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Selective Memory: A Note on Social Work Historiography

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Abstract

Since the Second World War, histories of social work have regularly confirmed that the activities of philanthropic visiting societies, chiefly the Charity Organisation Society (COS), supplied the principles and practices of late-twentieth-century social work. Similarly, histories of social work have asserted that there was no legacy from public sector welfare workers to the development of social work after 1948, which date marks the start of social work in the public sector. This paper reviews these orthodox assumptions, concluding that both are flawed. There is evidence that the reported legacy of charitable visiting societies owes a great deal to a particular set of circumstances after the Second World War and also that the public sector hosted social work roles and activity from before the Great War. Such practices and roles in the public sector developed in the interwar years and there was considerable continuity of staff and practice from before the Second World War into the 1950s. This public sector legacy was ignored, then forgotten by post-1948 historians of social work—partly by chance, partly as a deliberate policy by some social work historians and latterly because of a lack of rigour by those reviewing social work history.

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Orthodox assumptions of social work history

> It is . . . the principles and procedures involved in the first forty years of the life of the Charity Organisation Society . . . that most clearly show the

> gradual emergence of a social role, that of the informed and professional friend, whose activity was different from the squire, the clergyman, or the usual family friend (Timms, 1964, p. 2).
>
> For the majority of the destitute however recourse was usually made to the statutory Poor Law service. Until its abolition in 1948 this service was unaffected by the principles of social work as evolved by the voluntary bodies in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century (Timms, 1964, p. 2).

In 1953, Eileen Younghusband noted:

> How promising and how full of vigour was the social work in England fifty years ago! The essential initial discoveries about its nature and process and methods by which social workers should be trained had been made. All seemed set for a steady advance into territory which had been soundly surveyed. Then for reasons which it is difficult to determine a blight set in, and . . . social work in this country remained almost static, compared with the preceding half century, until after the second world war (Younghusband, 1964, p. 18).

This 'blight' between vigorous periods of development in social work, roughly between 1914 and 1948, was picked up and used as the basis for Philip Seed's study of the development of social work (Seed, 1973). Historians of social work during the generation after the war (Woodroofe, 1962; Rooff, 1972; Smith, 1952) followed the same line, concentrating their focus on what happened before and after the interwar years. These two spikes of vigorous development, as recorded in the works referenced, underpin the orthodox assumptions of social work history.

Social work's origins in the UK have usually been found in philanthropic district visiting societies (Blaikie, 1896; Simey, 1951; Green, 1876; Ashton and Young, 1956). Although visiting remained a mainstay of all religious denominations and many other philanthropic groups, from the 1830s, a number of organised district visiting societies sprang up with the precise aim of encouraging the poor to take responsibility for themselves (Pringle, 1937): to organise previously indiscriminate charity, prevent overlapping of charity, confront fraudulent claims, target relief to those thought to be capable of achieving independence and passing on those incapable of so doing to the Poor Law. This movement is epitomised by the London-based COS, which is credited with being the first voluntary organisation to use a caseload model, emphasise personal investigation of family circumstances and carefully record cases (Bosanquet, 1914; Loch, 1890). Although there were many antecedents to the COS across the UK with almost identical philosophies (Pringle, 1937), its London base, council of influential members, regular journal and energetic lobbying around national policies established it as the national benchmark for such societies (Rooff, 1972). The ideas and practices thus developed are taken to be the main inspiration in what developed into post-Second World War social work practices. This is a primary orthodoxy in social work history repeated again and again

(Timms, 1964; Woodroofe, 1962; Pinker, 1989; Younghusband, 1947, 1964, 1978; Smith, 1952; Payne, 2006; Parton, 1999; Hugman, 2009).

A second orthodoxy is that social work emerged as a state occupation and subsequently a profession in the aftermath of the Second World War, the result of the spur given by the welfare legislation of the Attlee government, epitomised by the 1948 Children Act and by the emergence to maturity of psycho-social casework as the professional body of knowledge of social workers. A key part of the orthodox belief is that social work as it developed at this time was seen to owe almost nothing to precursor local authority arrangements (Parton, 1999; Timms, 1964). At this point, it is worth noting that if the reader is looking for a definition of 'social work', I agree with Viviene Cree that, in 1900, 'social work was anything and everything, from the casework of the COS, to the social reform based settlement movement, to the institutional care provided by a large number of the Poor Law and voluntary agencies', and that at the end of the twentieth century, social work was 'confusing, multilayered and contradictory' (Cree, 1995, pp. 67 and 1, respectively).

Testing the orthodox assumptions

This article attempts to offer a historiographical analysis of these orthodox assumptions, the historiography of social work being notably weak (Stewart, 2007). The assumptions are examined against the literature and research into records of public service activity, which largely took place in the Bolton History Centre. Second, the origins of the orthodox assumptions are examined and why they remain largely unquestioned is considered. The examination is undertaken around the following three themes:

1 The legacy of the COS in late-twentieth-century social work.

2 The introduction of social work functions from around 1900 in Poor Law Unions (PLUs).

3 The continuity between PLU workers up to 1930, Public Assistance Committee (PAC) staff up to 1948 and the Children's and Welfare Departments that replaced them.

COS legacy

The London-centred COS was not a truly national organisation, its network being strongest in southern England, but from the 1870s, it was at the centre of much national debate about 'philanthropy'. The majority report of the Royal Commission on the Poor Law (1909) proposed the development of welfare provision along lines that matched the COS philosophy—not surprising, as the COS had five members on the eighteen-strong Commission.

But this zenith of success also saw the beginning of a rapid slide. The Royal Commission proposals were left untouched by the Liberal Government, which had, while the Commission was sitting, instituted reforms that by-passed both Poor Law and charitable visiting societies—including Old Age Pensions, sickness insurance and unemployment benefit. Around that time, many COS-type societies were merging with or were taken over by the rampant new local visiting charities: Guilds of Help (Laybourne, 1994). The Guilds began in Bradford in 1905 and spread quickly across northern England, then into the English midlands and the south, eclipsing the COS in numbers of people helped by 1909. Unlike the COS, Guilds all had a distinct local identity, always actively co-operated with local authorities and PLUs and attracted volunteers in the hundreds in each town, many from lower down the social scale. Although Guilds were not trusted by organised labour, they represented the more inclusive spirit emerging at the turn of the century (Moore, 1977).

Unlike the confident commentary by COS leaders (Loch, 1890; Bosanquet, 1914), COS case records and accounts by visitors do not show clear differentiation between respectable applicants and the unhelpable (Whelan, 2001). The COS files of Hammersmith and Fulham between 1885 and 1910 reveal a picture of visitors struggling with chaotic families of shifting means often caught out in untruths. Yet, the visitors hung onto many of these rogues, year after year, in direct contradiction to COS policy. Also, the few accounts of COS visitors that survive separately from the COS archive confirm their difficulty in putting rigid COS principles into practice (Hodson, 1909; Snell, 1937).

It is also arguable that the COS project failed because the basic material of the middle-class lady visitor was not suitable for the work. Poor Law employees, previously employed as clerks, cotton spinners, shop workers and paid charity workers (Bolton History Centre, Alice Kearsley's personnel file [GBO/28/569] and Ada Wainer's personnel file [GBO/28/1290]) had a head start in working with the poor. Rooff mentions a late-nineteenth-century *cri de coeur* from a COS District organiser that her affluent lady volunteers were on holiday all summer and sick all winter. Others dismiss such women as literally good for nothing because they had no experience of anything outside their limited social round (Marwick, 1966; Simey, 1951). Something of the class barrier can be guessed in Attlee's earnest counselling of aspiring social workers to cease advising poor women about budgeting and housing management until they had lived for six months without domestic servants (Attlee, 1920). The gulf is perhaps best summed up by the advice in a 1910 training manual to lady visitors to cheer up the weary housewife at the end of washing day by telling her about the latest play or ball she had been to (Shairp, 1910). Perhaps this is why the COS never attracted large numbers of volunteers and those numbers declined from the 1890s (Whelan, 2001). In slum areas of London, the COS was referred to in

slightly sinister tones as 'The Organisation' (Kirkman Gray, 1908) and Rooff notes the COS nickname 'Cringe Or Starve' (Rooff, 1972). Simey comments that many felt the investigative zeal of the Liverpool Central Relief Society (CRS), which operated on similar lines to the COS, was worse than the snooping undertaken by Poor Law relieving officers into the means of those seeking relief (Simey, 1951).

There were many who pointed to the failure of the COS before the Great War, the loudest being the socialists Sidney and Beatrice Webb (Royal Commission, 1909). But these two were arch enemies of the COS—having done battle for four years between 1905 and 1909 within the Royal Commission. More dispassionate writers were as critical (Kirkman Gray, 1908; Attlee, 1920; Macadam, 1925, 1934; Simey, 1951), being clear that the COS and her sister bodies failed to reduce pauperism or establish bases of trust in the heartlands of the poor, and were undermined by universal state provision and an increasingly positive approach taken by Poor Law administrations from around 1906.

Between the wars, the COS continued on a more limited basis in London, active Districts reducing from forty to twenty-eight by 1930. The total number of people helped each year recovered from a Great War low of under 10,000, but increased to 17,000 by 1934 (Rooff, 1972). In London, the numbers never recovered beyond 9,000. Although Woodroofe mentions 'family casework' as being a COS function at this time, the figures reveal that between a third and half of assistance given comes under the heading 'Medical, Surgical, Convalescence' (Rooff, 1972), much of that being the provision of teeth. J. C. Pringle, the secretary of the COS until 1937, identified 'family casework' as no different from parochial church visiting (Pringle, 1937). Despite the decline throughout this period, the regular commentary about welfare issues continued from the COS London headquarters.

Social work functions in PLUs

The generation around the turn of the twentieth century has been noted as a crucial period when attitudes in the UK to poverty, crime and health changed and the state's role developed towards actively helping ameliorate distress (Rose, 1971; Garland, 1985; King, 2006). Gray, at the time, noted a significant change in the administration of the Poor Law towards what he characterised as 'socialistic' principles and King demonstrates strong interconnectedness between philanthropy, political campaigning and public service (including PLU work) amongst female Poor Law Guardians in Bolton in this period (King, 2004, 2006). The 1906 election of a reforming Liberal Government gave a fillip to the Local Government Board's (LGB) management of PLUs, encouraging the recruitment of new types of relieving officer (RO) deployed to undertake what are

recognisable as social work tasks (King, 2004; Rose, 1985; Watkinson, 1955). Lady Visitors were appointed in many PLUs to visit boarded-out children, visit young people having left PLU care and manage the volunteers who did the bulk of this work (Bolton History Centre, Alice Kearsley's personnel file [GBO/28/569]). PLUs by this time each had an Infant Life Protection Visitor with firm encouragement that this should be a woman, and the role not just tagged onto the job of an ordinary RO. There were also specialist ROs for lunatics from 1904, to remove people exhibiting florid behaviours, but also to advise on and help return people to the community. From 1911, PLUs were obliged to employ 'case paper clerks' to manage the individual case recording—although the use of individual 'application sheets, upon which all other particulars are entered' had been used in at least one Lancashire Union since the 1860s (Aveling, 1909, p. 149).

Some places were infected with new thinking from female Guardians, elected to Unions in increasing numbers from 1895. Some of these did not just soften attitudes, but instituted constructive local policies. In one example, Mary Haslam, a Bolton Guardian, proposed that children up to seven who had been cared for by staff in the 'Cottage Homes' on a rota should instead be cared for by a married couple, the wife employed as a full-time mother and the husband acting as a father figure (Bolton History Centre, Mary Haslam's diary [2HA/17/17]; King, 2004). The husband of the couple appointed became workhouse bandleader, taught children music and also led games of football with the older boys (Bolton History Centre, Mr and Mrs Russell's personnel file [GBO/28/351]).

Also with a Poor Law Examination Board, a superannuation scheme (from 1898), a professional association (The National Poor Law Officers Association) from 1892, with its own journal (whose successor publication is the *Health Service Journal*), ROs appointed in the first decade of the twentieth century were entering a sought-after occupation. E. J. Urwick's famous School of Sociology, established in 1903 to provide social work training, offered three strands of education, one of which was for Poor Law officers (Chambers, 1960). This initiative, although led by the COS, benefitted from a largely unremarked though significant contribution from the Metropolitan Relieving Officer's Association (Mishra, 1968).

Further developments were stimulated by the Great War. By the mid twenties, some Unions had child-care sections responsible for after-care visiting, Infant Life Protection visiting, caring for the children of mothers on relief in hospital, boarding-out visiting and moral welfare. Thirty-six women with a range of qualifications, social backgrounds and public and voluntary welfare experience applied for the Children's Welfare Visitor post in Bolton Union in 1925. Most applicants were from the North West but ten were not, being from as far afield as London, Cornwall and

Birmingham. This suggests a vigorous career market in such jobs (Bolton History Centre, Ada Wainer's personnel file [GBO/28/1290]). It is also clear that PLUs in the 1920s and PACs in the 1930s supported, worked with and helped fund many voluntary organisations such as District Nursing Societies, the NSPCC, Moral Welfare Committees and so on (Bolton History Centre, Boarding Out Sub Committee, 1930–1947 AB/26/4 [1]). During the interwar period, emerging social work occupations became more confident. In 1920, Almoners developed their statement of duties, with the intention of 'distancing themselves from their origins in the COS' (Burt, 2008, p. 755). By 1936, direct appointment to probation posts by the Church of England Temperance Society was abandoned, school attendance officers took over responsibility for bringing children in need of care before the court (Sheldon, 2007) and psychiatric social workers established themselves as key components in the Child Guidance movement. Local authorities appointed visitors for mental defectives under the 1913 Mental Deficiency Act (Burt, 2008), although from 1901, local voluntary after-care visiting arrangements for feeble-minded children had been emerging (Haldane, 1911). From the mid 1920s, women police officers took on a critical role in child neglect (Jackson, 2003).

In 1934, Macadam coined the phrase the 'New Philanthropy' to denote a maturing set of relationships between public sector and charitable effort. As if in response, several occupational groupings—including publicly employed relieving officers and health visitors, as well as small elite groups such as psychiatric social workers—came together to form the British Federation of Social Workers at the end of 1935, indicating a growing confidence across these groups of what they had in common.

During the Second World War, the needs of women in munitions work, their children who needed day-care and thousands bombed out or evacuated, resulted in a significant increase in the numbers of social work posts being established. Henry Willink, asked by Home Secretary Herbert Morrison in 1940 to oversee London's belated response to the welfare needs of bombed-out families, appointed social workers to support this task (Titmuss, 1950). Once the initial emergency of the Blitz in Liverpool and Manchester had passed, the Pacifist Service Units there set themselves up as social work agencies to respond to the needs of the many 'problem families' they had come across (Stephens, 1945). This initiative developed into the post-war Family Service Units. During the war, just in Bolton, at least four new social work posts were established—an almoner for the VD clinic at the PAC Infirmary, a welfare officer for older people in the workhouse, an 'outworker' for the Moral Welfare Society and a child welfare worker appointed after thousands of unaccompanied children arrived in the summer of 1944 during the V1 attacks on London (Bolton History Centre, Boarding Out Sub Committee, 1930–1947, AB/26/4 [1], Billeting Advisory Committee minutes AB/36/1/[1], Maternity and Child Welfare sub Committee minutes ABCF/17/39).

Continuity between PLUs, PACs and post-1948 Children's and Welfare Departments

The vast majority of people in social work roles in the 1950s and 1960s were not trained, had names like 'welfare assistants' and worked in local authorities (Younghusband, 1978). In their *Portrait of Social Work*, Rodgers and Dixon (1960) demonstrate just how few trained social workers there were in social work agencies in the 1950s. They surveyed the staff of all welfare organisations both state and voluntary in a North West town (Rochdale). The new Children's Officer appointed in 1948 was a trained almoner, but none of the other fifty staff identified as undertaking social work activity in 1948 was. In the following ten years, several staff appointed had been on university social science courses, but only three arrived with a social work qualification. On the other hand, scores of staff had worked in the PAC and several had been working before 1930 in the old PLU as relieving officers. This pattern of staffing continuity was repeated in many places, at senior level as well as at the front line. Ian Brown, first children's officer in Manchester appointed in 1948, had previously been in the Education Department (Holman, 1996). The whole of the Bolton Children's Department field staff (all four of them) appointed in 1948 were transferred from the Education Department and Social Welfare Department. All seven Welfare Officers employed in Manchester's post-1948 Welfare Department had been relieving officers previously (Fox, 2010). There was a similar picture in Dewsbury (Mason, 2008), Bury (Bury Library and Archive, Minutes of the Children's Committee, 1947–48, AD/1/194), York (York City Archive, Minutes of the Children's Committee, BC 85, 1948–70), Blackpool (Lancashire Public Archive, Blackpool Children's Committee, 1948, CBBL/62/1) and Preston (Lancashire Public Archive, Preston Children's Committee, 1948, CBP53/22).

The Children Act was implemented with the sweetener of a small government grant to support each new Children's Department. For adults with disabilities, there was no such support. The majority of PAC staff were transferred to the National Assistance Board and NHS in 1948, and a tiny rump left in new Welfare Departments to run residential institutions and to visit older and disabled people. They offered an extremely limited range of community supports. In no sense was 1948 'Year One' for them and the continuity of activity was unquestioned. Although pressure and imagination from voluntary organisations meant the offer to older and disabled people in the community developed over the years, poor funding and status meant that only limited support was available until well into the 1960s.

Attlee's welfare legislation was seen by some as a new dawn and has often been characterised as such ever since. But the huge majority of staff starting work in the new departments in 1948 were old hands, most with old ideas and methods, but some with progressive work practices,

such as a long-standing commitment to boarding out (Mason, 2008). 1948 can only be regarded as a turning point because of the subsequent twenty-five years. A generation of political consensus, faith in publicly employed technical experts, slow then regular increases in local authority funding and into the 1960s an emerging passion and enthusiasm of those in Children's Departments—all this allowed Welfare and Children's Departments to establish themselves and expand, which, in turn, allowed the ambition of social work educators and professional associations to flourish. But as social policy texts accept, this did not bear real fruit until long after the Atlee legislation (Thane, 1996). A fire may have been lit in 1948, but it was a tiny one reliant on previously stored fuel, which required long and then vigorous stoking to get it going.

Why the orthodox assumptions have held sway for so long

So, the orthodox assumptions of social work history overplay the contribution of the COS-type visiting charity, while ignoring the work of public sector workers before 1948 and the continuity through the twentieth century of public sector social work activity. Post-Second World War histories of social work concentrate on the developing legislative framework, the development of university-based training and the development of the 'casework' methods university-trained social workers were taught and encouraged to use. They also focus on tiny bands of privileged groups, saying little about those not university-trained. Thus, we have only a partial history of social work—a history of the officer class.

This selective memory is a post-war phenomenon. Pre-war commentators paid due attention to the role of public sector workers (Attlee, 1920; Wickwar and Wickwar, 1936; Macadam, 1925, 1934, 1945). But during the 1950s, something shifted and the pre-war role of social work in public services was forgotten. There are a number of reasons why this happened:

1 Kathleen Woodroofe suggested that social work after the Second World War had not 'hardened into an unyielding exclusiveness . . . [but] had to pay a price . . . [for being] whittled down to a fragment of its former range . . . [and] forced to concentrate on method and technique' (Woodroofe, 1962, p. 225). This refers to the fact that all welfare and social workers (both state and voluntary) before the Great War although focusing on poverty, often had a role in education, morality, legal advice, housing, disability, health and so on. The Lloyd George welfare reforms took responsibility for a considerable bulk of financial relief away from the PLUs and the charitable societies. The 1948 NHS took away health from the concerns of the social worker. So one outcome of the Attlee government was to restrict social work activity to more limited fields than before. In response to this threat, Woodroofe

suggests social workers attempted to establish a precise identity, one of the ways of doing this being, in the 1950s, to establish professional status for social work: 'a place in the sun' (Woodroofe, 1962, p. 225). The agitation for professionalisation was associated with the identification and refinement of a body of knowledge for social workers, each profession having to secure one to lay claim to professional status. The body of knowledge elite groups of social workers chose was psycho-social casework, as promoted by American writers such as Charlotte Towle. As social work became increasingly associated with casework method, in the minds of social work teachers at least, it is unsurprising that the histories of social work written in the 1950s and 1960s should mirror that pre-occupation, concentrating on the elite groups of workers and their methods, not being so interested in what social workers actually did. Woodroofe's work, seminal at the time, had precisely this focus.

2 Kathleen Woodroofe's influential book also confirmed the central status of the COS in the development of social work. This was unavoidable because her UK research was almost entirely focused on records of the COS. This explains why Woodroofe's treatment of British social work concentrates on the COS before 1914 and why her narrative between 1914 and 1945 is distinctly thin.

3 Two earlier books influenced Woodroofe and subsequent historians. These were Margery Smith's history of social workers' training and Cherry Morris's first British text about social casework (Smith, 1952; Morris, 1950). Both of these were funded by the Family Welfare Association (as the COS had come to be known from 1946). Smith's book considers the development of training in London in the early years of the twentieth century, not mentioning the equally seminal work done by Professor Gonner in Liverpool. But she only looked at COS papers in her research. Morris's book concentrates on the work of elite groups of university-trained social workers with chapters on psychiatric social work, almoning and moral welfare work. Her references are often to American social casework literature, as had been most of Clement Brown's references in her pre-war text on the methods of the social caseworker (Clement Brown, 1937). This focus on American influences was new: different from the British influences that informed Macadam's interwar texts. The influence of the COS/FWA remained powerful even after the Second World War, despite its operational decline, because, like the English National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) today, it retained high public recognition and had a formidable publicity machine which it used to influence the national debate. The COS/FWA, in addition to those advantages, also had a wonderful eighty-year-long unbroken archive on a single site, openly available to researchers. This archive and the work of Smith, Morris and Woodroofe partially explain the 'London-centric' drift of social work history ever since.

4 Eileen Younghusband's influence on the national perception of social work in the 1950s and 1960s was second to none. She taught at the LSE, travelled extensively, was a prolific writer and chaired a committee of enquiry in the

late fifties into social work pay and status. A friend of Charlotte Towle's, Younghusband had ambitions to enhance the status of social work, establish social casework as the professional body of knowledge, increase the numbers of university-trained social workers and establish generic social work training in the place of the specialist psychiatric social work, almoner and child-care courses—the only ones available in the early 1950s. She achieved this when the LSE generic training course opened in 1954. Younghusband wrote two highly influential histories of social work, whose preoccupations matched her own ambitions (Younghusband, 1964, 1978). She also revised the view of what occupations could be considered as 'social work'. Macadam had lists of social work occupations in all three of her books (Macadam, 1925, 1934, 1945), in which public service workers such as relieving officers, health visitors and education welfare officers were included. Younghusband's early post-war list of social work occupations was thinner. It included probation officers, but she considered no other publicly funded job worthy of inclusion in her list, concentrating her favour on the small elite groups of university-trained social workers (Younghusband, 1947).

5 Another factor was that neither Kathleen Woodroofe nor Margery Smith was British, the one being Australian, the other American, both in the UK on research scholarships. So these people had limited knowledge of British social work beyond their field of study—most of which was in the COS archive.

6 The availability of the archives of professional social work associations is another reason why social work history is so partial. The elite branches of social work with long-standing national associations have histories with a continuous narrative: almoners, probation officers and psychiatric social workers. The clarity and accessibility of these archives lend themselves to easy use and many are available today, part of the extensive archive at Warwick University. In 2007, Warwick published a note from their Modern Archive identifying papers in their possession of fourteen professional associations of social workers (Stacey and Collis 2007). However, the National and Local Government Officers Association (NALGO) archive and the archive of the National Association of Poor Law Officers—whose members included boarding-out visitors, relieving officers for lunatics and duly authorised officers—were not mentioned in this note, these papers not being seen as relevant to social work history. And the records of the Association of Metropolitan Relieving Officers, which was one of the founder organizations of the British Federation of Social Workers in 1935, are not mentioned either (Burt, 2008), nor are the papers of the Association of Social Welfare Officers, neither regarded as social workers worthy of study.

7 Those keen to access records of local authority PAC, Education Committee and PLUs face real difficulties, as they are kept in hundreds of separate local authority archives across the country—with little consistency in what has been kept. Any research programme that could capture anything like a general national picture would have to be vast.

8 Those writing post-war histories of social work have in the main been social work academics rather than historians and have been prey to the trap of 'Whiggishness'. Herbert Butterfield's *The Whig Interpretation of History* criticised those historians of English political history whose interpretation of the past was dictated by what they approved of in the present (Butterfield, 1931). This retrospective creation of a line of progression towards a glorious present involves a focus only on what contributes to that present and avoidance of what is not viewed so positively or what might embarrass whatever view is being supported. Historians of social work in the fifties, sixties and seventies emphasised the antecedents, as they saw them, of generic qualification training, social casework and the work of the elite groups because that is what they valued.

9 The final reason for the partial history of social work we have seen since the Second World War is the determination of the post-war generation to make a fresh start. The idea that encapsulated all that went before was the Poor Law. In the immediate post-war period, the Poor Law was associated with the harsh equality of the 'means test' of the 1930s and the workhouse, many of which were incorporated after 1948 into District General Hospitals and held terrors for many poorer people threatened with a stay in hospital decades after the Poor Law was no more. And the dull, uncaring residential experiences of many children in both voluntary and public homes (Curtis, 1946) sparked a passion in many to offer more for children. If local authority Children's Departments and those responsible for the training of social workers likely to work in those departments needed to do any one thing to establish a positive reputation, it was to sever the link with the Poor Law. So those searching during the 1950s and 1960s for the origins of social work avoided mention of any remnant of the dark spectre that had only just been swept away.

The power of the orthodox assumptions

The orthodox assumptions remain powerful in the twenty-first century. For instance, Louise Jackson, writing about the welfare role of women police officers in 2003, mentions as an aside the immediate difference the 1948 Act made:

> The 1948 Children's Act set up Local Authority Children's Departments run by highly qualified Children's Officers who supervised teams of Child Care Officers (Jackson, 2003, p. 630).

But Children's Officers appointed to the new Departments were mostly 'untrained' and transferred from the previous Welfare or Education Departments. Their tiny numbers of staff also transferred from Social Welfare Departments or Education Departments. But Jackson thinks her claim is true, as do many others.

There are two factors that contribute to the continued survival of the orthodox assumptions today. The first is that from the later 1970s, the focus of histories was diverted to more recent events. For instance, Whitehead and Statham (2006), in their history of Probation, include a brief introduction covering the first seventy years of the twentieth century but concentrate in the bulk of the book on the more contentious decades of the eighties and nineties.

But the major reason for the maintenance of the orthodoxies is simple inertia—the assumptions have not been questioned. Robert Pinker, in 1989, did not question the orthodox position, lauding the COS as launching social work and concentrating in his narrative on casework development by small groups of elite social workers and the agitation for generic social work training in the 1950s (Pinker, 1989). Parton repeats the suggestion that post-1948 Children's Departments owe nothing to predecessor organisations (Parton, 1999). In the same volume, Thoburn implies the same thing, claiming that the title of 'boarding-out officer' was new to the childcare officers of the new departments (Thoburn, 1999). Barraclough *et al.*, (1996) *100 Years of Health Related Social Work* repeats the central tenets of the old orthodoxies without question. Even Holman's humane and generous histories *The Corporate Parent* (1996) and *Child Care Revisited* (1998) imply little continuity with the past. And Hugman's recent discussion about social work's identity can only find the COS and settlements as the 'beginnings of two broad strands of social work that can be seen running through the profession … to the present day' (Hugman, 2009, p. 1139).

A different approach

But there are alternative views emerging. Mike Burt's analysis is similar to the ideas proposed here (Burt, 2008). Viviene Cree, in her detailed historical analysis of an Edinburgh voluntary organisation, offers a broader view of social work history than the orthodox position (Cree, 1995) and more recently offers a brief commentary of the development of social work, which incorporates Poor Law work (Cree and Myers, 2008). Malcolm Payne, in *The Origins of Social Work* (Payne, 2006), although in the orthodox tradition, also offers a more balanced view of social work history. He notes the various contributions of public and voluntary effort over 150 years, but his concentration is still on the elite groups of workers and on the origins and impact of various theories and models of practice. Payne is less confident in his treatment of public service workers, not offering accounts of who social workers were, what social workers spent their time doing and what they thought of what they did.

Unearthing this sort of human history of the PAC and PLU workers from local archives would require a great deal of time and effort. But some

archives, such as that in Bolton, have a great deal to offer. The local development of welfare and social work services in the first five decades of the twentieth century is available from newspapers, committee minutes, diaries, charitable society records and personnel records. From these, the clear-eyed determination of Guardian Mary Haslam shines forth (Bolton History Centre, Mary Haslam's diary [2HA/17/17]). The unease of the first Lady Visitor, Alice Kearsley, at the size of her caseload in 1914 is revealed (Bolton History Centre, Mary Haslam's diary [2HA/17/17]), as is the attempt by her successor, Annie Higginson, to convince her boss to get the pattern of her work changed, and the frustration of Ada Wainer, the Child Welfare Visitor appointed in 1925, at having to manage a shirker and not being able to tackle the moral welfare work she thought she had been appointed for (Bolton History Centre, Ada Wainer's personnel file [GBO/28/1290]). Finally, in 1947, there is boarding-out visitor Miss E. H. Jones's fizzing rage at the sour treatment offered two fifteen-year-olds in a Catholic Voluntary Home (Bolton History Centre, After Care Boarded Out Case Papers, Special Report concerning the Girls Home, Pilkington Street, Bolton, 26/9/1947 [ABSS/1/768]).

There are also personal accounts and novels by ordinary social workers from all over the country. These include the diary of the exuberant Oxfordshire relieving officer, school board man and sanitary inspector George Dew (Horn, 1983), COS visitor Alice Hodson's letters (Hodson, 1909), an account by an NSPCC Inspector *The Children's Man* (Payne, 1912), autobiographies by probation officers Jo Harris (Harris, 1937) and Mary Ellison (Ellison, 1934), Cyril Bustin's extraordinary tales as an assistant relieving officer in Bermondsey (Bustin, 1982), John Stroud's clunky but engaging stories (Stroud, 1960, 1961), Dorothy Manchee's delicate exposition of the work of almoners (Manchee, 1946), W. R. Watkinson's forthright narrative of his relieving officer work in Holderness (Watkinson, 1955), Ricky Braithwaite's skilful novel of racial confusions in the early 1960s, *Paid Servant* (Braithwaite, 1962), Ruth Evans' painful memoir *Happy Families* (Evans, 1977) and Jane Sparrow's direct autobiographical novels (Sparrow, 1975, 1978). None of these accounts is widely available, but these works and the hundreds of others that must exist should be part of the discourse.

Using material like this, a vivid history of ordinary social workers could be constructed—one in which there is no contrived 'gap' between the dominance of middle-class philanthropy and the arrival of state-funded professionals. This would require:

- greater attention to the work of social and economic historians, such as Steven King,
- research in local archives, perhaps led or co-ordinated by local social work courses, which implies
- careful teaching of social work history on such courses.

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