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The Edinburgh Movement for Women's Higher Education Through the Eyes of its Founder: What Can the Writings and Biography of Mary Crudelius Reveal About the Campaign (1866–77)?[1]

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This article takes a new approach to the history of the women's higher education campaign in Victorian Scotland, analysing it through the lens of biography, subjectivities and the self. It uses a case study of the life and writings of Mary Crudelius, founder of Edinburgh Ladies' Educational Association. Crudelius' active campaigning (including tactics and methods, and building relationships and networks) is examined to understand how it shaped her, and the identities she constructed and drew upon in her work. The focus then turns to how Crudelius and her contemporaries reflected on her life, to consider the context in which she was operating, and what her political work meant to her. This article argues that the women's education campaign represented a significant challenge to the Victorian gender order. Crudelius' story illustrates how women activists' self-identity was shaped and developed within the campaign, as they gained fulfilment and confidence from their work.

Mary Crudelius was one of the foremost campaigners for women's higher education in Victorian Scotland, but she is less well-known than her English counterparts such as Emily Davies.[2] This campaign began in earnest in the 1860s with the formation of ladies' education associations (LEAs) in cities across the UK, which aimed to provide higher education for women and ultimately

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[2] For example, Davies is mentioned in many more articles on academic search engines, and the historiography of the English campaign is generally more extensive. For more on Davies, see B. Caine, *Victorian Feminists* (Oxford, 1992), 54–102. It should be noted that Crudelius is commemorated as a 'social reformer' with a bronze plaque in Bristo Square, Edinburgh. It was part of the Edinburgh Women of Achievement Trail created by Edinburgh District Council Women's Committee to highlight notable women connected with the city. See pamphlet: E. Kelly *et al.*, *Edinburgh Women's Achievement Trail* (Edinburgh, *c.*1993), 1, 22–3.

open the universities to them.[3] The historiography of the Scottish campaign falls into two categories. In the 1970s to early 1990s, 'recovery' women's history aimed to establish the key campaign events and participants, and record social histories of the first women university students.[4] More recent work has explored how women were integrated into universities, focusing on power dynamics, inclusion and segregation, and change over time.[5]

There has been little research approaching this topic through the lens of biography, subjectivities and the self. This article aims to remedy this gap by examining the career of Mary Crudelius. Taking this approach helps us to look 'inside' the campaign, to understand why certain tactics were employed and what the campaign meant to its participants. Subjectivity, incorporating personal experiences, perceptions, emotions, relationships and motivations, has become a rich and varied seam of analysis for gender historians.[6] Feminist researchers value the study of life-writing to highlight women's voices and experiences which have previously been overlooked by historians, challenge assumptions about conceptions of the self based on a masculine norm, and examine women's opportunities to exercise agency both through their writings and in their lives.[7] Such studies have had to respond to the influence of post-structuralism, which has questioned the idea that the historian can access a 'true' self and unmediated experience, suggesting instead that we can only view representations of multiple, partial selves through texts.[8] Bearing these considerations in mind, this article does not look for an accurate factual account of what happened or one true understanding of Crudelius, but instead analyses how Crudelius negotiated gendered expectations, presented herself as a political actor, and understood and gave meaning to her experiences.

3 C. Dyhouse, *No Distinction of Sex? Women in British Universities 1870–1939* (London, 1995), 13–14.

4 See, for example, H. Corr, 'An Exploration into Scottish Education', in (ed.) W. H. Fraser and R. J. Morris, *People and Society in Scotland*, II: *1830–1914* (Edinburgh, 1990), 290–309; S. Hamilton, 'Women and the Scottish Universities circa 1869–1939: A Social History' (PhD thesis, University of Edinburgh, 1987); L. Moore, 'The Scottish Universities and Women Students, 1862–1892', in (ed.) J. Carter and D. J. Withrington, *Scottish Universities: Distinctiveness and Diversity* (Edinburgh, 1992), 138–46.

5 Dyhouse, *No Distinction of Sex?*; C. D. Myers, *University Coeducation in the Victorian Era: Inclusion in the United States and the United Kingdom* (New York, 2010).

6 This draws on the definitions of M. Roper, 'Slipping Out of View: Subjectivity and Emotion in Gender History', *History Workshop Journal*, 59 (2005), 57–72, 57, 65. R. Gagnier, *Subjectivities: A History of Self-Representation in Britain, 1832–1920* (Oxford, 1991), 8–9.

7 S. S. Friedman, 'Women's Autobiographical Selves: Theory and Practice', in (ed.) S. Smith and J. Watson, *Women, Autobiography, Theory: A Reader* (Madison, WI, 1988), 72–82; P. Summerfield, *Histories of the Self: Personal Narratives and Historical Practice* (London, 2018), 3, 35–7.

8 Summerfield, *Histories of the Self*, 8; L. Stanley, *The Auto/Biographical I: The Theory and Practice of Feminist Auto/Biography* (Manchester, 1992), 14.

There is a rich collection of sources to inform this analysis. Katherine Burton, Crudelius' friend and fellow Edinburgh Ladies' Educational Association (ELEA) executive committee member, wrote a memoir of her life in 1879 which includes copies of many of Crudelius' letters. This is supplemented by a further archival collection of her correspondence, as well as ELEA reports and records. These sources provide excellent opportunities to compare Crudelius' reflections with those of her contemporaries, and to analyse her interactions with a variety of individuals. Letters are a helpful source for analysing subjectivity, because, as both Stanley and Summerfield point out, they have an immediacy which other retrospective forms of life-writing lack.[9] They thus allow a glimpse of Crudelius' thoughts and feelings at the time of events. At the same time, some of her letters written to close friends are valuable as they were more reflective about her life, allowing us to consider her self-perception and construction of a life narrative. The sources are, however, fragmentary and cannot reveal the whole picture. Crudelius' husband chose a 'a selection' of her letters to share with Burton, and her memoir aimed to create a positive memorial to Crudelius for private circulation, so she made editorial choices about which letters or extracts to include.[10] Crudelius did not leave any longer-form sources like diaries or autobiographies, so her subjectivity must be pieced together from multiple sources.

This article begins by setting the context of Crudelius' biography and background. It then examines Crudelius' active campaigning (including tactics and methods, and building relationships and networks) to understand how it shaped her, and the identities she constructed and drew upon in her work. The focus then turns to how Crudelius and her contemporaries reflected back on her life, to consider the context in which she was operating, and what her political work meant to her. Myers concludes that the admission of women into universities did not radically alter gender roles as the ideology of separate spheres continued to be influential, and to shape women's time at university.[11] By taking a longer view back to the 1860s, this article argues that the campaign for women's higher education in Scotland actually represented a dramatic potential change to the gender order. This change required strong leadership and wide-ranging networks of support to be successful. Crudelius was a driving force in the movement which changed her life and was central to her self-identity.

Mary McLean was born in 1839, into a financially comfortable family (her father was a draper), and educated at a ladies' boarding school in Edinburgh. In 1861, she married Rudolph Crudelius, a wool merchant, with whom she had two daughters. Aged twenty-eight, she founded the ELEA with a small group of others in 1867, serving as honorary secretary during its formative years. She suffered from continuing ill health throughout her adult life. As a

9 Summerfield, *Histories of the Self*, 172; L. Stanley, 'The Epistolarium: On Theorizing Letters and Correspondences', *Auto/biography*, 12:3 (2004), 202–3, 208.

10 (ed.) K. Burton, *A Memoir of Mrs Crudelius* (Edinburgh, 1879), 3.

11 Myers, *University Coeducation*, 186–7.

result, she stood down from the secretaryship in 1875–76, instead becoming vice-president until her death in 1877. During her tenure, the ELEA grew to offer lecture courses from Edinburgh University lecturers in many subjects, backed by university-accredited certificates. The organisation continued to campaign until women were admitted to the Scottish universities in 1892, when it turned its attention to supporting the new women students.[12] Crudelius was recognised by contemporaries as 'the whole soul and strength of the Association'.[13] Unfortunately, her poor health and early death at the age of thirty-eight shortened her campaigning career and curtailed her public profile, potentially contributing to the fact that she is not well remembered today.

Crudelius' class and family background gave her the foundations she needed to become involved in politics. Given the pervasiveness of the separate spheres ideology, her family responsibilities may have made it more difficult to campaign were it not for her husband's support. Crudelius described him as 'a very liberal-minded man, both theoretically and practically, as regards women, and we "Married for love"!'[14] She therefore had the family support and financial resources to take up voluntary work. Indeed, the Scottish campaign for women's higher education was dominated by the middle and upper classes.[15] Interestingly, Burton's memoir suggests that Crudelius was at the bottom of this social spectrum. She notes 'her social insignificance, her commercial origin, and foreign name, connected with a firm in Leith', which at first meant she was relatively unknown: 'society proper … asked in its most sneering tones "Who is Mrs Crudelius?"'[16] Burton may have wanted to emphasise the disadvantages Crudelius faced in order to highlight her later achievements, but she paints a picture of Edinburgh society as very hierarchical. Crudelius would need to leverage the support of socially influential people to achieve her education ambitions. Her successes would show that middle-class women outside the Edinburgh elite could make a public impact, and open educational opportunities for women of her class.

Crudelius played a crucial role in shaping the ELEA's tactics and goals. Examining the organisation from her perspective allows us to look beyond information revealed in public communications to understand her personal political development and the underlying motivations of the ELEA. Public documents present the organisation as moderate. Its first prospectus publicised limited goals to 'furnish to ladies, after leaving school, advanced instruction', but

12 S. Hamilton, 'Crudelius [née McLean], Mary (1839–1877), promoter of women's education', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (published online, 2004); L. Moore, 'Crudelius, Mary, n. M'Lean', in (ed.) E. Ewan, R. Pipes, J. Rendall and S. Reynolds, *The New Biographical Dictionary of Scottish Women* (Edinburgh, 2018), 103; Burton, *Memoir*, 264.

13 Burton, *Memoir*, 151.

14 Ibid., 207.

15 Hamilton, 'Women and the Scottish Universities', 439.

16 Burton, *Memoir*, 304–5.

clarified: 'It is not the aim of the Association to train for *Professions*.'[17] Burton's memoir reveals that 'Every word' of the prospectus 'formed a subject of intense and careful study to Mrs Crudelius'.[18] It had been crafted to avoid contentious topics such as women's employment or full university admission. Crudelius herself alluded to this point in her 1870 secretary's report. It swerves the topic of co-education, suggesting women could be taught within the University of Edinburgh 'without getting into the vexed question of mixed classes'.[19] It notes that the university had allowed women medical students to matriculate (after the well-publicised campaign of Sophia Jex-Blake).[20] Yet, Crudelius writes that, 'It would not be fitting in this report to say much about this concession to women. Opinions vary extremely among the members on this subject.'[21] The clear implication is that she does want to risk the ELEA becoming publicly involved in more controversial disputes. This careful, procedural approach frustrated some campaigners who preferred to move faster. Although Jex-Blake continued to be involved with the ELEA, Hamilton characterises her stance towards it as 'impatient'.[22]

However, examining internal correspondence reveals that the public and private aims were very different, as Crudelius carefully worked to maintain the support of both radicals and moderates. In her letters to other ELEA leaders, Crudelius depicts herself as highly progressive, and builds relationships with her conspiratorial tone. In contrast to the policies on teaching structures set out in the prospectus and report, her 1868 letter to Mrs Kunz, another executive committee member, explains, 'My aim is (always *sub rosa* as you know) the throwing open of the University to us, not the organising of a special college for women. Hence my wish to go cautiously.'[23] She even hinted to Professor David Masson (ELEA lecturer and one of its closest allies) that, 'The simple solution of all our difficulties would undoubtedly be mixed classes.'[24] The letter to Kunz persuasively justifies a potentially conservative tactic – proceeding slowly – as a more radical approach which would ultimately achieve the greater aims of equal university admission. This culminated in Edinburgh taking a significantly

17 Ibid., 33 (emphasis original).

18 Ibid., 35.

19 Ibid., 101.

20 On Sophia Jex-Blake's campaign for women's medical education, see S. Hamilton, 'The First Generations of University Women 1869–1930', in (ed.) G. Donaldson, *Four Centuries: Edinburgh University Life, 1583–1983* (Edinburgh, 1983), 99–115, 99–101. On its relationship to the ELEA, see Hamilton, 'Women and the Scottish Universities', 70–5. M. Hartveit, 'How Flora Got Her Cap: The Higher Education of Women in Edinburgh', *BSHM Bulletin: Journal of the British Society for the History of Mathematics*, 24:3 (2009), 147–58, 148–9.

21 Burton, *Memoir*, 100.

22 Hamilton, 'Women and the Scottish Universities', 72.

23 Burton, *Memoir*, 81 (emphasis original).

24 Ibid., 78, 130.

different approach from Glasgow LEA, which in 1883 incorporated into a separate women's college (Queen Margaret). Teaching in Glasgow continued to be delivered separately through the college when the universities opened to women, whereas Edinburgh University offered mixed classes.[25]

Crudelius' letters to close colleagues also reveal her wide-ranging views about the purpose of women's education. It should be noted that she restricted her 'hope in the higher education' to 'the middle and upper classes' only.[26] Nonetheless, she saw it opening a variety of opportunities for this group, from raising standards in girls' schools, to improving morals, to making better wives and mothers in more equal marriages, to giving meaning and serious purpose to women's lives.[27] Most notably compared to the ELEA's stated aims, she also linked education to employment. In 1867 Crudelius wrote to Burton, arguing 'In the industrial question [i.e. women's work] I am much interested, as the *vital changes* must come *there*.'[28] The intersubjectivities at play in the letters likely affected Crudelius' self-presentation. Burton reveals in the memoir that she was concerned that the ELEA lecture plans were 'a mere pastime' and did not address the issues of women's employment or equal access to universities.[29] Yet Crudelius carefully won her round, aligning their viewpoints and arguing her case for using the lectures as a starting point. At the same time, correspondence with Burton developed Crudelius' own thinking, with Crudelius writing to Masson in 1868 that 'Mrs Burton has a good deal of right on her side' and they should soon 'set to work at getting professions thrown open'.[30] Therefore, examining the ELEA from Crudelius' perspective reveals that it was a more ambitious organisation than it first appears. A deliberate tactic was adopted to initially downplay its radical long-term aims, while taking steady practical steps to secure the end goal.

Once the ELEA was established, Crudelius organised and advocated for it. Analysing her work reveals the gendered nature of public involvement in the 1860s and 1870s. She displayed the modesty and desire for public anonymity in her campaigning that would have been traditionally expected of women. This may have been a deliberate approach to soften the new and radical nature of the campaign for women's education by presenting herself as a model of respectable femininity (as did many in the women's movement at the time).[31] However, it should not be assumed that public campaign methods were the

25 Moore, 'The Scottish Universities and Women Students', 141–4.
26 Burton, *Memoir*, 204.
27 Ibid., 167–8, 102, 111–12, 104, 174, 191.
28 Ibid., 204 (emphasis original).
29 Ibid., 201.
30 Ibid., 104.
31 For example, the Pankhursts' emphasis on feminine dress and appearance, and suffragists' nervousness at any hint of sexual impropriety among their members: S. Pedersen, *The Scottish Suffragettes and the Press* (London, 2017), 50; L. Bland, *Banishing the Beast: Feminism, Sex and Morality* (London, 2001), 155.

only effective or assertive option. Given her role as secretary, and the fact that she was often ill and could not attend events in person, Crudelius' enormous personal correspondence was a crucial campaigning method for her and served many purposes. While letter writing was an acceptable and common activity for women, the content and tone of her letters was not deferential or exclusively personal. Some theorists argue that rather than written texts representing a pre-existing self, the self is performed and created through the very act of writing.[32] This idea can be usefully applied to Crudelius' correspondence. Two examples demonstrate how Crudelius presented different selves and negotiated gendered expectations to further her cause.

Crudelius used correspondence to maintain support and build a close working relationship with Professor Masson. She did not totally defer to, or hide behind, Masson. In the preparations for the second round of lectures, she took up a feminist position of women working for themselves, stating that while the support of men is highly valuable, 'It is best that we women should do the organizing.'[33] In an example of the common pattern of their conversations, he wrote to her asking,

> I have promised to take part in a meeting of the Association for Promoting the Employment of Women on the 15th … If you have anything on the subject that you would like to hint to me, I should be much obliged.[34]

He clearly valued her opinion, and she replied to him with her views, suggesting, 'If you agree with me, and see your way to pointing them out on the 15th, perhaps you will do it.'[35] She was able to use correspondence with Masson to develop and share her opinions, and politely suggest that he should take them up. Although she did not speak in public herself, requesting that Masson conveyed her views was an effective method to leverage his power as a male professor to influence others.

Crudelius' correspondence with Andrew Grant, Edinburgh University Principal, illustrates a different side to her. Summerfield has highlighted the value of collections of letters as sources, as writers often change their approach when speaking to different recipients, revealing 'multiple epistolary selves'.[36] Grant had written to *The Scotsman* in 1871 about the university's relationship with the ELEA, implying that it had been too slow to ask the university to certify its courses. Although Crudelius wrote to Grant personally rather than publicly responding in the newspaper, the correspondence reveals that she was not afraid to be highly assertive and challenging, even with the University

[32] K. Barclay and S. Richardson, 'Introduction: Performing the Self: Women's Lives in Historical Perspective', *Women's History Review*, 22:2 (2013), 177–81, 179–80.

[33] Burton, *Memoir*, 107.

[34] The University of Edinburgh Archives (hereafter EUA), Coll-42/5, David Masson, Letter to Mary Crudelius, 2 December 1868.

[35] Burton, *Memoir*, 110.

[36] Summerfield, *Histories of the Self*, 25.

Principal. Her first letter is full of forceful underlining to imply that the ELEA is in the right and Grant has ignored her point:

> You will observe that there is a distinct action on the part of the University implied in that sentence … We have waited patiently since the date you name; and are now feeling so keenly the need for some plan of certificates.[37]

In her next letter she defended the ELEA's stance, arguing that Grant's actions were harmful: 'I think we were justified in asking you to renounce the inference of carelessness and indifference on the part of the A[ssociation] which your letter has made upon the minds of the public.'[38] The correspondence stalled, but in 1872 the university agreed to issue certificates for the ELEA courses.[39] The interaction demonstrates how Crudelius used correspondence to put pressure on powerful people to support the ELEA, and how she was able to present herself in these letters as businesslike and equal to Grant.[40] These two examples illustrate how Crudelius was able to use private correspondence highly effectively, as an alternative to public speaking or events, to access and influence the educational, political and economic public sphere.

Crudelius had to grow the movement for women's higher education from small beginnings, which she achieved through building relationships in Edinburgh and further afield. Stanley argues that to avoid 'great woman' history, feminist biography must locate women within their social networks.[41] Analysing Crudelius' connections acknowledges how others influenced her and the ELEA. Her correspondence with Burton is a revealing case study of how the ELEA membership grew. Between April and December 1867, she sent no fewer than fourteen letters persuading Burton to join. After meeting her, Crudelius wrote,

> I seize on the very small pretext of an introduction at my German lesson for addressing you in this informal and friendly fashion, but I think you will forgive it for the sake of a subject in which I believe we are both interested.[42]

Here, Crudelius suggests she is progressive by bending the social rules to contact Burton. As noted above, Burton had concerns about the lecture scheme, but over several letters Crudelius emphasised their commonalities and located herself with Burton's more radical views: 'our actual views on the position of women are by no

37 EUA, Coll-42/5, Mary Crudelius, Letter to Andrew Grant, 24 December 1871.

38 EUA, Coll-42/5, Mary Crudelius, Letter to Andrew Grant, 27 December 1871.

39 E. J. B. Watson, *Edinburgh Association for the University Education of Women, 1867–1967* (Edinburgh, 1968), 7.

40 Dingsdale has also observed that Crudelius 'negotiated ruthlessly' and was able to successfully manage key figures in the 'Edinburgh Radical establishment' through her correspondence: A. Dingsdale, '"Generous and Lofty Sympathies": The Kensington Society, the 1866 Women's Suffrage Petition and the Development of Mid-Victorian Feminism' (PhD thesis, University of Greenwich, 1995), 80–2.

41 Stanley, *Auto/Biographical I*, 8, 250.

42 Burton, *Memoir*, 187.

means so widely different as … you seem to think. I agree with you most completely in your desire for the emptiness of many women's lives to be filled up by work.'[43] As Burton became more convinced, Crudelius 'took the liberty of proposing you as Vice-President', which Burton accepted.[44] To succeed in her plans, Crudelius had to be persistent and would not take no for an answer. The two women became friends through working together, with Burton reflecting that 'All those who had the opportunity of real intercourse with Mrs Crudelius became gradually aware of the sterling nature of her friendship.'[45] This indicates the importance of friendship networks in growing the campaign and bonding together the ELEA committee.

Crudelius' correspondence also reveals a cross-UK network communicating and co-ordinating to support women's education. The existing historiography has not fully explored collaboration between LEAs, and a full examination of the operation of this network is outside the scope of this article.[46] Nonetheless, Crudelius' activities suggest it may have been widespread, with Burton noting 'the extent of her correspondence with persons all over England, Scotland and Ireland'.[47] For example, Emily Davies in England offered to visit to help set up the ELEA, which Crudelius seriously considered but ultimately declined.[48] Crudelius, though, returned the support when she was asked to put forward Scottish financial supporters and applicants for a scholarship at Hitchin College, Davies' women's college project.[49] A close and lasting connection was formed, and when the ELEA opened a women's hall of residence in 1897, Davies wrote, as reported in *The Scotsman*, 'congratulating them on the crowning achievement of opening all the Universities of Scotland to women, "leaving poor old England far behind. From this humble position we admire and rejoice without grudging."'[50] A similar spirit of friendly competition is evident with Glasgow. ELEA member Miss Blyth appears to have undertaken a research trip in 1869, writing to Crudelius to report her findings:

> You will see that I date from Glasgow, where I am spending a few days, and have today been at one of a series of lectures by Prof. Nicholl. They are similar to ours but on a different footing, being undertaken by the lecturers themselves.[51]

Crudelius also shared Edinburgh's experience and example with others. She submitted a paper to the 1868 Social Science Congress explaining the

43 Ibid., 189.
44 Ibid., 202.
45 Ibid., 210.
46 The overviews of Hamilton, Dyhouse and Myers discuss LEAs separately, and many studies focus on just one, for example, L. Moore, 'The Aberdeen Ladies' Educational Association, 1877–1883', *Northern Scotland*, 3:2 (1980), 123–57.
47 Burton, *Memoir*, 74.
48 Ibid., 188–9.
49 EUA, Coll-42/5, F. A. Prideaux, Letter to Mary Crudelius, 13 December 1869.
50 EUA, GD58/20, Scrapbook, 1894–1905.
51 EUA, Coll-42/5, Miss Blyth, Letter to Mary Crudelius, 18 February 1869.

work of her fledgling society, which suggests that the ELEA wanted to inform wider progressive education policy and make male allies. In this report, she acknowledges that the ELEA 'differs considerably from the English Boards' as '[t]he whole school system is different', and notes 'local peculiarities' specific to Edinburgh.[52] Crudelius therefore thought that tailored approaches were needed for each local context, but this did not stop her from collaborating. In 1870, Crudelius corresponded with Isabella Tod to help her develop the Belfast Ladies' Institute, informing her about the ELEA and its relationship to the university. Tod responded,

> there is so much of similarity in the position of the … [LEAs] that what has been found suitable for the one is a very great help in finding what is suitable for the others … it will be a great encouragement to us, if we see you obtain a worthy recognition from the Edinburgh University.[53]

The organisations were supporting and informing each other to work out the best tactics. This was particularly important to counter the opposition they faced. Unfortunately, the existing sources do not reveal how or whether Crudelius thought local work might develop into a national system, but clearly she and the ELEA did not view themselves as an isolated campaign, rather locating themselves within a wider education movement. While further research is needed, this evidence suggests a cross-UK network of LEAs which influenced, inspired, and spurred each other on.

Beyond education, Crudelius saw herself as part of a wider contemporary campaign for women's rights. For example, she supported women's suffrage. Her letters to her husband show her following John Stuart Mill's 1867 women's suffrage amendment in the press.[54] In a letter replying to a request from the Edinburgh suffrage society she emphasised her progressive credentials: 'I have every right to be numbered amongst the firm friends of all true progress; I was one of the first fifteen hundred women who sent a petition to parliament, have signed and got what signatures I could since'. However, although she explained she would 'be glad to help you as far as I can', she justified why she could not join the committee: 'My *real* work and energy are however dedicated to the advancement of education.'[55] This reveals that she identified her life's purpose as education, and she was even willing to sacrifice her other feminist interests for it. She also took a keen interest in the development of the 1870 Married Women's Property Act, which allowed wives to keep their wages. In the correspondence noted above with Masson, she again pushed him to raise the issue: 'The other point which indeed must be won … is Mr Lefevre's bill – especially that part of it which refers to the earnings of married women … Therefore if you could point out how necessary a reform in the law is to any

[52] Burton, *Memoir*, 47.
[53] EUA, Coll-42/5, Isabella Tod, Letter to Mary Crudelius, 21 February 1870.
[54] Burton, *Memoir*, 9.
[55] Ibid., 27–8 (emphasis original).

real progress in industrial action, I think it would do good.'[56] Crudelius, then, presented herself as knowledgeable in political affairs and involved in a range of progressive causes which she saw as interlinked, but with a clear priority. This wider consciousness was also shared by Louisa Stevenson, one of Crudelius' successors in the ELEA leadership. Stevenson, though, took this further, into practical action, combining her education work with membership of Edinburgh Parochial Board, the management board of Edinburgh Royal Infirmary and support for women's suffrage.[57] Crudelius may have focused her activities on the ELEA to prioritise its success by keeping it separate from other complex campaigns, or because her health limited her capacity.

Having considered Crudelius' active campaigning, it is now possible to examine how she and others reflected on her life. This analysis will begin with her memoir, which reveals the context of gender relations in which Crudelius was operating, and how others perceived her. Burton explained the difficulties Crudelius faced when founding the ELEA: 'The religious and charitable world could not extend to her the right hand of fellowship. She did not profess to work for any directly religious object nor yet for any so called charitable one.'[58] Smitley has argued that in this period Scottish women were able to create a 'feminine public sphere' around temperance, Liberalism and suffragism, justifying this by drawing on evangelical arguments of 'woman's mission' to improve social ills.[59] Women's higher education did not fit easily into this justification. While some argued education could improve the work of women teachers and mothers in raising the next generation, women partly wanted higher education for their own fulfilment, which was itself a radical idea in Victorian society.[60] This demand was still relatively new, and the Edinburgh association was the first to be established in Scotland.[61]

This tension around how Crudelius fitted into conventional ideals of women's role is clear in the memoir. Burton included a letter describing Crudelius after her death from Professor Laurie (an ELEA lecturer), where he reflected,

> Her energy … was remarkable … She possessed a grasp of principles, a comprehensiveness of view, a ready perception of what was practicable … sound common sense and good temper combined with a certain resoluteness of mind and manner … [and] a frankness of speech almost daring.[62]

[56] Ibid., 110–13.

[57] E. T. McLaren, and nieces of the Stevensons, *Recollections of the Public Work and Home Life of Louisa and Flora Stevenson* (Edinburgh, 1914), 13–15.

[58] Burton, *Memoir*, 304.

[59] M. Smitley, *The Feminine Public Sphere: Middle-Class Women and Civic Life in Scotland, c.1870–1914* (Manchester, 2009), 40–1.

[60] For example, both justifications were used by Louisa Stevenson in her *The Higher Education of Women in Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1877), 11–12.

[61] Hamilton, 'The First Generations of University Women', 101.

[62] Burton, *Memoir*, 302–3.

This emphasises the energy and sheer force of character required to challenge convention. Crudelius is described with traditionally masculine characteristics like vigour and rational judgement. However, Laurie carefully manages any negative implications, qualifying that Crudelius was 'almost' daring and still agreeable.

Although the memoir's main purpose is highlighting Crudelius' campaigning success, Burton is also careful to show her fulfilling her household role:

> In her domestic and social duties she was entirely exemplary, not unconscious perhaps of the strong weapon furnished to the enemies of her sex by every woman who neglects the minutiae of duty for what some may suppose higher or wider interests. Mrs Crudelius, however, did not need the added reason for doing her part as wife, mother, and hostess perfectly.[63]

This suggests that Crudelius' domestic attentiveness may partly have been a political tactic to ensure that the ELEA avoided criticism. Burton quickly moves on to argue that Crudelius naturally wanted to fulfil this role anyway, but the more radical idea remains. This is not to argue that Crudelius rejected contemporary ideals of domesticity; in a letter to Burton she explained, 'I believe thoroughly in domestic life'.[64] It is just to highlight that these ideals would be coloured by others' perceptions of her reform work, and in practice would have to be balanced with it. In sum, the biography walked a difficult line between celebrating Crudelius' progressive views and the successes of her determined campaigning, while ensuring she met contemporary expectations of women.

Crudelius' correspondence reveals what her experiences in the ELEA meant to her. In 1871, she had to temporarily resign the secretaryship because of long-term illness. This prompted her to write several reflective letters to her trusted colleagues Miss Hamilton and Miss Dundas, who took over as secretaries.[65] A letter to Dundas provides a self-assessment which is an interesting counterpoint to Laurie's letter in the memoir. She does not hold back about how difficult she was to work with:

> Mine has certainly been a sort of despotism, but it has been the force of enthusiasm, and not wilfulness … I know I have too dogmatical a way of speaking, but it really comes from intensity of conviction, and not from temper.[66]

Her language is stronger than Laurie's, although she felt her actions were justified by how much she cared about the association. Her work also gave Crudelius new skills and opportunities for personal growth. She told Dundas that, 'I had never had anything to do with Associations, or with organizing in any

63 Ibid., 12.
64 Ibid., 203.
65 Ibid., 219.
66 Ibid., 171.

way till the Edinburgh Ladies' Educational Association'.[67] The ELEA was her first opportunity to learn about taking minutes, persuading others in meetings, business correspondence and negotiating fees with lecturers.[68] The increasing confidence and assertiveness seen in her correspondence may have developed through these experiences.

Crudelius' letters suggest that she was so devoted to her cause that it sometimes became all-consuming. While letters could be written from home to fit in with her family commitments, board meetings had to be attended in person. She warned Hamilton, 'from my own case, not to allow yourself to be led into … night work', explaining, 'Mr Crudelius was at home before me last night, and took me out of my cab with grave eyes and uncharitable feelings to the Association behind them. I wasn't at all well to start with, but was obliged to groan inwardly over my aching limbs all evening, afraid of increasing his ire against the corporation.'[69] This recollection indicates that Crudelius was so dedicated to her education work that she pursued it even at the expense of other activities and her health. It also reveals the tensions within Burton's comments on domesticity, as her commitment had to be balanced with, and occasionally affected, her home life and (usually supportive) relationship with her husband.

Crudelius' feelings about her work are clearest when she talked about having to stop. She explained to Hamilton that

> It is really a pain to me to give it up. Nobody knows what the Association has been to me. I feel to it in something of the same way that I feel to my children. It is little to do in a life, but the Secretaryship and its work has been *my* life work so far.[70]

Roper has highlighted the potential for life-writing to reveal emotional and embodied experiences, which is certainly evident in this case.[71] Here, Crudelius compares her ELEA work to what was considered her highest role in life in Victorian society: being a mother. Indeed, she argues it has been her whole life's work and uses emotive language of pain and loss. Only her illness could physically draw her away from the ELEA, and her dedication is clear in that she did not, in fact, give up her work, but returned as secretary when well enough.[72] Crudelius' experience was shared by other educationalists, showing the campaign's significance to these women. Louisa Stevenson worked on higher education for decades, again only retiring due to ill health. She described her feelings about resignation to a colleague in emotive terms similar to Crudelius, saying, 'my heart is sore'.[73] In Glasgow, Janet Galloway led the education

67 Ibid., 175.
68 Ibid. For example, EUA, Coll-42/5, Mary Crudelius, Letter to Professor Fraser, undated.
69 Burton, *Memoir*, 184.
70 Ibid., 181–2 (emphasis original).
71 Roper, 'Slipping out of View', 63–5.
72 Burton, *Memoir*, 219.
73 EUA, Coll-42/5, Louisa Stevenson, Letter to Margaret Houldsworth, 14 June 1904.

campaign for thirty-two years.[74] Fewer opportunities for this type of lifelong commitment were available for women elsewhere in Scotland, as local conditions varied. The Aberdeen LEA was founded by men, and ultimately short-lived due to a lack of funds and students from the smaller and more scattered Aberdeenshire population.[75] In St Andrews, the university itself administered a Lady Literate in Arts diploma from 1876.[76]

Examining the campaign for women's higher education in Edinburgh through the lens of biography, subjectivity and the self provides new insights about the movement and its participants. It demonstrates that they were pressing for a radical and dramatic change. Through the very act of campaigning for improved education, Crudelius had to speak and behave in ways which exploited, manoeuvred around, and pushed the boundaries of feminine ideals. The scale of the women's education demands was also unprecedented. To achieve this change, leadership by exceptionally determined and strong-willed individuals was needed, and was provided by Crudelius among many others. To grow the movement, campaigners built up networks of support through family, acquaintances, powerful male supporters and fellow women's rights campaigners within Edinburgh and across the UK. Crudelius built personal friendships and situated herself within a wider movement on the 'woman question'. She expertly negotiated gendered expectations, balancing radical aims with maintaining respectable femininity when needed to protect the ELEA.

Crudelius' work interacted with her self-construction in complex ways. Her correspondence shows the different identities and approaches Crudelius utilised to advance her cause in the practical day-to-day running of the campaign. Her experience shaped and changed her. She became a true political actor, negotiating, forging alliances and defending her organisation. Crudelius also reflected back on her career in her correspondence, as did her biographer in her memoir. These reflections show the sacrifices she was prepared to make for her work, which was crucially important to her. Crudelius did not personally benefit from the education for which she campaigned; she never had time to attend the ELEA lectures she organised, and she died before the universities opened to women.[77] Instead, she gained fulfilment, meaning, skills, confidence, achievements and community through the campaign for higher education itself. She exemplifies a new sense of self emerging for some women in this period, defined not only by their relation to home or family, but by their beliefs, activism and work.

[74] J. Geyer-Kordesch and R. Ferguson, *Blue Stockings, Black Gowns, White Coats: A Brief History of Women Entering Higher Education and the Medical Profession in Scotland in Celebration of 100 Years of Women Graduates at the University of Glasgow* (Glasgow, 1995), 36.

[75] Moore, 'Aberdeen Ladies' Educational Association', 126, 153–4.

[76] Moore, 'The Scottish Universities and Women Students', 141.

[77] Burton, *Memoir*, 74.