

History Notes: Issue 20

Women and the Foreign Office



Foreign &
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Office

FOREIGN OFFICE

WOMEN AND THE FOREIGN OFFICE

A HISTORY

FCO Historians

Credits and acknowledgements

This is an updated edition of History Note No. 6: *Women in Diplomacy, 1782-1999* written by Kate Crowe and Keith Hamilton. Additional research and text for this edition by James Southern.

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FOREWORD

The FCO today is worlds away from the Service I joined in 1983. In terms of equality, that's good news for the current generation of diplomats who happen to be female. My cohort of 'fast stream' new entrants was greeted by Minister of State Richard Luce with, 'nice to see such a good balance of men and women'. There were about seven women in front of him in the Foreign Secretary's waiting room, and more than twice as many men. He meant well. But the unspoken message he conveyed was that 30% women was quite enough, thank you. Several of those women, like me, had no family connection with the Diplomatic Service, and had applied through chance or curiosity. Most of those seven left the Service early in their careers.

In the 1980s, the absence of senior women was still being blamed on the pernicious 'marriage bar', lifted 11 years earlier. Someone joining the year before me was welcomed to her first job with, 'the best thing about you is that you're a woman'. He probably meant well too. Another friend of mine was the first woman allowed, in the mid-1980s, to give birth overseas and return to the same job. But only because her Ambassador argued her case with Personnel. Previously you would have been automatically sent back to London to have the baby and your posting cut short. 12 weeks was the maximum maternity leave then, and I knew of several women who didn't risk taking even that long.

The most positive change in the last two decades has been support for diplomats who are parents. That has been good for fathers and transformative for mothers. The FCO asked me to be photographed with my children at the start of a posting to New Delhi in 1998. The photograph appeared in The Times under the rather patronising headline, 'FCO to let mothers be ambassadors'. I was Political Counsellor at the time, and for a curious reason: I'd applied for the Commercial Counsellor post. The then High Commissioner – who later turned out to be a real ally – was reluctant to have me in the commercial slot and my husband, also a diplomat, as Political Counsellor. He would accept a 'joint posting' only if we switched jobs.

The FCO appointment system continues to be pretty opaque, particularly when it relates to the top jobs. Until very recently, there had never been a female British head of mission in Paris, Washington, Beijing, Tokyo, UKMis New York, New Delhi, or UKRep Brussels. To my knowledge, there have been at least two recent 'near misses' at breaking the exclusive male run in Paris. I like to think that those painful episodes cleared the way for two important appointments on merit: Dame Barbara Woodward to Beijing in 2015; and Karen Pierce to New York this year (2018). Karen's appointment – not just the first to New York, but a still rare ambassadorial appointment for a married woman with children – is especially ground breaking.

Back in the FCO of the 1980s, if you were married, your spouse's attitude or the state of your marriage could be commented on in your annual appraisal, as it was in mine for 1983. You had to deal with a certain amount of what the actor Emma Thompson, in a recent interview, skewered with the old fashioned word 'pestering'. Not taking it too seriously was the safest bet: making a fuss would have been career limiting.

Diplomats are usually savvy about spotting major cultural shifts and it would be hard to overlook the #MeToo movement; so I imagine and hope that's less prevalent today.

I was asked this year if I'd recommend the FCO as a career for women. I would. Partly because things have changed for the better in terms of how women are treated and regarded. And also because of the much higher number of talented women in the Service today. By the 1990s there were a few senior female role models in the FCO – including Maeve Fort, Ann Grant, Pauline Neville Jones - all of whom joined before the marriage bar was lifted. Today I can think of a lot of talented women, a number of whom are parents, who deserve to be in the lists for those top diplomatic posts. Paris, Washington, PUS are, for now, still just the other side of the glass ceiling. I'll be cheering from the side-lines when it finally shatters. But it will take male allies inside the FCO – I trust they still exist – to make that happen.

Dame Nicola Brewer
FCO 1983-2013
High Commissioner to South Africa 2009-2013
February 2018

I INTRODUCTION

Since the earliest forms of society, human beings have engaged in diplomacy, and as long as human beings have engaged in diplomacy, then that diplomacy has been shaped by assumptions about gender. As early as the first century BC, a female diplomat named Feng Liao officially represented the Han Dynasty of ancient China. Her reputation is preserved in a contemporary poem celebrating her life:

*A warm send-off for the royal caravan
moving westward through the pass
Resourceful and talented,
the woman envoy
Studied history and emulates
Ambassador Su Wu.
Her sage, heroic deeds will be famous
down through the ages.*

Feng Liao's story reminds us that there are always two ways of writing about the history of women in diplomacy. Some women, like her, transcend their sex to influence the masculine world of diplomacy, and are celebrated as such – think of Elizabeth I or Freya Stark. Others, although influential, find that as women their stories are absent from the historical record or neglected by historians. The task, of course, is to uncover, tell and retell both sets of stories to learn as much as we can about the relationships between gender and diplomacy.

This publication charts women's long journey in British diplomacy from outsiders to official representatives. It attempts to bring to life the incredibly diverse and important ways in which women have influenced the work of the Foreign Office throughout its existence. It hopes, as much as is possible, to construct a sound historical foundation for the struggle for gender equality in twenty-first century diplomacy.

Spain pioneered the employment of women as diplomats in the modern period when, in 1507, Ferdinand of Aragon sent his widowed daughter Catherine formal credentials as his ambassador in England and instructions to negotiate with Henry VII about the delay in her proposed marriage to Prince Henry. France soon followed: the Treaty of Cambrai (1529) was popularly known as 'The Ladies' Peace' because it had been negotiated and drafted by Louise of Savoy, mother of King Francis I, and Margaret of Austria, aunt of the Emperor Charles V, on behalf of their respective countries. Later that century, Madame Delahaye-Vautelaye was appointed French Ambassador to Venice, while the Marechale de Guebriant became the French Ambassador to Poland in the early years of the seventeenth century. The youngest daughter of Charles I, Henrietta Anne, Duchess of Orleans, acted as Louis XIV's representative when negotiating the secret Anglo-French Treaty of Dover with her brother, Charles II, in 1670. France subsequently discontinued the practice.

In the eighteenth century, we know of only two examples of a woman acting as her country's representative. One was Mrs. White, the widow of the British Consul at Tripoli. When her husband died in office in November 1763, Mrs. White took on the management of consular affairs, sought and obtained audience of the Regent of Tripoli, looked after some English sailors who had been detained in Tripoli, and conducted official business with aplomb until her husband's successor arrived in 1765. Mrs. White's initiative was unofficial, and was considered 'strange and ridiculous' by the Secretary of State, Lord Halifax. Nonetheless, her claim for official expenses of nearly £800 appears to have been honoured, at least in part. Around the same time, following the death of her husband, Richard Wolters, in 1771, Mrs Marguerite Wolters carried on the British spy network in Rotterdam, at least until 1785. In addition, there were cases like that of Mrs McNeill, wife of the British representative in Persia in the 1830s, who conducted her husband's official correspondence while he was away on tour.

In the seventeenth century the Dutchman Wicquefort considered the question of women in the Diplomatic service under the titles 'Si l'Ambassadeur se peut server de l'entremise des femmes pour le progrez de ses affaires' and 'Si les femmes peuvent estre Ambassatrices'. Wicquefort believed that women could assist in the running of diplomatic affairs although he did not think that they could become ambassadors. It was not until three centuries later, well into the twentieth century, that the possibility of admitting women to the administrative grade of the Diplomatic Service was even considered in Britain. It is difficult to appreciate today, for instance, the degree of iconoclasm shown by Harold Nicolson in making the heroine of his novel *Public Faces* (1932) the Permanent Under-Secretary of the Foreign Office. Yet although there were none in the administrative grade, women had worked in the Foreign Office since 1782.

II 'NECESSARY WOMEN': 1782-1999

Housekeepers and Housemaids

The first reference to women in the newly-established Foreign Office of 1782 was to Charles James Fox's 'necessary woman' or Housekeeper, Martha Southcott. Little is known of Southcott, other than that she had been hired from the old Northern Department and that she was replaced the following year by Ann Cheese. Cheese left a written description in her own hand of her duties, from which we know that she employed, fed, housed and clothed one man and three maid servants, who helped her to keep the Cleveland Row premises clean. She provided the office with paper and other items, pumped water to the printing room and water closets, and disposed of old office pens and ends of tallow candles to augment her income. She was comparatively well paid, receiving a stipend of £48, which rose to £100 in 1795.

The opening in 1868 of the new Foreign Office building in Downing Street brought the Housekeeper the extra duty of providing luncheons for the staff, for which a further allowance of £25 was sanctioned. Contemporary accounts suggest that this was an unsuccessful development: the Chief Clerk in the 1890s received many complaints about the food, which ranged from comments such as 'the garbage of Mrs Roberts' to 'having this day sat down to a plateful of maggots'.

In the nineteenth century the Foreign Office was, until noon, 'the preserve of the housemaids', who did all their cleaning before the clerks came in to work. Little is known of them, however, except for 'the energetic little housemaid' who helped to save irreplaceable original treaties by bringing buckets of water to quench a fire which broke out in the Library in the old Foreign Office in 1839. In 1914 the maids were still housed in the Foreign Office building, their bedrooms on the top floor overlooking Downing Street.

By the twentieth century the posts of Housekeeper and Chief Office Keeper had been united, and were usually held by men. By the early 1990s the majority of Office Keepers, now renamed 'Accommodation Managers', were, once again, women. However, in August 1998, as a result of a Value For Money (VFM) exercise an outside agent was appointed to manage the buildings: the FCO's 'necessary woman' has passed into history and been replaced by a Facilities Management Help Desk.

'Lady Typewriters' and Personal Assistants

In 1886 the Treasury accepted that the installation of typewriters represented significant savings in time and money as a skilful machinist could do the work of two copyists at a third of their wages. Miss Sophia Fulcher was the first typist appointed by the Foreign Office (in 1889) and she and her later colleagues were at first described as 'Lady Typewriters'. Originally used only for non-confidential copying work, by 1905 they were typing drafts and outgoing despatches. A Treasury minute of 17 March 1894 laid down that the service of women typists should cease as a matter of course upon marriage, and made provision for the grant of a marriage gratuity.

In February 1907, Miss Fulcher and her eight colleagues petitioned the Treasury for a rise in pay, pointing out that even the maximum salary was barely a living wage, and had probably been fixed on the assumption that most typists would leave the service to marry after a few years. The Foreign Office typists stated that most of them were obliged to work until they were physically unable to do so, and the pension to which they were entitled after thirty to forty years' service 'would admit only of the barest existence'. Their request was endorsed by the Secretary of State, Sir Edward Grey, who wrote that he had 'pleasure in testifying to the excellent work which is performed by these Typists under the able guidance of their Superintendent. The work comprises the transcription of a considerable amount of French manuscript which is often difficult to decipher, as well as the reproduction of documents emanating from foreign countries and written by persons imperfectly acquainted with the English language ... [it] is very desirable to grant adequate remuneration to such persons for the valuable services which they are able to render.' A pay rise followed, so that by 1912 wages ranged from forty shillings (£2) for Chief Superintendents, to twenty to twenty-six shillings (£1-£1.30) per week for ordinary typists.

The Civil Service Commission introduced regulations for the appointment of Shorthand Typists on 1 May 1908. Candidates between the ages of 18 and 30 had to pass examinations in writing, spelling, copying manuscript, arithmetic and typewriting. English composition was later added to this list. They were expected to take down shorthand at 70 to 100 words a minute, and to type at least 800 words an hour. Candidates nominated to the India Office were obliged to type at a speed of 1000 words an hour. By 1914 the Foreign Office typing pool comprised some 16 women, who were kept at a distance from the male staff in the room by means of a curtain.

As a result of the First World War and the Peace Conferences, the Foreign Office in 1922 employed 15 permanent and six temporary shorthand typists, with one superintendent. The demands on them were so intense that the Office requested Treasury permission to increase the permanent staff to 20 and to pay a special allowance to those with qualifications in French. Since there was 'a constant danger of losing the best members by resignation to take up private posts', the Treasury agreed and the award of the special allowance became dependent on passing formal examinations in French, French shorthand, and typing.

By 1930 there were 38 typists, 24 shorthand typists and six superintendents working in the Foreign Office. Some were allocated to senior-grade officials or departments and a few served in posts abroad, but most worked in the Typing Pool which had been established in rooms on the newly-built third floor of the Main Building. Conditions there were far from ideal. The ventilation was poor, one room had been painted a depressing grey so as not to show the dirt, and the predominantly pre-1914 typewriters were extremely noisy. Conditions improved following an efficiency study by the National Institute of Industrial Psychology in 1930, which recommended repainting the rooms in light colours, improving ventilation and access, and the replacement of antiquated typewriters.

Throughout the interwar period, the standard of Foreign Office typists was acknowledged to be extremely high. Those with qualifications in French were often borrowed by other departments to assist at conferences. When a Treasury delegate went to Paris in 1929 for talks on reparations, 'he asked for a Foreign Office shorthand

writer as no Treasury shorthand writer had the necessary knowledge of French. And he was considerably surprised ... [that she] could answer the telephone and deal with messages in French'. The National Association of Women Civil Servants submitted a pay claim in 1934 on behalf of typing staff, and the Foreign Office supported its preparation by providing a memorandum on the work of its own typists. The Office remained aware that good pay was essential to encourage well-educated women to join the staff and to stay, and, in this instance at least, succeeded in persuading the Treasury to sanction a moderate increase in pay.

As a result of the Second World War there was a nearly fourfold increase in the number of typists. For instance, in May 1946 the Archives and Communications Departments had respectively 73 typists in six pools and 65 typists in four shifts while the rest of the Office had another 87 shorthand typists. More importantly, the reforms of the Diplomatic Service announced by Anthony Eden in 1943 and implemented after the war by Ernest Bevin led to the secretarial staff forming a new Branch C in 1947. Pay-scales and allowances were improved, and there were some opportunities for promotion to executive posts in Branch B of the Service.

From Temporary Clerks to Executive Branch B: 1915-1946

The 1915 Report of the MacDonnell Commission on the Civil Service held that 'in connection with the employment of women . . . the object should be, not to provide employment for women as such, but to secure for the State the advantage of the services of women whenever those services will best promote its interests'. It also recommended that the Treasury should carry out a special enquiry to ascertain the clerical, inspectorial and administrative positions which should be filled by women, but action on the Report had to be suspended on account of the War.

Meanwhile, the increased wartime departmental workload and the absence of civil servants on military duty resulted in the large-scale employment of temporary staff, many of whom were women. Sir John Tilley, as Chief Clerk, was responsible for recruiting women as clerks and assistants to the Foreign Office at that time, and his views on them were unenthusiastic. While 'many were naturally amateurs . . . some had difficulty, according to their male colleagues, in acquiring habits of precision, and in the registries were said to be apt to think one number on a paper as good as another. Others were hard to persuade that, once engaged, they could not go off at once when their mothers and aunts and children were sick or otherwise in need of their help. Considerable difference of opinion existed in the Government offices and elsewhere as to the working power of women as compared with that of men . . . I think we should, diplomatically, have said four women to two men'.

The temporary staff nevertheless included a number of highly-educated and able women, such as Victoria Spenser Wilkinson, the daughter of the military historian, Spenser Wilkinson; and Dorothy Bigby, who had graduated from University College London before joining the Office on a temporary basis in June 1915. She was subsequently attached to the Peace Delegation at Paris, 1918-19, where her talents and industry won her an MBE. Lilian Penson, still largely unacknowledged as an editor of *British Documents on the Origins of the War* despite being a pioneer woman academic, was brought into the Civil Service during the war and went on to work with

the Foreign Office as a historian in the interwar period. Another woman to earn an MBE for her work in the Foreign Office during the war was Miss E. Townsend, an Assistant Librarian. A newspaper report wrote that 'it is with the greatest regret that she is seen making way for a man who has the right to the work'.

In the immediate postwar period it was necessary both to reduce the numbers of temporary staff and to make good the shortage of established staff. It was decided to hold a number of competitions for higher-grade posts which would be open to ex-Service personnel, and to offer opportunities of obtaining clerical and related posts to persons of either sex who had already worked in temporary capacities. In the interim, however, wartime temporary staff were being sacked in favour of employing temporary ex-Service personnel. As a result, it was only from 1921 that women were engaged as clerical and executive officers on a permanent basis in the Foreign Office. 48 clerical officers were appointed in 1921, and by 1939 this number had risen to 75 (four of whom were serving abroad) with another nine clerical assistants. The employment of women certainly produced a change in atmosphere: one diplomat, returning from abroad after many years' absence, said that one of the greatest changes to him was seeing 'the girls walking through the corridors of the Foreign Office carrying teapots'. Stephen Gaselee, the Foreign Office Librarian, observed in 1933 that women had become 'an important element in our modern organisation' and that they had 'added not only brightness but efficiency to our labours, chiefly in the direction of taking tasks from the shoulders of those who should have been engaged in responsible and executive work, but were formerly drowned in routine'. Nevertheless, only a handful of women appointed in the early 1920s had obtained promotion: Maude Victoria Moore had become an Executive Officer in Establishment and Finance Department, while Dorothy Bigby was a Staff Officer, later Registrar, serving in the Librarian's Department. She eventually became Acting Librarian in 1945-46, having been elected a Fellow of the Royal Historical Society.

Between 1939 and 1945 the exigencies of war again proved paramount in widening the range of executive and clerical positions available to women in the Foreign Office, and these developments were confirmed with the formation of Branch B as part of the post-war Eden Reforms of the Diplomatic Service.

III WOMEN DIPLOMATS: 1919-1939

Interwar discussions

The passing of the Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act in 1919 brought the technical possibility of admitting women to the administrative grade of the Diplomatic and Consular Services on to the horizon for the first time. Hopes were short-lived, however: although the Act stated that 'a person shall not be disqualified by sex or marriage from the exercise of any public function, or from being appointed to or holding any civil or judicial office or post', this was qualified by provisions 'giving power to reserve to men any branch of or posts in the Civil Service in any of His Majesty's possessions overseas, or in any foreign country'. Regulations made in 1921 specifically restricted to men all posts in the Diplomatic and Consular Services, and certain other posts overseas.

The question was reopened in 1931, following a recommendation in the Report of the Tomlin Commission on the Civil Service, and a committee under the chairmanship of Sir Claud Schuster, Permanent Secretary to the Lord Chancellor, was convened. In 1933, as part of the Foreign Office response to investigations by the Committee, Charles Howard Smith, Chief Establishment Officer, suggested to the PUS that he should seek the views of all HM Representatives abroad on the proposed admission of women. If, as he believed, 'the vast majority take the view that women should not be employed, this would surely go some way to influence the Committee, because we shall have the views of the men on the spot'. Sir Robert Vansittart approved this suggestion, observing 'you will need some lucky horse-shoes in your gloves when you step into the ring'. A circular letter was accordingly sent, and replies were received from the Heads of every British Mission abroad. A few representatives were in favour of the admission of women, only one was violently opposed, and the remainder were unenthusiastic, chiefly on the grounds that local conditions would not allow such an innovation.

The Schuster Committee Considers the Admission of Women: 1933-34

The Schuster Committee met on ten occasions, heard the evidence of 40 witnesses, and produced a report in 1934 summarising the arguments for and against the admission of women to the Diplomatic Service. Those in favour declared that the objections to the employment of women were based 'in part on prejudice, and in part on fear of the unknown', and that the difficulties peculiar to the Service would not be insuperable.

Arguments against included the view that there were many countries so different from Britain that 'it would be extremely difficult for a woman to make the contacts which form a large part of the work of diplomacy'. It was also alleged that the introduction of a woman officer into the intimate life of missions abroad would present difficulties, in that she might have to live alone, which would excite 'undesirable comment' or that she might at some missions have to share Government-owned accommodation with another junior officer, which would be embarrassing unless the other officer was also

female. Some held that 'the physical constitution of women is not such as to enable them to bear the strain of continuous overwork in hot and unhealthy climates'.

Those supporting admission had declared that women were particularly fitted to contribute to the general work of a mission abroad in connection with social and philanthropic duties and the observance of women's movements. The opposition replied that such work 'was now adequately performed by wives and daughters of members of the Service without any cost to the State'. This was reiterated by the British Minister in Berne, who noted that women already played a significant role in diplomacy as diplomatic wives, with the advantage that 'you have two diplomatists in your service for more or less the price of one'. On the other hand he did concede that there was one sphere connected with the Service in which women could be even more usefully employed than men: the Office of Works, especially the furnishing branch. 'I consider that a woman with taste and experience as an interior decorator would show more discrimination in selecting furniture and materials for Embassies and Legations . . . than any man'.

As for the Consular Service, its work was, the report said, performed in circumstances of greater loneliness and discomfort than the Diplomatic Service. It brought officers into 'contact with commercial men of all classes and types . . . and with seafaring men of every rank, race and colour . . . The rough population of the dockside does not offer the most fruitful field for an experiment of this nature'. Parts of the Committee were unimpressed by this argument, and pointed out that 'for many years the Government, through the Colonial Office, has quietly and unobtrusively recruited women in considerable numbers, and has assigned them to posts in these areas where their services were needed'. Moreover, women who entered the Colonial Service 'live in tropical or semi-tropical areas from the beginning to the end of their official careers, whereas life in the Consular Service . . . offers the almost certain relief of occasional or permanent transference to a more temperate climate'.

Another problem raised by the Committee was the question of marriage, as 'a woman could not be permitted to remain in the Service if she married a foreigner'. Resignation on marriage was recommended, 'for it is unthinkable that a woman should trail about from post to post a husband who would, owing to the nature of his wife's employment, be precluded from taking up almost any appointment in the place in which his wife was serving . . . The alternative of laying it down that a married woman diplomat . . . should not take her husband to any post . . . is even more unthinkable. On the other hand, the task of a spinster endeavouring to discharge the duties, official and social, of a diplomatic or consular officer, would be still more difficult'.

Foreign Comparisons

Britain appeared to be lagging behind the rest of the world in its refusal to employ women as diplomats. Mrs Keynes of the National Council of Women of Great Britain stated that in 1933, 13 countries including Latin and Eastern states such as Nicaragua and Turkey had admitted women to their Diplomatic and Consular Services. Spain was cited as one of the pioneers of women in diplomacy, with the appointment of Isabel de Zulueta as *Chancelier* of the Spanish Legation at Panama in 1933, while the Appointments Committee of Glasgow University made much of Chilean women

consular officers. Olga de la Barra served as Vice-Consul for Chile at Glasgow from 1927 to 1930, and was then promoted to be a Consul-attaché in London. Ines Ortuzar was Chilean Consul at Hull from 1928 to 1930, when she was promoted to Consul at Glasgow with responsibility for the whole of Scotland, and she echoed the views of Miss de la Barra in declaring that 'I have never found it difficult to carry out my less pleasant duties of handling the undesirable cases of sailors, etc. taking it just as part of my daily work.'

Admission of Women Diplomats Around the World	
Bulgaria	1920
United States	1922
Chile	1927
Netherlands	1927
Norway	1939
Australia	1943
France	1945
United Kingdom	1946
Canada	1947
Austria	1947
Brazil	1954
Japan	1958

During the interwar period, the United States and the Soviet Union were the most enterprising in the appointment of women diplomats. Ruth Bryan Owen served as American Ambassador to Copenhagen from 1933 to 1936 with considerable success. The British representative in Finland recalled, somewhat condescendingly, knowing an American woman Secretary at Berne 'with whom one could talk as if she were a man'. However he added, 'she had the option of transfer to Panama or getting married and chose the latter'.

The Soviet representative at Stockholm, Alexandra Kollontai, is generally recognised as the world's first ever female Head of Mission. Sir Archibald Clark Kerr described her as 'very feminine and quite remarkably intelligent'. Having entered the service at the top, with postings to Mexico and Norway before Sweden, she assured Clark Kerr 'that she has throughout been treated as a man and has never been conscious of any disability on account of her sex. Nevertheless, as regards that part of her work which is done *tête-à-tête*, she confesses that even now she prefers to ask the man with whom she has to talk to luncheon than to dinner'. The fact that Clark-Kerr chose these terms of reference is indicative of attitudes at the time.

This evidence was nonetheless questioned and then dismissed by the Foreign Office and Consular Service representatives. Having referred the information to the Governments concerned, they now rejected most of it 'as inaccurate and misleading'. Of the 14 countries said to employ women in their diplomatic services, 'three have never in fact employed women; three have in the past admitted women or one woman, but do so no longer; three others admit women to their Foreign Offices but . . . not . . . abroad; and of the thirteen women stated to be or to have been employed in Diplomatic or quasi-Diplomatic posts by the remaining five countries, five resigned after short

periods of service, and six do not furnish the slightest analogy with the system of admission by competitive examination in force in this country. There seems in fact to be a tendency on the part of those countries which have attempted or considered the experiment now to reject it. We have been recommended to appear as pioneers, but . . . we might be pioneering in a territory which had been already explored and abandoned'.

Between such views there was little middle ground, and the Schuster Committee was unable to make unanimous recommendations in its report about either the Diplomatic or Consular Services. With regard to the Diplomatic Service, four members were against the admission of women, two in favour of it, and two more in favour of admission on an experimental basis for a period of seven years. As to the Consular Service, six were definitely opposed to the admission of women while two proposed that a limited number should be seconded to it from the Home Civil Service. The Report was considered by the Cabinet on 28 November 1934, and it was agreed that it should be published with a Government statement accepting the conclusions of the majority against the admission of women. The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs was accordingly requested to draft the statement to accompany publication of the Report, but according to Howard Smith, Sir John Simon 'buried the question until he left office' and Sir Samuel Hoare 'would not touch it'. Anthony Eden brought the matter out into the open again by publishing the Report in the form of a White Paper on 28 April 1936. This duly recorded the Government's view that they 'do not consider that any injustice is being done to women by their continued exclusion from the Diplomatic Service', and that they were convinced 'that the time has not arrived when women could be employed either in the Consular Service or in the Diplomatic Service with advantage to the State or with profit to women'.

IV WOMEN DIPLOMATS: THE POSTWAR YEARS

If the story of women in diplomacy before 1939 was one of exclusion, then the years after 1945 may best be described by the phrase 'cautious inclusion'. The official admission of women to the Diplomatic Service in 1946 definitively closed the debate about women's official eligibility for diplomatic work, yet questions of pragmatism and traditionalism persisted. Could women be mothers *and* diplomats? Should a married man be forced to accompany his wife to postings? Would female diplomats hinder British foreign relations in countries where women had comparatively few rights? The issues facing women in the twenty-first-century Foreign Office – recruitment, promotion, maternity care, joint postings and so on – have their roots in debates dating back to the Second World War.

1939-1946: The War, the Gowers Committee and the Admission of Women Diplomats

Many, if not all, of the arguments made against women diplomats were emphatically rebutted by the events of the Second World War. The Foreign Office jobs vacated by conscripted men were often filled by women, who, serving with great distinction, dispelled any myths about feminine unsuitability for diplomatic work. By 1945, at least 108 women graduates were known to have been appointed to temporary administrative posts in the Diplomatic Service; of these, 31 served at Assistant Principal level, and 16 served overseas as First, Second and Third Secretaries, as Vice Consuls and as Press Attachés. Freya Stark (Iraq and Italy), Nancy (Ann) Lambton (Persia) and Elizabeth Wiskemann (Switzerland) served with notable distinction, and remain well-known to many, but there were also immeasurably important contributions made by many other women to the codebreaking efforts at Bletchley Park and the Political Intelligence Department.

The Foreign Office itself underwent a transformation in attitudes to recruitment during the Second World War. A White Paper entitled 'Proposals for the Reform of the Foreign Service', issued by then Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden in 1943, made unprecedented promises about creating a haven of 'equal opportunity for all' in the Diplomatic Service. The postwar world, Eden argued, required a modernised service, with British overseas representation 'from every social sphere'. A new recruitment system, the Civil Service Selection Board, was devised and rolled out after the war, promising to rebuild the Foreign Office on the principle of equality of opportunity – thereby attempting to fulfil Eden's promises. Crucially, part of Eden's modernising White Paper promised to re-examine the possible admission of women diplomats.

The ideas in the White Paper were all contained in a 1940 memorandum written by Ernest Bevin, a Labour member of the wartime coalition. Although Eden tried to fudge the issue, he was reminded of his pledge two years later by the Cambridge University Women's Appointment Board. Eden remarked in early 1945 that 'it would be a pity if women who had served in the war and whose characters had been tried out and formed by responsible war work, should be unable to compete in the reconstruction examinations'. Consequently, on 19 March 1945, the War Cabinet voted to convene a committee to re-open the question of women's admission to the Diplomatic Service.

The prospects for a favourable verdict were, by the time the committee reported in 1946, considerably greater than at the time of the Schuster Report in 1934. The Chairman Ernest Gowers prided himself on being fair, non-partisan and ruthlessly 'by-the-book' (his most famous publication was a guide to the writing of proper English prose). Moreover, the Gowers Committee was majority female. Given this auspicious set of personnel, and the fact that Ernest Bevin, a passionate meritocrat who had voiced his support for the idea of women diplomats as early as 1942, would take over as Foreign Secretary after the 1945 General Election, the situation looked promising for campaigners for women's admittance.

There were, nonetheless, some men still committed to defending the masculine status quo. Evidence was heard from one unnamed witness suggesting that women were 'less objective than men, less capable of keeping secrets, less good at teamwork, more liable to allow authority to go to their heads and more prone to let enthusiasm run away with them'. Old chestnuts were also redeployed: Edgar Joint, Commercial Counsellor in Brussels, said that 'women would not be acceptable leaders' in the 'bloody and unpleasant' situations in which his career had involved him. Thomas Ainscough, a former mayor of Wigan who had worked for a quarter of a century in India, Burma and Ceylon thought that women's perceived unfitness for so-called hardship posts would lead to frustration at their being offered supposedly 'easier' jobs. The report quoted him as saying that women

would automatically fall into a privileged position, and friction would arise if this took place on a considerable scale. He compared this process with the development of the Indian Civil Service where Indians are now getting all the best and easiest posts.

The complaints that women were emotionally, intellectually or physically inferior to men were far from new. Ainscough's parallel between gender in Britain and race in what was still a British colonial territory, however, illustrated the extent to which women were still (by some) perceived as radical outsiders to British diplomacy.

Despite this opposition, much of the evidence heard by Gowers reflected the egalitarian optimism generated by women's war work. The Council of Women Civil Servants (CWCS), who formed in 1920 and could count the admission of women to the Home Civil Service in 1925 as their biggest achievement, were among the boldest advocates for women diplomats:

"Safety first" is not a motto for a great and influential country in a changing world . . . Women are employed freely in the foreign services of the two great countries with which we are most closely associated in the struggle against Nazi and Fascist tyranny and they are also admitted to the foreign services of most, if not all, of the smaller democratic countries. Characteristically, the Fascist countries do not admit them.

The CWCS argument operated on the basis that if Britain was to maintain a world role after the war as a bastion of liberal democracy, then equality of the sexes in all areas of public life was fundamentally necessary. Appointing women diplomats would be a fitting legacy of the struggle against Nazism.

High-profile advocates of the CWCS position tipped the balance in favour of women diplomats. Freya Stark dealt with the 'unpostability' argument by pointing out that 'in countries where women are still, even if not veiled, inclined to be rather secluded, a man cannot possibly have as intimate a knowledge of the country as is open to a woman if she tries'. The Air Ministry observed that the ability of the women whom they had employed in meeting and negotiating with foreign representatives was 'so high that there could be no doubt of their competence to fill posts such as are ordinarily filled by diplomatic, commercial and consular officers'. Finally, the Admiralty, the Merchant Navy Federation and the Chamber of Shipping each dropped their objections from 1934; the latter emphasized 'the fundamental change . . . particularly during the war in regard to the employment of women and the more general appreciation that brains and capacity are not the monopoly of either sex'.

The Gowers Committee recommended, therefore, that 'women should be equally eligible with men for admission to the Foreign Service', urging the Foreign Office to 'lose no time in making the experiment real'. There were, however, conditions attached. Women would have to resign on marriage, unlike in the Home Civil Service for which the marriage bar was abolished in 1946, and moreover the recruitment of women to Branch A (the senior grades of the service) would be limited to 10 per cent of the total intake in any one year.

Given these terms, and the fact that, in common with the rest of Whitehall, women were paid 20 per cent less than men in equivalent jobs, this situation was hardly the 'fair field and no favour' situation desired by women's rights groups. It was, nonetheless, the opening of a new chapter in the history of Britain's foreign relations.

1946-1960: Britain's First Female Diplomats

Ernest Bevin became Foreign Secretary in 1945 and accepted the recommendations of the Gowers Committee in early 1946. He did, however, insist on a crucial caveat:

While I agree that no discrimination should be made by me in posting women abroad, I could not agree to the interests of our representation abroad being subordinated to the need of "making the experiment real" . . . It would be wrong to post a woman, or, for that matter, a man, to a place where we did not think their presence would be in the public interest.

Bevin passionately believed in meritocracy, and so his insistence on favouring blind recruitment and posting based on notions of talent and ability makes perfect sense. It does, however, belie a barrier that would hinder the recruitment of women diplomats for decades. When Bevin talked about 'the public interest', he meant the public interest *as understood and defined by men*. Assumptions about female suitability for diplomatic posts would remain unchanged, and with them the assumptions that diplomacy was a man's world in which women would have to learn to compete on men's terms were they to succeed.

The first fifteen years of the new rule brought relatively few female diplomats into the senior grades of the Diplomatic Service. Between 1946 and 1952, 18 women were recruited; of these, seven had already left by 1954 – largely because of the marriage

bar. Recruitment of women declined after that: between 1953 and 1960, just two women joined (as opposed to 89 men). 338 women applied to join the senior grades of the Diplomatic Service in the years 1950-55 – over one-fifth of the corresponding male total – so there was no shortage of candidates. At the self-styled meritocratic Civil Service Selection Board, female applicants to the Diplomatic Service scored a two per cent success rate while male success rates were as high as seven per cent.

There were, of course, mitigating factors outside of recruiters' control, such as the fact that 75 per cent of Britain's university undergraduate population was male until the 1960s. The plight of women diplomats is always part of a wider societal struggle over gender roles. But there were (as Bevin's comments suggested) clear cultural barriers to women's acceptance at the Foreign Office, as Dame Margaret Anstee (recruited 1948) recounted in her autobiography:

In day-to-day relations, negative reactions ranged from openly hostile to (sometimes involuntarily) patronising. I came back almost in tears one day from a glacial encounter with a senior officer dealing with the Middle East. More amusing was Caroline [Petrie]'s experience when she took a draft for clearance to the Vice-Marshal of the Diplomatic Corps, Marcus Cheke who, quill pen poised to pounce and finding no error, enquired with unintentional irony, 'Did *you* do this?' and when she modestly admitted authorship, insisted, in clear disbelief, 'What, *all* of it?'

In combination with structural barriers like the marriage bar – which forced women to resign on marriage – the existence of attitudes such as Cheke's leave little doubt as to why the intake of women to the Diplomatic Service resembled a trickle, rather than a flood, in the 1940s and 1950s.

There were, of course, notable pioneers among the early women diplomats. The first to be appointed was Monica Milne, who served in the United States with the Ministry of Economic Warfare during the war, and whose impressive Foreign Office interview performance saw her immediately posted to Washington in September 1946. Cicely Ludlam, an Oxford graduate and veteran of Bletchley Park, was the next to be appointed: she and her dog Hamlet were sent to Belgrade in 1947. Caroline Petrie and Grace Rolleston followed later in the year. Other milestones were passed, too: in July 1950, Joan Burbridge (recruited in 1948) became the first woman ever to conduct a Foreign Office Press Conference. Joyce Gutteridge, who joined the Foreign Office as a legal adviser in 1947, helped draft the Geneva Convention (Red Cross) in 1949 before going on to represent Britain on the United Nations Outer Space Committee in the early 1960s, earning the nickname 'Our Lady in Outer Space'.

By the late 1950s, the accomplishments of the immediate postwar years had settled into a gradualist war of attrition for Britain's female diplomats. While some important obstacles had toppled – equal pay, for example, was conceded in 1955 – a frustrating stasis persisted. By November 1959, there were just fourteen women in the Administrative (most senior) Grade – two per cent of the grade as a whole. William Strang's (PUS 1949-53) insistence in 1954 that women could 'aspire to very high posts if they serve a full career' seems hollow in the light of the low rate of recruitment and the continued requirement to resign on marriage. Bevin was bewildered and not altogether sympathetic about the numbers of women lost to resignation on marriage,

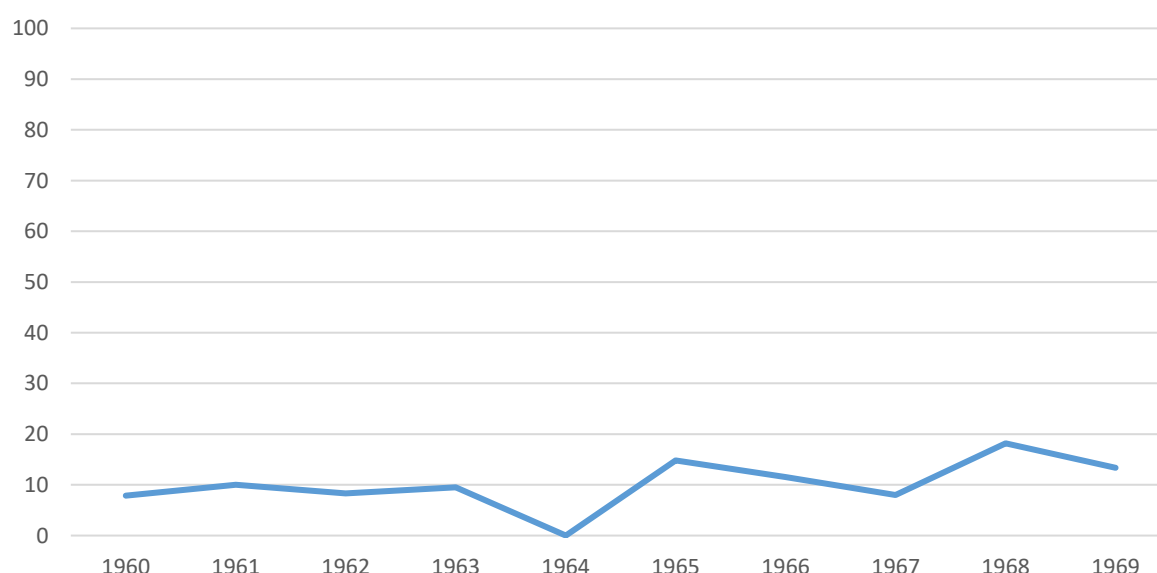
exclaiming: 'We've turned the Foreign Office into a matrimonial bureau!' Indeed, wastage due to the marriage bar effectively paralysed the growth of a substantial cohort of talented pioneer women at the Foreign Office. Monica Milne and Cicely Ludlam both left after less than ten years of service. Margaret Anstee, mentioned above, highlighted the sheer folly of the bar: she resigned on marriage in 1952 before pursuing an extremely successful career that culminated in her becoming the Under-Secretary General of the United Nations between 1987 and 1993.

The Years of Missed Opportunity? 1960-1990

The 1960s was a revolutionary decade for British women. The Abortion Act and the introduction of the contraceptive pill in 1967 both gave women unprecedented power and independence. The strike by women workers at the Dagenham Ford car factory in 1968, and which led directly to the Equal Pay Act in 1970, reflected shifting attitudes to gender, trade unionism and equality. Barbara Castle became the first female minister of state in 1965. The question for the Foreign Office was clear: in a changing British society, would it take action on the iniquity of its policy on women diplomats?

In 1962, Prime Minister Harold Macmillan appointed Lord Plowden to chair a Committee 'to review the purpose, structure and operation' of Britain's overseas representation. The Committee was all-male, but 'received evidence from a number of women's organisations' in order to reflect on the position on women in the service. The main focus of the campaigners who spoke to Plowden was on ensuring equal rights to a career as their male counterparts.

% Women Recruited to Diplomatic Service Administrative Class in 1960s



In the three pages of his final report dedicated to 'The Role of Women', Lord Plowden began by denouncing the futility of the existing ten per cent cap on female recruits. Since it had never been necessary to impose the cap, he surmised, it would be pointless to maintain it. The number of female recruits had in fact reached fifteen per

cent in 1956, but apparently the cap had not been applied. It would hit fifteen per cent again the year after Plowden abolished it, but maintained a steady ten per cent average throughout the 1960s. In recommending scrapping the cap, and not questioning the reasons why recruitment was so low, Plowden implicitly accepted that his role was to trim unnecessary administrative fat, rather than to ask more fundamental questions about the relative failure to appoint more women diplomats.

Plowden's main focus was on the marriage bar, which he called 'a more serious problem' than recruitment. Reviewing its continued impact, he and the Committee were 'convinced that there are valid reasons for the existence of the "marriage bar", although none of them reflect in any way on the fitness or ability of the women themselves'. Plowden also questioned, speculatively, whether the marriage bar was in fact unjust in any way:

We doubt whether it will often happen that a woman will wish to remain in the Diplomatic Service after marriage.

Dismissing those women who might aspire to careers beyond marriage, Plowden reserved his praise for another type of Diplomatic Service woman, writing that he and his colleagues 'wish in this context to emphasize and pay tribute to the part played by the wives of Foreign and Commonwealth Officers'. Plowden's comments reflected a basic assumption that marriage and career were mutually exclusive, and that women who pursued the latter were less worthy of recognition than their married counterparts.

In truth, neither the Foreign Office nor its small cadre of female diplomats made much attempt to create a collective network of women in the Diplomatic Service in the period immediately after the Second World War. Women were recruited from an assortment of sources, including from the Special Operations Executive (Barbara Salt), from senior clerical roles via promotion (Kathleen Graham, who joined the Senior Diplomatic Service aged 51 in 1955), and the Security Services (Daphne Park, known as the "Queen of Spies", the first female Director in the Secret Intelligence Service). Consequently, at the Foreign Office at least, there were individual women practicing diplomacy, but never a sense of "women diplomats" as a group. In the late 1940s and early 1950s, the only meeting which gathered all the women officers serving in London above the ranks of Second Secretary was one to consider whether there should be a Diplomatic Uniform for women. This apathy persisted: interest in the United Nations women's rights agenda of the 1970s, including International Women's Year in 1975, was negligible at best.

When the marriage bar was eventually rescinded in 1972, it certainly did not represent an optimistic turning-point akin to the spirit of the decision to admit women in 1946. The Kemp-Jones Report, published by the Civil Service Department in 1971 (and dubbed the 'Women's Lib Charter in Whitehall' by the *Daily Mirror*), recommended that all Civil Service jobs be open to both sexes, that recruitment boards be gender-balanced, and that a whole host of reforms be introduced to help women manage the demands of combining a career with family life. More important – at least as far as British diplomats were concerned – was the immanent passage of the Sex Discrimination Act (1975), which would make it illegal for employers to discriminate on the grounds of sex or marital status. By 1972, it was clear to the Foreign Office that

the Act was about to be passed and that their marriage bar would soon be on extremely shaky legal ground.

The 1970s witnessed two other landmark developments for women in British diplomacy. Although Barbara Salt was the first woman to be appointed as a Head of Mission when she was asked to become HM Ambassador to Israel in 1962, illness prevented her from taking up her post. It in fact took until 1973 for the appointment of Britain's first female Head of Mission, when Eleanor Emery was appointed High Commissioner to Botswana. Three years later, Anne Warburton became Britain's first female Ambassador when she was sent to Denmark in 1976. Alyson Bailes, an extraordinary polyglot and future Ambassador to Finland (2000-02), began her wide-ranging career in this period.

Yet despite these high-level appointments, and despite the removal of the marriage bar, institutional culture proved resistant to change. Partly, of course, this reflected social attitudes in other countries and indeed conservative attitudes to marriage in Britain. Nonetheless, the Foreign Office itself did little to challenge archaic assumptions about gender roles. A recruitment booklet in 1971 featured short articles about four 'typical younger members' of the Diplomatic Service – two men discussing their intellectual interests and two women, a clerical officer and a secretary. The Diplomatic Service Wives Association, formed in 1960, took until 1991 to change its name to incorporate male spouses – more evidence that at the post-1945 Foreign Office, women were considered wives above all else.

It took until 1987 for the Foreign Office to appoint Britain's first married female Ambassador, Veronica Sutherland, who was sent to Côte d'Ivoire. She was closely followed by Juliet Campbell, who was appointed Ambassador to Luxembourg the following year (Campbell's picture, when she was still Juliet Collings, appears on the cover of this publication). Significantly, both married late and were childless. Interviewed in 2003 for the British Diplomatic Oral History Project, Campbell, who joined the Diplomatic Service in 1957, said:

I was certainly told at least once in my career that I had been turned down for a post because they thought it inappropriate to have a woman . . . I remember being detailed, in the very early days, to act as departmental representative on some talks with the Treasury and the French, and suddenly the chap at the Treasury who was leading it, said, 'Now we will go off to the Travellers.' And he suddenly looked round at me and said, 'I'm terribly sorry, I didn't think of it but, I'm sorry, you can't come.' And that happened. Things like that happened.

Outmoded traditions and stubbornly-held assumptions kept women out of the upper echelons of the Diplomatic Service throughout the 1970s and 1980s. What remained to be seen was how – and indeed whether – attitudes could be changed in order that the important structural gains made since the Second World War were not symbolic or futile.

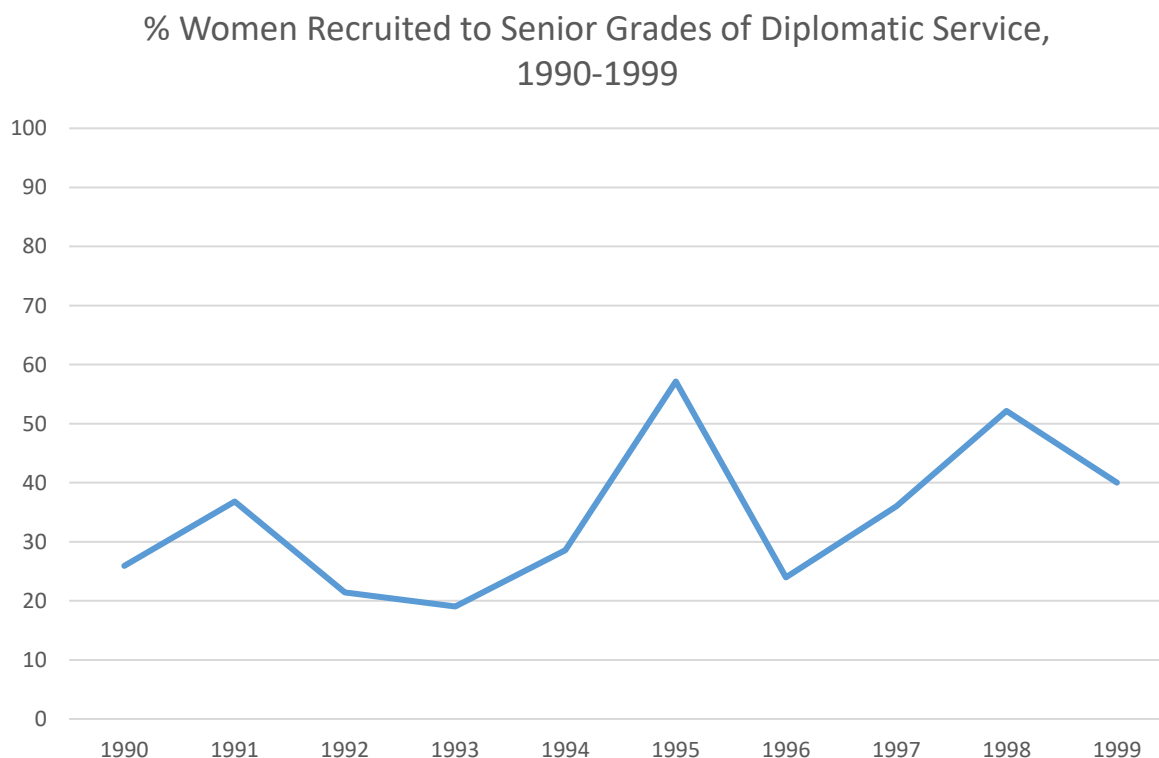
Lessons Learned?

Jill Gallard had never heard of the Diplomatic Service when she travelled to Scotland to study languages at the University of Edinburgh in the late 1980s. Growing up and attending a state grammar school in Northern Ireland, her only inclination about a future career was to use her language skills to become a school teacher. When her university flatmate brought home a brochure about Diplomatic Service careers, her first reaction was understandably dismissive: 'Presumably that's for English white men isn't it?' She applied nonetheless, and, to her surprise, was offered a job. Having risen to become Ambassador to Portugal in 2011, she today serves as Director of the Human Resources Directorate and is on the FCO Board.

Speaking in 2016, she remembered how she felt on her first day. 'The only thing that scared me wasn't my ability to do the job, it was: what are the people going to be like?' She described the colleagues she found waiting for her:

My memory is, there were no women over the age of 35; it seemed to me everybody was male. There were quite a lot of posh-sounding people, and there weren't many people who looked or sounded like me.

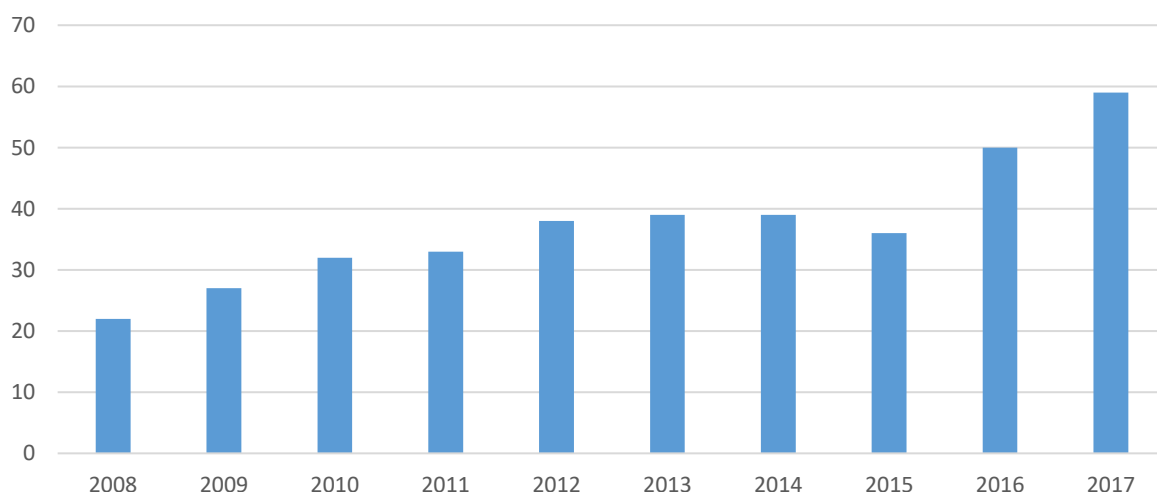
Gallard's comments reflect the conclusions drawn by *Women and Whitehall: Gender and the Civil Service Since 1979*, a study undertaken by the Institute for Government in 2015. The report judged that the 'steady and undeniable progress made by both the FCO and MoD in improving SCS gender balance cannot yet make up for their historical position as Whitehall backmarkers'. Understanding the FCO's transition from 'Whitehall backmarker' to an organisation which, in the 2010s, is at last beginning to show signs of significant progress on gender, is crucial for the campaigners of twenty-first century gender equality in diplomacy.



The 1980s brought different paradigms to the push for gender equality at the FCO. The rise of second-wave feminism and the growing influence of identity politics coincided with the importation of a new ideology of equality from the United States: diversity. Whereas equality had been understood in the early postwar period as “meritocracy” (i.e. equality of *opportunity*), advocates of “diversity” argued that a representative mixture of different ethnicities, sexualities, genders – in short, every recognisable type of identity – was an appropriate goal *in and of itself* for Foreign Office recruitment. Notwithstanding its vulnerability to accusations of tokenism, diversity politics have undoubtedly provided a powerful boost to women’s struggle for diplomatic equality in Britain.

The Foreign Office Departmental Report, published every year, first made explicit mention of women diplomats in 1994. That year, it announced that the FCO was to join ‘Opportunity 2000’ – a campaign launched in 1991 by the organisation Business in the Community. The FCO’s decision to join the campaign marks the first time in its history that it had taken positive, pro-active steps on the matter. Jill Gallard said it ‘took ten years’ for her to feel like some progression was being made on gender, and attributes this to Opportunity 2000 and the discussions it inspired.

Number of Female Heads of Mission, 2008-2017

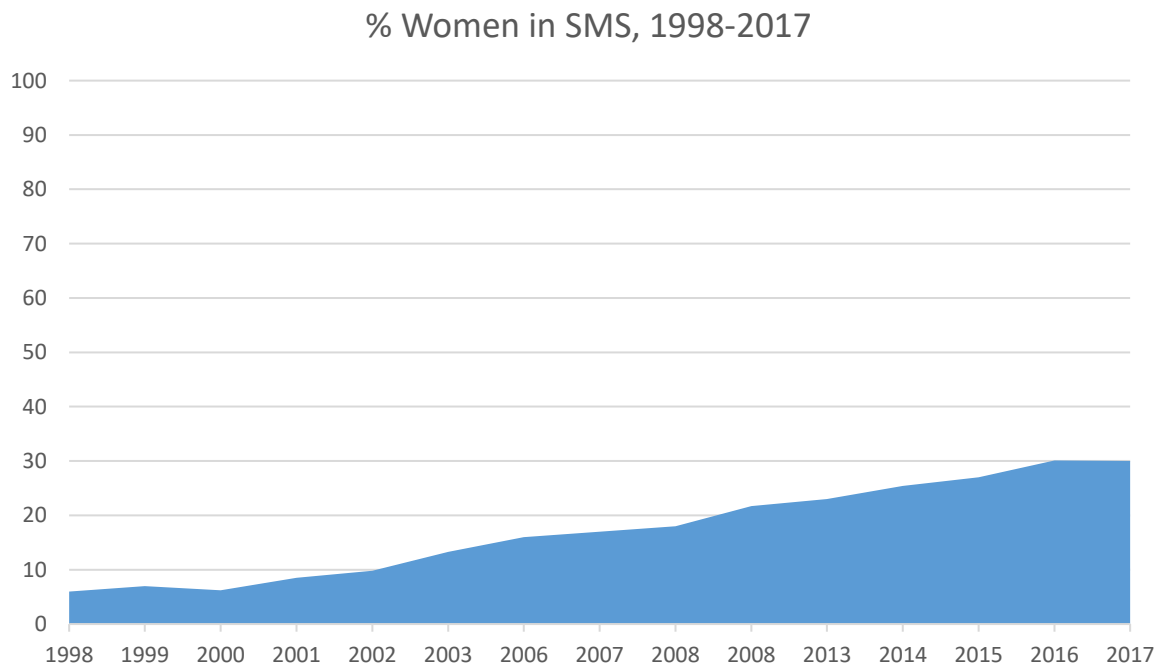


In 1995 the FCO unveiled a ‘Departmental Action Plan for Women’, promising to consider maternity packages, flexible working hours, part-time work, job sharing and help with childcare. Significantly, rather than expecting women to adapt to the male world of diplomacy, the FCO was – for the first time in its history – accepting that the organisation itself had to change in order to get the best out of its female diplomats.

The toughest challenge, of course – and one that continues to vex twenty-first century campaigners – is how to ensure that after recruitment women are not “filtered out” on the road to the top posts by unconscious bias and the various other intangible barriers to their progression. In 1995, there were three female Ambassadors and five female senior-grade officers in the Diplomatic Service, including Pauline Neville-Jones (Political Director), Veronica Sutherland (Ambassador to Dublin) and Maeve Fort (Ambassador to Beirut). This was also the year that saw Gill Bennett, a leading expert in the history of the Foreign Office and British intelligence, appointed Chief Historian.

Although 1996 saw the appointment of the (then) youngest-ever Ambassador, Jessica Pearce, aged 38, there was still very little growth in the number of female Heads of Mission (HoM) during this period. There were seven female HoM in 1996, eight in 1997, nine in 1998 and 12 by the year 2000.

This slow evolution appeared to reflect a culture of resistance to the appointment of women to the organisation's most senior roles. The Senior Management Structure (SMS), introduced in 1996 as part of a Whitehall-wide restructure, immediately set a low bar at the FCO with a 6 per cent female contingent in 1997. It also took time for home-based FCO women, including those in Specialist grades, to break into the SMS, as Gill Bennett did as Chief Historian. Despite a 2001 pledge to increase this proportion to twenty per cent within five years, in reality it would take until 2009 for that target to be reached. As late as 1996, the Foreign Office lost its top female diplomat when Pauline Neville-Jones famously resigned after being passed over for the role of Ambassador to Paris in favour of Sir Michael Jay, a man six years her junior in career terms. She went on to take a lucrative job as a senior executive with a leading British bank.



Indeed, the case of Neville-Jones expresses accurately the two main challenges, as far as gender equality goes, facing the Foreign Office in the twenty-first century: one, how to make use of talented women in the upper echelons of the service, and two, how to ensure that talent is rewarded with equal pay and fair promotion. In 2017, the gender pay gap at the FCO averaged at 12.7 per cent. A breakdown of the statistics highlights that the problem stems from male seniority: while the gender pay gap is a substantial 6.5 per cent at the very top of the FCO, the situation is increasingly equal in the lower grades. Ensuring that women can progress to the top of the FCO and be fairly remunerated as a result remains a fundamental issue to be tackled.

The legacy of the twentieth century is a lingering unreadiness to accept women as capable, senior officials. The appointment of Karen Pierce as Britain's Ambassador to

the United Nations – the first woman to be awarded this prestigious post since the UN's formation in 1945 – is a welcome development, but British diplomacy still awaits its first 'woman in Paris' or 'woman in Washington', or even its first female PUS. History, it seems, has still to be made.

V DIPLOMATIC WIVES

As this History Note makes clear, women have been “officially” involved in diplomacy for only about 100 years. There have, of course, always been heroic individuals who have transcended their gender to influence the masculine world of international politics. Elizabeth I, for example, was a particularly adroit diplomatist: in 1561 wrote to the Russian Tsar Ivan “the Terrible” in Latin – a language she knew he could not understand – to assert her authority and cultural superiority. Women like Freya Stark and Ann Lambton, who penetrated the diplomatic world before they were “officially” recognised as diplomats, are surely heirs to this tradition.

Yet there have always been women working “behind-the-scenes” in networks and informal associations whose influence on international relations is important to uncover. In Elizabethan England, aristocratic women were educated and informed enough to maintain important networks of letter-writing, which they used to exchange information their husbands could not have risked sharing with their male counterparts. Similarly, Catholic women arranged secret underground networks to hide politicians, priests and other influential people at a time when they were technically enemies of the Jacobean state. There are countless other instances of ladies-in-waiting and “bedchamber diplomacy” influencing the Queens of Early Modern Europe.

The Foreign Office, of course, has always had its own informal (and later more formal) network of women influencing its work: diplomatic wives. It is a role which has naturally and substantially declined in importance, but until the mid-twentieth century the main role of women in the Diplomatic and Consular Services was supporting their husbands by running large diplomatic households, presiding as hostesses, making their own range of contacts to complement the official work of the embassy and engaging in local voluntary and community work. This section takes a brief look at the influence of diplomatic wives and how their role has changed since the eighteenth century.

Ambassadors and Hostesses: Early Diplomatic Wives

In the eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries, the number of diplomatic wives was relatively small. Only the most senior diplomats could afford to take their wives abroad with them, and until the twentieth century, the appointment of full Ambassadors was restricted to a few major posts, such as Paris, Berlin, Vienna, Constantinople and St Petersburg. Nor was every Ambassador expected to be accompanied by his wife at that period: in Emily Eden's novel, *The Semi-Attached Couple* (written in 1830) the plot hinges on the heroine's refusal to accompany her husband on a special mission to Spain. Nonetheless, it is in the aristocratic milieu of parties, balls, social connection and hospitality that the initial role of the diplomatic wife was forged.

The Ambassador was responsible not only for the welfare of servants ranging from charwomen to chefs but also for the junior diplomatic officers who were regarded as part of the Ambassador's intimate family. As most Ambassadors came from the same upper ranks of society as their husbands, they were used to large households, to managing staff, and to the principle of *noblesse oblige* – that their position in society imposed duties as well as privileges. Not the least of these duties was the provision of

hospitality and entertainment on a grand scale, with a view to making and maintaining influential contacts. Besides balls, receptions and dinners for foreign diplomats and statesmen, the Ambassadors had to be prepared for a constant stream of house guests ranging from personal family and friends to visiting dignitaries and even members of the Royal Family. The life of the 'grande dame' held no charms for Harriet Cavendish, subsequently Lady Granville, wife of the British Ambassador at Paris, but she put public duty above her own feelings to such good effect that she is remembered as one of the great hostesses of the nineteenth century.

Lady Diana Cooper was one of Lady Granville's most significant twentieth-century successors, helping to restore the post-war British Embassy in Paris to something approaching its former glory. Her biographer Philip Ziegler recorded that 'the British Embassy was the place to be. There was a flavour of the unexpected about any occasion there . . . Diana's capacity to get on with people and convince them that their meeting was a memorable occasion for her as well as for them, became a tool of real importance. To be with her gave pleasure to many people who it was important should be well-disposed to Britain and British interests . . . she was a professional doing a good job of public relations for her husband's sake'.

An important part of the work of diplomatic wives was that of venturing into the realms of foreign (particularly female) society where no Ambassador could ever be admitted. The activities of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, the wife of the British Ambassador to Turkey in the early eighteenth century, provides a notable example of this. She added to the formidable classical education she had received from her brother's tutors by learning Italian, German and Turkish, and subsequently visiting the Sultan's harem and the ladies' bath house. She even disguised herself in local costume in order to explore the byways of Constantinople, and she described the local sights and customs in a series of vivid letters to family and friends at home. To her belongs the distinction of introducing to England the Turkish practice of inoculation against smallpox, the only protection against the disease until the coming of vaccination at the end of the century. Lady Sheil learned enough Persian when posted to Tehran in 1850 to enable her to converse with the wives of Persian ministers and officials.

Community and voluntary work provided opportunities for diplomatic wives to extend contacts at many different levels. In 1858, for instance, when Lord Stratford-Canning left Constantinople, he was presented with an address which paid tribute to his wife's hard work for the poor. Lady Rodd organised a team of Embassy wives who helped the victims of the Messina earthquake in 1908, and she was awarded a gold medal by the King of Italy for her nursing activities during the First World War. Lady Peake had a street named after her in recognition of her work after the earthquake in the Ionian Islands in the 1950s, while in the same period, Lady Bishop, wife of the Deputy High Commissioner in Calcutta, was a firm supporter of Mother Teresa.

None of this, however, is to say that women were valued by male diplomats independently of the husbands for whose 'sake' they worked. Lord Tyrrell, then British Ambassador to Paris, said in 1933:

There is no career in the world in which a man's work is so much shared by a woman as is a married diplomat's by his wife. A woman with the right personal gifts who marries a diplomat or a consular officer and is

conscientious about the performance of her duties is, as you know, invaluable to the public service and one can think of many Ambassadors and Ministers in the past, who have owed a great part of their personal success and of the success of their best work to their wives. There are far more opportunities for women who are in the diplomatic service in this sense, than there ever can be for those who might enter it alone.

In an attitude not untypical of the time, women, he suggested, were better off when subsumed *within* the role of their husband than when making independent contributions of their own.

There were, however, diplomatic wives who resisted such compartmentalisation. The most famous of these was the poet, novelist and journalist Vita Sackville-West, who was married to Harold Nicolson. But she was not alone. There was, for example, Lady Paget, the wife of the British Ambassador in Rome. She did not win 'golden opinions of the numerous fellow countrymen who yearly visit Italy', since she took 'no pains to disguise her indifference and antipathy to the subjects of the Sovereign she represents'. Lady Clerk in Paris preferred to paint in a tree house in the Embassy garden rather than give receptions. Others, such as Lady Cumming Bruce, wife of the British High Commissioner to New Zealand, rejected her diplomatic social life in favour of painting and 'could regularly be spotted crawling through the Residence shrubberies so as not to be seen arriving late at her own parties'. The role of the diplomatic wife was never universally satisfying nor universally respected among those expected to perform it.

The Evolution of the Diplomatic Spouse

On 18 December 1958, Diana Bromley, former Bletchley Park employee and wife of senior diplomat Tom Bromley, murdered her two sons (aged 13 and 10) before attempting to kill herself. She had, according to the Senior Medical Officer at Holloway Prison, been suffering from 'melancholia'; a hearing found that she had been treated in mental hospitals three times in her earlier life. The pressures and isolation of life as a diplomatic wife could, in some circumstances, evidently have disastrous consequences.

The Bromley case led in part to the formation of a small network of wives who, along with the Chief Medical Officer at the Foreign Office, Cornelius Medvei, recognised the impact on mental health that life as a diplomatic wife could have. This network became the Foreign Service Wives Association (FSWA) in 1960. After Anthony Eden's 1943 reforms, a whole new cohort of women – the '1943 group' – had joined the Foreign Office as diplomatic wives whose husbands did not have the vast private means that had previously been required to live and work as a diplomat. Without the stability of aristocratic wealth and social connection, the new generation of diplomatic wives lacked the collective security their predecessors had enjoyed. In the wake of Diana Bromley, the need for a more formal network of support seemed all the more urgent.

The FSWA had its first Annual General Meeting in 1961, and soon afterwards was called upon to give evidence to the Plowden Committee. In their new guise as representatives of an official association, Diplomatic Service wives were increasingly

assertive in communicating their discontent. Clear demands were made: for example, the FSWA testimony requested the allowance for the number of times children be financed to visit their parents at post be increased to three. Although this took until 1971 to be granted, this was nonetheless an important development: diplomatic wives were, collectively, recognising that the state owed wives more than they received in exchange for the role they performed.

The Plowden Report highlighted the large contribution made by diplomatic wives 'to the work, welfare and way of life of an overseas Mission'. Its recommendations, for example regarding representation allowances and boarding school allowances, were far more generous than any of its concessions to supporting women diplomats. The wives' association grew in strength and size, merging with the Commonwealth Relations Office Wives (CROWS) in 1965 to form the Diplomatic Service Wives Association (DSWA) and focussed on providing information and support for wives posted abroad.

Yet following the postwar expansion of the Diplomatic Service, there was less and less willingness on the part of diplomatic wives to perform the traditional hostess role to which their predecessors were so accustomed. In the context of changing attitudes to working wives in domestic British society, during the 1970s the issue of access to employment became the central concern of the DSWA in its dealings with the FCO. While there was no specific FCO policy on the issue, the combined problems of work permit refusals, intransigence over diplomatic immunity and bleak local employment prospects in host countries meant that DSWA members struggled to find work. Despite the efforts of the DSWA to arrange educational visits to the Houses of Parliament, the BBC and other institutions, women from the '1943 group' were still expected to be wives above all else.

A DSWA survey in 1975 found that 22 per cent of diplomatic wives were in employment, but that half of those were employed within FCO posts. Various schemes were tried to provide occupations for the increasingly redundant wives (who were by now increasingly 'spouses' rather than solely 'wives'), including commissioning a professional sociologist, Dr Eric Miller, to help train wives as counsellors in 1976. As the 1970s drew to a close, the DSWA was decidedly acting as a pressure group on behalf of those wishing to change official attitudes. Having carried out several surveys which showed that most wives preferred to work at paid employment abroad whenever possible, the DSWA took up the issue with the Administration, and together with the full support of the Permanent Under-Secretary and the Chief Clerk, explored ways of making this possible. Reciprocal agreements were made with several countries.

In the early 1990s, the growing number of diplomatic husbands prompted another name change, this time to the British Diplomatic Spouses Association (BDSA). By 1998 the name changed to its current incarnation, the Diplomatic Service Families Association (DSFA), reflecting the growing variety of support offered by the organisation, which today includes a range of advisers responsible Education; Careers & Professional Development; Family Information; Going Abroad; Special Needs and Disability. In 2017, 38% of DSFA members were male.

In 2017, the official DSFA magazine *Carousel* released a special 60th anniversary issue. In it, the outgoing Chair Pam Gordon reflected on her 44 years as a diplomatic

spouse, but also on the challenges facing the DSFA in the twenty-first century. She said that

there will be many greater challenges in the future to ensure that the needs and concerns of our partners, spouses and families are always uppermost in the mind of policymakers when considering how diplomatic life will look in the 21st century. There will be the dual career couples who may opt for unaccompanied postings but there will also be those who prefer to accompany the officer overseas and adapt their working aspirations accordingly. There must be room for both models and a spectrum of variations between if we are to ensure that we attract talented staff and remain an excellent diplomatic service that is also family friendly.

Gordon's comments illustrate well the journey of diplomatic spouses over the past 60 years. 60 years ago, women were expected to support the work of the Foreign Office. Now, the Foreign Office is expected to support the families of its diplomats around the world. That is a development to be applauded, though the ideal balance is difficult to achieve.

VI LGBT WOMEN IN BRITISH DIPLOMACY

In the history of British diplomacy, LGBT women are notable by their absence from the historical record. As this publication has shown, this is often the case with women in general. Lesbians, however, have to contend with a double prohibition: as women, their diplomatic status has been historically contested, but as lesbians, their sexuality meant that they were banned from serving as British diplomats until 1991. The bar on homosexuality at the Foreign Office was officially established after the partial decriminalisation of same-sex relations between men in 1967. There has, of course, never been any legislation specifically prohibiting same-sex relations between women, but the bar nonetheless applied to both sexes.

Consequently, the historian of women in diplomacy has a difficult task in reconstructing the experiences of lesbians at the Foreign Office. As the 2016 FCO Historians' History Note, *Homosexuality at the Foreign Office*, demonstrates, policy discussions always centred on the security risks of gay men. Lesbians were either tangential to the debate, or else used as a foil against which the problems supposedly inherent in *male* homosexuality could be defined. Lesbian lifestyles were stable, while gay men were promiscuous and careless, so the logic ran.

To begin to fill these silences, to the extent that this is possible, FCO Historians asked two women, Joanne Adamson and Bernadette Greene, to write short pieces about their experiences in the Foreign Office. Both identify as out gay women, and both joined the Office before the bar on homosexuality was lifted in 1991.

Joanne Adamson, *Deputy Head of Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations*

I joined the FCO in September 1989, just before the fall of the Berlin Wall and collapse of the Soviet Union. The vetting at that time to obtain security clearance was very much geared to finding behaviour which could, in the eyes of the Government, leave you vulnerable to blackmail or subversion by a foreign power. Homosexuality was very much seen as a vulnerability at the time. I expect the fact that the Cambridge Spy Ring included some homosexual men was also behind some of the paranoia. In my own case, I did not come out until later in life, in 2002. So I never had to hide a relationship to comply with the prohibition on the employment of homosexuals in the Diplomatic Service.

When I reflect, it is fascinating to me that the LGBTQ community in the FCO has gone from being vulnerable and in the shadows in 1989 to being celebrated in 2015 when I was asked by the Administration to appear on a Panel of LGBTQ Ambassadors at the annual Leadership Conference. That change in policy in the FCO reflected changes in legislation in the UK, from the lifting of the ban on serving as a British diplomat to the enactment of civil partnerships and same-sex marriage.

The change also reflected the evolution of attitudes among the majority of British society, though by no means all. We still have a way to go. This was brought home to

me - also in 2015 - when I had my audience with HM The Queen as UK Ambassador to Mali. I took my spouse along to Buckingham Palace. I subsequently received a message from the FCO Press Office saying that the Daily Mail had noticed the event in the Court Circular; would I like to comment for a piece they were doing? I chose not to comment. The subsequent piece was focussed on the fact that I was a gay women ambassador serving in Africa. The headline was something silly about my "gay African adventure". My family were upset by the coverage but I was most concerned that the article did not find its way to Mali, because by then I was involved in a number of LGBT networks in the country and worried about the possible impact on my contacts.

The possibility for networking has been one unexpected benefit to me as a professional gay woman. Within the FCO, there is a very supportive lobby group and network – FLAGG – which brings gay men and women together in addressing common (or distinct) challenges. Overseas, I've found I could make friends and contacts in a new country by seeking out any local LGBTQ organisation. The LGBTQ community often brings together people from different professions and places in society so it can give a diplomat a more diverse set of perspectives. So it's not the "special interest" group some might expect. For me being LGBTQ has opened doors, much as being a woman diplomat in the Middle East allowed me to talk to both men and women, even when the latter were behind closed doors.

Bernadette (Bernie) Greene, Head of Consular Casework Teams, Consular Assistance Department

I joined the Foreign & Commonwealth Office (FCO) in 1988, under the leadership of the first woman UK Prime Minister (Margaret Thatcher); and it's only now that I see another woman in that role. There has never been a woman Permanent Under-Secretary (PUS) at the FCO during my time; and only one woman Foreign Secretary (Margaret Beckett) who was short-lived in the role. For a career spanning nearly 30 years, those statistics are quite revealing: being a woman in the FCO is more challenging from a diverse standpoint, than being gay.

When I first joined the FCO, being gay was forbidden. Hard to believe, I know. It wasn't until the early 90s that the FCO lifted the ban on homosexuality. As gay women in the FCO go, we are relatively invisible compared to LGBT men. Women rarely participate in network events and in terms of numbers make up a very small percentage of the FLAGG (Foreign Office Lesbian and Gay Group) membership. I have tried to take a proactive and assertive approach to my sexual orientation, which has allowed me a greater degree of control over how colleagues respond to me. I can say hand on heart, I have experienced no barriers in the FCO as a result of my sexual orientation. I can only hope that most gay women in the Office feel the same.

Working for the FCO has given me a unique opportunity to be at the cutting edge of promoting UK LGBT diplomacy in the UK and overseas and making a real difference not only for me personally but for others. As co-Chair of FLAGG from 2009-2011, I entered the FCO into the Stonewall 2010 Equality Index, which lists the top 100 employers for LGBT staff. The FCO reached No.17 out of 352 organizations and was the 2nd highest ranking government organization in the group. While overseas, I entered the UK Consulate in Los Angeles into the local Pride events in 2014, becoming

the first ever international government to participate. I did the same thing in Utah in 2016, again becoming the first ever international government to do so.

The Foreign Office has come a long way, from the blanket ban on gay staff until the early 90s, to being one of the first Foreign Ministries in the world to offer its gay staff and their partners exactly the same benefits as other staff. We have a number of gay Ambassadors and various staff surveys have shown that we have exactly the same proportion of LGBT staff as society as a whole. Interestingly, we are statistically even more likely to find the Foreign Office a welcoming place to work than staff as a whole.

I have had an interesting and varied career in the FCO and being a woman, who just happens to be gay, has presented very few barriers to that. As an organisation, we cannot become too complacent and should always strive to be the top employer of choice for talented staff, regardless of sexual orientation.

AFTERWORD

I hope you have enjoyed reading this publication, perhaps rejoicing at the positive developments that it chronicles. It is a timely publication, one hundred years after the UK gave women the vote.

John Kerr, who was my Ambassador in Washington, said on becoming PUS in the late 1990s that his goal was “more females”. We can all subscribe to that, even if we wrinkle our noses at the faintly zoological tone. This book shows how he met that goal and how his successors continued and expanded on it. Nicola Brewer, who writes the Foreword is a shining example. Whereas she was once the only woman on the FCO Board, now half that Board are women. Nicola, like so many trailblazers, ensured that the ladder was there for others to climb up after her and I’d like to thank her for that.

But while undoubtedly “more”, it is still not “enough” in the senior ranks. This is not solely a matter of the FCO and the Diplomatic Service looking like the country and society we serve, important as that is, especially in an organisation whose role centres around representing Britain to the world. It is about championing – and being seen around the world actually to live – the values, and create the opportunities that allow societies to prosper and thrive and enable their people to pursue their life goals. We shouldn’t take this for granted – progress is not always relentless. This is why in today’s FCO we are stretching our targets, for recruitment and for entry into the senior structures, and building more effective pipelines to bring women through. And we are seeking to do something similar for other under-represented groups. By the time there is another edition of this book I hope its readers will think we have come on in leaps and bounds.

From my perspective I am interested in this notion that progress isn’t always linear, let alone geometric. This was brought home to me during my time as Ambassador to Kabul in 2015-16. Afghanistan gave women the vote one year after the UK did, and before the United States. The next 50 years saw steady if not startling progress. But a series of revolts, repressions and wars saw that progress fall away culminating in the harsh reality of the Taliban Government in the late 90s. It appears that in so many cases, Women, and not Truth, are the first casualties of war.

This is why it is so important that women are brought into peace processes, not as tokens but as active participants as ceasefires, constitutions, new governments are being devised. Women understand at a deep level the consequences of any trade-off between peace and justice. Diplomacy needs to take that fully into account if security and stability are to be restored. So the UK has been a player at the UN and elsewhere in fostering the Women, Peace and Security Resolutions to get women to the peace table.

And diplomacy has been helping today’s Afghanistan put its legacy behind it. Working with committed NGOs and a forward-looking Afghan government the UK and other partners have been helping get girls into schools in unprecedented numbers and deal with a range of women’s issues from safety and stigmatism to reproductive health.

This 100th anniversary of women’s suffrage is a cause for celebration. But the examples we have seen this year in the media and elsewhere of sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) are a stark, and a dark, reminder of how much there is still to do. This is why UK has been at the fore of global efforts to tackle SEA, including through our long-running Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative.

In the FCO we seek to be as ambitious in our policy-making on the women and girls front as we are for the institution. Recognising the critical role that girls' education plays in the economic and political development of a country, the Foreign and Development Secretaries have launched a government campaign for 12 years of education, supporting the Malala Fund.

As I was growing up in Preston, I was lucky enough to do so in an environment that encouraged me to pursue whatever goal I wanted. As a young recruit in Japan and later dealing with politico-military affairs it wasn't unusual for me to be the only woman in the room. My husband worked for a great firm that posted him with me to Washington and New York with first one and then two boys. I went to Geneva and Kabul alone, and certainly in respect of Kabul it is true that it is harder for those left behind. I have been outstandingly lucky and I am grateful. But as I close this Afterword I think my wish would be that it isn't reliant on luck. Whether one climbs the ladder upwards or swings sideways across the gorge or steps off the track for a break, the most important thing is that the system is welcoming and that it is enabling. Historically the FCO is one of what is known as the Great Departments of State. My task is to make sure that FCO offers as great a career for the talented women who come after as others offered me.

Karen Pierce
UK Permanent Representative to the United Nations
March 2018

SELECTED EVIDENCE FROM OFFICIALS TO THE SCHUSTER REPORT

The Schuster Report considered the admission of women to the Diplomatic and Consular Services in 1933-34. It recommended that women continue to be excluded.

There is no career in the world in which a man's work is so much shared by a woman as is a married diplomat's by his wife. A woman with the right personal gifts who marries a diplomat or a consular officer and is conscientious about the performance of her duties is, as you know, invaluable to the public service and one can think of many Ambassadors and Ministers in the past, who have owed a great part of their personal success and of the success of their best work to their wives. There are far more opportunities for women who are in the diplomatic service in this sense, than there ever can be for those who might enter it alone.

Lord Tyrrell, Paris

I dare say that the intellectual type of woman, which would presumably be the type to enter the Service, would be as useful as a man in a purely intellectual occupation such as that of junior clerk in the Foreign Office ... [However] the value of a diplomatist still largely depends on his success in making "contacts" with other people. In this regard, the intellectual type of English woman would ... be at a disadvantage when dealing with foreigners ... For, to put it bluntly, the clever woman would not be liked and the attractive woman would not be taken seriously.

Sir H.W. Kennard, Berne

Constant walking on the shifting sands of foreign politics and administrations calls for a balanced and equable temperament. Without it a nervous breakdown is inevitable. It is no secret that women abroad face similar difficulties in the domestic sphere well enough, but that is because the ultimate responsibility lies on their husbands. Take away this sheet anchor and the result would be deplorable. Add to the anxieties of diplomatic and consular work, final responsibility and the enervating effects of so many climates, and the result would be at least doubly deplorable.

H.E. Slaymaker, Santo Domingo

So far as Sweden is concerned a woman, whether diplomatist or consul, would certainly be treated with all respect and consideration. At the same time, she could not escape being the subject of some unpleasant speculation and perhaps also of some bawdy jokes. Much of course would depend on the woman herself. But however suitable she were, she would be greatly handicapped by not being able, as it were, to start at scratch and by having constantly to live down her sex in *tête-à-tête* dealings with officials and still more with businessmen.

Sir Archibald Clark Kerr, Stockholm

I have an instinctive prejudice in favour of change, which I associate with improvement and reform . . . I do not see why a woman should not cohabit at her post with her husband [particularly if he were] a man of letters or a craftsman of any sort . . . We live in a changing world, and no-one can say how mankind will regard anything in 1959. Who would have foreseen in 1894 that in twenty-five years women would be made eligible for the House of Commons, almost *nem-con*?

Sir Claud Russell, Lisbon

In the case of consular work it would be difficult for a woman to deal with mutinous crews or hectoring shipmasters, and it would be distinctly unpleasant for her to look after syphilitic seamen. Most shipmasters would find it very distasteful to discuss such complaints with a female consul.

Christopher Paus, Oslo

In foreign society the British girl will stand as stiffly and awkwardly in her lonely corner as any of her boyish compatriots: such contacts as she would make would be either null or undesirable. Moreover, with advancing years, the British male diplomat will generally speaking remedy this fault, while the British woman . . . often seems to become stiffer and more "British" with age. Socially speaking too, in the storm and stress of diplomatic life, the she-diplomatist will actually be a disadvantage to the Service in that . . . she will react most dangerously to one of the great diplomatic vices, that of Jealousy with its inevitable and disastrous concomitant of Prejudice, from which men themselves are not immune.

Sir William Seeds, Rio de Janeiro

Speaking empirically I would say that just as I know many men who are entirely unfit for the diplomatic or consular career (some of them I fear already in the services) so too I know of women who would be perfectly suitable for diplomatic or consular employment; but those women are all of a certain age and only suitable for employment in the higher ranks . . . I cannot recall to mind any young woman of 25 or so whom I should be anxious to have as a junior member of my staff.

Sir Ronald Lindsay, Washington

Women are not admitted to this [local] club; nor, if they were, would they be welcome at the table where the bachelor secretaries mess, the habitués of which interlard politics and shop with salacious tales and ribald reminiscences ... It is unthinkable that a diplomatic or consular officer should produce babies and at the same time do her work properly. It may be said that she might practise contraception. But even so the position of an official married woman with an unofficial husband, and still more with an official one, would be untenable. Nothing in this letter should be read as contesting the wisdom of appointing distinguished spinsters or widows as heads of diplomatic missions. Whenever it is thought desirable to go outside the service for a high diplomatic appointment, the selection should, in my opinion, be made irrespective of sex.

Sydney Waterlow, Sofia

I am against female suffrage, female MPs and female magistrates. I think that all that has done and will continue to do my country immense harm.

Joseph Addison, Prague

There can be little doubt that the German authorities and in fact German public opinion as a whole would not appreciate the employment of lady officials in any senior diplomatic or consular capacity by foreign countries in Germany. On the one hand they would feel that their own attitude was not being taken into proper account and that such appointments implied a lack of respect for German views; on the other hand they would be inclined, and especially so under the present regime, to regard these appointments as a sign of liberalist decadence, or at least eccentricity, on the part of the foreign state which made them. For both these reasons a lady diplomatic or

consular representative would be much less respected, carry far less weight, and be generally under a great handicap in the discharge of her duties as compared with a man.

Sir Eric Phipps, Berlin

Diplomatists have to deal with angry business men who have been placed on the black-list, they may have to carry important documents from place to place, including cyphers, and they may have to deal with spies and other blackguards, who may call at one's private house in the suburbs at late hours of the night ... it would be disquieting to feel that a girl secretary had to return in the dark to some lonely part of the outskirts of Oslo at moments when agents of a foreign power or even the local inhabitants might be inclined to assault or rob her.

Sir C. Wingfield, Oslo

I put forward this suggestion, namely, that as you are dealing with unknown quantities, you appoint temporarily a lady Secretary or a lady Vice-Consul and, then if the experiment succeeds, you could offer the lady permanent employment. The lady would have to be unmarried, as a married Secretary could hardly bring her husband into diplomatic circles without causing annoying complications. Furthermore, she would require a very handsome dress allowance as this is a matter to which the Cubans attach great importance.

H.A. Grant Watson, Havana

Once you postulate that Woman is admissible to HM personnel of Embassy, it is obvious that, taking it by and large, a good girl is going to be a more valuable member of the staff than a bad boy. In fact, the more I think about it, the plainer it becomes that the truth of the whole matter lies in this.

Sir Neville Bland, Brussels

It is unusual for any Secretary under the position of Head of the Chancery to have a room to himself and in many ways to have to share an office with a woman would be "gênant". Physically I suppose a woman could on the whole stand the strain pretty well, but she is bound to have her off days and the natural chivalry of the male (which I suppose does exist) would probably result in his taking on her job and consequently she might easily not pull her weight.

P.M. Broadmead, Addis Ababa

At best it may with more confidence be suggested that the appointment [of women] would occasion a certain amount of derision and ridicule (in the East that most devastating of all re-agents) at the expense of His Majesty's Government.

A.S. Calvert, Jedda

I make no doubt that women could carry out the normal duties of press-reading, translation, summarising, note and despatch writing and so on. As regards their social duties, that would naturally depend on the type of individual selected for any particular post. The hard bitten Englishwoman nurtured in the London School of Economics, with a Marx and Engels outlook and a passionate devotion to Professor Tawney; the product of Girton or Somerville, interested chiefly in the ancient Greek theatre, but wielding from time to time a forceful hockey stick; ... the "shires" girl who breakfasts off an ether cocktail and who will abandon the Chancery entirely for the polo field -

none of these would be suitable representatives . . . and it is, I imagine from these types, which have their masculine equivalents in the diplomatic and consular services, that candidates would largely be chosen.'

J. Greenway, Bucharest

A woman Secretary of this Embassy would be received at the Commissariat for the conduct of official business on the same footing as a man. The influence of this equality of status extends beyond the official Soviet sphere and has its effects upon the social habits of the foreign colony in Moscow. I can hardly think that any of our foreign colleagues here would find it disagreeable if a woman were appointed as Secretary of this Embassy, though they might sometimes be exercised as to where to place her at table . . . The British Subjects in Russia Relief Association have for over two years past employed a woman worker in Leningrad whose functions are probably more arduous and exacting than those of most consuls.

William Strang, Moscow

I see no reason to suppose that the office work in this Embassy could not be as satisfactorily performed by intelligent women as by the present members of my staff. Women could, no doubt, write despatches and memoranda and could form considered and useful judgments on political problems. But directly a woman secretary or counsellor emerged from the Embassy building, she would be placed I should say, at a very considerable disadvantage with her male competitor.

Sir Ronald Graham, Rome

Some of the candidates who are most successful at examinations lack the virility which is essential to the best type of Consular and Diplomatic official. In other words, in my opinion, the interests of the public service would be better served by endeavouring to secure a more virile type of official than by embarking on the experiment of admitting women.

Sir Patrick Ramsay, Athens

QUOTATIONS

It seems that history is silent as to any justification for the exclusion of women from practical diplomacy, and to a large extent supports their claim to enter the profession. Linguistic abilities, tact, political *flair* and judgment, combined with great discretion, have never been the monopoly of one sex.

Helena Normanton, *The Daily Telegraph*, January 1934

The time has not yet arrived when women could be employed either in the Diplomatic or Consular Services with advantage to the State or with profit to women.

Cmd 5166, 1936

Of course the great difficulty is staff, but surely when officers are being demobilised from the Intelligence Corps and so many young fellows are wanting to enter the Foreign Service, it ought not to be too difficult to get hold of a suitable body of men. Even women are possibilities.

R.C. Thomson, Foreign Office, August 1945

Men may be dull at times, but they are safer.

Comment cited in the Report of the Gowers Committee, 1946

We've turned the Foreign Office into a matrimonial bureau!

Ernest Bevin, circa 1949

It is unlikely that women will ever enter, or stay in, the [Foreign] Service in such numbers as to change its character.

F.T. Ashton-Gwatkin, *The British Foreign Service*, 1950

It would take a super-woman to run a Foreign Office job, a husband and a family, but I do think a woman diplomat should be allowed to decide for herself whether she wants to resign.

Cicely Ludlam (later Lady Mayhew, wife of a former FO Minister), 1952

For the male officer, marriage presents no Service problem. Convention allows that his wife need have no profession of her own. Moreover, she probably *should* have none, seeing that in the higher grades of the Service she will have an important social role which is likely to keep her fully employed. Indeed, it is very nearly true that she *can* properly have none; since, quite apart from the question of social demands on her time, there are extremely few professions the following of which would not conflict in some degree with the interests of the Service.

Sir William Strang, *The Foreign Office*, 1954

We endorse the view that women officers should be employed as widely as possible in the Diplomatic Service. No artificial or unnecessary restrictions should be placed on their duties or postings . . . we received no evidence which would suggest that women in the Foreign Service have proved "tender plants".

The Plowden Report, 1964

Diplomacy is a partnership game *par excellence*. A good pair is worth considerably more than two good individuals, and of the pair the wife has just as arduous a job as the husband, with rather less of the excitement in not knowing all that goes on marked "confidential". The partnership role of wives will continue, but there may be changes in how it is practised.

Lord Gore-Booth, *With Great Truth and Respect*, 1974

Frankly, if a wife chooses to be involved in the embassy work, it's an unpaid benefit for us.

FCO spokesman, *The Times*, 1986

I naturally also appreciate the greater opportunities for women. I joined a Service in which women had not achieved equal pay, and my letter of appointment included a paragraph warning that "in the event of your marriage you would be required to resign this appointment". Now I head an Embassy (surely the first) in which the majority of DS spouses are male.

Juliet Campbell, October 1991

Men have nothing to fear.

Sir David Gillmore, PUS, on the Opportunity 2000 Campaign, March 1993

Commentators still like to portray the FCO as white, male, middle-class and Oxbridge. According to some of them we all still wear bowler hats. But this stereotype is false . . . Our record for recruiting women continues to improve.'

Sir John Coles, PUS, April 1996

If you do a good job, somebody will look at you as the person doing a good job, rather than as a man or a woman.

Janet Rogan, Deputy Ambassador in Sarajevo, August 1997

I need the brightest but I give you this assurance: that merit is the only bar to getting into the Foreign Office and getting promoted in the Foreign Office. I want to open our doors to all walks of life.

The Rt. Hon Robin Cook, Foreign Secretary, September 1997

If I'm going to represent Britain in the world outside, I need to have here a Foreign Office that is representative of the whole of modern Britain, from all walks of life, both genders - we need more women at the top in the Foreign Office – from *all* the different communities that make up a multi-ethnic Britain, and we are at the moment weak on that.

The Rt. Hon Robin Cook, Foreign Secretary, September 1997

. . . you know, being a woman has actually made it easier to connect with people and to break down barriers.

Barbara Hay, Ambassador in Tashkent, February 1998

The FO establishment will also be told to adopt a more enlightened approach to any "outside experience" women diplomats gain when they are away because of children.

FCO spokesman, *The Guardian*, August 1998

A good deal of progress has been made on ethnic minority and women issues, including recruitment. But we are not yet tapping the full range of talent in society as a whole. We have made it easier for women to stay in the Service while they have families. But we need to help more over childcare.

Rob Young, Chief Clerk, September 1998

On 28 January the Board of Management discussed the issue of women in the FCO. It noted that the FCO does well on recruiting good female officers at all levels. But too many do not stay. We don't make the most of our female talent. The FCO is less effective as a result. Accordingly, the Board agreed an Action Plan on Gender. It will help the FCO to offer women the opportunity to realise their potential and maximise their contribution. Much of this is about good management. It will benefit all staff.

Christopher Hum, Chief Clerk, February 1999

CHRONOLOGY

- 1782** The staff of the newly established Foreign Office includes the 'Necessary Woman'
- 1889** Appointment of the first 'Lady Typewriter', Sophia Fulcher
- 1915** MacDonnell Commission Report considers the employment of women in the Civil Service. Women temporary clerks admitted to the Foreign Office
- 1919** Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act passed, but with caveat on the admission of women at administrative level to the Diplomatic and Consular Services
- 1921** Appointment of the first women clerical and executive officers (on a permanent basis) to the Foreign Office
- 1931** Report of the Tomlin Commission on the Civil Service recommends that HMG should reconsider the admission of women to the Diplomatic and Consular Services
- 1933-4** Schuster Committee examines the question of the admission of women to the Diplomatic and Consular Services and produces a Report
- 1936** Publication of Schuster Committee Report by HMG, which concludes that women should still be excluded from the administrative grades of the Diplomatic and Consular Services
- 1943** Eden Reforms: publication of White Paper stating that the admission of women to the administrative grades would be reconsidered
- 1946** Report of the Gowers Committee recommends the admission of women to the administrative grades of the Diplomatic and Consular Services, following success of wartime temporary appointments
- 1946-8** Appointment of the first women diplomats on a permanent basis
- 1955-61** Equal pay for women granted and implemented
- 1958** Establishment of Foreign Service Wives Association
- 1962** Barbara Salt, due to be appointed HM Ambassador to Israel, but never posted as such, owing to illness
- 1965** FSWA merges with Commonwealth Relations Office Wives' Association (CROWS) to form the Diplomatic Service Wives' Association (DSWA)
- 1972** Marriage bar rescinded
- 1973** Eleanor Emery appointed High Commissioner to Botswana: the first

woman to head a British Mission

- 1976** Anne Warburton is appointed HM Ambassador to Denmark
- 1987** First married woman (Veronica Sutherland) appointed as HM Ambassador (to Abidjan)
- 1991** DSWA renamed British Diplomatic Spouses' Association (BDSA)
- 1993** FCO publishes its objectives as part of the Opportunity 2000 campaign
- 1998** Victoria Harrison becomes the first disabled person to be appointed to the fast stream
- 1999** Action Plan on Gender agreed by the Board of Management: target of 15% for female representation in the SMS by 2003
- 1999** BDSA renamed Diplomatic Service Families' Association (DSFA)
- 2002** FCO Nursery opens
- 2002** PUS John Kerr becomes first FCO Gender Champion
- 2004** FCO awarded the Gold Standard by campaign organisation Opportunity Now in its survey on gender equality in the workplace
- 2007** Launch of e-learning module designed to train staff on gender and other diversity issues
- 2009** Julie Chappell becomes the youngest-ever British Ambassador when she is sent to Guatemala and (non-resident) to Honduras and El Salvador, aged 31
- 2017** Karen Pierce appointed Britain's first ever female UK Permanent Representative to the United Nations
- 2018** NneNne Iwuji-Eme appointed High Commissioner to Maputo, becoming the first British black female Head of Mission

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

Women Diplomats

Primary source material is available in the archives of the Chief Clerk's department, preserved at the National Archives in class FO 366/ pieces 915-7, 928-30, 933, 954, 1497-1500, 1519-1522, 1588-1590, 1597. See also *Report of the Sub-Committee appointed to consider the position after the war of women holding temporary appointments in Government departments* (Cmd 199 of 1919); *Women in the Civil Service* (Cmd 1116 of 1921); *Report of the Royal Commission on the Civil Service 1929-31* (Cmd 3909 of 1931); *Documents relating to the admission of Women to the Diplomatic and Consular Services July 30, 1934-April 1936* (Cmd 5166 of 1936); *Proposals for the Reform of the Foreign Service* (Cmd 6420 of 1943); *Admission of Women to the Foreign Service. Report of a Committee appointed by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs to re-examine the question* (XSI/A/211) of May 1946; *Marriage Bar in the Civil Service* (Cmd 6886 of August 1946); *Report of the Committee on Representational Services Overseas ... under the Chairmanship of Lord Plowden 1962-63* (Cmd 2276 of 1964).

By far the best starting point for histories of women in diplomacy is Helen McCarthy, *Women of the World: The Rise of the Female Diplomat* (London, 2014). See also the recent edited collection *Gender and Diplomacy* (Oxford, 2017), ed. By Jennifer Cassidy. Other relevant secondary sources include: Sir E Hertslet, *Recollections of the Old Foreign Office* (London, 1901); Sir J Tilley and S Gaselee, *The Foreign Office* (London, 1933); Caroline Petrie's article entitled 'Women in Diplomacy' (*The University Women's Review*, 1 May 1963); Simon Jenkins and Anne Sloman, *With Respect, Ambassador* (London, 1985); Peter Barber, *Diplomacy: The World of the Honest Spy* (The British Library, 1979) and Martin Pugh, *Women and the Women's Movement in Britain 1914-1959* (Basingstoke, 1992). For a study of the Ladies' Peace of 1529, see J G Russell, *Diplomats at Work: Three Renaissance Studies* (Gloucester, 1992) while Anne Sebba's *Battling for News* (London, 1994) examines the admission of women to journalism in the twentieth century. For the 1990s, see Ruth Dudley Edwards, *True Brits* (BBC, 1994).

Juliet Campbell's article 'The Perils of the She-Diplomatist' (*The Cambridge Review*, November 1994) looks at the evolving role of women in the FCO. For a view of women in other foreign services there is Rhodri Jeffreys-Jones' *Changing Differences: Women and the Shaping of American Foreign Policy 1917-1994* (California, 1995), and *Envoys Extraordinary: Women of the Canadian Foreign Service* by Margaret K Weiers (Toronto, 1995). Celia L Jones' *Dolly Mixture* recounts her experiences as the only senior woman working in the traditionally male environments of the Admiralty and the Ministry of Defence in 1940s and 1950s Britain (Edinburgh, 1995). For a view of women managers in the British Civil Service there is Andrew Hede's article 'Women managers in the Civil Service: the long road towards equity in Britain' (*International Review of Administrative Sciences*, Vol 61, No 4, December 1995). Lee, Baker and Beard's article 'An Away Match' (*People Management*, 14 May 1998) examines the recruitment process and its effect on the number of women applicants.

Diplomatic Wives

For the early nineteenth century, *The Private Letters of Mary Nisbet of Dirleton, Countess of Elgin* arranged by Lt. Col. Nisbet Hamilton Grant (London, 1926) provide a lively introduction, covering her husband's time in Constantinople and Athens (1799-1805) with accounts of sumptuous diplomatic receptions given by the Sultan and the assembling of the Elgin Marbles. Lady Harriet Granville's *Letters 1810-1845* (2 vols., London, 1884) give an entertaining view of the life of an ambassadress in Paris, 1824-28, 1831-41, and are complemented by *The Private Letters of Princess Lieven to Prince Mettemich 1820-1826* edited by Peter Quennell (London, 1937) in which the wife of the Austrian Ambassador to London gives sparkling pen-pictures of her contemporaries. See also Dennis Wright, 'Memsahibs in Persia' in *Asian Affairs*, Vol. 14, Part 1, pp.5-14. For the later nineteenth century, see Mrs Hugh Fraser, *A Diplomatist's Wife in Many Lands* (2 vols., London, 1911) for the lively reminiscences of the American wife of a British diplomat who served in Peking and Tokyo, as well as Europe. She wrote other works on the subject, including *A Diplomatist's Wife in Japan* (1899) of which a new edition has been edited by Hugh Cortazzi, (New York, 1982). Mary King Waddington was the American wife of the French Ambassador to Moscow and London, and her *Letters of a Diplomatic Wife* (London, 1903) show a keen observer of social detail.

For a conspectus of twentieth-century attitudes and experiences, see the following autobiographies: A M Borrill, *Nomads Are We* (Ilfracombe, 1974); Ann Bridge, *Facts and Fictions* (London, 1968); Angela Caccia, *Beyond Lake Titicaca* (London, 1969); Esme Cromer, *From this Day Forward* (London, 1991); Viscountess D'Abernon, *Red Cross and Berlin Embassy* (London, 1946); Jane Ewart-Biggs, *Pay, Pack and Follow* (London, 1984); Marie Noele Kelly, *Dawn to Dusk* (London, 1960) and *Mirror to Russia* (London: Country Life, 1952); Maureen Tweedy, *A Label Round My Neck* (London, 1976); Masha Williams, *The Consul's Memsahib* (Lewes, 1985); and *Exiled to America* (Lewes, 1987). Betty Holman's *Memoirs of a Diplomat's Wife* (Bracknell, 1998) cover Lady Holman's postings between 1940 and 1954. In Baghdad the Holmans were caught up in the Rashid Ali rebellion, while in Tehran Lady Holman helped to organise the 1943 Tehran Conference. Then they were posted to Paris with the Duff Coopers. After Paris they went to Romania, where they experienced life behind the 'iron curtain' before their final posting to Cuba. Beryl Smedley's *Partners in Diplomacy* (Ferring, 1990) examines the changes over the generations in backgrounds and attitudes illustrated by a wealth of contemporary anecdotes, and considers whether opportunities since the 1970s for women to have their own careers has diminished their sense of dedication to their husbands' profession. It also contains a comprehensive bibliography. Section IV of this Note draws very heavily on Lady Smedley's invaluable survey. For a pioneering investigation of the social pressures on servicemen and women and their families, which has some interesting parallels with the diplomatic service, see Ruth Jolly, *Military Man, Family Man, Crown Property* (London, 1987), also Annie Jones's *Gumboots and Pearls: The Life of a Wife of ...* (Kingston-Upon-Thames, 1990). Katie Hickman, a diplomat's daughter (who is also married to a diplomat), published a study of the realities of diplomatic life and the women who lead it in her book *Daughters of Britannia* (London, 1999).



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