

‘Back to the land’: Lady Warwick and the movement for women’s collegiate agricultural education*

by Donald L. Opitz

Abstract

Within the late-Victorian and Edwardian movement to promote women’s advancement in farming and gardening, Frances Greville, countess of Warwick, founded the first women-only collegiate centre for agricultural education in 1898. Initially affiliated with the University Extension College, Reading, her scheme relocated to Studley, Warwickshire in 1903, where it flourished as an independent, private college. Historians have previously described the founding, development, and ultimate fate of Warwick’s project, but in this article I consider the question of its status within the broader movement for women’s collegiate agricultural education. As I show, Warwick’s advocacy for a ‘Back to the Land’ ideology and women’s scientific and practical instruction in the ‘lighter branches of agriculture’ added a decidedly rural, agrarian orientation to a movement otherwise dominated by an emphasis on urban horticulture; yet, despite her efforts, throughout its first decade, the scheme remained effectively trapped within the mould of horticultural education. The mismatch between Warwick’s ideals and practical achievements established her as a visionary whose contributions ironically reinforced the very tendencies she hoped to counteract.

In a 1903 issue of the *West Sussex Gazette*, the ‘gifted writer and scholar’, Miss Rachel Challice reported on the relocation of a British women’s agricultural school from its birthplace in urban Reading, Berkshire, to its new home in rural Studley, Warwickshire. Founded as a hostel five years earlier but now expanded into a college, this educational innovation of Frances Evelyn ‘Daisy’ Greville, countess of Warwick (1861–1938), recapitulated her strategy of returning educated women ‘back to the land’: ‘[T]he lasses ... follow the course of training which, according to Lady Warwick’s scheme, leads energy and intellect “back to the land,” instead of

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allowing them to run to waste in the towns'.¹ This positioning of female 'energy and intellect' for the benefit of the land participated in a rich popular discourse linking women and science with national agricultural imperatives and, in so doing, strengthened a particular approach within a broader movement to advance women in the farming and gardening professions.

'Back to the land' thrived as a fairly common clarion call in the decades from the agricultural depression of the 1870s up to World War I. As Jan Marsh has shown, a confluence of factors elevated the status of the countryside within the British imagination: the poor conditions (and hence failed promise) of urban life, the declining status of (and hence need to rejuvenate) British agriculture, the resurgence of a moralistic nostalgia for the healthfulness of communing with nature, and the rise of suburbia.² For some social reformers, including aristocratic converts like Warwick, the call for a return to the land readily coupled with complaints over the wasting of women's talents. Applying trained female labour to '*la petite culture*' and, more specifically, the 'lighter branches of agriculture' (terms to be defined below) represented a single solution to the two-sided problem of distress among 'surplus' (unmarried and unemployed) middle- and upper-class women and struggling farming businesses. 'Careful pondering over these matters has convinced me that the solution of these two perplexing problems will be found in the juxtaposition of both', Warwick wrote in July 1899.³

As a leading advocate for this 'solution', Warwick recognized the critical value of scientific training in preparing women for agricultural careers and founded one of the first, independent collegiate programmes for women to study agriculture in 1898. Beginning with the 'Lady Warwick Hostel' which she later extended into the 'Lady Warwick College', her efforts joined others within a broader movement to provide 'sound practical and scientific training for women', part of a tendency towards the professionalization of agriculture, as Nicola Verdon recently noted.⁴ As I have described elsewhere, in the case of the Horticultural College, Swanley, the emphasis on scientific instruction was a strategic device to access the new county bursaries available to centres for technical instruction whilst asserting a new standard of qualification intended to create employment opportunities for women who otherwise lacked access to the male-dominated apprenticeships.⁵

Although traditionalists perceived this alignment of science and women to be a threat, Warwick shrewdly used science's potential to advance her cause. But, as I will show, her entrance into the larger movement to advance women's agricultural education notably shifted its emphasis from urban horticulture to rural agriculture, a nuance that has escaped previous historical analysis.⁶ In the present article, then, I position Warwick's scheme within the larger

¹ University of Reading, Museum of English Rural Life [hereafter MERL], FR WAR 5/6/4, newspaper clipping, Rachel Challice, 'The Lady Warwick College at Studley Castle', *West Sussex Gazette*, n.d. For the 'gifted writer and scholar', id., 'Are the planets inhabited?' *Popular Astronomy* 11 (1903), p. 417 n.

² Jan Marsh, *Back to the land: the pastoral impulse in England, from 1880 to 1914* (1982), esp. pp. 1–7.

³ Frances Evelyn Warwick, 'The new women and the old acres', *The Woman's Agricultural Times* (hereafter WAT) 1 (i) (1899), p. 2.

⁴ Nicola Verdon, 'Business and pleasure: middle-class women's work and the professionalization of farming in England, 1890–1939', *J. British Studies* 51 (2012), p. 406.

⁵ Donald L. Opitz, "'A triumph of brains over brute': Women and science at the Horticultural College, Swanley, 1890–1910", *Isis* 104 (2013), pp. 30–62.

⁶ For historical accounts see D. M. Garstang, 'Studley College', *Agricultural Progress* 28 (1953), pp. 4–15; Pamela Horn, *Ladies of the manor: wives and daughters in country-house society, 1830–1918* (1992),

movement, and I explain how her 'back to the land' rationale underpinned a distinctive rural perspective, in which scientific training provided the means for improving rural industries. In a close analysis of the development and implementation of her scheme, I will assess the limited extent to which it developed the capacity to achieve her ideals. I conclude that, for all its rhetorical promise, Warwick's project failed to break from the earlier, more successful urban horticultural model that continued to dominate women's agricultural training in the early 1900s.

I

Lady Warwick explained what she meant by the 'lighter branches of agriculture' in her introduction to the sixth volume of the *Woman's Library* (1903), which was devoted to the topic: 'It implies all work on the land which requires skill rather than mere physical strength', and yet it 'requires something more than a light heart and nimble fingers'.⁷ The branches included (as represented in the volume's contents) market gardening (especially of vegetables, fruits, and flowers), dairying, poultry-keeping, bee-keeping, and the commercial side of marketing produce. Warwick argued that young women were particularly suited to this range of work, and in order that they may develop the requisite competence, she prescribed 'sound training in some agricultural hostel or college'.⁸ In formulating a women's sphere of agricultural occupations and prescribing college training, Warwick added her voice to a protracted, national debate concerning the state of agriculture, women's economic status, technical instruction, and the relationship between these issues. As we shall see, she built upon an established movement's *rural* foundations and its emphasis in women's country pursuits.

Warwick's promotion of 'the lighter branches of agriculture' as occupations for women co-opted a phrase already circulating in the agricultural vernacular and representing an area that proponents argued was of increasing economic importance. More generally these branches fell within '*la petit culture*', literally, 'small culture', or the smallholding system of land tenure that was more common in the United States and Continental Europe, especially France, than in Britain, where landlord/tenant farming on large estates predominated.⁹ Commentators on the British 'land question' noted the desirability of expanding viable smallholdings in Britain within the context of the agricultural depression, and experiments in *la petit culture* and market gardening became beacons for a national political agenda.¹⁰ In his public addresses, Gladstone often favoured what he termed 'spade cultivation' over the trends to consolidate smallholdings and mechanize farms, which he demonized as

Note 6 *continued*

pp. 185–91; Catherine Horwood, *Women and their gardens: a history from the Elizabethan era to today* (2010), pp. 288–95; Anne Meredith, 'Middle-class women and horticultural education, 1890–1939' (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Sussex, 2001), pp. 127–38; Kay N. Sanecki, *A short history of Studley College* (1990).

⁷ Countess of Warwick, 'Introduction', in Edith Bradley and Bertha La Mothe, *The lighter branches of agriculture* (1903), pp. xv–xvi.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ The Cobden Club, *Systems of land tenure in various countries* (1870).

¹⁰ Joan Thirsk, *Alternative agriculture: a history from the Black Death to the present day* (1997), pp. 147–219.

the culprits behind the depression extending into the 1890s.¹¹ In his influential 1877 text, Frederick William Burbidge similarly underlined the commercial value of small culture and called for national education in this field:

To enable our home growers to compete with those of other countries, it seems desirable that the State should make the subject of earth culture a necessary part of the instruction given in all board schools; or, better still, by the institution of an extensive and well managed national garden, in which the best fruits and vegetables of all kinds might be grown experimentally, and instructions given, not only to cultivators, but to others interested in the best methods of cultivating the soil.¹²

As these ideas percolated, advocates for women's employment seized upon the potential suitability of the work for women. Sympathizers argued that small culture entailed less physical exertion than large-scale commercial farming, making it an appropriate activity for women, who, according to popular gender norms, had more delicate constitutions than men. Nevertheless, to thwart women's involvement, traditionalists regularly cited the rigours of the male-dominated pursuits. In response, supporters consciously emphasized the healthfulness of *light* fieldwork for women. As such, they advanced an agricultural form of a standard separation of spheres for men's and women's roles, in which women were closely aligned with more private, domestic chores and men with more public, business enterprises.¹³

Despite an earlier historical view that a shift towards large-scale farming in the early nineteenth century gradually edged out the labour of farmers' wives and daughters, Verdon has argued that women continued to contribute to their families' farming businesses and retained a strong position in poultry-keeping and dairying work.¹⁴ A well-documented, yet not atypical, case is that of Elizabeth Cotton, who performed a variety of (unpaid) work including the management of the dairy on her husband's 400-acre farm in Suffolk in the 1850s and 1860s.¹⁵ Even with the lack of statistics, creating difficulties in charting the levels of women's – almost always unpaid – farming labour in the final decades of the nineteenth century, it is clear that women continued to perform work on large-scale farms throughout the century. A few were farmers: in the mid-1890s, Miss Katherine Courtauld of the prominent textile family was established in farming by her father. When she was 21, he bought for her the 243-acre Knight's Farm at Colne Engaine, Essex. Although still modest in size, Courtauld's farm included arable land, pastureland, dairies, gardens, and orchards.¹⁶ One distinct area of food production that remained dominated by female labour was that of cheese-making, despite a growing

¹¹ W. E. Gladstone, 'The state of agriculture', in A. W. Hutton and H. J. Cohen (eds), *The speeches and public addresses of the Right Hon. W. E. Gladstone, M.P.* (1892), pp. 44–5.

¹² F. W. Burbidge, *Horticulture* (1877), p. 233.

¹³ Karen Sayer, *Women of the fields: representations of rural women in the nineteenth century* (1995), pp. 33–48; Verdon, 'Business and pleasure', pp. 399–400, 404.

¹⁴ Nicola Verdon "'... subjects deserving of the highest praise': farmers' wives and the farm

economy in England, c.1700–1850', *AgHR* 51 (2003), pp. 23–39.

¹⁵ Ibid, pp. 38–9; also Sheila M. Hardy, *The diary of a Suffolk farmer's wife, 1854–1869: a woman of her time*, ed. Jo Campling (1992).

¹⁶ Peter King, *Women rule the plot: the story of the 100 year fight to establish women's place in farm and garden* (1999), pp. 106–8; Verdon, 'Business and pleasure', pp. 403–4.

contemporary advice literature that implied women's displacement with the introduction of new scientific methods.¹⁷

The question of farming and gardening as paid occupations for women became a subject of public debate in the 1870s, within the context of the broader movement for advancing women's employment. British general periodicals – especially labourers' and women's magazines – floated the idea of women as independent farmers, market-gardeners, and estate head-gardeners, and they disseminated international news about women's successes, making pioneering cases like Elise Pierson Buckingham's California ranch known to British organizers.¹⁸ Correspondents to *The Woman's Gazette* between 1876 and 1877 also raised the question of gardening as an employment for *ladies* among the class of distressed gentlewomen, and the forceful Frances Power Cobbe elaborated how the success of one 'gardeness' could serve to build a movement:

[W]hen her little establishment is in full working order, our lady market-gardener might invite one or more other ladies to board and share her work, who will thus study practical gardening as a profession, and fit themselves to take the posts of head-gardeners in country-seats where a few under-gardeners are employed.¹⁹

The suggestion proved premature by a dozen years, as the question of systematic training took priority. In reprinting Cobbe's letter in *The Garden*, William Robinson ridiculed, 'She does not know how much has to be learnt to make a good gardener now-a-days'.²⁰

With the arrival of the agricultural depression, writer Jane Chesney O'Donnell also advanced the question but recognized the need for formalized training: 'One great bar to the increase in fruit-culture amongst us at present ... is the want of technical knowledge'.²¹ Within a social reform magazine column devoted to 'What Women Can Be and Do', she made one of the earliest detailed proposals for 'a Horticultural College, which should combine with its teachings something of the commercial element so as to become self-supporting' – precisely the model pursued in Swanley, Kent a decade later (to which I will return). But already in June 1878 she specified:

Instruction should be theoretical and practical, wide and thorough. The pupil should study agricultural chemistry, botany, geology, entomology ... A system of examinations, too, should be organised and certificates of proficiency be given.²²

With the disastrous effects of the 1878 and 1879 farming seasons now in view, by August 1879 she re-emphasized the virtues of small culture both for its competitiveness and profitability, citing Burbidge as her authority: 'as much profit is obtainable from two acres under garden

¹⁷ On cheese dairying, Sally McMurray, 'Women's work in agriculture: divergent trends in England and America, 1800 to 1930', *Comparative Studies in Society and Hist.* 34 (1992), pp. 248–70.

¹⁸ 'Gardening as an employment for women', in Countess of Aberdeen (ed.), *Women in professions* (1900), p. 157; Bertha H. Smith, 'Women ranchers of the coast', *The Country Gentleman* 79 (1913), pp. 1628–9.

¹⁹ Frances Power Cobbe, 'Correspondence', *The*

Woman's Gazette 2 (vii) (1877), p. 109.

²⁰ William Robinson, 'Women as gardeners', *The Garden* 12 (1877), p. 293.

²¹ Jane Chesney, 'A new vocation for women', *Macmillan's Magazine* 60 (1879), p. 344. Chesney also published under her married name of O'Donnell.

²² Jane O'Donnell, 'What women can be and do', *Social Notes* (xvii) (1878), pp. 262–3.

culture as from five times the space farmed in the ordinary way.²³ Her views, reprinted on both sides of the Atlantic, reached a wide audience of readers.

On the heels of O'Donnell's proposal, in October 1879 Emily Faithfull showcased a specific example about 'A Woman Farmer' in her *Victoria Magazine*. This was the American, Marie Louise Thomas, who managed a farm of 20 acres in Tacony (near Philadelphia), Pennsylvania as a means for sustaining her family's livelihood amid the declining health of her aged husband, the well-known Unitarian minister Abel Charles Thomas. There she cultivated wheat, small fruits and pears; raised and kept cattle, poultry and bees; and produced butter and honey. Thomas explained her success to would-be women farmers in lectures and published testimonies.²⁴ But Faithfull publicized further examples of women proprietorships when she reported on her American travels, and like O'Donnell she raised the question of training. In her 1884 book, *Three Visits to America*, she highlighted Mrs Jennie Carr's 'industrial rural school to prepare girls for practical farming' in Pasadena, California.²⁵ Faithfull excerpted Carr's writing about 'Woman and Land', in which Carr put forth the idea of a 'Woman's Industrial University ... the model for hundreds of practical training-schools throughout the country'.²⁶

Spurred on by the publicity of such exceptional American cases and the mounting discussions within the women's periodical press, organizing efforts got underway. A London campaign in autumn 1879 led to the founding of a Ladies' Association 'for the Promotion of Horticulture and Minor Food Production' – the name satirized in *Punch* (and afterwards shortened with the dropping of 'Horticulture').²⁷ Leading this effort was the medically trained Isabel Jane Thorne, who explained its objective as 'providing interesting and profitable employment for educated women, and giving them a scientific and practical training in the branches of food production included in the French term "*la petite culture*". The intended subjects of instruction included 'poultry and pig rearing, dairy work, fruit, flower, and vegetable culture, and beekeeping'.²⁸ Within weeks, after receiving 'numerous letters' showing 'that there is a widespread interest throughout Great Britain', Thorne reported the association's hope for organizing 'an institution where complete training can be given to women'. Citing statistics from the success of poultry breeding in France, she argued that this 'intelligent practice of one of the branches of the work ..., which can easily be carried on by women, may become an important factor in the national wealth'.²⁹ As Anne Meredith has described, *The Englishwoman's Review* followed the developments closely, reporting that the association organized lodgings for ladies to attend lectures in South Kensington for several years and thereby produced at least a couple

²³ Chesney, 'Vocation', p. 345. This was reprinted in American magazines like the *Living Age* [Boston] 143 (1879), pp. 728–32 and *Library Magazine* [New York] 2 (1880), pp. 252–8. *The Spectator* [London] 52 (1879), p. 1018, endorsed her ideas, urging that the 'admirable suggestions may be acted upon, and an efficient school of horticulture, open to persons of both sexes, established'.

²⁴ Emily Faithfull, 'A woman farmer', *Victoria Magazine* 33 (1879), pp. 534–6. Thomas spoke, for example, to a women's club over which she presided in New York

City: 'Soros is hears about bees', *The New York Times*, 19 Feb. 1895, p. 16.

²⁵ Emily Faithfull, *Three visits to America* (Edinburgh, 1884), pp. 248–9.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 249.

²⁷ 'New work for woman', *Punch* 77 (1879), p. 297; Isabel Thorne, 'Food production', *The Times*, 6 Jan. 1880, p. 8, emphasis added.

²⁸ Thorne, 'Food Production', p. 8.

²⁹ *Ibid.*: *The Times*, 17 Feb. 1880, p. 11.

of noteworthy, successful women-led flower market gardens.³⁰ Although the 'movement' (as Thorne repeatedly referred to it) seemed to fizzle within a decade, in some measure it energized the next wave leading to independent residential schemes, with greater longevity and influence.³¹

The early years of the movement thus showed a progression from rural theory to urban practice. Beginning with a general concern over British agriculture's failure to compete with foreign imports, advocates argued for the appropriateness of rural occupations for unmarried daughters of country gentlemen who faced the problem of earning their own livelihoods. In tandem with the idea that women could be farmers and estate gardeners, proponents recognized the need for systematic training and floated proposals for formalized agricultural and horticultural education. The London origins of the first successful scheme, directed by Thorpe, grounded those proposals in a decidedly urban context, precipitating the next significant development – the urban orientation of the first college that provided women with comprehensive, scientific training in horticulture. This urban dimension to the movement foreshadowed Warwick's imminent assertion of a need to return women 'back to the land'.

II

Although the activists clearly envisioned rural farms and market gardens of various types as destinations for women with the requisite training, they increasingly discovered more strategic niches within the up-and-coming realms of cities, suburbs, and colonial settlements. As opposed to agricultural occupations connected with rural farming estates, then, the movement emphasized those activities – small-scale food productions and decorative gardening – closely associated with homes and gardens of more modest means and typically situated in villages and towns. The educational schemes that took hold continued to address small culture in its full extent – dairying, poultry-keeping, bee-keeping, cultivation of fruits, vegetables, and flowers, and all of the associated food productions – but the job prospects tended to lie more often within private gardens and nurseries than farms. Two main catalysts propelled organizers' energies specifically in the direction of town gardening as distinct from commercial agriculture.

First, whereas women's field labour in the British Isles remained contentious, its potential for helping settle the colonies proved less objectionable, involving as it did another sphere constructed as domestic and feminine. Directed towards an imperial civilizing mission, women's rural skills were attuned more strictly to domestic management on colonial ranches, i.e., supervision of the household economy and associated outdoor tasks, particularly cultivation of kitchen and decorative gardens and the keeping of livestock. Organizations co-ordinating the emigration of women in service of colonial homesteads worked to establish formalized training under distinctly colonial conditions, leading to the establishment of the Colonial

³⁰ Meredith, 'Middle-class women', pp. 47–8.

³¹ Grace Thompson identified Thorne's association as 'the beginning of the movement which led to the foundation of Swanley Horticultural College [sic] and other

horticultural schools and poultry-farms for women'; Otto Fischel and Max Von Boehn, *Modes and manners of the nineteenth century*, trans. Grace Thompson (4 vols, 1927), IV, p. 76.

Training Home at Leaton, Shropshire, and its dedicated curriculum in home economics and horticultural subjects in 1890.³² As we shall see, colonial departments in the horticultural and agricultural colleges also joined this trend.

Second, the same logic underpinning women's usefulness to improving the national status of agriculture also propelled one enterprising London businessman to recognize the value of scientific instruction in the training of *male* middle-class students for careers in small culture. From the ambitions of Arthur Harper Bond and his supportive urban network emerged the Horticultural College, Swanley, in Kent, the first residential college devoted to horticultural training, and although beginning as a men-only institution in 1889, it became co-educational in 1891 and women-only in 1903. As I have shown elsewhere, Swanley (to shorten the college's name) was singular in advancing the cause for women's scientific education in horticulture and allied subjects in the 1890s.³³ Although its evolution proceeded quite independently of Warwick's scheme, it provided *the* focus for the women's agricultural education movement in the ensuing years.

Swanley's founders and feminizing agents approached the problem from an unmistakably urban perspective that shaped both the form and function of their contributions to the movement. Although bearing a similar arrangement as traditional models for residential, agrarian education and apprenticeships, and ultimately situated on a country estate some 20 miles outside of London, the college was formed by the entrepreneurial Bond in January 1889 as a joint-stock company, with one objective being explicitly:

To carry on business as horticulturalists, market gardeners, fruit growers, seed merchants, farmers and graziers, and to buy, sell, manufacture, and deal in implements, machinery and apparatus of all kinds required by customers of the Company, and to buy, sell, grow, improve, preserve and deal in plants, vegetables, shrubs, trees, fruit, and other products of all kinds.³⁴

The college's market emphasis aligned well with national imperatives promulgated by the likes of Gladstone; when welcoming the attendees of the Hawarden and Buckley Floral and Horticultural Society's annual show, which he hosted at his Hawarden Castle in August 1890, he cited a lecture by pomologist Cecil Henry Hooper, 'a Kentish man occupying an important position in Kent, in the Horticultural College', as 'a rather important sign of the progress the subject is making'.³⁵ One mark of the college's departure from its rural precedents was the class origins of the students; whereas long-established private colleges like the Royal Agricultural College, Cirencester strove to prepare sons of gentlemen for managing their estates, Swanley

³² On the alignment of imperialists' agendas, female emigration, and domestic ideals, see Lisa Chilton, 'A new class of women for the colonies: *The Imperial Colonist* and the construction of empire', in Carl Bridge and Kent Fedorowich (eds), *The British world: diaspora, culture and identity* (2003), pp. 36–56. Further on women's colonial training and occupations, see James A. Hammerton, *Emigrant gentlewomen: genteel poverty and female emigration, 1830–1914* (1979). On the

influential masculine precedent, the Colonial College, Hollesley Bay, see Opitz, 'A triumph of brains', pp. 48–9.

³³ Opitz, 'A triumph of brains'.

³⁴ The National Archives, Kew (hereafter TNA), BT 31/4333/28142, 'Memorandum of association of the Horticultural College and Produce Company, Limited, 30 Jan. 1889'.

³⁵ 'Mr Gladstone on cottage gardening and fruit farming', *The Times*, 22 Aug. 1890, p. 5.

joined a groundswell of new institutions devoted to 'the masses', primarily sons of professional and middle-class men.³⁶

Although an alumnus retrospectively claimed that 'Bond had in mind, from the beginning, the possibility of admitting women students', it took a well-known advocate for women's professional advancement to convince the college directors to accept its first female students in 1891.³⁷ Precipitating this historic victory were the experiment and organizing efforts of Miss Emma Cons, founder of the so-called 'penny lectures' by eminent men of science, held at her Royal Victoria Coffee and Music Hall ('the Old Vic'), and of the Morley Memorial College for Working Men and Women that developed from those lectures.³⁸ Having sat as a pioneering councilwoman on the London County Council, Cons's interest in Swanley developed when fellow councillor John McDougall, an original shareholder of the college's limited company and uncle to a 'Swanleyite', invited Cons to visit the campus in 1890. She was joined by her friend Miss Ethel Gertrude Everest, a lady of some means, and the 'autumn two energetic spirits [*sic*]' remained at the college for a few weeks to work alongside the students and thereby 'prove' that women had the physical capacity to withstand the rigors of the training.³⁹ Their investments of sweat and, perhaps more critically, capital (in Everest's case, £250) swayed Swanley's directors to accept their proposal, supported by the noted London landscape gardener of the Metropolitan Public Gardens Association, Miss Fanny Rollo Wilkinson, to open a 'Ladies' Branch' in June 1891.⁴⁰

The locus of support for Swanley's Ladies' Branch lay in urban quarters. Through Wilkinson, Cons called upon London's network of women gardeners, significantly including Mrs Edith Laxon Chamberlain, founder of the Women's London Gardening Association. Chamberlain's business hired women gardeners on a contract basis to care for private gardens, conservatories, window boxes, and interior plants in London, and she took in apprentices for instruction in floral arrangement and nursery work.⁴¹ In addition to lending her business's premises for the meeting of Cons's group, during which they drew up the first prospectus of the Ladies' Branch, Chamberlain agreed to serve as the branch's first honorary secretary. Chamberlain, who lectured on 'town gardening' at the Portman Rooms in central London, drew notice to Swanley's new branch when she repeated her lectures at the International Horticultural Exhibition at Earl's Court in the summer of 1892. Her lectures were afterwards collected in

³⁶ For the class distinctions, see R. Hedger Wallace, 'On agricultural education', *Trans. Royal Scottish Soc. of Arts* 12 (1891), p. 150.

³⁷ R. J. Tabor, 'Arthur Harper Bond', *Horticultural College Magazine* (hereafter *HCM*) (lxxxvii) (1941), p. 5. On Tabor, see A. B. Beakbane, 'A brief historical account of some members of the governing body of Swanley Horticultural College', *The Swanley Magazine* 6 (xcvii) (1946), pp. 7–8.

³⁸ ODNB, 'Cons, Emma (1838–1912)'.

³⁹ Emmeline Eason Wilkinson, 'The history of the college, part III: recollections of the early days', *HCM* (Nov. 1916), p. 20; Elsa Morrow, 'A history of Swanley Horticultural College', *Wye: The J. of the Agricola*

Club and Swanley Guild 21 (iii) (1985), p. 80; TNA, BT 31/4333/28142/item 5, 'Summary of Capital and Shares', 26 Jun. 1889.

⁴⁰ Elisabeth Crawford, *Enterprising women: the Garretts and their circle* (2009), p. 231; Morrow, 'Swanley', p. 80. For the prospectus, Hextable Heritage Centre, Swanley Town Council (hereafter *HHC*), W00011/1, 'The Ladies' Branch of the Horticultural College, South Bank, Hextable, Swanley', in 'Women's Branch of the Horticultural College, Swanley, minute-book (May 1891 to Nov. 1893)'.

⁴¹ Frances Wolseley, *Gardening for women* (1908), pp. 257–8.

the volume, *Town and Home Gardening*.⁴² As Sarah Bilston has pointed out, in Chamberlain's advocacy for women gardeners she made 'the relationship between traditional domestic and modern professional roles particularly clear'.⁴³ Thus in her handbook for gentlewomen, featuring a chapter on 'Gardening as a Profession' that highlighted Swanley's Ladies' Branch, she underlined the value of a scientific curriculum: 'To some minds much of this appears unnecessary, but it should be remembered that in this artificial age the gardener is always trying to forestall Nature, and only science can help him (or her) to achieve this'.⁴⁴ In her view, Chamberlain wedded science and modernity, horticulture and urbanity.

Although, as we have seen, the broader movement envisioned a range of rural, agrarian pursuits for women possessing the requisite training, in line with the new urban emphasis the leadership of Swanley's Women's Branch (as it was quickly renamed) focused primarily on equipping its students for situations in private gardens, market gardens, and nurseries. One gentlewoman visitor to Swanley, herself an accomplished horticulturalist 'brought up for the most part in the country', recognized the Women's Branch's potential for promoting 'a new employment ... for women of small means'. She suggested how within 'many of the suburban districts the dulness [*sic*] of the small plots of ground in front of the houses is entirely owing to the want of education in the neighbouring nurserymen', and '[a] lady gardener might easily undertake to lay out these plots in endless variety'. She identified 'larger villas, where single ladies might prefer a woman head-gardener with a man under her to do the rougher and heavier work', and greenhouses as further suitable situations for women with both the training and maturity.⁴⁵ The potential envisaged here lay within suburbia as opposed to rural arcadia. As Crawford illustrated in some detail, a good number of the graduates went to the cottage gardens of prominent middle-class women, for example a 'series of ex-Swanley gardeners' to Elizabeth Garrett Anderson's Alde House in the Suffolk village of Aldeburgh.⁴⁶ As one of Britain's pioneering women doctors, Anderson was quick to proclaim horticulture to be 'a healthy and suitable employment for women' and sat on the Women's Branch's council from 1893.⁴⁷ The honorary secretary of the Women's Branch, Miss Ada Goodrich Freer (afterwards Mrs Spoer), later confirmed the apparent trend, writing in 1899: 'Nine-tenths, at least, of would-be employers who have applied to me for women-gardeners are themselves women, and in very many cases they have offered as a reason that they thought it right to promote a new opening for women's work'.⁴⁸

A peak in Swanley's publicity coincided with a significant reopening of the question of rural women's potential, however. Among the events commemorating Queen Victoria's

⁴² Crawford, *Enterprising women*, p. 231. See also Karen Sayer, *Country cottages: a cultural history* (2000), pp. 92–102.

⁴³ Sarah Bilston, 'Queens of the gardens: Victorian women gardeners and the rise of the gardening advice text', *Victorian Literature and Culture* 36 (2008), p. 13; Edith L. Chamberlain, *Town and home gardening* (1893).

⁴⁴ Edith L. Chamberlain and Fanny Douglas, *The Gentlewoman's Book of Gardening* (1892), pp. 213–4.

⁴⁵ C. W. Earle, *Pot-pourri from a Surrey garden* (1897), pp. 4, 39–40; see ODNB, 'Earle, (Maria) Theresa (1836–1925)'.

⁴⁶ Crawford, *Enterprising women*, p. 234.

⁴⁷ HHC, SWAN00015, 'Women's Branch of The Horticultural College, Swanley, Kent, second annual report, December 1893', in 'Reports, 1892–1912', p. 7.

⁴⁸ Ada Goodrich Freer, 'Horticulture as a profession for the educated', *The Nineteenth Century* 46 (Nov. 1899), p. 776.

Diamond Jubilee, a congress devoted to 'Agricultural Education for Women in Great Britain, Ireland, and the Colonies' was held in early July 1897, at the Empress Theatre in Earl's Court, London. As part of the 'Victoria Era Exhibition', the topic was 'so keenly discussed, that the session was prolonged far beyond the allotted time'.⁴⁹ The congress addressed women's capacity for agricultural pursuits in the widest sense, and the presentation by Lady Georgina Vernon, who kept an apiary in the country at Hanbury Hall, Worcestershire, proposed 'activities connected with agriculture' as an answer to 'the problem of how to obtain the most profitable and suitable employment for women of the upper classes'.⁵⁰ Given her own rural and upper-class orientation to the subject, Vernon emphasized the potential inherent in small culture as well as estate gardening. With respect to dairying for example, she advised against 'embarking in a large business which would entail a number of men for the care of the cows', emphasizing instead the profitability awaiting 'one or two girls joined together in a small dairy farm', i.e., 'a small house and land for one or two cows'.⁵¹ She also affirmed the opportunities in gardening, 'a branch of work which could so easily be carried on by ladies in their own homes and their own gardens'. But she cautioned that '[a] garden, to be profitable, demands knowledge of horticulture', and she advocated 'a course of instruction at the Horticultural College at Swanley in Kent, if this occupation is to be taken up seriously'.⁵² In sum, this country gentlewoman's statements provoked a shift in the movement back towards rural concerns.

Ironically one of the male detractors of women's pursuit of horticulture contributed to this shift. In his presentation at the congress, the Oxford chemist, Hugh O'Donoghue Macan, argued, 'I am bound to say, and I will always say, that I cannot recommend women to take up the work of professional gardeners', citing as evidence Swanley's low job placement of women graduates into professional positions apart from 'doing valuable work in their own homes'.⁵³ And here, alternatively, Macan stated his position that women should be trained in rural, agricultural pursuits to 'enable them to supplement the work of men in the country and not to supplant them', achieving '[t]he harmonious working of all members of the family together'.⁵⁴ By invoking the rhetoric of separate spheres and speaking only a few years after the opening of the Women's Branch, Macan cast an unfair shadow over the gradual but certain success that the Swanley women enjoyed in obtaining a broad range of positions – especially in market gardening – over the ensuing decade.⁵⁵

Whether sympathetic or adversarial, the discussion at the 1897 Victoria Era Exhibition uniformly underscored the ascendancy of horticulture in the movement whilst noting the unrealized potential in agriculture as a whole. Swanley emerged as the beacon for women's scientific training but for outcomes more closely aligned with what Chamberlain popularized

⁴⁹ C. W. Kimmins, 'Introduction', in Countess of Warwick (ed.), *Progress in women's education in the British Empire* (1898), p. xviii. The congress was part of the Education subsection of the Women's Work section of the Victoria Era Exhibition.

⁵⁰ Lady Georgina Vernon, 'The training of women in dairy work and other outdoor industries', in Warwick (ed.), *Progress in women's education*, pp. 127–8.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 133.

⁵² *Ibid.*, pp. 135–6.

⁵³ H. Macan, 'Education suitable for women in rural districts', in Warwick (ed.), *Progress in women's education*, pp. 144–5.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 149.

⁵⁵ On the job placement statistics, see Opitz, 'A triumph of brains', pp. 55–7.

as ‘town and home gardening’, thereby associating women’s potential with the modernity of scientific training and urban living. It was against this backdrop – and indeed, in reaction to it – that Warwick advanced her own ideas for promoting women’s education and careers in agriculture. She picked up on Vernon’s main proposal that agriculture offered a key solution for retaining women on the land. Warwick soon afterwards elaborated a full rationale for an ‘Agricultural Training College for Women’, which, although including ‘practical work’ in ‘Horticulture’, among other subjects, positioned ‘Agriculture’ as the overarching frame and leading subject for the college and its curriculum.⁵⁶

III

While the Horticultural College at Swanley worked to accommodate the increasing women’s enrolments (which overtook the men’s in 1896), Warwick pursued an initiative of her own that gave rise to a competitor institution. Renowned as an aristocratic beauty, before and after her marriage to Francis Greville, Lord Brooke (and earl of Warwick from 1893), Daisy (as she was generally known) notoriously received the attention of various suitors and lovers, including the Prince of Wales (who addressed her as ‘My darling little Daisy wife’).⁵⁷ After several years of ‘dalliance’ (as the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* aptly put it), Daisy focused more on fulfilling a ‘Lady Bountiful’ role with considerable seriousness.⁵⁸ She first became interested in the plight of unemployed labourers’ daughters in the neighbourhood of her inherited estates centred on Easton Lodge, near Dunmow, Essex. There she launched, in 1891, the Easton School of Needlework to provide village girls with a form of technical training. In connection with this endeavour, and to provide the girls with prospects for work, she set up a shop on Bond Street in London. After meeting the journalist and ‘professional moralizer’ W. T. Stead in 1892, she received his encouragement for expanding her interests in this form of structural social reform.⁵⁹ Macan pointed to one artifact of her next project – in many ways more closely associated with her developing interest in women’s higher agricultural training – at the Victoria Era Exhibition congress: ‘that little leaflet ... laid upon [attendees’] chairs, giving an account of the technical school at Dunmow which has been started by the Countess of Warwick’.⁶⁰ This was her ‘Secondary and Technical School’ (afterwards ‘Secondary and Agricultural School’) established in early 1897 at Bigods Hall, near Dunmow, Essex.

Her home county having been hard-hit by the agricultural depression, Warwick came to believe that technical education held the key to a sustainable solution, an idea nurtured through her friendship with Joseph Arch, a radical, working-class agriculturalist, later MP, living in the village adjacent to her husband’s Warwick Castle estate. During periodic visits to Arch’s cottage ‘just outside the gates of the Castle’ in the mid-1890s, Warwick learned of his ‘struggles and victories’ for working-class labourers’ rights, especially his founding of the

⁵⁶ Countess of Warwick, ‘Woman and the future of agriculture’, *The Land Magazine* (i) (1897), pp. 723–9.

⁵⁷ Kate Caffrey, *The 1900s lady* (1976), p. 115.

⁵⁸ ODNB, ‘Greville, Frances Evelyn, Countess of Warwick (1861–1938)’; ‘Lady Bountiful’ was a term Warwick applied to herself; see, for example, Frances

Countess of Warwick, *Life’s ebb & flow* (1929), p. 100. On this role, see Horn, *Ladies of the manor*.

⁵⁹ Margaret Blunden, *The Countess of Warwick* (1967), pp. 79–81.

⁶⁰ Macan, ‘Education’, p. 146.

first Agricultural Labourer's Union in England (in 1872) and its advocacy for enfranchising labourers (achieved with the Third Reform Bill of 1884). During this time she suggested that he write, and she edit, his autobiography for publication, a project that impressed upon her that '[a]dequate education, elementary and technical, is what the agricultural labourer now needs most of all'.⁶¹ As she prepared to undertake this project, in November 1896 at a meeting of the Barking Technical Instruction Committee, during which she presented prizes, she heard chemist Raphael Meldola deliver a speech in which he expressed concern over the 'absence of technical day schools teaching the basic scientific principles underlying production' within the context of Britain's lagging competition behind foreign markets.⁶² Spurred by such ideas and dissatisfied with the poor secondary schools in her district, she sought to remedy the situation by founding a secondary school specializing in the technical preparation of local pupils for work in agricultural and allied rural industries, including ones she deemed especially suitable for young, working-class women.⁶³

Officially opened in February 1897 in buildings adjoining Bigods Hall on an estate of some 17 acres acquired for the purpose, the school accepted day students between the ages of 12 and 16. By 1898, to align the school with the Essex County Council's requirements for recognition as a science school eligible for technical instruction funds, Meldola advised Warwick to establish a separate 'Science School' section providing a three-year (afterwards two-year) course of study 'prescribed by the Science and Art Department'. She also opened Bigods Hall as a dormitory to mitigate the school's remoteness for many of the students.⁶⁴ In receipt of technical instruction funding, Warwick had chemical and physical laboratories built to accommodate practical demonstrations alongside theoretical instruction, and she provided 'all Senior Scholars' with experimental garden plots. In due course, she added a biology laboratory, a one-acre experimental farm, a dairy, an apiary, an orchard, glasshouses, a poultry run, a meteorological station, and an agricultural museum. Meldola drew up the scientific curriculum and selected the first principal, Eugene Edwin Hennesey, a science demonstrator from the Royal College of Science, London.⁶⁵ Despite offering co-educational instruction in most subjects, for the first couple of years the girls' training departed from the boys' in its substitution of botany and home economics, for physics, and flower cultivation, for vegetable cultivation. These gendered divisions shifted after the turn of the century, physics being added to the girls' subjects and the only remaining sex differentiation lying within the manual work. As Hennesey explained,

⁶¹ Warwick, *Life's ebb*, p. 145; ead., 'Preface', in Countess of Warwick (ed.) *Joseph Arch: the story of his life, told by himself* (1898), p. xiv.

⁶² Blunden, *Warwick*, p. 117. See also Raphael Meldola, 'The education of the farmer's son and (?) daughter', *WAT* 1 (x) (1900), p. 3.

⁶³ On the pedagogical connections between Warwick's schools, see James A. Kettle, 'Preparation for Life: the Countess of Warwick and British education' (unpublished ts, Forth Worth, TX, 1984), pp. 2–3.

⁶⁴ Meldola, 'Education', p. 4; Essex Record Office, T/P 229/23, *The Countess of Warwick's Secondary and Technical Schools, Bigods, Dunmow, Essex* (n.d.). On

the date of the school's original opening, Countess of Warwick, 'Technical education in rural districts', in Henry Treuman Wood (ed.), *International Congress on Technical Education: report of the proceedings of the fourth meeting* (1897), p. 231. For curricular changes, *The Countess of Warwick's Secondary and Agricultural Schools, Bigods Hall, Dunmow, Essex* (1903), a copy of which is held by the National Agricultural Library, Beltsville, MD, USA).

⁶⁵ Hannah Gay, 'Chemist, entomologist, Darwinian, and man of affairs: Raphael Meldola and the making of a scientific career,' *Annals of Science* 67 (2010), pp. 106–7.

'I do not think it is possible to have separate courses for boys and girls in rural schools, and for this reason that rural science schools are, as a rule, not big enough to allow of two courses running side by side'.⁶⁶ Private philanthropists funded a number of scholarships and prizes, including one given annually by Meldola 'for the best natural history collection'.⁶⁷

According to Hennesey, the 'elementary course' at Bigods included science subjects in which 'we do *not* give an agricultural bias', but beginning in the third year 'the course must undoubtedly have rural science for its foundation', and this meant both classroom and practical agricultural instruction. 'The course', Hennesey explained at a London conference of science teachers in January 1902, 'is really an elementary investigation into the properties – chemical, physical and biological – of the soil and of the plant, and the interdependence of these two'.⁶⁸ Meldola, speaking at the same conference about his role in adapting the curriculum of the Science and Art Department 'to the requirements of our case', noted the lack of precedents for developing 'a scheme with an agricultural bias'. He underlined, 'public attention had not been awakened to the different requirements of town and country education'.⁶⁹

This emphasis on Bigods Hall as a centre for *country* science education presaged Warwick's application of a similar logic to women's collegiate agricultural education. In a paper she delivered at the International Congress on Technical Education in London in June 1897, just weeks before the Victoria Era Exhibition, Warwick explained the fundamental tenets underlying her Bigods experiment as they related to women's technical education, foreshadowing her intervention in the women's agricultural movement.⁷⁰ Here she succinctly rationalized agricultural instruction steeped in natural science, with reference to back-to-the-land principles:

[S]o much of my interest is centred on rural subjects ..., with special reference to the Technical Education of girls and women, as its careful development may help – not a little – to stay the de-population of our villages ... First then and all important to the country child should come the study of Nature An intelligent appreciation of natural phenomena and natural laws when applied to agriculture might go a long way to relieve the depression from which our rural districts are suffering so keenly.⁷¹

At this point in the development of her ideas – on the brink of expanding greatly – Warwick thought of the beneficiaries and their potential occupations in quite conservative, even condescending terms. The instruction she envisioned 'will be for the wives and daughters of farmers, artisans, and agricultural labourers', a class for whom 'the only industry especially applicable is that of dairying, which is more or less women's work'.⁷²

Her 'interesting educational experiment' at Bigods Hall faced education scholar Michael Ernest Sadler's mixed approbation when he reviewed it for the Essex Education Committee in

⁶⁶ E. E. Hennesey, 'Technical education in English rural secondary schools', *The London Technical Education Gazette* 8 (1902), p. 46.

⁶⁷ *Warwick's Secondary and Technical Schools*; Michael E. Sadler, *Report on secondary and higher education in Essex* (1906), pp. 295–6.

⁶⁸ Hennesey, 'Technical education', pp. 46–7.

⁶⁹ R. Meldola, 'Pioneer work in secondary and

technical education in rural districts', *The London Technical Education Gazette* 8 (1902), p. 50.

⁷⁰ On the congress, see Henry Treuman Wood, 'International Congress on Technical Education', in Wood, *International Congress*, p. vi.

⁷¹ Warwick, 'Technical education', p. 223.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 225.

1905. Underlining the 'great value' of Warwick's founding premise that 'the future life-needs of the pupils should colour the course of training which a secondary school should give', he found the technical side of the school's curriculum efficacious, being 'sound in scientific principle and practical in its execution'.⁷³ Nevertheless, this focus, believed to give short shrift to 'a general education efficient in all respects, and especially thorough as regards English subjects', also jeopardized, and ultimately cost, the school's recognition by the Board of Education 'as a secondary school in receipt of grants'. Sadler's investigation prompted a special inspection of the school by the Essex Education Committee in 1906, leading to the discontinuance of its annual subsidy of £100 and leaving the school to rely upon private means alone, most especially Warwick's own annual contributions of up to £1000. Within 10 years of its foundation, Warwick found 'I could not afford to continue the school until it paid its way' and thus felt forced to close Bigods Hall by 1908.⁷⁴ Despite Sadler's finding that between 1900 and 1905 nearly half of the boys who attended 'have subsequently become farmers', Warwick afterwards reached a different conclusion based upon old students' anecdotal letters: 'With the exception of three prosperous farmers, not one of them went on the land'.⁷⁵ Based on the lacklustre state support the school received, Warwick later concluded, 'My efforts were a little before their day'.⁷⁶

IV

The eventual failure of Bigods lay most of a decade in the future. For the moment, the Bigods experiment positioned Warwick as an influential female voice in the technical education movement, and it was in this capacity that she joined the discussion on women's agricultural education at the Victoria Era Exhibition in 1897. Attended by ladies like Vernon, 'drawn from polite Society [but] having special associations with country life', the congress turned Warwick's attention to the potential of technical education *beyond* the secondary level for preparing women of the middle and upper classes for work in a range of agricultural branches.⁷⁷ She thus set herself on a new project and publicly announced her educational scheme in the December issue of *The Land Magazine*; there she elaborated upon the congress's idea that women could usefully contribute to the improvement of agriculture within a specified sphere: '[M]en have not hitherto given the necessary time and thought to the *lighter branches of agriculture*, such as poultry- and bee-keeping, flower and fruit growing, jam and soft cheese making, and such like; and it may be added that many women are gifted with more of the commercial instinct'.⁷⁸ Acutely aware of the criticisms of dissenters like Macan, who questioned the fitness of women for heavy farm labour, Warwick rephrased the dissent into justification for a separate sphere for 'women possessed of systematic training ... in *supplementing*, not *supplanting*, the work of their husbands and brothers on the farm'.⁷⁹ In publicizing her nascent scheme, she and her collaborators singularly popularized this feminized sphere consisting of the 'lighter branches of agriculture'. Warwick's intervention made a decisive departure from the women's

⁷³ Sadler, *Report*, pp. 295, 301.

⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 301; Blunden, *Warwick*, p. 197; Warwick, *Life's ebb*, p. 290.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 286.

⁷⁷ Blunden, *Warwick*, pp. 119–20.

⁷⁸ Warwick, 'Woman', p. 724, emphasis added.

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 725, emphasis in original.

agricultural education movement's trend towards 'town and home gardening', crystallized in the focus on horticulture at Swanley's Women's Branch, and she renewed instead the emphasis on agriculture as a means to effect women's return to the land.

As nominal chair of the sub-section concerned with women's education at the Victoria Era Exhibition, Warwick shepherded the publication of its proceedings shortly following the conference.⁸⁰ She relied upon the sub-section's secretary, Miss Edith Bradley, to carry out the editorial work (for which Bradley was acknowledged as 'sub-editor'). More importantly, Warwick looked to Bradley to help her make a reality of her grand ideas to return women to the land (see Figure 1). Bradley was well positioned for this work. Since 1892 she had directed the Women Lecturers' Association, her supplement to the male-dominated University Extension Movement, to promote women's continuing education, especially in the natural sciences.⁸¹ At Warwick's request, in the months following the conference Bradley investigated a number of established agricultural departments at universities – University College London, Nottingham, and Cambridge among them – to find a suitable host for a women's hostel, and the University Extension College, Reading (popularly referred to as 'Reading College') was settled upon.⁸²

The Agricultural Department at Reading was founded in 1893, only a year after the establishment of the college itself.⁸³ A joint standing committee of members from the Oxford University Extension Delegacy and the Reading College council supervised the design and delivery of curriculum, examinations, certificates, and degrees. The curriculum spanned both theoretical and practical subjects, and the certificates and degrees required the students to undergo periods of practical work while in residence on farms. The relocation, in 1895, of the British Dairy Institute from Aylesbury to Reading and its placement under the management of the joint committee established the college as a main centre for dairy teaching and research. From the outset, all of the department's classes were open to both men and women students who were at least 16 years old.⁸⁴ A month-long 'special course' in 'poultry farming, horticulture, and bee-keeping' in November 1894 piloted the inclusion of small culture. On the eve of Warwick's involvement, the department's director, Douglas Alston Gilchrist, hoped for an expansion of this part of the curriculum.⁸⁵

With Reading already accepting women students and offering a range of subjects aligning with Warwick's 'lighter branches of agriculture', the site proved expedient for launching her scheme. She now needed to overcome two hurdles to put her ideas into practice: setting up a hall of residence for the students, and acquiring an official affiliation with the college. To

⁸⁰ Warwick (ed.), *Progress in women's education*.

⁸¹ Bradley founded the organization as the Association of Women Pioneer Lecturers. On Bradley, see Blunden, *Warwick*, p. 119, and *The British year-book of agriculture and agricultural who's who, 1908–9* (1908), p. 480.

⁸² Blunden, *Warwick*, p. 122.

⁸³ Reading College originated within the University Extension Movement; see W. M. Childs, *The Making of a University* (1933), and Ian Macrae, 'The making of a university, the breakdown of a movement: Reading University Extension College to the University of

Reading, 1892–1925', *International J. of Lifelong Education* 13 (1994), pp. 3–18.

⁸⁴ Paul Brassley, 'Agricultural science and education', in E. J. T. Collins (ed.), *The Agrarian History of England and Wales*, VII, 1850–1914 (2 vols, 2000), I, pp. 641–42; Douglas A. Gilchrist, 'The Agricultural Department of the University Extension College, Reading', *The Record of Technical and Secondary Education* 3 (1894), pp. 514–25.

⁸⁵ Gilchrist, 'Agricultural Department', p. 525; 'Preface', in *Reading College calendar: seventh session, 1898–99* (1898), p. 7.

achieve the first, Bradley set out in July 1898 'dressed in green cycling suit and brown hat' and 'pedalled round Reading house-hunting'.⁸⁶ Meanwhile, Warwick struck an agreement with the college's principal, the geographer H. J. Mackinder - an original founder of the University Extension College - to officially 'recognize the Countess of Warwick's Hostel as a place of residence for Women Students' and affirm the college's undertaking 'to provide the necessary courses of instruction'.⁸⁷ With Bradley's success in identifying a suitable house with three acres of ground 'about twenty minutes' walk from the College' in Bath Road, the agreement specified the hostel's grounds would 'afford room for practical work'.⁸⁸ The scheme's expressed purpose was to enable 'women over the age of sixteen, to obtain a thorough training (theoretical and practical) in the lighter branches of Agriculture, viz., Flower and fruit growing, and packing for market, especially bush fruit, tomatoes, mushrooms, etc., Bee and poultry keeping, dairy work'.⁸⁹ With the agreement settled, and advertising for the hostel already underway, 12 students moved into 'Lady Warwick Hostel' in October 1898. By the following June, with 'applications continuing to pour in', Bradley rented a further house, named 'Maynard Hostel' (after Daisy's maiden name), and again by September a further house, Brooke House, 'had to be acquired'. By the time of the Hostel's third annual report in December 1900, Bradley recorded the entrance of 117 students since the opening, with 52 then enrolled.⁹⁰

The agreement with Reading established a governing body for Lady Warwick Hostel (which encompassed all of the facilities) to be filled with four appointees by Warwick and three by the college council. The appointments came later in the year, after the college's 'experimental stage' during which Warwick and Bradley managed the hostel's affairs, with Warwick as 'President' and Bradley as 'Warden'. Three of Warwick's appointees to the committee - her husband, Lady Vernon, and John Marshall Dugdale - ensured representation of the landed interest. Dugdale, a Welsh country squire, barrister, and chairman of the Dairy Teachers' Association, actively promoted the advancement of technical, agricultural education.⁹¹ The college council selected Mackinder, William Berkeley Monck, chair of the British Dairy Institute, and Martin John Sutton, senior partner of the prominent Reading seed firm of Messrs. Sutton and Sons, which 'kindly placed their nurseries and trial grounds at the disposal of the College for demonstration purposes'.⁹²

⁸⁶ Blunden, *Warwick*, p. 136.

⁸⁷ MERL, FR WAR/1/19, 'Countess of Warwick's agricultural scheme for women, hostel for students at Reading College, President: The Countess of Warwick' (ts, 1898). On Mackinder, Brian W. Blouet, *Halford Mackinder: a biography* (1987).

⁸⁸ 'Warwick's agricultural scheme for women'; *Reading College calendar, eighth session, 1899-1900* (1899), p. 54. Warwick looked over the house, Coleyhurst, in the summer of 1898; MERL, FR WAR 5/5/1, H. J. Mackinder to E. Bradley, 16 Aug. 1898.

⁸⁹ 'Warwick's agricultural scheme for women'.

⁹⁰ For advertising, Blunden, *Warwick*, p. 136. For the roll of the first 12 students, MERL, FR WAR 5/13/1, 'Lady Warwick Hostel Visitor Book' (n.d.). For the

addition of further houses and their capacities, Frances Evelyn Warwick, 'Agricultural education for women', *The Times*, 13 May 1901. On the enrolments, MERL, FR WAR 5/1/19, *Lady Warwick Hostel, Reading, third annual report, December 8th, 1900* (1900), p. 3.

⁹¹ The Dairy Teachers' Association was formed in 1895 'to promote the interests of dairy instruction'; see 'Technical education', *J. of Education*, new ser., 17 (1895), p. 258. On Dugdale, see *Brasenose College register, 1509-1909* (2 vols, 1909), II, pp. 620-1. In 1895 Dugdale's cousin Colonel Frank Dugdale had married Eva Sarah Greville, the fifth earl of Warwick's sister; Greville, *Life's ebb*, pp. 30-3.

⁹² *Calendar, eighth session*, p. 116. On Sutton, see ODNB, 'Sutton, Martin John (1850-1913)'.

Alongside these arrangements, Warwick proceeded to found the Lady Warwick Agricultural Association for Women (abbreviated as LWAA) in February 1899 'for the definite purpose of helping to organise and direct the extensive amount of work now being carried out by women in agriculture, horticulture, dairy and poultry work, bee-keeping, and other out-door occupations as well as all rural industries'.⁹³ At its heart, the association kept a registry as 'a means of bringing together employer and employed'; as such, it served as the job placement arm of Warwick's overall scheme. The range of situations were classified under headings including 'lecturers, organisers, teachers, commercial agents, gardeners (general, special and market), dairy and poultry women, bee-keepers, teachers of handicrafts, and ... out-door occupation[s]' (the last including the marketing of eggs, flowers, honey, and jam).⁹⁴ Members could subscribe annually to the LWAA as Patrons (at one guinea) or Associates (at five shillings), providing them with free access to the registry and a subscription to the association's monthly newsletter, *The Woman's Agricultural Times*. A non-subscriber who desired to use the registry – i.e., a student seeking work – could do so at half the price of an associate's subscription.⁹⁵ The indefatigable Bradley served as LWAA's organizing secretary and, effectively, editor (albeit Warwick nominally so). At its formation, the LWAA incorporated Dugdale's Dairy Teachers' Association and named him chairman of an executive committee of some ten members who included Mackinder, Vernon, and Gilchrist; a general committee of nearly 60 further members included an array of titled personages, educators, and noted agricultural scientists like A. D. Hall, principal of South-Eastern Agricultural College, Wye, and J. A. Voelcker, director of the Woburn Farm experimental station.⁹⁶ A few were also drawn from the early supporters of Swanley's Women's Branch: Mrs Garrett Anderson, MD; the Hon. Mrs Evelyn Cecil, the garden historian afterwards better known by her maiden name, Alicia Amherst; and Miss Henrietta Margaret White, principal of Alexandra College, Dublin, a women's college which introduced courses in horticulture early in the movement.⁹⁷

Although the scheme's rural bent steered Warwick to Reading and its established agricultural department, a tension existed between her theoretical ideas and the hostels' practical outcomes. She envisioned a return of her students back to the land, 'having put their hands to the plough ... content *not* to look back'.⁹⁸ In line with this vision, she hoped for students' placement on small 'Agricultural settlements for women', a plan consonant with both Gladstone's endorsement of smallholdings and Vernon's similar suggestion aired at the Victoria Era Exhibition. Warwick forecast:

⁹³ MERL, FR WAR 5/1/19, printed circular, 'Lady Warwick Agricultural Association for Women' [1899].

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid.; Edith Bradley, 'Lady Warwick Agricultural Association for Women', *WAT* 1 (i) (1899), p. 13.

⁹⁶ On Hall's role at Wye, see Stewart Richards, 'The South-Eastern Agricultural College and public support for technical education, 1894–1914', *AgHR* 36 (1988), pp. 172–87. In 1902, Hall assumed the directorship of the Rothamsted Experimental Station; on this aspect of his career, see Sir E. John Russell, 'Rothamsted and its experiment station', *Agricultural Hist.* 16 (1942),

pp. 229–50. On Voelcker, see B. Dyer, 'Obituary: John Augustus Voelcker', *The Analyst* 63 (1938), pp. 79–84.

⁹⁷ Sue Minter, *The well-connected gardener: a biography of Alicia Amherst, founder of garden history* (2010); ODNB, 'White, Henrietta Margaret (1856–1936)'. White persuaded Sir Frederick Moore, keeper of the Royal Botanic Gardens, Glasnevin, to offer a training course for lady gardeners in 1898; see M. Forrest, 'Women's horticultural colleges in Dublin in the early twentieth century', *Dublin Historical Record* 58 (2005), pp. 31–8.

⁹⁸ Warwick, 'New women', p. 2.

[T]he agricultural settlements, where for those who have small incomes cottages will be built with land attached which the trained women will cultivate. It is proposed that the cottages should be built in pairs, and that in each two women should live as partners; six or eight of these cottages will form a settlement presided over by a superintendent, who will advise about the crops and also market the produce of the settlement. Co-operative principles must prevail.⁹⁹

But despite these lofty ideals and Reading's robust agricultural curriculum, practically none of the hostels' students completed courses of study in agriculture proper; some earned certificates in dairying and poultry-keeping, and most followed pathways in horticulture. For students to earn an agricultural diploma the requirements included two years of coursework plus an additional two years of residence on a farm; the agricultural certificate required only one year of each type of instruction. Although the required lengths of instruction were apparently shortened for hostel students by 1900, the college's annual *Accounts and Reports* recorded only one woman student completing an agricultural course of study; this was Gertrude Codrington, who received a certificate in agriculture in 1901, but it is likely she was not a hostel resident.¹⁰⁰ Consistent with this outcome, Bradley reported in December 1900 that no hostel students had followed the agricultural tracks during the scheme's first three years. At that time, the 52 students then enrolled were distributed as follows: 29 full-course students of horticulture (56 per cent), ten full-course students of dairying (19 per cent), two full-course students of poultry-keeping (4 per cent), and 11 short-course students of specialized subjects (21 per cent). Given these trends, Bradley underlined the efforts to expand the facilities to provide 'sound practical training' in horticultural work.¹⁰¹

As per the agreement with the college, Warwick relied upon Reading's agricultural department to provide the theoretically informed curriculum, but she supplemented this with practical instruction in the hostels' grounds and demonstrations at off-site gardens, farms, and nurseries. Local sites included the Rev. George Wharton Robinson's nurseries at Calcot, the experimental seed grounds of Messrs Sutton and Sons, and the poultry runs at Edward Brown's farm at Theale. Further afield, the hostel students visited farms in Ascot, Berkshire; Cocum (near Barton Stacey), Hampshire; and Lockinge, the estate of Robert James Lloyd-Lindsay, Baron Wantage, in Ardington, Oxfordshire.¹⁰² Recognizing the criticalness of practical work

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ 'Report of the Council for the Year ended September 30th, 1901', *UCR Accounts and Reports, 1892-3 to 1900-1* (1901), pp. 17-20. Although, at the commencement of the Lady Warwick Hostel in 1898, the terms for the Diploma of Agriculture specified two years of theoretical plus two years of practical instruction, and for the Certificate only one year of each type of instruction, by 1900 the curriculum advertised in conjunction with the hostel seemed to relax these standards to two years of theoretical and *one* year of practical instruction for the Diploma, and only six months of theoretical instruction – with no mention of practical instruction – for the Certificate; compare *Calendar*,

Seventh Session, with *Reading College Calendar, Ninth Session, 1900-1901* (1900), p. 88.

¹⁰¹ *Third annual report*, p. 3.

¹⁰² Warwick, 'New women', p. 2. *Calendar, Eighth Session*, p. 116; MERL, FR WAR 5/1/19, 'Lady Warwick Hostel for Students at Reading College' (printed prospectus, 1 Jan. 1899), Edith Bradley, '"Our Daughters of Ceres"; or, matters concerning the Hostel students', *WAT* 1 (i) (1899), p. 9; M. Sharples, 'An ideal demonstration', *WAT* 1 (i) (1899), p. 10. On Robinson at Calcot, see Claire Tomalin, *The invisible woman: the story of Nelly Ternan and Charles Dickens* (1991), pp. 214-45. On Brown, see James E. Rice and F. C. Elford, 'A tribute to a great leader', *International Rev. of Poultry Science*

in the training of the horticultural students, in October 1899 Bradley rented six acres of land in Berkeley Avenue (near the Maynard Hostel) for the students to cultivate as a market garden, though she later recorded the challenge of achieving successful yields, given 'that for several years this piece of land had been out of cultivation, that it was choked with weeds, and that there was no depth of soil over a topsoil of gravel'.¹⁰³ Nevertheless, with 'double-ploughing' and 'very heavy manuring', within a year she reported, 'It certainly responds to cultivation splendidly'.¹⁰⁴ Named and advertised as the 'Warden's Farm', a variety of soft fruits, vegetables, and flowers were planted and harvested for sale in markets. So, in addition to gaining practical skills in small culture, the students also learned the business side of market gardening. Two large greenhouses were added in May 1900.¹⁰⁵ In this respect the arrangement in Reading, though more modest in scale, approached that of its older competitor, the Horticultural College, Swanley.

For horticulture, a certificate modelled after that of agriculture and granted by the Oxford and Reading Joint Committee required passing examinations after one year of classroom study and another year of practical work. The Reading College calendar for 1900 specified a range of examination subjects taught by well-credentialed instructors. The Rev. Robinson, an Oxford-trained, retired schoolmaster, taught horticulture and (as already mentioned) hosted demonstrations at his market garden. He was later joined by William Iggulden, head gardener to the earl of Cork and Orrery and an authority on tomatoes, who gave on-site horticultural lessons and supervised Marion ('May') Crooke – one of the original 12 students – in her appointment as hostel head-gardener. Percy Groom lectured on botany while chairing a department devoted to the subject at the Royal Indian Engineering College at nearby Cooper's Hill, Surrey. Charles Mann Luxmoore lectured on elementary chemistry and on soils and manures, subjects in which he also conducted extensive research. The Cambridge-trained Theodore Thomas Groom, who held a lectureship in zoology and geology (the latter being his primary field of research), taught agricultural entomology. The curriculum's other examination subjects included apiculture, bookkeeping and, optionally, meteorology.¹⁰⁶

For dairying, Frank P. Walker (a graduate of Edinburgh) provided lessons under the auspices of the British Dairy Institute, and after the first year further practical work was added on-site at the hostel under the direction of Bertha Marguerite La Mothe, another of the original 12 who had received the National Diploma in Dairying (NDD) from the Royal Agricultural Society

Note 102 *continued*

13 (1940), pp. 5–6; for the farm at Theale, 'Excursion to the College Poultry Farm, Theale, July 12th', in Edward Brown and Francis H. Wright (eds), *National Poultry Conference held at Reading: official report* (1899), pp. 77–9.

¹⁰³ Bradley and La Mothe, *Lighter branches*, p. 53. To help with the garden, Bradley hired 'An old gardener, whose best days had ended ten or twenty years ago, and a young boy' (pp. 55–6).

¹⁰⁴ *Third annual report*, p. 4.

¹⁰⁵ Warwick, 'Agricultural education', p. 10.

¹⁰⁶ On the examination subjects, see *Calendar, ninth*

session, p. 89. On the named lecturers' credentials, see W. R. Dunstan and B. A. Keen, 'Charles Mann Luxmoore', *J. Chemical Soc., Trans.* 123 (1923), pp. 3431–5; John Bretland Farmer, 'Percy Groom – 1865–1931', *Obituary Notices of Fellows of the Royal Society* 1 (1932), pp. 63–4; William Iggulden, *The tomato, with cultural directions for maintaining a continuous supply of fruit* (London, 1881); P. Lake, 'Theodore Thomas Groom', *Quarterly J. Geological Soc. of London* 99 (1943), pp. lxxxii–iv. On Crooke's appointment, *Third annual report*, p. 4. See also Edith Bradley and May Crooke, *The book of fruit bottling* (1907).

of England (RASE) in 1901. By May 1900, a turbine steam separator was acquired and placed in Maynard Hostel, enabling the production of butter and cream cheeses. One drawback was the lack of a dairy farm, requiring the purchase of outside milk and, as Bradley complained, resulting in losses of up to five shillings per pound of butter sold. In aviculture, Frances Home supplemented Brown's poultry lessons with further on-site poultry-keeping demonstrations. The continuing expansion of the facilities enabled appointments like La Mothe's and Home's, thus utilizing the talents of the hostels' own students.¹⁰⁷

To summarize, from a curricular point of view, despite the provisions for 'sound scientific and practical training' in an array of agricultural subjects, the dominant study lay nonetheless in horticulture – a reality confirmed by Bradley's enrolment reports and efforts to expand the hostels' facilities for practical gardening instruction. Within a couple of years, the mismatch between Warwick's idealistic 'back to the land' rhetoric and her scheme's practical outcomes became glaringly apparent.

V

The hostels' physical growth, increasing enrolments, and scattered sites provided justification for Warwick to mobilize a campaign to found an independent college, really her ulterior motive from the beginning. Speaking at the third celebration of 'Founder's Day' in December, 1900, Warwick broached the subject: 'We have *three* Hostels – we want to roof our students beneath *one*. We are overflowing on our garden ground, our poultry ground, our farm'. She called upon 'the press in the room' to bring attention to her 'lament' so that 'it may fall under the eye of some sainted millionaire, who will become the pious founder of a woman's agricultural and horticultural college'.¹⁰⁸ Press accounts indeed appeared in places ranging from the *Graphic* to the *Morning Post*, but Warwick penned her own public appeal in a letter to the editor of *The Times*.

What we require is an endowment of £30,000 or £50,000. This would enable us to purchase 200 acres of land and to build a proper agricultural college for women, equipped with lecture-halls and laboratories for practical and theoretical work, and supplied with all the other fittings of a well-managed garden and farm, besides providing accommodation for 200 students.

With Edward VII now on the throne (as of 22 January 1901), she noted 'His Majesty the King has graciously signified his approval of the scheme and given it his patronage'.¹⁰⁹ Unfortunately the appeal failed to attract a 'sainted millionaire' or yield a significant endowment.

Apparently, tensions within Lady Warwick Hostel's joint committee of management precipitated a decisive step towards complete independence from Reading in the following autumn. When the *Reading College Calendar* was printed for the 1901–02 academic year, it listed two

¹⁰⁷ Warwick, 'New women', pp. 1–2; *Third annual report*. Other student appointments included Elizabeth Constance Hoare (afterwards Mrs Miles Benson) as Assistant Instructress at the British Dairy Institute (see *ibid.*, p. 4), and Annie Quelch as Foreman Gardener at

the hostel; see 'Lady Warwick Agricultural Association for Women', WAT 2 (viii) (1901), p. 14.

¹⁰⁸ *Third annual report*, pp. 7–8.

¹⁰⁹ Warwick, 'Agricultural education', p. 10; Blunden, *Warwick*, p. 186.

new residences for women students – St George's Hostel and St Andrew's Hostel – but made no mention of Warwick's hostels.¹¹⁰ At the joint committee's meeting on 7 November 1901, the omission was discussed at length. Walter Palmer, a college governor and academic board member, attended the meeting to give 'his view of the relationship between the College and the Hostel'. He 'expressed the opinion that inadequate courses of instruction were given at the Hostel', referring to the growing trend of courses based at the hostels' premises serving as poor substitutes for the regular agricultural department courses at Reading's campus. This appears to have been the primary driver behind the 'action on the part of the College Council' taken 'in eliminating all mention of the Hostel from its Calendar'. Based on the meeting's minutes, a clear divide existed between the college's representatives – Mackinder and Palmer – and Warwick's representatives – Vernon and Kimmins. Although the minutes mention a 'particular incident' for which Lady Warwick 'expressed her regret', they are otherwise vague about the details of the controversy. In the end, 'After a long discussion, and frank expression on both sides', Mackinder agreed to reinstate 'the usual mention of the Hostel' 'in subsequent reprints of the Calendar'.¹¹¹ Nevertheless, by the end of the month Warwick decided to break off her agreement with Reading College and, following Bradley's recovery from 'a break-down in health' that spring, they began 'drafting a scheme of work & instruction for the future'.¹¹² Warwick's association with Reading officially terminated on 31 July 1902.¹¹³

The break from Reading promised Warwick greater freedom to tailor the curriculum and, hopefully soon, situate the students on a centralized campus in truly *rural* surroundings so as to align her scheme more closely with her original back-to-the-land agenda. But until such a site could be acquired, she and Bradley made do with the 'present scattered quarters' and fashioned a stand-alone curriculum. The hostel hired its own teaching staff to provide theoretical instruction on site. The new arrangement resulted in certain limitations, including an inability to offer certificates and diplomas bearing Oxford's imprimatur. Owing to the cramped facilities and incapacity to fund student scholarships, Bradley explained, 'it has seemed desirable from every point of view to arrange the necessary theoretical side of the training with the least possible expenditure of time, and also to teach only what is definitely required for the scientific side of the work'.¹¹⁴ In Bradley's outline for the new curriculum, horticulture appeared as the principal subject and agriculture, in its own right, did not make an appearance. Dairying, aviculture, apiculture, and marketing were all retained, but these were really subsidiary to horticulture. Warwick managed to retain agreements with many of the lecturers affiliated with Reading's agriculture department. Also listed was 'Colonial Training', already in progress at Brooke House as a one-year training course that included

¹¹⁰ *Reading College calendar, tenth session, 1901–02* (1901), p. 61; *Official gazette* [University College, Reading], 1 (xvii) (1902), p. 132. The new hostels were not restricted to agricultural students. St Andrew's Hall now houses MERL (a connection for which I thank the Editor).

¹¹¹ MERL, FR WAR 5/7/1, 'Minutes of the Fifth Meeting of the Lady Warwick Hostel Joint Committee of Managers held at Lady Warwick Hostel', (ts, 7 Nov. 1901). On Palmer, see 'Sir Walter Palmer', *The Times*, 18

Apr. 1910, p. 13.

¹¹² MERL, FR WAR 5/1/9, 'Letter book of LWH, Feb. 1902 to Dec. 1902', E. Bradley to C. W. Kimmins, 14 Jun. 1902.

¹¹³ 'Report of the Council to the Governors for the year ended 30th September, 1902', *Official Gazette* [University College, Reading], 1 (xvii) (1902), p. 136.

¹¹⁴ Edith Bradley, 'Lady Warwick Hostel: a new development', *WAT* 4 (i) (1902), p. 2.



FIGURE 1. Miss Edith Bradley, seated, and Frances, Countess of Warwick, standing, at the Lady Warwick College, Studley Castle, on Founder's Day, 1903. Museum of English Rural Life, University of Reading, FR WAR 5/10/4/1.

subjects in domestic science like cooking, laundry, and 'housewifery'. The new configuration of teaching staff included further appointments from among the hostel students.¹¹⁵ In short, the severance from Reading College retained certain continuities, but it made more apparent the reality that the Lady Warwick Hostel served as a centre for women's training in *horticulture* as opposed to agriculture in its broadest extent – an obvious compromise in a scheme intended to direct women back to the land.

By late 1902, Warwick had located a new site for her scheme closer to Warwick Castle and in a more rural context than Reading could supply. The 340-acre estate – which included a castle of its own – came on the market for £25,000, and, according to Warwick, 'I consulted with my husband and he agreed to our acquiring Studley Castle'.¹¹⁶ On 22 March 1903, while on a holiday in Palermo, she penned 'An open letter to my "Daughters of Ceres"', announcing that a 'most suitable place has been found' and that 'our College becomes an accomplished fact

¹¹⁵ Ibid., pp. 2–3. On the Department for Colonial Training, see 'Notes from cookery schools', *The Epicure* 8 (1901), p. 333.

¹¹⁶ Warwick, *Life's ebb*, p. 300. On the cost, see 'Studley College, Warwickshire', *Quarterly Rev.* [Royal Agricultural Society of England], (Nov. 1954), p. 13. The

property previously belonged to Thomas Eades Walker, a solicitor, and after the purchase it came under the supervision of the Warwick Estates' agent, Mr Payton; see Garstang, 'Studley', p. 10, and Blunden, *Warwick*, p. 186.

this year!¹¹⁷ Lord Warwick's estate staff worked to fix up the castle and grounds in time for receiving the students and college staff in the autumn, but Bradley recalled 'the discomfort and difficulties of settling into a new place' and gave as an illustration how 'a household of between 50 and 60 people with unfinished baths and a necessarily inadequate hot water supply, was – to put it mildly – trying to the temper'.¹¹⁸ In addition to about 40 students, as many resources as possible were transported from Reading, including the two 100-foot glasshouses that were taken down and re-erected on the castle grounds. Lecturing and other practical lessons quickly resumed at what was now Lady Warwick College, Studley, resulting in no apparent break in the students' education. During the first couple of years Bradley's energies were expended in managing new complexities in the college's affairs, attempting to make do with a shoestring budget, recruiting and retaining new students, and building up an endowment to enhance facilities and fund student scholarships.¹¹⁹ In the process, a rift was created in her relationship with Lady Warwick, and she and other members of the staff resigned in August 1903. To fill the warden vacancy, Warwick appointed Miss Mabel C. Faithfull, private secretary to Miss Alice Balfour, the Prime Minister's sister and chatelaine.¹²⁰

Before her departure, Bradley succeeded in launching the new curriculum and a structure of certificates and diplomas clearly modelled on the precedents in Reading. In horticulture, the students attended lectures and engaged in practical lessons to prepare for two sets of spring examinations, those of the Royal Horticultural Society, which issued prizes, and then those of Lady Warwick College, which issued the diplomas and certificates.¹²¹ The subjects were distributed amongst the two broad categories of 'Elementary Principles' (including soils, plant physiology, botany, and 'variation and selection') and 'Horticultural Operations and Practice' (including surveying and landscape gardening, propagation, cultures of various types, manures, hybridization, and pests) (see Figure 2). In 'Dairying', students prepared for examinations given by RASE for the NDD, the British Dairy Farmers' Association for a diploma and range of more specialized certificates, and the Lady Warwick College for its diploma and certificate. The college also offered diplomas and certificates in poultry-keeping, for which examinations were held each summer and included practical tests in 'plucking, trussing, and cramming'. Examinations in the theory and practice of apiculture

¹¹⁷ MERL, FR WAR 5/1/19, A description of the new Lady Warwick College, Studley Castle, Warwickshire (1903).

¹¹⁸ MERL, FR WAR 5/1/25, Lady Warwick College, Studley Castle, Warwickshire: warden's report (1904).

¹¹⁹ 'The Lady Warwick College, Studley Castle, Warwickshire', *The Ladies' Field*, 9 Jan. 1904, pp. 174–5; Blunden, *Warwick*, p. 186; Garstang, 'Studley', p. 11. See also newspaper clippings in MERL, FR WAR 5/8/4 and 5/8/5, for reports of Bradley's speeches, made from early to mid-1905 in public lecture halls, girls high schools, and ladies' drawing rooms.

¹²⁰ Blunden, *Warwick*, pp. 186–7; Horwood, *Women and their gardens*, pp. 290–1; Sanecki, *Short history*, p. 10. Faithfull was Emily Faithfull's cousin; Eric

Ratcliffe, *The Caxton of her age: the career and family background of Emily Faithfull (1835–1895)* (1993). Bradley and Crooke set up a gardening school in Bredon's Norton, and later Bradley founded a 21-acre women's farming commune and training centre with Miss Bailie-Hamilton at Greenway Court in Hollingbourne, Kent; see Anne Meredith, 'Horticultural education in England, 1900–40: middle-class women and private gardening schools', *Garden Hist.* 31 (2003), pp. 67–79; Owen Stinchcombe, *American lady of the manor, Bredon's Norton; the later life of Victoria Woodhull Martin, 1901–1927* (2000), pp. 36–45.

¹²¹ On the RHS examination results by sex from 1893 through 1939, see Meredith, 'Middle-class women', pp. 95–7.



FIGURE 2. Entomology lecture at the Lady Warwick College, Studley, 1903.
Museum of English Rural Life, University of Reading, FR WAR 5/10/2/24.

were administered by the British Beekeepers' Association.¹²² Again, agriculture *per se* was conspicuously absent from the curriculum until 1912 when a herd of 15 shorthorn cattle was acquired. But, as Doris M. Garstang noted, a long sought-after recognition by the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries in 1926 signified only then that the 'courses of training had come into line with courses at other Agriculture Colleges'.¹²³ During the early years at Studley, despite its being situated on a vast farming estate, the educational emphasis still lay in horticulture. Although the college's relocation succeeded in bringing students back to the country in 1903, its curriculum did not yet fully do so.

VI

Studley's early emphasis in horticulture, aviculture, and apiculture, however, did not rule out trainees' placement in a variety of rural situations, but it did reinforce a tenacious gendering of agricultural work, aligning women with its 'lighter branches'. Feminine iconography reinforced this gendering. Steeped in the classical imagery associated with the Roman goddess

¹²² Challice, 'Lady Warwick College'.

¹²³ Garstang, 'Studley', p. 12. Garstang was principal

of Studley College from 1949 to 1956; Sanecki, *Short history*, p. 33.

of agriculture, Ceres, Bradley dubbed the students of Lady Warwick's schemes at Reading and Studley the 'Daughters of Ceres' – a label connoting a heritage of agrarian plenitude but also birth from a fertile matron. In this respect, Warwick's habit of addressing her students as 'My Daughters of Ceres' created a close association between her matronly aristocratic identity and feminine divinity.¹²⁴ Bradley consistently titled her monthly warden reports in *The Woman's Agricultural Times*, 'Our Daughters of Ceres', and when she and six students formed the alumni guild in September 1900, they again utilized the same terms for its name.¹²⁵ The irony, however, is that despite the strong rhetoric and allusions to things *agricultural*, in reality the students were primarily trained and working in situations *horticultural*.

Warwick's and Bradley's reports about graduates' successes conveyed the notion that their hope for returning women back to the land was nevertheless coming to fruition. Their evidence included the robust numbers of students passing through the college since its inception as well as the high proportion of graduates who were applying their education in paid work on farms and in gardens as well as unpaid work at their country homes. So, in her annual report issued in October 1904, Bradley summarized that 250 students had 'passed through' the college since its foundation in 1898, 146 of which were 'Full Course students'; 50 per cent of *those* students were 'earning a livelihood or working at home'.¹²⁶ In breaking down the placement statistics, she indicated that 24 students 'possess small holdings of their own, either as farms or market gardens', with a further four ready to start after completing the current term. To this might be added the hazy figure of 12 'working their home gardens and farms'. Although it can be concluded that the bottom-line 'return' of Warwick's educational investment can be said to be fairly low, with only 40 of the total 250 students (16 per cent) reported to be farming or gardening in some capacity, paid or unpaid, at the same time those returns represented the largest segment of the full range of situations tracked. In raw numbers, returning even a few dozen women back to the land offered hope for opening the profession to women amid the apparent shrinkage of women's farming labour revealed by the census reports.¹²⁷

On her part, Warwick claimed success. At about the time of Faithfull's appointment in 1905, she told a journalist: 'I am now in a position to prove that, with sufficient training, a woman can make as good a competence on the land as in the crowded city, with the inestimable advantage of living in fresh air and enjoying the simple pleasures and pursuits of the country that make for health and happiness'.¹²⁸ Her privileging of country pursuits over city life continued a persistent tension in the movement, providing justification for her scheme amid a period in which further schools materialized and horticulture became an established university subject, particularly at Reading where the College Council agreed to create a Department of Horticulture in the wake of Warwick's withdrawal.¹²⁹ Rural, scientific instruction was a mainstay both in the curriculum

¹²⁴ On Ceres, see B. S. Spaeth, *The Roman goddess Ceres* (1996). The iconography at Swanley also included Ceres: the lecture-room was 'beautifully decorated with frescoes representing Ceres at play'; see J. E. T., 'A visit to the lady gardeners at Swanley', *Shafts: A magazine of progressive thought* (Jun. 1893), p. 82.

¹²⁵ 'Guild of the Daughters of Ceres', *WAT* 2 (vii) (1901), p. 13.

¹²⁶ Warden's report, p. 4.

¹²⁷ Verdon, 'Business and pleasure', pp. 395–7 (a point for which I thank Susie Steinbach).

¹²⁸ Warwick, *Life's ebb*, p. 304.

¹²⁹ On the schools, see Meredith, 'Horticultural education', pp. 67–79. On the formation of Reading's Department of Horticulture, see 'Report of the Council ... 30th September, 1902', p. 136.

and in advertisements of Warwick's scheme, thereby aligning with a touted national priority. As affirmed by Meldola, 'from the very beginning Lady Warwick had recognised the true position of science in the scheme of agricultural education'.¹³⁰

But, as with the Horticultural College, Swanley, the science and practice of horticulture, and a few lighter branches of agriculture, dominated Studley's curriculum. The effect reduced the full scope of Warwick's vision – '[t]he reform of rural England' through the realization of women's agricultural settlements – to a rather limited, gendered sphere of activity.¹³¹ Even so, the vibrancy of her scheme, thriving and growing in the decades since its launch, constituted a major component in the women's agricultural education movement. Adding a decidedly rural and agrarian orientation to a predominantly urban movement, ironically Warwick's scheme ended up strengthening a horticultural emphasis. Through her Daughters of Ceres, Warwick indeed pioneered a return of women back to the land, but outcomes beyond rhetoric required serious expansion of women's agricultural training and the launching of women's smallholdings. These developments were not achieved for at least another decade, stimulated in part by the emergence of the Women's Land Army in the context of World War I. Ultimately Studley achieved repute on par with other national agricultural colleges until its closure in 1969. Until these later developments, however, the 'town and home gardening' emphasis, championed at Swanley, dominated the early collegiate movement.¹³²

¹³⁰ Meldola, 'Education', p. 4.

¹³¹ Warwick, 'New women', p. 2.

¹³² On the rise of women's smallholdings in the ensuing decades see Erin Gill, 'Lady Eve Balfour and the British organic food and farming movement' (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Wales, 2011); Anne Meredith, 'From ideals to reality: the women's smallholding colony at Lingfield, 1920–39', *AgHR* 54 (2006), pp. 105–21; Stinchcombe, *American lady*; Verdon, 'Business and pleasure'. On the Women's Land

Army, see Carol Twinch, *Women on the land: Their story during two world wars* (Cambridge, 1990); Bonnie White, *The Women's Land Army in First World War Britain* (forthcoming, 2014); and, in connection with wartime 'return to the land' rhetoric, Susan R. Grael, 'Nostalgia, gender, and the countryside: Placing the 'Land Girl' in First World War Britain', *Rural Hist.* 10 (1999), pp. 155–70. On Studley's later history, see Sanecki, *Short history*.