

‘Waging War on the Streets’: the Irish Women Patrol, 1914–22.¹

Female activists across the United Kingdom had insisted from the late nineteenth century that the employment of women police who would deal with problems specific to women and children could help to address pressing social questions, or at least to offer women some protection within the entirely male criminal justice system. Their campaign for women police was connected to similar demands for the employment of female prison visitors and inspectors and, later, jurors and lawyers, and it was predicated on the idea that neither prisons nor courts afforded women fair and equal treatment under the law.² Early victories included the appointment of police matrons and searchers, but the resistance of police authorities and most other civil servants to female officers remained solid into the early twentieth century, feminist campaigning notwithstanding. The outbreak of the First World War, however, provided an ideal context for renewed activism on the issue, not least because commentators across the British Isles predicted that the apparent inability of girls and young women to resist the lure of uniformed men would lead to outbreaks of war-induced sexual promiscuity and a decline in standards of public behaviour.³

Irish feminists and social reformers monitored this situation carefully. They voluntarily offered women and children forms of assistance which they hoped female policewomen would one day be officially sanctioned to provide; but at the same time, they maintained their insistence that professional and properly trained female police officers remained their primary goal.⁴ They were united in the common conviction that female police might provide women with protection from male violence and exploitation, but beyond that they disagreed, sometimes sharply, about the precise form of the work female police officers should undertake.⁵ Would they simply replicate the work of men? Would they work only with and for women? Would they have the power of arrest and, most

¹ I would like to express my gratitude to Dr Gemma Clark and Joseph Curran for their invaluable research assistance, and to Dr Daniel Gray for reading and commenting on earlier drafts of this article.

² Philippa Levine, “‘Walking the streets in a way no decent woman should’”: women police in World War 1’ in *Journal of Modern History*, lxvi (1994), pp 34–9; Rosemary Cullen Owens, *Louie Bennett* (Cork, 2001), pp 15–16; *Irish Citizen*, 19 Dec. 1914.

³ Angela Woodeson, ‘The first women police: a force for equality or infringement?’ in *Women’s History Review*, ii (1993), pp 325–47.

⁴ *Irish Citizen*, 9 Jan. 1912, 14 Nov. 1914.

⁵ Leanne McCormick, *Regulating sexuality: women in twentieth-century Northern Ireland* (Manchester, 2009), p. 93.

controversially, would they become a kind of moral police force which would target the products rather than the causes of vice?⁶

The latter possibility was particularly contentious as some feminists were already wary of the aims of the rescue and vigilance societies which targeted women, usually prostitutes, removing them from the streets and condemning their activity, without extending their critiques to the men who used them and the social conditions which produced them. As early as 1912, the feminist periodical, *Irish Citizen* had, for example, condemned 'vigilance puritans' for 'tinkering clumsily' with the symptoms of 'sexual viciousness' while rejecting the only 'means to an effective purification of society'.⁷ The means of 'purification' identified by the mainly radical feminists who wrote the *Citizen's* editorials were a direct assault on the sexual double standard, frank and open discussion about the extent and causes of prostitution, rape and violence against women and children, and the feminisation of the courts, the police and the judiciary. Some campaigners, especially those who had been involved in social work, seemed to believe that women police would provide an extension of 'their work of rescue, reform and prevention'.⁸

By mid-1914, the Irish constabulary had joined the debate, insisting that police officers be consulted on the pressing question of whether women should be admitted to the Royal Irish Constabulary and the Dublin Metropolitan Police (D.M.P.) and if so, under what conditions.⁹ The question moved beyond the realms of theory on the outbreak of the First World War when the government agreed to sanction female police and patrols. Two initiatives were swiftly launched by British women in late 1914, the Women Police Volunteers (W.P.V.), and a women's patrol organised by the National Union of Women Workers (N.U.W.W.).¹⁰ Ireland adopted a version of the latter and an Irish Women Patrol (I.W.P.) was launched under the aegis of the N.U.W.W.¹¹ From early 1915, these Irish patrols went out nightly in pairs, in two-hour shifts between 8.30 and 11. They were not uniformed, but wore a badge and carried a small rule book and a card which authorised police to assist them if necessary. They did not have the power of arrest but had to be prepared to participate in the arrest of offenders, to spend some time in police stations charging those offenders, and finally to sacrifice the entire next morning to service in the police court.¹²

⁶ *Irish Citizen*, 9 Jan. 1915.

⁷ *Irish Citizen*, 14 Sept. 1912.

⁸ Lucy Bland, 'In the name of protection: the policing of women in the First World War' in Julia Brophy and Carol Smart (eds), *Women in law: explorations in law, family and sexuality* (London, 1985), p. 24.

⁹ *Constabulary Gazette*, (supplement) 13 June 1914, xxxv.

¹⁰ In 1918, the N.U.W.W. changed its name to the National Council of Women of Great Britain & Ireland but, for the sake of clarity, I shall refer to it as the N.U.W.W. throughout this article.

¹¹ The Irish Women Patrol Association was known by various names, including the Irish Women's Patrol, the Irish Women Patrols and the Irish Women's Patrol Committee. As it was most commonly known by its own members and by outside observers as the Irish Women Patrols (I.W.P.), I shall use this title throughout the article. The individual women who were active in the organisation were known as patrols or patrollers and shall be described as such in this article.

¹² Report of the Irish Woman Patrols (Imperial War Museum, Women's Work Collection (I.W.M./W.W.C.) EMP. 42.5/63, (1917) p.8) and *Irish Times*, 14 Jan. 1915.

Unlike policemen, female patrols were necessarily relatively well off: their work was unpaid, they were required to give at least two hours of their time each week and those who wished to join the general committee were obliged to contribute 2s. 6d.¹³ The voluntary nature of the organisation was the cause of some debate within feminist circles, but it also reflected the social reform and philanthropic tradition of many of the women involved in the initiative.¹⁴ Patrols were ideally to be between twenty-seven and fifty years old and they were required to be tactful, in good health and have some experience of working among girls. More than one patroller was physically assaulted, most famously Kathleen McLoughlin whose case achieved considerable press interest in 1916.¹⁵ It is difficult to know exactly how many volunteers came forward, but numbers certainly remained relatively small, totalling about twenty in Dublin by April 1915.¹⁶ By 1918, there were fifty working in Belfast and at least as many in Dublin, though official figures do not seem to have been published.¹⁷

There is little written on the development of women patrols in early twentieth-century Ireland, though much research has been produced on female policing in Britain in the same period. The best of the British scholarship has explored the way that what became ‘the slippage between befriending, warning, restraining and rescuing’ ultimately had ‘disturbing consequences’ for women police and patrols.¹⁸ British historians have not included the Irish case in their analyses, and what has been produced in the Irish context has tended to dwell on the conservative aims of the patrols, emphasising their work in controlling the sexual behaviour of poor women.¹⁹ There is no question that some of the women who were drawn to the I.W.P. were driven by a desire to impose their own moral values on working-class women and even to control their sexual behaviours, but this did not define the ethos of the organisation, let alone the aims of the individuals who pursued a variety of social and political programmes under its auspices.

Just as in Britain, Irish feminists agreed that the work of female police should be preventative rather than punitive, but a large variety of approaches existed within this broad consensus. An early split in the English women’s movement over the role of the new female police and their cooperation with military authorities brought these disagreements to a devastating head. Unlike its British counterparts, however, the Irish Women Patrol managed to survive the war and, despite some initial concerns, gained the support of most Irish feminist groups along the way. How and why was this possible? What made the Irish patrol

¹³ Report of the Irish Woman Patrols (I.W.M./W.W.C., EMP. 42.5/63, (1917) , p. 3).

¹⁴ Bland, ‘In the name of protection’, p. 26.

¹⁵ *Irish Times*, 12 Jan. 1916.

¹⁶ *Irish Times*, 15 Apr. 1915.

¹⁷ *Weekly Irish Times*, 19 Jan. 1918.

¹⁸ These include: Bland, ‘In the name of protection’; Levine, ‘Walking the streets’; Woodeson, ‘The first women police’; Angela Woollacott, ‘“Khaki Fever” and its control: gender, class, age and sexual morality on the British homefront in the First World War’ in *Journal of Contemporary History*, xxix (1994), pp 325–47; and Louise Jackson, *Women police: gender, welfare and surveillance in the twentieth century* (Manchester, 2006).

¹⁹ Christopher Shepard, ‘A liberalisation of Irish social policy? Women’s organisations and the campaign for women police in Ireland, 1915–57’ in *I.H.S.*, xxxvi (2008–9), p. 565, and Maria Luddy, *Prostitution and Irish society, 1800–1940* (Cambridge, 2007), p. 160.

different from its British counterparts and how did it manage to attract and retain the support of disparate individuals and organisations? In order to answer these questions, one must consider the specific circumstances in which the Irish Women Patrol was founded. Particular Irish social and political concerns shaped its ethos and development from the outset, as did the fact that it was built on a number of almost universally accepted ideas within the broader women's and social reform movements. The first of these was that public vice would increase during wartime; the second was that women, especially young working-class women, were particularly susceptible to this and, moreover, would pay a higher price than men for such moral laxity; and the third was that the streets were unsafe for women of all classes. The close cooperation of a number of feminist and social purity groups on issues including temperance reform and white slavery highlighted similarities in their moral compasses and provided a basis for cooperation on women police.²⁰ This was inevitable as 'feminist concerns and ideas animated social purity at its inception', just as Christian revivalism did.²¹ Still more fundamental to the development of the Irish Patrol was the fact that while it was a product of war, it quickly ceased to be shaped by it. Unlike their British counterparts, Irish patrols were not compelled to tour military camps, barracks or munitions factories, and an early detachment from the alleged necessity of protecting young women from war-induced temptation and soldiers from lascivious and potentially diseased women, allowed for levels of autonomy and flexibility largely unseen in British patrols. In many cases it allowed activist women an opportunity to pursue their own feminist and social reform causes under a new, semi-official guise.

The records of the Irish Women Patrol offer some valuable clues about how the organisation managed not to fall foul of its critics and how it maintained a workable balance between older social purity causes and new feminist ideas. It produced many fewer documents than its British counterparts, and it is unclear whether what remains represents the entirety of its official documentation, or whether some was lost.²² As it operated under the auspices of the National Union of Women Workers, some of its annual reports and précis of official reports were produced for internal and largely British audiences, particularly for the N.U.W.W.'s Women's Patrol Committee. Despite these obvious limitations, the reports do contain important insights into the work of the I.W.P. as well as some unexpectedly frank discussion about the prevalence of what all contemporary commentators would have considered to have been flagrant sexual impropriety and public vice in early twentieth-century Ireland, and what they believed could be done to address the social problems which such behaviour highlighted. The material is limited nonetheless, primarily because it contains the views of

²⁰ The following provide the most comprehensive discussions on the relationship between feminism and social purity in Ireland: Luddy, *Prostitution and Irish society*; McCormick, *Regulating sexuality*; Elizabeth Malcolm, "'Troops of largely diseased women": V.D., the Contagious Diseases Acts and moral policing in late nineteenth-century Ireland' in *Irish Economic and Social History*, xxvi (1999), pp 1–14.

²¹ Sheila Jeffreys, 'Women and sexuality' in Jane Purvis (ed.), *Women's History: Britain, 1850–1945* (London, 1997), p. 194.

²² Existing records are kept in the Imperial War Museum's Women's Work Collection. Only two reports survive, 1917 and 1919, suggesting that others were lost. Copies do not appear to have been lodged in the National Library of Ireland.

patrollers rather than the patrolled (though hints about the views of the latter are littered through the material), but also because it is almost entirely Dublin-centric. A patrol was established in Belfast, but very little was recorded in the press or in official accounts about its activities. Official reports produced by the I.W.P. centred almost entirely on its work in Dublin and while the Belfast patrol produced at least one 'special report', its activities appeared to have been more limited than in Dublin. By 1916, its parent body announced that the Belfast committee had experienced 'many setbacks in illness of members' and that a report had not been received for some time; by the following year, it reported that work had only recently been 'revived'.²³ Information about the Belfast patrol is unfortunately so scanty that this piece will deal entirely and necessarily with events and developments in Dublin, unless otherwise indicated.

The I.W.P.'s own accounts can therefore, only take us so far, but a great deal of information about how the Patrol was received is recorded in newspapers and periodicals as well as in a variety of private and official papers. These provide a rich basis for an examination of the establishment and development of the Irish Patrol and allow one to view it in a British Isles context while also exploring the impact on it of indigenous conditions. The purpose and the practical working of the I.W.P. remained subjects of debate throughout the war years and the views of its supporters and its detractors reveal much about the dynamics of both this debate and the tensions which existed within the broader feminist and social reform movements. A study of the Irish Women Patrol allows one to examine these tensions, as well as exploring why the Patrol survived despite them.

II

The Irish Women Patrol grew out of well-established voluntarist and social reform campaigns which stretched back to the nineteenth century and reflected social anxieties around prostitution, the sexual double standard and public immorality.²⁴ When war broke out in 1914, seasoned campaigners were thus able to come forward immediately, offering various forms of voluntary social service including the formation of a corps of women police. The most prominent of these included the Irish Girls' Protection Crusade, and the Women's National Health Association, but the task was soon taken over by a joint committee of delegates from various Irish women's societies, some of them feminist, some philanthropic, all of them broadly reformist in their emphasis on improving the lives of women and children.²⁵ This joint committee was headed by Anna Haslam, veteran social reformer and co-founder in 1876 of one of Ireland's earliest women's suffrage

²³ Report of the Women's Patrol Committee, 1917 (I.W.M./W.W.C., EMP. 42.5/30).

²⁴ See Maria Luddy, *Women and philanthropy in nineteenth-century Ireland* (Cambridge, 1995) and *Prostitution and Irish society*, for compressive discussions of the genesis of women's and feminist social reform and voluntarist campaigns in nineteenth-century Ireland.

²⁵ *Irish Times*, 22 Apr. 1915 and 23 Jan. 1923; Memoranda of Interviews, 10 Nov., 1914 (Sir Matthew Nathan Papers, vol. 1, Bodl., MS Nathan 467); Lady Aberdeen to Matthew Nathan, 25 Dec., 1914 (Bodl., MS Nathan 450); *Constabulary Gazette*, 9 Jan. 1915, p. 462; *Irish Citizen*, 14 Nov. 1914, p. 201. At least seventeen societies were represented on the joint committee: *Freeman's Journal*, 4 Jan. 1915.

societies, the Irish Women's Suffrage and Local Government Association (I.W.S.L.G.A.). Several months earlier Haslam had spearheaded the formation of a joint committee which had united 'women of every opinion for the betterment of the condition of women generally, and for the promoting of their interests in Municipal affairs'.²⁶ Although many members of her umbrella body became involved in relief work immediately on the outbreak of war, the committee remained sufficiently active in its original form to provide a template for the new coalition of women's groups which was to cooperate on the issue of women police, again under the leadership of Haslam and her I.W.S.L.G.A. colleagues.²⁷ The immediate enlistment of a wide variety of women's groups and the continuing commitment to broad-based support proved to be central to the success of Ireland's women patrols.

Haslam and her associates, especially Professor Mary Hayden, historian and fellow feminist and social reform activist, were able to take over the new scheme because they were well placed to build on the groundwork being done in England through the I.W.S.L.G.A.'s close association with the N.U.W.W. The National Union's broad and non-militant forms of feminism and social reform activism appealed to many Irish campaigners who had established close links with it from its earliest days.²⁸ Haslam herself became a member of its general committee in 1897 before being appointed a vice-president in 1907,²⁹ and the I.W.S.L.G.A. itself affiliated with the National Union in about 1915.³⁰ Unlike a number of other British societies, the N.U.W.W. had managed to take root in Ireland, largely because it pre-dated most Irish suffrage organisations and because it had a very broad appeal which did not attempt to replicate the work of any existing Irish organisation. The status of the N.U.W.W. as a coordinating body also rendered it less objectionable than other British organisations, but even it did not manage to establish an institutional home in Ireland until a Dublin branch was founded under the auspices of Lady Wright in late 1915.³¹ This had important consequences, the most significant being that the Irish Women Patrols were launched under the broad aegis of the National Union in early 1915 without the backing of a local chapter. It was unusual for patrols to be founded in cities where N.U.W.W. branches did not already exist, and in Dublin this reversal in the usual order of events meant that local organisers were 'left a free hand to adapt [their] system to the special locality'.³² The ability to function in a semi-autonomous manner and to tailor the patrols to particular local conditions proved to be one of

²⁶ *Irish Citizen*, 9 Jan. 1915.

²⁷ *Report of the executive committee of the Irish Women's Suffrage and Local Government Association for 1914*, (Dublin, 1915), pp 4–6; *International Woman Suffrage News*, 1 Jan. 1917, p. 55.

²⁸ The N.U.W.W. was an umbrella group to which many hundreds of mainly middle-class women's organisations were affiliated.

²⁹ *A Threefold Cord; a magazine for thoughtful women* (N.U.W.W.) ii, (1892), p. 1; Carmel Quinlan, *Genteel revolutionaries: Anna and Thomas Haslam and the Irish women's movement* (Cork, 2002), p. 143.

³⁰ Quinlan, *Genteel revolutionaries*, p. 143.

³¹ *Irish Times*, 18 Oct. 1916.

³² Mrs Creighton, *The National Union of Women Workers and the War*, (no date), p. 1; Mrs Carden, 'Women Patrols', in *Quarterly Leaflet of the Women's National Liberal Association*, lxxx (1915), p. 12.

the Irish scheme's greatest strengths, and helped to minimize Irish objections to the importation of an English scheme. At the same time, the I.W.P. benefited greatly from the N.U.W.W.'s financial and organisational clout, especially at first when an English organiser spent a fortnight training volunteers in Dublin, entirely at the expense of the central committee.³³

Having garnered sufficient support among many Irish women's societies, the joint committee turned next to securing the backing of several key public servants, especially Ireland's lord lieutenant, his under-secretary and the chief officer of the D.M.P. The lord lieutenant evidently approved of the idea as he wrote immediately to the N.U.W.W.'s London Patrol Committee, requesting 150 copies of a leaflet it had prepared for distribution by women patrols. He also agreed to issue instructions to the Irish police immediately, extending the terms agreed by the Home Office to chief constables in England and Wales.³⁴ By 1917, the backing of Belfast's lord mayor and city commissioner of Police had also been secured.³⁵ The cooperation of local officials was vital as the indifference and outright hostility of several chief constables had severely undermined patrols in other parts of the U.K.³⁶ Such hostility to women police, even in a voluntary capacity, was driven by a number of factors, not least of which was a lingering suspicion of the wider political impulses which drove advocates of female police. As Philippa Levine has argued, the women's suffrage question lay at the heart of much official opposition to women constables as bureaucrats believed that the 'impetus for female policing was feminist in origin' and that such involvement might lead to a militant invasion of the criminal justice system.³⁷ This fear was much less acute in Ireland, largely because militant feminists and their organisations were not involved in the N.U.W.W. scheme at its inception and the suffragists who were – notably Haslam and Hayden – were strictly and vocally non-militant. This no doubt soothed the anxieties of anti-suffragists. In a glowing report about the I.W.P.'s presidents, Ireland's *Constabulary Gazette* noted approvingly, for example, that there was 'nothing of the hysterics that many have associated with the forward women's movement to be found in either of these ladies'.³⁸

When the first patrols took to Irish streets in early 1915, the executive had therefore secured the backing of most major Irish women's organisations, the police and senior bureaucrats, and was unencumbered by competition from rival organisations. This placed it in a stronger position than many of the British schemes, but it was nonetheless subjected to some of the same objections as the British patrols as well as being obliged to address particularly Irish concerns. Irish organisers were able to respond to such anxieties through a combination of vigilance wherever possible and necessary and by managing local conditions in such a way as to cause the least offence to all interested parties. They also indulged in some strategic public ambiguity about their aims and methods in

³³ Report of N.U.W.W. Women Patrols, 1918 (I.W.M./W.W.C., EMP. 42.7, p. 21).

³⁴ Dublin Castle to Mrs Cardell of the N.U.W.W., 2 Nov., 1914 (I.W.M./W.W.C., EMP. 42.7).

³⁵ *Irish Times*, 22 Mar. 1917

³⁶ Woodeson, 'The first women police', pp 223–4.

³⁷ Levine, 'Walking the streets', p. 39.

³⁸ *Constabulary Gazette*, 13 Feb. 1915, p. 537.

order to appeal to as broad an audience as possible. The I.W.P.'s sense of purpose, for example, was deliberately set out in terms of what it was not, rather than what it was. Thus, while it was made absolutely clear that its brief was 'quite distinct from rescue work', and members were forbidden from undertaking such work, the ambitious but imprecise aim of the I.W.P. was 'to improve the moral and social conditions of the streets and to safeguard young people of both sexes'.³⁹ The duties of individual patrols included the equally vague instruction to go about 'making friends with young people' of both sexes, and 'warning boys and girls who have been seen behaving foolishly'.⁴⁰ Such aims were of course difficult to criticise, no matter what one's political or religious views, and reflected the careful attention paid to social and religious sensitivities, always acute in Ireland.

The affirmation that the I.W.P. did not engage in rescue work reflected the N.U.W.W.'s frequent insistence that its policewomen were voluntary constables rather than philanthropists or religious reformers in new clothes.⁴¹ The Irish executive believed it had to make this point more firmly than elsewhere and thus deemed it necessary to adopt the 'rules of the English Patrols' with 'considerable alterations', admitting privately that its work had initially been obstructed by religious and political objections.⁴² This resulted in a constitution and by-laws which guarded against even the hint of the organisation being dominated by any one religious group or creed.⁴³ All Patrols went out in pairs and it became compulsory in time to send out at least one Catholic and one Protestant woman in each shift.⁴⁴ It was permissible for a pair of Catholic women to patrol together, but not for two Protestants to do the same.⁴⁵ The organisation was obliged to have two presidents, one a Catholic and one a Protestant, and two-thirds of the executive in total must be Catholic.⁴⁶ Haslam admitted in 1917 that 'it was realised that in order to ensure success to the new undertaking a fair share in controlling the Association should be in the hands of Roman Catholics'. To this end, she added, 'stringent regulations were laid down' and religious uniformity introduced to ensure that 'no suspicion of proselytism or interference with the religion of the different persons dealt with could possibly be sustained'.⁴⁷ Whether these requirements were observed in Belfast is unknown, and the northern committee's much lower profile may well have reflected the difficulty in enforcing such denominational strictures.

As the Irish Women Patrol became established, its *modus operandi* necessarily differed increasingly from its British counterparts. This, as we have seen, reflected peculiarly Irish religious conditions, but it was also a product of more immediate social differences between Ireland and other parts of the United

³⁹ Report of the Irish Woman Patrols, 1917 (I.W.M./W.W.C., EMP. 42.5/63, pp 3, 6).

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

⁴¹ Levine, 'Walking the streets', p. 56.

⁴² Report of N.U.W.W. Women Patrols, 1918 (I.W.M./W.W.C., EMP. 42. 7, pp 23–4); Special Report of the Dublin Women Patrols, 1920 (I.W.M./W.W.C., EMP 42.3/11).

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ Report of the Irish Woman Patrols, 1917 (I.W.M./W.W.C., EMP. 42.5/63, p. 5).

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

⁴⁷ N.C.W. Patrols: Report of the Irish Patrol, (I.W.M./W.W.C., EMP 42.3/14).

Kingdom. The most important of these was the failure of 'khaki fever' to take hold in Ireland to anywhere near the same degree as it did in British cities and towns, especially those close to camps or barracks. In the very earliest weeks of the war, Irish organisers emphasised the similarities between wartime conditions in Dublin and other large cities across the British Isles in order to secure official approval for the Patrol.⁴⁸ This was vital in the Irish case as Under-Secretary Matthew Nathan was no supporter of female policing, having refused to countenance such a patrol composed of philanthropic women shortly before the outbreak of war, let alone to entertain the idea of a professional force of women.⁴⁹ The war, however, promised to introduce an entirely new set of social circumstances so potentially destabilising that old positions could be suspended: campaigners for women police took advantage of this. In line with other bureaucrats and most commentators across the United Kingdom, the Irish lord lieutenant and local police officials came to believe that the scheme was primarily desirable because of the work the women would do in 'the neighbourhood of newly formed Camps'.⁵⁰ The founders echoed this aspiration at first, noting that the Irish patrol would 'work for the benefit of young women, girls and men, particularly those who frequent barrack and camp districts'.⁵¹ Nathan and his officials welcomed the voluntary Patrols because in addition to filling gaps expected to be created by the removal of men to the front, they were expected to undertake duties deemed to be particularly suitable for women, especially the direct policing of other women.⁵²

The prospect of the latter alarmed some feminists, who argued that the protection of women rather than soldiers must be 'the primary function' of the patrols.⁵³ In early 1915, the *Irish Citizen* outlined these concerns in more detail, explaining why even those feminists who had long insisted on the necessity of women police, had responded cautiously to the I.W.P. The editor made clear that in addition to removing impressionable young women from the streets, the Patrol should 'also see that innocent women are not made the victims of unscrupulous, and sometimes brutal policemen' and that arrested women be treated with dignity.⁵⁴ This view reflected broader feminist objections to the 'more coercive implications of social policy', objections which had been a feature of the women's movement since the campaign against the Contagious Diseases Acts and which continued to be articulated into the twentieth century.⁵⁵ But the acceptance that the removal from the streets of 'impressionable young women' was a legitimate function of the I.W.P. is striking, reflecting the fact that even politically radical women believed that women required protection, be it from men, from dangerous influences or from themselves.⁵⁶ The *Citizen* initially reserved judgement on the new force, hoping that the 'spirit' of the Patrol would

⁴⁸ *Irish Times*, 14 Jan. 1915.

⁴⁹ *Freeman's Journal*, 4 Jan. 1915.

⁵⁰ Dublin Castle to Mrs Cardell, 2 Nov. 1914 (I.W.M./W.W.C., EMP. 42.7).

⁵¹ *Irish Times*, 14 June 1915.

⁵² Dublin Castle to Mrs Carden 2 Nov. 1914 (I.W.M./W.W.C., EMP. 42.7).

⁵³ *Irish Citizen*, 9 Jan., 6 Mar. 1915.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 2 Jan. 1915.

⁵⁵ Levine, 'Walking the streets', pp 40–1.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

not lead to the further demonization of women, especially poor women.⁵⁷ Such anxieties were soon exacerbated when the W.V.P. split over its cooperation with the military authorities in, among other things, enforcing a curfew on women living near a military camp in Grantham. Irish feminists followed these developments closely and a horrified *Irish Citizen* editorial warned that 'English policewomen are beginning to learn for themselves the lesson we tried to teach those interested in the question of women patrols – the grave risks of such effort under present conditions and the powerlessness of women in the face of intriguing officialdom.'⁵⁸

The potential for an Irish split along similar lines clearly existed, but it was averted as it quickly became evident that wartime Dublin was not going to follow the English pattern: no Irish equivalent to the Women Police Service emerged and the I.W.P. never attempted to adopt similarly coercive tactics. This was due to a number of factors, the most important being that the wave of sexual impropriety which commentators predicted would follow in the wake of the outbreak of war, simply did not materialise in Ireland. The N.U.W.W. organiser sent to Dublin in early 1915 was one of the first to recognise this, explaining that the condition of Dublin's streets was not 'abnormal in the same sense as English towns'.⁵⁹ Irish patrollers echoed her assessment, arguing that

Dublin had always contained a large body of troops and the populace was used to their presence, and Dublin girls did not lose their heads over the soldiers in the same way as it is said English girls did. Patrol work in Dublin, therefore, could not take the same form that it did in so many English towns.⁶⁰

Northern organisers soon concurred, explaining that 'the young girls of Belfast had not gone off their heads about soldiers as was the case in English cities'.⁶¹ The failure of 'khaki fever' to take hold in Ireland as it had in other parts of the British Isles was vital as Irish patrols were soon able to devote their time to 'the more or less chronic evils of the city'.⁶² The I.W.P. executive insisted in 1917 that while the Patrol had been 'started in War time as War work', the need for it remained and its focus would turn to waging 'active war on the deplorable state of the streets'.⁶³ Had the I.W.P. become involved in the kind of surveillance of women that the W.P.V. engaged in, it is likely that Irish feminist support would have splintered, especially as the Irish Women's Franchise League and the *Irish Citizen* were strongly anti-war and fiercely opposed to collaboration with British authorities. But the I.W.P. neither sought, nor was compelled, to work with the military authorities, and Irish feminists were thus left with a corps of voluntary female patrols who were largely free to operate as though war had never been declared.

⁵⁷ *Irish Citizen*, 9 Jan. 1915.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 6 Mar. 1915.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 13 Feb. 1915.

⁶⁰ Report of the I.W.P., 1917 (I.W.M./W.W.C., EMP. 42.5/63, p. 7).

⁶¹ *Irish Times*, 15 Apr. 1915.

⁶² *Irish Citizen*, 13 Feb. 1915.

⁶³ Report of the I.W.P., 1917 (I.W.M./W.W.C., EMP. 42.5/63, pp 7–8).

III

The *Irish Times* predicted that the establishment of the patrols in Dublin would ‘create varied discussions’ and it was not wrong.⁶⁴ It is difficult to see how controversy could have been avoided given that the scheme was established within the context of a quickening debate about public vice and immorality in which issues of class, sex and nationality were prominent. In October 1915 such discussion reached something of a climax when Lady Fingall famously and provocatively described Dublin’s streets at night as a ‘disgrace to Christianity, and above all, a disgrace to Catholic Ireland’.⁶⁵ The almost entirely male Dublin Corporation joined the debate with one member threatening to establish a vigilante group if the police failed to tackle the conditions of the quays in particular.⁶⁶ The *Irish Citizen*, loathe no doubt to ally itself with this collection of conservative interest groups, nevertheless welcomed the fact that such ‘scandal’ – long a subject of debate and reform within feminist circles – was at last being openly discussed, and that a suffragist – Lady Fingall – had brought the matter to broad public attention.⁶⁷ The fact that female patrols had joined Fingall and other campaigning women in exposing this ‘other Dublin’, and especially that they did so almost entirely from the perspective of and in the interests of women, was another key factor in the general feminist endorsement of the I.W.P.

As Maria Luddy has argued, one of the main shifts in early twentieth-century thinking about prostitution was the increased emphasis on the social and economic reasons that led women into the trade, and the I.W.P. made an important contribution to this expanding analysis.⁶⁸ The informal studies and reports compiled by women’s groups on a range of contributing factors including the condition of Dublin’s slums, the lack of employment opportunities for women, alcohol abuse and sexual violence, contributed to a more confident and at times, strident, exposition of ‘solutions’ to these seemingly interminable problems.⁶⁹ Given their exclusion from the institutions where decisions about women’s safety and well-being were made – especially the parliament, the courts and the police stations – informal reportage was the most direct way that women could contribute to and try to influence the wider debate about public and private vice, especially in a climate where such social investigation was taken increasingly seriously. The I.W.P.’s connection with the police, and the access this allowed members to Irish streets, courts and police cells, lent their findings a semi-official flavour, or at least a significance which was not usually afforded to other women’s organisations, none of which could boast anything close to this access to the corridors of judicial and legal power. This was especially the case in Ireland where the I.W.P. enjoyed such cordial relations with the D.M.P. and

⁶⁴ *Irish Times*, 14 June 1915.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 23 Oct. 1915.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ *Irish Citizen*, 23 Oct. 1915.

⁶⁸ Luddy, *Prostitution*, p. 160.

⁶⁹ See, for example, the Irishwomen’s Reform League’s campaign for the tighter regulation of licensing laws in ‘Dublin: The Irishwomen’s Suffrage Federation’, *Third Annual Report, for 1913–1914* (Dublin, 1915), p. 8; *Irish Times*, 13 Feb. 30 Mar., 20 Apr. 1915.

Belfast police. Their role as fact-finders on behalf of women was key to the organisation from the outset.⁷⁰

It was in a spirit of a collective commitment to feminist social investigation that the *Irish Citizen* was able to proclaim that women patrollers, including 'C.M' and 'other women patrols like her' who contributed harrowing accounts of their work on the streets, could speak with 'authority' on the subject of vice.⁷¹ Patrollers themselves emphasised their role as social investigators and the knowledge this had allowed them to acquire. In reply to a sneering article about the contribution of the 'zealous women' who had 'cited experiences met with in their walks abroad' to the debate about the immorality of Dublin, one patroller explained:

I think I may claim to know a little more of actual conditions in Dublin streets than the average man or woman who passes through them at night. For the past year I have studied those conditions by more intimate methods than are possible for the 'good folk hastening along our pavements' on business or pleasure; and the knowledge I have gained of slum conditions, of the tenement houses, of the public-houses, of the times of our women workers, and the hideous neglect of the children, leads me to the conclusion that toleration of such conditions is a crime for which the whole body of citizens must suffer, and which must even re-act on the whole nation.⁷²

This sense that women police had witnessed a side of Irish life largely unknown to the wider public was common in accounts of their work. As 'C.M' explained, 'I have had my eyes fully opened, and have stood aghast at the scenes my nightly walks have shown me.'⁷³ Such views about the extent of the 'other Dublin' and the crucial work done by women to bring it to public attention reinforced the view of the *Irish Citizen* that feminists had faced the brutal truth of the situation while a reluctant press attempted to sweep it under the carpet.⁷⁴ The journal's coverage of issues including incest, rape and prostitution accelerated during the war, as did its conviction that feminists had a particular duty to combat these social evils. It was suffragists after all, they argued, who had 'agitated the question for years' and who, with 'their flashlights' had 'penetrated many dark corners with effect'.⁷⁵ The I.W.P. contributed to this culture of feminist social action and investigation; by 1918, some patrols were claiming the credit for having shed 'light' on Dublin's grimy underworld, especially on the plight of Irish prostitutes, and for ensuring that people would no longer treat the issue 'with the conspiracy of silence with which Josephine Butler was treated'.⁷⁶

This was not entirely true for as Maria Luddy has shown, the mainstream Irish press did in fact become increasingly interested in highlighting the alleged depravity of Irish streets in the early twentieth century, and focused especially on prostitution.⁷⁷ Irish feminists nonetheless remained highly critical of Irish

⁷⁰ *Irish Citizen*, 13 Feb. 1913.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 30 Oct. 1915.

⁷² *New Ireland*, i (6 Nov.1915), p. 414.

⁷³ *Irish Times*, 23 Oct. 1915.

⁷⁴ *Irish Citizen*, 23 Jan. 1915.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 23 Oct. 1915.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 16 Oct. 1918.

⁷⁷ Luddy, *Prostitution*, pp 157–8.

newspapers, identifying particularly Irish impediments to the full and frank discussion of the extent of sexual violence. The editors of the *Irish Citizen* explained, for example, that ‘in Ireland the press was “patriotically” concerned to keep up the myth that nothing of a sexually vicious nature ever happens in Ireland’.⁷⁸ As the war progressed, press discussions of public vice were explicitly politicised, with republican propagandists in particular turning increasingly to the well-established trope of the contaminating influence of the rapacious and usually diseased English soldier on Irish morality, particularly on innocent Irish girls.⁷⁹ As Ben Novick has demonstrated, nationalist polemicists targeted British soldiers as part of their wider condemnation of the Irish involvement in the war effort, tapping into wider social debates for their own propagandist ends.⁸⁰ Such explicit condemnation of soldiers was surprisingly rare among (non-republican) feminists during the war years, the I.W.P. among them. The I.W.P. in fact insisted that it had ‘comparatively few dealings with soldiers’.⁸¹ It may have been the case that the Irish patrollers did not single out soldiers because they did not wish to antagonise the authorities on whom they depended, or because they were personally very patriotic. It is more likely, however, that they believed that soldiers contributed to serious existing problems rather than initiating them, their own wartime behaviours forming only a part of a wider and ongoing problem. The rather awkward truth, moreover, was that large numbers of these soldiers were in fact Irish men. While some advanced nationalists argued that the very fact of enlisting in the British Army had sullied the morals of innocent Irish men and made them more susceptible to particularly English forms of vice, Irish Patrols did not tend to rank public indecency by nationality.⁸²

The I.W.P. found to its cost that any criticism of Dublin’s apparently uniquely high moral standards did indeed provoke a ‘patriotic’ response. Mary Hayden could quip at a Belfast public meeting that ‘for a long time they were of the opinion in Dublin that work of this kind was not needed and that their people were extremely good’, but many Dublin nationalists did not see the joke.⁸³ The issue reached a crescendo at the I.W.P.’s 1918 public meeting when members debated a section in the organisation’s draft annual report which claimed that Dublin remained one of ‘the dirtiest, most immoral, and most unhealthy towns in the British Isles’. One republican feminist immediately denounced Mary Hayden’s critique on the grounds that the I.W.P. was an ‘anti-Irish group of women’ which was affiliated with ‘an English Union’.⁸⁴ The section was eventually dropped from the published report, but not before a considerable media storm had blown up around it. One prominent member, Edith O’Reilly, ‘expressed unqualified dissent with the statement in the report’ while Miss Moser warned that if the report went out unedited ‘it would put people’s backs up

⁷⁸ *Irish Citizen*, 23 Jan. 1915.

⁷⁹ See Ben Novick, *Conceiving revolution: Irish nationalist propaganda during the First World War* (Dublin, 2001), pp 150–7.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 150.

⁸¹ N.C.W. Patrols: Report of the Irish Patrol, (I.W.M./W.W.C., EMP 42.3/14).

⁸² See Novick, *Conceiving revolution*, pp 150–7 and Luddy, *Prostitution and Irish society*, 156–93, for comprehensive accounts of nationalist ideas about the corrupting influence of the British Army and feminist responses to such views.

⁸³ *Irish Times*, 22 Mar. 1917.

⁸⁴ *Irish Independent*, 16 Jan. 1918.

against them'.⁸⁵ Haslam herself disagreed with Hayden: both she and the chief of the D.M.P. believed that the 'report was a little strong'.⁸⁶ This public disagreement highlighted the fact that the diversity found in the I.W.P. meant that the views of individual patrollers sometimes differed, even at the highest levels of the organisation. Haslam's and Hayden's own activist careers outside the I.W.P. reflected this: Hayden's moral convictions took her into the Dublin Watch Committee and the Catholic Truth Society, while Haslam, a veteran of the Irish opposition to the Contagious Diseases Acts, campaigned almost exclusively through feminist societies.

Like the women's movement itself, the I.W.P. was broad and complex and its members inevitably held a variety of views about the causes of vice and immorality and the best ways to combat them. While they were unified in their condemnation of the sexual double standard, individual definitions of what constituted an 'equal moral standard' varied, just as they did across the broader feminist movement.⁸⁷ The organisation allowed individual members to focus on social questions to which they were especially committed. While the constitution was strict in some ways, it also allowed flexibility. As Anna Haslam explained, 'a great deal of licence [was] allowed for individual ideas' within the Patrol.⁸⁸ Some volunteers were particularly concerned with 'looking after children in the streets', others focused on suspicious public houses, while some dedicated themselves to helping female travellers.⁸⁹ Such differences of outlook and emphasis, as well as the different ideological impulses which had propelled some women into patrolling, inevitably meant that the line between 'protection' and 'rescue work' was sometimes crossed. It was easy enough, for example, to send home the naïve girls who wandered into the streets of Dublin, but what were patrollers to do if the girls they encountered had no homes, or had homes so filthy and dangerous that to send them back to them was in itself immoral? By 1916 the executive committee admitted that while its primary aim was to make the streets safe for respectable women and girls, its volunteers were asked at times by women who had 'already got into trouble for help'. In such cases, the women were taken to a local convent or, in the case of a Protestant woman, to 'one of the Protestant homes'.⁹⁰ The organisation was also 'asked to trace girls who [had] run away from home, and often [had] been able to return such to their parents in the country'.⁹¹

Other volunteers went further. In Belfast, for example, the I.W.P. boasted of having 'induced' three young women to 'give up their life on the streets'.⁹² Fearing the influence of white slave traders, the Belfast committee also reported

⁸⁵ *Constabulary Gazette*, xl, no. 27 (19 Jan. 1918), p. 440.

⁸⁶ *Irish Times*, 19 Jan. 1918.

⁸⁷ Lucy Bland, *Banishing the beast: English feminism and sexual morality, 1885–1914* (London, 1995), p. xix.

⁸⁸ N.C.W. Patrols: Report of the Irish Patrol, (I.W.M./W.W.C., EMP 42.3/14).

⁸⁹ Report of the I.W.P., 1917 (I.W.M./W.W.C., EMP. 42.5/63, pp 9–10); Report of the I.W.P., 1919 (I.W.M./W.W.C., EMP. 42.5/64, pp 7–8).

⁹⁰ *Irish Times*, 2 Mar. 1917.

⁹¹ Letter from A[nn]a Haslam and Mary Hayden to the minister of Home Affairs, 18 Feb. 1922 (N.A.I., Department of Justice, H/21/5).

⁹² Special Report of the Belfast Woman Patrols, no date given (I.W.M./W.W.C., EMP. 42.3/9).

having 'prevented' a girl from going to London on the grounds that she had answered a 'questionable advertisement re nursing'.⁹³ It appears that the Belfast patrol was more closely connected with rescue societies than its Dublin counterpart.⁹⁴ Leanne McCormick has explored these 'close connections between rescue and reform work' in the Belfast patrol, and argued that this association could be seen in the I.W.P.'s personnel: a Miss Curran of the Belfast I.W.P., for example, had been involved in the Church of Ireland Rescue League before the war.⁹⁵ It is difficult to know, however, how typical she was of the broader membership as constructing sociological profiles of I.W.P. members is difficult in the absence of official records, particularly for Belfast volunteers about whom we know very little. It appears, however, that Curran was unlikely to have been typical of Dublin members at least. While the association between reform and rescue work in Dublin was evident in the early support given to the scheme by organisations including the Church League, the bulk of the societies which formed the I.W.P.'s original Joint Committee were overwhelmingly drawn from the reformist rather than the overtly rescue and religious wings of the broader philanthropic movement.⁹⁶ The involvement of suffrage societies including the I.W.S.L.G.A., the Reform League and the Franchise League underlined the feminist impulses which also inspired the establishment of the I.W.P. In fact, one of the most immediately obvious features of the I.W.P.'s Dublin membership is that the women who became most closely involved with the Patrol movement were already active in a variety of feminist and social reform movements. As far as it is possible to tell, the majority were suffragists, the I.W.P.'s work being described by members as 'pre-eminently suffrage work' by 1916.⁹⁷ Executive committee members included Mary Weldrick, Poor Law guardian and member of the Irish Catholic Women's Suffrage Association, Mary Stack of the (Anglican) Church League for Women's Suffrage as well, of course, as Hayden and Haslam of the I.W.S.L.G.A. Ordinary patrollers included Susan Manning, an active member of the Irishwomen's Reform League who produced several accounts of her work as a patrol. The subscribers who made the work of the I.W.P. possible included militant suffragettes, constitutional suffragists as well as women and men who were associated with a wide variety of reform societies.⁹⁸

Yet even in Dublin, where the I.W.P. had been formed by a broad coalition of women's and reform groups and where the association between reform and rescue work did not appear to have been overt, attempts to 'rescue' or even to reform prostitutes did occur, albeit rarely. In 1919, the organisation's report stated that 'in many instances' young girls had been 'induced' to 'leave their evil companions and sometimes to return home'.⁹⁹ Nothing more was recorded about this aspect of the Dublin I.W.P.'s work, probably because of its explicit pledge

⁹³ N.U.W.W., The Women's Patrol Committee (report by Mrs Carden), 1915 (I.W.M./W.W.C., EMP. 42.5/21).

⁹⁴ McCormick, *Regulating sexuality*, pp 96–7

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 96.

⁹⁶ *Freeman's Journal*, 4 Jan. 1915

⁹⁷ *Irish Times*, 11 Apr. 1916.

⁹⁸ For information about executive members, volunteers and subscribers, see Report of the I.W.P., 1917 (I.W.M./W.W.C., EMP. 42.5/63); Report of the I.W.P., 1919 (I.W.M./W.W.C., EMP. 42.5/64).

⁹⁹ Report of the I.W.P., 1919 (I.W.M./W.W.C., EMP. 42.5/64, p. 7).

that it would neither engage in rescue work nor interfere with prostitutes who were the prime targets of rescue workers in the period, and presumably because members knew that flouting this would lead to public censure.¹⁰⁰ It was probably the case that volunteers sometimes approached young prostitutes when they were not actually working and when they appeared to be amenable to their 'assistance'. This seems to have happened in the case of 'E.H.A', a 'very pretty young girl' who was stranded in Dublin and had slept in the Phoenix Park for four nights before being 'removed by the Patrols to a safe place'.¹⁰¹

The insistence that rescue work was not in its remit was also a product of the Irish Women Patrol's fashioning of itself as self-consciously precautionary rather than punitive.¹⁰² The I.W.P. thus set out to 'protect or advise those who are respectable but ignorant' rather than to punish them, but while this appeared a sensible stipulation, particularly in the Irish context, it also left the I.W.P. open to criticism.¹⁰³ The idea that women required protection was embedded in much feminist discourse of the period and was partly a product of late Victorian middle-class ideas about the need for all young women to be protected – from themselves, from men and from 'unsuitable company'.¹⁰⁴ Lucy Bland has shown how such ideas permeated some feminist thinking and had a particular impact on social purity and protectionist feminist campaigning. This, she argues, led to 'protective surveillance' in some cases and reinforced the conviction that girls and women could be saved from sin and ruin by preventative measures.¹⁰⁵ There were clear echoes of this conviction within the Irish Women Patrol and, as Bland argues, such faith in the deterrent power of supervision could and, in the Irish case, did lead to repression. Some opponents identified this tendency, condemning the puritanical vigilantes who aimed, in the words of one critic, to interfere with 'the love-making of every young couple in whose innocent spooning their evil minds chose to discern signs of immorality'.¹⁰⁶

Such views have been echoed by modern scholars who have argued that the Patrol was established to 'combat prostitution and other forms of sexual immorality' and that it was 'aimed at regulating female sexuality'.¹⁰⁷ Such analysis broadly supports Angela Woollacott's contention that:

Anxiety about wartime loss of social control crystallized in the formation of the middle-class Women Patrols Committee and Women Police Service, both of which found their patriotic calling in policing public spaces for young working-class women going astray. To promote their own inclusion in the career of police work, middle-class women used the fears of changing female behaviour represented by khaki fever as an opportunity to claim authority to carry out 'women's policing'.¹⁰⁸

This might well have been the intention of individual I.W.P. members, and we know that many volunteers placed great emphasis on the potential of this kind of

¹⁰⁰ Report of the I.W.P., 1917 (I.W.M./W.W.C., EMP. 42.5/63, p. 9).

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰² *Freeman's Journal*, 4 Jan. 1915.

¹⁰³ *Irish Times*, 26 Jan. 1916.

¹⁰⁴ Lucy Bland, "'Purifying' the public world: feminist vigilantes in late Victorian England", *Women's History Review*, i (1992), p. 406.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁶ *The Worker*, 9 Jan. 1915.

¹⁰⁷ Shepard, 'Liberalisation of Irish social policy?', p. 565; Luddy, *Prostitution*, p. 176.

¹⁰⁸ Woollacott, 'Khaki fever', p. 327.

voluntary work to lead eventually to the recruitment of professional women into the Irish police forces, but the evidence nonetheless suggests a more complex picture.¹⁰⁹ While volunteers seem to have believed that warning impressionable girls ‘of the danger to which they [were] exposing themselves by lingering, behaving noisily and picking up chance acquaintances’ did not amount to repression or coercion, the fact remains that their advice to young women, no matter how well intentioned, *did* constitute a form of middle-class interference in (largely) working-class life.¹¹⁰ At the same time, however, patrols were also driven by more complex political analyses, especially in their rejection of the sexual double standard. To this end, some patrols emphasised the fact that they aimed to deal equally with the men and women who engaged in prostitution, both as clients and as workers.¹¹¹ Sexual continence was of course implicit in such views, but as patrols demanded the same moral standards for men and women and focused on public indecency only, it would be more accurate to describe their aim as the regulation of indecent public sexual behaviour, than the control of women’s sexuality more generally. They therefore targeted ‘prostitutes of both sexes’ if they encouraged or engaged in indecent acts in public spaces and largely left them alone if they plied their trade privately.¹¹² They frequently pointed out that they targeted ‘the ill-disposed of both sexes’ and that they aimed to help ‘the young’ generally, rather than women and girls in particular.¹¹³

Nonetheless, most of the activities described by patrollers themselves suggested that they worked predominantly with girls and young women. This is not surprising because, in common with many feminists of the era, they wished to highlight the damage prostitution caused to society, and especially to women. At the same time, they called for ‘purity in men and women’, for the laws of solicitation to be abolished and for men and women to be treated equally under the law in the meantime.¹¹⁴ They also denounced emphatically the notion that society ought to accommodate men’s uncontrollable sexual urges and that prostitutes provided a service for clients and their wives. The reality, as most feminists understood it, was that women of all classes were damaged and ruined by society’s acquiescence in this biological fiction. Some went further, laying the blame for the existence of the trade primarily on the men who created the demand for women’s bodies and paid little or no price for their involvement in it. As one volunteer explained:

If you are constantly on duty you grow to know these girls – as, of course, they are out night after night, no other vocation in life being open to them when once they have taken to the streets; they have not the same chance as men have of living an immoral life and being received by respectable people, and having excuses made for them if they are found out.¹¹⁵

Patrols insisted that men and women should be made equally responsible for checking such behaviour and that the law ought not to penalise women while

¹⁰⁹ *Irish Times*, 19 Oct. 1915, 18 Oct. 1916.

¹¹⁰ Report of the I.W.P., 1917 (I.W.M./W.W.C., EMP. 42.5/63, p. 9).

¹¹¹ See, for example, *New Ireland*, i (6 Nov. 1915), p. 414; *Irish Citizen*, 9 Oct. 1915.

¹¹² *New Ireland*, i (6 Nov. 1915), p. 414.

¹¹³ Report of the I.W.P., 1919 (I.W.M./W.W.C., EMP. 42.5/64, pp 6, 7).

¹¹⁴ *Irish Times*, 16 Oct. 1918.

¹¹⁵ *Irish Citizen*, 9 Oct. 1915.

allowing men to walk away without consequences. As Manning argued, while men could 'pass through these casual experiences and emerge into respectability apparently none the worse', the 'girls remain to drift from misery to misery'.¹¹⁶

Attempting to minimise the exposure of the young to 'acts contrary to public decency' necessarily meant that patrols sometimes moved on prostitutes when they were engaged in 'sexual intercourse in public thoroughfares'.¹¹⁷ Yet the I.W.P. continued to emphasise time and again that it was not primarily concerned with finding, warning or running in prostitutes and that it did not 'interfere with prostitutes unless they are accosting men, using obscene language or violating public decency'.¹¹⁸ The pronouncements of individual patrols did not judge or condemn prostitutes, and in fact called for a deeper public understanding of the conditions in which they were forced to make their livings. They offered no such courtesy to the men who sought them out. Prostitutes were left unmolested so long as they worked out of public view, and almost all the cases the I.W.P. brought to the courts arose from acts of open public indecency.¹¹⁹ In common with a number of Irish women's groups, the I.W.P. recognised that removing vice from the streets was not in itself going to save young women from 'falling into destruction'.¹²⁰ Patrollers emphasised repeatedly that many girls and boys were drawn onto the streets and thus into proximity to prostitution through boredom and through appalling housing conditions which provided neither privacy nor distraction, not through personal moral failure or weakness. One patrol described the filthy, crowded and unwelcoming tenement housing in which Dublin's poor lived, explaining that 'many factory girls I know do not care to go to their homes until bedtime, so they frequent the streets where mischief is just waiting for them'.¹²¹ She, like many of her colleagues, advocated the establishment of clubs and societies where young people could dance, drill, learn skills or simply mix with others, away from the temptations of the city's thoroughfares and docks. The I.W.P. did in fact establish such a club, though a scarcity of funds meant that it closed periodically.¹²² The I.W.P. emphasised the need for a club to which both men and women could be invited, noting that the girls who were most susceptible to the lure of the streets simply 'would not go to clubs which are open only to girls and women'.¹²³ They may not have approved of this, but they clearly understood that the women with whom they were engaged were agents of their own destiny and not likely to be pacified by a stern warning or a promise of a prayer and a cup of tea.

This is not to suggest that the I.W.P. was neutral on the question of prostitution or of prostitutes themselves. References to 'girls of this kind' were not uncommon and there is no suggestion here that the middle-class women who traversed the streets after dark considered prostitutes to be their social equals.¹²⁴

¹¹⁶ *New Ireland*, i (6 Nov. 1915), p. 414.

¹¹⁷ Report of I.W.P., 1917 (I.W.M./W.W.C., EMP. 42.3/14).

¹¹⁸ Report of the I.W.P., 1917 (I.W.M./W.W.C., EMP. 42.5/63, p. 9).

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹²⁰ *Irish Times*, 19 Oct. 1915.

¹²¹ *Irish Citizen*, 9 Oct. 1915.

¹²² Report of the I.W.P., 1919 (I.W.M./W.W.C., EMP. 42.5/64, p. 9).

¹²³ *Irish Times*, 15 Apr., 19 Oct. 1915.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 18, 19 Oct. 1915.

The Irish Women Patrol viewed prostitution in itself as a social evil which was fundamentally and primarily detrimental to women, but it was dedicated to prevention rather than cure: it aimed to interfere with the chain of supply and demand by targeting the girls and women who might go into the trade rather than dealing with the women who were already engaged in it. This refusal to engage directly with prostitutes and thus with rescue work helped to deflect potential criticism from more liberal and radically minded feminists, as did the I.W.P.'s unshakable insistence that the sexual double standard must be challenged. Nonetheless, it was the case that the I.W.P.'s identification of the women who were at greatest risk rested on certain assumptions, notably that they were working-class and susceptible to falling into vice. Unsurprisingly, feminists and patrollers alike had little sense that individual prostitutes might well have taken a rational economic decision to enter that trade rather than some other employment and that anti-vice crusaders might have interfered with the liberties of prostitutes. Such views went completely against most contemporary moral and feminist thinking, even radical feminist and socialist thinking. However, patrols unflinchingly insisted on the distinction between prostitution and prostitutes. 'G.M.' went further, arguing that respectable women had 'no right to blame' prostitutes, describing them as 'our sisters'.¹²⁵

Sisterhood is too strong a word to describe the relationship between most patrols and the women they encountered in Irish parks, docks and thoroughfares, but a sense that women of all social classes suffered at the hands of men, albeit in different ways, clearly informed their work. Forms of sex solidarity emerged as the I.W.P.'s work aimed to uphold the right of all women to enjoy unfettered access to public space.¹²⁶ Making Irish streets accessible and safe for women was a key feminist demand, especially as respectable working women ventured increasingly into the public sphere. During their rounds, patrollers identified the streets as battlegrounds for women who were collectively subjected to various kinds of street harassment as they went about their increasingly public lives. Hayden and Haslam reflected widespread feminist discontent when they explained that it was impossible for a respectable woman to walk along the G.P.O. side of Sackville (O'Connell) Street after 9 o'clock. If she did, she would run the risk of 'being annoyed and assaulted' and might view 'sights deplorable in any Christian city'.¹²⁷ Women patrols recognised that the 'giddy' girls who congregated in the streets contributed to this menacing street culture, describing how some of these women physically assaulted some patrols.¹²⁸ But the patrols also put considerable energy into protecting women and girls from 'pests', the men who preyed on women and girls in various parts of the city. These included the 'elderly gentlemen' who targeted young girls as they travelled to school on foot or by train.¹²⁹ Identifying

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 23 Oct. 1915.

¹²⁶ Hilary Frances, "'Dare to be free!": The Women's Freedom League and its legacy' in June Purvis and Sandra Stanley Holton (eds), *Votes for women* (London, 2000), pp 191–2.

¹²⁷ *Irish Times*, 19 Oct. 1915.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 18 Oct. 1915.

¹²⁹ N.U.W.W. Women's Patrol Committee: Extracts from Organisers' Reports, 1917 (I.W.M./W.W.C., EMP. 42.2/28); Report of the I.W.P., 1917 (I.W.M./W.W.C., EMP. 42.5/63, p. 9).

such 'pests' was, as Sheila Jeffreys has argued, deliberately linked to the feminist assault on the moral double standard as it highlighted the fact that while men were apparently free to harass women on the streets, prostitutes were penalised for soliciting on those same streets.¹³⁰

One might ask how these middle-class patrollers squared their determination to exercise their own right to walk the streets unfettered with their work in urging some working-class women off them. The answer is of course that many feminists, patrollers among them, did not think of their work in terms of contributing to the curtailment of the liberties of prostitutes or any women. On the contrary, they believed that identifying and protecting vulnerable women 'helped' them and, no doubt, 'helped' all women in the process.¹³¹ They also believed that their approach to keeping the streets free of vice was more even-handed than any of the campaigns which had preceded the I.W.P. as their work helped to alter the uneven bias of the law in favour of all women, even prostitutes. One report explained, for example, that the I.W.P. had challenged the assumption that while female prostitutes should be arrested for accosting or 'loitering about', 'it had not been considered within the bounds of possibility to arrest male offenders for worse offences'.¹³² The report announced proudly that the Women Patrol had 'altered all this'.¹³³ 'Men and women alike' were 'run in' and most of the people they brought to court were men.

The work of the I.W.P. changed over the years, not least because, as we have seen, the purpose for which it had ostensibly been established never really came to pass in Ireland. Rather than patrolling military camps, patrollers surveyed Dublin's parks and quays and some suburbs. By 1917 some had dedicated themselves to 'special patrolling of Kingstown Pier' where they apparently assisted 'hundreds' of women and children who were inconvenienced and often stuck in Dublin due to the 'congested state of the traffic'.¹³⁴ This form of protection was in many ways a continuation of a much older philanthropic tradition and it persisted into the 1920s, the I.W.P. claiming to have 'helped' more than one thousand travelling women in 1922 alone.¹³⁵ In the meantime, the professionalisation of female policing appeared to have made progress. By 1918, four Dublin and two Belfast women had been appointed to their respective services, 'as a result of women patrols' work': all were paid.¹³⁶ Three of the four policewomen who were attached to the D.M.P. by 1919 had begun their policing lives as I.W.P. volunteers and had been appointed to paid positions on the recommendation of Haslam.¹³⁷ They took on precisely the kinds of roles feminist advocates of female policing had long argued that women would be particularly suited to: they worked mainly in the city, 'being chiefly occupied with such matters as street trading, begging, the observance of the Children's Act and of

¹³⁰ Jeffreys, 'Women and sexuality', p. 196.

¹³¹ Bland, *Banishing the beast*, p. 120.

¹³² N.C.W. Patrols (I.W.M./W.W.C., EMP. 42.3/15).

¹³³ *Ibid.*

¹³⁴ Report of the I.W.P., 1919 (I.W.M./W.W.C., EMP. 42.5/64, p. 8).

¹³⁵ *Irish Times*, 22 Jan. 1919.

¹³⁶ List of Women Patrols employed by Commissioner of Police (I.W.M./W.W.C., EMP. 42.4/45).

¹³⁷ *Irish Times*, 9 May, 1919.

Acts concerning Food Prices'. Most importantly, they were empowered to attend the police courts when cases involving women and children were being heard, thus fulfilling a long standing and key feminist demand.¹³⁸ Even after the crisis of war had passed, the D.M.P. chief commissioner continued to demand funding for more women police.¹³⁹ He argued that the services of Irish women patrols had been outstanding and that the four paid policewomen in particular had been 'without exception, invaluable'.¹⁴⁰ He cooperated amicably and closely with Anna Haslam throughout the war and at its close he presented her, Mary Hayden and sixteen of their I.W.P. colleagues with awards in recognition of their valuable work.¹⁴¹

Many of the organisations which had campaigned for the appointment of women police before the First World War continued to do so after independence, and the demand for professional female police remained important to the Irish feminist movement into the twentieth century. Despite their years of lobbying, the voluntary and part-time Irish Women Patrol represented the highpoint of female policing in independent Ireland until 1959 when women were fully integrated into An Garda Síochána.¹⁴² Northern Irish police women fared slightly better, as a women's section was established within the Royal Ulster Constabulary in 1943, but even they did not achieve full equality with men until 1994. Some police officials continued to call for the recruitment of more women who could police their fellow women, but from the early 1920s, female police duties more usually involved searching women who were believed to be concealing weapons for the I.R.A. than escorting vulnerable or naive women through the city streets.¹⁴³ The most active female police officers in post-war Ireland were the fifty members of the British Women's Police Service, who worked with the Royal Irish Constabulary during the Anglo-Irish War, and the further twenty who were sent to Ulster in 1922.¹⁴⁴ These professional and uniformed policewomen were imported into Ireland primarily to deal with the republican women whom the police were forced to search, arrest and imprison. The I.W.P. gained no such professional status and appeared in fact to have ground to a halt by the mid-1920s. Active patrolling continued during the Anglo-Irish and Civil Wars, but formal cooperation with the Irish police ceased, despite the pleas of Hayden and Haslam for ongoing support and modest financial assistance.¹⁴⁵ The influence of Ireland's earliest women police survived through the four women who had been appointed to the D.M.P. as a result of the Patrol's work.¹⁴⁶ But as they were not replaced

¹³⁸ Special Report of the Dublin Women Patrols, 1920 (I.W.M./W.W.C., EMP. 423/13).

¹³⁹ *Irish Times*, 9 May 1919.

¹⁴⁰ W. E. Johnstone to Irish Under-Secretary, 9 Oct. 1919, (T.N.A., Treasury Papers, P.R.O., T 1/12398, 44452/1919).

¹⁴¹ *Irish Independent*, 9 May 1919.

¹⁴² Shepard, 'Liberalisation of Irish social policy?', pp 567, 569.

¹⁴³ *Constabulary Gazette*, 3 Apr. 1920, p. 580.

¹⁴⁴ John Carrier, *The campaign for the employment of women as police officers* (Aldershot, 1988), p. 70; Mary S. Allen, *The pioneer policewoman*, ed. Julie Helen Heyneman (London, 1925), pp 17, 184–99.

¹⁴⁵ A[nna] Haslam and Mary Hayden to minister of Home Affairs, 18 Feb., 1922, (N.A.I., H/21/5).

¹⁴⁶ According to Carmel Quinlan, the last of these patrollers, Elizabeth Watters, retired in 1956: Quinlan, *Genteel revolutionaries*, p. 180.

when they retired, their presence within the force became increasingly inconsequential, while Irish women continued to be exclusively policed by men.

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