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## “On an Equal Footing with Men?” Women and Work at the BBC 1923-1939

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### Abstract or Description

This thesis is a study of women’s employment in the BBC during the 1920s and 1930s and poses the question: what was the BBC like as a place for women to work, and how equal were they? While there has been wide research into a variety of aspects of the BBC during the inter-war years, to date there has been only cursory consideration of the role of women in the Company/Corporation. The BBC is a particularly significant organisation to study because women worked at all levels, apart from the very top; as charwomen and kitchen hands; as secretaries and clerical staff; as drama producers, advertising representatives and Children’s Home Organisers. Prior to the Second World War, three women, Hilda Matheson, Mary Somerville and Isa Bertram, attained Director status. The BBC viewed itself as a progressive employer, one that supported equal prospects and equal pay. However, understated sexual discrimination was commonplace and in 1932, a marriage bar was introduced. The practice of marriage bars was widespread in the inter-war years yet the BBC was fully committed to its bar and ‘exceptional’ married women and women judged to be useful to the Corporation continued to be employed and retained. This study considers the many different experiences of women at the BBC: married and single, waged and the salaried, young and old; graduate and non-graduate. As positioning itself within the historiography of the BBC, this thesis is the first to offer a detailed analysis of women’s employment in a large inter-war institution, one in which women’s experience of work was largely positive. It broadens both our understanding of the BBC and also offers new insights into women’s working lives in the 1920s and 1930s.

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