‘Lady Bountiful’ or community activist? Amelia Scott (1860-1952)

Anne Logan

University of Kent

Her Name Lives on at Pembury Hospital

> A well-known public worker, Miss Amelia Scott, of 4, Lansdowne Road, Tunbridge Wells, died on Tuesday, aged ninety-two.
> Miss Scott was a poor law guardian and in recognition of her work for the Pembury Institution a ward in the Pembury Hospital has been named after her. Miss Scott also helped to form the Tunbridge Wells branch of the National Council of Women in 1895.[1]

With this brief tribute, the *Kent and Sussex Courier* marked the passing of a woman whose activities forty years previously had been featured in the local press on a weekly basis. Amelia Scott not only served on the Board of Guardians, she was also a local councillor, suffrage activist and committed churchwoman. During her lifetime she promoted an impressive range of community projects in her home town, from a hostel for working women to social housing. She participated in the cultural and political transformation by which the Poor Law gave way to the Welfare State. Yet to some observers, she might simply appear to be a ‘Lady Bountiful’, an upper middle class resident of a comfortable town who had a private income and devoted her time to ‘good works’.

Discussions about women, philanthropy and social work have been taking place continually in social, women’s and gender history for nearly 30

years since the publication of Frank Prochaska's *Women and Philanthropy in19th Century England*. Prochaska linked women's involvement in philanthropy to contemporary notions of 'women's mission', a product of the important part that Christianity played in women's lives and education.[2] Since 1980 there have been many studies of the subject, some alluding to notions of charitable work as 'women's sphere', or a 'borderland' space in which women were able to fashion 'careers' and develop professional practices, others suggesting that a middle-class women who undertook home visiting can be conceptualised as a philanthropic flâneuse, colonising urban space in the course of her work as she might do while shopping.[3] While some historians have explored the connections between social work and social reform or the ambiguous relationship between female social and political activism, others have emphasised what they see as the essentially conservative nature of philanthropy/social work, especially in relation to its underscoring of class and gender norms and its reliance upon voluntarism rather than state action for the delivery of services.[4] Meanwhile, the radical edge of late nineteenth and early twentieth century feminism has been blunted by conceptual analysis of its 'maternal' variant and by interpretations that understate the feminist politics of all but the most radical of women.[5]

However, despite all this scholarship, it seems that some of the largely negative clichés concerning the 'Lady Bountiful' persist in popular and even academic discourse,[6] especially in relation to comfortably-off women who appeared to be meddling in the lives of poor, seemingly for their own amusement or benefit and in order to fill otherwise empty hours, before returning to their own comfortable, servant-run homes. While recognising that

female reformers may have had a ‘passionate, full time commitment’ to their work, Anthony Platt nevertheless argued that ‘philanthropic work filled a void in their own lives’.[7] Recently a more nuanced account has been proposed by women historians, for example, Moira Martin, in her account of single women’s philanthropic activity in Bristol between 1880 and 1914. For the women in Martin’s study, she concludes, the single life was an ‘empowering ideal … of service and influence’.[8] Ellen Ross has accurately observed that there is tremendous diversity among the female ‘slum travelers’ of 1860-1929.[9] Nevertheless, the motivation of philanthropic women still appears to be popularly imagined in terms of their lack of alternative activities, their religious education and vague notions of ‘mission’, with the occasional addition of class guilt or even a search for sexual frisson.

Eileen Yeo has offered an alternative interpretation by teasing out the method by which ‘scientific philanthropy’ became ‘social work’, in effect the process of ‘professionalisation’.[10] Fairly rapidly in the twentieth century the paid, university-educated social worker replaced, or at least came to work alongside, the untrained volunteer. But volunteers also could be surprisingly professional in their approach, at least in the sense that they self-educated and spent considerable amounts of time at work.[11] In the work of early twentieth-century social activists the conceptual boundaries between professional and volunteer seem to almost dissolve. Recognising this feature can not only shape our understanding of past practices, but also has contemporary relevance as the government looks to so-called ‘third sector’ agencies - which often blend the work of volunteers with paid staff - to carry forward social policies, programmes and initiatives.

Clearly one way for historians to further the debate over philanthropic/social work is through case studies on individuals involved, and the biographical turn in social history and women's history has facilitated this approach.[12] Of course, we are utterly reliant on the extant sources, many of which are not as useful or as complete as we would like them to be, especially where individuals' perceptions and motivations are concerned. This case study on Amelia Scott has made manifest several methodological and epistemological dilemmas. For example, it has prompted reflection upon the nature of historical evidence and the process of (re)constructing a life, which lies at the centre of a biographical project. A project such as this, on a figure whose impact was mainly confined to her local area and the traces of which are largely obliterated, raises questions concerning the public role of history and the nature of historical memory, both public and private. Amelia Scott lived all her life in Tunbridge Wells, Kent, and died, nearly sixty years ago, aged 91. Her work surely had impact upon the town and its residents, yet her death was only briefly reported by the local press in less than seventy words. Now she is all but forgotten and the workhouse-turned-hospital with which she was associated is being replaced by a 'state of the art' seven-storey hospital.[13] The past few years have therefore seemed to be an appropriate moment for the resurrection of her memory. However, this is not just a local history project. Although Amelia Scott's activism was mainly centred on her home town, she participated in national policy networks as well, not only through the National Council of Women, but also through membership of other organisations and through correspondence with well-known individuals. A biography of Amelia Scott – or even some recognition of her significance –

is therefore not the only end product of this research. In addition, a fuller historical understanding of identity and individual agency, within the shifting currents of voluntary work, political activism and welfare reform in the early twentieth century, can perhaps be achieved.

The remainder of this article describes briefly the research path that led to this study and discusses the 'evidence', the raw material examined for this project; then attempts to outline a brief narrative of Amelia Scott's life focusing mainly on her many public roles and campaigns before discussing her own reflections on changing social policies, and finally suggesting some tentative conclusions and raising some further questions.

Research Path and Sources

My curiosity was first aroused by a passing remark of Patricia Hollis' in *Ladies Elect*, her account of women in local government[14] that there had been an active women's movement in Tunbridge Wells during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. This caused me consternation: with its well-known image of staid conservatism, Tunbridge Wells seemed to be an unlikely setting for feminist politics. However, a study of the local press supported Hollis' supposition: the town and surrounding area did have an active women's movement both before and after the partial achievement of women's suffrage in 1918, with a range of - apparently thriving - local organisations including a Women's Suffrage Society, a Women's Citizens Association and a branch of the National Council of Women (NCW - formerly the National Union of Women Workers). In all these organizations the name 'Miss Scott' featured prominently and not merely in 'honorary' roles, but holding business offices

such as treasurer; proposing resolutions, making speeches and writing to the press. It soon became clear from reports that she also served as a Guardian of the Tonbridge Poor Law Union and in 1919 was elected to the council of the Royal Borough of Tunbridge Wells as a Women's Citizens Association candidate on an explicitly feminist manifesto.[15] Coincidentally, in the course of a separate research project on the national Public Service and Magistrates' Committee of the NCW I discovered that Amelia Scott was the committee's secretary. By extending newspaper searches backwards to the 'suffrage era' before 1914 and forwards into the 1920s, I uncovered further evidence of her activities and continuing campaigns, for women's suffrage and a women's lodging house in the pre-war era; and for women police, a maternity home, a municipal library, museum and art gallery post-war. Most strikingly, in 1920 she was awarded the Order of the Golden Palm by the King of Belgium for her help to Belgian refugees during the Great War.[16]

This article therefore is partly based on evidence from local newspapers supplemented by the records of the Poor Law Union and the national NCW committee, which she served for 17 years. In some cases, the newspaper evidence gave insights into her views and political standpoint: strongly feminist, and - despite apparent concentration on gendered issues such as lodging for women and a maternity home - not primarily a 'maternal feminist'. Her energy, commitment to social reform, her feminism and her religious faith were all evident. The problem was whether there was sufficient evidence for a meaningful piece of writing. Was she in any way representative of her generation, her gender or class? Crucially, how did she perceive her role in the emerging welfare politics of the early twentieth century? As

someone who operated mostly on a local level, how did she react to the growth of state welfare schemes, especially in view of the fact that she lived long enough to see the construction of the Welfare State in the 1940s. However copious in quantity, scattered newspaper references were not going to answer the many questions that they prompted.

Then in 2004 I became aware that a relative of hers had recently donated Amelia Scott's papers to the Women's Library. I spoke to the donor on the telephone. She was delighted that I was interested in the papers, which she had stored in her garage for some years since the death of her mother. The collection includes a typescript of a book inspired by Amelia Scott's work as a Poor Law Guardian, entitled *The Passing of a Great Dread*; some published work, notably *Women of Sacred History* published in 1898; other writings and speech transcriptions; material connected to her many campaigns and activities and those of the Tunbridge Wells NCW branch of which she was founder and long-term secretary; some photographs, memorabilia and a large amount of letters. This archive has enabled me to construct a much fuller biographical account than would have been possible with the newspaper articles alone.

Amelia Scott's life and work

Amelia Scott's papers reveal little about her early life but some basic details can be gleaned from the 'snapshots' in census returns. She was born in Surrey in 1860 but by the following year the family had moved to Southborough, on the outskirts of the rapidly developing town of Tunbridge Wells. Her father, Syms Scott, was described on the census return of 1861

as an accountant and the family were reasonably prosperous, employing at that time three servants, a housemaid, nursemaid and cook. Amelia Scott had several older siblings and her younger sister, Louisa, was born in Southborough. By the time of the 1871 census her father had died and the two younger sisters and their mother were living at another address in Tunbridge Wells, now with only one servant. The older siblings were not recorded at that address on this occasion. Ten years later Amelia Scott was staying with her aunt at her grandmother's house back in Southborough, the three of them being attended to by a cook and three maids.

From the census material we can conclude that Amelia Scott probably spent many of her early years living in an exclusively feminine environment and that the ties of family played an important part in her life. Her background was comfortably middle class – her aunt and grandmother were described as 'living on own means' – although the family was not exactly wealthy. Her grandmother was the widow of a clergyman and there is clear evidence in her papers of Amelia Scott's own religious belief and commitment as she continued to be a practicing Anglican. It is interesting to compare her background with similar women discussed by Ellen Ross, who found that many of her subjects – ladies who visited the London poor - were daughters of Anglican clergy. As Ross points out, average clergymen's incomes were on the low side for gentlemen, yet they nevertheless belonged to 'the genteel classes'.[17]

After her grandmother's death Amelia and Louisa Scott set up home together in Tunbridge Wells. The sisters, neither of whom ever married, stayed together until their deaths: the younger woman died, at the age of

ninety, only ten days after her elder sister.[18] Sadly there is less evidence specifically concerning Louisa, who also remained unmarried. It is, however, clear that she participated in many of her older sister's activities and fully shared her life, a not uncommon situation for never-married, female siblings in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. It is quite possible that Louisa Scott performed more of the domestic functions in the household, allowing her sister to devote more time to public activities. However the younger woman also featured on several of the committees that her elder sister was involved in. Interestingly, a souvenir album, tied with ribbon made in the colours of the Belgian flag, donated by Belgian refugees in 1916, was dedicated to 'Mesdemoiselles Scott'.

Figure 1 here

Nevertheless uncertainty over Louisa Scott's involvement and the ways in which the sisters shared, or divided, their public and private roles highlights the way in which archive and census evidence often raises more questions than it answers.

The Scott sisters were comfortably off for their times, but not especially wealthy. In later life they continued to live in respectable residences in the Tunbridge Wells area and were looked after by a single servant.[19] They each inherited one-sixth of their father's estate[20] and do not appear to have had to earn a living at any stage. Some of Amelia Scott's reflections on materialism are revealed in a handwritten note from 1906. Musing on 'St. Francis's Ideal of a simple life – can it be lived only by a few?' she wrote:

> [m]ay we not catch the spirit of St Francis today? ... Would not absolute sincerity in religion, in temporal things, in relationship with

> the world and our fellow men… bring about a simpler life – a life free and unfettered, a life of perfect joy? Would not everything be much simpler if there were no pretensions? [*Emphasis in original].* Why must one with a limited income [act] as if she were as rich as her wealthy friends? Must her clothes be as numerous and as fine? Would the very rich care so much for display if no-one aped them or vied with them?[21]

Perhaps these reflections, as much on class and femininity in Edwardian times as on 'the simple life', were prompted by the prospect of the Annual Conference of the National Union of Women Workers (NUWW, later NCW) that was to be held in Tunbridge Wells later that year. Many grand and titled ladies were expected to attend and Amelia Scott - working on behalf of the local grandees who held honorary offices in the local NUWW branch - was involved in a great deal of preparation. Moreover, her home town was already a fashionable place for shopping and the conference was likely to be an occasion when there would be pressure to wear smart attire. It seems very likely that she was the one with the 'limited income' who could not afford to rival the finery of wealthier ladies.

Returning to her life history, there is very little evidence of Amelia Scott's initial education or of the first thirty or so years of her life, [22] although she probably participated the in conventional Church of England-associated philanthropic activities of the era, such as running mothers' meetings and teaching Sunday school classes.[23] Her public work appears to have really begun around the mid 1890s. In 1931 she recalled attending a conference of 'women workers' whilst staying with a friend near Bristol in 1894.[24] This

seems to have been, in retrospect at least, an epiphany: '[i]n those days in Tunbridge Wells we lived in our own small, self-satisfied circles, both in religion, politics and class … . At Bristol I walked into a wholly different atmosphere, and it was an atmosphere where I *would* be'.[25] Inspired by this conference of the National Union of Women Workers, Amelia Scott subsequently formed a branch in Tunbridge Wells, holding the initial meeting in her own home and serving as its secretary for the next thirty-five years. Soon after - encouraged by the local NUWW president Louisa Twining, who despite being ostensibly retired had joined the local Board of Guardians - Amelia Scott also became a Poor Law Guardian, holding office for over thirty years. Together with five other NUWW branch members, in the 1890s she received training from the Charity Organisation Society (COS) in London and quickly established a local COS branch of which she was joint secretary. [26]

It seems, therefore, that around her mid-30s, Amelia Scott had truly found a vocation as a social worker. In common with some other socially-active spinsters of her generation, she only seems to have found her true role in mid-life.[27] Over the next four decades or so, she was continually involved, not only in practical social work and administration, but also in associated political campaigns. Her initiatives included the establishment c.1900 of the 'Leisure Hour Club for Young Women in Business' which she served as Honorary Secretary; the opening in Tunbridge Wells of the Crown hostel for women and children in 1913; and, perhaps most spectacularly, the foundation and management of a soldiers' laundry during the First World War that was said to have washed the clothing of nearly 168,000 men and mended over half a million garments.[28] Post-war projects included the establishment in

1925 of the Tunbridge Wells and District Nursing Home 'as a thank offering for Peace after the last war, with the desire to preserve the life of mother and child' and a campaign by the Tunbridge Wells Council of Service for the construction of social housing for the elderly.[29] These were all in addition to her more obviously political and/or feminist campaigns: for suffrage, for her own election to the council and Board of Guardians, for the appointment of women police and against the state regulation of prostitution. She was an avowed supporter of women's suffrage from 1905 and in 1913 took part in the NUWSS 'pilgrimage' to London of the newly formed Kentish Federation of Women's Suffrage Societies, giving speeches en route. Her leaflet bag, emblazoned in the NUWSS colours of red and green, is now kept with her papers at the Women's Library.

Figure 2 here

To all of this activity Amelia Scott seems to have brought a range of skills: as organiser, committee member, worker, fund-raiser, propagandist, tactician, politician and public speaker. But she seems to have taken part in the routine tasks – mending soldiers' clothing and, in her old age, knitting for the Seamen's Mission[30] – as well as in the more public aspects. As a Poor Law Guardian she not only regularly inspected the workhouse premises, as her mentor Louisa Twining had urged, but also visited people for whom the Tonbridge Union was responsible including those who had been sent elsewhere, for example to the County Asylum at Maidstone. Significantly she did not confine herself to acceptably 'feminine' tasks on the Board of Guardians: she was on the Union's Finance Committee as well as the Children's Committee, the House Committee and the Mental Deficiency

Committee. Her career as a Guardian continued until 1930 when the Board's functions were transferred to the Kent County Council's Public Assistance Committee.[31]

So far I have concentrated on local activities, but the evidence indicates that Amelia Scott was also a part of much wider, national political and policy networks. Foremost among these groupings was the NUWW/NCW, the very organisation that appears to have made such a deep impression on her at Bristol in 1894. She regularly participated, giving papers at the Annual Conferences, contributing articles to its publications and serving on the national executive. Moreover, as already mentioned, she was responsible for the organisation of one of the most momentous NUWW conferences, held in October 1906, the very week of the first arrests of suffragettes in the House of Commons.[32] She corresponded with many of the leading figures of the NUWW, including Louise Creighton, the founding president and wife of Mandel Creighton, onetime Bishop of London, and worked closely with later NCW presidents, notably Florence Keynes.[33] Her papers also point to involvement in the Women's Local Government Society, the COS, guardians' associations, a range of non-militant suffrage societies, and, intriguingly, the Christian Social Union, of which, again, she was for a time the Tunbridge Wells branch secretary: her correspondence contains letters from the Reverend Percy Dearmer, Christian Socialist and editor of the *English Hymnal*. Her high-profile correspondents also included Beatrice Webb, Eleanor Rathbone, Millicent Fawcett and Clementine Churchill, who was briefly a colleague on the Board of Guardians. The author Sarah Grand, who lived in Tunbridge Wells and was the local NUWSS president, was another prominent

contact. She was not, incidentally, above a bit of name-dropping, as a letter from Clementine Churchill reveals: clearly Amelia Scott had mentioned in a letter to the Prime Minister's wife her friendship with Florence Keynes.[34]

Amelia Scott's networks were of great significance in relation to the transmission of political ideas and policy initiatives, connecting her local work to changing national and international discourses of social action. For example, as proposer, founder member and first secretary of the NUWW/NCW Public Service (later Public Service and Magistrates') Committee from 1913 she was responsible for gathering evidence on issues of concern from branches throughout the country and constructing consequent plans of action.[35] One of the first policy initiatives of the Committee concerned the inadequacy of lodging houses – the only form of housing available to single people on low incomes. The evidence gathered nationally was used to support the local campaign for a women's hostel in Tunbridge Wells. A similar pattern can be discerned in other campaigns: Amelia Scott clearly kept abreast of all the latest initiatives in local government and the voluntary sector and was eager to try them out in pursuit of better welfare for the disadvantaged people, particularly, but not exclusively, women, children and the elderly, in her home town. By so doing she moved beyond the role of simple social worker or do-gooder into the realms of innovation and activism. As Jane Lewis points out the tradition of tackling social problems at a local level, which was still evident in the early twentieth century, enabled activist women to exercise pronounced influence over policy.[36]

From Poor Law to National Health Service – Amelia Scott's Reflections

One of the most important areas of social policy change to occur in Amelia Scott's lifetime was the gradual abolition of the Poor Law and its replacement by the universal social services recommended in the Beveridge Report of 1942. While it is now recognised that the transformation of services was not as complete as may be supposed, as a Poor Law Guardian of long standing, Amelia Scott was aware of the many changes that had taken place in her lifetime, as the Tonbridge Union workhouse was gradually and incrementally converted into Pembury Hospital. Her role as a Guardian was a key part of her public career and it provided points of reference for her personal reflections upon the many changes in social policy that had taken place during her lifetime. Although at least part of it dates from the early 1920s, it is likely that most of her book, *The Passing of a Great Dread*, was written or at least thoroughly revised after her retirement from her many offices and public duties in the early 1930s. Rejected by Hodder and Stoughton in 1947, whose editor rather meanly claimed that it 'falls below the standard of general literature' and 'lacks the literary touch',[37] the work eventually appeared in instalments in *Social Work – the British Quarterly Journal*, published by the Family Welfare Association (formerly the COS) in 1951, the year before her death. The 'Great Dread' of the title I assume to be the harsh, deterrent Poor Law of the nineteenth century and there is little doubt that the author was celebrating its passing, while simultaneously recalling the many changes that had been made in welfare along the way, and, but only by inference, the part that she had played in them.

The Tonbridge Union workhouse – later Pembury Hospital, near Tunbridge Wells – is thinly disguised as the 'Sourten' institution in the book draft.[38] The chapters are in epistle form, being letters written to a colleague in a neighbouring Poor Law Union. The first chapter focuses on yet another of Amelia Scott's campaigns: the provision of a new mortuary at the hospital - complete with a room furnished for grieving relatives to use - in place of the old earthen-floored shed. Despite her obvious commitment to this change, her own role in its achievement is absent from the narrative. The second section – written many years before – is a rather romanticised account of the life of an itinerant tramp, 'Elspeth Murdoch', and the lessons she was able to teach a female Guardian 'trained in all the lore of a London Charity Organisation Society office'. The Guardian is probably a self-portrait, although Amelia Scott used the third person and novelizes the recollection.

> Elspeth Murdoch was a sore puzzle to the COS Guardian. None of her stock phrases fitted the case. One after another of her theories broke down in the presence of this strange personality…. Kindly interest or advice seemed unwanted. No gifts were desired. Do what she could she could not prevent uncomfortable misgivings that it was *she* and not Elspeth who was 'undeserving'.[39]

Elspeth Murdoch's tale prompts some interesting questions, not least who is the true subject – Elspeth or 'the COS Guardian'?

The remainder of the chapters are on the whole less emotive and personal than this one, suggesting that they may have been written at

different times or for different reasons. Chapter – or rather Letter – Three focuses on the 'Ins and Outs', families who spent the winter in the workhouse and the summer working in the fields of rural Kent and Sussex. Amelia Scott was clear about the economic causes of this pattern, which by the time of publication she regarded as consigned to history: 'lack of employment, seasonal employment, low standard of wages, coupled with increasing rents'.[40] Letter Four details the many small, but significant, changes made to improve the lives of the elderly and infirm workhouse inmates (traditionally the work of lady visitors and Guardians) while Letter Five focuses on the youngest clients for whom scattered homes were opened after 'years of struggle', a significant phrase that reminds us that campaign aims were rarely accomplished swiftly or easily. Letter Six deals with the Infirmary, Seven with the maternity ward and Eight, entitled 'the Phthisical Ward' [sic], with the gradual improvements made in the care of tubercular patients. All the chapters contain vignette portraits of Poor Law 'clients' who were probably known personally to the author.

In general, the *Passing of the Great Dread* is very positive about the many changes that have taken place in social policy administration over the years of Amelia Scott's experience. Her authorial voice brings to mind her religious conviction and the way in which her faith seems to have underpinned her activism.

> The whole world, through their actions, is beginning to see that 'God's perpetual providence' is carrying out the work of men's salvation, and that things which were cast down, are being raised

> up, and that things which have been old are made new, and that all things are returning to perfection through HIM from whom they took their origin even our LORD JESUS CHRIST.[41]

Here, as elsewhere in her writing, Amelia drew on her religious faith to give meaning to her social work and to her commitment to reform.

Although not an autobiographical work in the accepted sense, *The Passing of the Great Dread* tells its reader a great deal about Amelia Scott. The 'COS Guardian' of the second chapter cannot have fooled any reader into believing that the book was not autobiographical. Despite her deliberate subjugation of self in this account of the changes she witnessed as a Guardian, she clearly drew satisfaction as well as a sense of moral and religious purpose from her many activities. She maintained her interest in Pembury hospital to the end and sent Christmas flowers to one of the wards only weeks before her death. However, while she was proud that the hospital was now part of the National Health Service, she felt that even when control had merely been transferred to the county that the 'local touch' had been lost and the services' administration was more remote from the people who needed them.[42] Her general faith in progress was thus tempered by some regret for the beneficial aspects of the old regime that she felt had been lost.

Hilda Kean has suggested that women of Amelia Scott's generation 'constructed their own identities through public activities'.[43] To an extent Amelia Scott seems to have used *The Passing of the Great Dread* to construct her identity in direct relationship with the development of the Welfare State and the great changes in social services which she had both

witnessed and helped to create. Her writing demonstrated her faith in progress and belief that political and social action – at local as well as national level – could bring tangible results.

Conclusion

Amelia Scott's life course – even her own identity - witnessed a transition from, not so much from 'Lady Bountiful' to 'scientific philanthropist' as from conventional, late-Victorian church-woman to social activist. All around her there was a parallel transformation from Poor Law to Welfare State, a process in which, it is now widely acknowledged, women and men of the voluntary sector and in local government played a vital part. She did not see her work as a conservative reinforcement of existing values but as a progressive force, albeit steeped in 'traditional' virtues of religious duty and altruism. She moved forward - or sometimes sideways - from issue to issue and campaign to campaign, but not before there had been some fruition. The completion and continuation of projects appears to have been very important to her and this thoroughness is an indication of her professionalism: she did not lack an attention to detail. She was paradoxically both a modern, independent woman of the twentieth century and a Victorian spinster who lived with a sister and a servant, and wrote devotedly to her Godchildren. Her public persona was as a committed and energetic reformer, a motivator and networker par excellence. In her own lifetime her contribution was often recognised locally, not least by the Belgian refugees who in 1916 presented her and her sister with a beautiful, hand-illustrated commemorative album, surely more a sign of genuine appreciation than of mere deference.

Any precise motivation for her varied activities can only be a matter for supposition. Amelia Scott undoubtedly had a religious faith and upbringing, but the evidence suggests she was in her thirties before that was translated – after her 'conversion' to women's social activism in 1894 - into a commitment to social and political action.[44] Thereafter, although religious belief may have continued to play a part, she seems also to have embraced politics, specifically a feminist ideology, exemplified by her election to the council in 1919 on a women citizens' manifesto. Moreover, *The Passing of the Great Dread* demonstrates her understanding that it was not just the workhouse infirmary that had undergone a transformation: 'the COS Guardian' had also had to reassess her earlier views and ideas. Therefore the factors that motivated her entry into the public arena in the 1890s may not have been the same as the ones that kept her there thirty years later. Amelia and Louisa Scott had long lives, ones in which politics and social policy underwent some major changes. While their willingness to work for the community remained constant, the causes altered and so may have their motivation. For example, the establishment of the soldiers' laundry during the First World War seems to have resulted largely from a patriotic impulse and the desire of so many women to 'do their bit', as well as a direct request from the commanding officer.

It is no doubt significant that - in common with many other middle-class female social activists of their generation - the Scott sisters never married, therefore the recent observations of Martin on the public activities of single women in the late-nineteenth century are apposite.[45] Local social activism gave middle-class women empowerment, personal satisfaction and an arena

in which to wield influence at a time when they were largely excluded from the national political scene. But none of these factors can explain the sheer determination and dogged dedication to so many different organizations, projects and committees evidenced by Amelia Scott and women like her. Therefore it is probable also that their activities in some ways amounted to a career, collectively providing them with the satisfaction and sense of purpose of a profession. While middle-class female volunteers neither expected nor received any payment for their work, they were often prepared to devote large amounts of time to their causes and to undergo appropriate training, as Amelia Scott did with the COS. They also participated in national associational networks, such as the NUWW/NCW, which promoted the sharing of good practice and an awareness of current policy trends as well as providing a focus for lobbying activities. Altruism and the urge to make a difference to social conditions must have played a part in this.

Some conclusions can therefore be reached, but many questions remain. Some arise from the fact that this account, like so many biographies of 'significant' individuals, is focused on Amelia Scott's public work, which she only began in her mid-thirties. What was her early life like? What part did her sister/companion play? Were there other women like her in other towns? Why, in contrast with earlier periods, was there apparently so little recognition of her life and work by the time she died, apart from the not insignificant tribute of naming a hospital ward after her? In answer to the final question, it is possible that, despite the modernity of her views on social policy, she seemed to the townspeople of Tunbridge Wells to be a rather old-fashioned figure by the 1950s, an elderly relic of the long-departed Poor Law system in

the era of the National Health Service, perhaps even a ‘Lady Bountiful’ from a bygone age. How she envisioned herself - with all her wealth of experience and memory of past social conditions - can only be imagined. Apart from some of her letters and the semi-autobiographical *The Passing of the Great Dread*, Amelia left little evidence of how she made sense of her life and work. It is therefore left to the researcher not only to construct a life story but also to reflect on the motivation that led Amelia and Louisa Scott - and so many other women like them - to dedicate their so much of their lives to social, political and community work.

The example of the Scott sisters and those of many other women like them suggests that philanthropy/social work in the early twentieth century provided an opportunity for both single and married women to prove their self-worth, achieve publicly-recognised goals, and realise personal aspirations at a time when established professional routes were either completely or partially closed to them. At the same time, they were able to suppress selfishness through altruistic action: as Stefan Collini argues, altruism lay at the heart of moral virtue from the Victorian period through to the middle of the twentieth century.[46] Similar normative aspects are again being recognized as a factor in motivating social service today: as Paul Hoggett et al point out, the public service ethic ‘is often something deeply rooted, typically part of the very identity that such [social work] professionals have’.[47] Social activism of the kind undertaken by Amelia Scott and others like her therefore cannot be interpreted purely in terms of self-interest or even self-worth, but as a much more complex phenomenon.

[1] *Kent and Sussex Courier*, 28 March 1952.

[2] Frank Prochaska, *Women and Philanthropy in Nineteenth Century England*, (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1980), 1, 3.

[3] The 'flâneuse' in the late nineteenth century city is discussed in Erika Diane Rappaport, *Shopping for Pleasure: Women in the Making of London's West End* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 6-7. On women's work, including philanthropy, see Ellen Jordan, *The Women's Movement and Women's Employment in Nineteenth Century Britain* (London, Routledge, 1999). For women's role mediating between 'public' and 'private' spheres, see Anne Clendinning, *Demons of Domesticity: A History of Women and the English Gas Industry, 1889-1939* (Aldershot, Ashgate, 2004).

[4] Maria Luddy, *Women and Philanthropy in Nineteenth Century Ireland* (Cambridge University Press, 1995); Bonnie G. Smith, *Ladies of the Leisure Class: The Bourgeoises of Northern France in the Nineteenth Century.* (Princeton University Press, 1981).

[5] Seth Koven and Sonia Michel, *Mothers of a New World: Maternalist Politics and the Origins of Welfare States* (London, Routledge, 1993).

[6] A recent example of the use of the term is Judith Rumgay, 'Another Look at Lady Bountiful: Reform, Gender and Organisations' in Frances Heidensohn, *Gender and Justice: New Concepts and Approaches* (Collumpton, Willan, 2006),

[7] A. M. Platt, *The Child Savers* (Chicago, Chicago University Press, 1969), 83. 77.

[8] Moira Martin, 'Single Women and Philanthropy: a Case Study of Women's Associational Life in Bristol, 1880-1914', *Women's History Review*, 17, 3 (2008), 395-417.

[9] Ellen Ross, *Slum Travelers: Ladies and London Poverty, 1860-1920* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 2007), 1-3.

[10] Eileen Yeo, *The Contest for Social Science: Relations and Representations of Gender and Class* (London, Rivers Oram Press, 1996), 247-8.

[11] Anne Logan, 'Professionalism and the Impact of England's First Women Justices', *Historical Journal*, 49, 3 (2006), 833-50.

[12] A recent example is Linda Mahood's *Feminism and Voluntary Action: Eglantyne Jebb and Save the Children, 1876-1928* (Basingstoke, Palgrave, 2009).

[13] 'Pembury PFI Hospital construction one year on', 12 April 2009, http://www.thisiskent.co.uk/news/Pembury-PFI-hospital-construction-year/article-887486-detail/article.html, viewed 9 October 2009.

[14] Patricia Hollis, *Ladies Elect: Women in English Local Government, 1864-1914* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1987).

[15] *Kent and Sussex Courier*, 8 August 1919, 4 November 1919.

[16] Ibid., 29 October 1920.

[17] Ross, *Slum Travelers*, 4.

[18]Centre for Kentish Studies, Maidstone (CKS) CH94/6, *NCW Royal Tunbridge Wells and District Branch: The First Seventy Five Years 1895-1970*.

[19] Personal communication.

[20] Women's Library (WL) 7/ASC/6/3.

[21] WL 7/ASC/1/2, 'St. Francis's Ideal of a Simple Life', 11 March 1906.

[22] It is likely that she attended University Extension lectures in Tunbridge Wells at a later stage.

[23] Her papers include a printed copy of a conference speech by Amelia Scott, entitles 'Moral Teaching in Sunday Schools'. WL 7/ASC/1/2.

[24] Moira Martin has accurately described the NUWW as 'an umbrella organisation' for 'women who were actively involved in social work'. According to Martin, the Bristol conference was held in1892. Moira Martin, 'Single Women and Philanthropy', 409.

[25] WL 7/ASC/2/1/2, pamphlet on 'The History of the NCW in Tunbridge Wells for the last 35 years' (1931).

[26] Ibid.

[27] There is a similarity here with Eglantyne Jebb. See Linda Mahood, 'Remembering, Representing and Writing a Rebel Daughter', *Women's History Review*, 17, 1 (2008), 1-20.

[28] For the girls' club, see WL 7/ASC/2/3/1-2; for the hostel, see *Kent and Sussex Courier,* 27 July 1913; for the laundry, see especially WL 7/ASC/2/1/2, pamphlet on 'Some War Work in Tunbridge Wells May 1915 – April 1918'. Louisa Scott took charge of the room which mended the soldiers' clothing.

[29] WL 7ASC/3/1/1-2.

[30] CKS CH94/6.

[31] CKS G/TO/A/M/46, minutes of Tonbridge Union Guardians' Committees.

[32] *Kent & Sussex Courier*, 23 October 1906. This was the conference at which the journalist, Evelyn Sharp, made a firm commitment to women's suffrage. See Angela V. John, *Evelyn Sharp: Rebel Woman, 1869-1955* (Manchester University Press, 2009), 52-3.

[33] For the work of Florence Keynes and the Public Service and Magistrates' Committee, see Anne Logan, *Feminism and Criminal Justice: a Historical Perspective* (Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 25-30.

[34] WL 7/ASC/7/1/1.

[35] London Metropolitan Archives (LMA) ACC/3613/1/77, minutes of the NCW Public Service and Magistrates' Committee 1913-1935. Miss Scott retired as secretary in 1927.

[36] J. Lewis, *Women and Social Action in Victorian and Edwardian Britain*, (Aldershot, Edward Elgar, 1991), 304.

[37] WL 7/ASC/7/1/2.

[38] It is designated as Pembury in the published version.

[39] WL7/ASC/1/1/1, *The Passing of a Great Dread* typescript, p. 21.

[40] Ibid., p. 26.

[41] Ibid, p. 97.

[42] Ibid., p. 101-2.

[43] Hilda Keen, 'Some Problems of Constructing and Reconstructing a Suffragette's Life: Mary Richardson, suffragette, socialist and fascist', *Women's History Review*, 7, 4 (1998), 475-93.

[44] Hilda Keen pointed out that suffrage feminists often used the motif of the religious-type conversion in their autobiographical accounts. Hilda Keen, 'Some Problems', 476.

[45] Moira Martin, 'Single Women and Philanthropy'.

[46] Stefan Collini, *Public Moralists: Political Thought and Intellectual Life in Britain 1850-1930* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1991).

[47] Paul Hoggett, Phoebe Beedell, Luis Jimenez, Marj Mayo & Chris Miller, 'Identity, Life History and Commitment to Welfare', *Journal of Social Policy*, 35, 4 (2006), 689-704. For the importance of normativity in sociology, see also Andrew Sayer, 'Class, Moral Worth and Recognition', *Sociology*, 39, 5 (2005), 947-963.