

Disabled Women and Socio-spatial Barriers to Motherhood

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Chapter Three

Out of Sight, Out of Mind

Introduction

Blind Asylums and Missions to the outdoor blind established in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Edinburgh and Glasgow sought to render blind people, primarily men, useful members of society and financially capable of supporting their families. Working in the asylum workshops, or supported by the blind mission to become street traders, blind men retained a presence and role in mainstream society. The asylums and missions, it seems, did not seek to render blind women as useful members of society in the same way, however, but rather sought to protect them from the rigours of everyday life. The root purpose of this chapter will be to chart this gendering of asylum and mission activity, using a range of primary historical sources to do with the work of the asylums and missions in Scotland's two major cities. The objective will also be to elaborate how the segregation of blind women in heavily controlled and surveyed asylum and even mission 'space' had enormous implications, partly for the women themselves in terms of what they could and could not do, be and become, and partly through growing perceptions of them as less-than-proper women with no role to play in wider family, community and social life.

Women admitted as residents or out-workers of the asylums were indeed subjected to constant surveillance, rules and regulations that acted to restrict their participation in mainstream society, as will be documented shortly. The majority of women supported by the missions lived in the community, but, whether in the family home, lodgings or poorhouse, supplied with knitting and sewing by the mission, they usually remained within the confines of this 'home', rarely participating in their local community. This social and spatial segregation imposed upon blind women severely diminished their opportunities to form relationships, engage in sexual activity, or to undertake

child-bearing or mothering roles in society. Blind women's spatial segregation, along with demeaning stereotypes created by the institutions, perpetuated a cultural belief that blind women were unsuitable reproducers, incapable of fulfilling feminised roles or indeed any useful roles in society (Stoddard Holmes 2001).

The Asylums

Local philanthropists established the Edinburgh and Glasgow Blind Asylums in 1793 and 1827 respectively. The directors, drawn from the medical profession, business and church communities, genuinely desired to have what they considered to be a positive influence on the lives and circumstances of blind people

The aim we have in view is to rescue the blind from hopeless despondency and render them useful members of society (GBAAR 1883:5).

These sentiments indicate a commitment to assisting blind people to acquire education and skills to facilitate their participation in mainstream society. The Edinburgh and Glasgow Blind Asylums admitted mainly young people, who generally had been blind from a young age. Entrance criteria favoured those who could be taught a trade and be employed within the asylum workshops, and they did not admit individuals who would possibly become a burden upon the institution (Royal Commission on The Blind 1886(c):44). The asylums proactively created the impression that they accommodated the needs of the majority of blind people in the cities' populations, but, because they only admitted those who could be absorbed as employees into the workshops, they effectively served to assist only a minority of the blind population (Ritchie 1930).

Moreover, it would appear that the directors' intentions to make blind people useful members of society were very much gender-orientated. These institutions were opened with the intention of offering blind males, first and foremost, opportunities to access general education, industrial training and employment within the asylum workshops. The asylums met the requirements of mainly blind males, mirroring the cultural expectations of that time, when men were assumed to have responsibilities as providers for their families. These blind males were enabled to fulfil their expected social roles and served

a purpose to society, manufacturing the various goods produced in the asylum workshop, but the directorial intentions for females appear to have been very different. Prior to the 1820 opening of the female asylum in Edinburgh, the directors were particularly concerned with the guidance and development of the moral deportment of their female charges. It seems that the directors perceived blind women to be physically and morally vulnerable, and in need of guidance and care. Many of the women initially admitted were assumed to originate from the poorest classes, although they were considered to be among the most respectable characters who were very poor (EBAMB 1805-1825:208). It is apparent that the directors regarded blind females as helpless, and that this misguided perception undoubtedly influenced their adoption of a guardianship role in the women's lives.

Contained spaces

The Edinburgh Asylum for the Relief of the Indigent and Industrious Blind, opened in 1793, was initially located in Waterloo Place in the centre of the city. The requirement for larger workshop premises prompted a move to Nicholson Street on the south side of the city. While located in the south side, a female asylum was opened in 1820, situated in the same street as the male asylum. Further expansion in workshop premises and female accommodation involved the erection of new buildings at Craigmillar Park on the periphery of the city: 'This which is a new building, is just outside the town, in a very healthy and beautiful situation' (Armitage 1878:6). Situated just beyond the city boundary, only a few large dwelling houses were present in the vicinity of the asylum in 1876 (Edinburgh 1877, 1881). House-building proliferated, and by 1893 the area had established itself as an affluent neighbourhood, and large detached and semi-detached dwelling houses had encroached on the fields that bounded the asylum grounds (Edinburgh 1893). The Glasgow Blind Asylum, established in 1827 and based in the former fever hospital, was located to the north of the city, occupying a semi-rural location bounded on the north and east by fields and west and east by newly built large residential dwellings (Maps 1828, 1831, 1832). In the mid 1800s the Asylum moved to a purpose-built site in Castle Street, and the new location positioned the asylum in front of Glasgow Royal Infirmary (Map 1860). The Asylum was surrounded by a substantial, nine feet high, perimeter wall. A statue of Christ opening the eyes of the blind stood symbolically at the Castle Street entrance. By 1896 the asylum had become completely encompassed by residential developments,

and these were large dwellings as opposed to tenements, which would suggest that the asylum was now sited in an increasingly prosperous residential area of Glasgow (Map 1896).

Peripheral locations contributed to the spatial segregation of blind people. Even when residential developments encroached on the asylum boundary, perimeter walls, austere, imposing entrances and long tree-lined avenues leading to the main asylum buildings all acted as physical boundaries between segregated and mainstream spaces. These physical boundaries distanced supposedly 'defective others' away from mainstream normality. These physical features contributed to the mystification of both the activities within such spaces and those who inhabited them.

The blind asylums distributed advertising literature to raise awareness of their charitable work, as well as detailing the items for sale produced by the inmates such as, mattresses, baskets, brushes, knitted shawls, stockings and baby clothes. Annual reports frequently carried adverts for these items, with the text always constructing the institutions positively as philanthropic providers and inmates negatively as passive recipients. This exploitation of inmates as a means of increasing legacies and donations was particularly pronounced during times of financial hardship. A trade depression in the late 1840s was identified as the cause of a decline in sales, donations and legacies, and in order to redress this situation the institutions promoted the need for their continuation:

The many pressing applications for admission to the institution, from all parts of Scotland and elsewhere, at once show the great helplessness of the blind. The reputation of the asylum for meeting their wants, and the usefulness of the institution in enabling them to raise themselves above entire dependence upon others (EBAAR 1850:3).

Edinburgh Asylum also projected the fate of inmates had they *not* been admitted into the institution:

Houselessness, uninstructed, blind – helped through this dreary world, as it were, from hour to hour, groping for aid amid the constant embarrassment of their forlorn condition (EBAAR 1852:4).

Similarly, Glasgow Asylum forcefully conveyed the institution's supposed role in alleviating the perceived burden that blind people placed on society:

The Asylum is the only institution in Glasgow or the West of Scotland where a blind person can learn to do something for his or her support, and without which many blind persons would now be wandering about begging or be dependent on their friends, or have to enter the poorhouse (GBAAR1883:8).

A trade depression in 1886 again dramatically reduced legacies and donations to the institutions and once again placed them in a tenuous financial position. These severe financial circumstances were reflected in an aggressive approach to raising public support and funds for the continuation of the institutions. The asylums clearly indicated their supposed role in society and the manner in which the general public were expected to assist them in undertaking their role:

To maintain such an institution necessarily involves a considerable outlay, which can only be provided by subscriptions, donations, bequests and purchases of articles manufactured by the blind (GBAAR 1887: Front Cover).

During financially hard times the institutions kept only profitable lines in production and resorted to using poorer quality raw materials. Inmates were portrayed as incapable of working efficiently and as such their wages required augmentation:

It must be remembered that the work of the blind can never be entirely remunerative. There will always be a certain income required from the public to keep the asylum in efficient state. Considerable expense must be incurred in the industrial training of the blind (GBAAR 1884:9).

Inmates were portrayed as an inefficient, unprofitable workforce who would have little influence on the prosperity of the institutions. The notion, perpetuated by the institutions, that blind individuals worked slower than sighted people meant that blind people were generally considered unsuitable for employment outwith the asylum workshops. Consequently, their association with the asylum tended to span their entire working life.

Institutional literature represented inmates as a human group deserving of sympathy and charitable support, while the general public were regarded and positioned as the main means of providing that charitable support. Thus, the general public were believed to have the capacity to influence the prosperity

of the institutions and to alter the life circumstances of blind people, rather than this possibility being in the remit of blind people themselves:

The desire to help the blind was natural in every well-disposed person. The sad loss under which they laboured in the deprivation of sight, and the cheerfulness with which they bore it, commanded the interest and sympathy of those more highly favoured (GBAAR 1888:8).

The Asylums, perhaps unintentionally, created a fearful image of blindness, describing blindness in some Annual Reports as 'one of the severest of human afflictions' (EBAAR 1857:4). Such descriptions were clearly used to stimulate generous donations, and the language used, combined with the spatial segregation of blind people, created societal fear of blindness and blind people. Therefore blindness was something to be avoided, and giving to charity enabled sighted individuals to distance themselves financially and physically from 'the blind'. Where gender was acknowledged, men were portrayed as competent, undertaking masculine tasks despite being blind. Women, however, were not accredited with adult status, and were instead portrayed as dependent, incapable, recipients who needed the institution to protect them.

To allow a female in the helpless state of a blind woman to go by herself unprotected through the crowded streets on a Sunday was inexpedient and attended with risk to the pupil herself (EBAMB 1825-1835:152).

The Asylums thus substantially contributed to the social construction of blind women as helpless and vulnerable individuals, women for whom everyday spaces were positioned as dangerous places.

The notion that blind females needed to be taken care of was reflected in statements from Annual Reports that reinforced the women's supposed unsuitability for work, inferring an incapacity to support themselves within or outwith the institution. Directors promoted their magnanimity towards the women:

The female asylum in a pecuniary sense, may be considered almost entirely unproductive, the expenses incurred for board, clothing of its inmates, absorbing a large proportion of the subscriptions to the institution. The directors have much satisfaction in believing that this great outlay is compensated by the comfort and happiness experienced by their interesting charge, through the mental training and sound

religious instruction they receive under the superintendence of their respected Matron, Miss Bathgate (EBAAR 1856: initial page unnumbered).

In general inmates' privacy or feelings were accorded little if any recognition by directors, and in many respects the inmates, especially females, were a commodity perhaps unintentionally exploited (Finkler 2003). For example, in an attempt to increase legacies and donations, members of the public were invited to tour the asylum on a daily basis. Females housed in the asylum in receipt of benevolence effectively became the property of the benefactors – the public. Giving to charity seemingly bought individuals the right to view, inspect and observe inmates at close quarters. For daily tours, no space was out of bounds. Visitors toured the workshops to watch inmates working, as well as the large dormitories where the women slept two to a bed. Female inmates were constantly on display, encouraged and expected to perform for visitors. As objects of public property, any aspect of the females' lives could be scrutinised or questioned by visitors and directors. As recipients of charity, the women were expected to be passive, diligent, obedient and most importantly, grateful.

The directors welcomed expressions of gratitude, and inmates were often invited into directors' meetings to thank them personally, or letters from inmates were read aloud. Despite the restrictive regimes, female inmates did express their gratitude to both the directors and the public. A letter submitted to the directors' meeting of November 1824 read:

The girls of the female blind asylum beg leave at this time humbly to thank the gentlemen of the management, the kind and indulgent public, and master Johnston in particular, for the many favours that are daily conferred on us: and it shall be our earnest prayer and constant endeavour to merit a continuation of the inestimable blessings both temporal and spiritual, which we have received since we entered the asylum (EBAMB 1805-1825:326).

Containment, morality and purification

The containment of inmates varied considerably depending upon the inmate's gender and the financial position of the institution. Prior to 1820 Edinburgh Blind Asylum admitted only males. The directors considered it highly improper to have males and females living in the same house. Funding constraints and a resultant lack of accommodation prohibited the admission of females for a

further 23 years. Boys and unmarried men were boarded within the asylum, and later in a boarding house purchased specifically for the purpose. This arrangement was abandoned in 1830. From this point onwards, boys were lodged with respectable married couples, unmarried men resided in lodgings selected by directors, and married men returned to their families each evening. Therefore, males participated in a segregated working environment during the day, after which they had, albeit limited, opportunities to participate in the everyday life of their local communities.

Women were accepted as home workers onto the roll of the Edinburgh Blind Asylum from 1796 onwards. Women were provided with materials and visited regularly by the overseer to monitor progress and productivity. At this early stage, differential directorial influence over females' lives became apparent. Where women's living conditions were considered to be very poor, the directors of the Asylum applied to the parish workhouse on their behalf. If women were accepted, but refused to enter the workhouse, they were denied the benefits of outworking for the Blind Asylum (EBAMB 1805-1825:17). By the early nineteenth century, directors resolved to establish a female asylum. In their deliberations regarding the location, they acknowledged 'the importance of females placed under their care in a more reputable situation and where their whole moral deportment would be under one superintendence' (EBAMB 1805-1825:217). It would seem that the directors did, in fact, assume responsibility for the moral correction and guidance of their female charges. The female asylum opened in 1820, and females admitted into the asylum resided within the walls of the institution. It was not until the middle of the nineteenth century that a few women were boarded out in lodgings selected by the directors. Even so, the majority of female inmates remained resident within the institution.

The directors' perceptions of the women as childlike had spatial consequences, chiefly manifested in the large dormitories with no physical divisions as privacy was not considered a requirement for inmates, especially when housed in single sex accommodation. Directors discussed the possibility of dividing the space with partitions, but took the decision not to do so (GBAMB 1880-1884). It was assumed that blindness, or at best partial sight, negated the need for physical divisions to create private space. For example, toilet facilities in the female dormitory were not equipped with doors until 1881 (GBAMB 1880-1884:58).

Moreover, newspaper descriptions of the female inmates at the time centred on their appearance, suggesting recognition of them as females. As with their sighted counterparts, their appearance indicated their moral stature; a dirty, untidy appearance was thought to signify immorality, while cleanliness and neatness equated with good moral standards (Barret-Ducrocq 1992). However, the description of their conduct also implies an infantile perception of these women:

In appearance they are clean, tidy and intelligent – in disposition apparently contented and cheerful: they appear less talkative than the males, the silence that reigns in the house being very notable in a household of women. The fact that they almost never quarrel among themselves is perhaps equally so (*Scotsman* article 1864:71).

In general, children rather than adults would be expected to quarrel amongst themselves. The article also described the men working competently with complex and potentially dangerous pieces of machinery. Female inmates were depicted quite differently, referred to as girls working quietly and passing the time singing; such portrayals distanced the inmates from sighted women.

The majority of Asylum inmates originated from poor families. Poor conditions and poverty were routinely associated by the Victorians with dirt, disease and also immorality. Directors therefore assumed that the majority of inmates originated from 'families where good example was not known' (EBAAR 1853:4). Inmates were occasionally admitted into the asylum on a conditional basis, especially when they were considered to come from an immoral background, and inmates were often forced to sever all ties or to limit contact with their relatives. For instance, Eliza Lyell was admitted into the Asylum on the condition that she only visited her family with the Matron's permission (RBASMB 1872-1883:20).

Although the directors perceived female inmates to generally be of good character, by virtue of their social class they were still assumed to have immoral and delinquent habits that had to be corrected through a purifying process of strict adherence to religious regimes. The directors professed their responsibilities towards both the moral and physical department of the inmates. 'With so great a responsibility [to] the moral, as well as the physical culture of so many of these almost helpless fellow creatures' (EBAAR 1855: unnumbered), worship, religious instruction, reading and recital of the bible

were fundamental elements of daily life in the asylum. The reformatory effects of the religious doctrine were considered to have paramount importance, especially in relation to female inmates. Christianity and expressions of Christian beliefs indicated the taming of a savage, animal-like group, and cleansing females of their immoral, depraved, dirty origins was crucial in the purification process. The female inmates were to be rendered as women of moral stature, living a celibate, moral life and, as such, could more readily gain social acceptability as deserving objects of charity.

Attendance at family worship twice per day, in addition to religious instruction and Sunday worship at the local church, was compulsory for all inmates. Male and female out-workers could choose which church they wished to attend, with their attendance monitored by directors. If monitoring revealed repeated absence, dismissal from the asylum ensued. The directors were convinced of the reformatory effects of religious doctrine:

The benefits of religious and secular education are afforded to those who might otherwise have remained in mental as well as visual darkness (EBAAR 1857:4).

Female resident inmates were held to a far higher moral code than were their out-working counterparts. Regulations dictated the church they were to attend, where they were to sit within the church, namely the seats provided for the blind, and the manner in which they should spend Sunday:

No one living in the house being left to wander about but all to attend the parish church with the mistress and to remain afterwards at home, neither admitting visitors or paying visits (EBAMB 1825-1835:271).

A few women residents made requests to attend a church of their choice. While the directors anxiously denied any desire to control the conscience or religious creed of the female inmates (EBAMB 1825-1835:272), they exerted their power directly in outright refusals to permit females to attend another church:

The directors do not want females wandering from church to church and perhaps about the streets or fields. Wandering on the Lord's day without God or good once influencing their mind (EBAMB 1825-1835:273).

The women's safety and religious ordinance may well have been causes for

directorial concern. However, it is highly likely that the directors did not want inmates to be 'aimlessly wandering' in public space, because women whose presence in the street could not be explained by an obvious task, shopping or some other necessary activity, were considered unnatural and their out-of-placeness perceived to signify doubtful morality (Barret-Ducrocq 1992). Also, images of vulnerability and helplessness had been constructed around the female inmates, women for whom public space was regarded as a thoroughly risk-laden place to be. Blind women independently navigating their way through public space would certainly have challenged this social perception of them. The directors' influence hence appears to have limited women's opportunities to participate independently in mainstream society, perhaps as a means of maintaining the created social images of both the incapable female inmates and the supposed necessity of the asylums.

Controlled and surveyed spaces

Strict regimes, rules and regulations formed the framework by which the Blind Asylums operated. The rules and regulations were initially devised to facilitate the efficient running of the institutions. However, as directorships changed over time, so too did the ethos underpinning both their involvement and attitudes towards the inmates. Regulations were introduced which acted to restrict and to control the choices and activities of all inmates to varying extents: for example, swearing, drinking alcohol, impertinent language, idleness and smoking were not tolerated within the asylum. Rules and regulations were frequently read out to inmates, particularly when they had been contravened. The threat of dismissal was unremitting and presence in the asylum was always conditional, dependent on adherence to the rules and diligence in the workshops. Since expulsion from the institution would almost certainly lead to destitution or entry into the workhouse, these actions perpetuated a climate of fear and conformity.

One of the objects of the Asylum was to 'educate the young, and to instruct the adult to earn his bread by his own industry' (Alston 1846:37). It was assumed that blind men would have families dependent upon them for support, whereas blind women were not expected to have such responsibilities, but rather to be themselves dependent upon their friends and relatives for support. A gender bias hence existed in the facilities provided within the asylum, mirroring assumed responsibilities and dominant social

roles. Expansion of male workshops enabled the enrolment of an increased number of males, and the Edinburgh Asylum Annual Report of 1865 notes 106 men and boys in the male asylum, and 28 females in the female asylum (EBAAR 1865:iv). Males outnumbered females at least three to one. Age limits on admission differed, with 40 years as a maximum age limit for men, compared to 30 years for females (EBAMB 1805–1825). Provision for female inmates was limited to one workroom and two dormitories, accommodating a maximum of 29 women (*Scotsman* 1864:72). The imbalance in provision was somewhat redressed in 1876 when the asylum moved to new buildings in Craigmillar Park, which allowed accommodation for upwards of 100 females (RBASAR 1874).

The directors exerted their influence over all inmates by devising and implementing mechanisms for monitoring conduct and behaviour within and, more significantly, outwith the institutions. All inmates had to seek the permission of the workshop manager prior to taking leave for example, prior to taking a day off work. A regulation was implemented that obligated the inmates to disclose why they wanted time off and where they were going. All out-worker's lodgings were selected and approved by the directors, and a regulation imposed a curfew on the activities of inmates lodged outwith the asylum:

It is enjoined that the blind shall never be from their homes after nine o'clock at night, unless they can give a satisfactory excuse and if the least appearance of drunkenness is discovered at any time it will be visited by the most severe reprehension of the directors and by dismissal upon repetition (EBAMB 1825-1835:338).

Outwith the institution female out-workers' activities and conduct were monitored more closely than males. For example, prior to the opening of the female asylum, a few out-workers sang in a choir along with male out-workers but the directors exerted their influence over the women's activities by instructing the minister that the women were no longer to participate (EBAMB 1805-1825:208). Male out-workers' behaviour was probably observed with a degree of leniency, so that when male inmates McDermid and Watson were found guilty of staying out late with suspicious company, both were admonished for their behaviour but neither was expelled (EAMB1825-1835:292). In November 1827, Paul Ramsay was disciplined for being seen intoxicated, but he was allowed to stay in the asylum on the condition that

this would not occur again (EBAMB 1825-1835:80). The directors took this opportunity to remind inmates of 'their determination to punish in the most exemplary manner every delinquency that may arise' (EBAMB 1825-1835:81).

For women, though, the consequences of digressing from the moral limits imposed upon them as females were enforced to a far greater degree. The minutes of a directors' meeting held on the 21st January 1834 record the dismissal of Margaret Bogle, an out-worker of the Glasgow Blind Asylum. She was dismissed for misconduct that took place outwith the asylum. The minutes do not detail the nature of the misconduct, but the stance and resolve adopted by the directors following this incident implies that the misconduct took place in Bogle's lodgings. Revealingly, they stated that:

... as much care as possible should be taken to find lodgings for blind females working but not boarded or lodged in the asylum. Where they would not only have the benefit of moral example, but observation taken of their conduct and for this purpose authorise the treasurer to allow out of their funds a small gratuity not to exceed £5, to a proper person for finding out such lodgings and taking superintendence and observation of their conduct (GBAMB 1825-1845:175).

It hence became common practice to pay sighted observers to monitor the conduct of female out-workers and to report any indiscretions to the directors. The likely hidden motive of surveillance measures may have been to prevent women indulging in supposedly immoral behaviour.

The conduct, activities and choices of females resident in the asylum were restricted and controlled by oppressive regimes that punctuated their daily lives. Woken at 7am, allowed a limited amount of time to wash, dress, eat breakfast and attend worship before commencing work for the day, the women's working day was then regimented by an inflexible timetable dictating breaks and mealtimes. The inmates were supervised constantly, and they had restricted opportunities to exercise choice, while options were usually set within narrow parameters. For example, women could choose from limited options the way in which they wished to pass the time during the evening in the asylum house: either to return to work, read an embossed Braille book, play the piano or engage in conversation with other inmates. Bedtime at 9pm ended their day. The daily routine, coupled with surveillance, enabled directors disproportionately to exert their influence and control over female inmates, in particular those accommodated within the asylum.

Female residents were rarely permitted to leave the asylum house unaccompanied. During the week, women were permitted to leave the asylum for one hour per day, usually accompanied by a sighted guide. A few of the women considered capable of negotiating the outside environment safely were allowed to take exercise in an area of land adjoining the asylum, which had been purchased specially for that purpose. Some independent freedom was allowed for a few women, then, but this was highly circumscribed:

At four o'clock the inmates are then taken out for a walk, under the charge of a servant generally straight south to Newington, or round the Meadows. A few who have the inclination and the cash, are able to take care of themselves on the streets, are permitted to indulge in 'shopping'. But all return to tea at five (*Scotsman* 1864:72).

Ritchie described a group of inmates of a blind institution negotiating public space in his book *Concerning the Blind*:

... the inmates of an institution were taken out like a party of rock climbers, united by a rope. Much more recently in vogue was the 'crocodile', wherein each youngster laid his hand on the shoulder of the one in front (Ritchie 1930:32).

Female inmates being guided in such a way in public space reinforced an evolving stereotype of blind women as dependent, helpless and different, but this learned helplessness was precisely *not* an option for female out-workers who had to negotiate their way to and from the asylum on a daily basis.

Directors frequently exerted their powerful influence over female residents by refusing petitions from women wishing to move out of the asylum house. In April 1834, eight females of the Edinburgh Asylum petitioned a representative of the board of directors regarding lodging out of the asylum house (EBAMB 1825-1835:303). Their request was refused. Directors interpreted such requests as insubordination by an unappreciative individual or group. In order to repress such ingratitude, petitions to leave the house were refused and regulation of food was introduced. The gradual erosion of personal autonomy and the necessary support of the directors to leave the house made it extremely difficult for women to change their circumstances.

Women within gender, sexual and eugenic limits

Socially dominant sexual stereotypes influenced female occupations, education, earnings and living arrangements within the asylums. Therefore, on a practical level, in relation to roles and occupations, *females were regarded as women*. Many prevailing social attitudes towards women were mirrored in the asylum. Women pursued socially acceptable, suitably feminine occupations such as plain sewing, knitting, dress-making, shirt making and fancy needle-work. Over and above their work in the asylum workroom, females were also expected to help as much as possible with cleaning and other domestic tasks in the house. Within the asylum workshops, men had the opportunity to earn between nine to eleven shillings per week (Alston 1846:37), but the comparative insignificance attributed to female earnings within the asylum is evident in the lack of clear indications of the pecuniary reward for work undertaken by the women. Alston simply recorded that 'many of these young women are receiving regular wages from the institution' (Alston 1846:41). Armitage, meanwhile, recorded that women in the asylum were paid far less for their work than men (Armitage 1878:9), presumably making attainment of financial independence and a self-supporting lifestyle virtually impossible. Regulations governing funds established to pay allowances to families of inmates in the event of their death, or to provide sick pay when inmates were unable to work, were based on the premise (as mentioned) that only men would have family responsibilities. In Edinburgh Asylum only men contributed to the fund, whereas in Glasgow both men and women participated, women contributing three pence and men six pence per week. When unable to work due to ill health, men then received six shillings per week and women received three shillings and six pence per week (Alston 1846:40).

Sex-differentiated education within the asylum also reflected the dominant social culture, where a sound elementary education was considered inappropriate for females. In keeping with this ethos, girls were instructed in various branches of female industry, in principles of religious instruction and in elements of general knowledge, whereas boys received religious instruction and elementary education as well as being taught trades that suited their capabilities and inclination. Annual reports recorded inmates educational and industrial activities. The activities of males were separated out into those of men and boys, no such distinction between adult and juvenile was made for women they were simply recorded as 'females' or 'girls'. Women in the asylums continued to be called 'girls' even when older, thus positioning them

as potential subjects of schooling.

Female inmates were infantilised by the asylum directors, often being referred to as 'girls' in annual reports, advertising literature and newspaper articles. Crucially for this thesis, these inmates were treated as childlike individuals, asexual and sexually immature. Consequently, they were denied recognition as women, and were deprived of the social trappings of womanhood: sexual maturity, sexual activity and the reproductive roles of childbearing and mothering. One aspect of this was ensuring that women and men in the asylums, or when out-working, were not allowed to mix in a manner that might carry any kind of sexual charge, such that gender segregation was indeed also very much a *sexual* segregation. Unsurprisingly, a host of problematic assumptions crowded into the imposition of this strict gendered and *desexed* geography of asylum life.

Stringently imposed and monitored measures to ensure gender segregation were implemented in both the Glasgow and Edinburgh Blind Asylums. Prior to opening, the directors of the Glasgow institution took the decision to implement a rigid separation of the sexes:

No intercourse shall be permitted between the male and female branches of the Asylum, nor shall the boys and girls enter the building appropriated to each other's use except when they are attending family worship or religious instruction (GBAMB 1825-1845:57).

Sexual separation was imposed in various ways, but most obviously in the social segregation, close supervision and monitoring of women resident in the asylum. Resident inmates rarely had time to themselves, or in fact, any time where their behaviour was not being observed. This level of surveillance severely limited their opportunities to express any resistance to the rules and regulations.

Separate workrooms indicated a deliberate measure to segregate inmates along gender lines:

Their apartments are separate from those of the males and no intercourse whatever is permitted (Alston 1846:41).

Men were engaged in mattress-making, sack-making, brush-making and rope-making (Alston 1846:37, *Scotsman* 1864:67), while women sewed mattress

covers (Armitage 1878:6, *Scotsman* 1864:67). The compatibility of these activities does not indicate a necessity for the tasks to take place in separate environments. In addition, men and women worked different hours, with men starting earlier and finishing later (Alston 1846:49). Women who boarded out-with the asylum were obliged to have dinner with resident inmates each evening, rather than carrying on working (Alston 1846:41). Furthermore, one of the Edinburgh Asylum regulations specifically forbade male and female inmates from communicating in any way within and outwith the institution

It is hereby most strictly enjoined that the men and boys shall on no account whatever hold any communication whatever with those in the female department of the institution, either on the respective premises or elsewhere (EBAMB 1825–1835:339).

Men and boys were hence strictly prohibited from communicating with the females, but there is no such documented rule preventing women communicating with men. This omission is revealing of the directors' attitudes towards the sexuality of the inmates, in that men were perceived as sexual beings while the women, however, were not. These measures contributed to spatial separation of men and women at times of the day when they could possibly meet, develop friendships or even form relationships, times when men, with supposedly limited control of their sexuality, might take advantage of vulnerable females.

As a means of preventing the women inmates from engaging in any immoral behaviour, sighted observers monitored the women in both public and private space:

It has been found advantageous to have an elderly woman, who has sight to take charge and work along with them [female inmates] (Alston 1846:41).

The Royal Commission on the Blind suggested that:

... the supervision of the blind at night should be obtained by a sighted officer sleeping in a cubicle in the same room, or in one with a window looking directly into the dormitory. We attach great importance to this (Royal Commission on the Blind 1886(a):xliv).

Daily worship in the morning and evenings were the only times when men and women were permitted to share the same space. Even so, women sat in a separate area of the chapel and a sighted elderly woman observed the

females' conduct and behaviour throughout the sermon. The sighted observer's principal role was to ensure that women did not engage in any form of communication with the male inmates. The superintendent of the male asylum also observed the men's behaviour throughout family worship.

The various measures to ensure gender and hence sexual segregation suggests that, despite infantilising the women, the directors did acknowledge the potential for sexual activity between inmates – primarily between men and women, since at this point in time the likelihood of same-sex relationships, certainly between women, was simply not recognised as a possibility by asylum directors. Lesbian sexual relations had not been discovered, identified or named.

Separation of the sexes within the asylums was probably influenced by the attitudes and moral stances of those involved in blind welfare. Notable in this respect was Dr T.R. Armitage, founder of the British and Foreign Blind Association, later known as the Royal National Institute for the Blind (Ritchie 1930). He was a prominent figure of the time who disseminated his views on wide-ranging social and moral issues in relation to blind people as a means of, in his estimation, producing healthy public opinion through sound views and correct information. In a paper, *On the Means Employed for Ameliorating the Condition of the Blind of Great Britain and Ireland*, presented to the Paris Congress in 1878, he indicated staunch support for morally informed sex segregation within institutions for the blind. Dr Armitage, himself a blind person, acquired a visual impairment later in life, and may have taken a moral stance that did not necessarily impact upon his own lifestyle. In relation to arrangements for achieving sexual separation within institutions for the blind, he stated that:

In one or two blind schools, the arrangements are so bad that inter-marriage among the old pupils is of frequent occurrence (Armitage 1878:13).

He made reference to a workshop in London where blind men and women worked side by side, and as a result some formed relationships and married. In the few institutions where men and women worked alongside each other, vigilant supervision was implemented and widely supported by those involved in blind welfare (Wagg 1932). It would appear the key function of sex separation, surveillance and imposition of an oppressive influence over blind

women's lives was primarily to prevent them forming relationships, engaging in sexual activity and procreating.

The 19th rule, as it became known and implemented within the Edinburgh Asylum, required all inmates to seek the permission of the directors prior to entering into marriage:

It is expected that when any of the blind think of entering the married state they will intimate their intention to the directors who will be always ready to give their best advice relative the formation of suitable connections. Although the directors do not claim to themselves any power to prevent marriages yet it is to be held imperative that they are to be consulted (EBAMB 1825-1835:338).

Directors were of the opinion that marriages entered into without due consideration could cause great misery. They rendered the 19th rule imperative, an action they believed to be important for the 'good of the charity and comfort, respectability and happiness of the members' (EBAMB 1825-1835:223). However, such an action undoubtedly placed the directors in a position of power where they could approve or disapprove of the blind person's intended spouse. Even when inmates lived and worked a considerable distance from the asylum, the directors continued to exert their influence over the inmates' lives. It would seem that the directors genuinely thought that their intervention would avoid blind people making a decision that they would later regret. The elevated status of the 19th rule from observed regulation to imperative rule implies that the directors may have indeed questioned the abilities of inmates to make considered and reasoned decisions.

One of the earliest records of an inmate seeking permission to marry is recorded in the Edinburgh Asylum minute of a directors' meeting held on the 5th July 1796. Denis McQueen had been sent as an out-worker of the asylum to David Dale's cotton mills in Lanark. Denis's written request sought permission to marry a local Lanark woman, and was accompanied by a letter from a Mr Lamb of Lanark vouching for the woman's good character. The directors resolved that they would give their permission if the woman's character withstood the closest scrutiny. The secretary ascertained the woman's age, current earnings, potential earnings and ability to assist Denis. Only when the directors had satisfied themselves that the woman was of good character, could earn her own bread and assist Denis, did they finally

give their approval (EBAMB 1792-1805:110). A thorough investigation of archive documents revealed no documented instances of female inmates requesting permission to marry. The absence of female appeals for permission to enter into marriage may well indicate the restrictive effects of surveillance on the women's lives and social activities. The absence of documented instances of men requesting permission to marry female inmates similarly points towards the limiting influence of surveillance.

Later in the century, the emergence of a particular social discourse in relation to blind people marrying undoubtedly influenced the attitudes of asylum managers and others involved in the welfare of blind people. Although blind people marrying was not encouraged, it would seem that blind men marrying sighted women was more palatable to those involved in blind welfare as it was assumed that sighted women, if necessary, could 'look after' their blind husbands. Also sighted wives of blind men were considered less likely to produce blind children. Whereas blind-blind intermarriages were presumed to be productive of blind children. Dr Armitage, mentioned earlier, was forthright in his views of blind intermarriage, stating to the Paris Congress in 1878 that:

Of all social questions connected with the blind, there is none perhaps on which those who have studied the subject practically are more unanimous than the evils of intermarriage (Armitage 1878:13).

The Royal Commission on The Blind supported this way of thinking, and their report suggested that:

The intermarriage of the blind should be strongly discouraged (Royal Commission on the Blind 1886(a):xliv).

Directorial stance and morally informed working practices within the asylums were undoubtedly influenced by such external discourses, this being obvious in the opinion offered to the Royal Commission on The Blind by Mr William Martin, Manager of the Edinburgh Asylum. He believed that:

Intermarriage of the blind ought to be prohibited by the State (Royal Commission on the Blind 1886(b):502).

It almost goes without saying that negative attitudes towards intermarriage of blind people, as held by those in a position of power within the institutions under study here, undoubtedly limited inmates' opportunities to marry.

Dr Armitage was of the opinion that 'intermarriages were followed by the usual bad consequences' (Armitage 1878:13). He did not elaborate on what such consequences might be, but Martin, in his evidence to the Royal Commission, offered his opinion on the consequences of intermarriage:

... I have never seen anything but either blind children or dirt and filth result from the intermarriage of the blind (Royal Commission on the Blind 1886(b):502).

Institutionalisation of blind women and proactive influences on public opinion colluded to engender widespread moral hostility towards the possibilities of blind people establishing relationships, marrying and bearing children, possibly children with inheritable blindness. It would appear that the moral issue of sexual separation was unquestionably charged with eugenic undertones, and the further notion that blind women's bodies rather than men's were more likely to transmit heritable blindness was illustrated by additional evidence presented to the Royal Commission by Martin:

[Sir Lyon Playfair] Was there any hereditary blindness in the family of either the man or the woman in the case to which you have just referred?

Answer: There was hereditary blindness in the case of the female.

[Dr Tindal Robertson] In the case of the man, was his blindness accidental, or had he been blind from birth?

Answer: He lost his eyesight gradually when young. He had a brother whose eyesight gave way also when he was young.

[Dr T R Armitage] Could you state what was the nature of the hereditary taint in the case of the woman?

Answer: There is a difference of opinion in this case, it is a very peculiar and interesting one (Royal Commission on the Blind 1886(b):503).

It would appear that the manager of the Blind Asylum associated the female's body with hereditary blindness, indeed perhaps as the source rather than questioning the male's genetic inheritance. The notion of women's bodies as carriers or sources of inheritable blindness without doubt contributed to a hostile moral climate towards blind women indulging in sexual activity and childbearing. The fear of blind women procreating not only justified precautionary methods of sexual separation, it legitimated their spatial segregation from mainstream society.

Resistance

Resignation and a proper spirit of gratitude for benefits received were the moral postures most highly in favour with the management (Ritchie 1930:33).

The asylum directors welcomed expressions of gratitude from the inmates. Female resident inmates were expected to be particularly grateful for what they received from the institution: a home, employment, earnings, clothes and food. However, for these benefits women were expected to comply with restrictive rules and regimes.

The directors interpreted acts of resistance to the asylum regime as insubordination, inevitably provoking a hostile or disciplinary response from them. Directors conditioned and convinced inmates that adherence to the rules and obedience was in their best interests. When the directors felt that order within the institution or their authority was being challenged by inmates, they took swift and decisive action to quell such confrontations. Action taken by the directors was dependent upon their interpretation of the gravity of the situation in line with the social moral code of the time. Asylum directors did not want their institution to be associated with immoral, depraved or delinquent behaviour, given the possible ramifications for both themselves (as supposed moral guardians) and levels of donations on which the asylums depended. Directors and the institution as a whole thus had to be distanced immediately from inmates who had transgressed moral boundaries. Instant dismissal facilitated distancing from such supposedly immoral behaviour, and acted as a warning to other inmates contemplating disobedience of the rules.

The age of inmates on admission had a significant influence on whether they expressed resistance to the rules and regimes of 'the house'. In general, the younger inmates were on admission, the less likely they were to test or to contravene the rules. Those who chose to defy the rules expressed resistance in various ways. Some refused to conform with daily regimes, such as attendance at religious ordinance and instruction. Women who absented themselves from religious worship were thought to be exhibiting signs of serious mental instability. When Isabella Gray, an inmate of the Edinburgh Asylum, refused to attend daily worship, the directors considered her to be 'mentally deranged'. They professed her presence in the asylum to be

'extremely injurious to the welfare of the inmates', and she was dismissed for insubordination of the house rules (EBAMB 1825-1835:173). It is reasonable to assume that Gray desired to exercise choice in relation to religious persuasion and attendance at worship, but that the wilfulness displayed in wishing to display such choice – something departing from the infantilised state in which the women inmates were supposed to reside – was perceived by the directors' as a threat to order and morality within the institution. The directors hence discredited her actions as those of a deranged and dangerous individual.

A hostile moral background within and outwith the asylums did not encourage marriage between blind people. Prior to entering into marriage, as indicated, all inmates had to seek the permission of the directors, but inmates very occasionally defied this regulation by entering into marriage *without* the directors' consent. Records of the Edinburgh Asylum document the case of John Strachan and Jean Miller, inmates who had contracted their marriage without consulting the directors (EBAMB 1825-1835:104). Following the discovery of this marriage contract, the directors delivered a stern address to the inmates warning of the consequences of such actions

That is of those under their protection [who] engage in so serious a contract without advising their best friends [the Directors] – such may expect immediate dismissal (EBAMB 1825-1835:104).

The justification for the imperative nature of this rule was attributed to the welfare of the inmates, and yet the moral enmity towards blind people marrying was more likely a pertinent factor. The 19th rule placed male inmates in a 'no win' situation, since in the process of seeking permission to marry they had to disclose the identity of their intended. If she was an inmate, they effectively admitted to breaching the rules by forming a relationship, punishable by dismissal. Similarly, not seeking permission, marrying and maintaining a relationship in secret also risked dismissal. Considered in these terms, it is probable that the 19th rule deterred individuals from entering into marriage. Resistance to this rule nonetheless affirms that a few inmates were indeed capable of making their own decisions, and were prepared to face the consequences.

With no easy access to contraception or abortion (Barret-Ducrocq 1992), the existence of forbidden relationships tended to be discovered when women

became pregnant. Such a discovery was usually followed by an immediate demand by the directors for the name of the father, particularly where the involvement of a male inmate was suspected. An inmate of the Edinburgh Asylum, Agnes Miller, was found to be pregnant to Thomas Manderson, also an inmate, and both were immediately dismissed. Following their subsequent marriage, Manderson requested to be readmitted into the asylum workshops, and he was allowed to return (EBAMB 1835-1849:370), presumably because he had done the honourable thing by marrying Miller (Barret-Ducrocq 1992) and thereby rendering her pregnancy respectable. Later in the century, the directors' response to behaviour that they considered immoral had not changed, as was evidenced when an inmate, Susan White, requested time off because she was in a 'delicate state of health'. The institution physician confirmed her pregnancy. She was instantly dismissed, with the directors ordering her name to be immediately removed from the roll and her family and friends to be informed of her pregnancy (RBASEMB 1872-1883:35). The directors' reactions indicated a revulsion to the manifest fact that, in a biological sense, the women were quite capable of adult sexual activity. Moreover, the implication is undoubtedly that their real sexuality was indeed being denied, repressed by the institutional regime

Female inmates of Glasgow Asylum also faced dismissal when found to be pregnant. Christina Mypen and James McLatchie, both inmates of the Glasgow Asylum, were dismissed when Christina was found to be pregnant. Directors were disgusted when McLatchie 'admitted intimacy with the girl, with the knowledge of the girl's parents' (GBAMB 1880-1884:28). Such immoral behaviour reflected negatively upon the institution and its directors, so it was thought, and the institutions were perceived to have failed their moral duty to both inmates and society. It would seem that directors interpreted their moral duty to society as one of keeping blind people's behaviour within morally acceptable boundaries, although this duty did not then extend to the welfare of those who broke the rules. Individuals, especially pregnant blind women, dismissed from the asylum for immoral behaviour possibly faced being shunned by their family and friends, or unavoidable entry into the poorhouse.

An institutionalised life for life

Although the main object of the asylums was to render blind people,

predominately men, self-supporting, very few inmates left the asylum to enter into mainstream employment or self-employment. The majority of male inmates tended to be associated with the institution for the duration of their working lives. The Edinburgh Blind Asylum Annual Report of 1852 noted of the inmates that 'many of [them] have been there from an early age and have grown grey in the institution' (EBAAR 1852:4). The institutions' founders did not intend to establish a long-term home for blind people. However, the creation of stereotypes and subsequent construction of blind men and women as helpless, passive dependants in need of special facilities, coupled to the simultaneous portrayal of the asylums as the most appropriate places of expert knowledge to deal with such a group, all meant that the systematic and long-term segregation of blind people became socially acceptable.

Turner and Harris's 1870 *Guide to Institutions and Charities for the Blind in The United Kingdom* contained survey responses from both the Glasgow and Edinburgh Blind Asylums regarding age of admission and potential length of time inmates might typically remain in the institution. Glasgow Asylum indicated an admission age of 8-14 years and that individuals could remain until their education and apprenticeship were complete, an average of seven years (Turner and Harris 1870:23). Edinburgh Asylum indicated five years and upwards as age of admission and that individuals could remain for life (Turner and Harris 1870:21).

Domineering controls and repressive regimes undoubtedly contributed to the length of time females remained resident in the asylum house. For some women their association with the asylum spanned almost their entire lifetime. Margaret Baxter, from Cupar Angus, was admitted into the Edinburgh Blind Asylum in March 1822, aged 15 years old. Prior to admission she had been employed as a spinner. She remained in the asylum for 72 years, until her death on the 21st December 1894, aged 87 years old (EBA Admissions Register 1793-1938: unnumbered, Register of Deaths 1894). Elizabeth Baird from Innerwick, was admitted into the Edinburgh Blind Asylum in November 1832, at the age of 13 years old. Prior to admission she had been employed as a servant. She died in the asylum 73 years later on the 31st January 1905 (EBA Admissions Register 1793-1938: unnumbered, Register of Deaths 1905). Women's long-term association with an institution was not unique to the Edinburgh institution. Glasgow Blind Asylum 1896 Annual Report records the death of Ann Taylor, who had been admitted into the asylum in July 1831, at

the age of 9 years old. She became a knitting instructor, and 'passed more than 64 years of her life in the asylum' (GBAAR 1896:10).

Although men may have remained associated with the asylum for a considerable proportion of their working lives, they did have the opportunity to return to their families, to live outwith the asylum, to take control of their own lives and even to participate to a limited extent in their local communities. Women, as resident inmates, however, had extremely restricted freedoms and little opportunity to engage with mainstream society.

The Missions

Since the asylums only catered for a minority of the blind population, even with out-workers in their workshops, Missions to the Out-door Blind were established initially in Edinburgh in 1857, followed by Glasgow in 1859. The Edinburgh Society for Promoting Reading Amongst the Blind and the Glasgow Mission to the Out-door Blind shared similar objectives:

To seek out the blind, visit them in their homes, conduct meetings among them where convenient, teach them to read with the finger the embossed system of reading, supply them, free of charge, with books from the society's library, and in every way possible seek their spiritual and temporal good (ESAR 1893:2).

The missions employed missionary teachers and volunteer lady visitors to undertake the duties of seeking out and teaching blind individuals to read embossed books. As well as visiting blind people in their homes, the missionaries also visited blind people in hospitals, infirmaries and poorhouses.

The Edinburgh and Glasgow Missions encompassed an extensive geographical area. The Edinburgh Missionaries worked within six counties; Edinburgh, Haddington, Peebles, Selkirk, Roxburgh and Berwick. Glasgow missionaries worked in the counties of Glasgow, Lanarkshire, Renfrewshire and Ayrshire. The missionary teachers of both societies went to great lengths to seek out blind people, note their circumstances, develop a register and keep statistical records of the diverse blind population. By 1882 ten Missions had been established, covering the whole of Scotland and these efforts formed the basis of a voluntary movement of welfare on behalf of blind people. Within ten years of their establishment, the Edinburgh and Glasgow Missions took the decision only to offer assistance to blind people who were unemployed

and those not associated with the Blind Asylums. By 1881, 2,747 blind people were on the rolls of the missions throughout Scotland (Auchincloss Arrol 1886:6). The missions claimed to be doing 'All in their powers to help this helpless class' (GMAR 1884(a):9).

The work of the missions was underpinned by a pervasive religious ethos, unsurprisingly given their very name, and they aimed to seek blind peoples' 'spiritual and temporal good' (ESAR 1893:2). Although their priority was to teach blind people to read, a close second was to save their souls, 'bringing them from darkness into the light' (ESAR 1889:2). Blindness, class and morality were closely connected. Individuals from the poorest classes were often considered to have brought illness or blindness upon themselves through immoral conduct, and women's immorality was particularly linked with loss of sight. In some instances blindness was directly attributed to women's inappropriate conduct.

Journal extracts disseminated in annual reports fuelled this ideology, placing emphasis on the ways in which wayward, wanton women had been reformed following the loss of their sight. Two cases illustrate this belief held by the missionaries and internalised by some blind women. The case of a 28-year-old woman, noted in the 20th Annual Report of the Edinburgh Society, indicates the stance supported by the missions:

This young woman was trained in a Sabbath School by a kind Christian lady. She left her home when she was a young girl but wandered far away from the paths of virtue and continued year by year to do so; but the Lord arrested her in her downward course by taking away her eyesight (ESAR 1879:3).

The case of Margaret Wallace, noted in the 1878 annual report, suggests the internalisation of this ideology. The 27-year-old had lost her sight eighteen months prior to the report, and had been taught to read by the missionary. She confessed to him:

I have lived a careless life, and believe God in his love has stopped me in my downward course, by taking from me my eyesight, and through your visits and instruction, I have been taught the way to be saved, and through grace I have taken Jesus as my saviour (ESAR 1878:3).

The implication was that blindness acted as a warning or punishment from God for living a morally careless life. Furthermore, blindness could seemingly

be avoided by living a moral, Christian life.

The missions exploited any opportunity to illustrate the reformatory effects of Christianity on blind people, and a conviction that blind peoples' lives and very character could be reformed by a belief in God was evident in all aspects of the missions' work:

The eyes of the blind have been opened, and those who were once in darkness are now light in the Lord (ESAR 1891: initial page unnumbered).

Therefore the rejection of a dark immoral lifestyle and the embracing of a Christian ethos could propel blind people onto a superior spiritual plain. Although they could no longer physically see, they could see spiritually. The reformatory effects of religious instruction subtly hinted at physical transformation: that for those who believed in God and lived a moral life, miracles could happen. In short, those who read their bible each day, prayed and led a Christian lifestyle might at some point have their eyesight restored. The importance of individuals reading their bible daily is shown in one of the few journal extracts regarding a blind woman with childcare responsibilities. The missionary does not focus on her physical responsibilities, but rather on her spiritual ones:

R's case is very interesting. She is the Mother of a number of children, and although she has the work of the house to attend to she finds time to read her portion of the word of the Lord (ESAR 1877:8).

Dissemination of extracts from letters evidenced both blind peoples' gratitude to the society for teaching them to read embossed print and in turn to find salvation, simultaneously publicising the reformatory effects of religious instruction on blind people. Hence one woman was presented as:

Manifesting a cheerful Christian spirit and filled with gratitude for what the mission, and especially the Ladies Auxiliary had done for her (LAGMAR 1888:5).

A relief fund enabled missionaries to provide limited financial support to unemployed blind people in times of extreme hardship. However, increasing demands made upon this fund for financial assistance influenced their supportive role. The missions undertook to assist blind people capable of working to return to some form of employment. The majority of blind people

resident in Glasgow in 1881 were not in employment or in a position of independence:

Blind people in the poorhouse	83
Receiving parochial relief	229
Employed	294
Non productive	899

(Auchincloss Arrol 1886:13).

Returning to work and realising the potential of financial self-sufficiency were considered to be of paramount importance for men. The loss of a breadwinner's income was portrayed in the missions' annual reports as a catastrophic turn of events:

... homes once bright and happy, suddenly plunged into deepest poverty and distress, by the terrible calamity overtaking the father or breadwinner (GMAR 1884(b):2).

Men were generally perceived to fulfil the role of breadwinner, with a family dependent upon him. The loss or deterioration of eyesight did not relinquish men of this role. For women with acquired visual impairments, though, it was assumed that they would have an extended family, friends or husband upon whom they could rely for financial support. On this basis, men and women were assisted into very different forms of employment.

Men were more likely to have served apprenticeships. Where possible, they were helped to return into their trade on a self-employed basis. Men were generally assisted to set up as tea, firewood, drapery and coal sellers (GMAR 1885:14). The Edinburgh missionary, Mr Brown, reported in 1894 that:

I had the privilege of giving a handbag and a quantity of tea to one of our blind men who has a wife and family dependent upon him, and thus set him agoing as an itinerant tea seller (ESAR 1894:5).

Furthermore, such employments meant that blind men remained visible in the streets, participated in their communities and provided a service to others. As such, they gained something approaching an equitable status with others eking out a living selling in the streets. The aim of the mission's support was to enable such men to become financially self-supporting, and so, in general, blind men thereby remained active in mainstream society. Blind women's dependence upon their families and friends was socially acceptable, conversely, and they were rarely expected or assisted to become physically or

financially independent. Scottish-wide statistics gathered in 1881 illustrate the emphasis placed upon blind men returning to employment. These estimated that 467 blind men were unoccupied and unproductive, whereas, 1,172 blind women over the age of twenty years were unoccupied and unproductive (Auchincloss Arrol 1886:6). The minority of blind women who were employed tended to be engaged in industrial and domestic occupations.

The Glasgow Mission to the Out-door Blind established a Ladies Auxiliary Committee in 1865, with the purpose of assisting unoccupied blind women. Their objectives were to teach blind girls and women to knit, to supply them with the necessary materials and to assist in the disposal of the finished articles. Members of the Ladies Auxiliary offered knitting classes to blind women. They resolved to brighten the lives of blind women who attended the classes 'by reading to them and providing them with little treats to relieve their gloom' (Dunbar 1989:55). This aim implies an assumption that blind women lived a miserable existence, brightened only by the knitting classes and cakes provided by the Ladies Auxiliary. Blind women, it would seem, were objects of pity and sympathy, women who lived their lives in a darkened gloom who could not possibly be happy. The description of a new recruit to the knitting class exposed some of these attitudes:

She is really very dull in spirits having now to face the stern reality of darkness all through her future in this life, and beginning to experience some of the hardships and disadvantages which surround the path of those in such circumstances (LAGMAR 1882:16).

The majority of women mentioned in the mission's annual reports were portrayed as passive recipients and dependants, living with their mothers, relatives or friends:

BG is about 19 years of age, who has been for years a great sufferer and never will be able to work for herself. She can knit a little and takes great pleasure in reading (ESAR 1877:8).

Income generated from knitting and sewing work was meagre, and the main purpose of such 'diversional' work was to keep women occupied. Even where the quality of work was so poor that items produced were not saleable, the mission continued to provide materials to those individuals. Regardless of previous working experience, these women were presented with knitting and sewing as the main means to earn a living. One woman mentioned in the

Glasgow Ladies Auxiliary Annual Report had successfully managed her own business prior to losing her sight. Nonetheless, she was still provided with knitting and sewing as a means of earning money (LAGMAR 1880:6). Although the nature of this woman's business was not documented, it was noted that she managed the enterprise with 'energy and ability' (LAGMAR 1880:6). It would appear that her capabilities as a businesswoman were taken to be annulled by her loss of sight, and her acquired visual impairment was clearly accompanied by a change in the social perception of this woman.

On the rare occasions where women were assisted to attain an independent lifestyle, their lives were still very much confined to their homes, with little indication of women participating in mainstream society. One journal entry tells the story of a young woman who lived with an aunt. They lived in extreme poverty, and the only prospect for the blind woman was the poorhouse. However, after being taught to read and supplied with knitting, her circumstances significantly altered:

She has now a neat, clean comfortable house of her own: and being fully occupied with her housework, her knitting and her book, is quite contented and happy (LAGMAR 1888:5).

Blind women were not supported or encouraged to become street traders, and instead all were offered work to be done in the home. At the time respectable and moral women's work was strongly associated with the confines of the home, while women's presence in the street was considered unnatural, except where they were involved in tasks such as shopping or running errands (Barret-Ducrocq 1992). Therefore, supplying working-class blind women with work to be undertaken in the home removed them from the streets and may have enhanced their moral stature. Since blind women were generally considered to be delicate and vulnerable, home working was perhaps a means of protecting them. Annual reports of the Outdoor Missions evidence the isolation and loneliness experienced by the women, many of who did not venture outside the familiar environment of their home, as illustrated in a missionary's journal extract for 27th May 1875

On reaching Ms L I found her much cast down and on hearing my voice she brightened up and exclaimed 'o Mr M is that you? Thank God I am not forgotten yet'. Were it not for my visits, this woman would not have a single friend to take any special interest in her (LAGMAR 1876:28).

Conclusions

The Blind Asylums established themselves as centres of expertise and knowledge in relation to the training, education and management of blind people. They proactively created the impression that they met the requirements of the majority of blind people in the Glasgow and Edinburgh populations, even if in practice they did not. Numerically, the Outdoor Missions probably worked with more blind people. The working practices of the asylums and missions seem to have been influenced by prevailing cultural stereotypes of female morality and respectability. Consequently, through religious instruction, the aim was to reform working-class blind women's assumed immorality to mirror the moral stature accredited to the asylum or mission with which they were associated. The connections and cross-codings between the women and the 'space' of both the asylum and the mission were hence multiple and enduring, having significant implications for both the women themselves and the perceptions of a wider (sighted) mainstream society.

Similarly, within the asylums the imposition of oppressive regimes, rules and regulations, ones manipulating institutional spaces to impose sexual separation, surveillance and monitoring of women's behaviour and conduct, were probably motivated by a desire on the part of directors to protect the respectable reputation of the institution rather than with genuine concerns for inmate welfare. This being said, we must beware of assuming that no directors held genuine feelings of wishing to improve the lot of inmates, but, even so, such feelings could not but have been framed by dominant discourses about disability, femininity and the 'right' ordering of social and sexual relations. As a result, the oppressive regimes, rules and regulations denied female inmates opportunities to sexual expression, childbearing and mothering. Likewise, changing notions of respectability saw the retreat of respectable women from the streets, and this undoubtedly influenced the imposition of institutional regulations that severely limited blind women's participation in mainstream spaces. The localised, but concentrated, spatial segregation of women resident in asylums, along with the limited presence of respectable women on the streets, combined to deter and virtually to eradicate the participation of blind women in mainstream society. With time, the erosion of blind women's presence in spaces of everyday life rendered

them invisible to the majority-sighted population. This pervasive invisibility became second nature, to the point where society no longer questioned their absence, a claim with great relevance to what will be discussed in the second half of this thesis.