"To Let You Understand..."

Women’s Working Lives In Edinburgh

Photographs and quotes from the exhibition about women’s working lives in Edinburgh, with relevant statistical information.

Produced by Edinburgh District Council Women’s Committee
'To Let You Understand' is an exhibition by Edinburgh District Council Women's Committee about women's working lives in Edinburgh and concentrates on the work that the majority of women do.

The work for the exhibition was carried out between September 1987 and April 1988 during which time many workplaces and women's groups were visited throughout the city.

For the first time in Scotland, the exhibition has given women a chance to put on record how they feel about their work and their lives.

This booklet is designed to accompany the exhibition and contains a selection of the photographs and quotes used, as well as relevant statistical information. All the quotes come from the women spoken to in the last six months and the statistical information has been collected by the Women's Unit.

PHOTOGRAPHY: FRANKI RAFFLES
Franki Raffles works as a freelance photographer and was commissioned by the Women's Committee to work on this exhibition. 'To Let You Understand' is her fourth exhibition which is specifically about women.

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"This is just typing, it's not secretarial. If you take secretarial studies you have to sit exams. We got a choice between typing and eight periods of P.E."

School Student

In October 1980, among school leavers available for work in Scotland, over a third were unemployed or on one of the Government’s schemes. The likelihood of being in work increased with ‘O’ grade success.

"At school we got two placements for two weeks just before you left. One of my placements was in the shop that I was already working in at night. When it came to filling in forms for jobs I didn’t have a clue what to do."

YTS Trainee

There were 2,389 young people on YTS schemes in May in 1987 in Edinburgh. 68% of them were boys and 32% of them girls.

"I think it’s a disgrace they’re going to make YTS compulsory. It’s alright for the politicians, how would they like to work 40 hours for £28 a week. If you work in a shop you’ve got to look smart, how can you do that on £28?"

YTS Trainee

YTS trainees get paid £28.50 in their first year of training. This rises to £35.00 in their second year.

The M.S.C. are estimating that an extra 20-25,000 young people in Britain will be on YTS within the next year. After September this year, everyone below the age of 18 will have to go on a YTS except those in certain circumstances (eg: a person with disabilities or a cover). If by the age of 18 the trainee has not secured a permanent job, the period of training will be extended.
“No-one knew I was pregnant until about six months. I know I was young but I don’t regret it now. It’s better than sitting about the house all day with nothing to do. The father’s dinnae know what they’re missing.”

Young Mother
"We had sexual intercourse classes or whatever they’re called. We were told to remember to brush your teeth, but we weren’t told how to do it or how to stop getting pregnant. At least when I was pregnant I knew I had clean teeth.”

Young Mother

In 1986, one in every eleven births in Lothian was to a mother aged under 20. In Craigmillar that year, 23% of births were to mothers aged under 20. In Morningside 0.8% of births were to mothers aged under 20.

The number of births (live & still) by young women aged 15 to 18 rose by 26% for the period 1980 to 1985. Births by women aged 16 rose by 400%.

"I started to go and do ‘O’ grades at Stevenson but by the time I’d got her up, taken her to nursery, gone back across town, studied, picked her up, gone home, got tea, bathed her, played with her and then got her to bed — how can you study after that?"

There are 9,000 single parents in Lothian with dependant children — 70% rely on income support.

90% of single parent families in Britain are headed by a woman.

"I don’t miss the job I had that much, but I miss the women I was working with. It wouldn’t be so bad if I could take the kids out more but there’s nowhere round here and you cannae always afford to take the bus somewhere else.”

The Equal Opportunities Commission have stated that “childcare remains the key issue for the Commission as inadequate childcare services seriously reduce women’s access to training and public life.”

“A lot of women leave when they get pregnant because they can’t get childcare.”

Personnel Manager, Banking Industry

In September 1983 there were 868 full-time nursery places available in Edinburgh. This had dropped to 766 in 1987. Part-time nursery places available had risen from 4,159 to 4,453 in the same period.

In September 1982 the percentage of full-time nursery places was 13% in Lothian — 4% higher than in Scotland as a whole. By September 1984 full-time places had dropped to 9% of all places and was only 1% higher than in Scotland as a whole.

"The problem with working full-time is my kids aren’t at school full-time — they finish at 3.00pm.”

Part-time Worker, Local Authority

In March 1987 there were 4,224 full and part-time nursery places available in Edinburgh. 5,988 children were on the waiting lists.

"The whole factory is on flexi-time. You can come in any time between 7.00am and 8.30am and leave any time between 3.30pm and 5.30pm. The women all tend to come in early and leave early, but the men don’t. They don’t have to see to the kids, or the housework or get the tea. I suppose sitting about here till 5.30 fills their day in.”

Line Worker, Computer Industry
"I hate shopping. I only use the local shops if I have to — they’re too expensive. Most weeks I walk to Savacentre and back, pulling the trolley with one hand and pushing the buggy with the other."

"Never mind getting someone to watch your bairns, you need a babysitter to watch your house round here."
“Lots of women go out to work at night when he’s in to look after the bairns — if you have to pay the childminder you can’t afford to work — it’s the only way to do it.”

Part-time Worker, Retail Industry
The number of female employees in employment has only increased because part-time employment has become more prevalent.

Female part-time working is the most rapidly growing section of the Scottish work-force — also the worst paid and the least protected.

In the hotel and catering industry over half the jobs are part-time and over 60% are filled by women.

The retail sector suffers from widespread low pay, part-time and casual employment. This accounts for approximately 10% of employment in Edinburgh, employing 23,376 workers in 1981.

In Scotland 900,000 people (46.3% of the total workforce) are low paid. Of these, 69% are women and 41% part-time workers.

In Edinburgh, 36% of all women in employment are part-time. 2% of all men in employment are part-time. Women account for 87% of all part-time workers in Edinburgh.

In Lothian it has been estimated that there are least 80,000 part-time workers — 75% of them are low paid and 90% of the low paid are women.

“We’ve had to lay off a lot of our full-time staff. Most of the women in the stores are part-time now. They used to be full-time but this way we don’t have to pay National Insurance or Superannuation. It’s really nasty but we’ve no option, we have to do it to compete.”
Manager, Retail Industry

“It’s the best job I’ve ever had. I work from 9.00am till 12.00am, all I need to do is serve the directors tea every morning.”
Part-time Worker, Retail Industry
"We serve 600 meals a day from the main canteen."

Canteen Worker, Computer Industry
"We're very hot on equal opportunities here — most of our employees are women."

Manager, Food Manufacturing
When performed by women the ten worst paid full-time jobs are — shop check-out, hairdressers, shop assistants, barmaids, waitresses, cleaners, sewing machinists, receptionists, chef/cooks and packers/canners.

“It would be a good place to work if the pay wasn’t so bad.”

Line Worker, Food Manufacturing

Recent legislation has removed many workers under 21 from the protection of the Wages Councils. This affects workers who are already in low paid jobs. For example, a shop assistant who receives £1.19 per hour at 20 will be entitled to claim the Wage Council minimum of £2.19 when she becomes 21. As a result of this, employees in certain sectors prefer to employ under 21s and many women, on reaching their 21st birthdays will become even more vulnerable in the labour market.

“As far as my parents were concerned, I’d made it when I got a job in the bank.”

Clerical Worker, Banking Industry

The four largest areas of service sector employment in Edinburgh provide over 50% of all jobs in the city. All four — Retailing, Hotel and Catering, Banking and Public Services — contain large sections of low paid workers.

*81.3% of full-time female manual workers earn less than £123 per week (Low Pay Unit definition of the poverty threshold) compared with 79% in Britain as a whole.

*51.9% of full-time female non-manual workers earn less than £123 per week compared with 44.4% in Britain as a whole.

*57.5% of all full-time female workers in Lothian earn less than £123 per week compared with 52.8% in Britain as a whole.

“Everybody loves working in the hospital. It’s a great place, you feel part of a team. It’s just the pay that gets you down. That, and the stupid things about money. We just got this place (pharmacy) painted after about ten years, but there wasn’t enough money to put up a notice board.”

Pharmacist, National Health Service

Using the Government’s own figures, it can be calculated that over 1 in 3 of all those working full-time in Lothian Region are low paid, 3 out of 5 female full-time workers and 4 out of 5 manual workers.

“It will all take time. There’s not a lot of women to recruit from although they can come up from the factory floor, and some do. You’re still made to feel you’re a woman in a man’s world, even though there’s no discrimination.”

Graduate Trainee, Computer Industry

75% of all clerks in the United Kingdom labour force are women but only 13% of ‘foremen and inspectors’ are women.

“We’re very hot on equal opportunities here — most of our employees are women.”

Manager, Food Manufacturing
“A few months ago we were all women in this section but we’ve started to get young men coming in and they can do clerical work just the same as women. Mind you, if the incentives don’t improve they’ll be off in a year’s time.”

Section Supervisor, Banking Industry

“It’s hard work but needs done. We do the laundry for most of the hospitals in Edinburgh. I go home at night shattered — the last thing I want to do is cook a meal or see to the house.”

Laundry Worker, National Health Service
“Staff are not the same as they used to be. They go where the money is.”
Personnel Manager, Retail Industry

“There’s not much choice of jobs these days.”
Checkout Worker, Retail Industry

“Nobody seems to realise how important our work is to the hospitals. It’s not just us who will suffer when private contractors take over.”
Laundry Worker, National Health Service

At present hospital domestics earn an hourly rate of £2.02 and school cleaners £2.45. The average rate paid by private contractors in Scotland is £1.45 per hour, though one company is known to pay as little as £1.00 per hour.

“Ten years ago hardly anyone knew what a Unit Trust was, these days everybody knows about them. It’s since all this privatisation. British Telecom started it. There’s plenty of money around, but it’s the same people who’ve got it.”
Clerical Worker, Banking Industry

Wage rates at the levels paid by many private contractors remove pension entitlements, employment protection measures, sick pay and maternity schemes from large numbers of women workers.

“It’ll be contract cleaning soon and that’ll be the end of us. They’ll offer us jobs, of course, but no-one will take them — who’d work the same hours for half the pay?”
Cleaner, Local Authority

“I’ve worked here a long time. You know how it is, you work in a place a few years and then you have to start thinking about long-term things and employment rights and pensions. It might be different when this PEP thing starts, but I’m not sure.”
Line Worker, Food Manufacturing
"Well, privatisation won't affect me. I'm due to retire soon, but it's the younger ones I feel sorry for."

Canteen Worker, Local Authority
"I was really annoyed that I couldn’t go on that Health Service march. I maybe can’t walk so good, but I can still shout as loud as anyone else."

In Scotland as a whole the number of people over retirement age is 879,790, 17.1% of the population. In Edinburgh the proportion is higher with 97,241 pensioners comprising 22.2% of the population in 1986. In December 1986, 13,640 pensioners were receiving Supplementary Benefit and a further 24,442 were in receipt of rent and/or rate rebates; over half of these pensioners have incomes below the Government’s needs allowance.

"My mother was only 60 when she died. She’d worked all her life and never knew what it was to sit down. She had eleven of us — nine are left and we’re all O.A.P.s. Aye, we’ve got time on our hands now — but not a lot to do with it. It just shows you how things have progressed.”

62% of all pensioners in Edinburgh are women. It is estimated that nearly half the city’s pensioners are receiving or entitled to receive means tested welfare benefits and are almost certainly living in poverty.

The basic rate of income support for single pensioners is set at £33.40 with an additional £10.65 pensioners premium, making a total income of £44.05.
“To let you understand, in those days you could make something out of nothing — a pot of soup and a dumpling. Mind you, in the 1926 strike there was nothing. Everybody was out looking for things on the cheap to get fed. It was hard then. The women didnae work — of course, there were no jobs for the men either. Mind you, there's still a lot of unemployment about now — who'd have thought we'd be going back to that? Just the other day I got one hundred pensioners to sign against the Poll Tax. I said to them 'it's no use moaning, you have to do something about it.' Aye, you're never done fighting.”
THANKS TO

Well Woman Centre, St Brides
Greendykes Parents Support Group
Jack Kane Parents Support Group
Royston/Wardieburn Women’s Group
Middlehouse Young Mothers
Citadel Women’s Support Group
Roundabout Women’s Group
Fort Community Wing Women’s Group
South Fort Childrens Centre
No. 20
Asian Women’s Group, Fort Community Wing
Chinese Women’s Group
Disabled Women’s Group
Star Coffee Bar Youth Wing
Canongate Girls Club
Young Chinese Women
Citadel SOAPA
Royston/Wardieburn SOAPA
Bridges Project
Victoria Hostel
Community Relations Council
Canongate Youth Training Scheme

Royal Bank of Scotland
Scottish & Newcastle Breweries
Royal Infirmary
Central Laundry Services, Western General
Department of Administration, (Catering & Cleaning)
Department of Environmental Health, Edinburgh
District Council
British Telecom
Home-Care Service, Lothian Regional Council
Bond 9
Traffic Wardens, Lothian & Borders Police
Safeway
Scotmid
Jenners
George Hotel
Caledonian Hotel
Burtons Biscuits
Newbattle Abbey College
Portobello High School
D B Marshalls
Millars Confectionary
Scottish Braille Press
John Menzies
Bruntsfield Health Centre
Brook Advisory Centre
General Practitioners, Lothian Health Board
Elsie Inglis Hospital

and all the women who gave us their time