FEMALE IMPERIALISM:
THE VICTORIA LEAGUE IN CANTERBURY, NEW ZEALAND,
1910 – 2003

A thesis
submitted in fulfilment
of the requirements for the Degree
of
Master of Arts in History
at the
University of Canterbury
by
Sarah Dowling

University of Canterbury
2004
Abstract

This thesis examines the activities of the Victoria League in Canterbury, New Zealand from 1910 to 2003, contributing to the historiography of gender and imperialism, and the work done to date on 'female imperialism' in Britain, Canada and South Africa. The arguments of this thesis are fivefold. Firstly, it argues that the League situated itself as patriotic first and foremost and was thus keenly interested in instilling a sense of patriotism in the citizens of New Zealand. Secondly, the thesis argues that this patriotism encompassed not only empire but also national, and even regional, pride. It argues that, rather than being mutually exclusive, when national or regional pride was expressed it sat within an empire schema. Thirdly, the thesis argues that from its belief in the hierarchies of empire and love of all things British stemmed the League’s sense of racial pride and ideas about race and ethnicity. Fourthly, the thesis examines in what ways the League’s work reflected the group’s ideas about women’s place and its perceptions of work suitable for elite women. Finally, it argues that for much of its existence the League represented dominant conservative politics, drew on dominant discourses, but that as the century progressed the group represented decreasingly popular ideas.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contents</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgements</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Abbreviations</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Tables and Illustrations</td>
<td>vi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter One:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Characteristics and Organisation</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Two:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>World War One and Post-War Memorialisation</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Three:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Interwar Years</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Four:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>World War Two and the Cold War</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Five:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1955–1975: Adaptation</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Six</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1975 Onwards: Decline</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendices</td>
<td>133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>134</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I would like to thank my supervisor, Katie Pickles, for her endless guidance and direction. Thanks also to Geoff Rice for reading and commenting on early drafts. Many thanks to the rest of the History Department staff, in particular Judy and Pauline. Thank you to the ever-helpful staff at the Canterbury Museum, the Canterbury Public Library, the Macmillan Brown Library and the Main Library at the University of Canterbury. My thanks are due also to Angela Wanhalla for not only academic guidance and input but also moral support. Thank you to Hayley Brown for stimulating debate on feminist issues and to the rest of my colleagues on the second floor for creating a supportive working environment. Finally, thanks to Mum and Dad for being encouraging yet allowing us to choose our own paths in life.
### List of Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CAFCIN</td>
<td>Campaign Against Foreign Control in New Zealand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CARE</td>
<td>Citizens’ Association for Racial Equality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CMT</td>
<td>Compulsory Military Training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPESA</td>
<td>Canterbury Pilgrims and Early Settlers’ Association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EEC</td>
<td>European Economic Community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HART</td>
<td>Halt All Racist Tours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IODE</td>
<td>Imperial Order Daughters of the Empire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MBL</td>
<td>Macmillan Brown Library</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NCW</td>
<td>National Council of Women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NZCWI</td>
<td>New Zealand Country Women’s Institute</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NZJH</td>
<td>New Zealand Journal of History</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NZHA</td>
<td>New Zealand Historical Association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RES</td>
<td>Royal Empire Society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RSA</td>
<td>Returned Servicemen’s Association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SOSBW</td>
<td>Society for the Overseas Settlement of British Women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SPWC</td>
<td>Society for the Protection of Women and Children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WCTU</td>
<td>Women’s Christian Temperance Union</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WILPF</td>
<td>Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WMOAS</td>
<td>Women’s Migration and Overseas Appointment Society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YMCA</td>
<td>Young Men’s Christian Association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YWCA</td>
<td>Young Women’s Christian Association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table One</td>
<td>Victoria League, Canterbury membership numbers, 1910 – 2003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure One</td>
<td>Victoria League, Canterbury membership card</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure Two</td>
<td>Victoria League delegates from around New Zealand assembled for the first Dominion conference held in Christchurch in 1918</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Introduction**

**Gender and Imperialism**

That histories of nationalism, imperialism and colonialism, like so many other kinds of history, have traditionally revolved around male dominated activities and neglected women’s experiences is a view widely held by women’s historians. It has been charged that imperial history, with which this thesis is particularly concerned, has ignored the history of women and imperialism, the significance of masculinity and the significance of gender metaphors. "Theories of colonialism have stressed its ‘masculine’ nature, highlighting the essential components of domination, control, and structures of unequal power" while "analyses of the formation of the Western nation overlook gender." The neglect has not been one sided, however, and it is also true that women’s and gender history have traditionally neglected imperialism.

What are the reasons for this traditional absence of women from imperial history, and of imperialism from women’s and gender history? Clare Midgley, in the introduction to *Gender and Imperialism* (1998), maps the reasons for these absences, attributing them to the very different beginnings and developments of the two fields. Gender history, she argues, had “radical, anti-establishment roots in women’s history, which in Britain [as elsewhere] developed in the early 1970s in response to feminist discontent at the marginalisation of women, and the preoccupation with class to the exclusion of gender, in the writings of labour and social historians.” The radical roots of gender history meant it was unlikely to find gender historians studying the ‘traditional’ area of imperial history. Gender history in Britain has also, despite its ‘radical roots,’ however, often followed the “somewhat parochial perspective of much British social history, exploring the interaction of gender and class but ignoring race

---

1 Ruth Roach Pierson and Nupur Chaudhuri with Beth McAuley, introduction, in Ruth Roach Pierson and Nupur Chaudhuri with Beth McAuley (eds), *Nation, Empire, Colony: Historicizing Gender and Race* (Bloomington, 1998) p.1
2 Clare Midgley, introduction, in Clare Midgley (ed), *Gender and Imperialism* (Manchester, 1998) p.1
3 Nupur Chaudhuri and Margaret Strobel, introduction, in Nupur Chaudhuri and Margaret Strobel (eds), *Western Women and Imperialism: Complicity and Resistance* (Bloomington, 1992) p.3
and ethnicity, claiming to describe Britain while actually talking about England, and rarely attempting to place the history of men and women within Britain in the context of Britain’s role as a leading imperial power”; gender history was guilty of neglecting issues of race and ethnicity, and thus relations of empire.

Imperial history had more parochial beginnings, being rooted “in the ‘high imperial’ period of the 1880s to 1914. Indeed, the main aim of the leading academic historians from the 1880s to the 1940s was to “increase scholarly knowledge of the British Empire” in an attempt to “foster popular enthusiasm for Britain’s role as an imperial nation.” There was thus little place for the study of women and gender in this tradition. Following the demise of the British Empire and post-war decolonisation, however, imperial history lost its traditional role, that of fostering enthusiasm for empire. Indeed, in the postcolonial climate, “European historians’ views on colonised peoples were condemned as racist and paternalistic,” and new histories were written from the viewpoint of the colonised, the work of Edward Said in particular inspiring the development of the field that came to be known as postcolonial studies. Imperial history managed to survive this crisis, renaming itself imperial and Commonwealth history and with an expanded subject matter, changing focus from policy making and administration to the “economic, social and cultural aspects of empire, and to the impact of empire on British society itself,” thus allowing more for the examination of both ethnicity and gender with relation to empire. It was the development of these new histories of imperialism, along with the growth of women’s and gender history which led to the development of histories of gender and/or women and imperialism.

---

5 Midgley, p.1
6 Catherine Hall, ‘Introduction: Thinking the Postcolonial, Thinking the Empire,’ in Catherine Hall (ed) Cultures of Empire: A Reader: Colonizers in Britain and the Empire in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries (Manchester, 2000) pp.13-14
7 Midgley, pp.3-4
8 Midgley, p.6. Important early works on gender and/or women and imperialism include Antoinette Burton, Burdens of History: British Feminists, Indian Women and Imperial Culture (Chapel Hill and London, 1993); Chaudhuri and Strobel; Jane Haggis Women and Colonialism: Untold Stories and Conceptual Absences: A Critical Survey (Manchester 1993); Catherine Hall, White, Male and Middle Class: Explorations in Feminism and History (Cambridge, 1992); Anne McClintock’s Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest (London and New York, 1995); Midgley; Pierson, Chaudhuri and McAuley; Margaret Strobel’s European Women and the Second British Empire
Feminist historians were at the forefront of efforts to write new imperial histories, "cognisant of the centrality of masculinity, femininity and sexuality to the makings of nations and empires."\(^9\)

Also important for the inclusion of women in histories of imperialism, was the recognition of what happened in the so-called private sphere as being equally as important as what happened in the 'public sphere.' As Jane Haggis points out, while "this split of social reality into the public and private areas is itself a highly controversial point among feminists...there is a consensus that the failure to recognise and include actions within the non-formal, private areas of social life automatically and severely discriminates against the principle areas of most women's lives."\(^10\)

Because most women's participation in empire, as in many other areas, had traditionally been in the "non-formal, private areas of social life," the recognition of the importance of the 'private sphere' thus allowed for the examination of women's participation in empire.

As the study of gender and imperialism progressed, it soon became apparent that imperialism was "a highly gendered phenomenon."\(^11\) In her 1995 book, Anne McClintock argued that "In the last decade a good deal of evidence has emerged to establish that women and men did not experience imperialism in the same way."\(^12\)

Initial studies done in the field of gender and imperialism generally "sought to rectify the exclusion of women from standard histories of imperialism and the exclusion of imperialism from histories of women,"\(^13\) and in 1998 Midgley identified six broad areas of scholarship in which recent work had been done in the field of gender and imperialism. The areas she identified were white Western women and imperialism;

---

(Bloomington and Indiana, 1991); and Vron Ware's *Beyond the Pale: White Women, Racism and History* (London and New York, 1992)


\(^10\) Haggis, *Women and Colonialism*, p.8


\(^12\) McClintock, p.6

\(^13\) Midgley, pp.6-7
the impact of empire on women in Britain; the experiences of colonised women; masculinity and empire; sexuality and empire; and gender and colonial discourse.\textsuperscript{14}

The study of white Western women and empire particularly set out to revise traditional imperial history because, where white women had been included in traditional imperial histories, they had previously been the subjects of negative stereotyping. Margaret Strobel stressed this point, arguing in 1991 that “Histories of the nineteenth and twentieth century empires virtually ignore European women. If they are mentioned at all their arrival is seen to have contributed to the deterioration of the relationship between the European administrator and those he governed.”\textsuperscript{15}

Thus, important early studies of white women in the colonies, such as Claudia Knapman’s \textit{White Women in Fiji, 1835-1930: the Ruin of Empire?} (1986) and Helen Callaway’s \textit{Gender, Culture and Empire: European Women in Colonial Nigeria} (1987), sought to criticise the prior representation of white women in masculinist colonial history, opposing the often-used ‘memsahib’ stereotype.\textsuperscript{16} As Chilla Bulbeck points out, in the last few years the white woman has found a voice in colonial histories: “Her voice questions the myth of the ignorant, jealous memsahib who turned the happy Arcadia of early race relations into a bitter segregation.”\textsuperscript{17}

Early attempts to deconstruct the negative stereotyping of the Western woman and to give women a place in imperial history fitted within the generally ‘celebratory’ nature of much women’s and gender history. Joanna Trollope’s early book \textit{Britainia’s Daughters: Women of the British Empire} (1983), for example, can be viewed in this ‘celebratory’ light. Western women studied until very recently were almost always ‘heroines’; in the imperial context this meaning feminists and/or anti-imperialists. In 1992, Nupur Chadhuri and Margaret Strobel argued that an

\textsuperscript{14} Midgley, pp.7-10
\textsuperscript{15} Strobel, p.1; see also Paisley, p.148
increasingly conservative political climate meant it was “hardly surprising to find feminism manifested as an interest in famous, “heroic,” white women in colonial settings.”18

More recently, however, “a body of historical scholarship has emerged that, scrutinizing the workings of power closely, implicates white Western feminism in imperialism and colonialism and establishes that women were actors too, “complicit in the imperial project”19 too, and indeed bear burdens of history.”20 As Katie Pickles argues, “women are not uniformly marginalised,” and some are indeed “complicit” in racism and oppression.21 Within this new ‘tradition’ of the study of white women’s complicity in imperialism has developed the subfield of ‘female imperialism,’ the study of women who actively organised into pro-empire societies. The study of female imperialism is a particularly new development, with Sara Mills arguing with reference to women travel writers that women who were openly imperialist previously tended not to be studied.22 Reiterating the point made about the celebratory nature of much women’s and gender history, Pickles argued in 2002 that the study of female imperialism had been particularly unpopular with women’s historians until very recently because female imperialists were essentially conservative, and therefore had “not fitted the agenda of a women’s and gender history intent on recovering past women’s organisations as role models for a leftist second wave feminism.”23

Another reason that the study of female imperialism may have been unpopular until recently is that the female imperialists did not fit the “widely influential public and private spheres framework which has held so much sway with women’s historians.” The female imperialists were women who “were placed” and “placed

18 Chaudhuri and Strobel, p.2
20 Pierson, Chaudhuri and McAuley, p.7
21 Katie Pickles, Female Imperialism and National Identity: the Imperial Order Daughters of the Empire (IODE) (Manchester, 2002) p.6
23 Pickles, Female Imperialism and National Identity, p.8
themselves” at once in the spaces of both domesticity and citizenship. As pointed out earlier, historians’ recognition of the importance of what went on in the ‘private sphere’ as well as in the ‘public’ led to the recognition that women’s activities in the domestic sphere were influential in the workings of empire. Further, the questioning of the separation of the ‘private’ and ‘public’ spheres has enabled the study of women who did not fit neatly into either category. The female imperialists are also complex subjects in that, as middle- and upper-class white women, they represented “both coloniser and colonised, privileged and restricted.” “the inferior sex within the superior race.”

It is in the context of the work done to date in the area of female imperialism that I place my study of female imperialism in New Zealand, a history of the Victoria League Canterbury branch, from its establishment in 1910 to the present day. The last few years have seen the absence of openly imperialist women addressed, and several studies have been made of the activities of female imperialist organisations. Work was initially done on the female imperialist organisations in Britain during the ‘high imperial period’ of the late 1800s to 1915 by Eliza Riedi, who focuses specifically on the Victoria League, and by Julia Bush, who studies the Victoria League along with the Girls’ Friendly Society, the Primrose League and the British Women’s Emigration Association. While the main studies of both these authors each include a chapter on the relationship of the female imperialist organisations in Britain with branches overseas, and there has been a small amount of work done on the Guild of Loyal Women of South Africa, so far the only one of these groups outside Britain.

---

24 Pickles, *Female Imperialism and National Identity*, pp.8-9
25 McClinotck, p.6
26 Strobel, p.xi
27 Eliza Reid, ‘Women, Gender and the Promotion of Empire: the Victoria League, 1901-1914,’ *The Historical Journal*, 45:3 (2002); Imperialist Women in Edwardian Britain: the Victoria League, 1899-1901 (PhD Thesis, University of St Andrew’s, 1998)
that has been studied in depth is the Imperial Order Daughters of Empire (IODE) in Canada. The IODE has been the subject of a number of MA theses and articles\(^{30}\) and recently the subject of a study of the group in its entirety from establishment to the present day, Pickles’s *Female Imperialism and National Identity: the Imperial Order Daughters of the Empire (IODE).*

**Women’s Organisations in New Zealand**

Although it will be seen in Chapter One that it was a contestable issue for the League, in essence the League was and still is a women’s organisation. The League is indeed included by Dorothy Page in her introduction to the section on women’s service organisation in the 1993 volume *Women Together: a History of Women’s Organisations in New Zealand.*\(^{31}\) My study therefore sits within the historiography on women’s organisations in New Zealand. Many women’s organisations in New Zealand, including the Victoria League, have published their own histories over the years. While generally celebratory, these can provide a useful factual background to what various organisations were doing. Of greater interest, however, are the more analytical histories, written by New Zealand women’s historians in book or thesis form, which explore the activities of either a single women’s organisation or groups of organisations. These histories are particularly important, because as Anne Else argued in 1993, women’s organisations “constitute a significant feature of New Zealand history which has...received little or no recognition or attention until recently.”\(^{32}\) An important early exception, was Margaret Tennant’s thesis *Matrons with a Mission: Women’s Organisations in New Zealand, 1893–1915*, which


examined the activities of the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU), the Society for the Protection of Women and Children (SPWC), the National Council of Women (NCW) and the Plunket Society. Tennant herself commented in 1976 on the "virtual exclusion from historical commentaries until recent times" of such organisations. More recent books include the Else edited volume *Women Together*, which covers 132 New Zealand women's organisations, Sandra Coney's *Standing in the Sunshine*, which explores a number of aspects of women's lives including numerous women's organisations, and Page's 1996 centennial history of the National Council of Women.

Recent work has examined the role of New Zealand women and women's organisations in nation building, taking its lead in part from the groundbreaking work done by Patricia Grimshaw, Marilyn Lake, Ann McGrath and Marian Quartley on Australia in *Creating a Nation*, a book that asserts "the agency and creativity of women in the process of national generation." For the New Zealand case, Angela Wanhalla argues that women's organisations asserted agency in nation building by the adaptation of eugenics "to the geographical and metaphorical spaces of New Zealand," while Megan Woods argues that in roles as varied as "social purists, wartime workers, instructors of young women and as mothers New Zealand women were crucial to constructed New Zealand identities." The League's gendered involvement in imperialism work fits within this framework for, as Diana McCurdy argues, "Imperialism structured the formation of colonialism, and by extension, nationalism."
Time: The Decline of Imperialism

By studying the entire period from 1910 to the beginning of the twenty-first century, this thesis traces the activities of the League through the peaks and troughs of popular imperialism. Imperialist groups “flourished” in Edwardian times and World War One, and Bush identifies the period from the death of Queen Victoria until World War One as the most important for the female imperialists, hence the focus of Bush and Riedi on this period. Midgley, however, has stressed the fact that more work is needed on gender and imperialism outside the 1880 to 1914 period of “high imperialism.”

Likewise, John MacKenzie argued in 1986 that though “most historians have agreed that any residual popular imperialism was killed by the First World War,” this view is too simplistic. “It would be a mistake,” he argues, to concentrate too much on the “imperial climacterics” of the late nineteenth century. Imperialism continued for longer than people have tended to think it did, particularly by means of popular culture, and the female imperialist organisations are a pertinent example of this.

Thus, my study, following that of Pickles for the IODE in Canada traces the activities of the League in Canterbury throughout the twentieth century. The study covers the period from the League’s establishment in 1910, in the midst of enthusiastic popular imperialism, until the present day. After covering the League’s establishment, and then World War One itself, during which time imperialism was at its peak, the study moves into the interwar period, which was supposedly characterised by “a rejection of the imperialism that seemed inseparably connected to the national militarism” that had produced World War One. Newly emerging transnational women’s groups in this period, such as the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), were oriented towards peace and often anti-

38 Bush, Edwardian Ladies and Imperial Power, p.8
39 Midgley, p.14
41 MacKenzie, introduction, p.3
43 MacKenzie, introduction, p.7
imperialism. Despite this supposedly changed climate of opinion, however, the League continued to do great amounts of practical work. The League in Canterbury managed to hold on to its membership during the 1920s, perhaps due to the fact it reoriented itself somewhat towards welfare work in these years. Though numbers declined in the 1930s, I would argue this was more due to the Depression than any other factor, and, during the 1930s, the League in Canterbury commonly discussed the problems of members resigning due to difficult times.

Table One
Victoria League, Canterbury membership numbers, 1910-2003

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Victoria League</th>
<th>Young Contingent</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1910</td>
<td>35 (100)*</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>35 (100)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1913</td>
<td>610</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>610</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1925</td>
<td>950</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>950</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1928</td>
<td>725</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>725</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1930</td>
<td>700</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1933</td>
<td>456</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>456</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1940</td>
<td>480</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>480</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1945</td>
<td>440</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>620</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1947</td>
<td>431</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>631</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1955</td>
<td>678</td>
<td>270</td>
<td>948</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1957</td>
<td>803</td>
<td>320</td>
<td>1123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1959</td>
<td>850</td>
<td>350</td>
<td>1200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>682</td>
<td>262</td>
<td>944</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1963</td>
<td>663</td>
<td>242</td>
<td>905</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1965</td>
<td>620</td>
<td>292</td>
<td>912</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1967</td>
<td>605</td>
<td>220</td>
<td>825</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1969</td>
<td>519</td>
<td>286</td>
<td>805</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1973</td>
<td>462</td>
<td>350</td>
<td>812</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1975</td>
<td>428</td>
<td>189</td>
<td>597</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1977</td>
<td>325</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>411</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>287</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>304</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1983</td>
<td>260</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>260</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td>174</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>174</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Membership stood at 35 at the beginning of the year but rose to 100 by the end of the year.
World War Two created renewed growth in patriotism empire-wide and, by the end of the war, the League’s numbers had again climbed. The post-World War Two period is another interesting time in the League’s history. This thesis examines the activities of the League in this era, as it tried to cope with the rapid decolonisation of the post-war period and the changing nature of empire. At first glance, it might seem somewhat surprising that the League in Canterbury actually had the most members of its history in the late 1950s and early 1960s. However, this upswing in the League’s popularity coincides with a period of conservative politics in New Zealand and of a high level of social activity for the League. As was to be expected, however, in an increasingly postcolonial environment, which saw the advent both nationally and internationally of much social and political unrest, the League’s numbers fell steadily from the 1970s, as in the last quarter of the century the League increasingly represented dominant politics.

**Space: Imperialism and Nationalism**

Many of the early studies which explored the interaction of gender and imperialism also examined issues of ‘core’ and ‘periphery,’ that is the relations of superiority and inferiority between imperial power and colony. While most of these studies focussed on British colonies such as India and parts of Africa, which experienced extreme imbalances of power, the so-called white-settler colonies such as Canada and New Zealand also occupied an interesting place in the power relations of empire. Scholars have recently begun to note the connections between national and imperial identities; 44 Tony Ballantyne argues that New Zealand itself was at once a colony and an imperial power, 45 while Pickles argues for the “enduring influence of British colonialism upon national imaginings.” 46

---

44 Pickles, *Female Imperialism and National Identity*, p.15
45 Tony Ballantyne, unpublished paper, ‘Space and Perspective in Imperial/Colonial Histories,’ New Zealand Historical Association Conference, Otago University, November 2003
The idea of New Zealand independence and nationalism is a controversial one. A date of independence is hard to ascertain for New Zealand, where there was no great severing that clearly marked independence, although this has not stopped historians from trying.47 W. David McIntyre, however, argues that "New Zealand was a British colony which became an independent nation very gradually," sentiments of imperialism becoming "mingled" with a growing nationalism.48 While many historians have argued that New Zealand was no more or longer dependant on Britain than other colonies, James Belich has recently challenged this in his 'recolonisation' thesis, in which he argues for "the tightening of relations between 'metropolis [Britain] and 'periphery' [New Zealand]'49 well into the twentieth century. Thus, the issue of whether the Victoria League in Canterbury showed independence is a key one in this thesis. I would argue that the League did show signs of independence and autonomous thought. Instances when the League in Canterbury or New Zealand 'stood up' to London are described in this thesis. Generally, however, the League in Canterbury was likely to defer to the wishes of its headquarters in London.

It will be seen in the course of the thesis that the Canterbury branch of the League indeed possessed a sense of national pride. National pride was, however, not necessarily contradictory to imperialism. P. J. Gibbons argues that, for New Zealand "national identity did not displace a sense of imperial identity."50 Generally, in terms of rhetoric, any national pride that was expressed was situated within an empire or Commonwealth context. For the League, ideas about New Zealand's independence were tied to the idea that New Zealand occupied an elevated position in the hierarchy of empire. It is also argued that the League was often more interested in promoting

47 See for example Malcolm McKinnon, Independence and Foreign Policy: New Zealand in the World Since 1935 (Auckland, 1993) pp.10-11, in which he outlines some of the dates identified by historians as dates marking the achievement of independence by New Zealand
48 W. David McIntyre, 'Imperialism and Nationalism,' in Geoffrey Rice (ed), The Oxford History of New Zealand, 2nd ed (Auckland, 1992) p.337
49 James Belich, Paradise Reforged: a History of the New Zealanders from the 1880s to the Year 2000 (Auckland, 2001) p.11
'regionalism,' than nationalism, taking great pride in Christchurch and Canterbury, though this too sat within an empire or Commonwealth schema.

While the League had branches in New Zealand, Australia and South Africa, along with numerous other colonies and dominions, one place the League was not established was Canada. Here an alternative female imperial organisation, the IODE, had been set up in 1900 by Margaret Clark Murray, a Canadian resident who had recently returned from Britain. Clark Murray had envisioned worldwide organisation for the IODE, including an imperial chapter in London, but this idea was soon put down by the League in London.\textsuperscript{51} Had the League in London not barred the IODE from further developing into New Zealand and Australia, could it have ‘flourished’ in these countries the way it did in Canada? Pickles doubts it, because, she says, central to the IODE’s vision was Canada, and a North American identity.\textsuperscript{52} Central to the vision of the League in New Zealand, however, was not New Zealand, nor a Pacific identity, at least not in the first half of the century. It will become apparent that, although it went through a seemingly progressive turn in the 1950s and 1960s, both prior to then and after, central to the vision of the League in Canterbury was instead Britishness.

\textbf{Victoria League Ideology}

Bush notes that the British female imperialists in the Edwardian period were not focussed on ideology. Rather than spending time developing ideologies they preferred to do work of a more practical nature, and tended to “borrow” theory as they “borrowed” male platform speakers. A very high proportion of what was said or written about the ideals of womanly imperialism was in fact said or written by men.\textsuperscript{53} This is also true for the League in Canterbury in its early years. Much of what the League said and thought was either imported from Britain, or inspired by own male

\textsuperscript{51} Bush, \textit{Edwardian Ladies and Imperial Power}, pp.88-89; Pickles, \textit{Female Imperialism and National Identity}, p.17
\textsuperscript{52} Pickles, \textit{Female Imperialism and National Identity}, p.178
\textsuperscript{53} Julia Bush ‘Edwardian Ladies and the “Race” Dimensions of British Imperialism,’ p.282; Bush \textit{Edwardian Ladies and Imperial Power}, p.80
theorists. Meriel Talbot, secretary of the London branch, noted the retiringness of women in the dominions, and commented on their “want of nerve” in anything like public speaking. As the years progressed, however, female League members in Canterbury became more likely to express their ideas about race and gender themselves.

In terms of its ideas about gender and gender roles, the League was something of a paradox. While claiming not to be a women’s organisation the League was an organisation run by strong women, an idea which is explored further in Chapter One. Yet, as pointed out earlier, the female imperialist organisations were essentially conservative, especially in their views on gender roles. Bush captures the essence of this conflict when she states that the feminised imperialistic rhetoric of Edwardian Britain was “on the one hand deeply conservative” yet on the other “a product of a woman-centred, woman-run organisation which by its existence challenged male domination of public affairs in Britain and the Empire.” The League adhered to the belief that women were different from, and in some ways even superior to, men. The idea that women fulfilled a unique position in society is highlighted in instances cited throughout the thesis. Generally, however, the League spoke little about gender, indicating the fact that it accepted the status quo, holding traditional ideas about the roles of women as wife and mother. The League’s ideas about the role of women become apparent in the fact that its work was gendered, often being performed in the domestic arena. The League adhered to the philosophy that “The destiny of the race is in the hands of its mothers,” and it will become apparent that much of the work done by the female imperialists was maternal in nature. In her 1978 article, Anna Davin explored the connections between imperialism and motherhood, and these connections are indeed explored further in the course of the thesis.

54 Bush, Edwardian Ladies and Imperial Power, pp.94-95
55 Bush, “The Right Sort of Woman,” p.400
56 Truby King, Feeding and Care of Baby (London, 1913) p.153, qtd in Tennant, Matrons with a Mission, p.85
With regard to racial ideology, Catherine Hall and Vron Ware both point to the importance of whiteness in constructing English ethnicity. Bush argues that the Dominions occupied their own racially defined place within the hierarchy of empire, with Canada, Australia and New Zealand, the so-called white-settler colonies engaged in a process of nation building designed to strengthen their racial affinity with Britain. For Canada, Pickles notes that the IODE “forthrightly articulated belief in a British race,” and the same applies to New Zealand. The League’s pro-British racial pride will become apparent in the course of the thesis.

The League was more likely to speak about race issues in its earlier years. When the League did speak about such issues New Zealand was portrayed as a bastion of racial harmony, and in 1925 a speaker at Canterbury’s quarterly meeting stated that “New Zealanders who...following in the footsteps of Sir William Martin, Bishop Selwyn, and Sir George Grey, had made the Maori loyal and contented citizens, should be helpful in solving the problems of the coloured races.” Generally, however, the imperialist organisations of Canada, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa, as in Britain, were largely silent on the subject of indigenous and other non-Anglo peoples. This was particularly so for the League as the twentieth century progressed. As is discussed in Chapter Six, even in the 1970s and 1980s, a period of substantial unrest over race issues in New Zealand, there was no mention by the Canterbury League of what was going on.

Sources

This reconstruction of the history of the League in Canterbury is done using a variety of primary source materials. The main source used is the League collection at the Macmillan Brown Library, University of Canterbury. The collection, which was donated to the Library by the Canterbury League, covers the period from 1919 to

---

57 Paisley, p.149
58 Bush, Edwardian Ladies and Imperial Power, p.107
59 Pickles, Female Imperialism and National Identity, p.37
60 Undated loose Press clipping, 3 June 1925, minutes, series A:1, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
1993, and contains minute books, correspondence, annual reports and ephemera. Another collection of papers used is that of Mary Tripp, the Canterbury League’s president from 1935 to 1955, which was donated to the Canterbury Museum after her death. This collection is particularly useful, containing transcripts of speeches given by Tripp, either to the League, or in her capacity as League president. I have also used a number of Christchurch Press reports, examining those indexed under ‘Victoria League’ at the Canterbury Public Library. The League in New Zealand also published a brief history of its activities from 1905 to 1980, *A History of the Victoria League for Commonwealth Friendship in New Zealand*. The thesis also includes material from personal conversations with former and/or current members of the League in Canterbury. It should be noted that first names of League members have been used wherever known. If, however, first names are not known or to avoid ambiguity the titles Miss, Mrs and Mr are used in some cases. Names and titles are also reproduced exactly in footnotes which refer to correspondence.

**Thesis Structure**

Chapter One explores how the League came to be established in London, and how it spread to New Zealand and Canterbury. It describes the characteristics of the group and its members and examines organisational aspects. Though League records do not begin until 1918, a partial reconstruction of the group’s World War One work has been done by the use of newspapers clippings and secondary sources. Chapter Two thus examines the League’s participation in World War One and the memorialisation work done immediately after the war. Chapter Three focuses on the interwar period, a particularly active time for the League in Canterbury, and a time at which it was greatly involved in ‘citizenship and welfare’ work. Chapter Four examines the League’s participation in World War Two. It also discusses what the League had to say in the early Cold War years of 1945–1955. Chapter Five explores the period

---

1955–1975, arguing that this was a kind of social ‘heyday’ for the League. Finally, Chapter Six charts and analyses the decline of the League since the mid-1970s.
Chapter One

Characteristics and Organisation

Introduction

This chapter traces the establishment of the Victoria League in London, explaining how it spread to overseas colonies including New Zealand, then, with specific reference to the Canterbury branch outlines the characteristics and organisation of the group. It argues that, as with other female imperialist groups, the League was “first and foremost” a patriotic organisation,¹ its purpose being to promote empire, and later Commonwealth, unity. The League was loyal to both New Zealand and Britain, expressing its national pride within an empire schema. Prioritising patriotism meant that the League did not consider itself, nor did it like to be seen as, either a charitable organisation, or a women’s organisation, though it is argued in this chapter that in many ways the League indeed was a women’s organisation.

While the League declared itself to be open to all, as with other female imperialist and women’s organisations,² its members, especially those at the executive level, were drawn primarily from the upper- and middle-classes. The women who occupied the senior positions within the League, as members of the elite, were also white, Christian, and represented conservative politics. They tended to be middle-aged or older and for much of its existence the group had trouble attracting young members. In terms of organisation, this chapter examines to what extent the League was democratic, arguing that, despite attempts to increase its general appeal, the core of the work continued to be done by a dedicated few, and that its organisation and methods of fundraising reflected the group’s elite composition. It also argues that while communication by means of conferences and a National Committee was often

¹ Katie Pickles, Female Imperialism and National Identity: the Imperial Order Daughters of the Empire (IODE) (Manchester, 2002) p.2
² See for example Leila Rupp, Worlds of Women: the Making of an International Women’s Movement (Princeton, 1997) pp.52-81, in which she outlines the characteristic of the women involved in the International Council of Women, the International Alliance of Women and the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom as elite, Christian, older and European
important when it came to making big decisions, the branches of the League in New Zealand were relatively autonomous in terms of day-to-day organisation.

Establishment of the Victoria League

The establishment of the League in London was inspired by the experiences of a group of prominent English women who had either lived or travelled in South Africa, their experiences around the time of the Boer War awakening “in them an interest in South African and imperial questions which proved to be long lasting.” The women were concerned specifically with the marking of Boer War graves, which they felt was a particular duty of women. Hence, “On a dull day in the Spring of 1901 a number of ladies dressed in deep mourning,” and “Oppressed by grief for their dead Queen and by the anxieties of war” a group of elite women gathered at the residence of the Prime Minister of England. They assembled to consider a request from the South African Guild of Loyal Women that “an organisation be set up in London to promote closer union between the different parts of the Empire by the interchange of information, the giving of hospitality, and co-operation in any practical scheme to foster friendly understanding within the British Empire.” A central committee was formed, and the name Victoria League chosen in memory of Queen Victoria, “the ultimate maternal icon,” who had died earlier that year.

The newly formed League was to be non-partisan and open to all British subjects, irrespective of gender, race, creed or political opinion, but did require of its members a “strong loyalty to the Crown and a love of freedom.” The aims and objectives of the League were thus:

The association holds itself, as far as possible, to support and assist any scheme leading to more intimate understanding between ourselves and our fellow subjects in our great colonies and dependencies, and aims at

---

3 Eliza Riedi, Imperialist Women in Edwardian Britain: the Victoria League, 1899-1914 (PhD Thesis, University of St Andrew’s, 1998) p.28
5 Riedi, Imperialist Women in Edwardian Britain, p.29
promoting any practical work tending to the good of the Empire as a whole. It endeavours to become a centre for the receiving and distributing of information regarding the British Dominions, and invites the alliance of, and offers help to, such bodies of a similar nature as already exist, or as shall hereafter be formed throughout the Empire.

The newly formed London committee was initially preoccupied with the Boer War in South Africa, and branches were established throughout the United Kingdom first. The League’s thoughts soon turned, however, to the British colonies overseas. Branches were established one by one, with the League eventually spreading to almost every Commonwealth country. Tasmania in Australia was the first overseas League in 1903 and Otago in New Zealand the second in 1905. The inaugural meeting of the Otago branch, held in Dunedin, “contained a ‘large attendance of ladies,’” many of them married to wealthy men.8

![Membership Card](image)

**Figure One**
Victoria League, Canterbury membership card  
*Source: Victoria League, Canterbury*

Canterbury was the third New Zealand branch (after Otago and Wellington), established in 1910, and its inaugural meeting ran along much the same lines as that of Dunedin, the first meeting being held at ‘Te Koraha,’ the home of prominent Christchurch citizens Mr and Mrs A. E. G. Rhodes.9 The meeting was inspired by the ‘stirring’ address of Meriel Talbot, secretary of the League in London, who was at the

---

9 History of the League, sighted on 19 July 2003, Christchurch
time on a world tour aimed at the establishment of new branches in the colonies. It was thus decided at the meeting to form a branch of the League in Canterbury and an executive committee was set up, along with an honorary committee of leading citizens whose purpose was to enlarge the sphere of interest in the League. Those joining in Christchurch were initially regarded as members of the Otago League. Progress was so rapid, however, that within a few months membership rose from 35 to nearly 100 and Canterbury became an independent League with Mrs Rhodes as its first president.

**A Charitable Organisation?**

Katie Pickles argues that the IODE, like other female imperialist organisations, initially appears to be one of the number of women’s philanthropic organisations that emerged from the latter half of the nineteenth century onwards. At this time, increased status was given to women’s ‘natural work’ in nurturing and domestic affairs, and women of the upper classes set about getting involved in “appropriate types of charity work.” The women’s imperialist organisations, however, were different, their purpose being first and foremost patriotic, and they thus made “strong distinctions between patriotism and charity.” The League’s Canadian equivalent, the IODE, for example, even issued guidelines “on how work that verged on charity could be made more patriotic.”

The League in New Zealand was likewise uninterested in charity purely for charity’s sake, and was concerned that the charity work it performed be related or of assistance to the imperial/Commonwealth cause. It was thus choosy about which charities it would work with. In 1972 the National Committee went to the extent of presenting each branch of the League with a set of guidelines, containing a clause to the effect that patriotism and charity were to be kept distinct, stating that “Financial

---

10 Colonel Hills, Victoria League, London to Mrs Sandstrum, Victoria League, Canterbury, 17 August 1959, correspondence, series B:7, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
11 Stokes, p.5
12 Pickles, *Female Imperialism and National Identity*, p.1
13 Pickles, *Female Imperialism and National Identity*, p.19
Assistance to Charitable Bodies should be strictly confined to those identified with the purposes of the League, or calculated to further its objects. It is therefore not within the scope of the League to financially assist these bodies unless they are definitely concerned with Commonwealth.”\(^{14}\) Through this thesis it is revealed which sorts of charity work were deemed suitable by the League, and which were not.

**A Women’s Organisation?**

Were the female imperialist organisations actually *women’s* organisations at all? The IODE in Canada most certainly was, with membership strictly women only. The League, however, was more ambiguous. In some ways it was a women’s organisation; membership of the League was predominantly female, with most of the organising done by women. Indeed, in a speech on women as empire builders in 1940, Tripp indicated her belief in the strength of women when she stated that “In all great professions and movements for good you can find women LEADING the way, but when you are wise you say they are CO OPERATING with men...I would remind you that women are the Creators of man and require very little assistance from man.”\(^{15}\) The group boasted a number of women in non-traditional occupations, such as a Mrs Clark who resigned from the League’s committee in 1924 to take up a new position as the first woman on the Canterbury College Board of Governors,\(^{16}\) and Alice Candy, the first female lecturer in the History Department at the University of Canterbury.\(^{17}\) However, even the presence of female academics such as Candy did not necessarily represent a questioning of the imperial order. As Pickles points out, the first academic women in Anglo-Canada, New Zealand and Australia, such as Candy, while concerned with advancing the place of women, did not critique “the colonial knowledges that were a part of their various institutions.”\(^{18}\)

---

\(^{14}\) 9 May 1972, minutes, series A:14, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
\(^{15}\) Tripp, undated manuscript, item 40, folder 5, box 2, Mary Tripp collection, ARC1994.17, Canterbury Museum
\(^{16}\) 12 March 1930, minutes, series A:2, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
\(^{18}\) Pickles, ‘Colonial Counterparts,’ p.273
In the early years, other women’s organisations often viewed the League as one of their own. Groups such as the Ladies’ Citizen’s Association, the Prohibition Women’s Committee, the Professional and Business Women’s Club, the Catholic Women’s League and the National Council of Women (NCW) all, at one time or another, requested Canterbury League representatives. Yet the League in Canterbury and New Zealand, at least, did not like to be labelled a women’s organisation, seeing itself as patriotic first. The League’s objection to being labelled a women’s group shone through in the interwar years in its dealings with one such group that attempted to appeal to it as a fellow women’s organisation, the Pan-Pacific and South-East Asian Women’s Association (PPSEAWA). The PPSEAWA was an international organisation, founded in 1928, its purposes being “to strengthen the bonds of peace by fostering a better understanding and friendship among women of all Pacific and South East Asia areas,” and “to promote co-operation among women of these regions for the study and improvement of social conditions.” In 1931 it was decided to form a branch in New Zealand, and the League in New Zealand was invited to send a representative to a meeting in Wellington for such purposes, as the PPSEAWA was “anxious that as many women’s organisations as possible ... be represented.”

The League in New Zealand was clearly not keen, however, with the president of the New Plymouth League replying that:

This branch of the Victoria League will watch your activities with interest and sympathy; but we consider that our League has nothing to do with the objects of the proposed association. We are not a women’s society, but a band of British men and women pledged solely to work for the unity of our Empire, loyalty to the Crown and constitution and personal service to all British subjects in every part of the world.

The Canterbury branch itself later declined a request from the PPSEAWA to subscribe to the conference and receive reports about the progress of its work. The

20 Letitia Coleman, History of the New Zealand Branch of the Pan-Pacific and South-East Asian Women’s Association, 1928-1978 (Christchurch, 1978) p.1
21 Miss Rees, Victoria League, Poverty Bay to Miss E Andrews, 21 February 1931, correspondence, series B:3, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
22 19 November 1931, minutes, series A:3, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
League’s perception of itself as not being a women’s society was restated in 1936, when a Canterbury League representative attended a meeting of combined women’s societies in Christchurch, but members decided that there was no reason for the League to join as it was not “wholly” a women’s society anyway.23

The League’s Young Contingent, established for younger members in the 1930s, possibly had more ‘progressive’ ideas than the senior League, and the 1947 annual report of the Young Contingent in Canterbury states that the group had become affiliated with the National Council of Women.24 It was soon put straight by the senior League, however, which informed them that as the League was not a women’s organisation it could not be affiliated to the National Council of Women, but could only send a delegate.25 Only in later years did the League become more relaxed about being associated with women’s organisations. In 1952, for example, the League in Canterbury was involved in the entertainment of overseas delegates to the to the Pan-Pacific Women’s Conference, which met in Christchurch in January of that year,26 the PPSEAWA commenting on the “wonderful hospitality given both officially and privately by residents of Christchurch and districts.”27 In later years the League in Canterbury became even more closely affiliated with the PPSEAWA - the League’s president from 1970 to 1976, Mrs C. Westrate, was also a member of the PPSEAWA and editor of its journal from 1969.28 Despite this later association, however, the League still never referred to itself as a women’s organisation, and the League’s ongoing problems with the perception of it as one are discussed further with reference to the last quarter of the twentieth century in Chapter Six.

One reason for arguing that the League was, indeed, not a women’s organisation is that, unlike the IODE in Canada, men were involved in the group worldwide since its inception. While the proportion of male members was always

---

22 9 June 1936, minutes, series A:5, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
24 Young Contingent annual report, 1947, series E:16, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
25 22 November 1948, Young Contingent minutes, series E:1, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
26 Press, 30 April 1952, p.2
27 Letitia Coleman, p.15
28 Letitia Coleman, p.32
low, prominent men were sought by the Canterbury branch to fill some of the important positions at an ‘executive’ level, or to chair and speak at League meetings. Professors and doctors were thought particularly appropriate, with J. Macmillan Brown, founding professor in English, Classics, History and Political Economy at Canterbury College, for example, joining as a vice-president in 1932. Nadia Gush points out that, for the Sunlight League, “latching…on to a learned pool of professional men” was a way to “at once gain access to knowledge otherwise denied women, and to gain credibility in wider circles (the public sphere).”

Other men involved were the husbands of prominent members who followed their wives in joining. Heaton Rhodes, for example, followed his wife Jessie in joining and was a vice-president from 1928. Husbands of the League’s female members still make up a large proportion of Canterbury’s male members today.

The League traditionally sought male participation because of the perceived benefits that ‘male’ qualities could bring to the organisation. In the late 1930s, the League in Canterbury expressed an interest in having local businesses join the League. It was especially interested in firms that had connections in London, and there was a suggestion that they be informed of the fact that “the big men at the head of affairs” had been asked to join in London. The connections between men and business were again stressed in 1951, when Mary Tripp stated that “the Victoria League is NOT a woman’s organisation…we want men’s co-operation and interest, especially with the wider developments we have entered into with the business world.”

The League was especially keen to seek advice from men on financial matters. Important decisions about financial matters were not made without taking advice first, and until 1944, treasurers of the League in Canterbury were all men. As Reidi argues,

---

21 Personal conversation, 19 July 2003, Christchurch
22 10 December 1937, minutes, series A-6, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
23 Tripp, ‘Address to Victoria League,’ item 51, folder 5, box 2, Mary Tripp collection, ARC1994.17, Canterbury Museum
the first reaction of the League in Britain to any particularly difficult question was to lay it before a man for consideration.33 Bush also cites a tendency “to want to call in male experts to deal with legal, financial and governmental aspects” of the work.34 Since 1944, however, the treasurers of the League’s Canterbury branch have been predominantly women, perhaps signalling a change in attitude away from the idea that men were better suited to handling financial concerns. And, despite the assistance sought from male advisors, Canterbury League membership, like that in London, for most of the century “remained overwhelmingly female, the League women benefiting from male experience without losing control of the organisation.”35 Linda Bryder has noted that the women of the similarly elite-centred Plunket Society, while using “their considerable contacts to their advantage...made the decisions.”36 It was only in the real crisis years of the late 1980s that the Canterbury branch finally had a male president.

Open to All?

As with the IODE, officially the League was ‘open to all,’37 and in its founding statement declared itself to be open to all British subjects, “irrespective of race, creed or political opinion” so long as they possessed “a strong loyalty to the Crown and a love of freedom.”38 In reality, however, especially amongst the upper ranks of the organisation, membership was more restricted. As far as Christchurch had an elite, it was the women of this elite who were involved. As Jim McAloon argues “Elite women were particularly prominent in imperialist campaigns, which provided both an acceptable form of public involvement for elite women, and were a demonstration of

33 Reidi, Imperialist Women in Edwardian Britain, p.133
38 Stokes, p.1
the priority of class allegiance over gender.” The connection between the elite and imperialism is a theme that is continued further in the thesis, particularly in Chapter Two on World War One.

The period from establishment in 1910 until the end of World War Two saw the presence of many elite names amongst the senior ranks of the League in Canterbury. The first president was, as mentioned earlier, Mrs Rhodes nee Moorhouse, who came from a prominent Christchurch settler family after which one of the four avenues is named. Her uncle was superintendent of the province and her husband Mayor of Christchurch in 1901, supposedly “one of the very few of the elite to occupy the position.” It was at their house ‘Te Koraha’ that the inaugural meeting of the Canterbury branch of the League was held. The second president was Mrs Elworthy, a name supposedly “synonymous with land, farming and Cantabrian gentility.”

Jessie Rhodes, wife of Heaton Rhodes (an agriculturalist, captain in the South African War, MP, cabinet minister, philanthropist, and “unquestioned” leader of the Christchurch elite) was president from 1920 to 1922, and vice-president from 1922 until her death in 1929. Heaton himself was also involved as a vice-president from 1928 to 1954. Another early president was Catherine Deans, who was the wife of the late John Deans, son of one of the first successful settlers in Canterbury. The names Acland, Cracroft-Wilson, Studholme and Tripp all feature prominently in the League’s records, and all of which are the names of prominent Canterbury

40 McAloon, ‘The Christchurch Elite,’ p.196
41 Paul Smith and Louise Callan, Our People, Our Century (Auckland, Hodder Moa Beckett, 1999) p.56
43 Heaton Rhodes was the cousin of Arthur Rhodes, exemplifying another characteristic, the fact that there were family connections within the League
44 Rice, Christchurch Changing: an Illustrated History, (Christchurch, 1999) p.11
45 Mrs Henry Acland was a vice-president from 1919 to 1927 and 1936 to 1963, Mrs Hugh Acland was a founding member and committee member until 1942, Mrs Rossmore Cracroft Wilson was convenor of the Young Contingent from 1938 to 1940 and a committee member from 1959 to 1966, Mrs IF Studholme was a vice-president from 1929 to 1936, and Mary Tripp was president from 1935 to 1955.
agricultural families mentioned in McAlloon’s chapter on the Christchurch elite. J. B. A. Acland and Charles Tripp, who were early Canterbury run-holders, were, in fact, founding members of the Christchurch club,\textsuperscript{46} a club that Megan Woods identifies as the exclusive domain of the elite. Early Cracroft-Wilsons and Studholmes were also club members.\textsuperscript{47}

Even in the early post-World War Two period, the presence of ‘elite’ Christchurch names, although considerably fewer, persisted. Lady Acland, a founding member, continued as a vice-president until her death in 1962 and Mrs Cracroft-Wilson was involved until the mid-1960s. The name Ballantyne, that of Christchurch’s most prestigious department store,\textsuperscript{48} appears in the form of Mrs R. F. Ballantyne, a committee member in the 1970s and vice-president in the 1980s.\textsuperscript{49} The elite nature of the League was reflected in the fact that, for a large part of its history, members had to be invited to join the League, with aspiring members filling in a nomination form, which had also to be filled in by two current members. Only since the 1970s has this practise desisted.\textsuperscript{50}

Despite the fact that the League itself was not a charitable organisation many of its elite members were involved with a variety of organisations that were often philanthropic in nature. McAlloon argues that, for these women, socialising, which, it will be seen, much of the League’s activity revolved around, and charitable work went side by side.\textsuperscript{51} Jessie and Heaton Rhodes were both keenly involved in the work of Nurse Maude’s District Nursing Association, the Rhodes Convalescent Home and the Order of St John, with Jessie also being involved in the Hospital Lady Visitors Association, the Royal New Zealand Plunket Society, the Bible in Schools League,

\textsuperscript{46} McAlloon, ‘The Christchurch Elite,’ p.196
\textsuperscript{47} Megan Woods, \textit{Behind Closed Doors: a Study in Elite Canterbury Masculinity, 1856-1900} (BA(Hons) Research Essay, University of Canterbury, 1995)
\textsuperscript{49} This was the continuation of a family tradition of involvement in imperial organisations, as an earlier Mr Ballantyne was the president of the Royal Commonwealth Society
\textsuperscript{50} McAlloon, ‘The Christchurch Elite,’ p.198
the Canterbury Girl Guides Association and Cholmondeley Children's Home. Apart from being involved with the Navy League and the Royal Empire Society, two of Christchurch's other imperialist organisations, president Mary Tripp, was also heavily involved with the Red Cross, Save the Children Fund, the Royal New Zealand Plunket Society and the District Nurses' Committee.

Indeed, certain organisations were considered the domain of the elite, the League, as an imperialist organisation, being one of them, and there was a good amount of cross membership between such groups. McAlloon identifies the St John Ambulance Association, for example, one such organisation. The Plunket Society is another, with "the new society's first major fund-raiser" in Christchurch a garden fete held at Elmwood, the home of Heaton and Jessie Rhodes. The Sunlight League is yet another example of an organisation which boasted an elite membership, and which showed cross membership with the Victoria League. Along with Cora Wilding, herself a Victoria League member, Mary Tripp was one of only two women on the executive of the Sunlight League. Professor Macmillan Brown was a member of both groups, and Mrs Chilton, secretary of the League from 1923 to 1927 and vice-president from 1934 to 1940, was present at the first unofficial meeting with regards to the Sunlight League in September of 1930. Despite involvement in multiple organisations however, it is likely that, because of its empire focus, and as with IODE "clubswomen," members viewed the League as "unique."

A number of other factors are tied in with the fact that the League attracted mostly elite, or at least upper- and middle-class, members. Certainly the most prominent of the League's members were of Anglo-Celtic, and particularly British, origin. As with the Christchurch and Canterbury Clubs, it would not appear that any Maori person was a member, or at least not a senior member, of the League in

---

51 Rice, *Heaton Rhodes of Otahuna*, p.281
52 Biographical information, Mary Tripp collection, ARC1994.17, Canterbury Museum
53 McAlloon, 'The Christchurch Elite,' p.213
54 Bryder, p.21
55 Gush, p.108
56 Pickles, *Female Imperialism and National Identity*, p.23
Canterbury. The League’s members were also devout Christians. Sandra Coney points out that, in 1885 at least, “It was unthinkable that any organisation could exist independently of the patronage of the church.” The elite in particular were involved with the church, Stevan Eldred-Grigg arguing in 1980 that South Island landowners “enhanced their status by acting as church patrons.” Helping the less fortunate was seen amongst female imperialists as not only a womanly and imperialist virtue, but also as a Christian duty. Mary Tripp was a member of many organisations and stated as her reason for being involved in so many different causes that “Christianity means service.”

While being a devout Christian was acceptable, and even desirable, certain types of Christians were more desirable than others. Pickles points out that most IODE members were Protestant, with the group going so far as to blackball Catholic applicants. Eldred-Grigg, McAlloon and Gwen Parsons all argue that the wealthy of Christchurch and Canterbury were ideally Anglican, along with a number of Presbyterians, and it can be assumed that many of the League’s elite members would have been of this persuasion. Heaton and Jessie Rhodes were certainly prominent Anglicans; he was a lay representative on the Synod and donated the parish church of St Paul at Tai Tapu as a memorial to Jessie. Mrs Walter Bean, a vice-president from 1919 until the mid-1950s was married to the Canon of Christchurch Cathedral. Indeed, the League today continues in the Christian tradition by holding its annual Commonwealth Day services in the Anglican Christchurch Cathedral.

While, in its founding statement, the League declared itself neutral in matters of politics, in reality, in Edwardian Britain at least, many of the leading female

57 Woods, Behind Closed Doors, p.1
58 Sandra Coney, Every Girl: a Social History of Women and the YWCA in Auckland, 1885-1985 (Auckland, 1986) pp.7-8
60 Bush, Edwardian Ladies and Imperial Power, (Leicester, 2000) p.77
61 Biographical information, Mary Tripp collection, ARC1994.17, Canterbury Museum
62 Pickles, Female Imperialism and National Identity, p.27
imperialists had strong political affiliations and, while leading members were affiliated to both the Conservative and Liberal parties,\textsuperscript{64} certainly none of them represented radical politics. While the political leanings of most individual members of the League in Canterbury are not known, a few key figures and events show that it was, as a whole, traditionally aligned with conservative politics, seeming especially conservative as the century progressed and it clung to ideals that people began to see as ‘old-fashioned.’ One senior League member who represents the League’s political leanings was Mary Poolson, president of the Canterbury branch from 1965 to 1970, who became the National Party’s first woman representative in parliament when she was elected to fill her former husband’s seat in 1942.\textsuperscript{65} Thus, League women were active in non-traditional areas, yet aligned themselves with conservative politics. Further examples of the League’s conservative leanings are outlined in the course of the thesis.

\textbf{An Aging Ideal}

Members of the League were generally middle-aged or older and married. Two of the Canterbury League’s longest-serving presidents embodied both these characteristics. Catherine Deans, born in 1856, was president from 1922 to 1929 and again from 1933 to 1935, making her between 66 and 79 years old at the time of her presidency, and was matriarch of a family of twelve. Her successor, Mary Tripp, born in 1879 was president from 1935 to 1955, making her 55 to 75 years of age when in office, and was mother of three sons. Bush states of Edwardian Britain’s female imperialists that most were married women, and that “the status of wife and (preferably) mother retained great importance” for them.\textsuperscript{66} While the majority of Canterbury League members appear from their titles to be married and thus fit this pattern, there are a significant number of women with the title ‘Miss’ also occupying important positions within the organisation. One example is Alice Candy, the well-known academic

\textsuperscript{64} See Bush, \textit{Edwardian Ladies and Imperial Power}, Chapter Two
\textsuperscript{65} Charlotte Macdonald, Merimeri Penfold and Bridget Williams, \textit{The Book of New Zealand Women} (Wellington, Bridget Williams Books, 1991) p.526
\textsuperscript{66} Bush, \textit{Edwardian Ladies and Imperial Power}, p.19, 31
mentioned earlier, who was involved in the League in Canterbury over four decades, from the 1940s to the 1970s. There are, however, also records of women resigning because they were getting married, indicating that while the important contribution of older, married women was acknowledged, it was believed that the most important role of the newly married woman was as homemaker.

The aged nature of the membership was due to the fact that “older established” women were more likely to possess the time and money necessary for involvement in such activities, not because of any desire on the League’s part to exclude young people. Indeed, the fact that it was failing to attract young members was an issue for the League for most of the group’s existence. As early as 1928 the League in Canterbury attempted to recruit Girl Guides as junior members, though the attempt was unsuccessful because many of them were too youthful, and the older ones were already fully engaged. A small group of girls were able to join from 1929 onwards, forming a branch of junior associates, and, amongst other activities, compiled scrapbooks for distribution around New Zealand. This arrangement was formalised in Canterbury with the establishment of the Young Contingent in the late 1930s. This was an arrangement put into place after much prompting from the London branch, which pressed League branches worldwide to form such groups, indicating that League branches worldwide faced similar problems. The Young Contingent in Canterbury thrived in the middle of the twentieth century, but folded in the early 1980s due to diminishing membership and financial insolvency. Over time, the membership of the League aged further, and the problem of an older membership, one which faces the League worldwide, was exacerbated. Mrs Hewland spoke in 1990, for example, of the need to attract younger members in the 40 to 60 age group.

---

67 Rupp, p.62. Rupp makes this argument for the women involved in the International Council of Women, the International Alliance of Women and the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom from the end of the nineteenth century to the Second World War.
68 23 August 1928, 21 March 1929, minutes, series A:2, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
69 2 May 1929, 6 June 1929, minutes, series A:2, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
70 8 June 1937, 12 April 1938, minutes, series A:6, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
71 Annual Reports for years ended 31 March 1983, 10 May 1983 in minutes, series A:17, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
72 10 April 1990, minutes, series A:20, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
In earlier years there was some evidence of family connection within the League. Surnames often appeared in multiple in lists of committee members, indicating sisters, sisters-in-law, or mothers and daughters ‘keeping it in the family.’ In later years however, the League’s rapidly declining membership numbers indicated that, unlike the IODE whose “intergenerational structure” has kept the group going, daughters were not following their mothers into the League.73

‘Elite’ Organisation

Throughout the years the League made “spasmodic”74 attempts to involve its general membership in the group’s activities. The idea of a quarterly meeting for members was first mentioned by the Canterbury branch in February 1925,75 and the first such meeting held in June of that year.76 The “laudable” objects of these meetings were said to be “increasing the spirit of comradeship amongst its members, and...stimulating interest in the League’s activities.”77 In later years a monthly morning tea or coffee afternoon for members was introduced, which, while initially popular, has dwindled in popularity in more recent years.

Despite attempts to involve the ‘average’ member, generally, the League’s organisation reflected the fact that senior members were drawn from the elite. In its earlier years, along with an executive committee, the work of the League was split amongst a number of committees. In Canterbury such committees included hospitality, book distribution, junior correspondence and sewing or knitting circles. Many upper-class women had experienced committees as part of their philanthropic work, and felt more comfortable contributing to and leading committees than they did making a speech or framing an argument around the politics of female imperialism.78 League members, as has been shown, were often involved with various other

73 Pickles, Female Imperialism and National Identity, p.168
74 Eliza Riedi states this as the case for London, ‘Women, Gender and the Promotion of Empire,’ p.577
75 10 February 1925, minutes, series A:1, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
76 2 June 1925, minutes, series A:1, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
77 Press, 3 June 1925, p.2
78 Bush, Edwardian Ladies and Imperial Power, p.56
organisations devoted to philanthropic causes, and thus were experienced in the area of committee organisation.

To the upper-class women of the League, patronage for their organisation was also important. When the League was first established in London, the elite women involved, many with royal connections themselves, had been able to secure royal patronage, a connection that continued throughout the League’s life. New Zealand branches were just as proud of the royal patrons as other branches, using the names of patrons on letterheads, and keeping each other informed when a new royal consented to become a patron. The League’s avid devotion to the monarchy is discussed further in the course of the thesis. New Zealand also sought, however, to have its own, local patron. The figure chosen was one who represented New Zealand, while being as closely tied to the British Crown as possible – the Governor-General, along with his wife. In 1918, at the League’s Dominion conference held in Christchurch, it was moved that the Governor-General and his wife be asked to become Dominion patrons of the League.79 Since then many Governors-General have consented to be patrons of the League in New Zealand.80 In fact the League is not alone in having the Governor-General and wife as patrons, various other women’s organisations such as the PPSEAWA and the Sunlight League had them also.81

Finance

Finance has always been an issue for the League, which, like most imperial propaganda societies, was “run on a shoestring.”82 Despite its somewhat ‘exclusive’ nature, the League has always been reluctant to raise subscriptions. Thus subscriptions could not offset the group’s expenses, which included a high level of entertainment costs. A further problem was that all League branches overseas were also expected to make donations to the League in London, or at ‘Home’ as they often

79 *Press*, 15 March 1918, p.2
80 8 October 1920, 10 February 1925, 10 September 1931, 14 August 1935, 13 November 1962, minutes. series A:1, A:3, A:5, A:12, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
82 Eliza Riedi, ‘Women, Gender and the Promotion of Empire,’ p.576
referred to it, in acknowledgment of the services it provided, along with the numerous other donations to local, national and international causes which each League chose to make. Thus the League’s Canterbury branch, like all others, was forced to fundraise. Fortunately, this was something at which it excelled.

Methods adopted by the League in general were gendered and reflected the socially privileged position of the League’s members. A 1952 newspaper report, for example, which summarised the League’s fundraising activities for the year stated that “By a garden party, a fashion parade and a bring and buy sale, [that traditional women’s fundraising method] the league had raised £268.” Balls, bridge parties and garden fetes were all frequently employed methods. The League’s fundraising work was often done in the ‘domestic’ arena. When organising a stall, for example, members would be asked to make donations of home baking or preserves. The Auckland League in particular, like other women’s organisations in New Zealand, was involved in the production of cookbooks, but the Canterbury League also produced one of its own in 1944. The book was named ‘Victorine’s Letters,’ and was written “in the form of letters to young women to suit the times we live in and solving the problems of food and drink.”

An alternative method of fundraising was the personal donation. While not going as far as some of the affluent IODE members, who “donated their homes, money and resources” to their causes, there was certainly a tradition within the League of the well-off senior members making personal contributions. These donations were sometimes made directly to other organisations and charities, and sometimes took the form of prizes or items for sale at fundraising events. Members also contributed to entertainment costs. In 1931, Mrs Chilton called attention to the

---

83 Coney, Every Girl, p.176
84 Press, 30 April 1952, p.2
85 See for example, New Zealand Country Women’s Institute (NZCWI), Portrait of Change: a Record of Country Women’s Institutes in New Zealand (Wellington, 1996) p.22; Noeline de Courcy, A History of the Catholic Women’s League of New Zealand (Dunedin, 1990) p.10. Pickles also notes this, see ‘Coffee, Tea and Spinsters’ Sprees,’ pp.89-90
86 8 February 1944, minutes, series A:8, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
87 Pickles, Female Imperialism and National Identity, p.43
fact that a recent morning tea had been paid for out of general funds, rather than by committee members, which was the usual custom. After discussion the committee members decided "to adhere strictly to the original plan that such entertainments given by the committee be paid by the members." As membership numbers dwindled over the years, the League's financial position declined further. The League was, however, reluctant to put up subscriptions, as this may have prohibited its pensioner membership, which makes up an ever-increasing portion of the League, from continuing as members.

**Autonomous Branches**

Although a number of branches have recently gone out of existence, at its peak in the 1960s, the League had twelve branches in New Zealand. Following Otago (in the city of Dunedin, 1905), Wellington (1906) and Auckland and Canterbury (both in 1910), were Taranaki (New Plymouth, 1913), Poverty Bay (Gisborne, 1914), and Wanganui (1915). Later branches were Marlborough (Blenheim 1930), Masterton (1951), Whangarei (1953), Dargaville (1959), South Canterbury (1960) and Ashburton (1965). The League's New Zealand branches realised early the importance of sharing and debating ideas. Thus, the first Dominion conference of the League was held in Christchurch in 1918, with conference president W. J. Napier of the Auckland branch stating that:

> After some ten years of labour by individual branches in the Dominion, it was at length felt that there should be closer co-operation and co-ordination between all the branches and that a periodic opportunity should be given the members for the interchange of ideas upon League work — hence the Conference which meets here today.\(^{89}\)

---

\(^{88}\) 5 February 1931, minutes, series A:3, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL  
\(^{89}\) *Press*, 15 March 1918, p.2
Figure Two
Victoria League delegates from around New Zealand assembled for the first Dominion conference held in Christchurch in 1918
Source: Weekly Press Photograph, Bishop Collection, Canterbury Museum, 17282, 1923.53.97

Dominion Conferences were held approximately every third year after that.90 Branches took it in turns to host conferences, which were seen as a big responsibility, inspiring much discussion about financing and whose turn it was to host next. In the early days especially, conferences were not a purely business affair, they were also an opportunity to host important guests from other Leagues and a lot of planning went into the itinerary of social activities for the delegates. In future, however, there may be no further Conferences due to the problems of declining membership numbers and finances.91

The other means by which the Leagues around New Zealand communicated with each other was the National Committee. It is unclear exactly when the National Committee came into existence, but, “from the earliest days there was a desire that there should be some national body to coordinate the affairs of the League,” the first suggestion being made at the first dominion conference in Christchurch in 1918 by Napier. In 1935 Auckland was appointed to act as an advisory board, and in 1956 it was agreed that the National Committee should remain in Auckland. In 1959 the National Committee was asked to prepare a complete set of policy rules for discussion, which were subsequently adopted in 1962.92 The National Committee, like

90 Stokes, appendix
91 Personal conversation, 19 July 2003, Christchurch
92 Stokes, p.23
the Dominion Conferences, was a source of debate amongst the Leagues, there being much discussion about how officers for the National Committee should be appointed. The deputy chairman of the National Committee today is the president of the League in Canterbury, as Canterbury members felt it important that there be a South Island representative on the committee. Although the National Committee used to hold meetings several times a year, the number of meetings declined in recent years, for the same reasons that the conference declined.93

Despite the realisation that communication and sharing of ideas was important, however, in terms of day-to-day organisation, New Zealand branches of the League generally operated in relative independence from each other. Writing the history of the organisation in 1980 apparently presented quite a challenge for Bertram Stokes, precisely because there were at that time “eleven autonomous and independent Leagues throughout the country, each presenting to its members its own interpretation of the aims and objects” of the League.94 It is the particular interpretation of the Canterbury branch which this thesis examines, and instances in which the branch disagreed with other branches are highlighted throughout.

**Conclusion**

The establishment of the League’s Canterbury branch followed much the same pattern as elsewhere – the first meeting consisted of a gathering of local elite, mostly women, who were suitably concerned about empire. These were to be the defining characteristics for the years to follow. As has been demonstrated, patriotism took priority above all else. Although the organisation was run by strong women, and was at times concerned with women’s issues, and although it was not ‘above’ charity work, what is important is that the League itself claimed to be neither a women’s nor a charitable organisation, thus revealing its priorities as an imperial society.

The defining characteristic of most of the League’s senior members was the fact that they were drawn from the Christchurch and Canterbury elite. This meant that

---

93 Personal conversation, 19 July 2003, Christchurch
94 Stokes, preface
they were also likely to be Anglo-Celtic, particularly British, Christian and conservative. League members were also middle-aged or older, though it has been seen that there was a constant desire for ‘new blood.’ Organisational aspects of the League very much reflected the elite and gendered composition of the group. Elite women were more comfortable with committee organising than theorising, they sought prestige by means of their patrons, and means of financing the organisation from donations to garden parties reflected the fact that the group consisted mainly of the upper- and middle-classes. The next chapters go on to examine exactly how the League’s characteristics and organisation affected the group’s activities.
Chapter Two

World War One and Post-War Memorialisation

Introduction

This chapter examines the work done by the Victoria League during World War One. The chapter first discusses League militarism arguing that, while New Zealanders were in general in support of the war, in Christchurch it was the elite who were most strongly in support of it. The League believed that women had an important part to play in the war, although mostly in a position of support for men. The work done by the League during the war such as the making of comforts, fundraising and the organising of hospitality reflected the League’s gendered and socially elite composition. In attempting to raise support for the war effort, League speakers employed the anti-German and pro-British discourses which were commonly promulgated by the Christchurch elite during the war.

This chapter also examines the rehabilitative and commemorative work done by the League immediately after the war, arguing that the League’s involvement in this area was also ‘gendered’ in nature. Importantly, memorialisation was seen as a way of instilling patriotism. While the League was mostly involved with “stone” memorials it also sought to establish memorials of a more practical nature. The League also showed its practical and maternal side in its support of the Returned Servicemen’s Association (RSA). The League’s involvement in Anzac Day highlighted issues of nationalism and imperialism, the sending of wreaths to London on Anzac Day causing issues in relations between Canterbury, other New Zealand branches and League headquarters in London. The chapter ends with a discussion of Empire Day celebrations in the immediate post-war period, arguing that they represented continuity with the past and were a way of instilling patriotism in the difficult post-war years.
Militarism and the Christchurch Elite

As seen in Chapter One, the League was primarily a patriotic, and thus militaristic, organisation. Prior to World War One, the League showed its militarism when, in 1913, speaker Bishop Julius stated that "The maintenance of the Empire intact depended in the first place on defence." The League's militarism was reflected in its long association with other militaristic organisations such as the Navy League. From at least World War One until the 1940s the Victoria and Navy Leagues in Canterbury cooperated in organising an annual essay competition for schoolchildren, the subjects of which often reflected the groups' mutual interest in the Navy and imperial defence. The League's militarism was put to good use in its support of the war effort. The League was an enthusiastic supporter of the war from the beginning, and in August of 1914, along with other "elite dominated groups," local elected officials, church organisations and businesses, participated in a patriotic parade held in Christchurch.

Militarism was, of course, not unique to the League. While there were women's groups in New Zealand which opposed war in this period, such as the National Council of Women, the Women's Christian Temperance Union and the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, these groups were a small minority of the population. Women's organisations which did oppose war and militarism were ones which "had radical ideas about what women's role in society should be," or were "outside the establishment." Indeed, "the vast majority of women

1 Press, 26 April 1913, p.12
2 Subjects included 'What is the probable influence of the recent visit of the US Fleet to Australia and NZ on the relationship between the British Empire and the USA,' 'Naval History in the reign of Queen Elizabeth,' 'What New Zealand owes to the British Navy and why it should contribute men and money for Naval Defence' and 'Discuss the necessity for defence in the British Empire.' Annual reports 1925, 1928, series C:16; 'Report of a Joint Committee Meeting,' 17 July 1928, series D:18, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
5 Hutching, "Turn Back This Tide of Barbarism," p.2
actively supported the war." In defence of the participation of women from the Otago Club in World War One recruiting processions Brenda Harding states that "in the early days of the first war it was the accepted fashion to encourage their men to join up and honour the flag." The League certainly did not have radical ideas at this time about what women's roles should be, and sat firmly within the elite establishment, thus reflecting the dominant militaristic viewpoint, which was unreservedly in support of the war. Support for the war in New Zealand stemmed from loyalty to Britain, so that "when Britain went to war with Germany in August 1914, New Zealanders automatically became foes of Germany. There was no separate declaration of war, no debate in or out of Parliament, no public dissent except from some socialists."

Thus, New Zealanders were generally in support of the wars in which New Zealand became involved. Historians have noted, for example, the enthusiasm with which news of the war in Europe was greeted in 1914. It has also been argued, however, that militarism was a particularly common trait of elite Canterbury citizens, a label that applied to senior League women. Many of the Canterbury elite were heavily involved in militarist campaigns during the South African War of 1899 to 1902, and were "vocal in their support of the war effort." Gwen Parsons argues for World War One that members of the Christchurch elite were generally "distinguished by their Conservative politics. They were both imperialistic and militaristic, combining a love of Empire with a desire to defend it." Parsons argues that it was the really wealthy who, more than any other group, had a vested interest in defending Britain and empire, hence their loyalty to Britain and their involvement in imperialist organisations.

---

6 Coney, Standing in the Sunshine, p.303
7 Brenda Harding, Women in their Time: Seventy Five Years of the Otago Women's Club (Dunedin, 1990) p.15
9 Parsons, p.10
11 Parsons, p.11
12 Parsons, p.7, 11
Thus, during World War One, members of the Christchurch elite were heavily involved in patriotic organisations formed specifically to support the war effort. In fact, "The five largest patriotic groups within Christchurch were dominated by members of the city elite, many of whom also belonged to the Navy League or the Victoria League."\(^{13}\) Mrs Walter Bean of the Canterbury Victoria League, an active war worker awarded an OBE for her efforts in 1918,\(^{14}\) sat on the executives of the Women’s Branch of the Citizens Defence Corps and Christchurch Lady Liverpool Fund. Mrs Elworthy, second president of the League also sat on the Lady Liverpool Fund. In fact, Lady Liverpool herself was present at the annual meeting of the League’s Canterbury branch, held on 15 March 1918.

**Women and War**

The League believed that women played an important part in the war effort. In moving the adoption of the 1918 Annual Report of the Canterbury branch, Booth indicated that the war would be lost without the contribution of women. "He did not allude only to their active war work, though that put the work of the men to shame. Battles were won by armies in the field, but their valour was sustained by the influence of the women they had left at home."\(^{15}\) Although it was acknowledged that women played an important part in the war effort, and there is mention of the fact that some women were actively involved in the war, it is also clear from this statement that the real emphasis was on the women who stayed at home, in a supporting role. According to Parsons, in regards to the discourses employed by the Christchurch elite in support of the war, women on the home front were often given the role of supporting the active participants of war.\(^{16}\)

\(^{13}\) Parsons, p.28

\(^{14}\) She was not the only Canterbury Victoria League member to be honoured for her war work, with Mrs Chilton, secretary from 1923 to 1927, and vice-president in preceding and following years, being awarded an MBE in the same year.

\(^{15}\) *Press*, 16 March 1913, p.2

\(^{16}\) Parsons, p.101
The work done by the League during the First World War thus fulfilled the "maternal functions of care and nurture."\(^{17}\) Like other New Zealand women, the League "knitted, sewed, packed parcels of 'comforts' and raised money."\(^{18}\) A 1915 Press article noted Canterbury members' "eager enthusiasm to make and send hospital garments and comforts for the soldiers,"\(^{19}\) and this type of work was done by most of the League's branches throughout New Zealand. One particular area in which the League could use the expertise of its 'lady socialites' to help in the war effort was fundraising. During World War One the Canterbury branch of the League organised a special war fund to be used for imperial or any special work, and a material fund for hospital supplies for Colonel Acland's New Zealand Stationary Hospital. It also collected £100-2-6 from members, thus contributing its 'full share' for a Motor Ambulance appeal organised by Auckland. Megan Hutching notes the somewhat contradictory nature of the League's work in collecting for both a machine gun fund and a motor ambulance fund.\(^{20}\) In another fundraising activity, on 26 October 1917, Mrs Elworthy held a garden party for the collection of money and gifts for Christmas presents for nurses and men in hospitals in Egypt.\(^{21}\)

Female imperialists sought their work to be of a "personal nature," and providing hospitality fitted neatly with this desire.\(^{22}\) The provision of hospitality was one area in which elite women were experienced and felt confident, and it thus became an important part of the League's work both from its earliest days. The League also incorporated this vital part of its work into its wartime activities, redirecting its regular activities towards the war effort. During the war, the League provided introductions to League headquarters for men destined for England. The Canterbury branch's 1917 Annual Report stated that "We cannot feel too grateful to those who look after our men while they are away, and the knowledge that this is done

---

\(^{18}\) Coney, Standing in the Sunshine, p.303
\(^{19}\) Press, 26 February 1915, p.9
\(^{20}\) Hutching, p.145
\(^{21}\) Annual report, 1917, series C:16, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
\(^{22}\) Julia Bush, Edwardian Ladies and Imperial Power (Leicester, 2000) p.74
so spontaneously and so well, draws the bonds of love, that bind us to the Mother Country." Caring for each other’s soldiers was thus also seen as a way of drawing the nations closer to each other.

**Anti-German and Pro-British Discourses**

The League was also certain about the role that ethnicity played in the war, and expressed strong anti-German sentiments during World War One. In its denunciation of the enemy, the League drew upon many of the anti-German discourses that were commonly promulgated by the Christchurch elite. In 1918, W. J. Napier, president of the Auckland branch of the League, addressed the first League Dominion conference, held in Christchurch in March of that year. In his address he employed the derogatory term “Teuton” when he stated that the British forces had “stemmed the onrush of the Teuton hordes,” thus indicating a strong appeal to ideas of difference between Germans and Britons. At the Canterbury branch’s annual meeting of the same year, G. T. Booth addressed the League, describing Germany as “an unscrupulous enemy whose crimes cried aloud to heaven, whose morals were the morals of a gorilla, whose crimes against humanity were piled high against computation.” This quote shows two different discourses, firstly the denunciation of the enemy as less than human, even barbaric, and secondly, the justification of the war in terms of morality.

In addressing such issues, women could be appealed to on the basis of their difference from men. Booth, in addressing the League’s members near the end of the war, appealed to them as women in an attempt to rouse anti-German sentiment:

There were critical times ahead, the issue of which would depend largely upon the fortitude of women. For months the enemy had been putting forth peace-feelers. He asked them to remember the kind of enemy from whom those peace-feelers came....It was inconceivable

---

23 Annual report, 1917, series C:16, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL  
24 Press, 15 March 1918, p.2  
25 Parsons, p.63  
26 Press, 16 March 1918, p.2  
27 Parsons, pp.61-72, 109
that sane people could think of peace with such an enemy, until he had paid the penalty of his crimes and been beaten to his knees.  

As this quote demonstrates, and as Parsons has pointed out, when war wariness set in, the supporters of war “claimed that only total military victory could rid the world of Prussian militarist aggression and bring justice.”

Anti-German discourses were complemented by pro-British ones. Whereas Germany was written off as less than human, barbaric and immoral, Britain was portrayed as moral, democratic and in support of freedom. Macmillan Brown appealed to the ideal of freedom in a speech made to the Canterbury branch of the League in 1915. The Empire, he said:

though only an island Empire, founded by a race of sailors, excelled all others in its greatness. The freedom of the sea was in the blood of the race... Today, the Empire was threatened with perhaps the greatest peril which had ever assailed it, and now was the time to hope for the spirit which it needed. As in the great crises of old, if Germany succeeded the Empire perished. Farewell to freedom if this great contest was lost.

Along with the discourses of liberty and democracy went discourses of citizenship and duty. W. J. Napier appealed to these ideas when addressing the League in 1918, claiming that the imperialism of the League was “that of a sane democracy, passionately attached to the civilisation, the institutions, and the ideals of British citizenship.” In a later address, he argued that it was the Empire’s “duty to fight on until victory was assured.”

The End of War – Rehabilitating and Remembering

World War One proved a major cause for the League, and its war work was a source of great pride. In moving the adoption of the 1918 Annual Report of the Canterbury League, Booth stated that “the activities of the Victoria League...had made it widely known as a loyalist society which was helping the nation win the war.”

---

28 Press, 16 March 1918, p.2
29 Parsons, p.87
30 Parsons, pp.81-88
31 Press, 26 February 1915, p.9
32 See Parsons, pp.89-108
33 Press, 15 March 1918, p.2
34 Press, 16 March 1918, p.2
35 Press, 16 March 1918, p.2
the war effort was so important was reflected in the establishment of three new branches, at Oamaru, Manurewa and Hamilton, during the period 1914 to 1918. These branches only lasted as long as the duration of the war, however, becoming unsure of where to redirect their attention once the busy war years were over.\textsuperscript{36} Though Canterbury was one of the older branches at the outbreak of war, even the more established branches "had not anticipated a situation where they would be called upon to stretch their resources to the limit."\textsuperscript{37} It seems, however, that the war actually gave the Canterbury League a boost, because, unlike those branches which folded at the end of the war, Canterbury found plenty to do with itself in the interwar period, this being a period of high membership and great activity.

One of the most pressing jobs for the League in the period immediately following World War One was rehabilitation and commemoration. The League was involved with the work of both rehabilitating returned servicemen and remembering those who had not returned. As an imperial organisation, memorialisation of those who had fallen while defending empire was seen as extremely important by the League as a means of "inculcating the spirit of patriotism among our young people"\textsuperscript{38} and the League’s memorialisation work had begun early in New Zealand. In 1910, the same year the branch was established, Auckland had set up a committee to search out and tend the graves of New Zealand War veterans.\textsuperscript{39} While the Christchurch branch was not practically involved in tending graves after World War One, because it seems that the Returned Servicemen’s Association (RSA) was overseeing this work and there was a constant fear of overlapping with other societies, it was happy to donate £10 in 1930 to enable the upkeep of soldiers’ graves at Bromley to continue.\textsuperscript{40}

The post-World War One years however, provided other opportunities for the League in Canterbury to become involved in the process of memorialisation. The

\textsuperscript{36} Bertram Stokes, \textit{A History of the Victoria League for Commonwealth Friendship in New Zealand} (Auckland, 2000) p.8
\textsuperscript{37} Stokes, p.7
\textsuperscript{38} Chris Maclean and Jock Phillips, \textit{The Sorrow and the Pride: New Zealand War Memorials} (Wellington, 1990) pp.31-32
\textsuperscript{39} Maclean and Phillips, p.31
\textsuperscript{40} 18 September 1930, minutes, series A:3, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
League was involved, for example, in fundraising for the establishment of both the Bridge of Remembrance, at the corner of Cashel Street and Oxford Terrace, and the Nurses’ Memorial Chapel, at Christchurch Public Hospital. In 1922, the League assisted with the selling of roses on Rose Day in aid of the new bridge, which was to be built to commemorate the fallen men of World War One⁴¹ and, in 1927, collected for the Nurses’ Memorial Chapel at Christchurch Hospital ⁴² to be built in memory of three sisters from the hospital who had died in the sinking of the ‘Marquette’ in 1915.⁴³ Chris Maclean and Jock Phillips note that it was “especially striking” how frequently canvassers at this time were women, and that many ways of raising money, such as rose selling in fact depended on their voluntary labour.⁴⁴ Nuala Johnson points out that recent research has highlighted the role of women in the organisation of commemorative activity, particularly with reference to war dead: “As mothers, wives and sisters women have been an active, if underrepresented grass-roots lobby for the repatriation of killed men.”⁴⁵

The League was thus involved with the establishment of war monuments, yet, as with the IODE in Canada, which showed “insight, initiative and innovation,”⁴⁶ the League also moved beyond stone memorials to more practical ones. At the end of the First World War, the League in Canterbury attempted to establish a memorial in the form of a scholarship, reflecting the group’s interest in youth as empire builders of the future. The League proposed using money left over from war funds to establish a scholarship at Canterbury for the sons of soldiers and sailors who had served at the front in the Great War [emphasis added].⁴⁷ While the college approved of the idea, the War Office, perhaps attempting to ensure such matters were left in male hands,

---

⁴¹ 19 October 1922, minutes, series A:1, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
⁴² 10 February 1927, 28 April 1927, minutes, series A:2, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
⁴³ See Coney, Standing in the Sunshine, pp.304-5. Another Commonwealth nurse killed during World war One and subsequently memorialised was the British Edith Cavell, see Pickles, ‘Edith Cavell – Heroine: No Hatred or Bitterness for Anyone? History Now, 3:2 (October 1997)
⁴⁴ Maclean and Phillips, p.92
⁴⁶ Katie Pickles, Female Imperialism and National Identity: the Imperial Order Daughters of the Empire (IODE) (Manchester, 2002) p.108
⁴⁷ 18 February 1919, 8 September 1921, minutes, series A:1, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
refused to sanction it and advised the League to hand the money over to either the Patriotic Society or the National War Funds Council in Wellington. The League, however, was keen to remain directly involved in the disposal of the funds and thus approached Rannerdale, a veterans’ home in Christchurch, to inquire if there was anything which the League could supply. The matron asked for the erection of a large veranda for a new annex and a billiard table, and the League agreed to offer the money to the Patriotic Society on the condition it was used for this purpose, and that the Society placed engraved plates on both the veranda and the table, saying who had made the donation.  

It has been argued that World War One accentuated trends of nationalism and imperialism in New Zealand, the growth of one not necessarily meaning the demise of the other. One way in which the League supported a New Zealand nationalism within an empire schema in the post-war period was through its involvement in the Anzac tradition. The League was involved from practically the moment of the tradition’s inception, which, “from the outset...was also linked to recruiting and fund-raising for the war.” As early as 1917, Dean Carrington and Mrs Walter Bean represented the League at Anzac Day celebrations in Christchurch. The laying of wreaths on Anzac Day was another important part of the Canterbury League’s memorialisation work during the 1920s and 1930s. Each year, to commemorate New Zealanders who had fallen in the First World War, a wreath was placed at Christchurch’s Anglican cathedral in Cathedral Square, or sent to the RSA. From 1929, the Anzac wreath laying tradition continued on a national basis, it being decided at the sixth annual conference in Wanganui that year that the League would henceforth send a wreath annually from New Zealand to the Cenotaph in London for Anzac Day.

48 8 December 1921, minutes, series A:1, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
50 Alistair Thomson, Anzac Memories: Living with the Legend (Melbourne, 1994) p.129
51 Parsons, p.26
The League was not the only organisation to send wreaths to England and, as Maclean and Phillips argue, during the 1920s, wreaths "illustrated the close ties between New Zealand and England." The issues which arose over the sending of the League’s New Zealand-wide wreath to England thus highlight aspects of the relationships between the Canterbury League, other branches of the League in New Zealand, and League headquarters in London. In 1929 the League’s Dominion conference had decided to send a wreath on ice, thus allowing it to be made in New Zealand. London headquarters, while happy with the idea of a New Zealand-wide wreath for Anzac Day, was concerned that the wreath would not travel well on ice, and therefore not look as good as it should. In July 1930, the secretary of the League in London sent a letter to this effect to the Wanganui branch of the League in New Zealand, stating that:

We will of course be delighted to cooperate with you in the arrangements for placing a wreath of remembrance at the Cenotaph in London on Anzac Day on behalf of the League in New Zealand. My Committee, however, expressed some regret on hearing that your plan is to send a wreath home on ice....It must, of course, be just as you wish, but the Committee thought that you might possibly consider having a wreath made in London, as far as possible of New Zealand emblems. Clearly, New Zealand Leagues were concerned that the wreath be visibly ‘New Zealand,’ hence the mention of using New Zealand emblems.

Canterbury must have been supporting London’s wishes because New Plymouth, which was responsible for the wreath in 1930 and 1931, wrote to the branch stating that at the Dominion conference it had been arranged that all branches would contribute to the wreath for two years, and it would be left to the next conference to decide on future arrangements. Canterbury decided to send 6/- for that year but, in obvious deference to the wishes of the London branch, wrote to New Plymouth stating its preference that in future the Anzac wreath from the Leagues of New Zealand be arranged for through head office in London. It did, however, stress

---

52 Maclean and Phillips, p.163
53 Gertrude Drayton, Victoria League, London to Mrs Norman Bain, Victoria League, Wanganui, 23 January 1930, correspondence, series B:2, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
the fact that the wreath should be a representation of New Zealand, stating that as far as possible it should be made of New Zealand flora.\textsuperscript{54} Perhaps the other branches were stronger willed than Canterbury, for the Canterbury branch received notification from Auckland in 1932 that the Wanganui branch was to be responsible for the wreath for the next two years, and wished it sent on ice as before.\textsuperscript{55} Finally, however, later that year, Wellington joined with Canterbury in suggesting that the wreath be made in London in future. This was agreed to by the Canterbury branch, which suggested that a small New Zealand flag be attached.\textsuperscript{56}

The League in Canterbury was concerned not only with soldiers who had died in the war, but also with those who had returned to New Zealand and needed to be rehabilitated, and this was reflected in the League's long and close association with the RSA. From as early as 1922, the League was involved in selling poppies for Anzac Day, this being one of the few occasions when the League agreed to be involved in street collections on an organised basis. Each year the League (wo)manned a stall outside Ballantyne's, on the corner of Colombo and Cashel streets. The League in Canterbury also supported the RSA by donating £5 each year between 1924 and 1934 to the RSA Christmas tree for the children of dead or injured soldiers,\textsuperscript{57} and in 1935 made a special donation of £100 to its Returned Soldiers' Benevolent Sick Fund.\textsuperscript{58} In 1924 it even donated £10 to provide "smokes" for returned soldiers.\textsuperscript{59} The League's support of the RSA was rewarded with the League granted free use of Jellicoe Hall between 1922 and 1928.\textsuperscript{60}

**Continuity with the Past**

Katie Pickles argues that recent work on war and memory emphasises the conservative effects of war. In Canada, for example, Victoria Day celebrations in the

\textsuperscript{54} 23 July 1931, minutes, series A:3, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
\textsuperscript{55} 3 March 1932, minutes, series A:3, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
\textsuperscript{56} 20 October 1932, minutes, series A:3, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
\textsuperscript{57} See for example Statements of Receipts and Expenditure, 10 February 1925, 3 March 1926, 28 April 1927, in minutes, series A:1, A:2, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
\textsuperscript{58} 9 April 1935, minutes, series A:4, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
\textsuperscript{59} 8 October 1924, minutes, series A:1, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
\textsuperscript{60} 19 October 1922, minutes, series A:1, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
interwar period were an expression of “continuity with past traditions,” and were “grounded in connections to Britain such as the British monarchy, and also stressed service in order to preserve freedom and democracy.”

Likewise, the League’s commemoration of Empire Day, the birthday of Queen Victoria celebrated on 24 May each year, must be viewed in light of the conservatising effects of World War One. According to J. O. Springhall the celebration of Empire Day during the post-World War One period, a period often depicted as anti-imperialism, was surprisingly resilient. Perhaps it was due to the efforts of groups like the League that Empire Day continued to be observed for as long as it did. On Empire Day during the 1920s and 1930s, the League in Canterbury placed a wreath on the Queen Victoria statue in Victoria Square, Christchurch. During the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s, the branch also contributed to a wreath from League branches empire-wide, which was placed on the statue of Queen Victoria at Buckingham Palace.

Pickles argues further that in the invention of these post-war traditions “educating the young took on great importance.” In a continuation of its attempts to instil a sense of imperialism in children, the Canterbury branch of the League thus attempted to ensure that Empire Day was suitably celebrated in schools. In 1925, it was mentioned that on one occasion, during the First World War, the League had been given access to schools on Empire Day, but that the privilege had been withdrawn on the ground that if it was allowed to the League it would have to be allowed to others. The matter arose again in 1933, when the League received

64 The statue was, coincidentally, unveiled by Acting Mayor A. E. G. Rhodes in 1901. See Mark Stocker, ‘Queen Victoria Memorials in New Zealand,’ Bulletin of New Zealand Art History 22 (2001) p.14
65 The change from celebrating Empire Day to Commonwealth and (briefly) Waitangi Day will be discussed in Chapter Five
66 Pickles, ‘The Old and New on Parade’
67 Undated loose Otago Daily Times clipping, 26 November 1925, minutes, series A:1, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
notification from the government that it would again be allowed access to schools on Empire Day to speak to the children, though the letter arrived too late for the League to organise anything for that year and arrangements were postponed until the following year.67 Thus in 1934, the League made inquiries into how schools were celebrating Empire Day. The Headmaster of West Christchurch School replied that some schools still assembled and saluted the flag, with the master saying a few words about Empire Day. He also mentioned that the June School Journal was now a special one dealing with Empire Day and the King’s Birthday. Clearly, the League found this arrangement to be satisfactory and decided nothing further be done with regards to its own involvement in this area.68

Conclusion

When war was declared in 1914 most New Zealanders were in full support, and the League was no exception. Though there were a few women’s organisations which were opposed to war, the League was not one of them. Espousing the same discourses as most of Christchurch’s elite, the Canterbury League’s members were some of the most vehement supporters of war. During World War One, the League emphasised the important part that women played in the war effort, and, as with work done throughout the League’s history, war work fitted with perceptions of suitable women’s work, being performed mostly in the domestic arena and fulfilling the criteria of care and nurture.

The League’s ‘war work’ did not stop immediately after the war. Indeed, the group became actively involved in the work of rehabilitating and remembering. Members acted in so-called feminine ways in both their caring for returned soldiers and in their commemoration of the fallen. Perhaps because of the huge effort New Zealand had put into defending empire during the war, some of the League’s New Zealand branches felt entitled to stand up to London headquarters about the sending of wreaths on Anzac Day. Canterbury, however, was the first to defer, something that it

---

67 13 June 1933, minutes, series A:4, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
68 3 May 1934, minutes, series A:4, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
was to repeat in later years. In the post-war years, which reflected continuity with the past, the League also attempted to instil patriotism in future citizens by means of its proposed scholarship and Empire Day efforts in schools. The League's continued attempts to instil patriotism in the nation's citizens during the 1920s and 1930s are the focus of the next chapter.
Chapter Three

The Interwar Years: Citizenship and Welfare

Introduction

The Canterbury branch of the Victoria League was very active in the years between World Wars One and Two. Although the League did not have its highest membership numbers at this time, the 1920s were nonetheless a peak for the League, and the interwar years represented "a great age of imperialism." During these years the League worked extensively in its traditional preserve – hospitality, which provided an opportunity for the League to showcase its own region as well as the nation. Hospitality work also caused problems, however, particularly in terms of relations with London headquarters.

During the 1920s and 1930s, the League also began working with immigrants as well as consolidating earlier work in education and charity, reflecting an attempt to have a direct effect on the nation's citizens. The League's work in these areas raises a number of themes, most notably with regards to ideas about eugenics and racial superiority. The group's educational work was performed with the intention of inculcating both children and adults with a sense of imperialism and empire unity. Charity work was also prominent amongst the League's interwar activities, although the League was choosy about which types of charity it deemed suitable. The chapter ends with a discussion of the League's involvement in the 1940 centenary arguing that, for the League, it was a way of expressing both national and imperial identities.

Hospitality

Hospitality work began in the League's earliest days, and was turned to the war effort from 1914 to 1918. The 1920s and 1930s provided an opportunity for the League in Canterbury to develop further its hospitality work in peacetime. An important part of hospitality work was the issuing of letters of introductions to other League branches to

---

travellers visiting other empire, later Commonwealth, countries, but mostly to those going ‘Home’ to England. League members and other prominent people who had been entertained or hosted by the League in London often spoke of the ‘wonderful’ hospitality they had received, and the London branch wrote to say how pleased it was to receive so many letters of introduction. As well as issuing letters of introduction to those headed overseas, the League in Canterbury likewise entertained members from overseas branches by taking them on drives, or to morning or afternoon teas. For senior League members and other important visitors the League often arranged receptions.

The League was particularly keen on giving garden parties, which, during the first half of the century, were held regularly for important guests. Garden parties were especially prevalent during Catherine Deans’s reign in the 1920s and 1930s. Deans was president from 1922 to 1929, and again from 1933 to 1935, as well as being a keenly involved member in-between. Unlike some members who belonged to multiple organisations, the League was Deans’s main interest, and she was keenly involved in the group’s hospitality work. The house and grounds of her home at Riccarton Bush were frequently for the League’s garden parties, and Deans was known as a “dignified and accomplished hostess.” As Katherine Raine has argued, the garden was “an essential part of the face the property presented to passers-by. A fine garden was as asset to the community.” In fact, the garden at Riccarton Bush had a long history of entertaining important guests; the Duke of Edinburgh had visited it in 1869.

Reciprocation of the hospitality given in Britain was seen as an important reason for providing the best possible hospitality in New Zealand. A League speaker, addressing a League conference in 1926, spoke of “the care taken in connection with visitors from overseas, particularly visitors from New Zealand to the Motherland.”

---

2 The issuing of letters was done mainly in the first half of the century, continuing on a much smaller scale into the second half; reasons for this will be discussed in Chapter Five.
The New Zealand branches of the League, he said, “were endeavouring to reciprocate in some way.” It was also important to the League that its hospitality work was appreciated, and that a good image of New Zealand was projected. In November 1927, the Right Honourable LCMS Leo Amery, Secretary of State for the Dominions and president of the Overseas Settlement Committee, who was touring New Zealand with reference to migration matters, and his wife visited Christchurch and were entertained at a garden party at Riccarton House that boasted 300 guests. In a Press article that reported on the entertainment of the Amerys by the League, Mrs Amery was reported as saying that in New Zealand she “had met only the most cordial welcome from charming people, and had been impressed by the beauty of the scenery.” Before her visit she had “held in her heart a great love for the Dominion of which she had read, and for the New Zealanders she had met in England. Her visit had confirmed the mental picture she had had.” The League would have no doubt been suitably impressed with this high praise of both the people and geography of New Zealand.

The perceived ‘Britishness’ of New Zealand was also of particular importance to the League. Thus comments such as Mr Amery’s that “What Britain was in the past – New Zealand is today, and what Britain is today New Zealand may become tomorrow,” would have been well received. As well as wanting New Zealand to be seen in the best possible light, the Canterbury League’s pride extended to regionalism. As Geoffrey Rice points out, Cantabrians of the elite thought that they were “different, more cultivated, more philanthropic and more reliable” than other New Zealanders, and it was said that there was no province in New Zealand more ‘English’

---

5 Undated loose newspaper clipping, 3 March 1926, minutes, series A:2, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
7 Press, 1 December 1927, p.2
8 Undated loose Press clipping, 30 November 1927, minutes, series A:2, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
9 Press, 1 December 1927, p.2
than Canterbury.\footnote{Geoffrey Rice, *Heaton Rhodes of Otahuna: the Illustrated Biography* (Christchurch, 2001) p.336-7; see also John Cookson, 'Pilgrims' Progress – Image, Identity and Myth in Canterbury,' in John Cookson and Graeme Dunstall (eds), *Southern Capital: Christchurch – Towards a City Biography, 1850-2000* (Christchurch, 2000) p.14,16} Phillipa Wilson argues that, in the antipodean context, "regionalism and Englishness were not mutually exclusive" but could exist "side by side."\footnote{Wilson, Phillipa, *We are Still English at Heart: Constructions of Englishness by Englishwomen in Nineteenth Century New Zealand* (MA Thesis, University of Auckland, 1997) p.10} Mr Amery endorsed the belief that Christchurch was more English than other parts of the Empire when he commented that Christchurch "claimed, and justly, to be the most English spot outside the British Isles."\footnote{Undated loose *Press* clipping, 30 November 1927, minutes, series A:2, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL} The Canterbury League was also proud of its region’s pioneering spirit. When Lady Cecil visited in 1926, she paid a "high tribute to the courage, wisdom and foresight of the pioneers of Canterbury, whose heroic work had borne an almost incredibly rich harvest in the short space of 70 years."\footnote{Undated loose *Press* clipping, 28 September 1926, minutes, series A:2, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL}

Hospitality work was not all plain sailing, however, and at times caused problems for the League. In the 1930s, for example, a controversy arose over exactly who was eligible for letters of introduction. While giving plentiful letters was seen as desirable, there was also a perceived need to be discerning. It was suspected that members who were intending to go abroad in the near future may be joining the League purely to obtain a letter of introduction. Thus, the president, Mary Tripp, was prompted to say in 1936 that it was necessary that those receiving letters of introduction should be personally known by some member of the League before being issued with one.\footnote{11 February 1936, minutes, series A:1, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL} As Eliza Riedi points out for England, discrimination in hospitality work was seen as "essential."\footnote{Eliza Riedi, 'Women, Gender and the Promotion of Empire: the Victoria League, 1901-1914,' *The Historical Journal* 45:3 (2002) p.583} The League was also concerned that the hospitality given by League headquarters not be abused. In 1930 an issue arose surrounding the payment of ‘travelling fees,’ which highlighted the League’s desire to keep its hospitality of a
personalised and nature. New Zealand visitors to London had been paying a one guinea ‘donation’ to the London headquarters before travelling to help defray their entertainment costs. In January of 1930, however, the League in London wrote to the New Zealand Leagues to say that:

they have never liked the system of this specific charge to members receiving introductions, and their experience of it has only confirmed their opinion that it leads to difficulties and misunderstandings [and would be] glad if discussions with regard to it lead the Victoria Leagues in New Zealand to give up the system, greatly as they appreciate the desire to help our funds which originally led to its adoption.  

Tripp, who had recently been in London, supported this view. She reported soon after receipt of the letter that she was:

sorry to say that some people going Home to London, think because they have paid a guinea donation, which is forwarded to Central Office, it entitles them to confuse Victoria League hospitality with a glorified ‘travel agency,’ and that they can demand tickets for any function they might wish to attend....The ideals they serve would be destroyed if the work was not kept personal and individual.

She reported further that the League’s ‘Home Office’ in London would in future prefer a donation from the branch rather than from individuals. The Canterbury League thus decided, “in deference to the wishes of the Central Committee” [emphasis added] to drop the fee, and sent a copy of the resolution to the other New Zealand branches. As late as 1938, the League in London wrote to say that “such people exploiting introductions may be suitably welcomed without allowing them to exploit unduly the kindness and hospitality the League represents.”

Immigration

Although hospitality was of great importance to the League, it was not the group’s only area of interest, especially during the interwar years. During these years the League in Canterbury was also keenly interested in matters which affected citizenship

---

16 Gertrude Drayton, Victoria League London to Mrs Norman Bain, Victoria League, Wanganui, 23 January 1930, correspondence, series B:2, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
17 Annual Report and New Settler Report in 14 March 1930, minutes, series A:2, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
18 10 April 1930, minutes, series A:2, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL; conferences, 1929, series D:2, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
19 12 April 1938, minutes, series A:6, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
and welfare. The first of these was immigration, which Julia Bush claims was “one of the success stories of female imperialism” in Edwardian Britain.\textsuperscript{20} In Edwardian Britain, though the League had “wider emigrationist ambitions” it acted “strictly as an auxiliary” to the established societies that catered specifically for women’s emigration,\textsuperscript{21} the most important of which was the Society for the Overseas Settlement of British Women (SOSBW). In New Zealand the League was one of several women’s organisations which assisted the New Zealand government with young female immigrants.

Although New Zealand had a long history of assisting Britons, including young single females intending to work as domestics,\textsuperscript{22} the League’s involvement in organised female emigration to the colonies did not begin until the 1920s, at which time the British and New Zealand governments co-operated in the operation of a scheme which offered free passages to New Zealand to British women domestics between the ages of 18 and 40.\textsuperscript{23} In 1920, the Young Women’s Christian Association (YWCA) had approached the New Zealand government, and entered into an official contract by which it received a subsidy from the government for welcoming and helping to settle women immigrants.\textsuperscript{24} While the League, as a smaller society, did not have any such official agreement with the government, it did, however, develop a close working relationship with the SOSBW, thanks to the fact that League members in Britain were also involved with the society. A number of Leagues throughout New Zealand established New Settlers Committees, which, according to the League, “became recognised in the community and even at government level.”\textsuperscript{25} As Pickles

\textsuperscript{20} Julia Bush, \textit{Edwardian Ladies and Imperial Power} (Leicester, 2000) p.146
\textsuperscript{23} Pickles, ‘Empire Settlement and Single British Women as New Zealand Domestic Servants During the 1920s,’ \textit{New Zealand Journal of History} (NZJH) 35:1 (2001) p.22
\textsuperscript{24} Pickles, ‘Empire Settlement and Single British Women as New Zealand Domestic Servants During the 1920s,’ p.32
\textsuperscript{25} Bertram Stokes, \textit{A History of the Victoria League for Commonwealth Friendship in New Zealand} (Auckland, 2000) p.11
has argued, despite increasing government recognition of the importance of the female immigration, “it was still believed that women were best placed to care for female migrants,” and thus “women’s voluntary organisations continued their maternal work.”  

The role of the League in Canterbury was to meet immigrants upon arrival, find suitable accommodation for them, and “generally look after them in a friendly way.” The League thus applied its prowess in hospitality to its work in immigration. The League was also, however, aware of its limitations as a small society. In 1923, the League received a letter from the SOSBW, requesting League assistance in the nomination, placing and looking after of a number of ex-service women. It was decided, however, not to take on too much responsibility and not to advise large numbers of girls to come. The League was also keen to work with other organisations in order to avoid any unnecessary overlap. A Mr Thompson spoke at the fourth conference of the League of the need to cooperate to avoid overlapping and wasting energy. Overlapping was seen in social and even religious work, he said, labelling it “a curious form of selfishness.” He went so far as to accuse “certain religious denominations” of criticising the government because it had given the chief part of the work to the Salvation Army, Young Men’s and Young Women’s Christian Associations.

In New Zealand, two key discourses surrounded women’s immigration in the 1920s. The first was what Joanna Malcolm-Black calls the “pseudo-demographic myth” of overpopulation in Britain. With reference to female immigration, the discourse applied specifically to the idea that Britain had a ‘surplus’ of women,

---

26 Pickles, 'Pink Cheeked and Surplus: Single British Women’s Inter-War Migration to New Zealand,' in Lyndon Fraser and Katie Pickles (eds), Shifting Centres: Women and Migration in New Zealand History (Dunedin, 2002) p.68
27 Press, 25 February 1925, p.5
28 Undated loose newspaper clipping, 3 March 1926, minutes, series A:2, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
29 Joanna Malcolm-Black, Suitable for New Zealand: the Impact of Interwar Immigration on an Emergent Nationalism (MA Thesis, University of Canterbury, 1997) p.59; in fact this myth had been in existence since the very early days of assisted immigration in New Zealand, see for example Macdonald, p.1
matched with the idea that there was a shortage of women in New Zealand in proportion to men. Women's migration from Britain to New Zealand would therefore help Britain by relieving it of its female surplus.\textsuperscript{30} Emigration was also seen as a way of helping Britain with the problem of having a rising population but no corresponding increase in production and employment.\textsuperscript{31} The Mayor of Wellington, speaker at the opening of the third League conference in 1923, drew on this discourse when he stated that he hoped the League would help in lessening the employment difficulties in Britain.\textsuperscript{32} Lady Cecil, visiting from the London branch echoed this idea, with the added emphasis of helping not just Britain, but the whole British Empire, when she stated "New Zealand could help the Empire in no better way than in encouraging migration, and absorbing the surplus women in Britain."\textsuperscript{33}

The second discourse surrounding women's immigration in New Zealand was an "alarmist 'servant shortage,'" which it was thought would lead to the overworking and denigration of the health of New Zealand mothers. Indeed, "the absence of domestic assistance in the homes of New Zealand" was seen as "a matter of national importance" by many New Zealanders.\textsuperscript{34} Thus, women's migration from Britain to New Zealand would not only help Britain, but New Zealand as well.\textsuperscript{35} Thompson, addressing the 1926 conference, spoke of the need for immigration to help our mothers, who he partly blamed for exacerbating the situation. "It was perhaps selfish," he mused, "but not to be wondered at that many young women shirked from the family tie altogether on account of its hardships." He pointed out that there had been

\textsuperscript{30} Pickles, 'Empire Settlement and Single British Women as New Zealand Domestic Servants in the 1920s,' p.26
\textsuperscript{31} Undated loose newspaper clipping, 3 March 1926, minutes, series A:2, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
\textsuperscript{32} 21 November 1923, Lyttleton Times, p.3
\textsuperscript{33} Constantine, p.129
\textsuperscript{34} Pickles, 'Empire Settlement and Single British Women as New Zealand Domestic Servants in the 1920s,' p.26; this discourse too had been in existence in the early days of assisted immigration to New Zealand; see Macdonald, p.192
\textsuperscript{35} Pickles, 'Empire Settlement and Single British Women as New Zealand Domestic Servants in the 1920s,' p.26
much more mutual help in the past than today, and life had not been taken at such a strenuous pace.36

This "alarmist servant shortage discourse" was tied to the broader discourse of eugenics,37 which was extremely prevalent both in New Zealand and worldwide in the first few decades of the twentieth century.38 Eugenicists were concerned with declining populations in terms of numbers, and in particular 'quality.' New Zealanders were concerned about the country's declining population and in a 1930 report the Canterbury branch's New Settlers Committee stated that "We must have more vision or we will perish...at our present rate of development, without immigration, in 200 years we would be extinct."39 Reproduction was thus a major goal of those who supported immigration and marriage was often seen as the ideal end. In 1931, Miss McOwen of the Canterbury League reported on the forthcoming marriage of a female immigrant to a farmer, approving it as "a very suitable match."40

In the eugenicists' eyes, it was important that immigration was encouraged, but not just any immigration. Eugenicists sought to control who reproduced, and thus wanted only the best 'stock' and the most racially 'pure' as immigrants to New Zealand. British immigrants were seen as ideal for the creation of "a vaster and more successful British Empire,"41 but other Europeans would be taken at a pinch. Mary Tripp, as late as 1938, emphasised this point when she stated that "First and foremost we should endeavour to secure British stock, but our contribution to the peace of the world might be that we should take a percentage of carefully selected Austrians or good thrifty Germans – we are not so virile as our forebears and need fresh stock."42

36 Undated loose newspaper clipping, 3 March 1926, minutes, series A:2, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
37 For an excellent discussion of female immigration, eugenics and women's groups in New Zealand in the interwar period see Angela Wanhallo, Gender, Race and Colonial Identity: Women and Eugenics in New Zealand, 1918-1939 (MA Thesis, University of Canterbury, 2001) pp.36-45
38 See for example, Sandra Coney, Standing in the Sunshine (Auckland, 1993) p.70
39 New Settlers Committee report, 14 March 1930, annual reports, series C:16, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
40 19 November 1931, minutes, series A:3, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
41 Pickles, 'Pink Cheeked and Surplus,' p.66
42 Report on 8th Victoria League Conference in 6 March 1939, minutes, series A:6, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
Thus, the League advocated acceptance of non-British immigrations for such high purposes as world peace, but only if they too fitted certain criteria.

Being British was not the only criteria that female immigrants were supposed to fulfil. Since colonial times, “the masters of Empire [had] wanted to ensure that only ‘the right sort of woman should be encouraged to settle…’,” and this was an idea that continued into the twentieth century. Single women in particular were the subject of scrutiny. Only women of good character were encouraged to go overseas, with an emphasis on a neat and tidy appearance, and good physical health. In 1926, Mary Tripp, then head of the Canterbury New Settlers Committee, specified exactly the sort of women the League wished to help migrate – they were those between the ages of 18 and 35, had received secondary school education, and “had sufficient courage, adaptability, and spirit of adventure to try their fortunes in this new land.” The League thus placed particular emphasis on the qualities of youth and hardiness, which were seen as necessary in the white-settler colonies.

While the New Zealand government was “pragmatic” about the servant shortage, requiring female immigrants to be experienced domestics, the “middle-class women’s organisations shared with the SOSBW a faith in a broader imperial agenda. Women’s organisations saw empire settlement as an opportunity for the migration of middle-class women.” The League itself was in a conflicting position. While it emphasised the fact that only domestic workers were needed as immigrants to New Zealand, it also wanted to encourage the immigration of ‘good quality’ women, thus requiring domestic worker immigrants to be well educated. As upper-class women, League members drew on their own connections to place domestic servants. In 1929, Tripp asked that if any committee member was in want of domestic help they should

---

42 Macdonald, p.16, 189
43 Dominic David Alessio, ‘Domesticating “the Heart of the Wild”: Female Personifications of the Colonies, 1886-1940,’ Women’s History Review, 6:2 (1997) p.259
44 Undated loose Press clipping, 28 September 1926, minutes, series A:2, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
45 Pickles, ‘Empire Settlement and Single British Women as New Zealand Domestic Servants during the 1920s,’ p.29
46 17 August 1922, minutes, series A:1, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
47 14 June 1923, minutes, series A:1, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
"cooperate at once" with either herself or Miss McOwen, and should ask their friends to do likewise.⁴⁹

Immigrants wanted were thus those who were courageous, adaptable, and had a 'spirit of adventure,' qualities which were seen as necessary for fitting into the New Zealand way of life. The League also spoke of the particular qualities that New Zealand had to offer immigrants, something that also occurred in other Dominions.⁵⁰ New Zealand was 'sold' on both its unique qualities and its likeness to England. A New Settlers Report in 1928 stressed the supposedly healthy conditions and climate of New Zealand as a unique selling point. "There have been no cases of sickness," it claimed. "In fact, they all, without exception, have improved in health since arriving in New Zealand, and one and all are enthusiastic about the climate and conditions generally."⁵¹ New Zealand was also sold on the fact that it was the most like Britain of all the colonies. "New Zealand [was] the most homelike of all the parts of the Empire," stated a speaker at the League conference of 1926.⁵²

The collapse of the economy in 1927 was a major reason for assisted immigration being "to all intents and purposes [left] in abeyance."⁵³ In 1931, Canterbury's New Settlers Committee informed the League that due to the prevailing depression it would not be bringing out any further migrants to the dominion.⁵⁴ The election of a Labour government in 1935 which had never favoured state-assisted migration further contributed to the small number of assisted immigrants in this period.⁵⁵ After a decade of little immigration, in 1939 a disappointed League finally cancelled its open nominations policy.⁵⁶ This was not, however, the end of the League's attempts to encourage migration to New Zealand. The League was keen to

---

⁴⁹ 5 December 1929, minutes, series A:2, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
⁵⁰ Pickles, 'Pink Cheeked and Surplus,' p.66
⁵¹ New Settlers Committee report, 21 March 1928, annual reports, series C:16, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
⁵² Undated loose newspaper clipping, 3 March 1926, minutes, series A:2, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
⁵³ Hutching, Long Journey for Sevenpence, p.34
⁵⁴ 12 March 1931, minutes, series A:3, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
⁵⁵ Hutching, Long Journey for Sevenpence, p.34
⁵⁶ 6 March 1939, minutes, series A:6, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
re-establish women’s migration as soon as possible and in March of 1939 the Canterbury branch wrote to the government stating that:

As the question of suitable women being brought out to New Zealand is a matter of national importance for the relief of overworked mothers, we pray that the Government re-open assisted passages to carefully selected domestic workers through the ‘Overseas Settlement of British Women’ as permitted under the Empire Settlement Act of 1922.

Realising that housing for immigrants was of concern to the government, the League pointed out that “While fully realising the shortage of housing makes any settlement on a large scale impossible at present, we point out that accommodation for domestic help is available at any moment.”\textsuperscript{57} The League justified its stand by claiming that this was not a political issue, but an issue of national importance. “This is not a party matter,” declared Tripp in 1938, “it is a matter of National Welfare, and should be given urgency.”\textsuperscript{58}

The other group of settlers with which the League was involved at this time was public school boys who came out from England to work on New Zealand farms. As with female domestic servants, the immigration of these boys was seen as a way of increasing the healthy, young ‘stock’ of the country. Speaking of the care of public school boy immigrants at the 1926 conference, League speaker, Mr Tapley, said that he did not think “they could do too much in that direction because they wanted to encourage the right sort of immigrants.”\textsuperscript{59} Malcolm-Black also argues that “Juvenile migration was perceived as an investment in Empire which would bind the inhabitants of its furthest reaches, consolidating and maintaining links.”\textsuperscript{60}

Drawing on its expertise in the area of hospitality, the League was particularly interested in making sure the boys felt welcome. The Canterbury branch did this by getting in touch with boys who had settled on farms, mostly by means of letter, and was anxious when it received few replies. The League attributed this to the fact that

\textsuperscript{57} Victoria League, Canterbury to the Right Honourable M. J. Savage, Prime Minister, 7 March 1939, correspondence, series B:4, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL

\textsuperscript{58} Report on Migration from 8\textsuperscript{th} Victoria League Conference, in 13 December 1938, minutes, Victoria League collection, series A:6, MB367, MBL

\textsuperscript{59} Undated loose newspaper clipping, 3 March 1926, minutes, series A:2, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL

\textsuperscript{60} Malcolm-Black, p.107
many boys who had appreciated help on arrival had soon found new friends and discontinued writing. Members were keen that the boys continue to have a maternal influence in their lives, and, perhaps realising that they lacked things in common with the boys, determined to find out what their interests were so as not to lose touch. Clearly the young boys were not as keen to stay in touch with a group of middle-aged and elderly women as the League thought they should be.

The League throughout New Zealand was also involved with the English schoolboys' tours to New Zealand in 1929, 1933 and 1938, and had a fundamental role in the organisation of the aborted school girls' tour planned for 1930. Pickles notes that empire unity was an important theme behind such educational excursions for "considered to be vibrant youth." The health of the schoolchildren was a priority, with the planned itinerary for the schoolgirls' tour to New Zealand criticised for being too tiring and for not allowing enough time for leisure and intervals of rest. The tours were also an opportunity for the female imperialist organisations to show off their organisational prowess, and to promote positive images of their country. League branches considered the tour an opportunity to showcase not only New Zealand as a whole, but each of their regions. One problem pointed out with a planned itinerary was that it gave too long a time to Auckland and too short a stay in other centres.

The League in Canterbury contributed to the boys' tours by sending letters of welcome, providing transport and assisting in making arrangements for their billeting and entertainment, and was more actively involved in the planning of the proposed

---

61 Undated loose newspaper clipping, 14 March 1929, minutes, series A:2, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
62 22 August 1929, minutes, series A:2, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
63 Katie Pickles, 'Exhibiting Canada: Empire, Migration and the 1928 Schoolgirl Tour' Gender, Place, Culture, 7:1 (2000) p.85
64 Miss Rees, Victoria League, Poverty Bay to Miss McOwen, Victoria League, Canterbury, 28 May 1930, correspondence, series B:2, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
65 Pickles, 'Exhibiting Canada,' p.88, "the girls were to see and feel Canada at its best."
66 Miss Rees, Victoria League, Poverty Bay, to Miss McOwen, Victoria League, Canterbury, 28 May 1930, correspondence, series B:2, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
67 14 February 1929, 11 April 1933, 15 February 1938, minutes, series A:2, A:3, A:6, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
schoolgirls' tour from the beginning. A. L. Rees, president of the Poverty Bay branch, obviously found it quite a challenge, because at one stage she wrote to Canterbury saying "We have no liability and we must not shoulder any in an excess of zeal."

When the tour was postponed, rather than being disappointed, she wrote "Congratulations! We did not shrink from the burden, but we can rejoice that we need not bear it." Due to the Depression the tour was not rescheduled until 1934, at which time, though there is no indication of League involvement in planning, League branches in New Zealand and Australia hosted the girls.

**Imperial Education**

The imperial propaganda societies, as John MacKenzie terms them, were primarily addressed to the task of affecting public opinion, and education was an especially effective means of doing so. Bush argues that education lay "at the heart of female imperialism," with no clear line drawn between education as propaganda, and more systematised, sustained imperialist education. The viewpoint of the imperialist societies in general was that knowledge equalled power, and that right judgement and true patriotism were impossible without it. The League in Canterbury thus promoted imperial education in a variety of ways to both adults and children. At the third League conference, held in Wellington in 1923, the Governor-General, Viscount Jellicoe argued that the educational work of the League was to be encouraged because it "fostered the spirit of unity and fellowship, and it was of the greatest importance at present that the Empire should hold together." The importance of education to the Canterbury branch of the League is reflected in the fact that it sought members who were important educational figures. Two of the key figures in this area were

---

68 Miss Rees, Victoria League, Poverty Bay to Miss McOwen, Victoria League, Canterbury, 28 May 1930, correspondence, series B:2, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL.
69 A. L. Rees, Victoria League, Poverty Bay to Elizabeth Hogg, Victoria League Canterbury, 7 June 1930, correspondence, series B:2 Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL.
70 Pickles, *Female Imperialism and National Identity*, p.79; Pickles, 'Exhibiting Canada,' p.86.
Canterbury academics Alice Candy, appointed to the committee in 1939 specifically to keep in touch with students going abroad, and J. Macmillan Brown.

Though, it shall be seen, the most important of the League's educational work was aimed at children, the League also did a substantial amount of work with adults. A key part of the work of adult education was 'literature dissemination,' a part of the League's work that started in the very early years of its existence. The work was formalised by the formation of a Book Distribution Committee in 1924, which distributed books, papers and magazines, and continued through World War Two. While, in its first year of operation, about 200 magazines and papers and the same amount of books were sent out, within a few years up to 1000 items were sent out between bi-monthly committee meetings. Literature was often sent to new settlers in New Zealand, and to those who lived in isolated 'backblock' areas or lighthouses. It was also sent to such varied places as sawmills, public works camps, a leper colony at Malokai, and "the Women's Gaol," which was described in 1929 as a "new concern."

The League was able to exert some influence in its acquisition of reduced postal charges in 1924, at which time the Honourable J. G. Coates sent the League a letter making the concession. The question of the amount of influence exerted by such groups is an interesting one. Bush notes that female imperialists in Edwardian times, while rarely influencing government policy, were taken seriously by leading figures. It is unlikely that the female imperialists held much sway in New Zealand, where the hierarchy was nowhere near as firmly implanted as in Britain, and their influence would certainly have diminished as the century progressed. Nonetheless, as will be seen in later chapters, the League in Canterbury was a keen writer of letters to government.

---

75 8 June 1939, minutes, series A:7, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
76 12 June 1924, minutes, series A:1, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
77 Undated loose Press clipping, 21 March 1929, minutes, series A:2, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
78 10 April 1924, minutes, series A:1, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
Another aspect of imperial education was the organisation of lectures, in which imperialist societies in Britain were heavily involved. In 1928, the New Zealand branches of the League were associated with an Australasian travel poster exhibition that included a special display of empire posters. The Canterbury League received a request for assistance from the organiser, Winifred Guy, and since His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales, Lord Birmingham and others had "eulogised" her efforts in making the exhibition educative, the committee deemed her exhibition acceptable and decided to allow her advertisement to appear under League "auspices." The exhibition allowed viewers to cast their imperial gaze upon remote parts of the world. "All interested in travel," read the advertisement, "all desirous of glimpsing scenes of other lands – and who is not? – should profit by this opportunity and visit this veritable treasure house of sunny vistas and thrilling scenes of far-off lands."  

Very often, imperial education had a moral aspect to it. Belich argues for a 'great moral tightening' from the 1880s to at least the 1930s. This was especially so for women's groups, as moral purity was seen to be a particularly female characteristic, and the idea continued from colonial times that it was women's duty to 'clean up' society. Film censorship was one way in which the League in Canterbury could make sure that the morals of the nation were upheld, and women's involvement in this was seen as essential. In 1930, the League wrote to the Minister of Education, stating that it:

appealed to the Government to try to raise the status of Film Pictures which we feel can be a power for Good or evil [and wished] to stress

---

80 Winifred Guy to the Secretary, Victoria League, Canterbury, 14 October 1928, correspondence, December 1923, 26 November 1927-23 December 1929, series B:1, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
81 25 October 1928, minutes, series A:2, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
82 14 October 1928, minutes, series A:2, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
83 James Belich, Paradise Reforged: a History of the New Zealanders from the 1880s to the Year 2000 (Auckland, 2001) p.157
85 Both the YWCA and NCW were likewise concerned with censorship. See Coney, Every Girl, p.83; Dorothy Page, The National Council of Women: a Centennial History, (Auckland, 1996) p.74
the necessity for a more stringent censorship....Judging from the class of the films shown the Censor is unable to give sufficient time to examination of films, and [the League] ventures to suggest the appointment of an assistant – preferably a lady.\textsuperscript{86}

The letter was forwarded to the Minister of Internal Affairs, who replied to the League that "your committee's representations have been duly noted," and that "this matter will receive due consideration in the event of it being decided to make any changes."\textsuperscript{87}

As far as films were concerned, the League believed that ones of good moral fibre were British, and ones of a low moral standard American.\textsuperscript{88} This was a common concern as the influence of the United States of America emerged in New Zealand. There was a hostile reaction from many New Zealanders, who still considered themselves British, and felt strongly against the Americanisation of popular culture through music, radio and the movies.\textsuperscript{89} The League in Canterbury thus supported a resolution passed by the Royal Empire Society (RES), stating that "The Council of the Canterbury branch of the Royal Empire Society wishes to draw the attention of the Government to the low standard set by some of the recent American pictures released and requests that there be a decided tightening up of censorship and that the quota of British films of a more elevating type be gradually increased."\textsuperscript{90} This preference for British films extended to support for British- and empire-made goods in general, the League calling, for example, for support for Empire Shopping Week. The League felt that buying British-made goods was important because "New Zealand made goods found a ready made market in Britain, and we could reciprocate by assisting Britain's trade...and at the same time strengthen our own reputation as 'the most loyal outpost of the Empire.'"\textsuperscript{91}

\textsuperscript{86} Secretary, Victoria League, Canterbury to the Minister of Internal Affairs and the Minister of Education, 22 March 1930, correspondence, series B:2, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
\textsuperscript{87} Minister of Internal Affairs to the Secretary, Victoria League, Canterbury, 25 March 1930, correspondence, series B:2, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
\textsuperscript{88} As did the IODE in Canada, see Pickles, 'Coffee, Tea and Spinsters’ Sprees: Female Imperialism in Sherbrooke and the Eastern Townships,’ 21 (Autumn, 2002) p.86
\textsuperscript{89} Rice, 	extit{Heaton Rhodes of Otahuna}, p.336; see also Belich, pp.251-54
\textsuperscript{90} The Secretary, Royal Empire Society to the Secretary, Victoria League, Canterbury, 10 March 1930, correspondence, series B:2, Victoria League collection, MB 367, MBL.
\textsuperscript{91} 6 May 1926, minutes, series A:2, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL.
In its educational work the League was particularly interested in children, the future citizens of nation and empire. As mentioned in Chapter Two, New Zealand branches of the League joined with the Navy League in organising an annual essay competition from about World War One to the mid-1940s. While in Otago such competitions were held for Training College and University students, in Canterbury the League targeted younger primary and secondary school children. The fact that the League worked on the essay competitions together with a men’s imperialist organisation, rather than independently may be significant, because Bush notes that “the imperial education of school children was one of the most congested areas.” In this, as well as other, arenas, there was pressure of competition, and the women’s associations “had to choose between rivalry, cooperation and avoidance in relation to the male-led voluntary societies,” which were often larger, better resourced and more influential. The League thus maximised its influence by joining with the male led Navy League in the organisation of essay competitions, nonetheless playing an important part in the organisation of the competition, in which up to 2000 children regularly competed, by conferring with the Navy League on the selection of subjects, and purchasing and presenting prizes.

The comments of a judge involved with the essay competition in 1925 emphasise why the Victoria and Navy Leagues promoted the competition as a means of imperial education, and why they targeted youth. “I have no doubt,” he said, “that [the competition] helps in the growth of a spirit of loyalty and love of country and lofty ideals and of admiration for nobility and heroism, in boys and girls at a most receptive and impressionable age.” According to Reidi the essay topics chosen by the League in England for its competitions were “predictable” and the same applies

93 Bush, *Edwardian Ladies and Imperial Power*, p.137
94 Bush, *Edwardian Ladies and Imperial Power*, p.127
95 See for example 11 February 1926, 12 March 1931, 22 March 1934, Victoria League collection, series A:1, A:2, A:3, MB367, MBL
96 Annual Report, 1925, series C, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
97 Reidi, *Imperialist Women in Edwardian Britain*, p.82
to those chosen for the Victoria and Navy Leagues essay competition in Canterbury. The female imperialist organisations supported progress,98 and this was reflected in essay topics such as “What has science done for the benefit of humanity,”99 and “Discuss the chief inventions and scientific discoveries which have influenced civilisation in the last 50 years.”100 Favoured essay topics also included famous empire builders such as Ernest Shackleton, James Cook, Francis Drake and Cecil Rhodes, and questions on the British Navy and imperial defence. This “adulation of military heroes” was part of a more general pattern in New Zealand at the time. In the New Zealand Education Gazette in 1921, for example, T. B. Strong argued that “great stories, the singing of noble songs, and the crowning of heroes” was “Essential to the education of children in New Zealand as a way of “inculcating the values of Empire.”101 In the interwar period, there were also topics which recognised the growing popularity of the ideal of peace, such as “Peace hath its victories no less renowned than war,”102 and “The work and value of the British Navy, when the Empire is at peace,”103 though these were far outweighed by topics on the might of the British Empire. The League’s general pro-militarism, and its close relationship with the Navy League was also reflected in its advocacy of physical training for boys, and in 1930 the Canterbury branch donated £3-3-0 for the naval training of ‘lads.’104

The other key area of children’s education in which the League in Canterbury worked was junior correspondence. The first mention of junior correspondence appears to be a Press report in 1913,105 however a special committee for this purpose was not established until 1924,106 and it was during the interwar period that this work

98 Pickles, Female Imperialism and National Identity: the Imperial Order Daughters of the Empire(IODE) (Manchester, 2002) p.3; Eliza Riedi also notes that the Victoria League was not so “hidebound” in its reactions to new technology as the Royal Colonial Institute, ‘Women, Gender and the Promotion of Empire,’ p.590
99 13 March 1939, minutes, series A:6, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
100 Annual report, 1930, series C:16, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
101 T. B. Strong, ‘The Inculcation of Patriotism,’ The New Zealand Education Gazette, November 1921, p.3 qtd in Wanbella, p.107
102 Annual report 1932, series C:16, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
103 Annual report 1933, series C:16, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
104 10 July 1930, minutes, series A:3, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
105 Press, 26 April 1913, p.12
106 14 August 1924, minutes, series A:1, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
was properly established. The idea was to link schools in New Zealand with ones in the "mother country," and other parts of the Empire and was seen as an important means of empire unification. While in the first year or so after the committee was established, only 34 children were linked up, by the 1930s up to 400 links a year were being sent to and received from England, Australia, Canada and Scotland.

Charitable Endeavour

The League’s final area of 'citizenship and welfare' work was that done for charities. While, as has been shown, the League declared itself not to be a charitable organisation, it was involved intermittently in different areas of charity work throughout the century. Margaret Tennant points to the "growing disfavour with which indiscriminate charity was viewed" in New Zealand in general in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; thus the League’s main concern was that any charity work it did should be in some way related to empire causes. The League was also concerned with the fact that charity could be seen as patronising. A newspaper report on the League’s fourth Dominion conference, held in Dunedin in 1925, summarised a speech made by Mr Thompson, stating that:

if there has been a shade of feeling that [the League's] atmosphere is touched by a breath of exclusiveness, an aroma of aloofness, an extension of its activities on the lines suggested by Mr Thompson may serve to remove an impression which may be wholly erroneous, but care was needed because in administering helpfulness of this kind the essential condition is to avoid the slightest trace of condescension or 'charity' – to use a word in its unhappily degraded significance.

One example of suitably empire-oriented charity work was that done to assist the RSA. The League was involved, as mentioned in Chapter Two, in collecting for the RSA on Poppy Day since the day was first established and it also collected for

---

107 10 April 1924, minutes, series A:1, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
108 Undated loose Press clipping, 4 March 1926, minutes, series A:2, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
109 12 March 1931, 13 April 1937, minutes, series A:3, A:6, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL. Junior correspondence continued on and off well into the 1960s and will be discussed further in Chapter Five
110 Tennant, *Matrons with a Mission*, p.22
111 Undated loose newspaper clipping, 3 March 1926, minutes, series A:2, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
'special causes' after World War One. But the League was selective about which organisations it collected for. In 1934, after receiving numerous requests from organisations such as the Red Cross, the Sailors Society, the Surf Lifesaving Club, the Young Man’s Christian Association (YMCA) and the Young Women’s Christian Association (YWCA) for assistance with their collections, the League replied that as a society it did not collect on any day but Poppy Day. Such policy was an indication of both the League’s preference for organisations directly related to the imperial cause, and of the League’s desire not to ‘demean’ itself by collecting for any and every society.

The League’s ‘charitable’ work increased in importance during the Great Depression of the 1930s. In 1932, for example, the League in Canterbury held a book stall at the All Nations Fair in aid of the Mayor’s Relief of Distress Fund, and later that year held a produce stall to raise funds to enable the YWCA to help unemployed women, with members sending in cakes and produce for sale. The League also cooperated with the women’s auxiliary of the Businessmen’s Relief Scheme, requesting all members to subscribe 2/6 towards blankets or “something definite.” Like other women’s organisations that performed charity work, it was important to the League that its work be of a practical and concrete nature.

Due to the strong influence of the doctrine of eugenics in New Zealand in the early years of the twentieth century, health was an area of particular concern for the League, and, though not an area in which the League usually worked, in the interwar years a limited amount of work was done. Female imperialist organisations were concerned with promoting the health of the nation, and of mothers in particular. Phillipa Mein Smith argues that in New Zealand during the interwar years “Maternal welfare, because it meant caring for the future mothers of the race, was an emotive

---

112 3 May 1934, 12 June 1934, minutes, series A:4, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
113 3 March 1932, minutes, series A:3, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
114 9 June 1932, minutes, series A:3, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
115 13 June 1933, 17 June 1933, 15 August 1933, minutes, series A:3, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
116 Bush, Edwardian Ladies and Imperial Power, p.74
117 Coney, Standing in the Sunshine, p.70
issue of great ideological significance. Experts of all persuasions agreed that the falling birth rate presaged dire consequences for New Zealand, and more especially for the Empire."\(^{118}\)

Although the League in Canterbury declined to collect for organisations such as the Cancer Research Fund and Plunket,\(^{119}\) it made an exception for the Health Stamp Campaign in 1936 and 1937, for which members sold stamps.\(^{120}\) The Health Stamp campaign was run by the government in conjunction with the Sunlight League, an organisation that ran health camps aimed to “return delicate children to health and vigour and inculcate in them the habits of good living and citizenship.” Here the League was likely influenced by member Cora Wilding, founder of the Sunlight League of New Zealand and “a fervent believer in eugenics.”\(^{121}\) Charity in this area was still not indiscriminate though, and Wilding and her League often chose children for camps on the basis of “family deservedness.”\(^{122}\) The League was also happy to help promote good health in other ways. The League donated to worthy ‘health’ causes such as the Cancer Research Campaign Committee, the Obstetric Movement and Queen Charlotte Maternity Hospital in London.\(^{123}\)

**The 1940 Centenary**

The League continued in its attempts to instil a sense of patriotism in the nation’s citizens in 1940, the year of New Zealand’s centenary celebrations. In honour of the centenary, the League in Canterbury supported the establishment of a memorial to Edward Gibbon Wakefield, the ‘founding father’ who organised mass British settlement in New Zealand. In 1938 the Canterbury branch thus put forward for remit at an upcoming conference “That in view of the Centenary being celebrated in 1940,

---


\(^{119}\) 10 July 1930, 7 August 1930, minutes, series A:3, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL

\(^{120}\) 25 November 1936, 9 February 1937, 8 June 1937, minutes, series A:5, A:6, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL

\(^{121}\) Coney, *Standing in the Sunshine*, pp.98-99

\(^{122}\) Tennant, *Children’s Health, the Nation’s Wealth: a History of Children’s Health Camps* (Wellington, 1994) p.105

\(^{123}\) 10 April 1930, 11 October 1943, 10 June 1947, minutes, series A, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
the Victoria League approve and support the movement to raise a national memorial to Edward Gibbon Wakefield, the founder of New Zealand”, and a subcommittee was formed by the League for this purpose in 1938.\textsuperscript{124} This can be seen as an attempt by the League to use memory to produce identity,\textsuperscript{125} the League attempting to produce both a national identity that commemorated 100 years of settlement in New Zealand, and an imperial identity that celebrated British origins.

With war arriving before the national centenary was celebrated in 1940, there was no further mention of the memorial by the League in Canterbury. While the Wakefield memorial did not go ahead, however, the League was still able to be involved in centenary celebrations, and have its chance to represent Britishness. In April of 1940, the League in Canterbury was invited to decorate a float for a centennial procession, and decided to represent on its float Queen Victoria and her family, thus again choosing to celebrate a New Zealand holiday by representing an element of British tradition. The League’s efforts fit with a more general pattern in which, W. H. Oliver argues, the centennial was actually a celebration of “a century of colonisation,” in which “the remembered achievements were British.”\textsuperscript{126}

**Conclusion**

During the interwar years, the League continued in its most traditional area, the gendered-feminine and elite work of hospitality. The fact that the League’s work in this area was somewhat elitist was reflected both in the choice of visitors entertained and in comments made with regards to problems which arose. Much of the League’s hospitality work reflected efforts to emulate Britain, yet it also provided an opportunity for the League to display regional and national pride. The interwar years were also, however, a time in which the League did much ‘serious’ work, its work in

\textsuperscript{124} 19 July 1938, 17 October 1938, minutes, series A/6, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
\textsuperscript{125} On the use of memory to produce identity see Pickles, *Female Imperialism and National Identity*, p.108
the areas of immigration, education and charity reflecting the group’s attempts to influence matters of citizenship.

Work done in immigration and charity by the League drew on the vastly influential discourse of eugenics which existed both in New Zealand and worldwide at the time, and appealed directly to the League’s ideas about racial superiority. Immigration of pure British stock and caring for mothers became ways of strengthening both nation and empire. Educational work at this time revolved around the inculcation of patriotism, particularly in children, the future citizens of New Zealand and builders of empire. The League saw essay writing and junior correspondence as the two main means of achieving its objectives, and through its involvement in the 1940 centenary the League extended its efforts to instil patriotism. While the Depression of the 1930s interrupted the League’s immigration work as well as causing a drop in membership numbers, World War Two again revived patriotism and the busy war years are the focus of the next chapter.
Chapter Four

World War Two and the Cold War

Introduction

As was the case with World War One, the Victoria League was in full support of the war effort during World War Two, and, at the outset, supported conscription, calling for young men to do their duty. The call centred on the League’s identity as mothers, those who were willing to make the ultimate sacrifice. Again mirroring World War One, the League’s activities during the Second World War were ones that were perceived as appropriate to the gender and social position of the group’s members, and included the making of comforts, the arranging of hospitality and fundraising. There was also an emphasis on citizenship, with the League attempting to instil patriotism in both soldiers, by means of literature distribution, and in schoolchildren through essay writing, flag saluting and anthem singing. The war forced the League to consider issues of loyalty. It is argued that the League managed to remain steadfastly loyal to Britain while also embracing the United States as an English-speaking ‘cousin.’

The Cold War was fought differently than World Wars One and Two, by means of rhetoric rather than practical activity, a means that the League applied with gusto. The period immediately following the war saw the League continue to represent dominant conservative politics in its support for the introduction of Compulsory Military Training in 1949 and its denouncement of watersiders involved in the 1951 lockout. The latter event became associated in the League’s mind with Communism, which was a major preoccupation for the League in the immediate post war years. The League was especially keen in these years to protect youth from the Communist threat, and denounced both trade unionists and pacifists in an attempt to do so.
Gendered War Work

Like the IODE in Canada,\(^1\) and as seen in Chapter Two, the League in Canterbury was traditionally a militaristic organisation, not a pacifistic one. This militarism was clearly demonstrated during World War One, and World War Two was no different, despite the fact that the League was unhappy with the label of ‘war organisation.’ When the Women’s Auxiliary wrote to the League in Canterbury in 1940 asking for a survey of its war work, the League replied that “although we had helped and were willing to help in any war work, we were primarily a peace time organisation and worked under the Head Office in London.”\(^2\) Nevertheless, as it had in World War One, the League took up the challenge of war work again in World War Two, and the general work of the League occupied a secondary position as war work came to the fore.

The League showed its militarism from the very beginning of the war in its strong support for conscription. In 1939, the president of the Canterbury League, Mary Tripp, advocated conscription, stating “it was logical justice to expect equality of sacrifice and equality of service. The trades unions had been fine enough to forget hours and grievances, and had promised the Government in England and New Zealand unqualified support.”\(^3\) Perhaps the statement indicated an attempt to ensure the trade unions fell into line. The need for ‘unselfishness’ was a call echoed in a later speech by Tripp. “I am now speaking to our Territorials,” she stated, “not to the veterans of the sea, who honour us tonight by their presence, but YOU YOUNG MEN on the threshold of life – called from your Universities, your Farms – or your Trades, to serve in the Fighting Forces. For the time being your personal ambitions must be put to one side.”\(^4\) In calling for young men to take up arms and defend their country, League members drew upon their influence as mothers. As Katie Pickles has argued,

---

\(^1\) Katie Pickles, *Female Imperialism and National Identity: the Imperial Order Daughters of the Empire (IODE)* (Manchester, 2002) p.46

\(^2\) 8 October 1940, minutes, series A:7, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL

\(^3\) Press, 15 September 1939, p.2

\(^4\) Tripp, undated manuscript c.1942, item 25, folder 4, box 1, Mary Tripp collection, ARC1994.17, Canterbury Museum
“Maternal sacrifice was construed as international in influence, representing supreme moral fortitude.”\(^5\) The League’s members were no strangers to sacrifice; Tripp, the keenest speechmaker of the group herself paid the ultimate price, losing two of her three sons during World War Two. Another League member, Elizabeth Hogg, spoke of Tripp’s loss of a second son in 1944, commenting that it was “very sad that one who spent her life sacrificing herself for others should have to face this further sacrifice.”\(^6\)

As in World War One, the fact that women were there to support men was emphasised. In April 1939, as war loomed, Tripp gave an address to her League on the urgency of maintaining the unity of the British Empire. “The Victoria League,” she stated, “should give a lead to public opinion, stand ready prepared to go efficiently to their job, which is to serve men.”\(^7\) The League also emphasised the importance of working with the proper authorities (predominantly masculine institutions), declaring just prior to the outbreak of World War Two that if necessity arose, the League desired to place its services “unreservedly” at the disposal of the authorities.\(^8\)

Despite this desire to ‘serve men,’ however, women also had an important part to play in war work. Pickles documents the maternal nature of much of the work done during World War Two by the IODE in Canada, and I would argue that the work done by the League in Canterbury during World War Two was of a similarly gendered nature. One of the biggest jobs the League, like the IODE,\(^9\) undertook during the war was the making of ‘comforts.’ This activity was both ‘feminine’ and practical, it being of great importance to the female imperialists that their work be of a practical nature. Clothing was knitted and sewn for soldiers, sailors and airmen, the orphaned children of men who had died in the war, and for those who had lost their own possessions in the air raids in Britain. Interestingly, in 1941 it was decided that, as the “poorer

---

\(^5\) Pickles, *Female Imperialism and National Identity*, p.96  
\(^6\) 18 May 1944, minutes, series A:8, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL  
\(^7\) 19 April 1939, minutes, series A:7, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL  
\(^8\) Annual report, 1940, series C:16, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL  
\(^9\) Pickles, *Female Imperialism and National Identity*, pp. 95-100
classes were well catered for,” the League would send parcels of clothing to the wives and children of officers.\(^{10}\)

In May 1942, the Canterbury branch of the League sent to League headquarters in London 898 garments made by Mrs Oakleigh Greenwood’s Babies’ Bee. A letter of thanks from the Duchess of Devonshire, chairman of the League in London, was published in the Christchurch \textit{Press}. “I really do not know how to express our thanks sufficiently for such lovely things nor how to say how welcome they are, for apart from the baby clothes the poor mothers have lost through raids, it is not often we see such beautiful clothes now that rationing has come in.”\(^{11}\) Despite Tripp’s emphasis on the work done by those who went on “greatly and unostentatiously week after week”\(^{12}\) the passing on of the letter’s subsequent publication under the title \textit{An Appreciation} shows that it was important to the League its hard work was recognised.

Other work done by the League during the war reflected both the League’s perception of appropriate women’s work, and the privileged social position of many of the League’s members. It has already been seen that the League turned its traditional work in the area of hospitality to good use in World War One, and this was repeated during World War Two. The League was keen to obtain the names of as many air force officers as possible, and issue these men with introductions to the League’s ‘Home Office’\(^{13}\) in London, which in turn asked for “the greatest possible numbers of personal introductions for Victoria League branches of men and women going to Great Britain on war service.”\(^{14}\) The League in Canterbury, along with other New Zealand branches, also supported Nutford House, a hostel in London for men from overseas. Tripp herself, who was at the time in England as an assistant

\(^{10}\) 14 October 1941, minutes, series A:7, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL  
\(^{11}\) \textit{Press}, 5 November 1942, p.2  
\(^{12}\) Annual report, 3 May 1945, series C:16, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL  
\(^{13}\) 2 February 1940, minutes, series A:7, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL  
\(^{14}\) 2 February 1940, minutes, series A:7, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
commissioner,15 visited the hostel in 1944, had dinner with and spoke to many of the men, and even “found one whose people she knew at home.”16

As well as making sure ‘our’ men were well looked after in Britain, the League ensured men arriving on New Zealand shores were welcomed in a fitting manner. During World War Two, the Young Contingent of the League in Canterbury was responsible for the weekly arrangement of flowers at the Welcome Club in Christchurch, where the League sometimes assisted in the entertainment of soldiers. The Welcome Club is an interesting case study in itself, set up in Christchurch by the pacifistic National Council of Women,17 and (wo)manned by various women’s organisations.18 In this instance, working together to support the nation’s men was more important than any difference in ideology.

The League clearly counted on the financially comfortable position of its members, as well as their commitment to the war effort, when it decided to ask them to contribute 1s each towards the expenses of the entertainment of soldiers.19 The League had decided that it was to be understood that the men were guests of the League and therefore not to pay for anything.20 The Young Contingent was especially useful in the entertainment of young soldiers, entertaining them at more youthful activities such as tennis or suppers.21 The senior League also assisted by staffing the Enquiry Bureau for soldiers in the square on Tuesday mornings.22

The League also followed the precedent set in World War One in the area of fundraising, doing so in appropriately gendered and social ways. In December of 1941 a country fair, complete with stagecoach, was held at Oxenhope in Riccarton, the home of Mr and Mrs Oakleigh Greenwood, to raise money for the League’s war

15 Biographical information, Mary Tripp collection, ARC1994.17, Canterbury Museum
16 Annual report 1945, series C:16, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
18 See for example, Noeline de Courcy, A History of the Catholic Women’s League of New Zealand (Dunedin, 1990) p.16
19 9 August 1940, minutes, series A:7, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
20 12 December 1939, minutes, series A:7, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
21 30 November 1942, minutes, series A:8, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
22 Annual report, 1945, series C:16, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
fund. The League also continued to hold its annual garden fetes, with stalls such as ice cream, cakes, and palm and teacup readings. In October 1940 members held a sale of cakes, cooked foods, flowers and sweets.

While the League drew on the experience and expertise of its elite women in the areas of hospitality and fundraising, it was also keen to engage in the ‘heavier’ side of war work. In 1941 Tripp stated that “This war is an all-time job; we cannot win it between tea parties. All of us, old and young, must work with all our might and with our praying hearts. Our sacrifices will bind us into a finer people and through suffering we shall learn to grow our souls – those neglected bits of immortality.” By saying that the war cannot be won between tea parties, Tripp emphasised the fact that the League was not, or at least did not wish to be seen as, a purely social organisation, something which was frequently an issue of major concern for the League, and which is discussed further with reference to the post-war period in Chapters Five and Six.

As with hospitality and fundraising, the distribution of literature such as books, magazines and newspapers was a facet of the League’s work which existed in peacetime, and which was turned to new uses during the Second World War. It also fulfilled the criteria of being ‘practical’ in nature. Literature was redirected from the ‘backblocks’ settlers it had previously been sent to soldiers in camps such as Burnham. Pickles describes the similar work done by the IODE in Canada which supplied books to soldiers overseas, writing that in doing so women built upon their roles as mothers and educators. The women gained access to a space of citizenship and attempted to control what soldiers read in order to have an effect on that citizenship.

The League consolidated its attempts to affect wartime citizenship by ensuring that schoolchildren be made to salute the flag and sing the national anthem. In 1940 it

---

23 *Press*, 22 December 1941, p.2
24 9 February 1943, minutes, series A:8, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
25 9 September 1940, minutes, series A:7, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
26 *Press*, 26 April 1941, p.2
27 Annual report, 1940, series C:16, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
28 Pickles, *Female Imperialism and National Identity*, p.100
was reported that Mrs Bean of the League had been “instrumental in having a sub-
commitee appointed to approach the education board re having all the schools in the
district instructed to assemble to salute the Flag and sing the National Anthem every
Monday morning.” The League also exerted its influence on schoolchildren by
reopening its essay competition in 1944, in which year Governor-General presented
flags to schools with the highest participation. In an attempt to affect adult citizens
the League tried to ensure that Empire Day was suitably commemorated. In 1940 it
informed the Navy League that if Empire Day celebrations were to be “purely social”
the League did not wish to take part, finally deciding that it would support the
luncheon but could not take part in the concert. The same year it also decided that
instead of placing a wreath on Queen Victoria’s statue as was usual on Empire Day it
would instead give the money to the Sick and Wounded Fund.

Wartime Loyalties

W. David McIntyre argues that during the war years, for New Zealanders “The
imperial theme was still foremost.” Throughout the war, great emphasis was placed
on helping the ‘Mother Country.’ As already seen, large quantities of the comforts
made in World War Two were dispatched to England for distribution, in continuation
of the tradition of sending gifts of clothing to England during the First World War.
The League in Canterbury was also involved in a major campaign of sending food to
England during World War Two. Parcels containing food such as condensed milk,
dripping, butter, honey, jam and dried fruit, much of it New Zealand specialty food,
were sent to the League’s headquarters in London between 1942 and 1954. Much of
the food was intended to be consumed by children. Some of it was also meant for the

29 20 August 1940, minutes, series A:7, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL.
30 18 April 1944, 8 August 1944, minutes, series A:8, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL.
31 15 March 1940, minutes, series A:7, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL.
32 9 April 1940, minutes, series A:7, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL.
33 9 July 1940, minutes, series A:7, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL.
34 W. David McIntyre, ‘From Dual Dependency to Nuclear Free,’ in Geoffrey Rice (ed), The Oxford
35 Press, 16 April 1918, p.2.
36 8 June 1943, minutes, series A:8, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL.
League’s King George and Queen Elizabeth hostel, which was destroyed in air raids in 1941, killing the London branch’s beloved secretary Gertrude Drayton.37

As with most New Zealanders who perceived Britain to be on the brink of starvation and continued to do more than their share,38 the League’s support for Britain continued well after the war, and clothing and food continued to be sent well into the 1950s. As the League stated in 1947, “With the cessation of the war the League in Canterbury has not diminished its efforts in sending food and clothing to Britain, and will continue as long as the need is great.”39 The ‘family’ metaphor was drawn on to inspire the nation to do its bit in helping England, with Tripp stating on Anzac Day in 1949 that:

Great Britain has sacrificed everything to keep England free...her debts are astronomical. She is recovering by courageous developments and great hardships, but her reconstruction is a matter that concerns the whole family...we members of her Overseas Family are called now to help with her policy of reconstruction and feed the people of Britain – only so we can justify our existence and measure up to those who lie in foreign fields.40

Thus, the rebuilding of England was seen as a duty by members of the imperial family, as well as a duty owed to fellow New Zealanders who had died in the war.

Despite a heavy emphasis on helping Britain during the war, there was also a focus on helping United States soldiers. This was a change of heart for the League, because in other areas, such as advocacy of British made films, the League had earlier taken a somewhat anti-US stance. The emphasis during the war, however, was on the United States as an ally of Britain; the “need to turn to the United States as the main protector in the Pacific” was, indeed, one of the big changes in New Zealand brought on by the war.41 During World War Two, the League in Canterbury set up its own subcommittee for the development of “American Relations hospitality.”42
committee arranged for the billeting of Americans, including 43 who came with a baseball team in 1943. In its 1943 Annual Report the League considered the American Relations Hospitality Committee "one of the most important developments lately made."

America was incorporated into the family metaphor used to describe the British Empire by use of the term "cousin," and was welcomed into the family on account of the fact it was an English speaking nation. An alliance with a fellow English speaking country such as America was seen as more desirable than alliances with other European countries. In fact, Tripp went so far in later years as to criticise Britain for its moves in this direction, saying at an Empire Day Conversazione how much better it would be "if the British Cabinet would give up flirting with the jades of Europe and settle down to a respectable alliance with our own charming cousin of America. The union of Europe is something great, but the alliance of the English speaking nations would make still greater stability."

**Victoria League Conservatism and the Cold War**

The Cold War period which followed World War Two presented a different kind of challenge. World War Two had provided an opportunity for the League to employ its practical 'feminine' skills in the name of patriotism. While a certain amount of practical support was extended to soldiers in the Korean War, which broke out in June 1950, with money and cigarette papers being donated to the Comforts for Korea Fund, the Cold War was in general less concrete and more theoretical. It therefore required the use of rhetoric rather than practical skills, something that the Canterbury League, led by a strong role model, Mary Tripp, excelled at.

---

42 1 May 1943, minutes, Victoria League collection, series A:8, MB367, MBL
43 *Press*, 7 May 1943, p.2
44 Tripp, undated manuscript c.1942, item 25, folder 4, box 1, Mary Tripp collection, ARC1994.17, Canterbury Museum
45 Undated loose newspaper clipping, 'A Plea for the Home,' item 63, folder 7, box 2, Mary Tripp collection, ARC1994.17, Canterbury Museum
46 *Press*, 12 August 1953, p.2
In the years immediately following World War Two the League continued in militaristic tradition, and in 1949 lent its eager support to the introduction of Compulsory Military Training (CMT). Although CMT was indeed passed into legislation by general referendum, it was, nonetheless, a divisive issue for New Zealanders, with the National Party and some of the Labour Party, including Prime Minister, Peter Fraser, supporting its introduction, but much of the Labour party opposing it. Robert Chapman comments on the nature of Cold War tensions, arguing that it was a reflection of these tensions that such a measure was suggested in early 1949.48 The introduction of CMT in New Zealand can also be seen as a way in which New Zealand fulfilled its obligations in terms of “Anglo-American global planning” after the war.49 The League in Canterbury felt so strongly on the subject that in July 1949 it held a special meeting to consider how it could best help the movement for CMT and secure a majority in the referendum to be held in August. Speaking to a gathering of different organisations on the subject, Tripp denied that it was an issue of politics, and appealed to the tried and true ideal of ‘Empire Unity.’ “The question of Compulsory Military Training,” she said, “was not a political one but concerned the safety and security of the whole Empire.” The League finally decided to help the passage of CMT into law by driving the old or infirm to the poll, and minding young children to enable mothers to vote too.50

The League also showed its conservative political leanings in its denunciation of the 1951 watersiders’ lockout, an event that caused great turmoil in New Zealand, dividing the right and left. The League, as an elite organisation, leaned to the right, but, because the League was supposed to be non-partisan, denunciation of the strike was justified in the name of ‘Empire Unity.’ At the 1951 annual meeting “Mrs Tripp emphasised the fact that Victoria League knew no politics. Its policy was Unity of Empire but in the face of present disruption of industry she felt that all

49 W. David McIntyre, ‘From Dual Dependency to Nuclear Free,’ p.528
50 20 July 1949, minutes, series A:10, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
citizens should co-operate to combat the enemy within our gates and to preserve the heritage of the people." This anti-Communism was prevalent not only in New Zealand, but in much of Western society in the post-World War Two period, and was a preoccupation of female imperialist organisations in general. Indeed, fighting Communism was so important to the IODE in post-war Canada that Pickles dedicates a whole chapter to it.

Tripp, president of the Canterbury branch of the League in the early Cold War years of 1945 to 1955, was no different from her fellow female imperialists, and had much to say on the topic of Communism. In the years following World War Two, different groups in New Zealand, as elsewhere, were associated with Communism. Pickles identifies peace and trade unions as two of the main targets in Canada, and the same groups were identified by the League in New Zealand. Pacifists were particularly unpopular with patriotic groups, because their wholesale denouncement of war belittled the sacrifice that so many New Zealanders had made during the war. Trade unions also came to be associated with Communism. In the following address to the Young Contingent of the League, Tripp attacks both pacifists and trade unions, revealing her political leanings by denouncing the Labour party at the same time:

You members of the Young Contingent who study world affairs know that Wars must cease or humanity will perish – and that the smoke screen raised by the Pacifists, in most cases is put out to obscure the issue – which is inspired by the Communists and seeks to destroy the free way of life we believe in, It’s financed in Moscow, and you see its methods in our Dock Strikes and Miners Strikes. Labour is in power both here and in England, the workers have their Arbitration Courts in which to discuss their grievances – and as far as I know there are no Capitalists left – Walter Nash has seen to that – and Sir Stafford Cripps is attending to it in England.

The excerpt comes from a speech encouraging the Young Contingent to support CMT in New Zealand, and continues, "We must be aggressive for Peace, and Arms should mean Protection." This was a commonly cited idea during the Cold War. While inciting the idea of peace as the ideal at the end, patriotic groups continued to

---

51 2 May 1951, minutes, series A:10, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
52 Pickles, Female Imperialism and National Identity, p.130
53 Tripp, ‘Notes for Talk to Young Contingent: Support C. Weston on Universal Training,’ 27 July 1949, item 34, folder 4, box 1, Mary Tripp collection, ARC1994.17, Canterbury Museum
advocate the use of militaristic tactics against perceived enemies of the Western world. It is significant that Tripp addresses the Young Contingent, as youth were identified by the female imperialists as being particularly at risk of corruption.\textsuperscript{54}

As far as the League was concerned, Communism was associated with the ‘darker’ European races, and peaceful qualities with Anglo Saxons. Watching a procession of Communists in London at the time of Queen Elizabeth’s coronation, Tripp was “struck by the large foreign element that England harbours, and noticed that they nearly all belonged to the dark-eyed races and it was the blue eyed serene Anglo Saxons who looked on.”\textsuperscript{55} Communism was seen as a trait of not only certain ethnic, but also certain religious groups. “The only thing that can save mankind against Bolshevism is Christianity,”\textsuperscript{56} stated Tripp during World War Two, thus emphasising the Christian ideals of the League.

**Conclusion**

The League continued in militaristic tradition in World War Two, automatically lending its full support to the war effort. Although most New Zealanders were again in support of the war, the League was perhaps one of its most vocal supporters, feeling entitled to speak out as the mothers of the nation. Again the League differentiated itself as female, in doing so placing itself in a position of supporting men. As in the First World War, work was done that was seen as suitable for women. The League also, however, emphasised the need to become involved in the more ‘serious’ side of war work, and thus extended its work well beyond fundraising into spaces of citizenship. The League’s main emphases during the Second World War were on helping nation and empire, and its loyalty to Britain was exemplified in the fact that it continued to lend support well into the post-war years. In later war years, however, out of necessity, the United States was also embraced as an ally.

\textsuperscript{54} Pickles, *Female Imperialism and National Identity*, p.127-8

\textsuperscript{55} Tripp, ‘How a New Zealander Saw the Coronation,’ item 41, folder 5, box 2, Mary Tripp collection, ARC1994.17, Canterbury Museum

\textsuperscript{56} Tripp, undated manuscript, c.1942, item 25, folder 4, box 1, Mary Tripp collection, ARC1994.17, Canterbury Museum
Post-war ideas about Communism prevalent worldwide were embraced by the League. In New Zealand anti-Communism was expressed by the League with regards to the 1951 watersiders’ lockout, and this, together with the League’s strong support for CMT in 1949 reflected the League’s continued support for conservative politics. While, on the one hand, the 1950s and 1960s saw the continuing dominance of conservative politics in New Zealand, they also saw the opening up of the world to New Zealand. Chapter Five examines how the League functioned in this climate.
Chapter Five

1955 – 1975: Adaptation

Introduction

As seen in the introduction, the period from 1955 to 1975 was one of consistently high membership numbers for the Victoria League in Canterbury. Between 1955 and 1965, the League had over 900 members, reaching a peak of 1200 in 1959, and continuing with over 800 members until 1975 when numbers began to drop rapidly. The League’s success and popularity in the early 1950s was exemplified by the move to ‘its own home’ in 1954, prior to which the League had held its meetings at a variety of venues. The first section of the chapter argues that the League also became much more socially oriented in this period. It examines what sorts of social activities the League engaged in and how it felt about becoming a social group, arguing that some members at least were not happy that the League’s ‘mission’ was being forgotten.

The second section of the chapter explores the League’s connections with the monarchy, suggesting that League popularity in this period may have been connected to the popularity of the monarchy. Apart from being a ‘social heyday,’ this period was also characterised by attempts to take a more international approach in adapting to the postcolonial world, exemplified by a change of name in 1964. The rest of the chapter thus examines the League’s work in the traditional areas of hospitality, fundraising, immigration, education and charity, and explain in what ways these activities reflected the past, and in what ways they were changed and adapted. The chapter argues that during the early post-war period the League was indeed successful in taking a more international approach.

A Social Heyday

Canterbury League membership numbers continued to grow in the late 1950s, and, at this time, the League experienced what I would term a ‘social heyday.’ It was, for example, in 1954 that the League joined with the other four patriotic societies to buy
Elizabeth House as a meeting and dining centre. While the League had always been socially oriented, with activities tied closely to the League’s hospitality work, the group became more so as the years progressed. The Young Contingent, which existed from the late 1930s to the early 1980s, was even more socially oriented than the senior League and, in 1950s and 1960s Christchurch, was apparently ‘the group to belong to.’

A large part of the Young Contingent’s time was spent planning parties. During the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s the Young Contingent held several functions each year in locations such as the Shelley Lounge at the University of Canterbury and the Sign of the Takahe on the Cashmere Hills. Parties were invariably themed, and included a Picasso party, a hippy party, a Bavarian night, a barbeque barn dance, a 1920s party, an ‘Up Pompeii’ Roman style party and a Mardi Gras ball. The senior League, while still very social, preferred more traditional kinds of activities. In the first half of the century, when more hospitality was given and fundraising done, the League was able to get its ‘social fix’ through these activities such as balls, cocktail parties and garden parties. In the post-war years, however, the amount of ‘practical’ hospitality and fundraising work done by the League waned, partly due, perhaps, to the changing nature of hospitality and ‘society.’ Thus, activities began to be run purely in order for members to socialise with each other. Bridge afternoons, for example, were first introduced in the early 1950s, and continued to run monthly until the mid-1980s. Monthly morning teas for members were first introduced in the late 1940s. They have continued, along with coffee afternoons in the colder months, to this day, though not with the 100 plus members they once attracted. Guest speakers were invited to both these morning teas and Young Contingent luncheons, which were a regular feature between 1945 and 1955.

The topics of talks given at morning teas and luncheons during this period are worth mentioning as they reveal many of the League’s preoccupations. It will be seen

---

1 Personal conversations, 11 August 2003, Christchurch; 4 December 2003, North Canterbury; 18 January 2004, Brisbane
later in the chapter that the League did not wish to be seen as a travel club. Despite this fact, however, and in line with the League’s ‘international’ approach in this period, most talks were on foreign countries. A number of talks were also given on New Zealand issues including “A Critical Appraisal of New Zealand Today” and “Constitutional Reform in New Zealand.” The League had not forgotten it heritage, however, as will be seen later in the chapter, and numerous talks were given on England, including “Impressions on Revisiting England,” “English Village Life,” and “Oxford University,” as well as on local heritage – “The History of Canterbury Museum” is one such example. There were also talks on Commonwealth concerns such as “Canada’s Divided Allegiance.” The League, having participated in the war effort, was keenly interested in the topic, and this interest was satisfied by speeches such as “War Relations” and “War Conditions and After.”

The League’s ideas about ‘women’s place’ are shown in the topics on which talks were given. It was of concern to the League how best to help the family, and most especially mothers, cope with the demands of modern life and help women to become exemplary housewives. Thus, the League had many speakers on ‘domestic’ concerns, and in 1948 ran a series of lectures designed to “help solve some of the problems that confront the modern family.”2 In 1950, a female speaker demonstrated the League’s belief in woman as homemaker when she quoted six maxims to which she thought women should subscribe. The maxims included that it was wrong “not to be able to give food to an unexpected guest,” and “not to educate our children to realise fully the importance of a lasting and happy marriage.”3

Royal Tours

The League’s popularity New Zealand-wide in the early 1950s may also have been linked to its connection with the monarchy, and, in particular, the royal tour of 1953/54. As Jock Phillips argues, the tour was a momentous occasion in New

---

2 Young Contingent annual report, 1949, series E:16, Young Contingent, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
3 1 June 1950, minutes, series A:10. Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
Zeland’s history, bringing “cheering crowds out into the streets.” The League, itself named after a member of the royal family, had always felt a strong affinity with the monarchy, exemplified in the fact that it had, and indeed still has, members of the Royal family as patrons. One way in which the League had shown its loyalty to the monarchy over the years was by the holding of special events such as balls to celebrate such occasions on the royal calendar as coronations, birthdays and weddings. A ball was held for Queen Elizabeth II’s coronation in 1953, for example, and was a “great success.” The League also showed its support for the monarchy with gift giving. On special royal occasions, the Leagues around New Zealand contributed to a presentation made by either the League’s New Zealand branches or by League branches worldwide.

Another key way in which the League had shown its support for the monarchy was through a heavy involvement, or at least attempted involvement, in royal tours to New Zealand. As with other important ‘royal occasions’ gifts were arranged and were presented to visiting royals. Such gifts were to be of the best quality New Zealand had to offer. In 1949 an itinerary was drawn up for a visit to New Zealand by King George VI, although it was subsequently cancelled due to his falling ill. In planning for the tour, League branches around New Zealand decided to present the visitors with three pairs of double blankets with a wide border of bridal satin (which took a total of 64 hours each to work) and embroidered with two monograms with a crown and a spray of New Zealand blossom, such as yellow kowhai, pink manuka and a New Zealand fern on each side. Clearly, the gift chosen was to be not only of the best quality, but also a unique representation of New Zealand, being made of wool, a traditional New Zealand export, and carrying New Zealand symbols.

The League also sought to be represented at functions held to honour royal visitors. In 1948, for example, the League in Canterbury wrote to the Mayor

5 9 June 1953, minutes, series A:11, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
6 12 April 1949, minutes, series A:10, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
7 7 December 1948, minutes, series A:10, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
requesting that it "be included in any arrangement made when their Majesties were in Christchurch." In 1950 the importance of the League being recognised was reiterated, at which time it was mentioned that the Auckland branch was to inquire as to what part the League could take in welcoming their majesties and to ask for recognition in the welcome. In requesting recognition at royal receptions, the League pointed out the prominence of the League in England; the Canterbury branch, for example, wrote to the Mayor of Christchurch to this effect in 1952.

Unfortunately the League’s desire for representation was not always satisfied. Referring to the royal visit of "Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth and the Queen Mother," the Canterbury League’s Annual Report for 1958 stated that "We had the honour and pleasure of sending flowers but we record with regret that the Victoria League was not given the opportunity of being represented at the Civic Reception to Her Majesty." In later years the League had more luck in being represented at royal receptions and, in 1970, was represented by its president at a reception for the royal family held at the Canterbury museum.

The issue of (non)invitation to the royal garden party to be held on 20 January 1954 in particular caused problems for the Young Contingent of the League in Canterbury. The Royal Garden Party Committee had allocated 12 tickets for Young Contingent members between the ages of 15 and 21 and the Young Contingent had replied with a list of names. When the Young Contingent received notice that the tickets were strictly for those under the age of 21, the group pointed out that:

of about 300 members of the Young Contingent of the Victoria League only 16 are under the age of 21 years...It is regretted that more courteous attention was not given to the practicalities of our situation...our own president is precluded from the honour of attending the Royal Garden Party...as it is now too late for her to apply for an invitation on the general list.

---

8 12 October 1948, minutes, series A:10, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
9 10 October 1950, minutes, series A:10, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
10 29 January 1952, minutes, series A:10, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
11 Annual report, 1958, series C:16, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
12 3 June 1970, minutes, series A:14, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
The final correspondence from the Royal Garden Party Committee ended the argument with the comment that "had it been appreciated that such a small proportion of your members are in that age group...the invitation might have been extended to some other organisation."\textsuperscript{13} This incident thus also highlights the fact that the League was so much an older person's affair that even Young Contingent members did not fit into the category of 'youth.'

**Broadening Horizons**

The thirty years following World War Two were an interesting and difficult time for the League, as it grappled with rapid decolonisation and "an entirely different international environment."\textsuperscript{14} The change of name from simply 'Victoria League' to 'Victoria League for Commonwealth Friendship' reflected the attempts of the League worldwide to broaden its horizons in a period of "multiracial optimism."\textsuperscript{15} In 1964, the president of the Canterbury branch, Mrs R. B. Neill, announced that as the group was now called the Victoria League for Commonwealth Friendship it needed to have a 'wider outlook.'\textsuperscript{16} In 1965, then president, Mary Polson, reiterated that the new name was "an important aspect of the organisation which meant to help the Nations of the Commonwealth hold together especially the New inexperienced nations to uphold our Democratic system, and to ease the burden of the older Nations by showing friendship to all nationalities visiting New Zealand."\textsuperscript{17} Despite a changing environment, however, New Zealand's recolonial relationship with Britain had survived challenges and, right up to the 1960s was still going strong. While, at this time, the American alliance was increasing, it was still seen as supplementary. The Australian one was still lying largely dormant, and the British connection remained

\textsuperscript{13} Acting Town Clerk, City of Christchurch to D Redgrave, Young Contingent, Canterbury, 23 October 1953, Young Contingent correspondence, series E: 6, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
\textsuperscript{14} W. David McIntyre, *The Significance of the Commonwealth*, p.70; or as Catherine Hall puts it 'Post-1945 the colonial order fell to pieces.,' 'Introduction, Thinking the Postcolonial, Thinking the Empire,' in Catherine Hall (ed) *Cultures of Empire: A Reader: Colonizers in Britain and the Empire in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Manchester, 2000) p.9
\textsuperscript{16} 24 June 1964, minutes, series A:13, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
\textsuperscript{17} 22 September 1965, minutes, series A:13, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
first and foremost.\textsuperscript{18} This chapter argues that, as long as this was the case, the League felt comfortable forging bonds with other Commonwealth, and even more international, countries.

During the third quarter of the twentieth century the League in Canterbury was to some extent successful in broadening its horizons. Since about 1960, the League in Canterbury had begun to take more interest in its Asian neighbours, and, in 1961, stressed to London Headquarters the importance of taking an interest in Asia. It stated in a letter that three of the speakers it had had recently had “stressed the great importance, particularly in this part of the world, of realising that Asian countries are very near to us and that not only in material ways there is a great deal we can do to help.”\textsuperscript{19} This point was reiterated several months later when the League in Canterbury wrote to London “It’s possible that the tensions and needs of South East Asia may seem a little remote to you, but to us they seem to be closer and more pressing all the time.”\textsuperscript{20}

The focus on Asia was continued in the League’s interest in forming a branch in Asia. In 1961 Canterbury decided to put forward for remit for the upcoming conference in Whangarei “That in view of increasing tourism and trade which is developing in the Far Eastern countries, this conference request Headquarters in London to consider the establishment of the League in the British colony of Hong Kong.”\textsuperscript{21} Here the League was taking an interest in what was best for New Zealand in terms of trade and tourism. Although, according to McKinnon, in New Zealand’s history “‘interest’ as a form of independence did not necessarily entail ‘independence’ in the fullest sense of the term,”\textsuperscript{22} it was an expression of independence nonetheless. The remit was approved by the conference, but England’s opinion proved to still be a

\textsuperscript{18} James Belich, \textit{Paradise Reforged: a History of the New Zealanders from the 1880s to the Year 2000} (Auckland, 2001) p.392-93
\textsuperscript{19} The Secretary, Victoria League, Canterbury to Colonel Hills, Victoria League, London, 25 May 1961, correspondence, series B:15, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
\textsuperscript{20} The Secretary, Victoria League, Canterbury to Colonel Hills, Victoria League, London, 7 December 1961, correspondence, series B:21, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
\textsuperscript{21} 14 November 1961, minutes, series A:12, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
\textsuperscript{22} Malcolm McKinnon, \textit{Independence and Foreign Policy} (Auckland, 1993) p.5
concern for at least some of the New Zealand branches, with the preliminary report on the remits from conference stating that “The remit on the formation of a League in Hong Kong was approved, although it was felt that the idea might not be altogether approved in London.”\textsuperscript{23}

In later years the League also showed a shifting interest from England to the more immediate neighbourhood through an increased interest in Australia. In 1973, the president, Mrs C. Wodstrate discussed with her committee ways of strengthening links with Australia. This discussion continued at the next meeting when the committee discussed how to establish more friendship between the Leagues of Australia and New Zealand, with a suggestion that there could be more participation and co-operation with tourist companies.\textsuperscript{24} Despite this period of increased interest in Australia however, there is surprisingly little mention of relations with Australia, New Zealand’s closest neighbour, in the League’s minute books, most contact still being made with England. The League also very rarely sought relationships with countries outside the Commonwealth, although it will be seen that the linking of junior correspondents was one exception.

**The Continuation of Practical Work**

The 1960s was a period of major concern for the League’s future. While the Canterbury League’s membership was greatest then, it was also a time when people were joining more for social reasons than for anything else. Despite the fact that the League’s work often revolved around hospitality, entertainment and other social activities, it was of major concern to the League that it not be seen as ‘just’ a social organisation, and that the importance of its mission be recognised. As early as 1935, in a newspaper report, a senior member of the League in Canterbury voiced this opinion when she stated that “We are said to be a social society. That in a sense is

\textsuperscript{23} 10 April 1962, minutes, series A:12, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
\textsuperscript{24} 13 February 1973, 13 March 1973, minutes, series A:14, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
true, but we have a much bigger work to do - to help keep the threads of Empire firmly knitted together."25

The idea of being seen as purely a social society became even more of an issue as the century progressed, and the prominence of the League’s work in hospitality, citizenship and welfare declined. At the annual meeting of the Canterbury League in 1961, the president had this to say: “1960 was a jubilee year and therefore a social one, and I hope everyone enjoyed the functions we have arranged. You all realise that our aims are not just to entertain ourselves, and I thought some of you must be wondering what we are going to do with our satisfactory credit.” She then went on to announce the League’s projects for the following year.26 In 1968, the Leagues around New Zealand were so concerned about the purely social nature of the League that they came up with a solution. When reporting on what had been accomplished at a National Committee meeting held in July of 1968, the Canterbury representative reported that there had been two key achievements, one of them being “The formation of a National Project,” as “For a long time the women of the Victoria League have been restless at the label we have as a social organisation.”27 Thus, the next section of this chapter examines the practical work that was continued by the League between 1955 and 1975, and its rapidly changing orientation.

The League continued in many of its traditional areas of ‘work’ in this period, often managing to incorporate its new ‘wider focus’ into these areas quite successfully. Hospitality was the most important of the League’s traditional work, and despite the move away from entertaining overseas visitors in private homes in this period in general, the League maintained a fairly steady level of work in this area. The League in Canterbury continued to issue introductions for overseas branches, and the most popular destination in this period continued to be London. In 1958, for example, it was reported that 40 members of the Canterbury branch had recently received

---

25 Press, 21 March 1935, p.3
26 31 May 1961, minutes, series A:12, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
27 9 July 1968, minutes, series A:13, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
introductions to the London branch. League members, like other New Zealanders, still saw themselves as Britons, and thus referred to England as home, and, in 1960, the secretary of the Canterbury branch wrote to London that “Once again our members are thinking of holidays at home.”

The League’s somewhat ‘snobbish’ ideas about the desired personal nature of its hospitality was mentioned in Chapter Three, and this idea continued to be echoed much later in the century. In 1964 the League in London received correspondence from intending visitors to England who had clearly ‘misunderstood’ the nature of League hospitality. A letter received by the London Headquarters and dated February of that year stated that “My friend and I are intending to fly to London soon and the USA etc., and naturally in England we will join the ‘Vic League’ also we intend to join a ‘Society Set.’ My friend has a ‘Family Crest,’ can you tell us of any ‘Society Sets’ at all please.” After being sent the correspondence by the London branch, the Canterbury branch replied that “we do not know them at all, so Mrs Neill [then president] said for you not to worry about them. We did a wee smile over the letter.”

The League also continued to echo concerns from the interwar period in its desire that it not be seen as a travel club. This issue caused some upset between the two parts of the League, it being reported by the Young Contingent in 1977 that the “Senior Division found it upsetting that we promote Travel in such a big way.”

While the League in Canterbury also continued to entertain “distinguished guests” from both New Zealand and overseas during the 1950s and 1960s, eventually both the prominent position the League held in society and the pre-eminence of elite and middle-class women’s organisations declined. Looking to other

---

28 Press, 9 June 1958, p.2  
29 See Belich, p. 382. “In the 1950s New Zealanders saw themselves as Britons too,” and p.383 in which he states that only by the 1970s and 1980s was Britain “no longer Home.”  
31 Myfida Tyrell-Kenyon, Victoria League London to Mrs McGibbon, Victoria League, Canterbury, 31 March 1964, correspondence, series B:35, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL.  
33 28 March 1977, Young Contingent minutes, series E:2, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL.  
34 Press, 9 June 1958, p.2
areas where hospitality work could be done, the entertainment of Asian students in New Zealand was first mentioned in the 1950s, when the League took an interest in students brought out by the Colombo Plan, a plan that saw Australia and New Zealand collaborating with both Britain and the Asian Commonwealth. The students were entertained with visits to the homes of the League’s country members, or to ‘fork dinners’ given by the Young Contingent. Entertainment of students was seen as important because “The students of today would be rulers of new nations in Africa and Asia in a few years time.” While encouraging hosts to “become aware of and interested in the life and conditions prevailing in their guests’ home countries,” an important part of hospitality for foreign students was, of course, “additional help in their speaking of English.” In her chapter on the IODE’s ‘defence’ of Cold War Canada, Katie Pickles argues that instruction in the English language for immigrants was an ongoing strategy of assimilation.

In 1974, the League in Canterbury was given the perfect opportunity to display both its Commonwealth loyalty and its hostessing prowess, when it became involved with the entertainment of visitors to Christchurch during the 1974 Commonwealth Games. As W. David McIntyre argues the Commonwealth Games were seen as a major endeavour in Commonwealth Unity, and they “must be seen as the Commonwealth’s most popular event.” Importantly for the League, the Games’ origins “were unmistakably imperialist.” Three Young Contingent cocktail parties were planned for 24 January, 31 January and 7 February, a garden party was planned for 3 February and the senior League also made arrangements for the serving of light refreshments at Elizabeth House while the Games were on. On this occasion the League was afforded a certain amount of prestige, and was invited to welcome a

32 W. David McIntyre, The Significance of the Commonwealth, p.159
33 Press, 3 April 1962, p.7
34 Press, 24 May 1962, p.2
35 Katie Pickles, Female Imperialism and National Identity: the Imperial Order Daughters of the Empire (IODE) (Manchester, 2002) p.134
36 David McIntyre, The Significance of the Commonwealth, p.236
37 15 January 1974, minutes, series A:14, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
38 12 February 1974, minutes, series A:14, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
special charter flight from Great Britain. The president also attended a reception at the Town Hall given by the British High Commissioner prior to the opening of the Games.\textsuperscript{42}

As well as entertaining visitors during the Games, the League was involved in fundraising by means of a fashion parade. The fashion parade, sponsored by the combined patriotic societies of Canterbury, was arranged for by Mrs Ballantyne, and held at Ballantyne's Department Store,\textsuperscript{43} a long-time favourite location of the League. The parade was a great success, with the chairman of the Commonwealth Games Fund, to which the proceeds were donated, writing to the League that "it is my pleasure to thank your organisation for its part in the magnificently planned and highly profitable Fashion Parade held in Ballantyne's on Tuesday of last week."\textsuperscript{44}

While the fundraising effort was considered highly successful and Young Contingent cocktail parties well attended,\textsuperscript{45} the senior League's idea of entertaining guests to lunch at Elizabeth House was less popular, and the Canterbury branch had to return money donated by other New Zealand branches for entertainment purposes.\textsuperscript{46} This may reflect the declining popularity of old-fashioned styles of entertainment especially towards the end of this period, and, indeed, it was partly due to the efforts of the Young Contingent that the League's social life flourished at this time.

Though the 'heyday' of League involvement in immigration that had occurred in the 1920s and 1930s was not to be repeated, the League's Canterbury branch maintained an interest in immigration for many years afterwards. Under the command of its president Mary Tripp, an ardent supporter of immigration, the League continued to pressure the government for increased immigration during the 1940s and 1950s. In 1948, for example, the Canterbury branch passed for remit at that year's conference "That the Victoria League now in conference urges the Government for greater

\textsuperscript{42} 5 June 1974, minutes, series A:14, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
\textsuperscript{43} 14 September 1971, minutes, series A:14, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
\textsuperscript{44} Ronald S Scott, Chairman, 10th British Commonwealth Games 1974 to the Secretary, Victoria League, Canterbury, 20 October 1972, correspondence, series B:63, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
\textsuperscript{45} 12 February 1974, minutes, series A:14, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
\textsuperscript{46} 12 February 1974, minutes, series A:14, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
immigration.”\textsuperscript{47} Indeed, once the distraction of war had passed, the government did reintroduce assisted passages to New Zealand for British citizens.\textsuperscript{48}

While women’s organisations no longer played a major role due to increasing bureaucratisation, the League continued to assist in the area of immigration wherever possible. It was involved, for example, with the Immigration Welcome Committee in Christchurch in the 1940s and 1950s. This committee could be called upon to help with the entertainment of new arrivals, thus drawing upon traditional skills in the area of hospitality. The Canterbury League also provided books and magazines for the reception centre at Wigram,\textsuperscript{49} demonstrating the perceived importance of educating new arrivals. During the early 1970s, another important League activity was the regular attendance of citizenship or “naturalisation” services and Oath of Allegiance ceremonies for immigrants. A letter from the Mayor of Christchurch to Mrs G. Reeves Harris, later president of the Canterbury League, in 1972 highlights the League’s reasons for attending such ceremonies. “I agree with you,” the letter read, “it is really remarkable to see the faces of these new citizens light up when they receive certificates of Oath of Allegiance.”\textsuperscript{50}

The main area of educative work with which the League continued in this period was its junior correspondence scheme. Although initially established as an exercise in ‘empire unification,’ as early as the late 1940s the growth of interest of New Zealanders in countries beyond the British Commonwealth was recognised. The 1948 Annual Report of the Canterbury branch of the League stated that “A number of requests have been received for correspondents beyond the British Commonwealth of nations – China, Argentina, USA, and countries in Europe – and in these days of internationalism we feel it incumbent upon us to establish these links if possible.”\textsuperscript{51} In fact, the League in Canterbury felt so strongly about internationalising

\textsuperscript{47} 10 August 1948, minutes, series A:10, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
\textsuperscript{49} 9 December 1947, minutes, series A:9, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
\textsuperscript{50} The Mayor to Mrs G. Harris, 8 November 1972, correspondence, series B:63, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
\textsuperscript{51} Annual report, 1948, series C:16, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
correspondence that in 1962 it put forward a remit for the upcoming conference stating that:

in view of changed and changing international circumstances this conference recommends that the aim of this League's correspondence scheme instituted at London Headquarters in 1901 be amended by substituting for the words "the British Empire" the following words "those nations within and without the British Commonwealth and Empire whose cooperation the League may from time to time deem it desirable to secure." The remit was not popular with all New Zealand branches, but despite some opposition was passed after being redrafted.

Another issue that highlighted the League's attempts to move with the times was whether to allow mixed sex junior correspondence. In 1948, the League in Canterbury recommended that the correspondence scheme be made not only international, but that "approval be given for the linking of opposite sexes." The issue arose again in 1961, when Miss Ray, convenor of the scheme, reported that she had received requests from teenage girls in British Colombia for links with boys of the same age. She had written to the Headmaster of Christ's College asking his opinion on the matter, and his approval encouraged the members of the committee to respond in the same way.

The League also continued with its education work by sponsoring a boy to the Outward Bound school. The Child Welfare Department was to find a suitable boy to be sponsored, and one committee member suggested a "Maorie" boy if one was available. This targeting of Maori students recurred in 1970, when the Canterbury League sent a remit to the conference stating that "The Victoria League in Canterbury wishes to support International Education Year 1970 which is a New Zealand-wide observance, by making available funds...to help a Maori boy or girl to attend Secondary or Technical School." Woods notes the assimilationist aims that

52 Conferences, 1962, series D:3, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
53 10 April 1962, minutes, series A:12, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
54 10 August 1948, minutes, series A:10, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
55 13 June 1961, minutes, series A:12, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
56 2 November 1965, minutes, series A:13, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
57 9 June 1970, minutes, series A:14, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
continued to underwrite some government policies and measures throughout the mid-twentieth century, and the League’s wishes to educate Maori in Western institutions fits within this broader pattern. The remit was not passed by the conference, however, and one that aimed to help Commonwealth Pacific Island students was passed instead.

At this time as before, the League, despite its primarily patriotic concern, participated to a certain extent in charitable endeavours. In Canterbury, the Young Contingent took a particular interest in charity work, and it was during the 1950s and 1960s that this work predominated. A 1951 newspaper report on a baby photo competition it had organised to raise funds for food for children in Europe reported that “The Young Contingent of the Victoria League in Christchurch works consistently for some charitable or welfare cause.” One major task undertaken by the Young Contingent was the sponsoring of children through the Save the Children Fund for twenty years from 1947 to 1968. The Canterbury League was particularly proud of this sponsorship, a newspaper report citing that “This is the only branch of the Victoria league in New Zealand which has undertaken to support the Save the Children Fund.” Ideas about race were apparent in the Young Contingent’s sponsorship of these children in the early days, with the group deciding in 1947 to sponsor no more than three in the meantime, “either European or British children to be accepted.”

Sponsorship of children through the Save the Children Fund ceased, however in 1968, with the Young Contingent reporting that:

regrettably...the Committee has decided...to discontinue supporting this fund in favour of an equally deserving local charity. This had been done in the form of a Christmas gift of cutlery to Mrs Miles, who looks after and provides a home for 24 young intellectually handicapped children in Christchurch...Should funds be available in

59 13 October 1970, minutes, series A:14, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
60 *Press*, 19 May 1951, p.2
61 *Press*, 23 May 1963, p.2
62 15 September 1947, Young Contingent minutes, series E:1, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
future...donations will be made to the Save the Children fund whenever possible.\textsuperscript{63}

This redirection reflected a more general trend to support either local charities, or those in the neighbouring areas of Asia and the Pacific. At the 1961 annual meeting, the president emphasised the importance of charity for Asia. In doing so, however, she also emphasised the bonds of Commonwealth, stating that:

we have had three speakers lately who have all urged us in New Zealand to try and do more for our less fortunate neighbours in the Commonwealth in South East Asia, and I have been wondering whether it would not be within our means to foster friendship and understanding in the Commonwealth by giving practical help in that part of the world.\textsuperscript{64}

This interest in Asia was also reflected in a project undertaken by the Canterbury branch of the League in the same year. The League raised a total of over £150 to build two houses for refugee families in Hong Kong.\textsuperscript{65} A Mrs Millner, in appealing to the League to help with this project, reported that “the children in particular need help, for to survive they are growing up little better than wild animals.”\textsuperscript{66} It is possible that the League saw this project as an exercise in ‘betterment’ through the ‘mothering’ of other races. Fiona Paisley, in her examination of Australian feminism and Aboriginal women’s rights in the interwar period, has explored this discourse of “duty” in which the more advanced nations were to help the less advanced.\textsuperscript{67}

**Celebrating Heritage**

The broadening of League horizons in this period did not preclude the group from continuing to take a keen interest in and celebrate its own heritage. In the very early post-war years the League celebrated its regional heritage, exemplified in a speech made by president Mrs Tripp at a tree planting ceremony in Victoria Park, on the Cashmere Hills. In the speech Tripp talked about the hard work of the early pioneers,

---

\textsuperscript{63} Young Contingent Annual Report, 1968 in 5 June 1968, minutes, series A:13, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL

\textsuperscript{64} 31 May 1961, minutes, series A:12, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL

\textsuperscript{65} 13 June 1961, 10 October 1961, minutes, series A:12, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL

\textsuperscript{66} Mrs Millner to the Treasurer, Victoria League, Canterbury, 8 August 1961, correspondence, series B:19, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL

something that New Zealanders were particularly proud of, and which Woods argues was actually an attempt to “establish markers of difference from Britain,”\textsuperscript{68} but which Cantabrians liked to emphasise with particular reference to themselves:

Our Canterbury pilgrims certainly came out to New Zealand with hearts of oak, and our sons have proved themselves in war Chips of the old block. When Mr Tripp and Acland arrived in 1855 they brought in kits some acorns from their homes in Somerset and Devon and planted them at Orari Gorge and Mt Peel. A few years ago a very fine oak at the Gorge was broken in a storm, and the family have had made some historic pieces of beautiful furnature – and the carved Choir Stalls in the lovely Woodbury church, done by Mr Gurnsey, are in memory of Howard Tripp the first child born at Mt Peel, and are a witness to those little acorns brought out by a Pilgrim to Canterbury.

While there is a certain amount of emphasis in this speech on the so-called uniquely New Zealand characteristic of the pioneering spirit, there is also, however, an emphasis on the fact that the pioneers originated from Britain.

Pickles has identified involvement in “heritage” projects as one way in which the IODE in Canada attempted to create a British Canada.\textsuperscript{69} As an elite group, the League was especially keen on emphasising its British, and particularly English, roots, and, it has been argued, the Canterbury elite was especially inclined to do so. One way in which the League in Canterbury attempted to preserve its English heritage was in the preservation of Hagley Park. In 1962 the League in Canterbury was one of many groups which voiced its objection to the Christchurch Master Transport Plan of that year, the focus of its objection being a proposed motorway through the middle of Hagley Park. The League in Canterbury received a letter from the Canterbury Pilgrims and Early Settlers Association (CPESA), asking whether it would have any objection to the CPESA adding its name to the petition that had been organised by the League protesting against the proposed road.\textsuperscript{70} The League gained over 1000 names on its petition in total,\textsuperscript{71} one of many petitions organised by Christchurch citizens

\textsuperscript{68} Woods, \textit{Re-producing the Nation}, p.144
\textsuperscript{70} The Secretary, Canterbury Pilgrims and Early Settlers’ Association to the Secretary, Victoria League, Canterbury, 11 December 1962, correspondence, series B:28, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
\textsuperscript{71} 9 April 1963, minutes, series A:12, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
angry at the proposed motorway.\textsuperscript{72} The issue of a motorway through Hagley Park was one that divided Christchurch and eventually caused the incumbent mayor to be voted out of office, the new mayor being voted in on the election platform of no road through the park.\textsuperscript{73} In its involvement in this issue the League sought to maintain the ‘Englishness’ of Canterbury, a city which was simultaneously labelled the most English city outside England and the garden city.

\textbf{Conclusion}

The early post-war period represented a ‘heyday’ for the League in terms of both its high membership numbers and level of social activity, although the high level of social and lack of practical activity was to prove a concern at times. The perception of the League as the group as ‘the group to belong to’ and the League’s association with the Royal family and the Royal tour of 1953/54 may have contributed to increased membership numbers. The League was also seen as a travel club, particularly by younger members. While the League was happy to be seen as having connections with the Royal family it was less happy to be seen as either a social club or a ‘glorified travel club.’

In terms of what practical work it did continue with, the League was successful in adapting to the changing international scene, this being exemplified by its name change in 1964. In its hospitality for Colombo Plan students, work with foreign immigrants, expansion of junior correspondence and charity for Asia the League moved away from a narrow focus on Britain and Europe and built new ties with its more immediate neighbours. Yet the fact that Britain was still first and foremost as far as most New Zealanders were concerned meant that the League was able to continue to celebrate its British heritage. For reasons that are explored in the


next chapter, however, after the mid-1970s the League was unable to continue adapting, and increasingly focused its attention on its British roots and connections.
Chapter Six

1975 Onwards: Decline

Introduction

Chapter Six deals with the decline of the Victoria League in the last quarter of the twentieth century. The first section of the chapter maps the decline of the Canterbury branch and briefly discusses some of the problems that arose from its dwindling membership, arguing that the same problems affected League branches worldwide. It discusses what the League attempted to do to solve its problems, discussing one drastic measure – amalgamation with another patriotic society - which was briefly implemented in London, and which Canterbury was one of few New Zealand branches to go along with. It explores reasons for the decline of the League, offering suggestions such as the proliferation of other organisations, inconvenient meeting times, lack of media coverage, and the League being seen as ‘old fashioned’ and a ‘closed shop’ due to a changing political climate.

This chapter argues that, unlike the period immediately preceding, in which the League adapted fairly successfully to a change in international order, in these later years, as visible ties between New Zealand and Britain diminished further and the Commonwealth went through a crisis period, the League in Canterbury made a ‘return to Britishness.’ The ways in which it did so and the rhetoric it employed are examined in the second section. Examination of incidents in which the League was targeted both by a pro-monarchist (in agreement with the group’s aims) and an anti-apartheid group highlight perceptions of the League held by the wider population. The last section of this chapter examines to what extent the League in Canterbury was able to continue with its traditional work in the areas of immigration, education and charity, and how those areas of work reflected the increasingly insular views of the League.
The Decline of the Victoria League

The period since the mid-1970s has seen the rapid decline of the League. With regards to the Canterbury branch, this decline can be mapped via its decreasing membership numbers. While in 1974 the League in Canterbury had 800 members, by 1977 numbers were down to about 400, in 1987 they stood at just 174 and today the League’s membership is about half that again, with between 60 and 70 members left. Loss of members has led to two major problems for the League. The first is that lower membership numbers means a greatly decreased level of income, this being compounded by the fact that the Canterbury branch of the League is loathed to raise its subscription above the $20 at which it currently sits.

The second problem arising from decreasing membership numbers is a parallel decrease in the level of practical activity in which the group engages. This was already an issue for the League in the 1950s and 1960s, and, in the years since the mid-1970s, the level of practical work done by the League continued to be of concern. A Young Contingent report on the triennial conference of 1979 stated that “If there was one clear theme which emerged from the discussions, it was that which advocated the need for League members to actually get out and do something…the need to adopt practical projects aimed at involving all members rather than just passive participation in social events”1 Unfortunately, despite its dislike of being seen a purely social group, as the last practical educational and charitable work ground to a halt, this is what the League became. The League’s activities these days consist mostly of morning teas, happy hours, dinner meetings and a walking group.2

The Canterbury branch was by no means isolated in its decreasing membership and activity. While, at its peak, the League had eleven New Zealand branches, this number is now down to six - Canterbury, Otago, Auckland, Whangarei, Masterton and Wellington, which is also on the verge of folding.3 The same problems

---

1 Young Contingent newsletters, volume 1, number 4, December 1977, series E:25, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
2 Personal conversation, 19 July 2003, Christchurch
3 Personal conversation, 19 July 2003, Christchurch
affected the League internationally, and it was due to declining membership numbers that the League worldwide, led by Britain, turned to amalgamation in the late 1980s and early 1990s, a fate it had managed to avoid since escaping amalgamation with the Navy League in the very early days of its existence.4 In 1989, the League in Britain joined with the Royal Commonwealth Society (RCS), a fellow patriotic society, to form the Commonwealth Trust (CT).5 Amalgamation lasted two years until 1991, when, “after nearly six months of difficult negotiations and discussions,” the League in London voted to “regain control of [its] own affairs.”6

During the two years in which the League in Britain was amalgamated, other branches of the League were encouraged to follow its lead. Major concerns for New Zealand branches when considering whether to amalgamate were “the fear of a loss of identity,” and “to a lesser degree independence.”7 Despite these concerns, however, New Zealand’s National Committee chairman was in full support, and Canterbury was one of a few New Zealand branches which chose to amalgamate, perhaps because the chairman’s newsletter pointed out that the Queen and Princess Margaret themselves had “made it known that they favour merger.”8

It is interesting to note the role of men in amalgamation. Both the National Committee chairman, who was in full support of amalgamation, and Canterbury’s president, who led the branch into amalgamation, were men. The following comment was made by the male president of a League branch in England which had just amalgamated. “I have dragged my girls out of the Empire,” he states, “and now we can look into the future,” and the New Zealand National Committee chairman commented in one of his newsletters that “that just about sums it up.”9 For the

4 Julia Bush, Edwardian Ladies and Imperial Power (Leicester, 2000) p.66
5 Notes from Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
6 Minutes of National Committee meeting, 30 April 1988, series F:8, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
7 Commonwealth Trust, London to Victoria League Canterbury, 31 August 1989, meetings week, series D:12, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
8 Minutes of National Committee meeting, 30 April 1988, series F:8, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
9 Minutes of National Committee meeting, 30 April 1988, series F:8, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
Canterbury branch of the League this comment is particularly pertinent. The next section examines reasons for the decline of the League, arguing that it was in essence about the League’s inability to leave the Empire behind.

The League was naturally concerned about falling membership numbers and discussed a number of possible reasons for its declining popularity. One suggested in Canterbury was that Christchurch seemed “to have an oversupply of organisations all manoeuvring to attract new members.” The League was not the only women’s organisation to suffer from a decline in status, or to cite such reasons, with the PPSEAWA, for example, stating in 1990 that membership remained “rather static” due partly to “the great proliferation of other organisations and leisure groups in our communities.” Another reason for decline was the League’s ‘old fashioned’ organising. The fact that meetings were, until very recently, held during the day on weekdays may have prevented an ever-increasing proportion of working women from becoming involved. Katie Pickles argues that “the context of women’s changing place in society” was also a reason for the IODE’s decline in membership, due to the fact that “As increasing numbers of women have joined the paid workforce there was simply not enough time for voluntary work.” Another perceived problem was the “the dismal attitude of the New Zealand press” towards coverage of the League’s activities, and, in 1979, the Auckland branch put forward for remit at national conference in 1979 “that we increase publicity of the Victoria League’s friendship of Commonwealth ties.” Despite a similar remit being put forward by Auckland again in 1982, however, little appears to have been achieved by the League in this area.

---

10 Conferences, 1980, series D.6, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
13 Katie Pickles, *Female Imperialism and National Identity: the Imperial Order Daughters of the Empire (IODE)* (Manchester, 2002) p.168
14 11 September 1979, minutes, series A:16, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
15 12 October 1982, minutes, series A:17, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
Another major problem for the League was the perception of it as a “closed shop,” this accusation being levelled at the senior League by the president of its Young Contingent in 1979, Darryl Stevens, in a letter to his counterpart in Otago. The fact that many of the League’s members in the early years were of the Christchurch elite, and that this continued to a certain extent in the post-war years contributed to the perception of the League as being somewhat snobbish, an image which the League’s members did not appreciate. As early as 1925, a speech made at the League conference had touched on this concern when it suggested that by increasing the League’s charitable activities the “breath of exclusiveness” and “aroma of aloofness” surrounding the group might be dispelled. The idea remained almost forty years later a concern not just for the Canterbury branch, but for the League worldwide. In 1963, the League in Canterbury received notice of a ‘Harford’ Report conducted by the League headquarters with regards to a possible name change. The report stated that adding the prefix Royal to the League’s name may help to “remove the ‘exclusive’ label hitherto liable to be attached to us.” The idea obviously remained later in the century and, in 1980 the League in Canterbury decided when invited to decorate a table for a fundraising event to do so in Polynesian style, as it “might help dispel the impression some have of the Victoria League being Victorian.”

A change of name was later suggested as a way of removing sexist overtones from the group. Despite the League’s desire for male participation, the perception of the League as a women’s organisation was so strong there were even accusations of League sexism against men. In fact, the accusations came from the same Young Contingent president who levelled the charges of the group being a “closed shop,” Stevens writing in 1979 that some effective action needed to be taken “on the sexist aspect of our membership which is affecting the image of the League extensively.”

The National Committee chairman replied that while he made a valid point, it would

---

10 Victoria League London newsletter, 28 August 1963, correspondence, series B:33, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
11 9 September 1980, minutes, series A:16, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
12 Darryl Stevens, Young Contingent, Canterbury to the Chairman, National Committee, 23 July 1979, Young Contingent correspondence, series E:11, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
be better to avoid “any of the emotive terminologies which seem to be so popular these days,” thus reflecting the more traditional ideals of much of the League’s membership. The issue of the name ‘Victoria League’ was raised again at the 1985 Dominion conference, as some felt it indicated women only. In the end, however, as it was felt that with a name change could come a loss of identity, any change was decided against.

As well as having issues with being seen as both a “closed shop” and for women only, which, as seen in Chapter One, the League objected to, the League in Canterbury grappled with the problem of an aging membership. It was seen in Chapter One that the League had a fairly ‘aged’ membership and constantly tried to attract younger members. In the period from the mid 1940s to the mid 1970s it was especially successful in doing so, as it was during these years that the League’s Young Contingent flourished alongside the senior group. Since the mid 1970s, however, age has become a major problem for the League. An examination of the League’s correspondence reveals that many members resigned because age and its incumbent health problems prevented them from full participation in the group. This, combined with the decline of the Young Contingent, has meant that older retiring members were not replaced with fresh new ones. The relationship between the senior League and its Young Contingent, especially in later years, could be rocky, and highlighted a growing gap in thinking between the two groups. In 1977 a senior League member attended a Young Contingent meeting and reported that the Young Contingent “appeared to be unaware of their commitments to the Senior Victoria League.” The problem, which apparently concerned the Young Contingent’s not following procedure, continued into the next year, but it was reported by June 1978 that “whatever went on last year was now in order.” Despite this, there was still a fear that the Young Contingent, which changed names to become the Younger Members’

19 The Chairman, National Committee to Darryl Stevens, Young Contingent, Canterbury, 27 July 1979, Young Contingent correspondence, series B:12, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
20 8 October 1985, minutes, series A:18, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
21 15 July 1977, minutes, series A:15, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
Group in 1978, "signifying a new era,"\textsuperscript{22} did not have "the right or proper ideas of Victoria League."\textsuperscript{23}

In spite of these attempts to revamp the Young Contingent in the late 1970s, by 1983 it was reported that the Younger Members' Group had gone into recess. "Diminishing interest in this group"\textsuperscript{24} was cited as the reason for its being wound up. The fact that young New Zealanders in particular were losing interest in the League's 'mission' was representative of wider developments. While the League had been useful for young people as a social group and for providing empire connections in the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s, especially for young travellers, its prestige in these areas declined in the later years as what the group stood became less and popular due to changing ways of thinking about empire. Decolonisation in the post-World War Two era and the thinking that grew up out of radical movements in the 1960s and 1970s both internationally and within New Zealand led to the questioning of the rightness of, among other colonising projects, the British Empire.\textsuperscript{25} Pickles states that, in New Zealand, in the past 30 years especially "narratives of New Zealand as colonial space [such as those espoused by the League] have become the subject of much criticism from a variety of standpoints such as Maori, feminist and Republican."\textsuperscript{26} It was logical that in such a climate of opinion, a group with ideals such as those of the League would become less popular. This argument is supported by the fact that the other four patriotic societies with which the League shares Elizabeth House have all also experienced dwindling membership numbers in recent years.\textsuperscript{27}

The Royal Commonwealth Society, which is, according to W. David McIntyre, "the most senior

\textsuperscript{22} 1 June 1978, minutes, series A:15, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
\textsuperscript{23} 7 June 1978, minutes, series A:15, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
\textsuperscript{24} 8 June 1983, minutes, series A:17, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
\textsuperscript{25} See for example W. H. Oliver, 'The Awakening Imagination, 1940-1980,' in Geoffrey Rice (ed), \textit{The Oxford History of New Zealand}, 2nd ed (Auckland, 1992) in which he states "By the mid-1950s there was relief that the threatening post-war decade had at least been survived...A mild optimism persisted into the middle 1960s...the tide, in the 1960s, seemed to be flowing in a liberal direction. The Vietnam protest and anti-apartheid movement grew greatly in that decade," p.566; on pages 368-9 he also cites the anti-apartheid movement, decolonisation and the American civil rights movement as deeply influential in the awakening of both "Maori awareness" and "Pakeha guilt."
\textsuperscript{26} Pickles, 'Kiwi Icons and the Re-settlement of New Zealand as Colonial Space,' \textit{New Zealand Geographer} 58:2 (October 2002) p.6
\textsuperscript{27} Personal conversation, 19 July 2003, Christchurch
of the organisations which attempt to foster interest in Commonwealth and provide facilities for personal contacts,” also faced financial and membership challenges from the 1960s.\footnote{28}

The League itself was not unaware of the impact of changing times on its organisation. The issue was raised as early as 1959, when members discussed reasons for a decrease in membership numbers over the year. It was decided not to reduce subscriptions because it was felt that increased resignations may be “a sign of the times” rather than due to any financial difficulty.\footnote{29} A newsletter from London Headquarters in 1967 confirmed this belief and the fact that the same thing was happening worldwide when it reported that “Our total membership is somewhat down on the previous year’s figure of 8260 but in view of the economic situation in this country and the difficult times politically through which the Commonwealth is passing, we feel reasonably satisfied that there has not been any greater fall.”\footnote{30} In 1980, New Zealand branches of the League outlined what the group had to contend with if it wished to survive. A discussion paper on ‘the Future of the Victoria League’ presented to the 1980 national conference in New Plymouth stated that “organisations such as our own are inevitably caught up in the changes taking place in our communities and therefore we have to be ready to adapt or get left behind. What the Victoria League enjoyed in the past belongs to the past and it has to be accepted that it cannot form a part of the future.”\footnote{31}

While the League locally, nationally and internationally recognised the problem of changing times with which it had to contend, the Canterbury branch, at least, was accused by its Young Contingent of not adapting to the changes it had identified. The same letter cited earlier, in which the Young Contingent president accused the senior League of being a “closed shop” and sexist, the senior League was

\footnote{28} W. David McIntyre, *The Significance of the Commonwealth, 1965-90* (Christchurch, 1991) p.208
\footnote{29} 23 June 1959, minutes, series A:12, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
\footnote{30} Victoria League London newsletter, 1 April 1967, correspondence, series B:44, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
\footnote{31} Conferences, 1980, series D:6, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
also accused of being “out of step with modern views on the Commonwealth.” What
the issue came down to for the senior League was how much it was prepared to
sacrifice in order to adapt to the changing times. A newsletter published by the
Canterbury branch in 1990 at the time of its 80th anniversary celebrations captured the
essence of the dilemma – “We believe keeping our standards high,” the letter stated,
“is more important than following modern trends.” The next section reveals that
what the League meant by ‘high standards’ was the retention of connections with
Britain.

A Return to Britishness

It was argued in Chapter Four that during the 1950s and 1960s, the League showed
more of an interest in making contacts with countries outside of Britain. In later years,
however, New Zealand’s links with Britain diminished, with McIntyre arguing that
the transformation of the Commonwealth “wrought since 1965...involved the ‘de-
Britannicizing’ of the Commonwealth.” Indeed, by 1989 the Commonwealth was
little more than an “historical souvenir.” Ironically, as New Zealand began to
concentrate on the South Pacific and take a more independent stance on many
issues, the League reverted back to an emphasis on Britain in an attempt to preserve
old links.

32 Darryl Stevens, Young Contingent to Alison Heberd, Young Contingent, Otago, 9 June 1979,
Young Contingent correspondence, series E:11, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
33 80th anniversary celebrations 1990, newsletters 1989-1990, series D:19, Victoria League collection,
MB367, MBL
34 See Peter Simpson, ‘The Recognition of Difference,’ in Geoffrey Rice (ed), The Oxford History of
New Zealand, 2nd ed (Auckland, 1992), p.572 in which he argues that these links were substantially
diminished by the 1980s. He cites a more independent line in international affairs “epitomized by the
Lange government’s anti-nuclear policies” and “the diversification of trade consequent upon Britain’s
entry to the European Economic Community in 1973” as indicative of this. James Belich also argues
for the weakening of the British alliance from the early 1970s, and its virtual disappearance by the late
1980s, Paradise Reforged: a History of the New Zealanders from the 1880s to the Year 2000
(Auckland, 2001) p.393
p.xxvii
37 W. David McIntyre, ‘From Dual Dependency to Nuclear Free,’ in Geoffrey Rice (ed), The Oxford
History of New Zealand, 2nd ed (Auckland, 1992) p.532
One example of this was the League’s reaction to Britain joining the European Economic Community (EEC) in 1973. It is a well-known fact that the entry of Britain into the EEC caused a major crisis for New Zealand in terms of its relationship with its ‘mother.’ As James Belich argues, “The EEC was in some respects the nemesis of the New Zealand - British recolonial system” with free trade between EEC countries displacing New Zealand products in the British markets. 38 When discussing this issue five years later in 1978, the chairman of the national conference emphasised the special relationship between New Zealand and Britain in arguing that New Zealand had every right to make its case known to Britain:

I believe that as members of the Commonwealth we have primarily an obligation to play our parts responsibly for the benefit of the whole. I believe in the past we have in fact done this without exception as a nation, but I believe that also as members of the Commonwealth we have certain rights. While these certainly do not give us the right to demand a living of any other nation, Commonwealth or otherwise, they must surely give us the right to make our voice heard on a personal level to other Commonwealth countries and of course I mean Britain in particular. I see no reason, when it is so obvious that British people are so unaware of the dramatic and adverse effect which their negotiations with the EEC are having and will have on our economy, why we should not speak directly to the British people – not in a political or hysterical sense – but simply by making our case and our position known. It has been said that New Zealand occupies a special place in the affections of the British people and having experienced the effect of this at first hand, I can confirm this is true. As an organisation I believe the Victoria League can do much by speaking to our relations and friends in Great Britain to make it known how serious the situation is at present for New Zealand and how adversely the present EEC regimes and regulations are affecting us. 39

Thus, while acknowledging that Britain joining the EEC was bad for New Zealand, the League did not denounce Britain’s activities, and instead sought to emphasise the ‘special relationship’ between the two countries. The League tried to talk itself into believing that it could actually do something to affect Britain’s actions and that Britain would not knowingly do anything to hurt its former colony.

As in earlier years, any assertion of New Zealand superiority or independence was situated firmly within a colonial agenda, the only difference being that the word

38 James Belich, Paradise Reforged: a History of the New Zealanders from the 1880s to the Year 2000 (Auckland, 2001) p.431
39 29 April 1978, minutes of National Committee meeting, series F:6, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
Commonwealth was now substituted for empire. These ideas were exemplified in the League’s attitude towards the New Zealand flag. While, on the one hand, flags represent nationhood, in this case, with its Union Jack implanted firmly in the corner, the New Zealand flag is also a strong symbol of the country’s imperial past. In recent years, the League was a strong voice in advocating that this symbol of New Zealand-British unity not be changed. In 1979, for example, the Young Contingent of the League in Canterbury put forward for remit at the upcoming conference that “we strenuously oppose any suggestion that the Flag be altered,” and the suggestion was unanimously agreed to by the senior committee.\textsuperscript{40} In 1988, when writing to the government of its concern that the flag not be changed, the Canterbury League advocated keeping the flag because it afforded prestige to New Zealand as an independent nation, pushing its way forward into world affairs. Thus, the League wrote that:

> Our flag reminds us of the efforts of the past upon which the present is built, and upon which we plan for the future. It reminds us of our achievements, our failures and our successes. As a senior member of the Commonwealth, under our present Flag, New Zealand has been listened to, as a senior partner for good, in the Councils of the world. With weakening ties towards the Commonwealth, newfound friends, whose philosophy on life is very different to our own, and a new flag, what or who would we be? Could we be trusted, or how could we contribute towards the welfare of those less fortunate than ourselves?\textsuperscript{41}

Despite a seemingly ‘progressive’ view of New Zealand’s independence and importance in world affairs, however, the League was still associating New Zealand’s influence with its imperial past, and emphasising the prestige of being a senior member of the Commonwealth.

Throughout its history, the League has asserted New Zealand’s superiority in terms of its supposed ‘Britishness.’ In a continuance of this idea, when the chairman of New Zealand’s National Committee visited England in 1984 he stressed that in some cases New Zealand was “more British than the British.” He said of New Zealand that there was no single country in the world whose heritage was so closely

\textsuperscript{40} 11 September 1979, minutes, series A:7, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
\textsuperscript{41} The Honourable H. J. Walker, Victoria League, Canterbury to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, December 1988, correspondence, series B:81, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
associated with Britain.\textsuperscript{42} The League in Canterbury has thus often attempted to enhance the prestige of British traditions in New Zealand, notably by its continued celebration of Empire, and later, Commonwealth Day. The celebration of Empire Day seems to have ceased about 1959, when the president informed members that "this year although the League did not celebrate Empire Day, which is now changed to Commonwealth Day our aim to unite members of the Commonwealth is ever to the fore."\textsuperscript{43} The first mention of the League celebrating Commonwealth Day was in 1961, when it was mentioned a luncheon would be held on Commonwealth Day, then 24 May. The League was probably one of few New Zealand groups to celebrate Commonwealth Day at this time as, prior to 1975, Commonwealth Day was "really a British commemoration" not a Commonwealth-wide one and it was not until 1976 that it was decided to take the second Monday in March as a simultaneous Commonwealth Day for all member countries.\textsuperscript{44} While briefly flirting with the newly established Waitangi Day in the mid 1970s, holding a garden party in 1974,\textsuperscript{45} and showing a selection of 'good' New Zealand films at a function in 1976,\textsuperscript{46} the League soon gave this up in favour of its traditional day of celebration, Commonwealth Day, showing it preferred to celebrate Commonwealth unity rather than New Zealand nationhood.

While later celebrating Commonwealth Day in March, the League in Canterbury also continued to favour 24 May as a special date, one which it sometimes refers to as 'Victoria League Day.' In 1985, for example, the League in Canterbury spontaneously decided to celebrate 'Victoria League Day' that year with a function at Elizabeth House.\textsuperscript{47} 24 May was also the date chosen for the celebration of the 80\textsuperscript{th} birthday of the League in Canterbury in 1990. Not only did the League honour English tradition by celebrating its birthday on that of Queen Victoria, but it also

\textsuperscript{42} National committee newsletter number 40, June 1980, series F:7, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
\textsuperscript{43} 10 June 1959, minutes, series A:12, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
\textsuperscript{44} W. David McIntyre, \textit{The Significance of the Commonwealth}, p.223, 228
\textsuperscript{45} 8 October 1974, minutes, series A:14, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
\textsuperscript{46} 10 August 1976, minutes, series A:14, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
\textsuperscript{47} 14 May 1985, minutes, series A:18, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
themed its birthday celebration in traditional English style. After a church service on the Sunday preceding 24 May, a lunch was held for members at Eliza's Manor House, complete with roast beef, Yorkshire pudding and plum duff. Decorations consisted of flags “and reminders of those fine British traditions of our forebears,” and songs sung included ‘Land of Hope and Glory’ and ‘Rule Britannia.’48 The Poverty Bay League captured the atmosphere of the celebration when it wrote to Canterbury “What a lovely 80th birthday celebration that was! It was as you promised – a real British – in the real sense – affair; real British food, British music, British decorations. I could almost hear a good British lion roar.”49

When, in 1991, it reiterated its earlier concern that the flag be left as it was, the League emphasised the British connection even more, tying its desire that the flag not be changed to a wish to retain the Queen’s image wherever possible. In its report to the national conference held that year on the future projects of the League in Canterbury, it was stated that the group intended to “make our views on ‘a New Zealand flag,’ known to Governors General, politicians...Also our opposition to removing the Queen’s head from our Bank notes etc.”50 In 1974 the League in New Zealand had sent a letter to the Broadcasting Authority registering its “protest and disapproval” at a satirical sketch regarding the publishing of Queen’s Birthday Honours.51 The League went even further with its advocacy of the importance of British tradition in New Zealand. A 1990 newsletter went so far as to suggest that there should be prayers in churches for “our Royal Family” and that either “a member of the Royal Family, or British Nobility should fill the Governor-General’s position in New Zealand.”52 In arguing for “the importance of the tenets and institutions of British colonialism, especially the monarchy” to New Zealand, the League behaved in

48 Bert Walker, President, Victoria League, Canterbury to John Norman, 80th anniversary celebrations, series D:8, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
49 Victoria League, Poverty Bay to Victoria League, Canterbury, 1 June 1990, correspondence, series B:82, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
50 Conferences, 1991, series D:7, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
51 27 December 1973, minutes of National Committee meeting, series F:5, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
52 80th anniversary celebrations 1990 newsletter, series D:19, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
the same way as the IODE in Canada. Pickles argues for the Canadian case, that “changes to a Canadian identity are not about making a clean break from the colonial to the postcolonial, erasing past rules and dominance. Rather, change is about the perpetuation of British values and their adaptation to Canadian space.”

Perhaps it is the ‘adaptation’ that is missing from the model in New Zealand.

As revealed in earlier chapters the League has always been a pro-monarchy organisation, and the comments made with regards to the Queen’s head on bank notes, Queen’s Birthday Honours and prayers for the Royal Family show that the group’s loyalty only grew in later years. The League today is still tied to the Royal Family by means of its patrons in England, and a current member cites as her favourite part of being a League member “The link with Britain and our Queen.” The League had been as involved as possible with Royal tours to New Zealand in earlier years, and this continued into the later period, with the League in Canterbury seeking the opportunity to provide hospitality. In 1986 the League requested the opportunity to organise a garden party for the visiting royals, to be held at Elizabeth House. In making the request it stressed the unique characteristics which it felt the League could provide. “Elizabeth House is a gracious, well-preserved home, used by former Governor-Generals as their official residence in Christchurch...We believe our League is well experienced in entertaining distinguished guests, and we are competent to provide a very special occasion for a very special Royal couple.” Here the League emphasised how distinguished it believed itself to be and its prominence in the hospitality arena. As it eventuated, the Canterbury League was represented by its president at the royal garden party of 1986, though not one organised by the League as it had wished.

53 Pickles, Female Imperialism and National Identity, p.170
54 Personal correspondence, August 2003
55 Mrs J. L. Hewland, Victoria League, Canterbury to the Honourable Peter Tapsell, 1 September 1986, correspondence, series B:81, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
56 11 March 1986, minutes, series A:18, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
On one occasion, the League's reputation as pro-monarchy made it the target of an ardent monarchist, who wrote to the League in 1990, offering to give a lecture to League members on his beliefs. The letter read:

I have been increasingly alarmed in recent years by the decline in enthusiasm for Monarchy, and decline seems to be accelerating. While some of this is no doubt due to the ever-growing pressures from America, I think a lot of it is due to ignorance of the workings of the mind. Every nation which becomes a Republic seems to find itself with a psychopath at the head of state within 20 years...Three or four times every year I give an illustrated lecture on psychopath and explain how royalty cannot turn out people without a conscience. 57

Although it cannot be said for certain that the League did not take up the offer of a lecture, there is no indication in the records of any such lecture being given.

Reactions to the League were not all as enthusiastic as that of the monarchist cited above, however, and in 1979 the League in Canterbury, as a pro-Commonwealth society was caught up in the attempts of an anti-apartheid group to find out about a South African visitor. According to the Young Contingent, "a certain lady at a society function decided to inform her friends that the Jaycees would be having Mr Lindhurst, a South African, as a guest speaker and this friend started a chain of gossip which was heard by the wrong ears." These 'wrong ears' wanted to confirm the story and thus made a fake membership inquiry to the Young Contingent in order to obtain League stationery. They altered the stationery and wrote to the South African Consulate in Wellington about a visit by a Mr Lindhurst to a League meeting, the League only becoming aware of what had transpired after receiving calls from the consulate about the matter. The group behind the affair turned out to be Campaign Against Foreign Control in New Zealand (CAFCIN), which was affiliated to Halt All Racist Tours (HART), Citizens Association for Racial Equality (CARE) and the Canterbury/Westland Coalition Against Apartheid. 58 The League could only guess that it had been selected as a target because of its "Commonwealth contacts." 59

57 Psychotherapist, Invercargill to the Secretary, Victoria League, Canterbury, 28 February 1990, correspondence, series B:82, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
58 Darryl Stevens, Young Contingent, Canterbury to the Chairman, National Committee, 14 July 1979, Young Contingent correspondence, series E:11, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
59 10 July 1979, minutes, series A:16, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
The Continuation of ‘Practical’ Work

Along with declining membership numbers in the last quarter of the twentieth century the amount of ‘practical’ work done by the League declined dramatically. While the League had been fairly successful in broadening its horizons to take a wider interest in both Commonwealth countries and the wider world during the 1950s and 1960s, this being reflected in its work at that time, in the latter period the group’s horizons narrowed again and this affected the nature of what little practical work was left. One example of this was in the area of immigration. Chapter Five covered the League’s involvement in welcoming new immigrants to the country. By 1979, however, the attitude of the Canterbury League seemed to have changed, possibly due to the fact that, in the 1970s major changes in immigration policy effectively broke this “traditional link with Britain.”60 The League thus responded somewhat negatively to a remit put forward by Whangarei in that year stating that the League should help immigrants to New Zealand, and in particular refugees. Members attended the naturalisation ceremonies, replied the Canterbury League, and felt that “on these occasions the immigrants have their own groups and did not appear to welcome outside influence.”61

The League’s interest in education was one of its longest lasting activities, although it no longer revolved around children, to whom access was now much harder to gain than it was in earlier years when empire was actively propagandised in schools.62 In the late 1980s the National Committee established a scholarship for university students around the country. Branches took turns at nominating deserving Commonwealth students for the scholarship, chosen for their academic abilities and financial need. The project was not popular with all branches, however, with Poverty Bay stating in 1991 that “we would like to discontinue monetary support for overseas

---
61 11 September 1979, minutes, series A:16, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL
students in New Zealand. We think that any money available for study should be used to support qualifying New Zealand students in New Zealand instead of bringing overseas students in."\textsuperscript{63}

While there is no indication that the Canterbury shared this opinion, when it came to charity the branch’s views were clear. In Chapter Five it was seen that the Young Contingent eventually discontinued its support of the Save the Children Fund in favour of a local charity. In 1981 the Canterbury League confirmed its support for local charities first when it put forward a remit to the National Committee, suggesting that “the Victoria League should give more consideration to projects for the community within New Zealand.”\textsuperscript{64} If charity could not be kept within New Zealand, then the League in Canterbury wished it kept within the Pacific area. In 1985, the Canterbury League offered for remit at the National Committee meeting “that the Pacific Basin Countries be considered first for the New Zealand League’s first priority charity area.”\textsuperscript{65} This idea was reflected in the adoption in 1977 of St Christopher’s Home in Fiji as a national project. St Christopher’s catered for all races and denominations, but was, importantly, “established by the church of England.”\textsuperscript{66} The League in Canterbury continued to support St Christopher’s until the early 2000s, when support was switched to Nurse Maude Hospital, reflecting the wish of members that money be given locally.\textsuperscript{67} It is in the area of charity work that the League differs most from the IODE, for, while “unofficially, patriotism has remained,” the IODE has generally been successful in refocusing on charitable endeavour,\textsuperscript{68} and especially in refocusing its attention towards the indigenous people of Northern Canada. In New Zealand, however, perhaps due to a smaller and “more rigid class structure”,\textsuperscript{69} or

---

\textsuperscript{63} Conferences, 1991, series D:7, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL

\textsuperscript{64} National committee newsletter number 40, June 1980, series F:7, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL

\textsuperscript{65} National committee newsletter number 40, June 1980, series F:7, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL

\textsuperscript{66} 1 June 1977, minutes, series A:15, Victoria League collection, MB367, MBL

\textsuperscript{67} Personal conversation, 19 July 2003, Christchurch

\textsuperscript{68} Pickles, \textit{Female Imperialism and National Identity}, p.174

\textsuperscript{69} Pickles, \textit{Female Imperialism and National Identity}, pp.178-79
perhaps due to a loss of confidence in speaking on race issues, the League in New Zealand has made no such reorientation.

**Conclusion**

The years since the mid-1970s have seen the rapid decline of the League in New Zealand. Membership numbers have dropped, many of the branches have closed and those branches that are still in operation have become increasingly socially oriented. The main reason for the group’s decline is the changing environment in which it has operates, both in terms of women’s roles in society and in terms of the way empire is now viewed. While the IODE in Canada has reoriented itself towards charity, the League, on the other hand, has made retaining ties with Britain its main concern, and gone about it vocally. Those activities of a ‘practical’ nature that were continued in the last quarter of the twentieth century were conducted in such a way as to reveal the League’s increasingly pro-British and insular views.
Conclusion

This thesis has argued that the Victoria League was first and foremost a patriotic organisation keenly interested in instilling in New Zealand citizens a sense of both national and imperial pride. From the League’s belief in the hierarchies of empire and love of Britishness stemmed its ideas about race. The thesis has also argued that the fact that the League was composed mainly of elite women informed the group’s ideas about suitable work, this being performed mostly in the social and/or domestic arena. In terms of ‘women’s place,’ despite being a woman-led and centred organisation, the League was conservative, and was more interested in preserving the status quo than challenging it. League conservatism stemmed from the fact it was an elite organisation, and continued throughout the twentieth century.

World War One was the League’s first major challenge, and one which Canterbury branch members, like most New Zealanders, supported fully. While women’s work was acknowledged as important, it was based on difference from, and in particular support of, men. Work done both during and immediately after the war fulfilled the maternal functions of ‘care and nurture.’ In terms of rhetoric employed during the war, the League, like the rest of the Christchurch elite, was quick to pick up on anti-German discourses and advance so-called British ideals of democracy, liberty, citizenship and duty. In the immediate post-war years, the sending of wreaths from New Zealand to England on Anzac Day became a way of expressing the closeness felt to the ‘mother country.’ The fact that New Zealand branches were adamant about having the wreath made in New Zealand also reflects, however, the importance of national pride to the League. In this particular instance, Canterbury proved itself the most eager of the New Zealand branches to please its ‘mother.’ This thesis has argued that the celebration of Empire Day in the immediate post-war years was a key way in which the League emphasised continuity with the past and attempted to instil a sense of patriotism in the nation’s citizens.

The years between World Wars One and Two saw the League in Canterbury thriving in terms of membership numbers and level of practical activity. One of the
most important areas of work for the group was hospitality, an area which reflected
the elite preoccupations of the group’s members. It was also an area which
demonstrated the branch’s attempts to emulate England, and, in attempting to ensure
New Zealand and in particular Canterbury were seen in the best possible light, the
League was eager to have its nation and region portrayed as ‘Homelike’. Other work
done in this period was performed in spaces of citizenship including immigration,
education and charitable endeavour. In performing such work, the League often
fulfilled a maternal role, for example in caring for young single female and public
school boy immigrants. The League, like many empire builders in this period, was
heavily influenced by the doctrine of eugenics and was thus concerned with measures
which would purify the nation racially, such as the immigration of ‘pure British
stock,’ as well as with ensuring the good health of mothers and children. Work
performed by the League in this period also reflected moral preoccupations which
were informed by discourses prevalent in New Zealand at the time; immigrants sought
were those of ‘good character,’ while films were to be censored and preferably
British. Finally, in the years immediately before World War Two, preparations for the
1940 national centenary saw the League once again attempt to instil in New
Zealanders a sense of New Zealand identity which was situated within a British
framework.

In many ways the League’s participation in World War Two mirrored World
War One. The League was again part of a majority of New Zealanders automatically
in support of the war effort. In addition, the League continued to draw on its maternal
influence in its support of conscription. As in World War One, the League emphasised
the importance of women’s war work, yet doing so from a position of support for
men. There was also an attempt to extend work beyond fundraising and knitting
comforts, however, as the League expressed a desire to engage in ‘heavier’ war work.
It was especially keen to influence citizens in terms of patriotism, illustrated by its
attempts to control what soldiers read and ensuring schoolchildren saluted the flag. In
terms of wartime loyalties, this thesis has argued that much of the League’s work
benefited Britain. While New Zealand was increasingly forced to rely on the United States as a protector in the Pacific and the United States was embraced as an English-speaking 'cousin,' as far as the League was concerned Britain remained 'mother.' The years immediately following World War Two were dominated by the Cold War in terms of international relations and the League supported New Zealand's efforts to play its part on the world stage in propagandising for the introduction of CMT. This, along with the League's denouncement of watersiders during the 1951 lockout, in which trade unions and pacifists became targets of anti-Communist rhetoric saw the League, as an elite organisation, continue to represent conservative politics.

The 1950s and 1960s were a particularly conservative period in New Zealand's history, and, as a conservative organisation, the League thus continued to reflect the dominant trend in New Zealand politics. In particular, the League demonstrated its loyalty to the monarchy, and League popularity in the early 1950s may have been partly due to the Royal tour of 1953/54. This period also saw a high level of social activity, particularly for the group's Young Contingent. Despite this activity, which often centred on domesticity, however, the League was restless at the label of social group and commented on the need to increase levels of practical activity. This thesis has argued that, in terms of what practical activity it did continue with, traditional areas of work were often reoriented in new direction. The League in Canterbury became more forthright in putting its opinions forward to League headquarters in London, and the group's work reflected a new wider focus, exemplified in the League's adoption of a new name in 1964. It should be noted, however, that it was only as long as New Zealand retained close ties with Britain that the League was happy to expand its horizons, and, in its educative and charity work in particular, embrace more immediate neighbours in Asia. Despite broadening horizons into Asia, however, though the Canterbury branch made some mention of helping Maori, other branches were not keen and the League remained largely silent on issues of race in New Zealand.
Conclusion

It was the weakening of formal ties between New Zealand and Britain from the mid-1970s and the rise of movements undermining the beliefs on which the League was founded which eventually led to the League’s decline. While the League correctly attributed the loss of membership numbers to the “changing times,” the group also commented that it was unwilling to sacrifice “high ideals” to “modern standards.” Thus, this thesis has argued, in the last decades of the twentieth century, the League attempted to prevent the further loss of ties with Britain and celebrated its British roots whenever possible. The League in Canterbury returned to deferring to Britain, exemplified in its following the London branch in amalgamating, and withdrew from the international arena. In terms of practical work it instead took a more local Pacific Island and New Zealand, though still not Maori, focus. While the majority of New Zealanders remained loyal to Britain well into the second half of the twentieth century, and the League thus represented the dominant view for a large part of its existence, this thesis has argued that, in the final quarter of the century the League came to represent a minority view.
Appendices

Appendix One: Presidents, Victoria League, Canterbury

Mrs A. E. G. Rhodes 1910-1917
Mrs Elworthy 1917-1920
Jessie Rhodes 1920-1922
Catherine Deans 1922-1929
Mrs Cuthbert Rutherford 1929-1931
Elizabeth Hogg 1931-1933
Catherine Deans 1933-1935
Mary Tripp 1935-1955
Mrs R. B. Neill 1955-1965
Mary Polson 1965-1970
Mrs C. Westrate 1970-1976
Mrs R. F. Savill 1976-1981
Mrs J. H. Powell 1981-1982
Miss M. Morten 1982-1984
Mrs G. Reeves-Harris 1984-1986
Mrs J. L. Hewland 1986-1988
Mr H. J. Walker 1988-1992
Joan Sawers 1992-1994
Mrs I. J. MacDonald 1994-1997
Diana Spence 1997-
A. Primary Sources

I. Unpublished Papers and Manuscripts

1. Canterbury Museum, Christchurch

Mary Tripp Collection
ARC1994.17
Box 1, Folder 2, Item 2
Box 1, Folder 4, Items 22-25, 27-28, 30, 33-34
Box 2, Folder 5, Items 38, 40-42, 50-51

2. Macmillan Brown Library, University of Canterbury, Christchurch

Victoria League Collection
MB367
Series A: Minutes (Canterbury Branch), Numbers 1-20
Series B: Correspondence (Canterbury Branch), Numbers 1-83
Series C: Finance (Canterbury Branch), Numbers 16, 17
Series D: General, Numbers 2-4, 6-8, 12, 18, 19, 25
Series E: Young Contingent/Younger Members’ Group (Canterbury Branch), Numbers 1-3, 6-7, 9-12, 16, 25-26
Series F: National Committee, Numbers 1-8
Series I: Ephemera, Numbers 45, 50

II. Newspapers

1. Canterbury Public Library, Christchurch
Press
1910-2000

B. Secondary Sources

III. Books


Bibliography


Grimshaw, Patricia, Marilyn Lake, Ann McGrath and Marian Quartley, *Creating a Nation* (Victoria, Penguin, 1996)


Hall, Catherine, *Cultures of Empire: Colonizers in Britain and the Empire in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Manchester and New York, Manchester University Press, 2000)

Hall, Catherine, *White, Male and Middle-Class: Explorations in Feminism and History* (Cambridge, Polity, 1992)


McClintock, Anne, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (London and New York, Routledge, 1995)


Pickles, Katie, *Female Imperialism and National Identity: the Imperial Order of Daughters of the Empire (IODE)* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2002)

Pratt, Mary Louise, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London and New York, Routledge, 1992)


Tennant, Margaret, *Children's Health, the Nation's Wealth: a History of Children's Health Camps* (Wellington, Bridget Williams, 1994)
Bibliography

Thompson, Alistair, *Anzac Memories: Living with the Legend* (Melbourne, University of Oxford Press, 1994)


Ware, Vron, *Beyond the Pale: White Women, Racism and History* (London and New York, Verso, 1992)

IV. Articles


Chaudhuri, Nupur and Margaret Strobel, introduction, in Nupur Chaudhuri and Margaret Strobel (eds), *Western Women and Imperialism: Complicity and Resistance* (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1992), pp.1-15


Else, Anne, introduction, in Anne Else (ed), *Women Together: a History of Women’s Organisations in New Zealand: Nga Ropu Wahine o te Motu* (Wellington, Department of Internal Affairs, 1993), pp.vii-x


Haggis, Jane, ‘White Women and Colonialism: Towards a Non-recuperative History,’ in Clare Midgley (ed), *Gender and Imperialism* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1998), pp.45-75
Hall, Catherine, "From Greenland's Icy Mountains to Africa's Golden Sand": Ethnicity, Race and Nation in Mid Nineteenth Century England,' *Gender and History*, 5:2 (1993), pp.212-30


Midgley, Clare, introduction, in Clare Midgley (ed), *Gender and Imperialism* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1998), pp.1-18


Pickles, Katie, ‘Edith Cavell – Heroine: No Hatred or Bitterness for Anyone?’ *History Now*, 2:3 (October 1997), pp.1-8

Pickles, Katie, ‘Empire, Settlement and Single British Women as New Zealand Domestic Servants During the 1920s,’ *New Zealand Journal of History*, 35:1 (2001), pp.22-44

Pickles, Katie, ‘Exhibiting Canada: Empire, Migration and the 1928 Schoolgirl Tour,’ *Gender, Place, Culture*, 7:1 (2000), pp.81-96


Pickles, Katie, ‘Kiwi Icons and the Resettlement of New Zealand as Colonial Space,’ *New Zealand Geographer*, 58:2 (October 2002), pp.5-16

Pickles, Katie, ‘Pink Cheeked and Surplus: Single British Women’s Inter-War Migration to New Zealand,’ in Lyndon Fraser and Katie Pickles (eds), *Shifting Centres: Women and Migration in New Zealand History* (Dunedin, University of Otago Press, 2002), pp.63-80


Ware, Vron, ‘Moments of Danger: Race, Gender and Memories of Empire,’ *Journal of History and Theory*, 31:4 (1992), pp.116-37


V. Theses and Research Essays


Wilson, Phillipa, “*We are Still English at Heart*: Constructions of Englishness by Englishwomen in Nineteenth Century New Zealand” (MA Thesis, University of Auckland, 1997)


VI. Conferences Papers
Ballantyne, Tony, 'Space and Perspective in Imperial/Colonial Histories,' unpublished paper, NZHA Conference, Dunedin, November 2003