



### A Bar too High - The Marriage Bar

Up until its removal in 1973, the big impediment to the advancement of women in banking was the marriage bar. By the early 1970s men still comprised the majority of staff, but women accounted for a vastly increased number (44%). These women helped swell the ranks of the IBOA and had an increasing voice in their union, articulating a growing demand for equality and fair treatment of women in the workplace.

The upshot of the marriage bar was that female bank officials had shorter working lives and were concentrated among the lower grades where they mostly operated machinery and acted as secretaries to managers. It is startling that just five women were employed on the promotional grade of Assistant Manager in 1971:

1971

	Men	Women	Total
No. Employees	4,415	3,405	7,820
No. Assistant Managers	1,788	5	1,793
% Asst. Manager	40.50%	.15%	22.93%

The monotony of the work and the circumscribing of opportunity created a degree of despondency among female bank officials. It was simply demoralising, one female official remarked, to watch male colleagues gain promotion for no other reason than that similar opportunities were closed to women.

There was also a major long-term financial cost for women who left the bank as a result of getting married. Women who married were granted a 'marriage gratuity' by the banks. Indeed, it was seen as a perk of a white collar job to be eligible for a marriage gratuity, a thank you for the years of loyal service. But of course the reality was that upon marriage women were forced to give up an income and were not entitled to a pension.

There is no doubt that the removal of the marriage bar was a huge step in the move towards equality for women in banking. However, it was not the panacea for removal of obstacles to full equality. Following the removal of the marriage bar, if women returned to work for the banks they frequently returned as part-time or temporary officials, again at the lower entry grade. They had little or no hope of being promoted to management grades and so the glass ceiling was reinforced, just in a different way.