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Mothering in a carceral space

In her 1864 work *Our Convicts*, educational and penal reformer Mary Carpenter wrote at length about the incalculable benefit of a good mother's influence upon her child's development. However, she warned, 'no one can estimate the evil which is caused to society, both directly and indirectly, by a wicked one'.[1] When the modern prison system was created in the mid-nineteenth century, motherhood had emerged as a dominant social construct and concern in Victorian England, with the question of what made a 'good mother' prompting debate and scrutiny within medical, social and government discourse. Using the prison as its setting, this chapter advances our understanding of the shifting views about, and expectations placed upon, mothers between the mid-nineteenth and the mid-twentieth century. It uncovers the efforts made to educate female prisoners in domesticity and mothercraft and to use this instruction as a reformative tool.

Throughout this period, women, particularly mothers, who committed crimes were subject to especial censure. Female criminality was believed to be symptomatic of a woman's lack of domesticity and their straying beyond the bounds of ideal femininity, but was also posited as a threat to the fabric of family life. The opening section of this chapter explores debates about using prison as a place to address these issues. Zedner highlighted the contradictions with regard to how broader societal views about female criminals impacted upon their treatment in prison, and stated that 'women were described as being both incapable of moral judgement and yet at the same time as morally degraded, as being shameless and yet desperate for self-respect'.[2] Late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century periodicals and commentaries on crime, its causes and its suppression were saturated with tales of fallen women, and of children

as the collateral damage of their mother's moral and criminal degradation.[3] However, this chapter demonstrates that it was not until the turn of the twentieth century that these laments about the undomesticated female offender translated into more determined efforts to use a prison sentence as an opportunity to train women to be 'good' wives and, especially, mothers. Initially, these efforts were largely driven by individual members of staff within women's prisons and by Lady Visitors, who sought to offer instruction to and influence on their imprisoned sisters. They were shaped by the experiences of staff attempting to contain and care for the women under their charge.

The efforts to educate and train mothers in prison became more centrally driven in the decade following the end of the Second World War. Motherhood was idealised to lure women back from the workplace to the home, but mothers were also subject to intense scrutiny. They were believed to be culpable in creating the social evil that was the 'problem family' who lived in cramped and unsanitary conditions and who produced unhealthy and ill-educated children. However, there were more determined efforts which posited education as an important tool in combating these issues. Using the unique setting of a prison enables the chapter to highlight how this education was shaped and delivered to women deemed to be in particular need of it. Courses in mothercraft were established in all women's prisons and for women in some mixed-sex prisons in the early 1950s and were delivered on a more consistent basis than ever before. Although their organisation differed slightly in each prison, the composition and teaching of the classes were the result of a sharing of ideas, experiences and best practice between prison officials, charities and organisations such as the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) and the Women's Voluntary Services (WVS) and, crucially, the Ministry of Health and local health authorities, including health visitors and the newly expanded maternity and child welfare services. Thus, the prison offers a previously underexplored setting in which to further the significant body of work which has charted the medicalisation and regulation of child-rearing in the twentieth century.

This chapter charts a discernible increase in acknowledgements in prison and medical rhetoric that greater education, particularly in mothercraft, during a prison sentence provided an opportunity

for more practical and, in some cases, more medically focused intervention. This was intended to achieve lasting rehabilitation and reintegration into the community. However, it is vital to acknowledge that the mothers who found themselves on the wrong side of the law continued to face moral condemnation for their perceived maternal shortcomings throughout this period. Despite the greater provision for practical and, to an extent, health training in mothercraft and domesticity after the turn of the twentieth century, the question of morality remained pervasive in the mid-twentieth century and beyond.

Raising their nature and habits? Prison education for women

'No person will deny the importance attached to the character and conduct of a woman.'[4] This was a principle at the heart of the work of nineteenth-century Quaker Elizabeth Fry. Now regarded as one of Britain's most eminent penal reformers, in the early nineteenth century Fry was a pioneer in advocating for the specific needs of women in prison. She believed that the helpless, depraved, afflicted and ignorant women she encountered in Newgate Prison had 'the greatest claim to the compassion of their own sex'. Fry argued that the superintendence of women over female inmates would not only be a check on the abuses she highlighted, but would also exert a moral influence over their fallen sisters.[5] Prison authorities, including governors, commentators and reformers, lamented that female respectability, once lost, was very difficult to reclaim. Despite this, there were arguments, ignited by Fry and continued by female prison officials in her wake, that women in prison could potentially be more malleable to reform than their male counterparts if kindness was shown alongside firmness. Emma Martin, Brixton's Lady Superintendent, remarked in 1853 that it was necessary for female officers, as far as their 'carrying out strict discipline would allow', to show kindness and provide a good moral example to the women in their care.[6]

In her study of the Victorian period, Zedner argued that female prisoners were subject to closer surveillance than their male counterparts, with moral standards more rigorously reinforced.[7] The

primary responsibility for this fell most heavily upon the shoulders of staff and, to some extent, Lady Visitors. Dobash et al. argued that a consequence of this greater management for the purpose of moral reclamation was the more rigorous enforcement of discipline upon female convicts.[8] While acknowledging the important role of male beliefs about respectability in shaping penal systems for women, Forsythe countered that the difference in treatment based upon sex was less pronounced than Zedner had suggested, and refuted the assertion made by Dobash et al. that female prisoners were punished with greater severity and frequency than their male counterparts.[9] Recent exploration of the female convict estate in the 1850s and 1860s has questioned how notions of ideal femininity impacted upon debates about the management of health and discipline. This research found that certain infractions of the rules, such as the use of immoral language or displaying fits of temper, were particularly lamented as being unfeminine and were thus believed to require greater censure.[10] The present chapter strengthens this scholarship by examining the interconnections between the management of female behaviour in prison and the preparation of women in prison for motherhood through training in domesticity and mothercraft.

By ending up in prison at all, pregnant women and those with young children were already believed to have negated their role as mothers. However, prison sentences were posited as potential opportunities to inculcate in these 'bad' mothers the traits and skills required of a 'good' one. Journalists and social commentators Henry Mayhew and John Binny, reflecting upon their visits to London's prisons in the mid-nineteenth century, claimed to observe a difference between the women in the various prison nurseries and the other inmates. They stated that the women in the nursery 'do not glory in their shame as some others do', and added that their being new mothers meant their hearts were not entirely withered and thus they still felt the degradation of their position,[11] the implication being that they were more malleable to, and eager to achieve, reform. Arthur Griffiths, former Deputy Governor of Millbank Prison and a prison administrator, expressed a similar sentiment in 1903 when he argued that in Wormwood Scrubs the 'prison mothers are generally a pattern to their sex'. He continued that there were 'no incentives to neglect of offspring, no drink, no masterful men, no temptation to thieve or go astray, their better feelings, their purer maternal

instincts have full play'.[12] Despite their importance in revealing beliefs about the potential for motherhood to be a tool of reform, we must question the extent to which acknowledgements such as these shaped the labour, education and training undertaken by female prisoners across this period.

Following their period in separate confinement, male convicts were sent to public works prisons to undertake forms of outdoor labour.[13] While demanding, this physical exertion was believed to be advantageous, as it offered a change in environment and employment. However, outdoor labour was deemed unsuitable for female convicts. Instead, their prison labour predominantly consisted of needlework, making clothes for male prisons and working in the prison laundry. The laundry was viewed as a beneficial form of labour as it allowed some degree of physical exertion, particularly for the more robust women, yet it was also deemed a monotonous task. The laundry at Brixton did the washing for Brixton, Millbank and Pentonville. The women also made prison uniforms, shirts and other linens to meet external orders. In local prisons including Westminster, Stafford, Bristol and Worcester the majority of the women worked in silent association in the 'knitting room' or in laundries with specially built 'washing cells' that were separated by high wooden partitions to prevent communication. In Westminster's Tothill Fields Prison in the late nineteenth century mothers in the nursery had a pound and a half of oakum to pick in the course of a day. When their children were over the age of eight months they worked in the associated workroom and their babies were cared for by other mothers in the nursery.[14] They would be expected to pick about two-thirds of the usual allocation of oakum.[15]

Foster Rogers, Assistant Chaplain in Westminster Prison, complained in 1850 that female prisoners needed more opportunities to learn about domestic order and cleanliness, skills which he believed to be at the heart of the 'decencies of life'.[16] William Douglas Morrison, Assistant Chaplain at Wakefield and Wandsworth Prisons in the 1880s, echoed this sentiment and added that for women with children the 'duties of maternity' could mitigate against their criminal tendencies, as they promoted the unselfish natural feminine instincts.[17] Prison officers and doctors repeatedly complained to the Prison Commission about the lack of suitable labour options for women and the dangers posed to their health by remaining in the same sedentary

conditions for the duration of their sentence.[18] In addition, the prison environment itself was the physical antithesis of the ideal middle-class feminine space, although it may have been an improvement upon the conditions women from the poorest communities faced outside. Florence Maybrick, a middle-class observer, bemoaned that prison sentences did not encourage reform nor offer the chance to 'raise the nature or habits', and that she herself had to work hard to maintain a regime of unyielding personal neatness and civility in an environment that facilitated neither.[19] Prison labour for women also attracted external criticism, particularly by the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. In 1898, Sarah Amos, a political activist, penal reformer and Superintendent of the Working Women's College in London, criticised what she viewed as the drudgery of prison labour for women, such as doing the prison washing and making mail bags. She labelled this type of work as a false idea of economy, as it did not offer any useful training for women. Instead, she advocated teaching a woman to make her home healthier and happier, which would make her return to it upon release a more welcome one.[20]

With the creation of the modern prison system in the mid-nineteenth century, prisons were adapted for the reception of women and, in some cases, modified to incorporate a distinct group of prisoners, namely pregnant women and mothers with young infants who were either born during their sentence or accompanied them into prison. In September 1850 it was decided by the Inspectors of Prisons to remove all the adult male prisoners in Westminster Prison to Coldbath Fields Prison so as to provide much-needed additional accommodation for female prisoners in the former. The governor, A.F. Tracey, reported to the Visiting Justices that the resulting large number of committals of women with infants, which was anticipated to increase further with the onset of winter, with its seasonal unemployment and harsher living conditions for the poor, rendered it paramount to make arrangements to ensure their 'peculiar treatment and wants' were met. After conferring with the prison's doctor, he was granted permission and funding to make extensive adaptations to part of the prison's ground floor, which included making ample space for a nursery wherein 'health and proper cleanliness' could be better maintained.[21] When Brixton became England's first female convict prison in 1853, a nursery was built to house mothers and their children, described

as 'the most touching portion of the female convict prison'. The mothers in the nursery cared for their babies, made them clothes and were regularly visited by the chaplain, who brought toys for the children.[22] In these spaces, women were encouraged to care for their child with some instruction from female members of staff, the chaplain and Lady Visitors. However, formal instruction was very limited, and taking care of their infants had to be done as part of a strictly regulated regime with little room for individual choice or initiative. It was not until the very late nineteenth and the early twentieth century that more concerted efforts were made, driven from within and outside of the prison system, to offer organised courses in domestic crafts and mothercraft.

In 1895 Herbert Gladstone chaired a committee of enquiry into the operation of the prison system. The ensuing report recommended a renewed focus on reformation, following three decades during which prison policies were characterised by severity, uniformity and economy. The report stated that it should be the object of the prison authorities to 'humanise the prisoners, to prevent them from feeling that the state merely chains them for a certain period and cares nothing about them'.[23] In his evaluation of penal policy in England and Wales, Bailey argued that the Gladstone Committee marked a notable shift in emphasising the rehabilitative role of prisons in the two decades prior to the outbreak of the First World War. Notable legislation, including the Prison Act 1898, the Inebriates Act 1898, the Prevention of Crime Act 1908 and the Mental Deficiency Act 1913 established arrangements for the extended training of prisoners and the abolition of labour deemed to have little reformatory function, and provided for the segregation and distinct treatment of habitual drunkards, recidivists and the mentally ill.[24] Although much of this was ultimately ineffective in properly addressing the issues intended, it provides useful context to the efforts being made in relation to domesticity and motherhood in prisons.[25]

A problem repeatedly highlighted in evidence to the committee had troubled prison authorities for decades, namely deciding upon appropriate occupations for female prisoners. In her evidence, Jane Taylor Gee, the Matron at Liverpool Prison, summed up this issue when she complained that the limited labour options and educational opportunities available meant 'the women do not feel they are doing anything good'.[26] By the turn of the twentieth century, these broader

debates about reforming prison education prompted a rethinking of the educational needs of mothers in prison in particular.

For centuries, mothers were believed to know instinctively how to raise their children with the help and experience of extended family. However, by the early twentieth century, infant welfare reformers, doctors and policy makers stressed that child-rearing in a modern society required mothers to be instructed in scientific methods of childcare. This education, it was argued, needed to begin in schools and continue in newly established 'Schools for Mothers'.[27] Historians of motherhood and maternity care, including Davin, Lewis and Dwork, have detailed the extensive efforts made in Britain to offer this advice and instruction to mothers by local authorities and voluntary organisations in the early twentieth century, at a time when high infant mortality rates were of critical concern. They have demonstrated how child health and child-rearing took a more prominent place in public discussion and were framed as a national issue as well as a moral duty for mothers.[28]

Ross identified that the period between 1870 and 1918 saw the flourishing of the belief that mothers were responsible to the state and were expected to turn out children reared in specific ways prescribed by medical professionals.[29] This period also witnessed the rise of the modern eugenics movement in Britain, which espoused that social position was determined by individual inherited qualities such as mental ability, susceptibility to sickness and predisposition to immorality. Although overtly eugenic responses were rejected by policy makers in Britain, Tania McIntosh found that the interaction between these ideals and the prominent question of public health influenced attempts to regulate certain aspects of motherhood, particularly among women from the poor and working classes.[30] When discussing the links drawn by prison officials, eugenicists and criminologists in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century between habitual inebriety, recidivism and feeble-mindedness, Zedner argued that these tendencies were labelled as both a cause of crime and a symptom of a pathological condition of physical and mental degeneracy among female prisoners.[31] The danger believed to be posed by these deficiencies was increasingly extended to include the children of these women. Combined with the rethinking of prison education prompted by the findings of the Gladstone Committee and the ever-increasing momentum of the infant welfare movement,

these concerns drove efforts to offer better education in domesticity and mothercraft to women in prison and coalesced in 1904 when prison policy responded directly to this much broader national issue.

The 1904 Report of the Inter-Departmental Committee on Physical Deterioration examined overcrowding, infant mortality, conditions of factory employment, alcoholism and parental ignorance as causes of high infant mortality. It drew attention to the low living standards of the urban poor and placed particular blame upon younger women, who were believed to possess a diminished level of maternal skill than even their own mothers before them, or perhaps had never had the proper opportunity to learn these skills. Mothers were accused of having no knowledge of how to treat their children's ailments and of lacking the skills to provide a healthy home environment for their families.[32] Certainly a crucial pillar of the broader health politics of the early twentieth century, the report's findings also added weight to ever-increasing calls for a more diverse, and medically driven, educational programme to be offered to women in prison.

The *British Medical Journal* (*BMJ*) reported upon an experiment in penal reform that was carried out with female prisoners in Portsmouth Prison in January 1904. Charlotte Smith-Rossie, an honorary lecturer for the Hampshire County Council, had been given permission by the prison to initiate a course of fortnightly lectures on sanitary subjects. The women who maintained the highest standard of behaviour and adherence to the prison rules were selected as students. Smith-Rossie commented that she had heard about a similar course being tried in Wormwood Scrubs Prison, but pointed out that there was a vast difference between training prisoners in a penal establishment like Wormwood Scrubs, and in a local prison like Portsmouth, where the women were mainly serving short sentences for very minor crimes. She claimed that these women, perhaps due to the petty nature of their criminality, were more responsive to teaching about the 'dignity of housekeeping and the efficient discharge of the duties of wife and mother'. Lectures and practical demonstrations on nursing, the care of children and domestic hygiene were reportedly well received by the women. In addition to their aim of offering training in domestic science, Smith-Rossie argued that the lectures offered a crucial 'safeguard against the outbursts of hysteria to which women in prison are particularly subject'.[33] Her comments provide further evidence of the recognition

by the early twentieth century that the monotony of prison life posed serious dangers to the health of prisoners but was also counter-productive to reform.

Due to the early success of the course, the *BMJ* called for the Home Office to develop similar classes on a more regular basis in the prison system, instead of leaving their organisation to the private enterprise of individual volunteers. In their report for the year ending March 1904, the Prison Commissioners detailed a similar scheme which had been initiated in Holloway and marked a 'new departure' in prison education. The women in the prison were given a series of lectures on subjects including health, nursing and sanitation in the home by a group of voluntary Lady Visitors. They reportedly enjoyed early success with the women, who viewed the lectures as not only 'a reward for good conduct, but also a source of useful instruction'. The scheme was subsequently extended to several larger provincial prisons.[34] By 1909, there were 257 lectures on subjects including hygiene in the home and child welfare delivered across the year in the forty-three prisons containing women. In the final month of their sentence women were given a book entitled *A Happy Home and How to Keep It* to study before their release.[35] In addition, the same year saw the opening of a new crèche in Holloway. The *Illustrated London News* reported how mothers would keep their babies with them in their cells during the night but at 8.30 in the morning would take them to the crèche, where they would be cared for by a wardress while their mothers worked in the workroom. It was noted that if the mother's conduct was satisfactory she would be allowed to see her baby and take the child out to exercise in the prison yard in the afternoon.[36]

The outbreak of the First World War and its aftermath had a profound impact on the fabric of British society. The capital and human resources required to fight the Great War reinforced concerns that had been repeatedly raised about the health of the nation since the late nineteenth century. The condition of children, which had been at the centre of these health politics, was a subject raised again in relation to the war effort. Children represented the nation's future – it was upon their feet that 'the race marches on' – yet they were believed to be facing perils comparable to those faced by the men at the front.[37] These comments were made to *The Times* by Lord Rhondda, President of the Local Government Board and Chair of

the Council of National Baby Week. This national event was held during the first week of July 1917 and comprised a series of exhibitions, films and lectures on subjects ranging from lifestyle, hygiene and health visitors to the impact of parental alcoholism upon the home. Trudi Tate has argued that, for those who believed the best way to improve infant health was through better food and medical care, Baby Week was a 'nuisance' that promoted the pro-natalist idea that mothers required supervision in order to be better, while failing to address the impact of broader socio-economic factors upon child health.[38] However, following a deeper exploration of the organisation and running of the event, particularly in London, Linda Bryder countered that those who led the campaign did not seek to blame mothers but, rather, crafted a carefully orchestrated event intended to harness the wartime circumstances to achieve reform of maternal and child welfare policy.[39] Some of the key figures involved in its organisation were also important figures in other areas of social reform impacting upon the lives of women, notably Adeline Russell, Duchess of Bedford, who was later to chair the 1919 enquiry in Holloway.

A theme to emerge during National Baby Week was one that had long been debated in relation to the prison population, namely the impact of parental alcohol consumption upon children. Children born to female drunkards were believed to face the dual disadvantage of being at greater risk of being born with poor physical and mental efficacy, making them more liable to fall under the influence of drink themselves, and of suffering from a lack of proper care, due to their mother's reliance on alcohol.[40] In their report for the year 1917, the Prison Commissioners praised the greater restrictions placed upon the licensing and drinking of alcohol owing to the wartime circumstances and drew a direct correlation with the decrease in the number of prisoners serving sentences for offences including neglect and cruelty to children. They made particular note of comments made by Holloway's Governor and the chaplains in several prisons including Bristol, Newcastle and Plymouth, who noted not only a decrease in the number of women in their prisons but also an improvement in their behaviour and malleability to reform and a 'greater interest both in their homes and themselves' which could be harnessed.[41] Despite the limited resources in prisons and the lack of a comprehensive policy to govern prison education, there was

an evident desire on the part of some prison authorities and penal reformers to nurture this interest among female prisoners through training in domesticity and mothercraft.

The 1920s and 1930s witnessed further efforts to develop the education and training opportunities offered to women in prison. They were primarily driven by female prison officials and philanthropists and reformers. Ladies from the Brabazon Society, initially established in 1882 to provide classes in crafts such as knitting and embroidery to the less able-bodied inmates of workhouses, offered classes in needlework to the women in Holloway. Similarly, three female teachers from Dudley High School gave lessons in handicrafts and school teaching to the younger women in Birmingham Prison. In March 1922 the Prison Commissioners praised their efforts and stated their conviction that voluntary visitors were an essential feature of 'any system which has for its object the rehabilitation of a social failure'.[42] In the autumn of 1922 the Prison Commission developed a scheme in collaboration with the Adult Education Committee wherein each local prison would be allocated an education adviser who would work with the governor to frame the educational curriculum in their respective prison and would help to obtain the services of voluntary teachers. When discussing the need for a 'new departure' in the standard of prison education, the Commissioners lamented the 'peculiar difficulty of restoring women to ordinary standards of life and conduct once they have become accustomed to prison surroundings'.[43] The issue of restoring female respectability, once a woman had been tainted by association with the criminal justice system, was not a new conundrum but, by the early twentieth century, education was increasingly viewed as the means to achieve this.

Chapter 1 demonstrated that the treatment of prisoners by staff, and their views of the women under their charge, varied considerably. Despite this, between the mid-nineteenth and mid-twentieth century, efforts to educate women in prison were largely driven and shaped by a sense of shared responsibility among those female members of staff who sought to adapt the daily monotony of the prison routine and to use education as a means of reforming the behaviour of the women they supervised. When Lilian Barker took up the position of Governor of Aylesbury Borstal for girls in 1923, she secured the services of a trained handicrafts teacher and introduced embroidery,

leatherwork and dressmaking into the education offered to all of the girls in the institution.[44] Following her appointment as Assistant Prison Commissioner in 1935, Barker continued to espouse a more humane model of prison reform with education at its centre. In 1938 she addressed the annual meeting of the HDPAS to talk about the benefits of offering the women in Holloway more advanced training in needlework, cookery and dressmaking. She argued that it made the women more efficient domestically and also, with the help and advice of the Society, more attractive to potential employers.[45]

Mary Size, prison officer, school mistress and Lady Superintendent in Manchester, Liverpool and Leeds Prisons and Aylesbury Borstal before being appointed Deputy Governor of Holloway in 1927, also implemented initiatives and improvements during her four decades of service in the women's prison estate. Her memoir *Prisons I have known*, published after her retirement in 1957, offers a detailed insight into the realities of daily prison life and a valuable means of exploring the role members of staff played in shaping the experiences of female prisoners. Throughout her career, Size reiterated that she believed education to be the keynote of reform. She recalled how the implementation of more classes in handicrafts, home care, cookery and gardening had helped to create a healthier atmosphere in prisons, as these greater educational opportunities marked a shift away from the harsh discipline that had bred hatred and distrust and had resulted in poor behaviour. Instead, she recalled, these classes, taught by members of the prison staff as well as by external voluntary visitors, fostered a sense of cooperation 'between official and prisoner and between woman and woman'.[46]

Women who gave birth in prison and those who brought infants in with them were believed to require greater guidance and education during their prison sentences. Reflecting upon her thirteen-year tenure serving as Holloway's deputy governor, Mary Size considered the advancements made in offering training in child welfare and management to the mothers who gave birth during their sentence as 'perhaps the most vital developments' in the prison's curriculum.[47] Cicely McCall, who worked as an officer in both Holloway and Aylesbury in the 1930s, praised the efforts of the staff to offer instruction in childcare to the women who had babies in prison. However, she complained that opportunities to properly teach the women subjects such as sickness, hygiene and mothercraft were

wasted by the prison authorities. She further regretted that there were no lectures or classes for the hundreds of women in prison who had children outside.[48] When liaising with a local branch of the NSPCC regarding the introduction of lectures on mothercraft to women in Durham Prison in 1945, the governor, R.F. Owens, lamented that the women in his charge 'had the most elementary ideas, if any at all, of their responsibilities as mothers or of how to tend their children'. He also bemoaned the fact that they had not been given an opportunity to learn these things until they came into the 'official care' of the prison.[49] However, the mid-twentieth century, especially the post-war decade, witnessed the introduction of a more comprehensive and centrally driven programme of courses on mothercraft into several women's prisons in England. They were intended to redress the perceived inadequacies in prison education, especially for mothers, but were also a response to the broader societal concern about the 'bad' mother and the danger she posed to the fabric of family life.

A new departure: mothercraft in the mid-twentieth century

During the Second World War, women had been called upon to step into several types of employment, previously reserved for men, to contribute to the war effort on the home front. In its wake, there were concerns that the traditional family unit would collapse in the face of such rapid change, and efforts were made to 'lure women back from the workplace to the home'.[50] Ann Dally described the thirty years following the Second World War as 'an age of idealisation of motherhood', and marked the period as one in which society emphasised the importance of the family and the need for children to be under the constant care of their mothers but, at the same time, took limited steps to help mothers adapt to a fast-changing world.[51] However, more recently, Laura King has explored how children were conceptualised as future citizens in the mid-twentieth century to provide justification for greater spending on improving child welfare.[52] During the war there were shortages in staff and provisions in prisons. Recounting their imprisonment in Holloway in the early 1940s, a group of conscientious objectors, including Kathleen Lonsdale, highlighted shortages in everything from clothes to

nutritious food, and detailed the poor sanitary provisions and medical care for women in prison.[53] These concerns were compounded by the difficulties women's prisons faced when accommodating the rising number of female prisoners, and led to calls for greater resources to tackle these issues.

In April 1945 the Prison Commission reported that the population in women's prisons was at a point 'well above danger level' and could no longer be ignored. It had risen from a pre-war figure of around 700 to 1,701 in April 1945. Particular concerns arose about the appropriate classification and accommodation of the women, due to the increased numbers. In Manchester and Birmingham each cell was at double capacity, and in the latter it was reported that 'all women, however unwilling or unsuitable, were sleeping in association'. In Cardiff and Exeter, prisoners had to be accommodated in the workrooms, meaning that proper classification and supervision was difficult. One reason that was dwelled upon to explain the increased female prison population was the number of women serving sentences for child neglect. In 1913, 731 women were sentenced to a term of imprisonment for cruelty to children. This figure had decreased markedly, to 120, by 1938.[54] Although the exact reasons for this are not fully clear, the reduction was most likely due to a combination of improved child welfare services and the introduction of the Children and Young Persons Act in 1933, which consolidated previous child cruelty legislation and introduced supervision orders for children deemed to be at risk of cruelty or neglect.

In the post-war period cases of child neglect rose sharply again, with 1,239 women convicted for child neglect in 1944, of whom 578 were sent to prison for varying terms.[55] The impact was widely felt in the women's prison estate, which was already under-resourced due to the impact of the war. In 1948, an article in the *BMJ* noted the dangers to health posed by overpopulation in women's prisons due to the continuing rise in sentences for child neglect. However, it noted the poor home conditions from which the majority of these women came, both to partly explain the increase and also to highlight the poor opportunities for redressing these issues. The article stated with consternation that 'it does look as though the housing situation in the country generally is reflected in its gaols'.[56] Debates about the impact of environmental circumstance in cases of child neglect is something to which this chapter returns later.

Taylor and Rogaly argued that the emergence of concerns about the 'problem family' in the immediate post-war years were prompted by the belief that widespread deprivation among families no longer existed. Instead, the causes of poverty were individualised and efforts to combat it were targeted at certain families who were designated as 'problem' families.[57] Welshman situated the 'problem' family of the mid-twentieth century within a broader chronological examination of successive reinventions of the 'underclass' idea since the 1880s, from the 'social residuum' notion of the nineteenth century to the 'social problem group' idea propagated in the early twentieth century.[58] Taylor and Rogaly identified similar continuities with earlier debates and highlighted how the 'problem family' posed a means for the Eugenics Society to reinvent itself following the decline of the respectability of eugenic theories in the late 1940s.[59] Within this evolution of the concept of the 'underclass', women from the poorer classes, especially mothers, often took centre stage. In her study of the stigmatisation of poor and working-class mothers in this period, Pat Starkey demonstrated how the image of the feckless mother meant that explanations for her plight were hinged on personal failings, as opposed to environmental circumstances.[60] For mothers in prison, they had long been deemed to be 'bad' mothers for ending up there at all, and their crimes were believed, at least at a policy level, to stem primarily from immorality, as opposed to poverty. However, crucially, the mid-twentieth century saw greater acknowledgement of the impact of poor housing and environmental circumstance as contributory factors to female imprisonment.

In their exploration of conditions in English prisons in 1922, Hobhouse and Brockway commented that women imprisoned for cruelty to children were often highly strung, with fraught nerves and tempers that had given way under an accumulation of 'repeated child-bearing and crowded miserable housing'.[61] Mary Steel, who had worked in both Birmingham and Holloway Prisons in the mid-twentieth century, echoed these sentiments when asking the question 'what makes a mother a failure?' She asserted that it was a combination of low intelligence, an unfortunate childhood, bad housing and a growing sense of irresponsibility among younger women.[62] When criticising the use of short prison sentences to punish mothers convicted of neglect, Lady Allen of Hurtwood, a child welfare advocate who served as a liaison officer with UNICEF after

the Second World War, commented that it was recognised that a high proportion of the women in prison for child neglect 'are probably of low intelligence' and that the majority faced economic and housing difficulties.[63] In their report for 1955, the HDPAS also pointed to the problem of women marrying men 'of low intelligence and far weaker character' who were wholly inadequate in their roles as husbands and fathers, and how this negated the woman's ability to be a good wife and mother.[64]

In December 1946 a meeting was held to discuss the problem of mothers being sent to prison for child neglect. Attendees included Dr Charity Taylor, Holloway's Governor, Miss Perrott, a psychiatric social worker who had visited and interviewed women in Holloway, Dr Methven and Miss Mellanby, both from the Prison Commission (the latter being responsible for the women's estate), Muriel Glyn-Jones, Woman Inspector of the Home Office's Children's Branch and Miss Goode, from the Home Office's Probation Branch. It was decided that a thorough examination would be carried out to identify the primary reasons why women ended up in Holloway for child neglect. This investigation was conducted over the course of two years and involved carrying out interviews with eighty-nine women during their sentence. The ensuing report was submitted to the Prison Commission in June 1949. It stated that all of the women had between one and eight children, with the majority having between one and five children at home at the time of their conviction. It was found that sixty of the women had no previous convictions but nine had served previous sentences for child neglect. The report pointed to the issue of the majority of the mothers themselves having had a poor education and lacking opportunities to establish a respectable social life, and stated that at least thirty of their number had grown up in neglectful homes, arguing that the neglect of their children stemmed from absence of knowledge and experience, as opposed to the intentional commission of cruelty.[65]

The marital status of the women was also discussed to illustrate their home life. Of the eighty-nine interviewees, forty-five were married, eleven were cohabiting, nineteen were separated or divorced, five were widows and nine were single. Of the fifty-six women living with men, thirty-seven stated that they were in 'unhappy relationships' and spoke of regularly being ill-treated by their partners, which made them 'lose interest' in their homes and children. In addition,

thirty of the married women admitted to being pregnant before they got married. Having to 'hurriedly set up home' was believed to have placed them at a disadvantage from the start.[66] Thus there was a discernible shift away from the nineteenth-century tendency to view the 'bad' or neglectful mother as a moral problem alone. Instead, there was some acknowledgement of the difficulties women faced when trying to maintain hearth and home, particularly those from the poorest or most marginalised backgrounds. For the women behind bars, particularly the new mothers, their prison sentence was believed to be an opportunity for intervention which would come in the form of practical, medical and demonstrative education. In response to the report, the training offered to women in Holloway was expanded to include more classes on home management and the care of infants, which were delivered by hospital staff and by visiting health and educational professionals.

Following their introduction in Holloway, courses in mothercraft were expanded and introduced into several other women's prisons in England in the early 1950s (Figure 3.1). Attendance was compulsory for all women committed for child neglect and all expectant mothers, but women were also able to volunteer to attend. Although they differed slightly in composition in different prisons, the courses involved a notable sharing of ideas, experiences and good practice by prison officials, organisations such as the NSPCC and the WVS and also, crucially, by the Ministry of Health, local medical authorities, including health visitors and local maternity and child welfare services. The classes were taught by a variety of professionals, including health visitors, nurses, midwives and local education authorities. They garnered favourable feedback from officials and prisoners alike. The Countess of Radnor visited Holloway as part of the Prison Nursing Advisory Committee in May 1951. When she was shown the prison's hospital by the matron-in-chief, the Countess reported that she was greatly impressed by the arrangements for new mothers, especially the large percentage of babies being breastfed. She remarked that the support and encouragement of this was 'a particularly valuable achievement' for the prison hospital.[67] Despite offering several criticisms of the conditions and regime in Holloway, Joan Henry remarked, 'I was quite impressed by the care given to the mothers and their children'. Expectant mothers attended classes in childcare and were given the instruction and materials to make

Figure 3.1 Women in a mothercraft class at Exeter Prison, c. 1960s.

clothes for their infants.[68] They were also among the women who attended weekly evening classes, introduced in 1952, which covered subjects including cookery, embroidery, home making, childcare, handicrafts, shorthand and country dancing.[69]

Dr Winifred Kane was the Senior Assistant Medical Officer for Maternity and Child Welfare for the City of Manchester and, in 1951, had been elected the Manchester Paediatric Club's President. She was also a voluntary visitor at Manchester Prison and had built up a good relationship with Miss D. Wilson, the deputy governor. When advocating for classes in mothercraft to be introduced into the prison, Dr Kane informed Miss Wilson of the work being done in the city by health visitors going into Mayfield House, a place provided under the stipulations of the National Assistance Act 1948 for mothers with young children to go to get advice and guidance on nursing their infants. The classes began in Manchester Prison in January 1951 and initially consisted of ten lectures lasting around

fifty minutes each, with an additional ten minutes for questions. The group sizes were between ten and fifteen prisoners at a time.

The lectures were given by Miss Lamb, a qualified health visitor. She had been selected by Miss Gowing, Manchester's Superintendent Health Visitor, as she had a wealth of experience in providing talks at her local child welfare centre and ran a 'Mothers' Club' in the evenings. Mr Hare, Governor of Manchester Prison, agreed to provide Miss Lamb with a domestic science room, which had a kitchen containing a sink, a gas cooker and a water supply, to teach the classes. Demonstration materials were provided by the Local Health Authority. Miss Lamb and Deputy Governor Wilson reported back to Dr Kane and made suggestions for the adaptation of the course moving forward. A.E. Girling, Public Health Nursing Officer, attributed the early success of the course to the establishment of a successful partnership between prison officials, the local health services and the women themselves. For its second iteration the course was adapted and extended to thirteen lectures. It was intended that each lecture would offer instruction in a specific subject and would be complete in itself, which was believed to be important due to the often transient nature of the female prison population as several of the women were serving only short sentences that would not last the duration of the full course.

The course included lectures on a woman's health needs during pregnancy, preparation for labour, antenatal care including information on diet, exercise and hygiene, breastfeeding and the care of the breasts before and after birth. There were also lectures on clothing and bathing babies, appropriate bedding and cots for infants, suitable toys and the importance of routine for babies as well as simple first aid in the home. The lectures were intended to offer as much practical instruction as possible to the women so that they could emulate it in their own homes, although the achievability of this varied depending upon the conditions to which the women would return following their release. This was an issue repeatedly raised by organisations such as the HDPAS and the WVS, who stressed the importance of supporting women to put their training in prison into practice outside. This support was both material, helping them to obtain things like furniture, bedding and clothing to improve their home conditions, and also sought to encourage women to use the local health and maternity services in the community.

In addition to practical instruction in domesticity and mothercraft, there were also lectures on the development of the foetus, a description of labour and the importance of post-natal examinations. The lectures were taught by Dr Brache, from Manchester's Maternity and Child Welfare staff, and Deputy Governor Wilson commented that having the doctor take these lectures helped the women to gain a greater understanding of what she termed the 'how and why' of certain aspects of motherhood.[70] It is highly likely that these areas were taught in more depth to some women in prison than to many outside who had limited opportunities to acquire certain knowledge of the 'how and why' before they commenced their mothering journey. The teaching of these parts of the course by a doctor, while intended to provide women in prison with more practical information of what to expect during labour and their post-natal care, can also be situated within the broader professionalisation and medicalisation of maternity care in the late 1940s and 1950s.

When speaking in Liverpool in February 1945 on the rise of convictions for child neglect, Lady Allen of Hurtwood stated that 'before joining in the clamour for harsher and longer prison sentences for parents who ill-treat their children, we should do well to pause and consider the consequences'. These consequences included the further dislocation of families and the permanent removal of children from their parents. Lady Allen advocated committing parents and children under a probation order to cottage homes where, under the supervision of skilled workers, they would gain practical instruction in caring for their home and understanding their children, and would be restored a sense of responsibility. She asserted that a rehabilitative scheme of this kind would be more constructive than joining 'the cry for filling the already crowded prisons'.[71] These suggestions certainly provided further voice to the mid-twentieth-century view that women often needed help, as opposed to censure alone, to help them to be 'good' mothers. Although the scheme described by Lady Allen was never fully adopted to replace short prison sentences for mothers, aspects of this idea, namely to provide a more homely physical space in which to educate women in domesticity, were implemented to some extent in the teaching of mothercraft in prison.

In February 1952 an experiment was initiated in Birmingham Prison to train the women serving sentences for child neglect in

domesticity and mothercraft. Within the grounds of the prison there was a red-brick house set apart from the main prison building, which had previously been used as officers' quarters. It was adapted to offer more home-like accommodation for the women undertaking the course. It had bedrooms and a well-fitted sitting room and kitchen. No doors were locked in the house, but outside of teaching hours the women would be supervised by a prison officer. The scheme offered an intensive course in home management and the care of children. Its syllabus and running were organised in collaboration with the City of Birmingham Education Authority, the Public Health Authority and the Children's Committee. The classes were taught by several health and educational professionals, including health visitors, teachers and a psychiatric social worker. Twelve women at a time took part in the course and were transferred in from various prisons across the country. They qualified for a place if they had been convicted of child neglect, were pregnant, were deemed eligible to live in a hostel-style environment rather than under the stricter conditions in the main part of the prison and they had long enough left on their sentence to complete the course. In its first year there were five iterations of the course, which lasted for two months, and sixty women took part.

Throughout the year reports were sent back to the Prison Commissioners about the progress of the course, including case histories of the participants. In their report of 1952, the Commissioners synthesised some of the similarities identified in cases of child neglect, including poor home conditions. However, they argued that this was not always the result of poverty and instead was due to wasteful and unintelligent spending, slovenly habits, unhappy marital relationships and the low mentality and poor physique of the mothers. Most of the women were described as having no knowledge of home management and the proper care of children when they began the course. However, the Commissioners praised the fact that the teachers had not been discouraged by the 'appalling degree of ignorance and idleness with which they have been confronted'. Instead, they had shown a real sense of vocation and zeal to awaken in the women a desire to learn.[72]

A large part of the course focused upon the training in mothercraft. Lectures offered instruction in antenatal care, preparing the home for a baby, breastfeeding and weaning, bathing a baby, hygiene in

the home and the prevention of infection. They detailed the specific developmental needs of infants and children between the ages of one and five years. Lectures were also given to provide women with information about the public health services available to them on the outside and advice on how to access them.[73] When writing about the early progress of the course in Birmingham, Mary Steel, one of the teachers, remarked that 'this is the first time that it has officially been recognised that depriving a bad mother of her liberty does not automatically make her into a good one'.[74] At the Women's Public Health Officers' Association Superintendents Group Meeting in March 1953 Mrs Potter, the Health Visitor and Organiser for Health Education for the Birmingham Health Department, spoke about the mothercraft training in the city's prison. She stated that, in addition to the more demonstrative practical training, the course placed emphasis on the emotional stress faced by mothers and offered advice on how to work through it.[75] A key part of this was offering them instruction on home care, budget management and diet and nutrition as well as handicrafts such as making curtains and flower decorations. There was a big common room, which was used to teach the housecraft lectures, and there were two smaller rooms used to provide shorter talks with smaller groups or individual mothers. Mary Steel remarked that, in teaching the courses in this way, 'slowly it became clear that the women were getting their first glimpse of what a home could really mean'. She added that, in taking pride in their communal living space, 'they were closer to serenity than they had ever been'.[76]

Printed reports and accounts of the courses overwhelmingly adopted this positive tone. The women who took part were repeatedly described as relishing the opportunity to be a part of them. However, it is important to acknowledge that these accounts were often written by strong advocates for these courses, who sought to reinforce their necessity to other members of the prison hierarchy. In addition, some of the women on the courses may have embraced them as providing a means to escape the monotony of prison life. As discussed previously, the want of meaningful occupation for women in prison was something bemoaned by prisoners and staff alike throughout the period under examination here. There was some resentment among those not given the chance to undertake the classes in domesticity and mothercraft. Following the first series of classes in

Birmingham, it was reported that there had been some bad feeling between the 'privileged' women chosen to attend the course and other prisoners who considered those convicted of child neglect to be a worse class of prisoner undeserving of special treatment. Joan Henry, when recalling her own time spent in prison, commented that any crimes committed against children generally garnered loathing among fellow prisoners.[77] There were instances of the women who were on the course in Birmingham being targeted for especial censure when working in the main part of the prison. The prison officers had some success in easing these tensions when they allowed the meals cooked as part of the domestic course to be sent over to the women in the main part of the prison.[78]

The overall success of the mothercraft courses, particularly in Manchester, Birmingham and Holloway, prompted the sharing of expertise and good practices between other prisons that accommodated women and their local health and education authorities in the early 1950s. In response to an enquiry made by Dr G. Lilico, the Principal Medical Officer for the Ministry of Health based in Newcastle, regarding mothercraft training in Durham Prison, Dr Ian McCracken, the County Medical Officer of Health in Durham, informed him that the lectures had been organised by the County Education Department in consultation with the Prison Commissioners, notably Miss Mellanby. The lectures were taught by a Mrs Hall, who had qualifications in domestic science and cookery from the University of Durham's Institute of Education, and Mrs Hutchinson, a state registered nurse and state certified midwife.[79] In March 1953 Dr Herbert, from the Welsh Board of Visitors, informed the Home Office that Dr Greenwood Wilson, a doctor in Cardiff who had connections with the medical officer in the city's prison, was interested in the recent reports of the success of the courses in mothercraft in some of the English prisons. He stated that he was interested in providing similar lectures in Cardiff Prison.[80]

Prison aftercare: the last and vital chapter in a long story

Although they were optimistic about the reformative potential of these courses in mothercraft and home care upon the women who completed them, several quarters of the prison hierarchy acknowledged that 'the

real trial awaits them when they return to cope with the conditions that defeated them before'.[81] The issue of women returning to poor home conditions and to husbands of a low moral character upon the expiration of their prison sentence had long been lamented by prison officials, discharged prisoners' aid organisations and charities. James Nugent, chaplain to Liverpool Prison in the second half of the nineteenth century, repeatedly complained to the Visiting Justices about the large numbers of women in the prison and the problem of short sentences, and thus the very limited opportunity to enact any true reform, in contributing to high levels of recidivism. In April 1870 he reported that he had interviewed some of the women not yet hardened in their criminality who expressed a real desire to abandon their life of vice but who had quickly fallen back into old criminal habits by bitter necessity, due to their poor home circumstances.[82] As detailed further in Chapter 1, Nugent and many other prison officials and penal reformers had used such testimony to reinforce their argument for the need for refuges to be set up to receive women from prison and provide an intermediate period between incarceration and reintegration into society, allowing time for the good resolutions they had made in the prison to manifest and to counter the harsh realities facing women when they returned to their old lives.

In her study *The Politics of Motherhood*, Jane Lewis provided a detailed exploration of the problem of class in relation to child and maternal welfare services and offering education and training to mothers. Lewis argued that women of all social classes wanted advice in raising their children, but working-class women posed more complex needs than their instructors could fully meet. She found that by the 1930s poverty and unsanitary conditions, as opposed to the inadequacies of individual mothers alone, were acknowledged by medical professionals as being causes of infant mortality and poor health. However, policy makers still believed that mothers, if instructed properly, could manage adequately, despite their circumstances.[83] There was evidence of comparable acknowledgements among those working in the prison system. Cicely McCall, a qualified psychiatric social worker, recalled that during her tenure as a prison officer she had often lamented that, despite observations of the plight of the women in prison, 'golden opportunities for the beginnings of constructive social work' were not taken.[84] The disparity in the

aims and efforts to bring about reform during a prison sentence and the means to sustain this thereafter endured throughout much of the period under investigation here. They also featured heavily in debates about the role played by prison aftercare organisations.

A reading of the 'typical cases' included in the HDPAS's annual reports throughout the first half of the twentieth century demonstrates that, although the women helped by the Society varied widely in terms of their age, the crimes they had committed, marital status and social background, there were recurring commonalities in the domestic situations of married women with children who found themselves on the wrong side of the law. They faced overcrowded and poor housing conditions, debt and the difficulty of having to work to supplement the family income but being unable to afford suitable childcare. By the late 1940s and early 1950s, discussions about the provision for mothercraft and homecraft training in prisons increasingly included more serious consideration about these issues and how to ensure the effectiveness of the courses beyond the prison gates.

In his address to the HDPAS's annual meeting in 1951, the Reverend Hugh Smith, Chaplain Inspector to the Prison Commission, talked about the concerted efforts being made to take a more individualised approach to the education of prisoners. However, he stated that this was not the complete answer and that prison aftercare organisations had a key role to play in bridging the gulf between prison training and its exercising outside, especially in the case of women. He continued, 'real after-care should not be considered merely a charitable extra tacked on'. Instead, it should be the final stage of reformative treatment, the 'last and vital chapter of a long story'.[85] In the post-war period the WVS established their After-Care Scheme, wherein a 'Friend' would be appointed to any woman who requested one upon release from Holloway Prison. They would offer the women advice on gaining employment and would help those with children to access the services of their local health visitors. Following the establishment of the mothercraft training courses in Birmingham Prison the WVS After-Care Scheme was extended to the women held in the prison. In addition, the Discharged Prisoners' Aid Society's (DPAS) welfare officer interviewed each woman who took part in the course to try to make arrangements for her release and put her in contact with her local DPAS branch.[86] In 1954 Dr

Charity Taylor, Holloway's Governor, commended the ongoing cooperation between the WVS and the Holloway branch of the DPAS, and their success in identifying the needs of the women before their release and making suitable arrangements to meet them in the community.[87]

Prisons without bars

In May 1932 the results of a government enquiry into the problem of persistent offending were presented to the House of Commons by the Home Secretary, Herbert Samuel. He stated that, although 86 per cent of women received into prisons since 1930 were repeat offenders, the great majority of them were a nuisance to society rather than a danger to it. The report concluded that 'prison buildings of the fortress type are unnecessary for the purposes of security and the effects of such buildings on women seem to be in many respects worse than on men'. Therefore, he recommended exploring ways to reform the women's prison estate to avoid 'the complete loss of self-respect' which women frequently suffered as a result of imprisonment.[88] In 1937 plans were drawn up to begin the conversion of Askham Grange, a manor house in Yorkshire, into a non-security prison for women, but were shelved due to the outbreak of the Second World War. However, the issue was revisited in 1946 and in November of that year Askham Grange was opened for the reception of its first female inmates.

Mary Size was recalled from her retirement to serve as the prison's governor. She described Askham Grange's opening as 'a revolutionary moment in prison reform', as it accommodated up to sixty women in dormitories instead of cells where they would 'live together as a family and behave in every way as a decent family should'.[89] Recalling her time in Askham Grange, 'the prison without bars', in the early 1950s, Joan Henry noted how the women ate their meals together around a table instead of alone in their cells as they did in other prisons. She added that Governor Size and the other officers treated her 'more like a person than a number'.[90] Training in cookery and housewifery began in March 1947; officers were employed who had been trained in technical schools before the war and the Local

Education Authority assisted in preparing the syllabus. The women would complete a twelve-week course and take an examination at the end.[91] In 1951 the West Riding Education Authority appointed an additional handicrafts teacher to teach embroidery, quilting and hemstitching. Mrs McMahon, a qualified dressmaking teacher, taught the classes and prepared the women to take the London City and Guilds examinations. All the candidates passed in the first year and some went on to work in dressmaking upon release.[92]

Special arrangements were also made to accommodate mothers and their babies in Askham Grange, where they were housed in dormitories that were part of the prison's hospital. In addition, Sister Bissell was appointed as the Nursing Sister to play a lead role in caring for their specific needs. She organised an infant welfare class, first aid lessons and a personal hygiene course. In the infant welfare lectures the women were given the same instruction as that given at welfare clinics outside. Other women who were mothers with children outside joined the classes, and the babies born to the women in the prison were used as living examples of how to feed, clothe and care for infants.[93]

Following the early success of Askham Grange, the Prison Commissioners decided to open a second regional training prison for women at Hill Hall, near Epping, Essex in October 1952. Hill Hall was a large country house surrounded with extensive grounds and, like Askham Grange, it could house up to sixty women in dormitory-style accommodation. Its opening was part of an initiative to establish more open prisons for men and women, the result, the Commissioners explained, of recognition of the benefits of individualisation in the treatment of offenders and its rehabilitative potential.[94] In the same year two additional open prisons for men were opened at Grendon Hall in Buckinghamshire and in Dover, Kent.[95] The opening of these prisons and the adaptation of the obdurate and heavily regulated regimes that had long prevailed in England's penal institutions demonstrates some recognition on the part of the highest prison authorities of the benefits of custodial differentiation, something that those who worked within the daily realities of prison life, such as Mary Gordon, Cicely McCall and Mary Size, had long since recognised in their efforts to use education to improve the lives of the women in their care during their time in prison and beyond it.

Conclusion

A key theme running throughout this book is that notions of ideal domesticity and femininity were so often at variance with the realities of prison life, from the management of female prisoner health and behaviour to the conditions under which women were accommodated, their prison dress and the labour they were expected to perform during their sentence. Despite this, prisons for women were expected to morally reclaim their inmates and prepare them for release back into respectable society. While there was no shortage of official discourse castigating the 'bad' mothers who populated prisons and the dangers they were believed to pose to hearth, home and child, prison regimes offered little opportunity for them to become 'good' ones. Instead, efforts to provide mothers in prison with education and training in childcare and home management were largely driven by the individual efforts of female prison officials and external reformers for much of this period. It was not until the early twentieth century, when affairs of the home were increasingly believed to be matters that required state intervention, due to concerns about national efficiency and child health, that there was more central recognition among the prison hierarchy of the benefits of initiating more regular classes in domestic science and mothercraft.

The introduction of more comprehensive courses in mothercraft to women in prison in the mid-twentieth century was a major step in the history of motherhood in prison. They were a response to the laments about 'problem families' in newspapers, medical discourse and government debates, wherein mothers in prison were held up as cautionary tales of the dangers of not properly educating 'bad' mothers to be good ones. However, these courses also marked a shift away from attempts to reclaim women through religious and moral instruction alone, and towards acknowledgement that prison was a space for medical, as well as penal, intervention. Furthermore, they can be contextualised within the broader contemporary discussions about educating, incentivising and medicalising motherhood occurring outside of the prison walls in post-war Britain. Their content was reflective of the increasing contemporary acknowledgement, particularly among those who worked in the women's prison estate on a daily basis, that imprisoning a 'bad' mother did not necessarily make her into a good one upon release, and they sought

to address the difficulties women faced in the home, whether through impoverished conditions, stress or lack of educative opportunities to learn how to be a mother. Considerations of how penal policies transcended the prison walls and affected families on the outside developed further in the second half of the twentieth century and, within debates about the treatment of mothers in prison, attention was increasingly diverted towards considerations of their children's needs on the outside. These discussions are ongoing in debates about the broader societal and familial consequences of maternal incarceration today.

Notes

1 Mary Carpenter, *Our convicts*, *Vol. II* (London: Longman, 1864), p. 205.
2 Lucia Zedner, *Women, crime and custody in Victorian England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 186.
3 Select examples include James Devon, *The criminal and the community* (London: J. Lane, 1912). Devon, the Medical Officer of Glasgow Prison and a prison administrator in Scotland, worried that daughters in particular suffered from their mothers' neglect and that when this was added to their bad examples it could have a severe effect upon girls. Mary Carpenter criticised the practice of having children and juveniles in prisons and used the fear of moral contagion as part of her promotion of reformatory schools. See Carpenter, *Our convicts, Vol. II*.
4 Elizabeth Fry, *Observations on the visiting, superintendence and government of female prisoners* (Norwich: S. Wilkin, 1827), p. 3.
5 Fry, *Observations on the visiting*, p. 3.
6 Report of the Directors of Convict Prisons for the year 1853 (London: 1854), p. 311.
7 Lucia Zedner, *Women, crime and custody in Victorian England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991).
8 Russell P. Dobash, R. Emerson Dobash and Sue Gutteridge, *The imprisonment of women* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), p. 86.
9 Bill Forsythe, 'Women prisoners and women's penal officials 1840–1921', *British Journal of Criminology*, 33:4 (1993), 525–540, https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordjournals.bjc.a048357, pp. 527–528.
10 Rachel Bennett, 'Bad for the health of the body, worse for the health of the mind: Female responses to imprisonment in England, 1853–1869', *Social*

History of Medicine, 34:2 (2021), 532–552, https://doi.org/10.1093/shm/hkz066.

11 Henry Mayhew and John Binny, *The criminal prisons of London and scenes of prison life* (London: 1862), p. 475.

12 Major Arthur Griffiths, 'In Wormwood Scrubs', in George Sims (ed.), *Living London: its work and its play, its humour and its pathos, its sights and its scenes*, Vol. III (London: Cassell and Company, 1903), pp. 126–131, p. 127.

13 For more on the public works prisons see Alyson Brown, *English society and the prison: Time, culture, and politics in the development of the modern prison, 1850–1920* (Suffolk: Boydell, 2003), Ch. 5.

14 Mayhew and Binny, *The criminal prisons of London*, p. 473.

15 Zedner, *Women, crime and custody*, p. 147.

16 Zedner, *Women, crime and custody*, p. 47.

17 William Douglas Morrison, *Crime and its causes* (London: Swan Sonnenschein & Co., 1891), p. 152.

18 For several good examples of these complaints and debates see Bennett, 'Bad for the health of the body'.

19 Florence Elizabeth Chandler Maybrick, *Mrs Maybrick's own story: My fifteen lost years* (London: Funk & Wagnalls Company, 1905), p. 188.

20 Sarah Amos, 'The prison treatment of women', *Contemporary Review*, 73 (1898), 803–813, p. 809.

21 LMA, WA/6/006, Minute Book, September 1850–December 1852, 9 November 1850.

22 Mayhew and Binny, *The criminal prisons of London*, p. 189.

23 Report from the Departmental Committee on Prisons (London: 1895), p. 13.

24 Victor Bailey, *The rise and fall of the rehabilitative ideal, 1895–1970* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2019), p. 18.

25 For a more thorough discussion of some of the key areas addressed by the Gladstone Committee see Christopher Harding, '"The inevitable end of a discredited system"? The origins of the Gladstone Committee report on prisons, 1895', *The Historical Journal*, 31:3 (1988), 591–608, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0018246X00023505.

26 Report from the Departmental Committee on Prisons, p. 189.

27 Jane Lewis, *The politics of motherhood: Child and maternal welfare in England, 1900–1939* (London: Croom Helm, 1980); for an examination of the developments in the education of mothers see pp. 89–113. Rima Apple also identified the mid-nineteenth century as a key period in which it was increasingly argued in the United States that mothers required the medical and scientific knowledge of experts to raise their

family. See Rima Apple, *Perfect motherhood: Science and childrearing in America* (London: Rutgers University Press, 2006); for a discussion of the early decades of the twentieth century see pp. 34–55.

28 Anna Davin, 'Imperialism and motherhood', *History Workshop*, 5:1 (1978), 9–65, https://doi.org/10.1093/hwj/5.1.9; Lewis, *The politics of motherhood*; Deborah Dwork, *War is good for babies and other young children: A history of the infant and child welfare movement in England 1898–1918* (London: Tavistock Publications, 1987). In her study of the United States, Apple identified a similar link between the growing maternal and child health movement of the early twentieth century and concerns raised about the poor physical condition of some of the armed forces during recruitment for the First World War, which was traced back to a failure on the part of the nation's mothers. See Apple, *Perfect motherhood*, p. 37.

29 Ellen Ross, *Love and toil: Motherhood in outcast London, 1870–1918* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 5.

30 Tania McIntosh, *A social history of maternity and childbirth: Key themes in maternity care* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2012), pp. 24–44.

31 Zedner, *Women, crime and custody*, pp. 265–267.

32 Report of the Inter-Departmental Committee on Physical Deterioration (London: 1904).

33 *British Medical Journal*, 20 August 1904, p. 397.

34 Report of the Commissioners of Prisons and the Directors of Convict Prisons for the year ended 31 March 1904 (London: 1904), p. 31.

35 Stephen Hobhouse and A. Fenner Brockway, *English prisons today: Being the report of the prison system enquiry committee* (London: Longmans, Green and Co, 1922), p. 179.

36 'Prison babies: The case of infants in Holloway Jail', *Illustrated London News* (9 January 1909), p. 56.

37 'Baby Week', *The Times* (3 July 1917), p. 6.

38 Trudi Tate, 'King baby: Infant care into the peace', in Trudi Tate and Kate Kennedy (eds), *The silent morning: Culture and memory after the Armistice* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), pp. 104–130, p. 115.

39 Linda Bryder, 'Mobilising mothers: The 1917 National Baby Week', *Medical History*, 63:1 (2019), 2–23, https://doi.org/10.1017/mdh.2018.60, p. 4.

40 For an example of these late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century debates see Mary Scharlieb, 'Alcoholism in relation to women and children', in T.N. Kelynack (ed.), *The drink problem of today in its medico-sociological aspects* (London: Methuen & Co., first published 1907, revised edition 1916), pp. 128–156, p. 129.

41 Report of the Commissioners of Prisons and the Directors of Convict Prisons for the Year Ended 31 March 1918 (London: 1918), pp. 8–13.
42 Report of the Commissioners of Prisons and the Directors of Convict Prisons for the Year Ended 31 March 1922 (London: 1922), pp. 14–15.
43 Report of the Commissioners of Prisons, and the Directors of Convict Prisons for the Year Ended 31 March 1923 (London: 1923), pp. 11–18.
44 Mary Size, *Prisons I have known* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1957), p. 45.
45 MRC, MSS/67/4/24/18, Holloway Discharged Prisoners' Aid Society Annual Report 1 January 1938, p. 5.
46 Size, *Prisons I have known*, p. 109.
47 Size, *Prisons I have known*, p. 125.
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