

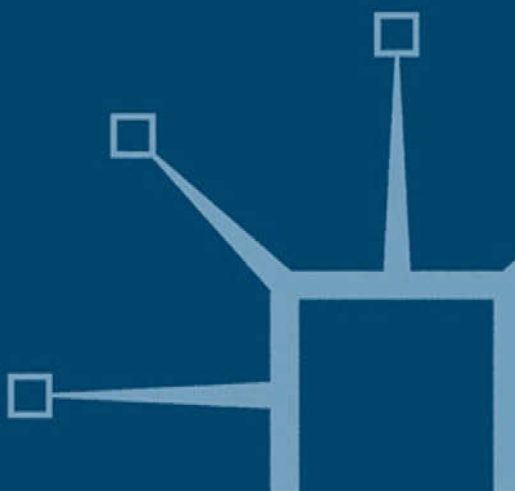
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# Common Prostitutes and Ordinary Citizens

Commercial Sex in London, 1885–1960

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Julia Laite



## *Genders and Sexualities in History*

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Palgrave Macmillan's series, *Genders and Sexualities in History*, aims to accommodate and foster new approaches to historical research in the fields of genders and sexualities. The series promotes world-class scholarship that concentrates upon the interconnected themes of genders, sexualities, religions/religiosity, civil society, class formations, politics and war. Historical studies of gender and sexuality have often been treated as disconnected fields, while in recent years historical analyses in these two areas have synthesized, creating new departures in historiography. By linking genders and sexualities with questions of religion, civil society, politics and the contexts of war and conflict, this series will reflect recent developments in scholarship, moving away from the previously dominant and narrow histories of science, scientific thought and legal processes. The result brings together scholarship from contemporary, modern, early modern, medieval, classical and non-Western history to provide a diachronic forum for scholarship that incorporates new approaches to genders and sexualities in history.

Julia Laite's *Common Prostitutes and Ordinary Citizens: Commercial Sex in London, 1885–1960* contributes to debates about the criminalization of prostitution in London between the Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1885 and the Street Offices Act of 1959. She situates prostitution within complex networks of gender and class relations, sexuality, public health, nation and empire, industrialization, and the criminal justice system. Crucially, Laite allows us to hear the voices of the women themselves, as well as those of feminists, anti-vice campaigners, politicians, health officials, police, and magistrates. In common with the other volumes in this series, Laite's *Common Prostitutes and Ordinary Citizens* is meticulously researched and elegantly written. Her intellectual contribution makes this an essential book for anyone curious about the history of gender relations, sexuality, and crime. It is an absorbing read, and is a sophisticated contribution to our understanding of the past.

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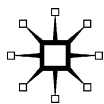
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*To Linda and Stanley G. Laite, with love*



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# Acknowledgements

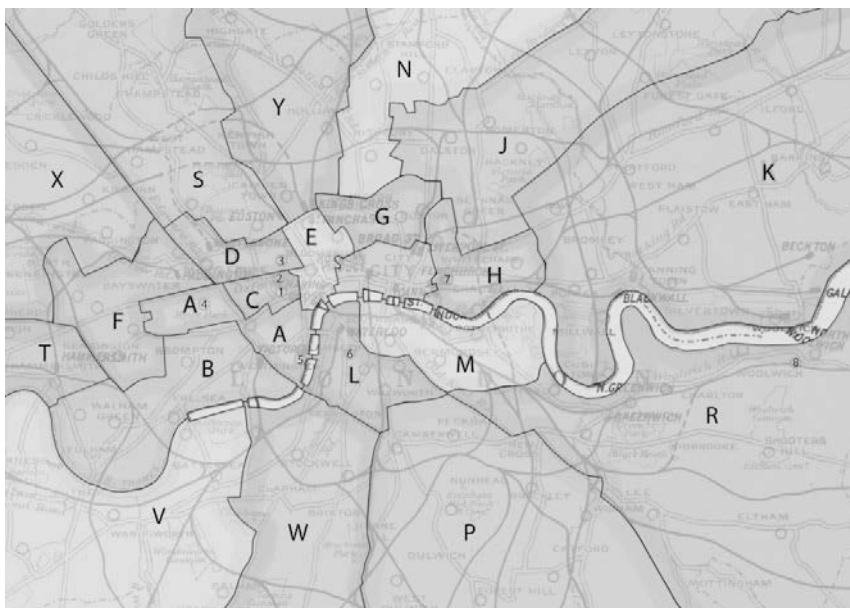
Researching prostitution is as challenging as it is fascinating: it is controversial, troubling, hard to describe and even more difficult to explain. I have carried this research project with me through a doctorate, several postdoctoral years, and finally a lectureship, and have never ceased to be both deeply interested and profoundly confused by prostitution, the public reactions to it and the debates surrounding it. Moreover, while I wrote this book, public concern about prostitution remained prominent and opinion about it diverse, and I could not help but notice how present-day debates and interventions bore a remarkable similarity to those which I was examining in the past. Much about prostitution discourse appeared to me as it had to feminist contemporaries in the early twentieth century; that is, as 'argument in a vicious circle'.<sup>1</sup> Disheartening stereotypes, injustices, misconceptions and polemics dominate popular and political accounts of prostitution, while women working in the sex industry continue to experience marginalization, stigma and harm.

This disappointing lack of change and understanding in popular culture and legislation surrounding prostitution was mitigated for me by the immense support I found in advisors, colleagues and friends. I would like to thank my PhD examiners, Peter Mandler and Lucy Bland, whose feedback and encouragement have extended beyond my doctoral studies; and Judith Walkowitz, Simon Szreter, Helen Self, Philippa Levine, Steve Legg, Ann Summers, Jane Caplan, Lesley Hall, Julie MacArthur, Daniel Grey, Lucy Delap, Catherine Lee, Mary Ann Poutanen and Philip Howell for some helpful conversations farther along the way. I am also grateful to Chris Youé, who has been supportive of my work since my undergraduate years, and to Arn Keeling, John Sandlos and Suzanne Morton, who supervised different stages of my postdoctoral work in Canada. Thanks are also owed to Emma Rothschild, particularly for her comments about 'Nellie Johnson', as well as William O'Reilly and Inga Huld Markan at the Centre for History and Economics; and to those involved with the Gender and History Workshop at Cambridge. Series editors John Arnold, Joanna Bourke and Sean Brady's enthusiasm for this book has been deeply appreciated, as has the encouragement I've received from Ruth Ireland and Michael Strang at Palgrave Macmillan, and the input of the anonymous readers who commented on the manuscript. I can think of no better place to have finished this book than amongst my colleagues and my students at Birkbeck College, University of London, and no better place to have started it than under the supervision of Deborah Thom, whose careful readings and graceful insights helped me, and my research, no end.

I would also like to thank the staff and faculty at the history departments of the University of Cambridge, Memorial University of Newfoundland, McGill University and Birkbeck College, each of whom provided a home for this project at different stages in its development, and to the staff at the various libraries and archives in which I researched, especially the National Archives, the Women's Library, the Wellcome Library and the Cambridge University Library. During my doctoral studies I enjoyed the generous financial support of the Commonwealth Scholarship, and later I was awarded postdoctoral fellowships from Memorial University's Faculty of Arts and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, which have been crucial in enabling me to finish my manuscript. A generous grant from the Scouloudi Foundation has assisted me with the costs of publication.

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Last, but undeniably not least, I would like to thank my family: my grandparents, Olive and Jacob Button, who have inspired me in ways I do not believe they realize; my cousins, for reminding me always to remember the story; and my sister, Katherine Laite, for being so cool. A thousand thanks go to my partner, William Alcock: his skill, patience and love during these years have kept my computer working, my head above water and a very big smile upon my face. Finally, I would like to thank my parents, Linda and Stanley G. Laite, and dedicate this book to them, in recognition of their unending love and support.



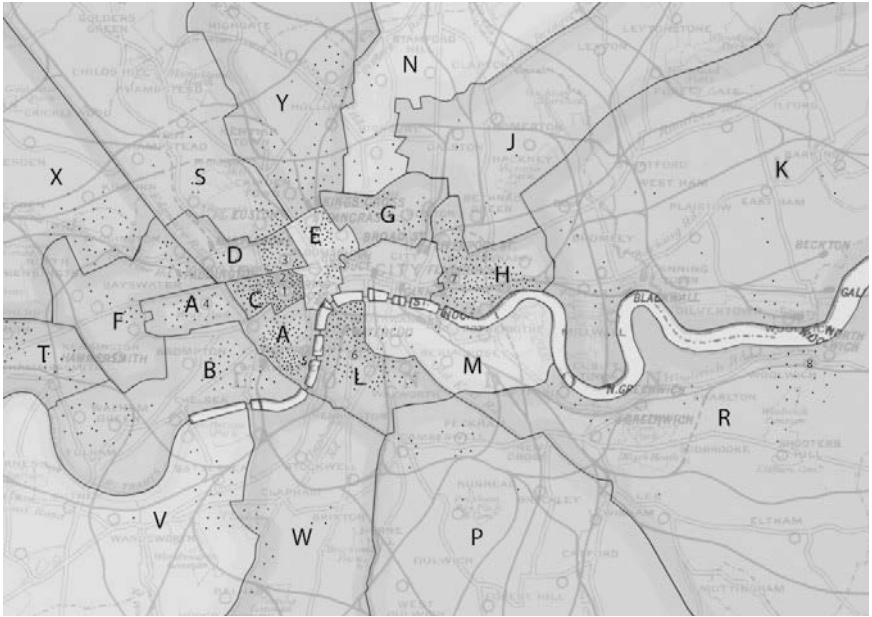
*Map 1* Police divisions in London, c. 1910

*Divisions:* A: Hyde Park and Whitehall B: Chelsea C: Piccadilly and St. James D: Marylebone E: Holborn F: Paddington G: Finsbury H: Whitechapel J: Bethnal Green K: Bow L: Lambeth M: Southwark N: Islington P: Camberwell R: Greenwich S: Hampstead T: Hammersmith V: Wandsworth W: Clapham X: Highgate Y: Kilburn City Police administered separately.

*Key stations:* 1: Vine Street Station (West End, C; later moved to West End Central Station, Saville Row) 2: Great Marlborough Street Station (West End, C) 3: Tottenham Court Road Station (North Soho, D) 4: Hyde Park Station (Hyde Park, A) 5: Canon Row Station (Victoria, A) 6: Kennington Road Station (Waterloo, L) 7: Lemn Street Station (Whitechapel, H) 8: Woolwich Station (Woolwich, R).

*Source:* Based upon a digital scan of 'London's Police Divisions and Railways', *Bacon's 'Citizen Series' Maps of London* (London, 1910); designed by the author.





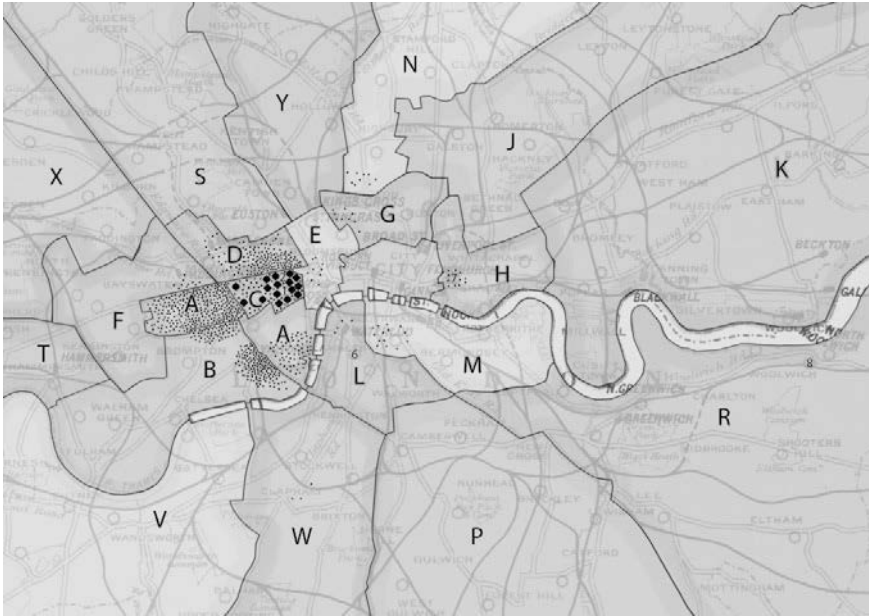
*Map 3* Arrests for solicitation in London, 1914–1916

*Key stations:* 1: Vine Street Station (West End, C; later moved to West End Central Station, Saville Row) 2: Great Marlborough Street Station (West End, C) 3: Tottenham Court Road Station (North Soho, D) 4: Hyde Park Station (Hyde Park, A) 5: Canon Row Station (Victoria, A) 6: Kennington Road Station (Waterloo, L) 7: Lemn Street Station (Whitechapel, H) 8: Woolwich Station (Woolwich, R).

1 dot = 10 arrests

*Notes:* Dots are placed randomly according to statistics for each police division and accompanying descriptions of areas, and do not represent actual locations of individual arrests.

*Sources:* Based upon a digital scan of ‘London’s Police Divisions and Railways’, *Bacon’s ‘Citizen Series’ Maps of London* (London, 1910); designed by the author. Arrest statistics from an unpublished police return, in London, The National Archives, MEPO 2/1720.



*Map 4* Arrests for solicitation in London, 1950–1953

*Key stations:* 1: Vine Street Station (West End, C; later moved to West End Central Station, Saville Row) 2: Great Marlborough Street Station (West End, C) 3: Tottenham Court Road Station (North Soho, D) 4: Hyde Park Station (Hyde Park, A) 5: Canon Row Station (Victoria, A) 6: Kennington Road Station (Waterloo, L) 7: Lemn Street Station (Whitechapel, H) 8: Woolwich Station (Woolwich, R).

1 small dot = 10 arrests

1 large dot = 1000 arrests

*Notes:* Dots are placed randomly according to statistics for each police division and accompanying maps and descriptions of areas, and do not represent actual locations of individual arrests; C Division arrests, which constitute 65 per cent of the total for London over the three year period (16,378 arrests), have been represented with large dots (equalling 1000 arrests) as well as small ones (equalling 10 arrests).

*Sources:* Based upon a digital scan of 'London's Police Divisions and Railways', *Bacon's 'Citizen Series' Maps of London* (London, 1910); designed by the author. Arrest statistics from unpublished police returns in London, The National Archives, MEPO 2/9713.

# Introduction: Criminalizing Commercial Sex

‘The prostitute is the scapegoat for everyone’s sins, and few people care whether she is justly treated or not,’ wrote Alison Neilans, the outspoken feminist campaigner who led early twentieth-century campaigns to repeal laws directed against prostitutes, end the government regulation of prostitution, promote sexual health without coercive measures, and overturn the double standard of sexual morality.<sup>1</sup> Like Josephine Butler a generation before, Neilans worked in relative obscurity, addressing a social problem that many were keen to denigrate or romanticize, but few were willing to examine carefully. ‘Good people have spent thousands of pounds in efforts to reform her;’ she continued. ‘Poets have written about her; essayists and orators have made her the subject of some of their most striking rhetoric; perhaps no class of people have been abused, persecuted, hated, or, alternatively, sentimentalized over as prostitutes have been, but one thing they have never had yet, and that is simple legal justice. Ought we not to secure legal justice for the “common prostitute” before we set out to reform her?’<sup>2</sup>

Reflecting in 1922 on efforts to control, eradicate, understand and prevent prostitution throughout history, Neilans invited her readers to consider prostitution not as a moral, philanthropic, literary or medical issue but rather as a legal one, and to see prostitutes as defined, controlled and ultimately wronged by the criminal justice system. Ten years earlier, independent suffrage campaigner Teresa Billington Greig, who, like Neilans, existed on the margins of the early twentieth-century women’s movement, was similarly unequivocal about the relationship between prostitution and the law. In response to panics over the traffic in women in the 1910s and the attendant ‘White Slave Bill’ of 1912, she wrote that ‘the ordinary citizen who detests exploited prostitution has no unbalanced desire for legislation at any price. He, or she, is prepared to accept that the causes of this evil cannot be touched by law; however perfectly conceived, however perfectly administered.’<sup>3</sup>

This book is also concerned with prostitution as a subject of legal intervention, and it examines a period in which prostitution-related activity

came to be more circumscribed than it had been at any other time in Britain's modern history. While previous studies of prostitution in Britain have examined attempts to instate regulatory systems of prostitution control in the mid-nineteenth century, charted a move from medical regulation to more repressive policies in the late nineteenth century, or examined the heyday of moral reform projects and feminist politics leading up to the First World War, I work here with a different periodization that lies between two immensely important legal interventions into prostitution: the 1885 Criminal Law Amendment Act, which made keeping a brothel a summary offence, raised the age of consent, and made procurement for the purposes of prostitution illegal, and the 1959 Street Offences Act, which strengthened and nationalized different laws that were directed against prostitution in the streets, and remains in place today. During this period, marked by the rise of social purity, social hygiene and the academic social sciences; by the changing role of women and changing attitudes to sexuality; by mass migration and rapidly shifting imperial relations; by, in sum, immense technological, political, cultural and socio-sexual change, there was a sustained, if contested, drive toward the gradual but definite criminalization of prostitution.

Criminalization is not a legal term, and it is true that prostitution – if we take that to mean the buying and the selling of sex – is not, nor has it ever been, prohibited in the United Kingdom.<sup>4</sup> Yet, as historian Helen Self demonstrates, while prostitution itself was never made illegal, 'the regulatory aspect of the law, substantively, although not formally or legally, transform[ed] the practise of prostitution into a criminal activity.'<sup>5</sup> The actual buying and selling of sex may never have been outlawed, but so many aspects of commercial sex had been legally proscribed after 1885, through criminal laws (such as provisions against brothels), regulatory measures (such as the licensing laws), or de facto and statutory changes in public nuisance policing (such as the solicitation laws), that the ways in which one could sell sex in Britain free from legal harassment were severely curtailed by 1960.

Seen as a 'sphinx to modern society; a riddle which society cannot solve'<sup>6</sup> 'the most spectacular symptom of moral disease in a community',<sup>7</sup> as well as a prism through which realities about women and sex are distorted and deformed,<sup>8</sup> prostitution has proved a very useful subject through which historians can learn about social values and sexuality, gender and class relationships, the construction of nation, community and empire, the intersection of politics and morality, and the development of criminal justice systems in the past. Prostitution has been a fascinating lens through which historians have viewed the politics of sexuality and gender, and has even played a role in developing our understandings of modernity and of Western civilization.<sup>9</sup> The phenomenon of prostitution can frequently be found entangled in serious histories of society, culture and the state, and prostitution often makes an appearance in popular history and historical fiction, with images



of prostitutes frequently used as backdrops to denote urban decay or the 'naughty' past.<sup>10</sup>

The serious historical study of prostitution has gained significant ground in the past thirty years. The campaigns to pass, repeal or change laws surrounding prostitution have formed the subject of several works on the history of prostitution in Britain, and several historians have also examined the social history of prostitution and the way it was policed in places like Southampton, Birmingham, Edinburgh, Glasgow and York, especially in the late nineteenth century. These studies have added tremendously to our knowledge not only of commercial sex, but also of the lives of working-class women, the impact of poverty, and the development of institutions such as the hospital, the workhouse, the prison and the police. They are joined by an impressive literature on the history of prostitution around the world, most remarkably in Continental Europe and the United States, but increasingly in East and South Asia, Africa, and Latin America as well.<sup>11</sup> Together, this research has unequivocally shown that prostitution is not a marginal topic of historical study, but, rather, an important, transnational, pervasive and near-omnipresent phenomenon in the modern world. It was discussed at the highest levels of government, it generated immense amounts of capital, it was one of the largest drains on policing and criminal justice resources, it was entangled with political scandal and private enterprise, and it was deeply infused with meaning by the media, the church, civil society and popular culture.

In the work of historians like Judith Walkowitz and Lucy Bland, we can learn about the intensely divisive feminist and moral politics of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that led up to the passing of the 1885 Criminal Law Amendment Act, and, in the work of Helen Self, we can see the political road to the 1959 Street Offences Act illuminated, as she charts the intricate debates and bureaucracies that helped to codify the contradictory policies on prostitution that remain in the present day.<sup>12</sup> Stephan Petrow has written briefly about how the moral campaigns of the late nineteenth century, which turned increasingly repressive, placed pressure upon the Metropolitan Police to respond to the problem of prostitution.<sup>13</sup> Paula Bartley discusses the changing role of rescue and reform in Britain up to 1914, while Francis Finnegan, Linda Mahood and Judith Walkowitz have provided case studies of how prostitutes were treated under different local systems of policing.<sup>14</sup> Philip Howell, meanwhile, examines how different British authorities controlled prostitution in the nineteenth century through official and unofficial regulation.<sup>15</sup> Together, these important works demonstrate that prostitution was an important and complex issue in Britain in the long nineteenth century, and tell us a great deal about the way prostitution was thought about and experienced in this period, and how it was tied to reform campaigns and the policing of sexuality.

Most of these accounts draw to a close before 1885, however, and with the exception of Helen Self's largely political history which focuses on the years leading up to 1959, we are left to wonder how prostitution was thought about and shaped during the period that actually witnessed the most intensive repression of commercial sex in the modern period. This is true especially after 1914, when virtually nothing is available that tells us about the social or cultural history of prostitution during, between or it is on this under-examined period that this book focuses after the major World Wars that marked the first half of the twentieth century.

Likewise, the political and social debates that have dominated many previous accounts of prostitution in Britain form the backdrop, rather than the main drama, of the account that follows. I am more interested here in how these debates translated into policies and action and, in turn, how these policies and actions affected and were affected by the sexual economy and the women who sold sex. Similarly while other historians have examined the role of civil society, more specifically those organizations dedicated to the rescue and reform of errant young women and prostitutes, I am more concerned here with what I feel was a far more significant relationship, that is, the one between women who sold sex and the criminal justice system: to put it simply, the vast majority of prostitutes were far more likely to experience arrests, fines and imprisonment than rescue and reform.

I am most concerned, in other words, with the consequences of the legal interventions that developed to an unprecedented degree between 1885 and 1959. The consequences of the first of these, the 1885 Criminal Law Amendment Act, were also on the minds of some of its contemporaries. While the Act was intended largely to protect women and girls from sexual exploitation, it also contained a section outlawing brothels, which concerned some of its opponents. One of these was Charles Hopwood, an MP for Stockport, who felt that the likely outcome of outlawing brothels would be 'that these poor girls would be hunted and chased about by the police...They would be at the mercy of their landlords and landladies, who would naturally charge increased rents, to reimburse themselves for the risks run'. He argued that the provisions against brothels 'would simply fall heavily upon a poor prostitute. They were going to raise every man's hand against her'.<sup>16</sup> A *Times* article in 1885, meanwhile, worried that the new Act brought with it 'laws which will do as much evil as they cure... trusting in showy, mechanical remedies, society will become careless of the deeper causes of juvenile misery and vice'.<sup>17</sup> With a similar sentiment, Josephine Butler declared in a letter in 1894 that 'I continue to protest that I do not believe that any real reform will ever be reached by outward repression'.<sup>18</sup> And, in the 1920s, Alison Neilans stated that 'laws made for the suppression of vice often have a marked tendency to do significantly more harm than good'.<sup>19</sup> This book will assess these arguments, with the benefit of historical hindsight.

I begin in 1885, at what has been described as a watershed moment for feminist moral reform movements surrounding prostitution: when the campaign to repeal the Contagious Diseases Acts had achieved its goals in Britain and was expanding to the Empire, when the International Abolitionist Federation was gaining ground in its efforts to rid Continental Europe of systems of regulated prostitution, when the age of consent had been raised and brothels outlawed, and when men who sold virgins into sexual slavery could at last be prosecuted.<sup>20</sup> 'Social purity', as it came to be known, was in full swing, entangling itself with feminism and with older moral reform projects, and making prostitution one of its chief concerns.

The road to 1885 had been a long one, and these increasingly successful campaigns were part of what was a well-established anti-prostitution crusade. Prostitution had been considered a problem of public order, collective morality and individual sin for many centuries, based upon religious and social concepts of sex – especially commercial sex – as immoral and sinful, and especially sinful for women, and upon the idea that prostitution was a source of social and public disorder, disease and abuse.<sup>21</sup> Between the late seventeenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth, growing popular and political concern about crime and disorder, combined with the waning of the moral authority of the church, the immaturity of secular law, and the inadequacy of policing, inspired the founding and flourishing of societies dedicated to tackling vice, and sexual vice in particular; around this same time, some of the earliest 'penitentiaries' for prostitutes were founded.<sup>22</sup>

By the 1830s and 1840s, the problem of prostitution, like many other problems of the new industrial and urbanized age, had attracted the attention of early social scientists and public health officials like Dr Alexandre Parent-Duchâtelet, whose 1836 study of prostitution in Paris helped inspire the French to implement systems of medical regulation, characterized by registered brothels, carefully controlled prostitutes (in theory, at least) and regular inspection of registered women for venereal disease. Duchâtelet's work also prompted increased attention to the problem on the other side of the Channel.<sup>23</sup> As M.J.D. Roberts has argued, concern about prostitution in this period was part of a more general demand for sweeping social and urban reform – prompted by the industrial revolution and heralded by the enfranchisement of the middle classes in the 1830s.<sup>24</sup> It was in this moral climate that organizations dedicated to the rescue and reform of prostitutes really began to flourish, as urban missionaries and penitentiary societies sought to recruit recalcitrant women in order to save them from their life of degradation and ruin, instruct them in the ways of piety, and retrain them for 'respectable' work.<sup>25</sup> While the image of prostitutes as licentious and morally bankrupt was a common one, increasingly it was thought that prostitutes were also 'fallen women', once-innocent victims of male lust, which had ruined them.<sup>26</sup> In the 1860s, meanwhile, the idea of the prostitute as society's scapegoat was famously articulated by historian William

Lecky, who wrote that 'she remains, while creeds and civilisations rise and fall, the eternal priestess of humanity, blasted for the sins of the people.'<sup>27</sup> Prostitution was a moral problem, but by mid-century it had also come to be seen as a social problem, and one that increasingly interested reformers of various stripes.

Though social and cultural attitudes toward prostitution were complex and moralistic in the first half of the nineteenth century, and prostitution was seen as one of the most emblematic problems of an ailing society, public support for legal intervention was mainly concentrated in the realm of public order; that is, laws that controlled the way prostitution was manifested on the streets, the manner in which brothels were conducted, and the way prostitutes behaved in public.<sup>28</sup> This can be explained in several interrelated ways. This approach was influenced by a sustained legal and cultural tradition of the liberty of the subject in Britain, which shied away from the brazen systems of medical regulation and licensed brothels on the Continent, and could not envision a way to make commercial sex completely illegal without infringing on the personal rights of the sellers and, more importantly, the buyers of sex. In a related, if less ideological, way, prostitution was often romanticized and glamorized, its connections to the unequal position of women were thought of more sentimentally than politically, if at all, and it was considered by many a 'necessary evil'. As Lecky put it, 'Herself the supreme type of vice, she is ultimately the most efficient guardian of virtue. But for her, the unchallenged purity of countless happy homes would be polluted...'<sup>29</sup> Understood through the lens of what Michael Mason has called 'classic moralism', prostitution was an institution that existed to serve and to control men's urge for sexual intercourse and prevent 'respectable' women from unwanted and harmful sexual attention.<sup>30</sup>

The earliest modern laws against prostitution-related activities therefore made explicit reference to a public nuisance beyond the act of soliciting sex or running a brothel itself. In the early nineteenth century the 1824 Vagrancy Act, which addressed all manner of unruly, immoral and offensive behaviour, introduced sections that allowed police and night watchmen to arrest 'common prostitutes behaving in a riotous or indecent manner'.<sup>31</sup> Fifteen years later, the 1839 Metropolitan Police Act, which dealt largely with crimes of offence, indecency and disorder in the streets, included a clause prohibiting any 'common prostitute' from soliciting to the annoyance of inhabitants or passengers.<sup>32</sup> A section in the Town Police Clauses Act of 1847 enacted similar provisions outside London.<sup>33</sup> These solicitation laws, as they came to be called, were the single most important aspect of the legal canon that was directed against prostitution. They were complemented by a series of Disorderly Houses Acts, which allowed local authorities to prosecute brothels (and other establishments) in their jurisdiction if they were disturbing the peace, and the later Prevention of Crimes Act of

1871, which allowed police to search and close brothels if they were found to be the resort of thieves and other criminals.

By the mid-nineteenth century, the expansion of British military activity and naval importance, the growth of towns, and new understandings of medical contagion meant that, for many, prostitution had become a medical problem, and its chief evil was its connection with venereal disease. Following the aftermath of the Crimean War, Dr William Acton's 1857 publication of *Prostitution, Considered in its Moral, Social and Sanitary Aspects*, and attempts at informal regulation in different parts of the ever-expanding and militarily dependent Empire, a series of Contagious Diseases (CD) Acts were passed in Britain (in 1864, 1866 and 1869).<sup>34</sup> These Acts, increasing gradually in scope and power, stipulated that any woman who was suspected of being a common prostitute in certain garrison towns could be taken into custody and medically inspected and, if found to be suffering from a venereal disease, could be incarcerated in a lock hospital until declared non-contagious. She would remain on a register of 'common prostitutes' thereafter, and have to submit regularly to inspection.<sup>35</sup>

The protest was almost immediate: taking the name – and the symbolism – of the 'abolitionists' who had fought against the British government's support of slavery half a century earlier, an alliance of radical liberals, evangelicals, moral reformers and feminist men and women such as Josephine Butler and James Stansfeld launched local and international campaigns against the government regulation of prostitution, forming the National Association and its sister Ladies' National Association for the Repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts in 1869.<sup>36</sup> The campaign against these Acts is widely considered one of the founding moments of modern feminism, and it soon spread to the Continent and the Empire when the International Abolitionist Federation was formed by repealers in 1871.<sup>37</sup>

While the Acts themselves represented a new way of thinking about and dealing with prostitution in Britain, the reaction they inspired – as Judith Walkowitz has outlined in her seminal monograph and elsewhere – also helped to forge new meanings for prostitution in the public imagination. In many ways, the campaign against the Acts was far more significant in terms of its effects on prostitute women than the Acts themselves.<sup>38</sup> Bound up in all the class and gender politics of the age, it blurred the line between feminism and anti-vice activism, and between the fight against the evils of the government control of prostitution and the evils of prostitution itself. On one hand, campaigners argued that the CD Acts were unconstitutional and unjust in that they stigmatized women as prostitutes, imprisoned them without cause, subjected them to forcible medical inspection, and placed them at the mercy of the police. Yet, on the other hand, repealers argued that the Acts tolerated and licensed vice by attempting to make it 'safe' for men, and, in so doing, granted legitimacy to a world view in which certain kinds of women were expected to be sexually available to men and in which

sexual licentiousness, male lust and the abuse of women were inevitable.<sup>39</sup> The fifteen-year anti-CD Act campaign had a complex legacy: while it gave birth to a sustained campaign for prostitutes' civil rights under the tenets of feminist libertarianism, it also helped to hone arguments against prostitution and sharpened public opinion against any form of toleration, be it government regulation or a more benign *laissez-faire* policy amongst the police. It was, therefore, an important step not only toward placing prostitution on the public agenda but also toward encouraging its increased repression and criminalization.<sup>40</sup>

Another contemporaneous and interconnected development that raised the profile of prostitution-related issues and encouraged policies of criminal repression was the growth of concerns over 'white slavery'. While the term had been used in several different related guises in the nineteenth century, it was in the 1880s, as the CD Acts entered their last years of operation, that it came to be almost exclusively attached to exploitative or juvenile prostitution.<sup>41</sup> This was thanks in no small part to the Quaker journalist Alfred Dyer, who, acting on the tip of a friend, visited brothels in Belgium and exposed the trade in British girls into that country's regulated brothels in the late 1870s. These revelations, quickly drawn upon by the press and by politicians, prompted a Select Committee of the House of Lords on the Law Related to the Protection of Young Girls, which sat and published its report between 1881 and 1882.<sup>42</sup> Meanwhile, Josephine Butler was touring Europe herself, encouraging local societies to oppose regulation; she eventually published her own account of the horrors of European brothels and their connections to the traffic in women.<sup>43</sup>

In the wake of these accounts of exploited prostitution and white slavery, and against the backdrop of the tenacious CD Acts, a new wave of moral reform organizations were formed. These included the Moral Reform Union in 1881, and the Church of England Purity Society, the White Cross Army, and the Gospel Purity Association (of which Alfred Dyer was a prominent member), all founded between 1883 and 1884.<sup>44</sup> These organizations varied in their defined priorities, their objectives, and the means by which they sought to achieve them, but, as Alan Hunt has argued, together they formed a distinct and transformative moral reform project that made prostitution one of its chief concerns.<sup>45</sup> They were joined by other organizations around the world, particularly in the United States, as the campaign for social purity and progressive social and moral policies became an international phenomenon.

It was on the heels of *The Report of the Select Committee*, and at the demand of these organizations, that the Criminal Law Amendment Bill was first introduced in 1883 and the suspension of the Contagious Diseases Acts was approved by Gladstone's Parliament in 1884; and so it was that many people who had concerned themselves with the repeal of one law began to campaign for the instatement of another. This new Bill proposed to raise the age

of consent from thirteen to sixteen, make 'procurement for the purposes of prostitution' illegal, and outlaw brothels.<sup>46</sup>

But, despite the best efforts of some committed members of the House and the campaigns of these concerned societies, the Bill seemed destined never to become law. Many Parliamentarians worried that the Bill might lead to extortion: of women by the police and, more importantly, of men by women.<sup>47</sup> Libertarian opponents of the CD Acts, meanwhile, may have lauded the protective measures of the Bill but feared what were called the 'police clauses', measures that gave police more power to search premises without warrant, arrest prostitutes on the streets and shut down brothels.<sup>48</sup>

With the Bill floundering in Parliament, William T. Stead, journalist, muckraker, social crusader and editor of the *Pall Mall Gazette*, heeded the call of Josephine Butler and other concerned campaigners, who felt that something was needed to incense the population and encourage popular support. The result was 'The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon', appearing in four parts from 6 until 13 July 1885, which recounted lurid tales of young girls from the East End and the Continent being smuggled into the cruel brothels of London's affluent West End, a place that traffickers considered, Stead wrote, 'the greatest market in human flesh the world has ever seen'.<sup>49</sup> In order to 'prove' his allegations, Stead went so far as to buy his own virgin for five pounds. Enlisting the help of the Salvation Army, Josephine Butler, and their connections to the underworld through a former madam, Rebecca Jarrett (whom they had 'rescued' and 'reformed'), he made a young girl named Eliza Armstrong a central, if unwilling, character in a complex moral, political and journalistic game.<sup>50</sup>

Immensely controversial and extremely profitable, Stead's account was read by people in the hundreds of thousands. While some read the articles to be thrilled by stories of the abduction, confinement and rape of girl children, many others were moved to sincere action. Propelled by Stead's sensational journalism, social purity organizations and vigilance societies were supplied with hundreds of new recruits, augmented moral authority and powerful ammunition. They lobbied government to approve the controversial Bill, and succeeded. Although some of the 'police clauses' directed against street solicitation were dropped, the Criminal Law Amendment Act was passed on 10 August 1885. Less than two weeks after the Act received royal assent, the National Vigilance Association (NVA) was formed, an alliance of the many different anti-vice and moral reform groups that had been founded in the early 1880s.

The NVA organized a rally on 22 August 1885, encouraging the people who had campaigned for years to pass the Criminal Law Amendment Act to gather in Hyde Park to express their support for it. Depending on estimates, there were between 70,000 and 150,000 people in attendance, though, despite the numbers, a *New York Times* correspondent noted that 'It was an extremely civil, orderly, well-dressed meeting.'<sup>51</sup> The parade that formed the

centre-piece of the demonstration was stacked with symbolic participants: girls in white gowns, women wearing the white flower of 'purity', and female factory workers; but was also graced by the more practical presence of religious organizations, temperance societies, trade unions and socialist groups. At first glance, the demonstration appeared to be a testament to the community solidarity that prevailed over the issue of prostitution, as much of civil society came together to demand that the Act's measures be implemented by the police, the government and the various local authorities with jurisdictions in London.<sup>52</sup>

Yet, even with a concrete piece of legislation in place, debates about prostitution would rage on, and these conflicting discussions are central to understanding the course that the criminalization of prostitution would take after 1885. However, a closer look at this rally helps to capture the important diversity of anti-prostitution and age-of-consent campaigns, and reveals the fissures within the far from homogeneous movement for moral and social reform. The numerous speakers at the rally connected prostitution and the ways to combat it to feminism and women's suffrage, to morality and religion, to temperance, to fair wages, to socialism, to land nationalization. 'All these speakers,' wrote the decidedly unimpressed *New York Times* correspondent, '... promptly traced the corruption of young girls back each to his own special grievance against society and then discussed that grievance'.<sup>53</sup>

Prostitution's connections to so many different social problems and grievances helped ensure that it would remain a controversial issue that was both legally and morally confusing. Even the two key, and often interconnected, groups within British society who were most concerned about prostitution – anti-vice activists and feminists – hardly spoke with a united voice. While almost every organization within the nebulous women's movement saw prostitution as an inherent social evil, feminist was divided from feminist and moral reformer from moral reformer by questions of how exactly to deal with it. Moral reformers tended to demand the outright prohibition of commercial sex, while liberal feminists continued to ask why women were singled out as the sole source of the prostitution problem while all the while economic and social inequality drove them to take up prostitution in the first place.<sup>54</sup> Impassioned and divisive discussions surrounded the criminalization of the buying as well as the selling of sex, the issue of clearing prostitutes from the streets through the use of the solicitation laws, and the incarceration of deviant young women for the purposes of reform, for instance. Libertarian thinkers throughout the period added to these criticisms, showing how laws against prostitution infringed the civil rights of prostitutes and encouraged unmitigated police power, reminding their audience that people could not be made moral by an Act of Parliament.<sup>55</sup> Some people, meanwhile, felt that the best answer to the question of what to do about prostitution was nothing at all. These were commentators who tended



to combine their libertarianism with libertinism, the 'gents and swells' of Piccadilly who found personal enjoyment in the 'vices' that were under attack, or who at the very least felt disinclined to disapprove; this usually translated into a wholesale attack on the 'fools and fanatics' who promoted what was called 'Puritanism'.<sup>56</sup>

For working-class members of the West End world, meanwhile, the crusade against prostitution could represent a threat to their livelihood: attacks on social vice could easily translate into an attack on the entertainment industry in general, one of late nineteenth-century London's largest employers.<sup>57</sup> Young working-class women, meanwhile, also helped to complicate the debate, and these young women would soon come to challenge every attempt to define and control prostitutes: by occupying public and private space, by wearing new fashions and drinking in pubs, by smoking cigarettes and having sex with boyfriends. Their own daily negotiations of sexual harassment and sexual desire on the front lines, so to speak, likely meant that they had rather different opinions from most on the topic of prostitution.<sup>58</sup> All too often, historians have charted attitudes toward commercial sex from the point of view of the middle class, and more work needs to be done on the way that working-class people felt about prostitution and the campaigns to repress it. There is evidence, on the one hand, that these 'ordinary citizens' were highly tolerant of prostitutes and, on the other, that some of them were among the chief voices in the clamour for police crackdowns.<sup>59</sup>

Working-class organizations like trade unions and socialist groups also did not quite see eye to eye about the best way to deal with prostitution. Both tended to connect the causes of prostitution, unsurprisingly, to poverty, low wages, the exploitation of workers, and pervasive social and economic inequality, but they disagreed amongst themselves over whether the solution was higher wages for male breadwinners, fair wages for women's work, or socialist revolution. Various different religious organizations meanwhile – Church, Nonconformist, Catholic and Jewish alike – joined the campaign and worked in rescue and reform, sharing their members with many anti-vice groups.<sup>60</sup> But, while some would come to support the total prohibition of prostitution, which was becoming the most common legal response in America, others campaigned on the side of civil liberties.<sup>61</sup> The ideological, religious and more practical rivalries that existed between different rescue and reform institutions were also well known.

Also amongst the active participants at the Hyde Park rally were some key local authorities, such as the Vestry of St Pancras, which, according to its banner, demanded 'a firm administration of the law'. After 1889, London's new Borough Councils would succeed the vestries, and would become formidable pressure groups in the call for the criminalization and more effective policing of prostitution in the metropolis. Concern about prostitution was consistent in local government, even as the LCC moved

from the Liberal-allied Progressives to the Conservative-backed Municipal Reform Party to, finally, a Labour government, and local councils and the LCC boasted a large number of both committed anti-vice activists and social reformers among their elected members.<sup>62</sup> However, the roles of the Borough Councils and the LCC in the repression of prostitution could take many and opposing forms: sometimes Councils campaigned for legal and policy change to more effectively repress prostitution, while in other cases Councils' entanglements with real estate, commerce and private enterprise meant that other interests, and even corruption, got in the way of effective administration of the law.<sup>63</sup> Some Councils took an active and willing role in the crackdown on off-street commercial sex, while others were more reluctant, feeling that the task – and the cost – should fall to the police alone.

The police, for their part, were all too familiar with the conflicting opinions surrounding what should be done about prostitution. All the legal measures that were developed to repress different facets of prostitution had to be administered in London, in whole or in part, by the Metropolitan Police, and concerned local authorities, social purity advocates and the Home Office were all beholden, to a greater or lesser extent, to the opinions, actions and decisions of individual police officers, Superintendents and Police Commissioners.<sup>64</sup> Capturing precisely what police opinion was, however, is no easy feat. When Edward Bradford, the Metropolitan Police Commissioner in the 1890s, sat at his desk in the Scotland Yard and considered the problem of prostitution in the metropolis, he seemed overwhelmed, writing that 'The accumulation of papers and reports on the subject in this Office is so vast as to make the difficulty of selecting those which give a coherent account of Police action a really formidable one.'<sup>65</sup> The historian is greeted with similar challenges.

On the whole, police officers at all levels were fatalistic about the policing of commercial sex, and the most common and constant opinion in all the years between 1885 and 1960 was that repressing prostitution in one area (geographic or structural) merely contributed to its rise in another. Many Police Commissioners, the vast majority of whom had roots in the military and the colonial service, believed either explicitly or tacitly in some form of regulation, acknowledging the inevitability of prostitution, the impossibility of complete repression, and the importance of being able to supervise and know the dimensions of the local commercial sex market. Edward Bradford wrote, for instance, that 'measures of repression – so often advocated – can scarcely be attended with success in dealing with sexual vice. Increased stringency in one direction diverts the current of immorality into other channels, but does not suppress it.'<sup>66</sup> These attitudes were not only to be found amongst high-ranking ex-military men: in the words of an ordinary police constable to one of Charles Booth's investigators, policing prostitution was like 'displacing water'.<sup>67</sup> Some police were committed to cracking down on prostitution, others were more inclined to

employ informal 'laissez-faire' polices. While some were kind and considerate to women on their beats, others saw prostitutes as a source of ready money and free sex. These individual idiosyncrasies could shape a beat, a neighbourhood, a police division or even an entire administration. The Metropolitan Police force, far from being a monolithic arm of the law or the state, was made up of individual police officers: from the Police Constable to the Police Commissioner, these men and, later, women were engaged in daily negotiations with police orders, legal procedures, other officers, the people on their beats, and especially the police magistrates who would hear the majority of police prosecutions.

Since the mid-nineteenth century, more and more crimes had been made non-indictable, meaning that they would be heard in Police Courts by magistrates rather than by juries or judges. The solicitation laws were all non-indictable, and after 1885 so too was the offence of keeping a brothel; therefore the vast majority of prostitution-related offences would appear before these magistrates, who managed everything from outdoor relief to domestic disputes to petty theft and public nuisance offences. While on the one hand, in the words of JP Cecil Chapman, magistrates were isolated from the Bar and had 'passed under the rule of the Home Office and been saddled with all the restrictions of a civil servant and none of their privileges', many of the laws under which offenders were charged were seriously open to interpretation, and it was entirely up to the magistrate whether and how he would prosecute, sentence or recommend the case for trial in a higher court.<sup>68</sup> It is not surprising, then, that the (often wildly divergent) attitudes of magistrates throughout London's Police Court districts heavily influenced the way that prostitution was controlled and criminalized.<sup>69</sup>

The Metropolitan Police and the London Magistrature were also – as Chapman had put it – 'under the rule of the Home Office'. This close relationship with the government meant that certain civil servants within the government, for instance, permanent Assistant Undersecretaries, had a great deal of influence on the development of prostitution policy. These officials, while lacking the authority of Commissioners and Home Secretaries, made up for it through the longevity of their appointments. An example of one of these very influential men was Ernley Blackwell: an Assistant Undersecretary of State from 1906 to 1913, and then Legal Assistant Undersecretary from 1913 to 1931, he played no small role in developing policies about prostitution.

Police officer, magistrate and Home Office civil servant alike were all answerable in complex ways to the forces of public opinion on prostitution, though these opinions were far from uniform. Nonetheless, in an era of an expanding franchise and popular politics, the state was becoming increasingly sensitive to the opinions of 'ordinary citizens', and the presentation of prostitution in the media is of central importance when trying to explain the course that the criminalization of prostitution took in this period.

Between 1885 and 1960, and indeed well beyond it, it was the popular press which was heavily responsible not only for disseminating the opinions of 'ordinary citizens' but also for creating them; indeed, one could argue that the media were responsible for creating the 'ordinary citizen' himself. In the late 1870s and 1880s, the journalists Alfred Dyer and William Stead helped solidify the support that the moral reform campaign needed to pass the Criminal Law Amendment Act in 1885. Theirs were not the last, but arguably the first, among a long series of media exposés that would influence policies and legislative change regarding commercial sex. Following in the footsteps of William Stead himself, individual journalists and editorial boards after 1885 would from time to time make a great deal of certain features of prostitution and its control in the metropolis, catapulting the issue into the forefront of popular and sometimes political discourse.<sup>70</sup> All together, the print media over the period provided a series of interlocking, repetitive and sometimes contradictory narratives about commercial sex in London. This helped to build a kind of prostitution imaginary in which certain areas, certain kinds of people and certain problems became at once familiar and at the same time perceived as novel, worse than before or more threatening.<sup>71</sup>

As prostitution-related issues were routinely brought into the political limelight, dragging with them all the larger social and ideological issues to which they were attached, politicians and Parliament became very important actors in their own right in determining the shape of criminalization.<sup>72</sup> At those key times when Home Office and Police attempts to mitigate popular concern and alleviate public pressure failed at the bureaucratic level (that is, when opposition or backbench MPs became involved or introduced new Bills, when it became an election issue, when a scandal or a panic was of unusual magnitude, or when local authorities and civil society had constructed a particularly persistent campaign), the government was forced to act. Over the course of the period in question this action could take many forms: the calling of an inquiry, committee or commission; the tabling of a new law; or the approval of a new policy such as a police order or magisterial procedure. The point at which a moral panic reached this level of government attention has been described by historian Jeffrey Weeks as 'the political moment': 'that period when moral attitudes are transformed into formal political action'.<sup>73</sup> This political action tended to take the final form of 'imaginary legal solutions', to use the words of Simon Watney in writing about the AIDS panic, which repressed manifestations of the problem or made the perceived problem itself illegal. These theories have been mobilized to explain the passing of the Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1885, and could be used to help explain the criminalization of prostitution.<sup>74</sup>

Many historians are content to explain why certain laws and policies come into being, and many historical accounts of prostitution in Britain end with comments about the police instituting crackdowns and causing

it to move underground. Here, historians tacitly agree with criminologist John Lea, who writes that, during the process of criminalization, ‘the separation and distinction of the criminal from surrounding economic and social activity is clear’.<sup>75</sup> Paula Bartley, for instance, only briefly assesses the potential impacts of criminalization in her monograph, while Stephan Petrow argues that repression made prostitution ‘a more dangerous and less attractive career, but it flourished nonetheless’, but does not detail why or how. Judith Walkowitz, who stops her account at the repeal of the CD Acts and the passing of the Criminal Law Amendment Act, posits criminalization as a force of change in the epilogue of her seminal monograph, but does not detail the effects of these ‘crackdowns’, as she calls them.<sup>76</sup>

However, seeing a move underground as the end result of criminalization not only obscures the ways that criminalization could be a regulatory as much as a repressive force, but also closes the interpretive door to seeing criminalization as an ongoing process that complicated, rather than severed, prostitution’s connections to the rest of modern life. Underground or not, the illicit sexual economy remained entangled with licit industries and with the social and cultural life of the metropolis; indeed, criminalization could function within the sexual economy as a series of constraints that stimulated new ways of doing business. The law, while imperfect, was a powerful force of transformation in terms of both its intentional and its unintentional effects, and in the historical record criminalization often appears as a perpetual game of cat and mouse.<sup>77</sup>

In other words, the story of criminalization must not end with explaining why certain laws get passed. When as historians we discover that criminalizing control was never total, was at times a relative failure, and frequently produced outcomes that it was never intended to produce, we must begin to see criminalization as something more than the act of bringing people and actions under control by defining them, policing them and driving them to that ill-defined ‘underground’ that is assumed to be lost to history. Instead, we must see criminalization as an ongoing process, a facet of the ‘social relations of crime control’, as criminologist John Lea has put it; a constantly shifting social process that was determined by negotiation and conflict.<sup>78</sup> In other words, to say that criminalization was the most popular form of legal intervention into prostitution in this period is not to say that it was a clear ideology or policy, or to say that it worked.

As the contemporary comments suggest, and as I shall argue over the course of this book, the criminalization of prostitution was fraught with irony. In one way, criminalization itself can be seen as an ironic outcome, a series of laws and policies that arose, rather haphazardly, and were applied, rather selectively, as the ‘moral agenda’ of feminism and social purity – which sought to change attitudes and efface inequalities – resolved itself into a ‘criminalization agenda’ instead, which sought rather more modestly, and arguably incompatibly, to repress the practice of prostitution. Whereas

feminist arguments tended to complicate and challenge the dichotomies and categories of 'good' and 'bad' women, criminalization functioned through the identification of certain women as 'common prostitutes', the necessary proviso that was put in place, it was argued, so that the police and the courts could tell the difference between a prostitute and an 'innocent' woman. The fundamental problems inherent in identifying which women were prostitutes goes a long way to explaining some of the chief difficulties and controversies surrounding the control of commercial sex. British prostitution law did not refer at all to the actual act of prostitution – the exchange of money for sexual service – nor did it require any proof of this transaction or intention to transact when prosecuting women for solicitation or for brothel-keeping. Instead, the control of prostitution relied entirely on the woman's identity, and, though the term 'common prostitute' was never defined in any statute, it was, and remains, absolutely central to the control of prostitution in Britain.

So too was another, even more poorly defined, concept, that of the 'ordinary citizen': a member of an assumed majority of Londoners and Britons who had increasingly come to understand that, for various reasons, prostitution was inherently criminal and a fitting subject for legal repression. The concept of the 'ordinary citizen' has been marshalled to manufacture consensus on morally or ethically divisive issues before and since, of course, but it was particularly prevalent in the development of repressive legal interventions into prostitution, while, ironically, prostitution remained an issue about which little consensus could actually be found.

This fundamental lack of coherent policy or clear consensus amongst the public and the government, and within the criminal justice system, helps to explain why the campaigns of moral and social reformers, which called for fundamental change within society, did not translate into a social, sexual or moral revolution, but, rather, a disorganized, reactionary and oftentimes half-hearted crusade against the day-to-day operations and public manifestations of commercial sex. Far from a programme of social and moral reform, prostitution control amounted to a number of 'imaginary legal solutions' to a series of moral panics. Meanwhile, the confused, uneven and imperfect development of the criminal justice system on the whole meant that policies toward prostitution and their implementation remained in flux, and attempts to control unruly prostitutes and insidious commercial sex enterprises helped to fuel the bureaucratization of policing while also exacerbating tensions and divisions within the criminal justice system.

Along these lines, I have paid careful attention to the subtleties, confusions and changes that were an inherent part of the application of the law. Too often, historians make assumptions about the impact of statutory interventions without examining the complex case histories, magisterial decisions and police regulations, and the back-door policies that came along

with these laws as they moved off the statute book and onto the street. Parliamentary debates about how to frame Acts are often accorded more significance than discussions between the courts, the police and the Home Office about how to apply them. Reformers' attempts to pass, repeal and supplement laws, meanwhile, have received significantly more attention than the less organized attempts to avoid and navigate these laws on the part of those against whom they were directed. This book attempts to redress these common oversights, and in so doing offers a meaningful model through which historians might complicate the way they view the dispositions of state, police and legal power.

But, as the women who experienced these crusades at street level could certainly attest, 'imaginary legal solutions' were not imaginary laws, though they were frequently ironic ones: the crusades against exploitative brothels cast women out of secure working spaces and created new opportunities for third parties to profit from prostitution; the campaign to clear the streets of solicitation expanded the indoor sexual economy; and the protection of victims of exploitation often resulted in their punishment. Most ironically of all, a campaign that began as a battle cry against exploitation developed into a crusade that came down the hardest upon prostitute women themselves, who experienced increased marginalization, vulnerability, exploitation and punishment. More harm, we might say, than good.

This is not to say that this book charts a kind of journey from a wonderful sex-work arcadia to a hellish modern reality: prostitution was a difficult job and a source of violence and exploitation before the renewed late nineteenth-century drive to repress it, and could also be engaged in relatively positive and safe ways afterward (though the opportunities for doing so were most certainly lessened). Neither is it to suggest that there were no attempts to repress prostitution before the late nineteenth century, only to argue that the period after 1885 witnessed an increase in the intensity, amount and support for these efforts.<sup>79</sup> I also do not mean to insist that criminalization was the only agent of change in commercial sex: as this book hopefully makes clear, massive shifts in social and sexual behaviour, the socio-political and economic deluge of two world wars, and significant and society-altering technological developments (the telephone, the motor car), all had a role to play in determining the shape and course that the sexual economy would take. It is clear, nonetheless, that criminalization had an immense, perhaps the greatest, impact upon the way that commercial sex happened in London and significantly affected the experiences of the women who worked as prostitutes in the metropolis.

Despite its size and importance, London has featured infrequently in previous investigations of prostitution in Britain, and until now has not been the subject of any dedicated study of prostitution in the nineteenth and

twentieth centuries, though Tony Henderson's examination of how prostitution was policed, and socially and spatially shaped, in the eighteenth century metropolis provides a useful background.<sup>80</sup> Despite this relative lack of attention, London became over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries both the symbolic and actual epicentre of prostitution in the nation.<sup>81</sup> Not only was London the reference point for national and international commentators on British prostitution, but by the interwar years the metropolis was contributing well over half (an average of almost sixty per cent) of the annual arrests for street prostitution in the country (and almost all the prostitution by foreign women), while containing only twenty per cent of the population<sup>82</sup> (see Table A.1).

London was home to one of the largest, most complex and most diverse sexual economies in the world, and, as is the case with other British cities, London fits into a municipally determined landscape of British prostitution.<sup>83</sup> In other words, many of the features of prostitution control in place there were in part determined by its municipal idiosyncrasies, especially the administration and enforcement of prostitution law in London by Metropolitan Police, the Police Court Magistrates and the local authorities. The geography of London was almost incoherent, divided by the new borders of Boroughs, the more ancient divisions of vestry and parish, the administrative lines of police divisions, court districts, railway lines and public services, and the multiplicity of cultural geographies overlaid onto these more quantifiable maps (see [Map 1](#)). London neighbourhoods had each its own character but also overlapped – their frontiers blurry, their contents contradictory – and prostitution often lay at the front lines of these geographic vagaries.

In the context of this complex municipal landscape, and in an atmosphere of disorganized criminalization, the geography of commercial sex becomes extremely difficult to characterize. In contrast to the findings of other historians, prostitution did not just happen in one 'red light' zone in London, police did not create informal concentrations of prostitution through de facto toleration, nor did specific kinds of prostitution divide themselves neatly into distinct geographic areas.<sup>84</sup> Despite the stereotypes about the East End generated by novels, films and sensational murders (and taken up in some serious histories), the area rarely figured among the most prominent sites of solicitation. While Westminster, and the West End in particular, was the most prominent prostitution area in the Metropolis, it was far from being the only one, and even here it defied the rules of containment and surveillance that some authorities, namely the police, may have wished to impose upon it. Similarly, while a push off the streets was one of the chief outcomes of the criminalization of prostitution over the course of the period in question, this was not effected tidily or deliberately, and, as we shall see, these spaces (where surveillance was less possible) formed yet another



complex urban geography of commercial sex. Hyde Park, host to the enormous public demonstration in support of the Criminal Law Amendment Act, was also becoming home to an increasing number of women selling sex who, in part because of the Act, had been displaced from their other workspaces. The park, with its bobbing banners demanding 'a firm administration of the law' and its women soliciting silently in the shadows beyond the Serpentine, is a powerful symbol of the dynamic and contested geographies of commercial sex, as the calculus of criminalization played out in space as well as over time.

To say that this book examines the criminalization of prostitution is also in direct reference to the research that has been done on the regulation of prostitution, and several works chart the move, mainly in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, of countries from systems of regulated prostitution – ones that registered prostitutes, legalized brothels and inspected women for disease – to different kinds of prohibition.<sup>85</sup> While the Contagious Diseases Act were the closet thing Britain had to an official regulated system, historical geographer Philip Howell argues that regulated systems of prostitution control that were in place in the nineteenth century should be defined very broadly, insisting that they existed within Britain and its Empire far more widely and concretely than previous histories have allowed. These regulated systems were predicated upon 'an acceptance of the inevitability of commercial sex combined with a search for strategies of containment and sanitation'.<sup>86</sup> In this respect, criminalization is very different. Predicated upon a desire to reduce, remove, prevent or even eliminate prostitution, criminalization projects continued even as evidence showed they could diffuse rather than contain prostitution, hinder attempts at disease control, and disrupt surveillance.

While it was, of course, markedly different from explicit systems which registered prostitutes, licensed brothels and monitored health, criminalization was nonetheless far from being the opposite of regulation. While I am examining prostitution policy in London during a period which was decidedly 'post-regulatory' – indeed, the symbolic Contagious Diseases Acts were suspended in Britain in the year that this study begins – it is impossible to discuss the control of prostitution in the period after 1885 without considering the law's regulatory as well as criminalizing effects, and to interrogate the real differences between them.

As we shall see, the Metropolitan Police and government officials perpetually tried to carve out ways to regulate the street-level realities of commercial sex amid the impossible moral task of criminal repression. This could range from the police employing a rotation system of arrests in lieu of arresting a woman every time they saw her on the street, to magistrates remanding young women to reform homes knowing that this could enable medical inspection, to legislators themselves approving controversial new

laws knowing that their measures would displace prostitution (indoors, for instance) but not actually reduce it. Most explicitly of all, the actual wording of the law on solicitation (which required that the offence had to be perpetrated by a 'common prostitute'), and the need to more effectively identify such women, meant that the Metropolitan Police routinely kept registers of 'common prostitutes' in London. Sometimes these were limited to individual police divisions, while at other times (and increasingly) they were maintained centrally; but in any case these registers enabled police, just as the Contagious Diseases Acts had, to subject certain stigmatized women to restrictions and regulations to which no other person was subject. Amid the lists of names, descriptions and, later, fingerprints of women who had been labelled 'common prostitutes', the lines between regulation and criminalization appear blurry indeed.

However, if we interpret criminalization as another form of de facto regulation, or as a driver of bureaucratization, we risk ascribing too much power and deliberateness to the state and the police in its control. The gradual and increasing legal intervention into prostitution in London, far from being some intentional and harmonious policy of regulation or of repression, took place amid a myriad of social, ideological and bureaucratic battles, as society and the state struggled to discover what ought to be done about prostitution and precisely how it might be achieved. But, while the conflicts between the police, local and national government, and civil society help to explain the course of criminalization, we must not forget that the forces of the underground sexual economy and the tactics of individuals within it also had an immense impact on the commercial sex industry and the way it was controlled.

I refer here in part to what has been called the economics of prohibition, which argues that criminalization places certain markets in the hands of criminal enterprises which in turn encourage their organization, parallel to and in conflict with state controls. After all, commercial sex functioned a lot more like an economy than other activities associated with sexual and moral deviance to which it was so often compared: unlike domestic or sexual violence, it featured supply and demand relationships, the exchange of money for services, a reliance on a large pool of largely unskilled labour, the availability of a variety of services in different places for a range of prices, and the occupation of spaces of business on and off the street.<sup>87</sup> Much to the chagrin of moral reformer and police officer alike, it continued to operate in this way even in the face of repression.

While theories about the economics of prohibition are one useful way to assess the impact of criminalization, they often fail to take adequate account of the actions of individuals within these wider economies, and seem to suggest that the people against whom laws were directed – in this case, women who sold sex – were controlled on either side of the criminalization

equation: hemmed in and harassed by official laws and policies, exploited and subjugated by criminal organizations. But, while women who sold sex were both involved in the sexual economy and caught up within attempts to repress it, their individual negotiations, tactics and resiliencies were themselves key forces in determining the shape that both commercial sex and its criminalization would take.<sup>88</sup> In continuing to sell sex despite increasing legal repression, prostitute women employed tactics and disrupted projects of criminalization by, as de Certeau simply puts it, 'knowing how to get away with things'.<sup>89</sup>

Attempts to describe the tactics of prostitute women have come under attack as obsessions with 'the romance of resistance', or, as Gail Hershatter puts it, the 'Quixotic search for agency and resistance',<sup>90</sup> but the ability and inability to act are not dichotomous, but rather a sliding scale that changes every day and with every personal encounter. It is not at all romantic to presuppose that most human beings, as far as possible in any particular circumstance, act in ways that they see as benefitting themselves or the people they care about, and that they have some kind of ability to, as Karl Marx has famously articulated, 'make their own history [but not] under circumstances chosen by themselves'.<sup>91</sup> Prostitutes did not resist and negotiate state and social control because they were pluckier or more resourceful than other people, but rather because they were just like other people.

Neither did resistance on the part of prostitute women have to take positive forms: methods used by women to avoid the state's control, for instance, included the surrender of their autonomy to third parties and the compromise of their personal safety. Tactics of resistance were also not always deployed by the women themselves: interested third parties such as pimps, and the frustratingly invisible clients of prostitutes, also resisted state control. Moreover, while the gaps between the will towards repression and the reality of the sexual economy may have allowed a great deal of resistance and negotiation on the part of prostitute women, they also created a space in which they were neither protected by the surveillance and legitimacy of formal regulation nor able to work free from harassment, control and reprobation.

Despite, or even because of, these complications, seeing criminalization as an ongoing relationship between the criminalizing and the criminalized can open up the possibility of learning more about the sexual economy of London, and about those elusive women who too often form the hazy backdrop of historical accounts of prostitution control. Most of my sources about these women are no more than fragments, a mediated moment or two in a person's exceptionally complicated life – a murder, a case of mistaken identity, a sensational trial, a trip across an ocean – and yet surely these fragments can only enrich our understanding of the experiences of

women who sold sex in this period, even as they also tell us about the people who categorized, reported and interceded in these experiences.<sup>92</sup> It is at these individual levels, amid these plural experiences and voices, that the dichotomies and narratives surrounding prostitution are most profoundly challenged.

The repression of prostitution on the street was part of a larger battle for the control of public space, while attempts to control prostitution off the street were intimately tied to the development of modern private enterprises such as the entertainment, leisure and real estate industries. The control of commercial sex was also linked to ideas about social welfare, public health and migration, and attempts to understand prostitution were increasingly caught up with definitions of citizenship and nationality.<sup>93</sup> Prostitution played a symbolic role in competing ideologies about women, work and class, and a starring role in debates about collective morality, the development of the criminal justice system, and the authority and legitimacy of state intervention into the private lives of citizens. Prostitution was at the centre of metropolitan and national controversies and scandals surrounding sex, which resolved themselves only to reappear in different forms throughout the period. Commercial sex in London was changed by – and played no small role in – the social, economic and cultural milieus of two World Wars, and, as the period progressed, was thought of increasingly as part of the world of organized crime. It was in the late nineteenth century that prostitution established itself as one of the most pressing concerns of moral reform and feminism, and over the first half of the twentieth century it proved itself to be also one of the most divisive. During this period, debates raged over the best way to cope with the problem of prostitution, and these debates and their proposed solutions significantly challenge and complicate the accounts of permissiveness and sexual liberalism that are meant to characterize the second half of the twentieth century.

Prostitution lies at a curious intersection of broad symbolism and personal intimacy. It illuminates and is connected to enormous social realities; it is about women, men, money, sex, space, morality, labour and politics. It remains one of the chief symbols of gender inequality, sexual objectification and social stigma. It was a phenomenon that mobilized generations of legislators and moralists; it was discussed at countless local government meetings, by women's organizations and in Parliament; it helped to transform the bureaucracy of policing and criminal justice; it sold newspapers (by the millions); and it was woven into the economic fabric and geography of the urban landscape. But, despite its connections to these immensely important themes, the narrative of the criminalization of commercial sex is also made up of plural, diverse and oftentimes conflicting stories and experiences; of police officers and civil servants implementing policies; of moral reformers, feminists and local governments campaigning for change and arguing with

each other; of politicians and Commissioners responding to (though rarely leading) public and media opinion; of clients buying sex and third parties making money from it; and, of course, of women who worked as prostitutes. Through major legal, bureaucratic, and social developments, and through these stories and experiences, commercial sex was changed and shaped in modern London.

# 1

## Selling Sex: Women, Work and Prostitution

Mary's husband, a collier by the name of Davies, was killed in the early 1880s in an explosion in a coalmine in Wales, though it is unclear which one. There were some Davies among the names of the 102 men who died in the catastrophe that occurred at Pen-Y-Graig, just before Christmas in 1880, when the ventilation fans began sending explosive gases back down into the mine. It was joined by at least a dozen fatal mine explosions in Wales alone between 1879 and 1882, which killed well over 300 people.<sup>1</sup> Neither can we say for sure how Mary, about nineteen years old at the time, felt about the death of her husband; we can only assume that it was devastating for her. Estranged from her immediate family, she went to live with a cousin in Cardiff, and it seems that it was there that she learned, probably through her cousin's prior involvement in prostitution, that a young, bright and attractive woman could earn a fair amount of money selling sexual acts.<sup>2</sup>

In 1884, Mary moved to London, settling somewhere in the west of the metropolis, where she made a living in whole or in part through prostitution; initially in the lucrative West End, and later, for a time, in Paris. But, by choice, by necessity or by direction, Mary eventually ended up in the East End, living at first at a suspected brothel on the Ratcliffe Highway. As she moved around the area, she became a well-known figure in her neighbourhood, thought of as pleasant and mild-mannered. In 1887, she met Joseph Barnett, a dock worker and porter at the Spitalfields fish market, and elected to live with him. He found work, and they found rooms. But, in what was a familiar story for working-class Londoners, especially casual labourers, at the time, low pay and unstable employment meant that soon the couple were visiting the pawn shop and 'shooting the moon', moving from room to room and dodging rents that were in arrears.<sup>3</sup> They quarrelled when Mary began to allow friends who worked as prostitutes to stay with them on cold nights; Joe left Mary, and it seems she turned back to prostitution herself.

Mary's is one story among thousands. There was also Lydia Harvey, a poor photographer's assistant who in 1910 embarked with her pimp from New

Zealand on a passenger liner to Buenos Aires, later to be found ill and lonely on the streets of London. Harvey's story lies in contrast to that of Nellie Thompson, a young woman who in 1885 testified to having received one or two pounds from her madam each time she saw a client, while living in St John's Wood. Then there was Leah 'Stilts' Hines, who worked as a prostitute in the interwar years, walking the streets of Soho in very high-heeled shoes; and Marthe Watts, who moved from her native Paris around the brothels of France, Spain and Italy until finally coming to London, where she became entangled with the exploitative Messina 'family' during the Second World War.<sup>4</sup> The police files, Home Office documents, court records, papers of rescue homes and philanthropic societies, and the published investigations and memoirs that furnish this study are peppered with the fragments from such women's lives.

Yet, even when a great deal (relatively speaking) is known about women who worked as prostitutes, there is so much left unknown in their stories. Mary, the widow of the miner, is an excellent example of this, for she is Mary Jeanne Kelly, the last victim of the serial murderer known as 'Jack the Ripper'. It is safe to say that Kelly's life has been scrutinized more than that of any other woman selling sex in late nineteenth and early twentieth-century London. Police interviewed witnesses; the coroner's inquest sought the testimony of her former lover Joseph Barnett, her neighbours and her friends. The press investigated her family; the coroner analysed her body – her breasts, her thighs, her uterus – which had been badly mutilated. We know the precise dimensions and furnishings of her little room in Milner's Court; we even know the song she was singing a few hours before she died (it was 'A Violet from my Mother's Grave').<sup>5</sup> We can also see the enormous transformations in her life brought by the passage of only four years, a scale of change which much of social history is ill-equipped to detect.

All this, and still so little is known about her, and less still is known about other women. An exception here is Marthe Watts, whose autobiography *The Men in My Life* (1960) represents the only authentic autobiographical account I have been able to find written by a woman who had worked as a prostitute before the 1960s.<sup>6</sup> Yet even this autobiography is problematic: while frank and unsensational, Watts's reminiscences are nonetheless stylized, edited and designed for popular readership. Indeed, there is good reason to suspect that they were in fact ghost-written as part of what was by the time of the book's publication a healthy industry of true-life crime writing.<sup>7</sup> Though the almost banal nature of the memoir suggests that it may not have strayed too far from her life story, her experiences of high-class prostitution as part of an organized criminal syndicate tell us little about many other women.<sup>8</sup> No individual story, after all, can be said to be representative of such a diverse group of people involved in something as variable as commercial sex.

Throughout the book, I have endeavoured to make the most of this diversity, and of the fragments of women's experiences, voices and lives that

come to me from court records, published sources, newspaper reports and, above all, police files; but the farther into the twentieth century the narrative moves, the more difficult it has proven for me to access the case files and police reports which are such a rich source for this kind of evidence: owing to the sensitive and personal subjects of the files, many remain closed.<sup>9</sup> What is more, women who did not come into contact with the criminal justice system, or any reform and rescue association, are virtually invisible in this history. 'It is difficult work,' wrote Association for Moral and Social Hygiene (AMSH) member E.M. Turner, reflecting on a study published in 1916 about the factors that contributed to women becoming prostitutes, 'for the successful prostitute will not tell her story, and the unsuccessful one, in the majority of cases, cannot.'<sup>10</sup> I have born these limitations and absences in mind.

Despite their experiences of stigma and criminalization, as historian Timothy Gilfoyle points out, historical researchers have found that prostitutes, demographically, are 'very much like most other women'.<sup>11</sup> Women who sold sex were also part of wider communities and economies; they had neighbours, they had children, they shopped; they worked in the theatre, they went hop-picking, and they had romantic partners. Some earned all their money from prostitution, others worked other licit and illicit jobs as well, while still others sold sex very rarely, when extra money was needed or wanted. Mary Gordon, the first female inspector of women's prisons, captured the paradox of identifying women as prostitutes perfectly in her account of the women she encountered in prison because of soliciting or brothel-keeping convictions: 'I have seen them become prostitutes in the only way a woman can become a prostitute, and that is by being labelled "prostitute" by the police.'<sup>12</sup>

For these reasons, I try to keep my use of terms varied, and endeavour to highlight the action or occupation of prostitution as often as possible. I use 'women who sold sex', 'women who worked as prostitutes', but also, occasionally and out of expediency, 'prostitute women' or 'prostitutes'. It is my hope that this draws attention to the fact that prostitution was an occupation (or, perhaps, a lifestyle) for women, but certainly not their nameable and encompassing identity: it is fundamentally important to recognize the distinctions between doing prostitution and being a prostitute, and, of course, the difference between being a prostitute and being called one.<sup>13</sup>

Others are also sticklers with words. Some feminists argue that women who engage in the sale of sexual services are *prostituted* women, a term that highlights the exploitation and abuse of women they feel is inherent in commercial sex.<sup>14</sup> However, the range of experiences my research has uncovered has made me rather reluctant to apply a simplistic equation of passivity, victimhood and exploitation to any individual woman who chooses, though not in conditions of her choosing, to sell sex. In contrast to this typically radical feminist approach is the insistence on the part of prostitutes' rights



advocates and other liberal or sex-radical feminists to refer to prostitutes as 'sex workers', arguing that prostitution must be understood as a form of labour within a larger sexualized economy (while recognizing in turn that prostitution, like other labour, can be exploitative). I have rejected the term 'sex worker' for its anachronism and also because I feel that it is not appropriate to apply this term, which is tied to identity politics in the present day, to women in the past who, as far as we can know, did not apply it to themselves.

Another consideration of the word 'prostitute' is a gendered one: this book examines females who sold sex. That there were male prostitutes in the period covered by this study is certain, and they increasingly became a social concern after 1885 and the notorious 'Labouchère Amendment' in the Criminal Law Amendment Act of that year. Male prostitutes (who, almost without exception, were, like their female counterparts, catering to male clients) were far fewer in number, and, more importantly, their experiences (both of commercial sex and of the criminal justice system) were so different from those of females who sold sex that they would warrant a separate study.<sup>15</sup> For these reasons, alongside constraints of time and space, men who sold sex are not featured in this book.

Historians have their own unique concerns with the term 'prostitute'. Linda Mahood problematizes the word to the point where it appears permanently in quotation marks, indicating that 'prostitute' represents a discursive category deployed to control many forms of working-class deviant female sexuality rather than a name applied to women who performed sexual acts for gain, and many other historians choose to focus on prostitution as a name given to many kinds of female sexual or social deviance, rather than as a distinct social phenomenon.<sup>16</sup> Elizabeth Clement, for instance, writing about New York City, sees 'prostitution' as one inaccurate way to describe a very sliding scale of sexual exchange that could range from dating men who were liberal with their money to selling full intercourse for cash.<sup>17</sup>

While these approaches reflect the complexities of defining and identifying prostitution within society (and certainly within the historical record), to consider prostitution as merely a term that was applied to various unapproved manifestations of female sexuality hinders our ability to assess prostitution as a real phenomenon, and to view it within a very large context of sexual exchange makes it difficult to assess its role as a form of labour. Historians are quite right to question the category of 'prostitute', and to highlight the rising importance of women's promiscuity and other deviant sexual behaviour in the story of sexual exchange, but in so doing often let go of the ability to discuss the actual social history of commercial sex and the kinds of experiences that women who did indeed sell sex, many of whom were labelled as prostitutes, may have had ('this is not,' Mahood writes, 'an empirical history of "prostitutes" and prostitution per se.'<sup>18</sup>). And

yet, it is both possible and important to be able to discuss the experiences of women who sold sex and to assess the dimensions and character of the immense sexual economy in which they worked, even as we also recognize that these experiences were extremely varied, that no clear line divided one kind of sexual exchange from another, and that the past has left us with a historical record in which representation and reality have become inextricably intertwined. It is my hope that this book highlights the complex ideological and cultural meanings of prostitution while also providing a social history of commercial sex.

All that being said, it is the strictly empirical dimensions of commercial sex that are the most difficult to determine. One of the greatest challenges for historians of prostitution in any era is determining how many women were selling sex, how many men were buying it, and whether or not this changed over time. One figure that is typically offered for women working as prostitutes in London in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries is 80,000. This figure was cited by William Acton in 1870, following an estimate given by the Bishop of Exeter who, active in the 'rescue' of unmarried mothers and approaching the matter from a strict religious perspective, included all women who were living in a sexual relationship with a man out of wedlock in his calculations, and hence is far too high.<sup>19</sup> Because of their tendency to blur the lines between commercial sex and all sexual transgression, estimates generated by moral reformers must be called into serious question.

In general, police estimates for the same period were significantly lower than those of moral reformers, and ranged from 8,000 to 10,000 around the turn of the century.<sup>20</sup> While they did include all 'known prostitutes', police were basing these estimates on arrest statistics, which do not give any clear indication of the real number of prostitutes, because many women could escape in any given year without being arrested, while others could find themselves arrested several times. Some, due to successful tactics of disguise, could be counted as more than one woman, while still others – especially women who worked entirely off the street or who engaged in prostitution extremely infrequently – never came into contact with the law at all. The unreliability of police statistics is further evidenced by the fact that arrest rates and practices were linked not only to the amount or the visibility of London prostitution, but also to police attitudes, action and inaction.<sup>21</sup> As we move farther into the period in question, it becomes significantly more difficult to judge how many women were working as prostitutes in London, even as criminal record-keeping improved and 'casual' and 'temporary' prostitution may have begun to fall. This is because prostitution began to move off the street, and police were left – by their own admission – with little means by which to judge the number of women selling sex in the metropolis. As I will argue throughout the book, the dark figure associated with prostitution throughout history not only prevailed during the

twentieth century, but actually increased as prostitution was driven further and further underground.

This, combined with the Metropolitan Police force's sensitivity to press allegations of incompetence or corruption, government investigations into their behaviour, and magisterial rebuffs after failures to convict, explains why the statistics related to prostitution offences in London are extraordinarily inconsistent both in terms of their rises and falls and in terms of the way they were – or were not – reported. As a result, the statistics I offer here are compiled in part from the *Annual Reports of the Metropolitan Police Commissioner*, which between 1893 and 1930 reported prostitution-related offences based upon a fairly standardized system, and in part from various unpublished police returns stretching into the 1960s, some compiled from monthly reports, others from divisional charts, and still others from annual figures recorded in a variety of police memoranda and minutes. At times and for certain offences, no figures for London alone are available, and I have been forced to rely upon numbers from the *Judicial Statistics of England and Wales*. Together, these cobbled together statistics are very useful, but very problematic.

Most historians of sexuality and society in this period whose work touches briefly on prostitution argue that commercial sex was in decline in the early twentieth century.<sup>22</sup> Hera Cook, while circumspect about the validity of arrest statistics, nonetheless accepts that there was a real fall in prostitution, and explains this through reference to the rise in non-mercenary sex outside marriage and the growing awareness of venereal disease.<sup>23</sup> Similarly, Lesley Hall argues that the amount of commercial sex fell as male attitudes toward it (and general social attitudes toward the purchase of sex) became significantly more condemnatory.<sup>24</sup>

Some statistics do suggest that there was a decline in prostitution: police estimates just after the Second World War put the number of women selling sex in London at 2,000, significantly lower than their 1900 estimate of 8,000. However, there is no way to tell how reliable either number was. Police were open about not including women working off the street in their 1947 estimate, and they also did not account for what Sybil Neville-Rolphe, an interwar expert on prostitution, called the 'fringe of casual or occasional prostitutes'.<sup>25</sup> Moreover, events such as the Second World War would have strongly militated against this downward trend, and, perhaps even more importantly, we do not have any real sociocultural evidence proving that a rise in promiscuity and negative attitudes towards prostitution actually results in a reduction in bought sex. A study in 2005, for instance, found that almost ten per cent of men interviewed – an increase from 1990 – reported having bought sex in their lifetime, in an era in which non-marital promiscuous sex was booming, having to pay for sex was denigrated, and there was widespread education about sexually transmitted infection.<sup>26</sup>

Furthermore, though there may have been fewer women selling sex by the interwar years, the women who remained were more likely to be working less casually, and therefore there would have been little change in the number of actual commercial sex transactions that occurred. This brings up another important question: do we measure the 'amount' of prostitution in terms of the number of women selling sex, the number of men buying it, or the number of times sex is sold? And what does each measurement tell us?

What all of this indicates is that, while these estimates and calculations are of great interest to many historians of sexuality, of population and of society more generally, it is an exercise in relative futility to belabour numbers when it comes to the history of prostitution. The dark figure both on, and especially off, the street was high and nearly impossible to estimate; the number of prostitute women was not in any way determinative of the number of commercial sex transactions; and, finally, changes in socio-sexual practices cannot be firmly correlated with rising or falling rates of commercial sex. One thing is for certain: the number of women selling sex and, even more so, the number of men buying it, has been very high throughout the modern period, and perhaps more constant than has previously been allowed.

Prostitution is rooted in highly gendered and moral beliefs about female and male sexuality, women's labour and the status of women within society, and throughout history people have been seeking explanations for its existence and, most of all, for why women sell sex. While this search for meaning often makes a special case out of prostitution, frequently pathologizes the women involved, and remains far more interested in those who sell sex than in those who buy it, it is also true that prostitution – like any work and more so than a lot of work – was not just motivated and determined by simple economics. For all of these reasons, social commentators, moralists, sociologists and historians have remained preoccupied with explaining why women sell sex.

Throughout the period in question, prostitutes were assumed – and largely found – to be from the working classes. G.P. Merrick, the statistically-minded prison chaplain of Milbank for the twenty years before it closed in 1891, recorded what he judged to be key life details about some 14,000 prostitutes and found that almost all came from working-class households, with over half of these reporting fathers who worked within the lowest-paid occupations.<sup>27</sup> These findings were echoed throughout the entire period. Prostitution was widely considered the female face of crime, and no one was surprised to find women's backgrounds to be similar to those of male housebreakers, pickpockets and other petty criminals.<sup>28</sup>

For Victorian and Edwardian commentators, prostitution also existed at the intersection between poor homes and 'bad' homes. Efforts were made to show that prostitution was connected to all the social ills that plagued the casual labourers and working-class 'residuum': overcrowding (which

was understood to cause incest), poor sanitation, alcohol abuse and desertion.<sup>29</sup> G.P. Merrick discovered that an overwhelmingly large proportion of the women he interviewed in prison had at least one parent who was dead, and many were orphans or runaways.<sup>30</sup> These 'bad' and fractured homes could also extend into adult life. Out of a sample of just over 3,000 women who were married, Merrick found that almost sixty per cent were estranged from their husbands because of abuse, desertion, infidelity or incarceration and almost thirty per cent had been widowed. Of the remaining percentage, most were openly supporting their husbands through prostitution.<sup>31</sup> In the interwar years, meanwhile, 'bad homes' took an even firmer place in the causal factors of prostitution; a study from the late 1920s revealed that sixty-nine per cent of jailed prostitutes were from 'broken homes', which could range from orphaning to 'defective discipline', 'viciousness' and 'alcoholism'.<sup>32</sup>

These bad homes could also lead to bad habits in the women themselves, but there is not a great deal of commentary regarding the connections between prostitution and drunkenness or drug use in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. While several observers noted that the vices often went hand in hand, there was not as much recognition that alcohol or drug addiction could actually cause a woman to turn to prostitution as there was an understanding that the 'lower class' of prostitutes frequently turned to drink, and that alcoholism could lead to more arrests and precipitate a downward spiral in a woman's life. Police Court Missionary Thomas Holmes heavily connected prostitution to alcoholism in his memoir of court life in the late nineteenth century, for instance, while the abuse of alcohol featured on other lists of prostitution's 'causes'.<sup>33</sup> As we shall see, by the mid-twentieth century commentators began to pay more attention to the use of drugs by prostitute women, but once again saw it less as a precipitating factor than as a hazard of the job. It seems we might have to look beyond the 1960s to investigate the history of present-day connections that are made between prostitution and drug abuse.

Caught up within the language of 'bad homes' were intimations that future prostitutes were more likely to have suffered sexual abuse as juveniles or to have had a consensual, but too early, sexual experience with boys or men of their own class. 'If a girl is to be seduced it is better she should be seduced by a gentleman, and get something for it than let herself be seduced by a boy or a young fellow who gives her nothing for it,' were the coolly logical remarks of one of Stead's young female brothel-keepers, reinterpreting feminist arguments that challenged men's rights of sexual access to women's bodies.<sup>34</sup> These perceived rights and the role they may have played in prostitution were laid bare by 'Walter', the licentious sex tourist and author of *My Secret Life*, who declared of the juvenile prostitutes whom he visited: 'It is the fate of such girls to be fucked young.'<sup>35</sup> 'Walter's' comments are a powerful reminder of the subtle and not-so-subtle forces of

sexual coercion that led many young women to sell sex, which can get lost in our efforts to articulate it as a choice and as a form of labour.

From the 1880s, ideas about girls and young women who were destined to be 'fucked young' were also tied into the idea of 'white slavery', which pointed to the role that coercion played in making prostitutes. The discourse of 'white slavery' or 'the immoral traffic', as it was also called, held that girls and young women were forced by client demand and the actions of third party exploiters to sell sex. Despite the fact that white slavery was deployed by feminists and moral reformers, this discourse was not so far away from the ideas of 'Walter', for it relied on the idea that, once 'ruined', women would be permanently corrupted and turn to prostitution willingly. For instance, William Stead insisted that, according to reform home matrons, 'the innocent girl once outraged seemed to suffer a lasting blight of the moral sense... the foul passion from the man seemed to enter into the helpless victim of his lust, and she never again regained her pristine purity of soul'.<sup>36</sup> These ideas about innocence and corruption would remain entangled in discourses about white slavery well into the twentieth century.

In addition to the complex ideas about prostitute women's working-class backgrounds, their experiences of bad homes, and their sexuality and sexual abuse, social commentators could still not help but note that women's prostitution was intimately linked to their choices and experiences as workers. In 1844, Karl Marx observed that 'The factory workers in France call the prostitution of their wives and daughters the nth working hour.' Prostitution, he continued, could be understood as 'only a particular expression of the general prostitution of the worker'.<sup>37</sup> Echoing Marx several generations later, in 1912, George Bernard Shaw reminded middle-class campaigners who railed against white slavery that what was really at stake was the ability of the middle class to afford their lifestyles: 'The wages of prostitution are stitched into your button holes,' he told them, '... passed into your matchboxes and your boxes of pins, stuffed into your mattress, mixed with the paint on your walls, and stuck between the joints of your water-pipes'.<sup>38</sup>

Contemporary connections between labour and sex notwithstanding, most popular ideas about prostitution and women's work continued to connect it to extreme poverty and destitution rather than to the gendered limitations, constraints and exploitations inherent in the capitalist economy. Some historians have agreed: Frances Finnegan, in her tellingly titled monograph *Poverty and Prostitution: A Study of Victorian Prostitutes in York*, argues that women became prostitutes out of economic desperation, but she arrives at this conclusion based largely upon records from workhouses: institutions to which only the poorest and most desperate prostitute women would turn.<sup>39</sup> Meanwhile other historians, such as Judith Walkowitz and Paula Bartley, have found that women turned to prostitution for labour and economic-related reasons, but not usually from 'sheer want'.<sup>40</sup>

Ideas about extreme destitution causing women's prostitution certainly fell short of explaining the connections between prostitution and domestic service, connections that no Victorian or Edwardian commentator could fail to notice. G.P. Merrick found that over forty per cent of the women he interviewed had been domestic servants, while other investigations found an even higher number of domestic servants selling sex in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.<sup>41</sup> This is not particularly surprising, considering the fact that domestic service was the largest employer of women in this period, but it surprised Merrick, not only because he simultaneously found that more poorly paid and sweated occupations did not seem to swell the ranks of prostitutes, but also because domestic service was considered a respectable, relatively well-paid and stable occupation. Interestingly, domestic service's connections to prostitution persisted into the interwar years, when the 'servant crisis' meant that more and more middle-class families were cutting down on their use of servants, and servants tended to work alone. Including waitresses in her calculations, Sybil Neville-Rolphe argued that fifty-eight per cent of women in Holloway on prostitution charges in the late 1920s were servants.<sup>42</sup>

Domestic service, that quintessential occupation of working-class women, had long been connected to prostitution and to critiques of the sexual double standard through the narrative of the 'ruined maid': left with no 'character' after seduction by her master, the pregnant or disgraced young woman fell into prostitution and eventually the churning waters of the Thames. This narrative, both emotionally and erotically charged, played into the hands of moral reformers, feminists and socialists alike.<sup>43</sup> Indeed, there is reason to suspect that prostitute women themselves employed this narrative deliberately, to drum up support from parishes and organizations, or simply because they worked very briefly in service and it was the best answer to (or parody of) investigators' pressing questions.<sup>44</sup> 'I'm a disgraced milliner, anything you want,' 'Lushing Loo' told one of Henry Mayhew's investigators in the 1870s.<sup>45</sup> 'I'm going to drown myself,' 'Pearly Poll' had informed the exasperated police officers who were trying to get her to attend a police line-up.<sup>46</sup>

Some turn-of-the-century social investigators, such as the intrepid Mary Higgs, painted a more subtle picture of the 'ruined maid'. Masquerading as a servant girl herself, she toured several women's lodging houses in the south of England and in London, and found there an itinerant population of young women who engaged in prostitution very casually between jobs as servants, and who relished the lively company of the lodging house and the freedom of the life they were living even as they also struggled with illness, poverty and loneliness.<sup>47</sup>

The women Higgs met around the turn of the century probably had a lot in common with Emma Shrivell, 18, and Alice Marsh, 21, who had quit their jobs as servants and moved to London around 1890 but, faced with

unemployment there, had decided to give domestic service another chance. They moved back to their native Brighton, but it was short-lived: they soon elected to pawn their clothes for the fare back to London in the hopes of finding work as actresses. They found work as prostitutes instead, and were murdered by Thomas Neall Cream in April 1891, discovered by neighbours moments before they died from strychnine poisoning in their rooms in Lambeth.<sup>48</sup>

If prostitution was connected to women's labour by commentators in this period, then it was also linked to women's rural-to-urban labour migration, and investigators noted that young women who came to London from the provinces – young women like Emma Shrivell and Alice Marsh – were particularly likely to become prostitutes. Merrick found that only forty-two per cent of the women he interviewed had been born in London, for instance, even though the 1891 census indicates that eighty-five per cent of women in London had been born there. In the 1910s, Havelock Ellis found that records from the Salvation Army Rescue Home showed that sixty per cent of the women who sought aid came from the provinces. In the 1950s, sociologist Rosalind Wilkinson found that, of the women working as prostitutes in London, only 28.6 per cent had been born or had grown up in the metropolis.<sup>49</sup> These statistics must, of course, be balanced against the sheer number of women, engaged in all kinds of work, who had migrated to London in this period of massive urban migration, but it is important to recognize the degree to which isolation, dislocation and other emotional, social and economic challenges unique to urban environments – and even more unique to immense metropolises like London – must have affected the young, single woman migrant. 'Above everything in my life I have dreaded loneliness,' Marthe Watts wrote, explaining her own move into prostitution as a young girl living in Paris.<sup>50</sup> Havelock Ellis was inclined to see this urban dislocation as a cause of the whole phenomenon of buying and selling sex, and argued that it was a by-product of 'our restrained, mechanical, and laborious civilization'.<sup>51</sup>

By the early decades of the twentieth century, there was a growing realization that women's prostitution was connected not only to the failure of social institutions such as the family – from which new metropolitan immigrants tended to be isolated – but also to the failure of government and philanthropic institutions that were meant to provide care and reform for wandering, luckless and neglected girls. Social commentators noted how prostitution could represent a much better option to working-class women than the dreaded workhouse, and pointed out that the methods of reform found in homes for recalcitrant prostitutes – strict regimes, sparse food and accommodations, and retraining in hated occupations like domestic service and laundry – meant that these institutions had little success in converting women who sold sex back on to the straight and narrow.<sup>52</sup>



There was no more damning critique of reform homes than that which we can glean from the actions – or lack of action – on the part of prostitutes themselves. Again and again, historians have uncovered evidence of the utter disdain that prostitutes had for these institutions, and contemporary criminal justice officials noted how they would gladly accept prison, fines or a return to the streets over such a fate.<sup>53</sup> By their own admission, reform homes tended to cater to women who, while sexually transgressive or pregnant out of wedlock, did not work as ‘hardened’ prostitutes, while most poor women who sold sex used only the overnight shelters, in cold weather and at times when business was slow.<sup>54</sup> In 1888, for instance, the year of the ‘Jack the Ripper’ terror, the National Vigilance Association reported only eleven girls who ‘of their own free will, have asked to be sent to Rescue Homes’.<sup>55</sup> For this reason, using the records of reform homes and workhouses to illustrate the realities of prostitution is highly problematic, and not likely to be representative of most of the experiences of prostitute women. As the responsibility for errant young women passed into government hands, commentators began to make connections between approved schools and borstals and young women’s move into prostitution.<sup>56</sup>

This desire for a life that broke away from working-class women’s hand-to-mouth existence and subscribed gender roles was frequently cited as a cause of prostitution, though usually as a way to denigrate these choices. The most frequent explanation for prostitution invoked the idea of ‘character’, and Victorian and Edwardian social commentators concluded that motivations such as ‘pride and love of dress’, ‘preferment of indolent ease to labour’ and ‘lack of character’ led girls to become prostitutes.<sup>57</sup> In the 1920s one Professor Burt noted that much prostitution could be explained by women’s ‘mere love of adventure’ and described prostitutes as women who had ‘not cultivated any serious purpose in life’.<sup>58</sup> Hubert Stringer, heavily involved in interwar rescue associations, felt that the causes of prostitution lay with ‘the widespread intolerance of discipline or self-discipline’.<sup>59</sup> Set against Bernard Shaw’s insistence that the ranks of prostitution were swelled by the low-waged female labourers who were necessary to sustain affordable middle-class living, these comments denigrating the materialism and frivolity of prostitute women appear hypocritical indeed.

By the early twentieth century, concepts of labour, bad homes and social welfare had become entangled with medicalized and eugenic concerns about prostitute women’s ‘feeble-mindedness’, and by the 1940s and 1950s other investigators began to employ the language of psychology and psychiatry to describe prostitute women.<sup>60</sup> Professor Burt argued in 1926, for instance, that ‘mental weakness plays an important part’ in the creation of prostitutes, second only to an ‘over-sexed constitution’.<sup>61</sup> While changes in scientific understanding changed the focus and terminology, the underlying principle remained the same: there had to be something psychologically, socially, sexually or physically wrong with a woman who sold sex.<sup>62</sup>

This was in contrast to what prostitute women themselves had to say about why they became involved in prostitution. The motivations of one prostitute interviewed by police constable Lilian Wyles in the early 1920s were particularly well stated in her response to an offer of 'rescue'. 'What can you offer me if I do give this up?' she asked, 'A job in a laundry at two pounds a week – when I can make twenty easily, and have a bit of fun thrown in?'<sup>63</sup> 'I'd rather die than go into domestic service,' one prostitute bluntly told the journalist Mary Chesterton in 1935.<sup>64</sup> Another told her that 'If I didn't go out with a man every now and then I couldn't stick life. I only earn enough to pay the rent of my room, my fares, and a bit of food night and morning. I couldn't even afford the pictures out of what I get and I should have to scrape to get shoes, let alone clothes.'<sup>65</sup>

Others have agreed: 'No scheme [of reform] appears to have the slightest chance of success', wrote Constance Tite in *The Shield* in 1916, 'while prostitution is not only the best paid, but the only well-paid profession for large numbers of girls... under present conditions nobody can pretend that a respectable life of work is a guarantee of tolerable comfort and well-being'.<sup>66</sup> Ultimately, concluded the Christian Conference on Politics, Economics and Citizenship (COPEC) commission on prostitution in 1924, 'It is not feasible that industry under any conceivable conditions could offer young inexperienced girls a wage which could hope to compete with the wages of youthful prostitution.'<sup>67</sup>

Rosalind Wilkinson's sociological study of 150 prostitute women in the late 1940s also provided overwhelming evidence that the women themselves did it for the money, and saw prostitution as work. 'Margaret', one of her interviewees, had been working in a milk bar for 2 pounds 10 shillings a week before she turned to prostitution and was arrested: "'Lady with a bun [the probation officer] said: 'would you like me to get you a job?' I said: 'what! Get me a job at three pounds a week' and she said: 'well you can't expect to earn more', and I said: 'And I can't expect to live on it.'"'<sup>68</sup> Even after the Second World War, Wilkinson noted that the alternative work open to women who sold sex was 'low grade, unskilled, often seasonal, offering little promise of advancement... it offers little scope for her to express her own personality and usually pays only sufficient for her basic requirements'.<sup>69</sup>

In terms of sheer wages, the earnings of prostitutes, in the words of one turn-of-the-century constable, 'varied enormously', but the evidence that prostitute women could earn more money than other unskilled labourers, male and female, for significantly shorter hours of work is overwhelming.<sup>70</sup> There are, of course, examples of very low earnings. In *My Secret Life*, the lecherous 'Walter' offers a woman a half crown (2s 6d) in Hyde Park around 1880 because, in his own words, he 'wished to know how cheap it could be had'.<sup>71</sup> He met other women who would perform sex acts for three shillings, or even for food, but his very surprise at this low amount suggests that these were not typical prices.<sup>72</sup> Police constables in the Southwark area of

London told social investigator Charles Booth in the late 1890s that there were prostitutes 'of the lowest class' who would perform sexual services for less than a shilling, or the cost of a pint. Women in the Woolwich Barracks area charged soldiers 9d for sex, but frequently the men were 'allowed to go on tick and pay when their money comes in'.<sup>73</sup> These low-earners were said to often supplement their earnings by stealing from the men they slept with, enabled by the intimacy of the sex act and protected from prosecution by the embarrassment of their customers.<sup>74</sup> Mary Gordon likewise reported that the prostitutes she encountered in prisons in the 1910s earned very low wages.<sup>75</sup> However, the women who ended up in prison would have obviously been on average poorer than those who could afford to pay fines, and hence often escape imprisonment: a very large proportion of prostitute women were in prison in default of fine payment.

It is true that some women were rumoured to be 'half-penny touches', but it is unlikely that even the poorest prostitutes would have been prepared to give out anything more than a touch for such a low amount. It is important to remember that when witnesses spoke of the amount prostitutes would charge they were often speaking of a sexual act that may not have been vaginal intercourse.<sup>76</sup> On several occasions, 'Walter' paid women he identified as prostitutes to urinate on him or to allow him to touch their breasts or genitalia.<sup>77</sup> Wilkinson found similar variety in sex acts when she investigated the wages of prostitutes in the early 1950s. 'Masturbation is a fairly frequent variation outside,' she discovered, 'it is more convenient and cheaper: "Five shillings if you use your hands".'<sup>78</sup> Sex outside was usually performed while clothed and standing up, and sexual acts in cars and taxis rarely amounted to full intercourse. For some women, this was the benefit in paying for indoor space, because being able to engage in full intercourse or 'perversions' increased earning potential. For others, this was why they chose only to work outside. 'Sally', who worked in Hyde Park and usually masturbated her clients, felt that working indoors was not for her: 'you have to undress and do all kinds of things,' she told Wilkinson.<sup>79</sup> Most women divided the time they spent with clients into 'short times', which were usually ten to twenty minutes long, and refused to go with a client for the whole night (often seen as risky), but some other women would charge a flat rate for the night, because it meant they only needed to solicit one man.<sup>80</sup>

Alongside the evidence of low earnings we find evidence of exceedingly high ones. 'Walter' most often offered the women from whom he bought sex a half-sovereign or a sovereign (ten shillings/one pound),<sup>81</sup> and some police constables told Booth that they knew women who earned five or six pounds a week.<sup>82</sup> An undercover police investigation into Piccadilly street prostitution in 1910 found several women asking twenty to thirty shillings (one to one and a half pounds) for a single act of intercourse,<sup>83</sup> and one prostitute reported that women who performed anal sex could expect to get paid

up to three pounds a time for it.<sup>84</sup> Wilkinson found that Mayfair prostitutes in the late 1940s charged three pounds for a 'short time', and that Soho prostitutes charged anywhere from thirty shillings to two pounds. Witnesses in the 1910s and 1920s reported that a prostitute in richer areas like Piccadilly could earn twenty to thirty pounds a week, putting such women's income on a par with many upper-level professionals.<sup>85</sup>

One short but fascinating Police Court report provides evidence of a middle ground between these low and high wages. In 1900, Annie Bernard brought Frank Andrews, an itinerant labourer, up on charges of theft, assault and living on the earnings of her prostitution. 'He complained that I was not earning enough,' she told the court, 'so last week I kept account in his pocketbook. On the Monday I earned 7s, on the Tuesday 10s, and so on.' Andrews was sentenced to seven months' hard labour.

These wages have to be set alongside the fact that many women who sold sex had very high overheads if they took clients to indoor spaces, particularly as pressure increased upon landlords under the new brothel laws. Beholden to risk-taking landlords, some prostitute women paid up to ten times the ordinary rent for an indoor workspace. But it is also vital to place this range of wages (even taking into account the costs) alongside the earnings of people selling non-sexual labour. If a woman earning ten shillings per sex act around the turn of the century had sex with only five men per week she would be making fifty shillings, or £2 6s, a week. This was not only over ten times the income of the average unskilled working woman of the day (which was around 6s 2d a week around the turn of the century) but also more than most working men (skilled trades like plumbing and bricklaying earned around forty shillings a week in 1906) and certainly more than police officers (who in 1906 earned on average 30s. 6d. per week after five years of service).<sup>86</sup> Even the woman charging three shillings per man could expect to earn the same as her domestic servant counterparts (in an average week of seeing five to ten men) for significantly fewer hours of work. The women who performed sex acts for bread (which cost between 5d and 6d in the 1890s and 1900s) or the cost of a pint (priced about 4d for the cheapest 'running' ale) were still making more pence per hour than a needlewoman (who made on average one or two pence an hour at this time).<sup>87</sup> Even when women's minimum hourly rates were raised to 3¼d in 1912 and 7d in 1928, a prostitute who charged five shillings per man could still expect to make significantly more than other unskilled labourers. In the 1950s, Wilkinson found that women working in Hyde Park could earn about four pounds on an average night. 'Anne', who worked in the Park, said that she could make fifteen pounds a week without working every night: this was in an era when waitressing or clerical work paid less than five pounds a week. Women in Victoria could earn up to nine pounds a week 'working hard', and Mayfair women made 'no more than' sixty to 100 pounds a week. This supports Marthe Watts's claim to have made over 150,000 pounds at

prostitution in the fifteen years she was working in London.<sup>88</sup> 'Even if she makes only ten pounds a week,' Wilkinson admitted, 'the street prostitute is earning far more than she could in any job open to her.'<sup>89</sup> In the 1950s, prostitutes' rents in the West End reached up to twenty-five pounds a week, but women who paid this amount in rent could also hope to earn fifty to seventy pounds selling sex, meaning that they cleared at least twenty-five pounds, five times more than a semi-skilled female office worker.<sup>90</sup>

Moreover, this income tended to be achieved with significantly fewer hours of work and a flexible schedule, which would have been all the more important for a woman with dependent children, partner or parents, because her potential hours of paid labour had to be considered alongside the required hours of unpaid labour she would have to perform in childcare and housekeeping. While it was generally thought that prostitutes did not usually have children, because of assumptions about sterility, abortion and abandonment, it is very difficult to support these claims. Police Court Missionary Thomas Holmes found that many of the women he met in the courts had children whom they were supporting, but noted that, because it was so easy for the courts to take their children from them and place them in government homes if they were found to be associating with prostitutes, most of these mothers boarded their children 'in decent homes, far away from the streets they themselves "walk"', and rarely mentioned their existence to authorities.<sup>91</sup>

As much as many women who sold sex did not take kindly to the idea of a regular, licit job, most seemed to treat prostitution as a serious form of employment. 'There is a definite market which is studied by the prostitute in order to obtain her trade,' Wilkinson found, 'the only commodity which she sells is her body, but she does this with the same respect for business as any shopkeeper; her attitude is matter-of-fact and the relationship with clients is always on a commercial basis.'<sup>92</sup> Prostitute women had carefully delineated working spaces and practices; this usually took the form of walking up and down the same beats, speaking to men or waiting to be spoken to, negotiating a price, and going to another location for a 'short time'. Like most businesses, women who sold sex endeavoured to build up a regular clientele, to reduce the amount of time they spent on the street and minimize the potential threat that unknown men might pose. 'The aim of many street prostitutes is to have sufficient private custom not to need to solicit,' Wilkinson remarked, yet 'a clientele can be built up through contracts made originally in the streets but has to continually be reinforced by periods of soliciting.'<sup>93</sup>

Women selling sex also maintained a work uniform, albeit one that changed a great deal between 1885 and 1960. Prostitutes in the late nineteenth century tended to be recognized by their (comparatively) short skirts, and in the 1930s by their fur coats and high heels. In the late 1940s women selling sex were recognizable by their high-heeled shoes with ankle

straps: Marthe Watts, who sported such shoes, found that her aching and blistered feet were one of the chief physical detractions of her occupation.<sup>94</sup> One fairly timeless feature of a prostitute's uniform was bright and – relative to the period – exaggerated make-up, what Wilkinson described as a 'mask'. Prostitute women also carefully delineated their working and non-working hours. When they were not working most traded their heels for 'flatties' and removed their make-up. Many set themselves a regular night off, or worked only as much as it took to make a specific amount of money. 'When I go off business I won't take anyone else,' one woman told Wilkinson. 'It's the same as if you opened a shop, if someone came in half an hour after you had closed you wouldn't serve him.'<sup>95</sup>

This kind of organization extended to third parties and to each other. While investigating the structures and practices of prostitution in mid-century London, Wilkinson discovered that

Among themselves the prostitutes have formed something of a work organization. English prostitutes talk of their work colleagues with some feeling of sisterhood... their mutual support reaches almost trade union status, despising the amateurs and threatening violence toward any woman who goes beyond the minimum rate for their neighbourhood. They have a language of their own which is partly composed of criminal slang and partly of technical terms belonging to the trade.<sup>96</sup>

This tantalizing glance at the rudimentary unionization of prostitute women could be seen as a fascinating precursor to the prostitute solidarity and rights movements which would spring up all around the Western world around three decades later, but the historian is left only to wonder at its true extent.

Prostitution was not an easy job, and it is not my intention to paint a romantic or unquestioningly empowering picture of it, any more than I would wish to exaggerate the loveliness of cleaning an office building or working at a cannery. The work came along with physical hardship, particularly if a woman was too frequently engaged in vaginal or anal sex. Because sex can be a highly emotional and intense activity, and because it is so intimately entwined with human morality, many women must have found having mercenary sex extremely emotionally and spiritually exhausting. Women were also frequently obliged to have sexual relations with men whom they found unattractive and even disgusting, were at a high risk of venereal disease, and were frequently victims of client abuse and of exploitation by third parties, as we shall see in subsequent chapters. Moreover, I think the claim, made by Judith Walkowitz, that very few women sold sex out of 'sheer want' is very difficult to quantify, and some helpful contemporary accounts remind us that, even if the majority of prostitute women made their choice to prostitute in complex labour and social circumstances,

many others did indeed turn to prostitution in a state of sheer economic, physical and familial destitution; such was the incredibly varied nature of prostitutes' experiences.<sup>97</sup> But it is important to ask, as this book does, just how many negative features of prostitution were created or aggravated by its position as a criminalized activity.

Despite what many commentators and the legal status conferred on 'common prostitutes' might have implied, women moved both into and out of prostitution. Many women also did not choose prostitution all at once, but became gradually involved in various aspects of it: accepting gifts from clients at first in lieu of cash, for instance, or selling sex only very occasionally while performing other labour, until the financial benefits or lifestyle of prostitution led them to sell sex on a more regular basis. Once involved in prostitution, many legal and social stigmas could keep a woman within it, alongside the dynamism of the lifestyle and, most of all, the fact that her other options likely remained poorly paid and unappealing. Many women probably stopped earning money through prostitution when better employment became available (for instance, during wartime) or when marriage or financial help from children or other family members meant that the income was no longer needed. Earnings in prostitution also usually depended on the age of the woman involved, and, as most relatively successful prostitute women got older, they probably exited prostitution through marriage, licit labour or personal savings, or may have turned to other prostitution-related pursuits in which they could continue to engage in later life (such as brothel-keeping or acting as another woman's maid). But some must have drifted from relatively successful modes of prostitution into more desperate straits as their life cycles progressed and the handicaps of disease, age and addiction meant they could no longer earn high wages in 'the life'. 'Many prostitutes prefer to take themselves quietly off the beat when they find the work unpleasant or have achieved the conditions, such as having sufficient money, which they regard as necessary to a change in their habits,' Wilkinson noted. 'Some, unfortunately, may never be able to do this.'<sup>98</sup> We know a little about the reasons women may have entered prostitution. We know far less about the ways they may have exited it, or what happened when they could not.

Our preoccupation with why women sell sex can often tell us as much, if not more, about our own ideas about prostitution as it does about the women involved in it. As Rosalind Wilkinson discovered, one could just as meaningfully interrogate why someone would want to study prostitution as why someone would want to engage in it, when one of her interview subjects asked her the question: 'Now tell me – what do you feel like, talking to a prostitute?'<sup>99</sup> So what can a century or so of obsessing over the reasons why women sell sex tell us about the women who did it? Prostitute women were overwhelmingly from the working classes, and, of the ones who came into contact with the criminal justice system at least, many had

experiences of failed or fractured social institutions. Like Emma Shrivell and Alice Marsh, many had moved to the metropolis of London from other parts of the country, and, like Marthe Watts, many had come from abroad. Some may have been coerced, but the majority made a rational choice to sell sex, though their reasons for doing so, the degree to which these choices were constrained, and the experiences they had once engaged in prostitution varied greatly. First and foremost, women viewed prostitution as a job, and this job tended to offer them a higher income than the majority of other work that was available to them, but a woman's move into prostitution was contingent, complicated and personal. Women sold sex because it made them money; because they enjoyed it; because they felt it was all they could or knew how to do; because they enjoyed the lifestyle and the working hours; because society had told them that they were 'destined to be fucked young'; because they had a family to support; because they gradually got into it; because someone had coerced or forced them. But, most importantly, women sold sex for the same reason that anyone sells anything: because someone was there to buy it.



# 2

## Buying Sex: Men and the Marketplace

The lack of male clients in contemporary and historical studies of commercial sex is not surprising when it is seen as symptomatic of the double standard of sexual morality, the pervasive attitude that held women solely responsible for the moral, legal and medical consequences of commercial sex contracts. 'The prostitute's client appears to have been neglected by students of prostitution in favour of the woman,' was sociologist Rosalind Wilkinson's understated comment. 'This continual avoidance of half the subject may explain the divergent views which exist concerning the function of prostitution as a social phenomenon.'<sup>1</sup> Even today, the purchase of sex, understood as part of a more generalized biological male need for sex at all costs (literal and figurative), remains largely naturalized, uninterrogated and ahistorical.

One of the reasons a historian can know so little about these men is because British law did not recognize them or their actions as legally liable, and therefore no police station, Police Court, or prison chaplain would have had any contact with them; nor did any agency set out to reform them, although the occasional social purity advocate suggested that perhaps they should.<sup>2</sup> In addition, society actively concealed the identities and actions of men who bought sex, hiding them, by extension, from historians. When a notorious brothel was closed and the brothel madam was brought to trial in 1885, the name of every woman who had set foot in the residence was announced in the courtroom and the newspapers. The judges and barristers were very keen, on the other hand, to ensure that no witnesses uttered the name of any man who had been the esteemed client of Mrs Jeffries.<sup>3</sup> Seventy-five years later, police insisted that references to RAF men being regular clients of prostitutes be removed from Rosalind Wilkinson's study before it could be published.<sup>4</sup>

In the same spirit of naturalization and censure, British common parlance has no word for men who bought sex that could be said to be equivalent to 'prostitute', although current media is beginning to use the American word 'john' and, since the 1970s, to employ other euphemisms like 'punter'. My

use of the term 'client' throughout this book is not intended to suggest any particular level of professionalism, normalization or euphemism, but rather is used in the sense that it tends to describe someone who pays money for a non-material service.

Historians as well as contemporaries have a curious tendency to estimate the number of women selling sex in the absence of any consideration of the number of men buying it, but if we do so it greatly inflates the estimated number of people involved in the commercial sex industry. It is reasonable to assume that there were at the very least five times as many men buying sex at any given time as there were women selling it, in order for women to earn a living from it. In other words, if there were between 4,000 and 10,000 women selling sex in London in the years 1885–1960, there almost certainly had to have been at the very least between 20,000 and 50,000 men buying sex. In the 'Little Kinsey' survey of 1948, one in four men reported having bought sex in their lifetimes, which suggests that clients of prostitutes in Britain might have been numbered in the hundreds of thousands.<sup>5</sup> Of course, it is difficult to account for the men who bought sex regularly (every week or two), those who bought it regularly for a short time in their lives (while at university, for instance), and those who bought it only once or twice in their lifetimes (for example, while on a business trip to London).<sup>6</sup> In a mid-century interview with 200 former Borstal boys, for instance, it was found that only eight had ever bought sex, and this had been while overseas serving with the merchant navy.<sup>7</sup> If all these kinds of clients are included, it is likely that the number of men who bought sex in London at any given time was very high indeed, far surpassing the 80,000 that the Bishop of Exeter had unreasonably estimated for the female sellers. Male buyers may have been, as Wilkinson points out, 'half the subject' in terms of the prostitution contract, but in sheer numbers they constituted far more than half; indeed, they were the largest category of participants in commercial sex. As Wilkinson argued, 'the chief influence on trade is ultimately the customer; what he wants, what he will pay, and when.'<sup>8</sup> As invisible as they were, clients' sexual desires, their spending and earning patterns, their mobility, their leisure patterns and their attitudes were highly determinative of the forms that commercial sex would take.<sup>9</sup>

In the late nineteenth century, the group of clients that most preoccupied social, political and especially medical commentators were soldiers and sailors, who formed a large proportion of the men who frequented prostitute women, and for this reason more is known about them as buyers of sex than of any other group.<sup>10</sup> It had been their propensity for contracting venereal disease which prompted Parliament to pass the Contagious Diseases Acts of the 1860s and 1870s, and, while the women with whom they consorted were subject to much harsher controls under the system, these male buyers of sex were also liable to disciplinary proceedings if they contracted a disease.<sup>11</sup>

Even after the repeal of the CD Acts, soldiers and sailors as clients of prostitutes remained a special area of concern. In one interesting quarrel between the police and military authorities from 1897, the police constables in charge of patrolling Hyde Park came under criticism from the Kensington Barracks, when Major General Lord Methuen blamed the Metropolitan Police's laxity in arresting prostitutes in the Park for the rise in venereal disease amongst his troops. Police, argued the barracks' chief surgeon, should be more vigilant in clearing the park of prostitutes who 'were of the lowest class' and who were responsible for infecting the bulk of his patients.<sup>12</sup> Police responded with frustration. The Superintendent from A Division claimed that 'from my own personal observation...the soldiers generally bring the women with them into the park and I have ascertained that when prostitutes have been turned out of the park by the police, they have subsequently been brought back into the park by soldiers.' These buyers of sex were able to control the space where they bought it, relying particularly on the clash of authorities that was implicit when civilian police attempted to control military personnel.<sup>13</sup>

The soldiers at the Woolwich barracks, meanwhile, would look for prostitutes who worked in the Dustbowl and Roperyard Rails, poor communities nearby. 'You always find that the women cluster about barracks,' a police officer told one of Booth's investigators in the 1890s.<sup>14</sup> Police complained that passes for good behaviour meant both soldiers and prostitutes were in the streets till the early hours of the morning, and once again pointed to their inability to effectively police the military in order to explain the proliferation of commercial sex in these areas, where women were drawn 'like flies to the honey pot'.<sup>15</sup> A little further west in the East End docklands, clients tended to be itinerant and of many different nationalities, and women who worked in areas near the docks depended heavily on occasional influxes of men who had been paid by their ship in one lump sum.

In 1885, just as the CD Acts were repealed, William T. Stead's exposé rendered some of the wealthier buyers of sex more visible and – through the metaphor of the minotaur who devoured virgins in Daedalus' maze – virtually monstrous. According to Stead, these men, usually from the professional and upper classes, sustained a terrible commerce in young virgins, who would be unwittingly bought from poor parents and sold into brothels in the West End. This image of the buyer of sex was a far cry from the military's fears about its rank-and-file soldiers, and Stead invoked it to illustrate the sexualized class warfare that he considered one of the chief causes of child exploitation and prostitution: the very rich preying upon the very souls of the very poor.<sup>16</sup>

Feminist campaigners were the most explicit in identifying the male buyer of sex as the chief cause of the problem of prostitution: it was his inability to control his sexual urges that both created prostitutes (through 'ruining' young working-class women) and maintained their trade, as well

as spread venereal disease to wives and mothers. These arguments underlay feminism's stance against regulated commercial sex, which they viewed as a tool for making vice 'safe' for men by controlling a certain 'class' of women. As historians like Lucy Bland and Judith Walkowitz have shown, ideas about men and prostitution lay at the heart of feminism from its very inception and were woven into the campaign for women's political enfranchisement in the early twentieth century: 'Votes for women, chastity for men,' Christobel Pankhurst declared in her prescription for the effective control of venereal disease.<sup>17</sup> Some moral reformers, in keeping with these ideas, began to campaign to make buying as well as selling sex illegal from the early years of the twentieth century; though they were never successful, they were nonetheless prominent campaigns.

Other regular buyers of sex could also cause occasional controversy and prompt intervention. In one case from 1900, police reported that 'a well-known public man' had to be taken into custody when he refused to stop cavorting with prostitutes on the street, while concerns also grew about the use of prostitutes by relatively affluent tradesmen, clerks, and other men of the upper working and lower middle classes. As historians Arthur Engel and, more recently, Philip Howell have detailed, undergraduate Oxbridge students were also considered problematic clients of prostitutes.<sup>18</sup> 'The duty of police in controlling the pedestrian traffic in Piccadilly is often rendered exceptionally arduous by the interference of members of the public who ought to know better,' wrote Commissioner Bradford in 1901. 'The apparent admirers of these women belong to all classes from the Peer to the shop-boy, and they promenade nightly until about 1:30 am.'<sup>19</sup>

Some of the most high-profile cases of men buying or soliciting sex were naturally those which concerned men from the upper and professional classes. These included Sir Leo Money, a well-known economist who, in 1927, was caught engaged in 'indecent' acts in Hyde Park with Irene Savidge, whose subsequent harassment by the police (while Money escaped largely unscathed) led to a government enquiry. Perhaps the most fascinating case of all was that of Sir Almeric Fitzroy, Clerk to the Privy Council, whose conviction for annoying women in Hyde Park was overturned on appeal in 1922 (once his defence had successfully determined that one of the chief witnesses was a prostitute and had her charged with perjury); all just five years after he sat on the Royal Commission on Venereal Disease during the First World War.

The war saw a literal army of buyers of sex flooding London, creating still more controversy and further problems for the police. 'The civil police are unwilling to arrest soldiers,' woman police officer Mary Harburn reported, upon witnessing police arrest two women who had clearly been harassed by two Canadian soldiers. 'I think the police do not like meddling with the soldiers at all.'<sup>20</sup> The soldier clients of prostitutes during both the First and Second World Wars, as we shall see, played an enormous role in shaping

attitudes towards commercial sex between 1914 and 1960, as well as in shaping the phenomenon itself.

By the post-war years, what little research was being done on the clients of prostitutes suggested that, while there was a remarkable diversity amongst these men in 'age, personality, and history', some patterns did in fact emerge. The psychologist T.C.N. Gibbens, who had been awarded research funding to investigate the purchase of sex in the late 1950s, found in his interviews with 270 white male patients at a London venereal disease clinic that many 'belong[ed] to the vulnerable professions – sailors, commercial travelers, lorry drivers, and so on... a third of all the men had jobs involving mobility and half of this group fell into these three professional groups'. These men from 'vulnerable professions', Gibbens explained, were not just disproportionately represented because of the nature of their jobs, but rather because the 'problems of adjustment which have led them to prefer these roving professions' were the same ones that led them to seek out prostitutes.<sup>21</sup> In sum, in his small sample Gibbens found 'ample confirmation of the varieties which have often been described – the mobile professions... the divorced and separated, the sexually perverse who make abnormal demands, [and] the physically handicapped'.<sup>22</sup> He made further connections between disability and prostitution in claiming that he had encountered 'schizoids' who had been 'nursed back to health by a consistent relationship with a prostitute'.<sup>23</sup> In keeping with the increased attention on the psychologization of gay men post-Wolfenden, Gibbens argued that the 'most compulsive clients' of prostitutes were 'closet homosexuals'.<sup>24</sup>

Concern over the racial dimension of the dangerous or diseased buyer of sex was added to earlier class and gender politics.<sup>25</sup> As the First World War heralded the arrival of more men of colour in London, more concern developed around miscegenation, and more attention was paid to the black man or the Asian man as a buyer of sex as well as a controller of the sex market. In 1932, an Indian Lascar, Rou Sharu, was prosecuted for running a brothel in Poplar's West India Dock Road. During the case, it was of special concern that Sharu insisted that the white women who worked for him have sex only with the black men who frequented this area of London as merchant sailors. It was perhaps this that led to him being tried at the Central Criminal Court for procurement rather than as a pimp or as a brothel-keeper, which would have been a non-indictable offence.<sup>26</sup> The Second World War, like the First, augmented the number of buyers of sex in London dramatically, and brought with it new concerns about colonial soldiers and black American troops as the racially 'other' boyfriends and clients of 'good time girls' and prostitutes.<sup>27</sup> Yet, in the post-war period, despite all of these concerns, the clients of commercial sex were once again omitted from the discussions and the new legislation of the 1950s, and, as Wilkinson herself noted, they generated little interest amongst sociological investigators.

What little information there is about men who bought sex in the late nineteenth and first half of the twentieth century suggests that the customers of prostitutes were as diverse as the women whom they paid: the motivations, desires, socioeconomic backgrounds and experiences of the men who bought sex varied greatly, and it is difficult to say whether there were any patterns in the way they changed over time.<sup>28</sup> This variety of experience is well illustrated in two contrasting accounts of buying sex: that of Arthur Harding, a man who became a well-known organized crime boss in the East End of the 1930s, and the many accounts of sex-buying which are found in the pornographic diaries of 'Walter', later published under the title *My Secret Life*. Harding's encounter with a prostitute recalls a moment when he was still a teenager, and is worth quoting at length.

I was friendly with the girls but I didn't stay with them except once. It was when I was about eighteen... She was an English girl, about eighteen years of age. I never knew her name – they used to call her 'Faithful Wedding'. One day, when she was passing by, one of the boys said 'I'd like to have a go at her'. I said, 'I could have her any time' – you know how you boast about these things... I had no more idea of what it meant than a fly in my ear, but I wanted to be somebody. Next night she must have done well, because about 12:30 she came home in a hansom cab. I went over to her and said, 'hello do you want to take me upstairs?' She said 'yes', so we went upstairs – all stone stairs – and went into her room... It was the first time I'd ever been with a woman and she had to instruct me... When it was over I felt very bad. I said to her, 'You've made me feel ill'. She said 'I haven't done anything to you. It's your first experience'. I said, 'It's funny, I feel terribly bad'. She said 'You'll be alright. I'll see you tomorrow night'. I said 'I don't think so'. I went out very early the next morning, about 5 o'clock, and all my stomach seemed empty. I was so weak I said to myself 'I'll never go with another one'. I didn't go with her again, but I used to protect her – I never let anyone interfere with her... It was done just out of bravado.<sup>29</sup>

In this retelling, it is clear that Harding chose to buy sex from 'Faithful Wedding' more because of the pressure from the other young men his age, 'out of bravado', in his own words, than from any strong sexual desire to do so on his part, and it is likely that many men who bought sex occasionally or only once did so for these sorts of reasons: because it was an accepted, encouraged or expected part of the male subculture in which they participated.<sup>30</sup> In the early 1960s, Gibbens argued that typical clients were 'the youngish married men who come to London for a business conference... they drink a great deal and when someone suggests looking for some girls they do not wish to seem more prudish than others'.<sup>31</sup> He also found that about half the men he interviewed had first bought sex before they

were twenty, and a third of them had gone to prostitutes in the company of other men.<sup>32</sup>

Harding's encounter with 'Faithful Wedding' challenges any simplistic assumptions about the buyer-seller relationship. For, while Harding boasts that 'he could have her anytime,' it is clear that 'Faithful Wedding', who worked in the West End and had done well enough to afford to come home in a hansom cab, was really the one determining their contract. Instead of feeling empowered or more manly through his experience of buying sex, Harding began to feel physically ill and weak. Harding's impression of illness did not seem to come from any immediate concern about venereal disease, but rather from a personal shame or anxiety about buying or even having sex. According to Harding, he never bought sex again, though he maintained a lot of contact with prostitute women and occasionally helped them deal with abusive pimps.<sup>33</sup>

In sharp contrast to Harding's single experience are the many experiences of the anonymous 'Walter', the infamous diarist who recounted his exceptionally frequent late nineteenth-century sexual exploits with women, and the occasional man, most of whom were prostitutes. The diaries were published between 1880 and 1894, but due to their pornographic nature the imprints are very difficult to authenticate. While attempts have been made to name him, 'Walter's' real identity remains largely a mystery, as does the degree to which the stories he writes recount actual experiences.<sup>34</sup> 'Walter' was obsessed with his sexual desires, and did not have a preference for what sort of woman he paid for sex, or what sort of area he frequented. He solicited women in parks, in hotels, in Piccadilly, in the slums of the East End and South, and on the Continent. He was also not at all averse to hiring children. He visited two or three prostitutes regularly over his lifetime, and seemed to develop a kind of emotional relationship with one of them, but for the most part the sex he bought was anonymous and disconnected. He was not rich, so did not frequently solicit expensive women, and usually offered five to ten shillings for sex. For 'Walter', the need to buy sex was pathological, and it is estimated that the diary recounts his sexual experiences with over 1,200 women, most of whom received money or presents in exchange. In his retelling of his encounters the exchange of money itself took on sexual meaning: he frequently remarks upon the varying amount of money he would offer women for sexual acts, and the sense of power he derived from it. On several occasions, money features as a physical toy in his sexual encounters.<sup>35</sup>

Arthur Harding and 'Walter' appear in sharp contrast to one another as buyers of sex. A less clear, but also less polemic, picture of a buyer of sex can be found in what one observer of London's underworld felt was a typical story of 1920s London life, in which a very average young man buys sex. John Smith, 'engaged until 5 o'clock in a stockbroker's office, with parents living too far out of London for him to come daily to the City from

home. He is lonely, and one night decides to go home with a prostitute. This, surely, at one time or another, must have been done by most John Smiths who walk down Piccadilly after midnight.<sup>36</sup> In this account, buying sex is explained as a reaction to the pressures and emotional challenges of modern urban life, but it is also the anonymous modernity of the city that eroticizes this loneliness. Anonymity licensed John Smith to 'go home with a prostitute'; there was no one to judge him for it. This anonymity shapes, but also obscures, buying sex as a historical phenomenon. Who is John Smith? He could, in fact, be anybody; Arthur Harding, 'Walter', or anyone in between.

Marthe Watts, in her autobiographical account of working as a prostitute in France, Spain, Italy, North Africa and especially London (where she worked for fifteen years), insisted that the client of the prostitute is 'Mr. "Everyman"'. The man who is restless, the man who is lonely, the man who has nothing to do, the man whose wife does not understand his peculiarities, the man with strange desires, the young man out on a spree, the elderly man beset by sensual desires'.<sup>37</sup> Throughout her account, Watts displayed a great deal of sympathy for many of her clients, although the relationships she had with them were always strictly businesslike. She was especially bothered by the rules imposed upon her by her pimp, who dictated she could spend no more than ten minutes with each client, meaning that frequently the men who saw her did not achieve orgasm. Interestingly, she viewed her clients as she had viewed herself, 'ready prey for the Messinas', the organized vice ring who commandeered hundreds of thousands of pounds from the earnings of prostitute women in mid-century London. Later in the century, the client of prostitute as 'dupe' became a fairly common trope in prostitution discourses.<sup>38</sup>

By the 1950s and 1960s, more and more attention was being paid to the clients of prostitutes as psychologically disturbed people, and studies and surveys made note of the fact that many were 'sado-masochistic perverts', 'malformed, diseased and lonely', 'vicious persons' or 'men with defective love objects'. Some suffered from 'bad home lives, depression, abusive, neglectful, distant fathers, obsessions over their mother, excessive disciplining'.<sup>39</sup> Somewhat conversely, it was also imagined that normal men bought sex when they were faced with 'frigid or invalid wives', and one study which found that one-third of its subjects were married remarked that 'the wives sounded possessive and neurotic, retiring into illness if they could not get their way or creating hysterical scenes', or making the man feel displaced by their preoccupation with their children.<sup>40</sup>

Most observers were forced to concede that buyers of sex remained diverse and, ultimately, ordinary: the perverts were joined in great number by men 'of the mobile professions'; adolescents seeking sexual experience; and, quite simply, by 'the ordinary person'.<sup>41</sup> In his 1962 study, Gibbens discovered that about 180 of his 200 interviewees had been with prostitutes, but



that 160 of these mixed their buying of sex with promiscuous sex with girlfriends and 'pick-ups'. Gibbens stressed the importance of seeing the buying and selling of sex 'in the context of all sexual behaviour'.<sup>42</sup> Meanwhile, the sexual double standard persisted in explanations of prostitution: Gibbens argued, for instance, that men who bought sex frequently were or had been 'overcontrolled' in other aspects of their life (often by their mothers), writing that 'they represent casualties of civilization to whom controls have been applied too strongly or unequally'. Meanwhile, other commentators continued to outline how a lack of control led women to sell sex.<sup>43</sup>

Given the huge variety of men who bought sex, it would be extremely difficult to try to categorize their attitudes toward the women whom they engaged. It would be safe to assume that many of these men viewed prostitutes, in the oft-cited words of French historian Alain Corbin, as 'seminal drains', a place to seek what was believed to be a hygienic evacuation of semen and a brief orgasm rather than any kind of real eroticism;<sup>44</sup> indeed, it would be difficult for most men to experience much else, seeing as the average prostitute was only willing to engage herself for ten or fifteen minutes. Other men certainly viewed prostitutes with a high degree of contempt, and, as we shall see in the chapters which follow, client abuse of prostitute women was probably more common than we can ever know from the criminal record. The causes of this abuse were also varied. As Wilkinson noted, 'sometimes the assault occurs as the result of a girl's being unwilling to do something her client wants, but sometimes it appears that the assault is the goal of the relationship, that it has been planned.'<sup>45</sup> Gibbens found in his study that 'The outstanding feature of [the client's] attitude was their contempt, and often hostility. One man, more violently outspoken than most, said he would go with a prostitute even "if she had a face like the back of a bus. They are women without souls, hard as nails, obscene, they swear like troopers, nothing seems to offend them. I wonder if they are people or just bodies, robots'.<sup>46</sup>

This contempt lies in contrast to other accounts. Around 1904, Ethel Griffiths, a woman who had worked as a prostitute on the streets of Whitechapel for several years, turned to an occasional client, George Gamble, to help her when a police officer from H division tried to force her to go with him for a 'short time'. Gamble, in defending Griffiths, was beaten by the officer to the point of hospitalization.<sup>47</sup> It was Arthur Harding, meanwhile, who took the case to the press and brought it to the attention of the Royal Commission on the Duties of the Metropolitan Police. Marthe Watts also counted many 'kind friends' among her regular clients.<sup>48</sup>

It seems that prostitute women saw many of their relationships with clients with a measure of humour, or sometimes derision. In one massage parlour trial from 1916, 'Funny Socks', 'Goaty Beard' and '5 pound Man' were the names given to clients by the women who worked there.<sup>49</sup> 'Hurry up and get out... come on and put a spurt on', were the common thoughts of one

of Wilkinson's interviewees when she was with her clients.<sup>50</sup> One successful Bond Street woman felt that she had become 'something of a diplomat and something of a psychologist' toward her clients, while another felt that all men were 'babies and fussers'.<sup>51</sup> Watts noted with surprise the number of British men who were masochists or submissives, or who requested bondage: she was asked by many of her clients if she could 'tie them up and beat them', and one man would have her manicure her nails into points and scratch him until he bled. 'I was completely astonished at the number who appeared to like this sort of thing,' she wrote, 'for in Italy and Spain and even North Africa, I had never seen anybody who wanted this.'<sup>52</sup> This raises interesting questions about the cultural, as well as the temporal, contingency of the nature of purchased sex.

Some of the women whom Wilkinson interviewed held very derogatory attitudes toward certain clients, especially those who were married. 'Some men are swine;' one woman declared, 'they have the loveliest wives at home, yet they come up here and take a street girl.'<sup>53</sup> Similarly, others declared that they could not bear clients who spoke 'badly of [their] wives'. Many reported that clients frequently excused themselves by saying, 'my wife doesn't understand this sort of thing.' 'Priscilla' was suspicious of these excuses: 'Judging from them I wonder which one it is doesn't understand. They can be so dull!' she told Wilkinson.<sup>54</sup> Prostitute women were often disgusted by the secret lives, desires and hypocrisies of their 'respectable' clients, as well as their bodies: as one woman put it, 'if only people knew what you were like, you awful slimy toad, I think.'<sup>55</sup>

The naturalization of the male demand for commercial sex has meant that very little attention has been paid to the historically contingent nature of the motivations, desires and structures of male sex-buying, and the way that the male purchase of sex may have changed over time. Gilfoyle argues that many early nineteenth-century New York males saw commercial sex as 'an intrinsic part of urban masculinity and male sexuality', a perspective so pervasive that it could even undermine dominant discourses of respectability. By the 1930s, a 'new conception of male heterosexuality' had begun to marginalize the clients of commercial sex.<sup>56</sup> Similarly, Lesley Hall uses the letters written by men to Marie Stopes and similar records to argue that British male sexuality underwent significant changes during the interwar period, arguing that the war threw previous ideas about the romanticized prostitute into relief, and produced a new image of prostitution that was base, crude and dirty. While she herself admits that the increasing unwillingness on the part of (middle and upper-class) men to confess they went to prostitutes does not mean they had actually stopped going, it did 'point to a growing public sense of the lack of acceptability of male resort to prostitutes'.<sup>57</sup> Gail Hershatter, meanwhile, who examines prostitution in twentieth-century Shanghai, argues that an increasingly modern perspective on the relationship between prostitutes and their

clients helped to erode previously traditional forms of prostitution that placed an emphasis on sociability and saw a rise in more 'industrialized' or strictly sexual relations.<sup>58</sup> Some of these changes in the patterns of male sex-buying are discussed in the chapters which follow, but there is much we cannot know. As the former Chief Inspector of the City of London Police noted in a *New Statesmen and Nation* article on prostitution in 1947: 'How the clientele has changed, whether the number of "family men" who use the services of prostitution has greatly decreased, and what are the proportions of lonely visitors or servicemen, the extent to which prostitution now caters for perverts – those are the questions so far unanswered by any research.'<sup>59</sup>

Whatever the relationship between individual women who sold sex and the men who bought it, it is important to remember that the repression of prostitution affected the clients of prostitutes as well as the prostitutes themselves, and could also affect the way they related to one another, even if the men were not the subject of the criminal law. The consequences of criminalization were doubtlessly more serious for the women who were its subjects, but the commercial sex market – and state attempts to control or repress this market – entwined both the buyers and the sellers of sex, both men and women, in its complex social, economic and cultural structures.

# 3

## The Crusade Begins: The Criminal Law Amendment Act and London's 'Brothels' before the First World War

In a quiet Chelsea neighbourhood in 1885, a row of white cottages stood behind a bank of trees on the corner of Church Street and Elm Park Road. Number 125, the cottage on the corner, was the home of Mary Jeffries, who kept numbers 127 and 129, and another house farther up the street, as high-class houses of introduction where she arranged for young women to meet and provide sexual services for wealthy and influential men. The brothel specialized in 'perversions', though it is unclear precisely what these 'perversions' were: there was one allegation by a servant that Jeffries allowed a thirteen-year-old girl to be raped on the premises around 1874, but the brothel was best known for offering sadomasochistic services like whipping, caning and bondage (usually performed on the men by the women).<sup>1</sup> Jeffries, who was said to have been a former high-class prostitute herself, was in her seventies by this time and her long career in commercial sex had taught her to manage her houses carefully. Clients, who usually heard about the houses at West End gentlemen's clubs, wrote to request sex, and Jeffries arranged for one of the women or girls who worked for her to be brought to the house in a brougham from where they lived in houses that she also provided. The business was discreet and the service was expensive: clients left their payment of five pounds on the table of the house as they departed, and the cottages were connected by communicating doors.<sup>2</sup>

Jeffries's notoriety as the madam for London's most affluent gentlemen did not escape the notice of anti-vice organizations and the local vestry council, as reformers and journalists scoured London in search of operations like those that Josephine Butler and Alfred Dyer had exposed on the Continent. In April 1885, the Gospel Purity Association (of which Dyer and a prominent Chelsea vestryman, Benjamin Scott, were members) prosecuted Jeffries for keeping a bawdy house under the Disorderly Houses Act of 1751. The trial, which was sent to Quarter Sessions, was somewhat farcical, for the judge seemed just as concerned with preventing the witnesses from

uttering the names of Jeffries's clientele as with determining the validity of the charge. In the end, Jeffries was advised by her counsel – the famous Montagu Williams – to plead guilty, and avoided prison time in favour of a 200 pound fine and 800 pounds in sureties, which she promptly (and we might assume easily) found.<sup>3</sup> To make matters worse, a few weeks later, a man who ran an establishment that catered to far less consequential clientele was sentenced under the same Act and by the same judge to two years' imprisonment.<sup>4</sup> Jeffries's brothel – which had in part inspired William Stead's descriptions of 'Modern Babylon' – was seen as a glaring example of all that was terrible about prostitution: a site where powerful men exploited vulnerable women; an organized vice ring that enjoyed the patronage as well as the protection of the very Parliamentarians who were meant to be passing laws against it. At Mary Jeffries's brothel, pervasive class, gender and political inequities played out and were magnified by gross sexual immorality and perversion.

The idea of the 'brothel' was and remains one of the most powerful ways in which commercial sex is imagined; brothels have figured in popular culture for many centuries as sites of eroticized luxury, mystery and sensation, and continued to be depicted in this way in historical fiction and popular history.<sup>5</sup> In the late nineteenth century, the political campaigns of libertarians, feminists and religious moralists helped imbue the image of the brothel with more serious political and social significance. In Stead's and Dyer's accounts, and in the moral panic that they helped to engender, the brothel had some important and largely unwavering features. First and foremost, it was an inescapable labyrinth, a trap, a prison: 'the portals of the maze of London brotheldom,' wrote Stead, who borrowed heavily from Alfred Dyer's descriptions of Continental brothels, represented 'inextricable paths... out of which... nobody could get out of who was inside.'<sup>6</sup> This image was metaphorical, representing the irreversible nature of a woman's 'fall', but it also represented a physical space, a house that was large and maze-like, that was adapted for special purposes (for instance, soundproofing, doors that opened only from the outside, wall panels and secret entrances), and in which women would be forcibly confined.<sup>7</sup> The brothel was also understood as an entirely indoor space, where women waited passively for clients. In Dyer's account, the 'inmates [were] forbidden to appear alone in the streets'.<sup>8</sup> Brothel-keepers, cruel and deceitful, were imagined as part of a simplified and eroticized hierarchy within commercial sex.<sup>9</sup>

It was the image of these sorts of brothels which helped to catapult the floundering Criminal Law Amendment Bill into law. This bill included a subsection (13) that made provisions for summary proceedings against sites of off-street commercial sex. It stipulated that 'any person who keeps or manages or assists in the management of a brothel', or any person who, as a tenant or landlord, knowingly let their premises be used as a brothel, would be liable 'to a fine not exceeding £100 or to imprisonment for a term not

exceeding three months', and 'on a second or subsequent conviction, to a fine not exceeding £250 or to imprisonment...for a term not exceeding six months'.<sup>10</sup>

The Criminal Law Amendment Act's section against brothels was an attempt to rectify some of the shortcomings of the Disorderly Houses Act of 1751 and the inadequacies of parish and police policy surrounding its implementation, which the first trial of Mary Jeffries laid bare. The 1751 Act encouraged the prosecution of brothels only when they became a public nuisance in the neighbourhood, and relied upon the Vestry committee to instigate prosecution.<sup>11</sup> The Act also held that 'bawdy house' keeping was an indictable offence, meaning that trials were more expensive and slower to proceed, and it was more difficult to secure a conviction, which usually resulted in a fine: it is not surprising that overall prosecutions were low and that police operated a kind of *laissez-faire* system of brothel control.<sup>12</sup> While the Criminal Law Amendment Act's new provisions did not significantly raise the degree or chance of imprisonment on a first conviction, they did increase the power of concerned parties to prosecute more rapidly, cheaply and easily.

Depictions of exploitative brothels not only encouraged Parliament to pass the Act, but also helped fuel and justify a crusade against off-street commercial sex in the years after 1885. This crusade was made up of moral reform groups as well as residents and ratepayers in affected neighbourhoods, who put pressure on local councils and the police in order to make sure this section of the Act was enforced. Moral reform organizations, whose members often also held positions in municipal politics, saw themselves as the gatekeepers of real estate morality, and – because they were suspicious of the police's level of commitment to enforcing it – as responsible for ensuring that the new Act did not become a dead letter.<sup>13</sup> The most famous of these crusaders was Frederick Charrington of the National Vigilance Association, who in the late 1880s patrolled London searching for houses that might be home to ostensibly exploited women.<sup>14</sup>

In this atmosphere, prosecutions for brothel-keeping in London rose significantly in the first twenty years of the Act's operation, going from around seventy annually before 1885 to over 150 by 1890, almost 350 in 1900, and finally reaching a peak in 1904, which saw almost 871 prosecutions (see Figure A.1).<sup>15</sup> Unsurprisingly, Mary Jeffries was one of the first of these: when the new Bill became law, she was immediately re-targeted by anti-vice organizations and by the police force, who sensed the need to appear co-operative in this closely watched case. Jeffries was sentenced in November 1887 to six months' imprisonment.<sup>16</sup> She was suffering from diabetes, and William Stead – facing criminal charges himself for the kidnapping of Eliza Armstrong and perhaps increasingly aware of having created his own kind of Minotaur – admitted that her clients rather than she should

have been the crusader's chief targets and expressed fears that she would die in prison.<sup>17</sup>

As historian Stephan Petrow notes, the early years of the new legal system of brothel repression were marked with conflict and confusion as various authorities squabbled over who had responsibility for the implementation of the new law.<sup>18</sup> Police, for their part, were reluctant to act, arguing that prostitution in London did not operate in stereotypical brothels and that a crusade against off-street commercial sex was like 'displacing water'.<sup>19</sup> They were rather frank, at least among themselves, about their preference for de facto regulation through the tolerance of houses associated with prostitution so long as they caused no nuisance, and warned that repression would make these places more diffuse and harder to keep under surveillance.<sup>20</sup>

Local authorities, on the other hand, who police insisted should maintain responsibility for brothel prosecution, told the Home Office that they needed the help, evidence and legitimization of the police to prosecute successfully, and that the London brothel – now seen as inherently criminal – should be the natural business of the Met.<sup>21</sup> By the early 1890s, the police and the local authorities had begun to move toward a consensus, as Charles Warren (who had had a thorny relationship with the Home Secretary) was succeeded by the more affable James Monro and later Edward Bradford, and Home Office and Metropolitan Police relations improved.<sup>22</sup> At the same time as the administration was changing, 'social purity' organizations were becoming powerful advocacy groups for the repression of off-street commercial sex, including the London Council for the Promotion of Public Morality (later the Public Morality Council) in 1895, and the South London Free Church Council in 1899.<sup>23</sup> These organizations gained more political power as well, sharing more and more cross-membership with municipal councils.

Municipal government, for its part, was also changing. In 1889, the London County Council was established and staffed with a reform-minded administration. London was divided into Boroughs in 1899, and these new local authorities developed more consistent policies about brothels, which included forming 'watch' committees which had as their explicit aim the monitoring of vice – especially sexual vice – in their areas. By the turn of the century, police were also growing more willing to accept a role in the repression of brothels, and together they agreed upon a standard procedure: police would keep observation for a Borough Council, or occasionally an anti-vice group, that was planning a prosecution, and testify in court, but the Council or the moral reform organization would bear the expense and bother of the actual prosecution. By 1914, eighty-five per cent of cases brought to the attention of police for observation were brought by the local authority, while only twelve per cent were brought by the public, and only three per cent were brought by police themselves.<sup>24</sup>

Another matter of confusion and controversy was cleared up through case law. The Criminal Law Amendment Act, based as it was on the accepted cultural stereotypes of the brothel, had neglected to define the meaning of the word in the statute. The legal definition of the brothel was instead determined rather quietly in 1895, in the case of *Singleton v. Ellison*, when a woman (Ellison) was brought up on charges by the Borough of Preston for keeping a brothel. There was proof that she had received a number of men regularly, and that they had paid her for sex, but her case was dismissed on the grounds that 'a "brothel" is a place of resort for people of opposite sexes for immoral purposes, and is not a place where one woman receives men.'<sup>25</sup> This definition was simplified by the 1913 case of *Caldwell v. Leech*, which defined a brothel as 'a premises used by more than one woman for prostitution'.<sup>26</sup> These definitions moved far away from the older idea (enshrined in the Disorderly Houses Act of 1751) that a brothel was criminal when it caused a nuisance in a neighbourhood, and from the newer idea (found in the campaigns for the 1885 Criminal Law Amendment Act, if not the Act itself) that a brothel was criminal when it was a site of exploitation. By 1913, a series of judicial decisions had redefined the brothel – which had appeared so complicated and terrible in Stead's account – simply as an indoor space where more than one woman practised prostitution. What had begun as a crusade against exploitative prostitution functioned instead with the understanding that brothels were immoral and, by virtue of this immorality and nothing more, a public nuisance: no evidence of exploitation, or indeed of nuisance, was required for a successful prosecution. The sections of the Criminal Law Amendment Act which targeted brothels were by far the most employed of the Act's provisions against commercial sex. As brothel prosecutions rose into the hundreds, prosecutions of the Act's centrepiece law against 'procurement', the coercion and exploitation of innocent women by sexual traffickers, rarely reached over five per year.<sup>27</sup>

Likewise, the brothel presented in the sensational accounts of reformers and journalists is difficult to find in the records of the criminal justice system. While 'enclosed' brothels may have been common on the Continent, where systems of government-controlled prostitution made them their specific subject and regulated them accordingly, in London they were much rarer.<sup>28</sup> That being said, it is difficult for a historian to comment concretely on absences. It is impossible to claim that brothels such as those identified by Stead did not exist at all in London, and it is easy to imagine why the upper-class brothels he described – protected by Parliamentary and police corruption – would not have shown up in historical records generated by the criminal justice system.

Regardless of the number of stereotypical 'enclosed' brothels that did exist in the metropolis, they did not tend to come under the control of the criminal law, despite the fact that it was these sorts of places which had inspired



the law in the first place.<sup>29</sup> Instead, the Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1885 came down most heavily on small-scale, residential and female-owned houses that were rented to prostitutes in a variety of ways and for a variety of purposes, mainly as accommodation or as temporary or permanent places to have sex with clients who had been solicited on the street. From a sample of around ninety cases heard between 1885 and 1914 and reported on in the Police Court section of *The Times*, about seventy per cent of people prosecuted under the new Act were landlords, agents or residents of premises that served as places for street prostitutes to bring their clients.<sup>30</sup> Police referred to these places as 'short-time' houses and generally recognized them as the most common form of off-street commercial sex in London in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.<sup>31</sup> Oftentimes, the cost of the room was absorbed by the client.<sup>32</sup>

As Judith Walkowitz found in her case study of Plymouth and Southampton under the CD Acts, the largest group of people who were charged with brothel-keeping between 1885 and 1913 in London were single women, who represented fifty-five per cent of the cases from the Police Court reports and fifty-two to sixty-eight per cent of total convictions in London as reported in the Metropolitan Police statistics in the same period.<sup>33</sup> These women were on average younger than their male counterparts: sixty-eight per cent of women convicted between 1894 and 1913 (when they stopped reporting these details) were under forty years of age, and almost forty per cent were under thirty (only fifty-eight per cent of male brothel-keepers were under forty, by contrast, and only twenty-nine per cent were under thirty).<sup>34</sup> These women were usually renters themselves, who sublet rooms to prostitutes on either a permanent or a temporary basis and who collected rents and saw to the upkeep of the house on behalf of a landlord who owned several other properties.

Elizabeth Turner was one of these women, prosecuted along with her daughter and a servant woman for keeping a brothel at 46 Cumberland Street, Pimlico, in November 1885, just after the Criminal Law Amendment Act had come into effect. Turner was widowed and poor, and caught between an estate agent and a landlord who were happy to have their high rent collected no matter where it had come from. Turner claimed to have rented the rooms of her house to prostitutes when she could find no other suitable tenants. 'I am very sorry;' she told the Magistrate,

I have only been in the house since July last. I took it from Mr. Ingram, the agent, over the way, at the corner of Sussex-street. I laid out every farthing I had to furnish it, intending to take gentlemen lodgers only. I could not let the rooms, and Mr. Ingram then said I had better take in women. As the rent was 65 pounds besides heavy taxes, I was compelled to do something, and I took women in. The landlord, Mr. Mitchell,

knows perfectly well what I use the house for, and he always has his rent in advance. In fact I paid him a quarter's rent in advance only tonight.<sup>35</sup>

Single women proved vulnerable landladies in London's volatile rental and labour market, and they often found themselves unable to be selective regarding who their lodgers were to be. Like Turner, many of these landladies were under pressure from other landlords and agents who were more powerful players in London's real estate world.<sup>36</sup> Elizabeth Turner's case certainly challenges the stereotypical power relationship between brothel-keepers and prostitutes.

Formally married or cohabitating couples were also commonly featured in police court reports on brothel prosecutions, and constituted about twenty-five per cent of the sample. Occasionally the woman in question was described as a prostitute herself and it was intimated that the man was her pimp, while in other instances the couple clearly acted as landlords for prostitutes, and in some cases the husband and wife were brought up on charges of managing several houses in a given neighbourhood.<sup>37</sup> In many cases, as one defence solicitor argued for a couple so charged, these brothel-keepers 'were poor people, it was a poor neighbourhood, and they carried on their business as quietly as possible'.<sup>38</sup>

Another sizable proportion, twenty-three per cent, of people charged as brothel-keepers between 1885 and 1900 were single men. Some of these men were acting as landlords of 'short-time' houses, and in other cases the men in question had legal trades or kept small shops, cafés and restaurants, renting the upstairs of the shop to prostitute women for temporary or permanent use.<sup>39</sup> This was the arrangement that the woman known as 'Faithful Wedding' in Arthur Harding's recollections had with a man named Fiddler, who kept a shop in Spitalfields and who rented 'Faithful Wedding' the room above.

In another thirteen per cent of cases, groups of two or three women were charged with brothel-keeping, women who probably lived and worked together as prostitutes, soliciting on nearby streets and returning to the house with clients. This was the working arrangement at 8 Oxendon Street, which, like many of these houses, changed hands frequently as prostitute women, agents and landlords moved about London or farther afield, dodging the attention of the police. In January 1889, Rosalia Dorval was charged with keeping a brothel at this address, an unassuming house of stone and concrete which lay a few steps away from Coventry Street and the Circus. Dorval, who solicited in Piccadilly, lived in the house with two other women, an unnamed woman who, like Dorval, worked as a prostitute and a servant named Mary Vincent.<sup>40</sup> After the prosecution, the City of Westminster Council encouraged the police to maintain an observation on the premises, knowing that the absentee landlord would likely rent to another group of

prostitute women. Sure enough, just over a year later police found that the house was being used by a woman named Marguerite Bourcier, where she and another unknown woman lived and brought their clients. Bourcier was charged with brothel-keeping and the servant in the house, now one Sarah Baker, was also charged with 'assisting in the management of a brothel'.<sup>41</sup>

Despite these prosecutions, the landlady persisted in renting the house to prostitutes. In 1894, Otto Schapeiro, Emma Schniedeheh, Armanda Basen and a female servant whose name was not known occupied the house. 'The women Schniedeheh and Basen walk the street for their living in the vicinity of Coventry Street,' wrote the officer in charge of the observation, 'but during the period of special observation the former had not been since and it has been ascertained that she is spending a holiday in the country. Basen is the only woman seen to take men to the house and she always admits herself by means of a latch key.'<sup>42</sup> The women seemed free to come and go, and, if exploitation or coercion was going on at 8 Oxenden Street, the only people who were prosecuted for it were the supposed victims of the exploitation themselves. As Mary Gordon, the first female inspector of women's prisons, found of her many years experience, 'the better off class of brothel keeper seldom or never gets into prison at all...Almost the only brothel keepers who get into prison are those young girls who have a room of their own, which is called a brothel. Say two young girls, 17 and 18, one is arrested for keeping a brothel, and the other for assisting...I only know that the rich upper-class brothel keepers never come to prison at all. We never get a well-to-do brothel keeper'.<sup>43</sup>

It is very striking that in only one case out of ninety was a brothel-keeper reported to have coerced or imprisoned the women who worked in the brothel: in 1898 Suzan Mariotte, a forty-two-year-old French woman who kept a brothel in Portland Street, was found to have five young French women under her charge, whom she confined to the house and kept in a kind of debt bondage that was typical of Continental brothels: she would credit each girl with ten shillings each time she saw a man, but subtract from that exorbitant costs for food, wine, clothing and lodging. Mariotte was sentenced to six months' hard labour.<sup>44</sup>

Another example which presented a far more subtle picture of the way that London brothels – even high-class ones – worked was the Jeffries case itself. Nellie Thompson was twenty years of age when she worked for Jeffries over a period of two months, and was called as a hostile witness in her trial. Her account of working for Jeffries relayed no instance of coercion or abuse, and she testified to seeing around twelve to twenty men in the two months she had worked there, while living in a different house which was paid for by Jeffries.<sup>45</sup> At two pounds per man, Thompson had earned twenty-four to forty pounds in two months in 1885, meaning she earned about as much as the doctors, lawyers and politicians to whom she had sold sexual acts. At the time of the trial she had given up prostitution.

It was a similar story almost forty years later, when the sensational 1913 trial of Queenie Gerald revealed to Londoners that a high-class brothel was hidden, of all places, above the Piccadilly tube station. Queenie Gerald, a young woman herself, was convicted for keeping a brothel and for living off the earnings of prostitution. One seventeen-year-old girl who worked for Gerald told the court that she had met her in a Wardour Street café after she had begun working as a prostitute and that Gerald had proposed to split the profits of her prostitution with her in exchange for arranging significantly higher rates of pay. The girl told the court that Gerald had, upon learning of her desire to be a stage actress, secured her a part in a pantomime, for which she was rehearsing until she decided that she could earn more money working at the flat, to which she claimed to have returned voluntarily. She testified that Gerald had offered to get her 'honest employment if she would stick to it. She had no complaint to make about the way the prisoner had treated her'.<sup>46</sup> We can never know the extent to which such women's testimony was coerced or performative, of course, and in all of the cases the women were very young; but these trials do point to a very different relationship between the brothel-keeper and the prostitute than had been imagined by moral reformers.

London's off-street prostitution also challenged many stereotypes and theories that circulated about the way that commercial sex was situated in urban space. Frank Mort and Jerry White, in their portraits of London as it moved into the early and mid-twentieth century, argue that Soho became London's red light zone, for instance, while pervasive stereotypes (built perhaps upon the legacy of Jack the Ripper) continue to reiterate the East End as London's epicentre of late nineteenth-century prostitution. Philip Howell and Phil Hubbard, meanwhile, argue that the control of prostitution tends to result in its concentration in 'easily disciplinable' urban space.<sup>47</sup> However, while the highest concentration of such houses and flats in the last decades of the nineteenth century, like street prostitution, was to be found in London's West End, it was spread throughout Westminster, and not merely concentrated in the backstreets of Soho. Meanwhile, many sites of off-street commercial sex spilled well outside these well-recognized areas. Lodging houses that catered to prostitutes and their clients were scattered throughout the metropolis, but were concentrated in the East End and in Woolwich. Rooms above shops, such as the one to which 'Faithful Wedding' took Arthur Harding, were also to be found everywhere in London. Many women, like 'Faithful Wedding', mainly used flats and houses in the West End for work (where they also solicited), living – and perhaps occasionally working – out of accommodations all over London. Other places, like cafés, hotels and furnished rooms, were similarly scattered, but tended to cluster around docklands and railway stations.<sup>48</sup>

Police also noted that the crusade seemed to be pushing off-street prostitution into previously 'respectable' neighbourhoods; this may have

contributed to the rise in commercial sex in areas like Shepherd's Market and Paddington, though this was not remarked upon, as we shall see, until some years later.<sup>49</sup> Some police officers in the very early years of brothel repression also suggested that there was a brief rise in women working in the streets and in parklands, and particularly that there was a rise in indecency, that is, the use of these spaces as a site for sex as well as solicitation, but this, they explained, did not last long; women soon found new living and working arrangements.<sup>50</sup> There appears to have been widespread displacement of off-street commercial sex within and between neighbourhoods, but overall it displayed resilience to eradication.<sup>51</sup>

The most noticeable adaptation of prostitutes and brothel-keepers in the years immediately following the Criminal Law Amendment Act took advantage of the legal definition of a brothel outlined in the *Singleton v. Ellison* case. Since it was not illegal for an individual woman to work as a prostitute out of premises, this meant that if a woman rented a single flat that she (and only she) used then she could not be said to be managing or assisting in the management of a brothel. The 1885 Criminal Law Amendment Act also only held landlords responsible when they knowingly allowed premises to be used as a brothel and not if they were used, as the single woman might use them, for 'habitual prostitution'.<sup>52</sup>

This legal loophole coincided with development of West London mansion blocks which offered the occupiers stylish and central accommodation, well supplied with amenities and with the security of a single entrance that was usually watched over by a doorman. The Gloucester Mansions in Cambridge Circus was one such building. On the busy corner of Charing Cross Road and Shaftesbury Avenue, this typically neo-Georgian block of red-brick and stone flats was ideally situated, a short walk away from areas of street solicitation like Piccadilly Circus, Leicester Square and, of course, the newly built Shaftesbury Avenue, as well as Cambridge Circus itself. It had first come to the attention of the Commissioner of Police in 1897, when the Vestry of St Anne's complained about the building being used by prostitutes in the area.<sup>53</sup> By 1902, the Commissioner had received several more complaints from the newly formed Westminster City Council.<sup>54</sup> The Vine Street officers who fielded the complaints attributed the increase in the use of flats 'for immoral purposes' to the repression of brothels in the area, and were aware of the irony of the situation. 'Owing to the action taken by local authorities,' they wrote, 'brothels are fewer in this neighbourhood than in 1897, possibly leading to the more extensive use of their apartments by women of the prostitute class.'<sup>55</sup>

After extended police observation, it was discovered that local street prostitutes (many of whom did not live at the Gloucester Mansions) were taking their clients there, and that the building was owned by a landlord named John Roos and a male caretaker, Ema Wacher. Roos was rarely seen, but police noted that Wacher had everyday 'been seen to assist the men

and women arriving in cabs to alight, and afterwards take them upstairs in the lift, also to call cabs on the departure of the men'.<sup>56</sup> The first attempt to prosecute Roos and Wacher was unsuccessful, because the magistrate decided that a group of individual flats did not constitute a brothel, and the Gloucester Mansions and the men and women who lived and worked there continued relatively free from legal attention for three years until March 1906, when the Westminster City Watch Committee once again complained to the police, and Roos and Wacher were successfully prosecuted. A year later, another prosecution of a block of flats led to an expansion of the legal definition of a brothel. In 1907 the justices hearing the appeal of *Durose v. Wilson* held the porter of a block of flats liable for assisting in the management of a brothel on the grounds, that while the individual flats did not constitute a brothel, the entire building did.<sup>57</sup>

In the West End, larger multiple-dwelling buildings like these Mansions, administered by wealthy estate agents and landlords, began to replace the older style of houses with two or three bedrooms run by couples, single women, families and prostitutes themselves. This new form of off-street commercial sex also increased opportunities for third parties to profit from women's prostitution. Ema Wacher earned money beyond his salary as a doorkeeper, lift operator and bellboy by providing protection from police and charging an informal entrance fee, which also put him in a position of power over the women hoping to use the premises. 'I have frequently seen the man Wacher receive money from gentleman accompanying these prostitutes,' wrote one of the officers who kept observation on the building, 'and on the night of the fifteenth he refused to admit a prostitute who did not reside on the premises... a disturbance ensued and the girl said "you let me in last night", Wacher replied "yes, and neither you or [sic] the toff gave me anything for my trouble. I can stop any girl coming here who doesn't live here, and I'm not going to let any of you in here for nothing".'<sup>58</sup>

People like the Gloucester Mansions landlord John Roos, as well as the absentee landlady of 8 Oxenden Street, posed more of a problem in prosecutions than agents like Wacher. It was far easier to prosecute third parties and prostitutes directly associated with the premises rather than their landlords, who often kept themselves at a distance from the operation and could profess (sometimes truthfully) ignorance about what was going on there. Moral reform organizations regularly pressured their MPs and the Home Office in the decades following the Criminal Law Amendment Act to amend the law so that landlords and landladies would be liable when they knowingly rented to prostitutes through third parties, or when they rented premises for 'habitual prostitution' (the prostitution of a single woman) in addition to as a brothel.<sup>59</sup> These campaigns succeeded in part in the Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1912, another law ostensibly passed because of concerns about white slavery and exploitation, which made it illegal for a landlord to let his or her premises as a brothel (in other words to more than one woman)

but also 'for the purposes of habitual prostitution'.<sup>60</sup> It did not make it illegal for a person to sublet premises 'for the purposes of habitual prostitution': this loophole would prove very significant in the decades to follow.

This campaign against off-street commercial sex seemed more closely connected to stopping property owners from accruing financial profits from vice than with bringing an end to exploitation within brothels. This was particularly ironic considering the fact that the crusade against small off-street sites of commercial sex had contributed to a sharp rise in the amount of money landlords and estate agents could make from renting to prostitute women. As a climate of repression prevailed, landlords were able to charge prostitute women higher rents, on the grounds that their renting to them placed them under certain legal and police scrutiny, and with the knowledge that prostitutes could be lucrative subjects for extortion, earning on average more than other women and men working in legal trades. Charles Booth's investigators in 1898 found that, even in poorer areas like Pimlico, prostitutes paid rents that were high in proportion to the quality of the housing, where 'nothing [decent] could be found under 8/- to 10/- to 12/- [shillings] a week'.<sup>61</sup> Prostitutes, the police told investigators, 'ran up the rents'.<sup>62</sup> Even the introduction of rent control in 1915 would have had little impact on prostitutes who, rendered vulnerable by their criminalized status, would not dare to take a landlord to task over extortionate rents lest they find themselves prosecuted or evicted for running a brothel.<sup>63</sup>

The increasingly common tendency for landlords to charge prostitutes very high rents had other subsequent effects on the larger working-class communities and prostitute women's place within them. 'The local landlords had discovered... that renting their premises to a brothel keeper was more remunerative than renting to other workers,' concluded a Vestry of St Anne's enquiry into the matter in 1895. 'Our respectable workers are in many cases being literally driven out of house and home to make room for the traders in vice who can afford to pay exorbitant rents.'<sup>64</sup> In an age when rent levels were the subject of organized and vehement protest amongst the working-class community and working-class women in particular, prostitutes must have been heartily resented for driving up the rents.<sup>65</sup> In this indirect way, the laws against brothels, as Walkowitz found of the Contagious Diseases Acts, helped place the 'community toleration' of prostitutes in jeopardy.<sup>66</sup> Neighbours – encouraged by a general atmosphere of intolerance toward commercial sex – were also playing an increasingly important role in the identification, eviction and prosecution of women who used houses for prostitution.

Extortionate rents that were driven higher by the increasing criminalization of off-street commercial sex went hand in hand with frequent evictions. After 1885, many people who rented to prostitutes came to feel that the profits did not outweigh the risks. This was especially true of people who had children, because the 1881 Industrial Schools Act, and later the

1908 Children's Act, stipulated that children could be removed from their parents' custody if found to be living in a 'brothel' or habitually in the company of prostitutes.<sup>67</sup> Ironically, the people most inclined to evict prostitutes under threat of the new laws against brothels and the reprobation of neighbours were those who were least likely to be involved in large-scale organized vice: couples with children who took on a prostitute woman as a lodger, men with rooms above their shops who were not picky about their tenants. These 'brothel-keepers' probably got out of the business altogether in high numbers after 1885, making room for the less scrupulous.

The prosecution of organized landlords and subletters, meanwhile, could lead to their evicting the prostitutes to whom they were renting by order of the court. When the Gloucester Mansions case was successfully prosecuted in July 1906, Roos was ordered to evict the women who were living in the flats, and, upon reappearing and proving he had taken measures to do so, received a fine of fifty pounds and costs rather than jail time. Roos had also been forced to promise the court that he would now rent the mansions as office space and as bachelor dwellings.<sup>68</sup> It seems that popularly vilified brothel-keepers could expect leniency in the courts if they visited punishments upon prostitutes.

The concerns raised by MP Charles Hopwood during the first reading of the Criminal Law Amendment Bill in 1885 – that it would cause prostitutes to be 'chased about by the police' and to be 'at the mercy of their landlords and landladies, who would naturally charge increased rents' – seem to have been well founded.<sup>69</sup> 'Landlords are clearing the prostitutes out as fast as they can get rid of them,' wrote C Division officers after the successful prosecution of Roos, adding that police hoped that 'the Westminster City Council [would] continue this action against the various sets of mansions – all tenanted by prostitutes – which abound in this district and they will soon be all empty and the landlords will then be glad to accept a reasonable rental from a respectable tenant'.<sup>70</sup> But the celebration was, unsurprisingly, short-lived. 'The women who have been turned out of Gloucester mansions have gone to other flats, some I know on this subdivision,' a C Division officer later reported, 'and that in the usual practice with them, it is simply a matter of Police driving them from one place to another.'<sup>71</sup> While this bears testament, on the one hand, to the resilience of the off-street commercial sex industry in the face of concerted repression, on the other hand it suggests the remarkable degree of itinerancy and precarious living situations prostitutes must have faced in this period.

While flat prosecutions tended to affect high-earning prostitutes, it was also becoming difficult for some of the poorest prostitute women to find places to live and work when campaigners turned their attention to London's lodging houses. The connection between lodging houses and prostitution was twofold: 'doubles', lodging houses that allowed couples to rent the rooms, were frequently used by prostitute women as 'short-time'



places, while lodging houses that rented only to single women were thought to act as homes for a large number of prostitutes. In 1892, the newly formed London County Council brought its demands to Home Secretary Charles Thompson Ritchie, asking for more extensive powers to register, regulate and inspect common lodging houses on the grounds that they posed problems of sanitation as well as crime and immorality. By the end of the first decade of the twentieth century, registered doubles had disappeared.<sup>72</sup> In their wake, unregistered doubles flourished, where occupants' names went unrecorded and where informal supervision was also less likely: these doubles were able to stay open so long as they did not provide a communal living space and thereby avoided being technically considered lodging houses.

Concern over the single women's lodging houses, meanwhile, was not concentrated on their use as brothels so much as their use as accommodation by confirmed and suspected prostitutes. 'These lodging houses are allowed to be kept open all night,' according to Police Commissioner Bradford, 'with the result that money can be obtained by the women frequenting them, by immorality practiced with the other sex, in open spaces and side streets, during the dark hours of the night and early morning, as the women can return to the lodging houses at any hour they please.'<sup>73</sup> Suggestions to exclude women from lodging houses after a certain hour were not met warmly by all police officers. 'These wretched women must find shelter somewhere,' wrote the Superintendent of R Division, Woolwich.<sup>74</sup> But, by the early 1910s, several Superintendents reported that campaigns against prostitutes' lodging houses had been successful: some houses had since been converted to house families, men or 'respectable' women, and made a point of excluding prostitutes whether they were practising off-street prostitution on the premises or not, despite the fact that concern over women's homelessness was on the rise.<sup>75</sup> Prostitutes who had depended on lodging houses as both a home and a workspace came to rely more heavily on notoriously squalid and considerably less sociable furnished rooms, and on alleys and open outdoor spaces, not only as their workplace, but also as their night's shelter. In 1906, for instance, seventy per cent of women arrested for prostitution-related offences in Woolwich over a three-month period were so itinerant that they could not even provide lodging house addresses in order to be released on bail.<sup>76</sup>

In the face of the repression of 'short-time' houses, lodging houses and other small-scale sites for off-street prostitution, more and more people sought the cover of legitimate business rather than legal loopholes. By the mid-1890s, the guise of 'massage' was offering a way for off-street prostitution to operate clandestinely, relatively safe from prosecution under the Criminal Law Amendment Act. Advertising themselves loosely as genuine massage businesses, these establishments would gain the attention of men who were looking to buy sex and who would be given sexual services upon request.<sup>77</sup> According to C Division officers, who coped with the highest

concentration of such establishments (they were particularly popular in their early years on Jermyn Street in St James, Piccadilly), massage parlours used for prostitution were usually above shops, on second and third floors, and the entrance was typically via a side door.<sup>78</sup> Three or four women would usually work at the parlour. Though not as popular as massage, manicure, elocution lessons and electric baths were also used as a front for clandestine prostitution, as women began working entirely off the street in unprecedented numbers.<sup>79</sup>

The police reported several cases in which massage-parlour prostitutes had been previously known to solicit on the streets, and an opportunity to move away from street-based work into drier and warmer accommodation was probably welcomed by many women.<sup>80</sup> Other women may have been attracted to the wider range of sexual services that they could perform in a massage setting, and working in a building with two or three other women could also provide better protection against possible abuse and attack. Massage parlours had the potential to attract more desirable clients; 'The class of business done has little in common with that of the ordinary street walker,' police explained, 'the financial support being derived from the polite habitué rather than from the type of men who would succumb to solicitation in a public thoroughfare.'<sup>81</sup> The commercial sex that took place in these massage establishments was also often lucrative: Lily Meredith, who was caught offering sexual services in her establishment in Air Street by two private detectives (presumably hired by the municipality), was found to have made around £120 a month in 1900.<sup>82</sup> Another group of women were found with over £1,000 in their possession.<sup>83</sup> But massage parlours may also have increased the vulnerability of some prostitute women, and allowed third parties to isolate and control them, or at the very least to take the largest cut of the profits. One man who ran a massage parlour in the West End around the turn of the century earned more than 1,000 pounds a year from the premises, which was managed by one of the women; he himself lived in Kent.<sup>84</sup>

From the earliest appearances of massage parlours in the 1890s, the difficulty of prosecuting them became rapidly apparent. Because the premises were conducted as legitimate massage establishments on the surface, the police could not gather evidence without being 'agents provocateurs' and committing entrapment.<sup>85</sup> As the Police Commissioner explained in 1897, 'even at the worst of these houses a man would probably receive only legitimate massage treatment unless he made overtures to the female operators.'<sup>86</sup> Twenty years later, massage-parlour prostitution had become even more common. The new Criminal Law Amendment Act that was passed in late 1912 made some stronger stipulations against landlords who kept premises used for habitual prostitution, but did little to address the growing problem of clandestine prostitution.<sup>87</sup>

In 1915, spurred on by the 'urgency of the situation' during the First World War, the LCC was granted powers to inspect and license massage parlours.

Under these measures, the LCC functioned as a body independent from the police to license legitimate massage businesses and to inspect premises once licensed in order to make sure they maintained certain hygienic and moral standards, particularly that they were not used for 'any immoral purpose' or run by a person 'of bad character'.<sup>88</sup> Upon violation of a licence, the LCC could prosecute the offending party and seek a fine and, upon further offences, imprisonment penalties. These premises were not usually prosecuted as disorderly houses but rather for specific violations under the LCC Act, a common one being the locking of the door to the massage room or carrying on an unregistered massage parlour.<sup>89</sup>

In its reliance on a supposedly licit identity, massage-parlour prostitution (as well as prostitution that operated under 'manicure' and 'nursing' guises) called the legitimacy of actual massage parlours into question. It is not surprising, therefore, that these new powers to control off-street prostitution were brought about in no small part because of the lobby of the legitimate businesses under whose names off-street prostitution operated. Nurses in Marylebone sent a petition in support of the Bill, and the Incorporated Society of Trained Masseuses and the Chartered Society of Physiotherapy had supported the idea of registration since the 1890s.<sup>90</sup> The repression of off-street prostitution thus became tied to the legitimation of other sectors and businesses, in this case health and beauty professions. This form of off-street commercial sex continued to operate despite the risks, and, far from instigating a move underground and a separation from the rest of commercial life, the repression of off-street prostitution had, in this instance at least, actually served to entwine London's prostitution with other service industries in very complicated ways.

While the years immediately following the passing of the Criminal Law Amendment Act were characterized by confusion over whom and how to prosecute, it was not long before the new Act had translated into a whole-hearted crusade on the part of local councils, social purity organizations and the police against London's 'brothels'. These brothels were by and large 'short-time' places, where street prostitutes would take their clients, and the landlords who rented these rooms to prostitute women became the chief targets of the legislation. Soon, the commercial sex industry had adapted, and prostitutes began using individually rented flats, alongside the front of 'massage establishments', in order to continue to take clients off the street. As authorities struggled to respond to these new forms of prostitution, it was clear that an intense and long-lasting game of cat and mouse had begun. Meanwhile, increased attention to street prostitution raised new and complicated questions about the use of the metropolis's public spaces and the control of the people within it.

# 4

## Women in Public and Public Women: Controlling Street Prostitution 1887–1914

On a warm July evening in 1887, Elizabeth Cass, a young woman from the North who worked in London as a dressmaker's assistant, was walking down Regent Street, window-shopping for a new pair of gloves.<sup>1</sup> As she moved through the growing evening crowd, she was approached by a Metropolitan Police Officer, Police Constable Bowden Endacott, and told to her great dismay that she had been seen soliciting men for the purposes of prostitution, to their annoyance, and had been observed doing the same on several occasions that month. She protested: she was not doing nor had she done anything of the sort, but Endacott was not to be swayed by what was surely a familiar defence. He arrested Cass and she went quietly with him to the station, where her particulars were recorded before she was moved on to the Police Court cell to await a morning trial. Her employer, the dressmaker Mrs Bowman, posted her bail, and the next morning at the police court the magistrate Mr Newton chose not to convict her but gave her a stern warning: she was not to be doing this sort of thing again and, if she was respectable, she had no business speaking to gentlemen on Regent Street at that hour – or indeed any hour – in the first place.<sup>2</sup>

PC Endacott was probably disappointed at the outcome of Cass's short and perfunctory trial, but expected that to be the end of the affair. He was mistaken: upon returning home with the doubtlessly mortified Cass, Mrs Bowman promptly unleashed the full force of her influence as a successful middle-class businesswoman upon the Metropolitan Police and the Home Office, demanding that her respectable employee's name be cleared. Newspapers (including, of course, Stead's *Pall Mall Gazette*) and certain MPs were quick to take up her case.<sup>3</sup> Police Commissioner Charles Warren was left with little choice but to declare an official police inquiry into the matter.<sup>4</sup>

Predictably, the initial stages of the inquiry were concerned with determining whether or not Elizabeth Cass was a 'respectable' woman. Endacott claimed that he had seen her, alongside another known prostitute, soliciting

men. He had pursued the pair, but one had 'given him the slip'. He was sure that the other was identical to Cass; and there was a vague allegation that she had been up to no good in the North. Other witnesses vouched for the girl's irreproachable character, and still more attacked Endacott's 'respectability': he had got a girl 'in trouble' in Staverton some time back.<sup>5</sup> In the end, it was found that Cass was the respectable young working-class woman that she claimed to be and that the arrest was without merit. PC Bowden Endacott, likely much to his shock, found himself on trial at the Central Criminal Court on charges of perjury.<sup>6</sup> He was found not guilty because it could not be proven that it was wilful and not a simple case of mistaken identity. He was discharged from the police force.

The story of Elizabeth Cass has been cited by historians as both a catalyst and an illustrative example of far-reaching fin-de-siècle debates about women in public space.<sup>7</sup> Since the 1860s at least, the narrative of respectable women being mistaken for prostitutes or harassed on the streets had featured in public discourse, and by the 1880s these narratives were reinvigorated by the changing social demography of public space.<sup>8</sup> Chief among the newcomers were single young women, who moved into public spaces in unprecedented numbers as shop and food industry workers, as performers and audience members, and as 'shopping ladies': working and middle-class women who felt increasingly at home in spaces that had traditionally been male, disorderly, public and eroticized.<sup>9</sup> Bernhard Reiger and Martin Daunton, following Erika Rappaport, characterize these female forays into public West End space as 'attempts to gain legitimate access to public spaces that had previously been considered almost exclusively male realms'.<sup>10</sup> The wrongful arrest of Elizabeth Cass, and similar anecdotes from other women in public, prompted a retelling of the classic cautionary tale of 'being mistaken for a prostitute'. Having been used in the past to justify the cloistering and chaperonage of 'respectable' women, it was now mobilized for political, feminist and reformist aims.<sup>11</sup>

The Cass case, which represented the pinnacle of a series of cases and anecdotes about mistaken female identity on the streets, helped to redraw the lines between 'women in public' and 'public women' – prostitutes – and in so doing represented a key moment in the history of the policing of prostitution. For, even as feminists began to challenge men for their right to public space and question the narrative that held that only 'bad' women occupied these spaces, it became, somewhat ironically, all the more important to ensure that these women were not mistaken for prostitutes: not by 'male pests' (as men who harassed women in the street came to be dubbed) and certainly not by the police.<sup>12</sup> The occupation of public space by 'respectable' women, in other words, did little to overturn the division of 'good' women from 'bad': while it slowly narrowed the category of 'bad' women, it also reinforced it. In this way, the appearance of non-prostitute women in the evening streets of the West End did not just contest an 'almost exclusively

male realm': it had significant consequences for the contingent female space that had been occupied by 'unrespectable' women.

'The watchword with which we started, Liberty for Vice, Repression for Crime, is the only safe keynote for the Legislature in dealing with this question,' wrote William T. Stead in the final instalment of 'The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon' in 1885. 'The streets belong to the prostitute as much as to the Vestryman, and her right to walk there as long as she behaves herself ought to be defended to the last.'<sup>13</sup> Stead's impassioned declarations about the rights of prostitutes on the street reflected a pervasive libertarian sentiment typical of his age. However, new waves of anti-vice activism that swept the country in the 1880s placed prostitution at the forefront of the debates about the proper uses of public space.<sup>14</sup> For moral reformers, street prostitution was a glaring example of immorality and social dysfunction that, far worse even than brothels, confronted the ordinary Londoner as he or she walked in some of the metropolis's most famous and central streets.<sup>15</sup> William Stead's important distinction between 'liberty for vice' and 'repression for crime' was frequently lost on members of the public, and, in spite of, or even because of, the controversies that helped to shape the policing of street prostitution in this period, the overall trend was toward a policy of street prostitution control that was more efficient and more repressive. This was largely owing to the gradual, imperfect but important resolution of three key contentious issues: who prostitutes were; what it was about street prostitution that constituted a public nuisance; and how such people and actions should be policed.

There were two charges that could be used against street prostitutes in London in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The first, subsection 3 of the 1824 Vagrancy Act, stated that 'any common prostitute wandering in the public thoroughfares and behaving in a riotous or indecent manner' could be deemed an 'idle and disorderly person'.<sup>16</sup> This Act placed prostitution in the context of vagrancy, pauperism and public nuisance, and it was also the first time the term 'common prostitute' was used, as Helen Self has noted, 'to distinguish a group of women as separate and identifiable legal subjects'.<sup>17</sup> The penalty for being a 'riotous or indecent' common prostitute under this Act was either a fine of forty shillings or fourteen days' imprisonment with or without hard labour. The penalties could increase with subsequent offences, as the person moved up the classes of offence unique to the Vagrancy Act: from an 'idle and disorderly person' to a 'rogue and a vagabond' to an 'incorrigible rogue'.<sup>18</sup>

The Metropolitan Police Act of 1839, passed during the Peel reforms, contained a subsection (53) which also used the term 'common prostitute', and held 'any common prostitute loitering or soliciting for the purposes of prostitution to the annoyance of inhabitants or passengers' liable to a fine (without the possibility of imprisonment).<sup>19</sup> In keeping with trends for other petty crime, fining had, by the early twentieth century, become the primary

sentence for women convicted of prostitution-related offences, rising from about fifty per cent of sentences in 1900, to sixty-two per cent in 1906, to over seventy per cent in the 1910s and eighty per cent in the 1920s.<sup>20</sup> The Town Police Clauses Act of 1847, applicable to areas outside London, was very similar in wording except that it applied the term 'nightwalker' as well as 'common prostitute', and also imposed a possible imprisonment sentence.<sup>21</sup> These laws were often referred to as 'the solicitation laws', and formed the framework of the system of prostitution control in England and Wales.

The solicitation laws all relied on the idea that a common prostitute was a legally definable person and, while prostitution itself was not an offence, that the action of street solicitation represented a special kind of public nuisance. The laws required that the prosecutor (almost always the police officer who arrested the woman) prove that the woman who was charged with 'loitering or soliciting for the purposes of prostitution to the annoyance of' or with 'behaving in a riotous or indecent manner' was a 'common prostitute'. The laws also placed the crime of solicitation in a larger canon of laws addressing order in the streets, and all three clearly stipulated that the woman in question had to be doing something that threatened the public peace in addition to soliciting.

The solicitation laws did not specify who 'common prostitutes' were, nor the definition of 'prostitute' at all, but they did specify that a 'common prostitute' must be a woman.<sup>22</sup> In the same manner as the Contagious Diseases Acts, therefore, the solicitation laws enshrined a double standard of sexual morality, yet, in order for them to function properly, they needed not only to separate men from women but also to identify certain kinds of women. Those who administered solicitation law were therefore concerned with how to determine prostitute identity and how to define prostitute behaviour as different from that of other women. When the laws against solicitation were first conceived, the line between the 'good' and the 'bad' woman, the 'respectable' and the 'unrespectable', was somewhat easier to determine and rested to a great extent on the person in question's presence, dress and behaviour in public space.<sup>23</sup> By the late nineteenth century, these lines came to be increasingly blurred as women from different classes began to occupy public spaces to an unprecedented degree and as prostitutes themselves adapted their work tactics in response to police action.

For the London police in 1887, who had collectively raised the money to pay for his perjury trial, Endacott's fate made a situation that had been frustrating nearly untenable. On the one hand they were lambasted for the wrongful arrest of women; on the other they were attacked for not clearing the streets of prostitutes. Alongside cutting analysis of the Cass scandal, newspapers like the *Pall Mall Gazette* were ever keen to publish accusations of police bribery, abuse and corruption in the control of prostitution.<sup>24</sup> Police Commissioner Charles Warren, caught between social purity

campaigners, feminists, libertarians and the Home Office, as well as his own police force, responded by issuing orders, unapproved by Home Secretary Herbert Samuel, which played directly upon the volatile question of the identity of prostitute women, how the legal control of prostitution hinged upon this identity, and the debate over solicitation as public nuisance. The unconventional orders read:

Police are [not] justified in calling any woman a common prostitute, unless she so describes herself, or has been convicted as such...a Police Constable, while admitting that the metropolitan district contains common prostitutes, should not assume that any particular woman is a common prostitute, though he may be perfectly convinced in his own mind that she is such...a Constable should not, himself, charge any woman for solicitation, but should only arrest when she is formally charged by the person annoyed or solicited, or by some inhabitant or passenger who can prove the annoyance.<sup>25</sup>

While Warren's short career as Police Commissioner was soon to draw to a close, his police order – and the controversies about street prostitution it reflected – outlasted him.<sup>26</sup> Over the next couple of decades, policies surrounding the policing of solicitation were in disarray. Police complained that the need to heed the annoyance clause resulted in making the entire solicitation law a 'dead letter', and routinely expressed their frustration over what they saw as hypocritical public opinion: demanding rights on the one hand, and repression on the other. The Met's solicitors J.J. Wotner and Sons, meanwhile, cautioned against stretching the law against prostitutes lest they be challenged on appeal, or another scandal arise.<sup>27</sup> Magistrates at the Police Court were also more cautious, and more frequently – though certainly not always – refused to convict on police evidence of annoyance alone.<sup>28</sup> Unsurprisingly, police attitudes were reflected in the records of arrests, which fell in London after 1887 and remained low for most of the 1890s (see Figure A.1).<sup>29</sup>

Nonetheless, by the last years of the nineteenth century, some of the issues surrounding prostitute identity and the question of indecency and annoyance began to be resolved, in an atmosphere of increased public concern and public pressure about 'the state of the streets', in which social purity organizations like the South London Free Church Council and the London Council for the Promotion of Public Morality played a large role.<sup>30</sup> These groups, alongside the newly formed and increasingly vocal Borough Councils and the London County Council (LCC), put more pressure upon the police to act against street prostitution. Amid the ever-increasing power of municipal government, and in an atmosphere in which public morality and public order were increasingly synonymous, police were pressured to act against street prostitution.<sup>31</sup>



The control of street prostitution in London also benefited from changes in the administration of the Metropolitan Police. While Commissioner Edward Bradford inherited the crises of his two short-lived predecessors, Warren and Monro, by the end of his lengthy tenure (from 1890 to 1903) he had developed a stronger and more consistent stance against street prostitution and arrest rates had begun to rise.<sup>32</sup> It was the long commissioner-ship of Edward Henry (from 1903 until 1918) that was the most influential: his talent for administration and passion for criminal record-keeping would have a significant and far-reaching effect on the way the criminal justice system dealt with prostitutes.<sup>33</sup>

One of the most important policy changes during Bradford and Henry's commissionerships was an unwritten one: a relaxation in the nature and quantity of evidence needed to prove that a woman's solicitation was to the annoyance of inhabitants or passengers, or that it was riotous or indecent. Historian Stefan Petrow has claimed that the policing of solicitation was severely hampered throughout the whole 1870–1914 period because magistrates refused to overlook the need to prove the annoyance clause, and that as a result the policing of street prostitution was usually tentative and 'passive'.<sup>34</sup> But, while it is true that several official attempts to remove the annoyance clause in Parliament failed, this did not mean that unofficial or *de facto* attempts to disregard the clause were equally unsuccessful.<sup>35</sup> While the situation Petrow describes may indeed have been the case for most of the late 1880s and early 1890s, from the mid-1890s to 1914 arrest rates recovered and remained high and (with the exception of the year of the Royal Commission in 1906) relatively stable for the period leading up to the First World War.

The conviction rate climbed to over eighty per cent by the 1900s as well, and these convictions were almost all secured without any evidence given by the parties annoyed. The 1906 Royal Commission found that fewer than one per cent of the total convictions during the previous three years involved the evidence from an annoyed person. Contrary to Petrow's observations, and even contrary to the complaints of the police force, magistrates seemed perfectly content to convict the other ninety-nine per cent, some 3,500 cases a year, on police evidence alone.<sup>36</sup>

These statistics suggest that a frustrated police force may have in fact exaggerated the degree of difficulty they had in prosecuting prostitutes, inspired perhaps by their intense dislike of the duty and their anger over PC Endacott's criminal trial and subsequent dismissal. Police estimated that there were about 10,000 prostitutes in London around the turn of the century, and between 1899 and 1901 they arrested women under charges for solicitation offences 12,345 times.<sup>37</sup> While this does suggest that police were not arresting (indeed would surely have not been able to arrest) every street prostitute they saw, and perhaps were employing a kind of rota arrest system in order to deal with these limitations, over 12,000

individual arrests in three years can hardly be characterized as a 'tentative' or 'passive' kind of policing. In addition, the police frequently used charges of indecency against prostitute women who engaged in sex acts with clients outside, and, as we shall see, were very likely also employing another section of the Metropolitan Police Act – one designed to address conduct that breached the peace – to arrest women whose identities as prostitutes had yet to be firmly determined. These practices created large dark figures for the number of prostitute women who were successfully prosecuted.<sup>38</sup>

Accompanying the lax interpretation of the offence of 'annoyance' or 'indecency' was a disorganized and highly discretionary use of the two solicitation laws. In C Division, ninety-nine per cent of the charges laid in cases of solicitation around the turn of the century were preferred under the 1824 Vagrancy Act, which addressed 'any common prostitute behaving in a riotous or indecent manner', while seventy-eight per cent of the charges laid in D Division in the same years were under the 1839 Metropolitan Police Act ('any common prostitute soliciting for the purposes of prostitution to the annoyance of inhabitants or passengers').<sup>39</sup> Because we can assume that this significant difference in procedure did not reflect the behaviour of the women (i.e., it is unlikely that every prostitute south of Oxford Street was more riotous or indecent than her northern counterparts), this indicates that the decision regarding which Act to use was a matter of police discretion, and it is very likely that police decisions about which Act they used had a lot to do with the opinions of the magistrates who sat at the corresponding Police Courts: G.L. Denman, for instance, ensconced at Marlborough Street, did not require extensive proof of indecency to convict under the Vagrancy Act, and accepted evidence of women taking men's arms in the street as 'indecency'.<sup>40</sup> Police attitudes, and the interchangeable nature of the two Acts, were also reflected in the official statistical reference in the *Annual Reports of the Metropolitan Police Commissioner*, which recorded arrests for 'prostitution', even though this was a non-existent offence. These attitudes, in tandem with anti-vice activism, helped to position solicitation itself as an intrinsic public nuisance.

The difficult question, then, was what distinguished women who sold sex, 'common prostitutes', from other women who waited for omnibuses, stood and watched the bustle of Regent Street, or socialized in Piccadilly Circus after the theatres had let out. The fact that real proof of a breach of public peace was now rarely required lent by extension significantly more importance to the other key feature of the solicitation statutes: that a woman soliciting had first to be identified as a 'common prostitute'. Had the police been able to prove that Cass was indeed a 'common prostitute', for instance, the question of what she had been doing – whether she had been buying gloves or whether she had been annoying men by soliciting them – would never have been asked. But how was this to be achieved?

Initially, the system of cautioning suspected prostitutes prior to their arrest grew out of the scandals of the 1880s, as a way to protect police constables from sharing PC Bowden Endacott's fate. By the turn of the century, the general police orders instructed officers who saw a woman they suspected of being a prostitute to formally warn or caution her once before they could arrest her. They were then required to write her name down in their police notebook – an indispensable pad of paper that all officers kept on their persons. When Edward Henry became police commissioner, he encouraged his Superintendents to pay particular attention to the cautioning orders and '... the importance of... systematizing the record to be kept of cautions given'.<sup>41</sup> While the implementation of the cautioning system still functioned to protect police officers in their 'delicate duty', it also became a way to establish the prostitute identity of a woman outside court before she attended court for the first time. With a systematized record of cautions, Henry's police force could be more confident in the arrests they made. Police constables were also reminded that 'in the case of known prostitutes who have been convicted of solicitation a caution is not necessary'.<sup>42</sup>

It was the successful establishment of prostitute identity that saw another street prostitution-related scandal in 1906 end so differently from the Cass case. Eva D'Angeley was a French woman who had been arrested in Piccadilly and who defended herself by claiming that she had not been soliciting but, rather, waiting for her husband, and had inquired the time of a man who had passed her. The D'Angeley case, picked up by the newspapers, served as one of the key catalysts for the establishment of the Royal Commission on the Duties of the Metropolitan Police, which subsequently sought out more cases of potential wrongful arrest, police harassment, abuse and bribery, and made the policing of street prostitution a special area of interest. In all the prostitution-related cases it examined save one, the Commission was primarily concerned with establishing the woman's identity as a prostitute rather than assessing her actions and whether or not they should have come to the attention of police. For instance, when it was proven relatively conclusively that D'Angeley had been working as a prostitute in Paris and later in London, the Commission concluded that the constables had acted properly and that she was 'guilty of solicitation for the purpose of prostitution'. This conclusion contained an interesting error, because – as the Commissioner himself had previously asserted – according to the law, solicitation for the purpose of prostitution was not an offence without evidence of a further breach of the peace.<sup>43</sup> Eva D'Angeley, unlike Elizabeth Cass, was obviously a prostitute, so this legal point went overlooked.

The Commission was similarly dismissive of the finer points of the law in the case of 'Mr Y', who chose to testify anonymously about an incident in which the police had arrested two of his female companions with whom he had been walking arm in arm in Piccadilly. Mr Y, who told the Commission that he had arranged to meet the women there and had not been annoyed

by them, also testified that, when the two women were brought to the station, 'they were charged with being common prostitutes, and nothing else, so far as he could remember.'<sup>44</sup> According to their charge sheets, the women were in fact charged under the 1824 Vagrancy Act but tried under the 1839 Metropolitan Police Act, suggesting once again just how interchangeable the two Acts could be and hence how unimportant the discrete case of 'annoyance' or 'indecent or riotous conduct' really was. Despite the fact that the Commission concluded that Mr Y gave his evidence credibly, they determined that the women were in fact prostitutes and therefore guilty of the offence. The Commission concluded that 'the constables may have made a mistake' in thinking the women were annoying Mr Y, but, in light of the fact that they were indeed prostitutes, this, in the words of the Commissioner, was 'not strictly material'.<sup>45</sup>

Another case of police harassment involved the direct testimony of a self-professed prostitute, Ethel Griffiths, who had witnessed a brutal attack on her acquaintance and occasional client George Gamble by one PC Ashford after she had refused the officer's demand for her to go with him for a 'short time'. The attack was instigated when Gamble approached Ashford and asked him to leave Griffiths alone. According to numerous witnesses, Ashford had beaten Gamble brutally, kicking him repeatedly in the head and genitals, and putting him in hospital for over a month with a ruptured urethra.<sup>46</sup> Alongside the neighbours who had hung out of their windows or rushed to the street to intervene, Griffiths was naturally a key witness to the attack, and she gave her testimony, by the admission of the Commission, 'consistently'. However, the Commission remarked that 'she had taken to the streets and ... therefore cannot be described as a person of good character'.<sup>47</sup> Despite the overwhelming evidence against Ashford, he was never prosecuted.

The Royal Commission on the Duties of the Metropolitan Police absolved the force of any widespread corruption and misconduct surrounding the policing of prostitution and public policing more generally, while predictably conceding the presence of a few 'black sheep'. It also helped to lay down a framework whereby police could effectively repress street prostitution while at the same time avoiding scandals of wrongful arrest. If they ensured that they could adequately prove that the woman in question was a prostitute before they arrested her, they could almost guarantee that they would not be liable to public scrutiny for wrongful arrest. The way that the solicitation laws functioned by relying on the *de facto* registration of prostitute women can be interpreted as a kind of regulation, in that it enabled officers to subject the women to special regulations to which no other women – and no men – could be subject.<sup>48</sup>

That being said, this informal register of prostitutes did not translate into spatial regulation, as some historians have found of other periods and areas where prostitution was successfully quarantined into easily supervised and often marginal urban spaces.<sup>49</sup> In London there is no evidence to suggest

that police were in control – official or unofficial – of street prostitution to any such extent. As Commissioner Bradford observed in a police memorandum regarding complaints from Westminster City Council, ‘The trouble is not confined to Piccadilly and its neighbourhood as it arises in every populous part of the Metropolitan Police District, for example, Tottenham Court Road, King’s Cross, Euston Road, the vicinity of Victoria, South Kensington, Earl’s Court, Brixton, etc. The difference is only one of class and of degree, although some of all classes of public women may be found in many of these places, the preponderating character varies with the general social condition of the district.’<sup>50</sup> To make matters worse, prostitute women, while aware of the police districts that served as a kind of administrative overlay for the social and consumer spaces and streets which they walked, were not hemmed in by them as beat officers were, and areas known for prostitution frequently existed at the borders of police district boundaries, enabling women to cross back and forth to different Divisions to avoid arrest. These discrete activities confounded the identification of individual women, and, when taken as a whole, made street prostitution difficult to spatially describe and circumscribe.

Its subtleties and fuzzy borders notwithstanding, the West End of London was the epicentre of commercial sex in the metropolis in the decades after 1885<sup>51</sup> (see [Map 2](#)). The area was patrolled by C Division officers, whose Division covered just under one square mile of metropolitan space. Hyde Park (Park Lane) formed the Division’s western border, and it stretched as far as Charing Cross Road in the East. To the North, the Division’s boundary lay along Oxford Street, and to the South it ran along Piccadilly, dropping farther south to Pall Mall, thereby encompassing St James, the Haymarket and Leicester Square. C Division experienced the highest number of arrests under the solicitation laws in the metropolis: between fifteen and twenty per cent of all metropolitan arrests occurred in this small district annually in the years before the First World War.<sup>52</sup> While this was due in part to the fact that this area was the most densely policed, it was also reflective of the amount of street prostitution occurring there (indeed, this was one of the reasons for the large number of police officers).<sup>53</sup>

The majority of the solicitation that happened in C Division was further concentrated still, centred on Piccadilly Circus and the streets surrounding it: the lower part of Regent Street, Glasshouse Street, Denman Street, Coventry Street and, after it was built in 1885, Shaftesbury Avenue. A fair amount of solicitation also occurred in Leicester Square, where prostitute women worked the balconies and promenades of music halls like the Empire and the Alhambra. In this district, the connections between commercial sex and the entertainment industry ensured that street prostitutes would find a steady and fairly high-paying stream of customers amongst the cafés, restaurants, music halls, theatres and nightclubs that drew pleasure-seekers to the area.

This dense collection of streets at the heart of the metropolis formed a network of beats for prostitute women, as they patrolled, for instance, the circle of Piccadilly, Shaftesbury Avenue, Great Windmill Street, Brewer Street and Glasshouse Street, stopping at pubs, cafés and restaurants (such as the famous Café D'Europe) for refreshment or custom along the way; or moved between the Circus and Leicester Square via Coventry Street, stopping at the music halls for customers or to see an act before making their way to Lisle Street and back onto Shaftesbury Avenue en route to Piccadilly Circus. Each woman had her preferred beat, which they felt maximized custom, avoided conflict with some women and kept good company with others, and, most importantly, confounded police in their attempts to observe and arrest them.<sup>54</sup>

Prostitution in this area was considered fairly high-class. It is important to note here that, while present-day ideas about prostitution paint street solicitation as the 'lowest', most degraded and meanest form of prostitution, there was no such assumption made by the police or the public in London in the era roughly before the Second World War. Indeed, it was recognized that almost all solicitation happened on the street and the 'class' of prostitution in any given area was determined by the general age and physical characteristics of the women, the prices they charged, the kinds of men they accepted and where they took their clients to have sex (i.e., whether they had rooms or temporary accommodation, or if they went outside). These economic gradations of prostitution were subtle, and could change from one street to another. While women in Piccadilly Circus were associated with relatively high-class street prostitution, for instance, the streets behind it in Soho, such as Brewer Street and Lisle Street, were known as areas where older and cheaper prostitute women tended to gather.<sup>55</sup>

Piccadilly, with its surrounding area, was challenged only by its northern neighbour for its place as the most popular site of street solicitation. The area, known as North Soho (dubbed Fitzrovia after Fitzroy Square in the 1960s), was the purview of the Metropolitan Police's D Division, which bordered C Division to the south at Oxford Street, and – being quite a lot larger than C Division – stretched west as far as Edgware Road. Its northern border began at St John's Wood and followed the southern contour of Regent's Park (which was policed by Royal Park authorities), continuing on along Euston Road until it reached Tavistock Square, which marked its eastern border.

Though it had only half the policing power of C Division, D Division still accounted for around fourteen per cent of annual solicitation arrests before World War I (see [Map 2](#)). The vast majority of these charges were laid at Tottenham Court Road Station: this thoroughfare and its side streets were filled with pubs, restaurants and cafés that provided an ideal marketplace for people involved in street-based commercial sex.<sup>56</sup>

Aside from its associations with leisure and entertainment, prostitution in D Division was also intimately connected to its relative proximity to

several of London's hubs of transportation. Near this district could be found five major rail terminuses: Paddington, Marylebone, Euston, St Pancras and King's Cross stations. This meant that the area saw a steady stream of male commuters who would arrive in central London, often without family or spouses, for business and for pleasure. For example, the area to the south of Euston Station that fell within D Division boasted dozens of inexpensive travellers' hotels and boarding houses, many of which were known to be used by prostitutes. The problem of street prostitution associated with the northern rail termini was also shared by E Division officers, and this Division, which bordered Euston, St Pancras and King's Cross Stations and comprised Holborn and Bloomsbury, contributed annually to about six per cent of solicitation arrests before 1914: solicitation here was considered low-class and was concentrated most heavily at the top of Gray's Inn Road.

Hyde Park was another area known for solicitation, and A Division officers were kept busy by women who waited for clients on the benches and main roads of the park, and who performed sex acts in its darker pathways (see [Map 2](#)). Arrests for solicitation in Hyde Park were somewhat lower than one might expect around the turn of the century, accounting only for fewer than five per cent of total metropolitan arrests. This may be due to the fact that police used Parks Regulations and laws against indecency as much as solicitation laws to clear the area of prostitute women, but it probably also reflects the fact that the Park was not an extremely popular place for solicitation before the First World War. The women who worked in Hyde Park – scattered by the occasional mass demonstration – catered to a large range of clients, from soldiers stationed at the Kensington Barracks to middle and upper-class men who liked the anonymity and darkness to be found amongst the park's shrubbery: Hyde Park reported the highest number of incidents of public indecency in the city, which, despite sharing the space with a significant minority of homosexual offenders, consisted of, police explained, mostly prostitutes with their clients.<sup>57</sup>

A Division also covered the area surrounding Victoria Station, which was known as a site of solicitation. Nearby Pimlico, meanwhile, was a popular place for prostitute women to live, and, though they rarely worked there, the area was known to have some lodging houses and furnished rooms that were used as brothels. The areas on the other side of the river were administered by L (Lambeth) and M (Southwark) Divisions, and, while their jurisdictions stretched far into the southern outskirts of London, their combined eight per cent of total metropolitan arrests occurred almost entirely in the Waterloo vicinity.<sup>58</sup>

Other areas in the west of London that were relatively well known for street solicitation around the turn of the century included Notting Dale (in X Division, Kilburn) and Shepherd's Bush and Earl's Court in Hammersmith and Fulham (T Division), which each contributed five per cent of solicitation arrests annually. Notting Dale's prostitution, like its residents in general,

was considered very low-class, and women made extensive use of the cheap lodging houses and unregistered 'doubles' in the area.<sup>59</sup> South and North Fulham's relatively high amounts of prostitution, meanwhile, owed a great deal to the popular American exhibition that opened in Earl's Court in 1887, and the Great Wheel that followed there in 1894. It was not just in the West End that entertainment and leisure were married to a robust trade in sex: 'The worst,' one police constable told Booth, 'was during the run of "Nero" and its ballet at Earl's Court.'<sup>60</sup> Just as the opening of new entertainment areas could encourage geographic changes in commercial sex, so too could a closure or a fall in popularity. When the Great Wheel was no longer such an attractive novelty, the epicentre of Hammersmith and Fulham's commercial sex trade shifted to Shepherd's Bush, where the White City had just opened, and the Olympics and Japan–British Exhibition were soon held.<sup>61</sup>

The East End, meanwhile, was more of a home than a workspace to prostitute women, and the area accounted for only three per cent of metropolitan arrests around the turn of the century<sup>62</sup> (see [Map 2](#)). This part of London was policed by H Division, which bordered the City to the west and stretched east to Limehouse, with the river to the south and Bethnal Green Road to the north, and included much of the East End: Whitechapel, Shoreditch, Shadwell, Spitalfields and Stepney. Many of the women living in the East End would commute to the West End in the evenings to work, returning to their rooms and houses by foot late at night or, if they could afford it, in hansom cabs (as Faithful Wedding did in Arthur Harding's memoir). According to Arthur Harding, police officers in the East End were notoriously corrupt, and this may have partly accounted for the low number of arrests – though not low levels of mistreatment – of prostitute women.<sup>63</sup> Some H Division officers, in other words, may have been more successful than PC Ashford in getting prostitute women to trade sex for freedom from arrest.<sup>64</sup>

Police corruption cannot possibly account entirely for such a remarkably low arrest rate, and it appears that levels of prostitution in the East End have been markedly exaggerated by contemporaries and by historians. The infamy of the 'Whitechapel' murders may have encouraged people to associate the East End with prostitution after 1888, but the majority of it still took place in other areas of the city. The women who did solicit around Whitechapel between 1885 and 1914 were probably older women or women who worked only casually as prostitutes, earning their lodging house 'doss' money (as some of the victims of Jack the Ripper had) through occasional prostitution with the sailors, soldiers and casual labourers who lived in or frequented the East End.

Further to the East, street prostitution could be found in Poplar and along the East and West India Docks, as well as in Bow and to the north in Bethnal Green. It was in Woolwich that it happened in the most striking numbers, and this police division (R) accounted for around eight per cent of all the solicitation arrests in London<sup>65</sup> (see [Map 2](#)). In Booth's investigations



around the turn of the century, the slum areas known as 'The Dustbowl' and 'Ropeyard Rails' were home to a high number of low-earning prostitutes who sold sex to low-earning soldiers and sailors, and a place where 'bullies' (often former soldiers themselves) also dominated the commercial sex scene. Some women solicited in notorious coffee shops, the local officers told Booth's investigators, but most of the prostitution was conducted outside.<sup>66</sup> Some of the women who sold sex in the vicinity lived in single women's lodging houses, but many were homeless.

Woolwich to the east was joined by Clapham in the south of London (W Division), where another eight per cent of arrests occurred. The majority of street prostitution in this district took place in the vicinity of Brixton, Balham and Clapham stations, all of which were near Clapham Common, a well-known site for 'low-class' prostitution.<sup>67</sup> Many prostitutes also lived in this area, where 'notorious' women's common lodging houses, pawnbrokers and rough public houses made the streets 'an awkward place for a stranger at night'.<sup>68</sup> Around the turn of the century, according to Booth's investigator's police escort, there was 'no strong feeling against [prostitutes] in [streets] like this'.<sup>69</sup> The community toleration of prostitutes in this area of South London had not yet suffered too greatly from anti-prostitution crusades.

The remaining areas of London had relatively low concentrations of prostitution, but barely any were entirely without it, which helps to demonstrate that street prostitution was by no means only happening in one quarantined zone in this period (see [Map 2](#)). In the absence of any red light zone, it becomes very difficult indeed to characterize the nature of London street prostitution and the kinds of experiences women had while selling sex. A woman working in Piccadilly Circus around 1900 had an entirely different clientele, different finances, and different living and working arrangements than a woman working at Ropeyard Rails far to the East; not to mention the fact that two women who worked side by side in Piccadilly may not have had the same experiences of selling sex. But one point of commonality was on the rise: their experiences of criminalization.

Arrests of street prostitutes had always been high, and in the 1870s often reached over 6,000 a year. These statistics are unreliable, however: some police stations included arrests for 'drunk and disorderly' if they believed the woman involved was a prostitute, and more generally there was no attempt to systematize or standardize the records either of arrest or conviction, especially before 1893.<sup>70</sup> Nonetheless, it is possible to see that arrests had dropped significantly during the years after the arrest of Elizabeth Cass. After 1893, things began to improve, and we can get a clearer picture of the real number of solicitation-related arrests, which climbed in the mid-1890s and remained high until the First World War, between which times 4,000–5,000 arrests were made annually.<sup>71</sup> While recidivism rates are not available for all these years, some records suggest that a woman would be arrested on average around three times per annum, meaning that the 4,000–5,000

arrests affected from 1,500 to 3,500 women (some of whom were arrested as many as twenty times in a year and others only once).<sup>72</sup> Women were not only more frequently arrested but were also far more likely to get convicted by the mid-1890s, when the conviction rate rose to over eighty per cent.

Prostitute women who worked the streets of London around the turn of the century were forced to contend with a city – and a street prostitution scene – that was changing rapidly. As we have seen, police officers were growing ever more careful and committed to the policing of street prostitution and women had to be more vigilant if they hoped to avoid arrest. Some key tactics involved simply moving away from police officers when they were spotted or changing beats upon being cautioned, in order to solicit in an area where they would not be recognized. Frequent changes in appearance such as hairstyle, hair colour, clothing and make-up were also employed in order to confound officers, who were required to warn women before arresting them if they did not recognize them as prostitutes.<sup>73</sup>

In the face of a police crackdown on street solicitation, many women, particularly those in the West End, developed more subtle methods of solicitation. In 1901, Edward Bradford observed how, due to increased police action, 'verbal solicitation has in fact been materially reduced and physical solicitation is now practically non-existent.'<sup>74</sup> 'The type of girl who uses the Piccadilly area,' commented rescue worker Basil E. Wedmore, 'knows the law and knows that the last thing she must do is to solicit so as to cause offence.'<sup>75</sup> Women would solicit customers with a nod, a simple 'good evening' or a meaningful glance. Many of these tactics clearly worked: a woman might solicit over 200 days a year, yet only appeared to suffer arrest three times. This could mean one of two things: that she was successful in avoiding arrest altogether, or that she was successful in hiding her identity from the prosecution, thereby appearing in the statistics as more than one woman.

Another popular method women used to avoid arrest was to familiarize themselves with the officers who tended to patrol in their areas, including the plain clothes policemen who were frequently employed on this duty.<sup>76</sup> During the Cass trial, another officer encountered a group of prostitute women gathered on Regent Street, who were keeping their eye on an officer on the other side of the road. 'We're watching number 42,' they told him when he asked what they were up to. Officer number 42 was PC Bowden Endacott: sometimes, prostitute women did a better job of watching police officers than police officers did of watching them.

A cordial relationship with other women on the street was essential: not only could more seasoned women pass on information about police officers, but the women on the street could also warn one another about bad experiences they had had with certain clients and share tips for more safe and successful work. Mary Higgs was witness to several of these exchanges while staying in women's lodging houses around 1900. When one girl complained

that she had been given pennies painted in silver by a client, for instance, another advised her to feel the edges of the coins in the dark to be certain of their value.<sup>77</sup> As more police pressure was put on street prostitutes, these important relationships between women may have begun to break down under the strain of intensive surveillance and criminalization.<sup>78</sup>

Criminal repression was not the only source of change. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the technology and geography of public space – the workplace of street prostitutes – were transforming at a remarkable pace. As the West End changed to accommodate its ever-increasing evening entertainment-seeking traffic, women who solicited on the street adapted their work tactics, creating subtle but important changes in the commercial sex landscape.<sup>79</sup> New streets like Shaftesbury Avenue and Charing Cross Road, which had opened the area to more business and visitors in the 1880s, became favourite areas for solicitation.<sup>80</sup> Prostitutes also made use of the new underground trains, and regularly solicited outside the Piccadilly tube station.<sup>81</sup> The public lavatories that had been designed as a convenience for ‘shopping ladies’ were also used by prostitutes as changing and socializing rooms, places where they would do their make-up and style their hair, exchange clothing, advice and stories, and take cocaine.<sup>82</sup> The electric lights that illuminated the burgeoning and increasingly heterosocial theatre-land and the West End cafés and restaurants also illuminated the commercial sex market, casting light on the well-dressed women who could no longer use verbal solicitations readily to attract clients.

The electric lights that lit up the stage of the commercial sex market of Piccadilly were not so welcome to some of the poorer women further north; those who could not afford the cheap travellers’ hotels near the rail stations to have sex with clients. In 1893, electric lighting on Euston Road had driven women from the main road into the side streets like Endsleigh Gardens where the gas lamps were no longer lit, much to the chagrin of the business owners who operated there in the daytime. Mr Elton, a chemist in the Gardens, complained that the women used the doorstep of his premises to gather ‘for disgusting purposes, and the language used by them is simply disgraceful’.<sup>83</sup> He was joined in his complaints by two other business owners in Endsleigh Gardens, and a new light was subsequently installed there; the women moved on to find another corner of the city that was yet unlit.<sup>84</sup> These dim areas were far more dangerous to solicit in, but women desperate to avoid arrest may have felt it a risk they had to take. ‘The darkness of Pall Mall is different from the darkness of Bishopsgate; the lights of Piccadilly are different from the lights of the Edgware Road,’ wrote H.H. Morton of his adventures in night-time London of the 1920s.<sup>85</sup> Like the men who searched for and practised homosex in Matt Houlbook’s *Queer London*, the women who depended upon electric lights to illuminate their marketplace and the women who used the shadows as spaces in which they could work both

understood how the city could be profoundly shaped by its lightness and darkness.<sup>86</sup>

Prostitution in all areas of London was woven into the fabric of urban space, culture and economy. It was conducted on the same streets that were used by everyone from the businessmen to the shop girl and was an integral – if illicit – part of the city's entertainment and leisure industry. Prostitution was, after all, a capitalist endeavour: it absorbed the capital of the men who paid for sex, and it generated capital for the women who sold it, who then spent it within London's enormous consumer economy. Prostitute women were as much a part of the capitalist space of a city as they were outside it.

The policing of street prostitution also remained a negotiation between police officers and prostitute women, as they both – albeit with different resources, recourses and degrees of authority – tried to carve out workspaces for themselves on the street. Neither were those in charge of ordering the spaces of the city entirely orderly themselves: the different branches of the criminal justice system and local authorities struggled to control corruption, implement consistent policies, and develop a consensus about how to control commercial sex. The controversy surrounding PC Endacott and Elizabeth Cass, as well as George Gamble and Ethel Griffiths, threw the discretionary power and undisciplined nature of individual officers, as well as magistrates, into relief. These subtleties of authority, identity and geography must have been well appreciated by the woman, unknown and unnamed, for whom Elizabeth Cass was mistaken (assuming she existed at all). Giving Endacott the slip by stepping into a restaurant or shop, or ducking into one of the smaller alleys off Regent Street, she was able to avoid arrest as a 'common prostitute' by blending in with the increasingly heterogeneous night-time crowd.

# 5

## 'Down on Whores' and 'Living on the Earnings': Violence, Vulnerability and the Law after 1885

On 3 April 1888, Emma Smith was walking home to her lodging house in George Street, Whitechapel; a matter of routine after a regular night of soliciting prostitution in the area. Smith, who was renowned for her proclivity for bar fights, was forty-five years old and widowed, with two adult children. Her work as a prostitute in the East End had been marked by violence and harassment: in mid-March she had been attacked and sexually assaulted by a group of men while soliciting, and had spent two weeks in the hospital, and earlier in the evening of 3 April she had been struck in the face by a man.<sup>1</sup> It was no wonder, then, that, as she passed Whitechapel Church around four in the morning and noticed a group of three or four young men behind her, she crossed the street to get out of their way. The men pursued her, and at the corner of Brick Lane and Wentworth Street they beat and raped her, and forced a blunt object into her vagina, tearing her perineum. They stole her evening's earnings and left her on the road. Smith managed to stagger back to her lodging house, bleeding heavily, and was admitted to hospital, describing her attackers as three or four youths around nineteen years of age. She slipped into a coma and died four days later.<sup>2</sup>

It is not possible to see instances of violence against women who sold sex statistically, buried as they are in the already scant quantitative information about violence against women more generally.<sup>3</sup> Because of this, it is extremely difficult to develop a chronology of violence; to determine whether or not, in the face of legal repression, violent incidents against prostitute women increased, but it is certain that they did suffer all too frequent, and, for reasons I shall outline below, likely elevated, abuse and assault in the years after the passing of the Criminal Law Amendment Act and the crusade to criminalize various aspects of prostitution. What must also be interrogated is the degree to which this violence was inherent to prostitution and the degree to which it was caused or exacerbated by social and legal responses to it.

Four months after Emma Smith succumbed to her injuries, Martha Tabram was found dead with over thirty-nine stab wounds to her body, lying crumpled on the first floor landing of a stairwell in the George's Yard Buildings, off Whitechapel High Street, on 7 August 1888. Tabram was known as a heavy drinker who made a meagre living selling trinkets on the street, supplementing these earnings with prostitution. Her husband had deserted her around 1878, and had used evidence of her prostitution to negotiate paying her a lower separation allowance. Tabram had spent much of the time prior to her death living with another man, who had left her the month before her murder. The night she was killed she was with her acquaintance Mary Ann Connelly, known as 'Pearly Poll', and according to Connelly they had picked up with a pair of guardsmen with whom they drank for three-quarters of an hour, separating later in order to have sex with them. It was the last time anyone saw Tabram alive.<sup>4</sup>

The other events that followed in the Whitechapel area that year are better known. In fact, they have been virtually immortalized by an intense cultural fascination surrounding 'Jack the Ripper' that would warrant a whole book of its own, and that has produced not only an entire subgenre of crime writing but a motif of serial murder to which we always seem to return.<sup>5</sup> These iconic murders would come to represent the first in what has become a horrifyingly long list of serial killings of prostitute women in the modern era.<sup>6</sup>

In the wee hours of the morning on 31 August 1888, just three weeks after Martha Tabram and 'Pearly Poll' had parted ways, the body of a woman, identified as Mary Ann Nichols, was found lying in Buck's Row, with her throat cut and her abdomen mutilated. More commonly known as Polly, Nichols was forty-four years of age when she was murdered, and had five children. She had separated from her husband seven years before, and, like Tabram's husband, he had subsequently cut off his support payment to her with the court's consent, after he had proved she was earning money through prostitution. In the seven years before her death, Nichols moved from workhouse to infirmary to workhouse, though by the time of her death she was living in White's House, an unregistered double at Flower and Dean Street. The night she was murdered Nichols was seen several times soliciting on the streets, and admitted that she had earned her 'doss money' (the money for her lodging house bed) several times over, but had drunk it all away.<sup>7</sup> After this murder, locals began to suspect John Pizer, nicknamed 'Leather Apron', a man who was known to assault prostitute women.<sup>8</sup>

Londoners had only begun to panic about this second hideous murder of an 'unfortunate' in the area within a month when just over a week later, on 9 September, the body of Annie Chapman was found a few streets away in the back courtyard of 29 Hanbury Street.<sup>9</sup> Chapman was forty-seven years of age, and, like Nichols, had been separated from her husband, upon whom she had depended for support payments. She found things difficult when he

died in 1886, and, if she had not done so before, she began to engage in prostitution. By 1888, she was living at a lodging house at 35 Dorset Street, and was known as a heavy drinker. Chapman had headed out in the evening of 8 September, as Nichols had, in order to earn money for her bed.<sup>10</sup>

Chapman's death was followed not a month later, on 30 September, by the discovery of the bodies of Elizabeth Stride and Catherine Eddowes, both murdered between 1:00 and 1:45 in the morning, near Berner Street and in Mitre Square. Stride, known as 'Long Liz', had come to London in 1866 from her native Sweden, where she had been formally registered as a prostitute under the country's regulated system.<sup>11</sup> By the 1880s, she had separated from her British husband and was lodging in Flower and Dean Street, where she began to rack up an impressive number of drunk and disorderly charges while working as a prostitute, and regularly petitioned the church and her community for poor relief.<sup>12</sup> One of the last witnesses to see Stride alive recalled that men in the pub had jested with her that she would become 'Leather Apron's' next victim.<sup>13</sup>

Catherine Eddowes, murdered minutes after Stride, had had two children by her first long-term partner Tom Conway, with whom she had travelled around the country selling pamphlets and books (and whose initials remained tattooed upon her forearm). By the time of her murder, she had parted from him and had been living with a man named John Kelly (taking his name) for the seven years before her murder. On the night she was killed, Eddowes had gone in search of her daughter to ask for a little money; she and Kelly had just returned from hop-picking and had pawned their boots in order to secure a lodging house bed. On this particular night, she did not find her daughter (who had changed addresses without informing her), and was found lying drunk on the pavement a few hours later. She was taken to sober up in a police station cell, and was murdered less than an hour after she was released.<sup>14</sup> Eddowes was the only victim of 'Jack the Ripper' who seems not to have worked as a prostitute – every witness interviewed at her inquest attested to this fact – even though history has remembered her as such. This not only throws into relief the potential for misreporting in the media record of such events, but also highlights the degree to which all of the Ripper's victims' prostitute identities have subsumed any of the more important features of their lives.<sup>15</sup>

London was abuzz with talk of the murders, particularly after Pizer's name was cleared and the search for the killer was widened. A vigilance committee was formed in order to patrol Whitechapel's darkened streets, and the neighbours had to be stopped more than once from lynching Jews who were suspected of the killings. Social pundits linked the murders to the general degradation of the East End, and the 'Whitechapel murders' became a national and international press phenomenon.<sup>16</sup> More and more criticism was heaped upon the already beleaguered police and Commissioner Charles Warren in particular, who was no doubt still exhausted from the Elizabeth

Cass scandal just over a year before and the infamous 'Bloody Sunday' incident of the past November. It was amid all this scandal, panic and heightened newspaper sales that the brutally mutilated body of Mary Jeanne Kelly was found on 9 November 1888 in her little room in Milner's Court. As the coroner traced her life back to its beginnings in Limerick and weighed her organs, Charles Warren resigned his commissionership.

The 'Jack the Ripper' murders were not isolated incidents. The last years of the nineteenth century saw a litany of prostitute murders in London, and still more assaults and attempted murders. Just before Christmas in 1888, the body of Rose Mylett (also known as 'Drunken Lizzie Davis' and by several other names), who worked as a prostitute, was found in Poplar. Police insisted it was death from natural causes, and refused to open an investigation, despite the fact that two medical examiners found clear evidence of strangulation.<sup>17</sup> Over the course of June of the following year, body parts that were later identified as belonging to Elizabeth Jackson, a prostitute who had worked in Battersea, were found in various locations in Battersea Park and Chelsea Embankment, and in the Thames.<sup>18</sup> In July 1889, Alice McKenzie, a woman who may have supplemented her earnings as a charwoman through prostitution, was found with her throat cut in an alley off Whitechapel High Street.<sup>19</sup> In September, a female torso was found underneath a railway arch in Pinchin Street. It was never identified, but was thought to be the body of Lydia Hart, a prostitute who had been missing for several days; the medical examiner suspected she had died after getting an illegal abortion.<sup>20</sup>

The tragic list goes on. In February 1891, Frances Coles, a young woman who worked as a prostitute in the Spitalfields area, was found lying on the pavement with her throat sliced just after 2:00 in the morning.<sup>21</sup> Then, starting in October 1891, Matilda Clover, Ellen Donworth, Alice Marsh and Emma Shrivell, all of whom solicited prostitution in the Lambeth area, were murdered by strychnine poisoning by Dr Thomas Neal Cream. Louisa Harvey, another prostitute woman, narrowly escaped murder by his hand.<sup>22</sup>

It is officially a coincidence that, three short years after an almost unprecedented crusade against commercial sex had begun in London during which 'brothels' were shut down, prostitute women were evicted from their homes, and street solicitation became an increasing focus for public condemnation, the world's single most famous serial killer targeted women working mainly as prostitutes in London's East End. None of the victims of 'Jack the Ripper' had been evicted because of, or prosecuted under, the new brothel laws as far as we know: their itinerancy was more due to poverty, alcohol abuse, illness and unstable relationships. And yet most did solicit in dark outdoor spaces and at late hours, in order to avoid police, and their access to safer indoor spaces may well have been compromised by the crackdown on 'brothels' and the subsequent rising prices of rooms for off-street commercial sex,



which doubtlessly hit very poor women extremely hard. Mary Kelly had left the West End some time in the mid-1880s: it could well be that this was as a result of the police crackdown on brothels in this area.

There are other connections between rising criminalization and the no fewer than sixteen prostitute murders that occurred in London within three short years of each other in the late 1880s and early 1890s. Though Emma Smith's brutal rapists and killers were never brought to justice, it was generally thought that she had fallen victim to a protection racket or 'high rip' gang, many of whom operated in the Whitechapel area, extorting money from prostitutes in exchange for protection or – most often – freedom from attack from the gangs themselves.<sup>23</sup> Women like Emma Smith, though frequently the target of physical and sexual assault from these gangs, did not tend to seek out the help of police.

This is not surprising, considering the evidence we have regarding police attitudes toward the testimony of women working as prostitutes. For instance, Mary Ann Connolly was called by police to attend a line-up, where she positively identified two men from the Wellington barracks as the men with whom she and Martha Tabram had gone. When these men were able to provide potentially false alibis (one's was given by his wife, the other's by his bunk mate), police concluded that '“Pearly Poll” could not be trusted again as [her] evidence would be worthless.'<sup>24</sup> Meanwhile, during the investigation into the Thomas Neill Cream murders in Lambeth in 1891, a prostitute was asked to encourage Cream to take an interest in her and to 'learn all she could about him'. When this woman – expected to perform as an unpaid agent provocateur in an extremely dangerous situation – opted to tell him that she had been sent by a detective and cut off ties with him (potentially saving herself from death by strychnine poisoning), her actions, according to the police, showed 'how utterly unreliable these women are'.<sup>25</sup>

These attitudes found expression in more official channels as well. When the Royal Commission on the Duties of the Metropolitan Police sat to collect evidence on police conduct toward prostitutes in the face of bribery and harassment allegations, they did not interview any prostitutes, arguing that 'it does not seem practical to obtain direct personal testimony from any women of this class as to their relations with Constables,' and that, even if evidence from prostitutes had been collected, it 'would be open to such plausible suspicion as to be practically worthless'.<sup>26</sup>

To make matters worse, sometimes the police themselves were the source of harassment and violence. Having refused PC Ashford's late-night attempt to extort free sexual services from her, Griffiths was followed and menaced by the officer, and watched – alongside Ashford's superior officer, Sergeant Sheedy – while he beat the man who came to her defence almost to death. It is unlikely that Griffiths was the first prostitute woman to be a victim of Ashford's extortion, and he was protected by his fellow H Division officers throughout the enquiry. Arthur Harding, who had an intimate knowledge

of the 'East End Underworld' around the turn of the century, implicated the police in the widespread blackmail and extortion of prostitutes. 'There was more money about and the police got their cut,' Harding recalled. 'There were the spielers [thieves], there were the brides [prostitutes]; and in Black Lion Yard and other places a lot of stolen property changed hands.'<sup>27</sup> Indeed, it was Harding himself who brought the case of George Gamble, Ethel Griffiths, and PC Ashford to the attention of the Royal Commission on the Duties of the Metropolitan Police, though he claims to have received only unwanted police attention thereafter for his troubles.<sup>28</sup> In 1907, meanwhile, Mabel Beale, a woman known as a 'common prostitute', lodged a complaint with a nearby Constable when an off-duty officer struck her in the face, and was shocked to see the Constable let the other man go. The officers were both disciplined, but Beale declined to press charges. Though there is no record of why, it is not hard to imagine that a weariness of already frequent court appearances, a cynicism about the criminal justice system more generally, an unwillingness to absorb the costs of prosecution, and a fear (possibly based upon a threat) that she would thereafter be made a target for police harassment all prevented Mabel Beale from feeling inclined to pursue justice.<sup>29</sup>

While many police officers displayed a notable sympathy and understanding toward the women who walked their beats, it was difficult for prostitute women to view them as friends. Because prostitutes' contact with police officers typically ended in warnings and arrests, many did not see the police or the courts as a potential source of protection, and many felt unable to seek out their support when they were threatened. Some women were virtually unable even to enter a police station because there were warrants out for their arrest: a rare report from 1906 shows that more than ten per cent of prostitutes bailed after an arrest for solicitation had warrants issued because they had failed to return for their police court trial.<sup>30</sup>

Later in the century, Marthe Watts would place innumerable calls to C Division officers when her clients became violent and unmanageable.<sup>31</sup> While Watts was thankful for their intervention, police who responded to these calls worried over being seen as prostitute protectors by their unruly clients. 'In ordinary circumstances,' felt C Division officers, 'many of the men who, generally speaking, are quite respectable, may be given the impression that Police have a leaning toward the prostitute, and great care is necessary to ensure that such an impression is not justified.'<sup>32</sup>

The kind of violence that Beale and, later, Watts experienced was not uncommon, and it was probably no coincidence that 'Jack the Ripper' perpetrated his murders in an atmosphere of increased disdain for prostitutes and moral outrage about prostitution. While the letters of 'Jack the Ripper' received by the Central News Agency during the period of the murders are thought by most experts to be fakes, their author did not miss this connection: 'I am down on whores,' the famous 'Dear Boss' letter read, 'and I

shant [sic] keep ripping them till I do get buckled.<sup>33</sup> Extreme incidents of murder and mutilation of women working as prostitutes were coupled with everyday violence, especially from clients, and also from a general populace that saw them as dirty, criminal and a public nuisance. 'Them - - - - - whores ought to be executed,' one soldier succinctly avowed, in light of allegations that prostitute women were spreading venereal disease during the First World War.<sup>34</sup>

As investigations into the 'Whitechapel' murders revealed, women selling sex had informal systems that helped to protect them from violent customers; they frequently let each other know if a client had been difficult, had struck them or had stolen their money.<sup>35</sup> This system was likely to have suffered greatly when women were forced by police repression of street solicitation to retreat to darker corners and more furtive solicitation, where they became increasingly out of touch with other women on the street.<sup>36</sup> Women also increasingly lost access to safer indoor spaces, as we have seen, particularly places where they were able to work on a permanent basis and be known to the people around them. Elizabeth Jackson boasted to friends that she had found a way to sneak into Battersea Park to solicit and have sex with clients after the gates had been locked, and it was here that part of her dismembered body was found.<sup>37</sup> Where lightness should have meant protection from violence, for Jackson darkness meant protection from the more immediate danger of arrest.

Women who worked as prostitutes were also an easy target for abuse and murder because (their ever-formalizing legal identities notwithstanding) their frequent homelessness, itinerancy, prison terms and familial estrangements meant that they could disappear without being missed and, if missed, their disappearance would not provoke alarm among neighbours and friends. When Rose Mylett was found murdered in Poplar on 19 December 1888, a woman with whom she had lived reported that she 'was not alarmed at [the] deceased not returning, as she believed she was locked up. She had been sentenced to five days imprisonment during the three months she was with [her]'.<sup>38</sup>

Despite these testimonies, the broader links between escalating criminalization and rising violence went largely unnoticed, and, while contemporary observers examined the degradation of such women's lives at length, little remark was passed about the connections between the recent crusade for criminalization and the murders. Connections were made, on the other hand, between the increasingly repressive prostitution policies in the post-1885 era and the rise in third-party – usually male – involvement in commercial sex. While it is a stretch to assert, as historian Luise White does, that 'men and male control enter prostitution only after the state does',<sup>39</sup> it is clear that state interventions contributed to an increase in reliance upon third parties, and an increase in opportunities for third parties (who were usually male) to profit from prostitution. As more laws and policies targeted

different prostitution-related activities and spaces, women who sold sex began to rely more and more on pimps to help them avoid police, find accommodation and navigate the criminal justice system; to be companions and romantic partners in an increasingly intolerant community; and to protect them from assault. The rise in pimping in the context of criminalization was particularly ironic considering how closely the image of the pimp, or 'souteneur', had been associated with regulated prostitution. Also ironically, a rise in third-party involvement in commercial sex contributed to a rise in the abuse and exploitation experienced by prostitute women even as the crusade against prostitution, which ostensibly condemned this exploitation, marched on.

The word 'pimp' has origins in the early seventeenth century, but was out of popular use in the 1885–1960 period (although, for the sake of clarity, it will be the general term that I will employ). Instead, words like 'bully' (which had been attached to this particular meaning since the early eighteenth century) and 'ponce' (which was introduced in the mid-nineteenth century) were used to describe men who lived on the earnings of prostitutes and/or directed their prostitution. Police officers would often use the term that prostitute women sometimes gave to these men: 'protectors'.<sup>40</sup> The practice of pimping was also caught up in other forms of third-party involvement in and organization of prostitution, and pimps could sometimes also be referred to as 'souteneurs', a French term for pimps (who were also called 'macques'), which in Britain tended to be associated with regulated prostitution on the Continent.

Despite, or perhaps because of, the cultural and political attention paid to it, it is difficult to ascertain the extent of third-party involvement in commercial sex in this period and its change over time. Though contemporary discourse surrounding 'white slavery' and exploitation developed a taxonomy of third-party organizers within prostitution (the pimp, the procurer and the trafficker formed the classic trio), these practices in reality were far murkier and more entangled.<sup>41</sup> Moreover, any quantitative measurement is dependent not only upon the laws that defined pimping, trafficking and procurement, but upon the success and accuracy of the arrests and prosecutions under these laws.

Police themselves frequently commented that the prominence of third parties had increased in commercial sex in the significantly more repressive climate since 1885. They also recognised that the most common role played by third parties in prostitution was not that of the procurer, but that of the pimp: 'Those who live on, and are supported by women more or less voluntarily, for the purpose of protection. These men invariably associate with a certain type of prostitute, following them about, often living with them, and associating with them on amiable terms and helping them if they get into trouble.'<sup>42</sup>

Police attributed the rise in pimps directly to the repression of brothels. It had become illegal for two or more prostitute women to live and work together, and, while many prostitute women had always lived with male partners, the virtual criminalization of prostitute cohabitation must have meant that many more women came to rely on males to fulfil their need for personal relationships and for someone to share the (increasingly exorbitant) rent. Living with men also helped women secure alternative accommodations, because a man could pose as, or indeed actually be, the woman's husband and thereby help her avoid the suspicion of landlords.<sup>43</sup> 'The evil [of living on immoral earnings],' wrote the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate in 1895, 'has to a great extent been caused by those who in their excessive zeal have made it impossible for a prostitute to live in apartments without a man living with her who appears to be her husband.'<sup>44</sup>

Alongside helping women in their tactical adaptations off the street, pimps also helped them avoid and cope with arrest and prosecution while soliciting. At a very simple level, having a man on the street meant a woman would have an extra set of eyes keeping careful watch for the police, motivated, if not by genuine concern for her, than at least out of fear of a costly interruption to their business. Undercover police who tracked women in Soho in 1910 noted that their pimps would follow at a distance or on the other side of the street, scanning Shaftesbury Avenue, Charing Cross Road and Leicester Square for the police, while also ensuring the women got on with the business of soliciting prostitution.<sup>45</sup> The presence of pimps could divide women working on the street from each other: police reported that pimps often threatened the women who worked for them if they were seen speaking with other prostitutes, and competition for men within this subculture caused rifts and violence between women.<sup>46</sup>

Another role played by pimps was as a support for women after arrest and after conviction. Because prostitute women were frequently not given the time to pay their police court fines (because it was felt that they would simply go out and commit the offence again in order to get the money), this meant that they were reliant on the graces of third parties in order to avoid jail.<sup>47</sup> When two French women, Marie Henant and Cleo Debarre, were arrested in 1906 and held in a police cell for almost twenty-four hours without money for bail, they eventually called upon a network of men to bring money to get them out.<sup>48</sup> By 1907, fears about these 'professional bailers' led the Metropolitan Police Commissioner to change the general police orders so that prostitutes could only be bailed on their own recognizances, not on those of a third party.<sup>49</sup> Protection from the threat of 'exploitation', in this and many other cases, came at the expense of liberty.

It was similarly recognized that the common practice of imposing fines for solicitation offences – by far the more commonly used sentence, as opposed to imprisonment, since the early 1900s – could encourage

third-party involvement.<sup>50</sup> If the woman in question, for instance, did not have the money to pay the fine, she could be forced to borrow money from loan sharks and 'rip' gangs. If she did not have the money on her person, she would need someone to bring it to the Police Court or to the prison where she would be sent for default of fine payment. Many women did not keep much money on their persons, lest they fall victim to client theft.

In the early 1920s, the Prison Commission investigated the role of third parties in paying fines after the prison chaplain of Holloway Prison, Rev. S.R. Glanville Murray, brought his concerns about 'white slavery' at the prison gates to the Secretary of State, Arthur Henderson: men, he claimed, were paying women's fines and using this to ensnare them.<sup>51</sup> However, as the Prison Commission pointed out, of the 292 women who had had their fines paid by third parties in the period of observation, 287 had themselves requested it. Moreover, the vast majority of people paying these fines were other women, and many of these women were working as prostitutes themselves.<sup>52</sup> In other words, if the fining system did render prostitute women more vulnerable to third-party exploitation, and it almost certainly sometimes did, it was in a way far more complex than that envisioned by people like the Rev. Murray. The paying of fines by pimps had been a problem 'mainly in big city prisons' for several years, but in the majority of these cases the woman, desperate to get out of prison, was complicit.<sup>53</sup> 'It is practically certain,' noted a Home Office circular,

that when the fine is paid whether out of their own incomes brought by friends or fellow prostitutes or by their landladies or brothel keepers or bullies the motive is the same namely to secure their freedom and resume their occupation... In some cases the women whose fines are paid would rather not go with these people but... nevertheless, the efforts made to persuade them to go to a Church Army or other Home instead, are usually unsuccessful, the attraction of complete liberty being too strong.<sup>54</sup>

It was not just the desire for liberty that motivated women to attach themselves to pimps: in the face of routine violence against their persons that all too frequently led to murder, it is no wonder that many prostitute women referred to pimps as 'protectors', and, entangled in all kinds of personal and financial relationships with them, were even keen to protect their 'protectors' from the law. While Charles Peneau, a young French pimp who operated out of Soho in 1910, may have been exploiting Vera Wilson, the woman from whom he took money, it may also have been some comfort to know that there was at least one person who would miss her if she failed to return to their High Street flat later that night.<sup>55</sup> And, if Louisa Harvey had not asked her pimp to come along and watch from the bushes when she met Dr Thomas Neall Cream on the Thames Embankment, she might

have lost her life; at the very least the Crown would have lost his testimony as a key witness.<sup>56</sup> Women working as prostitutes in a system that primarily punished prostitutes were often forced to measure the potentially coercive or abusive relationship they might have with their pimps or other third parties against the drawbacks of harassment, arrest, imprisonment and the dreaded reform home.

As fears grew about the men who lived off the earnings of prostitution, the Amendment to the Vagrancy Act was passed in 1898, which made 'knowingly living in whole or in part on the earnings of a prostitute' a summary offence, carrying with it a maximum of two months' imprisonment.<sup>57</sup> Arrests for the offence rose relatively steadily, going from around 100 per year in 1899, the first full year of the Act's operation, to 150 in 1906, and reaching around 200 per year in the early 1910s.<sup>58</sup>

The way in which these discrete cases of pimping amounted to abuse and exploitation was only vaguely interrogated by lawmakers and reformers. Evidence of a man receiving money from a prostitute woman, as well as of his being unable to prove he had other employment, was all that was required in order to prosecute. While evidence of coercion or abuse may have affected sentencing decisions, it was in no way needed to prove guilt. This legal liability extended to any man who, even when not taking a woman's money, suffered her to be a prostitute while romantically involved with him, and in so doing challenged norms not only of manliness but also of monogamy.<sup>59</sup> The 1898 Act may have protected some women from exploitation, but it also placed the family structures of women who worked as prostitutes under suspicion. A prostitute's contact with fathers, brothers, sons and romantic partners could make them liable to prosecution, and further isolated prostitute women from families, romantic partners and friends. In other words, just as solicitation laws turned women who sold sex into 'common prostitutes', so too did the laws against pimps turn the men who had relationships with them into people who 'lived on immoral earnings', to use a common phrase employed by police, even though, as Helen Self has noted, this was far from the actual wording of the law.

The Amendment to the Vagrancy Act must be read, then, not only as a move against exploitative prostitution but also, and somewhat contradictorily given the link between criminalization and third-party organization, a move against prostitution more generally. Moreover, it must also be seen as a product of an age of anti-immigration. It was generally recognized that many pimps were 'foreigners and fugitives from the justice of their native country', and animosity toward them was blended with xenophobia. While the majority of pimps in Britain were actually British, they were presented as stereotypically Continental European.<sup>60</sup> Early drafts of anti-pimping bills included powers of expulsion, but this would not be achieved until they were made a special category of unwanted aliens seven years later, in the Aliens Act of 1905.<sup>61</sup>

That being said, the Amendment to the Vagrancy Act did give some women a modicum of legal power over those who sought to exploit and abuse them. Vera Wilson, a twenty-two-year old British woman, was so smitten with her nineteen-year-old pimp Charles Peneau that, when he was arrested by police in Soho in 1910, she initially refused to give any evidence against him, despite the fact that police had observed him speaking angrily to her and taking her money. But her admiration for him went only so far. When Peneau's 'respectable' parents came from France in aid of their son, the family was quick to disparage Wilson as a prostitute who had lured Peneau into a gang of bullies. Wilson, in 'a fit of indignation', soon insisted that 'she knew a great deal' and said that she could give important evidence against him. In the end, Peneau pled guilty to the offence of pimping with the understanding that he would be deported and avoid prison time.<sup>62</sup>

Vera Wilson was not alone in her willingness to use the law to defend herself or threaten her pimp, and the 1898 Amendment to the Vagrancy Act was often used by women against men who took financial advantage of them, and particularly those who assaulted and abused them. For a prostitute woman to bring charges of assault against a man under other laws could be difficult, as she would frequently find her character on trial in the process. If she were 'unrespectable', for instance, the man could defend his abuse or neglect on these grounds: Polly Nichols's and Martha Tabram's husbands were both able to discontinue their support payments when they proved that their wives were working as prostitutes.<sup>63</sup> Because the 1898 Act was based on the premise that the woman upon whose earnings the man was living was already a prostitute, she had little fear that this stigma would hinder the prosecution. In this way, the Act opened up a new avenue by which prostitute women could bring their abusers to court, but this was only because it had been so often denied to them by other laws intended to address domestic assault and interpersonal violence.

Of the eighty-nine cases of 'living on immoral earnings' that were reported in *The Times* between the year 1899 and the end of the First World War, thirty-three cases were detailed enough to specify the person who was prosecuting. In eighteen of these cases the police or an organization like the NVA acted as prosecutor, but in fifteen cases the woman herself had brought the charge. In these cases, a woman's decision to prosecute a man who was living off her earnings was particularly dependent upon the level of violence in their relationship. Of the fifteen cases in which women prosecuted, twelve involved some kind of assault, usually following complaints from the woman in question regarding money. In one case from early 1900, Annie Bernard charged Frank Andrew with assault and with living on immoral earnings when he stole money from her and struck her, complaining that she was not earning enough.<sup>64</sup> The case was decided when Bernard produced Andrew's pocketbook, in which she had recorded her earnings and his expenditures, as evidence. In another unhappy example later that



same year, William Burret was found guilty of murdering his wife Ada after her dying deposition accused him of living off her prostitution. He had stabbed her fourteen times when she had asked him to start working.<sup>65</sup>

In contrast to the cases brought by the women themselves, instances in which the police or an organization acted as prosecutors were much less likely to involve any reported violence: of the eighteen cases, only five made mention of assault. Moreover, in six out of the eighteen cases the woman upon whom the man was living was also charged with brothel-keeping or with property crime. For instance, in 1899, just after the Act was passed, John Hopkins was charged with living on immoral earnings while his wife, Amy, was charged with keeping a brothel. They were both sent to prison and their three children were brought to the workhouse, and were later settled in an industrial school.<sup>66</sup> In other cases in which police, a Borough Council or a society acted as prosecutor, the woman protested the charge and refused to testify, and in one case from 1922, upon hearing the guilty verdict at her companion's trial, a woman 'fainted in court and was carried out by friends'.<sup>67</sup> While it is clear that the 1898 Amendment to the Vagrancy Act could be used by women in their own defence, it was also used by authorities to disrupt structures within commercial sex that were as likely to be supportive as coercive, at the same time encouraging legal proceedings against the women themselves.

Women who worked as prostitutes had to measure the potentially abusive and financially draining relationships they could have with their pimps against the increasing difficulties of operating as independent workers in a legally repressive climate, and the emotional and social challenges of life working as prostitutes. The 1898 law fed these contradictions: intended to protect women from sexual exploitation, it was also envisioned as part of a larger canon of laws and policies that sought to repress prostitution itself, even if this repression was to the detriment of the women whom some parts of the law purported to protect. These tensions between protection and punishment would find no better expression than in the panic over 'white slavery' that resurfaced in the years before the First World War, as a new generation of reformers and social commentators rediscovered and redeployed the idea of exploitative prostitution in an era of immense social, cultural and political change.

# 6

## White Slaves and Alien Prostitutes: Trafficking, Protection and Punishment in the Early Twentieth Century

In the winter of 1910, nineteen-year-old Lydia Rhodda Harvey was working as a photographer's assistant in Wellington, New Zealand. She had moved there a few years before, leaving her impoverished family in the small town of Oamaru on the South Island. Like many single young women in the city, she was living in a boarding house, and one night was approached by a man, who offered to introduce her to someone who could help her travel. This had always been a dream of Harvey's: she accepted, and met a man named Aldo Cellis and a woman named Marie, who called herself his wife. The pair asked Harvey to come with them to Buenos Aires, and made no secret of the kind of work that she would be expected to undertake once there, work for which the woman posing as Cellis's wife (whose real name was Marie Vernon) was well known in Wellington. Harvey was given high red plush boots and silk underwear, and told that she would 'not want for anything and be quite happy'. She was warned not to speak to the police and asked to lie to her parents. 'I was surprised when Mrs. Celli [sic] told me the life I was going to lead,' Harvey admitted, 'but she said I should have an easy life with nice dresses and it was that that induced me to go with them and I was also glad to be able to travel.' Her crossing with Vernon was arranged shortly thereafter, and Cellis met them in South America.<sup>1</sup>

Once in Buenos Aires, Vernon bought Harvey a dress and a hat, bleached her hair and took her to the casino to look for men. The commercial sex market in Argentina was booming alongside its agriculture, mining and export industries, and Aldo Cellis and Marie Vernon were joined by a large community of foreign labourers, including no small number of pimps and prostitutes, hoping to make good in Argentina's 'golden age'.<sup>2</sup> Once ensconced in the capital's commercial sex scene, Harvey became sexually involved with Cellis, and his demands on her became more coercive. Marie Vernon was

called upon to teach her how to perform oral and anal sex, and to train her in how to solicit men. But Harvey was not successful at the casino; 'I was thinking too much of home,' she said. Soon, alone in a tumultuous foreign country with no money, possessions or knowledge of the local language, she was forced by Vernon and Cellis to take clients, men whom she described as 'old, dirty and very repulsive to me'. Vernon would not let Harvey keep the money the men gave her, saying that she owed Cellis for her clothes and her passage on the ocean liner, that voyage she had always dreamed of taking.<sup>3</sup> When the Argentine authorities began to notice his activities, Cellis set his sights on London, and Harvey, who was now suffering from genital warts and gonorrhoea, spent her next journey across the Atlantic locked in their small cabin, because Cellis feared her presence above deck would alert the authorities. They arrived in the metropolis in May 1910.

While Lydia Harvey found herself alone in a London Lock Hospital bed, Cellis busied himself with reconnecting with his old business partner, Alec Berard, in the cafés of Soho. The two men had lived off women's earnings in prostitution together in their native Italy, had outstanding warrants for brothel-keeping in Australia, and had also organized the business in New Zealand. It was not long before the worldly pair had infiltrated themselves into a small pimping and trafficking ring that operated out of High Street.<sup>4</sup> After signing responsibility for Harvey over to another member of the group and telling her she was damaged goods, Cellis and Berard left for France in search of new women. They found seventeen-year-old Mireille Lapara, whom Berard met on a walk in the Tuileries Gardens, eighteen-year-old Marguerite Besçancon, who was working in a café near their hotel, and twenty-two-year-old Victoria Bricot, who was staying in furnished rooms close by. With varying measures of romantic coaxing and frank economics, they encouraged the women to come with them to England.<sup>5</sup>

The Metropolitan Police were not blind to the men's activities, and had for several months been tracking the movements of the loosely affiliated Soho gang as they circled Piccadilly Circus, Shaftesbury Avenue, Great Windmill Street and Brewer Street on their nightly solicitation beats; as they negotiated their street-level finances at pawn shops; and as they socialized in the cafés, restaurants and pubs of turn-of-the-century Soho. Among this bustling society police noticed new arrivals: the three young French women, who were under the watch of two well-dressed men. When they arrested Cellis and Berard on suspicion of procuring the women, police connected Lydia Harvey to the men and called her to be a witness in the case.

As police officers prepared their prosecution, and tried to sort out what to do with the women who had been brought to London, newspaper articles about the case, complete with sketches emphasizing the Italian profiles of Cellis and Berard, graced the pages of the London dailies.<sup>6</sup> These articles were joined by stories of more dubious veracity that were flooding the metropolis in the early 1910s. Newspapers spoke of men who patrolled

train stations, looking for innocent new arrivals to London; tales abounded of procuresses who donned the costumes of nuns and nurses; gossips told of women drugged and girls disappeared. Police officers and social workers had difficulty confirming the truth behind any of these accounts, but talk of them continued nonetheless, as social purity groups cited these cases as a reason to repress prostitution, suffrage campaigners tied the issue of 'white slavery' to women's rights, and novelists used it as plot fodder.<sup>7</sup>

The term 'white slavery' or 'the white slave trade' had been employed in various different contexts since at least the early nineteenth century, referring at different times to the actual slave trade in Europeans in North Africa, to the ravages of child labour in Britain, and to the defrauding of British immigrants to the West Indies and Van Diemen's Land. In this context, Ladies' Associations employed the term to express a specific concern about female migration and sexual morality: they feared that young women, encouraged to emigrate, were quickly compelled to 'deviate... from the paths of virtue'. In the 1870s, new uses of the term arose, particularly in reference to concerns about Italian children being taken from Italy and forced to work at mendicancy and street entertainment in Western Europe and the Americas. Again, this discourse raised specific concerns about the growing trade in girls, intimating that females could be 'exposed to dangers of a far worse description than the hardships their brethren had to encounter'.<sup>8</sup>

The concept of 'white slavery' came to be more firmly connected to exploitative and migrant prostitution during the campaign against the state regulation of prostitution that had roots in the anti-CD Acts agitation of the late 1860s. Systems of regulation, argued Josephine Butler and her associates, directly encouraged networks of sexual trafficking.<sup>9</sup> In 1880, the Gospel Purity Society had petitioned the Secretary of Foreign Affairs about 'white slavery', a term which they used to describe the traffic in British girls to Continental brothels.<sup>10</sup>

The equation of prostitution with 'white slavery' was so useful to those who campaigned against commercial sex because it touched on many different social anxieties: it trucked in images of endangered children and presented the newly recognized sanctity of childhood as under threat; it told a parable of sexual danger for women who ventured out into the world in an age when they were doing so more than they had ever done; it called up the spectre of slavery in the context of sexual purity; it presented ordinary male sexuality as potentially monstrous; and it showed how the pursuit of capital could be shady, sexual and devious through the personas of traffickers. These men and women, who were thought to be of the more undesirable European races, were international and the same time without citizenship, dark horses of the new globalizing economy and the era of mass migration.<sup>11</sup> In these popular accounts, 'white slavery' had some important key features. It involved dastardly rings of souteneurs, traffickers, procurers, procuresses

and pimps; it functioned through the forcible kidnapping of young women, and, like the pitiable Athenians who were yearly sent to meet their deaths in the labyrinth that furnished Stead's metaphor, the victims of 'white slavery' were sexually and morally pure. The independent and sexually experienced adult woman was left little room in which to be a victim of trafficking, and the protection of 'trafficked' or 'exploited' women and girls could often equal their punishment: deportation and incarceration awaited foreign and young prostitute women who failed to resemble the 'white slave'.

Informed by these concepts of white slavery, the 1885 Criminal Law Amendment Act made very limited provisions against the exploitation that actually occurred within prostitution. The section against 'procurement' made it an indictable offence for any person to 'procure or attempt to procure any woman or girl to become, either within or without the King's Dominions, a common prostitute', but this charge could only proceed if that girl or woman was not already a prostitute or 'of known immoral character'. Even if a girl was sixteen, or a woman was made to have carnal connection 'by false pretences or false representations', the charge would not proceed if there was evidence of prostitution or sexual immorality. In fact, the only measure of protection that 'common prostitutes' could have found within this Act would be in situations where they were procured by 'threats or intimidation' or 'drugged...with intent to stupefy or overpower'.<sup>12</sup> The charge of procurement was indictable, and carried with it a maximum sentence of two years' hard labour.<sup>13</sup>

In the years following the 1885 Criminal Law Amendment Act, anti-vice and moral reform organizations paid increasing amounts of attention to the international and transnational dimensions of prostitution. In the late 1890s, William Coote, the intrepid secretary of the NVA, made a kind of grand tour of brothels around Continental Europe in order to find and publish evidence of debt bondage and trafficking, which was followed in 1899 by the first London Congress on the White Slave Trade, an event that drew support from many organizations and the attention (though not the official sanction) of the government.<sup>14</sup> In 1901, the issue had reached pan-European dimensions, and resolutions were drawn up at the first International Congress for the Suppression of the White Slave Trade in Paris that would encourage governments to put measures in place to combat the traffic. Several more conventions and congresses would follow in 1902, 1906 and 1909, and the fight against sexual trafficking became one of the chief uniting social causes for the new and optimistic pre-war internationalist movement.<sup>15</sup> Armed with new international conventions, British organizations began to lobby for a new law against white slavery.

Meanwhile, organizations like the NVA also continued to promote their long-standing projects of rescue and reform, and maintained homes and training programmes to assist the young rescued victims of the 'immoral traffic'. After all, the image of 'white slavery' had always been bound up

with the image of the child. Whether it involved young girls hustled off to Tasmania through resettlement programs, small fingers assembling goods in the satanic mills, or the lost children of Italian mountain villages, employers of the term 'white slavery' always placed the young person in the role of helpless and hapless victim. This image of helplessness was used to call for serious measures of state intervention that infringed upon the rights of the person in question: disallowing the migration of young women without approval from philanthropic societies, and barring the migration of children out of Italy, for instance.<sup>16</sup>

'White slavery' as a concept had also connected itself to the migration of peoples before it ever came to be firmly associated with prostitution. In the 1830s, it was the mass emigration of working-class Britons to the South Pacific colonies that prompted fears over the 'white slavery' of the colonist experience.<sup>17</sup> In the 1870s, Parmesan and Lucchese boys became 'white slaves', who, before landing in the 'dingiest purlieus of Holborn', were moved by their masters from country to country, the worrisome lost children of the newly formed Italian nation: interestingly, Anton Cellis and Alec Berard both spent their boyhoods in rural north Italy, before getting involved in the metropolitan sex trade.<sup>18</sup> As Latin American historian Donna J. Guy notes, it was no coincidence that 'white slavery' became a popular concern just as the era of mass working-class migration dawned.<sup>19</sup> Organizations like the NVA also developed policies that combined the prevention of 'white slavery' with the surveillance of female migration: at the 1902 international diplomatic conference which addressed the issue, for instance, it was resolved that these societies would watch ports and train stations in order to monitor any young single women and to offer them assistance.<sup>20</sup>

In 1903, the Royal Commission on Alien Immigration identified the transnational dimensions of commercial sex as a special area of national concern, and they invited William Coote, the influential NVA secretary, to testify before the Commission on the subject of foreign prostitution in Britain. While Coote had no shortage of anecdotes about innocent girls being lured to Buenos Aires, he also made sure to provide lurid detail of 'the foreign woman who comes here for the purpose of carrying on their trade', who had 'already become demoralized in their own countries'.<sup>21</sup> Coote blatantly sexualized his xenophobia, telling the Commission that foreign prostitutes were more perverse than English ones. 'She has introduced into England what is called special forms of vice, which even amongst gentlemen would not bear mentioning,' he explained, 'but they are some of the most destructive forms of vice, and you must remember that the forms of vice are brought into contact with our young men... Our English girls simply do not understand that sort of thing'.<sup>22</sup>

Following Coote's advice, the Report of the Royal Commission on Alien Immigration recommended that the government adopt legislation whereby prostitutes could be easily denied entry to Britain and also easily deported.<sup>23</sup>

These recommendations were included in the Aliens Act of 1905, the first statute that took sweeping measures to regulate the number of migrants coming to Britain. A direct response to the influx of Eastern European Jews, the Act enabled the government to refuse entry to any aliens arriving on an immigrant ship based on their health and upon the likelihood that they would not be able to support themselves once in Britain.<sup>24</sup> It also enacted limited powers of deportation, giving magistrates the power to recommend, and the Home Secretary the power to approve, expulsion if the alien in question had committed an imprisonable offence or 'an offence as a prostitute under... paragraph 11 of section 54 of the Metropolitan Police Act'.<sup>25</sup> The solicitation statute referred to (the 1839 Metropolitan Police Act) did not allow an imprisonment sentence, which means that women convicted of soliciting as prostitutes constituted the only aliens in this Act who could be deported without having committed an offence for which they could be imprisoned.<sup>26</sup>

As Christiane Reineke has recently argued, because the new Act contained many loopholes and implementation was limited, much of the British government's enforcement of the entry restrictions and deportation powers operated 'politically selectively'.<sup>27</sup> Unsurprisingly, prostitute women proved an ideal focused target, and by 1908 several London magistrates who saw many foreign prostitutes come before their benches were regularly recommending expulsion for prostitutes.<sup>28</sup> 'Both the magistrates at Marlborough Street appear to have embarked on a regular campaign against alien prostitutes and recommend expulsion with equal freedom,' the Home Office reported.<sup>29</sup> Unlike these two magistrates, police and Home Office officials operating during this early era of immigration reform seemed reluctant to commit on the issue of deportation. In 1908, Ernley Blackwell, the Assistant Undersecretary of State who fielded almost all prostitution-related questions in the first decades of the twentieth century, admitted that 'It is difficult to know how to deal with these cases. In almost all cases the offence consists solely of accosting men in the streets... It would appear that the magistrates are guided by considerations... in selecting the cases which they recommend, but it is hard to decide whether their object is the salvation of the woman or the clearing of the streets'.<sup>30</sup>

While the Home Office gave police the leeway to argue against deportation, the animosity between the magistrates and the police, and the Home Office fear of second-guessing the poorly paid and much-needed magistrates, meant that decisions to deport were rarely overturned. The Home Office felt compelled to approve magisterial deportation orders lest the magistrates consider their efforts at reform and punishment 'frustrated by the Home Office'.<sup>31</sup> Moreover, deportation was a useful tool in the arsenal of those who hoped to keep street prostitution in check. 'I think it is a mistake to harry these women and deport them as prostitutes,' wrote Blackwell, 'but Inspector Mackay tells me that the fear of deportation has acted as a powerful

inducement to orderly conduct in the streets. Fines or imprisonment are disagreeable incidents in their lives which must be risked in the search for custom but, from their point of view, deportation means ruin.<sup>32</sup> The 1905 Act therefore became a useful addition to the legal arsenal that was used to repress prostitution in London, and, long before the next 'white slavery' legislation would be discussed in the early 1910s, the British government had singled out the migration of prostitute women as a particular concern; not in the context of their purported protection but as their being a particular kind of unwanted alien. Established prostitutes and victims of trafficking occupied dichotomous places in cultural as well as legal thinking.

The reality of migrant prostitution in London in the early twentieth century featured significantly more shades of grey. It was also prominent: between one-quarter and over one-third of arrests for prostitution-related offences before the London courts in the early twentieth century were of non-British women, most of whom were European.<sup>33</sup> According to the Royal Commission on the Duties of the Metropolitan Police, which provided a three-year snapshot of arrest statistics for prostitution-related offences between 1903 and 1905, almost forty per cent of the foreign women arrested in London were French, and another thirty-one per cent were German. These nationalities were rather distantly followed by Russians, at twelve per cent, and then by Belgians and Austrians, at five per cent and three per cent respectively. The remainder of the foreign women involved in prostitution were made up of Swiss, Danish, Italian, Swedish, Norwegian, Dutch and Spanish women, who each hovered around about one per cent of the total foreign arrests. While the returns do include a section for American and Argentinian women, only twenty-two Americans and six Argentinians were arrested in London in the three-year period. Indeed, according to these police returns, prostitute women from outside Europe were an entirely negligible presence in London around the turn of the century, and no other extra-European nationalities were recorded.<sup>34</sup>

These statistics on foreign prostitute women must be considered within some important contexts. While it seems that there undoubtedly were a high number of French women working within London as prostitutes, it is also possible that, because Frenchness was eroticized and helped promote custom, many women may have claimed to be French who were actually of a different nationality (this was probably a common tactic: Marthe Watts spent some time in Italy pretending to be Dutch because her madam reckoned it would intrigue clients).<sup>35</sup>

Meanwhile, the high numbers of German women working as prostitutes in London would likely have come to an abrupt end in 1914, when the German community in the metropolis was dealt a blow by First World War domestic politics from which it never recovered.<sup>36</sup> In addition, many foreign women, particularly those from more recognizable or exotic ethnicities, may have been more likely to work indoors, obscuring their presence in



London by not appearing in the streets and therefore not appearing in the statistics. Finally, foreign women would have very likely found themselves the recipients of a disproportionate amount of police attention, and would have subsequently been over-represented in arrest statistics.<sup>37</sup>

Foreign women working in London were not evenly dispersed throughout the areas in the metropolis where prostitution occurred, but, rather, were concentrated in certain divisions that were, predictably, known for both their prostitution and their large immigrant communities: Soho, where over fifty per cent of women were foreigners, mainly French and German; North Soho, where a full sixty per cent of those arrested for soliciting had been born in Germany, France or other European countries; and the East End, where twenty-seven per cent of prostitute women were foreign, mainly Russian and German Jews. The police in E Division, Holborn, also arrested almost twenty-seven per cent French, German and Russian women, and, in T Division Hammersmith, French and German women clustered around the Shepherd's Bush area, making up about twenty per cent of arrests.<sup>38</sup>

In this three-year period at the turn of the century, an unknown number of foreign women working as prostitutes in London experienced almost 3,000 separate arrests for street prostitution-related offences, making it likely that anywhere from 500 to 1,000 foreign women worked the streets of London around this time, and more still may have worked largely indoors. It is impossible to know the precise numbers, and similarly difficult to determine what set of circumstances, abuses, coercions and decisions led all these individual women from their home countries, often via other countries and frequently en route to places in South America or Africa, to the streets, parks and cafés of London.

One thing is more certain: unlike simplified stories of white slavery, the reality of women's migration for sexual labour was complex. In many ways, migratory prostitution cannot really be distinguished from female migration in a wider sense, and prostitute women, like their domestic servant or nurse counterparts, were guided by the promise of easy cash, adventure and change for the better.<sup>39</sup> Places like Buenos Aires and London promised sexual work that was steadier, more easily found and better paid, and the frequent demand for new women meant that a new arrival could earn a lot of money very quickly, without having to compete with other women in less demand-heavy areas, and without having to cope with reprobation from her home community.<sup>40</sup>

Lydia Harvey's story helps to put these analyses into a different and more challenging context, however, and Anton Cellis and Alec Berard lived up to every stereotype and story associated with 'white slavery'. Both men had a string of aliases, had avoided arrest warrants in several different countries, ran two successful brothels in New Zealand and others in Australia, and were connected to international commercial sex rings in Italy, Belgium, France, Argentina and Britain.<sup>41</sup> But in finding women to work for them, they did

not use 'drugs with the intent to stupefy or overpower' or 'threats and intimidation', as the Criminal Law Amendment Act had specified. In establishing their relationships with their victims, they played upon the very ordinary human desires of single, isolated and young working-class women.

Mireille Lapara, who at the age of seventeen was the youngest of Cellis and Berard's trafficked women, was an orphan who had spent most of her life caring for an elderly grandmother. She had come to Paris for adventure, romance and work: Alec Berard promised her all three. Marguerite Besançon, who was eighteen years of age, was tired of being between domestic service jobs and longed to leave Paris in the care of a wealthy man: Aldo Cellis presented himself as such a candidate. Victoria Bricot, unable to find work in the dairy business for which her childhood in her parents' *crémèrie* had trained her, accepted Cellis's frank offer of a new trade.<sup>42</sup>

Lydia Harvey, meanwhile, earned just enough to pay for her room at a lodging house in Wellington and certainly not enough to afford red plush boots and a ticket halfway around the world. The life that Cellis and Vernon offered these women even held the promise of social mobility: Harvey was promised her own house and her own income in Wellington if she stayed working for Cellis long enough; while Bricot, who was the eldest and seemingly the most self-possessed of the women, negotiated with Cellis to keep the majority of her earnings.<sup>43</sup>

Harvey was young and alone in the city, and the life of a prostitute did not strike her as much different from a previous sexual relationship with a sweetheart: 'She said I was silly to do it for love,' she recalled of a conversation with Vernon, 'as I could earn good money.'<sup>44</sup> As this remark suggests, the men also played upon the sexual ignorance of the young women in question. There is no doubt that Harvey knew that she was going to work as a prostitute, but in her witness statements it is clear that she was ignorant about the range of sex acts she would perform (she was expected to offer sex acts 'the French way' – oral sex – and also to engage in anal sex), and the degree of disgust she would feel for her clients.<sup>45</sup> A woman could agree to engage in prostitution, but this did not mean that she would not subsequently be subjected to coercion, violence and rape.

Once they had agreed to leave their homes, Cellis, Berard and Vernon ensured the women who worked for them were isolated (aided by the fact that they could not speak the language) and made to feel dependent upon them (for instance, by not allowing them any of their own possessions). They also insisted that the women were indentured: 'Marie reminded me on several occasions of the money Celli and she had paid for my passage,' Harvey recalled, 'and said Celli had to pay five to the man who brought me from the boarding house and introduced me to them.'<sup>46</sup> Cellis also played on their hatred of the arduous work that was their alternative to prostitution, instilled in them a fear of the police (an easy fear to instil, considering the number of women who were arrested as prostitutes by the police every

year) and an even greater fear of their family discovering what they had been doing. 'Cellis said that if I gave information to the police they would put me in a home and afterwards in domestic service where I should have to work for other people,' Harvey recalled. 'He also said that the Police would get everything out of me find out where my parents were and write to them and let them know what I had been doing. I was frightened about this.'<sup>47</sup> Besançon refused to leave England if the police did not assure her that they would protect her privacy. 'I do not want my sister to know where I am,' she told them, 'and I will not go to them if I got to France unless they know nothing of what has happened to me.'<sup>48</sup>

Despite the abuse Lydia Harvey had suffered, police were unable to prosecute Aldo Cellis with any indictable crime, largely because she testified to having agreed to become a prostitute of her own free will. The same problem arose when trying to charge Cellis for procuring the three young French women. Seventeen-year-old Mireille Lapara claimed not to have known she was going to be a prostitute in London, but, unfortunately for the prosecution, she had taken up a sexual affair with Cellis's partner, Alec Berard, before leaving Paris.<sup>49</sup> Police in Paris intimated she had worked as a prostitute, although Inspector Anderson, the sympathetic detective in charge of the case in London, thought the matter was debatable because she was 'only fifteen at the time'.<sup>50</sup> Eighteen-year-old Marguerite Besançon claimed similar ignorance, but, though she had not had a sexual relationship with either of the men, and swore that 'Before coming to London I have never acted as a prostitute,' she did admit to having 'had sexual intercourse with a few men'.<sup>51</sup> Twenty-two-year-old Victoria Bricot was suspected by Parisian police of being a prostitute, although Bricot insisted she had been wrongly accused.<sup>52</sup>

The police officers in charge of the investigation were therefore frustrated by the fact that they could not charge Cellis and Berard under the Criminal Law Amendment Act for procurement because of 'the class of woman and girl we had to deal with'.<sup>53</sup> They charged them instead under the 1898 Amendment to the Vagrancy Act, which was intended to be used against pimping, and held those 'living on the earnings of a prostitute' liable to a maximum of six months in prison. Even with these modified charges, police worried that conviction 'was not a forgone conclusion' and feared that an acquittal would allow Cellis and Berard to 'be absolutely free to commence their nefarious practices again, strengthened... by the knowledge of the difficulties to substantiate a case and secure a conviction'.<sup>54</sup>

The difficulties experienced by police assigned to the Cellis and Berard case were not isolated ones. Between 1885 and 1914, it was rare for more than five people to be brought up on procurement charges per annum, although in a handful of years the number did rise to ten or eleven. The annual average for arrests under this section of the Criminal Law Amendment Act was 2.16 for all of England and Wales, and the annual average of convictions was 1.57.<sup>55</sup> Charges laid for this offence, therefore, represented only a

fraction of a per cent of charges laid for prostitution-related offences more generally (the vast majority of which were made up of charges of solicitation and brothel-keeping brought upon the women themselves).<sup>56</sup>

In the end, Cellis and Berard pled guilty, to the evident relief of the officers who had worked on the case for several months. Their sentence – six months' imprisonment without hard labour and expulsion as aliens – was considered by police 'utterly inadequate, for we do not think we have ever had brought under our notice two more despicable ruffians'.<sup>57</sup> But police were forced to concede that 'the case is a difficult one...of the four girls concerned, and who are the principal witnesses, whose ages range from 17 to 22 years, two have led more or less irregular lives, in fact the young woman Bricot, age 22, has been in the hands of the Paris Authorities for prostitution'. Inspector Anderson, whose handling of the case appears to have been genuinely sensitive to the welfare of the women and the injustice of the situation, felt that these facts did not affect 'the gravity of the case'; but, to the law, they did.<sup>58</sup>

The Cellis and Berard trial was heard amidst rising fears of 'white slavery'. On the heels of the fourth Convention on the Suppression of the White Slave Trade that was held in Madrid in 1909, which set out national policy goals toward sexual trafficking, press attention and general publicity of 'white slavery' reached fever pitch and the government came under immense pressure to legislate on the problem.<sup>59</sup> Incredibly, William Stead had yet another role to play in the story of prostitution-related legislation: it was his death in April 1912, as he went down with the Titanic in the icy waters off the coast of Newfoundland, which helped to draw attention to the new Criminal Law Amendment (White Slave Trade) Bill that had been introduced in Parliament.

The 1912 Bill amended the 1898 Amendment to the Vagrancy Act ('living off the earnings of a prostitute') in three ways. First, it imposed harsher punishments for pimping, raising it from a summary offence with a maximum penalty of six months' imprisonment to an indictable misdemeanour, with a maximum penalty of two years' imprisonment. Secondly, it held females liable, meaning that women like Marie Vernon and Queenie Gerald could now be charged with 'living off the earnings of a prostitute'. Lastly, it added the offence of 'controlling or directing the movements of a prostitute', lifting the offence of trafficking outside the offence of 'procurement for the purposes of prostitution'.<sup>60</sup>

When it had become apparent that the new Criminal Law Amendment Bill would pass into law in midsummer 1912, the Commissioner of Police, Edward Henry, saw the need to develop a new police branch within the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) to administer the laws against 'white slavery'.<sup>61</sup> The 'White Slave Branch' was established by year's end, and consisted of eight men in total, a large number to commit to such a project. 'It is necessary,' wrote Henry in a November memorandum, 'to obtain

definite information about a class of men who are known as “bullies” or “ponces” and women who are procuresses. These persons are known to exist in considerable numbers in certain parts of London.<sup>62</sup>

A year later, in November 1913, John Curry, the Superintendent put in charge of the ‘White Slave Branch’, wrote his report, reflecting upon the activities of the special branch twelve months into its operation, in which he issued an unequivocal statement about the white slave trade in London:

At the time of the formation of the Branch the country was being aroused by a number of alarming statements made by religious, social and other workers, who spread the belief that there was a highly organized gang of ‘White Slave Traffickers’ with agents in every part of the civilized world, kidnapping and otherwise carrying off women and girls from their homes to lead them to their ruin in foreign lands, and were thereby reaping huge harvests of gold. I have to state that there has been an utter absence of evidence to justify these alarming statements the effect of which was to cause a large shoal of complaints and allegations (many contained in anonymous letters) to be received by Police. The white slave traffic in this country so far as procuring and transporting women is concerned, has been found to be of very small proportions and quite sporadic.<sup>63</sup>

Once it became apparent that cases of procuration were rare and even more rarely prosecuted successfully, Curry redirected the energies of the Branch to ‘watch suspected “ponces” and bring them to justice’.<sup>64</sup>

In June 1913, feminist Teresa Billington Grieg set out to conduct her own independent assessment of these ubiquitous stories of ‘white slavery’ that had played no small part in moving Parliament to act six months before, ultimately arguing that they amounted to a particularly pervasive urban legend.<sup>65</sup> Billington Grieg could find no evidence from police, prison officials, court missionaries, social workers or rescue workers to support any of the stories she had compiled.<sup>66</sup> No one, including members of societies that campaigned against the traffic, could supply her with any singular documented case of ‘white slavery’ that matched the popular descriptions. ‘We have done nothing for the victims of exploited prostitution by this panicked and punitive act,’ she concluded. Indeed, Billington Grieg, who would soon be joined by many other feminist campaigners, questioned the power of the criminal law to beneficially control any aspect of prostitution. ‘The law is of very little value in the underworld of sexual trading,’ she wrote, ‘... the more severe you make your deterrent punishment the more cunning and subtlety you develop in those who have to evade it.’<sup>67</sup>

Despite the pessimism and incredulity of Billington Grieg and John Curry, the 1912 Criminal Law Amendment Act did mean that men like Cellis would now be subject to harsher penalties for crimes such as those they had

committed against Lydia Harvey, including potential whipping, a measure that had been at the heart of the new Bill's controversy. But, upon closer inspection, the 1912 Act did little more than the 1885 or 1898 Act to attack third-party exploiters. In London, we can see that arrests under all three Acts rose significantly between the years 1898 and 1913, when the Metropolitan Police stopped reporting arrests for non-indictable offences. But following on, using information about prostitution in the *Judicial Statistics of England and Wales* (which by this time saw London cases make up the majority), it appears that, after the initial years of panic around 1912, arrest and conviction rates plummeted and, even when police forces were less taxed after the war, convictions for third-party exploitation never reached their pre-war numbers, while arrests of prostitute women for prostitution-related offences continued to vastly outnumber them.<sup>68</sup> It is difficult to say whether the law made for more 'cunning' and 'subtle' traffickers, as Billington Grieg had predicted, but it appears to have done little to stop their activities (see Figure A.3).

In the meantime, measures directed against white slavery continued to be connected to the control of female migration, though this was not always undertaken under the auspices of the Aliens Act. The term for this alternative expulsion from Britain of white slavery victims was called 'voluntary repatriation', and it was a typical recourse in cases of trafficking for the government, who relied heavily upon moral reform organizations like the NVA. The NVA had informally assisted in the repatriation of prostitutes for a number of years, but, after the new Criminal Law Amendment Act was passed in 1912, they took on a more official role.<sup>69</sup> Police orders were amended, instructing officers to formally notify the Association upon the conviction of any 'alien prostitute'. They would then send a 'lady visitor' to interview the prisoner in Holloway. It would be this NVA member's job to assess the woman as a candidate for repatriation, by questioning her as to 'her history and the causes which led her to following a life of prostitution, the method she has adopted in carrying on the business of prostitution in this country...and whether she would be willing to give up the life and return to her home and friends'.<sup>70</sup>

For women who did not feel like answering these questions, or who proved unwilling to 'give up the life', the Aliens Act continued to provide a way to remove prostitutes whose experiences and behaviour barred them from being victims of 'white slavery'. In 1920, twenty-nine-year-old Rose Willis was found guilty of soliciting in Regent Street. She was a Russian Jew born in Odessa, and had emigrated to Chicago when she was eighteen, marrying Isaac Willis, a naturalized American. The pair eventually came to London. At the time of her arrest her husband had died three years before, and she was left to care for her two sons, one American and the other British-born (Willis paid seventy-five pounds per annum to keep them at a boarding school). Though she had no previous convictions recorded against

her, G.L. Denman at Marlborough Street Police Court sentenced her to a month of hard labour and recommended her for expulsion. The order was granted by the Home Office and Willis was sent to Holloway, where she was visited by a NVA volunteer, working in a collaborating capacity with police and Home Office officials, who endeavoured to glean from a tight-lipped Willis additional information regarding the amount of savings she had and the whereabouts of her relations. The NVA member recommended her expulsion from Britain. Separated from her children, Willis found refuge with a sister living in Egypt.<sup>71</sup>

Frederick S. Bullock, the Assistant Police Commissioner for legal matters from 1909 to 1914, was explicit about the relationship between the 'voluntary repatriation' spoken of by those concerned with 'white slavery' and the policy of expulsion as practised by the government. He warned that voluntary repatriation should not 'be used to minimize the very salutary effects of the Aliens Act', and police should make sure that measures taken to help and protect 'white slaves' would not impede the policing and control of prostitutes. 'The Aliens Act,' he pointed out, 'is now a distinct terror to foreign prostitutes using the streets,' and it functioned alongside the anti-solicitation acts to promote public order.<sup>72</sup> Contradictorily, other Home Office officials pointed out that, while they were unsure of the right of magistrates to use the Aliens Act to harass and threaten foreign prostitutes, they could see that the Act could have a potentially beneficial effect on the reduction of 'white slavery'. 'A wholesale crusade against prostitutes is useless,' wrote one Assistant Undersecretary in 1908, 'and could do more harm than good. But the bully is an unnecessary evil, and in deporting these women we are spoiling his business, at any rate.'<sup>73</sup>

The irony of attempting to 'spoil the business' of exploiters by punishing the victims of exploitation passed largely unnoticed, as did the fact that the exceptional measures of punishment to which foreign women were subject often encouraged them to seek the help of third parties. They were vulnerable to violence, arrest and punishment like other prostitutes, but they were also immigrants, and the early twentieth-century officialdom which legitimated citizenship came along with an increased vulnerability for those who could not lay claim to it. The fact that these women were doubly illegal – they were undocumented or falsely documented migrants as well as prostitutes – only exacerbated their vulnerability to exploitation. Moreover, foreign prostitutes could also suffer from all the other vulnerabilities that were often felt by immigrants: language problems, a lack of social networks, and isolation. For these reasons, police frequently noted that 'bullies' were particularly prevalent among women of foreign birth.<sup>74</sup>

Like Rose Willis, who had sent her unrevealed savings to her sister in Egypt before she was deported to prevent them being seized, many foreign women were frequently resilient and resourceful. Some developed survival tactics that helped them escape the Aliens Act by obscuring their place of

birth. Police, magistrates and the Home Office had to frequently contend with women who claimed not to be aliens. 'Prisoners, reasonably supposed to have been aliens,' complained the Scotland Yard to the Home Office, 'have escaped being recommended for expulsion merely by claiming birth in his Majesty's Dominions.'<sup>75</sup> Ellen Grand, who spoke with a German accent, swore she was a Scot; Carmen Nelson insisted that she was from Gibraltar. Most commonly, French-speaking women claimed to be from Canada, Jersey or Malta.<sup>76</sup> Due to the lack of development of a system of official identification and travel documents, foreign prostitutes could sometimes confound police and Home Office attempts to control their migration. Meanwhile, police officers in charge of seeing through the deportation of such women made the most of the confused and ever-changing policies as well: woman police officer Lilian Wyles recalled that constables who were charged with seeing deportees to Dover would seize the opportunity to vacation with their wives and girlfriends by the seashore, once they were satisfied that the deportee 'could no longer hop ashore'.<sup>77</sup> The task of deportation was also frequently given to women police officers like Wyles, though she says nothing about their seaside holidays.<sup>78</sup>

The First World War saw the special 'white slave' branch suspended for lack of manpower at the same time as concern over suspicious and unwanted aliens grew, and international policing initiatives became better organized.<sup>79</sup> The Aliens Act was expanded at the outbreak of war in the Aliens Restrictions Order of 1914, which became peacetime legislation in the Aliens Restriction (Amendment) Act of 1919.<sup>80</sup> As passports were improved and border crossings and ports of entry more closely monitored, opportunities for foreign prostitutes to conceal their birthplaces and claim membership in the Dominions were growing ever slighter within the context of an increasing surveillance of both migration and prostitution.<sup>81</sup>

How, then, did the law cope with the victims of Cellis and Berard, those young women who found their characters on trial alongside the actions of their traffickers? After the trial, two lady volunteers of the National Vigilance Association were charged by the government with accompanying Lapara, Besançon and Bricot back to France. During the trip, any notions the NVA assistants may have had regarding innocent white slaves soon came up against all the complexities of real human beings. 'On their journey their conduct was anything but exemplary,' wrote one of the NVA members of Lapara and Besançon in her report, 'for they endeavoured to attract the notice of every man who came near us. On the boat, both when embarking and disembarking, their remarks called forth various replies from the men around us.'<sup>82</sup> Victoria Bricot, on the other hand, was docile when she was collected from the Church Army House where she had been placed in London. 'Her behaviour was excellent until we reached Dieppe,' her sponsor wrote, 'when she became suddenly very sullen and independent.' When the NVA representative tried to find her a place in a reform home, Bricot became



even more difficult. 'I shall not remain here,' she declared. 'I would rather return from where I came...Madam, I am free, am I not?'<sup>83</sup>

From the moment she left her NVA sponsor and wandered away into the streets of Paris, Bricot ceased once and for all to bear any resemblance to the pitiable white slave. In exercising her right to autonomy, she relinquished any claim she may have had to passive victimhood. Now, like Cellis's erstwhile victim-cum-assistant Marie, other young women had to be protected from her. 'I went to the Prefecture de Police and reported the case,' the NVA volunteer wrote. 'Mr Harouin, Chef de Division, who received me, was very kind and promised that a watch should be kept on [Bricot's] movements in future, in the interest of other young girls.'<sup>84</sup>

Upon arriving in France, Bricot and Besançon refused the option of a notoriously strict reform home. Mireille Lapara sobbed as she walked inside. Bricot and Besançon, meanwhile, were left to face the same unstable, arduous and low-paid employment and impoverished lifestyle that had made it so easy for Cellis and Berard to convince them to leave. And what of Lydia Harvey? She was taken under the wing of Inspector Anderson, the chief inspector in the case, who petitioned the Home Office and the National Vigilance Association to pay for her journey back to New Zealand because her mother 'desired the girl home, but could not afford the passage'.<sup>85</sup> Somewhat surprisingly, considering hers was such a flagship case of 'white slavery', the NVA was only willing to pay her fare to Wellington, for £39, telling the frustrated Inspector that she would have to come up with the money to Oamaru on her own.

After finally securing her passage through donations, Anderson and a Police Court matron accompanied Harvey to the London Docks and saw her safely in the charge of the captain of the vessel before it sailed out of the Thames. It was probably the last opportunity she had to travel.

# 7

## Making War, Taking Fingerprints and Challenging the Law: Policy Changes and Public Debates after 1914

Nellie Johnson began working as a street prostitute in London sometime during the First World War, a few short years after Lydia Harvey headed homeward on her New Zealand-bound passenger liner. Johnson was first arrested on 6 November 1916, when she was twenty-two years old, and, if she was anything like most of the women who sold sex on the streets of the metropolis, she had probably not gone much more than a year between first soliciting prostitution and finding herself under arrest for doing so.<sup>1</sup> But it is difficult to know anything at all about Johnson before her first encounter with the criminal justice system and its record-keepers: the census reports fifty Nellie Johnsons who were around seven years old in 1901 and she could have been any of them. Perhaps she was the Nellie Johnson born in Whitstable, Kent, in 1894; she did go to nearby Chatham, after all, a few years after her first arrest, perhaps seeking old contacts.<sup>2</sup> She also could have been Nellie Johnson the orphan, who was born in Camberwell in 1893, a part of South London coloured light blue ('very poor, chronic want') by Charles Booth a year before her birth.<sup>3</sup> By the age of seven this Nellie Johnson was living at the Brixton Orphanage for 300 Fatherless Girls, an institution founded in 1876 that had as its express mission the training of girls for domestic service.<sup>4</sup>

Nellie Johnson's experiences of prostitution and the criminal justice system in the late 1910s and early 1920s were both typical and – as we shall see – atypical, but her story helps to illustrate many of the crises and the consensuses that developed surrounding the control of prostitution during the First World War and in the interwar years, which were marked by major scandals surrounding the policing of sex in public space, challenges to the policies and philosophies of solicitation law, a renewed concern with venereal disease, and heated discussions about how to deal with juveniles and

young women who sold sex. Despite this, the trend toward more efficient identification and criminalization of prostitute women continued, through de facto policies of control and back-door legislation. Women like Nellie Johnson experienced – and attempted to escape – the vicious circles of stigmatization, arrest and conviction amid the shifting and volatile public discourses surrounding prostitution, and within a commercial sex industry, and a city, that was rapidly changing.

During the war, Nellie Johnson sold sex on the streets of North Soho, in the company of many other women from around London, Britain and Europe (this area, if you recall, had the highest number of foreign prostitutes in the metropolis). The neighbourhood was lively, and Tottenham Court Road and its side streets were filled with French, Italian and Belgian cafés and restaurants which were open late into the night and were known to sell alcohol after licensing hours to soldiers.<sup>5</sup> Before her first arrest, as she stood on the street meeting men's eyes, calling out to them or catching hold of their arms, she may have been told to move on, and had her name jotted down in the policeman's notebook. When she was seen again, she was charged under the Vagrancy Act for 'being a common prostitute behaving in a riotous or indecent manner'.<sup>6</sup>

Johnson, like most other women arrested for street prostitution, probably pleaded guilty. Hugh Macmillan, the Chairman of the Street Offences Committee (which would sit ten years after Johnson's first arrest), channelled the thoughts of the average prostitute woman to explain why so many of them chose to do this: 'she thinks to herself, "well, the odds are tremendous against my getting off: the worst that can happen is 40s... If I fight the case, I may annoy the police... they will run me in again."' <sup>7</sup>

In the 1940s, meanwhile, Barbara Tate, who worked as a prostitute's maid, recalled how any woman who challenged her arrest or pleaded not guilty would be targeted by police until she understood that 'pleading guilty... was the right and proper thing to do'.<sup>8</sup> By the First World War, it seems that even less attention was paid to the need to prove actual annoyance: Home Office Undersecretary Ernley Blackwell admitted in 1917 that most magistrates accepted 'rather slight evidence with regard to indecency or annoyance'.<sup>9</sup> Testimonies regarding the de facto removal of the annoyance clause were widespread, and the fact was generally acknowledged by police and civil servant alike. 'Many of these convictions... if appealed against, which for practical purposes they never are, would not be upheld simply on the question of the insufficiency of evidence', wrote the official police solicitors, J.J. Wotner and Sons. 'Evidence consists of "the male person solicited was annoyed... gesture of impatience or anger, a shrugging of the shoulders... stepping into the road..." I should be inclined to call it more a mere formula than actual evidence.'<sup>10</sup> The glib words of the police solicitor would have been cold comfort to twenty-two-year-old Nellie Johnson, who found herself without legal counsel at the first of what would be many Police Court

appearances. After the police testified as to her 'indecent' behaviour, she would have been given a brief chance to defend herself. Even if she understood which defence to use in a trial that would not have lasted more than five minutes and more likely under two, she was probably not going to be successful: by the First World War, conviction rates for solicitation offences had reached eighty per cent.<sup>11</sup>

Johnson's first arrest contributed to this statistic: she was found guilty and sentenced to fourteen days in prison, perhaps in default of fine payment but possibly because G.L. Denman Esq., the magistrate at Marlborough Street, was in the mood to teach first-time prostitutes lessons that day.<sup>12</sup> His colleague, Mr H. Smith at the Thames police court, certainly was: just a few months prior he had been shocked to the point of writing to the Home Secretary about three very badly behaved young women who were charged with solicitation at his bench: 'Why the - - - - don't you give me twelve months and have done with it,' one of them had spat when he asked about her home address. 'You'll get no information out of me, you - - - -'.<sup>13</sup> We are left to imagine the actual words the young woman used, as well as the look upon Mr Smith's face.

It is unlikely that any magistrate was in the best of moods in 1916, for they found themselves coping with the social upheaval of total war and a police force reduced by half as former constables sat in the trenches and died on the battlefields of France. One of their chief troubles were women and girls who came to be known as 'amateur prostitutes', a term that described young women who engaged in activity that ranged from flirting with soldiers in public spaces, to having sex with soldiers in exchange for gifts or for 'thrills', to taking up actual prostitution in unprecedented numbers during wartime.<sup>14</sup> It is difficult to measure the reality of 'amateur prostitution' and its related phenomenon of 'khaki fever' against the moral panic surrounding it, but these perceived changes in young women's behaviour during the war challenged the consensus that had developed about how to police, whom to police, and – with the rise in women's policing – who was doing the policing when it came to street prostitution.<sup>15</sup> 'The difficulties of dealing with prostitutes in normal times are always great; they are manifestly increased by existing conditions,' wrote Assistant Undersecretary Ernley Blackwell on behalf of the Home Office in 1917, 'many young women not formerly known to the police as prostitutes have been led to adopt this mode of life, or at any rate to be guilty of immoral conduct with soldiers.'<sup>16</sup>

Meanwhile, professional prostitutes – however they may be distinguished from 'amateur' ones – were no strangers to the wartime streets of London. For women selling sex on the streets, the war brought with it an immense rise in potential clients, as the metropolis began to fill with hundreds of thousands of soldiers from all over the Commonwealth and Britain. These men were mostly young, and had some measure of disposable income (this was especially true of the high-paid Canadian troops); they were also

excited, scared, amongst strangers, and part of an institution that, if it did not always blatantly encourage the use of prostitutes, openly acknowledged its inevitability. On the supply side of the sexual economy, the war positively impacted women's licit employment, but the seller's market for prostitution during wartime was so lucrative that, no matter how much more women's war work there was and no matter how much more it paid than in peacetime, prostitution during the war paid better still.<sup>17</sup> In the light of such potentially high earnings and in the excited and doomsday atmosphere of total war, many young women may have begun to sell sex for the first time. Nellie Johnson was very likely one of them.

The war also altered the way that commercial sex happened and the spaces in which it was conducted (see [Map 3](#)). One of the most remarkable changes during the war was the fall in the concentration of C and D Divisions, Soho, North Soho and Marylebone. Between January 1914 and August 1916, C Division saw only ten per cent (as opposed to eighteen per cent in 1906) of the arrests in the metropolis while D Division saw only five per cent (as opposed to fourteen per cent in 1906).<sup>18</sup> Some prostitution in this area had moved off the streets, as we shall see, but it had also spread out, and C and D Divisions' rates of prostitution were now shared among E and A divisions as well – Bloomsbury, Hyde Park, and Euston – largely in response to the more geographically widespread hotels, boarding houses and clubs where soldiers stayed and socialized. A great deal of commercial sex had also moved south, to Victoria and Lambeth, as Waterloo and Victoria stations became the hubs of transportation of troops to and from the war.<sup>19</sup> From the beginning of the war, police in this district reported that they not only had to contend with women they knew to be prostitutes in the area, but also with 'a larger number [of] prostitutes coming from other parts of London...not known to the officers in these particular areas'.<sup>20</sup> In keeping with the connections between war, transportation and prostitution, there was also an increased concentration of prostitution near Euston and St Pancras Stations, and in G Division, near King's Cross. H Division, Whitechapel, meanwhile, quadrupled its number of arrests during the war, due to displacement of women selling sex from barrack areas (as we shall see) and also to the increased navy and merchant marine presence that wartime brought with it to the docklands.<sup>21</sup> Interestingly, the shrinking of the West End sexual marketplace seems to have lasted into the 1930s, according to popular observations in the interwar years.<sup>22</sup>

Despite the likely rise in commercial sex, arrests under the solicitation laws fell dramatically during the First World War. There are some easy ways to explain this: constables detested policing street prostitution at the best of times, and during the war, when the Metropolitan Police force was greatly reduced in numbers, it is not unimaginable that the policing of prostitution could have been largely left to the wayside. Moreover, because prostitutes were seen by many people as an inevitable or even enjoyable part of the lives of the soldiers stationed in London, any police crusade against prostitution

would inevitably pit the metropolitan force against men from the military, a conflict in which most police officers had no desire to engage.<sup>23</sup>

We should not be so quick to assume that arrest rates for street prostitution-related activity really did fall during the war. While arrests under Section 54 (11) of the 1839 Metropolitan Police Act and Section 13 of the 1824 Vagrancy Act certainly did fall significantly, it seems that police were just as likely to turn to a different section of the 1839 Metropolitan Police Act, 54 (13), which held 'every person who shall use any threatening, abusive, or insulting words or behaviour with intent to provoke a breach of the peace, or whereby a breach of the peace may be occasioned' liable to arrest.<sup>24</sup> Even though this subsection was not intended to be used to arrest street prostitutes, it was favoured because it enabled police and magistrates to proceed even in the absence of definitive proof that a woman had a record of arrests or cautions as a 'common prostitute'.<sup>25</sup> Arrests under this subsection are not included in statistics related to prostitution in the *Annual Reports of the Metropolitan Police Commissioner*, but an unpublished police return during the war included it as part of the canon of laws used against street prostitutes. In this report, charges for 'insulting words or behaviour' represent a full thirty-eight per cent of the arrests for prostitution offences in the three years between 1914 and 1916.<sup>26</sup> If these arrests are added to those executed under the two solicitation acts, the total number of arrests for this period actually exceeds that of the three-year period examined during the 1906 Royal Commission (14,692 arrests over a two-and-a-half-year period as opposed to 12,795 arrests over a three-year period), calling into serious question the assumption that police action against prostitution was drastically reduced during the First World War (see Figure A.2, Note 4). It also challenges attempts by historians to argue, based on official arrest statistics, that instances of prostitution were falling.

While police were tackling solicitation by unknown women by straining a measure intended for more serious breaches of the peace, they were also implementing new measures by which women who were known to be 'common prostitutes' could be more quickly, confidently and permanently identified. In 1917, Assistant Undersecretary Ernley Blackwell reiterated a long-standing problem. 'To prove that a woman is a common prostitute is not usually an easy matter,' he wrote. 'Some constables can prove this as regard women who frequent their ordinary beat or the part of the town on which they are stationed, but others never trust themselves to identify in such a case; and, in any event, a woman who goes outside her usual ranks will generally escape identification.'<sup>27</sup>

It was with these problems in mind that Edward Henry extended his famous fingerprinting orders to prostitutes in 1917. While Superintendents in charge of outer districts of London felt that fingerprinting would be of little use to them because 'prostitutes, as a rule, become localized and those with previous convictions can usually be traced by the officers of the district

without recourse to fingerprints,<sup>28</sup> police in charge of central London were very receptive to the practice. The C Division Superintendent supported fingerprinting wholeheartedly, largely, he said, because of the significant number of foreign prostitutes in his area who moved frequently between districts and between countries, and who tended to disappear for lengthy periods of time.<sup>29</sup> In D Division, Marylebone, the officers reported that fingerprinting 'has been of the greatest assistance to Police and the Magistrates in... determining the character of a great number of women charged with prostitution. The fingerprints of this class of woman often bring to light particulars concerning her previous history which would not otherwise have been discovered'.<sup>30</sup> Police in these reports made constant reference to the character of the women in question, arguing that fingerprints could provide definitive proof that they were unrespectable, as though 'unrespectability' were the crime with which they were charged.<sup>31</sup>

The tactics of prostitute women to avoid criminal records relied on the fact that written descriptions or photographs were disembodied documents, and could not always be linked to the body and its actions in the present. The Superintendent of B Division, Chelsea, called up the spectre of the 'Cass controversy' when he informed Horwood that 'women charged with this class of offence frequently allege that they are respectable and they have been able to produce evidence of their respectability that could not be rebutted by the Police at the time, with the result that the guilty persons have been discharged and the public led to believe that the police made a mistake'.<sup>32</sup> The District Superintendent of E Division noted how prostitutes were known to 'change considerably in appearance', relying on the fact that 'time baffles recollection'.<sup>33</sup>

The fingerprint, on the other hand, was permanently embodied, a codified determiner of identity that, in the case of street prostitution, was the only thing needed to prove that a woman in public was soliciting prostitution to the 'annoyance' of the people surrounding her. Using fingerprints in the conviction of prostitutes also rested on the assumption that once a woman was a prostitute she would always be a prostitute, and would be a prostitute all of the time, even when she was not actually working. Mary Gordon, the chief inspector of women's prisons in the 1910s, encountered many women who protested this assumption. 'They often say, "Yes, I do walk the streets, but on that night I was doing nothing. I was going about my business – coming from work, or what not."' <sup>34</sup> An established identity of 'common prostitute', and hence such women's criminality, had become as constant, unchanging and permanent as their fingertips.<sup>35</sup> This represented the single most important wartime development in the policing of prostitution, and the policy and its consequences would stretch far beyond the war's end.

The First World War had other consequences for the policing of prostitution as well. With the war came a heightened concern with venereal disease, and renewed efforts to control its spread through controversial legislation.<sup>36</sup> While worry over VD was never far from the surface even in peacetime

(indeed, the Royal Commission on Venereal Disease was appointed before the war in 1913, even though it did not report until 1916), war meant that the consequences of these diseases were measured not only in terms of public health and morality but in terms of the reduced fighting power of the army.<sup>37</sup> Wartime also meant that the state was vested with the power to enact provisions that infringed on civil liberties, which would likely not have made it through Parliament in peacetime.<sup>38</sup> The first of these measures directed at venereal disease was Defence of the Realm Act (DORA) 13a, passed in 1915, which prohibited any person who had been found guilty of a prostitution-related crime to be in the vicinity of any place where his Majesty's troops were stationed.<sup>39</sup> 13a was widely enforced around barracks: Canadian military leaders at Folkestone noted that they found the provision very useful for keeping their well-paid troops away from the temptation of prostitution, and arrests for solicitation around Woolwich barracks dropped by half during the war.<sup>40</sup> This was in sharp contrast to the policy toward prostitution on the Continent, where troops (including British troops who were stationed there) were allowed formal access to government-regulated brothels.<sup>41</sup> As the war dragged on, the problem of non-mercenary promiscuity in the control of VD also loomed large, and in 1918 the notorious DORA regulation 40d was pushed through Parliament, which criminalized any woman – prostitute or not – who solicited or had intercourse with any member of His Majesty's troops if she was infected with a venereal disease (whether she was aware of her infected state at the time or not, and indeed whether it was she who had given it him or he to her).

Ultimately, women without criminal records as prostitutes were not very much affected by 40d. 'The effectiveness of the regulation is necessarily impaired,' wrote one MP in light of a Parliamentary investigation into the workings of the measure, 'as the police dare not take the risk of arresting any woman under the Regulation unless they know her to be a prostitute.'<sup>42</sup> Despite its sweeping and controversial measures, therefore, DORA 40d seems to have been most commonly used against women who were already stigmatized as prostitutes. The measure was also considered a complete failure by government. By the time of its repeal, only 396 cases had been reported for all of England and Wales, and only 203 of these had proceeded to court. Of these, fewer than half (101) had been convicted.<sup>43</sup> In the same period in England and Wales, over 20,000 arrests were made of women known as 'common prostitutes' for solicitation offences.

In general, it appears that police and magistrates preferred to avoid the controversial DORA 40d wherever possible, and, both during and after the war, found more subtle ways of compulsorily inspecting women for VD. Magistrates frequently used a series of extended remands into custody for younger women for whom there was not enough evidence to support conviction, a practice which, according to prison inspector Mary Gordon, continued into the interwar years and resulted in many women serving



relatively lengthy de facto prison sentences.<sup>44</sup> These remands – which frequently saw young women sent to homes and hostels such as the Church Army homes – enabled authorities to inspect them forcibly for venereal disease, because the homes required a physical examination before they took them in.<sup>45</sup> These kinds of back-door policies were part of what Pamela Cox has described as ‘the history of things that “didn’t happen”’ in the control of venereal disease, arguing that marginalized people were frequently coerced into compulsory inspection in a politically climate that ostensibly favoured voluntarism. This same concept of things that ‘didn’t happen’ can be applied to the police’s use of the ‘breach of the peace’ legislation to arrest unidentified women for solicitation.<sup>46</sup>

As it had been with the Contagious Diseases Acts, the reactions that the DORA measures inspired were as influential as the actual measures themselves. In response to the controversies surrounding prostitution and sexuality during wartime, the Association for Moral and Social Hygiene was formed in 1915, through a merger of the Ladies National Association for the Repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts and the British Branch of the International Abolitionist Organization (founded in 1875 to combat regulated prostitution around the world). They resurrected the old campaigner’s journal, *The Shield*, and the first issues of the new series of *The Shield* criticized not only the new regulation 13a but Britain’s use of the solicitation laws more generally to address the problem of prostitution in the streets. The AMSH, looking to their hero and guiding light, Josephine Butler, argued that ‘the opposition to the CD Acts rested not only on grounds of morality ... but on the ground of justice’, and that the solicitation laws, by labelling women as common prostitutes and subjecting them to special rules and punishments, encapsulated the same kind of injustice against which Butler and her colleagues had rallied.<sup>47</sup> ‘Denying to prostitutes the ordinary rights of human beings in a civilized country ... is fundamentally vicious’, wrote Maude Royden, a feminist and campaigner for women clergy who was one of the Association’s most active members.<sup>48</sup>

The most significant feminist and social purity outcry came on the heels of DORA 40d, which was widely attacked not only for reincarnating the sexual double standard of the CD Acts but also, somewhat contradictorily, because it could potentially be visited upon any woman.<sup>49</sup> This marked the beginning of a lengthy, influential and ultimately unsuccessful campaign on the part of the AMSH to repeal the solicitation laws and replace them with a gender- and offence-neutral law regarding public order in the streets. Despite focusing on controversial issues and arguing for radical solutions, the AMSH enjoyed the support of most women’s organizations at the time, including such disparate organizations as the International Women’s League, the Conservative Women’s Reform Union, the Women’s Liberal Federation, the Church League for Women’s Suffrage, the Salvation Army, the National British Women’s Temperance Association and the Young Women’s Christian

Organization. The vast support received for the AMSH's campaigns against the solicitation laws once again calls the idea of a consensus of 'ordinary citizens' into serious question.<sup>50</sup> That being said, the AMSH were no friends to the idea of commercial sex: with equal fervour, and this time in tandem with more conservative moral reform organizations such as the NVA, the AMSH also protested against the British military's tacit acceptance of regulated brothels for troops in France, and their issue of prophylaxis kits to their men. These measures, they insisted, were another incarnation of regulated and tolerated vice.<sup>51</sup>

During the war, old discourses surrounding prostitution, moral reform, feminism and the sexual double standard were reignited and reinvigorated, heralding a decade of controversies about the way that the state dealt with solicitation and prostitution. While the AMSH and its affiliated societies and the NVA and the wider moral reform movement had seen eye to eye during the war in their campaigns against French military brothels and DORA 40d, it was not long before they had become divided into factions over some key issues. While the AMSH considered the criminalization of the spread of venereal disease in general an unacceptable and unworkable measure, the NVA was concerned only that it would be applied equally to both men and women. Similarly, while the AMSH wished to see laws against solicitation repealed entirely, the NVA campaigned to make the buying and the selling of sex illegal, regardless of the degree of annoyance it had caused.<sup>52</sup> Whereas the AMSH advocated for sex education and voluntary retraining homes, the NVA launched several campaigns in support of the lengthy incarceration and forced rehabilitation of young prostitutes. These issues came to a head in 1917 and 1918, when Bills were introduced that criminalized the spread of VD and allowed the incarceration of under-aged prostitutes. When the government set up a Joint Select Committee to consider these bills, the AMSH launched its own shadow enquiry on 'the state of sexual morality', interviewing dozens of witnesses and eventually publishing a report which called for the repeal of all 'laws of exception' against prostitutes, including the solicitation laws.<sup>53</sup>

These ideological battles continued into the 1920s, as various groups concerned with prostitution, alternatively allied with and opposed to one another, all vied for the attention of law and policymakers. All of these animated and controversial discussions concerning what to do about prostitution meant little to Nellie Johnson, however, who found herself caught in the vicious circle of solicitation, arrest, conviction and solicitation again, which was the reality for most women who sold sex on the street. After her first arrest, Johnson continued to work in North Soho for many years, and continued to be arrested for street prostitution-related offences, becoming well known – or so they claimed – to the police officers of D Division's Tottenham Court Road station. It was here that she was arrested for the second time, almost a year later, in October 1917. Looking to escape a

harsher sentence, and playing upon the confusion over prostitute identity during the First World War, she gave her name as Lily Johnson, and received twenty-one days in prison. She had not been out of prison a month before she was arrested and convicted again as a disorderly prostitute, and this time the magistrate at Marlborough Street Police Court gave her three months' hard labour for her offence: this was an exceptionally severe sentence, and it is difficult to say what it meant. Magistrate G.L. Denman may have been in the mood to give her a harsh sentence, Johnson may have been particularly obnoxious while soliciting, or she may have had difficulty holding her tongue while in court. Just after her next release in March 1918, she appeared before the County of London Sessions for the first time under the alias Fanny Agar, and was at this point bound over for two years' probation. By this time she was twenty-three years old.<sup>54</sup>

The criminal justice system then saw nothing of Johnson for over a year. The war ended, the Metropolitan Police went briefly on strike and won their bid for higher pay, and Nellie Johnson drifted out of London and into Kent – and from prostitution into property crime – and was arrested in April 1919, appearing at the West Kent Sessions on charges of burglary. No other details were given, and we can only guess at why she had committed this offence. Perhaps Johnson's prospects in the sexual economy were hampered by the war's end, which brought with it a significant slowing of demand for commercial sex as the soldiers to whom London was a temporary home – and prostitute women a temporary respite – returned to their families. In any case, Johnson was awarded six months' hard labour, her longest sentence to date, and she was convicted under the name Ellen Johnson.<sup>55</sup>

We meet Johnson in her Ellen incarnation again almost exactly six months later. No sooner had she gotten out of prison for her burglary conviction than the police in Chatham arrested her for being a 'riotous or indecent' prostitute. The officers in Chatham must not have recognized her, and she did not give her real name under which her criminal record was filed, because she was tried in Chatham Police Court as a first or second-time offender, and given only fourteen days' imprisonment.<sup>56</sup> Whatever her reasons for being there in the first place, Chatham Dockyard did not hold Johnson for long, and soon she was back in London's generally more profitable West End. She was picked up by D Division officers three months after serving her fourteen-day Chatham sentence, and charged with disorderly prostitution. This time, twenty-six-year old Johnson was sentenced to one month's imprisonment, under her real name.<sup>57</sup>

Johnson had been out of prison for three months when a young constable by the name of Frederick Walker arrested her once again. She gave her name as Nellie O'Keefe, and was sentenced to ten weeks' imprisonment. When she got out of prison after those ten weeks, she enjoyed one of the longest spans of freedom she had had since 1916, and took a flat in Albany Street, where she lived amongst waiters, tradesmen, and other prostitutes perhaps, in the

working-class back streets near Regent's Park, which afforded her easy access to the North Soho area in which she continued to solicit.<sup>58</sup>

Nellie Johnson's experiences of criminalization fit into a broader picture of what was happening to women who sold sex on the street and the structures of street prostitution in the 1920s. Like Johnson, most other prostitute women were also experiencing frequent convictions: by the late 1920s, between eighty and ninety per cent of the arrests made under the solicitation laws in London ended in conviction. This rising London conviction rate was, unsurprisingly, coupled with a high rate of recidivism. There do not appear to be any complete or official statistical reports on recidivism for prostitution offences, but in 1927 Magistrate H.L. Cancellor provided the Street Offences Committee with some statistics he and his clerk had compiled concerning the rates of recidivism in Marlborough Street Police Court. In 1926 alone, thirty-one per cent of the 660 women charged with street prostitution offences had been charged more than once that year. Seventeen per cent had been charged twice, six per cent had been charged three times and four per cent had been charged four times. Fifteen women had been charged five times and nine women had been charged seven times. One woman had been charged a full thirteen times in one year.<sup>59</sup> Cancellor's statistics only reported on one police court in one calendar year; therefore it is reasonable to expect that these recidivism rates would have proved remarkably higher if they had reported on more than one court – Bow as well as Marlborough Street, for instance – and for a two or three-year period or longer.

The *Report of the Departmental Committee on Persistent Offenders*, meanwhile, noted in 1932 that, while repeat offending was high for both sexes (seventy-two per cent of people in prison had been in prison at least once before), it was a significantly larger problem for women. Of all the women in prison, eighty-six per cent were repeat offenders, and a startling forty-one per cent had been convicted over twenty times. This, explained the Committee, was due to the fact that more than sixty-six per cent of women in prison were there on charges of drunkenness, prostitution and violations of the Poor Law; these offences carried with them an implicitly high incidence of reoffending. Like Nellie Johnson, most of these women were 'ins and outs': more than half were in prison in default of fine payment, and only sixteen per cent were in prison for more than three months.<sup>60</sup>

Rates of recidivism are very hard to determine, and other reports suggest that a much higher percentage of women experienced repeat prison sentences. Sybil Neville Rolphe, writing for the *New Survey of London Labour* in 1930, found that fewer prostitutes were sent to prison than in 1900 (prostitutes constituted a substantial nine per cent of the entire prison population in 1900 and 'only' 5.8 per cent in 1930), in keeping with the marked rise in fining as the most common sentence for prostitution in the interwar years.<sup>61</sup> However, the number of women there in default of fine payment remained high: while Neville Rolphe found that seventy-six per cent of prostitute

women were fined in 1930 (as opposed to fifty-six per cent in 1900), and thirty per cent were able to pay (only eleven per cent had been able to pay in 1911), this still meant that the number of women sent to prison in 1930 was high indeed. Moreover, these statistics, which are the only glimpse we have of the number of women who defaulted on fines, suggests that prison was a very common experience for prostitute women. This cannot be taken to mean that women did not have the money to pay the fines, however, as it had been determined in the late nineteenth century that 'common prostitutes' ought not to be included in the list of people who were given time to pay.<sup>62</sup> If a prostitute did not have the money on her person, and did not have someone to bring the money to the police court for her, she was immediately sent to prison.<sup>63</sup>

Even amid these troubling statistics about recidivism and discussions about the treatment of persistent offenders, as the panics and problems associated with total war began to fade, so too did the controversy over amateur prostitution and the importance of fingerprinting prostitutes. In May 1920, the director of the CID raised the issue at a meeting of Superintendents because he was concerned that the task of taking the finger impressions of every prostitute arrested in all of England and Wales (some 3,000–5,000 every year) was a major burden on the system and was generally a complete and utter waste of time.<sup>64</sup> Now that the war was over, both the new Police Commissioner William Horwood and the Superintendent of the Fingerprint Bureau himself wondered whether, as the Commissioner put it, 'the game was worth the candle'.<sup>65</sup>

Police officers around London echoed the ambivalence of their superiors, and were lax when it came to actually implementing fingerprinting orders. In this atmosphere, Nellie Johnson's recourse to pseudonyms frequently seemed to work in her favour. That is, until a drizzly night near Christmas of 1920, when police constables James Bull and Willie Watson of D Division were patrolling Tottenham Court Road. Somewhere along this route, Bull and Watson encountered Johnson, and arrested her for being a 'prostitute behaving in a riotous or indecent manner'. The constables took Johnson back to Tottenham Court Road Station and wrote her name up in the charge book, when Watson recognized her as the same woman who had been previously convicted for a prostitution offence, around three years previously, under the name of Lily Johnson. PC Frederick Walker, a younger and less experienced constable, soon joined them, telling his colleagues that he recognized the woman as Nellie O'Keefe.<sup>66</sup> Inspector Bradshaw, the night Superintendent, denied Johnson bail on these grounds, detaining her in the police station cell for the remainder of the cold and drizzly weekend. After two uncomfortable nights, she appeared once again before the ageing magistrate G.L. Denman at the Marlborough Street Police Court on Monday morning.<sup>67</sup> Watson and Bull, acting as prosecutors, told Denman of their discoveries and he subsequently referred Johnson's case to a higher court,

where she was to be tried as an ‘incurable rogue’ (as allowed after repeated convictions under the Vagrancy Act).<sup>68</sup> To her likely chagrin, Johnson spent Christmas on remand in Holloway prison.<sup>69</sup>

Constable Watson, for his part, spent some time that Christmas preparing for Johnson’s County of London Sessions trial (though probably not too much – police officers did not get remunerated for overtime they worked preparing for court cases until the 1940s). At the Criminal Record Office (CRO) in the Scotland Yard he asked for her file by name, and was given one that listed a criminal record of six convictions for prostitution and one for larceny.<sup>70</sup> In court on 11 January 1921, he invited the younger constable Walker to give evidence of Johnson’s previous conviction for ten weeks’ hard labour and to read from the file to inform the judge of her other five convictions as well.<sup>71</sup>

It was at this point that Johnson’s case diverged rather sharply from most women’s experiences of arrest and prosecution as prostitutes, a divergence that nonetheless threw the day-to-day practices of prostitution control that had developed since the late nineteenth century into relief. For what Bull, Walker and Watson did not realise at the time of Johnson’s trial was that the CRO had handed Watson the wrong file, and that the criminal record they represented as Nellie Johnson’s in court was actually the record of another woman, whose name was Agnes Johnson. Both women had numerous convictions for prostitution and one conviction for minor property crime, and both had been convicted under the name of ‘Lily Johnson’. Because neither a photograph nor fingerprints had been taken of either prisoner, the mix-up passed unnoticed by all involved except for the defendant herself. She protested one of the convictions read out against her, telling the court that she had not been bound over for two years’ probation in March 1920. The judge was unsympathetic and sentenced her to six months’ hard labour for being ‘an incurable rogue’.<sup>72</sup>

Johnson’s recourse to appeal was very limited. As metropolitan magistrate H.L. Cancellor testified to the Street Offences Committee, ‘the right of appeal is practically nugatory in the case of the poor person.’ Out of the 2,000 or so women who were charged with street prostitution offences in 1925 and 1926, only five cases were appealed. Of these, four had their convictions confirmed and one received a modified sentence.<sup>73</sup> Whether it was appealed or not, Johnson’s case of mistaken identity was taken seriously, though not out of any grave concern for her personal experience of injustice. Even thirty years after the Cass controversy, the mention of this case or any threat that the well-publicized scandal might be repeated put the Metropolitan Police and Home Office on guard. The men of Tottenham Court Road Station must have felt particularly strongly about these issues: PC Bowden Endacott, the officer at the centre of the Cass scandal, had served in D Division. In the aftermath of the Johnson debacle, Constables wrote lengthy reports for their Superintendents, the Superintendents replied to

the Police Commissioner's questions, and the Commissioner assured the Home Secretary that, in the future, paragraph 489 section seventeen of the general police orders (the fingerprinting of prostitutes) would be strictly adhered to.

This disregard of miscarriages of justice in solicitation law prosecutions – as long as the woman in question could indeed be proven to be a 'common prostitute' – was common. According to the comment of Commissioner Horwood, Johnson's experiences might not have been so different from other women's after all: 'this is not the first mistake of its kind which has taken place with reference to prostitutes,' he warned.<sup>74</sup> In 1927 Assistant Undersecretary Ernley Blackwell could confidently claim to the Street Offences Committee that, in the administration of solicitation law, he had not seen any miscarriage of justice, in that 'very few persons are unjustly convicted as prostitutes who are not, in fact, prostitutes. That is as far as I want to go.'<sup>75</sup> In other words, prostitutes who had been unjustly convicted for riotous or annoying soliciting were not included in Blackwell's appraisal. Likewise, reflecting on the Johnson case, Superintendent Brind wrote to the Home Secretary in late January that 'It is obvious that a genuine mistake has been made but from the prisoner's real record no hardship has been inflicted on her, as her past is even worse than the woman for whom she was mistaken.' There was reason to be thankful that no great injustice had occurred.<sup>76</sup>

Nellie Johnson might have disagreed. For, while her record was 'worse', with seven convictions for prostitution as opposed to six and a conviction for burglary instead of larceny, the fact that, according to Agnes Johnson's file, she had been bound over for two years' probation in March 1920 meant that the judge thought Nellie Johnson was still on probation when he sentenced her. This mistaken knowledge certainly affected his decision to give her a sentence of six months' hard labour, when she could have escaped with only one month or ten weeks, or perhaps no time at all when it was realised how tenuous the police's identification of her truly was. Instead, before she was taken to Holloway to serve her time, Nellie Johnson – a person who had spent almost ten years changing her name to avoid a clear criminal record and to preserve her anonymity as a prostitute – upon the insistence of inspectors, Superintendents, the Criminal Record Office, the Police Commissioner and the Home Secretary himself, had her fingerprints taken.

In the aftermath of the Nellie Johnson debacle, which seems never to have seen the light of day beyond the circulars of the Scotland Yard and the Home Office, the orders to fingerprint prostitutes were reissued more firmly. 'Directions have been given for... strict compliance with the General Orders in the future,' wrote Horwood to the Home Office in the spring of 1921.<sup>77</sup> Nellie Johnson's case served as a reminder of the importance of fingerprinting and correct prostitute identification: the game was worth the

candle after all, and, after this narrowly avoided scandal, the fingerprinting of prostitutes became a permanent feature in the General Police Orders. On the other hand, Johnson's case also showed how the breakdown of policing procedures and policies on the front lines created another constant challenge to the control of street prostitution, which existed alongside the social and political campaigns to change, repeal or strengthen the solicitation laws.

As Nellie Johnson's experiences of grave injustice and mistaken identity went unremarked by the general public and even by organizations which concerned themselves with the just treatment of prostitutes, debates continued to rage over the best way to control prostitution on the street and commercial sex more generally. The AMSH introduced its Public Places (Order) Bill into Parliament for the first time in 1924, through AMSH member Nancy Astor, and continued to do so every few years until the 1930s, pressing for the removal of 'common prostitute' from the statute, and arguing that no special case should be made of solicitation on the street, but rather that the law should target all annoyance, and that the prosecution should proceed only if supported by the evidence of the person annoyed.<sup>78</sup> The NVA, meanwhile, introduced Bills that would make both the buying and the selling of sex illegal, in a fashion not unlike the more prohibitionist laws of the United States.<sup>79</sup> Many influential local authorities also supported the criminalization of commercial sex on the street, and drew lawmakers' attention to the loopholes in the law that allowed women to sell sex from private residences and that permitted landlords to rent to prostitute women.<sup>80</sup>

This ongoing discourse about prostitution was punctuated and amplified by key moments of crisis and scandal in the 1920s. The first of these was centred around the arrest of men in Hyde Park for importuning and annoying women in the autumn of 1922, one of whom happened to be Sir Almeric Fitzroy, clerk to the Privy Council, who was duly hauled up in front of Marlborough Street police court magistrate Mr Mead. Officers claimed to have seen Fitzroy following and talking to several women in the park, all of whom appeared annoyed.<sup>81</sup> After a trial in which the prosecution's only witness, a woman named Dorothy Turner, was attacked by the defence as being a 'common prostitute', a conviction followed, but was overturned upon appeal.<sup>82</sup> As Fitzroy celebrated the new verdict and penned letters to the editor of *The Times* reviewing art show openings, Turner was arrested on charges of perjury. When she was committed to trial she replied 'in broken tones' that she had no money with which to make bail.<sup>83</sup> Mercifully, the magistrate bound her over without a fine or jail time.

The Fitzroy debacle – accompanied by the quashing of the two other Hyde Park convictions of men importuning women – drew the reprobation of libertarian and libertine alike down on the heads of the Metropolitan Police, and the AMSH for their part used the case to illustrate how thousands of women were similarly arrested and convicted each year, without any



testimony of the annoyed person and without any public outcry.<sup>84</sup> The police responded as they had the last time such a scandal had hit the Force, and arrests for solicitation by 'common prostitutes' plummeted to an all-time low. For the next three years, the press were quick to publicize any matter related to police misconduct, particularly surrounding the policing of 'vices' like gambling, drinking and prostitution (including another case in which a prominent man, this time Major Graham Bell Murray, was accused of harassing young women in Piccadilly).<sup>85</sup>

As these panics and scandals mixed with the persistent – and conflicting – campaigns of moral and legal reform organizations like the NVA and AMSH, Home Secretary William Joynston Hicks, himself interested in matters of moral reform, appointed the Street Offences Committee in October 1927. This Committee was tasked with enquiring 'into the law and practice regarding offences against the criminal law in connection with prostitution and solicitation for immoral purposes in streets and public places and other offences against decency and good order, and to report what changes, if any, are in their opinion desirable'.<sup>86</sup> While the Committee sat, the Metropolitan Police were rocked by yet another prostitution-related scandal, which also began amongst the trees, hedges and ill-lit pathways of Hyde Park, when A Division officers arrested Irene Savidge and Sir Leo Money, a well-known writer and politician, for indecency. Money was acquitted, but Savidge accused the police of harassment in their questioning of her. A separate enquiry was established to look into the Savidge case, while the Street Offences Committee, with Hugh Macmillan, a prominent judge, as its chairman, published its report in November 1928.<sup>87</sup>

The Committee's minutes of evidence help demonstrate the extent to which the annoyance clause and the indecency requirements in solicitation law had already been removed in a *de facto* sense, and both the committee and many of its interviewees expressed the opinion that solicitation could be considered an implicit public nuisance. The assumption that women who had been labelled 'common prostitutes' could not be legally innocent (despite the fact that prostitution was not a crime) surfaced frequently among some of the most influential policymakers in government, with Police Commissioner William Horwood tellingly declaring that 'the term "common prostitute" in the legislation is a very great protection to the ordinary woman.'<sup>88</sup> Nonetheless, the Street Offences Committee did conclude that it was unjust and immaterial that a person be proven a 'common prostitute' before being convicted, and it recommended extending the offence of 'importuning for an immoral purpose' to both men and women.<sup>89</sup> However, and reflecting the profound lack of consensus among witnesses and committee members concerning what to do about prostitution, the committee also recommended removing any requirement to prove that the action of importuning had annoyed anyone, and did not object to the police being the only parties to give evidence in such cases.<sup>90</sup>

In the end, Stanley Baldwin's Conservatives gave little thought to the report or its recommendations before losing the June 1929 election to Ramsay Macdonald's second Labour ministry. The new Home Secretary, J.R. Clynes, did not have a great deal to say about the report either, stating simply that he did not see a 'way at present to introduce legislation upon this subject'.<sup>91</sup> The government's lack of commitment on legislative change surrounding street prostitution was echoed by an apathetic attitude toward prostitution amongst police officers. Police Commissioner William Horwood had testified to the Street Offences Committee, after all, that police considered it 'the most obnoxious part of their duty ... very very unpopular'.<sup>92</sup> Consequently, arrests for solicitation under the two Acts were low throughout the 1930s.

But police inaction alone does not explain these low arrest rates; the changing social landscape of prostitution also contributed to an increasing inefficacy of the solicitation laws. Police Commissioner William Horwood credited some of the decline in arrests to the fact that more women solicited non-physically and non-verbally than before, making it harder to prove 'indecentcy' or 'annoyance' to the magistrates.<sup>93</sup> Alongside 'better' behaviour was different behaviour. For instance, as several of the scandals of the 1920s suggested, Hyde Park had become a significantly more popular site of solicitation in the interwar years. Pushed from the brightly lit streets of Piccadilly and North Soho, and evicted from the West End 'brothels' in which they worked by several decades of concerted anti-prostitution campaigns, more and more women began to solicit and have sex in the park, which during that time was still very easy to access after dark, due to an absence of gates or hedges blocking the way. The Superintendent of A Division thought it a cause for concern: 'Bad women, unknown to the Police [in Hyde Park] as such, often migrate [there] from other districts in the hope of carrying on their immorality undetected,' he told Horwood.<sup>94</sup> In the park, women would have come under additional regulations (besides the solicitation acts) that masked the incidence of prostitution-related arrests: the parks regulations, for instance, and legislation against public indecency.<sup>95</sup>

The increasing popularity of personal automobiles in the post-war era also made an enormous difference to how sex was solicited on the street. Methods of policing solicitation had been developed with an understanding that it involved an interaction between a prostitute and a client, both of whom were walking or standing in the street. With more and more men cruising for prostitutes in motor cars, solicitation changed considerably. Without seeing them speak to men, police had even more difficulty determining which women were prostitutes and even more trouble explaining what about their actions constituted a public nuisance.<sup>96</sup> The increased use of motorized taxi cabs as what one police superintendent described as 'mobile brothels' also hampered solicitation arrests. Certain taxi drivers would wait in rank for prostitute women and their clients, refusing carriage

to ordinary customers and accepting payment above and beyond the ordinary fare when they agreed to drive the couple around the block while sex acts were performed in the back seat. Attempts to address the problem of taxi cab prostitution employed taxi and motor vehicle regulations, not the solicitation laws, meaning that these efforts to police street prostitution were hidden in regulatory laws, rather than in criminal ones.<sup>97</sup>

Finally, the falling arrest statistics for solicitation offences in general may also be explained by the continued use of the 1839 Metropolitan Police Act subsection 54 (13) that allowed police to make arrests for 'insulting words or behaviour' with an intent or a likelihood to result in a breach of the peace. This practice continued in full force in the interwar years: women who did not have records as 'common prostitutes' were arrested under Section 13, and subsequently fingerprinted and registered as 'common prostitutes'.<sup>98</sup> Magistrates determined the practice was legally unsound in 1927, and police solicitors pointed out that it was lucky that 'for practical reasons' such cases were never appealed, because they would never stand up in a higher court: women were convicted under this subsection, they felt, on 'mere formula rather than evidence'.<sup>99</sup> Ten years later, police had still failed to heed solicitors and magistrates' advice: in 1937 AMSH member Sir Frederick Pethwick Lawrence raised the issue in Parliament, and the AMSH lobbied the government to stop 'charging a woman or girl not known as a prostitute under the "breach of the peace" section and next by charging her as a "prostitute" on the strength of the first conviction occasioned by straining the law'.<sup>100</sup> Despite these legal points and public protests, police made quiet use of it into the 1950s, a fact which surfaced again during the enquiries of the Wolfenden Committee in the 1950s, which also suggested that the police used this section with the full knowledge of the Home Office.<sup>101</sup> This approach was rather contradictory: while police and policymakers refused to consider removing the term 'common prostitute' from solicitation law on the grounds that it protected 'innocent' women from arrest, they argued that ceasing the use of Section 13 would mean 'that the police would be powerless to check soliciting by women not known to be common prostitutes'.<sup>102</sup> It is no wonder Alison Neilans described the way the government dealt with prostitution as 'argument in a vicious circle'.<sup>103</sup>

The interwar years were a period marked by both crisis and consensus in the policing of street prostitution, as moral and legal reform organizations campaigned for legislative change, and the Met and the Home Office developed quieter policies in response to scandal and error. Yet the interwar period also demonstrated how the system of prostitution control was not only challenged by civil society and changed by bureaucracies, but also by the daily machinations of women like Nellie Johnson, who adapted their way of working to meet the strategies of the criminal justice system with tactics of their own: avoiding police officers, soliciting in darker areas, working with other women, offering false names and addresses, using

motor cars, and moving around to different parts of the neighbourhood, the city or even the country could foil police attempts to arrest and convict women for street prostitution.<sup>104</sup> But the most important adaptation of the commercial sex industry to the increasing criminalization of street prostitution was actually a move off the streets, where sex was increasingly sold behind the closed doors of cafés, night clubs, flats and other private and leisure spaces of the ever-changing and increasingly commercializing metropolis.

# 8

## Behind Closed Doors: Off-Street Commercial Sex in the Interwar Years

On 6 November 1916, police officers from D Division were keeping observation on a collection of European cafés that had recently sprung up in the side streets around Tottenham Court Road and Goodge Street. With names like 'Restaurant Francais', 'Au Drapeau Belge' and 'Roumainian Kosher Restaurant', these businesses were owned by a collection of French, Belgian, Russian, Italian and Romanian men (and a few women), and were opened into the early hours of the morning. During the first years of the war, the sound of their electric pianos and raucous crowds spilled out into the streets, and in their vicinity could be found a suspiciously large number of drunken soldiers, long after the hour had passed when the new licensing laws determined alcohol must not be served. Police suspected that at least twenty of the twenty-seven cafés allowed prostitutes to frequent the premises and to use them as a space in which to solicit soldiers; quite a few, meanwhile, were thought to be 'brothels', renting rooms to these women and their soldier clients above the bar.<sup>1</sup> Sex was also for sale in the streets surrounding them: on the very same night that Superintendent Billings wrote his report about his men's observations on the cafés, he also penned his first of many reports on the arrest of Nellie Johnson.<sup>2</sup>

These cafés were a product of the war in a number of ways. Their owners were largely refugees from the war on the Continent, seeking the shelter and the consumer market of London in the face of upheaval, uncertainty and danger at home. Their male patrons, meanwhile, were almost entirely soldiers from the colonies and other parts of Britain, whose voracious appetites for booze (during and after legal hours), for sex (both paid and unpaid), and for an all-around good time kept almost thirty of these establishments going in an area little bigger than a square mile. The cafés were also an ironic product of attempts to control wartime vice: with the war came heightened anxieties about the misbehaviour of soldiers and civilians (especially female civilians), and in 1914 the Defence of the Realm Act introduced stricter

licensing laws, which, among other things, significantly limited the hours in which liquor could be served, for instance no later than 9:30 at night.<sup>3</sup> With the demand for alcohol increased rather than reduced by a state of total war, it is no surprise that cafés like 'Au Drapeau Belge' were quick to step forward and offer illicit alcohol after hours. These café owners – alongside hoteliers, boarding house keepers, landlords and restaurateurs – also recognized that commercial sex, like alcohol, was more restricted and yet in higher demand than ever before, and frequently allowed (or at least turned a blind eye to) women selling sex in their establishments. These kinds of places were spread over the whole of the metropolis: boarding houses in Bloomsbury and Russell Square were reputed to be 'soldier's brothels', cafés such as the 'Blue Peter' in Well Street, Stepney, catered to the illicit tastes of the foreign sailors around Limehouse, and, in the West End, Soho's position as the centre of London's commercial sex scene was challenged by nearby Shepherd's Market and Curzon Street with their walk-up flats, around which soldiers milled.<sup>4</sup>

The passing of the Aliens Restriction Order in 1916 meant that police, authorized by the Secretary of State, could close alien-owned premises if they were found to have a 'criminal or disloyal association' or were 'conducted in a disorderly or improper manner prejudicial to the public good'.<sup>5</sup> The sale of illegal alcohol, the disorderly conduct in and surrounding the cafés, and the 'harbouring of prostitutes on the premises' therefore compelled D Division officers to act against them, and in late November Superintendent Billings sent three men undercover in plain clothes to several of the cafés in order to gain evidence for prosecution. The operation was a complete failure. According to the officers, this was due to the fact that 'the customers are all foreigners or soldiers and a stranger out of uniform is looked on with suspicion'.<sup>6</sup> They were told by patron and owner alike that no alcohol was available, as they were not licensed and the hour was late, and that sex was not for sale.

After spending the night sipping soft drinks and coffee under the resentful eyes of what we can assume to be an increasingly smaller and increasingly sober crowd, the officers devised a better plan for gathering evidence against the cafés. On 21 November 1916, Superintendent Billings contacted Police Commissioner Edward Henry, asking for permission to borrow two Canadian uniforms. The Commissioner passed the request on to the Commander of the Canadian forces in London, who begrudgingly agreed.<sup>7</sup> Officers sporting these uniforms blended seamlessly with the typical café crowd, and soon had plenty of evidence to prosecute two of the cafés. Superintendent Billings was hopeful that the prosecutions would serve to sever the other cafés' connections with prostitution, if not with alcohol.<sup>8</sup> The women who had once sold sex behind their closed doors, meanwhile, were now obliged to listen to the sound of the laughing crowds and the electric pianos from the street. It could well be that Nellie Johnson, who was

arrested on the night police began observations and who got out of prison just before they went undercover as Canadians, was one of those displaced. Cafés such as these were being closed all over London, including the Blue Peter in Well Street, Stepney, which came under the Aliens Restriction Order in 1917.<sup>9</sup>

The period between and including the First and Second World Wars witnessed the burgeoning of various clandestine forms of off-street prostitution. This was a trend that began, as we have seen, when the Criminal Law Amendment Act was passed in 1885, and was advanced by the stimulus to the sexual economy during the First World War. In response to further repression and continued demand, off-street prostitution flourished during the interwar years, and this underground economy received another enormous boost from the Second World War. Intertwined as it was with the entertainment, leisure and real estate industries, clandestine commercial sex was woven into the fabric of the urban indoor landscape: hidden under the guise of licit entertainment; up the stairs in the simple rooms of otherwise ordinary flats; caught up with the business of alcohol, food and, most importantly, real estate.

Similarly diverse and diffuse was the way in which police, local authorities and courts dealt with the problem. When the stipulations against 'brothels' set out in the Criminal Law Amendment Acts of 1885 and 1912 fell short of responding to the problem of clandestine prostitution, authorities turned instead to regulations rather than criminal laws, the administration of which involved local authorities and concerned citizens as much as the police. The control of off-street prostitution at times seemed as clandestine as its practice, as the criminal justice system and Borough councils attempted to curb the problem through such diverse measures as plain clothes police surveillance, licensing laws, aliens restrictions, music and dance hall licensing, massage parlour registration and taxi cab regulations, hiding prostitution-related prosecutions amidst a patchwork of other regulatory laws.<sup>10</sup> But, whatever method was used, crackdowns on off-street commercial sex during the wars and in the interwar years produced ample opportunity for enterprising third parties to make good in the sexual economy.

The more restrictive licensing acts outlasted the war years, and therefore the interwar period witnessed a burgeoning of clandestine or loophole ways to sell alcohol after licensing hours and outside licensed establishments, which in turn provided new homes for commercial sex. Prostitution's connections with alcohol consumption and public night-time entertainment pre-dated the modern period, of course, and some of the earliest laws on alcohol consumption and public houses included provisions against harbouring prostitutes.<sup>11</sup> In the modern period, the 1874 Licensing Act made it an offence for a licensee to allow his or her premises to be habitually used by prostitutes, whether they were there to solicit or not. Pressure on licensees

was stepped up in the repressive atmosphere after 1885, and the Licensing Consolidation Act of 1910 repeated the provisions of the earlier Acts.

The provisions against prostitution in licensed pubs and restaurants helped define and constitute reputable and legitimate establishments, and also co-opted business owners into the system of commercial sex repression.<sup>12</sup> Threatened with fines, the loss of their licence or the refusal of its renewal, licensees often discouraged prostitutes from staying in or sometimes even entering their premises. This was almost certainly the case after 1916 for the Tottenham Court Road area café owners, who faced closure under both the ordinary Licensing Act and DORA's new provisions against alcohol and alien-run establishments.<sup>13</sup> A version of the Aliens Restriction Order of 1916, including the previous order's restriction on immorally or improperly run alien-owned or alien-used businesses, became peacetime legislation in 1920, and this regulation was regularly employed to close premises that police felt to be conducted in a disorderly manner or associated with prostitution.<sup>14</sup> Indeed, the measures against alien-used premises were so useful in dealing with sites of prostitution that in 1927 Police Commissioner Horwood expressed his sincere wish that it could be used against premises 'whether used by aliens or not'.<sup>15</sup>

Despite legal attempts to dissuade café owners, publicans and restaurateurs from allowing prostitute women on their premises, connections between prostitution and these establishments persisted, and in the 1920s some restaurants and cafés became a front for sexual vice, racketeering and the sale or distribution of recently controlled substances like cocaine and opiates.<sup>16</sup> In the post-war period, many of these establishments were located in Soho and run by continental Europeans like Césaire Quintavalla, an Italian, who ran two restaurants, the Chic and the Wembley.<sup>17</sup> The rooms above the restaurants – which boasted a sparse selection of bleary-looking sandwiches – were rented out by the half-hour, at a charge of between 7s 6d and 10s 6d.<sup>18</sup> These rooms were truly 'short-time places': it was the waiter's job to knock after twenty minutes to let the couples know it was time to clear out. They were also an important source of income: while the Chic restaurant made around three pounds a day, the rooms above it generated eighteen pounds of profit.<sup>19</sup> Quintavalla's restaurants were joined by other cafés and a series of nearby hotels, again overseen by a network of men and women who were also engaged in other crimes. One particular hotel was described as very low-class: the disgruntled housekeeper told police of numerous fights, a great deal of cocaine consumption, and rooms with threadbare couches instead of beds.<sup>20</sup>

The West End was not the only part of London to play host to forms of off-street commercial sex that operated under the guise of legitimate businesses. The East End, especially the area around Limehouse, Poplar and the East and West India Docks, developed its own brand of clandestine prostitution, operating within coffee houses and cafés in the area.<sup>21</sup> Daisy



Louisa Woods, who had 'left home after a row' around 1933, found herself working as a 'waitress' alongside three other young women for a man named Rou Sharu, and having sex with the sailors who frequented his café at 63 West India Dock Road. That same year, Abu Ahmed Abdul Tarafdar was sentenced to twenty-two months' hard labour for procurement and living off the earnings of prostitution at his café at 62 Christian Street, while the police fought to prevent other similar cafés from being licensed in the Stepney area.<sup>22</sup> It was widely felt that these dockland 'brothels' were highly exploitative, and that the women within them lived and worked in very poor conditions.<sup>23</sup>

The prosecution of 'Kitten's Café' in Soho provides a glimpse at once into a typical illicit interwar café and into typical fears about them. The café was opened in 1922 by James Kitten, a man who had made his way to Britain after being interned by the Germans in Sierra Leone in 1915, and in 1918 had married a British citizen. The café was frequented by people who, like Kitten, were 'men of colour', and were described as musicians, sailors and 'undesirables' who 'did little work' and existed by 'sponging off... prostitutes who, for some reason, seem to be attracted to these men'. Five years after he opened, Kitten was summoned for allowing prostitutes to remain in the café, where police found, to their evident dismay, that 'there were present about thirty or forty coloured men and eight white women, seven of whom were prostitutes.'<sup>24</sup> These cafés were sites where miscegenation was encouraged, and where prostitution mixed with other racially stereotyped crimes: in the raid on Kitten's café police also found William Allen Porter and James Rich, black men who had been convicted of drug trafficking, counterfeiting and possession of opium.<sup>25</sup> Kitten's Café was also an early example of the anxieties surrounding Commonwealth immigrants: police were unable to prosecute Kitten under the Aliens Order because he and his clients were British subjects.<sup>26</sup>

The West and East Ends of London also saw a rise in 'nightclubs' around the beginning of the twentieth century; these combined the illicit after-hours sale of alcohol with other vices like gambling and prostitution. These nightclubs, mainly in Soho and North Soho, were 'frequented by men and women; the latter being the chief attraction for the men, using the club under the patronage of its proprietors, for the purpose of gaining their living by prostitution'.<sup>27</sup>

These clubs were not so far from the 'gentlemen's clubs' of the mid and late nineteenth century, where proprietors discreetly arranged for young women to engage in paid sex with the society men who were their clients.<sup>28</sup> But, like much of the rest of British society around the turn of the century, clubs were becoming more demotic and more responsive to the consumer needs of the middle and working classes, and therefore anxiety about them grew. These clubs offered very inexpensive 'doorstep membership', whereby a person would pay at the door to be a club 'member' and therefore be

entitled to enter with a guest; and the club, in turn, would be permitted to serve these private 'members' alcohol. Several of these clubs were prosecuted in the early 1900s as disorderly houses because they were known to be frequented by women of 'bad character'.<sup>29</sup>

While these clubs had existed since the late nineteenth century, they did not really capture widespread popular attention until after they experienced a massive growth in popularity during the First World War.<sup>30</sup> When licensing restrictions remained after the war, nightclubs only increased in popularity. In the 1920s, Soho and North Soho remained the home of most of London's nightclubs and many were prosecuted in this area, usually for selling alcohol outside licensing hours (which had remained part of post-war legislation), but also for operating as sites of indoor solicitation.<sup>31</sup> These clubs, with their jazz, their expensive liquors, their modern décor and their romance of criminality, were (like James Kitten's less genteel café) sites of miscegenation as well as the mixing of classes, where bright young things from Cambridge would go to get a taste of a less manicured side of life and where men of lower station could go to live large; where members of social and sexual subcultures would socialize. Inside these clubs, young women – those infamous 'flappers' – from all classes could smoke cigarettes, experiment with new fashions, drugs and new ways of acting, and enjoy new levels of heterosociability and laxer attitudes toward promiscuity.<sup>32</sup> As early as 1919, these sorts of places were at the centre of important moral panics about female promiscuity, miscegenation and crime, when the case of Freda Kempton, a nightclub hostess who overdosed on drugs supplied by Brilliant Chang, a young Chinese drug dealer, brought the hedonistic world of clubs, cocaine and 'dope darlings' to light.<sup>33</sup>

A typical form of prostitution that would take place in these nightclubs was doubly clandestine: not only was it hidden inside another legitimate establishment, but the women who sold sex would act as 'dancing girls', paid to dance with male clientele and encourage them to buy drinks. These women would often be expected, more discreetly, to go to a nearby hotel or restaurant room, or their flats, with the men who paid extra.<sup>34</sup> During an investigation on women in London's underworld in 1928, journalist Mary Chesterton met a young woman working as one of these 'dancing girls', who had come to London on the invitation of the nightclub owner. Upon refusing two men's offers to take her home, and attracting the opprobrium of the club owner, the woman was told by Lily, another woman employed at the club, 'that a professional partner at that club was expected to take men back for the night'.<sup>35</sup> It is difficult to extricate actual commercial sex from displays of 'parasexuality' (as Peter Bailey calls the use of the allure of sexual availability – but not the sale of sex acts – to promote patronage) and from general anxieties and stereotypes that arose around club-going women in the 1920s, but it is certain that many clubs did have firm ties to various kinds of prostitution.<sup>36</sup>

While nightclub prostitution offered a woman many advantages over the streets – the ability to screen clients at greater length and an indoor and entertaining place in which to solicit, for example – it could also signal a loss of autonomy and involve a woman in other criminal activity and the use of drugs. As Mary Chesterton put it, ‘this kind of club will always earn a handsome revenue. All kinds of stolen property will be received; all sorts of illegal sales will be effected, from drink and dope to a dancing-girl.’<sup>37</sup> It was in the interwar years that some of the earliest connections between drug use and prostitution were made, as – uncoincidentally – drug trafficking and prostitution also became more closely associated. In a rare reference to drug use being a cause of prostitution, ‘underworld’ writer Stanley Felstead wrote that some women were so addicted to cocaine that they would sell their bodies in order to obtain it.<sup>38</sup>

In order to successfully identify and prosecute premises connected with the illicit sale of alcohol, drugs and clandestine prostitution, police were obliged to entangle themselves within the underworld economy described by Chesterton. Though the Metropolitan Police’s ‘clubs office’ (a version of the American ‘vice squad’) was not founded until the coronation year in 1932, and contrary to some claims that plain clothes officers were not used in the prosecution of such establishments until the 1930s, undercover methods of discovering illicit activity were employed as early as the 1890s, largely in response to the diversification of off-street commercial sex in the wake of the 1885 Criminal Law Amendment Act.<sup>39</sup> As the story of the borrowed Canadian uniforms demonstrates, Metropolitan Police Officers also frequently employed creative undercover techniques during the First World War. After the war the practice became more common still, and led to much discussion about the correct procedure for using plain clothes officers, including how to monitor their expense accounts.<sup>40</sup>

It was not long before London learned of some of the consequences of these police infiltrations into illicit networks of sex, alcohol and crime, when in 1928 Police Sergeant George Goddard was caught blackmailing brothel-keepers and accepting bribes from questionable restaurants and clubs in exchange for protection from prosecution for harbouring prostitutes, fencing and illegal bookmaking. Goddard made himself many thousands of pounds at this venture, and during the investigation into his activities the interconnectedness of the Soho underworld was briefly illuminated: a world of clubs, drugs, police corruption, prostitution, gambling and fencing; where bookies and brothel-keepers looked out for one another, and women who sold sex formed a fundamental part of the underworld economy both as workers and as consumers. Some even doubled as police informants.<sup>41</sup>

This world of organized crime appears to have been predominantly male-controlled, although a few formidable women continued to hold their own; the most famous of whom was Kate Evelyn Meyrick, the owner of the 43 Club, who stood trial alongside Goddard.<sup>42</sup> But more typical in this scene

were men like Angelo Molinari, a powerful figure in the organized underworld of interwar Soho, who profited from a myriad of vices and crimes. He acted as a fence, directed a race-track protection outfit, and had interests in a variety of restaurants that doubled as 'short time' houses around Soho. His own headquarters were at the Sportsman Restaurant, at 32–34 Old Compton Street, described by one witness as 'one of the most well-known [brothels] in London'.<sup>43</sup>

The Goddard scandal illustrated not only the degree to which prostitution was caught up with small-time organized crime in interwar London, but also the degree to which police officers were involved. In historian Clive Emsley's examination of the Goddard scandal, he notes that a remarkably high number of C and D Division officers came under scrutiny during the subsequent inquiry and that a large number were transferred or dismissed.<sup>44</sup> Indeed, it is relatively impossible that Goddard could have achieved his lucrative protection racket without the acquiescence of his colleagues and perhaps even his superiors, and while the spotlight was on Goddard several other cases of police extortion and abuse of prostitutes were illuminated as well.<sup>45</sup> Ultimately, as Emsley concludes, police corruption and involvement with organized prostitution as seen in the Goddard case were not novel, and may in fact have been 'permanent elements of English policing' that were 'more significant and deep-rooted than has been allowed'.<sup>46</sup> Or, as contemporary magistrate Cecil Chapman tactfully put it, while police bribery and extortion happened 'less frequently in London than other capitals', they did occur 'more frequently than is generally supposed'.<sup>47</sup> London prostitution, while ostensibly free from the notoriously corrupt *police des meours* that characterized regulated prostitution on the Continent, was clearly not immune to this by-product of prostitution control: armed with various statutory instruments with which to threaten, harass and blackmail prostitutes, corrupt police officers must have had a profound impact on the lives of many women who worked in commercial sex.

Just as commercial sex was woven into the fabric of clubland and West End policing, so too had it become intertwined with other aspects of modern and commercial urban life. As music halls lost their reputation as a site of prostitution and made way for more 'respectable' entertainments, less reputable music and dance halls sprang up which functioned as meeting places for prostitute women and their clients, and occasionally as a kind of precursor to the strip clubs of the 1950s.<sup>48</sup> Massage establishments where sex was for sale continued to flourish, even after the London County Council's wartime and interwar year attempts to put them out of business through more stringent inspection and registration requirements.<sup>49</sup> Hotels and boarding houses, meanwhile, especially in certain areas around Euston and Victoria Station, were often used as 'short time' places, where street prostitutes would take their clients. Taxi cabs also continued to be used by prostitutes to service clients, and taxi drivers formed

part of an information network that helped visitors to London find sex for sale in a metropolis where prostitute women were increasingly forced to be secretive, indoors and itinerant.<sup>50</sup> Alongside taxi drivers, newsagents (who displayed small cards in their windows) and newspapers (who ran euphemistic ads in their publications) formed part of a third-party information network that helped men find prostitutes, who, thanks to the rising ownership of the home telephone and, probably even more importantly, the better assurance of privacy when making calls, were working more often as 'call girls' than ever before. The development of telephone technology and culture, alongside the ever-present pressure of criminalization, helped instigate a very important change in the way that commercial sex happened. This meeting point between sexual commerce and the consumption of telephone technology represented a coalescence of two highly gendered aspects of modern consumer society, though it has drawn little remark from historians.<sup>51</sup> However, because 'call girls', unlike most women selling sex in the past, never solicited publicly it is virtually impossible to say how many of these women there were; another reason why the assumed fall in prostitution as suggested by the solicitation arrest statistics must be called into question.

The 'call girl' dark figure was echoed in all aspects of off-street commercial sex during the interwar years, because many of the strategies developed by the state to control newer kinds of clandestine off-street commercial sex took the form of disparate acts of regulation rather than an explicit criminal law. The Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1885 was, in other words, very heavily supplemented by other legal regulations, and these new measures may help to explain why conviction rates for brothels plummeted nationwide just after the First World War.<sup>52</sup> Where once the prosecution of 'short time' houses had been made statistically visible under the Criminal Law Amendment Act, beginning at the turn of the century and increasing in the 1910s and 1920s, statistics on off-street commercial sex had begun to disappear, hidden within legislative action taken in other areas. These included prosecutions undertaken for massage licence violations, the revocation of licences under the Aliens Restriction Act and the Licensing Acts, music and dancing registration by-laws, hotel registrations, and even, in the case of taxi cabs during the Second World War, prosecutions for wasting petrol during rationing.<sup>53</sup> These measures were joined by laws prohibiting indecent advertisements, which were used against the newsagents and newspapers that helped prostitute women advertise.<sup>54</sup> Prosecutions for these sorts of violations – if reported on at all – did not provide details of the offence: a health code violation in a therapeutic massage parlour, for example, would not be recorded separately from a violation having to do with sexual massage; a taxi driver who wasted petrol as he idled at a coffee stall looked no different in the statistics from one who drove a prostitute woman and her client three times around the block.<sup>55</sup> The statistical fall in brothel prosecutions

in the interwar years tells us practically nothing, therefore, about the actual amount of off-street commercial sex that was taking place.

Despite the prevalence of these new clandestine ways to sell and buy sex off the street, a great deal of indoor commercial sex continued to take place in ordinary flats, and the most numerous of the third-party profiteers remained the landlords who charged prostitute women exorbitant prices in exchange for risky renting. Police reports during the interwar years are peppered with elusive references to these landlords, such as the absentee Mrs Whittaker, 'a notorious West End owner of a number of flats' that were rented to French women in the 1930s.<sup>56</sup>

These flats were dispersed all over central London, but were particularly prevalent in Soho, North Soho, Mayfair and Paddington. Women who used them as a place to take clients sometimes treated them strictly as 'offices', while others lived there alone or with partners.<sup>57</sup> Other houses were meeting places where women would invite clients and other women. One such flat belonged to Carmen Smith Rosenz, who would invite young women there to perform sex acts in front of men who watched. Rosenz's activities stand out within the records on brothels because she also hired young men to attend the flat to have sex with the women. One man, caught in the sex act when the flat was raided by police, told them that he was paid five pounds a week by Rosenz, whereas he could only earn three pounds five shillings at his job.<sup>58</sup>

Rosenz's house was on an expensive street in Mayfair, but like all accommodations in London these flats were extremely varied; carved out of old buildings, attached to businesses, in newer blocks, in attics, in basements, down hallways, up stairs. Also like other London accommodation, the ownership and management of these premises were convoluted: landlords bought up the tail ends of hundred-year leases; houses were subdivided into rooms that became flats with the addition of hot plates for 'kitchens'; and flats were sublet and leases were signed over dozens of times by estate agents, making the actual landlord impossible to trace.<sup>59</sup>

These kinds of flats were the bane of several Borough Councils, especially Paddington and Westminster, which were forever asking government for more reforms in the law, so that any person using premises for habitual prostitution could be prosecuted along with the landlords and agents. The Home Office heard several deputations from these Borough councils, and in the 1930s Westminster City Council stepped up its complaints, citing the problem of the spread of these flats from Soho to Shepherd's Market and Curzon Street. Paddington, meanwhile, pointed out that many houses in Maida Vale and around the station had been subdivided by their landlords and were being used for prostitution.<sup>60</sup>

In ironic contrast to the repressive campaigns of some Borough Councils, commercial sex real estate ventures sometimes reached into the upper levels of society and municipal government: when 'Messina girl' Marthe

Watts came to London in the early 1930s, she discovered that her dismal flat in Carnaby Street, one of many that were decorated completely in black and used as 'short time' places, was owned by a prominent society man, 'Colonel X'.<sup>61</sup> Police also intimated that these flats were sometimes protected through municipal corruption, and complained that members of Borough Councils would often warn landlords that police observation was pending, giving them time to evict their prostitute tenants. Some Councils, such as St Pancras, refused to prosecute at all.<sup>62</sup> And, much to the chagrin of Paddington Borough Council and the Church, it was discovered in 1944 that the ecclesiastically owned Paddington Estates were being used as brothels, reminding newspaper readers that the aristocracy and the church had age-old titles to huge swaths of urban real estate that were used for both licit and illicit business.<sup>63</sup>

The law in this regard had serious loopholes. So long as only one woman rented the flat, whatever form that flat took, she could not be prosecuted for keeping a brothel, but, because the landlord of these flats, after 1912, could be prosecuted under the Criminal Law Amendment Act of that year for allowing his or her premises to be used for 'habitual prostitution' even when only one woman was working there, this meant that these women were vulnerable to eviction upon discovery, or vulnerable to the extortion and blackmail of the landlord who suffered them to be there. These landlords came to be known as 'flat farmers' and made their living from buying up the leases or titles on usually rather derelict housing, often subdividing it further, and then renting it to people such as prostitute women and immigrants, who had little choice but to pay.<sup>64</sup> They would charge very high rents, and even more substantial 'key money' (a kind of deposit), which was a thinly veiled way to extort payment from prostitute women due to the illegal nature of their activities. After the LCC fixed rent and key money rates in the 1930s, flat farmers began to perfect the art of falsifying rent books. Police Commissioner Nott-Bower would report twenty years later that, while rents were fixed at thirty shillings, his officers knew of women working as prostitutes who paid up to twenty-five pounds per week.<sup>65</sup>

These flat farmers, or 'brothellers' as prostitute women took to calling them, also had little compunction about using the law against brothels to their advantage – and to the disadvantage of the women to whom they rented.<sup>66</sup> By the 1940s, police discovered that about fifty per cent of the complaints they received against women using premises for habitual prostitution had come from the landlords themselves, so that they could receive a caution from their local council and therefore have an excuse to evict their prostitute tenants, and subsequently find other women willing to pay an even higher price.<sup>67</sup> 'The girls are well aware that they are pawns in a game played by landlords and agents,' wrote sociologist Rosalind Wilkinson in the early 1950s.<sup>68</sup> Matters were surely made far worse after 1957, when the Conservative government effectively removed rent controls, causing a

'creeping deregulation' of London rental prices and encouraging unscrupulous landlords to uproot sitting tenants in order to dramatically increase their rental income.<sup>69</sup>

What about the women working within these clandestine off-street sites where commercial sex took place? It seems that many women preferred selling sex off the street, and many made the acquisition of such a place a kind of occupational goal which would also enable them to achieve the almost universal desire for a steady number of 'regular' clients. Sex off the street also meant the ability to avoid arrest for indecency, and the ability to charge more for services. Having a flat meant that one could keep a maid to assist with cleaning and with managing clients, although this working arrangement had the potential to come under the scrutiny of the two Criminal Law Amendment Acts. Some women chose to take even greater legal chances, and worked with other prostitute women.<sup>70</sup>

Women who worked from flats but solicited on the street usually made sure their 'beats' were near their flats, thus saving time between picking up a customer, getting rid of him, and getting back out on the street in order to do more business.<sup>71</sup> This advantage was often lost for women who did not have flats, who had to travel longer distances to hotels or boarding houses, or to Hyde Park. For women who solicited off the street, as well, the whole business was warmer and drier, and women in cafés and clubs were able to recapture some of the socialization phase of solicitation that had been lost after decades of crackdowns on street prostitution, thus giving them more time to screen their clients. Finally, 'call girls' and other indoor workers with a large number of regular clients did not have to solicit at all, and could even construct a regular schedule in order to maximize their non-working and leisure time.<sup>72</sup>

For all its benefits, there were also drawbacks to working off the street, the chief one being that clients expected women who worked indoors to perform sex acts unclothed. When working in alleys, parklands and taxi cabs, women almost always kept their clothes on, and if full intercourse was engaged in it was usually under a skirt. Moreover, while the range of sex acts one could perform off the street meant that one could make more money, working on the street meant that a woman could avoid full intercourse and certainly deny requests for 'perversions' – meaning largely anal sex and sadomasochistic practices – offering the cheaper, but quicker and largely physically easier, services of masturbation and oral sex instead.<sup>73</sup> Women working off the street were also far more beholden to third parties like landlords and club owners, and it is easy to imagine that men like Angelo Molinari and Césaire Quintavalla had no overarching concern for the well-being of the women who used the rooms above their restaurants: although Molinari did provide condoms, he bought them in bulk and sold them to women, seemingly more for his profit than their protection.<sup>74</sup>

Of all the drawbacks of working off the street, it was isolation that rendered women most vulnerable to harm, and the murders of Josephine Martin



(‘French Fifi’) in her Archer Street flat in November 1935 and Leah ‘Stilts’ Hines in a flat in Old Compton Street in May 1936 highlighted all too well the price of clandestinity. Hines, who earned her nickname from her signature high heels, was found bludgeoned to death in the Soho flat where she took clients, after picking them up in the Palace Theatre, Cambridge Circus, where she regularly solicited. This flat was a dilapidated apartment in an otherwise deserted house, and it is unsurprising that no one heard or saw anything suspicious on the evening of her murder.<sup>75</sup> Martin was strangled to death in similar premises. Though the press alleged that both murders were connected to the pimps of the Soho underworld, police concluded that they were both likely perpetrated by clients.<sup>76</sup>

Inspector Frank Sharpe of London’s illustrious ‘flying squad’ immediately found that his investigation into the Hines and Martin murders was seriously hampered by the clandestinity of the commercial sex world. ‘You must realise the difficulty in cases like this which the Police encounter, especially when a young woman who is a notorious prostitute and conducts her business in the late hours of the night and the early hours of the morning when no one would see her,’ he explained in the file he kept on the case.<sup>77</sup> It was a similar story with any potential clients, as he later outlined in his police autobiography: ‘It was likely that half a dozen men had been to that flat that night,’ wrote Sharpe, ‘but although we appealed for their help, none came forward.’<sup>78</sup> Similar difficulties were encountered with the women who sold sex in the area, for, though they were anticipated to be some of the most useful witnesses, ‘great difficulty was experienced in tracking some of the girls for they frequently change their addresses to keep clear of the police.’<sup>79</sup> One of the only witnesses, who ran into Hines in a café that she frequented, claimed that he had seen her with a man who appeared to be threatening her, but ‘he took no notice of this at the time as he stated that to his knowledge all the “girls” are threatened at some time or another.’<sup>80</sup> The ‘girls’ seemed well aware of this, and Inspector Sharpe recalled how many kept rolling pins and other potential weapons within easy reach in their flats, and carried bags of pepper in their purses.<sup>81</sup>

As a ‘desperate’ measure to find the perpetrator, the CID appealed to prostitute women to come forward with any and all incidents of violence they had recently experienced in the hopes of identifying Hines’s killer. This measure opened a window onto a world of frequent and day-to-day violence that prostitutes suffered, usually far away from the sight of the law, and, although the file which reports on these assault investigations remains closed, Inspector Sharpe has left us with some inkling of their nature in his memoir:

We asked them to report every attack, however slight, which was made on them and numerous woundings and assaults which normally would never have come to light were reported...Girls complained of being assaulted in their flats, of being struck on the nose in public houses with

glasses, one girl had been punched in the mouth in a motor car, another struck on the head with a bottle. Girls who had been thrown to the ground, threatened, half strangled, assaulted, and robbed, kicked on the leg, wounded, and who had had their thumbs dislocated were seen.<sup>82</sup>

In the face of this kind of isolation, vulnerability, violence and murder that could occur all too easily in a climate of clandestinity, it is no wonder that Marthe Watts, perhaps the most famous woman who sold sex in mid-twentieth-century London, insisted in her autobiography that the state should stop sweeping prostitution 'under the carpet' and allow commercial sex to 'take place under some form of public supervision'.<sup>83</sup> This was a far cry from the ongoing policy of the government, local authorities, moral reform organizations and the police, who insisted on repression; employing both the criminal law and regulatory measures in the game of cat and mouse that they continued to play with the forces of the underworld sexual economy on the eve of another world war.

# 9

## Sex, War and Syndication: Organized Prostitution and the Second World War

Marthe Watts, née Hucbourg, was born in 1913 in a little town beside the Argonne forest, among her father's family; it was a town where her mother and father would probably have stayed if it had not been for the fact that Adrien Hucbourg was one of many young French men to be killed at the battle of Verdun in 1915. In 1928, her mother moved to Paris, taking Marthe with her and separating her from her maternal grandmother, who was an important source of support. A few months later, her mother had remarried, and Marthe had to cope with her new stepfather's emotional abuse, and with her mother's growing neglect. Shortly after the marriage, Marthe was left alone in their apartment with no money or support, having no idea where her mother and stepfather had gone or when they would return. The abandoned Marthe was forced to go out in search of both money and companionship, and was drawn to the dance hall culture of interwar Paris. Here she met men and women who suggested that she sell sex, and soon she was working as a prostitute in a provincial French brothel, just before her sixteenth birthday.<sup>1</sup>

From there, Watts moved to the regulated brothels of pre-civil war Spain, but quickly abandoned these relatively squalid conditions for similar establishments in Italy, where she lived and worked in brothels in Milan, Rome, Naples and Florence. She made a great deal of money there, and recalled the time as 'without question the most wonderful time in my life...I was happy even in my sort of work, which I was pursuing in ideal surroundings, deplorable as this statement may seem to so many of my readers'.<sup>2</sup> After two years in Italy she met and fell in love with Georges, who was to become her first pimp. He asked her to work for him, and to join him in North Africa. Against the advice of her fellow Italian brothel workers and their madam, she agreed. She worked unhappily in dusty huts in Algiers and Tunis for two years before returning to Paris, where she took her own flat and solicited from a café, again turning the money over to Georges.<sup>3</sup>

In the mid-1930s, she and Georges became interested in the economic opportunities for prostitute women in England. “‘Il y’a beaucoup d’argent a Londres,” a man who organized marriages told them. ‘Une belle chambre. Le telephone. Une bonne’ were the ‘advantages of a professional life in London’.<sup>4</sup> For the almost compulsively itinerant Marthe, the decision was easy. ‘The streets of London are paved with gold,’ she recalled thinking.<sup>5</sup> She asked the man to organize a marriage of convenience for her, and was soon wed to the alcoholic and doddering Arthur Watts, in exchange for 30,000 francs (half of her and Georges’ savings). After some difficulties at Dover, she was granted a stamp on her French passport, and settled in London without any idea as to the location of her new husband. She found a flat (the dismal one in Carnaby Street) and got to work.<sup>6</sup>

Watts had soon secured herself better accommodation, and began making good money in London, soliciting on the street in the Mayfair area, where she kept a small flat, and charging her clients two pounds for a ‘short time’ of about ten or fifteen minutes. She sent most of this money back to Georges in France, who was unable to live with her in London lest they draw attention to her illegal marriage, but she soon discovered that Georges was living off another woman’s prostitution in addition to hers and cut off contact with him.<sup>7</sup> But it would not be long till Marthe was once again displaced and unsettled by world war, and by the early 1940s she was handing over her earnings once more, this time to London’s infamous Messina brothers, one of the metropolis’s first organized prostitution rings.

Marthe Watts’s is a remarkable story, not least because she had the opportunity to tell it in the first place, and her experiences of working as a high-class street prostitute in London, and for much of this time as a member of the Messina ‘family’, are not typical of the average woman who sold sex in this period. Nonetheless, her autobiography captures many of the circumstances with which women who sold sex in London had to cope during the late 1930s and 1940s: the wearying frequency of arrests for solicitation, the difficulty finding and keeping accommodation, the pressure of being an illegal immigrant, the high overheads paid to third parties like flat farmers and traffickers, the complex relationships entered into with pimps, violence at the hands of third parties and clients, and finally the deep psychological, social and physical dislocation brought about by the Second World War. More generally, the Second World War promoted a surge in commercial sex in London, while also paving the way for a renewed will toward repression at war’s end.

Marthe Watts, like Nellie Johnson and almost every woman soliciting on the streets of interwar London, soon found herself experiencing the metropolis’s system of prostitution control. Unlike in Italy, where she waited for clients in a brothel, and unlike in North Africa, where she solicited from the doorway of her hut, ‘In London... one had to keep moving – and it was not long before my feet were in a most deplorable state’, a problem compounded

by the high-heeled shoes that she wore.<sup>8</sup> Walking the beat was a way to avoid arrest, but it was not long before the inevitable happened. 'I had worked about six weeks before I was taken up by the police,' she recalled; 'they took my keys and put me in one of the cells, where a policewoman took my fingerprints.'<sup>9</sup> She found herself before the Bow Street magistrate, an experience she would come to view as part of the cost of doing business: 'This was the first of more than 400 appearances which I have made at Bow Street in my role as "common prostitute" and through which, even at two pounds a time, I have contributed substantially to [the] British Exchequer.'<sup>10</sup> She was protected from deportation under the Aliens Act and Orders because she was married to a British citizen.

Watts also discovered how easily a prostitute woman could come under the scrutiny of the 1885 and 1912 Criminal Law Amendment Acts for brothel-keeping. On one of her visits to Georges in France, she had lent her keys to another woman who had been using the premises for prostitution. Upon returning to London, she was, to her 'own amazement', charged with keeping a brothel.<sup>11</sup> These charges were soon conflated with her illicit immigration status. Police searched the flat and discovered that she had no British passport, and demanded that she produce her husband, which, after no small amount of searching, she was at last able to do, although he was barely sober enough to stand in the courtroom. Following on from this incident Watts was forced to move from flat to flat, avoiding the attention of police and complaints from neighbours, depending heavily upon her friendship with another French prostitute, Janine Gilson, in order to cope with this itinerancy.

While Gilson and Watts may have been unrepresentative of most women who sold sex because of their relationship with the Messina 'family', they were not alone in coming to London from France to find work in prostitution. The idea that 'il y'a beaucoup d'argent a Londres' was prevalent among continental European women working in the sex industry, and police reports catalogue the names of several hundred women, mostly French, who worked in London's sex industry in the interwar years. Though it is unclear exactly how much more women could earn in London or exactly how much healthier the sexual economy was there in comparison to their home countries, Marthe reported being pleased at her income and the rate of business. Her nationality was an asset: just as British culture demonized what it perceived as France's permissive sexuality, so too did this create a large market for French prostitutes among British men.<sup>12</sup> Many French and German women must also have been drawn to the more casual nature of the prostitution industry in Britain, which lay in contrast to the vestiges of regulated systems in their continental homes, which were still peppered with secret enclosed brothels and dominated by brothel-keepers and souteneurs.<sup>13</sup>

Women in continental Europe were also displaced – either directly or, like Watts, indirectly – because of the social, physical and economic

devastation of the First World War, and, because of the war, their routes of migration became increasingly difficult to navigate, especially if they had been convicted of any prostitution offence. The Aliens Order in 1916, coupled with the attention to 'unrespectable' women's migration brought about by successive 'white slavery' scares, made it more difficult for suspected prostitutes to come to Britain and even more difficult to remain after a conviction for prostitution. In the face of these growing restrictions, the most common ways for foreign women convicted of prostitution offences to avoid deportation under the Aliens orders was, as Marthe Watts had done, to acquire British nationality through marriage to a British man.<sup>14</sup> Police seem to have first discovered the practice of 'marriages of convenience' for prostitution in the early 1920s, soon after the Aliens Restriction Order of 1919 had become peacetime legislation. One of the first surviving case files dates from 1924, though it is almost certain that this method had been used to allow women to enter and remain in the country as prostitutes after the Aliens Restriction Order of 1916 had blocked their free passage, and perhaps had been in use since the 1905 Aliens Act, which had stipulated that an alien convicted of an offence as a 'common prostitute' could be deported.

It is likely, in other words, that Germaine Maria Mondet followed in the path of other women when she married a twenty-seven-year-old butcher's apprentice, Henry Charles Smith, in June 1924. Mondet, a French woman in her mid-twenties, had been born outside Paris around the turn of the century, to a father who was a 'jack of all trades'. She was one of seven siblings, but, according to her statement, had not spoken to her family for almost twelve years, since she had left home and been put in a boarding school in Paris. It is unclear how we should measure this information: on the one hand, Mondet's story of familial estrangement and loneliness seems to fit the backgrounds of many prostitute women; on the other, the desire to withhold news of her work as a prostitute (and the affair she had had with a 'gentleman' in Paris in her late teens) may have given her reason to lie to the police about her relationship with her family.

Police had first noticed Mondet when they arrested her for soliciting, and charged her with failing to register as an alien under the Aliens Order, and with making a false statement about marriage to an immigration officer. She was recommended for expulsion but returned in June 1924, and announced that she had married Smith, who had subsequently left the country for America to buy cattle; officers suspected she had been coached by her lawyer, Marston Garsia, into contracting the marriage.<sup>15</sup> Police may have had difficulty in getting her recommended for expulsion because of the marriage, but it had nonetheless made her vulnerable. By the time the police located her to question her further she was consumptive, and, having had her passport taken (apparently by her husband), was unable to return to France to get into hospital lest she not be allowed back into Britain. Her

case file ends with police locating her here, alone in a sanatorium outside London.<sup>16</sup>

Marriages like Mondet's, assuming that it was one 'of convenience', were usually arranged by third parties who charged a hefty fee, and the men the women married were usually down-and-outs, sometimes with criminal records, who were either unmarried or found – with the promise of some pounds in their pockets – that they had little problem engaging in bigamy.<sup>17</sup> As the people who arranged the marriages became more organized, they began to hire solicitors who would investigate the men's British nationality and marital status prior to contracting the marriage, after several cases had been lost because the police were able to prove the man was not a British citizen or had committed bigamy. One such semi-organized gang consisted of a man named Harold Brown, who arranged the marriages and frequently stood as witness to them, two Frenchmen, Georges Desmur and Georges Chamoulaud, and a Corsican, Fernand Bodena. Police alleged that the gang operated out of Westbourne Square [sic] and, with the help of Frank Bostock, 'a solicitor of ill-repute', and Fred Ford, an 'ex-convict who runs a doubtful estate agent's business', had arranged over forty of these marriages. Many of the women who were married had been defended in court by Marston Garsia, and it seems he was among those the police had in mind when they balefully noted the existence of police court solicitors and barristers in London who specialized in defending women in such cases, a practice going back to at least 1914.<sup>18</sup>

The men who married these women were also dealt with harshly in court, and George Foulstone, who had been paid fifteen pounds by Harold Brown to marry Julia Medes Hansen, did his best to plead his case. He told the court that he was so down-and-out when he was propositioned by Brown that he was 'drinking a cup of tea at Regent's Place Hotel and contemplating theft or suicide'. The woman he had married had since been deported and continued to work as a prostitute in Paris. In a dramatic turn of events, Foulstone, along with Brown, had been caught when a suspicious official at the Bermondsey Registrar's office had gotten a female stenographer to hide behind a wardrobe and record their conversation. The fate of Foulstone is unknown, but Brown was later charged with conspiracy and received twenty-three months' hard labour, while the stenographer was awarded a small sum by the Metropolitan Police, for service above and beyond the remit of her job.<sup>19</sup> As for the solicitor, Frank Bostock, police were unable to prove 'his activities to the fullest extent in this dirty business'.<sup>20</sup>

The women who married these men in order to gain access to and to remain in Britain usually never saw them again after their initial meeting and marriage, though some, like Marthe Watts, must have sought them out when in legal trouble. Others simply divorced and married again, as was the story behind what police referred to as 'the notorious Larsenneur case'. Marie Cecille Larsenneur was born in the tiny town of Plouguernevel in Brittany in

1904, and moved to Brussels when she was twenty-three, working (according to her) as an itinerant dressmaker, but according to the police 'she gave herself up wholly to prostitution.'<sup>21</sup> When the Brussels police finally succeeded in expelling her from Belgium, she married one John George Nash in 1929 and, along with a friend, came to London as Cecile Nash.

By 1931, Cecile Nash was living in Jermyn Street and had racked up fourteen convictions for soliciting by the time police discovered that John Nash had engaged in a bigamous marriage. They charged him, and demanded that Larsenneur register as an alien. She refused, telling police that she knew the law and that if she were to register as an alien that meant they could deport her as a prostitute. With the help of Marston Garsia, she succeeded in convincing the court that she should not have to register until the trial for bigamy proceeded. After another eleven convictions for soliciting (it is not difficult to imagine police were targeting her at this point), she reappeared in court, charged with being an unregistered alien, at which point Garsia announced that she had 'some very important news to tell the court': she had married one Arthur Clement McCorry, who 'wanted to take her away from a life on the street'.<sup>22</sup> The court was powerless to deport her.

Thanks to trials such as this, by the mid-1930s police were becoming increasingly aware of women like Marie Larsenneur. A 1936 report on the West End claimed that in C Division alone they knew of 116 foreign women working as prostitutes who had married British men. In response, police developed an 'album of foreign prostitutes and their associates' which they distributed to every police station, and to all major ports and points of entry.<sup>23</sup> The album had dual, and largely contradictory, aims: on the one hand, it was drawn up to get information about violence, murder and other 'heavy crime' surrounding prostitution, but it soon came to be used to prevent women from posing as 'respectable' with legitimate husbands, thereby gaining access to British residency.<sup>24</sup> Marthe Watts, Janine Gilson and many of the women they worked with graced the pages of the album, which recalled the kind of registration system that Britain had once flirted with and for which France had been famous. Regulation and criminalization mingled among the mug shots and scrawled details which graced the album.<sup>25</sup>

But, despite the best efforts of the Criminal Investigation Department's 'Special Branch', their interwar dealings with foreign prostitutes often amounted to little more than a relatively impotent surveillance. When thirty-year-old Germaine Sammut, a French woman who was a British subject through her marriage to a Paul Sammut in Tunis, reported her passport and marriage licence stolen after a trip to Paris, police, knowing her to be a prostitute, noted that 'it may be that steps can be taken to prevent her procuring another.' However, Sammut arrived in London with a no-passport weekend ticket, and all the Immigration Officer could do was diligently recall and record Sammut's clothing (brown hat, brown suit,



brown shoes) and her number in the Foreign Prostitutes and Associates Album (140). Attempts to prosecute proved futile when she was later able to produce a certified extract relating to her missing passport and a certified copy of her marriage certificate, which had been issued by the British consul general in Tunis. A few weeks later, C division officer reported that Sammut was living in the Haymarket and regularly soliciting prostitution in Regent Street.<sup>26</sup>

As Sammut's case illustrates, police were forced to resort to ad hoc tactics when trying to target foreign prostitutes. This could include trying to make sure that their cases would be heard before a particular magistrate, who was known to grant orders of expulsion more freely.<sup>27</sup> While certain police officers and magistrates seized upon opportunities to deport certain women, there was little sense of an overarching system of control and punishment, and many women like Marie Larsenneur and Germaine Sammut escaped from the weak clutches of the newly developing system of immigration control. It is no wonder that police were fatalistic about what they called 'yet another instance of a French prostitute marrying a British subject – in this case a one-eyed Maltese with a paralyzed right arm – in order to acquire British nationality and so pursue her calling without fear of deportation', a case that ended without conviction.<sup>28</sup> However, it was equally clear that harsher sentences could be imposed upon women for evading Aliens Orders than for soliciting, and police at times succeeded in using these measures as part of their legal arsenal for controlling prostitution.<sup>29</sup>

In the face of the continued currency of white slavery narratives and police intimations that traffickers were growing more cunning and co-ordinated, Watts was keen to disabuse her readers of the idea that her kind of migration was highly organized: 'My own story will make it obvious to my readers that it was solely a matter of independent enterprise for a French girl to come to London;' she wrote, 'and the majority of my fellow-countrywomen in the West End had arrived there in just the same manner as I had done.'<sup>30</sup>

The Metropolitan Police, for their part, were apt to think of 'white slavery' as little more than a fairy story. 'Wild statements as to "white slave traffic" appearing in the papers are, needless to say, hopelessly exaggerated,' one official memorandum from 1936 read. 'There is no evidence whatever of any "white slave" case in which any unwilling woman has been compelled or persuaded to act as a prostitute. There is, however, plenty of information that willing, greedy, foreign prostitutes are being assisted to come to this country by men with whom they are upon very friendly terms.'<sup>31</sup> While their hands were tied when it came to British prostitutes, many police administrators ardently wished that they might at least be granted the power to deport all foreign prostitutes from London.<sup>32</sup> It is difficult indeed to chart the actual experiences of migrant prostitute women between the biases of the police (as well as those of successful prostitutes like Watts), who were largely blind to or keen to downplay forces of coercion, and those of

moral reformers, who tended to understand all sexual migration in terms of either exploitation or criminality.

Emma Mock's experiences of illegal migration complicate both narratives. Mock was a twenty-five-year old Austrian Jew, who had been brought up by foster parents in Vienna who had died four years before. She had worked in Vienna as a model, but had eventually fled Austria and entered the UK in August 1938, telling the immigration officer she was there to visit her husband. He gave her six weeks' leave to remain. Later, the German Jewish Aid Committee informed the Home Office that Mock's fiancé was sending papers from New York so that she could apply for a visa for the United States, and asked for an extension of her permit to stay in the United Kingdom. In November, however, David John Wheatley, also known as David King, registered his intention to marry Emma Mock.

The case was flagged as a 'marriage of convenience' and police officers investigated. When questioned, Mock explained that she had come to London to marry a lifelong friend, Hans Garden, but he left for America after a week. She decided to marry Mr Wheatley after she had become pregnant. She was charged with making a false statement and failing to register as an alien.<sup>33</sup> Mock's husband-to-be, meanwhile, was a West End club owner and a convicted thief. He was living with a convicted prostitute, and was 'known to be associated with other prostitutes and suspected drug traffickers', and police soon discovered that her former fiancé was actually engaged to a British woman. The German Jewish Aid Committee supported Mock through the ordeal, but police feared that if Mock married Wheatley she would 'resort to a life of prostitution'. When Mock learned of his activities, she decided not to marry Wheatley, but was still found guilty of failing to register as an alien and sentenced to one day in prison. Whether Mock was a cunning migrant prostitute, a hapless victim of trafficking, or simply a woman trying to survive as best she could is difficult to say. We hear little else of her fate, though a scrawled note to the Police Commissioner from the Chief Inspector suggested that 'the lady is a Jewish refugee and it is as certain as anything can be that she will not be ordered to go back to Austria.'<sup>34</sup> We can only hope that the exasperated inspector was right.

It is ironic, considering their differing vantage points, that some of the police's most meaningful allies in outcome, if not ideology, were organizations campaigning against the 'white slave traffic' – most notably the NVA-affiliated International Bureau for the Suppression of Traffic in Women – who by the 1930s had joined the police in suggesting forced repatriation for all foreign prostitute women. Before the League of Nations Advisory Committee on Traffic in Women in 1931, the Bureau asked that new measures be put into place by member nations: first, to prevent prostitutes from entering any foreign country; second, to compulsorily repatriate any prostitute guilty of a breach of any law; and third, to punish them heavily if they returned to the country from which they had been

repatriated.<sup>35</sup> This policy reflected the binary of victimhood and agency that had long been constructed by anti-sex trafficking campaigners: like Victoria Bricot back in 1910, any woman who did not fit the image of the coerced 'white slave' was placed automatically in the category of criminal immigrant prostitute.

Not everyone agreed with this approach. The International Alliance of Women for Suffrage and Equal Citizenship, the International Council of Women, and the AMSH responded to these suggestions by warning that any measures of immigration restriction and deportation would 'create a situation favourable to the activities of all who prey upon and exploit women' and make women vulnerable to blackmail.<sup>36</sup> While the impassioned protests of these women's organizations kept the Advisory Committee from passing any of the proposals, a combined increase in punitive measures towards both prostitutes and immigrants continued to make allies of 'anti-traffic' campaigners and those opposed to immigration.

In 1932, two years after Marthe Watts and Georges arranged her passage to England, and only one year after the AMSH's warnings about how repression encouraged 'all who prey upon and exploit women', Eugenio Messina arrived in London, followed shortly thereafter by his brothers Carmelo, Salvatore, Alfredo and Attilo. The chronicle of these five men's lives, like Alec Berard and Antonio Cellis before them, reads like something straight out of salacious novels and films about white slavery.<sup>37</sup> Born in Alexandria and Malta, they learned about prostitution profiteering from a very early age: their Maltese mother and Sicilian father had opened a string of brothels in Egypt during the First World War, making considerable profit, and raising their sons in the business. Eventually the brothers, with Eugenio in the lead, opened brothels around North Africa and from the money made were able to move to London, using aliases, but at the same time claimed residency based upon their mother's citizenship, exposing once again the holes in the immigration system.<sup>38</sup> As the Second World War began, the Messina brothers began to build a lucrative vice empire.<sup>39</sup>

At the same time, Marthe Watts began to struggle with the social and psychological effects of the war. When the blitz began in the autumn of the following year, Watts worked only in the afternoons and spent her evenings in air raid shelters. She was very unsettled and, having recently said her goodbyes to Georges, was lonely. She and her friend Janine Gilson, alongside their maids, evacuated London for a time, but, through boredom and lack of business, soon returned to the metropolis, where criminalization and air raids had combined to make finding a new flat difficult indeed: 'When I got back to London I found everything changed,' Watts recalled. 'In particular, many of the houses had been bombed and only after difficulty did I find myself another place at the top of a block of flats in Jermyn Street.'<sup>40</sup> Alongside her friend Janine, she did her best to summon her own kind of 'blitz spirit'.

The Second World War not only improved the fortunes of the Messina brothers and drastically altered Marthe Watts's life, but also affected the whole commercial sex landscape in the capital, having as great an effect as, if not greater than, the First. The first year of the war brought with it an unsurprising rise in both prostitution and promiscuity as British and Commonwealth troops began to mobilize in London, while the second year of the war brought the Blitz, which destroyed vast amounts of property and a large number of lives, and plunged London nightly into complete darkness. Despite their best efforts to continue work, many women selling sex must have found themselves as unsettled as Watts.

Prostitutes were coming under fire during wartime in other ways as well: it was commonly held that many were spies for the enemy, or 'swallows': women who seduced military men for information.<sup>41</sup> Meanwhile, Ministry of Labour officials were flooded with letters from private individuals, organizations and politicians asking why they had made no better attempt, considering the threat that prostitution posed to the venereal health of the military, to register prostitutes for national service in order to get them off the street and ensure they contributed to, rather than thwarted, the war effort. The Ministry of Labour, for their part, did lament the fact that because of their itinerant lifestyles many prostitutes had been missed by the net of national registration, but felt that the average prostitute would be a great deal more of a hindrance than a help in a munitions factory.<sup>42</sup> They did tentatively suggest, however, that a programme could be established that would 'take a random sample of misfits, including prostitutes' and train them for war work, in isolation from ordinary women. It is unclear whether any such programme was ever established.<sup>43</sup>

The third year of the war brought with it the most important change of all when it came to commercial sex: the arrival of tens of thousands of American troops. The American presence in London generated an immense demand for many different kinds of sexual and non-sexual entertainments, including drinking, dancing and prostitution, and this demand was met with gusto by the licit and illicit business people of London.<sup>44</sup> Anxieties rose about the 'good time girls' who clustered around popular American haunts like the Rainbow Café and the Red Cross Hotels, and who liaised with black American soldiers. Russell Square, near North Soho's cafés and the northern rail terminuses, became a popular site for soldiers, and Victoria and Waterloo, which had lost some popularity in the interwar years, resurged as an area known for commercial sex.<sup>45</sup> Prostitutes were said to swarm around Piccadilly Circus and Glasshouse Street, supplementing their wages by stealing from soldiers. In the Burlington Gardens, near Saville Row and Regent Street, more expensive French women catered to the tastes of officers, while the cheapest women were said to be found in Old Compton and Gerrard Streets in Soho.<sup>46</sup>

After 1941, British officials grew increasingly concerned about the relationship between American troops stationed in London and prostitution, largely due to pressure from the American government and military, who felt that Britain was not doing enough to protect American troops from the temptations of prostitutes and the venereal disease which was seen as an inevitable outcome of these relations. British officials, in turn, became preoccupied with the impression they were giving to their allies and to the Commonwealth.<sup>47</sup> The Foreign Office warned the Home Office that the prostitution problem was having 'a really damning effect on American opinion about this country', pointing out that their new allies had been much more successful in clearing their streets: 'Prostitutes do not ply on the thoroughfares of New York... and one can also understand that the Americans should feel something like disgust that these women should be allowed to swarm round the American Red Cross hotels'.<sup>48</sup> Not a month later, the warnings had stepped up: 'The scale on which the American troops in this country are subjected to accosting by prostitutes [means that] we are beginning to be apprehensive about the long-term effect that it may have on Anglo-American relations generally'.<sup>49</sup>

The pressure was echoed in both the American and the British press. The *New York Times* hurled sensational statistics at its reading public: venereal disease infections were twenty-five per cent higher for Americans in Britain than at home, and up to one-half of these infections could 'be traced to the Piccadilly area'. The *Daily Mirror* and *Express* were happy to reprint and contribute to such damning accounts.<sup>50</sup> One high-ranking army official pointed out with confident numeracy that, while fifteen per cent of troops would actively seek out prostitutes and fifteen would never do so, there were another seventy per cent who would succumb to temptation if it were out in the open.<sup>51</sup>

For Inspector Coles, the Superintendent of West End Central station (the epicentre of wartime prostitution), it was the Americans who had caused the problem for them, rather than prostitutes causing problems for Americans.<sup>52</sup> In the first two years of the war, he claimed, there had been little noticeable increase in prostitution, but, after the arrival of American troops, blatant prostitution on the streets and more subtle prostitution off the street had steadily increased, owing largely, he felt, to the fact that Americans' wages were too high. To make matters worse, the US Army had requisitioned many buildings in the Shepherd's Market and Curzon Street areas, which had established themselves long before the war as sites of on-street prostitution connected to flats in the area.<sup>53</sup>

As the amount of prostitution that was happening increased, other wartime conditions made it more difficult for police to control. Blackouts make it harder to witness annoyance, and at least one police magistrate commented on how he was not sure if he would accept evidence of witnessed

annoyance in blackout conditions.<sup>54</sup> Police also complained about the peacetime legislation with which they had to work, pointing out that, while there were fifteen charges every night in the West End for solicitation, the fines never rose above two pounds.<sup>55</sup> Despite these challenges, police insisted that most of the agitation about prostitution during the war was nothing more than unsubstantiated panic, with Police Commissioner Philip Game remarking that 'London is more orderly now than it is in peace time,' and Home Secretary Herbert Morrison pointing out that, if New York experienced blackout conditions, they would find themselves in just the same predicament.<sup>56</sup> Another Home Office official went one step further, noting in a circular that 'personally I would say that to anyone who knew Paris or even London in the last war, London at the moment is by comparison a well-conducted Sunday school!'<sup>57</sup>

Coinciding with fears of venereal disease and damage done to Britain's relationship with its allies was a rising moral panic over the myriad of different clandestine businesses that had opened up during the war to cater to both citizens' and soldiers' demands for alcohol and, to a lesser extent, for sex. Resurrecting many of the tropes used to describe these sorts of establishments in interwar London, newspapers regularly featured a catalogue of dingy, dark and dangerous spaces in which women, soldiers and citizens transgressed. 'War has dimmed the bright lights of Piccadilly,' the *Sunday Pictorial* melodramatically intoned in August 1942, claiming that the worst kinds of war profiteers had 'turned a place that was once gay into a den of organized vice in which no one may walk with safety'. The newspaper managed to infuse the image of these new indoor urban spaces with just about every villain of the wartime home front: 'Fat foreigners sit in dingy club basements dealing in black market goods; Men find girls; men go blind. There are nude dances and a male strip tease popular among the foreigners and the pale, dissolute Mayfairites whom the call-up hasn't combed out.'<sup>58</sup> The *Pictorial* would, of course, have had quite a hard time convincing anyone that the West End had been free from vice before the war, but it was true that these establishments attracted new levels of contempt during wartime because these places – and the prostitutes, 'fat foreigners' and draft-dodging 'queers' within them – made money off the backs of their serviceman victims, who were led by their naivety and wartime needs 'to be sucked dry'.<sup>59</sup>

Unsurprisingly, the policemen of C and D Divisions insisted that these businesses formed a much less sensational part of the wartime entertainment landscape and described them matter-of-factly. One such kind of establishment was known as the 'bottle party', which worked like night-clubs in that they charged modest 'member's fees' to access what was ostensibly a private party, where patrons could order wine from late-night wine shops to be delivered to the premises, at exorbitant fees from which both the host of the party and the wine purveyor received a cut. With names

such as 'Embassy', 'Bag o'Nails' and 'Coconut Grove', they could usually be found in the basements of the West End, clustered around Regent Street and Leicester Square.<sup>60</sup>

These bottle parties operated during the same hours as 'near beer establishments', where patrons, desperate for socialization and a drink after regular licensing hours, paid high prices for refreshments that were under two per cent alcohol, low enough to escape the control of the liquor licensing laws.<sup>61</sup> These establishments, like bottle parties, often hired 'hostesses' to provide patrons with entertainment beyond the expensive, low-quality wine and beer. These women were selling their company rather than sex acts for the most part, leading men to believe that they would go home with them and thus encouraging them to buy more overpriced drinks. This practice, known as 'grafting', also depended upon 'parasexuality'; in this case directly linking the income of the establishment to the illusion of sexual availability of its staff, though many owners may have also encouraged women to turn illusion into reality for extra money at the end of the night. By 1942, police had prosecuted thirty-five such places under Liquor and Music and Dancing regulations, and twenty had been closed under the 1939 DORA regulation 42C.<sup>62</sup>

Nightclubs, on the other hand, were seen by police as a much bigger problem. In the West End alone, there were 274 clubs, and 130 of these were drinking clubs that, because of their 'doorstep membership', were able to sell alcohol for a full twelve hours beginning at eleven in the morning. While police could ask for clubs that were associated with illegal drink and prostitution to be struck from the clubs register, they found it nearly impossible to prevent them from simply reopening under a different name and a different licence. Indeed, police action against clubs seemed to have less of an effect than other conditions of war: there had been 392 clubs before the war, police explained, and the fall in over 100 clubs was due not to their efforts but to the Blitz.<sup>63</sup>

Nonetheless, police remained fatalistic and relatively unperturbed by the immense rise in commercial sex during wartime. 'The problem of prostitution and the variety of ways it is carried on has always been with us and is no way something fresh,' wrote the cynical superintendent of C Division in 1942. 'The West End of London is an acknowledged "mecca" of Service personnel and visitors to London and there are undoubtedly unsavoury individuals ready and willing to make easy money out of them, but police are always on the alert... The path of the service men on leave in the West End of London is not such a grim, sordid and sensational affair as [the newspapers] would have the more unsophisticated of [their] readers believe'.<sup>64</sup>

Grim and sordid were, of course, relative terms, though it is safe to say that the Arch Social Club at 67 Bryanston Street was not particularly sensational. The 'Club' had reopened at 67 Bryanston Street in April of 1940, after it had lost its previous licence as 'The Georgian', premises located

above a snack bar on Bayswater Road. The new location was frequented by several known prostitutes and run by Mrs Kirby, her two sons and a male friend. Women who frequented the club solicited on Bayswater Road near Marble Arch, and brought their clients inside. They would also occasionally be sought out at the bar by regular clients, such as the naval officer on twenty-four hours' shore leave, who came in on the second night looking for his regular girl, prompting Sonny Kirby to declare, 'we must take care of the Navy'. The men would stay for about an hour, spending time in the dilapidated bar area or going directly upstairs with one of the women who had solicited them on the street. Sonny and Jimmy worked the bar and handed out room keys on request, but did not appear to be anything more than the room-keepers, taking fees for the rental from the women but otherwise in no way directing their prostitution. The place was mainly frequented by soldiers and the occasional officer, who paid five shillings six pence for their 'short time'.

The women themselves swore and drank liberally, chatting with each other, with Jimmy and Sonny, and with the men. ('What do you think of these fucking stockings?' went one conversation, diligently recorded by one of the undercover police constables. 'I paid 25 shillings for the bastards.' The officer also saw fit to inform his superiors that 'the colour of her underclothing was pink.'<sup>65</sup>) Overall, the women appeared to have a measure of control over the space and the men within it. One woman openly proclaimed to the bar that her previous client was a 'cunt', and another, Jean, told a group of men that 'you can't kiss me until I'm pissed... and don't call me a cunt or I'll smack you in the fucking jaw'. When Sonny tried to stop her from singing, she told him that 'I can make a fucking row if I want to' and then 'broke into song'.<sup>66</sup>

The Arch Social Club provides a glimpse into a world of lower-class prostitution, where large amounts of alcohol were consumed and women worked in unsanitary conditions. Police, when they raided the club, made note of the threadbare and stained mattresses, and the used condoms spilling their contents onto the floor.<sup>67</sup> Women working there seemed exhausted and crass, and the atmosphere was often violent (police raided the club when they found two women fighting drunkenly in the street). Nonetheless, the women also had access to some degree of public supervision by the presence of men, and of Sonny and Jimmy, at the bar. We are left to wonder whether the prosecution of the Arch Social Club, sordid and grim as it seemed, left them in a better or a worse position.

The prosecution of the Arch Social Club notwithstanding, police largely elided the threat of off-street prostitution and remained primarily concerned with public order in the streets. The War Office, meanwhile, considered the greatest problem by far to be venereal disease, and in 1942 brought the Defence of the Realm Act regulation 33b into effect. The regulation stipulated that VD clinic doctors and nurses were required to report the names of



their patients' sexual contacts, and gave the Ministers of Health the right to submit these persons to medical inspection and take them into custody.<sup>68</sup> The regulation predictably inspired concerted protests from women's organizations, which had long campaigned for voluntary treatment and preventative measures rather than coercion, and, in the face of these criticisms and the challenges of administration, it is difficult to determine whether this regulation worked in any measurable sense, especially because the files concerning the police and Ministry of Health implementation of Regulation 33b remain largely closed.<sup>69</sup>

It would not be surprising to find that this controversial measure, like World War I's DORA 40d before it, came down disproportionately hard on those who had already been sexually and socially stigmatized, namely, women who had been labelled 'common prostitutes'.<sup>70</sup> Indeed, back-door ways of compulsory medical inspection continued into World War II. In 1942, for instance, it was discovered that young women were picking up Canadian and American soldiers in the Piccadilly area and bringing them to cheap hotels in Russell Square at a rate of four pounds per night. Unable to firmly label them as prostitutes initially, the police took to checking their National Registration Identity Cards against the aliases they used to register for a hotel room, enabling them to bring thirty-six young women into custody for falsifying their identities during wartime. Using the trick of remanding the youngest to reform homes in lieu of a police court cell, they were able to inspect them, and found nine to be suffering from venereal disease.<sup>71</sup> Police and magistrates alike give the distinct impression in their reports that they knew they were straining the law well beyond its intention: 'It is a scheme that can only safely be worked by carefully selected officers,' cautioned one unknown Home Office official, 'it is easier to rouse passions (suffragette and medical) on this subject than almost any other.'<sup>72</sup>

It was in this period marked by moral panic, total war and various attempts by War Office, Health Officer and policeman alike to control and suppress prostitutes and prostitution that the Messinas – Eugenio, Carmelo, Salvatore, Atillo and Alfredo – began to make their fortune. Watts, like most women selling sex in the West End, had heard of the Messina brothers and the women who worked for them, but knew them only from seeing them across the rooms of basement clubs and restaurants. One night after they had returned to London, over the tables of one such club, Watt's friend Janine Gilson sparked the interest of one of these five notorious brothers, and was soon a 'Messina girl'. 'I was very worried about it,' Watts wrote of Gilson's decision, 'for the Messinas had not a particularly good reputation even amongst the French people of the London underworld.'<sup>73</sup> Yet, despite her reservations, she soon accepted an offer of dinner from Eugenio, the eldest of the Messina brothers: 'I did my best to remain outside their set-up,' she insisted. 'However, my predicament can be stated quite simply. Above

everything in my life I have dreaded loneliness; and now I had lost my best friend to the Messinas and was lonely.<sup>74</sup> After taking her out several times, Eugenio asked her to work for him, and she agreed. 'It was less a decision than a resignation to evil circumstances,' she explained, 'for it was wartime, I was trapped in London, alone and by myself, and what else could I do? ... If it had not been for the war and its difficult circumstances, I would never have gone in with the Messinas in the first place.'<sup>75</sup> Thus began her over ten-year career as one of the Messina girls.

Marthe Watts provides a confusing account of her time with Eugenio Messina, seemingly unable to explain even to herself why she was a member of his 'family' for so long. The women who worked for Eugenio, while never allowed to keep much of their own earnings, were nonetheless supplied with furs, dresses and jewellery, and, in a strange kind of arrangement, each of his favourite women was given a weekly or biweekly night out with him, while Saturday was reserved for his wife. Watts quickly discovered that, apart from his wealth, she was unattracted to Eugenio, but she just as quickly realized that she might be in danger if she attempted to leave. Early in her career as a Messina girl, another woman ominously asked her, 'Vous n'avez pas goutez le fils électrique?'; a short time later, when Eugenio caught her speaking to a male acquaintance on the street, Watts was beaten with an electric flex wire that Eugenio had removed from a lamp in the room.<sup>76</sup> She was barred from contacting any of her friends from her former life, and was often watched by one of the brothers.

Using the boom in the commercial sex industry occasioned by wartime, the Messina brothers were able to invest in several houses around the West End which they used as brothels, and several more well-appointed premises where they themselves lived. They were able to do this through exploiting the loophole in the 1885 and 1912 provisions against brothels, which stipulated that a landlord could only be liable to prosecution if he or she rented premises as a brothel, and that only the tenant, lessor or occupant could be liable to charges of permitting a place to be used for 'habitual prostitution'. This meant that a landlord could sublet to prostitute women, even if all the rooms were in a subdivided house, and not be technically liable to the offence of keeping a brothel or of permitting habitual prostitution (because he or she was not the tenant, lessor or occupier). On the other hand, the prostitute woman who rented, leased or sublet a premises, because she was the 'tenant, lessee or occupier', was not blessed with the same immunity to prosecution, as Marthe Watts quickly discovered when she allowed a woman to stay in her flat while she was away. Thus it was that, rather bizarrely, the law disempowered prostitute women to organize themselves to work together and encouraged them instead to be organized through a landlord.<sup>77</sup> Watts was settled by Eugenio into a house in Curzon Street, Shepherd's Market, where she was placed on the police's informal 'prostitutes' register' for that area.<sup>78</sup>

Watts's work hours as a Messina girl were steady and long throughout the war, while all the while she and the other women were forced to cope with Eugenio's strangely rigid policies: all the women were forbidden to see Americans (a fact supported by police evidence), were never allowed to remove their clothes, and could not stay with a man for more than ten minutes (though he relaxed his 'no Americans' rule once it became evident how much money could be made from them).<sup>79</sup> On VE day, Watts and her co-workers saw as many as fifty clients each, turning the majority of their earnings over to the brothers, who were at this point banking over 1,000 pounds each a week. They laundered the money through various bogus businesses and spent it on trips abroad, houses and Rolls Royces, for which they became infamous. Watts, for her part, estimated that she had handed over 150,000 pounds to Eugenio in the fifteen years she worked for him.<sup>80</sup>

Curiously, both newspapers at the time and the historiography of Britain's gangland tend to take a rather organic view of the rise of organized vice rackets like the Messina brothers; they failed, and fail, to recognize that these syndicates were heavily contingent upon the way that prostitution had been increasingly criminalized in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.<sup>81</sup> If many women had not found themselves unable to secure accommodation or work with other women on their own; had they not been forced to cope with successive court appearances along with fines, remands and bail costs; had they not been constantly on the watch for police while soliciting on the street; and, most importantly, had they not been in such precarious situations as illegal immigrants, it is very possible that men like the Messinas would not have had so strong a hold on women like Marthe Watts.

It is also important to remember that, as real and as significant as the Messinas were, their outfit was not the most common way that commercial sex took place in the 1930s and 1940s. Rosalind Wilkinson, for instance, found that none of her interviewees – over 100 in all – were controlled by organized groups (while also admitting that she could not get near the Messina girls to interview them).<sup>82</sup> What she did find was that the overwhelming majority of them were supporting a man through prostitution.

It is impossible to assess whether pimping increased over the course of the twentieth century, based upon statistics for arrests for 'living on the earnings of prostitution' (in the 1898 Amendment to the Vagrancy Act) and 'controlling or directing the movements of a prostitute' (in the 1912 Criminal Law Amendment Act), because these arrests and prosecutions were highly dependent on police action and inaction. Charges skyrocketed in 1912 when Britons were in the grasp of the great 'white slavery' panic, but then dropped off throughout the 1920s as attention was diverted away from the issue. Between 1922 and 1931, for instance, the annual average

of arrests under this charge was only nineteen in London.<sup>83</sup> Police seemed more concerned with occasionally proving that a remarkably high percentage of pimps were non-British (especially Maltese and West Indian) than with providing consistent statistics on the phenomenon of pimping overall, which was, after all, a difficult thing to capture.<sup>84</sup>

Three cases of pimping from the mid-1930s demonstrate the diversity of relationships that women had with the men with whom they lived and shared their money. Twenty-five-year-old Ena Bassett told the police that she had first taken pity upon Eddie Smith, 'a coloured man', when she had seen him around Soho: 'he looked absolutely destitute and I was sorry for him and took him to a café and bought him some food.'<sup>85</sup> Bassett had worked in Piccadilly as a prostitute since she was sixteen, and, when the pair started living together and moved to Camden, 'Eddie didn't work, and stayed in bed with me until 1 or 2 o'clock every day,' and at least once had 'smacked her about the face' when she told him she was too tired to go out. In March 1939, Bassett told the police that she gave Smith all of his money, and that he knew she was earning it through prostitution; they also quarrelled often, especially when Smith gambled the money away. When the final quarrel ended with her kicking him out, he stole some money and some rings and she went to the police. 'I am quite willing – in fact I desire to give evidence against Edward Smith for living on my immoral earnings,' she declared in her initial statement.<sup>86</sup>

The story is complicated somewhat, however, by the fact that, when she was called to testify a few weeks later, she could recall little of what she had said because 'When I made the [first] statement ... I was drunk. I left court at 12 and drank until 2:45 ... and met the detectives at 3:30. There had been a quarrel over another woman and I was feeling very resentful toward him'. Her new story, as a hostile witness, was that he didn't know she was a prostitute and that he paid the rent.<sup>87</sup> We shall, of course, never know the truth of the relationship: neighbours frequently heard screams, and testified that Bassett was often 'hysterical'.<sup>88</sup> She appeared reluctant, when sober, to forgo her relationship with the man with whom she had lived for several years, even if this relationship was a source of violence and difficulty in her life. In any case, the decision was made for her, and Eddie Smith was put on trial for living on the earnings of prostitution and larceny. As is the case with criminal depositions, we are left with no idea of how the case ended.

In a similar vein, when C Division police issued a warrant for the arrest of Hyman Mintz for pimping in 1938, Ray Myers, who worked as a prostitute in the West End, turned up at the station to plead his case. 'He can't bear the thought of this charge hanging over his head,' she explained to the junior station inspector. 'If he gives himself up, will you make it as easy as possible for him? Will you promise to have him dealt with at the Police Court so he will only get six months?'<sup>89</sup> The office told her that procedure would be followed, but Mintz and Myers were caught a few days later trying to bribe

the senior detective on the case and made one last effort to plead for clemency, telling the officer to 'think of our children'.<sup>90</sup>

The final example is more clear-cut. Doris Golding had lived with Michael Canning for three years, working as a prostitute and handing over money to him. She had left him in 1935, and found a job in a café in Highgate, but he soon found her at her new workplace, and began demanding money from her with threats that he would tell her employer that she had been a prostitute. Golding felt she had no choice but to give in to his demands. 'I gave him money as I did not want a scene...' she told the court. 'I did not want to continue as a prostitute; I couldn't go on giving him money when I only earned 15/- a week unless I did so. I told him and he threatened to go to the young man I was engaged to.' According to her flatmate, when Golding had told him about her new life, saying that she wanted to go out to work and get married, 'Canning said she would never work, she was only fit for what she was doing.' There is no way to know the outcome of the case, or to know whether Golding's new job and relationship survived the exposure of the courts.<sup>91</sup>

As had been the case in the early years of increased repression, the practice of pimping was fed directly by criminalization: women needed men to secure accommodation, to pay fines, to bail them out and to watch for police. In this later period we are also afforded a glimpse of some of the more subtle reasons why prostitute women entered into relationships with men who tended to take part of their earnings, through the accounts of Marthe Watts and through over fifty interviews conducted by sociologist Rosalind Wilkinson. 'Above all things in my life I have dreaded loneliness the most,' wrote Watts, in an attempt to explain why she left the brothel in Italy where she was happy to go to North Africa to work for her new pimp, Georges. 'I suppose that even a prostitute – and, in this, we are only the same as other women – needs something more permanent than superficial admiration and transient relationships... it is her tragedy that, in full knowledge of this, lurks round her the evil scum of the male sex, waiting to satisfy her ... at the heavy toll of keeping all her earnings.'<sup>92</sup>

Many of Wilkinson's interviewees echoed Watts's sentiment (although a few did insist that they would 'never, ever' keep a man), and Wilkinson's research provided an interesting counterweight to the popular image of the pimp.<sup>93</sup> She found that the majority of pimps were themselves quite young, often younger than the women who kept them, and that many had come from broken homes, and had backgrounds of juvenile delinquency and institutionalization.<sup>94</sup> Since she was researching around 1950, Wilkinson found that many had been army deserters, or soldiers who had returned from war with mental or physical disabilities and were unable to find meaningful work. In the case of one interviewee, her pimp was also a prostitute himself, occasionally soliciting men to earn more money.<sup>95</sup> Wilkinson also made a direct connection between the rise in pimping and the social

and psychological effects of working as a prostitute in an age of repression and condemnation. 'The stability of the institution of ponce and prostitute, today, depends largely on the unpleasantness of living in such isolation as the new prostitute experiences. The prostitutes themselves are sufficiently conscious of their state to suggest loneliness as a cause of this relationship.'<sup>96</sup>

While Wilkinson might have been naïve in claiming that prostitute women were 'in little danger of coercion or exploitation against [their] will', it is important to remember that most of the violence, coercion and abuse that occurred in pimp-prostitute relationships was part of a larger story of domestic violence. It is hard to ignore the fact that Wilkinson's interviewees often insisted that ponces provided them with support and stability in a world that offered them little of either otherwise. 'If ever she was a victim,' she wrote of one young woman named Nancy who had been arrested and put in reform homes several times, 'it seems to be to the State, to the law, and not to the ponces.'<sup>97</sup> But, despite Wilkinson's sympathies toward ponces, it is difficult to forget Marthe Watts's story of having 'tasted the electric flex', or Doris Golding being extorted and harassed.

Alongside the domestic violence that prostitute women suffered at the hands of their 'protectors', and the harassment they experienced through the criminal justice system, they were also subjected to routine client violence. Marthe Watts was also no stranger to these sorts of attacks: because of Eugenio's bizarrely strict 'ten minute rule', she often found herself with customers who had not reached orgasm or who were otherwise unsatisfied. This resulted in many of the clients becoming difficult and violent, and her having to call the police, who reported having to attend many calls when 'the client demands his money back and when refused assaults the woman or refuses to leave.' Police responded to thirty-three such incidents in the summer of 1942 alone.<sup>98</sup> 'Incidents such as this are far more frequent than generally realized,' police remarked, and there is no telling how many women did not call the police for fear of being prosecuted for brothel-keeping.

Prostitute women working in wartime London had good reason to fear even more extreme forms of client violence, and, against the sinister backdrop of blackout in 1942, serial murderer and RAF pilot George Cummins targeted prostitute women. The first victim, Evelyn Hamilton, did not work as a prostitute but rather as a pharmacist, and was found strangled in an air raid shelter on 9 February 1942. After the Hamilton murder, Cummins seemed to seek out women who were guaranteed to be isolated, rather than accidentally being so. The second victim, Evelyn Oatley (also known as Lita Ward), was found on 10 February in her Wardour Street flat. She had been strangled and had her throat cut, and her genitals mutilated with a tin opener. Oatley was well known around the Regent Street Archway where she solicited, and her friend Laura Denmark, with whom she had been soliciting that night, testified that she was a heavy drinker. 'Her main trouble

was that she was lonely,' Denmark told the police.<sup>99</sup> Oatley preferred to go with older men, and to have them stay the night, because she did not like sleeping alone.<sup>100</sup>

Shortly afterward, on 11 February, Margaret Lowe (also known as Pearl) was found in her Marylebone flat, strangled by a silk stocking, her body and genitals brutally mutilated. The murderer worked with a startling speed, and the next day the body of Doris Jouannet, who worked as a prostitute from a flat she shared with her husband, was found. She had also been strangled and mutilated. This was followed two days later by attempted attacks on Margaret Heywood, in a doorway in Piccadilly, and on Katherine King when she took an airman customer back to her Paddington flat. Later that month, June Anderson was also attacked and was able to give a good account of her attacker. She had manually stimulated the man until he orgasmed, and it was then that he attacked her, wrapping his hands around her throat and saying 'women like you shouldn't live.'<sup>101</sup> Anderson was lucky enough to catch the ears of the housekeeper when she cried out for help.

Cummins, who came to be known as the 'Blackout Ripper', was tried, found guilty, and hanged at Wandsworth Prison on 25 June 1942, but his crimes were followed in short order by still more murders of prostitute women. In 1945, Gertrude Rose was found beaten to death with a shillelagh in her flat in Brixton. Rose, who was known as Maisie, had married a Canadian soldier and moved to Canada with him for two years, but came back around 1943 estranged from the man. She worked as a prostitute and took only American soldiers, soliciting them in the West End and taking them back to her flat for the whole night. It was thought that one such soldier was her murderer. Her neighbours, who spoke very highly of her, testified that she was a 'pleasant and likeable woman' and had conducted her profession discreetly. They also knew the purpose that the shillelagh had been meant to serve: 'She told me she kept it for her protection,' James Byrne, the father of the family downstairs, told the police. 'I presumed that because of her profession she knew that she was running a risk of being attacked. She was a very determined woman and I can well imagine her readily using this weapon if she was attacked.'<sup>102</sup> Sadly, it seems that Maisie Rose's efforts to protect herself from anticipated violence were not enough to prevent her death. Her murderer was never found.

Nor was the murderer or murderers of Helen Freedman ('Russian Dora') or Rachel Annie Fennick (Ginger Rae). Freedman was found in her flat in Long Acre on 5 September 1948, having died from stab wounds to her face, caused by a bread knife. Fennick was found at the end of the same month in her flat in Broadwick Street, also stabbed to death, also with a long-bladed knife. Both women had had good reason to keep clear of the police and hide their activities: Freedman had eighteen convictions for solicitation, while Fennick had eighty-four, along with two convictions for brothel-keeping.<sup>103</sup> A Messina girl, Hermione Hindin, was also attacked, and though

she co-operated with the police she was unable to identify the potential killer. Almost a year later, police were still searching. 'I have kept in close touch with many of the fraternity who frequent Soho, in the hopes of learning more of the movements of deceased and possibly the particulars of her assailant,' wrote a C Division officer, though he was hampered by the tight-lipped world of increasingly organized vice. Newspapers, meanwhile, suggested that the murders were directly linked to organized prostitution, and claimed that the Messinas had hired a Corsican assassin to come and do away with some of their unruly women.<sup>104</sup>

Meanwhile, the willingness to break the law and risk being charged with keeping a brothel had saved the life of Ada Adele Curran in June of 1949. Curran did not work alone from her flat in Soho, but, rather, employed a maid. When she took Leslie Shaw into her room for intercourse and he began to hit her in the head with a hammer, her maid Elena Percalo intervened, and Curran came away with a broken arm, serious head injuries, and her life.<sup>105</sup> In the face of this pervasive day-to-day hidden violence, Marthe Watts was not alone in her decision to seek the support and control of men like Gino Messina. Some women joined large crime syndicates, while others turned to small-time pimps and brothel owners. Others, like Curran, employed maids or protectors. But, as the law railed against any and all forms of third-party involvement in prostitution, both exploitative relationships as well as relationships that promoted women's protection came under attack.

The rise in organized prostitution around and during the Second World War was directly related to criminalization, as women like Marthe Watts negotiated their working and personal lives amidst arrests, evictions, deportations, violent attacks and air raids. Ironically, the growth in organized crime, and the Messina brothers in particular, would contribute to renewed calls for the further criminalization of prostitution in the post-war years. New moral panics and narratives entwined themselves with older attitudes about public nuisance and collective morality as Britain emerged from the aftermath of the Second World War; changed in some ways, retrenched in others, and increasingly concerned about prostitution.



# 10

## The Shame of London: Prostitution and Panic in the Post-war Metropolis

On a sunny afternoon in 1950, Rosalind Wilkinson, a young sociological researcher based at LSE, sat upon a bench in Hyde Park's carriageway, near the site where, in 1885, the crusade against prostitution and the sexual exploitation of girls and young women had sounded its most memorable battle-cry. Wilkinson was waiting nervously, trying to make contact with some of the prostitutes who frequented the park, but, by her own admission, was feeling more 'like a prostitute' herself, 'isolated by a bank of trees from the body of people enjoying the park'.<sup>1</sup>

Emerging from her previous task of wading through case files and compiling statistics from crime reports in the basement of the Scotland Yard, Wilkinson had chosen the Park for its close association with prostitution, an association that had grown stronger, she discovered in the course of her research, after housing shortages coupled with renewed campaigns against 'brothels' and street solicitation after the Second World War had seen many more women move their solicitation there. With its hidden paths, darkened corners and taxi cabs, the park could be used as a site for solicitation and as a place to service clients rolled into one.<sup>2</sup> These women, isolated from the 'people enjoying the park', could be found there in handfuls at any time of day or night, making subtle gestures to passing cars and male foot traffic or bidding them 'good evening dearie'. From time to time, they disappeared into the darker parts of the park or hackney carriages (that then circled the block) as they found their clients, with whom they had quickly discussed an average fee of about a pound.<sup>3</sup>

Wilkinson was studying women who worked within a commercial sex industry that had been drastically affected by decades of increased repression, two world wars and a changing social, cultural and economic landscape. These changes in the structures of prostitution and the experiences of prostitute women corresponded with the reconstruction, or at least resuscitation, of prostitution as a social problem by the media: it was infecting new

areas of the metropolis, weaving its way into the real estate and entertainment industries, and being controlled more effectively and on a larger scale by (foreign, dastardly) third parties. It represented the single most shameful blight on the public spaces and private buildings of an otherwise shining and triumphant – albeit beggared and pock-marked – post-war metropolis.

As Wilkinson, along with the Metropolitan Police and the Borough Councils, had discovered, some subtle but significant changes had taken place in the geography of commercial sex after the Second World War. While several historians emphasize the importance of Soho in post-war prostitution narratives and credit concern about this area as being an impetus for repression, the geography of London prostitution, and anxieties about it, continued to defy such tidy characterizations. Statistics from the early 1950s clearly demonstrate that arrests for solicitation offences were concentrating and increasing in C Division, especially Soho (see [Map 4](#)); but it is important to remember that these numbers might well have spoken more to the frequency of police action than the quantity of street prostitution. In any case, a high arrest rate such as this does not correlate with theories about police *laissez-faire* action in the creation of red-light zones, or of Soho's red-light zone in particular; nor did this concentration of arrests mean that Soho became the only prostitution problem-area in public imagination or political rhetoric. In fact, I would argue that it was the actual and perceived increase in commercial sex outside Soho that threw a spotlight onto a supposed rise in metropolitan vice.

Of all the areas in London, for example, it was Hyde Park that showed the greatest post-war increase in the number of prostitute women and arrests made. Wilkinson also found it to be the workplace of the most 'heterogeneous' group of women: 'Its facilities for prostitution without a room attract the very young and the very old prostitutes, as well as the housewife who comes out in the afternoons to go in cars,' she reported. Many young women preferred the 'freedom of the park', which allowed them to avoid full intercourse by not taking men indoors, while others turned to the park when they were evicted from their flats and in search of a new place to work.<sup>4</sup> As the Assistant Commander of A Division noted in 1950, 'charges [in Hyde Park] are preferred against not just a few regulars but hundreds of different women from all parts of London'.<sup>5</sup>

Likewise, Paddington, particularly the streets around Paddington Station, Edgware Road and Bayswater Road, had seen a significant rise in the number of women soliciting. Wilkinson, as well as police officers, felt that this was due to the fact that 'its numerous dark streets and cheap rooms' attracted young women, who got their start there before moving on to other districts.<sup>6</sup> Geographic shifts were also in part due to the actions of police. When the northern border of Hyde Park was fenced in to prevent solicitation on Bayswater Road, for instance, this led to greater problems for A division officers in the Park and C division officers to the east of it, even if

it relieved D Division of some of its prostitution problems.<sup>7</sup> Once more, it seems, police found themselves 'displacing water'.

Mayfair maintained its reputation, acquired mainly during the interwar years, as the area with the most expensive, refined and 'exclusive' prostitution in the metropolis. Here, the women who solicited on the streets dressed very well and had well-appointed rooms to which they took their clients, and, seeing as they charged three pounds for a 'short time', it is not surprising to find that most of their clients came from the upper and professional classes. 'They are aware of their position as the aristocrats of street prostitution,' Wilkinson noted.<sup>8</sup> This was the area where Marthe Watts lived and worked alongside other French women who were part of the Messina 'family', at the same time that Wilkinson was conducting her research, though Wilkinson proved unable to get near any of the Messina girls to interview them. Watts's sense of aristocracy, if she had one, must have been a complicated one: though she estimated herself to have made about 10,000 pounds a year at prostitution, she handed most of this money over to Eugenio Messina and had little to show for it after fifteen years of work.<sup>9</sup>

Soho, meanwhile, remained what it had been for many decades: the most popular site for commercial sex. Two thousand arrests had been made here, concerning some 457 women, in 1949. In its tangle of streets, women from around Britain and Europe catered to a large and varied clientele, walking their beats and dropping into lively cafés, mingling with the nightclub and theatre-going traffic, and dining at the late-night restaurants. While nowhere near as exclusive and refined as Mayfair, Soho prostitution was still considered fairly high-class, and women charged thirty shillings to two pounds for a short time: 'The essentially commercial side of prostitution is the aspect which impresses one most about Soho,' Wilkinson found.<sup>10</sup> Rooms were expensive and far less attractive than in nearby Mayfair, and some women chose to forgo the overhead in favour of using alleys, St Anne's Churchyard, darkened doorways and taxi cabs.<sup>11</sup>

Victoria, especially around Victoria Station, had in the aftermath of war become the 'reception area for older prostitutes' who moved from Soho and Hyde Park, and levels of drunkenness were higher as well. Nonetheless, women still charged thirty shillings for a short time, using rooms in cheap hotels around the station.<sup>12</sup> Victoria was joined by other smaller pockets of prostitution, often surrounding main-line railway stations, docks and barracks, or open spaces like parklands and commons. These included Euston Road near King's Cross, Waterloo, Whitechapel, Woolwich Arsenal, Finsbury Park, Clapham Common and Putney Heath, and in addition to these there were areas where solicitation was very subtle and infrequent, where 'even the professional woman may not solicit regularly.'<sup>13</sup>

Of all the areas of London known for commercial sex in the post-war period, it was Stepney that would generate the most sustained panic and concern. Always associated with certain kinds of low-class prostitution, by

the late 1940s it had become known as an area frequented by lorry drivers, new West Indian and East Indian immigrants, and seamen 'of all nationalities'.<sup>14</sup> In the aftermath of war, it was seen as one of the most injured spaces of London, with its bombed-out houses offering shelter to squatters, criminals and prostitutes (as well as adventurous neighbourhood children).<sup>15</sup> This area was home to what came to be dubbed the 'Stepney problem': young women from other parts of the country would, after coming to London to find work, adventure or escape, be drawn to Stepney for lack of anywhere else to go. Here, they would squat together in derelict buildings and be encouraged to take up prostitution, usually among the lorry drivers and sailors who frequented the area.<sup>16</sup> While the parishes in Stepney worried over the damaging effects of open solicitation on Stepney's children, the women soliciting were little more than children themselves: the nineteen young women Wilkinson met in Stepney were almost all under twenty-one years of age and were living together, along with some recent Indian immigrants, in a bomb site.<sup>17</sup>

This 'Stepney problem' that caused so much anxiety for Church and community leaders was, according to police, confined to a rather small area of the neighbourhood: prostitute women would solicit on a short stretch of Commercial Road and its side streets between Back Church Lane and Cannon Street, and live and have sex with clients in Cable Street.<sup>18</sup> The same was true for other concentrations of commercial sex: in the detailed maps of street solicitation that police produced for the Wolfenden Committee in 1956, Paddington solicitation was mainly limited to the problematic strip of Bayswater Road, some nearby street corners and the side streets around the station. In Pimlico, meanwhile, the vast majority of prostitution took place in Warwick Square, just to the south of the station, and in a small stretch of Kensington Road along the southern border of Hyde Park.<sup>19</sup> Mayfair prostitution was confined almost exclusively to Curzon Street. Even in Piccadilly and Soho, where prostitution was by far the most widespread, it appeared chiefly in the area around Brewer, Old Compton, Lisle and Coventry Streets, and in the evenings in the little square formed by Bond, Maddox and Conduit Streets.<sup>20</sup>

The changing geography of commercial sex was not the chief concern of the police: the most overwhelming change in prostitution in the immediate post-war years, so far as they were concerned, was the number of arrests for prostitution they found themselves making. Since 1945, arrests for street solicitation 'to the annoyance of' had skyrocketed. C Division, for instance, witnessed an over 100 per cent rise in arrests from 1945 to 1946, while B Division noted the 'quite phenomenal' fact that they had arrested 586 prostitutes in that year, compared with the previous eight-year average of forty-five.<sup>21</sup> When asked by the Home Office and the Commissioner for an explanation, B and C Division Superintendents suggested that it was a two-pronged issue: on the one hand, they explained, arrests had been

low during the war because 'business was brisk and the prostitutes spent less time on the streets as most of their clients were easily picked up in cafés, clubs and public houses;' on the other hand, now that the war had ended, the Allied troops had mostly departed. 'Trade is bad,' the C Division Superintendent remarked. 'Police have taken vigorous action against publicans and café proprietors for harbouring prostitutes with the result that the women are forced on the streets to ply their trade. Easy money is no longer forthcoming and there are[sic] practically twice the number of prostitutes to share what trade there is...women have become much more brazen in their persistence in order to try to scrape together some sort of living.'<sup>22</sup> In the face of these changes, the police argued that they had to begin arresting women in larger numbers in order 'to prevent something approaching a public scandal'.<sup>23</sup>

These police observations point to what amounted to an economic crisis in the commercial sex industry in the late 1940s and early 1950s: the departure of troops affected the leisure and commercial sex industries in tandem, and clearly impinged on many prostitute women's livelihoods. In C Division, officers 'noticed that some women who formerly worked four nights a week now work five or six' in order to make the same amount of money as they had during the war. Women complained that they had far fewer clients, and had had to reduce their fees. Moreover, 'they now take risks which were unnecessary when money was more plentiful [and] it would appear that many women who formerly relied solely upon their regular clients and would not consider soliciting are now forced to resort to this practice'.<sup>24</sup> This rise in arrests subsequently put yet more pressure on women selling sex to work more, charge less and hurry away with clients in order to get off the street as quickly as possible to avoid the police, and to recoup the costs of fines and lost time when they appeared in court.

Despite these explanations, it appears that some of the rise in arrests owed not so much to the behaviour of the women as to the actions of the police. After all, it was not as though there had not always been women to arrest: an average prostitute woman working on the street might solicit around 250 days a year, and yet the average recidivism rate in the interwar years was only about three arrests per annum.<sup>25</sup> In other words, it is easy to see how an increase in police activity could produce an enormous rise in arrest rates without actually corresponding to a rise in street solicitation or a change in women's behaviour. Police also neglected to take into account the fact that a new rowdiness patrol in the West End, designed to add manpower to the previously under-policed evening and night-time, was contributing heavily to overall C Division arrests. This patrol, which was introduced just before the war, suspended during the war, and increased in 1951 from ten to fourteen officers, was responsible for about eighty per cent of the arrests in C Division<sup>26</sup> (see [Map 4](#)). Moreover, there was little thought given to long-term crime statistics: as Helen Self points out, arrests in the 1950s were

not that much higher than they had been at the turn of the century, in the midst of a crusade against street prostitution (see Figure A.2).<sup>27</sup> In other words, the change lay not in the number of women who were soliciting but in the number of times women were being arrested: whereas the police estimated that about 8,000 prostitutes suffered about 12,000 arrests annually around the turn of the century, by the mid-1950s the estimated number of prostitute women on the street had been reduced to about 2,000, whereas the number of arrests had climbed once more to around 12,000. This means that the average arrest rate was six times per annum per woman, as opposed to 1.5 around 1900. While on the one hand being testament to better methods of identification, this striking statistic on the other hand bears witness to the degree to which criminalization was more acutely felt by street prostitutes by mid-century.

For their part, the Police Commissioner and his assistants were worried that the real increase in arrests was due to the fact that they had begun paying police officers for overtime, which meant that a constable could earn up to fourteen extra shillings each time he attended the Police Court in the morning. The Commissioner was anxious: 'Of all subjects with which police have to deal, none affords a greater opportunity for public outcry than any suggested impropriety or sharp practice in their dealings with prostitutes,' he wrote in a 1948 circular, failing to anticipate the *carte blanche* the police would be given a decade later in clearing the streets.<sup>28</sup>

Concern mounted as arrest rates for solicitation continued to climb: police made 9,799 arrests for solicitation in 1953, and seventy-five per cent of these arrests were concentrated in the West End. Indeed, as the rate continued to increase (rising to 10,948 in 1954), the Commissioner saw fit to impose a kind of quota system on the first Division Commander, who 'discussed this problem with the senior officers of the division and is satisfied that arrests are, and will be, no more than necessary to maintain a reasonable order'.<sup>29</sup> Concern over the potential abuse of overtime payments persisted: 'there is a danger that some men are making "easy money" from this type of arrest,' wrote the Assistant Commander of the First Division. 'Unless this activity is curbed we are certain sooner or later to have an "incident" injurious to Police.'<sup>30</sup> Some historians have suggested that the rising arrest rates may have represented a kind of police conspiracy to inflate the statistics, create a 'crime wave' of prostitution, and encourage government to make legislative change (for instance, to drop the annoyance requirement).<sup>31</sup> However, the extensive police files on the subject demonstrate that the Met, far from purposely inflating arrests, spent no small amount of time worrying over their potential consequences; the Police Commissioner had gone so far as to impose a limiting quota on arrests.

As the 1950s progressed 'incident' free, arrest rates and geographic areas of commercial sex remained volatile. New problems with prostitution in Dagenham, J Division, prompted a question in Parliament in 1957.<sup>32</sup>

Commercial sex-related arrests in H division, which covered Stepney, had been steadily climbing for years, while the Bayswater Road problem in D Division had by 1953 begun to drift toward Notting Hill and Kilburn.<sup>33</sup> By 1956, C division arrests had begun to fall while D Division (especially Bayswater Road) was again on the rise; the reason, in the words of Commissioner Nott-Bower, was 'anybody's guess'. 'The increased number of prostitutes on streets in the West End again causes a never-ending vicious circle,' the Commander of the First Division explained glibly to the Commissioner. 'Concentrated police action on "C" to meet [...] complaints leads to increased numbers of arrests, but at the same time merely serves to drive the prostitutes a few streets away to evade attention'.<sup>34</sup> It was by now an old story (see [Map 4](#)).

Rising arrest rates for solicitation and a likely corresponding (though probably not equal) rise in street prostitution after the Second World War were accompanied by a similar revitalization of concerns about off-street commercial sex. Perhaps in part because real estate was at a premium in post-war London, local councils paid more attention to the flats, buildings and houses that were suspected 'brothels' in their areas. Leading the charge was the Paddington Borough Council. Already sore about the 1944 scandal regarding the ecclesiastically owned 'brothels', the Council was horrified to find that more and more prostitute women, driven out by the high rents in the West End, were using the cheap rooms and hotels that surrounded the station.<sup>35</sup> The Paddington Borough Council, along with the Paddington Estate Trustees and the Paddington Furnished Houses Rent Tribunal, complained loudly to police, their MPs and the Home Office in 1948 and again in 1949. Joining forces with Westminster City Council, they remained loud spokespersons for the criminalization of off-street commercial sex into the 1950s.<sup>36</sup>

It was the mid-1950s, against the backdrop of intense campaigns against off-street prostitution, that witnessed the rise of the landlord Peter Rachman, whose name has been turned into a noun ('Rachmanism') in the Oxford English Dictionary, meaning 'the exploitation and intimidation of tenants by unscrupulous landlords'.<sup>37</sup> Using the loophole in brothel law that enabled subletting, and taking advantage of the post-war housing crisis, Rachman subdivided a swath of houses in North Kensington and Notting Hill from around 1954 to 1958 and rented them at exorbitant prices to prostitute women and West Indian immigrants. Rachman built his business by concocting fake rent books, hiring intimidating 'enforcers' (including the Black Power advocate and later music promoter Michael Freitas, or Michael X, who later testified against him) and threatening people who attempted to report him or apply for a rent review. Rachman had an especially firm hold on the women who used his badly maintained houses for prostitution, and made sure that they knew he would not hesitate to turn them in for brothel-keeping if they complained.<sup>38</sup> Indeed, an attempt to prosecute Rachman in

1959 was declared useless by the Department of Public Prosecutions on the grounds that 'only in the cases where the witnesses would be most unsatisfactory was the threat anything like severe.'<sup>39</sup>

While Peter Rachman represented the pinnacle of 'Rachmanism', there were many unscrupulous landlords who exploited and intimidated prostitute women, both before him and operating at the same time. These included Bernard Silver, whose operation known as 'the syndicate' sublet flats to women in the West End at what were referred to as 'prostitutes' rents'; Tony Rossi, who was the partner in an estate agency that managed several houses in Soho and who was also a suspected drug trafficker; and several other small-time protection rackets, club owners and landlords who frustrated the attempts of London's vice squad to prosecute them for any crime.<sup>40</sup>

It was in the midst of rising arrests, the increased concentration of prostitution on the streets and in new areas, and real-estate scandals that the press found new interest in commercial sex in London. Over the course of the late 1940s and 1950s, there were a string of highly publicized press campaigns that sought to titillate and incense their readership through 'frank', 'shameful' and 'shocking' exposés of the vice that was supposedly rampant in London. This was in the tradition of Stead's 'Maiden Tribute' as well as part of a new newspaper era in post-war Britain: as Adrian Bingham has noted, prostitution became one of the central topics through which the British press worked through important self-transformations and market exigencies in the 1940s and 1950s.<sup>41</sup>

Among the first to find themselves in the media limelight were none other than the Messina brothers: in June 1947, Eugenio Messina stood trial for the unlawful wounding of rival pimp Carmelo Vassallo, drawing press attention to the activities of the Messina 'family'. Meanwhile, in January 1948, the campaigns of the Borough Council and church groups in Stepney were taken up by the newspapers and made Cable Street into a virtual hell-hole of immorality, disease and degradation that was run by Maltese gangsters and financed by black and Asian immigrants.<sup>42</sup> At the end of that year, the murders of two prostitutes, Helen Freedman and Rachel Fennick, who had both been stabbed to death in their Soho flats, sparked more interest in prostitution, as the press intimated that 'a new Jack the Ripper' was at work on the one hand, and that the murders were related to organized crime on the other.<sup>43</sup> Sensing the time was right, no doubt, for another prostitution exposé, in late January and early February 1949 the *Sunday Pictorial* (one of the top three most popular Sunday newspapers) ran a series of articles on the moral degradation of post-war London. In part an attack on homosexuality and perceived sexual depravity, the articles also described parts of London that were notorious for commercial sex. There was Green Park and Hyde Park, where women engaged in all manner of indecencies, and where guardsmen acted as pimps. There were the 'smoky haunts round



Shepherd's Market', which were owned and controlled by foreign gangs. One tall woman, who walked with a limp, had been beaten with a flat iron by one of 'five thugs' for having a drink with her brother. Another Danish girl was 'riddled with syphilis'.<sup>44</sup>

Police took these allegations in their stride. The A Division Superintendent noted that fences and shrub hedges had been constructed to help with the problem of prostitution in the parks, and that there was no evidence to suggest that the guardsmen associated with prostitutes as anything more than the occasional client. Reacting to a series of dramatic descriptions of West End vice provided in October 1952 by the *Sunday Graphic*, a C Division Superintendent wrote that 'there aren't 4000 prostitutes. There are about 800. Most of the time they don't bother any one if it is clear the man isn't interested. Archdeacon Lambert [who was quoted in an article] says it is virtually impossible for decent citizens to venture out alone... [it] is just nonsense. Apparently the Archdeacon knows little of what goes on in his own parish and has a vivid imagination, for Soho is quieter now than it has ever been'.<sup>45</sup>

Their disdain for moralizers notwithstanding, the police saved their real invective for the journalists. Another C division Superintendent pointed out that the author of a set of 'Messina' articles, Douglas Warth, had worked as a police officer on C Division as a kind of spy for under a year, and that 'his tendencies toward journalese were far stronger than those toward police duty.' Committed police constables, by contrast, had a more intimate knowledge of the problem. 'We can give the names of all the Shepherd's market girls,' they reported, responding to Warth's condescending offer to provide them. The woman who walked with the limp, for instance, was none other than Marthe Watts herself, who had acquired it from a childhood illness rather than from a flat iron, and who had no brother. As for the Messinas, they had 'forgotten more than he will ever know about these nefarious Mediterranean gentlemen'.<sup>46</sup> The Superintendent of C division's West End Central Station (formerly Vine Street) could barely contain his anger as he reported to his superiors. 'These and similar articles in the "gutter-press" are always read with amusement and derision in Club's office, and I suggest that future articles need not be dignified by being placed on a CO file, but should be consigned to the proper place for rubbish'.<sup>47</sup> The post-war discourse on prostitution, as it had been in 1885, was a battle over who had authoritative knowledge about prostitution, as the police, the press and civil society sought to make their particular views of prostitution known to the public and to the state.

Despite the police disdain and dismissal of the 'journalese' of the 'gutter press', similar newspaper articles continued to proliferate and make waves amongst their readership and the Home Office. Marthe Watts could easily recall 3 September 1950, for it was the day she found herself and her companions on the front page of the *People on Sunday*, the first of a series of

articles by the self-fashioned intrepid crime reporter Duncan Webb.<sup>48</sup> While calling for more repression on the one hand, the exposé on the Messina brothers in the early 1950s turned Marthe Watts and the other women she worked alongside into tourist attractions. 'I am given to understand that Londoners love a spectacle,' Marthe Watts recalled thinking; 'if so, we were from now on their spectacle.'<sup>49</sup> The same articles that condemned prostitution and called for it to be cleared from the streets lent a prurient fame to that which they claimed to attack.

In 1951, the problem of London prostitution was augmented to a new level of spectacle, moral panic and political crisis by the Festival of Britain. As the nation prepared to receive hundreds of thousands of visitors from around the Empire, newspapers began to suggest that this influx of people would see a corresponding rise in prostitution. Newspapers warned that prostitutes were using telephones, motor cars and taxi cabs in order to solicit sex, and the fact that prostitution seemed to have colonized new technological commodities such as the phone and the automobile was almost as upsetting as the fact that Britain's colonial citizens might witness the 'shame' of London.

Colonial citizens, meanwhile, were also part of the problem. While foreign prostitutes continued to be imagined as French, in the 1950s more attention was focused on the racial profiles of both the pimps and the clients of prostitute women. Maltese men, for instance, were closely associated with the third-party organization of prostitution, be they the small-time pimps of Soho, the vice baron Messinas of Mayfair or the nasty brothel landlords of Cable Street, Stepney (the Stepney Borough Council's deputation to the Home Office in 1957 made the limitation of the 'freedom of Maltese immigrants' one of their chief requests).<sup>50</sup> Police supported this stereotype, indicating in 1947 that, while only about 1,000 Maltese and Cypriots were living in Soho, they were responsible for twenty-three per cent of the charges for living on immoral earnings. They failed to note that, since charges for the offence in this area rarely rose above 100 and many of the men had been arrested more than once, this meant that there were at most twenty-three men involved.<sup>51</sup> The anxiety over Maltese pimps was, of course, linked to Britain's relationship with Malta. Although seen as a source of organized crime, the island was also considered a stalwart defender of Britain's interests in the Mediterranean. Despite the requests of the Stepney Borough Council, the state was very unwilling to limit Maltese immigration.

To the older stereotypes of Maltese and Cypriot pimps were added new concerns about West Indians, as they began to arrive in far greater numbers in the post-war period. 'I would like to point out that negroes from the British West Indies and from Africa are just as bad [as the Maltese],' read one C Division report. 'It is well known that the negro population of London is increasing weekly and many of these men are living with white women – usually prostitutes.' In 1953, the Marlborough Street Magistrate

Frank Powell complained of the number of 'coloured' men who had immigrated to Britain and were living on the earnings of prostitution, and Police Commissioner Nott Bower noted that 'black ponces' in the Harrow Road and Albany Street area were known for the 'brutality that they display towards their women'.<sup>52</sup>

A 1953 police report on living on immoral earnings did indicate high numbers of certain foreign and colonial men involved in commercial sex. In a sample of seventy-three convictions, thirty-five per cent were 'British coloured', thirty-six per cent were British (presumably meaning white), twenty-five per cent were Maltese and three per cent were 'other alien'.<sup>53</sup> There were many reasons for this over-representation of blacks and Maltese men in this sample. Because of long-standing stereotypes and ever-increasing racism, racial profiling for crimes of 'living on immoral earnings' must have been common amongst police officers and within police courts. This is supported by the fact that most police concern was centred on a small number of repeat offenders, whom they arrested again and again: twenty-five West Indians, according to this sample, and eighteen Maltese.<sup>54</sup> If immigrant men from the colonies did take to pimping in greater proportions than native British, it is certain that the pressure and marginalization experienced by visible racial minorities made them more likely to engage in illicit ways of making money and 'immoral' ways of making friends. Wilkinson found that 'these men, often uneducated and unable to recognize the good from the bad white girl, arrive in a new and bewildering culture, find that they are not wanted by white people and are often forced to form associations with the class who will associate with them'.<sup>55</sup> While she may have overstated the degree to which new male immigrants who lived on the earnings of prostitutes were victims rather than victimizers, Wilkinson's observations place police statistics in an important context.

In the midst of renewed concern about pimps, the AMSH did, in fact, score a major ideological and statutory victory. In 1951, the Criminal Law Amendment Act was passed, which, after almost four decades of campaigning, finally extended protection from procurement and trafficking to all women – even those who were 'common prostitutes or of known immoral character'.<sup>56</sup> It would prove a small victory in light of the legislative changes to come.

All of this attention to the racial identity of pimps not only raised the profile of commercial sex in London in general, but also joined the more general discussion about rising Commonwealth immigration, as demand grew for measures that would enable the courts to repatriate offenders and prevent them from entering the country in the first place.<sup>57</sup> Meanwhile, the clients of prostitutes were also more commonly presented in a racial light. While the post-war period saw the numbers of black American servicemen fall, many American military personnel remained stationed in London in the early Cold War era. These black soldiers were known to frequent the

poorly lit streets and cafés in Soho on their month-end paydays, buying sex from prostitutes and sparking fears of miscegenation. Indian seamen and West Indians in Stepney were also problematic and racialized clients, known to chip in to rent rooms in which to host prostitutes, and to frequent 'low-class' cafés.<sup>58</sup>

All of these issues – the rise in street prostitution and its shifting geography, the perceived rise in organized vice, and the racial element in commercial sex – came to a head in Coronation year, which ultimately took on a much greater significance than the Festival of Britain, while touching on all the same themes of national identity, tradition, imperialism and pride.<sup>59</sup> It was easy for journalists to exploit and articulate the sharp, shocking and compelling contrast between the order and hopefulness of the Coronation with the immoral and disorderly state of the capital's streets: the very same terrain that would play host to the imperial crowds of onlookers hoping to catch a glimpse of the new young queen would be nightly trod by those selling and buying sex.<sup>60</sup> In November 1952, *Reynold's News* warned Londoners about the 'trade routes of shame', controlled by 'Anglo-French vice barons', and of the prostitutes who 'plan[ned] to invade London in Coronation year'.<sup>61</sup> Other features fixated on the anticipated rise in 'call girls', particularly those who came from abroad, who, while clearly not a public nuisance, seemed to punctuate Britain's anxieties about its moral image at this most sensitive of times.<sup>62</sup> Against this backdrop, women working as prostitutes were murdered by the unassuming man named John Christie, in a case, as Frank Mort has shown, that laid bare racial, class and gender tensions in the modernizing metropolis.<sup>63</sup>

While almost every major newspaper ran some kind of article or feature on London vice in 1953, the star author of the Coronation year panic was once again the intrepid Duncan Webb, whose articles ran in *People* in April and May 1953, just before the Coronation. One article pointed a finger at the cheap hotels and boarding houses of Victoria and Pimlico, where 'tawdry' prostitutes patrolled the area in the hundreds. Another article detailed how the entirety of Soho had gone over to 'organized vice', where women rented rooms from crooked estate agents who charged them exorbitant rates. Mayfair, for its part, was the subject of the most shocking revelations of all, for it was home to the Messina brothers, the 'thugs who thrive on 40 shilling fines', who were still up to their dastardly tricks and driving their Rolls-Royces, largely immune to newspaper exposés. Webb (and probably his readership) concluded that 'vice in London [was] a big-scale business organized largely by foreigners and staffed by imported French women'.<sup>64</sup> *People* ran no fewer than six of these 'blistering reports' leading up to the Coronation.<sup>65</sup> Prostitution was also increasingly imagined as entwined with other forms of crime, especially drug trafficking, and in the mid-1950s the stereotype of prostitute-addicts slowly began to emerge, envisioned as women who 'must learn to pay in sickening ways' for their addiction, for

‘the handful of dried leaves, the pinch of white numbing powder, the chunk of deadly brown gum’.<sup>66</sup>

While Duncan Webb penned his articles on organized vice, Marthe Watts was having her own troubles with the Messinas. Eugenio, while hiding abroad, had begun to diversify his criminal and prostitution-related endeavours, and began drug trafficking and more actively procuring from the Continent; and Watts grew increasingly uncomfortable with the younger and younger women whom Eugenio would send to London for her to oversee. Finally, in 1955, Carmelo and Eugenio were arrested in Belgium on charges of procurement, and sent to prison for nine and seven years, respectively. It was this – alongside a prolonged illness and the support of a ‘kind friend’ – that induced Marthe to leave the Messina family. Removing the words which Eugenio had compelled her to tattoo on her chest (‘L’Homme de ma Vie, Gino le Maltais’), she went on to write her memoir.<sup>67</sup>

Watts’s public exit from prostitution notwithstanding, popular concern over the rise in organized vice seemed to have little to do with concern over the welfare of prostitute women. In fact, these exposés painted prostitutes as criminals themselves and emphasized the connections, however shaky they were in reality, between prostitution and actual crime. All of these newspaper reports relied on strangely contradictory messages: on the one hand, vice in London had to be stamped out because it was harmful to women (think, for instance, of the imaginary version of Marthe Watts, beaten with a flat iron), and journalists, in the tradition of William Stead, built their descriptions of vice using the image of abused, beaten and degraded women. But at the same time the women themselves were what made vice so disgusting: they were insidious, invasive and ‘riddled with syphilis’; ‘tawdry’ women who swarmed the streets in the hundreds.

These sensational accounts offered gross exaggerations and sometimes outright misinformation about prostitution in London in the 1950s. When the press panic broke over the rise in prostitution in war-scarred Stepney, for instance, police insisted that ‘the Cable Street, Stepney, area was given newspaper publicity out of all proportion to its menace as a danger and police are satisfied that the reports of the conditions in this area were grossly exaggerated.’<sup>68</sup> It was a similar story for the panic over the rise in prostitution in Soho as highlighted by the *Sunday Pictorial* in 1948. ‘Sensational vice reports always sell newspapers, but they will do nothing to stop vice,’ the Superintendent of West End Central Station mused. He also seemed genuinely concerned about the injustice of raising penalties against prostitution: ‘Worse (and we have seen examples lately), by inflating uninstructed opinion they may create an emotional tide which might force a return to judicial savagery. Vicious penalties up to death have failed throughout the ages to stamp out prostitution.’<sup>69</sup>

Police had a particular problem with the way that press panics suggested that all of London prostitution was controlled by organized crime.

'The expression "organized vice" is an attractive one from the journalistic point of view,' C Division officers argued, 'but it is really another way of describing the letting of a single room, or very occasionally a flat, to a prostitute to be used by her for prostitution, the woman being asked to pay an exorbitant rent for the privilege.'<sup>70</sup> Police admitted that Duncan Webb was accurate in naming addresses of estate agents, crooked landlords, pimps and prostitute women in London, but noted his tendency toward hyperbole. 'Had Mr. Webb spent any time in [Victoria],' the B division Superintendent pointed out, 'he would have observed for himself in due course that far from there being hundreds of 'tawdry women', [there are] probably seven or eight regular prostitutes at any one time'.<sup>71</sup> The police struggled to assert their authoritative knowledge about prostitution and quell Home Office concerns.

Not everyone was in agreement with the assessment of the police. In the Coronation year, for instance, magistrates at Marlborough Street (still one of the two busiest police courts for prostitution-related cases) grew more heavy-handed when hearing charges of solicitation at their benches.<sup>72</sup> A Home Office official in the same year expressed concern that police might be downplaying the real extent of the problem in their reports in order to counteract the pressure brought to bear on them by the recent press campaigns.<sup>73</sup> And perhaps the Home Office was right to doubt, at least a little, the dismissive attitude of the police: Marthe Watts had not been beaten by a flat iron, it was true, but she had been whipped repeatedly with an electric flex by Eugenio Messina.

The press campaign against vice in London did not seem to correspond to any real rise in direct complaints among the public, however. While the little Kinsey survey in 1949 found that 'the mention of prostitution aroused more indignation amongst the people we interviewed than any other single aspect of sex,' historian Adrien Bingham also notes that this was likely largely in response to the frenzy whipped up by recent newspaper exposés.<sup>74</sup> Indeed, Little Kinsey's authors felt that indignant attitudes toward prostitution were defined by 'temporariness', and suggested that ordinary people were not much bothered by commercial sex until they were reminded of its existence by the interviewer.<sup>75</sup> This was in part because prostitution was not as visible as the newspapers would have had it appear: 'black spots exist [but] they have to be looked for,' Little Kinsey stated; "'pockets of vice" are much less frequently encountered than is often imagined.'<sup>76</sup> While Mass-Observation's national panel found that fifty-one per cent were 'against prostitution', and three out of five 'disapproved' of it, these percentages hardly suggest an overwhelming consensus. Moreover, only fourteen per cent felt that prostitution 'should be forcibly stamped out'.<sup>77</sup>

It therefore remains to be questioned just how far the general public was really concerned with or bothered by commercial sex in the 1950s. Some oral history evidence from people living in Soho, the most heavily trafficked commercial sex area, suggests that neighbours took the presence of prostitutes in

stride, often interacting positively with them.<sup>78</sup> Commissioner Nott-Bower had, after all, informed the Home Secretary in 1953 (as he was considering appointing the Wolfenden Committee) that 'the behaviour of women had, if anything, improved in recent years and it was now rare to see any of them causing active annoyance.'<sup>79</sup> B Division, who presided over all of Chelsea's and Victoria's prostitution, noted that most of the women simply stood on the road and smiled in order to solicit and they had received no written complaint about them.<sup>80</sup> A Division, in charge of Hyde Park, reported in 1954 that they had had 'no serious trouble' with public opinion about prostitution, and received only four complaints that year in all the stations on the Division. These officers also noted that the women in the Park were well aware of the subtleties of interpretation when it came to solicitation law, and avoided soliciting in the area on the nights when a particularly unsympathetic magistrate was on the Marlborough Street bench.<sup>81</sup>

There were some small groups of residents who lobbied the government and the police to do more to rid the streets of prostitution. Four inhabitants of Mayfair, who lived in the area of Shepherd's Market, petitioned the Home Office several times in the mid-1950s to get police to arrest all the women who solicited there on the grounds that they were causing a general annoyance to the ordinary inhabitants, rather than arrest – as was the intention of the law – individual women for having caused a discrete case of annoyance. While the magistrate at Bow Street (who would bring his strong opinions to the Wolfenden Committee) was receptive to the idea of arresting individuals on the grounds of collective annoyance, the Superintendent in charge of the Division felt that 'such a procedure would be most dangerous and cut right across the fundamental principles of our system of justice and liberty of the subject. No court is going to support it.'<sup>82</sup>

The extent of the general public's concern over or disapproval of prostitution on London's streets was up for debate, but nonetheless in 1954 these moral panics, products of press campaigns and pressure levied by local authorities (especially Paddington and Westminster Councils), church groups and the still powerful moral reform lobby, translated into political action. After taking several questions in Parliament, receiving deputations and memoranda from a number of concerned councils and societies, and reading the report of Assistant Undersecretary Philip Allen, who had been sent to the United States to analyse the way that American cities dealt with prostitution, Home Secretary Maxwell Fyfe suggested that it was high time that the solicitation laws be reformed. While ignoring the more difficult issue of outlawing single-woman 'brothels', Fyfe recommended that penalties for solicitation be raised and that solicitation itself be made an offence, without the need to prove annoyance. Recognizing that the demand for these reforms would prove extremely controversial (further proof that there was little consensus about prostitution despite all the moral panics about it), Fyfe felt that an independent commission was necessary before any legislative change was undertaken.<sup>83</sup>

When initial plans for a Royal Commission did not find favour with Churchill's Conservative administration, a Departmental Committee was decided on instead.<sup>84</sup> It was appointed in July 1954, and became the Wolfenden Committee on Homosexual Offences and Prostitution when John Wolfenden, a former headmaster and Vice-Chancellor of the University of Reading, was chosen as the chair. The committee, composed of fifteen members (lawyers, doctors, MPs, academics, denominational representatives, and Home Office and Scottish Home Department officials) waded for the next three years into the debates that had been raging since at least the late nineteenth century over who had the most authoritative knowledge about prostitution, and the best solution for what to do about it. They heard evidence from prison, school and court officials; police spokespersons from London, England and Scotland; moral reform groups, Home Office experts, sociologists, psychologists and medical doctors; military officials, women's organizations and religious professionals. They heard over 140 witnesses in total, but spoke to no one who had worked as a prostitute.

While the committee sat, Wilkinson's much abridged and edited sociological study was published by the British Social Biology Council in 1955 as *Women of the Streets*, which, despite (or perhaps because of) its unsalacious tone, level-headed and even sympathetic representation of prostitution and the women involved in it, was ignored by lawmakers and co-opted by journalists to support rather than counter recent calls for criminalization. The report, claimed future *Women's Hour* journalist Jeanne Heal, would 'shock the social conscience of Britain' in its revelations about the 'outcasts in our cities', showing prostitution to be an 'embarrassment to ordinary citizens going about the streets of the metropolis'. Heal went on to accord to James Maxwell, the spokesman for the British Association of Travel Agents, a strange authority as an 'expert' in this latest moral panic: 'It is almost impossible... for visitors to walk in the main thoroughfares of the West End without being brought face to face with aggressive soliciting', she quoted him as saying. 'All of us in the travel business have borne witness to the expressions of horror at the increasing blatancy and shamelessness of this degrading traffic.'<sup>85</sup> The Wolfenden Committee itself, meanwhile, offered journalists a new reason to dwell on commercial sex in the pages of their newspapers, serving once again to over-represent the extent of the problem. All eyes were on the streets as the committee was set to publish its findings: 'Last night I witnessed the shame of London,' a special report from the *Daily Sketch* intoned, on the eve of the release of the Wolfenden Report.<sup>86</sup>

In many ways, the cyclical moral panics over prostitution in the 1950s and the demands for legal reform they generated were nothing new; such panics and demands had never been far from the surface since (and indeed before) the crowd of campaigners had gathered in Hyde Park in the summer of 1885. But there were some key differences. First, the intensity



of the press campaigns of the 1950s was almost unparalleled: the stories were being carried by almost every major newspaper, many were lengthy serial 'exposés', and they continued, fairly regularly, for the entire decade. Secondly, the antipathy toward prostitutes themselves had never been higher, even as the public discourse trucked in images of racialized, exploitative and organized vice. Concurrently, organizations that had constituted some of the most vocal and articulate lobbies against repressive legislation, such as the AMSH, were losing some of their authority, direction, personnel and steam. Over the decade, prostitution in London had been amplified and reconfigured as a problem, and rampant commercial sex was set up as the greatest shame of post-war Britain.

And what of the women around whom this whirlwind of political and press attention swirled? Rosalind Wilkinson's much-abridged report affords a unique, if brief, view of some of the ways that women working as prostitutes experienced criminalization and, even more uniquely, some of their opinions about it.<sup>87</sup> Perhaps the most striking element of prostitute women's experiences of criminalization was the degree to which they viewed it as routine. 'Between them,' Wilkinson wrote, 'the police and the prostitutes have come to what might almost be termed a happy concurrence to make the law into a working, though pointless, compromise. They are both fairly tolerant of what they regard as an irritation in their nightly routine.'<sup>88</sup> Women gave very strong evidence that suggested a kind of rota arrest system, which the police emphatically denied publicly, though in other forums they freely admitted that, unable to arrest every woman, they were selective in their policing, relying once more on regulatory measures in order to manage commercial sex. Rotation arrests were also employed to avoid conflict with the magistrature: 'courts don't like it when they are crowded with prostitutes,' reported Police Commissioner Nott-Bower in 1954.<sup>89</sup>

Notably, Wilkinson found that 'very few prostitutes seem to question the justice of their being arrested' in that they did not have any explicit opinions or basic criticism about the letter of the law. Wilkinson interpreted this as revealing 'a sensitivity to public attitudes of disapproval which are codified in legal sanctions against them ... the sanctions do not worry them unduly, except when there is unfairness in their execution'.<sup>90</sup> On this the interviewees had a great deal to say. First among their allegations was that they were frequently arrested without having annoyed anyone, while they were standing quietly and even while they were not working. 'There were so many stories of being arrested when not annoying anyone, that it was difficult to regard them all as fabrications,' Wilkinson's editor had her tactfully conclude.<sup>91</sup> Later, she told the Wolfenden Committee more bluntly that she had in fact come across many cases of extortion and blackmail, though police officers more frequently demanded sex rather than money, or harassed women 'sometimes for some small satisfaction which the individual constable may get out of using somebody who is in his power or

twisting the situation to his own advantage... I have certainly met far more individual breaches than were in the book'.<sup>92</sup>

One Hyde Park prostitute woman contrasted her own inoffensive behaviour with that of those people who, unstigmatized as prostitutes, could engage in much more blatant moral offences unmolested by the police: 'I do not see why some people get away with it,' she complained. 'I go into the Park and see boys and these straight girls kissing and cuddling, and they look awful. But me – I'm just walking along the road and a copper comes up and says "It's your turn tonight."<sup>93</sup> Other women told stories of wrongful arrest while being out to buy newspapers, to meet a regular client (without soliciting) or a romantic partner, or while waiting for a bus. 'I'm sorry, I'm not working,' one of them informed the arresting officer, who took her into custody anyway.<sup>94</sup>

As many magistrates and police officers had noted over the past few decades, prostitute women, once arrested and brought to the police court, almost invariably pled guilty to the offence, and Wilkinson did not find otherwise. On the one hand, pleading guilty allowed the woman to escape with what was by then a particularly small fine (forty shillings). Young women, upon their initial arrests, were told by older women to plead guilty, lest they be redirected to a probation officer or police court missionary in lieu of punishment, and end up wasting an entire morning or, worst of all, being sent to a reformatory. But these banal and businesslike views of the court experience were not the only reason why prostitute women pled guilty, and many women also found the experience of being the morning's entertainment for police court attendees extremely upsetting and embarrassing. 'Everyone's waiting for you and looking at you,' one woman, who had been to court many times, told Wilkinson; 'then they say those awful words, "being a common prostitute" and you feel awful, all the time not knowing who's watching you at the back of the court. You say "guilty" and get out as soon as you can.'<sup>95</sup>

'It is likely,' Wilkinson observed, '...that police activity must make itself felt fairly early in the prostitute's professional life, and while it does not stop women soliciting, it does to some extent modify their behaviour'.<sup>96</sup> Her forty-nine interviewees frequently noted how the policing of street and brothel prostitution affected the way they did business. 'We won't stand with the man for more than three minutes because of the police,' one told her, while others testified to being in the habit of moving around to different beats and police divisions when the one on which they solicited became 'too hot', in their words. In these situations, Hyde Park was a likely destination.<sup>97</sup>

Soliciting men in cars also came to be a more common practice. Getting into men's cars had the advantage of a speedy escape from police eyes, and police complained that the practice made it all but impossible to arrest

a woman for 'soliciting to the annoyance of'. But, while many male clients seemed to prefer it, with its promise of anonymity and assurance of a personal and easy-to-control space, most prostitute women 'abhorred' it, according to Wilkinson, mainly because of the vulnerable position it put them in. Several women told Wilkinson about being taken to a remote location, having their money stolen, being threatened, and winding up stranded in the outskirts of London with no way home. Car prostitution afforded 'no protection from difficult customers, against whom prostitutes are always on guard'.<sup>98</sup>

Wilkinson also provided a snapshot of prostitute women's social lives as they looked after decades of concerted repression. The kind of 'community toleration' that Judith Walkowitz and myself have found of women who sold sex in the late nineteenth and earlier twentieth centuries appeared to have all but eroded: Wilkinson noted that the 'new' prostitute experienced very high degrees of isolation, barred as she was from living with other working women and effectively stigmatized as unrespectable (from her fingerprints to her footwear) in increasingly intolerant neighbourhoods. 'Loneliness is their chief complaint,' she noted.<sup>99</sup> In contrast, Wilkinson found that there were 'considerable feelings of community' among prostitute women, and, in a tantalizing glimpse into a period that pre-dated the prostitutes' rights movement by two decades, Wilkinson even noted that the degree of organization among certain groups of prostitute women amounted to a kind of 'trade union status'.<sup>100</sup>

Isolated from 'ordinary' society or not, Wilkinson's interviewees not only demonstrated a 'sensitivity to public attitudes of disapproval' but also an awareness of the degree to which the problem of prostitution preoccupied society and the extent to which responses to prostitution were reactionary, misguided and hypocritical. 'Oh I know you're from the Home Office, I've been warned about you ...', one especially suspicious woman told Wilkinson. 'They want to give us prison sentences; say it's to clear the place up for the Festival of Britain' (she may have been wrong about Wilkinson's role, but clearly was not wrong about the intentions of the government).<sup>101</sup> 'It's no use making reforms if you do not understand the people you are making them for,' another woman said.<sup>102</sup> Most interestingly, the financial element of prostitution control did not pass them by: 'The government will always have to collect its licensing money or income tax,' one woman observed. 'They'll never abolish fines,' another remarked glibly; 'they've got to have their rake-off out of us. How else are they to get our money?'<sup>103</sup>

While serious sociological studies of prostitution became entangled with press panics and sensational journalism, while bureaucratic and policing aims mingled with the wider goals and machinations of moral reform groups and local and national politics, and while the Wolfenden Committee heard evidence from experts and campaigners on what should be done about

prostitution, prostitute women continued to negotiate their work, their lives and their criminalization. They did so in an atmosphere of intense scrutiny and disapproval on the eve of the most significant change in prostitution policy since 1885, a change that would make their lives that much more difficult as Britain moved into the supposedly liberal and permissive 1960s.

# 11

## Risking the Dangers: Reconsidering Commercial Sex in 'Permissive Britain'

The establishment of the Departmental Committee on Homosexual Offences and Prostitution in 1954 reconfirmed that the controversies surrounding the best way to respond to the problems of prostitution remained after many decades of attempts at repression. Both the Victorian speakers and writers who campaigned for the Criminal Law Amendment Act and those who discussed prostitution in 1950s Britain had their own diverse understandings of its causes, opinions about its worst features, and solutions for its control and repression. Despite the lack of consensus, the outcome of the Wolfenden Committee was surprisingly clear-cut: almost all of its recommendations about street prostitution appeared in the Street Offences Act of 1959, which marked the most important legislative change in the way Great Britain dealt with prostitution since the Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1885.

The Departmental Committee on Homosexual Offences and Prostitution is best known for its assessment of homosexuality, and has been widely commented upon in this vein, seen largely as a watershed moment in the increasing liberalization of attitudes toward male homosexuality in the twentieth century.<sup>1</sup> But, as Helen Self points out, the Wolfenden Committee was initially, if not publicly, established for the purpose of justifying a change in solicitation law that would give police more power to clear the streets of prostitutes, in the wake of sustained moral panics about the state of the streets and the perceived proliferation of organized prostitution in London in the years after the Second World War.<sup>2</sup>

From this vantage point, the report looks less like 'the period's most influential liberal statement' and more like a document that facilitated a crack-down on prostitution in the street, which directly involved the overturning of long-standing liberal principles that had prevented such legal changes as were necessary to do this in the past.<sup>3</sup> An examination of attitudes and actions toward prostitution in the late 1950s, therefore, significantly

complicates the narrative of permissive Britain. Libertarian ideas about public space and the civil rights of the marginalized marked major losses in debates and decisions about prostitution in this period, while feminist campaigns to prevent exploitation, eliminate the double standard and preserve prostitutes' rights suffered further still. Most of all, the story of the rise of the permissive society would surely be lost upon the 'common prostitutes' who were the subjects of the unprecedented campaign to clear the streets in the late 1950s.

Historian and campaigner Helen Self, in her damning critique of Wolfenden and the subsequent legislation, argues that the Departmental Committee was established in order to justify a preconceived change in prostitution legislation as outlined by Home Secretary David Maxwell Fyfe, who achieved this through the heavy-handed direction of the Committee by its Home Office-appointed secretary, Conwy Roberts. Self concludes that the independence of the Departmental Committee on Homosexual Offences and Prostitution must be called into serious question.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, even if Wolfenden was more independent than Self allows, committee members entered into their enquiry acutely aware that one of their chief, if unofficial, directives was to find a way to remove prostitutes more effectively from the streets. This, coupled with an already long-standing *de facto* removal of the annoyance clause, a regulationist precedent which offered the possibility of the containment of prostitution indoors, and a profound awareness that they were not to be the equivocal Street Offences Committee of thirty years earlier, produced Wolfenden's predictable, if not outright predetermined, conclusions about prostitution.

Whether independent or government-directed, Wolfenden and his committee members were not given an easy task. First and foremost, the question of homosexual offences was attached to the Committee's mandate after a series of high-profile arrests for gross indecency between males inspired the government to lump their difficult and embarrassing sexual questions together.<sup>5</sup> While prostitution and homosexuality were loosely connected through public indecency legislation, they were largely unrelated issues, and the Committee's mandate to deal adequately with them both was almost impossible to achieve.<sup>6</sup> Even within the single issue of prostitution there was a great deal upon the Committee's plate. Despite the fact that Wolfenden was established to forge a kind of consensus upon which legislators could move, the proceedings of the Committee actually (and unsurprisingly) highlighted the lack of consensus that existed amongst public organizations and politicians, and within the criminal justice system itself, when it came to recommending what to do about prostitution.

During the years that Wolfenden sat, many women's organizations, including the AMSH and the National Council of Women, reiterated what they had been advocating for several decades, namely that it was unjust to legally label women 'common prostitutes'; that the solicitation laws

represented a double moral standard; and that it was illiberal to make a special case out of solicitation as a source of public nuisance and to ignore the need to prove annoyance.<sup>7</sup> Other organizations, such as the Church of England Moral Welfare Council, endorsed these recommendations in their reports to the Committee.<sup>8</sup> While the AMSH and its affiliated organizations enjoyed the support of several parliamentarians and Lords, and had been a vocal advocacy group since the First World War, Wolfenden essentially dismissed them out of hand.<sup>9</sup>

Another powerful – if diverse and largely disregarded – lobby group consisted of moral and social reform organizations (which included some women's groups). These included the British Social Biology Council, which stressed the social and biological causes and costs of prostitution, and the Public Morality Council, which advocated that Britain impose a similar legal framework as in many areas of the United States, where the buying and selling of sex was illegal.<sup>10</sup> In addition, these organizations, as well as the AMSH, pointed to the importance of offering women ways to exit prostitution or reform or 'redeem' themselves, though everyone tended to have a different idea about the best way that this could be achieved.<sup>11</sup>

The Borough Councils – Paddington, Westminster and Stepney in particular – formed another formidable lobby group, and were keen to see a recommendation for the reform of brothel law in order to make sublet flats used for habitual prostitution illegal, while at the same time, and not a little contradictorily, they were also in favour of clearing the streets.<sup>12</sup> While Paddington and Westminster were more seasoned advocates, it was Stepney that proved the most influential, as its spokespersons dramatically contrasted the shocking rise in low-class and heavily racialized prostitution in their area against 'thousands of anxious and distressed residents' – the working men and women of much-beleaguered post-war East London – who hoped that a new law would clear the 'evil that is now rampant in the Borough'.<sup>13</sup>

The Committee also interviewed several police court magistrates, and were especially interested in the testimony of Frank Powell and Paul Bennett, both of whom requested higher penalties for solicitation and more power to remand women to reform homes and for medical inspection for venereal disease. Powell blamed some of his colleagues' 'policy of tolerating prostitution' as contributing 'to the present sorry state of affairs'.<sup>14</sup> He felt prostitutes should be driven off the street through the use of prison sentences, and, while admitting that this might increase violence and exploitation from third parties, he imagined that 'the women would be willing partners in the matter'.<sup>15</sup>

One of these colleagues with a 'policy of tolerating prostitution' was the Chief Magistrate himself, Sir Lawrence Dunn, who warned of dire consequences should the police be too zealous in clearing the streets. 'The brothel and the call girl will pass into the hands of those able to organize them,' he

told the Committee, echoing the warning that Charles Hopwood MP had issued before Parliament almost eighty-five years before. 'Knowing, as I do, the virtual impossibility of obtaining evidence to convict the ponce in the present state of affairs, this opens up a most unpleasant vista. The women will be completely in the hands of these men ... I most urgently recommend that before any decision is taken to drive the women off the streets, there should be a most exhaustive examination of all the implications'.<sup>16</sup> The Magistrates' Association agreed with Dunn rather than with Powell and Bennet: representing over 900 magistrates on 100 different benches, they declared that annoyance must remain 'an essential part of the offence' of soliciting.<sup>17</sup>

Police officers at varying levels of seniority were also interviewed at length, and in the main they strongly advocated that the requirement to prove annoyance be dropped from any new law, while their testimony also demonstrated the extent to which it had already been dropped in a *de facto* sense in the actual day-to-day administration of the solicitation laws. But, on the other hand, police officers pointed out that the perceived rise in the quantity of prostitution on the streets which had prompted the Commission in the first place had been greatly exaggerated. PC Anderson and PC Scarborough, who both had about twenty years' experience of policing C Division's streets, told the committee that the West End was no worse than it had been twenty years ago. 'The situation is pretty much the same as it was in the 30s,' Anderson explained. 'They go from one street to another. Regent Street between Glasshouse St and Piccadilly Circus – back in the thirties Ford's motor showroom, that used to be a regular place, the same as in Jermyn Street and St James' street. It has moved from there to Coventry Street, Glasshouse Street, and Brewer Street. It has merely taken them from one street and put them in another.'<sup>18</sup> Both officers were adamantly against prison sentences for prostitutes, arguing that the punishment did not fit the crime.

While police officers' testimonies indicated the subtle geographic shifts that prostitution in London was constantly undergoing, they also warned that any crusade against street prostitution would divert it into other, and probably harder to police, areas. 'To make open solicitation unprofitable would in all probability force the women now practising in the streets to earn their living in more devious ways,' Police Commissioner Nott-Bower detailed. He reckoned that some would work as independent call girls, and others would rely more heavily on ponces and touts. Many would move into off-street sites like cafés, near-beer establishments and massage parlours. He also felt there was reason to fear that further criminalization would entangle prostitution more firmly with actual 'heavy' crime, and that this would in turn make it much more difficult for women to exit prostitution if they wished to do so:

I think from our point of view, and even more from the point of view of the general public, it would be a very great pity to introduce a large class



of people who had a financial interest in prostitution which they have not got now. It is the experience now that some prostitutes leave their profession – and they are quite free to do so whenever they like – but of course the more people you get who are financially interested in their activities, the less free they would become to chuck their profession if they wished to so.<sup>19</sup>

Other beat officers who were interviewed vehemently reiterated these warnings, and Nott-Bower told the committee he felt that the result of a push against street prostitution would be that ‘our difficulties would be increased rather than lessened.’ But, like Wolfenden and Roberts, the Police Commissioner also understood the importance of toeing the line on these issues, and concluded his strongly worded warnings with the promise of police co-operation. ‘If the Committee comes to the conclusion that drastic measures to remove... street walkers from the centre of London are desirable, the Police would neither deprecate such action nor find themselves incapable of dealing with its consequences.’<sup>20</sup> It was a shaky kind of official consensus; but, in the end, it was not Nott-Bower who had to deal with the consequences of the new legislation at all: he was replaced in his position in 1958 by Sir Joseph Simpson, who was the first Police Commissioner to have begun his career as an ordinary constable and the first, therefore, who had direct experience with arresting women for soliciting prostitution.

The Wolfenden Committee would have discovered that there was still less consensus about the nature of commercial sex and best practice when it came to prostitution if they had troubled themselves to interview any women who actually sold sex, the possibility of which they largely dismissed.<sup>21</sup> Over this omission Marthe Watts was indignant. ‘I, at least, speak from experience in what I have to say on the subject of prostitution,’ she wrote in her memoir. ‘John Wolfenden and his Committee produced their Report, which has altered the law on Street Offences, without as much as receiving evidence from any member of my former profession.’<sup>22</sup> It is not hard to imagine that her opinion was shared by many other women working as prostitutes at the time.

The confusion and limitations of Wolfenden’s scope were compounded when the Sexual Offences Act was passed in 1956, without waiting for their Report and without much debate in either House. This omnibus Act brought together a myriad of laws related to sexual abuse and exploitation and to third-party involvement in prostitution, combining the provisions against brothels found in the Criminal Law Amendment Acts of 1885 and 1912 (but without closing the legal loopholes regarding subletting or single-woman flats) and the measures against pimping and trafficking from the 1898 Vagrancy Act and the 1912 Act. It also included various measures related to sexual exploitation, abuse and prostitution from other disparate Acts passed

between the 1860s and the 1930s.<sup>23</sup> There was some talk in the House that the Bill merely 'consolidated bad law', but it succeeded anyway, and has remained largely in place into the twenty-first century.<sup>24</sup> As Helen Self has argued, in moving forward with this Act in the absence of the Wolfenden Report, Parliament rendered the many hours of evidence that Wolfenden gathered on off-street prostitution and third-party involvement, and the pages that they devoted to these matters within their final report, rather moot.<sup>25</sup> More significantly, the Sexual Offences Act as passed in isolation from the Wolfenden Report helped to divorce the repression of street prostitution from issues related to sexual exploitation and off-street commercial sex, which in turn created still larger intellectual, legal and political gaps between repressive laws and their consequences.

The Wolfenden Report was published in September 1957 and proved to be a best-seller. The print run of 5,000 from Her Majesty's Stationery Office was quickly depleted, and several reprints were issued until it was picked up by a commercial publisher in 1963.<sup>26</sup> The (very short) street prostitution section of the Wolfenden Report made consensus and simplicity of argument its key aims, starting from the agreed principle that the state had a responsibility to control prostitution not as a moral issue but as a public nuisance and source of harm. They clearly recommended that, while the term 'common prostitute' should be maintained in any new law, the requirement to prove annoyance should be dropped, despite the very apparent lack of consensus about prostitution in the interviews that they conducted.<sup>27</sup> They advocated raising penalties for first and subsequent solicitation offences, and imposing jail time for repeat offenders. With a nod to those who argued that neither fines nor prison would do anything to help the women who sold sex to stop selling it, the Report also advocated that women be given the option to speak to a probation officer, who would arrange for a program of 'reform' in lieu of prison.<sup>28</sup>

The Report's authors justified their recommendations with three key and interrelated arguments. The first was that the term 'common prostitute' could not be removed because it risked the arrest of 'innocent women'.<sup>29</sup> As we have already seen, this line of thinking had prevailed over more than a century of law and policy and, while Wolfenden appeared entirely unaware of the fact, was firmly rooted in still older assumptions about respectable women and about prostitute women, what AMSH campaigner Helen Wilson had in the 1910s called the 'triple standard', which divided not only men from women, but 'good' women from 'bad'.<sup>30</sup> In a more practical sense, Wolfenden seemed equally unaware of the fact that saying that the removal of 'common prostitute' would risk the arrest of 'innocent' women was in direct contradiction to their defence of the legal framework as being about public nuisance rather than morality, for if a 'common prostitute' on a street could often be mistaken for an 'innocent' woman, then for what public nuisance offence was she being arrested?<sup>31</sup>

The retention of the term 'common prostitute' was also related to the recommendation not to include clients in any new solicitation law. Wolfenden argued that male clients were not the offenders because it was not they who loitered in the street, and it was therefore not their actions which constituted offence.<sup>32</sup> However, their insistence on the identification of 'common prostitutes' lest an 'innocent' woman be arrested suggested a different underlying reason for not including clients in solicitation law: the arrest of clients for soliciting or loitering for the purposes of prostitution could not be successfully achieved without similarly labelling and identifying them, a measure that would never be supported.<sup>33</sup>

The second argument that the Report put forward was that women who chose to sell sex had changed demographically and psychologically since the days when the first solicitation laws had been passed. This was an idea built upon naïve post-war understandings of the successes of the welfare economy and a profound ignorance of women's economic position and the demands of childcare (which Wilkinson had shown to be a dominant concern of many prostitute women).<sup>34</sup> These ideas about the 'new' kind of prostitute were supported by the very early and very limited psychological studies of prostitute women, which argued that they had a distinct mental condition, and the social sciences provided reinterpretations of older ideas about the character flaws that were characteristic of 'common prostitutes'.<sup>35</sup> Edward Glover, a psychologist, wrote in his study of the causes of prostitution in 1945 (conveniently reprinted in 1957) that 'economic motivations are only ancillary in nature.' Instead, prostitutes displayed abnormal sexuality due to their upbringing, and prostitution was a 'pathological condition'.<sup>36</sup> T.E. James, in his 1951 look at the rehabilitation of prostitutes, concluded that prostitution 'was an emotional problem'.<sup>37</sup> British Social Biology Council secretary Eleanor French's interpretation of such findings was particularly unsubtle in her piece 'Prostitution', written for the Council in 1954: 'Let us get out of our minds that the prostitute's position today is the same as it was in 1870,' she wrote, 'when she was a victim of poverty and preyed upon by society. She is indeed still to be pitied but for different reasons, since now it is she who, driven by no economic compulsion, preys upon the community.'<sup>38</sup> The pathologization of prostitute women was also based upon older ideas – fostered in part by feminism itself – that a woman had to be mentally ill or deranged in order to consider selling sex. These ideas had been formalized by the UN Convention of 1949 that defined prostitution as an occupation 'incompatible with the dignity and worth of the human person'.<sup>39</sup> While conceived of in order to combat exploitation within commercial sex, this convention also suggested quite strongly that a person who engaged in prostitution had neither dignity nor worth.

This growth of social scientific attention to the causes of prostitution and the development of important international conventions against

exploitation was filtered through the Wolfenden Committee to produce the following conclusion:

there must be some additional psychological element in the personality of the individual woman who becomes a prostitute. Our impression is that the great majority of prostitutes are women whose psychological make-up is such that they choose this life because they find in it a style of living which is to them easier, freer, and more profitable than would be provided by any other occupation.<sup>40</sup>

The prostitute, in other words, had become quite a lot more pathological than pathetic.<sup>41</sup> The Report concluded that 'the present law seems to be based on the desire to protect prostitutes from coercion and exploitation. When it was framed, the prostitute may have been in some danger of coercion; but today, through the effectiveness of the law or through changes which have removed the economic and social factors likely to result in a life of prostitution, she is in less danger of coercion or exploitation against her will.'<sup>42</sup> This shockingly naïve statement was a direct product of the persistent and long-standing dichotomization of agency and victimhood, of empowerment and exploitation, within prostitution discourse.

Finally, drawing on the committee's deeply flawed arguments that a 'common prostitute' could be contrasted against an 'innocent woman' and that prostitute women were on the streets by pathological choice and laziness rather than because of economic need or coercion, Wolfenden was able to construct the right to public space as relative to respectability. The chief proprietor of the right to public space was the person who was liberally referred to as 'the ordinary' or the 'normal, decent' citizen. This 'ordinary citizen's' 'sense of decency' was conceived of as under threat by prostitutes, who were distinct from 'ordinary citizens'. 'We feel the right of the normal, decent citizen to go about the streets without affront to his or her sense of decency should be the prime consideration and should take precedence over the interests of the prostitute and her customers,' Wolfenden declared.<sup>43</sup> This was true even when comparing simple annoyance with the potential abuse and harm women might experience in an atmosphere of criminalization. Wolfenden stated that

having taken into account the dangers which might follow from the changes in the law which we have proposed, we think that they would be less injurious to the community in general than the present state of affairs...In any event, there must be set against these disadvantages, which are to a large extent hypothetical, the clear advantage that the ordinary citizen would be able to go about his business without the constant affront to his sense of decency which the presences of these women affords. So even if this can be achieved only by risking the

dangers that we have outlined, we still feel that the time has come to rid the streets of this nuisance and that the risk must therefore be taken.<sup>44</sup>

In the end, the Wolfenden Committee recommended maintaining the term 'common prostitute', dropping the requirement to prove annoyance, and replacing the myriad of different laws in Britain with one far simpler one. They also recommended introducing a cautioning system, raising fines and introducing imprisonment in the hope, so they claimed, that this would encourage more women to seek out probation and leave prostitution.<sup>45</sup>

Given that the Wolfenden Report was in part formed to lend weight to an already anticipated legal change, it is no surprise that the Street Offences Bill, introduced to the House by Home Secretary R.A. Butler on 29 January 1959, included most of the Committee's recommendations. It maintained the term 'common prostitute', while dropping the requirement to prove that 'common prostitutes' were annoying anyone while soliciting. 'It shall be an offence,' the new measure stated, 'for any common prostitute to loiter or solicit for the purposes of prostitution.'<sup>46</sup> In addition, it raised the fine for a first offence from forty shillings to ten pounds, and for a second offence to a fine of twenty-five pounds, and finally, for a third offence, a fine of twenty-five pounds or imprisonment for a maximum of three months, or both.

The lack of consensus about what to do about prostitution was made apparent once more in the debates about the Bill in both the Commons and the Lords. Opposition members pointed to the reactionary nature of the Bill, criticized the targeting of prostitutes and not their clients, and questioned the appropriateness of imprisonment. In the House of Lords, these issues resurfaced with equal fervour, and amendments were suggested which, as Helen Self notes, were all rejected by the Lord Chancellor, who so happened to be the former Home Secretary Maxwell Fyfe, in many ways the architect of the measures in the first place.<sup>47</sup> As the Bill was being debated, it was also criticized from the outside, by the AMSH, the Church of England Moral Welfare Council and various newspapers (who saw it as an attempt to simply sweep vice under the carpet).<sup>48</sup> R.L. Archdale of the AMSH demanded to know who, precisely, was being bothered by prostitution in the streets: 'the annoyance of people at large is a sham unless there are individuals – not particular and notorious Puritans, but ordinary passers-by – who say to themselves, "It is better that she and her kind should go to prison than that I and my kind should suffer the annoyance of seeing them." There may be men who reason thus and they may be 'decent', but they are not ordinary.'<sup>49</sup>

The chief champion of the supposed 'ordinary citizen' who was being bothered by prostitution was the new Tory Home Secretary R.A. Butler, who had been appointed in January 1957, just before the Wolfenden Report was

released. Ironically, Butler was the descendent of none other than Josephine Butler herself, and was in fact a vice-president of the AMSH, an affiliation which came to be untenable as his desire to remain Home Secretary and part of the Conservative party trumped his vague allegiance to ancestry or to feminism.<sup>50</sup> Butler, among other things, was especially keen to prove to the MPs that the women who sold sex in their day were a far cry from those in the days of his famous ancestress: 'All this is quite different to what happened in the time of Josephine Butler,' he told the House, 'when the girls she used to save were the poorest creatures in society.'<sup>51</sup>

It became apparent in further discussions that underneath these false dichotomizations of choice and coercion lay a profound contempt for the simple fact that women earned money in prostitution. For instance, Conservative MP Mr Reese-Davies, bandying entirely invented statistics, stated that 'today over 95% of prostitutes in this country are in it solely for one thing, and that is lucre, hard money. They are professional. There are none left of the old idea of Josephine Butler's poor old girls of the past. There is none of the romance of 'Fanny by Gaslight' in this modern tart. She is a hard girl who knows exactly what her value is.'<sup>52</sup> Or, as Butler himself went on to say, 'we are not dealing with the poor, pushed out by the circumstances of a capitalist society to earn their living by prostitution. We are dealing with girls who deliberately go into this trade to make a living and to make a far greater living than do those who do an honest day's work... The more the House realises those facts the better'.<sup>53</sup> Meanwhile, W.J. Edwards, the member for Stepney, alongside R.A. Allan, who represented Paddington, used the debates to reiterate the grave and specific problems they were experiencing with street prostitution in their constituencies, making a local problem into a national focal point for legislative change.<sup>54</sup>

Alongside profound ignorance of the ways that poverty and gender inequality acted as contributing factors in prostitution, and a contempt for working-class women who were able to earn middle and upper-class salaries by profiting from men's sexual desires, came a disregard of the potential consequences of the clearing of the streets. Like Wolfenden, the government did not, as Chief Magistrate Lawrence Dunn had recommended, conduct 'a most exhaustive examination of all the implications of clearing prostitutes from the streets'. In fact, in reviewing their records just before the Bill became law, Home Office officials discovered that their file entitled 'Research related to prostitution' was empty but for a series of memoranda regarding the urgent need for research. 'I am afraid this file has been gravely neglected,' wrote one official. 'It is surprising, and perhaps fortunate, that this question has not...been raised during the debates on the Street Offences Bill'.<sup>55</sup> The government's claim to authoritative knowledge about prostitution, iterated in the influential Wolfenden Report, was unsupported by actual research.

As some newspapers denounced the illiberal crusade against street prostitution and warned of its move underground, the Conservative party struggled to construct a consensus around its measures. When many backbenchers looked ready to oppose it, the party ultimately whipped the Bill (though the opposition did not) to ensure that it would get passed.<sup>56</sup> A decade of newspaper exposés, a changing understanding of public space, and pervasive religious and moral attitudes toward prostitution meant that many 'ordinary, decent' citizens supported the Bill, as demonstrated in the Gallup opinion poll in 1957 and another conducted by the *News Chronicle* in 1959.<sup>57</sup> In the Gallup poll, thirty-five per cent of respondents felt that the call girl should be allowed, fifty-six per cent felt that prostitution was a more serious problem than homosexuality, and forty-seven per cent said they had been approached by a prostitute on the street. In the *News Chronicle* poll, eight out of ten people supported higher penalties for solicitation, but one-third of respondents were also in favour of legalized brothels. In another poll, sixty-seven per cent of overall voters thought it right to send prostitutes to prison.<sup>58</sup> The ordinary citizen was far from a consensus regarding what to do about prostitution.

Nonetheless, the Street Offences Act became law in July 1959, its principal section stating that it was an offence 'for any common prostitute to loiter or solicit for the purposes of prostitution'.<sup>59</sup> It took the place of the disparate Acts that had existed around England and Wales for more than a century, including the relevant sections of the Vagrancy Act of 1824, the Metropolitan Police Act of 1839 and the Towns and Police Clauses Act of 1847.

While many interpretations of the Street Offences Act, and the Wolfenden Report that so heavily influenced it, see it as an example of the profound sexual and moral changes in post-war British society, it can just as easily be understood as a moment when many much older ideas and practices about the criminalization of prostitution became codified and legitimated. In maintaining the term 'common prostitute', the Act merely reaffirmed the logic of separating 'women in public' from 'public women', which had been an important issue in the criminalization of prostitution since, and indeed before, Miss Elizabeth Cass was arrested while window-shopping in July 1887. In dropping the annoyance clause, the Act simply legitimated what had already been in place in de facto police and magisterial policy for several decades: to the chagrin of Marthe Watts, Nellie Johnson and many other women who solicited quietly on the street, real proof of annoyance had very rarely been required for successful prosecution long before the Street Offences Act. Neither was raising penalties and reintroducing imprisonment a shocking break with what had gone before: forty shillings had at one point been quite a substantial amount of money, and imprisonment had been used regularly for prostitutes in various guises. This had been effected either through the use of the Vagrancy Act of 1824 (which allowed

for a short imprisonment after a first offence, and, as Nellie Johnson discovered, a lengthy one after subsequent offences), imprisonment in default of fine payment under either Act, or being held on successive remands by magistrates requesting very high sums for bail.<sup>60</sup>

Perhaps most significantly, many of the features of prostitution that had drawn it to public and political attention in the 1950s – the move of street solicitation to different neighbourhoods and the perceived rise in organized prostitution – were themselves products of earlier repressive campaigns. The political will and popular support (which itself can be called into serious question) that saw the Street Offences Act become law was not just related to the moral panics of the 1950s and the new post-war atmosphere of sexual and social change, but was also born out of a century-long legacy of crusades to repress commercial sex.

That being said, the Street Offences Act, which came into effect in August 1959, had quite a legacy of its own. The most immediate and observable impact of the Act was precisely what it was designed to achieve, that is, the clearing of prostitution from the streets of London. Indeed, the forthcoming law was so well publicized that many women who solicited on the street before 1959 looked to beat the rush. ‘The “professional” prostitute knew the Act was coming into force many months before it actually became law,’ wrote the Commander of A Division. ‘She had time, therefore, to make her arrangements accordingly.’<sup>61</sup> This pre-emptive move off the street is evidenced by the fact that with the introduction of the Street Offences Act came a dramatic fall – rather than a rise – in arrests for solicitation in the metropolis. Other witnesses reported that the Street Offences Act effectively eliminated on-street solicitation in the West End, with C Division officers noting that arrest rates had fallen by almost ninety per cent.<sup>62</sup> For those women who were arrested, much heavier fines, the hallmark of the new law, were handed out liberally. These fines increased with each conviction, and the allowance of prison time – both in default of fine payment and after a third conviction – was used by most metropolitan magistrates.<sup>63</sup>

Again following the recommendations of Wolfenden, the Street Offences Act had prescribed the adoption of a formalized system of cautions. However, contrary to the impression given by Wolfenden, and contrary to the conclusions of some historians, a cautioning system – which often included charging women under the ‘breach of the peace’ section of the Metropolitan Police Act and then using this charge to arrest them as prostitutes – had been in place in London since at least 1887, as recommended by Charles Warren in light of the Cass scandal, and formalized by Edward Henry in the early 1900s.<sup>64</sup> But there were two key differences between the old cautioning system and the one implemented by the Street Offences Act. The first was that the new Act helped codify and nationalize a system of cautioning that had been rather haphazard and locally isolated beforehand,



and, in light of the bureaucratic demands of such a system, there was a rush to establish a new central register of prostitutes before the Act came into effect, to be staffed by two women police officers.<sup>65</sup> New forms were issued to record previous arrests and the number of cautions, complete with number codes corresponding to previous arrests, marital status and ethnic background. The forms also contained a space for fingerprints. The other difference was that this new cautioning system was predicated upon the idea that formal cautions militated against stigmatization, by giving potential prostitutes the opportunity to redeem themselves, rather than the older systems, which were explicitly justified by the need to protect police from accusations of wrongful arrest.

Upon closer examination, these differences were more theoretical than actual. A year into the working of the new Act, the Central Register was understaffed, and very much behind in its registrations. They were especially confounded and hindered by the fact that women selling sex continued, as had the generations before them, to employ aliases, give false addresses, change their appearance and move around neighbourhoods, cities and countries.<sup>66</sup> 'If the figures are taken at face value,' wrote Superintendent Barker, the woman police officer in charge of the new registry, 'it would appear that over five hundred women have taken up prostitution for the first time since 16 August; this cannot be correct... this changing place of operation and hiding of identity is going to be our main difficulty in the future.'<sup>67</sup> It was a familiar story: bureaucracies of identification struggled to keep up with women who were engaged in constant transformations of their working and criminalized selves.

Even more significantly, it seems that, whatever the new intention, the cautioning system continued to function for the same purpose as it had previously: as a way of permanently identifying women as 'common prostitutes'. After about a year of operation, Superintendent Bather of the Women Police reported that 'the "cautioning" of the police has entirely failed in its redemptive purpose.' It had, on the other hand, 'amassed a great deal of information... One of the main tasks of the Index has been to try and establish the identity of these young women who are moving about from one subdivision to another using different names and addresses, and considerable successes are being achieved'.<sup>68</sup> The cautioning system, envisioned as offering a chance at redemption, served only to stigmatize women more effectively and register them as 'common prostitutes'.

At the same time long-established ideas about acceptable 'victim' behaviour rendered women who refused help or lapsed all the more deviant. Indeed, contrary to Wolfenden's most earnest expectations, neither the cautioning system nor the offer of probation in light of the threat of fines and prison seems to have encouraged women to seek out reform and exit options. Some of the very first women to be offered advice and probation

instead of a fine 'all treated such offers as a joke and dismissed it in most cases with a sneer'.<sup>69</sup> 'Unfortunately, there has been little response to the offers of welfare help but this was expected,' remarked Superintendent Bather.<sup>70</sup> Rosalind Wilkinson, meanwhile, was commissioned by the *Sunday Times* to investigate the impact of the new law at the end of 1959, and found that, of the 232 women who had been convicted since the Act had come into effect, only one had opted for probation.<sup>71</sup> By 1963, only ten women had accepted offers of reformatory help.<sup>72</sup> By 1977, sociologist Alexander Sion went so far as to claim (inaccurately) that 'no woman has ever made use of the social support and probation offered in the statute.'<sup>73</sup>

Many more women, by contrast, were sentenced to fines and imprisonment. Those who could not pay the fine, or who had been convicted too many times, were sent to prison: some 2,300 women between the years 1959 and 1963.<sup>74</sup> In some years, it was discovered that over one-quarter of women convicted of solicitation had been sentenced to imprisonment.<sup>75</sup> In 1961, a non-partisan inquiry that had been established by the AMSH (which would soon change its name to the Josephine Butler Society) found that the number of women sent to prison had increased seven-fold since the Act had been passed.<sup>76</sup>

Police and probation officers interviewed during the Wolfenden Committee hearings had already voiced their opposition to the use of imprisonment for prostitutes, and now, as the prisons of Britain found themselves flooded with women convicted of soliciting, it was Prisoners' Societies and Prison Commissioners' turn to complain.<sup>77</sup> The Chairman of the Board of Visitors to Styal prison, to which many London women were sent after it opened in 1962, noted that sending prostitutes to prison is 'no answer to the problem, and has no value'.<sup>78</sup> In their discussions with the Prison Commission over these issues, the new Labour administration openly acknowledged that it had long been realized that prison was never going to be rehabilitative, and that the Street Offences Act merely used the threat of prison to clear the streets.<sup>79</sup>

Clear the streets it did. Not a month after the Act came into effect, the media was wondering where all the street prostitutes had gone, setting up for another cyclical moral panic about the growth of the underground indoor commercial sex industry.<sup>80</sup> In 1961, the staged 'documentary' film 'West End Jungle' highlighted how dramatically street prostitution had fallen, and detailed the myriad of prurient forms that off-street prostitution was taking in its wake, relying heavily on images of clip joints and call girls from the 1940s and 1950s.<sup>81</sup> Despite these salacious imaginings, many of the features of this new indoor industry appeared rather benign. There was an increase in the use of name plates and signs for walk-up apartments, where the door would be left unlocked or open and women would wait inside for clients.<sup>82</sup> For a time, some women (including Hermione Hindin, one of the Messina

girls) took to tapping on windows or calling from doorways or balconies, until the 1960 case of *Smith v. Hughes* determined that this too constituted 'soliciting or loitering for the purposes of prostitution'.<sup>83</sup> As had been duly predicted by former Police Commissioner Nott-Bower, there appeared to be a sharp rise in call-girl establishments, though police reported that the situation was, by virtue of its being clandestine, very difficult to assess. Some women worked on their own, depending on a coterie of regular clients and small ads in shop windows, while others joined larger call-girl syndicates, where their clients were arranged by a third party.<sup>84</sup> Even police were surprised at how effectively prostitution was moved off the streets by the Act; however, this must have been in part because the structures were already in place off the street into which they could move, encouraged by a half-century of police crackdowns which developed the clandestine off-street commercial sex industry.

Despite the marked drop in soliciting on the street, there were some women who, by choice or economic necessity, remained outside. For these women, motor vehicles became very important. Some used automobiles themselves, while more often women relied on getting picked up by their clients. Superintendent Bather of the women police noted that 'the most consistent new method of soliciting is in the use of motor vehicles.'<sup>85</sup> While this had been going on to a certain degree before the introduction of the new Act, it seems that this law was responsible for solidifying car-based solicitation and servicing of clients as the dominant form of street prostitution into the twenty-first century. This is particularly significant in light of the fact that Wilkinson, researching in the early 1950s, had discovered that the majority of women strongly disliked going in cars: they felt that they were expected to perform a wider variety of sex acts and were vulnerable to violence, and many reported instances of being stranded in urban outskirts – and often robbed – by clients in cars.<sup>86</sup> The dangers and problems associated with car prostitution were compounded by the fact that women were now in even more of a rush to get off the street: in 1960, police noted that women who solicited along the carriageway in Hyde Park 'no longer bargain with would-be clients who have stopped their cars for them but enter and are driven away immediately'.<sup>87</sup> As present-day examinations of street prostitution indicate, this bargaining period is seen as crucial to women's assessment of men as potential threats.

Other police observations, alongside the enquiry conducted by Wilkinson and another by the AMSH in the first few years of the new Act, suggested still more potentially harmful developments. The women left on the street moved around more frequently, in order to avoid identification and arrest, and as such were not given the opportunity to develop a regular clientele or a rapport with other women. In addition, police noted that 'in the West End the women are working much later, most arrests and cautions taking

place after 11 pm.' It seems that prostitutes were increasingly separating their solicitation from the ordinary entertainment-seeking traffic and the public supervision that this naturally afforded.<sup>88</sup> The pressures of the Street Offences Act also meant that socialization between prostitutes – so important for maintaining safety – continued to erode. 'At no time, have I seen a group of prostitutes loitering together for the purpose of soliciting,' wrote the Superintendent of B Division, 'as was their habit prior to the new Act.'<sup>89</sup>

The Act, in clearing the streets of women who could afford to move indoors, created new realities for women working on the street and a new image of street prostitution. Whereas only a few short years before women like Marthe Watts could solicit on the street and earn thousands of pounds, on-street solicitation was now considered dangerous and low-class; the recourse of older, desperate and poor women.<sup>90</sup> While the majority of women on the street remained of British and Irish descent, more women from immigrant backgrounds began working there as well, and the number of West Indian women soliciting on the street soon outnumbered French women (which indicates that French women were by and large able to move off the street): this racial division in prostitution would become more marked in the later years of the twentieth century.<sup>91</sup> Street solicitation also became more spatially marginalized, with the majority occurring in docklands and railway stations, some of the metropolis's most transient and liminal spaces, though it did continue to a much lesser degree in Soho.<sup>92</sup> Finally, Hyde Park figured once more as a reception site for the displaced, where some of the poorest women were driven to solicit: this in turn sparked more outrage from 'ordinary citizens' about the rise in prostitution in this area.<sup>93</sup>

Also true to the prediction of the Metropolitan Police Commissioner and the Chief Magistrate, the Street Offences Act contributed to a rise in third-party financial interest in prostitution. As women moved their work entirely indoors, there was more reliance on taxi drivers and hotel porters to act as touts, and it proved more difficult for women to work without 'protectors'.<sup>94</sup> Prostitution came to be increasingly connected to drug trafficking and drug abuse: taxi drivers, for instance, who recommended prostitutes to passengers and acted as 'mobile brothels', were also known to sell drugs such as cocaine and heroin.<sup>95</sup> Perhaps most importantly, the push off the streets fed an already booming business of commercial sex real estate, padding the pockets of men who followed in the footsteps of Bernard Silver and Philip Rachman. Meanwhile, according to police, the old problems of prosecuting landlords persisted: 'Who pays the rent, what the rent is and who receives it, is – as it always has been – a most difficult thing to discover and even more difficult to prove.'<sup>96</sup> The problem of flat-farmers continued into the 1960s and 1970s, while the 1956 Sexual Offences Act, in reinvigorating the crusade against brothels, ensured that, as 1970s sociologist Alexander Sion found, 'a common feature of the lives of prostitutes is their rootlessness.'<sup>97</sup>

The Met was concerned about the potential rise in pimping: prosecutions for 'living on immoral earnings' remained low after the Act, but police were unsure what this meant.<sup>98</sup> 'There is no doubt that the offence of "living on immoral earnings" is harder to detect,' reported the new Police Commissioner, Sir Joseph Simpson, 'for the reason that women are not seen to solicit (or to be seen in the streets at all in some cases) it is more difficult to get evidence of knowledge on the part of the man of the women's prostitution or of his being given money by the woman.'<sup>99</sup> The Commander of A Division had a similar explanation: 'now the men are much more in the background...and it is hard to prove his association with the women and that the woman is a prostitute; the figure has dropped from 16 per month to 4'.<sup>100</sup> It is no wonder that some critics dubbed the Street Offences Act the 'pimp's charter'.<sup>101</sup>

Police were more successful, however, in intervening in more novel and benign forms of third-party profiteering. In 1960, Frederick Charles Shaw was successfully prosecuted for living on immoral earnings and for conspiracy to corrupt public morals (a little-used relic of English common law) for publishing the 'Ladies' Directory'. This magazine, which had been in press since late 1959, functioned a little like the old 'sporting' and 'gentlemen's' guides of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, in that it provided the names, addresses and (in this case) telephone numbers of women who sold sex from flats and offices. The women themselves paid Shaw to run their ads, which ranged from whole pages with photos to business-card-sized text-only descriptions.

It seems strange that the police and the Department of Public Prosecutions should have been so intent on quashing such a consensual and low-profile publication: the magazine was kept under the counter at certain newsagents and tobacconists (who were also prosecuted) and sold only upon request. And yet, police telephoned and visited every woman in the book until they managed to cajole, harass or threaten five of them into testifying against Shaw, and the police file relates in detail the process of matching the women's working aliases to their real names, and their efforts to decode the terms used for the sexual services they offered. During the trial, the prosecution focused on the sexual services offered by the women, making the fact that most catered to requests for sado-masochistic practices like bondage, PVC and whipping a pivotal piece of evidence against Shaw.<sup>102</sup> The reason why these details were important to the case was never explained, as police and solicitors alike found themselves entangled in the fine lines that divided the prosecution of crime from the control of morality, and those that divided a systematic investigation from their own erotic fascination.<sup>103</sup> In the end, Shaw was sentenced to nine months in prison, and some of the tobacconists and newsagents who carried his publication and displayed women's calling cards were also found guilty and fined.<sup>104</sup> As police closed down yet another

avenue whereby women could solicit sex, many, such as Wendy Clarke, who had advertised in the directory, grew exasperated. 'You've driven us off the streets,' she complained to police when they called at her door, 'and you are still not satisfied.'<sup>105</sup>

The rise and fall of Shaw's 'Ladies' Directory' was only one facet of the industries that grew as street prostitution fell, as more clip joints, hostess bars and nightclubs began to cater to the displaced sellers and buyers of sex. Simultaneously, more and more striptease clubs opened in London's West End. As historian Frank Mort has argued, these clubs were at once a complicated response to consumer demand in an age of increasing sexual liberalization, a continuation of a longer tradition of erotic performance, and a side-effect of the push of commercial sex off the streets.<sup>106</sup> While seen as part of the 'Americanized' post-war economy of consumer demand and hedonism, there is every indication that many features of the commercial sex industry in post-war London had a much longer history and were very much home-grown.

Examining the fate of street prostitution, repressed more thoroughly in the age of 'permissiveness' than it had been in any other period, is yet another way to challenge what Mort calls 'over-general and progressivist accounts of sexual modernization' in the post-war period and an example of what Jeffrey Weeks has characterized as a kind of paradox of sexual liberalism and criminalization that emerged in 1960s Britain.<sup>107</sup> It is perhaps paradoxical that, just before the 1960s dawned as a popularly recognized era of sexual permissiveness, the UK Parliament passed the harshest anti-prostitution law since the beginning of the modern and industrialized period, with a great deal of public support. But perhaps this was not paradoxical at all; just as the rise in heterosocial public space at the end of the nineteenth century led to more demands to repress prostitution on the streets, a crusade against prostitutes and their presence in public may well have been integral to the mechanisms and successes of the so-called sexual revolution.

Just as Matt Houlbrook has found of homosexual sex, it is certain that prostitution (both solicitation and sex acts) in London took place increasingly solely in private space as the twentieth century progressed, though significant public manifestations just as certainly remained.<sup>108</sup> Frank Mort and Jeffrey Weeks go as far as to argue that the Street Offences Act 'effectively privatized London's sex trade',<sup>109</sup> but it would be a mistake to overstate the degree to which this Act was a sharp break from things past: as we have seen throughout this book, the 'privatization' of commercial sex, if we take that to mean its entanglement with the world of business and real estate, and its disassociation with government regulation, had begun to occur long before. Similarly, Mort describes the period in the early 1960s as a move from 'negotiated regulation' of sexual commerce to 'an aggressive series of confrontations' that concentrated on the use of criminal and civil

law. However, this process had begun much earlier, when the Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1885 was passed, if not before.

On the other hand, 'negotiated regulation' continued to exist. Indeed, the whole Street Offences Act was an exercise in criminalization as regulation: in pushing women off the streets and failing to close the legal loopholes that allowed off-street commercial sex to flourish, Wolfenden and the Act explicitly conceded that they were quashing certain forms of prostitution and encouraging others.<sup>110</sup> This was yet another example of how, as Philip Howell has argued, systems of regulation could function within systems of criminalization. But the space in which prostitution was tolerated had become narrow indeed, and these strategies of prostitution control were discussed in terms of 'risks' rather than 'regulation'. An increase in call-girl establishments and other underground or clandestine commercial sex industries, a rise in third-party financial interest in prostitution, and a closer affiliation between prostitution and crime were risks that Wolfenden and the proponents of the Street Offences Act repeatedly claimed necessary and acceptable in order to clear the streets. Tacit within these acceptable risks was the potential effect these changes would have on the health and safety of women who sold sex. William Stead's insistence in 1885 that 'the streets belong to the prostitute as much as to the vestryman; and her right to walk there as long as she behaves herself ought to be defended to the last' found little support in 'permissive' Britain.<sup>111</sup>

These risks translated quickly into realities for women selling sex in post-1959 London. For women on the street, the Act meant more furtive solicitation in more isolated areas, less time to assess clients, and a recourse to car-based prostitution. For those women whom the Act had pushed off the street, this meant more reliance upon – and more of their earnings towards – landlords, touts and other third parties. Despite the fact that street prostitution was coming to be seen as the most unsavoury and dangerous form of commercial sex, there was evidence throughout the period that 'young women were very vulnerable indoors' as well.<sup>112</sup> The AMSH enquiry into the workings of the new Act found that 'after beginning [indoors] the girl has less freedom to choose her customers, to pursue her profession without the aid of ponces, and to withdraw from a life of prostitution'.<sup>113</sup> Echoing the concerns of certain commentators during the 1885 campaign, they noted that 'In the opinion of one probation officer with a lot of experience in this work the Act created a worse evil than it removed.'<sup>114</sup>

The vulnerability of prostitute women in the wake of the Street Offences Act was illustrated no better or more horrifically than by a series of unsolved murders, known as the 'nude murders' or 'Hammersmith murders', that occurred between 1964 and 1965. At least six, and possibly eight, women who worked as prostitutes in London fell victim to an unknown

killer dubbed by the pundit newspapers as ‘Jack the Stripper’, because he undressed his victims before disposing of their bodies. Hannah Tailford, Irene Lockwood, Helene Barthelemy, Mary Flemming, Margaret McGowan and Bridget ‘Bridie’ O’Hara were all killed by asphyxiation, strangulation or drowning, while Elizabeth Figg and Gwenyth Rees were manually strangled and also found naked. The narrative is, of course, eerily familiar: the 1885 Criminal Law Amendment Act was followed in three years by the ‘Whitechapel murders’; the 1959 Street Offences Act was followed in four years by the violent deaths of eight prostitute women. These would, sadly, be followed by many more in the later twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.<sup>115</sup>

The passing of the Street Offences Act most certainly did not mark the end of the controversies surrounding prostitution in London, any more than it marked the end of prostitution itself. Indeed, in the years following the Act many different voices of opposition arose. Some moral reform groups and Borough Councils felt that the rise in off-street prostitution was still more undesirable than it had been on the street and demanded that more laws be passed against it. Others, including the Josephine Butler Society, the new name of the AMSH after 1964, continued to campaign against the injustice and harm caused by repressive legislation directed against ‘common prostitutes’, joined by those who felt that the approach of the Conservative government was illiberal and hypocritical, particularly after the 1963 Profumo Affair, which illuminated the extent to which the underworld sexual economy was intimately entwined with the upper-class men who had just passed a law to repress it.<sup>116</sup> And, as the 1960s drew to a close, a renewed attack on the sexual objectification and commodification of women in prostitution came with the rise of ‘second wave’ feminism.

Finally, by the 1970s, the voices of women who sold sex began making themselves heard in the debates on prostitution: this campaign was connected to feminism old and new, long-standing liberal campaigns against injustice that stretched back into the nineteenth century, and also to the common experiences of harm and stigma felt by prostitute women around the world in an era of renewed repression.<sup>117</sup> These women, more vocal and organized than at any other time in modern history, launched new and controversial campaigns for prostitutes’ and sex workers’ rights that have stretched into the twenty-first century. Of these new voices, Marthe Watts was one of the first. ‘Thanks to the Report of the University Professor, girls no longer walk the streets of London,’ she wrote in the conclusion of her memoir, noting that, as a result of the Wolfenden Report’s recommendations, London had become a place where commercial sex was “‘swept under the carpet”’. She was unequivocal about what she saw as not only the futility but the potential harm



of criminalization: 'While this attitude persists I cannot think that you have in this country seen the end of such evils as I have endeavoured to warn against in this book.'<sup>118</sup> As her autobiography went to press in 1960, a new era in the criminalization of prostitution had begun; but, as Marthe Watts observed and as subsequent history has proven, this new era certainly did not witness any end to prostitution, or the harm and evils with which it was associated.

# Conclusion

'The ordinary citizen who detests exploited prostitution has no unbalanced desire for legislation at any price,' wrote feminist Teresa Billington Greig in 1912, reflecting on the panics over white slavery that were so influential in the 1910s. She referred here to a different kind of 'ordinary citizen' than the one to whom the Wolfenden Committee would appeal four decades later, and, unlike Wolfenden, she was not willing to concede that short-term expedient solutions outweighed the risk of the harm that they might do. She argued instead that the ordinary citizen should realise that 'the slow way is the only way of advance' when it came to tackling the problems of prostitution: 'He, or she, is prepared to face the inescapable truth that the causes of this evil cannot be touched by law,' she wrote, 'however perfectly conceived, however perfectly administered.'<sup>1</sup> The evidence strongly supports Billington Greig's convictions. As we have seen throughout this book, legal interventions – imperfectly conceived, imperfectly administered – proved very much unsuccessful in the repression of prostitution, though they did do a great deal to change its contours and to shape – overwhelmingly negatively – the experiences of women who sold sex.

In the late nineteenth century, campaigns to end the government regulation of prostitution and fight the sexual exploitation of women and children led to the passing of the Criminal Law Amendment Act in 1885, which, alongside raising the age of consent and criminalizing procurement for the purposes of prostitution, made brothel-keeping a summary offence. The subsequent rise in brothel prosecutions, while controversial and problematic, had an immense impact on the commercial sex industry, for, while many smaller houses owned by families and prostitute women themselves were targeted and repressed by the new law, it also stimulated new ways of doing business, including the use of individually rented flats and clandestine guises such as massage parlours. The brothel crackdown also meant that third parties like landlords and pimps became more important players in the sexual economy, offering – often at exorbitant costs – protection,

workspaces and social support to women who found themselves more excluded from neighbourhoods and divided from one another.

The vigorous crusade against so-called brothels was closely linked to renewed attention to the problem of street solicitation in the same period. While on the one hand the policing of 'common prostitutes' for solicitation proved extremely problematic for both individual police officers and the entire criminal justice system, de facto policy changes in the way that the law was interpreted and applied meant that, by the early twentieth century, arrests for solicitation had risen remarkably. Police, the magistrature and the state reconfirmed the importance of determining women's prostitute identities and came increasingly to disregard the need to prove an offence of indecency or annoyance beyond the act of soliciting. Meanwhile, women who sold sex on the streets – who in this period constituted the vast majority of prostitute women in London – negotiated their working lives amid increased surveillance, control and persecution. Placed in situations where they were more vulnerable to client abuse, and forced to rely more heavily on third parties in order to mitigate the pressures of criminalization, women who sold sex experienced greater amounts of violence and exploitation as the twentieth century dawned.

The early 1900s witnessed renewed concerns over exploited prostitution, which, ironically, gave rise to still more calls for control and repression. 'White slavery' panics resulted in the passing of the Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1912, which raised the penalties for pimping and brothel-keeping, and made 'controlling or directing the movements of a prostitute' a crime. In the midst of these panics, the protection of victims of 'white slavery' could frequently result in their punishment, while deportation and 'repatriation' awaited foreign prostitutes who failed to resemble 'white slaves'.

The First World War challenged still further any tidy dichotomies between victims of white slavery and criminal prostitutes, and threw into disarray systems that police – and society more generally – had established to identify them. With the rise of 'amateur prostitution' and non-mercenary promiscuity, and amid wartime fears of venereal disease, the War Office implemented controversial and iniquitous measures that criminalized the spread of VD by women. This fuelled the rise of a new wave of feminist campaigns seeking to reform prostitution laws, spearheaded by the Association for Moral and Social Hygiene, who sought to repeal the solicitation laws, campaigned for the civil rights of prostitutes, and joined the international effort to ban the government regulation of prostitution.

Meanwhile, the Metropolitan Police adapted their procedures to better cope with the new commercial sex landscape, introducing fingerprinting and employing other public order laws against suspected prostitutes. Against the backdrop of feminist campaigns and policy changes, prostitute women continued to navigate their way through criminalization, often confounding state efforts at control. Indeed, after a series of mistakes and scandals

sparked still more protest from libertarians, moral reformers and feminists, the government sat down to a major reconsideration of prostitution law in the Street Offences Committee of 1927. Even this proved confused and ineffectual, and no clear legal or policy change followed.

The commercial sex industry, on the other hand, underwent significant changes during the interwar years, as the legacy of the First World War, changes in sexual and leisure practices, and continued efforts to control and repress commercial sex encouraged a diversification in the off-street sexual economy, which made more use of nightclubs, cafés and other ostensibly licit businesses. This was met with a diversification in the methods used to suppress it, and the fine line between regulation and criminalization was once again blurred by the use of club registration, health regulations, and even taxi licensing measures to curb and control clandestine and off-street prostitution.

As this book has shown, back-door policies and laws have been every bit as important in the control of commercial sex in London as those which were explicitly designed to tackle prostitution. I continue to argue that this legislative and administrative patchwork, which became more complicated and more employed as commercial sex diversified, seriously obscured the statistical visibility of prostitution in the metropolis over time. While the number of women selling sex may have been reduced, those who did so did it more often than they had before (fewer prostitutes did not mean fewer commercial sex transactions, in other words) and the women who sold sex casually or for a short time would have remained almost entirely invisible in the statistics. The assumption that commercial sex was drastically reduced over the 1885–1960 period – a conclusion usually based upon arrest statistics (which reported only on arrests for solicitation), police estimates and non-correlated socio-sexual changes – must be called into serious question.

During the interwar years, foreign prostitution continued to flourish in London, and many Continental Europeans used falsified documents, claims to Commonwealth citizenship, and marriages of convenience in order to find work in the lucrative sexual economy of the metropolis. Meanwhile, a series of murders, and a rise in organized crime, served as evidence of some of the most dire consequences of the repression of prostitution, which had become even more entangled with the licit and illicit economies of London. The Second World War accelerated these changes. While a rise in both promiscuity and prostitution, and the development of larger and more organized crime syndicates, presented new challenges to London's police, British and foreign women who sold sex negotiated the strains and economic opportunities of total war on the Home Front while British society grew more concerned about the visibility of street prostitution.

Prostitution in post-war London took on new meanings and reflected new anxieties, while also reinvigorating older narratives. In an era of patriotism

and reconstructed national identity, against a backdrop of a waning empire and a loss in international status, and coupled with anxieties about class, race, gender and the new welfare state, London's prostitution was coming to be seen as its greatest shame, and indeed the shame of all of Britain. When a revolutionizing media outfit latched on to commercial sex as a topic ripe for public attention in the midst of civic festival, coronation and colonial immigration, the government called a second, and significantly more influential, enquiry into prostitution. Pairing it with – and allowing it to be overshadowed by – discussions about homosexuality, the Wolfenden Committee's recommendations were largely put into practice by the Street Offences Act of 1959, which codified long-standing practices that disregarded the need to prove annoyance or indecency, significantly raised the penalties for solicitation to include imprisonment, and effectively cleared London's streets of solicitation by 'common prostitutes', who remained stigmatized in legal language and policing practice. A new era in the control of commercial sex had begun, even as society continued to struggle with how to define and deal with the problems of prostitution. This crackdown on prostitution, the culmination of many decades of hardening public attitudes and gradual, and often de facto, repression, seriously challenges narratives about the rise and origins of 'permissive Britain'.

Through all of these changes, the sexual economy of London remained geographically and economically diverse. Even the clear concentration of prostitution arrests in Soho by the 1950s lasted a mere decade (before the 1959 Street Offence Act), demonstrating the volatility of commercial sex geography in London. By the 1990s, Soho's day as the undisputed epicentre of on- and off-street prostitution had passed, though its reputation for sexual commerce lingers on. Wartime prompted prostitution to spring up more heavily around the southern rail stations (see [Map 3](#)), pockets of solicitation and brothels popped up in certain working-class neighbourhoods, urban amenities like laboratories and underground stations created micro-geographies in the sexual marketplace, policing initiatives and rising real estate prices encouraged a move out of the West End to Paddington, and general harassment by police officers on the street encouraged women to make more use of Hyde Park. However, no red-light zone could be said to have clearly developed, neither was prostitution forced into indisputably marginal parts of the metropolis (see [Maps 2, 3, 4](#)). Mapping arrests for solicitation reveals that some stereotypes about commercial sex in London do not hold true: for instance, the East End was at times among the areas with the lowest rates of arrest and never became a significant prostitudinal space in a quantitative sense. The diversity of London's off-street prostitution continued to defy clear characterization as the twentieth century progressed, and the indoor landscape of commercial sex reached almost incoherent proportions, entangled as it was in London's property and leisure markets. The geography of London prostitution remained in flux, and the spaces in which it occurred remained contested.

This spatial complexity was mirrored more generally in state attempts to address the problem of commercial sex. Indeed, this book adds to the growing insistence on the part of social and political historians that the state is hardly a monolithic entity. Instead, it represents a series of political and social relationships that are ever-changing, contested and frequently even contradictory. In this story, the 'state' was made up of civil servants, police officers, magistrates, medical officers, and local and national politicians, who, while hemmed in by rules and policies they created or received, as well as by public opinion, still negotiated their own paths and acted upon their own opinions. This street-level reality, coupled with the rapidity with which political currents could change and the fundamental controversies associated with prostitution, meant that the historian is left with few ways of neatly characterizing state action. Prostitution was dealt with by the police, to be sure, but it was also in the purview of the Children's Department and Prison Commission, and the Departments of Health, Labour, War, Housing and even Transport.

As we have seen, civil society – particularly associations like the NVA and AMSH – had a profound influence on prostitution policy, and some – the NVA in particular – went so far as to take on duties such as informal incarceration and repatriation, revealing that today's so-called 'multi-agency' approach to prostitution control has quite a long history.<sup>2</sup> On top of this, the growing force of news media, in the context of an enlarging democracy and strengthening local government, regularly created and recycled influential narratives about commercial sex and how it ought to be controlled. The anxiety over the complicated origins of prostitution, which represented a formidable critique of gender and economic relations, proved to be more easily displaced onto simplified stories of prostitution involving a monstrous, identifiable and individual exploiter and an innocent and easily recognizable victim, or in which prostitution could be understood as causing a simple and depoliticized public nuisance.

The criminalization of prostitution within popular culture gave it new meanings and helped to defuse certain others. Prostitution had been a dangerous symbol for feminists and socialists to wield; it was a powerful parable about the consequences of sexual and economic inequality. The criminalization of prostitution helped to defuse this symbolism and to dis-implicate the state and capital from the causes and maintenance of prostitution (in a way that would not have been possible under systems of legal regulation). Criminalization helped to make prostitution about specific demons in society that could be managed by specific laws, rather than a sign of something very wrong in the fundamental structure of society or the state itself.<sup>3</sup> In this period, prostitutes lost a great deal of their metaphorical and sentimentalized status: pathologized and professionalized, women who sold sex became part of a marginalized world of deviance and crime. Prostitutes, while troublesome, no longer possessed the allegorical power

to critique or to challenge the capitalist, patriarchal and modern project. They became instead subjects of increasingly co-ordinated crime control.<sup>4</sup> Criminalization in turn gave rise to new structures within the commercial sex industry, while falling most heavily upon women who sold sex. 'We are going to raise every man's hand against her,' MP Charles Hopwood had prophesied in Parliament back in 1885.

Nonetheless, it is difficult to view the women who sold sex in London's streets and buildings simply as subjectified and subjugated. Again and again, in the drama of court testimony, a terse newspaper column, a government committee, an archived police report that is crumbling along the edges (and sometimes even in their own words), prostitute women, and other third parties who profited from commercial sex, provide us with ample evidence of how they negotiated their lives and their work amidst criminalization.

This is, on the one hand, testament to the economics of prohibition, which has been understood as 'plac[ing] markets into the hands of criminal enterprises'.<sup>5</sup> While my book has in some ways supported this assertion, I think that it has also revealed how complex and uneven the process could be. There is no doubt that criminalization helped create criminal organization in prostitution, and yet many, if not most, women continued to work outside these organizations, most relationships with profiteering third parties were entangled with romantic and familial ties, and the chief market relationship remained the one between the seller and the buyer of sex. It was the actions of individual women (and their clients), in other words, that confounded attempts at repression and shaped the sexual economy as much as, if not more than, criminal syndicates.

The assumption that prostitution and prostitute women became separated from 'ordinary' society through criminalization must also be called into serious question: women who sold sex continued to have families and partners, to contribute to the licit economy, and to engage in 'respectable' labour even as they suffered more frequent stigmatization, arrest and punishment. Of course, to say that women resisted criminalization and exercised agency is not to say they remained untouched and unharmed, yet it is in these mitigated fragments of individual women's experiences that the false binaries of agency and oppression that informed approaches to prostitution control were most thoroughly transgressed.<sup>6</sup> In the words of the prison inspector Mary Gordon, 'whether hunted by, or hunting life', the narratives of these women's lives represented 'a denial of all theories of lost souls'.<sup>7</sup>

Studies of prostitution in the past still sometimes have a strange disconnect from prostitution in the present day. For instance, Linda Mahood claims that, within nineteenth-century social structure, the control and labelling of women as 'prostitutes' 'raises the more general questions of the moral regulation of working-class sexuality' and gives insight into 'the experience of women in a male-dominated society', because the term was not an empirical category but a technology of power that fell indiscriminately

upon working-class women. Today's prostitution, she suggests by contrast, is associated with 'family breakdown, pornography, drugs, and most recently AIDs'.<sup>8</sup> Judith Walkowitz argues for a similar historical process, saying that, because the Contagious Diseases Acts made prostitutes who came under them an 'outcast group' by stigmatizing and more effectively labelling them, they became separated from the ordinary working-class community. Consigning today's prostitutes to their commonly held place on the 'outside' of society, historians and contemporaries no longer see them as being able to be confused or entangled with working-class women, and their control is no longer part of the 'moral regulation of working-class sexuality'. And yet, we have ample evidence that women who sold sex were very much connected to their families, their neighbours and their communities well after the 1880s, into the 1950s and even today. Research continues to suggest that they were (and are) demographically like most other working-class women and that their experiences and choices associated with prostitution are related to broad inequalities of gender and class. To be sure, the control of prostitution did move from the use of broad and imprecise labelling to significantly more refined systems of identification, but we must be careful not to confuse identification with identity, or stigmatization with total exile.

The feminist analysis of the AMSH and its wide array of affiliated women's groups is tied to the analysis of many historians, who remain interested in the politics and effects of the state control of prostitution. By contrast, in the present day the analysis of radical feminism sees prostitution itself, rather than the way it is controlled, as the problem. A recent museum exhibit on the history and idea of prostitution at the Women's Library, for instance, made no mention of the police, the law or the state. To the intense anger of many sex worker advocates, it focused instead on the abusive role of the client.<sup>9</sup>

Similarly, there are some groups who continue to locate their critique of prostitution firmly in the realm of state action. It was around two decades after the Wolfenden Committee had their first meeting that French prostitute women occupied a church in Lyon, in order to protest a rash of police arrests. The movement quickly spread to the UK and in 1982 a group of women who sold sex occupied a church in King's Cross. In a photograph taken during the occupation, we can see that their faces are masked to avoid being identified by the police, and yet at the same time are smiling, proud and even celebratory, suggesting that the Street Offences Act contributed to the making of a protest group as much as an outcast one. These groups, like historians who analyse the nineteenth century, continue to critique the state as the cause of stigmatization, rather than prostitution itself. As debates continue to rage about the regulation, criminalization and decriminalization of prostitution in the present day, it seems that identity politics have become firmly entwined with the politics of identification.



The period between 1885 and 1960 laid much important groundwork for the way that prostitution was practised and dealt with in the second half of the twentieth century and today, and it will be very interesting to see some new contemporary historical perspectives on commercial sex in Britain after 1960, as they emerge. There is also a great need for more research even before 1960 on other parts of Britain, of which London represents only one, and in many ways a very unrepresentative, part. Indeed, some very interesting questions about the national geography of prostitution arise, especially after 1960, when a new and stronger national law may well have displaced prostitution back out of the capital and into some of the smaller provincial cities which are so heavily associated with prostitution today.<sup>10</sup> Another of the most interesting questions surrounds the chronology of prostitution and drug use: the narrative of addiction that is so prevalent in prostitution discourse today is in need of much historical perspective. Finally, in light of a renewed concern about sexual trafficking that mirrors the 'white slavery' panic of the 1910s, historical connections need to be made between the control of migration and the campaign against trafficking in the modern and contemporary period.

I researched and wrote this book, amid renewed and heated debates about prostitution in the twenty-first century, which today constitutes a multi-billion pound, worldwide industry. As I examined the police reports about Jack the Ripper and the 'Nude Murders' at the National Archives, I read news stories about the women who were killed in Ipswich and Bradford, and followed the trial of Robert Pickton, who is believed responsible for the deaths of over forty women who sold sex in Vancouver.<sup>11</sup> As the newspapers of the 1950s predicted an invasion of call girls on the eve of the Coronation, news outfits warned of the rise in prostitution that would almost inevitably follow on the heels of World Cups and Olympics. As the diarist Belle du Jour revealed herself as a successful research scientist, I read the autobiography of Marthe Watts, one of the first women to have had her story of working as a prostitute published in the twentieth century. And, as I picked through the Parliamentary debates about the 1885 Criminal Law Amendment Bill and the 1959 Street Offences Act, the 2009 Policing and Crimes Bill was passed, which gave police still more power over women selling sex on the street and made the purchase of sex from someone controlled by gain a crime. As I charted the ideological battles over prostitution between and within moral reform and feminist movements in the past, I joined the present-day one.

Just as present-day debate can be illuminated by historical perspective, so too can the historian learn from the social sciences, and I am truly indebted to the depth, quantity and quality of research being produced by academics who examine sexual labour in the early twenty-first century. In contrast to the complaints of the Home Office back in 1959 (who had discovered that their file marked 'research into prostitution' lay quietly empty), sociologists, anthropologists, legal scholars, policy analysts, psychologists, geographers

and, of course, historians have produced an immense amount of material in recent years that helps us to better understand prostitution and best practice surrounding it, and, while many of these findings are still quietly ignored by the government, they have also formed an unprecedented lobby for change.

We are, of course, far from a consensus about what to do about prostitution, even within academic circles and certainly within feminist ones. The women's movement is perhaps more polemically divided than ever before over questions regarding the prohibition, regulation or decriminalization of the commercial sex industry. These discussions within feminism constitute a rich and tangled discourse. But, nonetheless, the history of the feminist engagement with prostitution in the late nineteenth and first half of the twentieth centuries makes clear the fact that there has been no real hiatus between feminist campaigns surrounding prostitution, despite the commonly held assumption that there was a gap between first and second-wave feminism, and that campaigns for prostitutes' rights are a product of the late twentieth century. These campaigns, and the demand for decriminalization, have a long and relatively continuous (if complicated) history, and this history contributes significantly to our understanding of twentieth-century feminism. Organizations like the AMSH challenge the lines that have been drawn between different kinds of feminism, and suggest that the polemic over prostitution within the women's movement could be tempered somewhat by historical perspective.

The feminist engagement with prostitution is not the only persistent feature of the way that commercial sex has been discussed and understood. As social scientists have shown, policies and attitudes toward prostitution continue to be determined by long-standing dichotomies of victimization and criminality, by the lobbying of local communities reacting to public nuisance, by the language of contagion and pollution, and by media-driven moral panic.<sup>12</sup> At the same time, legislative interventions continue to fall short of their goals; policing remains often ad hoc, piecemeal and determined at street level; scandals of wrongful arrest play out against wider questions of prostitute identity; and civil society still plays a very significant role in the reform and monitoring of prostitute women.<sup>13</sup> Finally, while prostitute women continue to experience increased marginalization and harm in the face of crackdowns, we all the while find evidence of the way that people working in the sex industry negotiate their working and non-working lives in the face of legal repression.<sup>14</sup>

Many present-day stances on prostitution fail to take adequate account of the legal interventions of the past and their outcomes, and a great deal of policy appears to be characterized by a kind of amnesia about previous attempts at reform, rescue, control and punishment. For instance, Sheila Jeffreys argues that prostitution had once been repressed and despised but is now tolerated, ignoring the compelling evidence that the chronology of

prostitution policy has often appeared to be rather more the reverse. Not only does Jeffreys disregard the fact that in most cases prostitution has moved from being regulated and tolerated to being legally repressed, but she ascribes the changes in commercial sex (i.e., its criminal organization and 'industrialization') to the vagaries of 'economic and social forces'. She completely ignores the possibility, in other words, that the criminalization of commercial sex may have augmented its harms and influenced its 'industrialization'.<sup>15</sup> On the other hand, some commentators and politicians have suggested the policy of government regulation, proposing a kind of quarantining of commercial sex in marginal urban 'tolerance zones', as though it were an entirely novel approach, ignoring the fact that similar systems had been in effect all over Europe for much of the nineteenth century.<sup>16</sup> Amid these almost cyclical discussions, one cannot help but remember Alison Neilans's unanswered call: that we ought to secure 'legal justice for the common prostitute, before we set out to reform her'.

In London between 1885 and 1960, prostitution was connected in symbolic and practical ways to women's labour and the women's movement, to the changing meaning of public space, and to the development of the real estate, entertainment and leisure industry of the capital. Prostitution entwined itself with issues of migration in the form of sex trafficking, and ideas about commercial sex were frequently entangled with concepts of race and citizenship. Prostitution helped colour and characterize the geography of the metropolis, and played a key role in concerns about urban decay and dislocation. The bureaucracy of the Metropolitan Police, the Police Courts and the Home Office regularly adapted itself to cope with the problems inherent in the control of prostitution at street level, struggling to translate legislation into practical policing through improving systems of identification and record-keeping, standardizing police procedure, and employing methods of back-door regulation in their battle against the commercial and human forces of the sex industry. Prostitution was an enormously complex social phenomenon, woven into an ever-changing metropolitan landscape.

Yet, at other moments, prostitution was just part of the life of – contrary to Wolfenden's distinctions – an 'ordinary' woman: Marthe Watts facing the infamous pimp Gino Messina beside the Summer House in Hyde Park in 1942, and agreeing to his offer to join the 'family'; Nellie Johnson having her fingers rolled onto a sheet of white paper at Tottenham Court Road police station in 1920; Lydia Harvey lying alone in a bed in the London hospital for venereal disease in 1910; Nellie Thompson riding in a horse-drawn brougham in 1885, on her way to Chelsea to whip wealthy men at a high-class brothel. With such grand narratives and significances set alongside these diverse and plural stories, and amid the false dichotomies and shaky definitions that divide 'common prostitutes' from 'ordinary citizens', the words of feminist and campaigner Maude Royden, who frequently

commented on prostitution in the early twentieth century, ring true. 'The problem is one of infinite complexity ...' she wrote; 'those who constitute it are human beings'.<sup>17</sup>

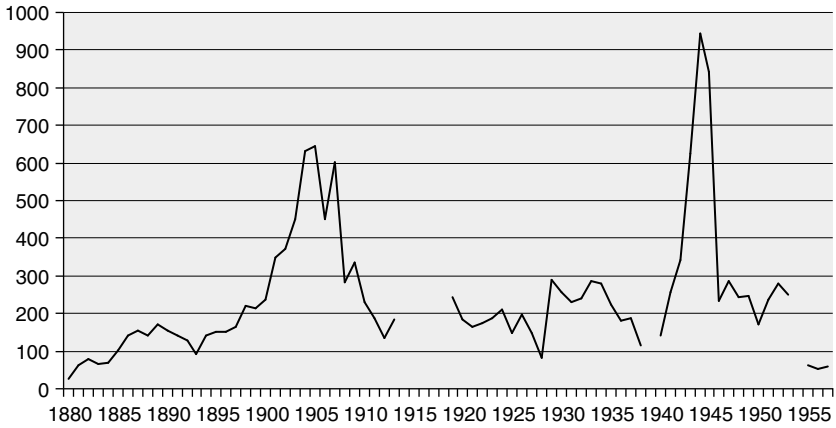
Alison Neilans, in the quote which opens this book, invites us to think of prostitution not only as a subject of legal intervention, but to consider 'common prostitutes' as perpetual victims of a deep historical injustice. Prostitution has always been imagined historically, evidenced by our culture's common, if flawed, use of the 'oldest profession' aphorism.<sup>18</sup> Prostitution has long been a subject of popular history, and both early and later works of varying scholarly merit have surveyed prostitution as a global and ancient historical phenomenon, preoccupied with the antiquity of prostitution as well as its link to the birth of civilization. Some present-day historians even appear surprised at how little it has changed over time.<sup>19</sup> However, not only has the practice of prostitution in fact changed very significantly over time, but these ideas about prostitution's static and eternal nature and its inevitability are directly related to the circular and repetitive ideas that surround it, in the past and in the present. In this way, a historical account is uniquely poised not only to highlight injustices, but also to assess the real impact of laws and policies directed against prostitution, which, while always changing, also display a curious and disturbing continuity both in their outcomes and in the ideologies that underlie them. Historical perspective can help to disrupt our complacencies about prostitution, and challenge our most fundamental ideas about what it was, what it is, and how we deal with it.

# Appendix

*Table A.1* Arrests for solicitation offences in England and Wales and London compared

Year	Arrests <sup>1</sup> (England & Wales)	Arrests <sup>2</sup> (London)	London arrests as % of E & W total
1906	10,873	4,577	42
1910	11,458	4,818	42
1915	6,915	3,361	49
1920	5,743	2,538	44
1925	3,222	1,683	52
1930	1,161	723	62
1935	3,303	2,870	87
1940	1,809	1,585	88
1945	2,117	1,983	94
1950	6,868	6,501	95
1955	11,916	11,173	94

*Note:* This table, in which London arrests reach an incredible ninety-four per cent of national arrests, is probably testament to the unreliability of statistical reporting either in the Metropolis or in the criminal statistics, or both. However, it does also indicate that there was almost certainly a rise in London's prominence in national arrests for prostitution, and perhaps a corresponding rise in incidences of prostitution itself.



*Figure A.1* Prosecutions for brothel-related crimes, 1880–1957

*Note:* Before 1930, these statistics come from the Annual Reports of the Metropolitan Police Commissioner. After 1930, they are from unpublished police returns in London, N.A., HO 45/21766. However, there are some serious problems with these records. Until 1893, for instance, they were combined with arrests for ‘keeping a disorderly house’, which could refer to brothels but could also refer to unruly clubs, gambling dens or unlicensed establishments. On the other hand, they are separated after 1893, and, while many disorderly house convictions after this date remained non-brothel-related, many others may well have been used to target prostitution on the premises.<sup>3</sup> Before 1893, in other words, brothels are lost amidst disorderly house prosecutions; after 1893, brothels that continued to be prosecuted as disorderly houses, rather than under the 1885 Criminal Law Amendment Act, are also invisible in the statistics. These statistics also do not include the number of premises shut down under the Aliens Restriction Order of 1916, and later Act of 1919, nor do they reflect any violations of massage, music and dancing, clubs, or taxi licences and registrations that were prosecuted by the London County Council, Borough Councils, police or Home Office. In other words, the table above very poorly reflects not only the amount of off-street prostitution that was happening but also action taken against it. The empty parts of the graph represent years for which no statistics are available.

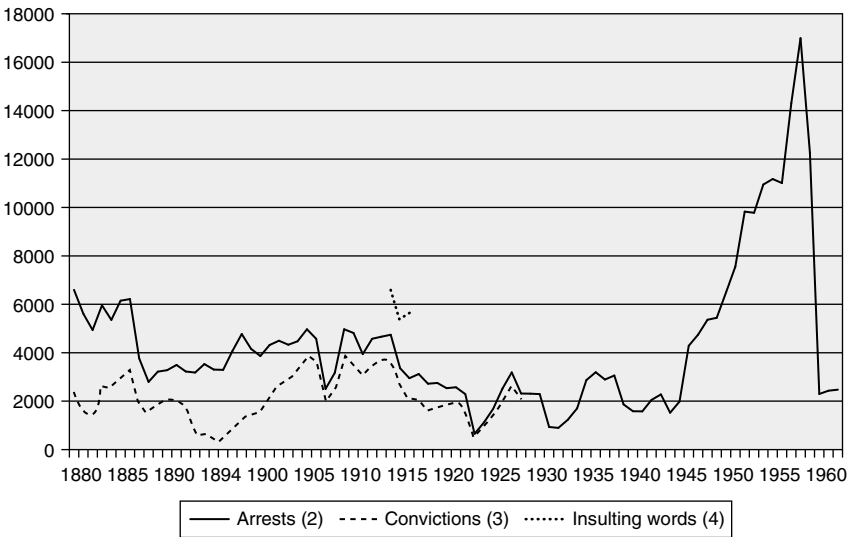


Figure A.2 Arrests and convictions for solicitation-related offences, 1880–1962

Notes: Until 1893, reporting of statistics more generally and solicitation arrests more specifically was highly inconsistent, and often included information on the non-existent charge ‘drunk and disorderly prostitute’. In 1892, a Departmental Committee recommended methods to better standardize and systematize criminal statistics, which were put into practice in 1893. Statistics therefore become more reliable after 1893, but the dip in conviction rates shown in the 1890s is in part to do with a change in reporting procedures, and in part to do with an actual change in magisterial practice (perhaps in the shadow of the Cass case).<sup>4</sup>

Up until 1930, these statistics are sourced from the Annual Reports of the Metropolitan Police Commissioner; after which time they come from London, TNA, HO 45/21766 and HO 345/8 p1. Conviction statistics are only reliably available until 1930 but appear to follow very closely behind arrest statistics; convictions resulted from ninety per cent of arrests by 1930. In all of England and Wales, conviction rates reached an incredible 99–99.75 per cent in the 1950s.<sup>5</sup>

Insulting words and behaviour arrests were only firmly reported in relation to solicitation in the war years; for 1914, 1915 and the first six months of 1916. I have included them here (represented by the short dotted line) in order to make the suggestion that, if they continued to be employed as they were during the war to arrest unknown women (i.e., not ‘common prostitutes’) for solicitation, this would have dramatically affected the reported arrests and seriously challenges the perceived decline in solicitation and/or its policing. I very roughly obtained the 1916 annual number by multiplying the number from the first six months; the police themselves in the returns suggested that the next six months would likely continue the arrest trend.<sup>6</sup>

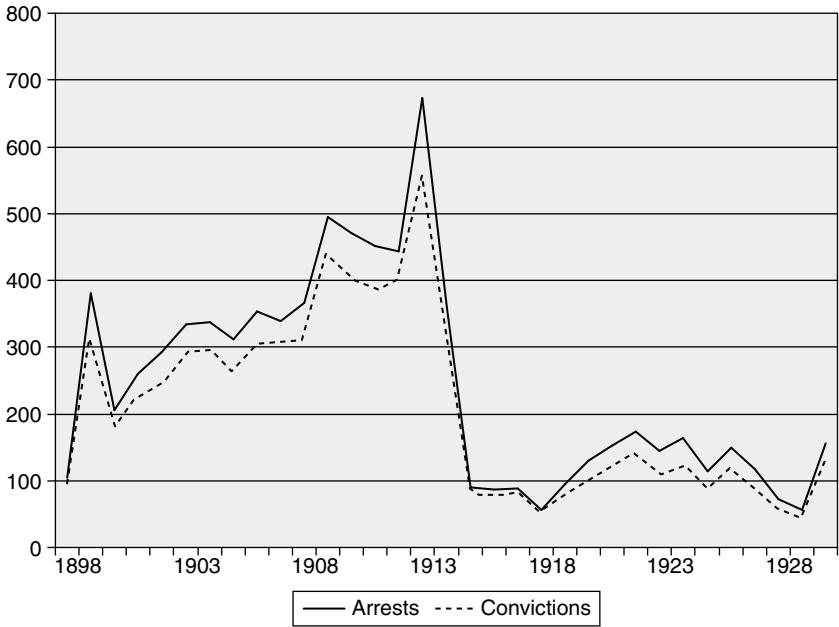


Figure A.3 Arrests and convictions for ‘living on immoral earnings’, etc., 1893–1930

Note: This offence, created by an Amendment to the Vagrancy Act in 1898, is only reported in the Annual Reports of the Metropolitan Police Commissioner until 1930. Corresponding statistics after this date from England and Wales combine ‘living on immoral earnings’ offences with ‘gross indecency between males’, making it impossible to compare.<sup>7</sup> Note also that after 1912 these statistics included prosecutions under the new Criminal Law Amendment Act, which amended the 1898 law to include ‘controlling or directing the movements of a prostitute’.



# Notes

## Acknowledgements

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## Introduction: Criminalizing Commercial Sex

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4. I turn to legal philosopher Noah Zatz for this book's working definition of prostitution as the act of 'attending to the sexual desires of a particular individual (or individuals) with bodily acts in exchange for payment for money'. Noah D. Zatz, 'Sex Work/Sex Act: Law, Labor, and Desire in Constructions of Prostitution', *Signs* 22, no. 2 (1997): 279.
5. Helen J. Self, *Prostitution, Women and the Misuse of the Law: The Fallen Daughters of Eve* (London, 2003), pp. 292–3.
6. August Bebel, *Women under Socialism* (Fairfield, Gloucestershire, 2009), p. 143.
7. Hubert Stringer, *Moral Evil in London* (London, 1925), p. VII.
8. Gail Pheterson, *The Prostitution Prism* (Amsterdam, 1996), p. 7.
9. As Elizabeth Clement put it in a recent review, prostitution is 'a lens through which we see the development of the modern West'. Elizabeth Clement, 'Prostitution', in *Palgrave Advances in the Modern History of Sexuality*, eds H.G. Cocks and Matt Houlbrook (Houndsmills, Basingstoke, 2006), p. 212.
10. For earlier works which survey the global history of prostitution, see Abraham Flexner, *Prostitution in Europe*, Prostitution ed. (London, 1914) and William Sangner, *The History of Prostitution: Its Extent, Causes and Effects Throughout the World* (New York, 1913). For more recent surveys, see, for instance, Vern Bullough and Bonnie Bullough, *Women and Prostitution: A Social History* (Buffalo, 1987); Neil Philip, *Working Girls: An Illustrated History of the Oldest Profession* (London, 1991); Fernando Henriques, *Prostitution and Society, Vol I: Primitive, Classical, and Oriental* (London, 1962); Nils Johan Ringdal, *Love for Sale: A Global History of Prostitution* (London, 2004); Nicki Roberts, *Whores in History: Prostitution in Western Society* (London, 1992); George Riley Scott, *Ladies of Vice: A History of Prostitution from Antiquity to the Present Day (the Story of Prostitution, Unabridged, Unexpurgated, Uncensored: A Salacious Reprinting of the Original)* (London, 1968) and Richard Symanski, *The Immoral Landscape: Female Prostitution in Western Societies* (Toronto, 1981). Texts on prostitution in the period in question also frequently feature lengthy historical introductions, tracing the pedigrees of prostitution around the world into antiquity. For a selection of these, see T.E. James, *Prostitution and the Law* (Altrincham, 1951), J.G. Mancini, *Prostitutes*

- and *Their Parasites*, trans. D.G. Thomas (London, 1963) and M. Ranga Rao and J.V. Raghavender Rao, *The Prostitutes of Hyderabad: A Study of the Socio-Cultural Conditions of the Prostitutes of Hyderabad* (Hyderabad, 1970(?)).
11. For Europe, see, for instance, Alain Corbin, *Women for Hire: Prostitution and Sexuality in France after 1850*, trans. Alan Sheridan (Cambridge, MA and London, 1990) and Jill Harsin, *Policing Prostitution in Nineteenth Century Paris* (Princeton, NJ, 1985); for similar systems of regulation in other parts of Continental Europe, see Laurie Bernstein, *Sonia's Daughters: Prostitutes and Their Regulation in Imperial Russia* (Berkeley, CA, 1995) and Mary Gibson, *Prostitution and the State in Italy, 1860–1915* (New Brunswick and London, 1986); Julia Roos, 'Weimar's Crisis through the Lens of Gender: The Case of Prostitution' (PhD, Carnegie Mellon University, 2001). For a selection of the vast literature on prostitution and legal and social reform in the United States, see Anne M. Butler, *Daughters of Joy, Sisters of Misery: Prostitutes in the American West, 1865–1890* (Urbana, IL, 1985); Elizabeth Clement, *Love for Sale: Courting, Treating, and Prostitution in New York City, 1900–1945* (Raleigh, 2006); Mark Thomas Connelly, *The Response to Prostitution in the Progressive Era* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1980); Timothy J. Gilfoyle, *City of Eros: New York City, Prostitution, and the Commercialization of Sex, 1790–1920* (New York and London, 1992); Marilyn Wood Hill, *Their Sisters' Keepers: Prostitution in New York City, 1830–1870* (Berkeley, CA and London, 1993); Alan Hunt, *Governing Morals: A Social History of Moral Regulation* (Cambridge, 1999), pp. 110–39; Jan MacKell, *Brothels, Bordellos and Bad Girls: Prostitution in Colorado, 1860–1930* (Albuquerque, 2004); Thomas C. Mackey, *Pursuing Johns: Criminal Law Reform, Defending Character, and New York City's Committee of Fourteen, 1920–1930* (Columbus, 2005); David J. Pivar, *Purity and Hygiene: Women, Prostitution, and the 'American Plan,' 1900–1930* (Westport, CT and London, 2002) and Ruth Rosen, *The Lost Sisterhood: Prostitution in America, 1900–1919* (Baltimore and London, 1982). For other parts of the world, see, for instance, Donna J. Guy, *Sex & Danger in Buenos Aires: Prostitution, Family, and Nation in Argentina* (London, 1991); Donna J. Guy, *White Slavery and Mothers Alive and Dead: The Troubled Meeting of Sex, Gender, Public Health, and Progress in Latin America* (London, 2000); Gail Hershatter, *Dangerous Pleasures: Prostitution and Modernity in Twentieth Century Shanghai* (Berkeley, CA, 1997) and Luise White, *The Comforts of Home: Prostitution in Colonial Nairobi* (Chicago, IL and London, 1990).
  12. Judith Walkowitz, *Prostitution and Victorian Society: Women, Class & the State* (Cambridge, 1980); Lucy Bland, *Banishing the Beast: English Feminism and Sexual Morality 1885–1914* (London, 1995); Helen Self, *Prostitution Women and the Misuse of the Law: The Fallen Daughters of Eve* (London, 2003).
  13. Stefan Petrow, *Policing Morals: The Metropolitan Police and the Home Office, 1870–1914* (Oxford, 1993).
  14. Paula Bartley, *Prostitution: Prevention and Reform in England, 1860–1914* (London, 2000); LINDA Mahood, *The Magdalenes: Prostitution in the Nineteenth Century*; (London, 1990); Francis Finnegan, *Poverty and Prostitution: A Study of Victorian Prostitutes in York* (New York, 1990); Daniel Walkowitz and Judith Walkowitz, 'We are not Beasts of the Field': Prostitution and the Poor in Plymouth and Southampton under the Contagious Diseases Acts; *Feminist Studies*, 1, no 2–3 (1978) 73–106.
  15. Philip Howell, *Geographies of Regulation: Policing Prostitution in Nineteenth Century Britain and the Empire* (Cambridge, 2009).
  16. Mr Hopwood, 9 July 1885, *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates* (London, 1885), pp. 200–1.
  17. *The Times*, 11 July 1885, 11C.

18. Josephine Butler to Mary Priestman, 5 November 1894, as cited in Lucy Bland, *Banishing the Beast: English Feminism and Sexual Morality, 1885–1914* (London, 1995), p. 96.
19. Alison Nielans, 'The League of Nations and the Traffic in Women', *The Shield*, 4, no. 1 (1923): 6.
20. Sheila Jeffries, *The Spinster and Her Enemies: Feminism and Sexuality 1880–1930*, p. 1.
21. For conceptualizations of prostitution as sin, crime or transgression before 1885, see Amanda Anderson, *Tainted Souls and Painted Faces: The Rhetoric of Fallenness in Victorian Culture* (Ithaca, NY and London, 1993); Jessica Hollis, 'Prostitution in the Long Eighteenth Century', *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 40, no. 2 (2007): 340–5; Eric Trudgill, *Madonnas and Magdalens: The Origins and Development of Victorian Sexual Attitudes* (London, 1976); on prostitution as a social problem in medieval England, see Ruth Mazo Karras, *Common Women: Prostitution and Sexuality in Medieval England* (New York and Oxford, 1996).
22. M.J.D. Roberts, *Making English Morals: Voluntary Association and Moral Reform in England, 1787–1886* (Cambridge, 2004), pp. 1–58. For the development of Magdalene penitentiaries and the eighteenth-century prostitute reform movement, see Edward J. Bristow, *Vice and Vigilance: Purity Movements in Britain since 1700* (Dublin, 1977), pp. 51–74; Vern Bullough, 'Prostitution and Reform in Eighteenth Century England', *Eighteenth Century Life* 9, no. 3 (1885); Sarah Lloyd, 'Pleasure's Golden Bait: Prostitution, Poverty and the Magdalen Hospital in Eighteenth-Century London', *History Workshop Journal* 41 (1996): 50–70; for new waves of moral reform in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, see Hunt, *Governing Morals*, pp. 28–75 and Roberts, *Making English Morals*, pp. 17–95; and, for the later nineteenth century, see Bristow, *Vice and Vigilance*, pp. 74–124; Lynda Nead, *Victorian Babylon: People, Streets and Images in Nineteenth-Century London* (New Haven, CT and London, 2000), pp. 161–88 and Roberts, *Making English Morals*, pp. 59–142.
23. On Parent-Duchâtelet's influence in France, see Alain Corbin, *Les Filles De Noce*, trans. Alan Sheridan (Paris, 1978), pp. 13–53; for his influence on British policy, see Judith R. Walkowitz, *Prostitution and Victorian Society: Women, Class and the State* (Cambridge, 1980), pp. 36–9.
24. Roberts, *Making English Morals*, pp. 96–192 and Hunt, *Governing Morals*, p. 2.
25. See Bartley, *Prostitution*, pp. 25–6; Francis Finnegan, *Do Penance or Perish: A Study of Magdalene Asylums in Ireland* (Kilkenny, 2001); Rene Koller, 'Magdalenes and Nuns: Convent Laundries in Late Victorian England', *Anglican and Episcopal History* 73, no. 3 (2004): 309–34; Deborah Logan, 'An "Outstretched Hand to the Fallen": The *Magdalen's Friend* and the Victorian Reclamation Movement', *Victorian Periodicals Review* 31, no. 2 (1998): 125–41; Susan Mumm, '"Not Worse Than Other Girls": The Convent-Based Rehabilitation of Fallen Women in Victorian Britain', *Journal of Social History* 29, no. 3 (1996): 527–46; Linda Mahood, 'The Magdalene's Friend: Prostitution and Social Control in Glasgow, 1869–1890', *Women's Studies International Forum* 13, no. 1/2 (1990): 49–61.
26. For the idea of fallenness, see Anderson, *Tainted Souls*.
27. William Lecky, *A History of European Morals from Augustus to Charlemagne* (New York, 1869), pp. 282–3.
28. For policies on street prostitution in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, see Bristow, *Vice and Vigilance* and Tony Henderson, *Disorderly Women in Eighteenth Century London: Prostitution and Control in the Metropolis, 1730–1830* (London,

- 1999). Philip Howell has pointed out that systems of regulation were in place in Cambridge and Oxford during this period (Philip Howell, *Geographies of Regulation: Policing Prostitution in Nineteenth-Century Britain and the Empire* (Cambridge, 2009), pp. 113–51) and that some police forces may have enacted de facto kinds of spatial regulation (pp. 76–112). On the visibility of prostitution in eighteenth-century London, see Roy Porter and Lesley Hall, *The Facts of Life: The Creation of Sexual Knowledge in Britain, 1650–1950* (New Haven, CT and London, 1995), pp. 24–7.
29. Lecky, *A History of European Morals*, 282–3.
  30. Michael Mason, *The Making of Victorian Sexual Attitudes* (Oxford, 1994), pp. 49–63, 72–3; for the sentimentalized status of the prostitute, see Anderson, *Tainted Souls*, pp. 43–64; for ‘necessary evil’ and St Augustine, see Henderson, *Disorderly Women*, pp. 82–3.
  31. 1824 Vagrancy Act (5. Geo.IV) Ch. 83, s.3, 4 and 5.
  32. 1839 Metropolitan Police Act (2 & 3 Vict.) Ch. 47, s. 54 (11).
  33. 1847 Town Police Clauses Act (10 & 11 Vict.) Ch. 89.
  34. William Acton, *Prostitution* (New York, 1968).
  35. These Acts form the centrepiece of Walkowitz, *Prostitution and Victorian Society*, which helped to open the field for serious historical research into prostitution. The CD Acts continue to preoccupy the historiography of prostitution, which includes reassessments of their importance in the British Empire and at home; see, for instance, Howell, *Geographies of Regulation*, pp. 28–75 and Philippa Levine, *Prostitution, Race and Politics: Policing Venereal Disease in the British Empire* (London, 2003). See also Frank Mort, *Dangerous Sexualities: Medico-Moral Politics in England since 1830*, 2nd edn (London, 2000), pp. 65–86; Miles Ogborn, ‘Law and Discipline in Nineteenth Century English State Formation: The Contagious Diseases Acts of 1864, 1866, and 1869’, *Journal of Historical Sociology* 6, no. 1 (1993); and F.B. Smith, ‘The Contagious Diseases Acts Reconsidered’, *Social History of Medicine* 3, no. 2 (1990). Despite their prominence in the historiography, Philip Howell argues – quite rightly, I feel – that their importance in the overall story of regulation and prostitution control more generally has been exaggerated, while their specific parameters have often been overlooked. Howell, *Geographies of Regulation*, p. 30.
  36. Hunt, *Governing Morals*, p. 9.
  37. For the international dimensions of the campaign, see Anne Summers, ‘Which Women? What Europe? Josephine Butler and the International Abolitionist Federation’, *History Workshop Journal* 1, no. 62 (2006): 214–31; Natalia Gerodetti, ‘“Lay Experts”: Women’s Social Purity Groups and the Politics of Sexuality in Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century Switzerland’, *Women’s History Review* 13, no. 4 (2004): 585–610; and Karen Offen, ‘Madame Gheacutenia Avril De Sainte-Croix, the Josephine Butler of France’, *Women’s History Review* 17, no. 2 (2008): 239–55.
  38. Walkowitz, *Prostitution and Victorian Society*; Judith R. Walkowitz, ‘Male Vice and Feminist Virtue: Feminism and the Politics of Prostitution in Nineteenth Century Britain’, *History Workshop Journal* 13 (1982): 79–93; Judith R. Walkowitz and Daniel J. Walkowitz, ‘“We Are Not Beasts of the Field”, 73–106; for critiques of the impact of these Acts, see Howell, *Geographies of Regulation*, pp. 54–73 and Catherine Lee, ‘Policing Prostitution in Kent, 1860–1880’ (paper presented at the Social History Annual Conference, University of Exeter, 31 March – 2 April 2007).
  39. See, for instance, Bland, *Banishing the Beast*; Lesley A. Hall, *Sex, Gender and Social Change in Britain since 1880* (Houndsmill, 2000) and Walkowitz, ‘Male Vice and Feminist Virtue’. Even Josephine Butler herself grew concerned with the campaign’s legacy. Josephine Butler, ‘Dangers of Legislation; an Address Given to the

- Meeting of the Friends' Association for the Abolition of the State Regulation of Vice, May 24th, 1883', *The Shield*, June 1918.
40. Julia Ann Laite, 'The Association for Moral and Social Hygiene, Abolitionism, and Prostitution Law in Britain, 1915–1959', *Women's History Review* 17, no. 2 (2008): 207–23.
  41. For more on how concerns about Juvenile prostitution developed in Britain, see Alyson Brown and David Barrett, *Knowledge of Evil. Child Prostitution and Child Sexual Abuse in Twentieth Century England* (Collumpton, Deron, 2002).
  42. Alfred S. Dyer, *The European Slave Trade in English Girls*, 6th edn (London, 1882), p. 5; *First and Second Report from the Select Committee on the Law Relating to the Protection of Young Girls*, 1881 and 1882, XIII, III.
  43. Summers, 'Which Women? What Europe?': 214–31.
  44. Roberts, *Making English Morals*, pp. 250–67.
  45. Hunt, *Governing Morals*, pp. 78, 94–109, 140–91.
  46. 1885 Criminal Law Amendment Act (48 and 49 Victoria) ch. 69. For historical work on British age of consent legislation and the protection of the child, see Deborah Gorham, 'The "Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon" Re-Examined: Child Prostitution and the Idea of Childhood in Late-Victorian England', *Victorian Studies* 21, no. 3 (1978): 253–80; Louise Jackson, *Child Sexual Abuse in Victorian England* (London, 2000); Margaret Jackson, *The Real Facts of Life: Feminism and the Politics of Sexuality, 1840–1940* (Abingdon, Oxon, 2006) and Marilyn Moore, 'Social Control or Protection of the Child? The Debates on the Industrial Schools Acts 1857 – 1894', *Family History* 33, no. 4 (2008): 359–87.
  47. Walkowitz, *Prostitution and Victorian Society*, pp. 250.
  48. Bland, *Banishing the Beast*, pp. 98–105.
  49. W.T. Stead, 'The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon', Part I, *Pall Mall Gazette*, 6 July 1885.
  50. Rebecca Jarrett, 'Untitled Autobiography (c. 1928)', *History Workshop Journal* 58, no. 1 (2004): 254–8 and Pamela J. Walker, 'The Conversion of Rebecca Jarrett', *History Workshop Journal* 58, no. 1 (2004): 247–53.
  51. *New York Times*, 7 September 1885: 11; see also 'A Demonstration in Hyde Park', *The Times*, 24 August 1885, 6B.
  52. For some of the first narrative historical accounts of the events surrounding this legislation, see Michael Pearson, *The Age of Consent: Victorian Prostitution and Its Enemies* (Newton Abbot, 1972) and Charles Terrot, *The Maiden Tribute* (London, 1959).
  53. *New York Times*, 7 September 1885.
  54. Bartley, *Prostitution*; Laite, 'The Association for Moral and Social Hygiene'; Lesley Hall, 'Hauling Down the Double Standard: Feminism, Social Purity and Sexual Science in Late Nineteenth-Century Britain', *Gender and History* 16, no. 1 (2004): 36–56; Hunt, *Governing Morals*, p. 12. On the social purity movement in Britain and its intersection with British feminism, see Bartley, *Prostitution*; Bland, *Banishing the Beast*; Bristow, *Vice and Vigilance*, pp. 74–124; Hall, 'Hauling Down the Double Standard'; Hall, *Sex, Gender and Social Change*, pp. 30–47; Hunt, *Governing Morals*; Jackson, *The Real Facts of Life*; Sheila Jeffreys, *The Spinster and Her Enemies: Feminism and Sexuality, 1880–1930* (London, 1985); Susan Kingsley Kent, *Sex and Suffrage* (Princeton, NJ, 1990); Linda Mahood, *The Magdalenes*; Paul McHugh, *Prostitution and Victorian Social Reform* (London, 1980); Mort, *Dangerous Sexualities*, pp. 103–209; Edward Mynott, 'Purity, Prostitution and Politics: Social Purity in Manchester, 1880–1900' (PhD, University of Manchester, 1995); M.J.D. Roberts, 'Feminism and the State in Later Victorian England', *The Historical Journal* 38, no. 1 (1995); Roberts, *Making English Morals*, pp. 245–90; Walkowitz,

- Prostitution and Victorian Society*, pp. 246–56; Walkowitz, ‘Male Vice and Feminist Virtue’ and Jeffrey Weeks, *Sex, Politics and Society: The Regulation of Sexuality since 1800* (London, 1981), ch. 5.
55. Rachel Schreiber, ‘Before Their Makers and Their Judges: Prostitutes and White Slaves in the Political Cartoons of the “Masses” (New York, 1911–1917)’, *Feminist Studies* 35, no. 1 (2009): 163–4. For contemporary British socialist and libertarian critiques, see, for instance, George Bernard Shaw, ‘The Root of the White Slave Traffic’, *The Awakener*, November 1912: 7–8; A. Neil Lyons, *White Slaves and Nasty Nonsense* (London, 1912); and Bertrand Russell, ‘The Recrudescence of Puritanism’, in *Sceptical Essays* (London, 1928).
  56. *Evening Standard* as cited in *New York Times*, 7 September 1885: 11.
  57. As cited in Bland, *Banishing the Beast*, p. 107.
  58. Walkowitz, *Prostitution and Victorian Society*, p. 131.
  59. *Ibid.*
  60. Sue Morgan, ‘“Wild Oats or Acorns?” Social Purity, Sexual Politics and the Response of the Late-Victorian Church’, *Journal of Religious History* 31, no. 2 (2007): 151–68.
  61. For the American reform tradition, progressivism and prostitution see, for instance, Connelly, *The Response to Prostitution*; Barbara Meil Hobson, *Uneasy Virtue: The Politics of Prostitution and the American Reform Tradition: With a New Preface* (Chicago, IL, 1990) and Pivar, *Purity and Hygiene*.
  62. Susan D. Pennybacker, *A Vision for London, 1889–1914: Labour, Everyday Life and the LCC Experiment* (London and New York, 1995) and Chris Waters, ‘Progressives, Puritans, and the Cultural Politics of the Council, 1889–1914’, in *Politics and the People of London: The London County Council 1889–1965*, ed. Andrew Saint (London, 1989), pp. 49–70.
  63. Philip Howell posits that there was much room for municipal corruption in the administration of prostitution law (Howell, *Geographies of Regulation*, p. 92), while Timothy Gilfoyle makes a more explicit case for its existence in turn-of-the-century New York City (Gilfoyle, *City of Eros*, pp. 119–42).
  64. See Stephen Inwood, ‘Policing London’s Morals: The Metropolitan Police and Popular Culture, 1829–1850’, *London Journal* 15, no. 2 (1990): 129–46 and Stefan Petrow, *Policing Morals: The Metropolitan Police and the Home Office, 1870–1914* (Oxford, 1994).
  65. Edward Bradford to Home Office, ‘Memorandum, Prostitutes in the Street’, 1 November 1901, London, N.A., HO 45/10123/B13517.
  66. Edward Bradford to an Assistant Undersecretary of State (Ernley Blackwell), 15 July 1909, London, N.A., MEPO 2/1287.
  67. Charles Thompson Ritchie to City of Westminster Deputation, 17 December 1901, London, N.A., HO 45/10123/B13517; Police Notebook, c. 1898, Charles Booth Survey Documents, London, LSE Archives, B358, 85–7.
  68. Cecil Chapman, *The Poor Man’s Court of Justice: Twenty-Five Years as a Metropolitan Magistrate* (London, 1925), p. 12.
  69. Jennifer Davis, ‘A Poor Man’s System of Justice: The London Police Courts in the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century’, *The Historical Journal* 27, no. 2 (1984): 13. Anne Logan’s recent work on female justices in Britain also highlights how important a role the magistrature played in the administration of criminal justice. Anne Logan, ‘Professionalism and the Impact of England’s First Women Justices, 1920–1950’, *Historical Journal* 49, no. 3 (2006): 833–50; see also Anne Logan, *Feminism and Criminal Justice: An Historical Perspective* (London, 2008).

70. For an analysis of the 'Maiden Tribute' narrative, see Judith R. Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London* (London, 1992), pp. 81–134.
71. For an analysis of some of these later narratives, see Adrian Bingham, *Family Newspapers? Sex, Private Life, and the British Popular Press, 1918–1978* (Oxford, 2009), pp. 159–200.
72. Ronald Weitzer, 'Legalizing Prostitution: Morality Politics in Western Australia', *British Journal of Criminology* 49 (2009): 88–105; Paul W. Werth, 'Through the Prison of Prostitution: State, Society and Power', *Social History* 19, no. 1 (1994): 1–15.
73. Weeks, *Sex, Politics and Society*, p. 15.
74. Simon Watney, as cited by Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight*, p. 121.
75. John Lea, *Crime and Modernity: Continuities in Left Realist Criminology* (London, 2002), p. 16.
76. Bartley, *Prostitution*, pp. 168–70; Petrow, *Policing Morals*, p. 146; Walkowitz, *Prostitution and Victorian Society*, pp. 251–2.
77. Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley, CA, 1984), p. xxiv.
78. Lea, *Crime and Modernity*, p. 48.
79. Henderson, *Disorderly Women*, pp. 76–165.
80. Ibid.
81. 'The city and the sexual,' writes Matt Houlbrook, 'appear culturally and conceptually inseparable.' Matt Houlbrook, 'Cities', in H.G. Cocks and Matt Houlbrook, p. 133.
82. *The Judicial Statistics of England and Wales, 1885–1930*.
83. Howell, *Geographies of Regulation*, 92–4.
84. Stefan Slater argues that the police pursued a policy of containment in London in this period, but offers very little evidence to support this. Stefan Slater, 'Containment : Managing Street Prostitution in London, 1918–1959', *Journal of British Studies* 49 no. 2 (2010): 332–57.
85. On the regulatory outcomes of the criminal law, see, for instance, Nicola Lacey, 'Criminalization as Regulation: The Role of the Criminal Law', in *Regulating Law*, ed. Christine Parker et al. (Oxford, 2004), pp. 144–68.
86. Howell, *Geographies of Regulation*, pp. 4–5.
87. Prostitution is frequently compared to abuses like slavery and domestic violence on the one hand, and sexualities like homosexuality on the other; however, what distinguishes it fundamentally is the fact that it involves an exchange of money. For more on the alternative economy of prostitution, see John Meadowcroft, 'Prostitution', in *Prohibitions*, ed. John Meadowcroft (London, 2008), pp. 178–95.
88. Ibid., p. xix.
89. Ibid.
90. Hershatter, *Dangerous Pleasures*, p. 27.
91. Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon, 1852*. Marx Engels Internet Archive. [www.marxists.org](http://www.marxists.org) (6 November 2004).
92. For some helpful words of warning and encouragement in the use of legal sources for histories of sexuality, see Matt Cook, 'Law', in H.G. Cocks and Matt Houlbrook, pp. 64–86.
93. For work on prostitution and venereal disease in Britain and the empire, see Levine, *Prostitution, Race and Politics* and Walkowitz, *Prostitution and Victorian Society*.

## 1 Selling Sex: Women, Work and Prostitution

1. See, for instance, *The Times*, 15 December 1880, 11A; 13 December 1881, 10A; 2 May 1884, 4D.
2. A.L. Harvey, 'Prostitution in Cardiff in 1908', *Archives* 25, no. 103 (2000): 117–22.
3. Jerry White, *London in the Nineteenth Century: A Human Awful Wonder of God* (London, 2007), pp. 115–20; David Englander, *Landlord and Tenant in Urban Britain, 1838–1918* (Oxford, 1983), pp. 33–50.
4. For Harvey see London, N.A., MEPO 3/197; for Thompson see Testimony of Nellie Thompson, 16 April 1885, Mary Jeffries Trial Transcript, London, N.A., HO 45/46/X124; for Hines see London, N.A., MEPO 3/1707.
5. *Daily Mail* and *Evening News*, 10–20 November 1888.
6. The very recently published memoir of Barbara Tate, who worked as a maid in 1940s Soho, provides another rare glimpse into the experiences of women selling sex and working in the sex industry in this period. Barbara Tate, *West End Girls* (London, 2010).
7. For more on crime writing and ghost-writing, see M. Houlbrook, 'Commodifying the Self Within: Crook Life Stories in Interwar Britain', unpublished paper read before the North American Conference on British Studies, Baltimore, 2010.
8. Marthe Watts, *The Men in My Life* (London, 1960).
9. These problems are also coupled with the fact that oral history evidence is largely unavailable: if women had worked as prostitutes as late in my time period as in the 1950s at the age of 25–30, it is unlikely that many would still be alive today and even less likely that I would be able to locate them for interview.
10. E.M. Turner, 'Review of *Downward Paths*', *The Shield*, July 1916: 211.
11. Corbin, *Women for Hire*, 53, as cited by Timothy J. Gilfoyle, 'Prostitutes in History: From Parables of Pornography to Metaphors of Modernity', *The American Historical Journal* 104, no. 1 (1999): 121.
12. Testimony of Mary Gordon, 1 December 1919, 'Committee of Enquiry into the State and Sexual Morality Minutes of Evidence', Records of the Association for Moral and Social Hygiene (hereafter Enq. Sexual Morality, AMSH Records), London, The Women's Library, 3AMS/B.
13. Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, 10th Anniversary Edition ed. (New York, 1999): 163–80; Denise Riley, *Am I That Name? Feminism and the Category of 'Women' in History* (Basingstoke, 1988); Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* (Harmondsworth, 1981). For a gendered look at labelling theory, see Edwin M. Schur, *Labeling Women Deviant: Gender, Stigma, and Social Control* (Philadelphia, PA, 1983).
14. Sheila Jeffreys, *The Idea of Prostitution* (Melbourne, 1997).
15. See the Testimony of W.H.J. Broderick, 1 December 1919, Enq. Sexual Morality, AMSH Records, London, The Women's Library, 3AMS/B. See also Matt Houlbrook, "'The Man with the Powder Puff' In Interwar London", *Historical Journal* 50, no. 1 (2007); Matt Houlbrook, *Queer London: Perils and Pleasures in the Sexual Metropolis* (Chicago, IL, 2005): 170; Jeffrey Weeks, 'Inverts, Perverts, and Mary Anns: Male Prostitution and the Regulation of Homosexuality in England in the Nineteenth Century', in *Hidden from History*, eds Martin Duberman, Martha Vicinus, and George Jr. Chauncey (New York, 1990), pp. 195–211; D. Romesburg, "'Wouldn't a Boy Do?" Placing Early Twentieth-Century Male Youth Sex Work into Histories of Sexuality', *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 18, no. 3 (2009): 367–92.
16. Bartley, *Prostitution*, pp. 94–115; Mahood, *The Magdalenes*, pp. 7–10.



17. Clement, *Love for Sale*.
18. Mahood, *The Magdalenes*, p. 12.
19. Acton, *Prostitution*, p. 32. For further discussion of moral reformers' estimates, see Michael Mason, *The Making of Victorian Sexuality* (Oxford, 1994), p. 73.
20. See the *Annual Reports of the Metropolitan Police Commissioner*.
21. For various discussions of the relationship between police statistics and actual crime rates see Howell, *Geographies of Regulation*, p. 86 and Howard Taylor, 'Rationing Crime: The Political Economy of Criminal Statistics since the 1850s', *Economic History Review* LI, no. 3 (1998): 569–90.
22. This observation was also made by more contemporary observers: see Mrs C. Neville Rolphe, 'Sex-Delinquency', in *The New Survey of London Life and Labour*, ed. Hubert Llewellyn Smith (London, 1935), pp. 288–96; Arthur Marwick, *The Deluge: British Society and the First World War* (Basingstoke, 2006), p. 110. These writers use arrest statistics as their evidence to support this decline.
23. Hera Cook, *The Long Sexual Revolution: English Women, Sex, and Contraception, 1800–1975* (Oxford, 2004), pp. 79, 198. Philip Howell also accepts this real fall in prostitution; Howell, *Geographies of Regulation*, pp. 79–80.
24. Lesley A. Hall, *Hidden Anxieties: Male Sexuality, 1900–1950* (Cambridge, 1991), pp. 51–3.
25. Neville Rolphe, 'Sex-Delinquency', p. 298.
26. H. Ward et al., 'Who Pays for Sex? An Analysis of the Increasing Prevalence of Female Commercial Sex Contacts among Men in Britain', *Sexually Transmitted Infections* 81, no. 6 (2005): 468.
27. G.P. Merrick, *Work among the Fallen as Seen from the Prison Cell* (London, n.d. [c. 1891]), pp. 22–5.
28. Hermann Mannheim, *Social Aspects of Crime in England between the Wars* (London, 1940), pp. 92–3, 266.
29. See, for instance, *First report of Her Majesty's Commissioners for Inquiring into the Housing of the Working Classes, 1884–85* [C.4402] [C.4402-I] [C.4402-II], pp. 13, 167.
30. Merrick, *Work among the Fallen*, pp. 31, 41; Walkowitz, *Prostitution and Victorian Society*, p. 261, n. 218.
31. Merrick, *Work among the Fallen*, p. 32.
32. Professor Burt's 1926 London study, as cited by Neville Rolphe, 'Sex-Delinquency', p. 307.
33. Thomas Holmes, *Pictures and Problems from London's Police Courts* (London, 1900), pp. 172–3.
34. W.T. Stead, 'The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon', Part II, *Pall Mall Gazette*, 7 July 1885.
35. Pearson, *The Age of Consent*, p. 12.
36. W.T. Stead, 'The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon', Part III, *Pall Mall Gazette*, 8 July 1885.
37. Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*, trans. Martin Milligan (Moscow, 1959), 15, 10.
38. Bernard Shaw, 'White Slave Traffic', pp. 7–8.
39. Francis Finnegan, *Poverty and Prostitution: A Study of Victorian Prostitutes in York* (New York, 1980), p. 215. On the workhouse, see Maria Luddy, *Prostitution and Irish Society, 1800–1940* (Cambridge, 2007), pp. 71–5 and Mary Higgs, *Glimpses into the Abyss* (London, 1906), pp. 262–3.

40. Walkowitz, *Prostitution and Victorian Society*, p. 19.
41. Gillian Ball, 'Practical Religion: A Study of the Salvation Army's Social Services for Women, 1884–1914' (Leicester, 1987), p. 104; Havelock Ellis, *Studies in the Psychology of Sex: Volume 6: Sex in Relation to Society* (Philadelphia, PA, 1920), p. 294; and Arthur Sherwell, *Life in West London: A Study and a Contrast* (London, 1892), chapter 5.
42. Neville Rolphe, 'Sex-Delinquency', pp. 302–3.
43. This was one of what Anderson calls the 'predelineated narratives' of 'fallenness'; Anderson, *Tainted Souls*, p. 12.
44. Stringer, *Moral Evil*, pp. 111–13.
45. Henry Mayhew, *London Labour and the London Poor: Volume IV: Those Who Will Not Work* (London, 1967), p. 224.
46. Report of Inspector Edmund Reid, H Division, 25 September 1888, London, N.A., MEPO 3/140.
47. Higgs, *Glimpses*, pp. 196–231.
48. See various lengthy reports in 'The Lambeth Murders', London, N.A., MEPO 3/144.
49. Merrick, *Work among the Fallen*, p. 18; Ellis, *Studies in the Psychology of Sex*, p. 294; Rosalind Wilkinson, *Women of the Streets: A Sociological Study of the Common Prostitute* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1955), p. 216.
50. Watts, *The Men in My Life*, p. 170.
51. Ellis, *Studies in the Psychology of Sex*, p. 288; see also Gilfoyle, 'Prostitutes in History': 135–37; Hershatter, *Dangerous Pleasures*.
52. Constance Tite, 'Is Rescue Work a Failure?', *The Shield*, 3, no. 3 (October 1916): 169.
53. See, for instance, Bartley, *Prostitution*, pp. 45–69; Paula Bartley, 'Preventing Prostitution: The Ladies' Association for the Care and Protection of Young Girls in Birmingham, 1887–1914', *Women's History Review* 7, no. 1 (1998): 49–54; Finnegan, *Do Penance or Perish*, passim; Luddy, *Prostitution and Irish Society*, pp. 84–5.
54. Stringer, *Moral Evil*, p. 100; for an overview of rescue homes and their operations in London, see pp. 138–63.
55. *Third Annual Report of the National Vigilance Association*, 1888, London, London Metropolitan Archives (LMA), A/FWA/C/D150/1.
56. Wilkinson, *Women of the Streets*, p. 233. For more on attitudes to clients, see various references in Tate, *West End Girls*.
57. Stringer, *Moral Evil*, p. 168; Mayhew, *London Labour and the London Poor*, pp. 240–52; Sangner, *History of Prostitution*, p. 319; Acton, *Prostitution*, p. 165. See also Mariana Valverde, 'The Love of Finery: Fashion and the Fallen Woman in Nineteenth-Century Social Discourse', *Victorian Studies* 32, no. 2 (1989).
58. Neville Rolphe, 'Sex-Delinquency', p. 311.
59. Stringer, *Moral Evil*, p. 168.
60. On women, sexuality and feeble-mindedness, see Bartley, *Prostitution*, pp. 119–54; on contemporary psychology, see T. Agoston, 'Some Psychological Aspects of Prostitution: The Pseudo-Personality', *The International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 26 (1945); Edward Glover, 'The Abnormality of Prostitution', in *Women*, ed. A.M. Kritch (New York, 1953); Edward Glover, *The Psychopathology of Prostitution* (London, 1957).
61. As cited in Neville Rolphe, 'Sex-Delinquency', pp. 308, 311.
62. Stringer, *Moral Evil*, p. 168. This was in keeping with changing attitudes toward crime in nineteenth and early twentieth-century Britain; see Martin J. Wiener, *Reconstructing the Criminal: Culture, Law and Policy in England, 1830–1914* (Cambridge, 1990), p. 256.

63. Lilian Wyles, *A Woman at Scotland Yard: Reflections on the Struggles and Achievements of Thirty Years in the Metropolitan Police* (London, 1952), pp. 88–9.
64. Mary Chesterton, *Women of the Underworld* (London, 1928), p. 171.
65. *Ibid.*, p. 156; Maude Royden, ed., *Downward Paths: An Inquiry into the Causes Which Contribute to the Making of the Prostitute* (London: G. Bell and Sons Ltd, 1916), pp. 34–5, 65–9.
66. Constance Tite, 'Is Rescue Work a Failure?': 169.
67. 'Selections from the Report of the COPEC Commission', *The Shield*, 1924, 4, 4: 163.
68. Wilkinson, *Women of the Streets*, p. 35.
69. *Ibid.*, p. 166.
70. Police Notebook, c. 1898, Charles Booth Survey Documents, London, London School of Economics and Political Sciences (LSE) Archives, B355, 39.
71. Anonymous, *My Secret Life* (London, 1995), p. 11.
72. *Ibid.*
73. Police Notebook, c. 1898, Charles Booth Survey Documents, London, LSE Archives, B371, 140–1.
74. Police Notebook, c. 1898, Charles Booth Survey Documents, London, LSE Archives, B355, 39.
75. Mary Gordon, *Penal Discipline* (London, 1922), p. 85.
76. Martin A. Monto, 'Prostitutes' Customers: Motives and Misconceptions', in *Sex for Sale: Prostitution, Pornography, and the Sex Industry*, ed. Ronald Weitzer (New York, 2010), p. 242.
77. Anonymous, *My Secret Life*, pp. 1,109, 1,290.
78. Wilkinson, *Women of the Streets*, pp. 59–60.
79. *Ibid.*, p. 60.
80. *Ibid.*, pp. 82–4.
81. Anonymous, *My Secret Life*.
82. Police Notebook, c. 1898, Charles Booth Survey Documents, London, LSE Archives, B355, 39.
83. 'Observations on Charles Peneau', 18 May 1910, London, N.A., MEPO 2/9998.
84. Statement of Lydia Rhodda Harvey, 13 July 1910, London, N.A., MEPO 3/197.
85. Basil E. Wedmore Testimony, 27 January 1919, Enq. Sexual Morality, AMSH Records, London, The Women's Library, 3AMS/B.
86. Hubert Llewellyn Smith and London School of Economics, *The New Survey of London Life and Labour* (London, 1930), p. 136.
87. *Ibid.*, pp. 115–16.
88. Watts, *The Men in My Life*, p. 231.
89. Wilkinson, *Women of the Streets*, p. 84.
90. Testimony of PC Scarborough and PC Anderson, 8 November 1954 and Police Commissioner Nott-Bower, 9 November 1954 to the Wolfenden Committee, London, N.A., HO 345/12.
91. Holmes, *Pictures and Problems*, p. 162; Industrial Schools Amendment Act, 1880 (43 & 44 Vic, ch. 15); Children's Act, 1908 (8 Edw.7, ch. 67).
92. Wilkinson, *Women of the Streets*, p. 77.
93. *Ibid.*, p. 54.
94. *Ibid.*, pp. 77–8; Watts, *The Men in My Life*, pp. 141–2.
95. Wilkinson, *Women of the Streets*, pp. 77–8.
96. *Ibid.*, p. 135.
97. Sidney Webb, 'The Social and Economic Causes of Vice', in *The Nation's Morals* (London, 1925), pp. 206–18.

98. Wilkinson, *Women of the Streets*, p. 99.  
 99. *Ibid.*, p. 10.

## 2 Buying Sex: Men and the Marketplace

1. Wilkinson, p. 76.
2. See *Third Annual Report of the National Vigilance Association*, 1888, London, LMA, A/FWA/C/D150/1. For attitudes toward clients in the same period in the United States, see Mackey, *Pursuing Johns*.
3. Testimony of Nellie Thompson, 16 April 1885, Mary Jeffries Trial Transcript, London, N.A., HO 45/46/X124.
4. Minutes of meeting between Commander Robertson, Superintendent Bather and C.H. Rolph, 30 July 1954, London, N.A., MEPO 3/2967.
5. Mass-Observation, 'Little Kinsey: Mass-Observation's Sex Survey of 1948', in *Sex Surveyed: From Mass-Observation's Little Kinsey to the National Survey and the Hite Reports*, ed. Liz Stanley (London, 1995), p. 143.
6. For the purchase of sex by Oxbridge undergraduates, see Howell, *Geographies of Regulation*, pp. 129–35 and Steve Humphries, *A Secret World of Sex: Forbidden Fruit: The British Experience 1900–1950* (London, 1988), pp. 122–4.
7. T.C.N Gibbens, 'The Clients of Prostitutes', *The Alison Neilans Memorial Lecture VI* (London: Josephine Butler Society, 1962), p. 3.
8. Wilkinson, *Women of the Streets*, p. 81.
9. Hall, *Hidden Anxieties*, 49.
10. See, for instance, Police Notebook, c. 1898, Charles Booth Survey Documents, London, LSE Archives, B371, 138–40 and B358, 85–7; Maria Luddy, 'An Outcast Community: The Wrens of the Curragh', *Women's History Review* 1, nos 341–55 (1993): 341–55.
11. Smith, 'The Contagious Diseases Acts': 203–4.
12. Methuen to Bradford, 15 July 1897, London, N.A., MEPO 2/5815.
13. Report of A Division, 22 July 1897, London, N.A., MEPO 2/5815.
14. Police Notebook, c. 1898, Charles Booth Survey Documents, London, LSE Archives, B358, 85–7.
15. Police Notebook, c. 1898, Charles Booth Survey Documents, London, LSE Archives, B358, 371 138–40; Summary Report of District Superintendents, 24 June 1909, London, N.A., MEPO 2/1287.
16. Stead, 'The Maiden Tribute', Part I.
17. Cristobel Pankhurst, *The Great Scourge and How to End It* (1913).
18. Arthur J. Engel, 'Immoral Intentions: The University of Oxford and the Problem of Prostitution, 1827–1914', *Victorian Studies* 23, no. 1 (1979): 79–107; Howell, *Geographies of Regulation*, 132–3.
19. Bradford memorandum to Home Office, 27 November 1901, London, N.A., HO 45/10123/B13517.
20. Testimony of Inspector Harburn, 10 March 1919, Enq. Sexual Morality, AMSH Records, London, The Women's Library, 3AMS/B.
21. Gibbens, 'The Clients of Prostitutes': 5.
22. *Ibid.*
23. *Ibid.*: 4–5.
24. *Ibid.*: 8.
25. Lucy Bland, 'White Women and Men of Colour: Miscegenation Fears in Britain after the Great War', *Gender and History* 17, no. 1 (2005): 29–61.

26. Transcript of the trial of Rou Sharu, 5 December 1932, London, N.A., CRIM 1/626.
27. Sonia O. Rose, 'Girls and GIs: Race, Sex and Diplomacy in Second World War Britain', *International History Review* 19 (1997): 1, 147–77.
28. Hall, *Hidden Anxieties*, pp. 52–3.
29. Raphael Samuel, *East End Underworld: Chapters in the Life of Arthur Harding* (London: 1981), pp. 110–11.
30. Humphries, *A Secret World of Sex*, pp. 122–4.
31. Gibbens, 'The Clients of Prostitutes': 7.
32. *Ibid.*
33. Samuel, *East End Underworld*, pp. 111, 153.
34. Ian Gibson, *The Erotomaniac: The Secret Life of Henry Spencer Ashbee* (London, 2002); Mason, *Victorian Sexuality*, pp. 46–7.
35. Anonymous, *My Secret Life*, pp. 1,772–8, 1,871–3, 1,892, 2,034–7, 2,280–1.
36. Taylor Croft, *The Cloven Hoof: A Study of Contemporary London Vice* (London, 1932), p. 17.
37. Watts, *The Men in My Life*, p. 223.
38. See, for instance, Arnold L. Miller, 'West End Jungle' (UK, 1961).
39. Gibbens, 'The Clients of Prostitutes': 10.
40. Gibbens, 'The Clients of Prostitutes': 10.
41. Fernando Henriques, *Prostitution and Society, Vol III: Modern Sexuality* (London, 1968), p. 267; James, *Prostitution and the Law*, p. 123.
42. Gibbens, 'The Clients of Prostitutes': 5.
43. *Ibid.*: 6.
44. Lesley Hall, 'Impotent Ghosts from No Man's Land, Flapper's Boyfriends, or Crypto-Patriarchs? Men, Sex and Social Change in 1920s Britain', *Social History* 21, no. 1 (1996): 60–1.
45. Wilkinson, p. 90.
46. Gibbens, 'The Clients of Prostitutes': 3.
47. 'Gamble's Case', *Report of the Royal Commission on the Duties of the Metropolitan Police* (London, 1906), [hereafter *Duties of the Met. Police*]: 392–3.
48. Watts, *The Men in My Life*, p. 153.
49. *The Times*, 22 May 1916, 3B.
50. Wilkinson, *Women of the Streets*, p. 88.
51. *Ibid.*, pp. 86–7.
52. Watts, *The Men in My Life*, p. 153.
53. Wilkinson, *Women of the Streets*, p. 91.
54. *Ibid.*
55. *Ibid.*, p. 87.
56. Gilfoyle, *City of Eros*, pp. 104, 312.
57. Hall, 'Impotent Ghosts': 59.
58. Hershatter, *Dangerous Pleasures*, p. 42; Gilfoyle, 'Prostitutes in History': 130–1.
59. C.H. Rolph, 'The Oldest Problem', *The New Statesmen and Nation*, 17 May 1947.

### 3 The Crusade Begins : The Criminal Law Amendment Act and London's 'Brothels' before the First World War

1. Mary Jeffries Trial Transcript, London, N.A., HO 45/46/X124. The servant's account of rape is recounted in Pearson, *The Age of Consent*, p. 108.
2. Testimony of Elizabeth Bromwich and George Bellchambers, 2 April 1885, Mary Jeffries Trial Transcript, London, N.A., HO 45/46/X124.

3. *The Times*, 6 May 1885, 12B.
4. *The Times*, 22 May 1885, 6C.
5. See, for instance, E.J. Burford, *Bawds and Lodgings: A History of the London Bankside Brothels C. 100–1675* (London, 1976); Tim Harris, 'The Bawdy House Riots of 1668', *The Historical Journal* 29, no. 3 (1986): 537–56; Fergus Linnane, *Madams: Bawds and Brothel-Keepers of London* (Thrupp, 2005); G.L. Simons, *A Place for Pleasure: The History of the Brothel* (Lewes, 1975).
6. Stead, 'The Maiden Tribute', Part I.
7. Both Stead and Dyer described the doors of brothels which were easy to enter by, but difficult to exit through. Dyer, *The European Slave Trade in English Girls*, p. 5 and Stead, 'The Maiden Tribute', Part III.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 4. This is also reminiscent of the 'dress lodger' figure discussed in Mayhew, *London Labour and the London Poor*, pp. 228–32, a young woman who is followed about the streets by her madam, who has clothed her and holds her in debt bondage.
9. Stead, 'The Maiden Tribute', Part II.
10. 1885 Criminal Law Amendment Act (48 and 49 Victoria, c.69) s.13.
11. 1751 Disorderly Houses Act (25 Geo. II, c. 36) s. 5 and 25.
12. Petrow, *Policing Morals*, pp. 147–8.
13. Correspondence regarding Common Lodging Houses, 1888, London, N.A., HO 45/9798/B5239; correspondence regarding police procedure for brothel prosecution, 1889, London, N.A., MEPO 2/201; and correspondence regarding the application of the new Criminal Law Amendment Act, 1887–8, London, N.A., HO 45/9678/A47459.
14. Bristow, *Vice and Vigilance*, p. 154. For a heroic retelling of Charrington's activities, see Stead, 'The truth about our secret commission', *Pall Mall Gazette*, 9 July 1885, and for a more disparaging account see Metropolitan Police Commissioner Charles Warren to the Secretary of State, 25 October 1888, London, N.A., HO 45/9798/B5239.
15. From London, N.A., HO 45/21766.
16. *The Times*, 8 December 1887, 3F.
17. She did not. Mary Jeffries lived into her nineties, dying in 1907. Terrot, *The Maiden Tribute*, p. 80.
18. Petrow, *Policing Morals*, pp. 147–53; see also correspondence regarding the application of the new Criminal Law Amendment Act, 1887–8, London, N.A., HO 45/9678/A47459.
19. Charles Warren to Secretary of State, 31 October 1887, London, N.A., HO 45/9678/A47459; Charles Thompson Ritchie to City of Westminster Deputation, 17 December 1901, London, N.A., HO 45/10123/B13517; Police Notebook, c. 1898, Charles Booth Survey Documents, London, LSE Archives, B358, 85–7.
20. Howell, *Geographies of Regulation*, pp. 76–112.
21. Vestry of St James, Piccadilly to Home Office, 28 October 1887, London, N.A., HO 45/9678/A47459; Vestry of Ratcliffe to Home Secretary, 25 July 1887, London, N.A., HO 45/9678/A47459.
22. James Monro to Home Office, 16 February 1889, London, N.A., MEPO 2/209.
23. Petrow, *Policing Morals*, p. 153.
24. 'Comparative Return', n.d., c. August 1914, London, N.A., MEPO 2/1720.
25. *Singleton v. Ellison* (1895) 59 JP 119.
26. *Durose v. Wilson* as cited by *Caldwell v. Leech* (1911–13) ER Rep 703.
27. *Annual reports of the Metropolitan Police Commissioner; Judicial Statistics of England and Wales*.

28. Corbin, *Women for Hire*; Harsin, *Policing Prostitution*; Gibson, *Prostitution and the State in Italy*.
29. In William Acton's 1857 survey (in which he relied on police evidence), he found that the vast majority of 'brothels' were places 'where prostitutes lodge', while another handful were places 'where prostitutes resort'. William Acton, *Prostitution Considered in Its Moral, Social and Sanitary Aspects* (London, 1857), p. 16. By the second edition of the book, little had changed in these statistics.
30. The other thirty per cent were largely early examples of massage parlours.
31. Police Notebook, c. 1898, Charles Booth Survey Documents, London, LSE Archives, B354, 122–5; Reports of Vine Street Station, C Division, 11 January 1889, 22 April 1890, 25 September 1894, and 24 September 1896, London, N.A., MEPO 2/209.
32. Report of Vine Street Station, 22 March 1906, London, N.A., MEPO 2/429.
33. Walkowitz, *Prostitution and Victorian Society*, p. 200.
34. Compiled Police Court reports, *The Times*, 1885–1900; *The Judicial Statistics of England and Wales*, 1893–1913.
35. *The Times*, 9 November 1885, 13C and Report of C Division, 10 November 1885, London, N.A., MEPO 2/8833.
36. *First Report of Her Majesty's commissioners for inquiring into the housing of the working classes*, 1884–5, p. 184.
37. Compiled Police Court reports, *The Times*, 1885–1900.
38. *The Times*, 25 October 1887, 3C.
39. Compiled Police Court reports, *The Times*, 1885–1930; Samuel, *East End Underworld*, p. 110.
40. Report of Vine Street Station, C Division, 11 January 1889, London, N.A., MEPO 2/209.
41. Report of Vine Street Station, C Division, 22 April 1890, London, N.A., MEPO 2/209.
42. Report of Vine Street Station, C Division, 1 October 1894, London, N.A., MEPO 2/209.
43. Mary Gordon testimony, 13 January 1919, Enq. Sexual Morality, AMSH Records, London, The Women's Library, 3AMS/B.
44. *The Times*, 3 March 1898, 14C.
45. Testimony of Nellie Thompson, 16 April 1885, Mary Jeffries Trial Transcript, London, N.A., HO 45/46/X124.
46. *News of the World*, 23 June 1913, press clipping in London, N.A., HO 45/24649.
47. Howell, *Geographies of Regulation*, pp. 76–112.
48. For 'the Mint' see *First Report of Her Majesty's Commissioners for Inquiring into the Housing of the Working Classes*, 1884–85, pp. 274–5.
49. Comm. Charles Warren to Secretary of State, 31 October 1887, London, N.A., HO 45/9678/A47459.
50. Warren to an unnamed Assistant Undersecretary of State, 25 October 1888, London, N.A., HO 45/9798/B5239.
51. Chapman claims that the Southwark local council closed down 700 brothels between the years 1892 and 1906, while Rev. Cardwell of Soho recalls that, beginning in the same year, there was a major crackdown on Soho brothels. Chapman, *Poor Man's Court*, p. 92; Rev. Joseph Cardwell, *20 Years in Soho* (1895), p. 42.
52. Commissioner Henry and others, comments on letter from Westminster City Council, 3 June 1905, London, N.A., MEPO 2/8833.
53. St Anne's Vestry to Commissioner of Police, 9 December 1897, London, N.A., MEPO 2/429.

54. Report of Vine Street Station, C Division, 26 September 1902, London, N.A., MEPO 2/429.
55. *Ibid.*
56. *Ibid.*
57. *Durose v. Wilson* (1907) 71 JP 263.
58. Report of Vine Street Station, C Division, 22 March 1906, London, N.A., MEPO 2/429.
59. See, for instance, Minutes of the St Pancras Borough Council Deputation to Home Secretary, 18 May 1905, London, N.A., MEPO 2/8833; 'Disorderly Houses Bill', 1911, in London, N.A., HO 45/10644/208926.
60. 1912 Criminal Law Amendment Act (2 & 3 Geo. V, c. 20).
61. Police Notebook, c. 1898, Charles Booth Survey Documents, London, LSE Archives, B354, 199.
62. *Ibid.*
63. For rent control, see Englander, *Landlord and Tenant*, p. xvIII.
64. Cardwell, *20 Years in Soho*, p. 157.
65. For tenant protest against high rents and so forth, see Englander, *Landlord and Tenant*, pp. 85–161; Mary Chesterton, *I Lived in a Slum* (London, 1936), p. 205.
66. Walkowitz, *Prostitution and Victorian Society*, p. 30.
67. 1880 Industrial Schools Amendment Act (43 and 44 Vic, ch. 15); 1908 Children Act (8 Edw 7, ch. 67).
68. Report of Vine Street Station, C Division, 11 September 1906, London, N.A., MEPO 2/429; Police Notebook, c. 1898, Charles Booth Survey Documents, London, LSE Archives, B354, 199.
69. Hopwood, *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*.
70. Report of Vine Street Station, C Division, 11 September 1906, London, N.A., MEPO 2/429.
71. Report of Vine Street Station, C Division, 12 October 1906, London, N.A., MEPO 2/429.
72. LCC deputation to Ritchie, 31 March 1892, London, N.A., HO 45/9798/B5239; Commissioner Henry Memorandum, 7 March 1913, London, N.A., MEPO 2/1287.
73. Summary Report of District Superintendents, 11 June 1909, London, N.A., MEPO, 2/1287.
74. Report of Blackheath Station, R Division, Woolwich, 6 January 1908, London, N.A., MEPO 2/1266.
75. Summary Report of District Superintendents, 24 June 1909, London, N.A., MEPO 2/1287.
76. Report of R Division, 7 September 1906, London, N.A., MEPO 2/1086.
77. *London Figaro*, c. April 1897, press clipping in London, N.A., MEPO 2/460.
78. Report of Vine Street Station, C Division, 24 October 1898, London, N.A., MEPO 2/460.
79. See, for instance, *The Times*, Monday 17 October 1898, 9A; 17 April 1899, 4E; 13 January 1900, 3F; Friday 5 October 1900, 2G; 17 October 1903, 4D; 30 August 1917, 3E.
80. Report of Vine Street Station, C Division, 24 October 1898, London, MEPO 2/460.
81. Report of the Metropolitan Police Commissioner on 'Pelican Advertisements', 7 December 1917, London, N.A., MEPO 2/460.
82. The rent for the premises was £280 a year, meaning she potentially cleared over £1,000 in profit.



83. *The Times*, 17 October 1903, 4D.
84. *The Times*, 17 April 1899, 4E.
85. *The Times*, Saturday 29 November 1913, 4F.
86. Commissioner Henry, Comments, 7 April 1897, London, N.A., MEPO 2/460.
87. *The Times*, 21 July 1913, 3D.
88. *Ibid.*
89. 'Massage Establishments: Infringements', London, LMA, LCC/PC/MASS/1/1 and 'Massage establishments: registrations refused', London, LMA, LCC/PC/MASS/1/9.
90. *The Times*, 18 March 1914, 10B; *The Times*, 9 August 1915, 3E; see Press cuttings on the massage establishment scandals; papers of the Chartered Society of Physiotherapy, Wellcome Library Archive, 1894 and 1895, SA/CSP/D.1/1.

#### 4 Women in Public and Public Women: Controlling Street Prostitution 1887–1914

1. Walkowitz reports Cass's occupation as milliner, but contemporary accounts all describe her as a dressmaker. Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight*, p. 128.
2. Inquiry into the arrest of Miss Cass, London, N.A., HO 144/472/X15239.
3. See, for instance, the *Evening Standard*, 13 and 22 July 1887; 'The Arrest of Miss Cass', House of Commons, *The Times*, 7 July 1887, 3B.
4. Charles Warren to Secretary of State, 8 July 1887, London, N.A., HO 144/472/X15239.
5. *Evening Standard*, 22 July 1887; HO 144/472/X15239.
6. Inquiry into the arrest of Miss Cass, London, N.A., HO 144/472/X15239.
7. Judith R. Walkowitz, 'Going Public: Shopping, Street Harassment, and Streetwalking in Late Victorian London', *Representations* 62, no. Spring (1998).
8. Nead, *Victorian Babylon*; Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight*, pp. 41–80.
9. Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight*, pp. 45–50; Walkowitz, 'Going Public': 10–12.
10. Bernhard Rieger and Martin Daunton (eds), 'Introduction', in *Meanings of Modernity: Britain from the Late-Victorian Era to World War II* (Oxford, 2001), p. 6.
11. Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight*, pp. 50–2; Walkowitz, 'Going Public': 10–12.
12. Walkowitz, 'Going Public': 8–9.
13. Stead, 'The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon' Part IV, *Pall Mall Gazette*, 10 July 1885.
14. Bland, *Banishing the Beast*, pp. 95–123; Mort, *Dangerous Sexualities*, pp. 128–9.
15. Clergy of St Martins in the Fields to Home Office, 3 July 1896; City of Westminster Borough Council to Secretary of State, 12 November 1901 in London, N.A., HO 45/10123/B13517; Petrow, *Policing Morals*, pp. 129–46.
16. 1824 Vagrancy Act (5. Geo. IV, c 83) s.3,4, and 5.
17. Self, *Prostitution, Women and the Misuse of the Law*, p. 38.
18. 1824 Vagrancy Act.
19. 1839 Metropolitan Police Act (2 & 3 Victoria, c. 47) s. 54 (11).
20. Source: *The Judicial Statistics of England and Wales*, 1885–1930.
21. 1847 Town Police Clauses Act (10 & 11 Vict. c. 89).
22. This remained a stipulation of the law until the 2003 Sexual Offences Act that made the 1959 Street Offences Act gender neutral. 2003 Sexual Offences Act (c. 42).
23. Henderson, *Disorderly Women*, pp. 122–8, 132–3; Erika Rappaport, *Shopping for Pleasure: Women in the Making of London's West End* (Princeton and Oxford, 2000), pp. 3–15.
24. See London, N.A., HO 144/472/X15239A.

25. Police Orders, issued by Charles Warren, 19 July 1888, London, N.A., HO 45/9964/X15663.
26. Keith Surridge, 'Warren, Sir Charles (1840–1927)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, Sept 2004); online edn, May 2006 (<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/36753>, accessed 14 April 2010).
27. J. Wotner and Sons, Police Solicitors, to James Monro, 14 January 1889, London, N.A., MEPO 2/209.
28. Bradford to Home Office, 26 October 1893, London, N.A., HO 45/10123/B13517.
29. See *The Annual Reports of the Metropolitan Police Commissioner*.
30. Petrow, *Policing Morals*, pp. 137–9.
31. See, for instance, Deputation of Westminster City Council to Home Secretary, 17 December 1901, London, N.A., MEPO 2/8835.
32. *Annual Reports of the Metropolitan Police Commissioner*, 1900–3. Katherine Prior, 'Bradford, Sir Edward Ridley Colborne, first baronet (1836–1911)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, 2004) (<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/32025>, accessed 14 April 2010).
33. F.E.C. Gregory, 'Henry, Sir Edward Richard, baronet (1850–1931)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, 2004) (<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/33822>, accessed 14 April 2010).
34. Petrow, *Policing Morals*, p. 130.
35. *Report of the Street Offences Committee* (London, 1928), p. 15.
36. *Duties of the Met. Police* (London, 1906), Police Return C.
37. *Ibid.*
38. Unpublished police statistics, 1914–1916, 1916, London, N.A., MEPO 2/1720.
39. *Duties of the Met. Police* (1906), Police Return C.
40. *Duval v. Denman* (1901) 65 J.P. 297.
41. See police orders GO Sec XX paragraphs 25 and 29 and various letters to and from Henry, January 1911, London, N.A., MEPO 2/1419.
42. F.W. (unknown official), 15 September 1911, London, N.A., MEPO 2/1419.
43. *Duties of the Met. Police, minutes of evidence* (London, 1906), pp. 123, 221.
44. *Ibid.*, p. 412.
45. *Ibid.*, p. 424.
46. *Duties of the Met. Police* (London, 1906), pp. 388–410.
47. *Ibid.*, p. 396.
48. Petrow, *Policing Morals*, p. 146.
49. Howell, *Geographies of Regulation*, pp. 76–112.
50. Bradford Memorandum, 18 December 1901, London, N.A., MEPO 2/8835.
51. Prostitution in London appears to have a long history of defying spatial concentration. Henderson, *Disorderly Women*, pp. 52–75.
52. *Duties of the Met. Police*, 1906, Police Return C.
53. 754 per square mile; see *Annual Report of the Metropolitan Police Commissioner*, 1910.
54. The routes and tactics of street prostitutes to avoid police were almost ubiquitously remarked upon by police officers who reported on their beats, but see, for instance, E Division Report, 20 December 1900, London, N.A., MEPO 2/293 and C Division Report, 31 May 1910, London, N.A., MEPO 3/197.
55. C Division Report, 18 May 1910, N.A., MEPO 3/195.
56. See London, N.A., MEPO 2/1714.
57. Neville Rolphe, 'Sex-Delinquency', p. 319. For instance, while Matt Houlbrook finds that there were an average of thirty-three incidents of gross indecency

- between men in the Park by the 1930s, the vast majority remained offences committed by those selling (and occasionally those seeking) heterosexual mercenary sex. Houlbrook, *Queer London*, p. 55.
58. *Duties of the Met. Police*, 1906, Police Return C.
  59. Summary of police reports on common lodging houses, 19 March 1913, London, N.A., MEPO 2/1287.
  60. Police Notebook, c. 1898, Charles Booth Survey Documents, London, LSE Archives, B361, 241.
  61. Jerry White, *London in the Twentieth Century: A City and Its People* (London, 2001), p. 310.
  62. *Duties of the Met. Police*, 1906, Police Return C.
  63. Samuel, *East End Underworld*, p. 200.
  64. *Duties of the Met. Police*, pp. 388–410.
  65. *Ibid.*
  66. Police Notebook, c. 1898, Charles Booth Survey Documents, London, LSE Archives, B371, pp. 160–1.
  67. Police Notebook, c. 1898, Charles Booth Survey Documents, London, LSE Archives, B363, 146–9.
  68. *Ibid.*
  69. *Ibid.*
  70. *Annual Reports of the Metropolitan Police Commissioner*; Petrow, *Policing Morals*, p. 132.
  71. *Annual Reports of the Metropolitan Police Commissioner*, 1885–1914.
  72. Neville Rolphe, ‘Sex-Delinquency’, pp. 322–4.
  73. Report of E Division, 25 June 1920, London, N.A., MEPO 2/9998; Summary of Superintendent Reports, 24 December 1910, London, N.A., MEPO 2/1434.
  74. ‘Prostitution in the Streets’, Edward Bradford to the Home Office, 12 November 1901, London, N.A., MEPO 2/8835.
  75. Testimony of E. Basil Wedmore, 27 January 1919, Enq. Sexual Morality, AMSH Records, London, The Women’s Library, 3AMS.
  76. J. Wotner and Sons, Police Solicitors, to Commissioner, 8 December 1910, London, N.A., MEPO 2/1419.
  77. Higgs, *Glimpses*, p. 103.
  78. Wyles reported that there was a great deal of violence between women who competed for the best beats. Wyles, *A Woman at Scotland Yard*, pp. 77–8.
  79. Robert Machray, *The Night Side of London* (Philadelphia, PA, 1902), pp. 17–18.
  80. See various reports from London, N.A., MEPO, 3/197.
  81. Mary Costin Testimony, 27 January 1919, Enq. Sexual Morality, AMSH Records, London, The Women’s Library, 3AMS/B.
  82. Wyles, *A Woman at Scotland Yard*, p. 76; Rappaport, *Shopping for Pleasure*, pp. 88–9. This was, of course, not the only way in which public lavatories became sexually transgressive spaces; see Houlbrook, *Queer London*, pp. 59–64.
  83. Mr Elton to the Metropolitan Police Commissioner, 22 February 1892, London, N.A., MEPO 2/293.
  84. Stocker and Thompson to the Commissioner of Police, 22 February 1892; Report of E Division, 5 April 1892, London, N.A., MEPO 2/293.
  85. H.V. Morton, *The Nights of London* (London, 1926), p. 2.
  86. For the role that street lighting, or the lack thereof, played in the construction and determination of queer sexual and social space in twentieth-century London, see Houlbrook, *Queer London*, pp. 49, 61.

## 5 'Down on Whores' and 'Living on the Earnings': Violence, Vulnerability and the Law after 1885

1. Testimony of Margaret Hayes to Emma Smith Coroner's Inquest (7 April), as cited by *Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper*, Sunday 8 April 1888: 1.
2. Testimony of Mr George Haslip to Emma Smith Coroner's Inquest (7 April), as cited by *The Times*, 9 April 1888: 7E.
3. On contemporary domestic violence, see, for instance, Chapman, *Poor Man's Court*, pp. 58–61. See also Carolyn Conley, *Homicide, Gender, and National Identity in Late Nineteenth-Century England, Ireland, Scotland, and Wales* (Columbus, 2007); Shani D'Cruze, *Crimes of Outrage: Sex, Violence and Victorian Working Women* (DeKalb, IL, 1998); Ellen Ross, *Love and Toil: Motherhood in Outcast London 1870–1918* (Oxford, 1993), pp. 84–6 and Shani D'Cruze and Anupama Rao (eds), 'Violence and the Vulnerabilities of Gender', in *Violence, Vulnerability, and Embodiment: Gender and History* (Malden, MA, 2005), pp. 5–10.
4. Martha Tabram Coroner's Inquest, as reported in *Evening News*, 10, 11, 14, 15 and 24 August 1888 and *Evening Standard*, 24 August 1888; Report of Inspector Edmund Reid, H Division, 25 September 1888, London, N.A., MEPO 3/140.
5. For classic 'ripperologist' texts, see Paul Begg, *Jack the Ripper: The Definitive History* (London, 2004); Patricia Cornwall, *Portrait of a Killer. Jack the Ripper: Case Closed* (London, 2002) and Donald Rumbelow, *The Complete Jack the Ripper* (London, 1988). See also Judith R. Walkowitz, 'Jack the Ripper and the Myth of Male Violence', *Feminist Studies* 8, no. 2 (1982) and Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight*, pp. 191–245.
6. Hilary Kinnel, *Violence and Sex Work in Britain* (London, 2008).
7. Mary Ann Nichols Coroner's Inquest, as reported in *Evening Standard*, 3, 4, 7, 18 and 24 September 1888.
8. See, for instance, *East London Advertiser*, 15 September 1888.
9. See 'The Moral of the Whitechapel murders', *Pall Mall Gazette*, 12 September 1888.
10. Annie Chapman Coroner's Inquest, as reported in *Evening Standard*, 13, 14, 15, 17, 20 and 27 September 1888.
11. Peter Baldwin, *Contagion and the State in Europe, 1830–1930* (Cambridge, 1999), pp. 400–18.
12. Elizabeth Stride Coroner's Inquest, as reported in *Evening News*, 1, 3, 4, 6, 8 and 9 October 1888.
13. Testimony of J. Best and John Gardner to Elizabeth Stride Coroner's Inquest, *Evening News*, 1 October 1888.
14. Catherine Eddowes Coroner's Inquest, as reported in the *Daily Telegraph*, 5 October 1888.
15. John Kelly testimony to Catherine Eddowes Coroner's Inquest, as reported in the *Daily Telegraph*, 5 October 1888.
16. Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight*, pp. 191–228; Warren to Secretary of State, 6 November 1888, MEPO 3/140.
17. *Morning Advertiser*, 25 December 1888.
18. Elizabeth Jackson Coroner's Inquest, as reported in *The Times*, 4, 5, and 9 July 1889.
19. Alice Mackenzie Coroner's Inquest, as reported in *East London Advertiser*, 20 July and 17 August 1889.
20. Unknown person Coroner's Inquest ('The Pinchin Street torso murder'), as reported in *The Times*, 12, 13, 14 and 25 September 1889.
21. Francis Coles Coroner's Inquest, *The Times*, Saturday 21 February 1891.

22. For an account of these murders, see Angus McLaren, *A Prescription for Murder: The Victorian Serial Killings of Dr. Thomas Neill Cream* (Chicago, 1993); for contemporary accounts see London, N.A., MEPO 3/144 and CRIM 1/38/1.
23. *Echo*, 1 September 1888; *Daily News*, 5 September 1888.
24. Report of Inspector Edmund Reid, H Division, 25 September 1888, London, N.A., MEPO 3/140.
25. Report of L Division on Cream investigation, 20 May 1892, London, N.A., MEPO 3/144.
26. *Duties of the Met. Police*, p. 81.
27. Samuel, *East End Underworld*, p. 200.
28. *Ibid.*, pp. 188–94.
29. Report of B Division, 8 and 10 September 1907, London, N.A., MEPO, 1791.
30. Summary reports of all Divisions on bail for prostitutes, 7 September and 18 December 1907, London, N.A., MEPO 2/1086.
31. Watts, *The Men in My Life*, p. 185.
32. Report of C Division, 24 August 1954, London, N.A., MEPO 3/9713.
33. Dear Boss letter, received 27 September 1889, dated 25 September 1888, London, N.A., MEPO 3/140.
34. John Cohen, '13a', *The Shield*, April 1916, 1, 1: 32.
35. Report from Frances Coles murder investigation, 21 February 1891, London, N.A., MEPO 3/140.
36. *The Times*, 14 February 1891, 12C.
37. Deborah Arif, 'The murder of Elizabeth Jackson'; <http://www.casebook.org/victims/jackson.html>, accessed April 16 2010.
38. *The Times*, 3 January 1889, 12C.
39. White, *The Comforts of Home*, p. 40.
40. *Oxford English Dictionary*, 'pimp' def. 1a; 'ponce' def. 1; 'bully' def. 4a.
41. Mancini, *Prostitutes and Their Parasites*, pp. 73–90.
42. Edward Henry Memorandum, 23 November 1912, London, N.A., MEPO 3/228.
43. Police Notebook, c. 1898, Charles Booth Survey Documents, London, LSE Archives, B354, 199.
44. Chief Magistrate John Budge to the Home Office, 21 February 1895, London, N.A., HO 45/9745/A56729.
45. 'Observations on Charles Peneau', 18 May 1910, London, N.A., MEPO 3/197.
46. *Ibid.*
47. Mr Frederick Mead, JP, to the Street Offences Committee, 2 December 1927, London, N.A., HO 326/7.
48. Report of C Division, 8 October 1906, London, TNA, MEPO 2/1086.
49. Reports of Marlborough Street Station, C Division, 8–9 October 1906, London, N.A., MEPO 2/1806.
50. Chapman, *Poor Man's Court*, pp. 96–7.
51. Rev. S.R. Glanville Murray to Lord Darynton, MP, 12 November 1923, London, N.A., HO 45/12001.
52. Governor of Holloway to Secretary of State, 14 May 1923, London, N.A. HO 45/12001.
53. Prison Commissioner to Secretary of State, 28 May 1923, London, N.A., HO 45/12001.
54. *Ibid.*
55. 'Observations on Charles Peneau', 18 May 1910, London, N.A., MEPO 3/197.
56. Deposition of Charles Harvey, 1891, London, N.A., CRIM 1/38/1.
57. 1898 Amendment to the Vagrancy Act (61 & 62 Vict., c. 39) s. 1 and 2.

58. *Judicial Statistics of England and Wales, 1898–1930*.
59. Self, *Prostitution, Women and the Misuse of the Law*, p. 185.
60. See, for instance, press clippings in London, N.A., MEPO 3/197.
61. Draft of a Bill to Amend the Vagrancy Act of 1824, House of Commons, Hansard's, 19 July 1898, vol. 62 cc 425–32.
62. Report of C Division on Charles Peneau, 10 June 1910, London, N.A., MEPO 3/197.
63. D'Cruze, *Crimes of Outrage*, pp. 134–6.
64. *The Times*, 20 January 1900, 3C.
65. *The Times*, 31 August 1900, 9G.
66. *The Times*, 16 August 1899, 12E.
67. *The Times*, 23 October 1922, 7D.

## 6 White Slaves and Alien Prostitutes: Trafficking, Protection and Punishment in the Early Twentieth Century

1. Witness Statement of Lydia Rhodda Harvey, 13 July 1910, London, N.A., MEPO 3/197.
2. Edward J. Bristow, *Prostitution and Prejudice: The Jewish Fight against White Slavery 1870–1939* (Oxford, 1982); Henriques notes that by 1924 seventy-five per cent of the registered prostitutes in Buenos Aires were foreigners. Henriques, *Prostitution and Society, Vol III*, pp. 289–301.
3. Witness Statement of Lydia Rhodda Harvey, 13 July 1910, London, N.A., MEPO 3/197.
4. Report of Inspector Anderson, 14 March 1911, London, N.A., MEPO 3/197.
5. Report of Inspector Anderson, 30 August 1910, London, N.A., MEPO 3/197.
6. *Reynold's Newspaper*, 10 July 1910.
7. Elizabeth Robins, *Where Are You Going? ...* (London, 1913); Evelyn Waugh, *Decline and Fall* (New York, 1929).
8. *The Times*, 13 December 1815, 2C; 26 February 1833, 4B; 12 July 1836, 1G; 26 December 1873, 6B.
9. Jan Jordan, *Josephine Butler* (London, 2007).
10. Stead, 'The Maiden Tribute', Part I.
11. Greig, 'The Truth About White Slavery': 428–9; various police reports, London, N.A., HO 45/9747/59343L and MEPO 3/228. For secondary works dealing with 'white slavery', see Bristow, *Prostitution and Prejudice*; Lloyd O. Gardner, 'Anglo-Jewry and the Jewish International Traffic in Prostitution', *AJS Review* 7 (1982); Gorham, 'The "Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon" Re-Examined'; Guy, *Sex & Danger in Buenos Aires*; Mara L. Keire, 'The Vice Trust: A Reinterpretation of the White Slavery Scare in the United States, 1907–1917', *Journal of Social History* 35, no. 1 (2001); Katarina Leppänen, 'Movement of Women: Trafficking in the Interwar Era', *Women's Studies International Forum* 30, no. 6 (2007): 523–33; Levine, *Prostitution, Race and Politics*; Mariana Valverde, *The Age of Light, Soap and Water: Moral Reform in English Canada, 1885–1925* (Toronto, 1993), pp. 77–103 and Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight*, pp. 81–134.
12. These stipulations were reiterated by case law in *R v. Gold and Cohen* (1907) 71 JP 360.
13. 1885 Criminal Law Amendment Act (48 and 49 Victoria) c.69.
14. Self, *Prostitution, Women and the Misuse of the Law*, pp. 44–5; William Alexander Coote, *A Vision and Its Fulfillment* (London, 1910).

15. League of Nations, *Traffic in Women and Children Annual Report*, 1922 as included in London, N.A., HO 45/20044.
16. 26 February 1833, 4B; 12 July 1836, 1G; 26 December 1873, 6B; Miranda Morris, 'In Perilous Waters: Single Female Migration to Post-Penal Tasmania', *Nineteenth-century Contexts* 29, nos 2/3 (2007).
17. *The Times*, 12 July 1836, 1G.
18. See, for instance, *The Times*, 7 February 1868, 10B; 13 April 1868, 6F; and 26 December 1873, 6B.
19. Guy, *Sex & Danger in Buenos Aires*, pp. 2–3.
20. 'Repatriation of prostitutes', National Vigilance Association File, London, The Women's Library, 4NVA/4/11/04–31.
21. *Report of the Royal Commission on Alien Immigration Minutes of Evidence* (London, 1903), p. 426.
22. *Ibid.*
23. *Report of the Royal Commission on Alien Immigration*, p. 41.
24. Krista Maglen, 'Importing Trachoma: The Introduction into Britain of American Ideas of An "Immigrant Disease", 1892–1906', *Immigrants and Minorities* 23, no. 1 (2005): *passim*.
25. 1905 Aliens Act (5 Edward 7, c. 13) s. 3a.
26. In both Jill Pellew, 'The Home Office and the Aliens Act, 1905', *Historical Journal* 32, no. 2 (1989): 370 and Gardner, 'Anglo-Jewry': 149 the stipulations regarding prostitutes are misreported.
27. Christiane Reinecke, 'Governing Aliens in Times of Upheaval: Immigration Control and Modern State Practice in Early Twentieth-Century Britain, Compared with Prussia', *International Review of Social History* 54 (2009): 46–7.
28. Pellew, 'The Home Office and the Aliens Act, 1905': 369–85.
29. Jon Peddar (Assistant Undersecretary of State) comments, 10 November 1908, London, N.A., HO 45/10390/17149.
30. *Ibid.*
31. *Ibid.*
32. Ernley Blackwell to Jon Peddar, 11 November 1908, London, N.A., HO 45/10390/17149.
33. Police Notebook, c. 1898, Charles Booth Survey Documents, London, LSE Archives, 355 146–7 and B355; Report of D Division, 21 September 1900, London, N.A., MEPO 2/239; Report of C Division, 7 September 1907, London, N.A., MEPO 2/1086; *Duties of the Met. Police*, Police Return C; *Royal Commission on Liquor Licensing Laws: Minutes of Evidence*, p. 362.
34. *Duties of the Met. Police*, 1906, Police Return C.
35. Watts, *The Men in My Life*, p. 81.
36. White, *London in the Twentieth Century*, pp. 106–7.
37. Stead, 'The Maiden Tribute', Part IV.
38. *Duties of the Met. Police*, 1906, Police Return C.
39. Pamela Sharpe, ed., *Women, Gender and Labour Migration: Historical and Global Perspectives* (New York, Routledge, 2001).
40. Laura Maria Augustin, *Sex at the Margins: Migration, Labour Markets, and the Rescue Industry* (London, 2007).
41. Report of Inspector Anderson, C Division, 22 July 1910, London, N.A., MEPO 3/197.
42. Witness Statement of Victoria Bricot, 24 June 1910, London, N.A., MEPO 3/197.

43. Witness Statement of Lydia Rhodda Harvey, 13 July 1910, London, N.A., MEPO 3/197.
44. Witness Statement of Lydia Rhodda Harvey, 9 July 1910, London, N.A., MEPO 3/197.
45. Witness Statements of Lydia Rhodda Harvey, 9 and 13 July 1910, London, N.A., MEPO 3/197.
46. Ibid.
47. Ibid.
48. Witness Statement of Marguerite Besançon, 1 July 1910, London, N.A., MEPO 2/197.
49. Witness Statement of Mireille Lapara, 23 June 1910, London, N.A., MEPO 3/197.
50. Report of Inspector Anderson, 30 July 1910, London, N.A., MEPO 3/197.
51. Witness Statement of Marguerite Besançon, 1 July 1910, London, N.A., MEPO 2/197.
52. Witness Statement of Victoria Bricot, 24 June 1910, London, N.A., MEPO 3/197.
53. J. Wotner and Sons, Police Solicitors, to Inspector Anderson, 13 September 1910, London, N.A., MEPO 3/197.
54. Report of Inspector Anderson, 30 August 1910, London, N.A., MEPO 3/197.
55. Fifty-eight per cent of the charges were brought upon men, and forty-eight per cent on women.
56. *The Judicial Statistics of England and Wales, 1893–1930*.
57. J. Wotner and Sons, Police Solicitors, to Inspector Anderson, 13 September 1910, London, N.A., MEPO 3/197.
58. Report of Inspector Anderson, 30 August 1910, London, N.A., MEPO 3/197.
59. See 'Suppression of white slave trade', in London, N.A., T 1/11203 and HO 45/11072/387653 for various examples of documents relating to international conventions on the suppression of trafficking.
60. The United States' Mann Act of 1910, which predated the UK's by two years, included provisions against interstate transport of women for immoral purposes. David J. Langum, *Crossing over the Line: Legislating Morality and the Mann Act* (Chicago, 2006).
61. F.S. Bullock to Edward Henry, 17 October 1912, London, N.A., MEPO 3/228.
62. Henry Memorandum, 23 November 1912, London, N.A., MEPO 2/228.
63. Report of Superintendent John Curry to Edward Henry, 7 November 1913, London, MEPO 3/228.
64. Ibid.
65. Greig, 'The Truth About White Slavery': 430.
66. Ibid.
67. Ibid.: 428. Grieg was by no means its only detractor. See, for instance, Shaw, 'White Slave Traffic' and Lyons, *White Slaves*.
68. *The Annual Reports of the Metropolitan Police Commissioner, 1898–1913; The Judicial Statistics of England and Wales, 1913–30*.
69. See 'Expulsion of Foreign Prostitutes: Co-operation of the National Vigilance Association, 1913–1933', London, N.A., HO 45/15041.
70. Revised G.O. (sec XVII), 6 January 1914, London, N.A., HO 45/15041.
71. Report of Marlborough Street Station, C Division, 21 April 1920, London, N.A., MEPO 3/310; Report of Edith S. Thomas, NVA Lady Visitor to Holloway, 14 April 1920, London, N.A., MEPO 3/310.
72. Ernley Blackwell to unknown Assistant Undersecretary of State, 9 September 1913, London, N.A., HO 45/15041.



73. Comments of A.J., unknown Assistant Undersecretary of State, 12 November 1908, London, N.A., HO 45/10390/17149.
74. Police Notebook, c. 1898, Charles Booth Survey Documents, London, LSE Archives, B355, 39.
75. Scotland Yard to Home Office, 20 January 1915, London, N.A., HO 45/15041.
76. Edward Henry to the Home Office, 19 June 1914, London, N.A., HO 45/15041.
77. Wyles, *A Woman at Scotland Yard*, p. 51.
78. *Ibid.*, pp. 52–3.
79. Jens Jager, 'International Police Co-Operation and the Associations for the Fight against White Slavery', *Paedagogica Historica* 38, nos 2–3 (2002): 565–79.
80. 1919 Aliens Restriction (Amendment) Act, 9 & 10 Geo. 5, ch. 92; see also Reinecke, 'Governing Aliens': 39–65.
81. John Torpey, 'The Great War and the Birth of the Modern Passport System', in *Documenting Individual Identity: The Development of State Practices in the Modern World*, eds Jane Caplan and John Torpey (2001), p. 257.
82. 'Repatriation of Mireille Lapara and Marguerite Besançon', National Vigilance Association and the International Bureau for the Suppression of the White Slave Traffic, nd (c 25 September 1910), London, N.A., MEPO 3/197.
83. *Ibid.*
84. *Ibid.*
85. Anderson to Home Office, 24 September 1910, London, N.A., MEPO 3/197.

## 7 Making War, Taking Fingerprints and Challenging the Law: Policy Changes and Public Debates after 1914

1. Merrick, *Work among the Fallen*, p. 13.
2. 1901 Census of England and Wales, Series RG13, Piece 799, Folio 11, Page 14, schedule number 94.
3. Charles Booth, *Maps Descriptive of London Poverty, 1898–1899* (London, 1984); 1901 Census of England and Wales, Series RG13, Piece 434, Folio 114, page 10, schedule number 13.
4. John Lane, ed., *Herbert Fry's Royal Guide to the London Charities* (London, 1917), p. 29.
5. For North Soho during the war, see White, *London in the Twentieth Century*, pp. 108–9, 332–3.
6. Police returns, London, N.A., MEPO 2/1720.
7. Macmillan to Blackwell, 25 October 1927, Street Offences Committee Minutes of Evidence, London, N.A., HO 326/7.
8. Tate, *West End Girls*, 169.
9. Report of Ernley Blackwell, 3 February 1917, London, N.A., MEPO 2/1720.
10. J.J. Wotner and Sons to Police Commissioner, 27 October 1927, London, N.A., MEPO 3/7356.
11. For lack of legal defence for prostitutes, see testimony of Mary Gordon, 16 July 1918, Enq. Sexual Morality, London, The Women's Library, 3AMS/B/09/01. For conviction rates see *The Judicial Statistics of England and Wales, 1893–1930*. For the shortness of these perfunctory trials, see F.W. Pethick Lawrence, 'The Police Court: Abuses of the Present System', *The Shield*, 3, 7 (1917): 435–6.
12. Nellie Johnson's Criminal Record Office File, as cited in a letter from Tottenham Court Road Station to the Home Office, 21 January 1921, London, N.A. MEPO 2/9998.

13. Police Court report from *Lloyd's Newspaper*, and Smith to Secretary of State, 11 May 1916, in London, N.A., HO 45/10523.
14. Testimony of Ernley Blackwell, 15 October 1918, Joint Select Committee into the Criminal Law Amendment and Sexual Offences Bills Minutes of Evidence (London, 1918), pp. 4–6. For attempts to define 'amateur prostitution', see The Joint Select Committee on the Criminal Law Amendment Act and the Sexual Offences Act, 1918 and 1920 (London, HMSO); Testimony of Miss Costin, 27 January 1919, Enq. Sexual Morality, London, The Women's Library, 3AMS/B/09/01.
15. Lucy Bland, 'In the Name of Protection: The Policing of Women in the First World War', in *Women-in-Law: Explorations in Law, Family and Sexuality*, eds Julia Brophy and Carol Smart (London, 1985), pp. 23–49; Philippa Levine, "'Walking the Streets in a Way No Decent Woman Should": Women Police in World War I', *Journal of Modern History* 66, no. 1 (1994): 34–78; Angela Woollacott, "'Khaki Fever" And Its Control: Gender, Class, Age and Sexual Morality on the British Homefront in the First World War', *Journal of Contemporary History* 29, no. 2 (1994): 325–347.
16. Anonymous Memorandum (likely Ernley Blackwell), 3 December 1917, London, N.A., MEPO 2/1720 'Road to Ruin', Lloyd's, 11 May 1916, as cited in London, N.A., HO 45/10523.
17. On women's war work, see Deborah Thom, *Nice Girls and Rude Girls: Women Workers in World War I* (London, 1998) and Susan Grayzel, *Women and the First World War* (London, 2002).
18. Unpublished police return, 1914–1916, London, N.A., MEPO 2/1720.
19. *Ibid.*
20. 'Measures for Dealing with Prostitutes', 3 February 1917, London, N.A., MEPO 1720.
21. Unpublished police return, 1914–1916, London, N.A., MEPO 2/1720.
22. Neville Rolphe, 'Sex-Delinquency', p. 299.
23. Testimony of Inspector Harburn, 10 March 1919, Enq. Sexual Morality, AMSH Records, London, The Women's Library, 3AMS/B.
24. 1839 Metropolitan Police Act, s. 54 (13).
25. See, for instance, Report of A Division Superintendent, 25 June 1920, London, N.A., MEPO, Seventh annual report of the Association for Moral and Social Hygiene, 1921–1922, and Testimony of W. Clarke Hall, 19 May 1919, Enq. Sexual Morality Minutes of evidence, London, The Women's Library, 3AMS/B.
26. Unpublished police return, 1914–1916, London, N.A., MEPO 2/1720.
27. 'Measures for Dealing with Prostitutes', 3 February 1917, London, N.A., MEPO 1720.
28. Clark to Horwood, 25 June 1920; Hammett to Horwood, 7 July 1920, London, N.A., MEPO 2/9998.
29. Bastable to Horwood, 26 June 1920, London, N.A., MEPO 2/9998.
30. Superintendent D Division to Horwood, 26 June 1920, London, N.A., MEPO 2/9998.
31. Bastable to Horwood, 26 June 1920, London, N.A., MEPO 2/9998.
32. Superintendent B Division to Horwood, 26 June 1920, London, N.A., MEPO 2/9998.
33. Ewark to Horwood, 25 June 1920, London, N.A., MEPO 2/9998.
34. Testimony of Mary Gordon, 13 January 1918, Enq. Sexual Morality minutes of evidence, London, The Women's Library, 3AMS/B.
35. Edward Henry, *Classification and Uses of Fingerprints*, 6th edn (London, 1928), p. 5.

36. Baldwin, *Contagion and the State*, pp. 355–523; Levine, *Prostitution, Race and Politics*, pp. 146–73.
37. S.M. Tomkins, 'Palmitate or Permanganate: The Venereal Prophylaxis Debate in Britain, 1916–1926', *Medical History* 37, no. 4 (1993): 384–5 and David Michael Simpson, 'The Moral Battlefield: Venereal Disease and the British Army During the First World War' (University of Iowa, 1999).
38. For an overview of the Defence of the Realm Act in Britain, see Andrew Grierson Bone, 'Beyond the Rule of Law: Aspects of the Defence of the Realm Acts and Regulations, 1914–1918' (McMaster University, 1995).
39. Defence of the Realm Act (5&6 Geo. V, c.34) regulation 13a. See also *ibid.*, pp. 220–4.
40. 'Measures for dealing with prostitutes', 3 February 1917, London, N.A., MEPO 2/1720.
41. Testimony of Reverend Herbert Gray, 24 March 1919, Enq. Sexual Morality Minutes of Evidence, London, The Women's Library, 3AMS/B; see also Mark Harrison, 'The British Army and the Problem of Venereal Disease in France and Egypt During the First World War', *Medical History*, 39, no. 2 (1995): 139–43.
42. Memo by G.N Barnes, MP, 20 August 1918, London, N.A., WO 32/4745.
43. Ernley Blackwell report as cited by The Fourth Annual Report of the Association for Moral and Social Hygiene, 1919, p. 11.
44. Gordon, *Penal Discipline*, pp. 116–17.
45. Police Court report from *Lloyd's Newspaper*, and Smith to Secretary of State, 11 May 1916, in London, N.A., HO 45/10523; Lawrence, 'The Police Court'; Superintendent Peto to Miss Wall, 29 October 1935, London, N.A., MEPO 3/986 and CID to Police Commissioner, 2 December 1942, London, N.A., MEPO 3/2140. This practice continued into the 1950s: see London, N.A., HO 291/1080. For more on the hidden compulsory methods for dealing with venereal disease in marginalized populations, see Pamela Cox, 'Compulsion, Voluntarism, and Venereal Disease: Governing Sexual Health in England after the Contagious Diseases Acts', *Journal of British Studies*, 46 (2007): 112–15.
46. *Ibid.*
47. Stansfeld's 'touchstones' speech, as cited in Association for Moral and Social Hygiene, Second Annual Report, 1917, pp. 8–36; Helen Wilson, 'Principles of the International Abolitionist Federation – the Single Standard', *The Shield*, 2, no. 2 (1919): 95.
48. Maude Royden, 'The Problem of Undesirables', April 1916, 1, 1: 39.
49. Association for Moral and Social Hygiene executive meeting minutes, 19 July 1918, and Testimony of Mary Costin, 27 January 1919 Enq. Sexual Morality minutes of evidence, London, The Women's Library, 3AMS/B.
50. Laite, 'The Association for Moral and Social Hygiene': 207–23.
51. *The Shield*, April 1916, 1, 1.
52. See, for instance, Alexander Coote's testimony on behalf of the National Vigilance Association to the Royal Commission on the Duties of the Metropolitan Police, 1906 (London, HMSO, 1907) and his testimony on behalf of the NVA on 7 April 1919 to the Enq. Sexual Morality, London, The Women's Library, 3AMS/B/09/01.
53. Report of the Joint Select Committee on the Criminal Law Amendment and Sexual Offences Bills, 1918 and 1920 (London, 1920); Association of Moral and Social Hygiene, *The State and Sexual Morality* (London, 1920).

54. Nellie Johnson's Criminal Record Office file, as cited in a letter from Tottenham Court Road Station to the Home Office, 21 January 1921, London, N.A. MEPO 2/9998.
55. Ibid.
56. Chatham Docks were administered by the Metropolitan Police Thames Division.
57. Ibid.
58. The *1911 Census of England and Wales* provides us with a snapshot of the Albany Street neighbourhood from which I've drawn this description, bearing in mind that it may have changed over the decade.
59. Testimony of H.L. Cancellor, 18 November 1927, Street Offences Committee Minutes of Evidence, London, N.A., HO 326/7.
60. *Report of the Departmental Committee on Persistent Offenders* (London, 1932), pp. 38–9.
61. Neville Rolphe, 'Sex-Delinquency', pp. 300–1; *Judicial Statistics of England and Wales 1900–1930*.
62. *The Judicial Statistics of England and Wales*, 1930, xvIIi.
63. London, N.A., HO 45/12001.
64. Horwood comments, 18 May 1920; Hammett to Horwood, 7 July 1920, London, N.A., MEPO 2/9998.
65. Horwood to Collins, 19 June 1920, London, N.A., MEPO 2/9998.
66. Report of Brind, 3 February 1921, London, N.A., MEPO 2/9998.
67. For descriptions of the conditions in police court cells, see Holmes, *Pictures and Problems*.
68. Report of Bull, 1 February 1921, London, N.A., MEPO 2/9998.
69. On the unsanitary conditions of police cells and the practice of holding those awaiting trial there, see F.W. Pethick Lawrence, 'The Police Court: Abuses of the Present System', *The Shield*, 3, no. 7 (1919): 435–6.
70. Report of Watson, 1 February 1921, London, N.A., MEPO 2/9998.
71. Report of Bull, 1 February 1921, London, N.A., MEPO 2/9998.
72. Report of Walker, 6 May 1921, London, N.A., MEPO 2/9998.
73. Testimony of H.L. Cancellor, 18 November 1927, Street Offences Committee Minutes of Evidence, London, N.A., HO 326/7.
74. Horwood memorandum, 4 April 1921, London, N.A., MEPO 2/9998.
75. Testimony of Ernley Blackwell, 35 October 1927, Street Offences Committee Minutes of Evidence, London, N.A., HO 326/7.
76. Barrett to the Home Office, 21 January 1921, London, N.A., MEPO 2/9998 and Report of Bradshaw, 3 February 1921, London, N.A., MEPO 2/9998.
77. Horwood to Home Secretary, London, N.A., 4 April 1921, MEPO 2/9998.
78. See, for instance, 'Public Places (Order) Bill', in *The Thirteenth Annual Report of the Association for Moral and Social Hygiene*, 1930.
79. *Report of the Joint Select Committee on the Criminal Law Amendment and Sexual Offences Bills, 1918 and 1920* (London, 1920).
80. Ibid.
81. *The Times*, 9 October 1922, 8C.
82. *The Times*, 16 October 1922, 4A.
83. *The Times*, 11 November 1922, 7D; *The Times*, 20 December 1922, 7D; 25 June 1922, 13F.
84. Letter to the editor of the *Daily Express*, as cited in *The Shield*, 3, no. 5 (1921): 208 and 'The Injustice of the Solicitation Laws', *The Shield*, 3, no. 5 (1921): 206–8.

85. Clive Emsley, 'Sergeant Goddard: The Story of a Rotten Apple, or a Diseased Orchard?' in *Crime and Culture: An Historical Perspective*, eds Amy Gilman Srebnick and René Levy (London, 2005), p. 86.
86. *Report of the Street Offences Committee*, p. 737.
87. Inquiry in Regard to the Interrogation by Police of Miss Savidge, 1928.
88. Testimony of William Horwood, 20 December 1927; see also testimony of Ernley Blackwell, 25 October 1927, Street Offences Committee Minutes of Evidence, London, N.A., HO 326/7.
89. *Report of the Street Offences Committee* (London, 1928), p. 18.
90. *Report of the Street Offences Committee* (London, 1928), pp. 18–25.
91. House of Commons Debate, 21 February 1929, *Hansards*, vol. 225 c1323W and House of Commons Debate, *Hansards*, 27 March 1930 vol. 237 c584.
92. Testimony of William Horwood, 20 December 1927, Street Offences Committee Minutes of Evidence, London, N.A., HO 326/7.
93. Testimony of William Horwood, 20 December 1927, Street Offences Committee Minutes of Evidence, London, N.A., HO 326/7. Neville-Rolphe also claims that it had been commonly observed that prostitutes were less brazen in solicitation by the 1930s. Neville Rolphe, 'Sex-Delinquency', p. 299.
94. Hopkins to Horwood, 25 June 1920, London, N.A., MEPO 2/9998.
95. Several official reports suggested that arrests for indecency in Hyde Park were high, and the majority of them were connected to prostitution. London, N.A., MEPO 2/1720. However, Hyde Park had also become a more popular resort for gay solicitation by mid-century as well. Houlbrook, *Queer London*, p. 53.
96. For 'gutter crawling' see London, N.A., MEPO 2/4600.
97. Home Office minute citing London Cab Order of 1934, 8 November 1951, London, N.A., HO 385/1.
98. The AMSH complained of this common practice in their Seventh Annual Report, 1921–2.
99. Wotner and Sons to the Metropolitan Police Commissioner, 27 October 1927, London, N.A., MEPO 3/7356.
100. Alison Neilans to the Secretary of State, 17 December 1936, London, N.A., HO 45/21766.
101. Memorandum from the Commissioner's Office, November 1927; Evidence submitted to Committee on Homosexual Offences and Prostitution by Metropolitan Police, London, N.A., HO 291/1068. Another hidden measure that was used against prostitutes was the charge of 'conspiracy to corrupt public morals' under a little-used section of the common law: by the 1950s, it appears that around forty women per year were charged under this Act for offences related to prostitution. Report of Chief Superintendent, 14 July 1951, London, N.A., MEPO 2/8935.
102. Draft Home Office response to Pethick-Lawrence and Alison Neilans, c. January 1937, London, N.A., HO 45/21766.
103. Alison Neilans, 'Clause 3a- A rejoinder', *The Shield*, 1, no. 7 (1917).
104. Brighton seemed to be a popular seasonal destination for some of London's prostitutes. Police Notebook, c. 1898, Charles Booth Survey Documents, London, LSE Archives, B355, 39.

## 8 Behind Closed Doors: Off-Street Commercial Sex in the Interwar Years

1. Report of Superintendent Billings, 6 November 1916, London, N.A., MEPO 2/1714.

2. *Ibid.*; for cafés more generally and London night life, see White, *London in the Twentieth Century*, pp. 335–6.
3. I. Donnachie, 'World War I and the Drink Question: State Control of the Drink Trade', *Journal of the Scottish Labour History Society*, no. 17 (1982): 25 and David W. Gutzke, 'Gender, Class, and Public Drinking in Britain During the First World War', *Histoire Sociale/Social History* 27, no. 54 (1994).
4. Report of H Division, 28 February 1933, London, N.A., HO 144/22301 and MEPO 2/2135.
5. Aliens Restriction (Consolidation) Order, section 10, no. 122, Defence of the Realm Act, 1916.
6. Report of Superintendent Billings, 21 November 1916, London, N.A., MEPO 2/1714.
7. Colonel Johnson to Edward Henry, 30 November 1916, London, N.A., MEPO 2/1714.
8. Report of Superintendent Billings, 30 March 1916, London, N.A., MEPO 2/1714.
9. Report of H Division Superintendent, 28 February 1933, London, N.A., HO 144/22301.
10. Similar methods were used by police in the control of male homosexual offences in the interwar years. See Houlbrook, *Queer London*, pp. 76–80.
11. Henriques, *Prostitution and Society, Vol III*, pp. 45–9, 154–82.
12. 1910 Licensing Consolidation Act (10 Edw. VII and I Geo V. 5, c.24) s. 76 and 77.
13. Testimony of Miss Costin, 27 January 1919, Enq. Sexual Morality Minutes of Evidence, London, The Women's Library, 3AMS/B.
14. Alien Restriction (Amendment) Act, 1919 (9 and 10 Geo. 5. Ch. 92).
15. Commissioner Horwood Memorandum, 15 February 1927, London, N.A., HO 144/22301.
16. Marek Kohn, *Dope Girls: The Birth of the British Drug Underground* (London, 1992), pp. 120–49.
17. Statement of Guiseppe Valla, 31 January 1930, London, N.A., MEPO 2/2462.
18. Anonymous letter, 30 April 1927, London, N.A., MEPO 3/2462.
19. Statement of Charles Bellamy, 16 August 1929, London, N.A., MEPO 3/2462.
20. Statement of Ms Richesta, n.d., London, N.A., DP 1/87.
21. Wyles, *A Woman at Scotland Yard*, pp. 63–70; Trial of Rou Sharu, 5 December 1932, London, N.A., CRIM 1/626.
22. Report of H division, 19 January 1933, HO 144/22301.
23. Wyles, *A Woman at Scotland Yard*, p. 67.
24. Report of C Division, 19 February 1927, London, N.A., HO 144/22301.
25. For more on the connections between these kinds of cafés, crime and 'dope', see the passage on the café the 'Black Man's Buddy' in Stanley Scott, *Tales of the Underworld* (London, 1925), pp. 66–7.
26. Report of C Division, 19 February 1927, London, N.A., HO 144/22301.
27. CID Report, 6 July 1900, London, N.A., MEPO 2/514 and Police Notebook, c. 1898, Charles Booth Survey Documents, London, LSE Archives, B355, 39.
28. Testimony of George Bellchambers, London, N.A., HO 45/468/X124.
29. *The Times*, 7 October 1898, 13D; 12 January 1900, 14A; 27 October 1900, 15G; 1 November 1900, 2G; 10 May 1901, 14B. Frank Mort, for instance, suggests that this practice of 'doorstep membership' dates to the interwar years. Frank Mort, 'Striptease: The Erotic Female Body and Live Sexual Entertainment in Mid-

- Twentieth-Century London', *Social History* 32, no. 1 (2007): 46. For an early description of a 'nightclub' and a 'dancing girl' who worked there, see Machray, *Night Side of London*, pp. 226–34.
30. White, *London in the Twentieth Century*, p. 332.
  31. Report of C Division, 17 June 1924, London, N.A., HO 45/16205.
  32. Winter v. Woolfe, [1931] 1 KB 549; White, *London in the Twentieth Century*, pp. 332–5; Kohn, *Dope Girls*; Bland, 'White Women and Men of Colour': and Helen Moore, *Inside British Jazz: Crossing Borders of Race, Nation and Class* (London, 2007), pp. 17–25.
  33. Kohn, *Dope Girls*, pp. 120–49.
  34. Morton, *Nights of London*, pp. 169–71.
  35. Chesterton, *Women of the Underworld*, pp. 139–52.
  36. Peter Bailey, 'Parasexuality and Glamour: The Victorian Barmaid as Cultural Prototype', *Gender and History* 2, no. 2 (1990): 148–73 and Neville Rolphe, 'Sex-Delinquency', p. 299.
  37. Chesterton, *Women of the Underworld*, pp. 139–52.
  38. Sidney Theodore Felstead, *The Underworld of London* (London, 1923), p. 269. For other comments on drug use being on the rise amongst prostitutes, see Scott, *Tales of the Underworld*, pp. 83–8; Stringer, *Moral Evil*, pp. 187–8; and Wyles, *A Woman at Scotland Yard*, pp. 75–6.
  39. Mort, 'Striptease': 28–9. For earlier discussion about the use of plain clothes officers to arrest prostitutes and keep observation upon clubs, see Wotner and Sons to Police Commission, 8 December 1910, London, N.A., MEPO 2/1419.
  40. The Met was reimbursing Sergeant Goddard 200 pounds a month in expenses. *The Times*, Wednesday 19 December 1928, 7A.
  41. CID report, 4 December 1928, London, N.A., MEPO 3/2462. For prostitutes acting as police informants see Wyles, *A Woman at Scotland Yard*, p. 76.
  42. Kate Meyrick, *Secrets of the 43: Reminiscences by Mrs. Meyrick* (London, 1933).
  43. Statement of Pietro Nicotti, 25 February 1929, London, N.A., MEPO 3/2462.
  44. Emsley, 'Sergeant Goddard', pp. 89–93.
  45. *Ibid.*, p. 92.
  46. *Ibid.*, pp. 103–4.
  47. Chapman, *Poor Man's Court*, p. 154.
  48. Mort, 'Striptease'.
  49. *The Times*, 27 January 1921, 7A.
  50. Report of C Division, 13 January 1945, London, N.A., MEPO 3/2817.
  51. For instance, there is no mention of telephone sex or solicitation in M. Martin, 'Hello, Central?': *Gender, Technology, and Culture in the Formation of Telephone Systems* (Kingston, 1991), pp. 148–66.
  52. *The Judicial Statistics of England and Wales, 1885–1930*.
  53. Report of C Division, 13 January 1945, London, N.A., MEPO 3/2817.
  54. See, for instance, 'Indecent Advertisements Bills, 1909, 1910, 1920', in London, N.A, HO 45/12933 and H.G. Cocks, 'Peril in the Personals: The Dangers and Pleasures of Classified Advertising in Early Twentieth-Century Britain', *Media History* 10, no. 1 (2004): 9–14. See also H.G. Cocks, "'Sporty" Girls And "Artistic" Boys: Friendship, Illicit Sex, and the British "Companionship" Advertisement, 1913–1928', *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 11, no. 3 (2002): 457–82.
  55. Zatz, 'Sex Work/Sex Act': 301.
  56. Report of the CID, 2 November 1934, London, N.A., MEPO 3/1072 and Reg v. Silver, 40 CAR 32, as cited in London, N.A., MEPO 2/10559.

57. See, for instance, memorandum on brothels, n.d. 1938, London, N.A., MEPO 2/5962; F.D. Sharpe, *Sharpe of the Flying Squad* (London, 1938), p. 107 and Wilkinson, *Women of the Streets*, pp. 67–8.
58. Frederick Redfern and Vera Harding Depositions, 25 February 1938, London, N.A., CRIM 1/1007.
59. For these issues in a slightly earlier period, see Englander, *Landlord and Tenant*, pp. 33–50. For more on these flats, see various references in Tate, *West End Girls*.
60. Memo on Brothels, n.d. 1938, London, N.A., MEPO 2/5962; report of Chelsea Station, B Division, 4 May 1948 and Report of West End Central Station, 1 November 1951, London, N.A., MEPO 2/2622.
61. Watts, *The Men in My Life*, p. 138.
62. Report on Brothels, n.d. 1939, London, N.A., MEPO 2/5962.
63. Report to the London Diocese Conference by the special committee appointed to investigate matters relating to the Paddington estate and the connection of the ecclesiastical commissioners therewith, in London, N.A., MEPO 3/2967.
64. Report of the Conference on the White Slave Traffic, 22 April 1936, London, N.A., MEPO 2/998; Report on Brothels, n.d. 1939, London, N.A., MEPO 2/5962; police evidence submitted to the Wolfenden Committee, London, N.A., MEPO 2/9713.
65. Testimony of Police Commissioner Nott Bower to the Wolfenden Committee, 9 November 1954, London, N.A., HO 345/12.
66. Wilkinson, *Women of the Streets*, p. 68.
67. Report of B Division, Chelsea, 2 Feb 1950, London, N.A., MEPO 2/7856.
68. Wilkinson, *Women of the Streets*, p. 65; Report of B Division, Chelsea, 2 February 1950, MEPO 2/7856 and C division, West End Central Station, 24 August 1954, London, N.A., MEPO 3/9713.
69. John Davis, 'Rents and Race in 1960s London: New Light on Rachmanism', *Twentieth Century British History* 12, no. 1 (2001): 69–92.
70. Wilkinson, *Women of the Streets*, pp. 78–9. The importance of a maid to many prostitute women is plainly shown in Tate, *West End Girls*.
71. Watts, *The Men in My Life*, pp. 139–40.
72. Rosalind Wilkinson, 'Review of Study on Traffic in Persons and Prostitution, United Nations Publication, 1959', *British Journal of Criminology* 1, no. 2 (1960): 78 and Watts, *The Men in My Life*, p. 153.
73. Wilkinson, *Women of the Streets*, p. 60. Marthe Watts also complained about being expected to take off her clothing indoors, but she never did. Watts, *The Men in My Life*, p. 191.
74. Statement of Charles Bellamy, 16 August 1929, London, N.A., MEPO 3/2462 and Statement of Ms Richesta, n.d., London, N.A., DP 1/87.
75. Report of C Division on murder of Leah Hines, 25 June 1937, London, N.A., MEPO 3/1707.
76. Frank Sharpe to CID, 16 May 1936, London, N.A., MEPO 3/1707.
77. Report of Frank Sharpe, 25 June 1937, London, N.A., MEPO 3/1707.
78. Sharpe, *Flying Squad*, p. 124.
79. *Ibid.*, p. 79.
80. Report of C Division, 24 July 1937, London, N.A., MEPO 3/1707.
81. Sharpe, *Flying Squad*, p. 124.
82. *Ibid.* For evidence of the closed reports on assaults, see FOI notice of eight redacted pages in London, N.A., MEPO 2/1707.
83. Watts, *The Men in My Life*, pp. 234–5.



## 9 Sex, War and Syndication: Organized Prostitution and the Second World War

1. Watts, *The Men in My Life*, pp. 13–41.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 106.
3. *Ibid.*, pp. 106–25.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 127.
5. *Ibid.*
6. *Ibid.*, pp. 137–55.
7. *Ibid.*, pp. 156–7.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 142.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 145. As Stefan Slater has discovered, there is a record of Watts's 1938 prosecution for brothel-keeping in the records of the Westminster City Council, showing she was living at 13 Duke Street at the time. Stefan Slater, 'Street Sex for Sale in Soho, 1918–1939: Experiences, Representations, and Attempts at Control' (University of London, 2007), p. 31.
10. Watts, *The Men in My Life*, p. 146.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 149.
12. 'Marriages of Convenience', c. 1936, London, N.A., MEPO 2/998 and Stefan Slater, 'Pimps, Police, and Filles De Joie: Foreign Prostitution in Interwar London', *The London Journal* 32, no. 1 (2007): 53–74.
13. Offen, 'Madame Gheacutenia': 244–8.
14. Police Minute, 10 February 1936, London, N.A., MEPO 2/998.
15. Police consistently misspell Garsia's name, but it is almost certain that 'Marston Garcia' in the police files and 'Marston Garsia', the legal author and barrister active in the 1920s and 1930s, are one and the same. Marston Garsia appears to have been a respected barrister, writing a series of law 'in a nutshell' books for the publisher Sweet and Maxwell in the 1920s that enjoyed several editions, and making a serious contribution to writing on criminal law and procedure. See, for instance, M. Garsia, *Criminal Law in a Nutshell* (London, 1922).
16. CID to unknown Chief Inspector, 7 February 1925, London, N.A., MEPO 3/2583.
17. CID Report, 2 July 1931, London, N.A., MEPO 3/1072.
18. Law firm of Dagg and Smith; Police Commissioner to the Home Office, 19 June 1914: HO 45/15041 and 6 February 1936, London, N.A., MEPO 3/988.
19. CID Report, 14 June 1932; Special Branch Report, 14 January 1933, London, N.A., MEPO 3/1072.
20. Report of Vine Street Station, 20 April 1931, London, N.A., MEPO 3/1072.
21. Report of the Brussels police to CID, 26 November 1931, London, N.A., MEPO 3/1072.
22. Report of CID, 10 November 1931, London, N.A., MEPO 3/1072.
23. Slater, 'Pimps, Police, and Filles De Joie': 53–74.
24. Police Minute, 10 February 1936, London, N.A., MEPO 3/988.
25. See undated handwritten list in London, N.A., MEPO 3/2582.
26. Telegram from Croyden Immigration officer to Special Branch, 22 October 1937; Report of the Special Branch, 23 July 1937, London, N.A., MEPO 3/1091.
27. Memorandum of Chief Inspector 10 October 1933, London, N.A., MEPO 2/1072.
28. Report of the CID, 2 July 1937, London, N.A., MEPO 3/1091.
29. Undated Memorandum (c. 1933) in London, N.A., MEPO 3/1072.
30. Watts, *The Men in My Life*, p. 141.

31. 'Memorandum on the so-called "white slave traffic"' etc., 6 February 1936, MEPO 3/988.
32. These opinions were outlined in the tellingly entitled 'Memorandum on the so-called "white slave traffic"; the position of undesirable aliens in this country; marriages of convenience; and immigration control and deportation orders', 6 February 1936, MEPO 3/988.
33. Report of the CID, 29 November 1938, London, N.A., MEPO 3/1093.
34. *Ibid.*
35. Association for Moral and Social Hygiene, 'Compulsory Repatriation of Prostitutes', published pamphlet, London, 1931, 6.
36. *Ibid.*, 8–9.
37. Albert Londres, *Le Chemin De Buenos-Aires* (Paris, 1927).
38. This was in the years following 1936, as there was no record of their activities in a Met survey of 'ponces' in that year, London, N.A., MEPO 3/988.
39. For the substantial amount of newly released Metropolitan Police and Home Office files on the Messina brothers and for several accounts of their lives before and after coming to London, see London, N.A., MEPO 2/8935; MEPO 3/2143; MEPO 2/8707; and HO 45/25638.
40. Watts, *The Men in My Life*, p. 169.
41. 'You forget but she remembers', the National Archives INF3/271, The Art of War online Exhibition ([nationalarchives.gov.uk/artofwar](http://nationalarchives.gov.uk/artofwar), accessed 22 April 2010).
42. Home Office letter, 28 January 1943, Minister of Labour to Secretary of State, 15 February 1943 London, N.A., HO 45/23650.
43. Notes from a meeting held at the Home Office, October 1942, London, N.A., LAB 9/109.
44. Sonia Rose, 'Sex, Citizenship and the Nation in WWII Britain', *American Historical Review* (1998): 1151–2 and Rose, 'Girls and GIs'. For the impact on US soil, see Clement, *Love for Sale*, pp. 114–43.
45. E Division Report, 21 November 1942, London, N.A., MEPO 3/2140 and unidentified Home Office official to Police Commissioner, 9 September 1942, London, N.A., MEPO 3/2138.
46. Report of Coles, West End Central Station, 27 August 1942, London, N.A., MEPO 3/2138.
47. Memo to the Commissioner, 19 October 1942, London, N.A., MEPO 2/2138.
48. Foreign Office to Osbert Peake MP, 7 April 1943, London, N.A., MEPO 3/2138.
49. Richard Law to Home Secretary, 5 May 1943, London, N.A., MEPO 3/2138.
50. *New York Times*, as cited by the *Daily Mirror*, Thursday, 3 June 1943.
51. Brigadier General Hawley to Colonel Douglas, 16 March 1943, London, N.A., MEPO 2/2138.
52. Report of Coles, West End Central Station, 27 August 1942, London, N.A., MEPO 3/2138.
53. *Ibid.*
54. Home Office Minute, 28 September 1942, London, N.A., MEPO 3/2138.
55. *Ibid.*
56. Police Commissioner Philip Game to Admiral Sir Edward Evans, 7 September 1943, London, N.A., MEPO 3/2138; Herbert Morrison, 15 February 1943, London, N.A., HO 45/23650.
57. Minutes of Home Office conference, 29 October 1942, London, N.A., MEPO 3/2138.
58. *Sunday Pictorial*, 23 August 1942.

59. Ibid.
60. Report of West End Central Station, C Division, 14 September, 1942, MEPO 3/2138 and Robert Fabian, *London after Dark: An Intimate Record of Night Life in London, and a Selection of Crime Stories from the Case Book of Ex-Superintendent Robert Fabian* (London, 1954), p. 17.
61. Ibid.
62. Ibid.
63. Herbert Morrison MP to Herbert Williams MP, 6 Oct 1942 and Report of West End Central Station, C Division, 14 September 1942, MEPO 3/2138.
64. Report of West End Central Station, C Division, 14 September 1942, MEPO 3/2138.
65. Report of PC E. Fudge, D Division, 19 April 1940, London, N.A., MEPO 3/770.
66. Ibid.
67. Statement of PC William Bailey, D Division, 23 April 1940, London, N.A., MEPO 3/770.
68. Roger Davidson, *Dangerous Liaisons: A Social History of Venereal Disease in Twentieth-Century Scotland*, Dangerous liaisons ed. (Amsterdam, 2000), pp. 211–12.
69. Roger Davidson, 'Searching for Mary, Glasgow: Contact Tracing for Sexually Transmitted Diseases in Twentieth-Century Scotland', *Social History of Medicine* 9, no. 2 (1996): 198–206 and Roger Davidson, 'Fighting "The Deadly Scourge": The Impact of World War II on Civilian Vd Policy in Scotland', *Scottish Historical Review* 75, no. 199 (1996).
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71. Testimony of Frank Powell to the Wolfenden Committee, 5 January 1955, London, N.A., HO 345/12.
72. Anonymous police memoranda, 4 December 1942 and 21 November 1942; and Alexander Maxwell to Commissioner Game, 1 March 1943, London, N.A., MEPO 2/2140.
73. Watts, *The Men in My Life*, p. 169.
74. Ibid., p. 170.
75. Ibid., pp. 173, 177.
76. Ibid., pp. 175–6.
77. *Siviour v. Napolitano* (1931) 95 JP p72; Memorandum of the Joint Standing Borough Committee to Wolfenden, c. 1956, London, N.A., HO 345/8.
78. Report of C Division, West Central Station, 8 February 1949, London, N.A., HO 45/23650 and Watts, *The Men in My Life*, p. 184.
79. Ibid., pp. 188, 191.
80. Ibid., p. 231.
81. For instance, Jenkins and Potter claim that 'brothels fell out of favour'. Philip Jenkins and Gary Potter, 'Before the Krays: Organized Crime in London, 1920–1960', *Criminal Justice History* 9 (1988): 214 and Donald Thomas, *Villains' Paradise: A History of Britain's Underworld* (London, 2006), pp. 265–301.
82. Wilkinson, *Women of the Streets*, p. 18.
83. Neville Rolphe, 'Sex-Delinquency', p. 320.
84. Report of C Division, 30 September 1949, London, N.A., HO 45/23650.

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86. *Ibid.*
87. Ena Bassett deposition, 16 March 1939, London, N.A., CRIM 1/1087.
88. Peggy Moores deposition, 16 March 1939, London, N.A., CRIM 1/1087.
89. Alec Muir deposition, 11 January 1938, London, N.A., CRIM 1/993.
90. Frank Chaplin deposition, 11 January 1938, London, N.A., CRIM 1/993.
91. Doris Golding and Sybil Harrison depositions, Central Criminal Court, 30 April 1935, London, N.A., CRIM 1/772.
92. Watts, *The Men in My Life*, p. 107.
93. Wilkinson, *Women of the Streets*, pp. 117–18.
94. *Ibid.*, pp. 116–19.
95. *Ibid.*, p. 125.
96. *Ibid.*, p. 116.
97. *Ibid.*, p. 121.
98. Report of Coles, West End Central Station, 27 August 1942, London, N.A., MEPO 3/2138.
99. Statement of Gladys Lilian Barter, 11 February 1942, London, N.A., MEPO 3/2206.
100. Statement of Mona Hitt, 11 February 1942, London, N.A., MEPO 3/2206.
101. Statement of June Anderson, 21 February 1942, London, N.A., MEPO 3/2206.
102. Statement of James Byrne, March 16 1945, London, N.A., MEPO 3/2291.
103. Report of C Division, 26 September 1948, London, N.A., MEPO 3/3027.
104. Thomas, *Villains' Paradise*, p. 269.
105. Report of C Division, 23 December 1949, London, N.A., MEPO 3/3027.

## 10 The Shame of London: Prostitution and Panic in the Post-war Metropolis

1. Wilkinson, *Women of the Streets*, p. 4.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 36 and Deputy Commissioner Minute, 2 May 1950, London, N.A., MEPO 2/2622.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 79; Report of A Division, 24 August 1954, London, N.A., MEPO 3/9713 and David Litton to the Home Office, n.d. (c. November 1957), London, N.A., HO 291/124.
4. *Ibid.*, pp. 188, 146, 150.
5. Report of Assistant Commander A, 2 May 1950, London, N.A., MEPO 3/2622. The late 1940s and early 1950s witnessed a restructuring of Police Divisions, including the changing of the rank of District Commissioner to Commander.
6. Wilkinson, *Women of the Streets*, p. 49; Report of Assistant Commander A, 10 November 1951, London, N.A., MEPO 3/2622.
7. Report of Assistant Commander A, 10 November 1951, London, N.A., MEPO 3/2622.
8. Wilkinson, *Women of the Streets*, p. 48.
9. Watts, *The Men in My Life*, p. 231.
10. Wilkinson, *Women of the Streets*, p. 48.
11. Minute, Chief Inspector, n.d. (c. 28 January 1953), London, N.A., MEPO 3/2817.
12. Wilkinson, *Women of the Streets*, p. 49.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 47.
14. Unknown police official, 15 January 1948, London, N.A., MEPO 3/2967.

15. From 'The Pilot St. Paul's Church of the Port of London for Seamen', July 1961, in London, N.A., HLG 118/66.
16. 'Report on Prostitution in Stepney', 31 January 1956, London, N.A., MEPO 2/9715; Wilkinson, *Women of the Streets*, p. 244; 'Vice in London's East End', *The Times*, 13 August 1958 and Commander A, 14 September 1957, London, N.A., MEPO 2/2622.
17. Police Memorandum on a pamphlet entitled 'Vice increase in Stepney by the Reverend Edwyn Young and Others', n.d. (c. 1957), London, N.A., MEPO 3/9715.
18. See undated maps (c. 1957) from HLG 118/66 and 'Report on Prostitution in Stepney', 31 January 1956, London, N.A., MEPO 2/9715.
19. Police maps of solicitation in D and B Divisions submitted as evidence for the Wolfenden Committee, n.d. (c. 1956), London, N.A., HO 291/1068.
20. Ibid.
21. Report of the Deputy Commissioner, 10 February 1948, London, N.A., MEPO 2/2622.
22. Ibid.
23. Ibid.
24. Report of C Division, 27 May 1950 and 1 November 1951, London, N.A., MEPO 2/2622.
25. Annual reports of the Metropolitan Police Commissioner: this rate is very roughly determined by the ratio of 'known prostitutes' to the number of arrests.
26. On the impact of the rowdyism patrol, see memorandum of the Metropolitan Police to the Wolfenden Committee, London, N.A., HO 345/8; Testimony of PC C 570 Anderson to Wolfenden Committee, 8 November 1954, London, N.A., HO 345/12.
27. Self, *Prostitution, Women and the Misuse of the Law*, p. 73.
28. Commissioner in Police circular, 10 February 1948, London, N.A., MEPO 3/9713.
29. Deputy Commissioner to Commissioner, 2 June 1950, London, N.A., MEPO 3/2622.
30. Assistant Commander in Police circular, 6 November 1950, London, N.A., MEPO 3/2622.
31. Helen Ware, 1969 as cited by Self, *Prostitution, Women and the Misuse of the Law*, p. 75 and Carol Smart, 'Law and the Control of Women's Sexuality: The Case of the 1950s', in *Controlling Women: The Normal and the Deviant*, eds Bridget Hunter and Gillian Williams (London, 1981), p. 50.
32. Police Commissioner memorandum, 5 May 1957, London, N.A., MEPO 3/2622.
33. Report of A1 Branch, 10 September 1957, London, N.A., MEPO 3/2622.
34. Commander 1 to Commissioner of Police, 6 April 1954, London, N.A., MEPO 2/2622.
35. Home Secretary to MP Graham Pole, 9 November 1949, London, N.A., HO 45/23650.
36. Notes on police conference on prostitution, 4 August 1954, London, N.A., MEPO 2/2622.
37. 'Rachmanism noun', *Oxford Dictionary of English*, revised edn, eds Catherine Soanes and Angus Stevenson (Oxford University Press, 2005); Oxford Reference Online, Oxford University Press, McGill University (<http://www.oxfordreference.com/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t140.e63505>, accessed 9 July 2010).

38. Director of Public Prosecutions to the Metropolitan Police Commissioner, 4 August 1959, London, N.A., MEPO 2/10077; see also 'Perc (or Peter) RACHMAN: undesirable activities in connection with ownership of properties in London, including exorbitant rents, harassment of tenants and letting for immoral purposes, 1958–1963', London, N.A., MEPO 2/9999.
39. Director of Public Prosecutions to Metropolitan Police Commissioner, 4 August 1959, London, N.A., MEPO 2/10077 and Davis, 'Rents and Race in 1960s London'.
40. Report of West End Central, 18 May 1953, London, N.A., HO 45/25651 and Thomas, *Villains' Paradise*, pp. 265–301.
41. Bingham, *Family Newspapers?*, pp. 159–200.
42. Metropolitan Police Commissioner to the BSBC, 15 January 1948, London, N.A., MEPO 3/2967.
43. Newspaper clippings in London, N.A, MEPO 3/2582 and 3/3027.
44. *Sunday Pictorial*, 6 February 1949.
45. Report of C Division, 30 October 1952, London, N.A., MEPO 2/9367.
46. Report of C Division, 8 February 1949, London, N.A., HO 45/23650.
47. Report of Superintendent C, 9 February 1949, London, N.A., HO 45/23650.
48. Duncan Webb, *Crime Is My Business* (London, 1953).
49. Watts, *The Men in My Life*, p. 210.
50. Stepney Borough Council Home Office Deputation minutes, 19 July 1957, London, N.A., MEPO 3/9715.
51. Report of West End Central Station, 30 September 1949, London, N.A., HO 45/23650.
52. Frank Powell in the *Westminster and Pimlico News*, 23 October 1953, cited in Self, *Prostitution, Women and the Misuse of the Law*, p. 75.
53. Memorandum of Police Commissioner to Wolfenden Committee, c. July 1956, London, N.A., MEPO 2/9713.
54. Memorandum of Metropolitan Police Commissioner, 30 September 1949, London, N.A., HO 45/23650.
55. Wilkinson, *Women of the Streets*, pp. 118–19.
56. Self, *Prostitution, Women and the Misuse of the Law*, p. 70.
57. But Malta's strategic location in the Mediterranean inspired the government to avoid 'impair[ing] the goodwill of her people'. Memorandum of Metropolitan Police Commissioner, 30 September 1949, London, N.A., HO 45/23650.
58. Testimony of PC C 570 Anderson to Wolfenden Committee, 8 November 1954, London, N.A., HO 345/12 and Police Memorandum on a pamphlet entitled 'Vice increase in Stepney by the Reverend Edwyn Young and Others', n.d. (c. 1957), London, N.A., MEPO 3/9715.
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65. *People* on Sunday 26 April 1953; 3 May 1953.
66. Fabian, *London after Dark*, p. 43.
67. Watts, *The Men in My Life*, inset image between pp. 192 and 193.
68. Metropolitan Police official to BSBC, 15 January 1948, London, N.A., MEPO 3/2967.
69. *Ibid.*
70. Report of West End Central, 18 May 1953, London, N.A., HO 45/25651.
71. Report of B Division, 17 May 1953, London, N.A., HO 45/25651.
72. Report of A Division, 24 August 1954, London, N.A., MEPO 3/9713.
73. Anonymous Home Office official, 20 June 1953, HO 45/25651.
74. Bingham, *Family Newspapers?*, p. 164.
75. Mass-Observation, 'Little Kinsey: Mass-Observation's Sex Survey of 1948', p. 150.
76. *Ibid.*, p. 146.
77. *Ibid.*, pp. 148–9.
78. Judith Summers, *Soho: A History of London's Most Colourful Neighbourhood* (London, 1989), pp. 210–11.
79. Minute of meeting held at the Home Office between Secretary of State and Police Commissioner, 21 July 1953, London, N.A., HO 45/25651.
80. Report of B division, 24 August 1954, London, N.A., MEPO 2/9713.
81. Report of A Division, 24 August 1954, London, N.A., MEPO 3/2967.
82. Superintendent Baston to the Home Office, 26 May 1956, London, N.A., MEPO 2/2139.
83. Self, *Prostitution, Women and the Misuse of the Law*, p. 69.
84. *Ibid.*, p. 81.
85. Jean Heal, 'Outcasts in our Cities: Summing up "Women of the Streets", the Report that Shocked Britain', *Empire News*, 29 November 1954.
86. *Daily Sketch*, 4 September 1957.
87. This report was the subject of controversy. There was a great deal of ill-feeling between the BSBC and Hermann Mannheim, who helped get the project funded through LSE and who had suggested Wilkinson as the researcher, and eventually the situation degenerated into Wilkinson having to sue for copyright of the material (she lost). Meanwhile, police and the Home Office also found much to dislike in the document, and the BSBC were keen to edit it according to their wishes. See, for instance, Notes from Meeting with Mr C. Hill of the Home Office, June 22 1954, and Miss French, Secretary of BSBC to Miss EC Bather, Superintendent of the Metropolitan Women Police, London, N.A., 2 August 1954, MEPO 3/2967.
88. Wilkinson, *Women of the Streets*, p. 18.
89. Testimony of Police Commissioner Nott Bower to the Wolfenden Committee, 9 November 1954, London, N.A., HO 345/12.
90. Wilkinson, *Women of the Streets*, p. 18.
91. *Ibid.*, p. 19.
92. Testimony of Rosalind Wilkinson to the Wolfenden Committee, 16 November 1955, London N.A., HO 345/12.
93. Wilkinson, *Women of the Streets*, p. 20.
94. *Ibid.*
95. *Ibid.*, p. 24.

96. *Ibid.*, p. 36.
97. *Ibid.*
98. *Ibid.*, p. 9.
99. *Ibid.*, p. 116.
100. *Ibid.*, p. 120.
101. *Ibid.*, p. 10.
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103. *Ibid.*, p. 37.

## 11 Risking the Dangers: Reconsidering Commercial Sex in 'Permissive Britain'

1. Jeffrey Weeks, *Sex, Politics and Society: The Regulation of Sexuality since 1800* (London, 1989), p. 239 and Mort, *Capital Affairs*, [chapter 4](#).
2. Self, *Prostitution, Women and the Misuse of the Law*, p. 70.
3. Weeks, *Sex, Politics and Society*, p. 239.
4. Self, *Prostitution, Women and the Misuse of the Law*, p. 70.
5. Houlbrook, *Queer London*, p. 254.
6. Self, *Prostitution, Women and the Misuse of the Law*, pp. 80–2.
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8. Derrick Sherwin Bailey, *Sexual Offenders and Social Punishment: Being the Evidence Submitted on Behalf of the Church of England Moral Welfare Council to the Departmental Committee on Homosexual Offences and Prostitution* (London, 1956), pp. 61–2.
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10. *Daily Herald*, 20 January 1959; evidence of BSBC; Church of England Moral Reform Council Memorandum for Wolfenden Committee, n.d. (c. 1956), London, N.A., HO 345/8 part 2; *ibid.*, pp. 168–9 and Self, *Prostitution, Women and the Misuse of the Law*, pp. 170–1.
11. Memorandum on 'Public Concern about the nuisance caused by prostitutes', n.d. (c. 1959), London, N.A., HO 291/1083; Departmental Committee on Homosexual Offences and Prostitution, *The Wolfenden Report: Report of the Committee on Homosexual Offences and Prostitution* (New York, 1963), p. 154.
12. Memorandum of the Metropolitan Boroughs Standing Joint Committee to Wolfenden, n.d. (c. 1956), London, N.A., HO 345/8 and *Evening News*, 13 December 1954.
13. Report of Arbour St Station, H Division, 26 August 1958, London, N.A., MEPO 2/9715; for the connection between prostitution and housing see 'Stepney Slum Clearances', July 1960, HLG 118/66.
14. Memorandum of Mr Frank Powell to Wolfenden, London, N.A., HO 345/1, p. 1.
15. Testimony of Mr Frank Powell to the Wolfenden Committee, 5 January 1955, London, N.A., HO 345/12.
16. Memorandum of Chief Magistrate Lawrence Dunn to Wolfenden, London, N.A., HO 345/8, p. 1.
17. Memorandum of the Magistrates' Association to Wolfenden, London, N.A., HO 345/8, p. 2.
18. Testimony of PC 410 Scarborough and PC 570 Anderson to the Wolfenden Committee, 8 November 1954, London, N.A., HO 345/12.



19. Testimony of Commander A. Robinson, Mr T. Macdonald Baker, Solicitor to the Police, and Commissioner Nott-Bower, 9 November 1954, Wolfenden Committee Minutes of Evidence, London, N.A., HO 345/12 and testimony of PC 410 C Scarborough and PC 570 Anderson, 8 November 1954, Wolfenden Committee minutes of evidence, London, N.A., HO 345/12.
20. Memorandum of Commissioner Nott Bower to the Wolfenden Committee, n.d. (c. 1954), London, N.A., MEPO 3/9713.
21. Self, *Prostitution, Women and the Misuse of the Law*, p. 120.
22. Watts, *The Men in My Life*, p. 12.
23. Sexual Offences Act 1956 (4 & 5 Eliz. 2 c. 69).
24. Lieut.-Colonel Marcus Lipton (Brixton); House of Commons Debate, 6 July 1956, *Hansards*, vol. 555 cc. 1,750–1, 1,750.
25. Self, *Prostitution, Women and the Misuse of the Law*, p. 156.
26. *Report of the Departmental Committee on Homosexual Offences and Prostitution* (London: HMSO, 1957), cmd. 247 and *Prostitution, Wolfenden Report*.
27. Reservations by Mary G. Cohen, Kathleen Lovibond and Lily Stopford, *ibid.*, pp. 207–8.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 189.
29. *Ibid.*, p. 145.
30. Wilson, 'Principles of the International Abolitionist Federation'.
31. *Prostitution, Wolfenden Report*, pp. 143–7.
32. *Ibid.*, pp. 143–4.
33. In the 1980s, the first attempt to prosecute clients for 'kerb crawling' came into effect and immediately suggested these problems of identification, particularly because the offence (unlike the offence of soliciting) required proof that the man had done it 'habitually'. In the administration of this law, the state appeared more willing to identify men's cars (by their licence plates) than the men themselves.
34. Wilkinson, *Women of the Streets*, pp. 103–4.
35. T. Kemp, 'A Study of the Causes of Prostitution, Especially Concerning Hereditary Factors', in *A Decade of Progress in Eugenics, Scientific Papers of the Third International Congress of Eugenics* (New York, 1932).
36. Glover, *Psychopathology*, pp. 12–13.
37. James, *Prostitution and the Law*, p. 133.
38. From 'Prostitution' by Eleanor French, BSBC, London, 1954; clipping from HO 345/8 p. 2.
39. *House of Lords Debate, 07 June 1951, Hansards*, vol. 171, cc. 1,198–206, 1,199.
40. *Prostitution, Wolfenden Report*, p. 131.
41. *Ibid.*, p. 132.
42. *Ibid.*, p. 162.
43. *Ibid.*, p. 140.
44. *Ibid.*, p. 157.
45. Smart, 'Women's Sexuality', p. 49.
46. Street Offences Act 1959 (7 & 8 Eliz. 2.) Ch. 57.
47. Self, *Prostitution, Women and the Misuse of the Law*, p. 104.
48. The AMSH launched a campaign 'deploring the recommendations of Wolfenden', Minutes of AMSH meeting, 19 September 1957, London, The Women's Library, 3AMS/B/04/16 box 4.
49. R.L. Archdale, *Prostitution and Persecution, Some Comments on the Street Offences Act, 1959: Pamphlet Number 8* (London, 1959), p. 21.

50. Self, *Prostitution, Women and the Misuse of the Law*, pp. 164–5.
51. Secretary of State, R. Butler, HC Debate, 26 November 1958, vol. 596 cc 365–508, 365.
52. Mr Reese-Davis, MP, House of Commons Debate, 29 January 1959, *Hansards*, vol. 598 cc 1,267–386, 1,267.
53. Secretary of State, R. Butler, House of Commons Debate, 22 April 1959, *Hansards*, vol. 604, cc 484–555, 484.
54. Mr Walter Edwards, MP, House of Commons Debate, 29 January 1959, *Hansards*, vol. 598, cc 1,267–386, 1,267.
55. F.G.H. to Nunn, 3 April 1959, London, N.A., HO 291/124.
56. *Daily Mail*, 19 and 27 January 1959 and *Daily Herald*, 20 January 1959.
57. Robert J. Wybrow, *Britain Speaks out, 1937–1987: A Social History as Seen through the Gallup Data* (Basingstoke, 1985), p. 52. For the *News Chronicle* poll, see Bingham, *Family Newspapers?*, p. 169. For police and Home Office reception of the poll, see HO 291/124.
58. Gallup opinion poll, as cited in London, N.A., HO 291/124.
59. Street Offences Act 1959 (7 & 8 Eliz. 2. ch. 57).
60. This was practised regularly by Magistrate Frank Powell at Marlborough Street during the 1940s and 1950s. Frank Powell Memorandum to the Wolfenden Committee, London, N.A., HO 345/8, p. 1.
61. Report of Commander A, n.d. (c. November 1959), London, N.A., MEPO 2/10002.
62. *Ibid.*; on sexual liberalization see Mort, 'Striptease': 29.
63. Report of the Working Party set up by the Josephine Butler Society (formally AMSH) to study the effect of the Street Offences Act, 1959, in London, N.A., MEPO 2/10287.
64. Roger Davidson and Gayle Davis, 'A Festering Sore on the Body of Society: The Wolfenden Committee and Female Prostitution in Mid-Twentieth Century Scotland', *Journal of Scottish History* 24, no. 1 (2004): 82–3 and Report of the Metropolitan Police Commissioner to the Home Office re: the Street Offences Bill, n.d. (c. April 1959), London, N.A., HO 291/1068.
65. Police Minute, 2 June 1959, London, N.A., MEPO 2/10815.
66. Superintendent Barker to Commissioner, 28 August 1959, London, N.A., MEPO 2/10815 and Report of Commander A, n.d. (c. November 1959), London, N.A., MEPO 2/10002.
67. Report of J.J. Nunn to the Home Office, 15 December 1959, London, N.A. MEPO 2/10008.
68. Report of Superintendent Bather, 23 August 1960, London, N.A., MEPO 2/10815.
69. Police Commissioner, Summary of Divisional Reports for week of 30 August 1959, London, N.A., MEPO 2/10001.
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71. Rosalind Wilkinson in the *Sunday Times*, 6, 13 and 20 December 1959.
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73. Alexander Sion, *Prostitution and the Law* (London, 1977), p. 80.
74. *Ibid.*
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76. Minutes of the inaugural meeting of the All-party Parliamentary group, Tuesday 5 December 1961, London, WL, 3AMS/B/04/16 box 47.

77. Testimony of PC 410 C Scarborough and PC 570 Anderson, 8 November 1954, Wolfenden Committee minutes of evidence, London, N.A., HO 345/12.
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79. Letter from Roy Jenkins, Prison Commissioner, to Board of Visitors, 13 July 1967, London, N.A., PCOM 9/2233.
80. *Daily Sketch*, 30 September 1959; Miller, 'West End Jungle' and Bingham, *Family Newspapers?*, p. 72.
81. Miller, 'West End Jungle'.
82. Report of the Working Party to Study the Street Offences Act, 1964, London, The Women's Library, 3AMS/B/04/16/04 box 048 and Summary of Divisional Reports for the four weeks ending 13 December 1959, London, N.A., MEPO 2/10002.
83. *Smith v. Hughes* (1960) 1 WLR 830; see comments on the *Smith v. Hughes* case in London, N.A., DPP 2/3161.
84. See various reports in London, N.A., MEPO 2/10815, MEPO 2/10002 and 'Notes on a discussion on vice in London', 29 July 1963, London, N.A., HO 291/1086.
85. Report of Superintendent Bather, 23 August 1960, London, N.A., MEPO 2/10815.
86. Wilkinson, *Women of the Streets*, pp. 58–9.
87. Report of A Division, 17 August 1960, London, N.A., MEPO 2/10002.
88. Summary of Divisional reports for the week ending 27 September 1959, London, N.A., MEPO 2/10002.
89. Report of B Division station, 4 July 1960, London, N.A. MEPO 2/10002.
90. Report of the Working Party to Study the Street Offences Act, 1964, London, W.L., 3AMS/B/04/16/04 box 048.
91. Report of A. Townsend, Commander A, 22 March 1961, London, N.A., MEPO 2/9711.
92. *Ibid.*
93. Testimony of Miss Hamilton (probation officer) to the Working Party to Study the Street Offences Act, 1964, London, W.L., 3AMS/B/04/16/04 box 048. National Archives Press Release, 30 November 2005 (<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/documents/30nov2004.pdf>, accessed 23 November 2009).
94. Report of the Working Party to Study the Street Offences Act, 1964, London, W.L., 3AMS/B/04/16/04 box 048.
95. Fabian, *London after Dark*, p. 39.
96. Report of C Division, 18 November 1963, London, N.A., MEPO 2/10287.
97. Sion, *Prostitution and the Law*, pp. 112, 107.
98. Report of Commander A, n.d. (c. November 1959), London, N.A., MEPO 2/10002.
99. Police Commissioner to J.J. Nunn, 11 March 1960, London, N.A., MEPO 2/10002.
100. Webb to Nunn, 16 October 1959, London, N.A., MEPO 2/10002.
101. Summers, *Soho*, p. 214.
102. Report of Superintendent of the CID, 22 November 1960, London, N.A., MEPO 2/10559.
103. MEPO 2/10559.
104. See, for instance, *R v. Sheila Platoni*, in London, N.A., DPP 2/3161.
105. As reported by PC Monahan, 7 March 1961, London, N.A., DPP 2/3161.
106. Mort, 'Striptease': 45.
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109. Weeks, *Sex, Politics and Society*, pp. 244 and Mort, 'Striptease': 42.
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111. Stead, 'The Maiden Tribute', Part IV.
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114. *Ibid.*
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118. Watts, *The Men in My Life*, p. 235.

## Conclusion

1. Greig, 'The Truth About White Slavery': 429.
2. Jane Scoular and Maggie O'Neill, 'Regulating Prostitution: Social Inclusion, Responsibilization, and the Politics of Prostitution Reform', *British Journal of Criminology* 47 (2007): 764.
3. Hans Boutellier, 'The De-Victimization of the Prostitute: From Regulation to Brothel Prohibition', in *Crime and Morality: The Significance of Criminal Justice in Post-Modern Culture* (Dordrecht, Boston and London: 2000).
4. For current appraisals of this dynamic, see Joanna Phoenix and Sarah Oerton, *Illicit and Illegal: Sex, Regulation, and Social Control* (Cullompton, Devon: 2005), pp. 76–105 and Kemshall (2002), as cited by Scoular and O'Neill, 'Regulating Prostitution': 769–70.
5. John Meadowcroft, 'Introduction', in *Prohibitions* (London, 2008), p. 25. Elizabeth Clement argues that this was very much the case in the contemporaneous period in New York City. Clement, *Love for Sale*, pp. 117–211.
6. Scoular and O'Neill, 'Regulating Prostitution': 775.
7. Gordon, *Penal Discipline*, p. 10.
8. Mahood, *The Magdalenes*, p. 1.
9. 'Prostitution: What's Going On?', 21 September 2006 – 28 April 2007, Exhibition Hall, The Women's Library, London Metropolitan University.
10. As Matt Houlbrook reminds us, there is a great deal of information left to be discovered about sexuality in rural or non-metropolitan environments. Houlbrook, 'Sexuality', 150–4.
11. For more on violence and sex work, see Kinnel, *Violence and Sex Work*.
12. The sociological literature on sexual labour in the present day in Britain is fascinating and immense. For a variety of perspectives, see, for instance, Elizabeth Bernstein, *Temporarily Yours: Intimacy, Authenticity, and the Commerce of Sex* (Chicago, IL, 2007); Kate Hardy, Sarah Kingston and Teela Sanders, eds, *New Sociologies of Sex Work* (London, Ashgate, 2010); Julia O'Connell Davidson, *Prostitution, Power and Freedom* (Ann Arbor, MI, 1999) and Phoenix and Oerton, *Illicit and Illegal*.

13. For the interesting persistence of mistaken identity, see Bernstein, *Temporarily Yours*, pp. 60–9 and Scoular and O’Neill, ‘Regulating Prostitution’: 774–5.
14. Teela Sanders, ‘The Risks of Street Prostitution: Punters, Police and Protesters’, *Urban Studies* 41 (2004) and Sophie Day, *On the Game: Women and Sex Work* (London, 2007).
15. Sheila Jeffreys, *The Industrial Vagina: The Political Economy of the Global Sex Trade* (London, 2009).
16. Philip Howell, David Beckingham and Francesca Moore, ‘Managed Zones for Sex Workers in Liverpool: Contemporary Proposals, Victorian Parallels’, *Transactions of the Institute for British Geographers* 33, no. 2 (2008).
17. Royden, ‘Problem of the Undesirables’: 3.
18. While this phrase has been linked to Kipling’s 1888 remarks about ‘the most ancient profession in the world’ (Rudyard Kipling, ‘On the City Wall’, in *In Black and White* (London, 1888)), it appears that its origins are significantly older, if undetermined. In any case, the imaginative link between prostitution and the development of ancient civilization has been frequently referred to, for instance, by Lecky in 1869, when he wrote that the prostitute ‘remains, while creeds and civilisations rise and fall, the eternal priestess of humanity, blasted for the sins of the people’. Lecky, *A History of European Morals*, pp. 282–3.
19. Clement, ‘Prostitution’, p. 208; she states that she is often surprised by ‘how little change there has been in prostitution compared to other work’.

## Appendix

1. Source: Departmental Committee on Homosexual Offences and Prostitution, *The Wolfenden Report*, p. 223.
2. Before 1930, these statistics come from the *Annual Reports of the Metropolitan Police Commissioner*. After 1930, I have compiled them from unpublished police returns in London, TNA, HO 45/21766.
3. Annual Reports of the Metropolitan Police Commissioner, London, TNA, HO 45/21766.
4. R.S. Sindall, ‘The Criminal Statistics of Nineteenth-Century Cities: A New Approach’, *Urban History* 13 (1986).
5. *Judicial statistics of England and Wales*.
6. London, TNA, MEPO 1/1720.
7. Prostitution, *The Wolfenden Report*, pp. 160–1.

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