



ECSOGA Spring Meeting Presentations

Summer
2005



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The Glass Ceiling – Myth or Reality – and does it still exist?

Prompted by a recent rash of articles in the press and the news that 10% of FTSE 100 directors were now women, ECSOGA recruited a panel of speakers discussing their various experiences *The Glass Ceiling* for the 2005 Spring Meeting.

Where we have the text of the panellist's contribution it is included here with minor amendments, otherwise there is only a brief outline of the speech.

Chair:

Dr Mavis Hamilton (Glibbery 1946-53) Gained HNC in Chemistry before marrying and raising 4 children and went on to get a Master's Degree in Corrosion Science & Engineering and then a Ph.D.

Speakers:

Mary Beagles (Comyns 1937-43) Secretary at BBC whilst studying at Birkbeck College and gained BA (General) 2nd Class in 1952 [read by Janet Naylor]

Marina Warden (Brown 1946-51) Joined Lloyds Bank at 16 - was initially advised not to bother with Banking Examinations, but later studied and passed them and was one of the first women to become a branch manager.

Jean Endean (1958-63) Left school after GCE O level and went into advertising at a junior level in the office and is now Financial Director of Paling Walters which is part of the Omnicom Group – the largest international media advertising agency.

Catherine Corns (Patrick 1959-66) Thwarted in her ambition to join the Army or the Police, a post as a temporary laboratory technician in a Hospital Pathology Department, lead to new ambitions and achievements.

Harriet Nailon (Lott 1956-63) Worked in the hotel and catering industry in the U.S. as well as the U.K. and has experience in retailing, education and the arts.

“only men did degrees as it was too much mental and physical strain for a woman”

When I left school at the age of eighteen I started working at the Ministry of Supply Explosives Research and Development Establishment in Waltham Abbey. I was one of a very small group of female laboratory workers. We were all in the lowest grade and I don't think there were any women in senior positions. I was told that I would be allowed day release for study and was sent off to Enfield Tech to choose a course and enrol. I went with a boy who had started working at the same time as I and who had similar A-levels. We both enrolled on an External Degree Course from London University. After a couple of weeks I was summoned to the Personnel Office when I was told that only men did degrees as it was too much mental and physical strain for a woman. I was forced to do a Higher National Certificate in Chemistry. When I finally got my certificate it said “He” all the way through. What amazes me now is that I accepted these things without question!

I worked at ERDE for 4 years and then left to get married. My husband was an RAF Officer and we moved around a lot. I also had 4 children quite quickly so never had the opportunity to work. When the children were older and my husband was thinking of leaving the RAF I too started thinking about the future and started studying with the Open University. At the same time I went to Garnett College in Roehampton and qualified as a chemistry teacher for colleges of Further Education.

Teaching Hairdressers and Engineering Students

Terry duly left the airforce and we moved to Harpenden. I had part-time teaching jobs at 3 separate colleges mainly teaching hairdressers their science and biology. I also taught “General Studies” to Engineering students – if

any of you have read *Wilt* by Tom Sharpe I promise you it's all true! After 4 years I decided to improve my qualifications and try for something more rewarding. I had almost finished my OU degree and managed to get a TOPS Award (Training Opportunities) to do a one year full-time Masters Degree in Corrosion Science and Engineering. At the end of the year I was offered the chance to do a Ph.D. and what's more they were going to pay me to do it. Needless to say I accepted. I didn't go back to teaching but started working for the Open University initially doing research and ending as a course manager working in a team of academics to produce and maintain technology courses.

Starting at 50 -too old to think of advancement? Wrong!

The OU was a very forward looking organisation. I started working there when I was 50 and assumed that this was far too old to think of any advancement and that I would stay in a fairly junior position for what was left of my working life. (The expectation then was that women would retire at 60). I was wrong and was promoted fairly quickly. The OU was one of the first organisations to implement an equal opportunities scheme and it has been interesting to see how the numbers of female lecturers and professors has increased over the recent years. It now has a female Vice-Chancellor and Chancellor!

My chosen field was initially chemistry then metallurgy – neither of which were popular choices for women. From what I read that is still true so I'm not sure that “glass ceilings” are factors in these professions. If there are very few workers in the lower ranks is it reasonable to expect to see more than the occasional, very exceptional woman at the top?

I tried to find the origin of the expression the “glass ceiling” and found a suggestion that it came from “*Down and Out in Paris and Lon-*

don" by George Orwell, who wrote about the barrier of class difference which is "not so much like a stone wall as the plate-glass pane of an aquarium; it is so easy to pretend it isn't there, and so impossible to get through it." Even though Orwell didn't use the word "ceiling" he did convey the idea of a glass barrier, which seems as though it is not there, but is quite effective in its purpose.

It is interesting to look at some of the "firsts" achieved by women in the last half century. I've only looked at 2 decades (otherwise we might be here all day). I chose the 50s when most of our speakers were in or soon to be in work and the 90s to see how far women have got.

- 1950 Olive Hirst was appointed to the board of Management of Sells Ltd, making her the first woman on the board of an advertising agency. The following year she became Managing Director.
- 1953 Equal pay for women teachers introduced.
- 1953 Lita Rosa became the first woman in Britain to reach Number 1 in the charts with "How much is that doggy in the window?"
- 1954 Dame Evelyn Sharp became first woman permanent secretary in the civil service as Head of the Housing Ministry – sister of our headmistress Miss M C Sharp
- 1955 Barbara Mandell was the first woman to read the news on ITV

I find it quite difficult to appreciate that some of these events of the 50s were firsts – why did it take so long to let a woman read the news? Did they think she might be too emotional? – wouldn't deliver football scores with the right sense of gravity? Who knows?

By the 1990s women were being recognised as people with rights In 1990 women were taxed independently of their husbands and in 1994 marital rape was declared illegal. Women were regularly being appointed to top jobs.

- Stella Rimington Head of M15
- Dr Anne McLaren First woman officer of the Royal Society

- Helen Sharman Britains First female astronaut
- Dame Marea Hartman First woman president of the Amateur Athletic Association
- Barbara Mills First woman director of public prosecutions
- Jackie Brambles First female day time DJ on radio 1
- Betty Boothroyd First woman speaker in the House of Commons
- Women become priests in the church of England
- Dr Carol Jordan First woman president of the Royal Astronomical Society
- Pauline Clare First woman to hold rank of Chief Constable
- Cynthia Fowler First woman Air Commodore in the RAF

And lastly women achieved the right to compete in the Vale of Belvoir conker championship after taking their protest to the European Parliament

Last year 7% of FTSE 100 Board directors were female. 39 FTSE Companies still had no female directors. What will the next decade bring? Will we know we've cracked the glass ceiling when women no longer make headlines by their commercial or academic successes? Will current legislation on such things as maternity benefits make it harder for the woman of child-bearing years to get a top job? Are there any other obstacles? In an article entitled "Are female execs walking into trouble?" Judith Woods writing in the Telegraph last

one man's glass cliff is another woman's springboard.

September suggests that high flyers who are appointed to company boards may be at greater risk than their male counterparts. They are often brought in when company performance is poor and risk becoming fall guys when pushed over the proverbial corporate precipice or "Glass cliff". However she suggests that women must seize any opportunity to gain entry to the boardroom. If that means capitalising on crisis, the so be it. After all, one man's glass cliff is another woman's springboard.

we didn't have a glass ceiling in the BBC

The simple answer to this is that we didn't have a glass ceiling in the BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation) where I worked as what we called a Secretary from age 17 until age 40. Sir John Reith - later Lord Reith - who set up the framework of the BBC, was the son of the Principal of a Presbyterian Theological College in Glasgow, and stamped the BBC, and many subsequent organisations, with strong Christian principles. The BBC was to inform, educate and entertain, in that order. It aimed at total accuracy and fairness. Its Charter stated it "is not a Government Department. It is a self-governing Corporation operating under a Royal Charter and a Licence, its activities are limited only by that Charter and Licencethe Postmaster-General does not direct the activities of the BBC". It was from the beginning a Platonic organisation, where life at work and one's private life were completely separate "but one's private life must not reflect on the BBC".

Competitiveness really began and ended at our recruitment

Competitiveness really began and ended at our recruitment: the qualifications and background required were high, and thereafter staff competed on known merit, not on dirty tricks. All BBC jobs were advertised as open to men or women, the comparatively low pay (dependent on the wireless licence and Government hand-outs for special work) was always dependent on the job. Why ever should it depend on the sex or status of whoever occupied it? We worked for job satisfaction, which was great, not solely for money. Of course, some jobs would naturally be more suited to men or women, promotion generally was to be in small stages, jumping from one grade to another, not leap-frogging several. We were asked at our first interviews which BBC Departments we would enjoy working in (such as The Listener or Music in my case), and which we would hate (such as Catering or Building Department in my case). A snag was that we weren't given the chance to work in our very first choice of de-

partment at once, but had to fight for it later with our job applications.

The BBC was a very popular employer in 1943, Broadcasting House (and various other BBC premises) being in the West End, with its shops, theatres and proximity to the main London landmarks. Well-bred County girls would come up from the country and flat-share with three or four others. Otherwise, for a Secretary, living with her parents was essential. (My first BBC pay-slip was for £2.8s.2d. per week). I joined the BBC with 12 subjects in Matric, including shorthand and typing, and, as my father couldn't, on a Bank Clerk's salary, afford to send me as well as my brother to college, spent four years of my spare time and journey to work time, reading for my Arts degree.

My BBC career mainly involved staff administration, job evaluation and job description, where I took notes and drafted the report on BBC staff's jobs, fortnight-long Conferences training BBC senior management at High Wycombe, three months as Secretary to Editor and Deputy Editor, radio News, and Secretary to the Editor of the newcomer, Television News, at Alexandra Palace. I worked in Duty Room, Broadcasting House, where I took phone calls from the public, and saw off and offered a drink to, often well-known and eminent people who had just given or recorded a talk on the radio. And for one summer I acted as Holiday Relief for all the senior secretaries in Bush House European and Overseas Services.

When I resigned from the BBC at age 40, to see the "un-BBC world", I suddenly found it to be full of dirty tricks, ignorance, self-interest, insecurity, and ruthlessness, and of people struggling against appalling backgrounds - all of whom would have been rejected by our Appointments Department. A single police record or communist party membership in their entire family would have meant their rejection.

Today, many BBC staff are recruited from the commercial TV world, and so bring their commercial attitude with them. Television Centre and offices in White City are situated in an area of London, near Wormwood Scrubs, which does not attract a high calibre of staff.

Marina Warden

A solid ceiling and very limited promotion prospects

Having enjoyed mathematics at school and found Miss Bowen's teaching methods easily understandable, Marina joined Lloyds Bank on leaving school at the age of 16. She found that there was a difference in attitude towards the male and female employees. Marina was advised by her supervisor that it was not worth her while to study for Banking qualifications, but she realised that some of her contemporary male employees were progressing much more than she was. One of them pointed out that he was working hard studying and taking exams and that was why he was getting on.

Marina set about studying for and passing a series of examinations to acquire Banking qualifications. She found one of Miss Bowen's standard analyses of Income Tax particularly useful. Miss Bowen had always given a detailed analysis and pointed out that her own personal tax payments were paying for her pupils' education. This comment had helped to fix the details in Marina's memory to be put to use at an opportune moment.

one of the first female bank branch managers

The qualifications gained did not automatically ensure Marina's promotions; she still had to fight to get on, but she overcame the obstacles. Marina's determination to succeed finally won her the distinction of being one of the first female bank branch managers, and she regretted that recent changes have resulted in the demise of the traditional bank manager.

Marina enjoyed every aspect of banking and challenges that had come her way. Marina quoted figures from recent research that she had carried out showing that the glass ceiling does still exist in banking, although this fact is denied.

Jean Endean

developed "stunning self-belief"

Leaving school after GCE O level, Jean went into advertising at a very junior level in the office. Jean found the atmosphere exciting and stimulating, encountered Germaine Greer and Bel Mooney and developed "stunning self-belief".

Jean was convinced that, given the opportunities, she had the potential to achieve great things and rise to a senior position within the Company. Jean therefore lobbied the personnel department on a daily basis to be given opportunities. Eventually, as she puts it, they got so tired of seeing her that they sent Jean on a training course. She studied very hard and continued with her campaign of lobbying so that she was selected to go on other courses, which led to promotions and more responsibility. Jean was always prepared to work long hours at work and, if necessary, take work home to keep up to date. She was determined to achieve the highest possible post within her capabilities and would not let her private life get in the way of her ambitions.

women must be prepared to match men in dedication to work

When her son was born Jean took just six weeks off work and she feels strongly that women must be prepared to match men in dedication to work if they are to gain the most senior posts.

Jean is now Financial Director of Paling Walters, one of the most profitable parts of the Omnicom Group, the world's leading marketing services company. Jean often has a punishing schedule travelling to board meetings at the head office in the US and rushing back to finish end of year figures. Stimulated by the pressure of big-business, Jean has little sympathy for women like the airline pilot who sued her employer because she was not allowed to work part-time: why should a woman get a top job if she is not prepared to work under the same conditions as a man?

Nothing is impossible and rules are there to be broken.

One of my ambitions - a wild notion, as a Young Liberal - was to be the first female Prime Minister, but Maggie Thatcher beat me to it, so I was left with more mundane glass ceilings to break.

There are two things in my life which provide me with a perverse satisfaction - that as a non-medic I am a Fellow of the Royal College of Pathologists and a Fellow of the Royal Society of Medicine and that despite never having served in the Armed Forces, I am a Member of the Royal United Services Institute.

Indeed, as regards the latter, when I was about to leave ECS and mentioned to Miss Hogg that I was considering a career in the Army she looked over her spectacles at me and observed: 'Cathryn, I think you might find instant obedience to orders a little difficult', a very perspicacious comment, considering my impeccable disciplinary record at school. Of course, she was right and over the years I have developed a simple view of life: Nothing is impossible and rules are there to be broken. This has led to some cracks in a few of the glass ceilings that I have encountered.

When I left ECS I decided not to take up the offer of a place to read Microbiology and instead (thanks to the efforts of the Great British Post Office losing some vital forms) found myself temporarily working as a laboratory technician in the Pathology department at the North Middlesex Hospital - 39 years later I am still working in a Pathology department!

I took all my professional exams and moved to the Middlesex Hospital as a Senior Technician, where I discovered another sort of animal living in the laboratory, called a Clinical Biochemist. Their job was a mixture of medicine

and science and immediately I wanted to be one!

There was, however, a small problem. I needed a degree

There was, however, a small problem. I needed a degree; however much I might feel that my professional qualifications were equivalent to a degree, officialdom disagreed. A glass ceiling, but one which could be broken, thanks to Harold Wilson, Jennie Lee, the Open University and a convenient pregnancy. In my day there was no maternity leave: pregnancy meant leaving work; my daughter was born in 1973 and I combined part-time work, motherhood and studying.

Armed with my OU degree I went back to work, part-time at the Middlesex, this time as a Research Assistant, on the bottom rung of the ladder to becoming a Clinical Biochemist. I applied to the University of London for a place on their MSc course in Clinical Biochemistry and hit my head on another piece of glass. The U of L was quite clear - only full-time employees of the University were allowed entry to part-time MSc courses of this type.

the University was persuaded to change its regulations

Fortunately, I had found a staunch ally, in my then Head of Department, who took on the U of L head on. After lengthy and heated debate and several trees of correspondence the University was persuaded to change its regulations - and there was the sound of breaking glass at Senate House, and a hole in the ceiling.

The next hurdle was my own professional body, the Association of Clinical Biochemists, who demanded that I had to work the equivalent of 8 full-time years before I could sit their final exam - by which time I felt I might be drawing my pension. They would not relent, so instead I went to the Royal College of Pathologists who were more easily persuaded allowed me to take their exam after 8 years, whether full or part-time.

Today, I am that rare, and possibly endangered, species a non-medical hospital consultant - and even have a car park permit to prove it! - and am Clinical Director for Pathology. None of this could have happened without the shattering of some glass at Senate House.

I found Whitehall easier to breach than Gower Street

As for the Royal United Service Institute, I found Whitehall easier to breach than Gower Street. Membership came in consequence of having been invited to speak on a military history panel there and invoking the support some friends, such as the military historian, Richard Holmes. Richard frequently talks of the British soldier being susceptible to a pretty ankle, and the senior military seemed equally susceptible to a little female charm - as well as some puzzlement that a woman might actually be interested in military matters!

in my lifetime I feel that things have changed dramatically

I am sure that glass ceilings did exist and that women or people of the wrong colour or religion were held back from progressing in their career, but in my lifetime I feel that things

have changed dramatically. I believe that the single biggest barrier to women progressing used to be the need to take an enforced career-break if they became pregnant and the lack of organised child care meant that many never caught up on the career ladder again. The advent of paid maternity leave and work-place childcare have made a huge difference, and in my view it is now much easier for women to make progress.

principles instilled at ECS gave me the independence to see that the glass ceilings I have meet have been breachable

A few corners remain un-breached, most notably, I believe, the City and the Armed Forces, but most of the barriers have been broken down and the now the 'Glass Ceiling' seems to be used as an excuse for lack of progress which in reality is due either to a lack of ability or of commitment. The ceiling encountered is one of competence and not a truly glass one. I'm just grateful that a certain native bloody-mindedness and some of the principles instilled at ECS gave me the independence to see that the glass ceilings I have meet have been breachable and have - I hope - opened up the way for others to follow.



Cathryn Corns is co-author with John Hughes-Wilson of *Blindfold & Alone* - published by Cassell - ISBN 0384 364495.

This book aims to give a truly objective view of the events that led to 346 soldiers being executed by the British Army during the Great War.



Harriett Nailon

the ceiling to a woman's promotion was
GRANITE rather than glass

Glass ceiling? When I started my career, admittedly in an old fashioned and hierarchical industry, the ceiling to a woman's promotion was GRANITE rather than glass – and set at a rather low level.

In the 1960s, in hotel companies, and to a lesser extent in catering companies, a woman with any sense had no illusions: the top jobs weren't attainable and many middle management and even some quite junior posts were likely to be off-limits, too.

Inequality was built into the system. Firstly there were differing pay-scales for men and women in every job, and some jobs were wholly reserved for one sex or the other – male receptionists, for example, and female chamber-maids and, as a result, male Reception Managers and female Head Housekeepers. There were, therefore all sorts of restrictions on recruitment. Of particular relevance to our discussion today, all Management Training Schemes were for male college graduates only. The corollary of this was that even right at the beginning of my career, when I was doing the industrial year of my college course, I was eligible for training at one of three companies, whereas ten companies were offering placements to boys on the course.

Even the most progressive hotel company – Strand Hotels, part of the Lyons group, did not promote women very far in some departments. So, for example, as late as 1970, a woman could not be the manager of one of the company's coffee shops – even though such restaurants were the lowest in the catering hierarchy within the hotel. A woman could be a senior supervisor and therefore able to deputise for the male manager or male assistant manager, if neither was available – not an unusual occurrence given that coffee shops were open every day of the year from 7am to 11.30 pm. Strangely, during World War Two, women had been managers and assistant managers of almost all the restaurants in the Strand Hotels chain.

As for the being in charge of the whole hotel – the

General Manager – that job might possibly be open to a woman in a small, privately owned company but certainly was unlikely to be so in a property with more than 100 bedrooms or in chain hotel.

Until the early 1970s there were only two
multi-unit hotel companies which had some
female General Managers

Until the early 1970s there were only two multi-unit hotel companies which had some female General Managers: firstly there was Trust Houses – which owned about 50 hotels at that time and employed about five female General Managers in far-away places like the Beaufort Arms in Raglan or small properties like the Rose and Crown in Tring – certainly not in London or Birmingham. Secondly there was North Hotels whose half-dozen hotels were all in London and run by women who had the title of Manageress. Sounds promising – but, sadly, no: a career with North Hotels left a woman unprepared for a post with any other hotel organisation as North was a temperance company which neither sold nor allowed the service of alcohol anywhere in their properties.

To be fair to the hotel industry, it was not alone at that time in these matters. In a 2004 report by the Chartered Management Institute (which used to be called the British Institute of Management), it was stated that in 1974 only 2% of management posts in British commercial companies were held by women.

As can be imagined the whole situation improved markedly in the mid-to-late 1970s, following Equal Opportunities legislation, introduction of maternity leave, etc. However, I personally took a 10 year career break from 1972 – 82 so realistically I then had no hope of ever reaching the very top. Maybe I could have reached General Manager level, and I used to tell myself that, if I was ever asked my ultimate career goal, I would have said 'To be General Manager of the Cumberland or the Cavendish'.

I was 37 and....already over the hill and unlikely to rise above departmental manager level

Strangely, no one ever asked if I had an ultimate career goal as, by 1982 I was 37 and, in promotion terms, already over the hill and unlikely to rise above departmental manager level.

So my opinion is based partly on my own experiences, but mainly on watching my peers and younger colleagues who haven't had children – in other words -women who have devoted their lives to careers in the hotel industry.

Based on the evidence that I have seen, I have to say that, despite the very real improvements which have come about since the 1970/80s, I am firmly convinced that the Glass Ceiling was not – indeed is not - a myth in the hospitality industry.

I've been retired for some time now, but my contacts in the business lead me to believe that while the glass ceiling may be getting thinner, or even have holes in places, in the greater part of the industry it is still firmly in place.

In the hotel sector, in particular, women are competing for the holes in the ceiling with gay men. Women and gay men make up a large proportion of the work force in hotels – particularly in the 4 and 5 star market - but neither group is represented in the top levels of hotel companies in the numbers that justice and common sense would expect. Gay men usually do better in the promotion stakes as far as General Manager positions, but when it comes to Area posts or Corporate or Board Level jobs, they fare no better than women.

There is, I think, a certain amount of tokenism –

There is, I think, a certain amount of tokenism – and there is not always room for both a token gay and a token female at the very top. Even where women are at board level, sometimes there are indications that there are factors other than merit in the equation. Family connections can be helpful but not always conclusively so. When I worked at Forte Hotels there were many who felt, with some

justification, that the wrong member of the Forte family was Chief Executive. Rocco, the only son and youngest of Lord Forte's children had been promoted to the top spot ahead of his sister Olga who may not have been an Oxford fencing blue but seemed to many to have more grasp of the realities of the business and would have been unlikely to let Granada catch the company napping. But Olga was in charge of design and interior decoration, not the destiny of the company. Even if a woman is on the board, she rarely gets the top job.

In the past 15 or so years the situation has been complicated by the change in the patterns of hotel ownership. Hotels are now increasingly being bought by large, diverse conglomerates – fewer and fewer hotels belong to dedicated hotel companies. In the mid 20th century the leading companies in the hotel industry were developed by people who actually had run properties themselves – the names tell the story – Statler, Hilton, Marriott, Forte, Sheraton – all men who had themselves stood behind a reception desk and/or at the door of a restaurant. Nowadays hotel companies are subsidiaries of Japanese banks or consortia based in the Far East or the Gulf, or are gobbled up by TV companies like Granada or find themselves as a small division of a computer giant, as Sheraton was of ITT.

So, just at the time when the glass ceiling was thinning out or developing some holes, so that a woman could make it from, say being General Manager of the Hilton Park Lane to being Area Director for Europe and, then, maybe to a Board Level job, Hilton was merged with Ladbroke's, the betting shop giant and a step up to Board level for even a male hotel General Manager became almost impossible. In a diversified organisation like Ladbroke-Hilton, a person – male or female - who has built their career on operating hotels, and climbing up that particular ladder, will be seen as too specialised and/or too politically – with a small p - compromised for really high office. So a number cruncher or asset stripper or PR wizard from outside will be found through the 'old boy' network – or maybe the 'new boy' network – and those of a certain age within the hotel part of the company will find that the logic of their original career plan is no longer operative. So, for us women, we now get to General Manager level – a vast improvement on 30 years ago, but the glass ceiling is still there,

Harriett Nailon continued

up to Board level for even a male hotel General Manager became almost impossible. In a diversified organisation like Ladbroke-Hilton, a person – male or female – who has built their career on operating hotels, and climbing up that particular ladder, will be seen as too specialised and/or too politically – with a small p – compromised for really high office. So a number cruncher or asset stripper or PR wizard from outside will be found through the ‘old boy’ network – or maybe the ‘new boy’ network – and those of a certain age within the hotel part of the company will find that the logic of their original career plan is no longer operative. So, for us women, we now get to General Manager level – a vast improvement on 30 years ago, but the glass ceiling is still there, usually closely overhead – although there are a few women area managers, overseeing a group of maybe 8 or 10 hotels.

So, in conclusion: Yes the glass ceiling is real – and still with us, maybe not everywhere, but it is certainly firmly in place in parts of the hospitality industry. It may not be granite any more, and it is certainly higher up the organisation than it used to be – female General Managers are now found quite routinely – a far cry from when a female became the senior assistant hotel manager of a 100 bed-room property in 1971 which rated a feature in the Company Newspaper under a heading along the lines of ‘Harriett the Pioneer’.

The received wisdom among the Human Resource profession (what used to be – and should in my view, still be called – the Personnel profession) is that the glass ceiling is now located at or around board level. In a BBC Radio 4 programme in October 2004 some fairly authoritative statistics were quoted. It would seem that in British industry and commerce, as a whole, 8% of board members are female. In the United States the comparable figure is 14% and in Norway the government is trying to get legislation passed which will compel companies to have 40% of board members to be female.

So, at 8% it would seem that the glass ceiling is definitely still with us, and not only in the hotel industry. In a Daily Telegraph article last September there was talk of a new hazzard encountered once

the commanding heights have been scaled, called the Glass Cliff – but I’ve seen no mention of it since so perhaps it is just a journalistic invention.

On reflection – and with advancing years – I have to admit to thinking that, perhaps, after all, the Glass Ceiling is not really such a bad thing. Maybe we women are starting to realise that we cannot have it all – indeed that we were fools to believe that we could, maybe even greedy fools?

A small number of exceptional and exceptionally dedicated women will always make it through to the very top of almost every field. But most of us are not that exceptional and, for reasons of biology and the social health of society cannot be exceptionally dedicated – or maybe we find that we do not want to be that exceptionally dedicated to our careers. Therefore perhaps it is right that the majority of women have to content themselves with careers which do have a ceiling.

maybe call it the frosted glass ceiling?

Maybe everyone concerned would be happier if we thought of it as some-thing other than glass – in other words if we acknowledged the reality of the situation (– maybe call it the frosted glass ceiling?)

Unrealistic expectations make for discontent. Maybe we all need to be more honest with ourselves and about ourselves and be more realistic about human life and society’s needs. That would, of course, mean a need for much more frankness in recruitment processes and much less political correctness – which are at least three other topics entirely.

Perhaps we need to remember that men are men, women are women and that to achieve a satisfactory work-life balance for both the sexes, most women need to acknowledge, without too much grumbling, that, for us, there will always be the likelihood of a ceiling to promotion – call it glass, plastic or what you will – compared with our male colleagues and that this is one of the facts of life.

C’est la vie. Vive la difference!

GLASS CEILING? WHO IS TO BLAME? A Review

Able led by Mavis Hamilton (Glibbery: Metallurgist), the five speakers Mary Beagles (Comyns: Secretary), Marina Warden (Brown: Bank Manager), Cathryn Corns (Patrick: Head of Biochemistry & Clinical Director NHS Trust Hospital), Jean Endean (Financial Director International Advertising Agency) Harriett Nailon (Senior Manager Hospitality Industry), gave much cause for thought. Their success stimulated open debate. Congratulations and thanks to all.

Particularly stimulating were Cathryn Corns and Jean Endean, who pointed out that often women were their own enemies; motherhood, caring for ageing parents often led to lack of forces, lack of commitment, lack of continuity which, in many professions and businesses mean that promotion could not be justified.

Stimulus has been on-going. Women's struggle for equality of opportunity is less than 100 years old, whereas men have faced social and educational barriers for centuries. Too many women, until the last war, assumed that their function was procreational and domestic. The attitudes of women, as well as of men, have to change.

Is the work in question truly equal or is it like tennis stars - for women 3 sets, for men 5? - or politics where there is a demeaning all women's list? Do we too often want our cake and eat it? How many of us have willingly "sacrificed our rise to our husband's ambition and later feel aggrieved? How many of us are not prepared to take a risk?

Consider how much progress has been made in the lifetime of ECS; how many of us are the first in our families to stay on at school after 14 or 16? How many are the first to go on to some form of higher education? How many women had to leave an occupation on marriage (a ban often supported by their single counterparts)?

Progress has been miraculous in the acceptance of women as individuals rather than child-bearing work horses.

If you still feel belligerent or frustrated, emigrate to Norway where more than 20% of women, compared with 8% of men are promoted to board level. Avoid Spain and Italy, or worst of all, Japan.

SPRING MEETING 2006



Saturday 11 March 2006

"This green plot shall be our stage.."

*Midsummer Night's Dream
Act III Scene 1*

**Reflections on drama production
With Miss Flint and Miss Cox 1941-68
Chaired by Brenda Sanders (1940-46)**

Achievements in drama at ECS from the 1940's to the late 1960's with reference to Miss Kate Flint and Miss Doris Cox as well as other staff.

Participants will reminisce about drama at ECS as they knew it, in form of conversation or solo pieces and, at intervals will include a short monologue or two-handed extract from plays in which they have appeared.

The audience, as well as OG's unable to attend, will be invited to participate. Send your reminiscences to Harriett Nailon, Particularly if you were in plays produced by both Miss Flint and Miss Cox. Did you always play men, and if so, how did you feel about it?

Let us have your views.

Material not used at the meeting will be added to the ECSOGA Historical Materials Collection.

Write to:

Harriett Nailon, 56 Palmerston Road,
London SW19 1PQ

