



VOLUNTARY ACTION HISTORY SEMINARS

VAHS seminar series at the Institute of Historical Research

SEMINAR ABSTRACT

19th January 2015

Duncan Scott

The Making of a Social Researcher

This seminar explores the role of the Salford Council of Social Service in developing the practice of applied social research in the early 1940s when formal preparation for undertaking research of this kind was in its infancy – a stage that has been described as ‘pre-professional’. The paper will focus on the formative influence of ‘work experience’ with the CSS in shaping one outstanding social researcher of the time.

Margaret Haigh had come from the shadow of a Lancashire textile mill to gain a first class History degree at Oxford University, whilst also being awarded a double ‘Blue’ in hockey and cricket. Then, in the darkest days of the Second World War, she held a dual appointment as a university tutor (in Social Administration) and as a research assistant in the Manchester and Salford Council of Social Service. At the age of twenty-two she completed a hugely important piece of applied social research (for the Manchester Ship Canal Company) about the extent and causes of absenteeism among dock workers. It was 1942 and Ernest Bevin (Minister of Labour) was so impressed he asked her to work for him in London.

While the paper will also outline the roles played by home, schools and university in shaping Margaret as a social researcher it will focus on her time at the Council of Social Service (the forerunner of the Manchester CVS) and the ways in which she developed her approach to applied research and acquired the understanding needed to make a major contribution to the discipline. The paper will conclude by spelling out for the social research curriculum makers of the 21st century some of the lessons from this historical episode about finding an appropriate balance between ‘Getting Out’ and ‘Staying In’.