitary Association,” *EWJ*, Vol, III, Iss. 14 (1859).

reveals their slow but steady progress in making discussion on women's issues 'as salt to soup' in their network. The metaphor has domestic connotations and, on the surface, could be seen as trivializing the journal as a flavor additive. However, they carefully apply the metaphor of 'salt' in reference to the well-known biblical encouragement for Christians to be 'the salt of the earth'.⁶⁴ Salt's reputation as a stringent, sharp flavor could also imply their belief that the *EWJ* possessed a bold, strident voice in mid-Victorian journalism. Equally, the metaphor makes a powerful statement about their self-perception. By embracing the homely connotations of soup and salt it depicted the public sphere as a domestic scene, perhaps suggesting that society was a setting in which they were completely at home.

Overall, the central premise of the periodical was women's employment, with many articles proposing various careers for women, including medicine, nursing, teaching, and in one article, wood-engraving. As that article expressed: 'the female teachers in the training school attain great excellence and take high class certificates.'⁶⁵ But it also deliberately campaigned for the reform of the legal rights of women, and perhaps the second most common issue it addressed was women's education. This issue, in particular, foreshadowed the Kensington Society. However, the *EWJ* also stressed the need for discussions on women's hygiene, temperance, ragged schools, the poor, refugees, and many other philanthropic causes. These discussions were canvassed across its three volumes. Each contained six issues, with every issue spanning 72 pages. The *EWJ* was published from 1858 to 1864, with 'never more than about 500', but circulation was 'probably much greater,' according to David Doughan.⁶⁶ *Nineteenth Century Serial*

⁶⁴ Matthew 5:13, The Bible: King James Version of 1611.

⁶⁵ "The History of Wood-Engraving," *EWJ*, Vol. 1, Iss. 3 (May 1858), 174.

⁶⁶ David Doughan, Denise Sanchez, eds. *Feminist Periodicals 1855-1984: An Annotated Critical Bibliography of British, Irish, Commonwealth and International Titles* (Brighton: The Harvester Press, 1987), 1-2.

Editions claimed that by the start of 1859, it had 400 annual subscribers, and sold 250 copies a month.⁶⁷

The *EWJ* was edited by Bessie Rayner Parkes from its first publication in 1858, with Matilda Hays as joint editor. Although Emily Davies took over the editorship for one year in 1863, Parkes became its editor again for the last year. The first advertisement of the *EWJ* makes a significant effort to emphasise the breadth of their supporters and contributors:

It is no slight encouragement to ourselves and other women to persevere in the same direction, to know that a long list of those who are most distinguished in intellectual and benevolent exertion are also those to be numbered among the active supporters of the ENGLISH WOMAN'S JOURNAL.⁶⁸

This 'long list' of 'intellectual and benevolent' women was actually never very long. With most of the *EWJ*'s articles never accredited to authors, it is assumed that most were written by Parkes, Davies, Hays or Bodichon. However, letters between the editors suggest that they occasionally utilised the wider network of the Kensington Society women, such as Frances Cobbe and Sophia Jex-Blake. As Davies wrote to Bodichon:

The review of Ragged Life in Egypt was written by Miss Gimingham, the other by a young man named Roscoe, a friend of Bessie's. The Canter across the Campagna was by a Mrs. Montague Blackett, a friend of Miss Cobbe's, who spent last winter at Rome; the Coffee-party by Miss Jex-Blake. She is

⁶⁷ Mussell, "English Woman's Journal."

⁶⁸ Their use of capitals, "A Few Words," *EWJ*, 1.

willing to contribute gratuitously any number of little sketches of that sort.⁶⁹

Similarly, younger activists contributed a handful of articles. The second issue, for instance, featured Elizabeth Blackwell, the first woman to obtain a medical degree in America.⁷⁰ In May 1858, Blackwell put her name to ‘Extracts from the Law of Life, with special reference to the Physical Education of Girls’ in which she championed a reform of women’s physical health, turning away from the feminine ideals of beauty and asserting the belief that ‘We need muscles that are strong and prompt to do our will’.⁷¹ Isa Craig, Kensington Society committee member and published poet, contributed to the *EWJ*. In February 1859, an advertisement in *The Times* used her reputation to endorse the *EWJ*:

Advertisement. – Isa Craig and ‘The English Woman’s Journal.’
– The new number of ‘The English Woman’s Journal’ for February 1 contains a new poem by Isa Craig. ‘The Ballad of the Brides of Quair.’ Miss Craig has been a regular contributor to ‘The English Woman’s Journal’ since its commencement in March, 1858. Readers will find her full signature in the numbers of June and January to a poem and prose article. Published by ‘The English Woman’s Journal’ Company, limited, at their office, 14a, Princes-street, Cavendish-square, W., and by Piper and co., Paternoster-row. Price, 1s.⁷²

⁶⁹ Davies to Bodichon, 18 December 1862, extract in *Emily Davies: Collected Letters*, 12-13.

⁷⁰ Elizabeth Blackwell later published an influential tract, *Medicine as a Profession for Women* (New York: Trustees of the New York Infirmary for Women, 1860).

⁷¹ Elizabeth Blackwell, “Extracts from the Law of Life, with special reference to the Physical Education of Girls,” *EWJ*, Vol. 1, Iss. 3 (May 1858), 190.

⁷² *The Times*, 1 February 1859. As quoted, <http://gerald-massey.org.uk/craig/>

This strategic promotion illustrates the ambition of the *EWJ* to be seen as a reputable and venerated periodical, reaching beyond the smaller world of nineteenth-century women's activism. Its location in *The Times*, one of the most widely read newspapers in Britain at the time, indicates a wish to grow their circulation numbers. Shelia Herstein has claimed that 'Popularity was never the goal; rather the Journal was designed as a print platform for the infant women's movement.'⁷³ To an extent, Herstein is correct: the nature of their articles, which were counter-cultural in their sentiment, signals a general apathy to popularity. However, the goal was always to grow their readership, and in doing so, stimulate social progress in obtaining the vote in nineteenth-century British society.

The *EWJ* hosted a respectable number of guest women contributors in their book reviews. Solveig Robinson, having assessed these regular book reviews in the *EWJ*, claims that the 'early reviewers also initiated the feminist project of establishing a pantheon of notable women writers, proudly drawing attention to contemporary women's literary achievements.'⁷⁴ Unsurprisingly, the *EWJ* was quick to review literary women with connections to their circle. Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* received a glowing accolade in 1860 from an unknown author, 'J.A.', who exclaimed: 'No woman had ever before written with this unfeminine strength, and yet there are passages in the book which scarcely could have been written by a man.'⁷⁵ Likewise, Elizabeth Gaskell's biography, *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*, was allowed a two-part review.⁷⁶ Like the authors and their novels, such book reviews played an essential role in women's advancement in nineteenth-century Britain. Joanne Wilkes has rightly stressed the constraints for women reviewing other women in Victorian literature, claiming that women in nineteenth-century

⁷³ Sheila Herstein, "The Langham Place Circle and Feminist Periodicals of the 1860s," *Victorian Periodicals Review* 26, No. 1 (1993), 25.

⁷⁴ Robinson, "Amazed at our success," 162.

⁷⁵ J.A., "The Three Sisters," *EWJ*, Vol. 1, Iss. 4 (June 1860), 340.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

literary society were extremely self-aware and had an acute understanding of the role that gender played in publishing.⁷⁷ In this situation, it is evident the *EWJ* felt a keen sense of responsibility when reviewing fellow women writers. If they were to acclaim a work, it must be able to withstand even the harshest criticism from similar respected, and predominantly male-run periodicals.

On the other hand, if a review were to condemn a woman's work, this would be a heavy blow to an individual writer. Thus, the reviews of the *EWJ* were a more complex tool of reforming communication than they might at first appear. Though they wrote their reviews as English women, for English women, they could not escape the fact that they would be judged accordingly. In such ways, the *EWJ*'s book reviews were a precursor to the Kensington Society's later emphasis on the importance of education, and in particular wide reading, for women. In June 1858, for instance, the *EWJ* published a review of Emily Shirreff's *Intellectual Education, and its Influence on the Character and Happiness of Women*.⁷⁸ Although the review opens by acknowledging Shirreff's 'wide and fruitful thought on the technicalities of tuition,' it expresses reluctance to give it a glowing review because of the reviewer's obligation:

we should be ill-performing the special function of the reviewer for such a journal as the one for which we are writing, if we failed to say that one of the main principles of the book is laid down in what appears to us direct defiance of the inevitable laws by which the Creator developed human character, whether of men or of women.⁷⁹

⁷⁷ See Joanne Wilkes, *Women Reviewing Women in Nineteenth-Century Britain: The Critical Reception of Jane Austen, Charlotte Bronte and George Eliot* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010).

⁷⁸ Review of Emily Shirreff, *Intellectual Education and its Influence on the Character and Happiness of Women* (London: John. W. Parker and Son, West Strand, 1858) in *EWJ*, Vol. I, Iss. 5 (June 1858), 344-347.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

Fundamentally, the review disagrees with Shirreff's reasoning that 'women of the upper and middle classes be exempted from hard and hearty work, whether manual or mental.'⁸⁰ The long review continues to expose the illegitimacy of this claim, with a tone that nears indignation, arguing that the middle and upper classes had a moral obligation to demonstrate hard work and the benefits of a vocation. In this case, there was very little restraint in criticising Shirreff's book; indeed, the opportunity of a review was seized upon to justify the work and position of the *EWJ* women.

Nonetheless, the *EWJ* also communicated a hope that the periodical would become an organ for all 'English Women'. Parkes expressed her belief that multiple strands of endeavour were essential to women's progress in her 1866 *Essays on Women's Work*: 'We must not be surprised to find that a diversity of practical aims has existed among the supporters of what has generally been known as the women's movement.'⁸¹ It was this diversity that was at the core of the *EWJ* and the Kensington Society's stratagems – a breadth of communication for women, encompassing channels into the public media. Indeed, Parkes was determined that the journal maintain an 'organic character,' that was 'worked out not by one but by many, under a certain supervision by one.'⁸² We know from Boucherett's testimony that the railway bookstall was a place for the *EWJ* to grow its readership. Such strategic placement suggests that the editors were seeking the contribution and expanding audience of women who were not already amongst their extensive network, and in particular, the travelling woman.⁸³ In a literal sense, the *EWJ*

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Bessie Rayner Parkes, *Essays on Women's Work* (London: A. Strahan, 1866), 8.

⁸² Bessie Rayner Parkes, "The Use of Special Periodical," *Alexandra*, Vol. 1 (1864): 257-9.

⁸³ Ros Ballaster et al., have built upon previous studies to further establish the facts that the 'growth of the periodical press was inextricably linked with that of a number of other industries, including the railways, the postal system, and the power industries. Expansion in all these areas combined with such social changes as the concentration of population in cities and towns, the growth of general literacy and the spread of

entered the public platform on a railway station, taking hold of its potential to reach a greater range of clientele, and enlist further readers into its ranks.

In this context, José Harris has suggested a paradigm for understanding journalism in nineteenth-century Britain that revolves around the concept of ‘Private Lives, Public Spirit’.⁸⁴ Despite the fact that Harris’ research begins in the 1870s, this insight rings true for the editors of the *EWJ*. Significantly, many articles were published anonymously, a practice that was common in most nineteenth-century circulations. As Onslow has pointed out, the ‘unsigned article...both aided and hinder women’ by allowing men to remain the only visible ‘authority’ in literary endeavours.⁸⁵ Nevertheless this practice in opinion pieces ensured a greater freedom of expression for authors. Creative literatures and poetry were avenues in which female authors had more success in making a name for themselves. In its general anonymity, however, the voice of the periodical could be said to transcend those of its individual writers; it was a collective entity that articulated shared values. This ambition is evident in their choice of title, embracing the entire ‘English Women’ populace in its nominated coverage.

Additionally, the *EWJ* enhanced the network of nineteenth-century reform-minded women with regular accolades of exceptional women. The recurring tributes and praises they offered to past and present women brought to light the large number of women who had overcome their social constrictions to make a lasting impact on British society. Concentrating on women who had made an impact on society, the *EWJ* commemorated those who were emancipated through their work and mind as well as those who were famous. Because of this deliberate strategy, the *EWJ* has been used by

education’ which facilitated the immense growth of the periodical press in the nineteenth century. *Women’s Worlds: Ideology, Femininity and the Woman’s Magazine* (Houndmills: Macmillan, 1991), 78.

⁸⁴ José Harris, *Private Lives, Public Spirit: A Social History of Britain, 1870-1914* (London: Oxford University Press, 1993).

⁸⁵ Barbara Onslow, *Women of the Press in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2000), 12.

historians to discern a contemporary canon of female reformers in Victorian Britain. Take for instance Matilda Hays' glowing exposé on the work of 'Florence Nightingale and the English Soldier,' praising the nurse and other 'noble self-sacrificing women' who:

in the face of obstacles and difficulties innumerable, is but an earnest of what woman will easily and naturally achieve, as legitimate spheres of action open before her in the world's growing conviction of the need of the female element for its highest organisation and administration.⁸⁶

The article's phrase 'legitimate spheres of action' is particularly noteworthy. Evidently, the *EWJ*'s women were conscious of how contemporary social constructions of their gender limited them in 'action.' In an attempt to break down these gendered boundaries, they drew attention to the courage of women such as Nightingale who found an available avenue for reform, revolutionising the nursing practices and military medical conditions. Hays' article portrayed the *EWJ*'s tendency to employ a rhetoric of radical, progressive, positive action, but simultaneously revive the image of past women to further such an ideal. This seeming inconsistency was a powerful tool of the *EWJ*. Although they looked to the future for social improvement, it was essential for them to highlight the women who had gone before - the trailblazers of social change. While this practice benefitted the authors - recognising themselves as standing on the shoulders of past progressive women - it also strengthened their case, assuring their readers that past women had also pursued change with pure and benevolent motives.

A significant footnote to Hays' article entreated the avid audience to follow in the path of Nightingale: 'We especially call the attention of our young female readers...as

⁸⁶ Matilda M. Hays, "Florence Nightingale and the English Soldier," *EWJ*, Vol. 1, Iss. 2 (April 1858), 76-77.

one proof more of the necessity there is for long and systematic training, if we would hope to excel in any department, or to be of use in our generation.’⁸⁷ The choice of nursing, however, as the first openly endorsed career option that the *EWJ* suggested for women is more strategic than it may appear. The occupation of nursing was considered a useful and acceptable employment for Victorian women, especially those in the middle class in which it exemplified the traditional ‘caring’ role of women, but it was also considered to be a respectable ‘route to social advancement’, as Sue Hawkins has phrased it.⁸⁸ Hawkins argues that the history of nineteenth-century nursing has been dominated by large studies on nursing reformers, and subsequently, overlooked the career path and ambitions of ‘rank and file’ nurses who utilised the respectability and training of the nursing profession to better their prospects, their families, and in turn, their society.⁸⁹ Evidently, the *EWJ* chose their topics with careful thought, and their inaugural article on Florence Nightingale deliberately established a tone and theme for their periodical. It was a call to women of all classes to train in careers to advance society. This objective and its accompanying endorsement of social mobility was at the heart of the *EWJ* and the future design and purpose of the Kensington Society.

Women entering the medical profession as doctors was also frequently encouraged by the *EWJ*. In 1858 Anna Blackwell submitted a biography of her two sisters, ‘Dr. Elizabeth Blackwell’ and ‘Dr. Emily Blackwell,’ as she termed them, after an ‘appeal’ from the editors of the *EWJ*.⁹⁰ Although the article was titled ‘Elizabeth Blackwell,’ the extensive, twenty-page account details her sisters’ tumultuous entry into

⁸⁷ Ibid., 74.

⁸⁸ Sue Hawkins, “From Maid to Matron: Nursing as a Route to Social Advancement in Nineteenth-Century England,” *Women’s History Review*, 19, Iss. 1 (2010): 125-143.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 138.

⁹⁰ Anna Blackwell, “Elizabeth Blackwell,” *EWJ*, Vol. 1, Iss. 2 (April 1858): 80-100.

the medical profession in America.⁹¹ Like the Nightingale article, Blackwell notes her sister's 'earnest desire to be useful to her sex and to her kind.'⁹² As she explains, in their path from governessing to medicine, Blackwell again notes the sisters' frustration at the limited career options of women. Restricted employment opportunities for women frustrated their own ambition and inhibited what they could offer to all women:

They felt not only that, thrown as they had been on their own resources, their possibilities of success would have been infinitely greater had they been men instead of women, but also that, even as women, had training and opportunity been within their reach, they would have been quite as competent to carry on a mercantile concern; conduct a lawsuit, or practise the healing art...and they often discussed the possibility of adopting some of those pursuits as an avenue to fortune for themselves and for others of their sex who should be minded to follow their example.⁹³

Once again, the *EWJ* made a practical appeal to its readers to be 'useful' to their gender by pursuing careers that might provide 'fortune for themselves and for others.'⁹⁴ The recurring nature of this theme suggests that a concern for female financial vulnerability was at the core of the *EWJ*'s social agenda - an obligation to serve the common woman through enabling financial independence and therefore, reform society.

⁹¹ Anna Blackwell points out the common misbelief that the Blackwell sisters were American because it was where they were trained, when they were born and grew up in Bristol, England. "Elizabeth Blackwell," *EWJ*, 80.

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 86.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

The structure of the *EWJ* featured a mix of literary, social and political content, across eight to eleven segments in each issue. The opening article was designed to address a ‘Disputed Question’ (as one was titled) concerning contemporary women.⁹⁵ The second would highlight a particular individual, collection of women, or organisation that deserved praise for their work. Often, the second article featured women in the artistic world, such as Rosa Bonheur, the French Realist painter; Maria Edgeworth, the Anglo-Irish writer; Félicie de Fauveau, the French sculptor; and Johanna Kinkel, the German composer. This feature, in particular, illustrates a universal perspective from the editors of the *EWJ*. Moreover, across three issues there was an article on the ‘Gallery of Illustrious Italian Women’, notably credited as written ‘By an Italian.’⁹⁶ In the first, the author explains their ‘purpose to revive the memories of some of the most remarkable Italian women, commencing with the professors of the University of Bologna.’⁹⁷ As far as we know, the *EWJ* only reached a British audience.⁹⁸ However, it was captivated by international examples of women’s progress, believing these to be an encouragement for women to recognise their diverse progress across the civilised world. The *EWJ*

⁹⁵ “The Disputed Question,” *EWJ*, Vol. I, Iss. 6, LIII (8 May 1858): 361-367.

⁹⁶ “Gallery of Illustrious Italian Women: Four Female Professors of the University of Bologna,” *EWJ*, Vol. 1, Iss. 6, LIV (August 1858): 367-381; ‘Gallery of Illustrious Italian Women: Female Artists,’ *EWJ*, Vol. II, Iss. 9, XXIV (November 1859): 160-178; “Gallery of Illustrious Italian Women: Female Artists (continued...),” *EWJ*, Vol. II, Iss. 10, XXXII (December 1859): 231-240.

⁹⁷ Arguably, the repeated article also indicated their interest in a European context, and Italy’s current movements towards unification. The connection between political liberty and liberty for the sexes was intertwined. “Gallery of Illustrious Italian Women,” *EWJ*, Vol. 1, Iss. 6, LIV (1858), 369.

⁹⁸ There are no copies of the *EWJ* in overseas archive libraries.

demonstrated an early fascination in the international progress of women, later adopted by the Kensington Society. As the article remarked:

In Italy the consciousness of the rights and duties of women is far less developed than in England, and in England less than in the United States, but in Italy there is such intense intellectual susceptibility, such aptitude to rise rapidly to the height of noble inspirations, that once let liberty reign in the bel paese, and Italian women will not fail to respond to the appeal of regeneration.⁹⁹

Palpably, the medium of the journal was especially powerful and multidimensional. Its great communicative strength was its multifarious make-up, and the journal featured a variety of forms in a single place, thus setting it apart from books and pamphlets. This layout and design of the *EWJ* made it a useful tool for the Kensington women. In one issue, they had the opportunity to use opinion pieces, bulletins, reviews, stories, poems, and open forums to disseminate their beliefs. While individual Langham Place and Kensington Society women could devote publications to one singular issue, such as education, legislation or employment, the *EWJ* evinced the potential to portray the intertwined nature of these causes. Parkes was conscious of the power of the journal's form to emphasise and reiterate arguments. In a telling article in 1864, 'The Use of a Special Periodical,' Parkes urged that 'there is something in a reiterated effort which far outweighs the effect of the separate thoughts...it is partly the effect of the repetition – line upon line – and partly the knowledge that there is in the world a distinct embodiment of certain principles.'¹⁰⁰ She believed that the periodic nature of a journal could become

⁹⁹ "Gallery of Illustrious Italian Women," *EWJ*, Vol. 1, Iss. 6, LIV (1858), 368.

¹⁰⁰ Parkes, "The Use of a Special Periodical," 258.

a strategic strength of their communication. She seized upon it as a vehicle for change, not once, but twice, later embarking on her own publication, *The Alexandra*, in 1864.¹⁰¹

Janice Schroeder has contended that although the *EWJ* sought to ‘probe everyday assumptions about women’s experience, and to offer new models of the female self’, it was also anxious to sustain the ‘feminine propriety’ typical of Victorian women’s ‘outlook’.¹⁰² Sarah Dredge has also illuminated this strategic nature of the *EWJ*.¹⁰³ However, Dredge’s emphasis on the femininity of the *EWJ* contributors has arguably blinded her to a more significant theme running throughout the periodical. The *EWJ* was as concerned with the preservation of morality, and especially Christian piety, as its womanly persona. In every issue an article can be found that argued for women’s progress allied to an evangelical Christian outlook. For instance, one poem in 1858 endorsed the image of a woman pursuing a meaningful life with Christ as her model:

It was a time of sadness, and my heart
...
Felt wearied with the conflict and the strife,
And the needful discipline of life.
...
And thus, no longer trusting to His might
Who says – “We walk by faith and not by sight,”-
Doubting, and almost yielding to despair,
‘The thought arose – “My Cross I cannot bear!”
...
Then one more fair than all the rest, for He
Was one to whom all others bowed the knee,

¹⁰¹ Despite Parkes’ enthusiasm for the journal medium, the *Alexandra* was short-lived, not living out the year in 1864.

¹⁰² Schroeder, “On the *English Woman’s Journal*, 1858-64,” *BRANCH*.

¹⁰³ Sarah Dredge, “Opportunism and Accommodation: The *English Woman’s Journal* and the British Mid-Nineteenth-Century Women’s Movement,” *Women’s Studies* 34, Iss. 2 (2005): 133-157.

Came gently to me as I trembling lay,
 And, "Follow me," he said, "I am the Way."
 ...
 And so the little Cross I quickly took,
 But all at once my frame beneath it shook;
 The sparkling jewels, fair were they to see,
 But far too heavy was their weight for me.¹⁰⁴

The anonymous author of 'The Change Cross' saw herself as first a follower of Christ, and second, a female. In the *EWJ* the theology of Christianity was often professed and promoted as a worthy impetus to implement change. This outlook should not be considered a contradiction to their feminist crusade. Some historians, such as Laura Green, have made the mistake of arguing that women such as Davies and Bodichon displayed a tension in their writing between their admiration for the traditional female models in Christian teaching and their simultaneous work at undermining this.¹⁰⁵ This argument does not accord with the *EWJ* articles in which Christianity and its moral teaching were considered to demand a practical solution to women's disadvantages in Victorian society. In an article on 'Women's Work in the Reformatory Movement,' the author expressed the belief that 'it is Christianity only which has given to women her true position in society, so far as she possesses it, so it is in her Christian spirit only that she is absolutely free.'¹⁰⁶ The article also espoused the belief that Christ was a proponent of women's equal position: 'Their love was accepted by the Saviour – and it was rewarded;

¹⁰⁴ "The Changed Cross," *EWJ*, Vol. 1, Iss. 3 (May 1858), 184.

¹⁰⁵ Laura Morgan Green cites Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* as an example of woman's literature in Victorian Britain which struggled with this tension, in *Education Women: Cultural Conflict and Victorian Literature* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2001), *passim*.

¹⁰⁶ The article continued: 'Whatever legal or social disabilities she may still lie under, however, she may be thwarted in her aims, cramped in her endeavours, fettered in her action, by the real or imaginary shackles imposed by public opinion, yet let her be imbued deeply and strongly with a Christian spirit of self-denying love, and she will have the *freedom* which Christ has given to his disciples, and which no mortal *can* take from her.' "Women's Work in the Reformatory Movement," *EWJ*, Vol. I, Iss. 5 (July 1858), 290.

women first beheld him when he had put on immortality.’¹⁰⁷ Similarly, one of their most forceful articles, ‘The Disputed Question,’ displayed the conviction that if women were endowed with ability by God, therefore they had the authority to use it:

we must also and even in the first place set before them the highest aim by which humanity can be urged to exertion – the full development of our being in accordance with the design of our Creator...that of whatever women are capable, for that they were intended.’¹⁰⁸

In portraying the reformation of morality along Christian lines as one and the same as reforming the world, the *EWJ* simultaneously typified the contemporary ethics of Victorian Britain. In an article concerning a ‘House of Mercy’ for fallen women, the author applauds the institution and its ‘course of reformation’ for the girls.¹⁰⁹ Further, Amanda Anderson has examined how Victorian social reformers and critics, such as John Stuart Mill, employed a specific literary rhetoric in relation to the ‘fallen woman’ that ‘dramatizes the philosophical and social predicaments that inform Victorian debates on individual character and social reform.’¹¹⁰ Though the moral (and Christian) reformation of women readers was the primary hope of the *EWJ* article, it was also concerned with the self-respect of women: ‘to gain the confidence of each girl is of the highest importance, and to treat her as an individual, and not as one of a mass.’¹¹¹ Evidently, the individual woman was important to them. The article also expressed a fundamental belief

¹⁰⁷ Their use of italics. Ibid., 289.

¹⁰⁸ “The Disputed Question,” *EWJ*, 362-3.

¹⁰⁹ “A House of Mercy,” *EWJ*, Vol. 1, Iss. 1 (March 1858), 22.

¹¹⁰ Amanda Anderson, *Tainted Souls and Painted Faces: The Rhetoric of Fallenness in Victorian Culture* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 22; See also Cheryl R. Jorgensen-Earp, “The Lady, the Whore, and the Spinster: the Rhetorical Use of Victorian Images of Women,” *Western Journal of Speech Communication*, Vol. 54, Iss. 1 (1990): 82-98.

¹¹¹ “A House of Mercy,” *EWJ*, 18.

that ‘She must be strengthened, encouraged, stimulated.’¹¹² Above all, this phrase demonstrates the ambitions of the *EWJ* to use their powerful tool of communication to accentuate the significance of every individual woman. This objective was, of course, fully in accord with the aims of the Kensington Society.

Although the *EWJ* authors were in London, and its title encompassed only English women, many of the articles had a decidedly international flavour. Arguably, this wider gaze evidenced the education, class and intelligence of its contributors. *EWJ* authors were well-travelled and cultivated on all international issues (though mainly European). This international contextualisation would also explain frequent references to esteemed figures of history. A quotation from Voltaire, for instance, enhanced their discussion of ‘Who precludes woman from obtaining a complete education?... ‘In all times and in all countries,’ says Voltaire, ‘laws have ever been more or less oppressive for women, because they have ever been dictated, promulgated, and sanctioned by men.’¹¹³ There were also three smaller segments, regular features in the *EWJ*, that fostered a deliberate international link. The first was ‘Passing Events’, which contained information on significant contemporary events or issues in the wider society. Arguably, this portion of the *EWJ* served as exegesis as well as education, attempting to elucidate and discuss the legal, social, international and workplace issues facing all women. Often the journal was entirely focused on international current affairs. An example is an article on ‘Slavery in America’ which appeared in 1858, written from an abolitionist perspective – recounting what had been heard from ‘friends’ of shocking statistics and horrific experiences on plantations: ‘In these fifteen States of the American Union are 3,700,000 human beings who have no legal rights, no legal right to their persons or their labor, and who can be

¹¹² “A House of Mercy,” 22.

¹¹³ “Gallery of Illustrious Italian Women,” *EWJ*, Vol. 1, Iss. 6 (1858), 368.

sold from hand to hand like horses of dogs.’¹¹⁴ Usually, however, articles were relevant to the advancement of women overseas, including recurring articles on ‘Education in France.’¹¹⁵ Such articles allowed British readers to compare, either favourably or unfavourably, the progress of women’s rights outside the confines of their own society.

A definite strength of the periodical form was its currency and ability to engage with current affairs on a regular basis. An article on ‘The New Law of Divorce’ appeared in the third issue, written in context of ‘recent legislation’ that had made ‘important changes in the Law of Divorce, and gives to married persons facilities to get rid of the miseries of unfortunate marital connexions, not before permitted to either sex.’¹¹⁶ This was a reference to the 1857 Matrimonial Causes Act that profoundly changed the laws around divorce. Although the Act made it easier for a marriage to be annulled it also greatly favoured the husband – who had only to claim that his wife had committed adultery to allow a divorce by civil litigation. On the other hand, a wife had to present evidence of abuse, desertion, or cruelty to be granted a divorce. The *EWJ* article does not offer an impassioned criticism of the Act, but a measured, rational outline of the changes. Yet it concluded with an account from *The Times* from 9 April 1858, of a marriage that was annulled, in which the wife was the greater victim because the new law necessitated that a ‘penniless woman’ take to court ‘a husband who cannot be found’.¹¹⁷ The author of the *EWJ*, however, politely suggests that this legal disadvantage is ‘one of those oversights which will ever occur in legislation’, concluding with the words: ‘We invite the attention of our legal friends to this important point.’¹¹⁸ Arguably, the tone of this

¹¹⁴ “Slavery in America,” *EWJ*, Vol. I, Iss. 8 (1858): 94-100.

¹¹⁵ The first to appear on this topic was “Education in France,” *EWJ*, Vol. V, Iss. 29 (July 1860): 289-304.

¹¹⁶ “The New Law of Divorce,” *EWJ*, Vol. 1, Iss. 3 (May 1858): 186-188; *Ibid.*, 186.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 188.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

article was purposely analytical and measured. Such discussions enhanced the journal's image as not strongly feminist but as an intelligent woman's source of news.

This currency allowed future Kensington women to be constantly engaged with contemporary debate, training them in becoming aware and shrewd in current affairs. Recent pamphlet or articles were often mentioned and discussed in the *EWJ*, promoting a culture of critical discernment amongst its contributors. For instance, if there was an article or recent speech with which they disagreed, they could present a counter argument in the next issue. Such topicality created a fluid, but sheltered, 'tête-a-tête' in a male-dominated public space, whilst propelling women into public discussion. In one issue, for example, they featured an article in response to 'Fraser's Magazine for April', which had recounted a recent lecture given at the Royal Institution on 'The Influence of Women on the Progress of Knowledge' by Thomas Henry Buckle.¹¹⁹ According to the *EWJ* 'Notice' about Fraser's feature, the lecture had 'given rise to a good deal of discussion', presumably, in the rooms of 19 Langham Place.¹²⁰ Once again, a polite but sceptical tone is employed to question the validity of the lecture's main argument that 'women being by nature more deductive, and men more inductive,' a generalisation to which it responded: 'the arbitrary use of the terms inductive and deductive seems to be a stumbling block in the way of many.'¹²¹ However, the 'Notice' chose to recognise the positive change that Buckle's lecture could endorse, using his argument that women were severely disadvantaged not just by their nature but by their current limited educational opportunities:

¹¹⁹ Thomas Henry Buckle was the author of the 'History of Civilization in England,' and delivered the lecture at the Royal Institute, on Friday, 19 March 1858, "Notice of Books," *EWJ*, Vol. 1, Iss 3 (May 1858): 194-196.

¹²⁰ 'Notice of Books,' No. 3, *EWJ*, Vol. 1, Iss. 3, 1858, 194.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 195.

Mr. Buckle would do good service by following up the present elegant and comprehensive lecture with one upon Female Education. It is a fertile theme, on which he must have many and good things to say, while the need of bringing public opinion to bear upon it is daily growing and strengthening.¹²²

The *EWJ* embarked on another proactive engagement with the wider journalist network of Victorian Britain in the same issue, with a response to a condemnatory article in the *Saturday Review* which had ‘addressed to us some temperate, and we have no doubt, well intended criticism.’¹²³ The *EWJ* response was beguilingly subtitled, ‘The Reviewer Reviewed,’ as it conceded that although ‘our contemporary is, to be sure, not satisfied with our fictions, and thinks our “disquisitions on political subjects” “very ordinary,” our experienced readers will no doubt have observed that, in matters of taste, differences are not uncommon.’¹²⁴ Despite this, however, the *EWJ* review explicitly responded to the criticisms made against it:

Our contemporary triumphs over our assumed ignorance of Political Economy: women, he thinks, can know nothing of such things. We should have thought that the name of Mars. Marcet, who by her writings so ably instructed young people in the principles of that science, while Sir Robert Peel, with all his influence, and energy, and talent, was fisting the wicked battle of taxed food and prohibitory duties, might have occurred to our censor: we should have thought that he might have remembered how Miss Martineau laboured to impress upon the people the duties of self-reliance and prudence in marriages, at a time when the great truths of political economy were scorned and derided by

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ “The *Saturday Review* and the *English Woman’s Journal*,” *EWJ*, Vol. 1, Iss. 3 (May 1858), 201.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

all classes of English statesmen, and were thought too “low” and revolutionary to be even mentioned in a journal so respectable as the ‘Saturday Review.’¹²⁵

The language employed in this response could be considered ‘epideictic rhetoric’, a feature studied by Kathryn Summers in the later *Englishwoman’s Review*.¹²⁶ Her application of the term, however, can also be applied to the rhetoric of the *EWJ*. The term stemmed from Aristotle’s concept of ‘ceremonial rhetoric’ in which:

Political speaking urges us either to do or not to do something...The ceremonial orator is, properly speaking, concerned with the present, since all men praise or blame in view of the state of things existing at the time, though they often find it useful also to recall the past and to make guesses at the future.¹²⁷

In Aristotle’s theory, epideictic language is a highly strategic form of writing or speech, devised to turn the spotlight on others to validate an argument. In Summer’s opinion, Victorian feminists frequently employed epideictic language and ‘examples of women’s professional, political, economic, and academic achievements ... to construct a persuasive image of success and progress that would solidify the movement’s aspirations for women.’¹²⁸ This practice was evident in the above review’s response, which defended the *EWJ*’s right to respect by assertively listing examples of leading political women from the early nineteenth-century. The persuasive response also shoots the criticism in the direction of another, and in this case a male - British statesman and Prime Minister, Sir

¹²⁵ Ibid. 202.

¹²⁶ Kathryn Summers, “Epideictic Rhetoric in the *Englishwoman’s Review*,” *Victorian Periodicals Review* 34, Iss. 3 (2001): 263-281.

¹²⁷ Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, ed. W. D. Ross, trans. W. Rhys Roberts (New York: Cosimo Classics, 2010), 13.

¹²⁸ Summers, ‘Epideictic Rhetoric,’ 263.

Robert Peel - to make a greater contrast and criticism.¹²⁹ This, accordingly, deflected the critical focus. Epideictic rhetoric was rampant in the reviews and articles of the *EWJ*. It became a rhetorical instrument of change through which the *EWJ* women appealed to praiseworthy women of the past and united the women of the present.

Literary reviews and recommendations habitually concluded every issue of the *EWJ*. The 'Notice of Books' section provided a review of a handful of literary publications, most commonly of novels, poems, and religious tracts. From October 1861 a 'Books of the Month' section appeared. This addition allowed a more contemporary feel, focused on books relating to current affairs. Similarly, there was occasionally a 'Foreign Literature' segment which reviewed a recent international publication. Short stories were also a well utilised tool of creative persuasion in the *EWJ*. In the first issue, a young twenty-two-year-old Amelia B. Edwards wrote a compelling, comic story on 'Bradshaw the Betrayer.'¹³⁰ The tale was written in the first person of a young man, following his disappointing travels through Spain and France. In many ways, Edwards' piece idealises the freedom of a young male in nineteenth-century Europe, detailing his extensive travels and earlier 'feats and failures on the Cam in college days long since gone by.'¹³¹ Interestingly, it also forecast the future career of its young author, who was to become a notable English novelist, travel writer, journalist, and Egyptologist.¹³² The *EWJ's* use of such literature and young authors exhibits an imperative to inspire both its readers and contributors. Additionally, the *EWJ* editor's inclusion of such a young writer,

¹²⁹ Ironically, Robert Peel once stated his belief that public opinion was 'that great compound of folly, weakness, prejudice, wrong feeling, right feeling and newspaper paragraphs.' Asa Briggs, Peter Burke, *A Social History of the Media: From Gutenberg to the Internet*, Third edition (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009), 187.

¹³⁰ Amelia B. Edwards, "Bradshaw the Betrayer," *EWJ*, Vol. 1, Iss. 1 (March 1858): 36-56.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 44.

¹³² Edwards, whilst still young, had begun publishing short stories in periodicals by the age of fourteen. She also featured in journals such as *Household Words*, *All the Year Round*, *Saturday Review* and *Chambers' Journal*. Deborah Manley, "Edwards, Amelia Ann Blanford (1831-1892)," *ODNB* (2015).

and her aspirational story, displayed a confident intention not only to establish the legitimacy of past and present literary women but also to promote the community of new, young female writers and use their words to create a more stimulating future for women.

There are no accounts of prominent women explicitly refusing to contribute to the *EWJ* except for Mary Ann Evans (George Eliot), who declined Bodichon's invitation to write on the grounds that her reputation would damage the public image of the journal (it was well known that she was living in an unmarried union with George Henry Lewes). Evans had been preoccupied with her own writing ventures, such as editing the *Westminster Review* from 1851 to 1854, and publishing four of her seven novels during the years of the *EWJ*.¹³³ During her unpaid and anonymous editorship, the *Westminster* was often highlighted for its 'radical, atypical nature' in Victorian society.¹³⁴ Although Eliot declined to add her name to the *EWJ*, she remained in correspondence with Parkes throughout her editorship, offering snippets of advice to her amateur editor friend. On one occasion, she wrote to Parkes: 'The more business you can get into the journal- the more statements of philanthropic movements and social facts, and the less literature, the better.'¹³⁵ In Eliot's opinion, the *EWJ* should continue to diverge from its earlier model, the *Waverley*, by featuring further contemporary political content, rather than reviews. In doing so, she argued that the small journal would be more respected than many women's periodicals of the time which featured too much of fiction, which in her opinion, led to

¹³³ The included *Adam Bede* (1859), *The Mill on the Floss* (1860), *Silas Marner* (1861) and *Romola* (1862-63). Fionnuala Dillane, "'The Character of Editress': Marian Evans and the *Westminster Review*, 1851-54", *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 30, No. 2, *Women in Anglo-American Periodicals* (2011) 269. See also Fionnuala Dillane, *Before George Eliot: Marian Evans and the Periodical Press* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Beryl Gray, 'George Eliot and the 'Westminster Review,' *Victorian Periodicals Review*, Vol. 33, No. 3 (2000) 212-224.

¹³⁴ Dillane, "The Character of Editress," 269; Part of its socially radical public image was due to Evan's lengthy 'Belles Lettres' quarterly section. Beryl Gray, "George Eliot and the *Westminster Review*," *Victorian Periodicals Review* 33, No. 3 (2000), 215.

¹³⁵ Gordon Sherman Haight, *The George Eliot Letters: 1836-1851*, Vol. 2 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1954), 379.

women becoming frivolous and preoccupied in an unrealistic world. Arguably, the *EWJ* heeded Eliot's suggestions. The overt placement of articles on political and social issues before those of literature suggests a ranking of priority. However, while the *EWJ* made an effort to generate discussion of current affairs, literary reviews were evidently a core part of their appeal and outreach in the public arena. It was important to the *EWJ*, as it was later for the Kensington Society, to encourage intelligent reading for women. As an article on 'A Question. Are Men Naturally Cleverer than Women?' stated: 'reading is a good means of acquiring knowledge, but if a man who can read never opened nor takes up a newspaper he will be no wiser than he was before he learnt his letters.'¹³⁶ With well-reasoned reviews, the *EWJ* also saw the necessity of maintaining an audience of women who were more interested in literary pieces than political affairs. This consequently widened their network while still promoting their more socially progressive ideas.

However, on occasion the *EWJ* would strategically utilise its position in the public arena to demand action. Two years before it was founded, a Marriage Reform petition had been sent to the House of Commons by Jessie Boucherett and Elizabeth Wolstenholme's Married Women's Property Committee (MWPC). In its first issue, an article in the *EWJ* reflected on the 1855 petition that had 'circulated throughout England representing the injustice of the law respecting the property and earnings of married women.'¹³⁷ The article mourned the slow progress of reform that had been made since that time, and criticised the government for failing to follow through on its promise to 'take the subject into consideration...a promise as yet unredeemed.'¹³⁸ In an effort to incite a rebirth of women's petitioning, the forceful article asserted that 'without the earnest and unflagging support of all interested in it, we may never hope to see it pass

¹³⁶ "A Question: Are Men Naturally Cleverer than Woman?" *EWJ*, Vol. 2, Iss 11, (January 1859): 333-336.

¹³⁷ "Property of Married Women," *EWJ*, Vol.1, Iss. 1 (March 1858), 58.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

into the laws of the land', stipulating that: 'It should never be forgotten that all reform originates with the people, and that the sustained and organised expression of public opinion can alone lead to a successful issue.'¹³⁹

The third regular segment in every issue of the *EWJ* was entitled 'Open Council.' This was a section in which readers could submit a short, written comment, voicing their opinion on a chosen issue. Often the submissions would engage with a recent *EWJ* article, pursuing further discussion as to the accuracy or purpose of the piece. The existence of the 'Open Council' section points to the editors' enthusiasm to receive feedback from their readers and a high regard for their wider 'assembly.'¹⁴⁰ However, 'Open Council' also points to deep respect for the essential practice of discussion. The editors invited their audience not only to read the *EWJ* but to collaborate in its literary construction. In the first issue, it was coupled with a key disclaimer: 'As these pages are intended for general discussion, the Editors do not hold themselves responsible for the opinions expressed.'¹⁴¹ This strategic disclaimer allowed them a certain freedom of expression through the 'open council.' It also indicated the editors' wish that the *EWJ* be a platform of publication for all women who wished to contribute - a place of community and shared discussion. One anonymous submission on 'The Home Help for Neglected Children,' suggested that 'miserable women and children' would be best helped by a greater focus on their spiritual wellbeing: 'The Ragged Schools do much, but much more must be done to form a good character in a child.'¹⁴² The author, a "'Lady Teacher,'" would be happy to meet any ladies by appointment,' arguing that 'In order to lift up the human mind, it

¹³⁹ Ibid.; Ibid. 59.

¹⁴⁰ According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the word "council, n." is defined: 'an assembly of people meeting regularly to advise on, discuss, or organize something.' *Pocket Oxford English Dictionary*, Eleventh Edition, ed. Maurice Waite (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 199.

¹⁴¹ My italics. "Open Council," *EWJ*, Vol. 1, Iss. 2, XVI (April 1958), 137.

¹⁴² "The Home Help for Neglected Children," *EWJ*, Vol. II, Iss. 10 (December 1857); "Open Council," *EWJ*, Vol. 1, Iss. 2 (April 1858), 140.

should be understood that wisdom descends from above, though her voice be heard in the streets.’¹⁴³ In this instance, the contributor sought to further her own network of interested women through the *EWJ*. Essentially, the *EWJ* existed to give women a platform for publication and public discussion, and the ‘Open Council’ was the clear demonstration of this aim. It pointed to the later aims of the Kensington Society. Thus, the *EWJ* should be considered the more public and traditional precursor to the private Kensington Society. While they both worked to create and engage in communication about women’s progress, the *EWJ* was employing a strategy of agitation for social reform that was not unusual in a patriarchal world, with a multitude of similar publications edited by men.

The *EWJ* aimed, however, to create and sustain a wider network of like-minded women. As an article in its sixth issue stated: ‘union is strength.’¹⁴⁴ Sheila Herstein credits the *EWJ* with having created ‘the country’s first effective feminist network.’¹⁴⁵ She argues that the ‘origins of organised British feminism can be traced to the Langham Places offices’ of the *EWJ*, by exploring the evolution of the journal to the *Victoria Magazine* (1863-1880) and then the *Englishwoman’s Review*.¹⁴⁶ In part, the journal is a timeline of the various organisations and networking events that were initiated by mid nineteenth-century women reformers. Societies such as ‘The Society of Female Artists’, established by Bodichon, were regularly advertised in its pages. More often than not, this involved a account of a meeting by an attendee and an appeal for readers to join the next.¹⁴⁷ It is in

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ This statement was in an article encouraging women to joined the philanthropic Workhouse Visiting Society: ‘we will conclude with an earnest hope that many who read them in different parts of the kingdom will be induced to link themselves on to the Society, remembering that ‘union is strength.’ “The Workhouse Visiting Society,” *EWJ*, Vol. 1, Iss. 6, LV (August 1858), 391.

¹⁴⁵ Sheila R. Herstein, “The Langham Place Circle and Feminist Periodicals of the 1860s,” *Victorian Periodicals Review* 26, No. 1 (1993), 24.

¹⁴⁶ Although the *Victoria Magazine* and the *Englishwoman’s Review* are both valuable sources of nineteenth century feminist periodicals, this thesis is solely focused on the *EWJ* as the journal with the closest connection to the Kensington Society. Herstein, “The Langham Place Circle,” 24.

¹⁴⁷ “The Society of Female Artists,” *EWJ*, Vol. 1, Iss. 3 (May 1858): 205-208; See in “The Annual Reports of the Governesses Benevolent Institution from 1843-1856,” *EWJ*, Vol. I, Iss. 1 (March 1858): 1-13.

this context that we may observe the rationale for the foundation of the Kensington Society, a maturation of the feminist vision first trailed in the *EWJ* from 1858 to 1864.

The contemporary middle-class woman was their reader, and the *EWJ* placed her at the forefront of their strategic outreach. Evidently, the *EWJ* was a strategic platform for Victorian women to highlight past and present illustrious women as worthy models of activism, and so gradually build a network of socially engaged women in nineteenth-century Britain (an ambition which later materialised more advantageously in the regular Kensington Society meetings). As a result, the *EWJ* reflected the initial limited collaborative strength and cohesion of the 1850s and early 1860s female activist circle. However, as had been mentioned, popularity was not the ambition of the *EWJ* editors. In 1864, a year before the first Kensington Society meeting, Parkes wrote of her realistic goals for the *EWJ*:

Had it from the first any hope, any expectation, any wish to come forward in the same field with the able monthlies, which contained the best writing of the day? To this question an emphatic no must be given... If it had been wished to start a brilliant and successful magazine, some eminent publisher should have been secured and persuaded to undertake active pecuniary interest and risk; and all the best female writers should have been engaged, ‘regardless of expense’, and then – good-bye to the advocacy of any subject which would have entailed a breath of ridicule; goodbye ... to the results which have sprung up around the small office where so many workers collected together, because the purpose and the plan were honestly conceived and carried out.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁸ Parkes, ‘A Review of the Last Six Years,’ *EWJ*, Vol. II, Iss. 12 (February 1864), 361.

The wider impact of the *EWJ* in these early years is difficult to discern. However, the effect of its words on a small audience was vividly portrayed in its regular ‘Open Council’ section, with one submission commenting: ‘I happened lately to be one of a party of ladies where the conversation turned on the social condition of women, and Miss Leigh Smith’s pamphlet, ‘Women and Work,’ having been mentioned, was talked of on the whole very indulgently.’¹⁴⁹ Arguably, the public circulation of the *EWJ* was its Achilles’ heel. Unlike the Kensington Society, the women editors and contributors were far more vulnerable to external and critical scrutiny. While they worked hard to establish a respectable public image, and sought public acknowledgement for the causes they supported, the *EWJ* women were vulnerable to attack from both internal and external contemporaries. Parkes’ father, Joseph Parkes, sent a number of letters concerning the *EWJ* to his daughter. Evidently, he was highly concerned about her reputation and seemed acutely anxious about her career as a radical journalist. After reading a criticism of the *EWJ* in the establishment’s *National Review*, he wrote promptly to advise:¹⁵⁰

If you unwisely provoke the opposition of other and more popular Periodicals than the *National Review* you will speedily smash your Journal. It was born with the Croup, and it may easily be fatally choked. I have no idea who wrote the article in question; but it has much force and effect. It seems to me to be an Inn of Court Man – either Hutton or his Co-Editor. The *English Woman’s Journal* will be very silly if it replies in any article. Rather let The *Westminster Review* answer the attack on itself. You will, if not more careful, be fortunate if you do not get more circulated and influential Periodicals ‘down upon you.’¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁹ “Open Council,” *EWJ*, Vol. 1, Iss. 3 (May 1858), 209.

¹⁵⁰ The article in the *National Review* was insolently titled “Woman,” written by William Caldwell Roscoe, *National Review*, Vol. 7, (1858): 333-361, as cited in Janice Schroeder, “Better Arguments,” 243.

¹⁵¹ Joseph Parkes to Bessie Rayner Parkes, GCPP Parkes 2/61.2.

The letter's metaphor of the journal as an infant suggest Parkes' rather patronising view of the *EWJ*. Evidently, he was sceptical of its success, predicting its life with 'Croup' as an inevitable struggle, and probably short-lived. Parkes father was also concerned with her work. Interestingly, however, it was the nature of her trade that worried him:

Do not make yourself a Slave, or fancy it is necessary to the life and success of a Monthly Periodical to be always behind the counter. I think also, and so think others, that your sale of Tracts is a foolish and useless appendage to an office for the Journal...Advertise your Tracts, but why retail them? Also take care of what characters you let into your News Salon, or one Black Sheep will bring disrepute on the entire establishment. I mean be mindful. Men and Women without character always desire to get into the society of those who enjoy moral repute.¹⁵²

Although he makes no comment on the ideas disseminated in the *EWJ*, Parkes was evidently most concerned with the taint of trade in his daughter's career. The fact that her journal was a business, with 'sale', 'retail', and time 'behind a counter' necessary, was not aligned with their family's social situation, further illustrating the change they faced as middle-class women in publishing. Interestingly, Parkes ignored her father, crafting an article in response that appeared in the *EWJ* in January 1859, titled 'The Reviewer Reviewed.'¹⁵³

The black sheep to which he refers is undoubtedly Emily Faithfull, then involved in the highly publicised divorce of Admiral Sir Henry Codrington, as the companion of his wife. Notably, he did not seem to question the purpose of her 'establishment' or its

¹⁵²Joseph Parkes to Parkes, GCPP Parkes 2/63.2.

¹⁵³ Parkes, "The Reviewer Reviewed," *EWJ*, Vol. II, Iss. 11 (January 1859): 336-343.

work for women's advancement. Similarly, his suggestion that they not 'retail' the *EWJ*, circulating it instead amongst their associates, reveals his belief that the publishing trade was not a suitable profession for his daughter. Prizing his daughter's outward piety and the reputation of her circle, he added that:

On the whole the dirty case will take all the enamel off of E.F.'s reputation and ruin her business. If wise she will at once retire from business and her Printership to the Queen.

Still one pities her as a wild girl thrown into such society at the early mad age of 19. Excuse my reading over this as I must close.

If I hear of the verdict presently I will add it.

...

E.F. is bold, and may try to brazen it out, but the S. Sciences &c. can't continue Printing with her.¹⁵⁴

He continued to proffer this advice in a letter of 4 August 1864:

Also, a leading art. from to-day's Daily News – the 'accident' to the Victoria Press Lady will do Woman's Work no good. The scare is in everybody's mouth.

...There is a report that E.F. is in London in male attire. I don't believe this. However, end as the case may, E.F. will be much stained, unless she can clear herself by her own evidence...¹⁵⁵

By 1863, however, the relationship between Faithfull and the *EWJ* had already broken down, mainly because of her controversial involvement in the sensational Codrington divorce case. In December, Parkes had ended the Victoria Press contract to print the *EWJ*

¹⁵⁴ 'S. Sciences &c.' are in reference to the National Association for Social Sciences. GCPP Parkes 2/79.

¹⁵⁵ Joseph Parkes to Parkes, 4 August 1864, GCPP Parkes 2/81.2.

and appointed her friend, Emily Davies, as its editor. From 1865, Faithfull published her own journal, the *Victoria Magazine*, a monthly periodical.¹⁵⁶

Following the success of the *EWJ*, an increasing number of feminist periodicals entered the thriving market of Victorian publishing. It was in the immediate aftermath of the *EWJ* that suffrage campaigns became the prime focus of women's press endeavours.¹⁵⁷ Philippa Levine has emphasised the importance of the press in Victorian England, and the power it unlocked for feminist periodicals.¹⁵⁸ For her, the *EWJ* was the first feminist publication, and subsequently the progenitor of several other periodicals concentrating on women's progress in Britain: 'Though it was short-lived, foundering on the inevitable rock of finance, the *EWJ* was nonetheless important in pioneering such ventures.'¹⁵⁹ Levine notes that the 'creation of a feminist press was a distinctive move, asserting both the importance of women's issues and an understanding of the need for a women's voice.'¹⁶⁰ The history of nineteenth-century British women's progress has often considered the *EWJ* a minor, but not inconsequential, illustration of early feminism's insertion into the public sphere; such a view, this chapter has argued, is a gross underestimation. The *EWJ* was instead a significant early foray into the male-dominated culture of journalism and printing, launching the women's movement 'on a storm sea of

¹⁵⁶ The *Victoria* was more singular in its focus than the *EWJ*, chiefly concerned in the growth of women's remunerative employment. Maria Frawley, "The Editor as Advocate. Emily Faithfull and The *Victoria Magazine*," *Victorian Periodicals Review* 31, No. 1 (1998), 87.

¹⁵⁷ Philippa Levine has pointed out that the *Women's Herald*, which began in 1895, and introduced itself as 'a Weekly Record of the Progress of the Women's Movement', as well as the *Women's Suffrage Journal*, the publication of the National Society for Women's Suffrage, were similarly 'designed to act as the mouthpiece for specific campaigning organisations following the traditions of radical and liberal politics, while others pursued an independent propagandist function.' Levine cites David Doughan and Denise Sanchez, *Feminist Periodicals, 1855-1984: An Annotated Critical Bibliography of British, Irish, Commonwealth and International Titles* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1987) in Philippa Levine, "'The Humanizing influences of Five O'clock Tea': Victorian Feminist Periodicals," *Victorian Studies* 33, No. 2 (1990), 293.

¹⁵⁸ Philippa Levine, "The Humanizing Influences of Five O' Clock Tea: Victorian Feminist Periodicals," *Victorian Studies* 33, No. 2 (1990): 293-306.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid. 296.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid. 294.

print' and providing fruitful ground for Britain's first feminist debating society.¹⁶¹ The Kensington Society's future members cut their journalistic teeth on the *EWJ*. In 1862, for instance, Frances Power Cobbe wrote the first of her feminist articles in the *EWJ*, titled 'Celibacy v. Marriage,' establishing her activist credentials with compelling prose.¹⁶²

Always strategic and practical in her actions, in 1863 the new editor Emily Davies had begun to question the power of the *EWJ* to foster actual social change in Victorian society. On 28 December 1862, she wrote to Barbara Bodichon, questioning:

I wonder how you will like the Jan. Journal. Lizzie finds it more interesting than the last... It would be very difficult to point out any definite conversion effected by the instrumentality of the Journal alone. I have never heard of any.¹⁶³

Failing subscriptions were also an issue. They had not generated the wider readership that they had hoped for. There were also financial worries. The brutal reality of Victorian Britain meant that women, and particularly single women, including Davies, Parkes and most of her staff, needed an income. In their correspondence, money came to be a recurring topic of discussion. In January 1863 Davies wrote to Bodichon: 'I am in the last degree of perplexity about the Journal. Ever since I came into it, Miss Lewin has been constantly in distress and difficulty about money, and yesterday she told me she has not enough to pay the rent.'¹⁶⁴

¹⁶¹ Pauline Nestor, "A New Departure in Women's Publishing: the *English Woman's Journal* and the *Victoria Magazine*," *Victorian Periodicals Review* 15, Iss. 3 (1982), 95.

¹⁶² Susan Hamilton, *Frances Power Cobbe and Victorian Feminism* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 15.

¹⁶³ Davies to Bodichon, 18 December 1862, *Davies: Collected Letters*, 12-13.

¹⁶⁴ Davies to Bodichon, 14 January 1863, as seen in Murphy, ed. *Emily Davies: Collected Letters*, 29. Jessie Boucherett and Barbara Bodichon were amongst the few members of the KS who were not in this situation due to inherited wealth. For more on this topic, see Ellen Jordan, Anne Bridger, "'An Unexpected Recruit to Feminism': Jessie Boucherett's 'Feminist Life' and the Importance of Being Wealthy," *Women's History Review* 15, Iss. 3 (2006): 385-412.

Nonetheless, new channels of publishing opened to them through the *EWJ*. On 3 January 1863, Davies wrote to Bodichon: ‘Bessie has been asked to write on our subject in “Good Words,” with its circulation of 60,000, monthly (equal to five years of the *EWJ*!) and wd. probably be open to Bessie also. It seems to me a pity to waste our efforts on so limited a circle of readers, when there are now (unlike 4 years ago) so many wider channels open to us.’¹⁶⁵ Later that month, on January 14, 1863 she wrote again to Bodichon:

To create an atmosphere we must be read, and the *EWJ* is not. I think it is of very little use as a rallying point... The journal has been of no use in the Medical movement. It was of no use in the London University matter, and is of none now, that I can see, in the Local Exams question... I wonder how men could be taught to respect women. Not by keeping up feeble journals, that I am convinced of.¹⁶⁶

Although Davies was evidently disheartened by the declining circulation of the *EWJ*, and was perhaps burdened by disappointed ambitions, hindsight does allow us to argue that the *EWJ* did ‘create an atmosphere.’ When it eventually closed in 1864, it had propelled the ‘atmosphere’ in Britain for reform far beyond its relatively short existence, drawing valuable members into the women’s movement and spawning three literary successors, Parkes’s *Alexandra Magazine* (1864), Emily Faithfull’s *Victoria Magazine* (1863-1880) and the *Englishwoman’s Review* (1866-1910).¹⁶⁷

Earlier, in the *EWJ*’s fourth issue, a short story, ‘A Woman’s Pen’, applauds a young girl who dreams of a career in writing, and thus, in the author’s opinion, ‘do the

¹⁶⁵ Davies to Bodichon, 3 January 1863, *Emily Davies: Collected Letters*, 26.

¹⁶⁶ Davies to Bodichon, 14 January 1863, *Ibid.*, 30-32.

¹⁶⁷ Herstein, “The Langham Place Circle and Feminist Periodicals,” 24.

world's noblest work.'¹⁶⁸ In the unexpectedly prophetic conclusion of the story, the purpose of The Kensington Society was subtly inserted:

I know not whether the discussion will bear fruit, whether the time is ripe for it, whether result is far or near. I only know that the world is full of harmonies, hallowed sympathies and solemn truths, which we are evoking as our knowledge grows.¹⁶⁹

Perhaps this statement was all too accurate, and the time was not ripe for a women's journal to make a radical impact on nineteenth-century society. However, the *EWJ* made one thing evident: the time was ripe for women's discussion. The *EWJ* spearheaded the use of the periodical as a tool of empowerment for activist woman. Within a year of the *EWJ*'s demise, the women behind the journal had turned to a more rigorous and focussed centre for communication to generate that 'atmosphere' for the advancement of women so desired by Davies. They did this by founding a 'rallying point' discussion group, the Kensington Society. When the Kensington Society was founded in 1865, they returned to the roots of the *EWJ*. These provided them with the next step in their commitment to provoke discussion, grow their knowledge, and disseminate their reform ideas to the wider community of middle-class women in mid-Victorian Britain

¹⁶⁸ "A Woman's Pen," *EWJ*, Vol. 1, Iss. 4, XXXIV (June 1858): 246-259.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 259.

CHAPTER III. 'WHAT IS THE USE OF ALL THIS DISCUSSION?'¹

On 1 November 1858, an article in the *English Woman's Journal* opened with the question, 'what is the use of all this discussion?'² The piece, most probably written by Isa Craig, recounted the most recent meeting of the National Association for the Promotion of Social Sciences (NAPSS) in April 1858.³ The article's question was directly in reference to the meeting's purpose which was to discuss the emigration of women as a solution to unemployment. However, the question also alluded to a deeper and quite deliberate emphasis on 'discussion' as a vital aspect of nineteenth-century social reform, particularly in regard to the mid-Victorian women's movement. After all, the term 'the discussion' had become almost synonymous with the phrase 'the woman question' in public discourse.⁴

As if this were not potent enough, Craig's exposition concluded on an even more poignant portrayal of 'discussion,' by selecting a few lines by Alfred Tennyson:⁵

Not clinging to some ancient saw;

Not master'd by some modern term;

¹ "The Meetings at Liverpool," *EWJ*, Vol. II, Iss. 9, XXIII (November 1858), 145.

² *Ibid.*

³ The article was probably written by Isa Craig, who had just been appointed the first female secretary of NAPSS and presented her own paper on "Emigration as a Preventive Agency" at the Liverpool NAPSS meeting in April 1858.

⁴ In an 1858 *EWJ* article the woman question is termed 'the discussion': 'Public opinion, however, so far as it concerns itself about the matter at all, is, it must be granted, as yet against the discussion, and prejudice is a strong fortress.' "The Disputed Question," *EWJ*, Vol. 1, No. 6, LIII (August 1858), 362.

⁵ At the end of the article, the speech of the Lord Chancellor of Ireland is quoted, and his reference to the German philosopher Niebuhr's plea to England, 'to busy herself with the nobler work of social reformation.' "The Meetings at Liverpool," *EWJ*, 159.

Not swift nor slow to change, but firm:
And in its season bring the law;

That from Discussion's lip may fall
What Life, that, working strongly, binds –
Set in all lights by many minds,
To close the interests of all.⁶

Tennyson's 1842 poem 'Love Thou Thy Land' is about reform, both natural and social, in which the personified 'Discussion' plays a vital role. By quoting Tennyson's lines, the author questions, just as a Kensington Society would, the worthiness of discussion for women's progress. After the initial, moderate success of the *EWJ*, the Kensington women returned to the domestic home as the space in which change might be cultivated. It was in these private meetings that the mid-nineteenth century fully realised the merit of discussion, and it was upon discussion that they subsequently placed all their strategy, as a place for 'hallowed sympathies and solemn truths,' and where they could grow their 'knowledge.'⁷ The true significance of this leading question and preface to the *EWJ*'s article would not be realised for another seven years, when the Kensington Society first gathered together with the sole purpose of structured discussion.

The purpose of this chapter is to explore this concept of 'discussion', and its significance for the Kensington Society. The word derives from the Latin word 'discutere' which could also be translated as 'investigate.'⁸ The Kensington Society served to accommodate upper middle-class, independent, and cultivated women who lacked a public space and platform to communicate their opinions or to investigate other points of

⁶ Alfred Tennyson, from his poem *Love Thou Thy Land, with love far-brought*, as quoted in "The Meetings at Liverpool," *EWJ*, 159.

⁷ The phrases employed in "A Woman's Pen," *EWJ*, 259.

⁸ "discuss, n." *Pocket Oxford English Dictionary*, 256.

view, with the shared objective to engender change in the condition of women in nineteenth-century British society.⁹

In May 1865, Emily Davies wrote to Anna Richardson about her new discussion group, the Kensington Society:

We have announced ten vacancies and intend to select from the members proposed, who maybe twenty or thirty, those we think most desirable. This is a stratagem (borrowed from the Century Club) for sifting without personal offence to anybody. I wish you belonged to the Kensington. We are getting a delightful set of members. Some of the papers already in are very good, and we are looking forward to an interesting discussion upon them on the 23rd.¹⁰

Davies' letter, written just months after their first meeting in Charlotte Manning's home, brings to light three key facets of the Kensington Society. The first is that the Society held a rigorous vetting process for potential members. Secondly, that there was a deliberate strategy behind this procedure, and finally, that the essential purpose of the society was the delivery of papers that provoked 'interesting discussion.'

It is important to understand that throughout the years of the Kensington meetings, members of the Society were also involved in multiple committees and unions designed

⁹ Interestingly, these women were not from noble families. In fact, the petition for marriage rights reform illustrates this. Mary Lyndon Shanley has pointed out that the only woman to sign the petition that was of noble heritage was the Hon. Julia Maynard, the daughter of Henry, Viscount Maynard. A further aim of this thesis will be to assess the class status of these women. While they have often been referred to as middle-class, many of them reflect the malleable nature of class situation in the nineteenth century. For instance, a significant number of these women were the daughters of Anglican clergymen. See Mary Lyndon Shanley, *Feminism, Marriage, and the Law in Victorian England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 33.

¹⁰ Davies to Anna Richardson, May 1865. GCPP Davies 1/1/5.

to improve the situation of women in marriage, education, employment and opportunity.¹¹ The National Association for the Promotion of Social Science and Emily Davies' home gatherings of the London Association of Schoolmistresses, for instance, boasted several overlapping members, including Emma Fitch and her husband, Joshua Fitch MP and Isa Craig, the secretary of NAPSS. Likewise, Parkes and Barbara Bodichon were both regular members of Clementia Taylor and MP Peter Taylor's regular 'Pen and Pencil Club', a literary group that met in their home at Aubrey House, Kensington, as well as the 'Portfolio Club', a venue which brought together female artists, including Christina Rossetti. Members of the Victorian middle class were undeniably enthusiastic in forming genteel societies.¹²

But the Kensington Society was more socially and political radical in its purpose. The most common misconception is that they were a lobby group, because a large majority of the original members soon signed Bodichon's 1866 suffrage petition.¹³ Yet, fundamentally, the Kensington Society was a debating society. At the time, 'discussion' and debating groups were uniformly associated with men's societies and university assemblies, all of which excluded female members. Instead, the Society met in the domestic sphere of a drawing room, 'providing women with a physical space of their own, an important consideration in an age when so many women lived in the houses of husbands or fathers or brothers.'¹⁴ In fact, the import of a room, and in particular, a drawing room, for women, was understood before the Kensington Society ever met. Their

¹¹ Jessie Boucherett, for instance, founded the Society for the Promotion of the Employment of Women (SPEW) in 1859 with the intention of finding alternate career paths for disappointed governesses; and a number of Kensington members were part of Bodichon's British Women's Suffrage Committee that she began in 1865, and within two weeks had collected 1,500 signatures for her petition in favour of female suffrage.

¹² See Peter Clarke, *British Clubs and Societies 1580-1800: The Origins of an Associational World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

¹³ Presented to the House of Commons by John Stuart Mill.

¹⁴ Philippa Levine, *Victorian Feminists*, 15.

comrade, Bessie Rayner Parkes, had emphasised its significance in her 1854 poem ‘Lilian’s Second Letter’:

A spirit moves
Amidst the silk of gilded drawing rooms
And in laborious homes, with equal voice
It summons us to labour and to prayer,
To labour which is prayer, and which alone
Can solve the question which the age demands,
“What is woman’s right and fitting sphere?”¹⁵

The imagery of Parkes’ poem is a powerful illustration of how the harmonious, peaceful domestic home of these Victorian women was permeated with a ‘spirit’ which ‘summons’ them to question their place in society, for both higher-class women, in ‘gilded drawing rooms’ and working-class ‘laborious homes.’ Such an image was in stark contrast to the sheltered, protected connotation which is commonly associated with the nineteenth-century home.

However, the concept of a drawing room in which they could discuss or debate becomes even more complex when the privacy of the space is considered. The importance of privacy for the Kensington Society members was evident in a concerned letter Emily Davies wrote to Bodichon about her paper on ‘Female Suffrage’:

I would not mind saying a few indignant things at the meeting, but these papers travel about the country and go into families where they may be read by prejudiced men, so it is necessary to be careful...

¹⁵ Bessie Rayner Parkes, “Lilian’s Second Letter,” *Summer Sketches and Other Poems* (London: John Chapman, 1854), 164.

I don't see my way about the Committee. I have taken further advice, and it is all against. If we could have a perfect Committee, it might do good, but I doubt whether the sort of people who can really help us would join, yet, and wild people might do great harm. I am inclined to think that the first thing to do is to stir up women, chiefly thro' private channels, to use the rights they already possess, of voting for Guardians &c. So long as those rights remain unharmed, they are an almost incontrovertible argument against us. To get women to work on mixed Committees is also very useful. It accustoms men's imaginations to the spectacle of women taking part in public affairs.¹⁶

Davies' strategic thinking is illuminating. Her suggestion that the 'sort of people' they needed would not be interested in a public Committee stressed the fact that privacy was a valued commodity for these women. Wary of prejudiced audiences, 'private channels' were not only a strategic avenue of women's communication, but a safe one. However, Davies also makes it clear that women in public sight was crucial to reform, in particular, 'men's imaginations,' and the public platform should not be surrendered.

'TO STIR UP...THRO' PRIVATE CHANNELS'

¹⁶ Her use of underline. Davies to Bodichon, 14 November 1865. GCPP Bodichon 1/1. Girton College, Cambridge.

Evidently, the Kensington Society women felt that they could express in person what they did not feel comfortable expressing in a private letter. The significance of the private sphere for women as a confined, suppressed space, hidden from the male-dominated public sphere, has been a key concept of women's history. However, for these women, it does not reflect the complexity of the domestic space. Although the Kensington women did not have complete independence in the domestic domain, they had autonomy and the opportunity for free discussion. To an extent, Charlotte Manning's Kensington gatherings of thirty or so women were simultaneously public and private. In this case, the drawing room became a tool of empowerment for nineteenth-century women. Although it was born out of an exclusion from public life, their collective separation from society provided a space of liberty for these women.

In fact, it is possible that an event in which these women first embraced the public sphere was the catalyst for the Society. When Emily Davies reflected on the society years later, she recorded that it had actually grown out of the first agitation for women's tertiary education, for which a committee had been formed in October 1862, to campaign for the admission of girls to the university examinations in London, Cambridge, and Oxford. The committee included future Kensington members, Barbara Bodichon, Elizabeth Bostock, Frances Buss, Isa Craig, Emilia Gurney and Emily Davies, amongst others.¹⁷ Davies, who had acted as secretary to the committee, wrote:

The agitation for the opening of the local examination had brought into communication with each other a good many people having more or less common interest and aims, and it seemed desirable that the cessation, for the moment, of the special occasion for co-operation should not result in our losing touch of each other, with

¹⁷ It was chaired by Henry Alford, the current Dean of Canterbury, from 1863.

a view to supplying some sort of link between us, a small society was started, for the discussion of questions of common interest.¹⁸

By December 1864, the committee had expanded to include Mary Eliza Porter, Gertrude King, Dorothea Beale, Frances Martin and Elizabeth Wolstenholme. Each of these women, as teachers or headmistresses of girls' schools, was selected to present evidence to the Taunton commission, an investigation into secondary schools in Britain, mere months before the first Kensington meeting.¹⁹ Of the nine female witnesses, only two were not Kensington members: Eleanor Elizabeth Smith and Susan Kyberd. It also marked the first public gathering of the Kensington Society for a shared purpose, before they discovered the nascent potential of meeting in Charlotte Manning's drawing room.

This chapter will further explore why and how the Kensington Society founders chose to use a private meeting to communicate and discuss their socially progressive opinions. It will demonstrate how 'discussion' was the most available form of social and political involvement open to Victorian women. While courts, universities and local parliaments were closed to them, the private and domestic sphere of the home was the familiar space in which they could question, debate and test their thoughts. In this space, discourse could be more transparent. The fact that the Kensington Society did not take minutes of their meetings (as unfortunate as this fact may be for historians), demonstrates that their intention was to create a private communicative space in which members could feel at liberty to profess their thoughts openly. Because of this gap in our knowledge, we can only glimpse their discussion and debate by examining the list of questions that they circulated and answered.²⁰ A closer look at the official forms of the Kensington Society,

¹⁸ "Family Chronicle," GCPP Davies 1/1-2. Girton College, Cambridge.

¹⁹ Sara Delamont, "Davies, (Sarah) Emily (1830-1921)," *ODNB* (2007).

²⁰ "List of Questions for Discussion," APPENDIX III.

however, reveals a carefully constructed society dedicated to providing a network of communication and learning for intellectual and socially progressive women.

It might also be argued that the Kensington Society provided its members with an opportunity to ‘self-educate’ through discussion. The link between women’s progress and education belonged to a feminist tradition that viewed learning as the crucial route to emancipation. It is not surprising, therefore, that the Kensington women’s public activism mostly involved educational reform. Elizabeth Wolstenholme, who was present at the Society’s first meeting, established a private girls’ boarding school in Boothstown, outside Manchester. Wolstenholme, like many, was appalled by the dismal state of girls’ elementary education and joined the College of Preceptors in 1862 – through which she met Emily Davies. During her career she became an avid supporter of biological education for women regarding their own bodies, including sex education, another aspect of self-education. She was also the founder of several Manchester branch organisations for women’s progress.²¹ The Kensington Society meetings, in fact, imitated a micro version of a university: their practice of writing and presenting answers to questions exemplifies a mutual learning environment in which networking and intellectual gain were imperative. The Society was also a product of its culture: the Victorians, following on from their Romantic and Enlightenment ancestors, and having witnessed the radical society brought about by the French Revolution, recognized the power of discourse and the pragmatic ways in which it could be employed. To better understand the Society’s intellectual genesis, there are three historical precedents that warrant assessment for their shared social and intellectual aims.

²¹ Wolstenholme also established the Manchester branch of SPEW in 1865, the Manchester Committee for the Enfranchisement of Women (MCEW) in 1866 and was a member of the North of England Council for the Higher Education of Women.

The 1854 meeting at Charlotte Manning's living room was not the first time they had met together with an organised intention to commune with like-minded friends. In the summer of 1853, Barbara Bodichon and her aunt, Julia Smith, gathered at the King's Arms Inn, Leith Hill with Mary Ann Evans (George Eliot), Bessie Rayner Parkes, Sara Hennell, and Susanna and John Chapman, the publisher from London, to spend a few weeks on a literary reading and writing retreat.²² Another gathering for the literary minded that would have served as inspiration for the Kensington Society was Clementia Taylor and the Radical MP Peter Taylor's 'Pen and Pencil Club', hosted in their home at Aubrey House, Kensington, in which members shared their writing, poetry, art, literature.²³ The Kensington women, Bodichon, Alice Malleson (and her sister Elizabeth) and Frances Power Cobbe were members of this radical gathering in the early 1860s, joining fellow women activists, Elizabeth Blackwell, Louis Blanc and Emilie Ashurst Venturi amongst other literary figures, including a visit from Louisa May Alcott. Long before either of these groups, however, a young Elizabeth Garrett had hosted 'Talks on Things in General' gatherings in her father's Alde House on Sunday evenings. Millicent Fawcett, her sister, remembered them well:

I can see her now on the sofa in the Alde House drawing room: George, our younger brother, on her lap, and the rest of us grouped around her while she talked on just what was uppermost in her mind at the time: Garibaldi and the freeing of Italy from the Austrians, Carlyle's Cromwell, Macaulay's History of England,

²² Kathleen McCormack speculates that these gatherings were the inspiration behind much of Eliot's literary work, including 'the narrator's satiric descriptions of the exchanges among the drinkers' in *Adam Bede*, *George Eliot's English Travels: Composite Characters and Coded Communications* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 41; 43.

²³ The Taylors had previously been active in the anti-slavery campaign, with Clementia Taylor founding the Ladies' London Emancipation Society from 1863. See Elizabeth Crawford, "Taylor [nee Doughty], Clementia (1810-1908)," *ODNB* (2004).

and modern political events and persons, such as Lord Palmerston and the chances of a Reform Bill.²⁴

The strategic weight of home gatherings for women's progress, however, had been most poignantly exemplified for them by Anna Jameson. Well before the Kensington Society, Jameson had held weekly meetings at her home in Ealing for literary female friends. Numerous literary luminaries of the day met here, including Lady Byron, Elizabeth Jesse Reid, Ottilie von Goethe and Elizabeth Barrett Browning. She often hosted a number of the Kensington women when they were younger. According to Gerardine MacPherson, Jameson's niece, she 'gathered around her quite a little coterie of aspiring young souls, whom she called her adopted nieces, and whose various talents, in whatever way they gave token, she nurtured with counsel and assistance.'²⁵ Macpherson's biography also recounted her aunt's two drawing room lectures in 1855 and 1856 on the topics of 'sisters of charity' and 'communion of labour,' both held in the home of Elizabeth Reid.²⁶ Jameson was:

persuaded to put her thoughts upon the public ministrations of charity, and the office which women might fitly fill in this way, into the form of lectures. The first of these, 'On Sisters of Charity Abroad and at Home,' was delivered in the month of February 1855 'privately' at the home of Mrs. Reid in York Terrace...The first lecture was experimental, and met with such success, that,

²⁴ Millicent Fawcett, *What I Remember* (T. Fisher Unwin, 1924), 41.

²⁵ Geraldine McPherson, "A Wreath on the Grave of the Late Anna Jameson," *The Argosy* 21 (June 1881), 455, accessed: <https://www.victorianvoices.net/ARTICLES/MISC/Argosy/A1881-AnnaJameson.pdf>

²⁶ Jameson, whilst utilising the private nature of the drawing room, also saw the potential in publishing these lectures, and in 1859 an edited form of the lectures was published. Geraldine recounted that it was 'printed 'by desire,' and the interest it excited was sufficient to demand a second edition within three months.' Gerardine MacPherson, *Memoirs of the Life of Anna Jameson* (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1878), 289; See Anna Jameson, *A Communion of Labour: A Second Lecture on the Social Employments of Women* (London: Longman, Brown, Green, Longmans & Roberts, 1856).

had Mrs. Jameson's health permitted the necessary exertion, she might have been encouraged to give her mind to this branch of public education.²⁷

Although these lectures were presentations, rather than open discussions, the intention behind their assembly was a blueprint of the Kensington Society's later ambition – to allow a space for private dissention and promote 'public education' by disseminating their ideas.

MacPherson believes that this group of women, who became the Kensington Society, faintly resembled the coteries, French salons and debating societies of the preceding century. The next part of this chapter will therefore assess these societies' strategies for private communication, and how the Kensington resembled them in purpose and practice. However, the more practical aspects of the Society were what made it unique – the two most important being eligibility for membership, and the original topics they addressed in their gatherings. Fortunately, the Girton College archives hold the official members list of the Kensington Society.²⁸ The second part of this chapter will therefore address the practical nature of the Kensington meetings, highlighting the topics for discussion in Charlotte Manning's drawing room.

In the Romantic Period the term 'coterie' was commonly applied to feminine gambling societies, or a narrow circle of French associates. More recently, however, literary studies have redressed the negative connotations attached to coteries and, instead, highlighted their social and political significance. In the seventeenth century, Lady Anne Southwell, a Calvinist-inclined poet, gathered around her a 'coterie' of notable literary figures in Acton which, in Elizabeth Clarke's opinion, shows that she was 'indeed a

²⁷ MacPherson, *Memoirs of the Life of Anna Jameson*, 288.

²⁸ "List of Members," APPENDIX II.

“springing Well” of wit, intelligence and pre-Civil War Church of England Spirituality.’²⁹

Betty Schellenberg, in her notable 2016 study on *Literary Coterie and the Making of Modern Print Culture: 1740-1790* redefines the literary coterie as:

a physically realised entity, a relatively cohesive social group whose membership may undergo shifts over time, but which is held together as a continuous identifiable whole by some combination of kinship, friendship, clintage, and at least occasional geographical proximity. Most importantly, a literary coterie’s cohesiveness is based on, and is maintained to a significant degree by, strong shared literary interests, expressed in the scribal exchange of original compositions, reading materials, and critical views.³⁰

Despite their literary preoccupations, Schellenberg’s eighteenth-century coterie bear a remarkable resemblance to the Kensington Society meetings. Moreover, they were both largely formed from circles or networks already established through familial or linked relationships. Likewise, they both became venues for women to create a communal and intellectually open space. They also prioritised sociability, gathering in a home rather than in a public venue. Gillian Russell and Clara Tuite have attempted to demonstrate the political muscle of sociability in the eighteenth and nineteenth century by emphasising the sociability of the Romantic literary sphere in which accompanying political discussion played a pivotal role.³¹ Frequently, historical associations of women have been too lightly

²⁹ Elizabeth Clarke, “Anne, Lady Southwell: Coterie and Culture,” in *The Intellectual Culture of Puritan Woman, 1558-1680*, ed. Johanna Harris, Elizabeth Scott-Baumann (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 68.

³⁰ Betty Schellenberg, *Literary Coterie and the Making of Modern Print Culture: 1740-1790* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 9.

³¹ See especially Margaret C. Jacob’s chapter, “Sociability and the International Republican Conversation,” in *Romantic Sociability: Social Networks and Literary Culture in Britain, 1770-1840*, ed. Gillian Russell, Clara Tuite (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002): 24-42.

considered as mere social gatherings. For the Kensington Society and the coteries of the seventeenth and eighteenth century, gatherings in homes were a reaction to a greater necessity: to open up spaces of discussion for women. The assembly rooms and associations of women were, arguably, progenitors and architects of Britain's and Europe's first gender-inclusive universities. The same might be said of the famous female-dominated French salons.

Indeed, Duncan McColl Chesney has described the French salon as 'an important cultural inheritance in the nineteenth century.'³² Salons, initially practised in Italy in the sixteenth century, thrived in France throughout the seventeenth, eighteenth and even nineteenth centuries, thus dominating the social scene in Europe. The role of women in this world of salons has been heavily debated in historiography, with scholars focussed particularly on the salon's relation to the emergence of public sphere discourse. Steven Kale has argued that the seventeenth-century model of a salon fought against 'an atmosphere critical of feminine assertiveness, the *précieuses* tried...to foster civility and restore the image of women by reaffirming their right to consideration, independence, and learning. As a result, salons became sites for two forms of innovation: the contestation of social conventions and the discussion of progressive ideas.'³³ Salons were the platform for philosophical, literary and artistic discussion.

Joan Landes, however, argues that the French Revolution silenced the public aristocratic woman by forcing her to retreat to the private realm.³⁴ Such retreat, however,

³² Duncan McColl Chesney, "The History of the History of the Salon," *Nineteenth-Century French Studies* 32, No. 1 (2007-8), 94.

³³ See Steven D. Kale, *French Salons: High Society and Political Sociability from the Old Regime to the Revolution of 1848* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 2004), 17-18; See also Steven D. Kale, "Women, the Public Sphere, and the Persistence of Salons," *French Historical Studies*, 25, No. 1 (1957): 115-148.

³⁴ Joan B. Landes, *Women in the Public Sphere in the Age of the French Revolution* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988); See also Barbara Caine's *Victorian Feminists*, and *English Feminism*, which systematically follow the growth of the feminist network from the French Revolution to the advent of Women's Liberation.

allowed them to penetrate the social, political and economic discussions of their day with a newfound freedom. According to Dena Goodman, the French Enlightenment and its salons had restored women to an active intellectual position in society. Her prominent work, *The Republic of Letters: A Cultural History of the French Enlightenment* (1994), argued that the ‘cultural history of the French Enlightenment must also be a feminist history,’ as it ‘challenges the conceptualization of intellectual activity as the product of masculine reason and male genius.’³⁵ Moreover, the tools of discourse in the Enlightenment were uniquely suited to a female lifestyle, such as ‘polite conversation and letter writing, and its defining social institution was the Parisian salon.’³⁶ Goodman argues that in these “forums for discussion,” private individuals formed civil society, creating a new public sphere to challenge and eventually to appropriate the old, inauthentic public sphere of the monarchy. The new public sphere was authentic precisely because it was open.’³⁷

Donna Andrews has assessed some of the public debating topics of this period, and highlighted four key establishments for women: ‘La Belle Assemblée, the Female Parliament, the Carlisle House Debates for Ladies only, and the Female Congress.’³⁸ By the nineteenth century these French salons had grown increasingly political.³⁹ The exchange of ideas and society between British and French women had also increased.

³⁵ Goodman cites other feminist philosophers who have also made this observation, including Genevieve Lloyd, *The Man of Reason: “Male” and “Female” in Western Philosophy* (Minneapolis, 1984); Jean Grimshaw, *Philosophy and Feminist Thinking* (Minneapolis, 1986); Dena Goodman, *The Republic of Letters: A Cultural History of the French Enlightenment* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), 3.

³⁶ Ibid; Goodman also contends that ‘In Paris, the new public sphere was structured by the salon, the press, and other institutions of sociability and publicity which were developed to counter the courtly institutions of the absolutist state. Goodman, *The Republic of Letters*, 14.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Donna T. Andrews, “Popular Culture and Public Debate: London 1780,” *The Historical Journal* 39, No. 2 (1996): 410; Carly Wood’s recent PhD at the University of Pittsburgh has also explored the concept of space for women’s debating groups in the United States and United Kingdom between 1835-1945. Carly S. Woods. *Debating Women: Gender, Education, and Spaces for Argument, 1835-1945* (East Lansing: Michigan State University, 2018).

³⁹ Kale, *French Salons*, 110.

Feminist practice in France was having a direct impact upon what British women were doing. Similar to the Kensington Society, very little is recorded of what was said in French salons, unless it was recounted through correspondence, which described it as a private and natural discussion forum, in which members could feel safe in voicing their opinions.⁴⁰ It is most suggestive that in 1864, a year before the Kensington Society was founded, Bessie Rayner Parkes was a guest of the successful salonnière Marie Trélat, who hosted a fashionable Friday salon meeting in her Parisian drawing room at 6 Rue de Seine in Paris. As a notable socialite and wife of celebrated surgeon Ulysse Trélat, Trélat attracted prominent guests from across Europe.⁴¹ On 13 June 1864, Bessie Rayner Parkes wrote to her French mother-in-law, Louise Swanton Belloc (née Anne-Louise Chasseriau Swanton), from the midst of Madame Trélat's salon.⁴² They were apparently holding a meeting for the *Ecole Professionnelle*.

I am writing this in the midst of the French Society for the employment of Women! *Ecole Professionnelle* they call it; and I have come with Mde Trélat to a committee. It seems to me a great deal more practically effective than ours – It is called *Ceutied* in one large old house, - different classes of young girls being prepared for different means of earning their living.⁴³

Evidently, Parkes thought there was much to be learnt from attending these meetings in Paris. *Ecole*, roughly translated, is 'school', and the term '*Professionnelle*' is often translated as 'vocation.' From Parkes' description, the '*Ecole*' resembled the Society for

⁴⁰ Steven D. Kale, *French Salons: High Society and Political Sociability from the Old Regime to the Revolution of 1848* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 2004), 2.

⁴¹ One of Ulysse Trélat's most prominent patients was Napoleon III.

⁴² Belloc was the author of over forty publications, all of which were published in French and English.

⁴³ Bessie Rayner Parkes to Louisa Belloc, 13 June 1864. GCPP Parkes 2/12, 3.

the Promotion of the Employment of Women in its practice and ambitions. Parkes continued her association with Madame Trélat for a number of years, and to some extent, we can assume that the parallel British and French societies benefited from this international relationship.

Mary Thale has also pointed to the rise of English women's debating societies in the 1790s as a product of the Enlightenment and the intellectual ideals of Thomas Hobbes, Isaac Newton, and John Locke.⁴⁴ However, it may be perceived as part of a 'heightened participation by both men and women in increasingly secular and open discussion of issues of public concern'.⁴⁵ Above all else, these societies prioritised reason as the primary source of authority. They also indicated a growth in public political participation. Thale suggests that a study of London's debating societies 'provides new evidence on the development of artisan self-consciousness and reveals the increasing interest of the common people in political issues.'⁴⁶ In other words, simple discussion went hand in hand with striving to reason through the complexities of an evolving society and world. Sarah Wiggins further argues that for late-nineteenth century women, debating societies were more commonly 'in their own space for political advantage.'⁴⁷ That is not to argue that there were no organised open forums for women's debates: Kensington Society members who had supported the Marriage Reform Act would also have been invited to a public meeting that was held to gain support and publicity for this reform.

Other female debating societies similar to the Kensington Society produced journals that reflected the social and political debates they addressed. The Edinburgh Debating Society, for instance, published a magazine from 1865 to 1880 entitled *The*

⁴⁴ Mary Thale, "London Debating Societies in the 1790s," *The Historical Journal* 32, No. 1 (1989): 57-89.

⁴⁵ Walter Garrison Runciman, *Very Different, But Much the Same: The Evolution of English Society Since 1714* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 83.

⁴⁶ Thale, "London Debating Societies in the 1790s," 58.

⁴⁷ Sarah Wiggins, "Gendered Spaces and Political Identity: Debating Societies in English Women's Colleges, 1890-1914," *Women's History Review* 18, No.5 (2009), 738.

Attempt. Kate Kelman's study of this Edinburgh-based society asserts that this magazine was a tool of self-education for the women and their readers, in a similar political and social climate as the *EWJ*: 'At a time when women's societal role was limited and access to education based on wealth or the philanthropy of others, these women were able (through privileged place in the middle and upper classes) to construct their own canon of improving reading and to set guidelines for the education of others.'⁴⁸ Eventually, education through discussion was an ideal propounded at the Kensington Society's Girton College, which hosted the 'Spontaneous Speaking Society', 'Debating Society', 'Girton College Parliament' and Political Discussion Society.⁴⁹

'PRACTICALLY EFFECTIVE'

The fact that its members did not employ the term 'debating society' may indicate that the Kensington Society's intention was to appear as a more genteel, educated, and in fact, middle-class gathering. In this, they could appeal to a clientele of intellectual, but also respectable, women. Unlike the public debating societies of the nineteenth century, the Kensington Society was strictly formal in its meetings and member admissions. Their obsession with procedure and formality is evident in their rules. On January 1, 1865, the

⁴⁸ Kate Kelman, "'Self-Culture': The Edinburgh Reading Pursuits of the Ladies of Edinburgh, 1865-1885," *Victorian Periodicals Review* 36, No. 1 (2003), 59.

⁴⁹ For more on the debating societies of early women's colleges, see Wiggins, "Gendered Spaces and Political Identity."

first rules were drawn up by the committee, which included Isa Craig, Emily Davies and Charlotte Manning:

THE KENSINGTON SOCIETY:

The following rules have been agreed upon provisionally, subject to such modifications as experience may suggest:-

Questions will be issued four times a year. Answers may be given either in a single sentence or at any length which the subject may seem to require. Members will not be expected to write on every question. They will be requested to suggest one question each term, and from the list thus furnished, the committee will select the three which appear to them of the greatest general interest. Questions may be on any subject which is not merely personal or local.

Selections from the answers will be printed from time to time, at the discretion of the Committee, for circulation among the members, and a social meeting will be held each term, at which papers will be read, followed by conversation.

An annual subscription of half-a-crown, and an entrance fee of half-a-crown (additionally) will constitute membership. The financial year will end on March 25.

The Committee will exercise a veto on the admission of members. Applications for admission to be addressed to the Secretary, 17 Cunningham Place, London, N.W.

Committee
Ms. Sergeant Channing

Miss Isa Craig
Miss Emily Davies (Hon. Sec.)⁵⁰

The formal nature of these rules reveals that the founders' original motive was to produce a respectable and reputable society. Indeed, the propriety of the Society was a continuing theme of debate amongst its leaders.⁵¹ It was therefore important that their gatherings be decorous, as was expected of middle-class Victorian ladies. For some members, this was a large part of their appeal. On 23 May of the same year, Emily Davies praised the Society's president for her management of the members: 'I am not very anxious about this evening. The main responsibility rests with Mrs Manning, and she always manages people beautifully.'⁵² What the Society did not intend to become is evident from Alice Westlake's letter to Helen Taylor, encouraging her to join the group. Westlake emphasized that 'none but intellectual women are admitted and therefore it is not likely to become a merely puerile and gossiping Society.'⁵³ The formalised manner of their proceedings, outlined in the rules, reflects an institutional approach to learning from each other, reminiscent of the practice of university lectures and classrooms. Through these private practices of communication, the Kensington Society deliberately became a space to interchange ideas, provoke thought, and test the strength of answers, collectively questioning their cognitive basis of their ideas for public consumption.

A detailed study of the original manuscript archive reveals that the list of Kensington women had a high turnover, with lines crossing out members as they presumably left the group, and pages added as new members joined. The rough nature of

⁵⁰ "The Kensington Society Rules," APPENDIX I.

⁵¹ When Emily Faithfull was embroiled in the Codrington divorce case, for instance, the founders of the Kensington Society distanced themselves. Emily Faithfull, and her unfortunate involvement in this public scandal will be investigated further in Chapter 5.

⁵² Davies to Anna Richardson, 23 May 1865, as quoted in *Emily Davies: Collected Letters*, 156.

⁵³ Westlake to Taylor, 20 March 1865, Mill-Taylor Collection 14/103.

these official documents highlights the fluidity of the group as well as its priorities. It suggests that they were not merely a social networking group. Members were not members for life. Their discussions, not their names, were valuable to the Society. They were, however, allowed to be absent from meetings and submit papers on the circulated questions by correspondence. Despite this, the Kensington Society saw a steady growth in numbers. At the first meeting there were thirty-three guests. By the following year this had grown to fifty-eight, and by its closure in 1868, there were sixty-eight names on the membership lists.⁵⁴

Members were asked to pay a substantial sum to be a part of the discussions, being charged two shillings and sixpence annually and the same sum for each meeting. Beth Palmer has rightly pointed out that although this fee limited members to a middle-class income or upbringing, it was not unusually high.⁵⁵ This raises the question of who they admitted as members. A letter from Emily Davies to Annette Akroyd is particularly revealing on this topic. On 3 October 1865, she wrote:

My dear Miss Akroyd,

I am glad to tell you that on Miss Bostock's proposal, you have been elected a member of the Kensington Society. I enclose the Rules & the questions for the current Term.⁵⁶

This letter, amongst other, illustrates how members were introduced and added through mutual acquaintances, and as the Society did not advertise their meetings publicly, it is unlikely that there were any members who approached the Society independently. In the

⁵⁴ "List of Members," APPENDIX II.

⁵⁵ Beth Palmer, "Reading Langham Place Periodicals at Number 19," in *Reading and the Victorians*, ed. Matthew Bradley, Juliet John (New York: Routledge, 2015), 58.

⁵⁶ Davies to Annette Akroyd, 3 October 1865, *Emily Davies: Collected Papers*, 157.

case of Annette Akroyd, it was her fellow Bedford student, Emily Bostock, that nominated her membership. Naturally, many were recruited through family association. Mary Llewelyn Davies, for instance, was the sister-in-law of Emily Davies. Barbara Bodichon's aunt, Julia Smith, was also a member and present at their first meeting. Similarly, Eliza and Annie Keary, two sisters, joined the Society together, as did Lavina Solly and Miss Solly the sisters of Charlotte Manning (née Solly).⁵⁷ Some, however, also entered sister groups, such as the Society for Promoting the Employment of Women, or the editing staff of the *EWJ*. As mentioned, Bedford College was also a feeder association for the Kensington Society, as was the Edinburgh Seven circle which connected Elizabeth Garrett, Sophia Jex-Blake and Emily Bovell, and they brought their own female family members, including Elizabeth Garrett's sister, Louisa Smith.

It has already been established that the Kensington Society women were predominately middle to upper middle-class in their background. The simplest reason for their affinity with middle-class women was admitted by Emily Davies in a letter to Henry Roby in November 1865: 'One knows one's own class, of course, from personal intercourse.'⁵⁸ However, Barbara Caine has rightly argued that 'mid-Victorian feminism was a middle-class movement, drawing many of its ideas from the liberal economic and political beliefs that were so important for the middle class, and making extensive use of a distinctively middle-class ideal of womanhood.'⁵⁹ To an extent, this distinctive middle-class ideal was inherited through the internally selective nature of their group. However, it is important to note that the Kensington Society members were selected on educational as well as class grounds. After all, to fully participate in their meetings it was required that

⁵⁷ The identity of 'Miss Solly' is unclear. "List of Members," APPENDIX II.

⁵⁸ This line, however, was crossed out in Davies' original letter, suggesting her hesitation to use this argument in relation to the letter's topic, in which she suggested Frances Buss should give evidence at the School's Enquiry Commission into the admission of girls to Oxford and Cambridge examinations. Emily Davies to Henry Roby, 18 November 1865, *Emily Davies: Collected Papers*, 162.

⁵⁹ Barbara Caine, *English Feminism, 1780-1980* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 89.

they both regularly write and read submitted essays. This required schooling to a high level. It cannot be denied, therefore, that the Kensington Society was collectively middle-class in its outlook. It assumed that the best work for women's social and educational progress would be led by educated women. Arguably, this was an accepted and common approach for Victorian social reformers. George Gissing's contemporary novel *The Odd Women* (1893) illustrates a similar group of women starting a school for young middle-class, educated girls in a house in Chelsea, to learn typing and other skills. Considering the similarities, the fictional 'Miss Barfoot' might have been inspired by the Langham Place women and their aims. 'Her aim', Gissing writes, 'was to draw from the overstocked profession of teaching as many capable young women as she could lay her hands on, and to fit them for certain of the pursuits nowadays thrown open to their sex.'⁶⁰ In a scenario remarkably relevant, the character Barfoot argues with a fellow female activist:

'But surely you don't limit your humanity, Miss Barfoot, by the artificial divisions of society?'

'I think those division are anything but artificial,' replied the hostess good-humouredly. 'In the uneducated classes I have no interest whatever. You have heard me say so.'

'Yes, but I cannot think – isn't that just a little narrow?'

'Perhaps so. I choose my sphere, that's all. Let those who work for the lower classes (I must call them lower, for they are, in every sense), let those work for them who have a call to do so. I have none. I must keep to my own class.'

'But surely, Miss Nunn,' cried the widow, turning to Rhoda, 'we work for the abolition of all unjust privilege? To us, is not a woman a woman?'

'I am obliged to agree with Miss Barfoot. I think that as soon as we begin to meddle with uneducated people, all our schemes and

⁶⁰ George Gissing, *The Odd Women* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 63.

views are unsettled. We have to learn a new language, for one think. But your missionary enterprise is admirable.’⁶¹

Although we cannot claim that this was the Kensington Society’s rule, Gissing’s novel provides an illustration of the overt tensions between differing Victorian female activist groups: those which fought for the working-class, and those that focused on the education and rights of the upper-middle class. Collectively, the Kensington Society was in tune with Miss Barfoot, composed solely of educated and relatively affluent women. This is not to say that working-class women were not a topic of discussion in their meetings. On the contrary, the circumstances of servants and lower-class women were deliberated in questions such as:

To what extent are masters and mistresses responsible for the morals of their servants?

How far are the errors and miseries of the lower class of people dependent upon defects of education and how may such defects be remedied?

What changes do experience and observation suggest in the education of the poorer classes? – Ellen Charnock.⁶²

Although these questions evidence a concern for the working and poorer classes, especially in regard to their education, each of these questions were constructed from a middle-class perspective. Individually, however, the Society was not blind to the plight of working-class women and addressed this concern through SPEW, which was created by the Kensington Society member, Jessie Boucherett and a close associate of all the

⁶¹ Ibid., 62.

⁶² “List of Questions,” APPENDIX III

women, the poet Adelaide Proctor.⁶³ Other members joined them in SPEW, including Frances Buss and Jane Crow, SPEW's secretary (eventually, another member, Gertrude King, followed her as secretary for SPEW). The society's precise objective was to fashion a register of employment opportunities for working-class women. Josephine Butler, a female activist, was at this time actively campaigning for the abolition of child prostitution and human trafficking of women across Europe, publishing a series of essays in 1869 on the need to provide work for women, entitled *Woman's Work and Woman's Culture*.⁶⁴ Notably, several Kensington Members contributed essays to the published collection.

SELF-EDUCATION

While the Kensington Society was limited in its membership, other contemporary forums, centred around the offices of the Society for the Promotion of Employment for women and the *EWJ*, were open to all female guests. The 1859 establishment of the 'Ladies Institute' at 19 Langham Place, Kensington, offered a lunch room, a library which

⁶³ Boucherett was inspired by an article written by Harriet Martineau in the *Edinburgh Review*, 'to form a society which should have for its object the opening of new employment for women and their more extensive admission into those businesses already open to them.' Ellen Jordan and Anne Bridger, "'An Unexpected Recruit to Feminism': Jessie Boucherett's 'Feminist Life' and the Importance of Being Wealthy.'" *Women's History Review* 15, Iss. 3 (2006), 390.

⁶⁴ Josephine E. Butler, *Woman's Work and Woman's Culture: A Series of Essays* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1869).

circulated recommended reading material for guests, and most importantly of all, a reading room. On 1 September 1859, an advertisement for the room read:

A LADIES' READING ROOM. – The Ladies Reading Room is open from 11 a.m. to 10 p.m. Leading Daily and Weekly Papers, Magazines and Reviews.

Terms, one guinea per annum. A two guinea subscription enables the subscriber to bring any lady not a subscriber. N.B. Professional ladies half price.

Ladies visiting the West End on shopping or other business, will find it a great convenience, as attached to the Reading Room is a Luncheon Room, and a room also for the reception of parcels, for the use of subscribers only.⁶⁵

This room eventually became a place for members of the Kensington Society, as well as any interested women, to read the *EWJ* or other recommended periodicals - a literary space in which they could all circulate unpublished scripts. It is also reminiscent of the current Reading Room at the British Museum, which was a 'mecca of literary research workers,' and increasingly so for women.⁶⁶ Janis Dawson claims that while it was created for men, from the 1860s onward 'the Reading Room offered determined women writers rare opportunities for fellowship, networking, and professional development.'⁶⁷ An earlier article in the *EWJ* has demonstrated their idolization of the widely-read women who frequented the British Museum:

⁶⁵ "Prospectus of the Ladies," as seen in Helen Blackburn, *Women's Suffrage: A Record of the Women's Suffrage Movement in the British Isles, with Biographical Sketches of Miss Becker* (London: Williams & Norgate, 1902), 248, cited in Hirsch, *Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon*, 197.

⁶⁶ Ruth Hoberman, "'A Thought in the Hugh Bald Forehead': Depictions of Women in the British Museum Reading Room, 1857-1929," *Reading Women: Literary Figures and Cultural Icons from the Victorian Age to the Present* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), 168.

⁶⁷ Janis Dawson, "'Write a little bit every day': L.T. Meade, Self-Representation, and the Professional Woman Writer," *Victorian Review* 35, No. 1 (2009), 138.

In the reading-room of the British Museum, that magnificent abode of learning, the roving eye may any day detect the bowed heads and black silk dresses of ladies who come there for references on every subject under heaven; searching out obscure hints concerning the ways and words of defunct princesses, or well-nigh forgotten manipulations of antediluvian trades.⁶⁸

This eccentric description of women perusing the British Museum illustrates the enthusiasm of the Kensington Society women for education and knowledge, and their intention to disseminate this image to their associates. The ‘Ladies Institute’ at Langham Place was partially created for this intention, as ‘a home for fifty Lady-Residents’ with a ‘library and dining-rooms’ that were also ‘accessible to out-door Lady-Members’.⁶⁹ Gillian Sutherland claims that the Kensington Society’s Langham Place headquarters was ‘a modest female equivalent of the gentlemen’s club – which opened its doors in 1860, supported by these women, and where they often met.’⁷⁰ It could also be understood as a university-style setting.⁷¹ Evidently, the initial Langham Place women saw themselves as educating the wider public on the important issues facing women.

Whilst it might be seen as modelled on the masculine prototype of a gentleman club, the very nature of these clubs, which denoted privacy for guests, meant that they

⁶⁸ “The Profession of the Teacher,” *EWJ*, 8.

⁶⁹ The Reading Room at the Langham Place headquarters also offered journals including *The Westminster Review*, *The National Review*, *Household Words*, *Chambers* and *Punch*. “Ladies Institute,” *EWJ*, Vol III, No.13 (March 1859): 52; See also Ruth Hoberman, “‘A Thought in the Hugh Bald Forehead’: Depictions of Women in the British Museum Reading Room, 1857-1929,” *Reading Women: Literary Figures and Cultural Icons from the Victorian Age to the Present* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005): 168-181.

⁷⁰ Gillian Sutherland, *Faith, Duty and the Power of the Mind: The Cloughs and their Circle, 1820-1960* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 73.

⁷¹ Bodichon, along with other members of the Kensington Society, had long been passionate about the idea of opening a university college for women. Girton College, Cambridge, at this time, was an ideal rather than an actuality.

were accessible to Victorian women. Amy Milne-Smith argues that nineteenth century gentlemen's clubs stole from the family home the role of being a 'a space of refuge from the chaos of the hectic modern world...The gentlemen's clubs, seemingly in the heart of the public sphere, actually provided their members the friendly intimacy and privacy ideally located in the home.'⁷² Arguably, the opposite could be the case for the women who entered the Langham Place home. By entering this public space, they could not only engage in intimate conversations and learning practices, but they had the protection of the domestic sphere – a house signifying their presupposed rightful place. In this space, they were immune from the usual responsibilities of women, but protected by its outward, respectable facade. By circulating reading material and providing this space, it is clear that they also strove to advertise themselves as a self-educating community. However, the openness of this space seemed to disappoint some founders. Bessie Rayner Parkes, for one, was disappointed that all sorts of women apparently took advantage of the room. She wrote to Bodichon regarding the wall art for the room noting that she would 'send a couple of smaller telling pictures, something bright and not too good for the gaudy company; delicate pictures are utterly lost here.'⁷³ In Beth Palmer's opinion, this may have been because 'well-to-do women shopping in the West End did not shift easily from their habits as leisured consumers into a studio or workmanlike mode of reading on entering 19 Langham Place.'⁷⁴

Given the lack of minutes, we know little of what was discussed at the Kensington meetings, but the circulated questions highlight the diverse nature of members' discourse. Indeed, they tackled miscellaneous issues affecting Victorian women. Thankfully, the

⁷² Amy Milne-Smith, "A Flight to Domesticity? Making a Home in the Gentlemen's Clubs of London, 1880-1914," *Journal of British Studies* 45, No. 4 (2006): 796-7.

⁷³ Parkes to Bodichon, 30 January 1859, GCPP Parkes 5/88, as quoted in See also Beth Palmer, "Reading Langham Place Periodicals at Number 19" in *Reading and the Victorians*, ed. Matthew John Bradley, Juliet John (New York: Routledge, 2015): 59.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

Girton archives hold an entire list of one set of the questions.⁷⁵ In an official ‘Notice’, members were informed of their obligations:

NOTICE

Members are requested to write on one side of the page only, and not to answer more than one question on the same sheet.

Only one question should be suggested for each term. The same may be sent in again, if it has not been chosen.

Members may propose candidates for admission, whose names will be added to a list from which the Committee will fill up vacancies.⁷⁶

To demonstrate the nature of their discussion, we may note three of the initial meeting’s circulated discussion points. Significantly, although they begin with remarkably domestic questions, they become increasingly focused on social reform:

1. What is the true basis, and what are the limits, of parental authority?
2. By what means may sentimentality be checked without discouraging healthy sentiment and individuality of character?
3. What national characteristics are expressed in English dress?⁷⁷

Although we do not have the papers submitted to the March meeting, by the next, in June, their topics had taken a more political turn. This could be regarded as a reflection of the Kensington Society’s March discussions, and arguably, the contentious contemporary parliamentary context:

⁷⁵ “List of Questions,” APPENDIX III.

⁷⁶ “The Kensington Society: Notice,” GCPP Davies 10/2.

⁷⁷ “List of Questions,” APPENDIX III.

1. What is the process of mind by which belief is attained?
2. Is the extension of the Parliamentary suffrage to women desirable, and, if so, under what conditions?
3. To what extent, if any, are masters and mistresses responsible for the morals and happiness of their servants?⁷⁸

On 15 November 1865, they asked:

1. What are the limitations within which it is desirable to exercise personal influence?
2. What are the evils attendant upon philanthropic effort amongst the poor, and how may they be avoided?
3. How does the cultivation of artistic taste affect the well-being of society?⁷⁹

Finally, on 30 January 1866, the Kensington Society discussed:

1. What are the subjects on which it is desirable to lay the greatest stress in the Education of Women?
2. What is Rest?⁸⁰

Perhaps the growing politicisation of these questions, and indeed, their willingness to suggest controversial topics alongside moral themes, illustrate the developing priorities of the Kensington Society women. Nonetheless, a comparison between these topics and the discussions of similar groups demonstrates the markedly philosophical nature of the

⁷⁸ Ibid., 9 June 1865,

⁷⁹ Ibid., 15 November 1865.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 30 January 1866.

Kensington Society. For societies such as National Association for the Promotion of Social Sciences, for instance, topics were far more practical in nature. In the 1865 meeting of NAPSS, papers were presented on issues such as prison reform: 'Discussion on Inadequate Sentences.'⁸¹ At the NAPSS meetings, Kensington Society members presented papers with a practical analysis of current reform work, with Dorothea Beale's paper on 'The Ladies' College at Cheltenham.'⁸² Although their individual external campaigns were designed to propagate change, the central purpose of the Kensington Society was to develop the intellectual debating practices of its members.

The rigorous nature of the Kensington Society meetings, and their involvement in NAPSS and other associations, while admirable, may also have been their downfall. In late 1866, the Kensington Society postponed their meetings. On 26 November 1866, Davies wrote to Helen Taylor to inform her that the Mannings were unwell and Isa Craig was unable to work. She proposed:

to let the Kensington Society go to sleep for a little while. We shall not hold any discussions at present, and the new set of questions will not be [ready?] until after Christmas. By that time I hope we may be able to resume work, having simply skipped a term.⁸³

The Kensington Society did not meet again until March 1868, and this meeting signalled the end of the Society, perhaps because the members had become concurrently engaged in too many additional societies and unions. As Davies explained to Taylor in January 1868:

⁸¹ George W. Hastings, et al, *Transactions of the National Association for the Promotion of Social Science*, Sheffield Meeting, 1865 (London: Longman, Green, Longman, Roberts, and Green, 1866): 258-259.

⁸² Ibid., 274-286.

⁸³ Davies to Taylor, 26 November 1866, *Emily Davies: Collected Letters*, 214.

I find it very difficult to spare the time for the Secretary's work, which owing to the universal forgetfulness and inaccuracy of mankind, is much more burdensome than might have been expected, and the Society does not seem now to be so much wanted as when we began. During the last 3 years, the Suffrage Committees, Schoolmistresses' Association and other organisations, have come into existence, which supply links between our members and also consume their time and energy, so that they have less to spare for writing papers.⁸⁴

In light of their relative success as a group, and the growth in numbers that they enjoyed, the Kensington women also modelled their other activist meetings on the Kensington model. In 1866, the committee for the University Examinations for Girls recounted in the *Leeds Mercury* a similar gathering:

On Saturday, October 8th, through the kindness of Dr. Heaton, a meeting of ladies resident in the chief towns of the Riding, and interested in the education of girls, was held at his house, Claremont, Leeds, for the purpose of discussion the above subject, with Mr. J. G. Fitch, M.A., Assistant-Commissioner of the School. It was thought that ladies would more readily enter into a discussion in a private room...⁸⁵

The principal purpose of the Kensington Society, and its organ, the *EWJ*, had been to disseminate and encourage discussion. The nature of these 'private room' meetings needs to be understood in the context of the intellectual milieu of European women's

⁸⁴ Davies to Taylor, 22 January 1868, *Emily Davies: Collected Letters*, 257.

⁸⁵ *Leeds Mercury* clipping (February 1866), GCPP Davies 12/3.

seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth-century societies. Drawing upon earlier tried and tested forms of political activist groups, the Kensington Society women ascertained that a living room discussion group was the most accessible and profitable society for Victorian women eager to engender social progress. It was in this communication space that the Kensington Society sharpened and modelled their arguments before presenting them for public discussion. It was also in this private sphere that the women collated learning and rational debate, eventuating in confidence in the strength of their causes. Through ‘mutual intercourse’ and ordered discussion, the Kensington women were progenitors of the ideas of the Victorian feminist movement.⁸⁶

⁸⁶ Alice Westlake to Helen Taylor, 28 March 1865, Mill-Taylor Collection 14/103.

CHAPTER IV. THE KENSINGTON SOCIETY'S EPISTOLARY NETWORK:

'MAGIC COMMUNION'¹

Alongside their private meetings at Charlotte Manning's home, a more intimate form of correspondence was a fundamental aspect of their organization, inspiration and eventual success in reforming the education, employment and professional opportunities of women in mid-Victorian Britain: letters. This success is measured by the founding of influential women's education institutions and their entrance into medical schools. On 14 November 1865, Emily Davies wrote to Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon:

I am inclined to think that the first thing to do is to stir up women,
chiefly thro' private channels, to use the rights they already
possess...²

This letter between Davies and Bodichon betrays the paramount importance of 'private channels' for the Kensington Society. As women, their home meetings had allowed them a space to candidly test their ideas and thoughts. Similarly, the strategic use of private letters was equally opportunistic for open discussion. As Davies' phrase suggests, this was an avenue of communication that they already possessed, as educated women in mid-nineteenth-century Britain.

Although past research has frequently utilised the public writings of the mid-Victorian women's movement, in which their civic ambitions for female progress are especially clear, the private networking of letters, discussion and organization that was

¹ Parkes, "Lillian's Second Letter," *Summer Sketches and Other Poems* (London: John Chapman, 1854), 19-20.

² Her use of underline. Davies to Bodichon, 14 November 1865, GCPP Bodichon 1/1/B1.

achieved in the personal letters was equally instrumental to their campaign's eventual success. This chapter will investigate the epistolary lives of the Kensington Society by focusing on the letters they sent and received in the years prior and during their London meetings. The multiple facets of the private letter, its varied form and topic, allowed it to become a strategic tool for the social reform purposes of the Kensington women. In fact, it is the contention of this chapter that this circle of mid-Victorian women evidenced an increased vigour in use of this private tool after their initial excitement and enthusiasm for private discussion, as practised in their meetings.

Letters were a purpose-driven text for the Kensington Society members, and this purpose was multi-layered. The three principal reasons for their letters provide the structure of this chapter. The first objective of the Kensington Society letters was networking: the majority of their letters were written to resume ongoing friendship, or to construct a new understanding between two people. This purpose, though perhaps obvious, played a pivotal role in developing the wider mid-Victorian women's movement. The second purpose of their private letters was mutual discussion. Similar to their meetings, the letter provided a protected platform for open discourse and debate amongst these women. This purpose was achieved in both internal letters between the Kensington Society women and external correspondence with their mentors and family members. In shared letters their ideas and strategies were shaped and sharpened, before they were reproduced in the public writings of the Kensington women. The final purpose of their letters was to propose action. In the private written word, the Kensington Society found a fast and discrete way of furthering their cause. In a sense, their correspondence became a meeting place for the organizational strategies of the mid-Victorian women's movement.

An examination of the Kensington Society letters highlights the fact that they were

at the heart of a mutual web of connections. Certain correspondents who most frequently appear across a spectrum of the members' letter collections present the most compelling evidence of the Society as a whole, and hence, their letters will dominate this chapter. For instance, the correspondence between the architects of the Kensington Society (such as Emily Davies and Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon) reveals critical detail about the discussion group and their circle of female reformers, shedding light on the critical relationship between the Society and private correspondence.³ Moreover, three women who were avid correspondents and celebrated literary and political minds of the day have also deserved more attention in the context of the Society. Likewise, women who corresponded more regularly will be the focus of case studies. Partially, this is due to a heightened emphasis on correspondence amongst more politically active members, but it is also a product of necessity. Emilia Gurney, for instance, was a corresponding member of the Kensington Society as she and her husband spent time in Jamaica during 1865, and her extensive correspondence with Julia Wedgwood evidences a yearning for discussion and mutual edification through letters. Other case studies will consider the ability of the letter to facilitate mentorship, such as in letters between Emily Davies, Elizabeth Garrett Anderson and Sophia Jex-Blake, on their plans to pursue a medical career; and letters from outside associates, such as Anna Jameson and Mary Ann Evans (George Eliot). Although it is not possible to encompass all Kensington Society correspondence, through these compelling case studies this chapter will examine the internal and peripheral epistolary network of the Kensington Society, highlighting letters from friends and family which shaped and sharpened the objectives of these female activists.

It is well known that the eighteenth century welcomed a 'golden age' of letter

³ Due to their prominence in the mid-Victorian women's movement, their letters have also been conserved, unlike lesser-known members of the Society. The majority of correspondence for this research has been found in Girton College Library, or the family biographies of Kensington Society members.

writing. More than 21,000 texts published in the eighteenth century were entitled ‘Letter’ or ‘Letters,’ not to mention countless others that used the form without the title, and there were of course innumerable private collections.⁴ Indeed, the manuscript and print letters of the early modern period have been subjected to particular critical inquiry over the last two decades. Epistolary form, the letter as a functional form of writing in the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and the tradition of women letter writers of the eighteenth century and their consequent engagement in social reforms, have been extensively examined in the literature.⁵ Caroline Bland and Maire Cross have highlighted the methodology of epistolary studies in their volume, with their chief preoccupation being ‘gender in relation to political rituals.’⁶ The essays in their volume also offer important insights into how the epistolary form was instrumental in the realm of political negotiation and change. The nineteenth century’s female letter writers who built upon this tradition have not, however, received equal attention, despite the fact that by this time the epistle form had exploded in use with the growing literacy of the population, surpassing previous centuries in its capacity.

Nineteenth-century women, and the Kensington women in particular, inherited an intellectual tradition of letter writing from their mentors and family members. Early female activists had relied on the letter as a source of networking and fellowship. Harriet Martineau expressed a yearning for this style of connection to Anna Jameson in 1840: ‘Send me the letter you mention; but O! do send, (if only an introductory sentence,) something from yourself. I shall send a mere page or two; but our ranging ourselves with

⁴ Clare Brant, *Eighteenth-Century Letters and British Culture* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 1.

⁵ See Jordan Lavers, “The Epistolary of a Social Network: Simulating a Romantic Network Community in Letters by Karoline von Gunderode,” in *Social Networks in the Long Eighteenth Century: Clubs, Literary Salons, Textual Coterie*, ed. Ileana Baird (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014): 149-71.

⁶ Caroline Bland, Maire Cross, eds. *Gender Politics in the Age of Letter-Writing: 1750-2000* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004).

them by so express an act is what they want, & what I feel to be my duty.’⁷ Bessie Rayner Parkes, similarly, had developed a particularly strong friendship with her mother-in-law, Louise Swanton Belloc, through regular correspondence. Belloc herself was an avid correspondent with a wide circle of friends.⁸ She engaged in lively correspondence with many influential figures of nineteenth-century Europe and America, including Charles Dickens, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Elizabeth Gaskell, Maria Edgeworth, Victor Hugo, and Lord Byron.⁹ In doing so, she established a tradition of intellectual correspondence to which her daughter-in-law bore witness.

Equally well known is the adage of the early nineteenth century as the ‘age of reform.’¹⁰ The overlap of these two centuries is the richest period for an assessment of the agency of epistolary literature in social reform. Nonetheless, the relationship between the nineteenth-century private letter and social reforms has been insufficiently explored. When it comes to the advent of the Victorian era women’s movement, this is no exception. Bonnie Anderson made an exhaustive study of the correspondence of twenty feminists across the US and Europe in order to highlight the early international groundswell when ‘early feminists connected internationally primarily by correspondence.’¹¹ A particular focus for Anderson was the correspondence of Jeanne Deroin and Pauline Roland, imprisoned in St. Lazare, Paris with a cohort of American women at the very first National

⁷ Harriet Martineau to Anna Jameson, 2 July 1840. The letter concluded: ‘I hope you will do as much as I have said above.’ As seen in Valerie Sanders, *Harriet Martineau: Selected Letters* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 287.

⁸ Belloc was also the author of over forty publications, all of which were published in French and English, including the first biography of Byron, *Lord Byron*, published in 1824, *Bonaparte et les Grecs* in 1826, and *Pierre et Pierrette*, published in 1838.

⁹ Unfortunately, a significant portion of her correspondence was damaged or destroyed during the 1871 Franco-Prussian War; Harriet Beecher Stowe’s most famous publication was a piece of fiction, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1853); Victor Hugo was author of *The Hunchback of Notre-dame* (1831); Maria Edgeworth published a number of romantic fictions as well as a two volume study, “Practical Education,” with her father, Richard Lovell Edgeworth (1798); and Byron wrote *Memoirs* (1831).

¹⁰ See E.L. Woodward, *The Age of Reform 1815-70*, Second Edition (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967).

¹¹ Anderson, “From Letters to a Movement,” 8. See also Bonnie Anderson, *Joyous Greetings: The First International Women’s Movement, 1830-1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

Women's Rights Convention in Massachusetts. In this passionate letter, they write:

Sisters of America! Your socialist sisters of France are united with you in the vindication of the rights of woman to civil and political equality...

It is in this confidence that, from the depths of jail which still imprisons our bodies without reaching our hearts, we cry to you, Faith, Love, Hope, and send to you our sisterly salutations.¹²

Penned from prison, the letter demonstrates the powerful solidarity that female activists exemplified, not only locally but internationally, with the endearing term 'Sisters' illustrating the close bond they shared. Lindsay O'Neill's recent study has documented how epistolary friendships and alliances were central to networks in the seventeenth and eighteenth century.¹³ O'Neill also stresses how these networks were various in nature – founded through social, economic or religious associations – but also how they were created separately and would 'feed off' larger networks around them.¹⁴ Networks of correspondence with mentors were a crucial part of the Kensington Society's strategy – the idea of building and sustaining epistolary networks was critical. Amongst the Society's letters there were as many admonitory letters as those sisterly and confiding. 'Letters mingle Soules,' wrote Donne, and for the Kensington Society, letters provided the site where their minds, ambitions, desires and frustrations coalesced.¹⁵

¹² The complete letter can be found in *The Proceedings of the Woman's Rights Convention, Held in Worcester, Oct. 15-16, 1851* (New York: Fowler & Wells, 1852): 32-35.

¹³ Lindsay O'Neill, *The Opened Letter: Networking in the Early Modern British World* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015).

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹⁵ John Donne wrote to a friend: 'Sir, more then kisses, letters mingle Soules; For, thus friends absent speake.' See Ronald J. Corthell, "'Friendships Sacraments': John Donne's Familiar Letters," *Studies in Philology* 78, No. 4 (1981), 417.

‘SISTERLY SALUTATIONS’

There was also a practical reason for the explosion of letter writing in the Victorian age. The Postage Duties Act of 1839 introduced radically reduced prices with a standardized prepaid postage service. Catherine Golden has highlighted the material nature of the letter and the consequential rise in jobs and products surrounding the postage service.¹⁶ What Golden overlooks in her study, however, was how the escalation of the postage system transformed the networking potential of letters. In effect, the speed of delivery stimulated a more informal tone in letter writing, with shorter and more hurried notes taking the place of longer, narrative letters. Whilst many of the Kensington Society met and socialized in London, they originated from across Great Britain and frequently travelled internationally. Their subsequent and necessary correspondence evidences this change in style. Scholars have traditionally categorized epistolary forms along the lines of a letter’s intended readership, delineating between the ‘individual’ and the ‘communal’.¹⁷ The ‘individual’ letter, which is the prime focus of this chapter, is often termed ‘familiar’, referencing those to family, friends and associates. The familiar letter was becoming unceremonious. In many letters, the language takes on a speech quality, with words written as they might be spoken. An 1854 poem by Bessie Rayner Parkes confirmed the

¹⁶ Catherine J. Golden, *Posting It: The Victorian Revolution in Letter Writing* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2009).

¹⁷ Amy Elizabeth Smith, “Naming the Un-‘Familiar’: Formal Letters and Travel Narratives in Late Seventeenth and Eighteenth-Century Britain,” *The Review of English Studies* 54, No. 214 (April 2003), 178.

powerful ‘communion’ that letters allowed for the mid-Victorian woman:

 Their letters fly like shuttles swift
 Between them, and the rarest gift
 Of each the others still receive,
 Magic communion they weave,
 Which, like the wandering hero sat,
 Carpets for them a meeting place,
 A church beyond the bounds of space...¹⁸

The enhanced speed and familiarity in nineteenth-century letters therefore allowed a closer network to be created through correspondence. It could also be argued that this hurried, loose handwriting between friends carried a particular feminine style. This ‘natural’ manner in letter writing may be perceived as a ‘stream of consciousness’ mode. It is not a lack of control, but rather, a story telling which often follows a chronological trajectory, much like Austen’s definition of her writing style to her sister, Cassandra: ‘I have now attained the true art of letter writing, which we are always told, is to express on paper exactly what one would say to the same person by word of mouth.’ Samuel Richardson also wrote in the character of Lovelace: ‘I loved familiar letter-writing, as I had more than once told her, above all the species of writing: it was writing from the heart (without the fetters prescribed by method or study), as the very word correspondence implied.’¹⁹

Time and time again meaning is encoded in the familiar letters of the Kensington Society, so much so that they seem an intimate conversation. This level of intimate familiarity in a letter generated a conversational feel in their written word. To an extent,

¹⁸ Parkes, “Lillian’s Second Letter,” 19-20.

¹⁹ Samuel Richardson, *Clarissa*, Vol. II (London: Everyman’s Library, 1962), 431.

these letters replicated the sense that they were meeting together. Emily Davies and Barbara Bodichon best illustrate this familiarity through their letters, having known each other from a very young age. Davies was first in touch with Bodichon through her sister Annie Leigh Smith. Her autobiographical memories of the meeting illustrate the deep yearning Davies felt for mutual understanding and connection with other women:

After making acquaintance at Algiers with Annie Leigh Smith (Madame Bodichon's sister) - the first person I had ever met who sympathized with my feeling of resentment at the subjection of women - I corresponded with her and she introduced me to others of the same circle and kept me up to what was going on. In 1858, the first organized movement on behalf of women was set on foot.²⁰

Davies' memoir sheds light on the role that correspondence played in allowing introductions between women who mutually agreed on the need for women's progress. This was an essential stage in the creation of the first organized movement for women.

Epistolary theory has increasingly recognized the malleability of letters and letter writing as a medium, and the powers of persuasion permitted by correspondence within the 'private sphere' of women's lives. The familiar letter generated female fellowship between family and Kensington Society members when they were apart by replicating this private sphere. Between female correspondents, letters were notably less poised in their epistolary style. Discussing ideas that appeared urgent and open, they wrote frequently to one another. In these letters, the handwriting is often rushed, with long strokes and less attention to neatness, suggesting a more emotional, spontaneous attitude in the author. The tone is also more casual, written as a strain of thought rather than edited

²⁰ "Family Chronicle," GCPP Davies 1/1/159.

and perfected sentences. This was often the case with letters to family members and in particular, mothers. Sophia Jex-Blake uses a familiar tone that resembles more of a journal than a letter in her countless letters to Mary Jex-Blake during her time working as a teacher at the Grand Ducal Institute for Women in Mannheim, Germany, mostly addressed to her ‘darling’ or dearest,’ an affectionate term that replaced ‘mother’ and amplified the informal style of their correspondence. In 1862, she wrote:

My own darling,
...I always wake of myself just at 5.30 a.m., usually just 5 or 10 minutes before I am called. I wasn’t wrong about my power of adaptability, was I, Mother? Indeed, I thrive greatly on hours, far and all of other circumstances; I have not been so strong for months, indeed now it is just a year. What a strange, grey, weird year!²¹

Reciting such day to day details reflects a yearning to have a confidant, a friend with whom she need not be cautious about what she says. In another letter, Jex-Blake shares her love of Herbert’s poetry:

I don’t know if everyone has words running all day long in their head as I have, it makes a glorious song sometimes silently enough, but running like a golden thread through daily work and labour, raiding it all till ‘the parapets of heaven with angels leaning’ come full in view... Do you remember George Herbert’s delicious poem?

‘My Joy! My Life! My Crown!
My heart was meaning all the day

²¹ Sophia Jex-Blake to Mary Jex-Blake, September 1862, as seen in Margaret Todd, *The Life of Sophia Jex-Blake* (London: Macmillan and Co. Ltd., 1918), 131.

Something it fain would say,
And yet it runneth muttering up and down
Within only this,
My Joy! My Life! My Crown!

...In the deep struggle times, one of the things that helped me most of all was always those glorious words of consecration that reminded me of the cross on the brow 'In token that thou shalt not be ashamed to confess the faith of Christ crucified, and manfully to fight under His banner against the world, the flesh, and the devil, and to continue Christ's faithful Soldier and servant unto the end! And again, the Communion words about 'ourselves, our souls and bodies.'

Oh dear, how one does write on! But I think it pleases Mother and I'm sure it helps me...²²

Jex-Blake's heartfelt letter allowed her to process and reflect on her life and ambitions, a purpose that could only be achieved in familiar letters. Thus, the writing and reading of letters involved a process of self-reflection. Such yearning was particularly urgent for Jex-Blake in her isolated life in Germany, a circumstance that was not uncommon for many Kensington Society members who blazed a trail in seeking professional careers. Sarah Poustie has used the letters of Olive Schreiner, an active member of the Men and Women's Club, to highlight the complex and instrumental power of letters within networks, and interestingly, the 'future-orientated' aspect of 'letterness.'²³ Poustie suggests that this orientation has been less recognized than the retrospective purpose of letter writing. For women such as Jex-Blake, letters allowed discussion of future plans as well as introspective self-reflection on the present and past.

²² Sophia Jex-Blake to Mary Jex-Blake, October 1862, *Ibid.*, 132.

²³ Sarah Poustie, "Letters and Networks: Analyzing Olive Schreiner's Epistolary Networks," PhD, University of Edinburgh, 2014. The Men and Women's Club was a debating society in London, that radically questioned marriage, homosexuality and prostitution.

Other Kensington women faced rigid opposition from their parents and found encouragement in familiar letters. Elizabeth Garrett frequently discussed her future radical career with Emily Davies after they met in 1859, while Garrett was staying at Jane Crows house.²⁴ Garrett was only twenty-three years old at the time. From that date in 1859, there were over one hundred letters between the two women, often discussing Garrett's ambitions to enter medicine and follow in the footsteps of the first US female medical practitioner, Elizabeth Blackwell, who was a friend of Davies. It is evident from the tone of their letters that Davies served as a mentor for the younger woman. According to Garrett's biography, written by her daughter, 'the influence of Emily Davies proved to be to Elizabeth what conversion has been to others. Emily turned her vague aspirations into a precise plan and for ten years inspired and led her.'²⁵ From the meeting at the Crows, their relationship was sustained through letters as well as meetings. According to her daughter, 'constant letters passed between Elizabeth and Miss Davies. All dealt with aspects of the subject which engrossed their minds – the cause, the position of women, examinations, and particularly every move Elizabeth made to forward her plans.'²⁶ Louisa Garrett Anderson, her daughter, claimed that this 'stream of letters' provided Garrett with a 'tuition by correspondence.'²⁷ On 15 June 1860, Garrett wrote to Davies describing her recent conversation with her father about her future plans:

he said the whole idea was so disgusting that he could not entertain it for a moment. I asked what there was to make doctoring more disgusting than nursing, which women were

²⁴ Louisa Garrett Anderson, *Elizabeth Garrett Anderson* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 39.

²⁵ The biography was first published in 1939. It contains an account of Garrett Anderson's career, and like most research, does not mention her affiliation to the Kensington Society. Anderson, *Elizabeth Garrett Anderson*.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 47.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 47; 45.

always doing, and which ladies had done publicly in the Crimea. He could not tell me. When I felt rather overcome with his opposition, I said as firmly as I could, that I must have this or something else, that I could not live without some real work, and then he objected that it would take seven years before I could practice. I said if it were seven years I should then be little more than 31 years old and able to work for twenty years probably. I think he will probably come around in time, I mean to renew the subject pretty often.²⁸

The level of detail in Garrett's account of her conversation suggests a strong affinity between the women, suggesting the letter continued on from a previous discussion regarding her parents' reaction to her career choice. As an earlier letter from Garrett declared: 'I am very glad you do not tire of this subject, I like writing to you about it very much.'²⁹ In this form, the letter replicated the purpose of a journal. In the account to Davies, Garrett recorded and reflected on her conversation, a process of mutual contemplation that could only be achieved in an intimate setting.

Mentoring was a common objective in the letters between Kensington Society members and their supporters. Garrett, in turn, replicated Davies' mentoring in her relationship with younger Kensington women. She encouraged Sophia Jex-Blake in her ability to succeed in a medical career. As she wrote in 1862: 'Chiefly I want you to make up your mind to obtain the University degree... You are one of the few who could do so pretty soon, and it would take most women a year and a half or two years to prepare for the Matriculation.'³⁰ Davies had received similar mentorship through correspondence with the Quaker, Anna Richardson. Their letters suggest that their discussion followed on

²⁸ Garrett to Davies, 15 June 1860, as seen in Anderson, *Elizabeth Garrett Anderson*, 46.

²⁹ Garrett to Davies, exact date unknown, 1860, *Ibid.*, 44.

³⁰ Garrett to Jex-Blake, exact date unknown, as seen in Todd, *The Life of Sophia Jex-Blake*, 118.

from previous conversations. Richardson wrote in 1868: 'I forgot to say, in speaking of the College, that I think you should keep your eye on likely women, who might be teachers and lecturers there, and get them to prepare themselves, with a view to a special subject.'³¹

A yearning for fellowship through private discussion was palpable within the Kensington Society, especially throughout the years of their meetings. Sustained correspondence provided the vehicle for fellowship amongst women who did not have many commiserates in nineteenth-century culture. The Kensington Society meetings triggered a further desire for female fellowship amongst the women who were introduced at their gathering, which could be most easily achieved through the private letter. Thus, they reached out and established bonds between members and families of the leading British thinkers of the day. The networking and dialogue that was achieved in such female correspondence expanded their ranks and cultivated the wider women's movement. It was, arguably, key to their campaigns' eventual successes. After all, communication, for women and about women, was the origin, the insignia and the greater purpose of the Kensington Society. It was designed to engage a wider female audience and welcome them into their 'mutual intercourse.' Well before they had conceived of their meetings and subsequent activism, the Kensington members engaged in extensive correspondence that consolidated the foundation of their Society cohort across Britain and abroad. In these epistolary networks they initiated and continued their meetings' discussions on the status of their sex; how women should be educated, employed and empowered, and the ideas and strategies of the wider women's progress campaign in Victorian Britain. The letters of the Kensington Society epitomize the nineteenth century's grasp of such

³¹ Anna Deborah Richardson to Davies, as printed in *Memoir of Anna Deborah Richardson, with Extracts from Her Letters* (Newcastle-on-Tyne: J.M. Carr, 1877), 214.

communication for social networking and meticulous relationship building. These Victorian women, following their Enlightenment ancestors, recognized the power of discussion through letters.³² They were also aware of the increasingly smaller distance and time for communication to travel. Thus, the Kensington Society became part of a long trajectory of women who utilised the innovative nature of the letter to broaden their spheres of influence.

Anna Jameson's influence on the younger Kensington women was chiefly engineered through letters. Over the course of her long public career, as the author of radical tracts such as *Characteristics of Women, Moral, Political and Historical* (1832), Jameson had corresponded with many prominent women of early Victorian England, including Harriet Martineau, Lady Byron, and Elizabeth Barrett Browning.³³ During the later part of her life, she became increasingly silent on the topic of women in public writing. In her private correspondence, however, she was an intimate confidant of many of the later Kensington women; and in her twilight years especially, she thrived in communicating with the next generation of female activists. Her correspondence with Bodichon, Eliza Fox and Anna Howitt, her 'adopted nieces', exemplifies a new generation of feminist correspondence between young women and their elder and more experienced, compatriots, heirs to a tradition from which they were anxious to learn from. Such correspondence garnered a circle of ambitious and intellectual women, eager to discuss their place in a cultivated yet still to be reformed society. Jameson emphasized

³² 'Words - oral, written, and printed - were the medium of the Republic of Letters. Since the sixteenth century, printers, so instrumental to the communication of ideas, had been central to intellectual life.' Goodman, *The Republic of Letters*, 16.

³³ In 1832, Jameson published *Characteristics of Women, Moral, Political and Historical*, a catalyst for future Victorian feminist publications. See Jameson, *Characteristics of Women, Moral, Political and Historical* (London: London: Saunders & Otley, 1832). In 1838 she published *Winter Studies and Summer Rambles in Canada* (London: Saunders & Otley, 1838) which expressed progressive views on women and their situation in North America.

this ambition to the next generation of female leaders in her letters; as she wrote to Parkes on 9 June 1855:

Remember! I expect much from you – for God has given you the power to rule and kindle other minds. To set thoughts as well as feelings to Music!³⁴

In her memoir Bodichon described the authority Jameson held over this circle of women. The nature of their relationship is evident in an extract of Parkes' 'A Review of the Last Six Years', in which she describes Jameson and her involvement in the Marriage Bill of 1857:

I refer to Mrs Jameson. The oftener I recur to those former years, and to the thoughts and plans current among the younger generation of my sex, the greater is, I feel, our debt of gratitude to her, for the influence she exerted, not only in her writings, but in her own person. She was ever ready to give time, thought, and her best judgment to the plans of her younger friends...a group of young women, who pursued art in one or other of its various branches, were among her constant visitors during her sojourns in London...The result in her mind was a strong belief in the efficiency of sisterhoods; and she embodied her opinions in two admirable lectures, entitled 'Sisters of Charity', and 'The Communion of Labour', which were personally delivered in the drawing-rooms of two lady friends, and afterwards reprinted by Longman.³⁵

But it was Jameson's letters that reveal that the early women's rights movement was

³⁴ Jameson to Parkes, 9 June 1855. GCPP Parkes 6/11/2.

³⁵ Parkes, "A Review of the Last Six Years," *EWJ*.

galvanised through letters. The most substantial correspondence between her and a Kensington Society member was with Bessie Rayner Parkes. Jameson's early letters to Parkes reveal a keen affection for the younger woman, and a determination to inspire her career. In a small envelope of 1855, we find a letter addressed to 'Miss Bessie Parkes' at 2 Saville Row, in which Jameson scrawled in the postscript:³⁶

Remember! I expect much from you – for God has given you the power to rule and kindle other minds. To set thoughts as well as feelings to Music!

Give my live to Anna Mary Howitt – & give or send the enclosed to Barbara – How I should like to dwell among you – you bright spirits!³⁷

Jameson's rushed, abrupt sentences, written in a long, spidery hand, resemble a tête-à-tête. It also suggests her keen affinity and yearning to be completely amongst the 'bright spirits.' The physical quality of these familiar letters between the Kensington women is important to keep in mind, as much can be learnt from the material form of their writing.³⁸ This heightened familiarity in her letters, using the postscript, and her informal rushed language, reflects the intimacy she felt with the young women. In a way, the letters became a confident conversation, a casual and relaxed idiomatic exchange.

³⁶ During this correspondence Parkes would send her paintings to Jameson, who would mark her favourites and send them back. In one letter she praises Parkes's artistic talent:

I had your volume in my hand which I had just finished - [cut away] - your poems have given me real pleasure - I am struck by the power of thought, the variety of colour, the intense feeling of natural beauty which they convey - but I am also sensible of a latent power - you will do better yet than any thing I find here - I have marked all my favourite - those which speak to me...³⁶

Jameson to Parkes, 9 June 1855, GCPP Parkes 6/11/2.

³⁷ Jameson to Parkes, 8 June 1855, GCPP Parkes 6/11/1.

³⁸ James Daybell has emphasised the importance of the material form of letters from the tools used, including quills and paper, to the handwriting and social signs in early modern-England correspondence. See James Daybell, *The Material Letter in Early Modern England: Manuscripts, Letters and the Culture and Practices of Letter-Writing 1512-1635* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2012).

The lengths to which the Kensington Society women went to polish and perfect their public communication is evident in an early letter from Jameson to Parkes, thanking her for sending her a copy of the *Waverley*. On 2 August 1857, from a Florence address, Jameson wrote:

I intended to have written to you before I left Florence to thank you for the *Waverley* and to reply to your kind letter – but things pressed upon me – more than I could well get thro’ and so I write to you from this old city – to tell you that I congratulate you on the appearance of your first Number tho’ with a hope that the next number may be better both in matter and arrangement – I was going on to make some criticism on the difference articles but it is hardly fair for I can conceive that you must have been greatly hurried – your general prospectus is very well written – tho I object to the use of the word gentlemen – instead of men – like ‘Ladies’ instead of ‘women’, it has a touch of vulgarity you avoid the latter appellation why adopt the former? ...in point of quality in your number, the summary of literature – very careless in style and very hurried and unsatisfactory – you must look to your critical department – because as it is to guide taste and judgement it should be in style exact and elegant, and thoughtful discriminating in the expression of opinion – knowing that your heart and soul are in your work – I do, with heart and soul, wish you success.³⁹

Jameson played a critical role in refining their public message. Her advice regarding the *Waverley* was intellectually authoritative. Steering Parkes away from ‘vulgarity,’ Jameson stresses the fact that high quality journalism is crucial for the success of their journal, not only to demonstrate their ability, but to guide their audience of middle-class

³⁹ Jameson to Parkes, 2 August 1857, GCPP Parkes 6/22.

educated women towards ‘thoughtful discriminating in the expression of opinion.’ This ambition was fundamental to the Kensington Society’s public communication.

Jameson’s lengthy correspondence with the Kensington Society women evidences a deeper purpose behind their letters. Although they were somewhat exceptional in mid-nineteenth-century society, there were few established minds who could join them in regular female fellowship. Jameson was one. Her candid criticism of Parkes’s early effort with the *Waverley* evidence the open discussion that was expected from her letters.

In 1856, when the Kensington women began to garner support for marriage reform law, Jameson advised Parkes that they should be wary of the hands into which they let their petition fall, and that the petition needed the legal expertise of a practising lawyer:

My dear Bessie – I do most cordially assent to the purport and spirit of the petition – but I am afraid it will not do as to form and expression I am afraid it must go through the hands of a man and one of legal experience and ability before it can fulfil its purpose and your hopes – who has seen it except us women? – it wants the masculine power – the masculine hand – do, dear Bessie, wait for a few days – I am coming to town for a sojourn of a week or two....’⁴⁰

The hesitancy surrounding who would have access to the draft correspondence of the Kensington Society was a recurring theme in their letters. Above all, this caution emphasises the strategic purpose behind these personal epistles. They were part of calculated communication plan.

⁴⁰ Jameson to Parkes, exact date unknown, 1856, GCPP Parkes 6/14.

‘YOUR MIND COULD HELP MINE’

It would be simplistic to claim that letters between the Kensington Society were primarily for either networking or organizational purposes. On the contrary, the greatest function of their letters was the opportunity they allowed for intellectual growth for both author and her correspondent. The Kensington Society recognized the importance of not only building epistolary networks but employed them as intellectual nourishment. Kate Kelman argues that correspondence amongst educated Victorian women became a form of ‘self-culture’ for women.⁴¹ She focuses on the mid-Victorian Ladies Edinburgh Debating Society and the thousand or so upper- and middle-class women who attended the society over its fifteen years.⁴² Although Kelman’s study is dedicated to the reading practices of the Scottish society and the strategic way in which they educated themselves by sharing their reading and writing, it highlights the fact that nineteenth-century women, who were limited in their educational opportunities and social occasions, often leaned on each other to develop their own intellectual ‘awakening’. Journals have also been highlighted recently as a tool of self-education. Felicity James and Julian North have demonstrated how Romantic and Victorian biography, through diary entries or considered publications, exposed ‘the many ways in which lives might be written together: across gender boundaries, across time, across genre.’⁴³ The genre of letters became a forum for this ‘awakening’. Their very purpose – connecting people regardless of distance, age or

⁴¹ Kelman, “Self-Culture’: The Edinburgh Reading Pursuits of the Ladies of Edinburgh,” *passim*.

⁴² The society met once a month between 1865 and 1936.

⁴³ Felicity James and Julian North, “Writing Lives Together: Romantic and Victorian Autobiography,” *Life Writing* 14, No. 2 (2017), 133.

gender – reflects how sociability could be found in the written word. For Victorian women, and for the Kensington Society in particular, the letter became a strategic tool of collaborative life, self-forming and critical discussion. Similarly, there were some Kensington meeting discussions that required further digestion in private letters. Emily Davies, for instance, chose to write on 14 November 1865 to Bodichon with a few more suggestions for a paper she had recently submitted. Writing an honest letter to her friend, with a fast hand, she amiably discussed Bodichon's suggestion that they begin a suffrage committee:

I find your paper capital. It is much the best that has come in, to my mind, as furnishing a basis for discussion. Miss Taylor has sent one, but I am a little disappointed in it. There are three very strong against...In your paper there are two or three expressions I should like to have altered, e.g. I don't think it quite does to call the arguments on the other side 'foolish'. Of course they are, but it does not seem quite polite to say so. I should like to omit the paragraphs about outlawry. You see, the enemy always maintains that the disabilities imposed upon women are not penal, but solely intended for their good, and I find nothing irritates men as much as to attribute tyranny to them. I believe many of them do really mean well, and at any rate as they say they do, it seems fair to admit it and to show them that their well intended efforts are a mistake, not a crime. Men cannot stand indignation, and tho' of course I think it is just, it seems to me better to suppress the manifestation of it. I should not mind saying a few indignant things at the meeting, but these papers travel about the country and go into families, where they may be read by prejudiced men. So it is necessary to be careful.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ Davies to Bodichon, 14 November 1865, GCPP Bodichon 1/1/B1.

This letter is an accurate depiction of the candour expected within Kensington Society discussion: a vital facet of this discussion was critical discussion and unapologetic feedback. Claire Putala has made a related study of how the letters between women in the nineteenth-century United States became a method of ‘Writing Ourselves into Being.’⁴⁵ Arguing that women used letters amongst each other to shape ideas and their selves, Putala’s research is centred on the Osbourne Family Papers from 1812-1968, a vast correspondence between women of the Wright, Mott and Osborne families, spread across the USA. This includes Lucretia Coffin Mott, the Quaker abolitionist and feminism campaigner who was in contact with women later in the Kensington Society after the Seneca Fall Convention of July 16-20, 1848.⁴⁶ Mott lived in Philadelphia, but her sister, Martha Coffin Wright, who shared her passion for women’s rights, lived in New York. The subsequent correspondence between them yields what Putala describes as ‘a rich intellectual and political companionship.’⁴⁷ Mott’s letters are an example of how women expanded their minds and experiences through a private channel of correspondence. To an extent, this involved living vicariously through the lives described in letters. As Lucretia Mott wrote to a family member, ‘Tell us your topics, your calls, your domestic arrangements, we want to know everything.’⁴⁸

The Victorian women who emerge in the rich and evocative corpus of correspondence articulated and refined their views through their regular letters. The letters of a female comrade, for instance, look remarkably different from letters to an elder, or an admired and respected mentor, where the handwriting is more carefully

⁴⁵ Claire White Putala, *Reading and Writing Ourselves into Being: The Literacy of Certain Nineteenth-Century Young Women* (Greenwich: Information Age Publishing Inc., 2004).

⁴⁶ See Dana Greene, “Quaker Feminism: The Case of Lucretia Mott,” *Pennsylvania History* 48, No. 2 (April 1981): 143-154.

⁴⁷ Putala, *Reading and Writing Ourselves into Being*, xiv.

⁴⁸ Margaret Hope Bacon, *Valiant Friend: The Life of Lucretia Mott* (New York: Walker and Co., 1980), 156, as quoted in Putala, *Reading and Writing Ourselves into Being*, 51.

penned and formally scripted. By analysing the textual nature of these letters, therefore, we may learn much about the female writer's emotion and intent. The physical and stylistic form of the Kensington Society letters demonstrate this familiarity. An exchange of intimate letters allowed the Kensington Society women to educate themselves, and express and strengthen their thoughts from the safety of their own homes. For some, education was achieved through literary discussion. Pam Hirsch's biography of Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon points to the frequent literary nature of her informal letters to friends, in which friends 'recommended books to each other and critically discussed...everything they had been reading.'⁴⁹ Mostly, it was effusions of mutual encouragement and emboldening, seasoned with discussion of their latest readings – from literary pursuits such as Shakespeare and Bacon, to contemporary visionaries, including John Stuart Mill and Harriet Martineau.⁵⁰ Just as Jex-Blake's had shared Herbert's poetry with her mother, she also often shared other authors who she had been reading recently, such as: 'C. Bronte. Moved me almost to tears.'⁵¹ For other women, sharing what they had been reading was more pointedly for discussion, and relating to their contextual social causes. On 22 August 1866, for instance, Emily Davies wrote to Bodichon:

I saw Mrs. Lankester yesterday. They will be very glad of an article on Female Enfranchisement for the Social Science Review, if not for September, certainly for October. Would you like me to send yours? It might do good in preparing for the

⁴⁹ Hirsch, *Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon*, 32-6.

⁵⁰ Deborah Kaplan has studied Austen's style and asserted that this intimate nature of correspondence between the two sisters was conversational rather than formal: 'The letters evoke writer and reader especially vividly, asserting the primacy of a verbal communication, face-to-face gossip upon which these letters are modeled.' Deborah Kaplan, "Representing Two Cultures: Jane Austen's Letters," in *The Private Self: Theory and Practice of Women's Autobiographical Writings*, ed. Shari Benstock (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 216.

⁵¹ Sophia Jex-Blake to Mary Jex-Blake, September 1862, as seen in Todd, *The Life of Sophia Jex-Blake*, 131.

discussion, & the S.S. review is an independent authority, which at any rate could not damage us.⁵²

Davies' concern for the 'damage' that could be done by less independent reviews demonstrates the hostility they faced from reviewers, and thus, their caution around who saw their papers until they were improved by the eyes of their Kensington Society supporters. Davies continued:

I have been reading it with a view to extracts & I cannot find any one paragraph which one could take out by itself. Would you mind my making little alterations which would obviate this I should like also to leave out the quotation from Mill's speech, which seems to me to break the flow, without adding strength. Miss Boucherett has sent me a bit of information about women's having voted in the time of Henry IV., which think might be added to your note about Austria & Sweden, but I should like to verify it first, if I can.

What do you think of the wisdom of circulating the enclosed in Conservative papers only? I feel a little doubtful, but on the whole it seems to me so important to get anything said that is not decidedly adverse, that I think it will do rather good than harm. There is a sensible article in yesterday's *Pall Mall* on Sisterhoods. I am sending it to Miss Taylor.⁵³

The preparatory nature of the letter, as a terrain on which the Kensington Society women could finesse their ideas before they appeared in the public domain, is evident throughout the Kensington Society's correspondence. In this case, Davies' concern that 'extracts' of

⁵² Davies to Bodichon, 22 August 1866, *Emily Davies: Collected Letters*, 196.

⁵³ The article Davies refers to was "Sisterhoods," *Pall Mall*, 21 August 1866, as cited in *Emily Davies: Collected Letters*, 196.

the article could be twisted by reviewers, and her careful discussion of this issue in the letter, accentuates the critical function of private correspondence in orchestrating and refining their public discourse.

The evident scope of Davies' epistolary network highlights her ambition to educate herself and her 'sisterhood' through correspondence. To stimulate lively discussion Boucherett sent her historical research to Davies, and Davies shared the *Pall Mall* article with Taylor. Davies and her circle were patently convinced that reading, discussion and passing papers amongst themselves through correspondence, was the key formula, 'adding strength' to their public arguments. Letters were therefore more than for private encouragement: they were an inextricable part of the intellectual formation of their public discourse.

Mutual edification was also achieved through correspondence. For the Kensington Society women, letters served as instruments of education. It was through private interaction that their public words were first tested and formed. Letters were also a vital network of solidarity for the women. The long epistolary liaison between Emelia Russell Gurney, the wife of MP Russell Gurney, and her niece, Frances (Julia) Wedgwood, further demonstrates the high value placed by the Kensington women on correspondence between like-minded women:⁵⁴

Good measure, pressed down and running over, dearest Snow, you
give into my bosom in return for a poor word. How delightful the
certainty of a response is!⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Wedgwood was also in correspondence with Harriet Martineau. See Elisabeth Sanders Arbuckle, ed. *Harriet Martineau's Letters to Fanny Wedgwood* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1983). Julia Wedgwood's letters have received attention for her similarly long correspondence with Robert Browning, see: R. Curle, ed. *Robert Browning and Julia Wedgwood: A Broken Friendship as Revealed by their Letters* (London: John Murray, 1937).

⁵⁵ Emelia Gurney to Julia Wedgwood, 12 August 1867, as seen in *Letters of Emelia Russell Gurney*, ed. Ellen Mary Gurney (London: James Nisbet & Co. Ltd, 1902), 48.

Their correspondence evidences a deep appreciation for letters and the opportunity they allow for women to stimulate their minds. Over eleven years they corresponded regularly. Gurney keenly cherished ‘Snow’, as she affectionally called Wedgwood.⁵⁶ In fact, as she expresses in multiple letters, she is overtly grateful for the friendship and correspondence during her sojourn in Jamaica. In this situation, it was the younger mind that seemed to feed the elder. As Gurney expressed to Wedgwood: I liked your letter very much, and I feel as if your mind could help mine very much indeed.⁵⁷ On 6 February 1867, she wrote that ‘You are a blessed creature, Snow, because you are rich enough to give so much to others; so much love and tender, fine sympathy, and so much mind, all warm and alive from your heart.’⁵⁸ On 12 August of that same year, she wrote ‘Good measure, pressed down and running over, dearest Snow, you give into my bosom in return for a poor word. How delightful the certainty of a response is!’⁵⁹ In a particularly effervescent letter, Gurney wrote:

Now I feel I need you so much; you have the qualities that I do crave for to stimulate me and make me feel well, so that I must lay hold of you and keep you. The look of your handwriting always makes me feel thirsty, and when I have read your letter twice it has given me the satisfied sensation of a drink of fresh water. I hope on your side there is some satisfaction in giving me to drink. Never think I shall say, ‘Not a work of your philosophy I beg.’ On the contrary, my voice would always be going into your ear if it could, saying, ‘Tell me some more.’ ‘Give me some of your oil,

⁵⁶ Ellen Mary Gurney, Emelia Russell Gurney’s niece, collated many of her letters into the *Letters of Emelia Russell Gurney*.

⁵⁷ Gurney to Wedgwood, 15 December 1865. Ibid., 39.

⁵⁸ Her use of italics. Gurney to Wedgwood, 6 February 1867. Ibid., 45.

⁵⁹ Gurney to Wedgwood, 12 August 1867. Ibid., 48.

for my lamp is gone out,' is my motto, I am ashamed to say; such a hankering after feeding it from others, rather than going to those that sell. And you have no idea how wickedly intolerant this makes me feel to those who have a still more feebly burning lamp than my own. I feel they have no right to exist at all!⁶⁰

Gurney's expressive metaphors, employing the image of thirst-quenching water and oil to a lamp, dramatically portray her desire for intellectual edification. For Gurney, letters were a life-source, something that was not only desirable, but essential. Although less dramatic, Wedgwood was equally affectionate in her letters to the older woman. She replied to 'my E.' with her opinions and thoughts on recent events or readings.⁶¹ Months earlier, on 6 February 1866 during an extended trip to Jamaica, Gurney wrote: 'I want very much one of your refreshing awakening letters; because I am in danger of letting my brain get very soft in this heat...' ⁶² Wedgwood's response to this request demonstrates the deep understanding between the two women and the letters which they richly valued:

Your mother said your first letters were to her like a parable of death; while she had been in such agony, you had been waking up to this new world of magical beauty. You cannot think how that expression, 'a parable of death,' has haunted me. When all one's grief lies in the past, when once one begins to think of the departed as at home in the new abode, how one does long for some word to come from them! Oh, I wonder if words do come, and we do not hear them! if they write to us of a new world – a spiritual tropics – where the poor wearied spirit expands into a "perfumed, luscious air" like yours, and we cannot read their letters, or mistake them for something different; or if we do not open them, that would be

⁶⁰ Wedgwood to Gurney, 18 September 1866. Ibid., 30-31.

⁶¹ Gurney to Wedgwood, 16 September 1867, Ibid, 52.

⁶² Gurney to Wedgwood, written from Jamaica, 6 February 1866. Ibid., 29.

the worst! I do feel in that terrible silence such an intense need to treasure up all the hints and suggestions of a future, of which this world seems to me to be full and yet not full enough.

I cannot tell you this evening how welcome to me is your bright glimpse of tropical life. I want some escape from the contemplation of dreary, sordid English life as exhibited in a workhouse, which just now oppresses me, and your note give a suggestion of something so different.⁶³

Like Gurney, Wedgwood used the letters as an ‘escape.’ As intelligent women, letters were their exploration into the debate and intense thought that was, at that time, only accessible to men in universities or politics. Their lust for philosophical thought is also evident in the social and theological discussion that often took place in their correspondence, with letters often discussing the statements of their mutual friend, F. D. Maurice, as well as Thomas Erskine and her uncle, Charles Darwin. ⁶⁴ In one instance, Wedgwood proclaimed: ‘...I believe his [Maurice] is one of the most saintly natures that

⁶³ Wedgwood to Gurney, 3 March 1866. Ibid., 30-31.

⁶⁴ Thomas Erskine and F.D. Maurice were also close friends and correspondents, and Maurice dedicated his *Priests and Kings of the Old Testament* to Erskine. Erskine wrote five books including *Remarks on the Internal Evidence for the Truth of Revealed Religion* (1820). See also F.D. Maurice’s *Reasons for Not Joining a Party in the Church: A Letter to the Ven. Samuel Wilberforce, Archdeacon of Surrey* (London: J.G.F. & J. Rivington, 1841); *The Sacrifices Which We Owe to God and His Church* (Cambridge: Macmillan, 1862); Wedgwood’s clear affection for Charles Darwin the Naturalist is equally as evident as her shrewd mind when she evaluates his views in her letters to Gurney:

I have been enjoying a visit so much to my uncle, Charles Darwin. He has one of the few minds I ever knew that can understand and philosophies upon its own limits; *e.g.* he was speaking of his great love for Poetry as a young man, and how completely it had given way to his taste for science, and there was something so very accurate and subtle in his description of his incapacity it seemed wonderful to me his keeping the knowledge of what poetry was, and yet losing his take for it. He said, ‘Well, I suppose it is that in reading scientific books one has not properly taken them in unless one could put the meaning into other words, and so I have got into the habit of this attempt, and cannot help making it upon poetry, where it *must* fail.

Wedgwood to Gurney, 3 March 1866. *Letters of Emelia Russell Gurney*, 31.

ever were condemned to sojourn in this world.’⁶⁵ Thus, the letters between Wedgwood and Gurney were more than letters of female fellowship. They shaped the philosophical and religious thinking of these two women, allowing them a literary space to sharpen their minds.

Amongst the literary circles of mid-Victorian Britain, another female author held notable authority amongst the Kensington women. Barbara Bodichon met George Eliot, in 1852. At the time Eliot was cohabiting with a married man, G. H. Lewes. Given her own parents’ situation, Bodichon was unfussed by this arrangement; it did not interfere with their friendship. When Eliot’s first novel *Adam Bede* appeared in 1859, Bodichon was the first to recognize the hand of her friend. ‘I know that it is you’, she wrote, ‘that it is written by Marian Evans, there is her great big head and her wise wide views.’⁶⁶ Eliot replied:

God bless you, dearest Barbara, for your love and sympathy. You are the first friend who has given any symptom of knowing me - the first heart that has recognized me in a book which has come from my heart of hearts. ⁶⁷

It is often postulated that Eliot’s 1862-3 novel, *Romola* was based on the character and likeness of Bodichon. Bodichon’s lifestyle reflected her financial independence, but also

⁶⁵ Wedgwood to Gurney, March 1869. Ibid., 62; There was also a notable account of Wedgwood’s conversation with Thomas Erskine (1788-1870) the Scottish theologian and apologist. Erskine was known for his radical emphasis ‘on the internal and subjective aspects of religious experience...a new way of theologizing in Britain which was to come to fruition in the so-called ‘Broad Church.’ In one letter, Wedgwood uses a page to recount ‘as you ask, a few recollections of Mr. E’s conversation (or rather monologue) with me.’ Wedgwood to Gurney, July 1866. Ibid., 40-41; See Trevor Hart, “Erskine, Thomas, of Linlathen (1788-1870),” *ODNB* (2004).

⁶⁶ Eliot’s given name was Mary Ann but friends often referred to her as ‘Marian.’ Bodichon to Eliot, 16 April 1859, as quoted in Rosemarie Bodenheimer, *The Real Life of Mary Ann Evans: George Eliot, Her Letters and Fiction* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), 140.

⁶⁷ Eliot to Bodichon, 5 May 1859, as quoted in Philip Davies, *The Transferred Life of George Eliot: The Biography of a Novelist* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 6.

an appreciation of reading. During a stay in 1870, Dante Rossetti wrote of 'Barbara's Cottage': 'Barbara does not indulge in bell-pulls, hardly in servants to summon thereby – so I brought my own. What she does affect is any amount of thorough draught – a library bearing the stern stamp of "Bodichon," and a kettle-holder with the uncompromising initials B. B. She is the best of women'.⁶⁸

It could be argued that not only Eliot's correspondence but, by extension, her career was deeply inspiring to Bodichon. Her literary style, in which she often explored the consequences of gossip and society's self-erosion, was that of an aloof narrator, not unlike the style she would have employed when a journalist in London. From 1851 she worked as a freelance journalist, and eventually was the editor and critic for the *Westminster Review* until 1854. Her partner, George Henry Lewes, was also a journalist who founded a radical weekly periodical entitled *The Leader* with his friend, Thornton Leigh Hunt. Eliot often wrote reviews for their literary section. During these years, Eliot was also working on a translation of Ludwig Feuerbach's *The Essence of Christianity* (originally published in German in 1835-6), a philosophical study that portrayed God as a human abstraction. This work had an enormous influence on the development of nineteenth-century Europe humanism.⁶⁹

It was during her journalist career that Eliot more coherently expressed her views on the 'woman question.' In October 1854, she wrote an article entitled 'Woman in France: Madame de Sablé' for the *Westminster Review*, in which she emphasizes the higher quality of seventeenth-century French women writers, largely due to their practice

⁶⁸ Dante Rossetti to William Allingham, 7 March 1870, in *Letters of Dante Gabriel Rossetti to William Allingham, 1854-1870*, ed. George Birkbeck Hill (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1897), 291.

⁶⁹ Karl Marx and Fredrich Engels were also strongly influenced by Feuerbach's philosophy. See Hans-Martin Sass, "The 'Transition' from Feuerbach to Marx: a Re-Interpretation," *Studies in Soviet Thought* 2, No. 2 (1983): 123-142.

of ‘affecting manly views or suppressing womanly ones.’⁷⁰ This is now more properly understood by Barbara Pauk as a ‘feminist statement, expressed in a very subtle and innovative way.’⁷¹ An earlier article by Eliot, on ‘Margaret Fuller and Mary Wollstonecraft’ stresses her concern that women were stereotyped by society, noting the ‘folly of absolute definitions of woman’s nature and absolute demarcations of woman’s mission.’⁷² This concern pervaded Eliot’s letters to the Kensington Society women. In 1857 George Eliot declined to contribute to the *EWJ*, pleading total commitment to her novel writing, but she did become a subscriber and adviser. As she advised Parkes:

The more business you can get into the journal—the more statements of philanthropic movements and social facts, and the less literature, the better. Not because I like philanthropy and hate literature, but I want to know about philanthropy and don’t care for second-rate literature.⁷³

⁷⁰ George Eliot, “Woman in France: Madame de Sablé,” *Westminster Review* 62 (October 1854): 448-73; See also Beryl Gray, “George Eliot and the ‘Westminster Review,’” *Victorian Periodicals Review* 33, No. 3 (2000), 223.

⁷¹ Rosemary Ashton, “Evans, Marian [pseud. George Eliot] (1819-1880),” *ODNB* (2008); Eliot also published similar subtle critiques of nineteenth century women in her 1856 essay, “Silly Novels by Lady Novelists,” *The Norton Anthology of Victorian Literature: The Victorian Age*. Vol. 2b. Seventh Edition (New York: Norton, 2000): 1461-69; Barbara Pauk, “The Evolution of Woman: George Eliot’s *Woman in France: Madame de Sablé*,” *Cahiers victoriens et édouardiens*, No. 73 (2011), 38; Those who have argued that the article is antifeminist are: Shirley Foster, *Victorian Women’s Fiction: Marriage, Freedom and the Individual* (London: Croom Helm, 1985) and Frederick R. Karl, *George Eliot. Voice of a Century: A Biography* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1995). On the other hand, literary critics who believe her writing was more nuanced include Alexis Easley, “Authorship, Gender and Identity: George Eliot in the 1850s,” *Women’s Writing* 3, Iss. 2 (1996): 145-60; Kimberly J. Stern, “A Common Fund: George Eliot and the Gender Politics of Criticism,” *Prose Studies* 30, Iss 1. (2008): 45-62.

⁷² The essay was published in the *Leader* on 13 October 1855, and it reviewed Fuller’s *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* (1845) and Wollstonecraft’s *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792). It also mocks those who resist improvement in women’s education: ‘Anything is more endurable than to change our formulae about women, or to run the risk of looking up to our wives instead of looking down on them.’ George Eliot. “Margaret Fuller and Mary Wollstonecraft,” 13 October 1855, *Leader*, Vol. VI. 988-989.

⁷³ Eliot to Parkes, 1 September 1857, in Gordon Sherman Haight, ed. *The George Eliot Letters: 1852-1858*. Vol. 1 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1954), 379.

Eliot believed the journal's strength was its philanthropic, social reform activism, not literary reviews. Hinting to a past prejudice that novels were somewhat second rate because of their association with women writer and readers, Eliot advises that they avoid damaging the journal's reputation by appearing frivolous or lightweight with fiction reviews, perhaps particularly as female-only editors.⁷⁴

Eliot also demonstrated a strong faith in the effectiveness of journalism and the power of the written word to inform society.⁷⁵ She also gave advice on the sort of literary material that would improve the *EWJ*:

The chief suggestion that has occurred to me on looking through the Magazine is this: that it would be a better thing to do, in a literary sense, and therefore in a business sense, if you chose to give one good and long criticism of some work worthy either to be read or damned, in place of several short noticed. You would get as many books of the better sort sent to you; and as for publishers and their advertisements, they follow success, which will not be won by futile writing. ⁷⁶

⁷⁴ Eliot's entire statement about the futility of literature in the *EWJ* continued:

The state of weekly and monthly book-reviewing is to me so nauseating – such a miserable hodge podge of conceited incompetence, hackneyed phrases unscrupulous praise and unscrupulous blame, that I should like you to use your present opportunity of sending a clear current along that muddy gutter. You would be doing something towards this by having a carefully written review of a single book, or cluster of kindred books, every month. There would be some nourishment for your readers in that.

I know you will forgive me for obtruding this opinion on you. All opinions are good for something, a propos of periodicals for the gros publique.

Ever your affectionate,

Marian.

Eliot to Parkes, *The George Eliot Letters: 1852-1858*. 437.

⁷⁵ For more on Eliot and her 'ways of thinking like a novelist, some inherited, some invented, which go into a novel and its influence for ever after' and Eliot as a realist author, see Philip Davis' recent study, *The Transferred Life of George Eliot* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017) Intro.; Fionnuala Dillane, *Before George Eliot: Marian Evans and the Periodical Press* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Kathryn Hughes, *George Eliot: The Last Victorian* (New York: Cooper Square Press, 1998); Nancy Henry, *The Life of George Eliot: A Critical Biography* (London: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012).

⁷⁶ George Eliot to Parkes, exact date unknown, 1858, *The George Eliot Letters: 1852-1858*, 437.

Evidently, Elliot believed ‘books of the better sort’ were appropriate for the public image of the *EWJ*. Through this correspondence the accomplished author gave private advice on the purpose and practice of the journal, and how to improve its expediency for the women’s cause. However, the Kensington Society’s relationship with Eliot was not entirely journalistic advice: Eliot also found intellectual enrichment through correspondence. As she wrote to Davies while the Society was regularly meeting, on 8 August 1868:

The pleasure of a visit from you made me thrust away all that pre-occupation, but I was not very successful, and I fear I talked on serious subjects in a sadly flurried imperfect way, which makes me feel guilty. Ineffectual rash talk is an offence, only not so bad as ineffectual rash writing. Pray consider the pen drawn through all the words and only retain certain points for your deeper consideration, as a background to all you may judge it expedient to say to your special public. ...⁷⁷

Despite her reference to a private visit, this letter exposes Eliot’s concern that her opinions would receive a wider audience than this familiar letter. Evidently, she saw the letter as a forum for candid ‘flurried’ and ‘ineffectual rash talk,’ but wanted to stress that these epistolary discussions should remain private. The ‘special public’ which Eliot refers to, we can assume was Davies’ circle of women’s activists, specifically the Kensington Society. Interestingly, this term suggests that Eliot saw herself as outside this circle, presumably because of her home arrangement (living with Mr Lewes), or her unwillingness to openly advocate women’s reform openly. Nonetheless, Eliot’s

⁷⁷ Barbara Stephen. *Emily Davies and Girton College* (London: Constable & Co., 1927), 181

contextual correspondence with the Kensington Society women demonstrates her close affinity to their cause, a support which was enabled through an abundance of private letters.

‘CARPETS FOR THEM A MEETING PLACE’

On 31 October 1866, Emily Davies wrote to Helen Taylor, recounting the recent Kensington Society meeting, and what came of it:

I believe Mrs. Bodichon has written to you about our meeting & told you of the decisions arrived at. I dare say she explained that the somewhat complicated arrangement finally adopted was not chosen as absolutely the best, but only as the best open to us.⁷⁸

Davies’ letter – and the referenced letter from Barbara Bodichon within it – highlight a pivotal component of the Kensington Society’s correspondence that is yet to be sufficiently explored. The political strategies of the Kensington Society formed another vital element in their correspondence. Early in their relationship, the correspondence between Bodichon and Helen Taylor evidenced their plans to present the petition for the Marriage Reform Bill, and then the presentation of the Bill itself in 1866. Taylor became the go-between for John Stuart Mill and the Kensington Society women, often

⁷⁸ The Kensington Society meeting mentioned was held three days earlier, on 28 October 1866. Davies to Taylor, 31 October 1866, *Emily Davies Collected Letters*, 211.

communicating on behalf of him in her letters and planning the strategies that involved his political influence. The score of letters between Taylor and Davies in regard to the petition demonstrate Davies' appreciation for her help, as well as her strategic use of the Kensington Society network to instigate action. As Davies wrote in a long letter to Taylor on 18 July 1866:

Does Mr. Mill know how deeply & warmly we thank him for what he is doing? One feels an almost irrepressible impulse to try to tell him & then we are held back by feeling that it would be an impertinence. I think you are perhaps scarcely aware how much your steady sympathy and your prompting helps & sustains those who have to carry out the details... The advantage of making your personal acquaintance will count for still more in one's life's work. I must not return evil for good by inflicting long letter upon you.⁷⁹

On 9 May 1866, Taylor had written to Bodichon in a neat hand:

We should only be petitioning for the omission of the word male or men from the present Act. I am afraid we cannot expect to get many influential names. But this would not be of much importance if numbers can be got. If a tolerably numerous petition can be got up, my father will gladly undertake to present it, and will consider whether it might be made the occasion for anything further... as regards myself I will do my best to prepare a sketch for a petition, for your consideration, but it will take me some days to think over what seems the best words to put down. Probably the Petition finally should be drawn up from the suggestions of many. I shall be very glad to subscribe £20 towards expenses; and may perhaps

⁷⁹ Davies to Taylor, 18 July 1866, *Emily Davies: Collected Letters*, 184.

be able to call at 19 Langham Place on Friday or Saturday at the time you mention but am not sure that I can do so. I will in any case send you what I can prepare in the way of a petition as soon as it is ready, and shall be glad to hear from you any further suggestions on the subject.’⁸⁰

On June 6, 1866, she followed up with a more rushed letter concerning the petition:

My father has not been able to see Mr Russell Gurney and has therefore written to him to ask him to move for the venture. Mr Mill himself will present the petition tomorrow, /if that is still the wish of the ladies/ and it should be sent to the House of Commons to arrive there before two p.m. tomorrow, Thursday June 7th, directed to Mr Mill, and ‘petition’ written on it. It is indeed a wonderful success. It does honour to the energy of those who have worked in it and promises well for the prospects of any further plan for furthering the same objects.

Yours very truly

Helen Taylor

P.S. If anything should interfere to prevent Mr Russell Gurney from moving for the venture Mr Mill will do it himself, but thinks it very desirable that it should be done by Mr. R. Gurney.

H.T.⁸¹

In Taylor’s letters, the construction and presentation of the petition was choreographed with meticulousness. Their collaboration with Mill and Gurney, the decision that ‘numbers’ of names were equally as important as ‘influential names’ and their

⁸⁰ Her underline. Taylor to Bodichon, 9 May 1866, Autograph Letter Collection: General Women’s Movement, GB/106/7/B1.

⁸¹ Taylor to Bodichon, 7 June 1866, Ibid., GB/106/7/B2.

discernment in what the petition would ask, including ‘the best words to put down,’ point to the acutely careful discussions that took place through letters.

These discussions also included a wider network of members. When Bessie Parkes first met Emily Faithfull in November 1858, she was certain of her suitability for the purposes of the *EWJ*. She wrote to Bodichon in January 1859: ‘Emily Faithfull is the nearest approach to my ideal of a canvasser I have yet got hold of. A clergyman’s daughter, aged 23, and rather strong-minded; carried her own huge carpet bag, etc.’⁸² Emily Faithfull became a significant talking point for the Kensington Society coordinators, their letters revealing their dramatic loss of respect for their young counterpart when her involvement in the Codrington divorce case came to light in 1863. Adelaide Procter and Faithfull, for instance, were close associates through the Portfolio Club, a meeting place for creatives in poetry and painting. In 1862, without explanation, Procter ended her friendship with Faithfull, writing of it to Parkes: ‘The break with Emily Faithfull is made and is a great one... I thought ill enough of E.F. to drop her and to break my friendship with her.’⁸³ Parkes, at this time, knew nothing of the scandal. It was not until Bessie heard from Isa Craig:

Isa burst out one day by accident with part of it to my astonished ears! and little by little the other two let out what they knew!

Sometimes I think she is mad; a mere case of “Folie Lucide”; but whether she is mad or bad, and whether what she says is true or false is more than I can tell.

Now this is all I can or dare tell you; and more perhaps than I ought to say. I do not think you will do harm by visiting her; but I am

⁸² Parkes to Bodichon, 30 January 1859, GCPP Parkes 5/87.

⁸³ Adelaide Procter to Parkes, 7 August 1862, GCPP Parkes 8/26.

publicly involved; and must keep clear of the blow-up which I think must by all the laws of chances, come some day...⁸⁴

Crucially, this break in the friendship was primarily discussed through private letters, without spreading gossip to larger groups of people. Such letters demonstrate the confiding nature of a private letter, in which women could share their thoughts and feelings with sympathetic minds. These thoughts were the beginning of strategies that informed the Kensington Society's campaigns, and in turn, the mid-Victorian women's movement. In a letter of Davies to Bodichon in 1862, the first seeds of the women's medical training campaign were sowed:

Lizzie Garrett has asked me to write to you about a matter in which I am sure you will be interested. We are going to try to get the London University open to women. Lizzie is advised that she had better make sure of getting admitted to the M.D. examination, before making any more attempts upon Medical Schools...I will send you by Book-post some lists of the Senate, and a paper we are having printed, telling people in a few words, what we want.⁸⁵

Davies further wrote to Bodichon, urging her to write to her friends to hasten the acceptance of women into London's University's medical examinations:

I will send you by Book-post some lists of the Senate, and a paper we are having printed, telling people in a few words, what we want. Will you write to everybody you know, and get them to use their influence, either personally or thro' the press. It is important to get up some manifestation of public opinion, if possible, as the

⁸⁴ Parkes to Bodichon, November 1863, GCPP Parkes 5/159.

⁸⁵ Davies to Bodichon, exact date unknown, 1862, *Emily Davies: Collected Papers*, 2.

question will come before the general body of Graduates. They have a right to discuss and make recommendations, tho' the ultimate decision rests with the Senate.⁸⁶

This letter not only significantly expresses Davies's proficient grasp of political persuasion, but her fundamental trust in correspondence to further her goals. Her plea for Bodichon to communicate with her own network of women to expand the reach of the petition exemplifies the strategic correspondence of the Kensington women. Davies continued:

As soon as the Memorial is in the course of signature, we can announce it in the papers, and that will be an occasion for them to take up the subject. There seems a very good prospect of success. My brother, who is generally discouraging, thinks we can scarcely fail. He will bring a good deal of the [Frederick] Maurice interest to bear.

Adelaide Procter is at work, and the Drewrys will do all they can in their circle, and I am going to stir up my Quaker friends.⁸⁷

Davies' letter betrays, critically, her intention to generate a wider movement, including Quakers, men and women, to support their campaign for women's education. For this purpose, the letter was certainly the most useful and practical method of networking to disseminate ideas and agitate for further reform.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 3.

⁸⁷ Ibid. The Drewrys were Ellen and Louisa Drewry. The memorial was addressed to the Senate of the University of London, *Memorial signed by women doctors addressed to the University of London* (June 1877) Senate House Library. <https://www.senatehouselibrary.ac.uk/exhibitions-and-events/exhibitions/rights-for-women/resources/letters-and-transcripts/memorial-of-women-doctors>

Letter writing was arguably the most strategic form of collective activism in Victorian England and a fundamental tool of persuasion and networking for these well-connected women. Hence, the Kensington Society's private communication undoubtedly served a greater strategic purpose. Through private channels, networks and circles, their letters were designed to stir up other women to action. As Emily Davies encouraged Bodichon in 1862:

Will you write to everybody you know, and get them to use their influence, either personally or thro' the press. It is important to get up some manifestation of public opinion, if possible, as the question will come before the general body of Graduates. They have a right to discuss and make recommendations, tho' the ultimate decision rests with the Senate.⁸⁸

This included the concurrent organisation of the *EWJ* between the Kensington Society members. The salary and arrangement of Davies' editorship of the *EWJ*, for instance, was arranged through correspondence between her and the primary benefactress of the journal, Bodichon. A contract was then drawn up, signed by Faithfull and Davies, stipulating that Davies would be given the annual income of 100 pounds.⁸⁹ They also discussed the daring of the *EWJ*. In 1862, Davies wrote to Bodichon:

I have had a letter to you on my mind for some time, but since I came home, I have had more to do than I have known how to get thro'... On the whole things are going on as well as one could expect. The number of subscribers to the Journal is the same this month as last. I suppose some will go off at the end of the year.

⁸⁸ Davies to Bodichon, exact date unknown, 1862, *Emily Davies: Collected Papers*, 2.

⁸⁹ Davies to Bodichon, exact date unknown, 1862, GCPP Bodichon 2/2.

Kent has had an extra five and twenty, but till his account comes in, we don't know whether he has sold them. ⁹⁰

For diplomatic reasons, issues such as salary were perhaps more comfortably discussed in these private letters. When the first plans for Girton College were raised, letters allowed a private space to assess the best strategies for implementation. On 19 January 1867, Davies wrote to Bodichon: My dear Ms Bodichon...I am full of the College and must discourse about it.⁹¹ Evidently, their irregular meetings and separate lives made it difficult to sustain this keen discourse. The Kensington Society's practice of circulating papers was a unifying strategy to address this practical problem. It created an intimate circle of correspondents beyond London. By admitting corresponding members, the Kensington Society also constructed a wider network of women. Within private communication, they developed as a reform collective, and were enabled to sustain joint public projects.

In the letters of Emily Davies, Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon, Sophia Jex-Blake and other members of the Kensington Society, the dynamic fusion of professional and personal discussion through correspondence are therefore brought to life. Margaretta Jolly and Liz Stanley assert that 'Letters present a similarly tantalising form of writing's engagement with life, where public and private, professional and personal are so happily confused.'⁹² As Jolly and Stanley note, for these nineteenth-century female reformers, the letter's ability to combine personal and private discussion allowed them to dissent in

⁹⁰ Murphy and Raftery believes this note refer to William Charles Kent, the editor of the *Sun* and the *Weekly Register*: see in *Emily Davies: Collected Letters, 1861-1875*, 10; Parkes and her father also discussed contemporary international issues. On slavery, Joseph Parkes wrote to his daughter, Bessie: 'As for the United States Civil War, I have ceased to speculate, having come to the conclusion the awful slaughter and coming anarchy we read of are, under Providence, designed as the end of Slavery – and as equal punishment of North and South for the cruel tyranny of both over the Coloured Races. But I pity the Southerners, and I doubt if they will be eventually subdued; and it looks as if the freedom of the Blacks will after all be brought about by their owners! The majority of the People in the North never meant and do not mean Emancipation.' Joseph Parkes to Parkes, GCPP Parkes 2/78.3.

⁹¹ Her use of underline, Davies to Bodichon, 19 January 1867, GCPP Bodichon 1/5.

⁹² Margaretta Jolly and Liz Stanley, "Letters as / not a genre," *Life Writing* 1, No. 2 (2005), 1.

private, and sharpen their ideas before entering the male-dominated sphere of British public life.⁹³ Letters became an invaluable vehicle of the Victorian women's movement to discuss and disseminate their reforms for mid-nineteenth century Britain, and the specific reform ideas of the Kensington Society were sharpened utilising epistles.

⁹³ Jolly and Stanley have stressed the difficulty of studying letters as a historical genre and the nature of truth and authenticity in letter writing. *Ibid.*, 2.

CHAPTER V. WOMEN OF LETTERS: 'PUBLICITY IS ESSENTIAL TO SUCCESS'¹

Public opinion, however, so far as it concerns itself about the matter at all, is, it must be granted, as yet against the discussion, and prejudice is a strong fortress. Women are told they must take the citadel, or bring it to capitulate by stratagem...²

Amongst the papers of Emily Davies in the Girton College Library is a large scrapbook.³ It contains a myriad of newspaper cut-outs and press snippets, all in relation to either an associated woman or activist, or Girton College's foundation. A number refer to the venerated nurse and cousin of Barbara Bodichon, Florence Nightingale. Others were cuttings from the *Spectator*, *Leeds Mercury* and the *Morning Post* relating to contemporary women. They were all published between February 1865 and December 1866, two dynamic years in which the Kensington Society met frequently. This collection exhibits Davies' fascination with the press, and by extension, the Kensington Society's concurrent strategic awareness of public communication. As nineteenth-century female reformers, they were convinced that the public's perception of their desire to extend women's rights was pivotal to their success. As the above statement from the *EWJ* predicted, they sought to 'take the citadel' of the public press, use writing as a tool of resistance, and through powerful published words 'capitulate by stratagem.'⁴

¹ Emily Davies, "Letters addressed to a Daily Paper at Newcastle-upon-Tyne, 1860," in Emily Davies, *Thoughts on Some Questions Relating to Women 1860-1908* (Cambridge: Bowes and Bowes, 1910), 5.

² "The Disputed Question," *EWJ*, 362.

³ Emily Davies' scrapbook can be found in Girton College Archives, GCPP Davies 12/1.

⁴ "The Disputed Question," *EWJ*, 362.

This chapter will examine the significant contribution of Kensington Society members to nineteenth-century British publishing. The Kensington Society utilized all forms of publications to campaign for the broader goals of women's liberation. The majority of their published works were highly political statements, essays, journal articles and papers appealing for political change. The timeline of the Kensington Society's written activism suggests that they initially pursued more political avenues of communication - such as the petition. However, they increasingly utilized the creativity of literature to shift public opinion.

While the *EWJ* is often considered the literary organ of the Langham Place circle, well before its first meeting in 1865 many of the Kensington Society women had demonstrated a firm belief in the power of not just the petition, but pamphlets, articles, and all literary publications, including poetry and novels, to campaign for change within the restrictive social parameters of womanhood in Victorian Britain. Over the course of their meetings, and in the years closely following, the Kensington Society represented the epicenter of female journalism in Victorian Britain.

The *EWJ* had been moderately successful in disseminating their early opinions on women's progress, but it was fundamentally limited. As a woman's journal, it did not reach a wider readership of both men and women. On the other hand, publishing in esteemed journals allowed them a much larger audience. It was also impractical to continue the *EWJ*. As many of the women lived outside of London, they were better able to write and shared their writing through the post. The organised women's movement had begun, they had shared their thoughts through discussion meetings, and now they set out to actively communicate their resistance. In the years following the Kensington Society's last meeting in 1868, its members increasingly published individual essays, pamphlets, books and journal articles that championed women's training and education.

It is clear that the Kensington Society's meetings inflamed their interest in public writing. While this chapter will focus on their individual work, it is important to acknowledge that the meetings of the Kensington Society, which focused on written papers and strong discussion, unified and endorsed them as authors. After all, the most powerful demonstration of the Kensington Society's belief in the written word to provoke thought and change society was their practice of presenting and circulating written responses to topical questions.

The number of journalists in the group, in particular, demonstrates the Society's identity as a publishing collective. Ann Dingsdale has pointed out that not only were the Kensington Society members enthusiastic in joining and creating organisations, but they also 'had an usually high level of experience of employment, and many were working full time at demanding jobs.'⁵ Nine members, for instance, were employed writers, either in journalism or literature. Frances Power Cobbe and Frances Martin were both paid journalists. Emily Davies, Jessie Boucherett, Sophia Jex-Blake, Dorothea Beale, Elizabeth Wolstenholme, Anna Swanwick, Annie and Eliza Keary, Ellen Clayton, Barbara Bodichon and E. A Manning were all published writers, authors and poets. It is no surprise that the Society, with its emphasis on written responses and shared papers, drew women with writing skills into its midst. Clearly, the Kensington Society harnessed the power of the publishing professions to disseminate their ideas.

The published pen gave a voice to the Kensington Society. Yet they were very judicious in what that voice said, and how it was heard. This chapter will bring to light the tactical nature of the Kensington Society by not only examining the individual publications they released, but also the communication and strategy discussions regarding their public work that were simultaneously taking place through meetings and letters. To

⁵Dingsdale, *"Generous and Lofty Sympathies,"* 200.

assess their public strategy this chapter will consider three facets of their published work. The first avenue of public work that had unified the Kensington Society was the collective act of petitioning. Although there were only two large petitions encouraged by the Kensington Society, this form of public statement reflects one of the most fundamental principles of the Society – that united communication was vital for radical women in mid-nineteenth century Britain. The second, and by far most extensive, is the political and social essays, pamphlets, journal articles and books published by the Kensington women. To assess this, it will give particular attention to members who were professionally engaged as either writers, speech-givers, poets or journalists. In particular, it will canvass the work of the Kensington Society's more vocal figures, such as Frances Power Cobbe and Frances Martin. These women, the most prolific writers in the Society, demonstrate the publishing strength of the Society. The final facet of the Kensington Society's public communication is less often acknowledged: their fictional publications. A number of Kensington women were authors of literature or poetry, including the lesser known authors, Isa Craig, Anna Swanwick, and Eliza and Annie Keary. An inquiry into the versatile language of their creative texts will exhibit the Kensington Society's commitment to tactical, radical social reform.

The Kensington Society made a substantial contribution to the nineteenth-century British feminist movement. Through pamphlets, essays, poetry and novels, the Kensington Society broke free of feminine propriety. Yet women were still vastly outnumbered by men as authors, and patriarchal ideals were a barrier to women writers in mid-nineteenth century Britain. In 1851, Helen Taylor's mother, Harriet Taylor, had been vocal on the prejudicial restrictions on women, and their right to enter politics and the press. She had published this declaration in the *Westminster & Foreign Quarterly Review*:

Many persons think that they have sufficiently justified the restrictions on women's field of action, when they have said that the pursuits from which women are excluded are *unfeminine*, and that the *proper sphere* of women is not politics or publicity, but private and domestic life.

We deny the right of any portion of the species to decide for another portion, or an individual for another individual, which is and what is not their 'proper sphere'. The proper sphere for all human beings is the largest and highest which they are able to attain to. What this is, cannot be ascertained, without complete liberty of choice.⁶

These women found their 'liberty of choice' in the pen. They were, of course, not the first women to utilize print to forward progressive views. Mary Wollstonecraft, for instance, described herself as 'the first of a new genus' as a female journalist.⁷ Wollstonecraft had joined Joseph Johnson's circle of radical writers in the 1780s, and through this friendship, published her first book, *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters* in 1787, her first fictional book, *Mary: A Fiction* a year later, and over the following years contributed over 200 articles for Johnson's literary periodical, the *Analytical Review*. Although other women, such as Elizabeth Montagu and Charlotte Manning had authored literary articles, and Isabella Griffith published anonymously in her husband's *Monthly Review*, Wollstonecraft was 'the first woman for whom short-notice literary criticism on demand

⁶ Harriet Taylor Mill, "Enfranchisement of Women," *Westminster & Foreign Quarterly Review* (July 1851).

⁷ Mary Wollstonecraft wrote in a letter to her sister Everina Wollstonecraft on 7 November 1787: 'Mr. Johnson...assures me that if I exert my talents in writing, I may support myself in a comfortable way. I am then going to be the first of a new genus – I tremble at the attempt.' *Collected Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft*, ed. Ralph M. Wardle (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1879); as quoted in Mary A. Waters, "The First of a New Genus": Mary Wollstonecraft as a Literary Critic and Mentor to Mary Hays." *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 37, No. 3 (2004), 415.

provided a considerable part of her total income.’⁸ Wollstonecraft’s career, and her writing, especially *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, exerted a radical influence on nineteenth-century women’s thinking, inspiring many to follow her path into public journalism.⁹

Past research has frequently underestimated the number of professional women writers in Victorian Britain.¹⁰ The late-eighteenth century had seen a rise in women journalists, historians, literary theorists and art critics, as well as conduct book authors. By the mid-nineteenth century, to be a ‘woman of letters’ was an achievable career option, although most needed extra financial support. Although Norma Clarke has argued that ‘women of letters’ was a purely eighteenth-century phenomenon, others, such as Linda Peterson, believe that women writers can be recognised in both the eighteenth and nineteenth century as ‘professional in a modern sense: they show an interest in making money, dealing with publishers in a business-like way, actively pursuing a literary career...’¹¹ Peterson has established her argument by identifying Harriet Martineau, Mary Howitt and Charlotte Brontë as worthy of the term ‘women of letters’ by demonstrating the professional nature of their writing. In particular, Peterson highlights Martineau’s anonymous writing in the *Monthly Repository* as an example of a woman whose lengthy, fifty-year career in periodicals made her a ‘heroic (wo)man of letters.’¹² The Kensington

⁸ Mary A. Waters, “The First of a New Genus”: Mary Wollstonecraft as a Literary Critic and Mentor to Mary Hays.” *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 37, No. 3 (2004), 416.

⁹ It was Eliot who unearthed Wollstonecraft in her essay, “Margaret Fuller and Mary Wollstonecraft,” 13 October 1855, Vol. VI. *Leader*, 988-989, until William Godwin’s posthumous biography of his wife sank her reputation for the first half of the nineteenth century.

¹⁰ The biographical identities of women writers have also been frequently misconstrued. See Brenda Ayres, ed., *Biographical Misrepresentations of British Women Writers: A Hall of Mirrors and the Long Nineteenth Century*. (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).

¹¹ Queen Victoria has long been considered a woman of letters and one of the greatest diarists of the century. Although she left instructions for them to be destroyed after her death, a selection still remains. *Leaves from a journal of Our Life in the Highlands* (1866); Norma Clarke, *The Rise and Fall of the Woman of Letters* (London: Pimlico, 2004); Linda H. Peterson, *Becoming a Woman of Letters: Myths of Authorship and Facts of the Victorian Market* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 1.

¹² Peterson, *Becoming a Woman of Letters*, 62.

members presented themselves as professional women firmly embedded in contemporary journalism and social discussion. It is the contention of this thesis that the Kensington Society should be considered as a network of professional ‘women of letters.’

Before 1865, the ‘woman of letters,’ Anna Jameson, had led the way through copious publishing on the Woman Question. Jameson was, as Judith Johnson puts it, ‘a woman confident in her position as a successful professional writer.’¹³ The term ‘woman of letters’ first made its appearance in Victorian Britain when Julia Kavanagh, an Irish novelist and biographer, first used it in her *French Women of Letters: Biographical Sketches* in 1862 and subsequently her *English Women of Letters* in 1863.¹⁴ The term traditionally referred to those who wrote public letters prolifically, but for these women, it was an accurate term to illustrate their use of all written letters, both public and private, to become journalists and writers. Arguably, a ‘woman of letters’ was a product of the restrictive female realm in nineteenth-century Britain; with capable women barred from a political career, they turned to a formally private form, the letter, to address the public.¹⁵ Jameson’s activist writing made her eminent in some circles. As Parkes recalled:

her admirable ‘Letter to Lord John Russell’, in which she touches on many wants suffered by her countrywomen and devotes some pages to the consideration of the medical question. This letter is

¹³ Johnston argues this in light of Jameson’s correspondence with Elizabeth Gaskell, and her discussions of Gaskell’s novel, *North and South*, with reference to Charles Dickens and William Thackeray. See Judith Johnston, *Anna Jameson: Victorian, Feminist, Woman of Letters*, (originally published 1997) (New York: Routledge, 2016), 4.

¹⁴ Julia Kavanagh, *French Women of Letters; Biographical Sketches* (London: Hurst and Blackett, 1862); Julia Kavanagh, *English Women of Letters: Biographical Sketches*, (London: Hurst and Blackett, 1863); Kavanagh was a close correspondent of Charlotte Brontë, and wrote *Woman in France during the Eighteenth Century* (1850), *Women of Christianity* (1852), *French Women of Letters* (1862). Thompson Cooper, revised by Megan A. Stephen, “Kavanagh, Julia, (1824-1877),” *ODNB* (2004).

¹⁵ For more examples of nineteenth century women of letters, see Meredith B. Raymond, Mary Rose Sullivan, ed. *Women of Letters: Select Letters of Elizabeth Barrett Browning & Mary Russell Mitford*, (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1987). See also Robert W. Uphaus, Gretchen M. Foster, ed. *The ‘Other’ Eighteenth Century: English Women of Letters, 1660-1800* (East Lansing, MI: Colleagues Press, 1991).

one of the most remarkable production of Mrs Jameson's pen. It is characterized by a simplicity and dignity which reveal the aged and experienced woman, willing to come forward and stake her well-won reputation for the sake of those younger than herself; it is written alike without heat and without timidity and is a noble example of that style of writing in which the moral character of the author penetrates every sentence, and infuses an authority to which mere eloquence could never attain.'¹⁶

Not only was Bodichon an admirer of Jameson's work, but it clearly instilled in her an appreciation for public writing as a noble form of activism. Noting that eloquent, persuasive language was more powerful than language with 'heat' and anger, Bodichon demonstrated first, the Kensington Society's avid belief in the dignity of public expression, and second, the strategic potential of the language utilised.

The value of circulated prose was established by predecessors of the women's movement. Some Kensington members were initially inspired to join the cause by what they had read in journals. Jessie Boucherett, for instance, first learnt of the valid argument behind women's rights when she read Harriet Martineau's 'Female Industry' article in *The Edinburgh Review*, April 1859.¹⁷ Martineau had written emphatically about the extensive contribution women had already made to Britain's industry, arguing how 'wearied' some of them were 'with the incessant repetition of the dreary story of spirit-broken governesses and starving needlewomen.'¹⁸ This meant that the public rarely obtain 'a glimpse of the full breadth of the area of female labour in Great Britain.'¹⁹ It was the evidence provided in Martineau's article that spurred Boucherett to travel to London to

¹⁶ Parkes, "A Review of the Last Six Years," as seen in Lacey, *Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon*, 216-7.

¹⁷ Harriet Martineau, "Female Industry," *The Edinburgh Review*, Vol. 109, No. 222. (April 1859).

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

visit the offices of the *EWJ*, and henceforth, become a crucial editor of that periodical. Boucherett later published her own papers on women's rights, with special reference to education, and the isolated situation of unmarried women, such as 'On the Cause of Distress prevalent among Single Women' in 1864.²⁰ In 1867, two years after the Kensington Society began, Boucherett published another article on 'The Condition of Women in France' in *The Contemporary Review*.²¹ In that article, Boucherett criticised the laws of France that inhibited women, arguing: 'in France the increasing prosperity of the working man is not shared by the working woman. This deterioration in their state is caused by legislation.'²²

Barbara Onslow is one of the few scholars to have attempted a full examination of nineteenth-century British feminism and activist journalism, in her *Women of the Press in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (2000).²³ Onslow's study is very broad, however, canvassing over one hundred women writers and editors. While the multifaceted relationship between Victorian feminism and the press was widely acknowledged, it has rarely been studied as a unified movement of women. Most studies of women's journalism and literature are individual biographies, or compilations such as Andrea Broomfield and Sally Mitchell's *Prose by Victorian Women: An Anthology*.²⁴ Nevertheless, Broomfield and Mitchell rightly 'encourage readers to examine the assumption that Victorian middle- and upper-middle-class women, ensconced in

²⁰ Boucherett other political essays include *On the Obstacles to the Employment of Women* (1860), *On the Education of Girls with Reference to their Future Position* (1860), *Local Societies* (1861) and *On the Choice of a Business* (1862); Linda Walker, "Boucherett, (Emilia) Jessie (1825-1905)," *ODNB* (2013).

²¹ Jessie Boucherett, "The Condition of Women in France," *The Contemporary Review*, 1866-1900, Vol. 5 (May 1867): 98-113.

²² *Ibid.*, 112-113.

²³ Barbara Onslow, *Women of the Press in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000).

²⁴ However, the only Kensington members that Broomfield and Mitchell consider is Frances Power Cobbe and Helen Taylor in Andrea Broomfield, Sally Mitchell, eds. *Prose by Victorian Women: An Anthology* (New York: Garland Publishing Inc., 1996).

domesticity, were not familiar enough with ‘worldly’ events to write serious non-fiction.’²⁵

The prolific number of publications by the Kensington Society is the most telling sign of their determined use of the media. For instance, the Kensington Society journalist, Frances Power Cobbe, was one of the lead writers of the respected periodical, *London Echo*. Over the course of her career she also published over twenty books.²⁶ Susan Hamilton has pointed out that ‘though she was not the first woman to write regularly for the daily newspaper press, Cobbe’s tenure at the *Echo* is a significant incident in the history of Victorian feminism.’²⁷ Hamilton notes that writers like Cobbe spelt a resurgence in British feminism in the late 1860s, arguing that: ‘Reading the many articles, chapters, and books on the fight for women’s suffrage in the aftermath of the 1868 election reminds us that the policies, strategies and decisions taken were as insistently local and opportunistic as they were founded on broader philosophical ideals.’²⁸ Hamilton evidences Frances Power Cobbe’s 1868 article in *Fraser’s Magazine*, ‘Criminals, Idiots, Women and Minors’ as a prime example of the growing enthusiasm for feminist

²⁵ Ibid., xi.

²⁶ Cobbe’s most successful book was *Broken Lights*, published in 1864. The work claims that religiosity can hinder social reform. Janet L. Larson argues that ‘public and personal gender issues are being negotiated through its modes of discourse and argument, in Janet L. Larson, ‘Where is the Woman in This Text? Frances Power Cobbe’s Voices in “Broken Lights,”’ *Victorian Literature and Culture*, Vol. 31, No. 1. *Victorian Religion* (2003), 100. See Frances Power Cobbe, *Broken Lights: An Inquiry Into the Present Condition and Future Prospects of Religious Faith* (London: Trübner, 1864.) On this topic, see also her article “Woman’s Work in the Church,” *Theological Review*, Vol. 2 (September 1865): 505-521. Other books included *An Essay on Intuitive Morals, Part I., Theory of Morals* (London: Longman’s 1855), *Friendless Girls, and How to Help Them: Being an Account of the Preventive Mission in Bristol* (London: Emily Faithfull, 1861), *Essays on the Pursuits of Women. Also a Paper on Female Education* (London: Emily Faithfull, 1863), *The Red Flag in John Bull’s Eye*, London Emancipation Society, tract 1. (London: Emily Faithfull, 1863).

²⁷ Susan Hamilton, “The Practice of Everyday Feminism: Frances Power Cobbe, Divorce, and the London Echo, 1868-1875,” *Victorian Periodicals Review* 35, No. 3 (2002), 227.

²⁸ Susan Hamilton, *Frances Power Cobbe and Victorian Feminism* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 63.

pamphleteering in the late 1860s.²⁹ In *Macmillan's Magazine* the editor also highlighted the increasing interest in women's contribution to papers; the *Magazine* was known as a journal that offered 'many unpopular opinions' for the sake of portraying 'all sides to controversial debates.'³⁰ As Alexander Macmillan wrote to Henry Fawcett, Millicent Fawcett's husband on 3 March 1868: 'I was sorry Mrs. Fawcett's paper wasn't in our last number. It certainly will be in the next. If for no better reason than that *room for the ladies* is clearly the cry of the day.'³¹

Some scholars have argued that more women wrote to maintain the status quo of Victorian society than those who wrote to reform it. Peggy Meyer Sherry has proposed that women writers were supposed to write 'stories that satisfied the appetite of the Victorian reader for the harmony of a happy ending. They reaffirmed the male domination of society and the view that the woman's place was in the home.'³² Sherry overlooks the fact that female journalists formed a small minority in the Victorian mainstream press. She also overlooks the fact that while nineteenth-century women's rights authors were a small network, they were united in their purpose. As a collective of women with a remarkable number of publications between them, the Kensington Society formed a model of nineteenth-century strategic feminism. As shall be demonstrated, the similarities and cohesion between their work suggests that they were strategic in their invasion of the male-dominated world of publishing. Claire Brook has made a similar observation of

²⁹ From 1863 to 1868, Cobbe wrote a total of fourteen articles for *Fraser's Magazine*. Susan Hamilton, "The 'force' of sentiment: Married Women's Property and the ideal of marriage in *Fraser's Magazine*," in *Frances Power Cobbe and Victorian Feminism* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 61.

³⁰ For more on *Macmillan's Magazine*, see Andrea Broomfield, "Towards a More Tolerant Society: *Macmillan's Magazine* and the Women's Suffrage Question," *Victorian Periodical Review* 23, No. 3 (1990), 121.

³¹ George Macmillan, ed. *The Life and Letters of Alexander Macmillan* (London: Macmillan, 1908), 122, as quoted in Rosemary T. Vanarsdel, "*Macmillan's Magazine* and the Fair Sex: 1859-1874 (Part One)," *Victorian Periodicals Review*, Vol. 33, No. 4 (2000), 375.

³² Peggy Meyer Sherry, "Telling Her Story: British Women of Letters of the Victorian Era," *The Princeton University Library Chronicle* 57, No.1 (1995): 149-150.

Elizabeth Garrett Anderson's strategies, arguing that a close observation of her public writing points to a carefully constructed public image.³³ After all, publishing was then an unimpeachable profession; for women, along with teaching, it was one of few respectable earning options. For Garrett, as a pioneer figure for female doctors, the ways in which she was reflected in the press carried serious ramifications. The same could be said of the Kensington Society and the social advance of nineteenth-century British women.

In some ways, their entry into publishing was a deliberate response to the poor standard of education (for nineteenth-century girls) and the consequent limited opportunities for women. They wrote to improve the public image of women's intelligence and to broaden their social horizons. In *Thoughts on Some Questions Relating to Women, 1860-1908*, Emily Davies later reasoned that women led idle lives because of their educational deficiency and lack of opportunity. To counter this, she believed that women should embrace their social role. In her earlier 1860 *Letters to a Daily Paper*, (Newcastle), she contested the arbitrary boundaries placed on women's lives:

It is averred that 'public life' is injurious to women; they are meant for the domestic...What is meant by it? Is there any woman living who does not go more or less into public...The work of a medical practitioner is scarcely more public than that of a district visitor...the business of a chemist and druggist is no more public than a confectioner...Fathers who would shake their heads at the idea of taking their daughters into their own counting-houses, allow them to stand behind a stall at a bazaar, or to lead off at a charity-ball – far more public scenes, and, where indeed, publicity is essential to success.³⁴

³³ Claire Brock, "Elizabeth Garrett Anderson and the Professionalism of Medical Publicity," *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 11, Iss. 3 (2008): 321-42.

³⁴ Emily Davies, *Letters to a Daily Paper*, Newcastle, 1860, as quoted in Hollis, *Women in Public*, 6.

For Davies and the Kensington Society, publications were a perfect gateway to the public sphere, and as with all organisations and businesses, their ‘publicity’ was ‘essential to success.’³⁵ As many counter-cultural reformers before them had discovered, the pen was a weapon capable of defying the impractical confines that Davies illustrated. Elizabeth Wolstenholme had also argued that published and circulated papers were a critical method of educating the public. In ‘The Education of Girls,’ Wolstenholme implored her readers to eradicate the ‘cruel tyrant’ of the obligatory ignorance that she believed enslaved her nineteenth-century female readers and ‘Set free the women who sigh in prison-houses, the captives of ignorance and folly.’³⁶

In general, the strategic nature of the Kensington members’ published work was twofold: they aimed to highlight the problems facing women, and by openly endorsing emancipation, they educated their readers. It answered the question that Miss Hayward posed at their November 1866 meeting: ‘What is the best way to teach people to think?’³⁷ The carefully articulated appeals for reform included social commentary pamphlets, articles written on behalf of reform organisations, and petitions, which openly named those who agreed with their political demands. However, some of their published work was more calculating, and anonymity and pseudonyms were used to protect their identity and gender. Fiction was also employed to mould public opinion clandestinely. More oblique than pamphlets, novels could nevertheless convey a dynamic message. Despite its reputation as the most feminine form of literature, it offered a unique opportunity to defy

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Elizabeth Wolstenholme, “The Education of Girls, its Present and its Future,” in *Woman’s Work and Woman’s Culture*, ed. Josephine E. Butler, 327-8.

³⁷ “List of Questions,” APPENDIX III.

the separate social and political spheres assigned to women and men by creatively disseminating the fruit of their discussions.

It was in Hastings that Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon's curiosity in journalism was first aroused. A friend of Bodichon's, William Ransom (born 1822), was a Hastings printer who from August 1848 onwards allowed Bodichon under the pen name 'Esculapius' to expound progressive women's ideas in his newspaper, *Hastings & St. Leonards News*.³⁸ She also published books and pamphlets, including *an Appeal to the Inhabitants of Hastings*, *Conformity to Custom* and *The Education of Women*. Bodichon's *Brief Summary of the Most Important Laws Concerning Women*, along with Parkes' *Remarks on the Education of Girls* (London, 1854) are probably the most well-known examples of the Kensington Society's published work, despite the fact that they were written before the society's first meeting. While they certainly warrant attention as prominent examples of Victorian feminist social critics, it is the aim of this chapter to highlight a broader range of authors in the Kensington Society, including the more covert political messages emerging through their work.³⁸ In particular, this chapter will focus on those who wrote during and after the Kensington Society gatherings.

³⁸ Bodichon's most significant publications include *A Brief Summary, in plain language, of the most important laws of England concerning women: together with a few observations thereon* (London: Holyoake and Co. 1856); *An American Diary, 1857-58*, ed. Joseph W. Reed (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972); *Objections to the Enfranchisement of Women Considered* (London: J. Bale, 1866); *Reasons for and against the Enfranchisement of Women* (London: McCorquodale & Co., 1872); *Reasons for the Enfranchisement of Women* (London: Chambers of the Social Science Association, 1866); *Women and Work* (New York: C.S. Frances & Co. 1859). Parkes' notable publications include, *A Passing World* (London: Ward & Downey, 1897); "A Year's Experience in Woman's Work." *Transactions of the National Association for the Promotion of Social Science* (London: John W. Parker & Son, 1861); *Ballads and Songs* (London: Bell and Daldy, 1863); *Essays on Women's Work* (London: A. Strahan, 1865); *In A Walled Garden* (London: Ward and Downey Ltd., 1895); *La Belle France* (London: John Chapman, 1868); *Poems*, (London: John Chapman, 1852); *Remarks on the Education of Girls* (London: John Chapman, 1854); *Summer Sketches and Other Poems* (London: John Chapman, 1854); *Vignettes: Twelve Biographical Sketches* (London: Alexander Strahan, 1866).

‘A SMALL NUMBER OF INFLUENTIAL PEOPLE’

Although they occasionally chose to maintain anonymity when publishing, the Kensington Society members were eager to add their names to contemporary political petitions. The political petition played a potent role in Victorian literature, a fact which is too often forgotten. The Kensington Society women were not the first to appreciate that petitions offered a vital opportunity for voicing their opinions through signatures. During the French Revolution, a collective of women had presented a petition to the French National Assembly on November 1789, advocating a decree by the National Assembly to give women greater equality. Sarah Richardson argues that, despite being seen as indecorous by some politicians, ‘Women-only petitions added a distinctive voice to the key political campaigns of the mid-nineteenth century including anti-slavery...’³⁹ In 1833, as part of the anti-slavery movement, Anne Knight and the London Female Anti-Slavery Society organised a national women’s petition in support of abolishing slavery. They gathered 298,785 signatures. Throughout the nineteenth century there was a continued increase in the use of petitions to propagate political change. As Britain’s press grew, and society gradually became more literate and informed, so did the enthusiasm for petitions. After all, the power of a petition was inherently different to that of a pamphlet. It conveyed an army of supporters, rather than a single voice. This was especially important for the Kensington Society, as their primary ambition was to unite like-minded women. In petitioning, their public work was united. As an earlier article in the *EWJ* had

³⁹ Sarah Richardson, *The Political Worlds of Women: Gender and Politics in Nineteenth Century Britain* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 117.

claimed, a petition demonstrated the ‘profound and universal interest felt in the question, and the absolute necessity for immediate alleviation.’⁴⁰

The Kensington Society inherited a rich legacy when it came to female petitioning, particularly in seventeenth and eighteen-century Britain. Women were prominent petitioners throughout the English Civil War.⁴¹ However, it was not until the abolitionist movement that women took the lead in gathering and disseminating petitions. Susan Kaeske has highlighted how women became strategic organizers of petitioning in the abolitionist movement in America and in doing so, ‘many women transformed their political identity from human subjects to national citizens.’⁴² By coordinating and collecting petitions against slavery, women radically widened their sphere of political participation.⁴³

The Kensington Society recognized that petitioning allowed them entry into the contemporary political sphere. They began to see themselves as agents of citizens participating in collective action. Through petitions, these nineteenth-century women reformers demanded social change. In 1862, it was a petition that saw the Kensington Society women first agitated together. Davies was involved in organising a petition to the University of London, calling for women to be admitted to medical degrees. It was not necessarily looking for large numbers of signatures; on the contrary, it needed only the right names listed. As Davies explained to Bodichon:

⁴⁰ “Property of Married Women,” *EWJ*, Vol.1, Iss. 1, VI, 58.

⁴¹ See Amanda Whiting, *Women and Petitioning in the Seventeenth-Century English Revolution: Deference, Difference, and Dissent* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2015).

⁴² Susan Zaeske, *Signatures of Citizenship: Petitioning, Antislavery, and Women’s Political Identity* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 172.

⁴³ See also Deborah Bingham Van Broekhoven, “‘Let Your Names Be Enrolled’: Method and Ideology in Women’s Anti-Slavery Petitioning” in *The Abolitionist Sisterhood*, ed. Jean Fagan Yellin, John C. Van Horne (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994): 179-199.

Lizzie will apply for admission to the Matriculation examination in a few days, and will be refused, on precedent. We shall then get up a Memorial, and signed by a small number of influential people, both men and ladies...*As soon as the Memorial is in course of signature, we can announce it in the papers*, and that will be an occasion for them to take up the subject. There seems a very good prospect of success.⁴⁴

The petition was significant, with ‘Lizzie’ (Elizabeth Garrett Anderson) eventually becoming the first registered female doctor in Britain. Garrett Anderson participated in many Kensington Society meetings, and her paper to the group, in answer to the question ‘What is the true basis, and what are the limits of parental authority?’ is one of only two Kensington Society essays that we have.⁴⁵ She took a backseat in promoting the medical women’s cause through the press, choosing instead to focus on her work and career. Garrett Anderson replicated the Memorial in June 1877 with her own petition of women doctors addressed to the University of London.⁴⁶ It stated ‘we the undersigned women, who are engaged in the practice and study of Medicine...We believe that this incentive will prove to be in all its bearings as valuable to women as it has been to men.’⁴⁷ Garrett’s use of the first person plural ‘we’ carries more weight than a single author. In this, she

⁴⁴ My italics. Davies to Bodichon, exact date unknown, 1862, extract in *Emily Davies: Collected Letters*, 2-3; See the memorial: Elizabeth Garrett Anderson, “Memorial signed by women doctors addressed to the University of London,” June 1877, Senate House Library, University of London, <https://www.senatehouselibrary.ac.uk/exhibitions-and-events/exhibitions/rights-for-women/resources/letters-and-transcripts/memorial-of-women-doctors>

⁴⁵ The other paper stored in Girton’s Kensington Society archive is Helen Taylor’s “What are the subjects on which it is desirable to lay the greatest stress in the education of women?” GCPP Davies 10/4. Elizabeth Garrett Anderson, “What is the true basis, and what are the limits of parental authority?” GCPP Davies 10/6; See D. Cherry and L. Walker, “Elizabeth Garrett Anderson: Image, Identity and Space in the Modernization of Nineteenth-Century Medicine,” *Visual Culture in Britain* 3, No. 2 (2002): 33- 56; In 1872, Garrett Anderson founded the New Hospital for Women in London, and in 1883 she became the Dean of the London School of Medicine for Women. M.A. Elston, “Anderson, Elizabeth Garrett (1836-1917),” *ODNB* (2017).

⁴⁶ Garrett Anderson, “Memorial signed by women doctors.”

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

utilised and emphasizes the primary power of the petition. Garrett Anderson also wrote on hospital conditions, with her paper given at NAPSS, 'Hospital Nursing' in 1866.⁴⁸ On the other hand, another Kensington member, Sophia Jex-Blake imitated Garrett Anderson in fighting the University of Edinburgh to allow her to graduate in 1869. She should be seen as an early publicist for the cause of women in medicine.⁴⁹ In 1865, the year the Kensington Society was formed, Bodichon, Helen Taylor and other members drafted a petition for suffrage which was signed by the majority of Kensington members, including Elizabeth Garrett, Emily Davies, Bodichon's sister, Anne Leigh Smith, Jessie and Louisa Boucherett, and Alice Malleson. Overall, it was signed by 1499 women. Through the lesser recognized power of the signatory petition, the Kensington women continued this historical form of activism and made a large contribution to the intellectual life of nineteenth-century Britain.

Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon was also an enthusiastic initiator of petitions. Shortly after marrying, she established a Society for Female Artists that included both British and European artists. In 1859, she organised a petition from amongst these women and their friends that encouraged the Royal Academy to accept female students.⁵⁰ Anna Jameson was amongst those who signed. In a sense, this petition recalled Bodichon's earlier work in organising a committee to collect signatures in support of the Married Women's Property Bill of the Law Amendment Society.⁵¹ Harriet Martineau wrote to a friend on 5 January 1856:

⁴⁸ Elizabeth Garrett Anderson, "Hospital Nursing," *Transactions of the National Association for the Promotion of Social Science*, in Manchester (April 1866): 472-78, extract in Hollis, *Women in Public*, 96-7.

⁴⁹ Shirley Roberts, *Sophia Jex-Blake: A Woman Pioneer in Nineteenth-Century Medical Reform* (London: Routledge, 1993).

⁵⁰ Hirsch, "Bodichon, Barbara," *ODNB*.

⁵¹ Lacey, *Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon*.

Dear Eliza, I have signed even your proof, - lest the sheet for signatures should be too late. I will with pleasure do any thing to help this rational object. Would you like, or not, to have it noticed in the newspapers now – or soon, -- or not till the petition is presented?⁵²

When it was presented to parliament on 14 March 1856, it held 26,000 signatures. Deborah Cherry has pointed out that the Royal Academy petition was the place where ‘the politics of feminism connected to the practice of art,’ propelled by the activism and experience of Barbara Bodichon.⁵³

It is important to acknowledge that not all female authors supported women’s progress and were equally happy to criticise the women who did. Margaret Oliphant, for instance, a Scottish novelist and historical writer, wrote in *Blackwood’s Magazine* in September 1866, that the women who signed the 1866 petition for female enfranchisement were ‘snatch[ing] at anything that will prove them to be on an entire level with the envied male creature’.⁵⁴ Further demonstrating their awareness of public hostility, on 7 June, 1866, Elizabeth Garrett and Emily Davies took their suffrage petition to Westminster Hall but famously asked an apple-seller to hide the large petition form until John Stuart Mill had arrived to present it to the House of Commons. The Petition appealed for an amendment to the Reform Act which would give women suffrage. It was defeated by 196 votes to 73.⁵⁵

⁵² Harriet Martineau to Eliza Fox, 5 January 1856, in *Harriet Martineau: Selected Letters*, ed. Valerie Sanders (Oxford, England: Clarendon Press, 1990), 287.

⁵³ Deborah Cherry, *Beyond the Frame: Feminism and Visual Culture, Britain 1850-1900* (London: Routledge, 2000), 9.

⁵⁴ Margaret Oliphant, “The Great Unrepresented,” *Blackwood’s Magazine* 100 (September 1866), 373, as quoted in *Exchanges and Correspondence: The Construction of Feminism*, ed. Claudette Fillard and Francoise Orazi (Newcastle-on-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010), 238.

⁵⁵ Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon, “Reasons for the Enfranchisement of Women,” paper presented at NAPSS, October 1866. Printed edition: (London: Chambers of the Social Science Association, 1866).

Although the petition was unsuccessful, Bodichon was not perturbed, and in the Kensington Society's twelfth recorded meeting (October, 1866), she presented a paper to the National Association for the Promotion of Social Science, *Reasons for and against the Enfranchisement of Women*, published in 1869.⁵⁶ In turning to overt pamphleteering to further the case for suffrage, Bodichon argued that female citizenship would encourage 'a healthy lively, intelligent interest' in public life: 'Public spirit... is like fire: a feeble spark of it may be fanned into a flame, or it may very easily be put out...Citizenship is an honour, and not to have the full rights of a citizen is a want of honour.'⁵⁷ Arguably, *Reasons* was originally an article written for Kensington Society circulation. In their list of questions, although it does not specify the date, the sixteenth question asks, 'What protection, if any, is afforded to women by the laws of honour as they now stand, and how might they be improved?'⁵⁸ Given the likely case that *Reasons* was influenced by Kensington Society discussion in 1866, then the succinct style of the 1869 pamphlet makes more sense. It was tried and tested first, before presentation, and was written not as an emphatic, emotional statement of one woman, but as a considered statement of a reasoned group of minds.

'ALL POSSIBLE PUBLICITY'

Later, the paper was also presented at the National Society for Women's Suffrage, 1872. Hirsch, "Bodichon, Barbara," *ODNB*.

⁵⁶ Hirsch, "Bodichon, Barbara," *ODNB*.

⁵⁷ Bodichon, "Reasons and against the Enfranchisement of Women," National Society for Women's Suffrage, 1872; It is assumed this is the Kensington Society's twelfth meeting from their members list, which notes when a new member joined the group. "List of Members," APPENDIX II.

⁵⁸ "List of Questions," APPENDIX III.

In a strategic move, Barbara Bodichon (then Leigh Smith) published a pamphlet outlining the current marriage laws that inhibited women, in the same year as the petition was presented – titled, *A Brief Summary, in plain language, of the most important laws of England concerning women: together with a few observations thereon*.⁵⁹ The title alone, emphasising the frank, succinct, ‘plain language’ of the pamphlet, revealed Bodichon’s objective to reach a wide audience, including those who were not familiar with the intrinsic arguments behind the women’s movement. In the second published edition of *A Brief Summary*, the aim to make it readable was even more explicit, with notes on the topics she covered running down the margin of the pamphlet. These included ‘seduction,’ ‘bigamy,’ ‘breach of promise’ ‘Married women no legal existence’, and ‘A husband has a right to the person of his wife.’⁶⁰

In 1874, Sophia Jex-Blake helped establish the London School of Medicine for Women.⁶¹ She advertised for women to join her fight to get Edinburgh University to give professional medical qualifications (Edinburgh Seven) in *The Scotsman* and other journals.⁶² Her articles on the topic were combined into a book *Medical Women: A Thesis and A History* in 1886.⁶³ Combining them into a book allowed them to serve as an anthology of her reasoning and an outline of the struggle they faced. It was through *Medical Women* that Jex-Blake convinced the public of the value of female doctors.⁶⁴ Jex-

⁵⁹ Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon, *A Brief Summary, in plain language, of the most important laws of England concerning women: together with a few observations thereon* (London: Holyoake and Co. 1856).

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ See S. Roberts, *Sophia Jex-Blake: A Woman Pioneer in Nineteenth-Century Medical Reform* (London: Routledge, 1993).

⁶² M.A. Elston, “Edinburgh Seven (act. 1869-1873),” *ODNB* (2015).

⁶³ Sophia Jex-Blake, *Medical Women: A Thesis and a History* (Edinburgh: Oliphant, Anderson and Ferrier, 1886).

⁶⁴ Shirley Roberts, “Blake, Sophia Louisa Jex- (1840-1912),” *ODNB* (2004).

Blake also engaged with contemporary journalists on the issue of female doctors. In 1870, she published a response in *The Lancet* to Dr. H. Bennet, who had previously written:

I believe most conscientiously and thoroughly that women as a body are sexually, constitutionally and mentally unfitted for the hard and incessant toil, and for the heavy responsibilities of general medical and surgical practice.⁶⁵

Three weeks later Jex-Blake replied:

We say... 'State clearly what attainments you consider necessary for a medical practitioner... put no obstacles in our way... subject us ultimately to exactly the ordinary examinations and tests and, if we fail to acquit ourselves as well as your average student, reject us; if, on the contrary, in spite of all the difficulties, we reach your standard, and fulfil all your requirements, the question of "mental equality" is practically settled... give us then the ordinary medical licence or diploma, and leave the question of our ultimate success or failure in practice to be decided by ourselves and the public.' This is our position, and I appeal, not to the chivalry, but to the justice of the medical profession, to show us that it is untenable, or else to concede it at once.⁶⁶

The fierce tone suggests that Jex-Blake relished these public discussions. She used the term 'We' to enforce the support behind her, and evidently believed that she wrote on behalf of all aspiring female doctors. It was a chance for her to explain their reasoning, and more importantly, to demonstrate their ambition and drive.

⁶⁵ Dr. H. Bennett, letter to *The Lancet*, 18 June 1870, extract in Hollis, *Women in Public*, 101.

⁶⁶ Sophia Jex-Blake, letters to *The Lancet*, 9 July 1870, extract in Hollis, *Women in Public*, 102-3.

It was not uncommon for the Kensington Society members to publish papers that had been previously delivered orally to organisations. These public works are another source of female activism worth considering. Julia Wedgwood's *Political Claims of Women* (1873), for instance, was first presented to the London National Society for Women's Suffrage.⁶⁷ In a speech that Emily Davies delivered at the annual 1868 meeting of the Social Science Association, her considered use of irony and comic relief demonstrates how the Kensington Society members modified their words according to their public forum:

A stolid indifference to the higher interests of life, complete absorption in petty cares, is supposed to produce a placid, equable animal state of existence, favourable to the transmission of a healthy constitution to the next generation. We have persuaded ourselves that Englishmen of the present day are such a nervously excitable race, that the only chance for their descendants is to keep the mothers in a state of coma... the theory that starving the brain is the best way of keeping it healthy.⁶⁸

Gertrude King joined the Kensington Society on 25 November 1865.⁶⁹ She later became the Secretary of the Society for Promoting the Employment of Women.⁷⁰ In 1874 she presented a paper before delivering evidence at the Playfair *Civil Service Inquiry Commission*. The report was more objective than poignant, stating that 68 women gained permanent employment from her office at SPEW. She also explained that there had been a significant rise in the number of employed female clerks in private businesses. King's

⁶⁷ Frances Julia Wedgwood, *Political Claims of Women* (London: W. Wilfred Head, 1873).

⁶⁸ Emily Davies, "Proposed New College for Women," read at the annual meeting of the Social Science Association, 1868, extract in Hollis, *Women in Public*, 23-24.

⁶⁹ "List of Members," APPENDIX II.

⁷⁰ Elizabeth Prevost, "King, Gertrude May (1867-1954)," *ODNB* (2012).

answers to questions at the *Civil Service Inquiry* also demonstrated the Society's belief that the realities of women's plight spoke for themselves:

Those who are employed as bookkeepers in shops are generally daughters of the better class of trades-people. Ladies have rather a reluctance to go into shops, but some do so...we wish we could get them younger. They generally come to us when they have had homes until their parents die, and then at 30 or 35 they are thrown upon the world.⁷¹

King's evidence illustrates the Kensington Society's conviction that well-informed arguments were crucial, and perhaps more powerful when delivered in person.

On the whole, however, the Kensington Society members were most prolific in publishing essays, penning a myriad of pamphlets and articles. There is one member of the Kensington Society who was particularly distinguished in nineteenth-century Victorian journalism. Frances Cobbe, who was present at the first Kensington Society meeting in March, 1865, and the third to sign the membership form, was a trailblazer in women's rights journalism. Her regular publications in the *Spectator* and the *Echo* demonstrated her conviction that intellectual communication could change Victorian society.⁷² Many biographers of Cobbe have noticed her fixation on those who were the neediest in society – one of her most vigorously debated issues involved animal rights, and specifically, vivisection.⁷³ Working-class women, children and victims of domestic

⁷¹ "Evidence of Gertrude King, Secretary of the Society for Promoting the Employment of Women, to the *Civil Service Inquiry Commission*, 1874," extract in Hollis, *Women in Public*, 105.

⁷² Barbara Caine, "Cobbe, Frances Power (1822-1904)," *ODNB* (2006).

⁷³ See Cobbe's article "Light in Dark Places" was 'for the protection of animals from vivisection.' (London: Victoria Street Society for the Protection of Animals from Vivisection, united with the International Association for the Total Suppression of Vivisection, 1883); See also, Susan Hamilton, "Reading and the Popular Critique of Science in the Victorian Anti-Vivisection Press: Frances Power Cobbe's Writing for the Victorian Street Society," *Victorian Review* 36, No. 2, *Natural Environments* (2010): 66-79.

violence were also recurrent topics. The *Wellesley Index to Victorian Periodicals, 1824-1900* credits Cobbe with one hundred and seven publications during this period.⁷⁴ This included her regular front page feature for the *London Echo*, which was published daily, and her numerous articles in *MacMillan's Magazine* and *Fraser's Magazine for Town and Country*.⁷⁵ In 1868 Cobbe campaigned for the right of women to own their own property and income with a book, *Criminals, Idiots, Women and Minors*, in which she argued:

Granted let me be physically, intellectually and morally your inferior. So long as you allow I possess moral responsibility and sufficient intelligence to know right from wrong (a point I conclude you will concede, else why hang me for murder?) I am quite content. It is *only* as a moral and intelligent being I claim my civil rights.⁷⁶

Using herself as an example, Cobbe challenged the belief that women were intellectually inadequate. The entire book was centred around a provocative comparison between the rights of criminals, idiots, women and minors, a contrast which had plenty of dramatic literary potential (such as the inflammatory question, 'why hang me for murder?'). In

⁷⁴ These included essays, pamphlets, letters and books. The *Wellesley Index* looks at 45 major Victorian periodicals and lists the journalists who wrote each article. See *Wellesley Index to Victorian Periodicals, 1824-1900*, online ed. <http://wellesley.chadwyck.co.uk/marketing/index.jsp>

⁷⁵ Cobbe's articles covered a range of social and philosophical issues that were in debate contemporarily, including: Frances Power Cobbe, "Workhouse Sketches," *Macmillan's Magazine, 1859-1900* 3 (April 1861): 448-461; "Social Science Congresses, and Women's Part in Them," *Macmillan's Magazine* 5 (December 1861): 81-94; "Celibacy v. Marriage," *Fraser's Magazine for Town and Country* 65 (February 1862): 228-235; "What shall we do with our Old Maids?," *Fraser's Magazine for Town and Country* 66, (November 1862): 594-610; "Female Charity: Lay and Monastic," *Fraser's Magazine for Town and Country* 66 (December 1862): 774-788; "What is progress, and are we progressing?" *The Fortnightly Review* 7 (March 1867): 357-370; "The Final Cause of Woman," in *Woman's Work and Woman's Culture*, ed. Josephine E. Butler (London: Macmillan, 1869): 1-26.

⁷⁶ Frances Power Cobbe, "Criminals, Idiots, Women, Minors, is the Classification Sound?" *Fraser's Magazine* 78 (December 1868): 777-94.

1878 Cobbe campaigned for increased protection for women in the event of legal separation in marriage, with a similarly provocatively titled article, ‘Wife Torture in England’ in the *Contemporary Review*.⁷⁷ Cobbe employed extensive research of police reports in Britain’s major cities, documenting domestic abuse in England. The language within the article was deliberately evocative, suggesting that ‘the whole relation between the sexes in the class we are considering is very little better than one of master and slave.’⁷⁸ However, because of her research into figures and facts, her seemingly exaggerated argument was undeniably convincing. Cobbe wrote other essays in a similar style, intending to shock her readers, such as ‘The Rights of Man and the Claims of Brutes’ in *Fraser’s Magazine* (1870) and ‘The Right to Beat a Wife’ in *Echo* (1870).⁷⁹

Strategic rhetoric was a popular tool for other Kensington Society authors. Rhetorical questions, hyperbolic and provocative statements were the most popular contemporary literary ploys at play throughout the public writing of Dorothea Beale. In this, she imitated many journalists of Victorian Britain. The nature of their topics, which fought against injustices in society, often lent themselves to more sensitive rhetoric. In her 1865 presented paper ‘The Ladies College at Cheltenham’ in *Transactions of the National Association for the Promotion of Social Science*, which addressed the inferior teaching of girls in schools, Beale asked:

I ask whether a boy educated on this plan would be good for much;
would he or would he not be likely to have acquired habits of lazy

⁷⁷ Frances Power Cobbe, “Wife Torture in England,” *Contemporary Review* 32 (April 1878): 55-87.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ “The Rights of Man and the Claims of Brutes,” *Fraser’s Magazine* 68 (1870): 582-602, Cobbe, “The Right to Beat a Wife,” *Echo*, 17 January 1870. Other published works by Cobbe include *Essays on the Theory of Intuitive Morals* (London: Macmillan, 1855); *Essays on the Pursuits of Women* (London: Emily Faithfull, 1863); ed. *The Collected Works of Theodore Parker*, 14 Vols. (London: Trübner & Co., 1863–66), *Studies New and Old of Ethical and Social Subjects* (Boston: William v. Spencer, 1863), *Darwinism in Morals, and Other Essays* (London: Williams & Norgate, 1872), *The Duties of Women: A Course of Lecture* (London: G.H. Ellis, 1881).

self-indulgence? And is a girl so trained likely to prove a diligent and wise and thoughtful woman?⁸⁰

The strategic questioning of Beale's statement bore similarity to the discussion subjects posed at the Kensington Society's meetings. This hypothetical question compared the education of boys and girls for dramatic effect. In doing so, Beale stresses one of their key arguments: that the social parameters of contemporary women were to blame for their educational inadequacy.

Another influential author amongst the Kensington Society members was the translator and author Anna Swanwick.⁸¹ Swanwick joined the Society on 30 March 1866. In 1876, Swanwick published 'Evolution and the Religion of the Future' in *The Contemporary Review*.⁸² It was a historical religious tract, a 'record of the dawn of religion in a human soul' which also hinted at rationalist belief: 'in the light of modern criticism it is discovered that no authority is infallible – that the claims alike of inspiration and tradition must be brought before the bar of reason and conscience, and that upon their verdict the decision as to the true and the good must ultimately rest.'⁸³ In 1888, Swanwick continued to expose radical political and religious ideas in *An Utopian Dream and How it May be Realised* which similarly advocated that society and its citizens should be 'devoted to the free liberty of the mind and garnishing of the same. For herein they conceive the felicity of this life to consist.'⁸⁴ However, it was in public speaking that Swanwick's utopian ideals for society garnered the most public influence.

⁸⁰ Jacqueline Beaumont, "Beale, Dorothea, (1831-1906)" *ODNB* (2007).

⁸¹ Barbara Dennis, "Swanwick, Anna, (1813-1899)," *ODNB* (2004).

⁸² Anna Swanwick, "Evolution and the Religion of the Future," *The Contemporary Review* 28 (June 1876): 110-123.

⁸³ *Ibid.* 112; 119.

⁸⁴ Anna Swanwick, *A Utopian Dream and How it May be Realised*, (London: Kegan Paul Trench & Co., 1888), extract in Mary L. Bruce, *Anna Swanwick: A Memoir and Recollections, 1813-1899* (London: T. Fisher Unwin. 1903), 176.

In Cobbe's recollection, Swanwick had been reticent in public debate until 1873, when at a gathering for the suffrage campaign Cobbe witnessed that:

I have a clear recollection of hearing Anna Swanwick make her first speech in public. She was at the time sixty years of age...it may be noted that in her private circle, and even at her own table, she rarely assumed the reins of general conversation, but talked with animation, or listened with eager sympathy, to her nearest neighbours.

On this occasion, however, it was planned by some of the leaders of the 'Woman's Suffrage' Movement to utilise and give all possible publicity to Miss Swanwick's known approval of the agitation.

...we all expected that she would simply rise from her seat and say something equivalent to 'I am very happy to support this resolution,' and afterwards we thought we would do our best to draw attention to the fact that so learned a woman, and one so universally respected, had given us her unqualified approbation. But we were agreeably disappointed.

...without falsetto or failure of fulness of tone, and in that sweet, strong voice, which none of us had guessed she possessed, she continued to speak, without hesitation or failure of words, for something like twenty-minutes. Her speech was crammed with ideas, and of course had been prepared beforehand, but she had no manuscript or notes, and it was absolutely extempore.⁸⁵

For Swanwick, 'all possible publicity' was found in both tracts and public speaking. Public addresses were equally as potent to strategic communication. As Cobbe's recollection noted, careful preparation was put into these significant moments in front of

⁸⁵ Frances Power Cobbe, as quoted in Bruce, *Anna Swanwick: A Memoir and Recollections*, 159-161.

the public eye, with the language, tone and ‘fulness’ of the speech becoming poignant tools of persuasion for these lesser-known Kensington Society women.

Deliberate, sensationalist language was used by Frances Martin, who joined the Kensington Society on 4 July 1865.⁸⁶ Martin, a less recognised activist in Victorian history, had written a small piece on blindness in the literary magazine, the *Cornhill Magazine*, in May 1864.⁸⁷ Martin employed empathetic language, and italics to emphasise her opinion that ‘the greatest known privation’ of Victorian Britain is that there are ‘*thirty thousand* blind men and women in Great Britain and Ireland, and nearly all of them are poor.’⁸⁸ While Martin used empathetic language to enhance her paper, she also employed numbers, facts, and an accolade to those working to change the injustices of their society. This paper’s purpose in the public sphere was not only to provoke sympathy, but to celebrate and recommend the current work being achieved by their circle of humanitarians. In ‘Blind Workers and Blind Helpers,’ Martin points to the progress that was being made in London through the Association for Promoting the General Welfare of the Blind, which, led by Elizabeth M. M. Gilbert, was experimenting with blind embossing.⁸⁹ The purpose of Martin’s paper was not only to evoke an emotional response from her readers but to arouse radical social reform.⁹⁰ Some articles, however, served a more practical purpose. The same year, Martin published ‘A College for Working Women’ in *Macmillan’s Magazine*, describing the aims for the new College for Working Women.⁹¹ In this, Martin hoped to not only demonstrate the new educational

⁸⁶ “List of Members,” APPENDIX II.

⁸⁷ Frances Martin, “Blind Workers and Blind Helpers,” *Cornhill Magazine* 9, Iss. 5 (May 1864): 603-17.

⁸⁸ Her italics. *Ibid.*, 603; 607.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ M. C. Curthoys, “Martin, (Mary Anne) Frances (1829-1922),” *ODNB* (2007).

⁹¹ Frances Martin, “A College for Working Women,” *Macmillan’s Magazine* 40 (1879): 483-8; The College was a regeneration of the Working Women’s College (which had become co-educational).

opportunities for working class women to a largely middle-class audience, but the article also advertised the College.

Calculated rhetoric was also at play in Josephine Butler's *Woman's Work and Women's Culture*, published in 1869. The book is a collection of essays investigating the current issues facing women in education, employment, and political regulations, and a profound illustration of the vast, unified network of women writers in Victorian England and the strength of their numbers and minds.⁹² Notably, four of the ten essays were written by Kensington members, despite the fact the Butler was not a listed member.⁹³ Frances Power Cobbe wrote the first chapter, 'The Final Cause of Woman,' and Jessie Boucherett the second, 'How to Provide for Superfluous Women.' Sophia Jex-Blake gave her informed opinion on 'Medicine as a Profession for Women' and Elizabeth Wolstenholme's essay concerned 'The Education of Girls, its Present and its Future,' arguing appropriately that: 'Women should speak for themselves, and claim to be considered, not as a separate community, but as a part of the whole...'.⁹⁴ Butler tactically published *Women's Work* in the same year that Mill published his prominent *The Subjection of Women*.⁹⁵ In her introduction Butler explains:

The Essays, including the following introductory remarks, were
all written before Mr. J. S. Mill's book – 'The Subjection of

⁹² Josephine E. Butler, *Woman's Work and Woman's Culture: A Series of Essays* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1869).

⁹³ Five of the essays were written by men, including James Stuart, Charles Pearson, Herbert Mosley, John Boyd-Kinnear and Rev. George Butler, Josephine Butler's husband.; Butler may not have been a member because she was heavily involved in campaigns such as the Contagious Diseases Act, which the Kensington women were less involved in. She was, however, aligned with their work on education, and was the president to the North of England Council for the Higher Education of Women in 1867. Later, she was also involved in establishing another women's college, Newnham College, Cambridge in 1871. In 1896 she published a memoir, *Personal Reminiscences of a Great Crusade* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), reprint.

⁹⁴ Elizabeth Wolstenholme, "The Education of Girls, its Present and its Future," in *Woman's Work and Woman's Culture*, ed. Butler, 293.

⁹⁵ John Stuart Mill, *The Subjection of Women* (London: Longmans, Green, Reader, and Dyer, 1869).

Women' – appeared. More of them were already in print. The others were out of the writer's hands. They have been allowed to remain without alteration. In some of them the same lines of thought are pursued more in detail which are opened up in Mr. Mill's book, and a measure of agreement will be found with the general principles announced by him.⁹⁶

Butler's words demonstrate her belief, shared by the Kensington women who wrote in *Women's Work*, that essays written as a collective gave a stronger voice to women's issues, especially those published in tandem with Mill's widely read *Subjection*. All contributions to Butler's *Women's Work* employed not just powerful rhetoric, but also strong religious arguments. Elizabeth Wolstenholme, in her article pleading the case for women's education, explained the faith-based reasoning that inspired her words:

We plead the cause of women. We ask that the gifts of God may not be wasted, that women themselves may not be robbed of some of the purest joys of life, those of intellectual effort and achievement, and that society which needs their help so much may not be defrauded of their best and worthiest service. Give us knowledge, power and life. We will repay the gift a hundred-fold.⁹⁷

Emily Davies, in her 1866 publication *The Higher Education of Women* had similarly written of 'Ideals', and highlighted the full ramifications of men's subjection of women, and its inconsistency with God's divine creation:

⁹⁶ Butler, "Introduction," *Woman's Work and Woman's Culture*, viii.

⁹⁷ Wolstenholme, "The Education of Girls, its Present and its Future," *Woman's Work and Woman's Culture*, ed. Butler, 327-8.

The educational question depends, as we have seen, on the larger question of women's place in the social order. Are they to be regarded, and to regard themselves, primarily as children of God, members of Christ, and heirs of the kingdom of heaven, and, secondarily, as wives, mothers, daughters, sisters? or are the family relationships to overshadow the divine and the social, and to be made the basis of a special moral code, applying to women only?⁹⁸

Davies' emphasis on women's place not only in the domestic home but in the heavenly hierarchy demonstrates her belief that authentic Christianity viewed women more equally than was the current practice in Victorian Britain. It also illustrated the belief that the will of God empowered them – namely, that if He gave them gifts, they should use them. In their public texts, they often employed religious language to emphasise their arguments. They understood how to strategically engage with a Victorian culture that was deeply invested in Christian values. In 1872 Helen Taylor addressed the third annual meeting of the Edinburgh branch of the National Society for Women's Suffrage with these authoritative words:

In the beginning man and woman were created equals, made in the same divine image. God blessed them unitedly, and gave them conjoint dominion over the world. The distinctive characteristic differences that make the sexes were intended to complement each other and blend in one harmonious and perfect unity, not to lead to the usurpation of power by the one over the other. But sin came and changed this natural order. Of things, by converting the precedence – necessarily taken by the protector – from a matter of

⁹⁸ Emily Davies, "Ideals," *The Higher Education of Women*, originally published 1866 (London: The Hambledon Press, 1988), 30.

expediency, into a sovereignty that increased with exercise, until mere physical power established a supremacy that has existed in a greater or lesser degree until now. Under this arbitrary rule woman has been more or less degraded to the position of a slave; been treated in many respects as a mere chattel, and she has rarely, if ever, been in a position fully to develop and freely use the powers which God has gifted her.⁹⁹

In a predominantly Christian society, these arguments directly addressed the supposed biblical argument against women's innate equality. In such arguments, the Kensington Society demonstrated strong ties to Evangelical nonconformity, thus engaging an already sympathetic audience in nineteenth-century Britain. For these women, religious rhetoric allowed them a 'strong public voice' in a 'unique area of socially-acceptable participation and even predominance.'¹⁰⁰

It was evidently important that the Kensington Society published not only the appropriate material, but that it was published in the right journal. The strategic nature of their public work is also revealed in a letter that Emily Davies wrote to Barbara Bodichon in 1866. Bodichon's paper for the Kensington Society on the enfranchisement of women was ready to be published, and Davies was anxious that it should find its way into the most effective magazine:

Dear Mme. Bodichon,

I almost hope Mr. Lewes will refuse your paper, as I particularly wanted *that* one for the Cornhill. It is suited to commonplace

⁹⁹ Helen Taylor, "Address to the Third Annual Meeting of the Edinburgh branch of the National Society for Woman's Suffrage," 1872, extract in Hollis, *Women in Public*, 294-5.

¹⁰⁰ Julie Melnyk has highlighted the popularity of female editors and journalists in Christian publishing in nineteenth-century Britain, and their subsequent empowerment, in "Emma Jane Worboise and *The Christian World Magazine*: Christian Publishing and Women's Empowerment." *Victorian Periodicals Review* 29, No. 2 (1996), 133.

people & meets the illogical, sentimental objectives which we are not at the stage of dealing with. We have plenty of converts among sceptics & dis theorists of all sorts. We want to make it understood that we have got out of the region of theory & are asking seriously to have our proposal put in practice. I am very much inclined to believe that our victory is not so very far distant. We have only to get a few people to take it up as a *practical* matter, & we may expect the rest to follow, as there is not party interest of any sort, political, theological, academical or professional, which would suffer by it. *Please* don't waste anything upon the Westminster. I have an eye to my extracts, & the Westminster would do us no credit.¹⁰¹

The letter sheds considerable light on the tactical thought that lay behind their publicity. It was important that members were published in journals that had substantial political weight (unlike William Thackeray's *Cornhill*, which specialised in literary, philosophical debate).¹⁰² The Kensington Society had moved beyond the discussion stage and were seeking real change in Victorian Britain. As Davies suggests, they felt that the time was ripe for their ideas to not only be heard by the right audience, but to be acted upon. Davies was not alone in her practical discernment. Other members were mentioned for their advice regarding which journals were more sympathetic in their cause. Davies continued:

Miss Wolstenholme says the moderate Liberal paper at Manchester is going against us, she suspects for no reason but that the extreme Liberal has pronounced for us.

The fortnightly is not so bad as the Westminster, but Miss Boucherett says it is disapproved of by the sort of people she

¹⁰¹ Davies to Bodichon, exact date unknown, August/September 1866. *Emily Davies: Collected Letters*, 199.

¹⁰² Carol Atherton, *Defining Literary Criticism: Scholarship, Authority and the Possession of Literary Knowledge, 1800-2002* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 61.

shows, & I don't fancy it has much weight, in *itself*, with anybody.
But of course I should be glad to have something in it.¹⁰³

The journals in which they published were vital to the success of their work. Their rhetoric was similarly crucial to their strategy. In 19 January 1867, Davies wrote to her friend, Lydia Becker, regarding an article that had appeared in *The Spectator* criticizing women who advocated enfranchisement. Davies wrote:

Do you ever write letters to newspapers? I believe there is to be an attack upon us in to-day's *Spectator*. If you could get hold of it and answer it, I think it would be useful.¹⁰⁴

The article that Davies refers to stated 'that English women in general have not yet reached the stage of development at which [voting] would be useful, either to themselves or others.'¹⁰⁵ Evidently, Davies was aware of the gendered expectations for women who wrote in the public eye. As the article in the *Spectator*, by an anonymous author, 'S.D.C.', was derogatory to women, Davies felt it needed a public reply written by a woman. Clearly, the public image of the mid-Victorian woman's movement consumed Davies. She wrote again to Becker a month later, expressing her concern and apprehension regarding her response and its tone:

I am afraid it is not too late to answer S.D.C.
I doubt very much whether the *Spectator* would put in an answer so long after, and I am not sure that it may not be as well to let the matter die. If it were taken up at all *now*, I think it must be in a

¹⁰³ Davies to Bodichon. August/September 1866, *Emily Davies: Collected Letters*, 199.

¹⁰⁴ Davies to Lydia Becker, 19 January 1867, *Ibid.*, 220.

¹⁰⁵ Written by 'S.D.C.', *Spectator*, 2 February 1867, as cited *Emily Davies: Collected Letters*, 220.

manner on its own ground, with only an allusion to the letter of S.D.C as containing some arguments on the other side.

In any case, I think it would be better to deal with her arguments only, without any reference to her manner of stating them. It is not a matter of much interest to the public whether S.D.C writes good grammar or not, and tho it is a temptation to criticise and *expose* one's enemies, it seems to me better not to do it.

I think people are more inclined to listen to any one who had manifestly tried to understand and make the very best of the arguments on the other side.

In women especially the slightest appearance of being angry or contemptuous, offends, and provokes opposition.¹⁰⁶

Davies was clearly aware of the expectations for female journalists who had to defend their right to present themselves in the public media. Women had to carefully construct and control their public image as professional writers. This included their rhetoric. This heightened pressure was a product of counteracting gendered identities in mid-Victorian society. Thus, a woman giving the 'slightest appearance of being angry' or employing other less-womanly attributes, 'provokes opposition' to her case. Evidently, a female author's rhetoric was held to a different standard than that of a male author. In part, they were held hostage to Victorian society's ideals of femininity. As Peggy Sherry suggests, they were enacting 'a liberal middle-class humanistic vision of society,' in which they sought education and employment, whilst remaining within ideal feminine boundaries.

¹⁰⁷ This was a common denominator in the correspondence of the Kensington Society. They knew their work reflected not only on them, but on the wider mid-Victorian women's movement.

¹⁰⁶ Davies to Becker, 19 January 1867, *Emily Davies: Collected Letters*, 227-8.

¹⁰⁷ Peggy Meyer Sherry, "Telling Her Story: British Women of Letters of the Victorian Era," *The Princeton University Library Chronicle* 57, No.1 (1995), 151.

However, the pressure to conform to specific rhetoric was sometimes avoided by publishing anonymously. Like many Victorian authors, the Kensington women often published under pseudonyms. Charlotte Bronte wrote under the name Currer Bell, and Mary Ann Evans became George Eliot, Elizabeth Wolstenholme wrote under the initial E. and the pseudonym Ignota, and in select articles, such as ‘Celibacy v. Marriage’ and ‘Women’s work in the Church,’ Frances Power Cobbe used the pseudonym F.P.C. (the article was later republished in *Pursuits of Women*).¹⁰⁸ Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon, in her first published article in the *Hastings and St Leonards News*, wrote under the name Esculapius. Later, in 1854, she used her initials B.B. for two essays in *The Leader* which argued that women could be saved from a life of prostitution with more employment opportunities and instruction.¹⁰⁹ Interestingly, Cobbe’s two articles focused on issues that had repercussions for her life choices. She lived for years with another woman, Mary Lloyd, and held contentious views on the role of the church in society.¹¹⁰ Pseudonyms obviously allowed anonymity for the author, and hence, also a greater freedom to their work. They also prevented pre-judgement through identity. In her 1869 essay, ‘Female Suffrage,’ in Josephine Butler’s *Woman’s Work and Women’s Culture*, Julia Wedgwood noted:

If a woman writes books as well as a man does, she will find it just as easy to get a publisher to take them as a man does. If she paints as well, she will find the public equally ready to buy them. It is nothing to the contrary that our greatest female writer is known as George Eliot, and that young authoresses who choose a *nom de plume* prefer one which leaves the sex doubtful. We need

¹⁰⁸ Hamilton, *Frances Power Cobbe and Victorian Feminism*.

¹⁰⁹ Hirsch, “Bodichon, Barbara,” *ODNB*.

¹¹⁰ See Sally Mitchell, *Frances Power Cobbe: Victorian Feminist, Journalist, Reformer* (Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 2004).

not enter on the reasons which induce a great and fearless thinker to claim the liberty of speech conveniently only granted to a man, and for her more timid followers it is sufficient to suggest the presumption that a woman's writing will not be so good as a man's – a probability which no one will dispute.¹¹¹

Wedgwood's statement, which argues that some women authors found 'liberty of speech' denied to them because of their sex, highlights the difficult cultural climate in which they wrote.¹¹² As Alexis Easley analyses, 'Famous women authors were often held accountable to confining definitions of "female authorship", which constrained their choice of subject matter and exposed their personal lives to public scrutiny.'¹¹³ On the other hand, anonymity allowed them to engage in conventionally 'masculine' social issues' while evading the 'notions of "feminine" voice and identity'.¹¹⁴ All of these choices illustrate the strategic nature of the Kensington Society's publicity. They were determined to radically transform public opinion to effect social and political change.

'A USEFUL ELEMENT'

¹¹¹ Frances Julia Wedgwood, "Female Suffrage," in *Woman's Work and Woman's Culture*, ed. Butler, 249-250.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Alexis Easley, *First Person Anonymous: Women Writers and Victorian Print Media, 1830-1870* (London: Routledge, 2016), 1.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 2.

With at least six members published poets, artistic licence played a powerful role in disseminating the Kensington Society's ideas to a Victorian audience. They employed intellectually attuned literature for social and political agitation. In July 1853, Bessie Parkes had written an epistolary poem, urging her fictional correspondent to write down her thoughts:

These fine visions are but play
Till they stiffen into deed,
Till the blossom crowns the seed.
I to-day must catch the hur
Of a fir-tree 'gainst the blue,
Lilian, you must write a poem
With these visions for a proem.
So with pencil and with pen
We must translate our thoughts to men.¹¹⁵

Parkes demonstrates and advocates the tactical use of literature to demonstrate women's intellectual ability and express their ideas. It is ironic that Kensington Society members used creative literature to 'translate' their 'thoughts to men'; however, their poetry either directly, or indirectly, often highlighted the condition of women in nineteenth-century British society. The use of poetry to carry significant political messages was a well-established tactic of British history. In 1847, Lord Alfred Tennyson, for one, had felt that women had more to contribute to Victorian England. He had also employed poetry to convey his doubts about the strict gender roles assigned to men and women:

Man for the field and woman for the hearth:

¹¹⁵ The poem was later published in 1854: Parkes, "Lilian's Second Letter," 26.

Man for the sword and for the needle she:
Man with the head and woman with the heart:
Man to command and woman to obey;
All else confusion.¹¹⁶

Indeed, in the first half of the nineteenth century, Chartists had employed radical verse to promote democratic reform. Their influential periodical *Northern Star* published nearly four hundred poems from 1838 to 1852.¹¹⁷ Helen Rogers has argued that such radical politics in the third quarter of the century prompted women to develop a stronger public identity and authority, claiming that Chartist poetry inspired women's rights authors to utilise language and expression that imitated 'women of the people.'¹¹⁸ The reason for this was that they were not just onlookers, but eyewitnesses and victims of society's harms.¹¹⁹

The Kensington Society's literary publications demonstrated the creative side of their public strategy. The Kensington women were fascinated by the creative arts and how both reading and writing could improve individuals and society. In their meetings, literature, poetry and creative writing, in particular, were frequently discussed. Their first meeting offered the question: 'What are the influences and the inducements which lead to the choice of literature as a profession?' The question was deeply pertinent for the numerous female journalists present at the meeting. Later discussion questions reflect a similar fascination with the potential of literature to challenge thought and reform society:

¹¹⁶ Lord Alfred Tennyson, *The Princess* (1849).

¹¹⁷ Mike Sanders has analysed the *Northern Star's* poetry column in depth in *The Poetry of Chartism: Aesthetics, Politics, History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 71.

¹¹⁸ Helen Rogers, *Women and the People: Authority, authorship and the Radical Tradition in Nineteenth Century England* (Aldershot and Brookfield, VT: Ashgate, 2000).

¹¹⁹ Ibid.; See also Anna Clark, *The Struggle for the Breeches: Gender and the Making of the British Working Class*, (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1995).

How far do the books we read affect us?

What is the effect produced on the mind by modern practice of fragmentary reading? – Miss Hayward.

What are the effects of reading as a pastime?

What is the function of Art (literature, music and the arts of design) in relation to morals?’

Why is eminence in sciences, art, or literature less easily and less often attained in our age than in any previous one, and is this fact to be rejoiced in or regretted?

What is the true definition of ‘Poetical justice?’- Miss King.

Would not the study of the classics be a useful element in the education of women? – Miss Taylor.

What amount of acquaintances with works of fiction is absolutely necessary for a well read person of the present day? – Miss Wilks.

The uses of poetry. – Miss Beale. ¹²⁰

The significance of these questions is twofold: first, they illustrate the Kensington Society’s deep interest in literature’s function, but perhaps more importantly, they are fascinated by the power of literature, either written or read, to transform the mind. From these questions, the purpose behind the Kensington Society’s members is exposed: they sought to educate and reform the minds of their audience, and thus, reform nineteenth-century society. The Kensington Society’s discussion questions also illustrate their particular interest in fiction and poetry. This preference was also reflected in the members’ public work. Obviously, they employed the form in which they were most gifted to disseminate their ideas. As Emma Fitch’s husband, Sir Joshua Fitch MP, had suggested in a letter to Davies in 1863 (on the topic of women’s education):

¹²⁰ “List of Questions,” APPENDIX III.

The only way in which a community can get the maximum amount of good from its individual members is to leave to each the choice of the particular form of intellectual exertion which he or she prefers.¹²¹

Although Fitch was suggesting that women should be allowed to choose what topics they are schooled in, the principle applied to the Kensington women's public writing. While the agenda behind their literary work is sometimes more concealed, it had equal potential to disseminate their ideas. In the very first article of the *EWJ*, the editors wrote:

The arts, literature, and tuition might be safely left to provide for the livelihood of *clever* women, if *sensible* women would but turn their sense to its many legitimate spheres of action.¹²²

Diane Nicola Thompson has argued that the 1860s saw an increased discord 'between popular and "serious" literature'.¹²³ However, she also contends that scholarship has, to the detriment of history, emphasized this division too much, and rigidly categorized women's literature as either feminist, anti-feminist or domestic. For the Kensington Society women, the act of publishing was a tool of resistance against women's position in society, and they encouraged other women to employ the pen to make their thoughts known. Frances Martin further demonstrated her belief that more women should publish while she was the governess of Ladies' College at Bedford Square London. She

¹²¹ Fitch was speaking on the topic of women's education, and which subjects should be open to women in universities, however, the same principle applies to their written expression. As quoted in Alfred Leslie Lilley, *Sir Joshua Fitch; an Account of His Life and Work* (London: E. Arnold, 1906), 147-8.

¹²² "The Profession of the Teacher," *EWJ*, 8.

¹²³ Nicola Diane Thompson, ed. *Victorian Women Writers and the Woman Question* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 8.

encouraged her students to publish a volume of their poetry, which was released as *Springtime among the Poets* in 1866.¹²⁴

The initial purpose of the Kensington Society was to provide a space in which women could openly discuss their concerns, but it was through publicity that these discussions had effect. Their writing was aligned with the broader goals of the Kensington Society - women's liberation through education, employment, marriage rights and eventually suffrage. These topics are clearly reflected in their essays, books and creative literary pursuits. Published ideas were an integral part of the social reform campaigns for women's liberation. These women found their voice through both fiction and non-fiction, and it is only by understanding the deliberately cohesive nature of their public work that we can understand the full ramifications of the Kensington Society. They wrote to make discussion of women's progress widespread, and the pages of their published work testify to their active role in the fight for urgent social change in Victorian Britain. Amanda Claybaugh has likewise argued that in contemporary American literature, realism in novels played an integral role in the history of reform.¹²⁵ Across the transatlantic nineteenth century, the 'novel of purpose' was created in the belief that informing the minds of readers was a necessary step in reforming society.

Novels were also an avenue of powerful influence. The Kensington Society took strategic advantage of the rising literary culture of Victorian Britain and the new taste for moral fiction. Previous scholarship has attempted to define Victorian female novelists as either feminist or anti-feminist. However, this dichotomy limits our understanding and appreciation for their literary merit. There is much more to be gained by Nichola Diane Thompson's argument that 'Novels by Victorian women writers tend to be melting-pots

¹²⁴ Curthoys, "Martin, Frances," *ODNB*.

¹²⁵ Amanda Claybaugh, *The Novel of Purpose: Literature and Social Reform in the Anglo-American World* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2007).

of ideological conflict and exploration of attitudes toward women's nature and role...'¹²⁶ Indeed, it is well substantiated that writers of the Victorian period saw their novels as instructive teaching rather than simply entertaining fiction. Peggy Sherry has therefore characterised these writers as 'faithful to a moral aesthetic', depicting the realities of life through literature while also promoting 'harmony.'¹²⁷ This aim is best exemplified in moralistic tales of redemption. Elizabeth Gaskell, for instance, as a contemporary author, was intent on giving her readers a realistic but hopeful message. Her novel *North and South* addressed growing concern about the Industrial Revolution, without explicitly condemning its values, while *Mary Barton* questioned the Victorian concept of the 'fallen woman,' raising the prospect of her possible redemption.¹²⁸ To an extent, authors such as Gaskell were also rebelling against another archetype of nineteenth-century female writing, 'Silly Novels by Lady Novelists.'¹²⁹ George Eliot's anonymous 1856 essay in the *Westminster Review* had addressed the untold damage that such female authors could inflict on impressionable readers.¹³⁰

Barbara Onslow believes that Victorian female novelists were respected by the wider press because of their 'remarkable powers of observation.'¹³¹ She suggests that the 'very feminine gift of seeing the reality behind the façade was ultimately what endowed

¹²⁶ Nicola Diane Thompson, ed. *Victorian Women Writers and the Woman Question* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 4.

¹²⁷ Peggy Meyer Sherry, "Telling Her Story: British Women of Letters of the Victorian Era," *The Princeton University Library Chronicle* 57, No.1 (1995): 147-162.

¹²⁸ See Nina Auerbach, "The Rise of the Fallen Woman," *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 35, No. 1 (1980): 29-52.

¹²⁹ George Eliot, "Silly Novels by Lady Novelists," *Westminster Review* XX, VI (October 1856) 442-461.

¹³⁰ Ibid.; Parkes continually encouraged Eliot to be more manifest in her support of the women's movement. On October 13, 1856, Eliot published a complimentary essay on "Margaret Fuller and Mary Wollstonecraft," *Leader* VI (13 October 1855): 988-989. See also Eliot, "Woman in France: Madame de Sablé," *Westminster Review* 62 (October 1854): 448-73. For more on Eliot's journalism see Fionnuala Dillane, *Before George Eliot: Marian Evans and the Periodical Press* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

¹³¹ Barbara Onslow, "Deceiving Images, Revealing Images: The Portrait in Victorian Women's Writing," *Victorian Poetry* 33, No. ¾ (1995): 450-465.

their work with its moral and indeed intellectual power.’¹³² The Kensington Society women substantiated this argument. Bessie Rayner Parkes’ 1854 *Remarks on the Education of Girls*, had argued that literature and books were the ‘key to learning’ – and in this she especially addressed teachers, asking them to ‘fearlessly open all past and present literature’ to their female students – including authors who were otherwise not deemed appropriate for girls. George Sand, in particular, was mentioned, indicating Parkes’ respect for authors who used their pen to advocate female liberation. Sand was a female French Romantic novelist, Amantine Lucile Aurore Dupin (1804-1876) who wrote under a masculine *nom de plume*.¹³³ She often wrote of young, inspiring feminist heroines in the 1840s and 50s. Kensington members arguably endeavored to support Sand by imitating her aim of using literature to inform society. Matilda Hays, a co-founder of the *EWJ* (although never listed on the Kensington Society member list) translated several of Sand’s novels into English.¹³⁴ In *Howitt’s Journal*, the journalist Samuel Smiles reviewed Hays’ translation and applauded Sand (although he did not recommend the novels should be read by young girls).¹³⁵ Hays also published two of Hays’ own novels, *Helen Stanley* (1846) and *Adrienne Hope* (1866).

Other members of the Kensington Society recognised that their ability as poets could be used to convey their social and political ideals. Adelaide Proctor’s witty poems in the *EWJ* had already proven their interest in evocative potent poetry that both evidenced and supported women’s empowerment.¹³⁶ In 1857, Proctor’s Kensington

¹³² Ibid. 451.

¹³³ Dupin also chose to wear male attire in public, as a powerful subversion of public stereotypes.

¹³⁴ These included George Sand, *Spiridion*, trans. Eliza A. Ashurst, ed. Matilda M. Hays (London: Churton, 1842); George Sand, *Letters of a Traveller*, trans. Eliza A. Ashurst, ed. Matilda M. Hays (London: Churton, 1847); George Sand, *Andre*, trans. Eliza A. Ashurst, ed. Matilda M. Hays (London: Churton, 1847); George Sand, *Fadette*, transl. Matilda Hays (1851).

¹³⁵ Samuel Smiles, “George Sand,” 1 March 1847, in *Howitt’s Journal*, ed. William Howitt, Mary Botham Howitt (London: William Lovett, 1847), 128.

¹³⁶ Adelaide Proctor published series of poems in the *EWJ* entitled: “A Woman’s Question,” “A Woman’s Answer,” and “A Woman’s Last Word” were published in succession, like one of Charles Dicken’s serials

Society contemporary and friend of Ellen Heaton, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, foretold her opinion that, in order to seek change, women must demonstrate their intellect and capacity through words. In her epic poem, *Aurora Leigh* (1856), dubbed by Barrett Browning a ‘novel in verse’, she argued that women should make their voices heard:

A woman... must prove what she can do
Before she does it, prate of woman’s rights,
Of woman’s mission, woman’s function, till
The men (who are prating too on their side) cry
“A woman’s function plainly is... to talk” –
By speaking we prove only we can speak,
Which he, the man here, never doubted...¹³⁷

Browning’s poem speaks to the heart of the Kensington Society and their social activism. Their writing was not only to ‘prate’ of ‘woman’s mission’ and ‘function’, but to prove their intellectual and practical capabilities. Only this would prove their ability to engage with a male-dominated public sphere.

Isa Craig had also proven her capacity in ‘publicity’ before she entered the Kensington Society. By the time she became an editor of the *EWJ* in 1857, Craig had been a regular journalist for the well-established Edinburgh based newspaper, *The Scotsman*, and she had already published her first volume of poems, *Poems by Isa* in

in *Household Words*, with the reader left eagerly anticipating the next chapter. Dickens actually published a number of Procter’s poems in his *Household Words* and *All the Year Round* between 1853-1860. Gill Gregory, *The Life and Work of Adelaide Procter: Poetry, Feminism and Fathers* (Aldershot, Hants., England: Ashgate, 1998) 2; Procter’s allegiance to the *EWJ* was a great advantage. Gill Gregory has estimated that by the time of her premature death (at 38 she succumbed to tuberculosis) the ‘demand for her poetry was greater than for any other English writer bar Tennyson.’ Gregory, *The Life and Work of Adelaide Procter*, 1.

¹³⁷ Elizabeth Barrett Browning, *Aurora Leigh and Other Poems* (London: Women’s Press, 1978), 8, lines 814-43.

1856.¹³⁸ She continued to publish eighteen books of poems throughout her career.¹³⁹ In 1863, she further demonstrated the Kensington Society's united conviction that poetry could be an instigator of social reform by publishing a set of abolitionist poems, *The Essence of Slavery*.¹⁴⁰ Craig also saw the benefits of collating the poetry of a group of attuned poets, including Bessie Rayner Parkes, Christina Rossetti, Dante Gabriel Rossetti and Mary Howitt. She published their collection in *Poems: An Offering to Lancashire, Printed and Published for the Art Exhibition for the Relief of Distress in the Cotton Districts*.¹⁴¹ The compilation was chiefly concerned with encouraging British support for antislavery during the American Civil War. Julie Wise has made the pertinent argument that the poems in *An Offering* 'suggest that the act of reading poetry might itself serve to foster this necessary quality of sympathetic thought and feeling.'¹⁴² Craig's poetry not only united the women's movement, but it also aligned British female activists with contemporary social causes. More specifically, *An Offering* encouraged an alliance with the abolitionist movement in America.

It is important to recognise that the Kensington Society members not only wrote to advocate social change, but they also wrote for each other. Some specifically dedicated their work to each other, illustrating the mutual communion found in their Society. This practice also suggests that they saw their published work as a united effort. They credited

¹³⁸ Isa Craig, *Poems by Isa* (Edinburgh: William Blackwood and Sons, 1856).

¹³⁹ Craig's published work also included: *Duchess Agnes, a Drama, and Other Poems* (London: Alexander Strachan, 1864); *Poems: An Offering to Lancashire, Printed and Published for the Art Exhibition for the Relief of Distress in the Cotton Districts* (London: E. Faithfull, 1863).

For more on Craig's career, see T.W. Bayne, "Knox, [née Craig,] Isabella (1831-1903)," *ODNB* (2004).

¹⁴⁰ Isa Craig, *The Essence of Slavery* (London: Published for the Ladies' London Emancipation Society and Emily Faithfull, 1863).

¹⁴¹ It's important to note that in this case, art was also used as a forum for social debate and reform, with their accompanying exhibition demonstrating the power of images to provoke thought. Isa Craig, ed. *Poems: An Offering to Lancashire, Printed and Published for the Art Exhibition for the Relief of Distress in the Cotton Districts* (London: E. Faithfull, 1863).

¹⁴² Julie M. Wise, "From Langham Place to Lancashire: Poetry, Community, and the Victoria Press's 'Offering to Lancashire,'" *Victorian Poetry* 47, No. 3 (2009), 523.

each other for the inspiration behind their words, and particularly, their poetry. Bessie Rayner Parkes' first published book, *Poems*, for instance, was dedicated to Barbara Bodichon.¹⁴³ Likewise, in 1894, Frances Power Cobbe wrote a poem entitled 'Elizabeth Garrett Anderson', the first female doctor in Britain. In the ode she questions the difficulties of balancing ambitions with the social expectations of Victorian England:

'Give up ambition! Be my bride' - Alas! *no* clarion voice replied
Excelsior!

At end of day when all is done,
And women's battle fought and won, Honour will aye be paid to one
Who erst called foremost in the van

Excelsior!
But not for her that crown so bright, Which her's had been, of surest
right, Had she still cried, - serene and blest – 'The Virgin throned by
the West'.
Excelsior!¹⁴⁴

Evidently, Cobbe's friendship with Garrett had made her question the ramifications of women's progress for the individual. The important question she asks is whether or not ambition is compatible with feminine nature. Cobbe employed a literary persona to engage in a discussion of women's position in nineteenth-century British society with

¹⁴³ Bessie Rayner Parkes, *Poems* (London: John Chapman, 1852); other creative publications by Parkes included *Summer Sketches and Other Poems* (London: John Chapman, 1854) and *Ballads and Songs* (London: Bell and Daldy, 1863).

¹⁴⁴ Frances Power Cobbe, "To Elizabeth Garrett Anderson," in *Women's Writing in the Victorian Period, 1837-1901: An Anthology*, ed. Harriet Devine Jump (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999): 181-82.

dramatic effect. Her repetition of 'Excelsior!' is anthem-like, as though she is spurring on all women onwards and upwards in progress.

Kensington Society members often emphasised the long line of literary women who had inspired them. They legitimised their claimed to professional authority by publishing biographies of these exemplary women.¹⁴⁵ Ellen Clayton, for instance, a younger member of the Kensington Society, published a book *Women of the Reformation: Their Lives, Faith and Trails* in 1861, introducing her topic with the statement: 'Every true Protestant heart must glow with sympathy and admiration for the Women who, self-abnegating, earnest, diligent, gave their lives, their best energies, and their undaunted championship to the cause of the Reformation.'¹⁴⁶ In her book, Clayton retold the stories of a number of revered Protestant women, including Lady Jane Grey and Katherine Willoughby, 'the high-spirited, fiery woman, fighting the good fight under the banner of Christ.'¹⁴⁷ Eleven years after the Kensington Society, Clayton also published a two-volume book, *Female Warriors*, which surveyed remarkable women from Antiquity to Africa, and was 'dedicated, in token of affection and esteem, to Madam Ronniger'.¹⁴⁸ Ronniger was the only French member of the Kensington Society, and present at their first meeting. Madame Jane Ronniger was a 'portrait painter and public elocutionist', teaching girls in Kensington.¹⁴⁹ Between 1876 and 1879, Ronniger published her short-lived magazine, *The Aesthetic Review and Art Observer*, dedicated to art and literature reviews.

¹⁴⁵ In 1866, Parkes wrote a biography of women from various backgrounds who 'did worthy work in the world', including Anna Jameson, in Bessie Rayner Parkes, "Preface," *Vinnette: Twelve Biographical Sketches* (London: Alexander Strahan, 1866).

¹⁴⁶ Ellen Clayton, "Preface," *Women of the Reformation: Their Lives, Faith and Trials* (London: Dean & Son, 1861).

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Ellen Clayton, *Female Warriors: Memorials of Female Valour and Heroism from the Mythological Ages to the Present Era* (London: Tinsley Brothers, 1879), i.

¹⁴⁹ Diana Maltz, *British Aestheticism and the Urban Working Classes: Beauty for the People, 1870-1900*. (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 107.

Kensington Society sisters, Annie and Eliza Keary, were both authors and poets. The Irish sisters had joined the Kensington Society together on July 4th, 1865 and were the daughters of a former army chaplain, William Keary, who had moved to England when he was appointed rector of a parish in Yorkshire. A religious fervour was evident in both of the sisters' novel and poetry publications, but particularly that of Eliza's poetry, which was often biblically inspired. In 1884 she published, *Rays of Light: A Textbook* and *A Casket of Pearls*.¹⁵⁰ With her sister, she also collaborated on popular children's stories, such as *The Hero of Asgard* (1857) and children's history books, including *Early Egyptian History for the Young* (1861).¹⁵¹ The latter was a product of their time in Egypt, where they travelled in 1858, as a sojourn for Annie, who had suffered a breakdown after years of serving as mother to her uncle's children, and a broken engagement.¹⁵² It wasn't until after the Kensington Society that she published her first book of poems, *Little Seal-Skin and Other Poems*, which held a short poem titled, 'A Sketch.'¹⁵³ The poem captures the dashed hopes of a woman, and by extension, Keary's interpretation of universally unaccomplished dreams for women - and perhaps her own. The poem begins with feminine, pastoral imagery, as a woman lay,

Upon the ground,
Made tender around her with moss and with flowers

¹⁵⁰ Eliza Keary, *Rays of Light: A Textbook* (London: Frederick Warne, 1884), *A Casket of Pearls* (London: Frederick Warne, 1884).¹⁵⁰

¹⁵¹ Annie Keary and Eliza Keary. *The Hero of Asgard: Tales from Scandinavian Mythology* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1870), and *Early Egyptian History for the Young: With Descriptions of the Tombs and Monuments* (Cambridge: Macmillan and Co., 1861).

¹⁵² John Sutherland, *The Longman Companion to Victorian Fiction*. Second Edition (London: Routledge, 2009), 347.

¹⁵³ Eliza Keary. "Sketch," *Little Seal-Skin and Other Poems* (London: George Bell and Sons, 1874): 98-9.

Yet following this scene, the poem develops a note of sadness, with ‘a wistful smile’ upon the woman. Abruptly, in the twentieth line, the poem unveils a bitter accusation, as it describes the female as: ‘you, you, pretty slave’.¹⁵⁴ Such harsh tones continue to the end of the poem. Keary dashes the idyllic imagery of the poem like the dreams of her protagonist:

Have you drained the last drain
Of your gold cup at last,
Knowing your ease pain?
The tender moss and the flowers,
The long love-sweet hours,
Mound round you pressed,
Woman, earth-caressed,
Eyes downward cast,
At last, O! at last,
Slave with wings hidden,
With divinity bidden,
To sleep – nay, drown
In its own blood, self-shed,
Inspired call unanswered,
So to fill the perfect part of womanhood
It was said.¹⁵⁵

It was an account of a woman who did not pursue her chosen path or profession. In consequence, the author warns that ‘sleep – nay, drown’ is the product of this misuse, with ‘wings hidden.’¹⁵⁶ It is impossible to read this poem without questioning how much it represented the emotions of its author. The protagonist’s disappointment betrays

¹⁵⁴ Ibid. 98.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 98-9.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

Keary's own understanding of blighted dreams, and her poem serves to warn other women against becoming slaves to 'womanhood.'¹⁵⁷

However, Annie was arguably the more successful writer, beginning with a children's story, such as *Mia and Charles* (1856), and the popular school tale, *Sidney Grey* (1857). In 1863 she published her first novel, a domestic tale, titled *Janet's Home* which had partial success. In 1869 she had more acclaim with *Oldbury*, a novel situated in a small village. It resembled Elizabeth Gaskell's depictions of the daily life for women in rural Britain. However, it was not until 1875, seven years after the Kensington Society had dissolved, that her most successful novel, *Castle Daly*, appeared as a serial in *Macmillan's Magazine*, depicting the cultural difficulties of Ireland between Celtic and Saxon traditions.¹⁵⁸ Four years later Keary's most passionate work, *A Doubting Heart* (1879) appeared. Similar to her sister's 'Sketch,' Keary's final novel told the story of a young woman who is forced to marry for either money or love and dramatised the difficult decisions facing women. Her novel followed the tradition of seventeenth and eighteenth-century plots, such as ones that 'depicted heroines transforming deficient men through their love and sweet nature, or besting them through their feminine wiles.'¹⁵⁹ In these novels of the Kensington Society women, heroines adhered to the modest expectations of Victorian women while also subverting social constructs. This ambiguity was a powerful tool allowing the novels to remain appropriate reading material for young women, while also reaching a different, and perhaps wider audience than an explicitly feminist pamphlet. The contemporary novelist and editor of the *EWJ*, Matilda Hays, had earlier translated and published a novel by George Sand that told a similar story *Indiana*

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ Eventually, it was published as a book: Anna Maria Keary, *Castle Daly: The Story of an Irish Home Thirty Years Ago* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1875); Gillian Avery, "Keary, Anna Maria [Annie] (1825-1879)," *ODNB* (2006).

¹⁵⁹ James Curran, "Media and the Making of British Society, c. 1700-2000," *Media History* 8, No. 2 (2002), 138.

(originally published in French in 1832), which protested against the social restrictions on women.¹⁶⁰ The heroine eventually makes a similar radical decision, as Hays did in her own life, an unhappy marriage for a passionate love. Marriage, and the momentous complexities of this institution for women, was a key theme in their novels. These novels demonstrate their calculated use of the established press to inform society and spark discussion on the inequality of women in Victorian society.

The copious publications of the Kensington Society members, on topics ranging from social propriety to the advancement of women, placed them firmly in the public eye, and they learnt to cultivate their words and style to the audience they aimed to ‘stir.’ They utilized non-fiction, including overtly political pamphlets, tracts, essays, published books, as well as fiction and poetry to disseminate their message more discretely. While their articles and pamphlets stimulated lively debate on women’s issues in Victorian Britain, the Kensington members also explored the ideological complexities of women’s lives through their novels and other creative writing. Their publications demonstrated the Kensington Society’s fundamental belief in the ‘function’, ‘effects’ ‘eminence’ and ‘use’ of the written word for nineteenth-century society, and it became the loudest vehicle for their critical ideas.¹⁶¹

¹⁶⁰ Despite her close connection through the *EWJ*, Hays was not on the Kensington Society membership list.

¹⁶¹ “List of Questions,” APPENDIX III.

CHAPTER VI. THE 'TIDELIKE' DIASPORA OF THE KENSINGTON SOCIETY¹

A year after the Kensington Society's last meeting, Elizabeth Wolstenholme contributed an essay in Josephine Butler's *Women and Work* (1869) entitled 'The Education of Girls, its Present and its Future.'² Wolstenholme was an original member of the Kensington Society; and as headmistress of a secondary girls school in Congleton, Cheshire, had a growing concern that Britain was being left behind in the advancement of education across Europe:

We are, it appears, on the eve of great educational reforms. We have been told, and by voices we cannot disregard, that instead of being, as we fondly believed, amongst the first of European nations in matters of instruction, we are so far fallen behind the onward march of other nations that it is now the shame of England to possess almost the worst instructed people in Europe...³

Wolstenholme claimed, like many of her contemporaries, that this 'shame' would be most keenly felt in respect to the education of girls in Britain. Despite their protests, however, very little attention was given to these insufficiencies by the male powers that be, and even less action:

¹ Frances Power Cobbe, "Introduction," *The Woman Question in Europe*, ed. Theodore Stanton (New York: Putnam's, 1884), 7.

² Elizabeth C. Wolstenholme, "The Education of Girls, its Present and its Future," in *Woman's Work and Woman's Culture: A Series of Essays*, ed. Josephine E. Butler (London: Macmillan and Co., 1869): 290-330.

³ Wolstenholme, "The Education of Girls, its Present and its Future," 290.

in all these discussions we hear singularly little on the education of women. “The air is thick,” says a Quarterly Reviewer, “with schemes for the education of women;” but these schemes lie quite apart from the general discussion of the subject and have been conceived in the interests of women by women themselves. ⁴

Wolstenholme’s paper stated, vehemently, that if women felt their education was lacking, they were responsible for improving it for the next generation. It is no coincidence that many of the Kensington Society members became particularly active in educational reform in the years following their last meeting. At this final meeting, on 4 March 1868, its members discussed seven questions. The final was Emily Davies’ suggestion: ‘What are the objects of meetings for social intercourse and what are the best means of attaining those objects?’⁵ This was a pivotal topic for the Kensington Society to discuss at the conclusion of their official meetings. Although we have no records of the ensuing discussion, the allied questions signal their belief that ‘social intercourse’ for an ‘object’ was a crucial facet of their mid-nineteenth century Victorian ethos. Intriguingly, the question foreshadowed the end to this Society because this particular object had run its course. By 1868, the Kensington Society had served its functional purpose: the discussions had taken place, the network built, the wheels of the women’s movement were in steady motion, and there was more diverse work to be done for female advancement.

Arguably, members of the Kensington Society became increasingly energised in social and political agitation in the years following the conclusion of their debates. Wolstenholme’s essay was strategically timed in the swelling wave of the women’s

⁴ Ibid., 292.

⁵ “List of Questions,” APPENDIX III.

movement in Britain. From 1860 to 1890 a dramatic transformation was underway in the British educational system. During these years, the Kensington members dispersed to focus on individual causes, and after 1868 the women grew increasingly concerned with one pivotal aspect of social reform: the educational opportunities of women. Education, and the establishment of secondary and tertiary schooling became their central concern. As Laura Swartz has pointed out, like the wider Victorian feminist network, the Kensington Society increasingly ‘directly equated freedom with the acquisition of knowledge.’⁶ The immediate context was the parliamentary push for the 1870 Education Act which would ‘provide for public Elementary Education in England and Wales’ for males, with females still no part of the political equation.⁷

The final aim of this thesis is to examine the repercussions of the Kensington Society and the pivotal role its members played in the educational advancement of women in Britain and beyond, in the years following their meetings. This chapter will investigate the Kensington Society’s clearest legacy – the empowering education of women in Britain and beyond – from access to employment and training for working women to the momentous establishment of Britain’s first tertiary college for women in October 1869, Girton College Cambridge. It was the greatest collaborative success of the Kensington Society, with the majority of the Kensington Society members involved in petitioning and supporting the early concept of a women’s college. More importantly, the college became the culmination of their strategic public and private discussions and where their ambitions for women’s progress found immediate fruition. As an archetype, the Kensington Society was a micro university and arguably, the first step towards Girton College was taken in

⁶ Laura Schwartz, “Feminist Thinking on Education in Victorian England,” *Oxford Review of Education* 37, No. 5, Political and Philosophical Perspectives on Education, Part 2 (2011), 670.

⁷ Thomas Preston, *The Elementary Education Act, 1870: Being the Act to Provide Public Elementary Education in England and Wales* (London: William Amer, Lincoln’s Inn Gate, 1870), 7.

the front drawing room of Charlotte Manning's house, when a collection of women met together to discuss critical social, moral and political issues, and digest potential strategies. Much like the discussion society, the College embodied their belief that discussion, debate, practice papers, collective communication and education would ultimately empower British nineteenth-century British women.⁸

The second part of this chapter will assess the transnational dissemination of the Kensington Society's ideas through international education initiatives. This assessment will demonstrate the ideological repercussions of the Kensington Society across the Atlantic in the United States and eventually, the wider British Empire as it looked to the new world for the wider future of women's progress. With a case study approach, this chapter will focus on the educational careers of some lesser-known Kensington members, such as Dorothea Beale and her pivotal role in the establishment of Girton, Sophia Jex-Blake and her tours of the United States and Annette Beveridge's school and translation work in India. By cogitating on and employing the communication strategies that they learnt in the Kensington Society, including deliberate discussion, networking, publications, and society establishment, these women created a transnational exchange of ideas.

The Kensington Society's amplified focus on education was the natural result of the communication strategy they had established together. As nineteenth-century women, they had learnt that education empowered communication, and communication allowed them a voice. Their discussion, meetings, journals, circulated papers and letters bore witness to the flow of ideas and social progress that was engendered through their education. As the trajectory of this thesis has demonstrated, the Kensington Society women initially entered nineteenth-century social and political agitation through the

⁸ See Stephens, *Girton College, 1869-1932*.

creation of their *English Woman's Journal*, before they began their regular meetings to utilise private networks of communication, during which time they also employed private letters to further their causes. However, by 1868 it became clear to them that these communication strategies would only empower women if they were first educated to communicate. After all, there was no point standing on a street corner handing out pamphlets if all the young women passing by could not read it. Thus, the compelling objective of the Kensington Society became educational reform, a cohesive ambition to empower a larger network and generation of enlightened women.

EDUCATIONAL REFORM

The Kensington Society's first steps in educational reform were realised in Britain, and primarily in the overhaul of girls' secondary schooling. Many original members of the Kensington Society were simultaneously headmistresses of secondary schools, including Dorothea Beale, Elizabeth Wolstenholme and Frances Buss. All three of these women campaigned for more academically rigorous tuition for girls with a commensurate ability to sit external examinations. Despite their common misrepresentation as a purely elite British reform group, the members of the Society were at the forefront of working women's education in the nineteenth century. Jessie Boucherett also saw the education of mature-aged women as imperative to the progress of women in Britain. In 1859 she had already established a school in Charlotte St., London, devoted to this cause. She was also enthused by the ragged schools' projects, triggered by growing industrialisation and

pervasive child poverty in nineteenth-century Britain.⁹ An early comrade was Lord Shaftesbury, who was deeply invested in the success of the Ragged Schools Union. He was the first chairman from their establishment in 1844.¹⁰ Another Kensington Society member, Frances Martin, who joined at their 4 July 1866 meeting, collaborated with the aunt of a Kensington member, Elizabeth Malleson (her niece was Alice Malleson), and together they extended their educational reforms to working-class women. With Buss and Beale, Frances Martin presented evidence at the schools' inquiry commission, the Taunton Commission, investigating the state of secondary education in England from 1865-68.¹¹ She had been serving as the superintendent of Bedford College from 1853. Unlike Beale, however, Martin believed that vocational education was equally as important as academic, and she initially opposed the plans for women's entry into university examinations.¹² So when Elizabeth Malleson founded the Working Women's College in Bloomsbury in 1864, Martin was drawn to the concept behind the College – a school in trade for women. The college was a replica of the existing Working Men's College which had been established by Charlotte Manning's brother, Henry Solly, in 1862.¹³ Although it primarily served as a vocational training for women, with evening subjects ranging from literacy to bookkeeping, Martin was also adamant that the College provided an important meeting place for working women, where they could build a network of women in employment.¹⁴ In 1879 Frances Martin wrote an article on 'A

⁹ Ragged schools' activists also saw public media as a proactive solution to ignorance and published the *Ragged School Union Magazine (RSUM)* from 1849.

¹⁰ John Pollock, *Shaftesbury: The Reformer* (Eastbourne: Kingsway Publications, 2000).

¹¹ Gary McCulloch has made a study of the Assistant Commissioner to the Taunton Commission, James Bryce, and his opinions on the state of middle-class education in Britain, in Gary McCulloch, "Sensing the Realities of English Middle-Class Education: James Bryce and the Schools Inquiry Commission, 1865-1868," *Journal of the History of Education Society* 49, No. 5 (2011): 599-613.

¹² M.C. Curthoys, "Martin, (Mary Anne) Frances (1829-1922)," *ODNB* (2007).

¹³ Solly was a Unitarian minister and leading advocate of working-class social reform and political rights. For more on Solly, see Alan Ruston, "Solly, Henry (1813-1903)," *ODNB* (2004).

¹⁴ M.C. Curthoys, "Martin, (Mary Anne) Frances (1829-1922)," *ODNB* (2007).

College for Working Women' in *Macmillan's Magazine* emphasising the social aspect of the college:¹⁵

The College is a collection of students. It sees to supply the need of instruction and improvement felt by a few women in every class. But it does more than this: it seeks to promote culture, to teach habits of prudence and forethought; it gives thoughtful women an opportunity of meeting each other and forming valuable friendships...¹⁶

In its ambitions and structure, the 'Working Woman College' bore a remarkable similarity to the Langham Place office of SPEW.

Frances Power Cobbe was similarly ardent about establishing networks for working women, both in Britain and the wider women's movement in Europe. Like Martin, she also utilised the public press to enhance this network. In 1884, she published a collection of essays on *The Woman Question in Europe*, which featured consecutive essays by women writers from: England, Germany, Holland, Austria, Norway, Sweden, Denmark, France, Italy, Spain, Portugal, Belgium, Switzerland, Russia, Poland, Bohemia, and East Asia.¹⁷ The 'England' chapter contained five essays, the first on suffrage by Millicent Fawcett, the second on the educational movement by Maria G. Grey, the third on women in medicine by Frances E. Hoggan, the industrial movement by Jessie Boucherett and women's philanthropy by Henrietta O. Barnett. The book reveals the close collaboration of the Kensington women with European women activists, and their continued work in building the global network of feminism. It also demonstrates the

¹⁵ Frances Martin, "A College for Working Women," *Macmillan's Magazine* 40 (1879): 483-8.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 485.

¹⁷ Cobbe, *The Woman Question in Europe*.

comparative nature of women's activism in the nineteenth century, with feminists from different nations looking to keep pace with each other. In the introduction Cobbe stated:

Of all the movements, political, social and religious, of past ages there is...not one so unmistakably *tidelike* in its extension and the uniformity of its impulse, as that which has taken place within living memory among the women of almost every race on the globe...[T]his movement has stirred an entire sex, even half the human race.¹⁸

Clearly, Cobbe believed that the 'uniformity' of the contemporary women's movement was its greatest strength, a principle that had been accentuated by the Kensington Society twenty years earlier. Her powerful expression 'tidelike' illustrated the continuity felt between the European and British women activists, and their joint sense of the natural inevitability of the success of their cause.

From the 1840s to 1860s, the groundwork for their educational reform was laid, with the establishment of small institutions for women that would equip them for all occupations, ranging from trades (in which SPEW specialised) to professions and academia. The Kensington women were at the forefront of these strides. Significant parliamentary reforms were paving the way by improving the conditions and accessibility of schooling to all classes. In 1870, the Elementary Education Act transformed education into a public issue by allowing local governments to financially support existing institutions. By 1880, primary education until ten years old became compulsory in England and Wales through the Elementary Education Act. Thus, the pace of the Victorian women's education movement dramatically quickened from the 1870s to

¹⁸ My italics. Cobbe, "Introduction," *The Woman Question in Europe*, 7.

1880s; the fact that this period was directly following the Kensington Society was not a coincidence. It is the argument of this chapter that this escalation was also stimulated by the establishment of Girton College at the University of Cambridge in 1869.

The auxiliary argument of this chapter is that in the aftermath of their meetings, the Kensington Society women shifted their focus almost entirely to educational reform. It had been the bedrock of their British activism – being, in their belief, the best route to women’s ultimate social emancipation. However, they were aware that their meetings lacked the intellectual rigour that a university could offer. In consequence, members came to discuss the potential for a radical new entry into the British academic arena – the first female tertiary college. The path to Girton College had been opened in 1864, when Cambridge University first permitted women to sit for their local examinations. The same year, a Royal Commission to investigate the state of education in British schools was begun, known as the School’s Inquiry Commission. Emily Davies and Eliza Bostock (an early member of the Kensington Society) presented a petition suggesting that they also consider the education of girls in the commission’s inquiry. Within a year many of the same women who had signed the petition were present at the first Kensington meeting. Their discussions about the new college also took place outside the Kensington Society meetings, in consultation and letters. In 1867, Emily Davies wrote to Edward Plumptre, the current chaplain of King’s College, London:

I send you a kind of Programme of a new College for women, which we hope to get affiliated to Cambridge. *The project has grown out of the meetings... about which I wrote to you in the autumn.* After seeing the schoolmistresses and hearing what they had to say, I felt that what they wanted could not be supplied by either of the existing colleges. The only resource seems to be to try what we can do with a fresh start. The scheme is rather in the

clouds as yet, but there seems to be a fair prospect of its being carried out.¹⁹

The meetings to which Davies refers were the London Association of School Mistresses which she had founded in 1866, the same year she published her provocative and eminent text *The Higher Education of Women*.²⁰ The movement to reform all levels of women's education grew out of the initial imperative of reforming the schools for girls. After all, it was they who had 'suffered more than anyone from the dead hand in education.'²¹ The inadequacy of girl's education in Britain was brought to light by the Taunton Commission from 1865-68.²² The public Commission was one of the first chances for female educational activists to enter 'momentarily...into the glare of publicity, and for once the complaints and practices and aspirations of large numbers of them became a matter for the public record.'²³ A number of Kensington members gave evidence to the Taunton Commission as current headmistresses of girls secondary schools, including Dorothea Beale (of Cheltenham Ladies College) Frances Mary Buss (of the North London Collegiate and Camden Schools for girls) and Mary Porter (of Bolham School in Tiverton, Devon).²⁴ In 1869, a year after the Kensington Society had ended, Dorothea Beale

¹⁹ My use of italics. Davies to Edward Plumptre, February 1867, *Emily Davies: Collected Letters*, 223.

²⁰ Emily Davies, *The Higher Education of Women*, first published 1866 (London: The Hambledon Press, 1988).

²¹ Sheila Fletcher, *Feminists and Bureaucrats: A Study in the Development of Girl's Education in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 39.

²² Ibid.

²³ See also Joyce Senders Pederson, "Schoolmistresses and Headmistresses: Elites and Education in Nineteenth-Century England," *Journal of British Studies* 15, No. 1 (1975), 136.

²⁴ At the young age of twenty-three, Dorothea Beale had been appointed head teacher at Queens College, London, having spent five years there as a mathematical tutor. During the Kensington Society meetings Dorothea Beale had gained a merited reputation for her girl's educational reforms and praised as Head Mistress of St Hilda's College, Cheltenham: see Beaumont, "Beale, Dorothea," *ODNB*; Frances Buss chose to pursue teaching at the young age of fourteen, after attending a sub-standard school in Kentish Town. Her mother established a school in Kentish Town in 1845: See Elizabeth Coutts, "Buss, Frances Mary (1927-1894)," *ODNB* (2006); Mary Porter ran a girl's school at Gateshead from 1866 to 1871, until she was appointed head at Keighley in Yorkshire. Felicity Hunt, "Porter, Mary Eliza, (1835-1905)," *ODNB* (2018);

published the evidence she gave at the Taunton commission, with a forward in *Reports of the Education of Girls. With Extracts from the Evidence*.²⁵ On 19 April 1866, Beale's presented her evidence. The central theme of the evidence was that:

The education of girls has too often been made showy, rather than real and useful – accomplishments have been made the main thing, because these would, it was thought, enable a girl to shine and attract, while those branches of study especially calculated to *form the judgement, to cultivate the understanding, and the discipline the character* (which would fit her to perform the *duties* of life), have been neglected; and thus; while temporary pleasure and profit have been sought, the great moral ends of education have too often been lost sight of.²⁶

Beale's expressed concern about the state of female education suggests that the entire objective of girls' education needed a revolution. The emphasis, in her opinion, needed to be on their *mind, understanding, and character*. An education that prioritised these facets would empower women by allowing them to communicate with their equals in the male-dominated culture of Victorian England. Naturally, once empowered to develop their own judgement and understanding, they would be equipped to empower other women. Beale evidently saw schools as the vehicle of women's progress in Britain. In 1858, seven years before the Kensington Society, she had become the Principal of the newly established Cheltenham Ladies' College, the first women's secondary teaching college in Britain. The school, which had begun in 1854, trained women to teach. Through Beale's leadership,

The only biography of Beale is by Elizabeth Raikes, *Dorothea Beale of Cheltenham* (Edinburgh: T. and A. Constable, 1908).

²⁵ Dorothea Beale, *Reports Issued by the School's Inquiry Commission, on the Education of Girls. Reprinted with Extracts from the Evidence* (London: David Nutt, 1869).

²⁶ My italics, except for '*duties*', which were Beale's.

the school became renowned for the unconventional subjects she and her staff taught, such as mathematics.²⁷ Jacqueline Beaumont has also noted Beale's significant decision to have her student's work examined by external peers, including Oxford and Cambridge professors, emphasising that while the practice could be seen as simply professional accountability, it was also a strategic public relations step, as it 'broadcast' the success of her school to the wider academic world, and subsequently, the academic potential of her girls.²⁸ In these ambitions, Beale's was aligned to the ideals of the Kensington Society. Beale continued her position as head teacher at Cheltenham throughout her membership in the Kensington Society until her death in 1906. In 1874 she founded the Association for Head Mistresses of Endowed and Proprietary Schools with Frances Buss, and from 1895, acted as the elected president of the Association.²⁹

Frances Buss followed in her mother's educational footsteps. In 1845, to increase the family's income, her mother established a private girl's school in Clarence Road, Kentish Town, at which Buss began to teach herself.³⁰ The philosophy of the school was inspired by Johan Heirich Pestalozzi, the Swiss educational reformer and Romantic.³¹ During 1848 and 1849, Buss also attended classes at Queen's College, London, under the tutelage of F.D. Maurice, amongst others, and developed a close friendship with her future

²⁷ Mathematics and science were considered boy's subjects, and Beale faced disagreements with parents over this decision. Beaumont, "Beale," *ODNB*; Joyce Peterson has rightly noted that although feminist such as Beale were principally involved in establishing these schools, the schools were also supported by individuals and organisations who 'shared a common interest in promoting educational institutions.' Joyce Senders Pederson, "The Reform of Women's Secondary and Higher Education: Institutional Change and Social Values in Mid and Late Victorian England," *History of Education Quarterly* 19, No. 1 (1979), 62.

²⁸ Ibid. Gillian Sutherland has pointed out the correlation between 'professionalism' and 'virtue' amongst middle-class feminist educationalists in Gillian Sutherland, "Examinations and the construction of professional identity: a case study of England, 1800-1950," *Assessment in Education* 8 (2001): 51-64. See also, Christina De Bellaigue, "The Development of Teaching as a Profession for Women before 1870," *The Historical Journal* 44, No. 4 (2001): 963-988.

²⁹ Josephine Kamm has written a biography of Beale and Buss' work together, *How Different From Us: A Biography of Miss Buss and Miss Beale* (London: Routledge, 2012).

³⁰ Coutts, "Buss," *ODNB*.

³¹ Ibid.

Kensington Society associate, Dorothea Beale. Eventually, she became the head of her mother's school, renaming it the North London Collegiate School for Ladies.³² The school had a practical focus, aimed principally at producing governesses.³³

GIRTON COLLEGE

It would be another five years until Girton College was founded, on 16 October 1869, under a motto that aligned remarkably well with the principles of the Kensington Society: 'Better is wisdom than weapons of war.' Initially, it was titled 'College for Women at Benslow House' in Hitchin, Cambridge.³⁴ Kensington Society hostess, Charlotte Manning, was appointed the first Headmistress of the College. Her stepdaughter Adelaide, another Kensington member, was one of the first to sit and pass the entrance examination to Cambridge in June 1869, at the age of forty-one.³⁵ Harriet Cook's sister, Rachel also entered Girton. Emily Davies and Barbara Bodichon were the principal founders of Girton College. Letters between them often discussed how and when they would take the initiative. These letters also evidence the involvement of other Kensington members in the decision-making for the College, suggesting that it was a collaborative scheme for the entire Society. On 16 February 1869, for instance, Davies wrote to

³² Frances Buss's mother was Frances Fleetwood, and her father was an artist, Robert William Buss, Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ It wasn't until sixteen acres were purchased near the village of Girton, Cambridge, and the college built, that the college relocated in October 1873 and became 'Girton College,' see Stephen, *Emily Davies and Girton College*.

³⁵ Gillian Sutherland, "Manning, (Elizabeth) Adelaide (1824-1905)," *ODNB* (2004).

Bodichon concerning the ‘Trust-deed’ of the College: ‘Mrs Manning came out strongly & was of *great* use. Mrs. R. Gurney and Miss Metcalfe were very good...Everybody likes the idea of the house at Hitchin...’³⁶ Their letters conveyed an optimism and even excitement about the College, especially concerning the students it would host. In May, 1869, Davies wrote to Bodichon: ‘The first candidate who has filled up her Form of Entry is a young woman after your own heart. She takes French, Mathematics, and Chemistry and declines Scripture. It is Miss [Eliza] Orme, sister in law of Professor Masson. She is 20.’³⁷ In 1872, their letters consisted mainly of practical plans for the physical building and site of the college, when it moved to Girton from Hitchin, closer to the centre of Cambridge. However, by 1873 they were largely concerned by potential opposition to the college, which aimed at deterring its smooth integration into Cambridge University. Davies wrote to Bodichon after ‘Mr. S. Taylor’ presented a ‘manifesto’ in opposition to the college at an Executive Committee meeting:³⁸

I made no opposition, not wishing to seem anxious to stifle discussion. But if you shd. see your way to it, perhaps you could indicate the uselessness of putting on Camb. men to bother us, wasting time and strength on an agitation which can only damage the College without producing any other fruit, our majority being as I believe quite overwhelming.³⁹

The Kensington Society’s ambitions for the next generation of women were realised when the daughter of Mary Hopkinson, otherwise known as Mrs Llewelyn Davies on the

³⁶ Davies to Bodichon, 16 February 1869, in *Emily Davies: Collected Letters*, 306.

³⁷ Eliza Orme became the first woman to obtain a law degree in England from the University of London in 1888. Leslie Howsam, “Orme, Eliza (1848-1937),” *ODNB* (2004); Davies to Bodichon, May 1869, Murphy, *Emily Davies: Collected Letters*, 315.

³⁸ This was discussed in an earlier letter from Davies to Bodichon, 11 March 1873, as seen in *Emily Davies: Collected Letters*, 398.

³⁹ Davies to Bodichon, 15 March 1873, *Emily Davies: Collected Letters*, 398-399.

Kensington member's list, Margaret Caroline Llewelyn Davies became a Girton College student in 1881.⁴⁰ Earlier, Maria Gurney, the granddaughter of Emelia and Russell Gurney, became a student at Girton in 1872. The Gurneys were highly aware of the contribution they were making to women's social advancement in Britain, not only through their own work, but in the example they set. They believed that Girton would be the first of many colleges for women.⁴¹ When Davies was asked in 1867, 'But *why* Cambridge? Why not Oxford?' she replied, 'I think we have more hold at Cambridge because I have not talked to Oxford men. But Lady Brodie says we are quite right to begin with Cambridge, and they will follow by and by.'⁴² Davies was perfectly correct in this assumption. It was only in 1892 that Beale finally purchased Cowley House, Oxford, and established St. Hilda's College for women teachers. By 1893, Beale had become the founder of St Hilda's Hall, Oxford's second women's college (following Somerville College, which was founded in 1879) and simultaneously, an active attender of educational conferences across Europe and the United States.⁴³

TRANSNATIONAL REFORM

⁴⁰ Margaret Caroline Llewelyn Davies, who was also Emily Davies' niece, became a significant women's rights campaigner, piloting divorce law reform in the early 1900s and publishing a ground-breaking book, *Maternity: Letters from Working Women*, in 1915, highlighting the traumatic childbirth experiences of working women using 400 letters containing midwife testimonies. Mary Scott, "Davies, Margaret Caroline Llewelyn, (1861-1944)," *ODNB* (2006).

⁴¹ Another husband of the Kensington Society, Sir Joshua Fitch, was on the first governing board of Girton. Alfred Leslie Lilley, *Sir Joshua Fitch; an Account of His Life and Work* (London: E. Arnold, 1906), 142.

⁴² Davies recounted a conversation with Mark Pattison, the Rector of Lincoln College, Oxford, and a recent trip to Oxford, in a letter to Anna Richardson, 4 February 1867, as quoted in *Emily Davies: Collected Letters*, 224.

⁴³ Beaumont, "Beale," *ODNB*; Elizabeth Raikes, *Dorothea Beale of Cheltenham* (Edinburgh: T. and A. Constable, 1908).

Despite the location of their meetings, and the nationality of their members, the Kensington Society was part of a larger web of social reform throughout Europe and the New World. The discussion at their meetings had already evidenced the international, perceptive of their Society. In November 1866, for instance, when Mary Eliza Porter asked the question: ‘How can it be accounted for that cheerfulness and poverty seem to be more compatible with each other among the lower orders of people in countries on the continent than in England?’, she demonstrated her international scope.⁴⁴ To fully comprehend the Kensington Society’s communicative activism, their relationship with the United States requires further investigation, a society that was deeply aligned to the British intellectual and cultural issues.⁴⁵ As Amanda Claybaugh has argued, ‘the United States and Great Britain formed as nations in a transnational context. Each, that is to say, came to conceive of itself as a nation with, through, and against the other.’ In the nineteenth century, this transfer was manifest in women’s rights.⁴⁶ British nineteenth-century women’s activists clearly utilised a web of connections to impact their society. Victorian feminism was conceived as a network of expanding transnational pathways. They employed a network of cultural transfer to disseminate their ideas. Alessa Johns has recently demonstrated how feminism exploited the power of cultural exchange in her research into the bluestocking movement. Her *Bluestocking Feminism and British-German Cultural Transfer, 1750-1837* (2014) followed the sociocultural repercussions

⁴⁴ Mary Porter also continued to spearhead educational reform after the Kensington Society. In 1874, Porter was a founding member of the Association of Head Mistresses, and in 1878 hosted their meeting in her home; “List of Questions,” APPENDIX II.

⁴⁵ This transatlantic transfer of ideas through women’s journals has also been established by Stephen Pigeon, “Steal It, Change it, Print it: Transatlantic Scissors and Paste Journalism in the Ladies’ Treasury, 1857-1895,” *Journal of Victorian Culture* 22, Iss.1 (2017): 24-39.

⁴⁶ Amanda Claybaugh, *The Novel of Purpose: Literature and Social Reform in the Anglo-American World* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2007), 16.

of discourses on liberty in France, Germany and Britain, amid the American and French Revolutions.⁴⁷ She argues that feminists, and other reformers, utilized this pivotal exchange to spawn further discussion on the position of women in the radically changing cultures of Western Europe, and demonstrated the use of considered communication to effect educational and employment reform.⁴⁸

The Kensington women were conscious of the strategic power of networking from their common utilisation of groups and societies to garner support for social reform. The Society was already connected to this web of international reformers through their mentors and family. For instance, Parkes' mother-in-law, Louise Belloc, was a correspondent of Harriet Beecher Stowe, and eventually translated her anti-slavery novel, *Uncle Tom's Cabin, or, Life Among the Lowly*, which was been a crucial piece of fiction for the American Civil War, into French in 1853.⁴⁹ She believed that the French public needed to read the profoundly successful novel that advocated for the abolition of slavery in their own tongue.⁵⁰ The translation was a success according to Belloc, who later wrote to their mutual friend, Annie Fields, that 'It was read by high and low, by grown persons and children. A great enthusiasm for the anti-slavery cause was the result. The popularity of the work in France was immense, and no doubt influenced the public mind in favour of the North during the war of secession.'⁵¹ However, the most telling example of the Kensington Society women's transatlantic connections was their association with anti-

⁴⁷ Alessa Johns, *Bluestocking Feminism and British-German Cultural Transfer, 1750-1837* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2014). See also Courtney Bates, "Transatlantic Women: Nineteenth-Century American Women Writers and Great Britain," *American Literary Realism* 47, Iss. 2, (2015), 128.

⁴⁸ Margaret H. McFadden has highlighted nineteenth-century transatlantic links of feminism in *Golden Cables of Sympathy: The Transatlantic Sources of Nineteenth-Century Feminism* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2009).

⁴⁹ Belloc had already made a name for herself as a translator of Maria Edgeworth's novels into French. Sarah Robbins, *The Cambridge Introduction to Harriet Beecher Stowe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 114.

⁵⁰ Harriet Beecher Stowe, *La case de l'Oncle Tom* (Paris: Carpentier, libraire-editeur, 1853).

⁵¹ Annie Fields, eds., *The Life and Letters of Harriet Beecher Stowe* (Boston and New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1896), 157-8.

slavery activists in America, many of whom they had first met at the World's Anti-Slavery Convention in London in 1849. Anna Mary Howitt had raised money to help Frederick Douglass, the African-American freed slave abolitionist, to attend the Convention.⁵² During his stay in Britain, Douglass was hosted at Anna Richardson's house in Newcastle as well as at the home of Lavinia Solly, Charlotte Manning's sister-in-law and fellow Kensington member and her husband, the Unitarian minister Francis Bishop.⁵³ At the convention, Bodichon was introduced to Douglass, who had travelled from America to attend with William Lloyd Garrison, the editor of *The Liberator* and the *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, and Lucretia Mott.⁵⁴ Douglass was the editor of *North Star* from 1847 to 1851, when it merged with Gerritt Smith's *Liberty Party Paper* to become *Frederick Douglass' Paper*. *The North Star's* slogan was 'Right is of no Sex – Truth is of no Colour – God is the Father of us all, and all we are Brethren,' an illustration of how the issue of slavery and women's oppression were entwined in American activist

⁵² During his 1848 lecture tour of England, Douglass stayed with Anna Richardson's home in Newcastle, the Quaker abolitionist and mentor of Emily Davies.

⁵³ Lavinia Solly and her husband, Unitarian minister Francis Bishop, had a daughter the same year as they hosted Garrison, and named her Caroline Garrison Bishop in honour of their guest. Caroline eventually became a leader in kindergarten educational reform. See E. Last, *Memoir of Caroline Garrison Bishop* (London: Headly Borthers, 1936).

⁵⁴ As another example of the frequent transatlantic transfer between British and American society reformers, Lucretia Mott had organised the Seneca Falls Convention with Elizabeth Cady Stanton after they had met at the World's Anti-Slavery Convention in London in 1840. See Sally G. McMillen, *Seneca Falls and the Origins of the Women's Rights Movement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008); At the conference, 68 women and 32 men signed the "Declaration of Rights and Sentiments," a public dispersion of their stances on the equality of all women and men. The document included a "Declaration", "Resolutions", and a powerful avowal:

We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men and women are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness...it is the right of those who suffer from it to refuse allegiance to it, and to insist upon the institution of a new government, laying its foundation of such principles, and *organizing* its powers in such form as to them shall seem most likely to effect their safety and happiness.⁵⁴

"Declaration of Rights and Sentiments," as seen in McMillen, *Seneca Falls*, 237; Mott was head of the Philadelphia Anti-Slavery Society. Nancy C. Unger, "Mott, Lucretia Coffin (1793-1880)," *American National Biography*, online (2000), <https://doi.org/10.1093/anb/9780198606697.article.1500494>

groups.⁵⁵ In 1848, Bodichon travelled to America to attend the Seneca Falls Convention for women's rights in New York, which hosted an estimated three hundred men and women from July 19 to 20. The Convention, hosted by Elizabeth Cady Stanton, marked the beginning of the transatlantic network of women activists.⁵⁶

In 1857-58, Bodichon again travelled to America, and her memoir of this trip was later published as *An American Diary, 1857-58*.⁵⁷ At the end of her travels she met with Lucretia Mott in Pennsylvania, on 20 April 1858. According to her account, they discussed 'many questions about the South and slavery, and I told her what I have told you of the wonderful eloquence of the black preachers...of the secret schools, and of the widespread knowledge among the slaves of the efforts made to emancipate.'⁵⁸ Lucretia, in turn, offered her 'a mass of Woman's Rights literature and I made my pick for the benefit of B.R.P. [Bessie Rayner Parkes] and M.H. [Matilda Hays], and she showed me her books of notes for lectures with extracts and little quotations so nicely put together, and as we looked them over she gave me little accounts of the occasions on which they were used.'⁵⁹

Much like their intellectual heritage, the continuing United States connections of the Kensington Society members should be considered one of the most noteworthy characteristics of the group. Partly, this is due to the upper middle-class background of the clear majority in the Society – a class that was much more likely to travel and make use of their larger and valuable familial connections across the Atlantic. The transatlantic

⁵⁵ *North Star*, 7 January 1848. See also Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave. Written by Himself*. Sixth Edition. (London: H.G. Collins, 1851).

⁵⁶ See Kathryn Kish Sklar, "Women Who Speake for an Entire Nation": American and British Women at the World Anti-Slavery Convention," *The Abolitionist Sisterhood: Women's Political Culture in Antebellum America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994): 302-333.

⁵⁷ Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon, *An American Diary 1857-58*, ed. Joseph W. Reed (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972).

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 139.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

exchange of ideas was an acknowledged phenomenon of the nineteenth century. The crucial relationship between British women and their newly independent, but still inherently linked, younger nation, the United States has been emphasised in recent studies by Bonnie Anderson and Margaret McFadden.⁶⁰ These studies have demonstrated the copious amounts of transatlantic epistolary exchange for social reform. Naturally, there are many epistolary links between Kensington Society women and American associates and female activists that should not be overlooked. One example is the correspondence of Barbara Bodichon, France Cobbe, Emily Faithfull with Paulina Wright Davis (1813-1876), a copious reformer for anti-slavery, temperance, health reform and women's rights in America.⁶¹ However, Kensington members who visited or emigrated to the United States had an undoubtedly more enduring impact on educational reform by immersing themselves in the educational systems of either America or the British colonies. These visits, as well as the travel accounts that they generated, were a significant facet of cultural exchange for the Kensington Society. As Barbara Korte has explored, 'educated women started to travel in great numbers around the time of the French Revolution; the emerging movement for women's emancipation in the wake of the revolution gave women's travel renewed impetus.'⁶² Alessa Jones also argues that this was part of an intellectual correlation between the 'New World' and 'utopian ideas'.⁶³ Jones's argument is certainly

⁶⁰ Bonnie S. Anderson, *Joyous Greetings: The First International Women's Movement, 1830-1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000). See also Anderson, "From Letters to a Movement: The Creation of Early International Feminism, 1830 to 1860," in *Exchanges and Correspondence*, ed. Fillard and Francoise Orazi, 8-22.; Margaret H. McFadden, *Golden Cables of Sympathy: The Transatlantic Sources of Nineteenth-Century Feminism* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2009); See also Karen Hagemann, Gisela Mettele, Jane Rendall, eds., *Gender, War and Politics: Transatlantic Perspectives, 1775-1850: War, Culture and Society, 1750-1850* (Basingstoke, Palgrave MacMillan, 2010).

⁶¹ Davis was also the founder of the UNA, one of the first periodicals devoted to women's rights in the United States. See her compilation, Paulina W. Davis, *A History of the National Women's Rights Movement, for Twenty Years* (New York: Journeymen Printers' Co-operative Association, 1871).

⁶² Barbara Korte, *English Travel Writing from Pilgrimages to Postcolonial Explorations*, trans. Catherine Matthias (Basingstoke: MacMillan Press Ltd., 2000), 112.

⁶³ Alessa Johns, *Bluestocking Feminism and British-German Cultural Transfer, 1750-1837* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2014), 123.

manifest in the travels of the Kensington women. For women such as Jex-Blake and Elizabeth Blackwell, education opportunities were only found in the new world. Her visits to America were necessitated by the fact that Britain did not offer medical degrees to women at the time. Compared to Britain, the time was ripe in the United States, which was much more open to the idea of professional women.⁶⁴ From their travels, the Kensington women were exposed to a society that was clearly more progressive in female education systems and employment opportunities than mid-nineteenth century Victorian Britain. However, in other ways, nineteenth-century America was still highly influenced by its cultural roots in Britain, and the transfer of their feminist ideas was crucial to this aspect.

By travel, the Kensington members honed and spread their lessons on communication strategy to engender progress in women's rights. What they experienced and learnt from their international connections can shed much light on the communication strategies that were later employed by the women's movement in Britain to activate change in women's education, employment opportunities and marriage rights. From their later travels, we can glimpse the fruition of their ideas in other nations and cultures, through the connections and engagements they held in the United States, in particular. Consideration of all these transnational interactions and exchanges will reveal an extensive trading network of female activity during the second half of the nineteenth century. The Kensington Society, as a band of women particularly well-connected in the political and social circles of nineteenth-century Europe, were equally well placed in transatlantic circles. Through numerous affiliations, a process of cultural transfer

⁶⁴ See Mary Ryan, "Gender and Public Access: Women's Politics in Nineteenth-Century America," in *Feminism, the Public and the Private*, ed. Joan B. Landes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998): 195-222.

occurred between the Kensington Society and the nineteenth-century women's education movement in the United States.

The transatlantic cultural transfer of the Kensington Society was initially furthered by Sophia Jex-Blake. Jex-Blake was only twenty-five when she attended the first meeting of the Kensington Society, but she was clearly an eager participant, and the seventh member listed on their membership form.⁶⁵ Although a lesser recognised member of the Kensington Society, Jex-Blake had looked further afield for training in the medical profession when the Medical Act of 1858 was established. The Act refused women entry into the register of Britain's qualified medical practitioners and did not acknowledge women as eligible practitioners. Jex-Blake, therefore, turned her attention to Europe, and in 1862, was temporarily employed as a medical teacher at the Grand Ducal Institute in Mannheim, Germany. In 1865 she attended the first Kensington Society meeting. However, only six months later, she set out on a tour of the United States for educational research - to observe their standard of women's education. At this time, America was still reeling in the immediate aftermath of their Civil War. Once there, Jex-Blake visited various innovative schools – most of them co-educational – in Missouri, Massachusetts, Ohio and Michigan.⁶⁶ The trip was successful for a number of reasons. It established pivotal connections between the British and American educational reform movements for women, including many pioneer female American medical practitioners, such as Dr. Lucy Sewall. Her notes and reflections, *A Visit to Some American Schools and Colleges*, explained:

⁶⁵ "Kensington Society Member List," APPENDIX II.

⁶⁶ Sophia Jex-Blake wrote a book about her trip to the United States which was published in 1867: Sophia, Jex-Blake, *A Visit to Some American School and Colleges* (London: Macmillan and Co, 1867); Shirley Roberts, "Blake, Sophia Louisa Jex- (1840-1912)," *ODNB* (2004).

On September 15th, 1865, we started from Boston on our intended tour of visits to the various Schools and Colleges for girls and women in the United States.⁶⁷

Jex-Blake's *A Visit* details her excursion through schools, her discussions with fellow female practitioners, and her comparison of the British and American women's movement. On the whole, she claimed that the British were erroneous in believing themselves to be ahead of the Americans, suggesting the American accent had misled the condescension of the British:

it habitually gives the latter an impression that the former are very much less educated than is probably the case...while, in fact, the women at least on the Western side of the Atlantic are,' as I believe, more thoroughly educated on the whole than those on our own shores.⁶⁸

A year after she published *A Visit*, and perhaps because of her estimation of the superiority of American education, in 1868 Jex-Blake applied to study medicine at Harvard University but was declined. In 1869, one year after the completion of the Kensington Society, she was allowed to enrol in medicine at Edinburgh University, becoming one of the famed 'Edinburgh Seven' women with Kensington member, Emily Bovell, and later, the first practising female doctor in Scotland. In 1873 Jex-Blake published on the topic, with her powerful tract, *The Medical Education of Women*, and in 1874 she co-founded the London School of Medicine for Women with Elizabeth Garrett (now married with the surname Garrett Anderson) and Elizabeth Blackwell, who had also trained in medicine in

⁶⁷ Jex-Blake, *A Visit*, 1.

⁶⁸ Sophia Jex-Blake, *A Visit to Some American School and Colleges* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1867), 225.

the United States.⁶⁹ It was the first British institution to provide women with a medical education that would allow them to register as a medical practitioner in Britain.⁷⁰ In 1886 Jex-Blake published *Medical Women: A Thesis and a History*, which commemorated her fellow American and British female practitioners and their role in the advancement of women in medicine.⁷¹ Garrett Anderson went in a slightly more political direction and was elected the first female mayor in England in 1902.⁷²

For many of the Kensington Society, the British empire potentially offered more scope for educational reform, as well as a better life for Victorian women. Like many nineteenth-century emigration advocates, they saw it as a way for impoverished women to escape their situation and social ills, and find better fortune and prosperity in the new world, and so become the woman depicted in an earlier *EWJ* poem:

the adventurous *she*,
Who in the first bark dared the unknown sea;⁷³

In 1859, Isa Craig had written an article for the *EWJ* titled, ‘Emigration as a Preventive Agency,’ which had previously been read at a NAPSS meeting a year earlier.⁷⁴ Craig’s main argument was that crime would be dramatically decreased by emigration of the poor classes:

⁶⁹ Roberts, “Blake, Sophia,” *ODNB*; In an article for the *EWJ*, her sister, Anna Blackwell celebrated ‘our transatlantic cousins’ and applauded them for the opportunity they had given Elizabeth. See Anna Blackwell, “Elizabeth Blackwell,” *EWJ*, Vol. 1, Iss. 2 (1858), 94; June Edwards has examined the work of Blackwell in women’s physical education in America in *Women in American Education, 1820-1955: The Female Force and Educational Reform* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2002).

⁷⁰ Roberts, “Blake, Sophia,” *ODNB*.

⁷¹ Sophia Jex-Blake, *Medical Women: A Thesis and a History* (Edinburgh: Oliphant, Anderson and Ferrier, 1886).

⁷² Garrett Anderson was elected mayor of Aldeburgh, Suffolk. Elston. “Anderson,” *ODNB*.

⁷³ *EWJ*, Vol. 1, Iss. 1 (March 1858), 11.

⁷⁴ Isa Craig, “Emigration as a Preventive Agency,” *EWJ*, Vol. II, No. 11, XLI (January 1859): 287-293.

It is well known how brief is the unhappy career which our female criminals run. How they are recruited it is not hard to guess, in a country where there are fifty thousand women working for less than sixpence a day...at every point emigration meets us as a preventive agent.⁷⁵

According to Nan H. Dreher, 'Discussion of large-scale emigration had first begun in the 1830s as a solution to overpopulation for the working classes, but by 1859 it also focused specifically on single, middle-class women'⁷⁶ This was partially due to the belief that working women had greater employment opportunities overseas but lacked the necessary provisions and safety precautions to emigrate alone.⁷⁷ Jessie Boucherett was one Kensington member who was particularly vocal about the need for women's emigration, deeply concerned about the number of impoverished women in Britain, in light of the overflowing SPEW's register of unemployed women. To draw attention to the mounting problem, Boucherett had written an essay on 'How to Provide for Superfluous Women' in Josephine Butler's 1869 collection, *Women's Work*, despondently stating: 'nobody wants them, either in the Old World or the New... unless Heaven should send a new planet alongside for us to export our superfluous women to.'⁷⁸ Unlike W.R. Greg's 1860 essay, 'Why are women redundant?', which argued that women should emigrate for greater marriage opportunities, the early English feminist activists saw emigration as an educational and employment opportunity for women.⁷⁹

⁷⁵ Craig, "Emigration as a Preventive Agency," 291-293.

⁷⁶ Nan H. Dreher, "Redundancy and Emigration: The 'Woman Question' in Mid-Victorian Britain," *Victorian Periodicals Review* 26, No. 1 (1993), 4.

⁷⁷ Jan Gothard has investigated the dominant concept of 'protected migration' for British women in "A Compromise with Conscience: The Reception of Female Immigrant Domestic Servants in Eastern Australia 1860-1890," *Labour History* 62 (1992): 38-51.

⁷⁸ Jessie Boucherett, "How to Provide for Superfluous Women," in Butler, *Women's Work*, 31.

⁷⁹ William R. Greg, "Why are women redundant?" *National Review* (1862) reprinted in Janet Horowitz Murray, ed. *Strong-minded Women and Other Lost Voices from Nineteenth Century England* (London: Penguin, 1984), 51.

They perceived that a practical step in solving this problem was a new society of women in which they could best discuss the specific methods of action. In May 1862, the Female Middle Class Emigration Society (FMCES) met for the first time at 12 Portugal Street, London (it ran until 1884 when it was absorbed by the United British Women's Emigration Association, which ran until 1908).⁸⁰ It was the first emigration society with feminist objectives. Their president was Lord Shaftesbury. Janet Myers has rightly pointed out that the founding of the FMCES marked a change in emigration rhetoric in Britain, which had previously been concentrated on the employment of women from poor backgrounds with little financial prospects in Britain.⁸¹ Rather, the FMCES, largely because of the circle of women from which it originated, was a significant advocate of emigration for middle-class, educated women to countries with greater employment prospects, chiefly to Canada and Australia.⁸²

This development links with the first significant step the Kensington Society women had taken in acting upon their discussions with an international scope. It also signified their interest in the advancement of not only British, but all classes of women.⁸³ Kensington Society and SPEW members were prevalent among the first members of the

⁸⁰ The FMCES, unlike the Kensington Society, was not a solely female organisation, and included Lord Shaftesbury as their first president. The Records of the Female Middle-Class Emigration Society are held at The Women's Library, LSE.

⁸¹ Janet C. Myers, "Performing the Voyage Out: Victorian Female Emigration and the Class Dynamics of Displacement," *Victorian Literature and Culture* 29, No. 1 (2001), 129.

⁸² For more on the emigration and employment experiences of British women to Australia from 1860-1890 see Jan Gothard, "A Compromise with Conscience," 38-51.

⁸³ However, it is important to note that the Female Emigration Society was primarily made of, and focused on, middle-class women. On the other hand, it was created then in part because working-class girls were entitled to receive benefits from the government for emigrating for work opportunities, and the Female Emigration Society sought to rectify the lack of assistance for middle-class women. See also Julia Bush's research, which argues that female emigration societies were set upon stamping their gender's right to the British empire into the conscious of British Society. Julia Bush, "'The Right Sort of Woman': Female Emigrators and Emigration to the British Empire, 1890-1910," *Women's History Review* 33, No. 3 (1994): 385-409.

FMCES.⁸⁴ Barbara Bodichon had been their financial contributor, with other leaders including Bessie Rayner Parkes, Isa Craig, Emily Faithfull, and Jane Lewin.⁸⁵ Maria Rye was also an early activist in female emigration and had already assisted twenty-two women to emigrate. Marion Diamond's biography of Rye has highlighted her earlier links to the Langham Place feminists and their agenda to 'expand the options for women through an enlarged access to employment abroad.'⁸⁶ Rye continued to pioneer this practical solution to the large number of unemployed, unmarried women in Britain and escorted groups of young women to countries such as Canada and Australia, allowing women to envisage international lives and the opportunity of social movement. A crucial part of her immigration strategy was that she was focused on the emigration of 'educated women' alone, as she argued in an 1861 essay, *Emigration of Educated Women*.⁸⁷

The Kensington Society women drew upon the support of their social network to create more singularly focused organisations that would effect educational reform in the wider British Empire. The most important of these to note was The National Indian

⁸⁴ In "A Review of the Last Six Years" Parkes recounts that 'the emigration movement, in which Miss Rye's name has lately become prominent, grew naturally and imperceptibly out of the work of the Law-copying office.' The Law stationer's office was run by SPEW at the same address as the FMCES, 12 Portugal St., London. "A Review," *EWJ*.

⁸⁵ Marie Ruiz has pointed out that although the first twenty years of the FCMES was heavily associated with the Langham Place circle, by the time Jane Lewin retired in 1881 as secretary, the feminist circle has become somewhat disillusioned with the emigration movement and its 'solution' to 'surplus' women that 'partly depended upon an effective collaboration with men's ideals' or women as 'domestic beings.' See Marie Ruiz, *British Female Emigration Societies and the New World, 1860-1914* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 8; Jane Lewin was not a Kensington member, but is considered part of the Langham Place circle. She was part related to the Conservative Whig politician William Grote through George Grote, a parliamentarian who married her aunt, Harriet Lewin. Harriet was the daughter of Thomas Lewin (and Jane, therefore the granddaughter) of a British civil servant who served in India. See his memoir, *Thomas Lewin, A Fly on the Wheel, or How I Helped to Govern India* (London: W.H. Allen, 1885). For more on Lewin's service in India, see Andrew J. May, "'The Starched Boundaries of Civilization': Sympathetic Allegiance and the Subversive Politics of Affect in Colonial India," in *Subverting Empire: Deviance and Disorder in the British Colonial World*, eds. William Jackson (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015): 61-84.

⁸⁶ Marion Diamond, *Emigration and Empire: The Life of Maria S. Rye* (New York: Garland, 1999), 74.

⁸⁷ The paper was originally read at the Social Science Congress in Dublin in 1861. Maria Rye, *Emigration of Educated Women* (London: Emily Faithfull & Co., 1861).

Association in Aid of Social Progress (NAIAASP) in 1870. The Association was founded by Frances Power Cobbe's female companion, Mary Carpenter, after her visit to India in 1866. It was focused on creating educational opportunities for Indian women.⁸⁸ Although Carpenter was never an official Kensington member, her close connection to Cobbe allowed several more Kensington members to become involved in the Association, such as Sophia Dobson Collet. The following year, 1867, a London branch was opened by Charlotte Manning and her step-daughter, Elizabeth Adelaide Manning (Charlotte Manning died a year after establishing the London branch). Elizabeth Manning then spent twenty-eight years involved in the National Indian Association as its secretary, both before and during her time serving as Girton's headmistress. Together, Elizabeth Manning and Rye edited and published *The Journal of National Indian Association*, which also supported Indian women students in Britain.⁸⁹ In 1880, Manning hosted Cornelia Sorabji, an Indian Parsee Christian, as she studied law at Somerville College, Oxford from 1889-1893. Eventually, Sorabji became India's first female barrister.⁹⁰

Other members of the Kensington Society critically highlighted the need for educational reforms in India. A close link between their society and the British colony was initially created through members who came from missionary families. Kensington member sisters, Annie and Eliza Keary's parents, for instance, 'were obliged to leave them in England whilst they returned to India,' from 1871.⁹¹ This created a link between the Kensington women and India, which was furthered by the Mannings' research. In 1869, Charlotte Manning published her second book on *Ancient and Mediaeval India*

⁸⁹ Mary Carpenter published a book on her experience in India, *Six Months in India* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1868). See also Antoinette Burton, "Institutionalizing Imperial Reform: *The Indian Magazine* and Late-Victorian Colonial Politics," in *Negotiating India in the Nineteenth-Century Media*, ed. David Finkelstein and Douglas M. Peers (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000), 23-50.

⁹⁰ See Cornelia Sorabji's 1935 memoir: Elleke Boehmer, Naella Grew, eds. *India Calling* (Nottingham: Trent Edition, 2004).

⁹¹ Eliza H. Keary, *Memoirs of Annie Keary* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1883), 102.

which she had evidently been working on during the Kensington Society's existence.⁹² The book examined past and present Hindu society, noting that women's legal and social position in India was grim: 'women are so absolutely without rights, that they are not merely on a level with Sûdras, but with all slaves, servants, and children.'⁹³ Rosemary Seton has examined the difficulties faced by British women in reforming the education opportunities of girls in India during the mid-nineteenth century.⁹⁴ Seton notes that the main obstacle was in persuading parents to allow their daughters to attend schools, a hesitancy that was due to 'objections to Christianity' in Hindu and Muslim homes, as well as their cultural custom of early marriages.⁹⁵ The Society for Promoting Female Education in China, India and the East (SPFEE) had already been established in 1834 (and existed until 1899) but was having little impact in education as it was an openly Protestant Christian mission.⁹⁶

Thus, Annette Beveridge's call to educational reform was realized in 1872 when she travelled to India with the ambition of opening a non-denominational school for girls.⁹⁷ A young member of the Kensington Society, Annette Beveridge (née Akroyd), who joined their sixth meeting on 1 August 1865, at twenty-three years old, had an entire career in activism still ahead of her after its disbandment. Beveridge became acquainted with the Kensington women when she attended Bedford College between 1862 and 1867 (the school established by Kensington member, Elizabeth A. Bostock).⁹⁸ She attended

⁹² Charlotte Manning, *Ancient and Mediaeval India* (London: William H. Allen and Co., 1869).

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 292.

⁹⁴ Rosemary E. Seton, *Western Daughters in Eastern Lands: British Missionary Women in Asia* (Oxford: Praeger, 2013), 18.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ Caroline Lewis, "Establishing India: British Women's Missionary Organizations and their Outreach to the Women and Girls of India, 1820-1870," (PhD, University of Edinburgh, 2014).

⁹⁷ A. G. E. "Mrs. Beveridge," Obituary, July 1929, *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, No. 3, (1929), 729.

⁹⁸ Bedford College was established in the home of Elizabeth Jesser Reid at 47 Bedford Square, Bloomsbury, London in 1849, with the money she inherited from her husband's death. In 1900 it became associated with the University of London. Megan Katherine Brown, "'A College for Women, or Something Like It':

with her childhood friend, Ellen Nichols, who later also joined her in the Kensington Society. Her philanthropic career was largely triggered by this education, as well as the stimulus of her involvement with the Kensington women. She developed the conviction that education should be available to all women, regardless of social position and race.⁹⁹ She was part of a collection of women who were further inspired by Keshub Chunder Sen's visit to England in 1870.¹⁰⁰ Sen (1838-1884) was a Hindu reformer who called on educated British women to move to India to improve secondary schools for women.¹⁰¹ On 18 September 1873, she established her secondary school for girls, the Hindu Mahila Vidyalaya. Despite its Hindu pupils and headmaster (Dwarkanath Ganguly), the school had a distinctively British flavour, with students taught to use cutlery (a peculiarity in Indian culture) as well as the usual topics studied in an English boarding school. British cultural imperialism has often followed Beveridge's legacy. However, according to her son, Henry Beveridge, who later wrote a biography of his parents' lives in India, *India Called Them* (1947), they 'believed that Britain should allow India as early as possible to govern herself.'¹⁰² On the other hand, her son also argued that Annette 'was alienated from the Indian Cause because she resented the way Indian women were treated and the low regard in which they were held.'¹⁰³

Barbara N. Ramusack has drawn a comparison between the careers of Maria Rye and Beveridge in India, suggesting that educational imperialism hindered their efforts to

Bedford College and the Women's Higher Education Movement, 1849-1900" (PhD, Portland State University, 2011), 1; Margaret Janson Tuke, the principle of Bedford from 1907 to 1929 also wrote *A History of Bedford College for Women, 1849-1937* (London: Oxford University Press, 1939).

⁹⁹ M. A. Scherer, "Beveridge [née Akroyd], Annette Susannah (1842-1929)," *ODNB* (2004).

¹⁰⁰ Sen's tour had been arranged by Mary Carpenter.

¹⁰¹ Beveridge later fell out with Sen over theological issues. See M. A. Scherer, "A Cross-Cultural Conflict Re-examined: Annette Akroyd and Keshub Chunder Sen," *Journal of World History* 7, No. 2 (1996); Scherer, "Beveridge," *ODNB*.

¹⁰² Victor Purcell, review of Lord Beveridge, *India Called Them* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1947) in *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944-)* 24, No. 3 (1948), 410.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

educate women in India, and that instead, they became ‘cultural missionaries preaching a gospel of women’s uplift based largely on models adapted from their experience in Britain.’¹⁰⁴ The criticism is perhaps unfair, based on the severe limitations for women inherent in aspects of Indian culture and evidence of Annette Beveridge’s school. However, when Annette met and married Henry Beveridge, a British civil servant, her educational career came to an end. Through his influence, however, she began to study Oriental languages extensively. She excelled in Persian and Eastern Turkish, especially, and eventually authored several significant translations of oriental texts, including the first English translation of *The Humāyûn-nāmah*, the memoirs of Emperor Babur, or her study of Emperor Babur’s daughter.¹⁰⁵ The text was also revolutionary in the insight it provided to the English-speaking world into Indian women’s duties, education, and their role in society. M. A. Scherer, who is the only scholar to have studied Beveridge comprehensively, has illuminated the correlation between this translation and Beveridge’s interest in women’s progress, correctly highlighting her appreciation for ‘female authorship’ and ‘women like herself who in writing were stepping outside their central social roles.’¹⁰⁶ This translation work of Beveridge points to her valuation of Indian culture, and a desire to bridge the understanding between British and Indian women. Translation was employed as a functional tool of communication to implant a woman’s voice into cultural history and understanding. Beveridge’s career therefore reflected the essential ethos of the Kensington Society, a group that was established on the principle that communication allied to education, be that face-to-face discussion,

¹⁰⁴ Barbara N. Ramusack, “Cultural Missionaries, Maternal Imperialists, Feminist Allies: British Women Activists in India, 1865-1945,” *Women’s Studies International Forum* 13, Iss. 4 (1990), 309.

¹⁰⁵ See Annette S. Beveridge, trans. *The Humāyûn-nāmah* (London: Royal Asiatic Society, 1902); Annette S. Beveridge, “Life and Writings of Gulbadan Begam (Lady Rosebody),” *Calcutta Review* (April 1898): 345.

¹⁰⁶ M. A. Scherer, “Woman to Woman: Annette, the Princess, and the Bibi,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Third Series, 6, No. 2 (1996): 197, 199.

published journals, pamphlets or letters, was the most expedient path to progress for women.

Having embellished through debate and the circulation of ideas the foundations of a mounting women's movement in Britain, the Kensington Society women pivoted externally to contribute to specific female establishments, adapted their own advice, and consequently improved the opportunities of women internationally. The waves of their Kensington discussions were felt on the shores of the British Empire as their agenda embraced educational innovation and opportunities for women. The purpose behind this agenda was uncomplicated: by educating individual women, society is enlightened to the potential and capabilities of women. They realised that the next logical step in their effectiveness was to teach women how to read and interpret for themselves. Rational thinking dictated that these educated women could then empower themselves. The universal outlook of the Kensington Society, outlined here, is a topic that deserves more examination than has been allowed here. However, this brief investigation of their direct contribution to transforming women's position in all societies demonstrates their resounding commitment to education as the critical avenue for women's ultimate social progress in nineteenth-century Britain, the United States, and the British Empire.

CONCLUSION

THE RENAISSANCE OF THE KENSINGTON SOCIETY

This thesis has reinstated the Kensington Society as a leading advocate of women's intellectual discourse in nineteenth-century social reform. By unlocking the doors of 44 Phillimore Gardens, Kensington, it has illuminated the ways in which the mid-Victorian women's movement actively networked, discussed and disseminated their ideas. The women who came to constitute the Kensington Society orchestrated a strategic communication scheme between 1850 and 1890, deploying a jointly edited women's journal, organised meetings, strategic private letters, radical publications and campaigning for the reform of educational institutions. In this way, the Society's members astutely used all forms of communication available to them as women to improve the position of women in Victorian Britain and its colonies.

The amount of primary material that has been researched for this thesis has been extensive, focusing on the sixty-eight members of the Kensington Society. The thesis synthesises this evidence and assesses its significance. The Kensington Society created an enduring legacy for subsequent generations, and their discussions continue into the twenty-first century via the archiving and digitalization of their ideas.

The intellectual heritage of the Kensington Society women has received deliberate attention throughout this thesis to shed light on the ideological roots of the mid-Victorian women's movement. Theological traditions within religion played a key role in stimulating the early intellectual rationale for feminism; most of the Kensington Society women were deeply in debt to their religious heritage for inspiration, especially those from the Unitarian or socially reformist wing of Evangelicalism. Their faith gave greater

impetus to their activism than has been previously recognized in Victorian women's history. As the *EWJ* insisted in 1858, the Kensington Society women were invested in the belief that:

*the aim of women must be higher...*The first duty of women is to themselves, and that duty is to fulfil the will of God, by developing their nature to its highest, and thus progressing in the scale of spiritual intelligences...¹⁰⁷

This sense of duty was at the core of the Kensington Society's social activism. They believed as a select group of women that they were not only equipped but obligated to improve the opportunities for all women. In this, they were equally indebted to their ancestors' example, which allowed them the confidence and sense of legitimacy to attempt to reform Victorian society. This is particularly evident in their educational interests. The Kensington Society was indeed a small but integral part of a vast network of progressive, intellectual and politically radical circles in nineteenth-century Britain who had previously challenged the bulwarks of education. Radicalism in their family and immediate social circles was the reason Kensington Society women were far more 'educated' than their nineteenth-century counterparts. In turn, they generated decades of new educational opportunities for their gender.

When this small circle of educated women collaboratively launched the *EWJ* in 1858, they demonstrated a judicious desire to use a public platform to disseminate their ideas. It permitted them to cement themselves in Victorian public debate, in a position that allowed them to demonstrate women's capacity to engage in current affairs as well as connect and encourage their network of women.

¹⁰⁷ "The Disputed Question," *EWJ*, 364.

In time, however, they soon found it even more fruitful to coordinate their activism and form their arguments and political strategies through private avenues, in tandem with producing the *EWJ*. Salon-like gatherings of like-minded idealists for intellectual discourse became the critical inspiration behind the Kensington Society's meetings. The Society utilised the private sphere to sharpen and circulate the ideas of its members. Through invitation only meetings and letters the Kensington women employed the private, autonomous space to speak without fear of censure and finesse their arguments. As this study has highlighted, these women harnessed the political nature of sociability, and the powerful potential of social meetings.¹⁰⁸

Even more vital to this strategy was the inherently collectivist nature of the Kensington Society. They gathered together to unite the strength of multiple minds and harness reforming energy. Previous disparate studies, which have studied these women separately and individually, with little reference to the Kensington Society, have failed to consider why they chose to meet with a large group of like-minded women to debate social progress. Neglected too has been an understanding of their collective impact generated through the stimulus and self-education of its members. Their formative discussion and unified strength enabled them to begin the transformation of Victorian society. The greater political consequences of their regular meetings are evident in the radical changes that occurred both during and after the dissolution of their Society, and in the reforming lives of its members. Although we only retain two answers to their questions, they signify the collective direction of their activism for social reform.

Similarly, in the private letters of the Kensington Society, ideas were articulated and finessed, illustrating the significance of private communication for the public

¹⁰⁸ Ina Ferris, *The Romantic National Tale and the Question of Ireland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), *passim*.

endeavours of the Kensington Society. Epistles became a vehicle of Kensington Society discussion, in which they articulated early thoughts, consolidated ideas and networks, and essentially ‘organised’ the Mid-Victorian women’s movement. The strategic correspondence of the Kensington members was not only a form of collective activism, but a fundamental tool of networking and persuasion for their circle of women.

Public channels of persuasion were equally strategic for the Kensington Society. By investigating individual careers and published material, this thesis has demonstrated their calculated use of the established press to pressure society and trigger discussion on the inequality of women in Victorian society. An extensive number of individual essays and published pamphlets became the imperative tool of dissemination for progressive women. As Parkes commented in 1865:

if editors were ever known to disclose the dread secret of their dens, they would only give the public an idea of the authoresses whose unsigned names are legion; of their rolls of manuscripts, which are as the sands of the sea.¹⁰⁹

Parkes’s reference to how difficult it was for women to publish their work highlights the importance of networks and journals like the *EWJ*. Their collective passion for social change, and the community of likeminded women around them, demanded they publish their thoughts, and the extensive range of publications during and after their gatherings, reveal their imperative of putting their dissenting thoughts immediately into print, including pamphlets and larger publications, and so communicate with the wider public. The Kensington Society women harnessed the power of the emerging nineteenth-century fascination with journalism. The women’s movement grew hand in hand with the prolific

¹⁰⁹ Parkes, *Essays on Women’s Work*, 121.

expansion of the press in Victorian England. In the years following the Kensington Society, feminist journals and female political commentators gained greater recognition and readership from both men and women, illustrating their developing strategic engagement with mainstream Victorian society. When Jessie Boucherett assumed the editorship of the *EWJ*, and entitled it *The Englishwoman*, the journal began a new life, widening its audience by changing its tone. In February 1909, it claimed:

The Englishwoman is not addressed only to those who are already fully convinced of the justice of the Women's Movement...It is intended for the general public... The question of the Enfranchisement of Women is not one...that interests only a struggling minority, and we trust that we may add to the already increasing number of women who desire a more equitable distribution of power and responsibility.¹¹⁰

The 'struggling minority' of support for the women's cause had clearly ended, and former Kensington Society members were still in the vanguard of an intensification in women's activism.

Education not only orchestrated the Kensington Society, but the pursuit of greater equality became the cornerstone of their communication strategy. Although the issue of marriage rights was initially the prime mover for Kensington Society women, employment and, increasingly, education became the central theme of their discussion and subsequent radical publications. A crucial argument of this thesis has rested on the multiple tiers of the Kensington Society's communication strategies. Communication was

¹¹⁰ *The Englishwoman* 1 (February 1909), as quoted in Maria DiCenzo, Lucy Delap, Ryan Leila, *Feminist Media History: Suffrage, Periodicals and the Public Sphere* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 1.

more than a merely functional tool for nineteenth-century women. Educating an illiterate young woman to read was part of this systematic communication strategy, as well as an essential tool for social emancipation. By doing so, she could be invited into their deeper discussions of women's progress, equipping her to disseminate her own ideas. Prior critical histories of Victorian women have failed to identify the international impact of the Kensington Society on education and employment. Notably, this topic has been omitted from research on similar endeavours overseas which replicated their ideas.¹¹¹

Furthermore, the Kensington Society's intellectual legacy is secure in the success of Girton College, Cambridge, and the opportunity it afforded women in late nineteenth-century Britain. Through such physical institutions, the Kensington Society's communication strategies did not end with their lives. The final and lasting renaissance of the Kensington Society has been through the archiving and publishing of their thoughts. There are three ways in which this has been achieved: the first is through the autobiographies or biographies authored by the Kensington Society; the second is through the archives of the Kensington Society, deposited within the library of Girton College, Cambridge; finally, the Kensington Society women have communicated through the multiple studies referenced throughout this research that have used their lives and papers as discourse with future generations.

It is evident that the Kensington Society members were consciously recording their own contextual communication. Biographies and autobiographies were written for subsequent generations, documenting the achievement of women who paved the way in social progress. Sisters or nieces were often the ones to write biographies, such as Eliza

¹¹¹ The *Ecole Professionnelle de Juenes Filles de Marseille*, for instance, which resembled SPEW in France, began in 1880, with a significant link between the two societies. See Phyllis Stock-Morton, "Secularism and Women's Education: The Case of the *Ecole Professionnelle de Juenes Filles de Marseille*," *French History* 10, Iss. 3 (1996): 355-374.

Keary's *Memoir of Annie Keary*, or Ellen Gurney's *Letters of Emelia Russell Gurney*.¹¹² Others, like Frances Power Cobbe, published their own autobiography.¹¹³ Similarly, the Kensington Society women who donated their personal papers to Girton College, or other public institutions, allowed history a greater understanding of their reforming ideals. Emily Davies left her 'Family Chronicle' to Girton College, a four-hundred-page unpublished account of her life, as well as her letters and scrapbook, in which she archived numerous clippings from newspapers regarding the Kensington Society women, or Girton College's formation.¹¹⁴ Davies also archived at Girton the papers of the Kensington Society meetings. Elizabeth Garrett Anderson's papers were eventually left to the Women's Library at the London School of Economics.¹¹⁵ Some of these archives have been digitized, with hopefully more to come, and the growing electronic archives of the Kensington Society women highlights their legacy. Archiving, through manuscripts or more modern technologies, is arguably even more imperative for the history of women than men.¹¹⁶ The Kensington Society was drawn to record its achievements in a manner that preserved not only the history of the members' lives for the future, but their philosophies, transcending their own timelines. As Virginia Woolf has written:

The whole of the mind must lie wide open if we are to get the sense that the writer is communicating his experience with perfect fulness.¹¹⁷

¹¹² Eliza Keary, *Memoir of Annie Keary* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1883); Ellen Mary Gurney ed. *Letters of Emelia Russell Gurney* (London: James Nisbet & Co. Ltd, 1902).

¹¹³ Frances Power Cobbe, *Life of Frances Power Cobbe by Herself* (London: Richard Bentley, 1894).

¹¹⁴ Davies' letters were not published until the twenty-first century, by Murphy and Raftery, ed. *Emily Davies: Collected Letters* (2004).

¹¹⁵ Papers of Elizabeth Garrett Anderson, The Women's Library, LSE. GB 106 7EGA.

¹¹⁶ Archiving, through papers or more modern technologies, is arguably more important for the history of women. See Rachel Mosely and Helen Wheatley, "Is Archiving a Feminist Issue? Historical Research and the Past, Present and Future of Television Studies," *Cinema Journal* 47, No. 3 (2008): 152-158.

¹¹⁷ Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*, 121.

Their personal papers and letters served this function more than autobiographies, due to their greater authenticity. Through these strategies, the Kensington Society women have opened the door to direct communication through time, informing the history of activism through their experience, and making a substantial contribution to the intellectual life of Britain.

Female reformers within the ranks of Victorian social reform movements have been well documented. However, their cohesive communication strategy in disseminating these social reform ideals has been overlooked. Yet the strategic nature of their work was a significant point of discussion in their lives. The women who pioneered these movements strongly believed that the progress of women could be achieved only by networking with dissenting women of similar ideas, disseminating common thoughts and, crucially, advocating greater educational opportunities for women. For this reason, the Kensington Society dissented against society's restrictions on women by discussion, educating themselves, and disseminating the intellectual product of these discussions. The Kensington Society aimed to transform mid-nineteenth century society through intellectual communication. Its members dedicated their lives to permeating discussion on the imperative of women's social progression. In the papers they left behind, they were 'communicating' their 'experience with perfect fulness' as they continued to dissent, discuss and disseminate down through the decades.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

APPENDIX I

THE KENSINGTON SOCIETY RULES¹

The following rules have been agreed upon provisionally, subject to such modifications as experience may suggest:-

Questions will be issued four times a year. Answers may be given either in a single sentence or at any length which the subject may seem to require. Members will not be expected to write on every question. They will be requested to suggest one question each term, and from the list thus furnished, the committee will select the three which appear to them of the greatest general interest. Questions may be on any subject which is not merely personal or local.

Selections from the answers will be printed from time to time, at the discretion of the Committee, for circulation among the members, and a social meeting will be held each term, at which papers will be read, followed by conversation.

An annual subscription of half-a-crown, and an entrance fee of half-a-crown (additionally) will constitute membership. The financial year will end on March 25.

The Committee will exercise a veto on the admission of members. Applications for admission to be addressed to the Secretary, 17 Cunningham Place, London, N.W.

Committee

Ms. Sergeant Channing

Miss Isla Craig

Miss Emily Davies (Hon. Sec.)

Created 1 January 1863.

¹ "Kensington Society Rules," 1 January 1865, Archive of the Kensington Society, GCPP Davies 10/1. Girton College, Cambridge.

APPENDIX II

THE KENSINGTON SOCIETY MEMBERSHIP LIST⁸⁹⁹

Date of admission.	
March.	Miss Bostock
	Miss J. Boucherett
	Miss Cobbe
	Miss Solly
	Miss L. Solly
	Mrs Barker
	Miss S. Jex Blake
	Miss Fitch
	Miss Porter
	Miss Beale
	Miss Charnock
	Miss E. A. Manning
	Mrs Westlake
	Miss Garrett
	Miss Swaine
	Miss Lawrence
	Miss Garth
	Miss S. C. Bompas
	Miss Roberts
	Mrs Andrews
	Mrs Heaton
	Miss Emery
	Miss Wolstenholme
	Miss Harrison
	Miss Agnes Wedd
	Miss Heaton
	Mrs J. W. Smith
	Miss Sanson
	Miss Helen Taylor
	Mrs Llewelyn Davies
	Miss Wilks
	Miss Cox
April 19 th	Miss Armour

⁸⁹⁹ "List of Members," Archive of the Kensington Society, GCPP Davies 10/1. Girton College, Cambridge.

	Mrs Hutt
	Mrs Gurney
	Miss A. May
May 8 th	Miss Hare
	Miss Todman
	Miss Bovell
16 th	Miss Buss
	Miss Crow
July 4 th	Lady Nicholls
	Miss Keary
	Miss A. Keary
	Miss Alice Malleson
	Miss Martin
	Mrs Bodichon
August 1 st	Miss M. E. Nichols
	Miss M. A. Jenkins
	Miss Hayward
	Miss Clayton
	Miss H. Cook
	Miss A. Akroyd
November 25 th	Miss King
	Miss Keith
March 30 th	Miss A. Swanwick
June 9 th	Miss Hutchinson
July 3 rd	Mrs Ronniger
October 28 th	Mrs H. Philips
November 10 th	Mrs G. Green
February 21 st	Mrs Atkinson
March 4 th	Miss Tirrell
	Miss Walker

APPENDIX III

THE KENSINGTON SOCIETY DISCUSSION QUESTIONS⁹⁰⁰

1. In which of the various forms of Art, including verse, has poetry exercised the greatest influence?
 2. What is vulgarity?
 3. In what sense is discernment a commendable and exhilarating quality?
 4. To what causes is it owing that the influences of the drama has been superseded by that of novels?
 5. In what manner can the wives and daughters of master-manufacturers exert themselves most advantageously for the work people with whom they are connected?
 6. Is the use of sarcasm desirable in the defence of truths, and if so, when may it be used with effect?
 7. Are persons wholly uneducated in Art qualified to give any opinion on the work of artists?
 8. What kind of ability is required to make a good chess player?
 9. To what extent are masters and mistresses responsible for the morals of their servants?
 10. What feature of the face is the truest index of the mind?
 11. What is the truest basis, and what are the limits, of parental authority?
 12. To what faults of character are teachers especially liable, and by what means may they be guarded against?
 13. By what means may sentimentality be checked, without discouraging healthy sentiment and individuality of character?
 14. Is the love of the beautiful necessarily coincidental with, or conclusion to, the love of the good?
 15. What kind of power predominates in Shakespeare?
 16. What are the influences and the inducements which lead to the choice of literature as a profession?
 17. What prevents our age from originating a good style of architecture?
 18. What qualities of the national character are excluded in English dress?
-
1. Does the belief that truth, virtue and justice are right, perfidy, falsehood and injustice wrong, when once daily apprehended, seems to be the same necessary, (not contingent) truth, as the axioms of geometry?
 2. How far are individuals justified in availing themselves of social or legal privileges which they think unjust in principles?
 3. Is language the instrument only, or is it the necessary condition of thought?
 4. To what extent is it the duty of a government to provide for the education of its subjects?
 5. Why do we women work well together?
 6. Who is the greatest of living English painters?
 7. What means will elicit the powers that make a valuable governess?

⁹⁰⁰ "List of Questions for Discussion in the Kensington Society," The Kensington Society Archive, GCPP Davies 10/3. Girton College, Cambridge.

8. What good influence would accrue to the female mind from and more general cultivation of mathematics studies?
9. What principle lies at the root of the great Testimonial system, etc.
10. What is the process of mind by which belief is attained?
11. To what extent is punishment necessary in education?
12. Are private governesses, as a class, well qualified for their work, and if not, by what means might their efficiency be increased?
13. What is the best means of cultivating the memory in young children?
14. What is best? Treat the subject with special reference to the New Test. Teaching respecting the Sabbath.
15. The True and the False in the conventional rules of society, especially as regards women.
16. What protection, if any, is afforded to women by the laws of honour as they now stand, and how might they be improved?
17. Describe the different kinds of memory.
18. To what causes may be traced that shrinking from difficulty, etc.
19. What is the function of Art (literature, music and the arts of design) in relation to morals?
20. Why is eminence in sciences, art, or literature less easily and less often attained in our age than in any previous one, and is this fact to be rejoiced in or regretted?
21. Why do the readers of Goethe and Schiller often transfer the preference which they had in their young days for Schiller to Goethe as they grow older?
22. To what extent if any are master and mistresses responsible for the morals of their servants?
23. Is the system of District Visiting beneficial to the poor or otherwise?
24. Is the extension of the Parliamentary suffrage to women desirable, and if so, under what conditions?
25. How far are the errors and miseries of the lower class of people dependent upon defects of education and how may such defects be remedied?
26. How does the cultivation of artistic taste affect the well-being of society?
27. How far is a man's character discernible by his actions?

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Davies papers 10/3

1. How can it be accounted for that cheerfulness and poverty seem to be more compatible with each other among the lower orders of people in countries on the Continent than in England?
Miss Porter.
2. What is the best way to teach people to think? Miss Hayward.
3. Is it a duty to have opinions, and if so, what is the best stimulus to the formation of them?
E.D.
4. Is it desirable for women to take part in public affairs, and if so, in what way?
E.D.
5. What is the moral justification of the pursuit of the Fine Arts? E.D.
6. Is feeling intensified or weakened by expression?

- How ought society – evening parties – to be managed?
Miss Nichols.
- Is it possible for women to be learned and yet perfectly womanly?
Miss King.
- What is the true definition of ‘Poetical justice?’?
Miss Charnock.
- What changes do experience and observation suggest in the education of the poorer classes?
Miss Taylor.
- Would not the study of the classics be a useful element in the education of women?
Miss Swaine.
- If the Election Franchise should be extended to women, would it probably lead to their taking part in the management of public affairs, and would the effect of their doing so be beneficial or otherwise to themselves and to the general community?
Miss Bompas.
- What are the subjects to which most time should be given in the education of girls?
Miss Clayton.
- What would be the best remedy for so much of the false civility pervading society?
Miss Jenkins.
- In what respects are women superior to men and in what are men superior to women?
Miss Hayward.
- What is the effect produced on the mind by the modern practice of fragmentary reading?
Miss Hayward.
- Is it not possible to find some desirable substitution for the Workhouses?
Miss Heaton.
- If women should have the Franchise, ought they also to be made eligible for the County magistracy, for the House of Commons, for the Pres.law Board, for the Inspectionship of schools, etc. etc. etc.
- When, if at any time, is it right to rebel against constituted authority?
Miss Akroyd.
- How may simplicity of character be attained when it does not naturally exist, and what circumstances would be most favourable to its development?
Miss Porter.
- What is signified by the phrase, ‘Modern Ideas?’
Miss May.
- How is the impulse of the present age towards monasticism to be accounted for?
Miss May.
- On the right choice of amusements.
Mrs Westlake.
- What amount of acquaintances with works of fiction is absolutely necessary for a well-read person of the present day?
Miss Wilks.
- What is rest? Treat the subject especially in reference to the Sabbath question.
Miss Beale.
- The uses of poetry.
Do.
- What is liberty?
Do.
1. What are the tests of originality? A. May
 2. The uses of poetry. Miss Beale.
 3. What is the best way to teach people to think? Miss Hayward.

4. How far do the books we read affect us? Miss Cox.
5. At what age generally speaking, should children begin to study? Miss Emery.
6. What is character? Miss Akroyd.
7. How should the Bible be taught to children? And should the events and characters especially of the Old Testament be freely used for this instruction? Miss Wilks.
8. Is it inevitable, and is it proved by history, that the power of seeing more than one side of a subject, hinders promptness of action? Miss Manning.
9. Has the active or the contemplative character, in the end, the greater influence on society? Miss Swaine.

[Scribbled on back:]

Is energetic action incompatible with the habit of looking at all sides of a question?

What are the effects of reading as a pastime?

1. What are the grounds of the obligation of truth? Helen Taylor.
2. Is it desirable to employ emulation as a stimulus in education? Mrs Barker.
3. In what does the gift of fascination consist? Miss Heaton.
4. What is the differences between meditation and reverie? Miss A. May.
5. What forms of government is most favourable to women? Miss B.
6. What are the grounds. And limits of self-sacrifice? Miss Westlake.
7. What are the objects of meetings for social intercourse and what are the best means of attaining those objects? E.D.

[Pencilled below:]

How ought social intercourse – evening parties etc. – to be managed?

THE KENSINGTON SOCIETY NETWORK



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