

ABSTRACT

Title of Document: SINGLE WOMEN IN THE BORDERS: RELIGION
AND PHILANTHROPY AS PATHS TO SOCIAL
ACTION IN VICTORIAN BRITAIN.

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This project examines how so-called "redundant women" used religion and philanthropy as a means for social action in Victorian Britain. I will argue that some women skillfully negotiated the borders between public and private by first engaging in philanthropy, which then led to public speaking, and then service in various national organizations, reform efforts, and even local government bodies. I will show how four lesser-known Victorian women were pioneers of the feminist movement although they were uninterested in suffrage. The foundation of this project are case studies of four women, for whom I examine both their private and public writing and their philanthropic and social reform activities. Mary Carpenter (1807 - 1877) helped reform the education of impoverished children and became a renowned pioneer of the Ragged School movement. Carpenter's research would lead to the passage of two parliamentary Acts in the mid-1850s. Louisa Twining (1820 - 1912) began her work as an unpaid district visitor,

but she would eventually be elected as a Poor Law Guardian. Twining ultimately transformed healthcare of the pauper sick and helped reform the nursing profession; her work led to the passage of the Metropolitan Poor Bill in 1867. Honnor Morten (1861 - 1913) furthered Twining's work in nursing reform and helped professionalize nursing, as well as serving in local government, most particularly the London School Board. Emily Faithfull (1835 - 1895) took philanthropy to the level of professional work by broadening the options for "respectable" ladies' employment. Faithfull trained middle-class women in printing, established the Victoria Press, and edited/wrote a number of practical publications advocating women's work opportunities. The final section of this dissertation looks at women's work in the context of fiction rather than fact. Drawing on a selection of novels by Elizabeth Gaskell and Charles Dickens, I will argue that the significant work being done by women such as Carpenter, Twining, Morten, and Faithfull, was not adequately represented in the fiction of the period. The middle-class, single women studied here all pushed the boundaries of the separate spheres ideology, but their work was too radical to be depicted adequately in didactic Victorian fiction.