

**What a Girl Needs:  
The influence of religion on the Girls' Friendly Society  
and West Central Jewish Girls' Club in the late Victorian era**

by

Jillian L. Ferris

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“Experience shows us that a club for girls will do a great work,” Maude Stanley wrote in the opening pages of her 1890 book, *Clubs for Working Girls*, “for can we too highly estimate a work which raises, which ennobles, which brings out the best traits in a girl, which by its wholesome pleasures, by its varied interests, by its human sympathies between the ladies and the girls, will make their lives happy and good ones?”<sup>1</sup> Stanley was the foundress of the Soho Club, one of the organizations at the forefront of the “clubbing” movement in the late Victorian era. Her book elucidated the need for philanthropic work to support and educate working girls, offering a practical guide to middle- and upper-class ladies interested in pursuing such work.

Stanley was not alone, however, in her experience of organizing a club for girls. Her work was part of a larger trend in the late Victorian era towards establishing such organizations and clubs for girls as well as boys. A “club for working girls,” she reminded readers, “is one of the most modern of all schemes, but the rapid spread of such institutions in less than ten years, over England, and Scotland, and America, shows how greatly they were needed.”<sup>2</sup> By 1890, a number of youth organizations were already in existence. Other groups followed within the next two decades. These developments are summarized in a table in Appendix 1.

This table illustrates the growth of such youth organizations. Some were created as neighborhood clubs, while others developed into much larger associations with branches scattered throughout the country. The goals of the groups also varied, with some offering recreational and educational opportunities to the youth they served, while others

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<sup>1</sup> Maude Stanley, *Clubs for Working Girls* (London: Macmillan, 1890), pp. 3-4.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14.

focused on the employment conditions of domestic servants. Two other defining trends should also be examined, though: the religious orientation of many of the groups and the development of clubs as single-sex organizations.

First of all, the religious development of many of the organizations can be divided into three main categories: interdenominational Christianity, the state church (Anglican or Presbyterian), and Judaism.<sup>3</sup> The ties to Britain's religious history are evident. While the Anglican and Presbyterian Churches supported their own youth organizations, there are few such clubs supported by other Protestant denominations. Though the Act of Toleration of 1689 and the Catholic Relief Act of 1829 allowed greater religious freedom for religious minorities, organizations affiliated with these sects still faced challenges like the size of minority religious populations and Britain's class structure. Voluntary organizations were organized by members of the middle- and upper classes, who were more likely to affiliate with the state church than those from the lower classes.

The exception to this is the Jewish clubs, which can be explained by the nature of Britain's Jewish community. A small group of interrelated Jews struggled for several centuries to assimilate. By the late Victorian era, these Anglo-Jews had made great strides and were largely integrated into the British population. A large influx of Jewish immigrants arrived in Britain at the end of the nineteenth century, however, and threatened the social acceptance and advances the Anglo-Jews had made. To combat this, the established Anglo-Jewish population sought to help these Eastern European immigrants assimilate, often through educational and social organizations. The Anglo-Jewish community itself supported these endeavors.

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<sup>3</sup> Other religious groups such as the Quakers and Roman Catholics had youth organizations, but not as many. In fact, by 1900 these denominations only had the Frideswide Girls' Club (1893) and Catholic Lads' Brigade (1900) respectively.

Another trend to note is the creation of clubs on the basis of sex. Organizations for both boys and girls often had a number of aims, whether educational, recreational, promotion of social conformity, nationalism or imperialism. Associations for girls, though, often had the additional goal of preventing girls from falling into vice or losing their “purity” (read: virginity). While clubs were certainly concerned with promoting a general modesty and morality amongst members, Stanley describes the “ultimate object of the club” as “to try and help the girls to overcome the many difficulties and temptations that surround them and so to fit them to live better lives and, later on, to be good wives and mothers.”<sup>4</sup> This is especially true within the Jewish community, as girls were thought to be more at risk of falling to such sinful pressures than boys, hence the development of girls’ clubs before the development of boys’ clubs.<sup>5</sup> These organizations “taught girls to be ‘Jewesses of the right sort’ and tried to surround members with uplifting and refining influences,” thus attempting to influence and control the sexuality of young, Jewish girls.<sup>6</sup>

This paper will focus on two of these organizations: the Girls’ Friendly Society, affiliated with the Anglican Church, and the West Central Jewish Girls’ Club, loosely associated with Liberal Judaism. Both were part of the early clubbing movement for girls,

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<sup>4</sup> Stanley, *op. cit.*, p. 8. While Victorian language can be circumlocutory, historians like Vivienne Richmond define club goals of purity as the preservation of chastity. Club leaders therefore stress the importance of maintaining one’s virtue, addressing religious and societal ideals about virginal wives, as well as concerns about the threat of sexually transmitted diseases as illustrated by the Contagious Diseases Act of 1864.

<sup>5</sup> Moving Here, “The Jewish Girls’ Brigade,” The National Archives, <http://www.movinghere.org.uk/stories/story374/story374.htm?identifier=stories/story374/story374.htm>. Within the Jewish community, organizations were first formed for men. Though boys were sometimes included in these clubs, the first dedicated clubs for boys were formed after the formation of associations for girls. See Appendix 1.

<sup>6</sup> Susan Tananbaum, “Ironing Out the Ghetto Bend: Sports and the Making of British Jews,” *Journal of Sport History* 31:1 (2004): 58.

but they developed in very different directions due to their respective religious influences.

Through these two examples, I will examine how women acted through religion to create clubs intended to uplift and educate lower-class girls. I will trace the motivations of such work, the practicalities of how the groups functioned, and the challenges and controversies both organizations faced. Through these three main ideas, the essence of the clubs themselves is revealed, and may then be recognized in historical context.

This paper begins to fill a hole in historical scholarship; despite an abundance of work about the development of the clubbing movement, much the focus has been on boys. Girls have been largely neglected by scholars in this context, due to a perception that girls' clubs were just offshoots of boys' organizations.<sup>7</sup> These early clubs were formed to address fears about an increase in degeneracy amongst girls, as well as address other societal challenges like the need for assimilation.

In the appendix of his book about British youth movements, John Springhall wrote, "youth movements for girls are, at least in origin, imitations of the organizations originally intended solely for boys. If they are relegated here to the afterthought of an appendix, this is not intended as a comment on their intrinsic interest to the social historian."<sup>8</sup> Springhall's assertion about the formation of girls' clubs is not true of the early clubbing movement, though, as demonstrated by Appendix 1.

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<sup>7</sup> Two such works that promote such a view include John Springhall, *Youth, Empire and Society: British Youth Movements, 1883-1940* (London: Croom Helm, 1977), p. 130; Kathleen Heasman, *Evangelicals in Action: An Appraisal of Their Social Work in the Victorian Era* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1962), pp. 113-15.

<sup>8</sup> Springhall, *op. cit.*, p. 130.

Of the research that has been done on girls' clubs, Carol Dyhouse's 1981 *Girls Growing up in Late Victorian and Edwardian England* is one of the most frequently-cited works, but its focus is broad and encompasses many other aspects of girls' lives such as education and domesticity, while offering only a few pages on the girls' clubbing movement.<sup>9</sup> Several other compendia of associations and organizations are helpful to the researcher, including work by Peter Gordon, David Doughan and Susie Steinbach.<sup>10</sup> These offer broad overviews of many organizations including the Girls' Friendly Society and the West Central Jewish Girls' Club, though none delve deeply into thorough examination of any case studies; Gordon and Doughan especially, though, do an excellent job at providing great breadth in their works on the clubbing movement.

When approaching such research, it is useful to consider these organizations in the context of leisure-time activities. To this end, Catriona M. Parratt's article about rational recreation is useful in examining the function of such clubs as a tool of social education and control.<sup>11</sup> This article is directly relevant both this paper and other recent scholarship on the topic of late Victorian clubs.

More specifically, the Girls' Friendly Society has published several organizational histories including the *History of The Girls' Friendly Society* (1905) by Agnes L. Money and *Some Memories of Mrs. Townsend, Foundress of the Girls' Friendly Society* (1923)

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<sup>9</sup> Carol Dyhouse, *Girls Growing up in Late Victorian and Edwardian England* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981).

<sup>10</sup> David Doughan and Peter Gordon, *Women, Clubs and Associations in Britain* (London: Routledge, 2006); Peter Gordon and David Doughan, *Dictionary of British Women's Organisations, 1825-1960* (London: Woburn Press, 2001); Susie Steinbach, *Women in England, 1760-1914: A Social History* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).

<sup>11</sup> Catriona M. Parratt, "Making Leisure Work: Women's Rational Recreation in Late Victorian and Edwardian Britain," *Journal of Sport History* 26:3 (Fall 1999): 471-87.

by Kathleen M. Townsend.<sup>12</sup> Similarly, Lily Montagu published *My Club and I: The Story of the West Central Jewish Club* in 1942.<sup>13</sup> Though these all are celebratory rather than analytical in their approach, they remain invaluable to the historical researcher.

Other articles of interest to the historian include studies by: Brian Harrison, Vivienne Richmond and Jean Spence.<sup>14</sup> Harrison's article intends to place the G.F.S. within the context of conservatism in the late Victorian era, though he does an excellent job at outlining the operations of the organization. Richmond, on the other hand, is concerned entirely with the debate about Central Rule III and the society's mission to uphold virtue, not rescue fallen girls. Spence, who has devoted a great deal of her scholarly work to Lily Montagu's legacy, examines Montagu and the West Central Jewish Girls' Club as it relates to industrial workplace reform. This is largely the extent of original historical research on both organizations, though they are often briefly mentioned in works about Victorian youth and clubs for girls.<sup>15</sup>

### **Early Girls' Clubs**

The Girls' Friendly Society and West Central Jewish Girls' Club were part of the early girls' clubbing movement, in which organizations were created to address a problem thought to plague girlhood. As Lilian Lewis Shiman describes,

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<sup>12</sup> Agnes Money, *History of the Girls' Friendly Society* (London: Wells Gardner, Darton & Co., 1905); Kathleen M. Townsend, *Some Memories of Mrs. Townsend, Foundress of the Girls' Friendly Society* (London: G.F.S. Central Office, 1923).

<sup>13</sup> Lily Montagu, *My Club and I: The Story of the West Central Jewish Club* (London: Herbert Joseph, 1942).

<sup>14</sup> Brian Harrison, "For Church, Queen and Family: The Girls' Friendly Society 1874-1920," *Past and Present* 61:1 (November 1973); Vivienne Richmond, "'It is Not a Society for Human Beings but for Virgins': The Girls' Friendly Society Membership Eligibility Dispute 1875-1936," *Journal of Historical Sociology* 20:3 (September 2007); Jean Spence, "Working for Jewish Girls: Lily Montagu, Girls' Clubs and Industrial Reform 1890-1914," *Women's History Review* 13:3 (September 2004).

<sup>15</sup> At the time of submission, there is an unpublished PhD thesis by Patricia Mary Clyne Mitchell from Open University that also deals with the Girls' Friendly Society. I was not able to locate this source, though, and thus cannot include it in my historiography.



For many females in the nineteenth century the greatest problem was unwanted pregnancies:...Many young, unmarried women found themselves pregnant, not because some lord had seduced them, nor because they were victims of an employer or his son as popular rescue literature would have it, but more often because they were courting and went too far. These women had few places to turn. Most of them were respectable but unlucky in their choice of friends.<sup>16</sup>

In the 1860s and 1870s, organizations were formed both to “rescue” and to “prevent the fall” of girls into vice or, more specifically, sexual sin.<sup>17</sup> Much of the motivation behind the formation of these societies was not just an abundance of pregnancies among unmarried women; by the mid-Victorian era there was also a perceived increase in prostitution.<sup>18</sup> F.K. Prochaska explains that prostitution “corrupted those things...held to be most dear” by destroying family relations and threatening the health of wives with venereal disease, as well as presenting “a direct attack on femininity and chivalric ideals, however antiquated.”<sup>19</sup>

It is important to distinguish these early organizations from the clubs that followed, such as the Girls’ Guildry, Girls’ Life Brigade and Girl Guides. The later organizations were indeed modeled on boys’ clubs and were part of the national efficiency movement that stressed the physical fitness of young Britons. Like the boys’ clubs, these girls’ organizations placed an emphasis on drill and physical exercise. This was not the start of the girls’ clubbing movement, though; they were preceded by earlier organizations that focused on preventative and rescue work.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Lilian Lewis Shiman, *Women and Leadership in Nineteenth-Century England* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1992), p. 98.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> Simon Morgan, *A Victorian Woman’s Place: Public Culture in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Tauris Academic Studies, 2007), p. 103.

<sup>19</sup> F.K. Prochaska, *Women and Philanthropy in 19<sup>th</sup> Century England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), pp. 184-85.

<sup>20</sup> Heasman, *op. cit.*, p. 113.

Such philanthropy was seen as “women’s mission to women,”<sup>21</sup> and grew out of the “maternalistic” charity that aristocratic women had carried out for years, in the form of “visiting.”<sup>22</sup> As middle-class women became increasingly concerned about such social problems as prostitution and vice, they began to form larger organizations, directed at broad categories of those in need, like working girls and prostitutes. K.D. Reynolds states that they “sought to be recognized as ladies, [and] imbued that status with moral qualities, and attached to it appropriate behaviours. Aristocratic women proffered charity to their dependents; therefore middle-class women adopted charity as one of the qualities of both femininity and social status.”<sup>23</sup>

These middle-class women sought to bring morality to the poor by imposing their middle-class values upon the lower classes. Reynolds notes that these values included Christianity and “middle-class feminine respectability, which dictated that women did not engage in pre- or extra-marital sex.”<sup>24</sup> This is not to say that upper-class women were excluded from such organizations or that middle-class women turned away from the practice of visiting, but early girls’ clubs were driven, in large part, by middle-class women and their moral beliefs.<sup>25</sup>

The Church of England became involved in many of these social organizations when it was determined in the Religious Census of 1851 that most Englishmen and women did not attend church.<sup>26</sup> By focusing on the social concerns of women, the Church was able to develop women into loyal supporters; they took the forefront in the Sunday

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<sup>21</sup> Steinbach, *op. cit.*, p. 52.

<sup>22</sup> K.D. Reynolds, *Aristocratic Women and Political Society in Victorian Britain* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), pp. 103-06, 111.

<sup>23</sup> Reynolds, *op. cit.*, p. 111.

<sup>24</sup> Steinbach, *op. cit.*, p. 52.

<sup>25</sup> Reynolds, *op. cit.*, p. 111.

<sup>26</sup> Shiman, *op. cit.*, p. 94-5.

School movement and many of the Church's "ameliorative reform" organizations.<sup>27</sup> This was attractive both to aristocratic women who were already active in the Anglican Church, as well as to middle-class women interested in social outreach, thus bridging class barriers.

### **The Girls' Friendly Society**

Accounts of the founding of the Girls' Friendly Society are varied and redolent of folklore, especially as told by foundress Mrs. Mary Elizabeth Townsend. Several years after the society's founding, she wrote: "I do not know how the idea of 'The Girls' Friendly Society' first came to me; but I know that it grew at once into a definite shape;...and after it had lain by to ripen for two years, it came to pass that five friends met together at Lambeth Palace, one May morning in 1874, to decide what was to be done in furtherance of the scheme."<sup>28</sup> This "historic meeting of five"<sup>29</sup> was attended by G.F.S. foundress Mrs. Townsend; Mrs. Tait, the wife of the Archbishop of Canterbury; Mrs. Harold Browne; Mrs. Nassau Senior, a Poor Law administrator; and the Reverend T.V. Fosbery, editor of the devotional book, *Voices of Comfort*. The organization was officially started on January 1, 1875. Agnes Money further dispelled some of the mystery surrounding the organization's start:

Our Foundress once wrote that she did not remember how the idea of [the] G.F.S. first came to her. But I remember that when she first spoke to me of that idea, she told me also how it first came to her. The Bishop of Winchester (Samuel Wilberforce) was creating an organisation through the diocese for rescue work, and Mrs. Townsend was asked to join. It was while sitting at one of these

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<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> Mary Elizabeth Townsend, "The Girls' Friendly Society" booklet, ca. 1880, 5GFS/4/012, Women's Library, London Metropolitan University.

<sup>29</sup> K.M. Townsend, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

meetings that the idea flashed through her mind: ‘If the power of *rescue work* will be so increased by organisation, why should not work be organised to save from falling?’<sup>30</sup>

While rescue work emphasized saving girls from lives steeped in vice, the intention of Townsend and the other founders was instead to encourage girls to maintain pure and noble lives.

Though the organization began slowly, in the words of Townsend “it became a mighty river carrying with it life and comfort, joy and strength, wherever its waters penetrated.”<sup>31</sup> It was the first society for women and girls associated with the Church of England, though it incorporated many individual efforts that women had been making in the vein of “the upholding of the purity of Christian maidenhood.”<sup>32</sup> Societies already functioning on a local level and doing similar work were offered the opportunity to affiliate with the Girls’ Friendly Society, thus encouraging both the growth of the G.F.S. as an organization and communication between women doing similar work amongst working girls.

Women would join the G.F.S. as Associates in the branch nearest where they lived; these Associates meanwhile recruited girls to become Members of the G.F.S. While Associates were required to be members of the Church of England, no such restriction was placed on Members;<sup>33</sup> instead, they were required to abide by Central Rule III: “No girl who has not borne a virtuous character to be admitted as a Member;

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<sup>30</sup> Money, *op. cit.*, p. 4. My emphasis.

<sup>31</sup> K.M. Townsend, *Some Memories...*, p. 15

<sup>32</sup> Money, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

<sup>33</sup> This is stipulated in Central Rule I. Central Rule II established a system of dues payments, such that all Associates contributed at least 2s. 6d. a year to the Central Fund, while Members paid at least 6d. Girls’ Friendly Society Central Council, Constitution, 1887, 5GFS/001/005.

such character being lost, the Member to forfeit her Card.”<sup>34</sup> While the precise meaning of virtuous character is not offered, it is best interpreted as sexual purity, with responsibility falling on the girl to maintain her virginity.<sup>35</sup>

Most Associates were middle- and upper-class women. Mrs. Townsend’s husband was a squire in Warwickshire; other Associates were members of the nobility, such as the Countess of Dartmouth and the Duchess of Leeds, who both served on the Central Council. Growth in the number of Associates was astonishing: in January 1877 there were 2,500 Associates;<sup>36</sup> by May 1888 there were about 26,000.<sup>37</sup> “Many Associates have found that the Society has given them opportunities of becoming acquainted with, and taking a personal interest in, girls, whom otherwise it might not have occurred to them to befriend.”<sup>38</sup> The organization encouraged Associates to seek girls outside of their own class for “friendship.”

Members, on the other hand were primarily working girls. In May 1881 *Friendly Leaves*, the official G.F.S. monthly paper for Members and Associates, reported that 47,000 Members belonged to the G.F.S.<sup>39</sup> The structure of the organization promoted a low Members-to-Associates ratio, as the women were encouraged actually to befriend the girls. Early papers from Mrs. Townsend reflect an interest, especially, in befriending domestic servants and bringing them into the Girls’ Friendly Society,<sup>40</sup> though other branches of the organization recruited factory girls. By 1888 Members numbered about 113,000, and were engaged in a range of professions and activities:

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<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> Gertrude Campion to Father Osborne, September 6, 1898, 5GFS/2/287.

<sup>36</sup> *Friendly Leaves*, no. 5, January 1877.

<sup>37</sup> *Friendly Leaves*, no. 141, May 1888.

<sup>38</sup> *Friendly Leaves*, no. 12, August 1877.

<sup>39</sup> *Friendly Leaves*, no. 57, May 1881.

<sup>40</sup> M.E. Townsend, “The Girls’ Friendly Society” booklet.

Then there are the Members... girls of all ages, ranks, and occupations—young ladies, and little maids-of-all-work, girls helping their mothers at home and girls in shops, serving behind the counter, and girls in factories, weaving the stuffs and ribbons that you wear, or making the pins that you put in your frocks, or the eyes of the needles that some of you are threading with such care and pains at school. Then there are the Post-Office clerks that sort your letters—for even little people write letters now-a-days, and the girls at the refreshment-bars, who serve you with penny buns and sponge-cakes when you go by train, and last, not least, the kind nurses who are ready to watch over you if you should be ill and have to go into a hospital to be made well again. Is it not pleasant to think that amongst all these there are Members of the G.F.S., that friendly fingers may be working for us and friendly hearts thinking of us and praying for us all over the country, yes, and in many other lands, too, beyond the seas?<sup>41</sup>

Provided Members complied with Central Rule III, they were eligible to join the G.F.S. at the age of twelve and could continue as a member until they married or turned twenty-one. Even after a girl left the society, there is evidence to suggest that she may have remained in contact with her Associate: in the Registry of Blind Members there are updated notes about the girls several decades after they had aged out of the Society.<sup>42</sup> While it is possible that this continuation of the relationship between the Associate and Member was more typical of blind members who likely needed more aid, it would be incorrect to suppose that these relationships would end with a member's twenty-first birthday. Such a presumption is, in fact, contrary to the idea of friendship upon which the organization was founded. More likely, Members and Associates would continue their friendship on a more informal level, without the oversight of the G.F.S.

As the organization grew, it also sought to incorporate more girls into its fold. A new classification of "Candidate" was introduced in 1879, though the Department of Candidates was not formed until 1897.<sup>43</sup> Girls of at least eight could become Candidates until they turned twelve, or for at least one year if their birthday occurred before their

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<sup>41</sup> *Friendly Leaves*, no. 141, May 1888, 5GFS/10/012.

<sup>42</sup> *Registry of Blind Members: Bangor to London*, 5GFS/4/015.

<sup>43</sup> M.E. Townsend, "Candidates Department" in Candidates Department Record of Activities, undated, 5GFS/4/019.

Candidacy year was completed. In this way, the Associates could watch over young girls to prevent them from slipping into vice and thus risking their application for G.F.S. Membership. Additionally, the G.F.S. sought ways to keep older members involved in the organization; placing Elder Members in charge of Candidates' classes offered one possibility. Such Elder Members were required to be Church of England Communicants, and to "be careful that their own daily life be consecrated to the Master's service, that their example may lead the little ones committed to their care to the Saviour."<sup>44</sup>

Unlike the work with Candidates, the organization had a much more difficult time incorporating Elder Members into the Society. Also called Branch Workers, much of the success of keeping older members involved depended on the individual endeavors of branches.<sup>45</sup> These differences also account for the lack of specificity about requirements for Elder Members. The recorded information states that "a special Card should be given to those Members who, having been seven years in the Society, and being considered by their Branch to be duly qualified, should be called 'Working Elder Members,' and should be encouraged to take some definite part in the work of the Society."<sup>46</sup> There is no indication that the age or marriage restrictions placed on general Members also applied to the newer Elder Members. The attempt at creating this category, though, does indicate the exclusiveness of the organization with regard to class; though some Members were the daughters of the upper- and respectable middle classes, the majority were from the lower classes, and therefore seen as incapable of holding the position of Associate.

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<sup>44</sup> "The Claims of the Girls' Friendly Society on its Elder Members" in *Friendly Work*, January 1888, 5GFS/10/081.

<sup>45</sup> Money, *op. cit.*, pp. 78, 97.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 97.

According to the Constitution of the Girls' Friendly Society, the organization was set up to mimic the structure of the Anglican Church: "diocesan, ruridecanal, and parochial."<sup>47</sup> From the Branch level, Associates could then be elected to the Diocesan Council, following the structure established by the Church of England. From these Councils, women would then be selected to represent the Diocese on the Central Council of the Girls' Friendly Society. Though it took several years to establish this hierarchy, by 1878 the G.F.S. had spread to each of the ten Dioceses in England and branches were established in Scotland, Ireland and the United States of America.<sup>48</sup>

Programs and services offered by the Girls' Friendly Society differed from branch to branch. In the July 1879 issue of *Friendly Leaves*, events reported for the London Diocese included tea parties for both members and potential members in the St. Pancras and Hoxton Branches; a singing concert put on by members of the St. George's Branch; and various evening and Bible classes. Some branches, like Hoxton, also offered girls a club-room where "books and various games are provided for recreation as well as writing materials."<sup>49</sup> By 1881, the organization boasted ten Lodges and Clubs for members in business; seventeen Homes of Rest where members could stay during periods of ill health or on their day off; seven Diocesan lending libraries; a central lending library; and forty-one Lodges and Registry Offices for members in domestic service to obtain situations.<sup>50</sup>

While many of these resources were locally created and maintained, all Members were entitled to certain benefits and resources. First and foremost, the goal of the Society was to foster friendships between Associates and Members, with the Associates visiting

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<sup>47</sup> *Constitution*, December 1887, 5GFS/1/005.

<sup>48</sup> K.M. Townsend, *Some Memories...*, p. 17.

<sup>49</sup> *Friendly Leaves*, no. 35, July 1879, 5GFS/10/004.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 57, May 1881, 5GFS/10/006.



Members' workplaces if possible, helping them form relationships with the clergy and recommending them to another Associate, should a Member move to a new town or village.<sup>51</sup> Girls, in the meantime, were expected to "Bear ye one another's Burdens," the motto of the organization. Consequently, the girls were taught to pray for the other Members and Associates of the G.F.S. According to "A Member's Letter on the G.F.S." which appeared in the February 1889 issue of *Friendly Leaves*:

Then we have another great help in the prayers of all our fellow-members, and surely, when we remember our Saviour's promise, that 'If two of you shall agree up on earth as touching anything that ye shall ask, it shall be done for them of My Father which is in Heaven,' the thousands of prayers that are daily offered up to God for us by our Society must be a most real help to us to lead a pure and holy life.<sup>52</sup>

Girls were also encouraged to help one another in simple ways, such as by sending flowers from the country to their fellow members in the city. These simple acts on the part of the country girls brightened the days of their "town sisters."<sup>53</sup>

As *Friendly Leaves* developed, letters between readers and the editor were published with increasing frequency. This seems to have evolved into a "Notes and Queries" section, to which girls could write with questions that would, if possible, be answered in the subsequent edition. However, some of the earlier "Letters to the Editor" and personal stories offered in *Friendly Leaves* allow us a snapshot of how some Members saw the Society. One such anonymous letter is described as a "spontaneous testimony to the honour in which our Society is held by Members" and reads:

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<sup>51</sup> M.E. Townsend, "The Girls' Friendly Society" booklet.

<sup>52</sup> "A Member of the Girls' Friendly Society," "A Member's Letter on the G.F.S.," *Friendly Leaves*, no. 150, February 1889, 5GFS/10/012.

<sup>53</sup> *Friendly Leaves*, no. 34, June 1879, 5GFS/10/004.

MADAM,--I am so much better that I am in hopes I shall be able to keep my place. I thank you much for *Friendly Leaves*. I don't know how to thank you for all your kindness to me; and that comes of being a Friendly girl, for I should not have thought of going to any one hadn't it been for the Friendly Society; and I wish every girl might feel as I do towards it, for I think it is a great honour to belong to the G.F.S.

'I feel I should like to put a good long letter in *Friendly Leaves* about it; but I am not scholar enough to, so I must leave it at liking.<sup>54</sup>

Another letter appears a month later from the Curate of two churches in Sandwich who received a surprise gift of two framed pictures of his churches from the G.F.S. girls in his Bible class.<sup>55</sup> It may be surmised that these girls, going to such great lengths to surprise their instructor with a gift (later letters discouraged other girls from such actions, as it was deemed not thrifty to spend money on gifts for Associates and Bible class instructors), were positively influenced by their involvement in G.F.S.

Still, these examples may be less typical than the editor would have us believe. Beyond these isolated examples, it is difficult to determine just how Members perceived the Girls' Friendly Society. A girl who was unhappy with the Society was not likely to write to *Friendly Leaves*; nor, perhaps, was such a letter likely to be published.

It is likewise difficult to determine the perceptions of the employers of "Friendly girls" who received visits from their Associates. Lionel Rose posits that "volunteers were patronizing Lady Bountifuls who expected their protégées to feel grateful," an attitude that factory girls, in particular, did not tolerate. At the same time, householders that employed Friendly Girls resented the intrusion of the G.F.S. ladies.<sup>56</sup> While this may be true, no girl was forced to join the G.F.S. or was encouraged to do so without the consent

<sup>54</sup> "A Member's Testimony," *Friendly Leaves*, no. 57, May 1881, 5GFS/10/006.

<sup>55</sup> "A Pleasant Surprise. To the Editor of '*Friendly Leaves*,'" *Friendly Leaves*, no. 59, July 1881, 5GFS/10/006.

<sup>56</sup> Lionel Rose, *Erosion of Childhood* (New York: Routledge, 1991), p. 50.

of her parents and/or employer.<sup>57</sup> Additional recorded perceptions, especially negative ones, are likely relegated to personal diaries and papers; these voices seem to be lost through the course of history.

### **Religion and the Girls' Friendly Society**

There was an expectation within the Society that Friendly Girls be Christians who led Christian lives. To make the organization's work accessible to more girls, Members were not required to belong to the Church of England as Central Rule I required of Associates. Still, the organization was created with an overtly Christian outlook and work was carried out under these expectations. The ladies of the Society saw themselves as "doing God's work." Lady Knightley, an Associate, wrote of this feeling in her diary:

*Easter Eve, April 15<sup>th</sup>* – I walked down to Badley, and went round to the mistresses and mothers of the girls whom I want to enlist for the G.F.S. My mind is quite full of it, but I was glad to go to the quiet five o'clock service, and resolutely turn my thoughts to to-morrow, when I hope to draw near to my Blessed Lord. Even work for Him must not come between me and Him.<sup>58</sup>

Similarly, in an address to G.F.S. Members that was later published in the January 1878 issue of *Friendly Leaves*, C.E. Skinner recognized the Girls' Friendly Society as part of "God's work":

All human societies unite to do different parts of God's work—Bible Classes for one part, Temperance Societies for another, Working Men's Clubs for another—but the Christian Church exists for the *whole* of God's work, for the glory of God *altogether*; therefore each particular society, like our Girls' Friendly Society, for instance, should feel that it is part of a still larger whole, and also that it is undertaking a part of the work of God's great kingdom, and is trying to extend God's rule by means of its operations; and this feeling lifts up every tiny little branch of

<sup>57</sup> "Rules for G.F.S. Members," *Friendly Leaves*, no. 17, January 1878, 5GFS/10/003.

<sup>58</sup> Lady Knightley of Fawsley, "The Lady Knightley of Fawsley: Memories of an Old Friendship," undated, probably 1880s, 5GFS/4/003.

our Girls' Friendly Society that we have, and makes us no longer small, but great—great with the greatness which comes from God.<sup>59</sup>

It was part of the mission of the Associates to guide girls and provide them with religious teachings. Bible classes were offered in all branches and moral instruction was consistently provided for girls via *Friendly Leaves*. Serial stories contained religious and moral themes and scripture lessons were included in each issue. The Society's affiliation with the Anglican Church influenced other articles such as one series that detailed "Offices of the Church," including Morning and Evening Prayer, Holy Baptism, Confirmation, Communion, Holy Matrimony and Visitation of the Sick.<sup>60</sup> Another article from January 1877 offered a meditation for the new year. Girls were encouraged to read the piece aloud, with the expectation that God was listening:

My heart has been very cold, my prayers have been very dull, my thoughts have been very full of this world. Oh! how many things have I done which I ought not to have done; and, oh! how many things have I left undone which I ought to have done! When I look backwards, I can only go down on my knees, and cry, God be merciful to me a sinner for Jesus Christ's sake. Amen.<sup>61</sup>

Even through the organization's newsletter, girls were taught religious lessons, such as prayer. This was all done through the perspective of the Anglican Church.

Despite the emphasis on religious instruction, questions were raised in the Central Council about a brochure published by a branch that warned Associates against proselytizing. While the Central Council agreed that the G.F.S. was not a proselytizing society, women on the Council questioned the meaning of the Society's association with

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<sup>59</sup> C.E. Skinner, "An Address to G.F.S. Members" in *Friendly Leaves*, no. 17, January 1878, 5GFS/10/003. Emphases in original.

<sup>60</sup> *Friendly Leaves*, 1891, 5GFS/10/014.

<sup>61</sup> *Friendly Leaves*, no. 5, January 1877, 5GFS/10/002.

the Church of England and debated the expectations of girls attending G.F.S. Bible classes.<sup>62</sup> An article from August 1898 readdressed this issue, stating, “Though not a proselytising Society, it is a Missionary Society. There is immense Church leverage on Members, from the fact that all Associates and all Members elected to positions of trust [as part of the democratization of the Society], are Members of the Church of England; very many are by this means brought into the Church, who would never otherwise have been reached.”<sup>63</sup>

Despite its place as a society of the Church of England, the Girls’ Friendly Society was still in a very attractive position to girls of nonconformist backgrounds. The number of “helps” that the Society offered, especially by way of employment support and social opportunities, would certainly have been welcome to all girls of a Christian background. According to the August 1898 article, “All Members must say the G.F.S. Prayer and therefore must be Xtians,”<sup>64</sup> but beyond this individual societies were encouraged to respond according to the needs of their respective communities. Still, non-conformist members were seen as potential Church of England converts: “It must be borne in mind that elasticity of method is very necessary. In the north of England, Dissent is very strong, and a large number of the Clergy would find that too stringent a line of action would alienate Non Conformist Members and destroy all chance of bringing them into the Church.”<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Central Council Minutes, April 2, 1879, 5GFS/001/003.

<sup>63</sup> “Interests of the Parish Clergy,” August 1898, 5GFS/2/287.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.* The Members’ Prayer, as printed in the G.F.S. Constitution, reads “O God our Father, we beseech Thee to bless us, and all who belong to the Girls’ Friendly Society. Help us to bear one another’s burdens, to live not for ourselves, but for others, as members of one family in Jesus Christ; wash us from our sins in His precious blood, make us holy by the indwelling of Thy Spirit, and bring us all at last to Thy happy home in Heaven; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. “

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*

The expansion of the Girls' Friendly Society beyond England offered a unique challenge for the society. It was advantageous to encourage development abroad, especially as Members moved out of the country. Established societies in the colonies and other countries could receive these emigrating girls, serving the same function as the domestic branches, which received girls moving from town to town, or to a new city. There was some concern, however, about how the organization could function within the empire, or even globally, in light of its close link to Anglicanism. The G.F.S. leaders were thus forced to question the significance of their religious affiliation, as the Anglican Church was not the dominant religious force in the rest of the world. Mrs. Townsend discussed these challenges in a letter to Miss Money in March 1882:

The Colonial Churches are *in a true and deep sense Branches* of the Anglican Church, otherwise I fail to see that they are Churches at all....(With regard to Scotland, do not forget that the *Society* there *may* stand on different footing, because the *Presbyterian Church* is there *the Church by law established*. The Irish alas! have altered their Prayer Book, and I don't know what's to be said about them.)...They ought, and I am sure they *do* hold allegiance to the Mother Church in England, just the same as the *Colonies do to their Queen*. I see no reason whatever why the G.F.S. in the Colonies should not be one with our Society....It would not signify in the *same* degree about the Colonial Societies if it were not for the tide of Emigration, but taking that into consideration it is most deeply important.<sup>66</sup>

These issues were overcome, by and large, on an individual basis. As just one example, the Scotch [*sic*] Girls' Friendly Society was granted the use of the Central Monogram to be adapted for use by the Society, though only "with the condition that the name and monogram shall be discontinued if at any time adherence shall be withdrawn from the Third Central Rule."<sup>67</sup> In this way the G.F.S. was able to overcome the differences between the Churches of Scotland (Presbyterian) and England (Anglican).

<sup>66</sup> Mrs. Townsend to Miss Money, March 23, 1882, 5GFS/2/285. Emphases in original.

<sup>67</sup> Undated declaration, 5GFS/2/287.

The one question on which the Girls' Friendly Society proved to be unbending, though, was the application of Central Rule III, the absolute requirement that girls have, and maintain, their "purity." Agnes Money recorded that "in some minds, [there were] strong objections to Central Rule III as unchristian, and as likely to foster a pharisaical spirit in the members," but this opposition eventually died away.<sup>68</sup> It reemerged, however, as the G.F.S. took up work in larger metropolitan areas amongst lower-class girls. In a city or factory setting, it could be difficult to determine a girl's acquaintances and find family members with whom an Associate could confirm that the girl had maintained her purity. "Those working among them," Money wrote, "while most anxious to hold loyalty to the G.F.S. and its rules, yet desired some relaxation of the rule of character among such classes of girls as I have referred to, so as to obviate the necessity of inquiry into their past."<sup>69</sup> In response to this dispute, Mrs. Townsend and the Central Council sought the approval of the G.F.S. constitution by the Anglican bishops in 1880, to ensure that Central Rule III became entrenched in the formal structure of the organization.<sup>70</sup> As a result, some Associates broke with the Girls' Friendly Society, including Mrs. Papillon who formed the Young Women's Help Society, which did not have such stringent membership requirements; ultimately, the G.F.S., despite "the sundering of friends and the hindering of work," stood by Central Rule III as a foremost, core value of the organization.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Money, *op. cit.*, pp. 26-27.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>70</sup> Brian Harrison, *op. cit.*, 118.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*

In 1898 Father Osborne, an Anglican priest, wrote a letter of inquiry to the Girls' Friendly Society, directly questioning the application of Central Rule III.<sup>72</sup> Included in Appendix 2, this correspondence chain includes a number of possible scenarios about a girl's "loss of purity," and the responses of Gertrude Campion, then President of the Central Council. One such case addressed the sexual victimization of a girl:

Case III. A girl of perhaps sixteen – a young servant for instance sent out at night in a lonely place to do an errand for her mistress – is seized by two or three men and evil done to her. She neither desires nor consents but is powerless to prevent. Perhaps the men are prosecuted and punished for the outrage.  
Is she eligible to join the Society?  
If she is already a member must she leave?<sup>73</sup>

In this instance, Campion responded, "Where there is no 'consent' to sin the girl is herself still virtuous, she will have known what sin is, but to lose character, consent is needed."<sup>74</sup> These letters are interesting, though, as they indicate confusion on behalf of clergy wishing to uphold the statutes of the Girls' Friendly Society. Campion addressed Father Osborne's concern later in her letter:

Where a G.F.S. Member, who is held in good repute in the world confesses to a Priest some sin against Purity in her past life, the decision as to her withdrawal or not from the Society must rest with him in his discretion, the intention, effect of Central Rule III being upheld. In all such cases *the assurance of silence* will be imperative. G.F.S. does not mean inquisition into the past...it does mean, broadly speaking Chastity and honourable reputation for such.<sup>75</sup>

Campion's letters contain a sense of hesitancy, though. She included confidentiality clauses to protect her responses, indicating the caution with which Central Rule III was approached. As such a contentious but fundamental value it required a great

<sup>72</sup> Father Osborne to the Girls' Friendly Society, August 7, 1898, 5GFS/2/287.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>74</sup> Gertrude Campion to Father Osborne, September 6, 1898, 5GFS/2/287.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.* Emphasis in original.



deal of defense, though adherence was quite obviously on a case-by-case basis, on the good faith of the Member herself. While there are a few records of girls who withdrew from the organization for a breach of the rule (Richmond lists 558 girls in 1900 alone), it is impossible to determine if girls remained in the G.F.S. despite a breach of the rule.<sup>76</sup> Though some inquiry into a girl's past was undertaken prior to her admittance into the society, unless she became pregnant, the application of the Central Rule III once a girl was admitted to the G.F.S. had to be based on a matter of trust.

### **Jewish Community**

The late Victorian and Edwardian eras had marked a high point in Jewish migration into Britain, with between 100,000 and 150,000 Jews emigrating from Russia and other Eastern European countries settling in Britain between 1881 and 1914.<sup>77</sup> London was home to about two-thirds of Britain's Jewish population, as well as serving as the primary port of entry for a similar proportion of these immigrants.<sup>78</sup> At the turn of the century, C. Russell estimated the Jewish population in London at roughly 110,000, with about 60,000 of these persons being born abroad and all but about 10,000 of the total population residing in London's East End.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Richmond, *op. cit.*, 309.

<sup>77</sup> Rickie Burman, "Middle-Class Anglo-Jewish Lady Philanthropists and Eastern European Jewish Women" in Joan Grant, ed., *Women, Migration and Empire* (Stoke-on-Trent: Trentham Books, 1996), p. 124.

<sup>78</sup> Harold Pollins, *Hopeful Travellers: Jewish Migrants and Settlers in Nineteenth Century Britain* (London: London Museum of Jewish Life, 1990), p. 27.

<sup>79</sup> C. Russell and H.S. Lewis, *The Jew in London: A Study of Racial Character and Present-Day Conditions being Two Essays Prepared for the Toynbee Trustees* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1900), p. 12. While this book is now viewed as a historical source itself, Russell and Lewis' sociological work at the turn of the century is still seen as providing surprisingly accurate statistics about the Jewish population in London at the time. V.D. Lipman, *A History of the Jews in Britain Since 1858* (London: Leicester University Press, 1990), p. 52.

The Jewish community has had a long history in Britain. Though Edward I expelled the earliest Jewish communities from England in 1290, Oliver Cromwell readmitted a community of Sephardic Jews in 1656. This early community from Spain and Portugal fled to England to escape the Spanish Inquisition. They soon integrated into British society as much as possible. As Adrienne Baker explains, they “were aware of a need to be as little different as possible from the English; their Jewishness must not in any way make them seem like foreigners.”<sup>80</sup> The successful assimilation of this early Anglo-Jewish community can be noted in a few key events: in 1847 Lionel Rothschild was elected as the first Jewish MP, though he was unable to take his seat until 1858. Additionally, Jews were first admitted to universities like Oxford in 1871 with the passage of the University Test Act.<sup>81</sup> These were great achievements for the Anglo-Jewish population, but the influx of immigrant Ashkenazi Jews from Eastern Europe in the last few decades of the nineteenth century threatened future advancements.

Despite the physical proximity of London’s Jews, the community itself had great class divisions between the Anglo-Jewish and Ashkenazi populations. The former, descended from the Sephardic Jews, was largely middle-class and consisted of a small number of connected families with their own elite families. The latter were predominantly of the working classes and continued to practice the religious and cultural traditions of their homelands; many of these Jewish immigrants did not speak English.<sup>82</sup> Still, the Jewish community was very self-supporting, with a number of organizations for

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<sup>80</sup> Adrienne Baker, *The Jewish Woman in Contemporary Society: Transitions and Traditions* (London: Macmillan Press, 1993), p. 10.

<sup>81</sup> Steinbach, *op. cit.*, p. 143.

<sup>82</sup> Burman, *op. cit.*, p. 124.

the benefit of Jews being maintained by members of the community itself.<sup>83</sup> A common goal of many of these organizations was the assimilation of the Ashkenazi population, though often this did not have the desired result and class divisions within the Jewish population continued throughout the Victorian era.

Anglicization was effectively applied to Jewish youth, though. As Russell wrote, “All the children who pass through an elementary school may be said to grow up into ‘English Jews,’” but at the same time “[w]hile outgrowing many of the virtues of their fathers, they are apt to pick up the fashionable vices of their adopted country.”<sup>84</sup> Indeed, the process of Anglicization created a challenging situation for Jewish youth, who were forced to reconcile the culture of their parents – loyalty to family and strict religious beliefs – with British culture, which focused more on economic prosperity and an urban lifestyle.<sup>85</sup>

A sizeable Jewish population grew up in the Soho district of London’s West End, where the tailoring industry was established. Russell noted that “much of the work done in the West End is undoubtedly passing into [Jewish] hands,”<sup>86</sup> but the working and living conditions for these Jews was far from ideal:

Rent was inordinately high, and it was necessary to live near the ‘shop,’ so that rooms had to be used both for living and working purposes. The average working hours were 8 a.m. to 8 p.m., with

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<sup>83</sup> Gertrude Himmelfarb, *Poverty and Compassion: The Moral Imagination of the Late Victorians* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1991), p. 140; V.D. Lipman, *op. cit.*, p. 107; Israel Finestein, *Anglo-Jewry in Changing Times: Studies in Diversity, 1840-1914* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 1999), p. 225. These organizations include the Jewish Board of Guardians which offered less fortunate Jews a financial support alternative to the dole, the Jewish Workingmen’s Club founded by Samuel Montagu in 1876, the West Central Jewish Girls’ Club, detailed in this paper, and the Jewish Lads’ Brigade.

<sup>84</sup> Russell, *op. cit.*, pp. 24, 26.

<sup>85</sup> Lloyd P. Gartner, *The Jewish Immigrant in England, 1870-1914* (London: Simon Publications, 1960), p. 174.

<sup>86</sup> Russell, *op. cit.*, pp. 13, 69.

an hour for dinner and half an hour for tea. In hot weather the men often worked stripped to the waist, and the atmosphere created by overheated bodies was anything but pleasant.<sup>87</sup>

In these West End workshops, one girl described being “chased round the room in which she worked, and her ears stuffed with cotton wool, when, as a very young girl, she had ventured to protest against the discussion of some obscene subject.”<sup>88</sup> These conditions created the climate of depravity that the upper classes feared would corrupt all girls and spiral downward into further vice.

Those Jews settled in the Soho area and separated from the rest of the Jewish community were also removed from many of the religious and social resources the community offered its members to prevent such societal decline. Additionally, these Jews in the West End were part of the new immigrant community and thus out of reach of many efforts at assimilation. The West Central Jewish Girls’ Club is a notable exception to this, though.

### **West Central Jewish Girls’ Club**

The West Central Jewish Girls’ Club grew out of a Torah class offered by Emily Harris to a small group of Jewish girls in Bloomsbury. Nineteen-year-old Lily Montagu and her cousin, the then Miss Beatrice Franklin, were invited to visit the class. As Montagu recounted in her book about the organization, *My Club and I*, “the afternoons proved interesting, and we made friends with the girls....[T]hey told us that if we would move to bigger premises in Soho we should find large numbers of girls who would welcome the

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<sup>87</sup> Lily Montagu, *op. cit.*, p. 60.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 61.

formation of a girls' club."<sup>89</sup> Shortly thereafter, two rooms were rented on Dean Street in Soho and the club set forth "to bring brightness and refinement into the lives of Jewish working girls."<sup>90</sup>

The West Central Jewish Girls' Club was a much smaller and localized organization than the Girls' Friendly Society. The first annual report, written in September 1894, recorded seventy to eighty members with about twenty to thirty attending the club nightly.<sup>91</sup> Though it is impossible to trace membership totals concretely,<sup>92</sup> a manuscript from 1931 records that after taking the two rooms in Dean Street, "in an incredibly short time our members had risen to 150."<sup>93</sup> In 1910, Montagu announced a total of 447 members,<sup>94</sup> with an increase to 670 members four years later.<sup>95</sup>

From the club's inception, Lily Montagu dedicated herself to the work. The sixth child of ten, Montagu was raised in the Orthodox, upper-class family of Samuel Montagu (elevated to Lord Swaythling in 1907), a self-made millionaire banker, Gladstonian Liberal MP and prominent member of London's Jewish community.<sup>96</sup> The family resided in Kensington Palace Gardens, then as now one of the wealthiest streets in London.<sup>97</sup> Lily was greatly influenced by her parents who undertook a great deal of social work within

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<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23.

<sup>90</sup> Nellie G. Levy, "The West Central Story and Its Founders," undated, 1993.67.11, Jewish Museum, Finchley.

<sup>91</sup> Lily Montagu, "Address given by the Hon. Lily Montagu at the Queen's Theatre, on the Occasion of the Annual Display of Work," March 20, 1910, ACC/3529/3/15, London Metropolitan Archives, London.

<sup>92</sup> During the night of April 16-17, 1941, a bomb hit the headquarters of the club, killing twenty-seven people who were inside the building at the time. "We had been so busy keeping records, and working up a very elaborate organization... But in a few minutes these records were changed into rubble," Lily Montagu wrote in *My Club and I*, p. 137. This presents a challenge for the historian attempting to glean information about the early years of the organization. Such work becomes increasingly reliant on the retrospective accounts of club members and workers. Still, while valuable sources were undoubtedly destroyed, this does not diminish the fact that the organization still can and, indeed, *should* be studied.

<sup>93</sup> Lily Montagu, untitled manuscript, 1931, ACC/3529/3/14/A.

<sup>94</sup> Montagu, "Address given by the Hon. Lily Montagu at the Queen's Theatre..."

<sup>95</sup> The West Central Girls' Club and Emily Harris Home Programme, February 3, 1914, ACC/3529/3/6/B.

<sup>96</sup> Spence, *op. cit.*, 497.

<sup>97</sup> Eric Conrad, "Lily Montagu. Prophet of a Living Judaism," 1953, ACC/3529/3/4.

the Jewish community; likewise, they supported her work with the West Central Jewish Girls' Club, both emotionally and financially. Though her father ended contact with Lily several years before his death in 1911 due to her break with Orthodox Judaism in preference for Liberal Judaism, she remained in contact with her mother. This family strain greatly burdened Lily, but she felt passionate about developing a form of "living Judaism" that applied to everyday life.

Montagu convinced her sisters and friends to join in her work with the club. Lily's older sister, Marian, became her companion in club work, and other members of the Montagu family continued to fill crucial leadership roles in the organization well into the twentieth century. In 1910 Lily Montagu reported that the organization boasted sixty-eight workers, though she noted in particular that "four or five [workers]...give a very great deal of time to the work." They were also supported by twenty-four girl workers.<sup>98</sup>

The work of the club revolved around its rooms, which were used to hold classes and social functions, such as concerts and dances, as well as simply to offer the girls social space. Education became a major focus of the club after a short time, with classes being offered in a range of subjects from singing to drill to needlework.<sup>99</sup> "The girls told me that they did not want to come to the Club just to laze about. Unless some definite reason for coming was provided for them, they were so irregular that they did not come under Club influence at all."<sup>100</sup>

As the club developed, it did so in a very personal fashion. Shaped by her previous experiences volunteering in the Jewish community in the East End of

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<sup>98</sup> Montagu, "Address given by the Hon. Lily Montagu at the Queen's Theatre..."

<sup>99</sup> Montagu, *My Club and I*, p. 25.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 26.

London,<sup>101</sup> Montagu believed strongly in the importance of cultivating relationships with the girls. She and the other leaders endeavored to visit all of the girls in their homes and meet with their parents. However, much to Lily's embarrassment, her parents insisted that a governess accompany her on all such visits to the working-class districts in which the members lived. Still, careful attention was paid to absentees, in an effort "to show [the girls] that they were always missed if they stayed away."<sup>102</sup>

The club also developed democratically, offering girls a voice in the governance and offerings of the club. Lily Montagu described the process by which classes were determined:

We found early that there was no advantage in forming classes which were not required by the students themselves. They had to collect the right number of students and then ask for opportunity to study their subject. It was useless to give them what we thought they ought to like. They had to have what they themselves actually did like.<sup>103</sup>

Similarly, in an article for the club's fiftieth anniversary edition of *Club Link*, the West Central Club's magazine, Rose Kohn reflected on the responsibilities that she had been given as a girl member. Among these were helping the librarian and with Sunday afternoon teas, and later planning and organizing the first club dance that was held in a hired hall.<sup>104</sup> While none of these events are dated and we can only make an assumption based on the article title that Kohn was a member of the club in its early years, the progression of responsibilities that she outlined is representative of the encouragement given to the girls to take responsibility for their own club.

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<sup>101</sup> Lily Montagu, *The Faith of a Jewish Woman* (Keighley: Wadsworth, 1943), pp. 14-15.

<sup>102</sup> Montagu, *My Club and I*, p. 35.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 53.

<sup>104</sup> Rose Kohn, "From an Original Member," *The Club Link*, Special Jubilee Edition, 1943, 1991.30.1.46, the Jewish Museum, Finchley.

Despite the autonomy granted to the girls, they were still held to certain standards within the club. A member's ticket from 1897 had the following rules included on it, as reported in a 1954 article from *The Club Link* with additional, unattributed commentary in parentheses:

- Members shall pay 2d entrance fee and subscribe a penny a week.
- Members shall not join any excursion or treats unless their attendance during the past month has been regular or their absence has been satisfactorily explained.
- Members shall remove their hats as soon as they enter the club.
- Junior members shall leave the club at 9-30 p.m. (Juniors were under sixteens).
- Junior Members who are guilty of misconduct shall have their names inscribed on the Default List. (Apparently there was no such rule for Senior Members).<sup>105</sup>

Discipline within the club, or the lack thereof, was questioned and criticized by both contemporary observers and modern historians alike.<sup>106</sup> After the club's first concert early in its history, Montagu faced criticisms from relatives about the poor manners of some of the girls in attendance, a censure she continued to battle even after the club was established. As a club leader dedicated to understanding the background of her girls, however, she considered the noise her girls made to be the result of the repressive and trying environment in which they lived and worked.<sup>107</sup>

Montagu also had to defend the club to the parents of her girls, explaining the difference between the West Central Jewish Girls' Club and "the undesirable [clubs] existing in Soho."<sup>108</sup> Through an ambitious program of home visiting, Montagu became acquainted with the families of her girls and these fears were assuaged, though the hesitancy of her own parents remained.

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<sup>105</sup> "Sixty Years Ago – Almost," *The Club Link*, January 1954, 1991.30.1.71, Jewish Museum.

<sup>106</sup> David Doughan and Peter Gordon, *Women, Clubs and Associations in Britain* (London: Routledge, 2006), p. 96.

<sup>107</sup> Montagu, *My Club and I*, pp. 23, 61.

<sup>108</sup> Levy, "The West Central Story..."



The club attracted a lot of attention from its inception, as a pioneering organization in the girls' club movement. This notice helped to raise funds to support the organization, as an annual performance staged by the members of the club in a West End theatre became a "social affair" attended by "the pillars of the Jewish community."<sup>109</sup> While it is likely that Montagu exaggerated this to a certain extent, the prominence of the upper-class Montagu family in the Jewish community probably did help to drum up some of this support; such a report of the event attendance is also in line with the interconnectedness and supportiveness of the Jewish community in London in the late Victorian era.

When examining perceptions of such an organization, it is perhaps most important to look at how the girls targeted for membership viewed the club. Though many of the voices of the girl members have not been recorded in the surviving historical documents, we may look to several sources to discern such perceptions. First of all, the growth of attendance is indicative of the impact of the organization. While the carefully-maintained registers from these early years no longer exist, the reported growth from a conservative estimate of seventy girls in 1894 to 447 members in 1910, just sixteen years later, shows a great increase. In that time, many of the original girls would have grown and married, and though there is no indication that such girls would have to terminate their membership as in the Girls' Friendly Society, the club population still increased more than six-fold. As the organization was drawing on a small minority population, geographically separated from the rest of the Jewish population, these figures can certainly be seen as significant. The assertion by Hetty Freedman that "The life of nearly

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<sup>109</sup> Montagu, *My Club and I*, p. 118.

every Jewish girl and woman living in the West Central district is bound up with the history of the Club since its inception” carries a great deal of credence.<sup>110</sup>

We may also draw conclusions about the influence and perceptions of the organization from member testimonials, such as those of Freedman and Kohn. Though published fifty years after the formation of the organization, the reflections of these women on their girlhood allow them to look back on the influence of the organization on their lives. According to Freedman, “Ever since then, my one great ambition has been to try to live up to the lofty ideals that [Lily Montagu] has set before us...It was in the Club that we learnt what friendship and service could mean, it was there, too, that we found an outlet for our dreams and visions of making our small corner of the world a little better than we found it.”<sup>111</sup> While it is unclear whether Freedman is referring to Liberal Judaism or merely adopting the philosophy in this statement, Montagu’s influence is evident as both a role model and teacher.

Kohn’s testimonial offers a similar view on the impact of the club: “Now, nothing gives me more pleasure when I meet old Club members, and they ask me if I want their Club money! Times have changed very much since I first joined the Club, but I can’t help thinking that the ‘old Club was the best,’ for I have spent some of the happiest hours of my life there.”<sup>112</sup> Despite this glowing recollection, Kohn also recounts her initial negative impression of the organization, showing that such efforts by the Club were not always welcomed warmly. The account of her early experience seems successfully to

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<sup>110</sup> Hetty Freedman, “From an Original Member” in *The Club Link*, Special Jubilee Edition, 1943, 1991.30.1.46.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>112</sup> Kohn, “From an Original Member.”

maintain the voice of the young Rose Kohn, despite the fact that at the time of writing this article, she would have certainly have reached old age:

At first I did not like it at all, and so decided not to go again. My absence was noticed and Miss Montagu came to see why I had ‘not been up to the Club.’ I told her my Mother would not let me. Little did I dream that she would speak to my Mother about this, but she did, and my Mother said I could go if I wanted to. Miss Montagu visited me several times, before I promised to give the Club ‘another try.’ I kept my promise and the result was that, in time, I became a very staunch member of the West Central.<sup>113</sup>

The positive influence of the West Central Jewish Girls’ Club can also be surmised from the contacts maintained with grown club members. The formation of the Montagu Club in New York City, started by former club members who emigrated to the United States of America, is undoubtedly illustrative of the impact of the organization, as neither age nor emigration severed the ties of these adults to their childhood club. When the organization faced trials in the twentieth century such as the bombing of the club building, members offered a donation to be put towards the costs of rebuilding. In the notes for her speech at a Jewish Religious Union reception in 1931, Lily Montagu described her recent trip to America:

Found one [former member working as the] Director of [the] Community Centre [at] Baroness de Hirsch Colony. Several others doing work of real importance in community. *All so* affectionate and so delighted to see us. Middle aged – years passed – Excitement. Sixty in New York Club among themselves. One of my friends told me I had no idea what she hadn’t done because of me. Another came 300 miles to see us; another got access to us with great difficulty by showing a snapshot 23 years old. Children and grandchildren in every town.<sup>114</sup>

Perceptions of the West Central Jewish Girls’ Club that are available to the historian are limited to these few, largely positive, accounts. This is not to say that all

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<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>114</sup> Lily Montagu, “J.R.U. Reception,” February 11, 1931, ACC/3529/3/14/A. Emphasis in original.

encounters with the organization would be positive, as certainly Rose Kohn's testimony reveals. Still, what we can take from this is that the club played a special role in the West Central Jewish community and the revolutionary practice of giving girls autonomy within the club, as well as the friendly atmosphere of the organization, may have proved especially attractive to girls at the time. Additionally, it is important to note that most of the accounts attribute their positive experiences not only to the club, but also to the Montagu sisters, especially Lily. The power of her personality is clearly intertwined with the impact of the club, such that the club seems almost a reflection of its founder.

### **Religion and the West Central Jewish Girls' Club**

The West Central Jewish Girls' Club certainly started with an outwardly religious aim, as the product of a Torah class for Jewish girls. The club was intended to serve a small religious minority in London at the end of the Victorian era, and a very exclusive community at that. Without a doubt, the girls in the club all came from a Jewish household, most with parents who were recent immigrants and still practiced the Jewish traditions from Russia and Poland.<sup>115</sup>

As it has previously been shown that the club was closely linked with Lily Montagu, the examination of religion within the organization must also be linked with Montagu's own religious beliefs. In *My Club and I*, she described her club work as "aimed at keeping Judaism alive among our young people," despite the friction her religious development and work caused with her Orthodox father.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> Levy, "The West Central Club..."

<sup>116</sup> Montagu, *My Club and I*, p. 19.

Even before she helped form the West Central Jewish Girls' Club, Lily Montagu offered children's services through her synagogue. These English services offered her an early opportunity to begin her spiritual ministry; she brought the strength of her religion to the start of the club. Each evening the club concluded in prayer, and talks on religious matters were commonplace.<sup>117</sup> The club was also closed on Friday evenings for Sabbath observance.

Despite these efforts, it was difficult to inspire an interest in religion in the club members. Few of the girls attended synagogue regularly or observed the Sabbath, despite the encouragement of Lily Montagu and other club leaders. There seemed to be several reasons for this lack of religious practice. Firstly, in many of the girls' homes, the Jewish traditions from Eastern Europe were upheld. In these cultures, unmarried girls need not participate in public worship and when a girl was menstruating, she was especially instructed not to participate in religious observance or pray as she was seen as "unclean."<sup>118</sup> It was also not economically possible for many of these girls to observe the Sabbath, as they were required to work on Saturdays to help support their family, while their fathers ran tailor shops and were required to work late into the night on Friday evenings and until mid-day on Saturdays.<sup>119</sup> Finally, as Lily Montagu noted, there was a great disconnect between traditional Judaism and the lives of the girls. This excerpt, from *Faith of a Jewish Woman*, indicates the religious indifference that Montagu discovered in the girls:

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<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 50.

<sup>118</sup> Montagu, *Faith...*, p. 23.

<sup>119</sup> Montagu, *My Club and I*, pp. 41-43; Ellen M. Umansky, *Lily Montagu and the Advancement of Liberal Judaism: From Vision to Vocation* (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1983), pp. 122-23..

I found that their Judaism was of the weakest, flimsiest kind, and had hardly any recognised connection with goodness. I remember being asked quite seriously by an intelligent girl, while we walked together arm in arm along the sea front in Littlehampton, ‘But *has* religion anything to do with goodness? I didn’t know,’ she added thoughtfully, as new possibilities presented themselves in her mind....I was surprised to find that Judaism was quite external from my girls’ lives: it did not seem connected with conduct....*They did not consciously let religion enter into life.*<sup>120</sup>

Montagu was deeply impacted by these experiences, and persisted in trying to encourage religious observance and belief in her girls. She dedicated a book entitled *Prayers for Jewish Working Girls* to the club members. Included in the book were prayers for apprentices and domestic servants, those unable to keep the Sabbath, and those getting engaged or married.<sup>121</sup>

Montagu also wrote a Friday evening service to rekindle Sabbath observance and girls were encouraged to join a guild within the club in which members dedicated themselves to staying home on Friday nights to observe the Sabbath. Though the success of these endeavors may have been small, Montagu notes in *My Club and I* that “to-day in many homes, young mothers who were once Junior Guild members and others who came strongly under Club influence hold their home Sabbath services and rejoice in their allegiance.”<sup>122</sup>

Sabbath-day services were held by Montagu first at the Dean Street club rooms, in which Lily and her sister ministered to West Central girls and, later, men and other Jewish women. The services were on Saturday afternoons so that those who had to work until 1:00 p.m. were able to attend before dinner. The services were also conducted in English, using prayers that “had a meaning for modern Jews and Jewesses in the actual

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<sup>120</sup> Montagu, *Faith...*, p. 20. Emphasis in original.

<sup>121</sup> Levy, “The West Central Club...”

<sup>122</sup> Montagu, *My Club and I*, p. 44.

circumstances of their lives.”<sup>123</sup> Montagu believed that girls turned away from the synagogue did so because of the long, boring sermons; by making religion more meaningful to their lives, she felt they could be brought back.<sup>124</sup>

Through her experience with religious leadership and observations of the failure of Judaism to be relevant in the lives of many of her Club girls, Montagu took very strongly to Liberal Judaism when she was introduced to the philosophy in the 1890s. She also met Claude Montefiore around this time and, with his help, formed part of a small group that brought the movement to Britain.<sup>125</sup> Under the guidance of Montefiore, Israel Mattuck and others, Montagu began to explore her own personal religion which she related to both the ideas of Liberal Judaism and beloved secular literature, also favored by Montefiore.<sup>126</sup>

Montagu’s involvement in this movement hurt her relationship with her father. However, this did not detract from her involvement and in 1916 a West Central Liberal section was established in conjunction with the club as part of the Jewish Religious Union. The synagogue evolved from Montagu’s early services, though the congregation “has not attracted a multitude of Club members. They have, as I have said before, no interest whatever in services of any kind. If attendance involves the slightest effort, the vast majority refuse to make it.”<sup>127</sup>

Liberal Judaism is radically different from the Orthodox Judaism that Montagu grew up practicing. As Adrienne Baker describes, Liberal Judaism saw the practice of Judaism “not as obedience to a set of rules but rather as an ethical imperative about how

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<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 45-46.

<sup>124</sup> Umansky, *op. cit.*, p. 122.

<sup>125</sup> Eric Conrad, “Lily Montagu...”

<sup>126</sup> Umansky, *op. cit.*, p. 84.

<sup>127</sup> Montagu, *My Club and I*, p. 47.

to act in the world. It therefore stressed one's duty to care for the welfare of others – Jew and non-Jew alike – rather than formal practice and observance,” although she also indicated that amongst Liberal Jews observance of the Jewish Sabbath and holidays increased in comparison to their parents and grandparents.<sup>128</sup> V.D. Lipman attributes the success of the movement to “the fact that reform Judaism in Britain had become very little more radical since its inception over a half a century before,” with services that still incorporated little English and seated men and women separately.<sup>129</sup> Liberal Judaism offered an alternative to this.

The practices of Liberal Judaism, as supported by Lily Montagu and Claude Montefiore were very radical, and though they gained support amongst some Jews in Britain, others were deeply offended by the movement. Lord Swaythling, a devoted Orthodox Jew, ended his relationship with his daughter after she professed to him her part in Liberal Judaism and belief “that the Bible was partly a human and not an entirely divine book,” an assertion that “caused him real pain.”<sup>130</sup> Swaythling's response to his daughter's involvement in Liberal Judaism is just one example of how divisive the movement was to the Jewish community.

Montagu balanced the lack of religious inclination of the club members with the efforts that some had taken, claiming that,

It has been generally understood that the Club leaders and their colleagues care about Judaism. We have been able to introduce a certain religious interest in our Club. It has fallen woefully short of the ideal we set ourselves; it does exist, nevertheless, and it is real. Girls and boys throughout the years have often sought God on their own account, having been stimulated by the Club....To put

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<sup>128</sup> Baker, *op. cit.*, pp. 84-5.

<sup>129</sup> Lipman, *op. cit.*, p. 92.

<sup>130</sup> Montagu, *My Club and I*, pp. 18-19.



the matter simply: our young people have discovered that our faith means a great deal to us and is the main source of our strength and happiness.<sup>131</sup>

Thus the religious basis of the West Central Jewish Girls' Club is interesting in that it is marked by both a firm commitment to Judaism and a membership that, for the most part, saw religion as only a nominal part of their lives.

### **Comparing the Girls' Friendly Society and the West Central Jewish Girls' Club**

In seeking to understand the impact of religion on both of these clubs, it is useful to draw broader comparisons to determine how they grew and developed. This section will analyze the self-professed goals of the organizations, their structure and how they undertook work with girls, the influence of the founders, and, finally, the influence of religion on the development of the organizations.

The founding purpose of these clubs is interesting in that, while both sought to elevate the morality of working-class girls, the West Central Jewish Girls' Club sought to fill another perceived void – that of Anglicization. Both clubs used language such as “uphold the purity” and “bring brightness and refinement” to describe their work with girls.<sup>132</sup> The women certainly perceived their work to be a godly, noble task, enriching the lives of the working-class girls by the example they set; their language reflects this perception.

More specifically, the G.F.S. wanted to prevent girls from falling into lives of vice. The insistence on Central Rule III – even at the expense of losing devoted workers who found the rule too exclusive – clearly illustrates just how committed Mrs. Townsend and the other G.F.S. Associates were to an organization that encouraged girls to maintain

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<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 47-48.

<sup>132</sup> Levy, “The West Central Story...”

their purity. Membership in the Girls' Friendly Society was intended to be a reward in and of itself; no girl who had led a sub-par life was to be admitted to the organization. Still, the organization grew out of discussions about how to raise the standard of virtue amongst British girlhood; it was created in response to the mid-century perceptions of increasing immorality and prostitution.<sup>133</sup>

The West Central also sought to address the purity of girls, by offering Jewish working girls a safe place to spend their leisure time. Working on a more local basis, Lily Montagu and the other West Central ladies did not limit their services to the uncorrupted. Rather, these women hoped to extend their influence and have a positive impact on the young Jewish girls who were otherwise surrounded by tough economic circumstances and immorality.

It should be noted that while the G.F.S. started in 1875, the West Central Jewish Girls' Club did not start until 1893. While both were concerned about the condition of working-class girls, they were created in response to the needs of their respective communities. The G.F.S. began work a number of years earlier than the West Central, however, most Jewish immigrants began to arrive in the 1880s, thus beginning the conflict between the Sephardic and Ashkenazi Jews in the last two decades of Victoria's reign. The great emphasis that the West Central Jewish Girls' Club placed on education strongly indicates that the organization was an outgrowth of this conflict.<sup>134</sup> Though not labeled as such by Montagu and the other West Central women, it was an attempt at the

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<sup>133</sup> Shiman, *op. cit.*, p. 98; Morgan, *op. cit.*, p. 103; Prochaska, *op. cit.*, pp. 184-85.

<sup>134</sup> The educational efforts of the West Central Jewish Girls' Club were recognized by the London Board of Education when it became the first club to receive a long-term grant of financial assistance for its work. Umansky, *op. cit.*, p. 121.

assimilation of the immigrant population that had settled in London's West End to work in the clothing industry.

Perhaps the most obvious comparison to make between the two organizations is of the clubs' structure and scope of activities. In January 1893, the Girls' Friendly Society in the Ely Diocese alone reported a total membership of 2,655 Members, 789 Candidates and 559 Associates for the previous year.<sup>135</sup> In comparison, the West Central Jewish Girls' Club only reached 670 members in 1914, well after the end of the Victorian era. The Girls' Friendly Society was established to work on a national level, incorporating as many girls of both Anglican and dissenting background as possible, whereas the West Central Club, as its name implies, was intended to serve a small local population in London.

With this difference in size and target membership populations, the governance structure of both organizations also proved to be very different. The G.F.S. "took a pride in its complex structure" which focused much of the governance responsibility on spinster Associates, as Brian Harrison points out.<sup>136</sup> The West Central, meanwhile, encouraged democratic processes within the club almost from its inception. Girls were encouraged to take a part in club programming and governance, as well as contributing to the overall maintenance of the club. Additionally, the two clubs diverge in the types of events and programs offered for girls. While both did offer educational and religious programs and classes, they differed in how social events were approached by the organization. The G.F.S. held teas and lawn fêtes at the country estates of prominent

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<sup>135</sup> M. MacMichael, "Report of the Work of the G.F.S. in Ely Diocese During 1892" in *Ely Diocesan Quarterly Leaflets*, 5GFS/5/051.

<sup>136</sup> Harrison, *op. cit.*, pp. 111, 121-22.

Associates,<sup>137</sup> whereas the West Central allowed girls to plan and host mixed-sex dances at rented halls, thus encouraging chaperoned, social mingling of Jewish youth.<sup>138</sup> Such G.F.S. events created a separate world for girls, offering benefits for the maintenance of their purity, while West Central dances encouraged responsibility amongst the girls and promoted the idea of Jewish marriage. Though the G.F.S. was not averse to Christian marriage for its members and, in fact, began issuing “marriage cards” in 1882 to recognize “honourable marriages,”<sup>139</sup> Montagu and the other leaders of the West Central were more concerned about inter-marriage between a Jewish girl and a gentile man, a practice contrary to Jewish custom.

Both organizations emphasized personal contact between girls and the women workers, but the nature of this contact differed as between the clubs. The G.F.S. carried greater class distinctions, as Associates set themselves apart from the working-class Members; contact between the two was intended to lift up the girls through the example of the benevolent women who took an interest in and befriended them. Within the West Central Jewish Girls’ Club, though, Lily and Marian Montagu inspired closer, compassionate contact, visiting girls in their homes to gain a better understanding about

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<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 114.

<sup>138</sup> Kohn, “From an Original Member.”

<sup>139</sup> Money, *op. cit.*, p. 72. These marriage cards were essentially certificates attesting to a girls’ honourable marriage. One such card from January 5<sup>th</sup>, 1899 bears the following inscription of passages from the Book of Proverbs: “A virtuous woman is a crown to her husband. Her price is far above rubies. The heart of her husband doth safely trust in her. She will do him good and no evil all the days of her life. She worketh willingly with her hands. She stretcheth out her hand to the poor; yeah, she reacheth forth her hands to the needy. Strength and honour are her clothing; and She shall rejoiceth the time to come. She openeth her mouth with wisdom; and in her tongue is the law of kindness. She looketh well to her household, and eateth not the bread of idleness. Favour is deceitful, and beauty is vain: but a woman that feareth the Lord, she shall be praised.” 5GFS/19/3/01.

working-class living conditions. That Lily Montagu, daughter of a self-made millionaire, went on to lobby for industrial reform, illustrates this difference.<sup>140</sup>

Comparisons should also be drawn between the influences of the founders of both organizations. Both Townsend and Montagu were dynamic figures, deeply involved in the creation, organization and success of the clubs. They were role models often referred to in club publications, and undoubtedly had a great deal of input in the operations of the groups. As the head of a large organization, though, Townsend's work often seemed to set her apart from the Friendly Girls she endeavoured to help. She wore many hats, including publishing club papers, administrative duties on the Central Council, and later serving as head of the Central Department for Candidates. She took the name "Foundress" with reference to her work with the G.F.S. Montagu, on the other hand, was more able to be intimately involved with the West Central girls she recruited to the club. Through an extensive pattern of home visits, she came to know many of these girls. She took on the name of "Club Mother," an indication of the influence of her own mother, as well as her attitude towards the girls in the club.<sup>141</sup>

Ultimately, though, the influence of religion on both organizations is essential to drawing comparisons between the two. The Girls' Friendly Society was supported and organized by the Anglican Church, though run by lay people. It was part of the Church's move towards social help organizations in the mid-Victorian era, as an effort to attract women to the church. All of those in leadership positions within the organization were required to be Communicants in the Church of England; by befriending girls that might

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<sup>140</sup> Spence, *op. cit.*, 502-506.

<sup>141</sup> Spence, *op. cit.*, 497.

not otherwise be impacted by religion, they were able to exert religious influence on the working classes.

More specifically, the Society gave the Anglican Church great leverage in promoting its ideas about how to lead a “Christian life.” Central Rule III insisted on a Christian ideal about avoiding sexual sin; in addition to this, girls were instructed in other virtues such as thrift and friendliness, to both make their working-class lives easier and practice Christian goodness. Quite simply, it is impossible to separate these Christian ideals from the core tenets of the G.F.S. The organization itself was based on what was perceived as “God’s work.”

While the West Central Jewish Girls’ Club was similarly imbued with religious influence, there is a great difference in that the organization is based on Judaism. Unlike the Girls’ Friendly Society, which was supported by the state church and thus more mainstream, the West Central drew on a smaller, minority religion that had historically faced persecution when it stood out too much. While both promoted their respective religions to members, the West Central was also influenced by the needs of the Anglo-Jewish community and thus included educative efforts aimed at assimilation as well as general religious education.

Additionally, the West Central Jewish Girls’ Club had a great influence on Lily Montagu’s personal religious beliefs and the development of Liberal Judaism in Britain. It served more as a catalyst of religious reinterpretation than as a tool of an existing religious branch. Even at that, however, the organization did not have the success at turning otherwise irreligious, though culturally Jewish, girls to Liberal Judaism for which Montagu would have hoped. In the end, though, she and the other volunteers saw any

small success as worthwhile; the organization was not intended solely to exert religious influence over girls, but to offer girls an alternative to the lives they currently led in the poor work conditions of the shops and crowded immigrant quarters in which they lived.

### **Conclusion**

The Girls' Friendly Society and West Central Jewish Girls' Club were pioneers in the clubbing movement for girls. Originally created to address concerns about immorality among working-class girls, they evolved into two very different organizations. The Girls' Friendly Society spread Christian values through a large, national, multi-tiered organization, while the West Central Jewish Girls' Club operated on a local basis to promote not just Jewish religion, but also assimilate the immigrant population in West Central London.

Both organizations were religiously influenced to a great degree. Within the Girls' Friendly Society, its tie to Anglicanism helped to define the moral values that governed the organization – namely Central Rule III – while within the West Central Jewish Girls' Club, Judaism offered a cultural springboard with which to approach the girls, while also encouraging the development of a new branch of Judaism in Britain. Religion thus helped define the Girls' Friendly Society, while the West Central was, in part, a proponent of a religious reinterpretation.

Despite these differences, both organizations offered women a new place within these established religions. Though for several years the Anglican Church had been expanding its social programming to attract women, the Girls' Friendly Society was the first organization of its kind linked directly to the church. Entirely run by women, the

organization is one of the key social groups that helped solidify women as a bulwark of the Anglican Church.

Though the organization was never involved in British politics or the women's suffrage movement, the G.F.S. did cast women in a new light. They saw themselves as capable of tasks previously reserved for men. Even if few G.F.S. girls became involved in the women's suffrage movement, the organization's place in the public sphere began to change public conceptions of what women were capable. This certainly had to precede any efforts at involving women in politics. As Brian Harrison expounds, "G.F.S. literature operated on the assumption that it was only the member who had problems: yet the Society also gave unobtrusive help to many of its associates, by mobilizing their organizing skills."<sup>142</sup> Many women had little experience with such organizing prior to their involvement; their involvement in G.F.S., though, "helped to emancipate the members...by consolidating a female working class elite whose example would raise the self-respect, and hence the status, of their sex."<sup>143</sup>

The West Central Jewish Girls' Club, started several years later, undoubtedly had a similar effect. Though there is no information about the involvement of West Central girls in the suffrage movement or politics in the early twentieth century, the club was revolutionary through its influence on Lily Montagu. First of all, Montagu's work with Liberal Judaism was inspired, in part, by her work with the club.<sup>144</sup> As this branch of Judaism took hold in Britain, it updated traditional practices such as seating men and women separate during services. Additionally, women were allowed to participate and lead services; Montagu also became the first woman to serve as a lay minister at the West

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<sup>142</sup> Harrison, *op. cit.*, 121.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*, 123.



Central Liberal Jewish Synagogue. Secondly, Montagu's work with the working-class girls of the West Central inspired her work for industrial reform. Outlined in Jean Spence's article, her involvement with the Women's Industrial Council certainly cast her in a public role not typical of a daughter of a member of the Jewish aristocracy.

Thus both organizations also helped to redefine women's roles at the end of the Victorian era, by casting women as actors in the public sphere, and not just observers. Though both organizations reinforced class divisions and forced middle class ideology on working class girls, involvement in the Girls' Friendly Society and the West Central Jewish Club allowed women to take on greater participatory roles within their respective religions – a huge advancement in the late Victorian era.

## Appendix 1.

<b>Year</b>	<b>Organization Name</b>	<b>Sex</b>	<b>Religion</b>
1844	Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA)	Boys	Christian
1854	Islington Presbyterian Church Young Men's Association	Boys	Presbyterian
ca. 1855	Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA)	Girls	Christian
1860	West London Youth Club	Boys	n/a
1860	Gateshead Wesleyan Methodist Young Men's Vigilance Band	Boys	Methodist
1860	Marylebone Presbyterian Church Young Men's Guild	Boys	Presbyterian
1861	Belgrave Presbyterian Church Young Men's Association	Boys	Presbyterian
1868	Camberwell Presbyterian Church Young Men's Association	Boys	Presbyterian
1873	Guild of Nazareth, Newington	Boys	Anglican
1874-75	Metropolitan Association for Befriending Young Servants	Girls	n/a
1875	Girls' Friendly Society (G.F.S.)	Girls	Anglican
1879	Young Women's Help Society	Girls	Anglican
1879	Flower Girls' Brigade	Girls	n/a
1880	Soho Club for Girls	Girls	n/a
1881	Young Men's Friendly Society	Boys	Anglican
1881	Kensington Presbyterian Church Young Men's Society	Boys	Presbyterian
1883	Boys' Brigade	Boys	Presbyterian
1885	Shaftesbury Boys' Club	Boys	n/a
1886	(East London) Jewish Girls' Club	Girls	Jewish
1887	Federation of London Working Boys' Clubs	Boys	n/a
1887	John Knox Presbyterian Church Young Men's Mutual Improvement Association	Boys	Presbyterian
1887	Jewish Working Men's Club and Lads' Institute	Boys	Jewish
1888	Club for Working Girls (Espérance Club)	Girls	Christian
1889	Florence Institute for Boys	Boys	n/a
1891	Church Lads' Brigade (CLB)	Boys	Anglican
1893	West Central Jewish Girls' Club (West Central)	Girls	Jewish
1893	Frideswide Girls' Club	Girls	Quaker
1893	Girls' Brigade of Ireland	Girls	Protestant
1895	Jewish Lads' Brigade (modeled on CLB)	Boys	Jewish
1898	West Central Jewish Lads' Club	Boys	Jewish
1899	Boys' Life Brigade	Boys	Christian
1900	Girls' Guildry of Scotland	Girls	Presbyterian
1900	Catholic Boys' Brigade	Boys	Catholic
1902	Girls' Life Brigade of England	Girls	Christian
1904	Junior Imperial and Constitutional League	Boys	n/a
1907-09	Boy Scouts	Boys	n/a
1910	Girl Guides	Girls	n/a

## Appendix 2.

Letter from Father Osborne, August 7, 1898:

Questions have been raised as to the Third Central Rule of the Society – its interpretation, the manner in which it is to be applied, its general effect upon the position of the Society, in the regard of Churchmen and etc. The following cases are submitted for consideration.

It is understood that the words “*Virtuous Character*” are interpreted in their strict-sense and not with regard to *reputation among others*; the latter interpretation being perhaps possible from the phrasing of the sentence “having borne a virtuous character.”

The cases submitted are not imaginary. Others might be given varying somewhat in detail, but these serve enough to cover general principles.

G.F.S. Case I. *A child of tender years*, under 10, perhaps as young as five, led [to] evil, her own consent can hardly be a question. Afterwards taken out of her surround and shielded and taught so that no further evil comes to her. Under favourable circumstances and by the Grace of God, all evil may entirely pass away, leave no apparent taint on the general character, and the facts spoken of may be totally forgotten. It is asked-

1. Is she eligible for the Society at the age say of 18?
2. It might happen that some lady or the person who had befriended her in childhood knew that she proposed to join the G.F.S.- Is such person bound to tell her she must not, and to bring back to her mind and life evil that is gone?
3. She might join in ignorance of the strict interpretation of the Rule at the age say of 18. Two or three years later, it might well come to her knowledge, or in some mission season she might be reminded of the past. Is she bound to resign her membership under such circumstances?

Case II. *A native Christian girl in India or Africa*. It may be said in general terms that *Virtue* does not exist among heathen girls. Further it may be said that there being no law there is no sin, and that the absence of “*Virtuous Character*” (as defined under Rule III) does not necessarily imply a state of degradation.

A heathen is converted at the age of 16 or 14 and her former life is put away. She is baptized and made “a new creature in Christ-Jesus.” The Church receives her fully, bids her forget the past, and live in Christ now who has made her new.

Is such a girl eligible for the Society?

Note. The same might apply to some girls in England.

Case III. A girl of perhaps sixteen – a young servant for instance sent out at night in a lonely place to do an errand for her mistress – is seized by two or three men and evil done to her.

She neither desires nor consents but is powerless to prevent. Perhaps the men are prosecuted and punished for the outrage.

1. Is she eligible to join the Society?
2. If she is already a member must she leave?

Case IV. A girl of perhaps 15 or 16 of low moral standard, with dull conscience for want of teaching, does wrong thoughtlessly; it might be said permits wrong to be done, perhaps almost as a joke, and totally forgets the whole thing. It leaves no impression on her mind or life, and never recurs. She grows up...an ordinary good sort of young woman, rather dull perhaps, is confirmed and becomes a Communicant. Filling a good place in service or other work, respected and trusted at 25 years of age. Through education, training, and perhaps in G.F.S. classes, having joined the Society in good faith at 20, and the working of grace, her conscience becomes enlightened, she recollects the past and realizes that it was sin. To visit her past sin on her would be to judge her, or require her to judge herself, for that by her *present* standard of right and wrong which is not just. Would it be expected of her, that if she come to a knowledge of the meaning of Rule III she should leave the Society?

Case V. A good member of the Society in a moment of weakness – perhaps unhappiness or loneliness – yields to a sudden temptation. A solitary act, bitterly repented of at once. Known to no other (save one) nor suspected, nor likely in anyway to bring scandal.

Is she to give up her membership?

Case VI. It is understood that Rule III applies to *Associates* as well as members. Cases I, II or III might occur with an Associate- allowing for some changes in the circumstances. What would be required of them?

In either of these it would be quite possible that the Associate- was now a person of great influence and usefulness, a Branch Secretary or other officer.

This further case is submitted – VI. A young woman of good position – not of the labouring classes – fails in her life. Subsequently she is happily married. During her married life, or in subsequent widowhood, she hears of the G.F.S. and wishes to become an Associate – desiring to help girls. Possibly her experience might make her wise and tender in advising others.

1. Is she eligible to be an Associate?
2. If she has become one already, would it be required of her to resign?

Case VII. This is not so much a case as a question. Supposing a friend to have knowledge of a failure – either recent or long ago – in a girl’s life, such knowledge being confidential as for instance.

A mother. A good mother. One who has adopted an orphan.

A clergyman preparing one for confirmation &c &c

Would the authorities of the G.F.S. consider such a one bound to –

1. Interfere to prevent her joining the G.F.S.
2. To urge on her as a matter of conscience that she should leave if already a member?

This might be applicable to any of the cases except Case V.

Note. By voluntarily leaving the Society, a girl runs great risk of criminating herself. She could not always have another reason to give which would be sufficient and also true. Many Associates (not knowing the true reason) would naturally, and rightly, try to persuade her not to leave.

Some would press her hard for a reason. Some associates might even say “You have not broken Rule III, have you?” When a girl must either lie or confess.

Other members would ask questions, and perhaps suggest suspicions. This would be the move likely when the girl had been popular and respected.

These points should be remembered in saying “Certainly she must leave” [*sic*] Especially with reference to cases I to V.

“Conditions on which Answers to Papers were Given-----” August 1898:

The following answers were given to two Papers sent by Father Osborne to Miss Grosvenor containing questions on difficulties experienced by some Clergymen in working the G.F.S. in their Parishes. They are given by the undersigned Members of Central Council, as the expression of their own opinion, but, with no authority from Central Council. The answers are to be considered strictly private and confidential, and the promise given that they shall be so considered by those into whose hands they are placed. It is also desired that only two [handwritten note at bottom of page that original copy may have said one, but unsure] copies should be made of them, and that in the event of Father Osborne’s leaving England he will leave them with a Clergyman, who will agree to the above conditions.

Signed Gertrude Campion and Victoria Grosvenor.

“3<sup>rd</sup> Central Rule” (Copy), August 1898

Morality was at so low an ebb when the G.F.S. was started that it was only by a strong Rule which would *act* as a deterrent that a higher standard of morality *could be* created.

A fall from Purity and loss of character was only looked upon as a misfortune, not a sin. Mothers would speak of children borne to their daughters out of wedlock as “Love Children” with absolutely no shame or appreciation of its sin. Childbirth, a month or two after marriage was considered respectable. This state of things prevailed throughout our country towns and villages.

The Rule is no doubt strong but it has to a great degree accomplished its purpose. Purity is more guarded as a precious possession, falls within the ranks of the Society, [and] resulting loss of membership have greatly decreased and the standard has been raised amongst *all girls* generally by the influence of the Society. This is testified to by Clergy and Workers in villages and country districts, as having “altered the whole state of things in the countryside” etc. A rule of the kind must always bear hardly on some cases, but for the sake of the Community, at large, for the sake of Purity, we would not dare to weaken it, ever, if we could. Where there is no “consent” to sin the girl is herself still virtuous, she will have known what sin is, but to lose character, consent is needed.

It would not be advisable to admit native Xtians in India or Africa to Membership. Work should begin there with little children as candidates. In cases such as IV and V the girls should not be admitted and should be hindered from doing so.

Where a G.F.S. Member, who is held in good repute in the world confesses to a Priest some sin against Purity in her past life, the decision as to her withdrawal or not from the Society must rest with him in his discretion, the intention, effect of Central Rule III being upheld. In all such cases *the assurance of silence* will be imperative. G.F.S. does not mean inquisition into the past (see Re. C Beckersteth’s paper) it does mean, broadly speaking Chastity and honourable reputation for such.

An associate’s life should, in our view, be absolutely “sans reproche.”

Letter to Father Osborne from Gertrude Campion, Sept. 6, 1898:

Dear Father Osborne,

Miss Grosvenor tells me that you are not satisfied with the answer sent respecting Cases IV and V. It is extremely difficult indeed almost impossible to give a distinct answer to cases, in which certain circumstances, conditions &c may make a great difference. I judge that Case IV refers to an act of sin against Purity, and yet not a distinct “Fall” in the accepted meaning of the word; it then seems to me that decision as to withdrawal or not from the Society would rest with the Priest who is directing the girl, and I think that what was written at the end of our Paper points to that. If a “Fall” then, the girl must withdraw, it would seem to me, quite as much for her own sake as for others; surely nothing could be more paralysing to any soul than to live as it were a lie with the fear of detection? No reason need be given for withdrawal and none should and I couldn’t believe would be asked. Number V is really positively referred to in the last paragraph of our Paper. It is only my own private opinion and may be faulty, but, I give it with a due sense of responsibility. – Yours truly, Gertrude Campion.

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