

Caversham Working Paper, 1998-6

The Enumerator's Blind Spot Information on Women in the Caversham Database

Hamish James

Many of the traditional sources of quantitative history include scant information on women. A reflection of the biases of the times, this lack of information is now a significant problem for historical analysis. The most common response to this problem has been to concentrate on the analysis of men while bemoaning the difficulties which prevent the analysis of women. The analyses conducted by the Caversham Project have, to date, generally followed this pattern. There is a surprising amount of information on women available in the sources stored in the Caversham Database, but because of its fragmented nature it has not been utilised.

By drawing on information in different sources within the database and relying on other forms of supporting evidence the database can be a useful source of data on women. This is shown below. After a short discussion of each of the sources in the database, some brief analyses of data relating to women are presented.

The Sources

The sources can be loosely placed into three groups, general enumerations of the adult (21 and older) population, records of demographic events, and organisational records. All the sources offer some information on women but the final category is the most useful. Keep in mind that the following descriptions of each source are not meant to be full and comprehensive, rather they focus on the usefulness of the source for the analysis of the place of women in society.

The electoral rolls and street directories are general enumerations of the adult resident population. They provide name, address and occupation for men. Name and address are listed for women but the key variable of occupation is usually replaced by marital status. Occupation is replaced by marital status for women in most sources. Apart from this systematic difference between the information collected on men and women the overall lack of information on women is explained by their absence from many sources, not the nature of the information recorded

Marriage registers, Intention to Marry certificates and the register of deaths give information on marriage and death. Birth Certificates have not been collected. Unlike the electoral rolls and street directories, marital status and occupation are recorded separately, but occupation is not normally recorded for women. Occupation and marital status are usually both recorded for men. These sources also include information on age, place of birth and place of residence.

The remaining sources provide more detail on limited groups within the population of Caversham. Although still not to be expected as a matter of course, details of women's occupations are to be found in the 1937 Housing Survey, friendly society records and registers and case books of the Benevolent Society. The widely varying purposes of these records means that a diverse range of additional information is included. These sources offer the most information on women, but this advantage is compromised by their limited coverage of the population.

Electoral Rolls

The electoral rolls record all adults (21 or older) who registered to vote. A comparison of 1901 census population figures for Caversham Borough with the entries from the 1902 electoral roll entries covering the borough area suggest registration rates were very high. The census gives an adult population for the borough of 2,986 and the Caversham Database contains 2,945 entries from the 1902 Caversham electoral roll. With such a high number there is little scope for registration rates to differ between the sexes. Thus, electoral rolls make a good foundation for a database as most residents are likely to appear in one or more of them, with the exception of short term residents who arrive and leave between elections.

The database contains 31,427 electoral roll entries from the years 1902, 1905, 1911, 1914, 1919, 1921 and 1928 (1908 has not been entered) for addresses within the Caversham Borough (with some minor differences). See table 1 for more detail. Most women are listed by marital status, but in the earlier rolls, 1905 and especially 1902, a sizeable minority of women are listed by occupation. Although not yet incorporated into the database the rolls for 1893 and 1896 also appear to have a reasonable number of women listed by occupation. No detail is available, of course, prior to 1893. In the earlier rolls it is unclear whether the occupational titles 'domestic duties' and 'household duties' refer respectively to paid employment and work in the home, as they are treated in the database.

Valuation Rolls

The sections of the Dunedin City Valuer's Private Field Books which cover Caversham Borough (and some small adjacent areas), hereafter referred to as the valuation rolls, have been entered into the database for the years 1912 and 1921. The valuation rolls include information which helps determine patterns of property value and ownership. Generally, the valuation books list the name of the occupier or owner of a property in addition to details about the property. Occupations of some men are recorded. For women, occupation is replaced by marital status, indicated by title, 'Miss', 'Mrs' or 'widow'. More women than might be expected appear in the valuation rolls. In the case of widows it is usually clear that the woman is the owner of the property. Some properties have both husband and wife listed, suggesting joint ownership, while in other cases it appears that the woman listed on the valuation roll was the respondent to the City Valuer when he called at the house, but not necessarily the legal owner of the property.

Friendly Society Records

Some friendly society records indicate the name of a man's wife along with their date of death and cause of death, if applicable (a handful of cases). Of much more use are the admission records, 1893-1940, for the two women's lodges in the area, Miriam Rebekah and Miriam Linda. These records, 639 out of the total of 4,305 admission records collected, are one of the few sources which list occupations for women. They also give date of birth, marital status and some indication of subscriptions to the friendly society, among other information.

Intention to Marry Certificates

The Intention to Marry certificates have been collected for Caversham for the period 1893-1913 in an effort to identify actual, rather than inferred, marriages and to identify change of name at marriage. Some records have been collected up to 1919, but it becomes difficult to identify those referring to Caversham after 1913 as residence is increasingly recorded simply as 'Dunedin'.

The Intention to Marry Certificates provide information on marital status for both bride and groom. Occupation is listed for grooms, and occasionally for women. The current and usual place of residence is also given for both. One of the most useful pieces of information given is the age of the bride and groom.

Marriage Registers

In addition to the information on the Intention to Marry certificates, marriage registers also list the mother and father of both bride and groom. Fathers' occupations are listed, while mothers have their maiden name recorded. Collection of the certificates for Caversham is not yet complete so this source is not discussed further, except to note that a major use of this type of source is the investigation of social mobility and in this situation the lack of information on the occupations of brides (and complete absence of this information for their mothers') is a difficulty.

Street Directories

Both Stone's and Wise's street directories have been used for various purposes by the Caversham Project. Stone's Otago and Southland Directory is a more inclusive list of individuals than Wise's New Zealand Post Office Directory, but both fail to record many people, in particular women. The residents of Caversham have been collected from Stone's for 1900, 1905, 1910, 1915 and 1920. This information has not been maintained since 1995 and it is of unknown completeness and accuracy. In each of these years entries for men outnumber entries for women. In 1900, for example there are 998 entries for men and 291 for women. In 1920 there are 1266 entries for men and 310 for women. Somewhat over one third of men, but only one in ten women, found on the electoral rolls also appear in Stone's Directories. Address and marital status ('Mrs') are provided for those women who do appear. Normally only female heads of household are listed.

Because of the limited population coverage Stone's provides, the directories have been used only in specialised ways in recent years: Stone's Trades and Professions directory indirectly provides a source of information on women where businesses can be identified as being owned by women; Stone's and Wise's have been used to conduct a search for men and women who leave the area (i.e. those not on a subsequent electoral roll and not found in the death register).

Death Registers

The Dunedin register of deaths has been used to disaggregate those who have simply left Caversham from those who have died. When an individual vanishes from the electoral roll record they are checked in the death register to see if they have died. A total of 1,562 dates of death have been recorded. For the 955 individuals who died between 1902 and 1915 more information has been recorded from the register of deaths. These individuals do not necessarily appear on the electoral roll, they merely have to be resident in Caversham according to the register of deaths. Name, street address, age and marital status have been collected, but the register offers much more information, including: cause of death, duration of illness, father's occupation, place of birth, ages of children and more.

1937/38 Housing Survey

Provides age, sex and marital status of the over 10,000 members of households in the surveyed blocks of Caversham and South Dunedin. Provides occupation and employment status for survey respondent, who is usually male household head. There are 282 households without adult male members..

Otago Benevolent Society outdoor relief Register and Casebook

This source has been collected for three years, 1895, 1900 and 1905. The records refer to cases throughout Otago. Of the 662 cases recorded in 1895, only 35 list Caversham as place of residence. A further 72 list South Dunedin. In total, about two thirds, 412, list Dunedin or a suburb of Dunedin. In 1900 and 1905 this proportion drops to around one half of the smaller number of cases, 441, 452 respectively. The proportion resident in Caversham or South Dunedin remains similar to that in 1895. Many women are listed in this rich source. Unlike other sources, multiple occupation and information on other sources of income are recorded for many women. Considerable information is available in note form on topics including illness, employment, criminal record and other issues relating to the provision of aid. Some case notes include material on suspected desertion by husbands.

Women and Men in Caversham: Demographic Patterns

Table 1 shows the sex balance for the electoral roll (adult) population of Caversham during the study period (currently 1902-28). Women formed a modest majority of the population of Caversham throughout this period. Caversham Borough amalgamated with Dunedin City in 1904 and is not listed separately in the census after 1901. For this reason the information used here is derived from electoral rolls. Women consistently outnumbered men in

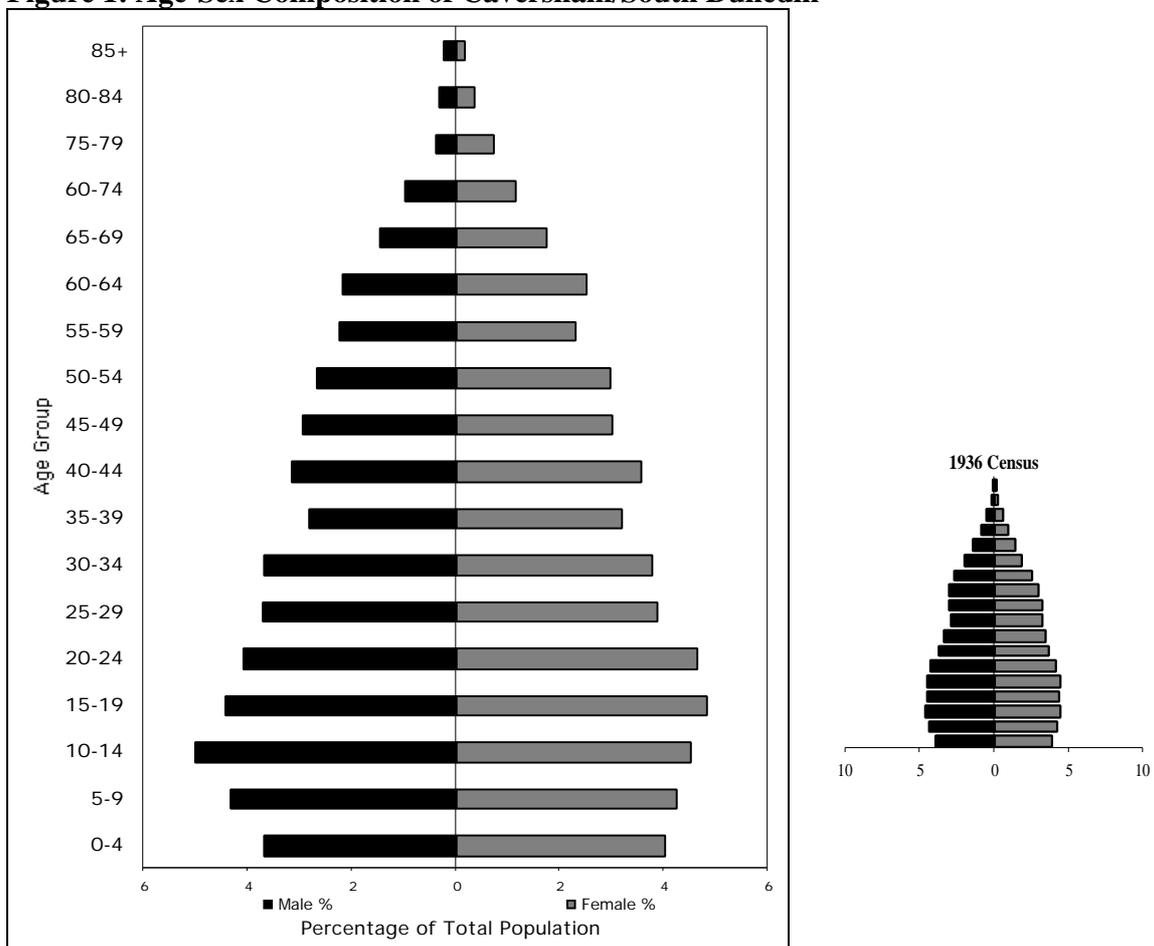
Caversham. All four main centres had an excess of women over men, even though the national sex ratio for the 15-64 age group showed an excess of males.¹

Table 1: Caversham Sex Balance

| Year | Sex | | | Total |
|-------|--------|-------|------------------------|-------|
| | Female | Male | Male per 1,000 females | |
| 1902 | 1494 | 1451 | 971.2 | 2945 |
| 1905 | 1642 | 1590 | 968.3 | 3232 |
| 1911 | 2070 | 1906 | 920.8 | 3976 |
| 1914 | 2211 | 1983 | 896.9 | 4194 |
| 1919 | 2817 | 2330 | 827.1 | 5147 |
| 1922 | 2499 | 2139 | 855.9 | 4638 |
| 1928 | 3950 | 3345 | 846.8 | 7295 |
| Total | 16683 | 14744 | 883.8 | 31427 |

Source: electoral rolls for Caversham, Dunedin South and Dunedin Central 1902-1928 (excluding 1908).

Figure 1: Age-Sex Composition of Caversham/South Dunedin¹



¹ Based on 10,327 valid age and sex records (488 invalid records excluded).

¹ E. Olssen, 'Women, Work and Family: 1880-1926' in P. Bunkle & B. Huges, *Women in New Zealand Society*, Sydney, 1980, p. 161; Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, *Country Monograph Series no. 12: Population of New Zealand*, vol. 1, United Nations, New York, 1985, p. 30.