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# Women in the Regional Economy: The East Midlands, 1700-1830

By  
Penelope Lane

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This study explores the processes of economic change and their impact on women's working lives in the East Midlands region during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Drawing on a wide range of sources, for example, estate, probate, criminal and poor law records, it offers alternative perspectives on the position of women in the economy.

The first part of the thesis looks at the wealth creating and income generating activities of 'middling' women living in urban areas. Inheritance strategies delineated in men's and women's wills do not indicate that women from the beginning of the eighteenth century became less able to hold property or engage in enterprise. Industrial development in this region encouraged women's economic participation and created additional opportunities for those situated in industrial towns to extend their interests. The value of estate records for the investigation of women's businesses is also discussed, and it is concluded that while they have their limitations, these records can provide valuable insights into women's commercial dealings.

Part two is concerned with the effects of regional specialisation on the work of labouring women. There is very little evidence to suggest a shift in the sexual division of labour in agriculture from the mid-eighteenth century. The types of tasks in which women were engaged were generally no different in the early nineteenth century than they had been at the beginning of the eighteenth. The continued move to pastoral farming reduced the amount of agricultural work for women, especially for those in Leicestershire. The initial expansion of dairying while giving rise to more dairymaids can be seen as promoting growth in the domestic service sector rather than agriculture, since these occupations are so very closely linked. The majority of women appear to have been engaged in domestic service work prior to the eighteenth century, and limited work opportunities for women helps explain the emergence of redundant female labour prior to 1700. It is also argued that the expansion of domestic industry and a reduction in age at first marriage for women in the early eighteenth century noted by historians was largely a phenomenon generated by these conditions.

This study also includes the trends in wage rates for women over the period, it shows that female real wages declined in comparison with those of males. The evidence presented also supports the belief that women were paid a customary wage. However, under certain circumstances some women could command wages comparable with those of men. Finally, it is argued that the intensification of the trends described, in addition to the inability of women to move between sectors of employment, led many women to employ survival mechanisms that included the greater exploitation of 'criminal' activities within the informal economy and their sexual relationships with men.

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Department of History

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## **ABBREVIATIONS USED IN NOTES**

L.R.O.        Leicestershire Records Office

N.A.O.        Nottinghamshire Archive Office

H.L.          Huntington Library, San Marino, California, USA

## **PREFACE**

I would like to thank my supervisor Maxine Berg for all her support, and especially her patience, during the preparation of this thesis.

I wish to thank the ESRC for awarding me a Research Studentship, and the Research Committee of the Huntington Library for a Foundation Fellowship.

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## INTRODUCTION: Women's Working Lives in the Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries

At the start of this decade Amanda Vickery could still write 'the eighteenth century represents a black hole in the history of British women.'<sup>1</sup> The study of women's working lives in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries is a relatively new but rapidly growing phenomenon.<sup>2</sup> Until very recently only two books existed to shed light on the subject, and one of those was concerned mainly with the previous century. Alice Clark's, *Working Life of Women in the Seventeenth Century* and Ivy Pinchbeck's, *Women Workers and the Industrial Revolution*. Pinchbeck saw the impact of the industrial revolution on women's lives in positive terms. Single wage earning women gained 'social and economic independence', while the adoption of the concept of the family wage allowed married women to make their 'economic contribution' by staying at home and rearing children.<sup>3</sup> However, this optimistic assessment failed to include those women who were employed, for example, as servants, framework knitters and dressmakers.

Alice Clark viewed the predominance of the individual rather than family wage in a negative light. She lamented the disappearance of the family as the economic unit of production, the separation of home and work, and the withdrawal of wealthy women from commercial enterprise.<sup>4</sup> In the absence of research on women's economic

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<sup>1</sup> A. Vickery, 'The Neglected Century: Writing the History of British Women', *Gender and History*, 3:2, (1991), p. 211.

<sup>2</sup> The major essays published on this topic are contained in P. Sharpe, (ed.), *Women's Work: The English Experience 1650-1914*, (London, 1998).

<sup>3</sup> I. Pinchbeck, *Women Workers and the Industrial Revolution 1750-1850*, (London, 1930, repr. 1969).

<sup>4</sup> A. Clark, *Working Life of Women in the Seventeenth Century*, (London, 1919, repr. 1982).

activities in the early modern period, Alice Clark's work informed the writing of other historians. Keith Snell and Bridget Hill, for example, accepted her assessment of a past where women engaged in the same types of work as men. As wives, women worked in the context of a family economy and shared an equal status with their husbands. During the eighteenth century, they argue, women experienced a decline in their status and a contraction in the economic opportunities open to them.<sup>5</sup>

Clark's imagery has receded, however, as historians found it less easy to find evidence of an equity in the economic and social relations between men and women. Earle's examination of the London female labour market during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries shows little difference when compared with that of the mid nineteenth century. Women, it is observed, were clustered in the same sectors of work, i.e. domestic service, the needle trades, charring, laundry and nursing the sick.<sup>6</sup> Similarly, these findings are reflected in those of Schwarz also for London. He noted that between 1747 and 1851, there was no significant change in the types of occupations open to women.<sup>7</sup>

Nonetheless, some historians could locate evidence in Clark's support. Anne Laurence, in her social history of women in England, concluded that between the years 1500 and 1760, 'we see a reduction in the opportunities for women to work in different trades and a diminution in their rights to hold office.' But she also states that 'early

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<sup>5</sup> B. Hill, *Women, Work and Sexual Politics in Eighteenth Century England*, (London, 1994); K.D.M. Snell, *Annals of the Labouring Poor*, (Cambridge, 1987).



modern England was not a golden age for women.’<sup>8</sup> If the early modern period was not a ‘golden age’ for women, then neither did women spend their time working in the context of a family economy. As Berg has observed, this image is a ‘great distortion’ for the eighteenth century. Numerous women had to support themselves independently.<sup>9</sup>

Theories that have promoted women’s marginalisation at the expense of the underlying continuities in the position of women have of late been criticised.<sup>10</sup> Judith Bennett has argued that the characteristics of women’s employment have in fact altered little from the medieval period to the modern.<sup>11</sup> The apparent antipathy towards ‘change’ theses became the focus of a debate between two eminent women’s historians in the early years of this decade. Bennett stressed the continuity in women’s status arising from the forces of patriarchy in the home and in the wider community. Hill, on the other hand, attached primary importance to economic determinants in the process of change, and argued that economic factors had often been ignored in recent studies of

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<sup>6</sup> P. Earle, ‘The Female Labour Market in the Late Seventeenth and Early Eighteenth Centuries,’ *Economic History Review*, 42:3 (1989), pp. 328-353.

<sup>7</sup> L.D. Schwarz, *London in the Age of Industrialisation*, (Cambridge, 1992), pp. 14-21.

<sup>8</sup> A. Laurence, *Women in England 1550-1760: A Social History*, (London, 1994), pp. 272-3.

<sup>9</sup> M. Berg, ‘What Difference Did Women’s Work Make to the Industrial Revolution?’, *History Workshop Journal*, 35 (1993), reprinted in Sharpe, *Women’s Work*, p. 165. O. Hufton, ‘Women Without Men: Widows and Spinsters in Britain and France in the Eighteenth Century’, *Journal of Family History*, Winter (1984).

<sup>10</sup> A. Vickery, ‘From Golden Age to Separate Spheres?: A Review of the Categories and Chronology of English Women’s History’, *The Historical Journal*, 36:2 (1993). For overviews of the historiography on the effects of industrialisation on women’s workforce participation and status see J. Thomas, ‘Women and Capitalism: Oppression or Emancipation?’, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 30 (1988); P. Hudson ‘Women and Industrialisation’ in J. Purvis (ed.), *Women’s History in Britain, 1850-1945*, (London, 1995).

<sup>11</sup> J.M. Bennett, ‘History that Stands Still: Women’s Work in the European Past’, *Feminist Studies*, 14 (1988), pp. 269-283.

women's history.<sup>12</sup> Sharpe, by contrast, takes a common sense view that 'neither change nor continuity is satisfactory as either an explanatory or a descriptive scheme.' She believes that continuity and change can co-exist, and capitalism and patriarchy should both be considered when researching women's employment. She also found for the county of Essex, that while capitalism created opportunities for women to work, overall, they experienced a decline.<sup>13</sup>

Research into different aspects of the English economy during the eighteenth century continues to show the emergence of distinctive regions in England during this period.<sup>14</sup> Such is the significance of this economic spatial development that some historians have argued that the regional approach is 'uniquely important for comprehending the economic and social history of the industrial revolution period.'<sup>15</sup> The complex processes that led to regional specialisation had significant implications for women's working lives, and it is from an investigation of these processes at the regional level that can best aid our understanding of how capitalism and industrial development affected women's participation in the economy. The East Midlands is the region chosen for this study and the demographic and economic change in the area is explored in Chapter 1.0.

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<sup>12</sup> J.M. Bennett, 'A Study in Continuity and Change', *Women's History Review*, 2:2 (1993), pp. 173-184; B. Hill, 'Women's History: A Study in Change, Continuity or Standing Still?', *Women's History Review*, 2:1, (1993), pp. 5-22.

<sup>13</sup> P. Sharpe, *Adapting to Capitalism*, (London, 1996), p. 150.

<sup>14</sup> E.H. Hunt, 'Industrialisation and Regional Inequality: Wages in Britain, 1760-1915', *Journal of Economic History*, 46:4 (1986); A. Kussmaul, *A General View of the Rural Economy of England, 1538-1840*, (Cambridge, 1990); P. Clark, 'Small Towns in England 1550-1850', *Small Towns in Early Modern Europe*, (Cambridge, 1995).

<sup>15</sup> P. Hudson, 'The Regional Perspective', P. Hudson, (ed.), *Regions and Industries: A Perspective on the Industrial Revolution*, (Cambridge, 1989)

As much research in recent years has stressed the importance of social and cultural factors in shaping people's daily lives, in this study of the East Midlands, the emphasis has been firmly placed on economic factors. However, it is recognised that the effects of patriarchy were deeply imbued in the economic and social systems of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Women were undoubtedly constrained in what occupations and professions they could enter or the roles they could play in society and the wages they could earn. Nevertheless, economic imperatives often snapped these social and cultural constraints, and if not always directly opening up avenues for women, often provided them with opportunities to participate in the economy. Women are shown here as proactive rather than reactive, engaging in economic activity in a wide variety of ways.

This research likewise illustrates the continuities that existed in women's work and commercial activities that stretch across the centuries. However, as historians have been keen to point out, we cannot view women as a homogenous group.<sup>16</sup> Indeed, one of the major findings of this research is that economic change not only impacted differently on groups of women in the same vicinity, but in the case of the hosiery industry, the economic advantage for one group of women could come directly at the expense of another. This study was undertaken with a view to conducting empirical research which aimed to challenge or confirm some of the widely accepted beliefs and

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<sup>16</sup> H. Barker, 'Women, Work and the Industrial Revolution, c. 1700-1840', in H. Barker and E. Chalus, (eds.), *Gender in Eighteenth-Century England*, (London, 1997), p. 100; D. Green 'Merry Widows and Sentimental Spinsters', in J. Stobart and A. Owens, *Urban Fortunes: Property and Inheritance in the Town 1700-1900*, (forthcoming).

theoretical positions, and to offer alternative perspectives on the working lives of women in this period. In the next part of this chapter, further consideration will be given to the historiography on women's work as it relates to aspects covered by this thesis.

### **'Middling' Women: Property and Business**

The research on women in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries has to date focused largely on labouring women, particularly those in rural areas. The economic activities of 'middling' women, by contrast, have until recently received much less attention. Studies of women's property holding in early modern England have shown that contrary to the prescription of Common Law, women owned and inherited property on a relatively equal basis with men.<sup>17</sup> Women's status and rights regarding property holding, however, appear to have declined during the course of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Davidoff and Hall have argued that women's property became tightly controlled by their male relatives. While men would manage and deploy their assets in economic endeavour, women were not expected to be 'active economic agents or even care for their own property'. Thus women's property held in personal trusts, a device mainly associated with the upper middle class, became a resource for male enterprise while women received only income.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, some historians contend that women had a greater 'emotional investment' in household and personal

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<sup>17</sup> A.L. Erickson, *Women and Property in Early Modern England*, (London, 1997); C. Churches, 'Women and Property in Early Modern England: A Case Study', *Social History*, 23:2 (1998), pp. 165-180.

<sup>18</sup> S. Staves, *Married Women's Separate Property in England, 1660-1833*, (Cambridge Mass., 1990). L. Davidoff and C. Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class 1780-1850*, (London, 1987), p. 209.

goods because they were unlikely to own or bequeath real estate.<sup>19</sup> Maxine Berg's research on the industrial towns of Birmingham and Sheffield in the eighteenth century questions these perspectives on women's property rights. She argues that trusts were set up by people of varying degrees of wealth and for different reasons. Indeed, Berg contends that the provincial industrial classes in fact frequently used trusts as a device for protecting women's property or providing for children. Importantly, she found that women owned considerable amounts of real property and in general 'disposed of it as they wished'.<sup>20</sup>

Women's ability to own and exercise control of their property is central to our understanding of women's participation in the wider economy during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, since this perception of a marginalisation in women's property rights is paralleled by their exclusion from sectors of commercial enterprise.<sup>21</sup> Davidoff and Hall have further argued that despite limited control and ownership of property, and a perceived retreat from trade, promoted largely from the increasing identification of middling women with the domestic sphere and the difficulties of engaging in a market based on large scale enterprise, women were, nevertheless, in private the 'hidden investment' of the family business. Women continued to perform a wide variety of tasks such as caring for family members, supplying small sums of money with which to

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid. p. 211; A. Vickery, 'Women and the World of Goods: A Lancashire Consumer and Her Possessions, 1751-81', in J. Brewer and R. Porter (eds.), *Consumption and the World of Goods*, (London, 1993), p. 294.

<sup>20</sup> M. Berg, 'Women's Property and the Industrial Revolution', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 24:2 (1993), pp. 240-243.

<sup>21</sup> Clark, *Working Life*; Pinchbeck, *Women Workers*; B. Hill, *Women, Work and Sexual Politics in Eighteenth Century England*, (London, 1994); Davidoff and Hall, *Family Fortunes*.

generate new businesses and earning money in the 'interstices of household management'. All this while simultaneously trying to maintain rank by the 'appearance of a non-working lifestyle'. Women would only openly enter the public world of trade if they had no income of their own or no man to support them.<sup>22</sup> Therefore, in reality, women continued to work in both the public and private sphere.

There has been relatively little work undertaken on the lives of women in urban areas. Moreover, there are, for example, only a handful of studies directly related to the experiences of widows in towns, and these have largely revolved around the subject of remarriage.<sup>23</sup> David Green has highlighted the need to consider the different experiences of wives, widows and spinsters in the processes of wealth creation. With some optimism, he sees the early nineteenth century 'independent' women of London's middle class in a superior position to that of their working class sisters. Green states, 'whilst for working-class women widowhood, and to a lesser extent, spinsterhood, were often steps towards dependence and poverty, for their middle class counterparts such status could

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<sup>22</sup> Davidoff and Hall, *Family Fortunes*, pp. 272-315. Given the lack of reliable quantifiable evidence there is no firm foundation for accepting the view of a decline in women's participation in business over the course of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. See M. Hunt, *The Middling Sort: Commerce, Gender and the Family in England 1680-1780*, (London, 1996), p. 145; H. Barker, 'Women, Work and the Industrial Revolution: Female Involvement in the English Printing Trades, c. 1700-1840', and S. Sked, 'Women Teachers and the Expansion of Girls' Schooling in England, c. 1760-1820', both in H. Barker and E. Chalus, (eds.), *Gender in the Eighteenth Century*, (London, 1997), pp. 81-100; Davidoff and Hall, *Family Fortunes*, pp. 293-304.

<sup>23</sup> For studies looking at the circumstances surrounding the remarriage of widows see, for example, B. Todd, 'The Remarrying Widow: A Stereotype Reconsidered', in M. Prior, (ed.), *Women in English Society 1500-1800*, (London, 1985); V. Brodsky, 'Widows in Late Elizabethan London: Remarriage, Economic Opportunity and Family Orientations', L. Bonfield, R. Smith, K. Wrightson, (eds.), *The World We Have Gained*, (Oxford, 1986); Jeremy Boulton, 'Decline of Female Remarriage in London', *Continuity and Change*, 5:3 (1990). For studies of women in urban economies see M. Prior, 'Women and the Urban Economy: Oxford 1500-1800', in Prior, *Women in English Society*; 'Women in the Market Place: Oxfordshire c. 1690-1800', *Midland History*, 9 (1984); S. Wright, 'Holding Up Half the Sky: Women and their Occupations in Eighteenth Century Ludlow', *Midland History*, 14 (1989).

and frequently did bring personal autonomy as well as legal and financial independence'.<sup>24</sup> However, as he also found, female testators often made provision for other women,<sup>25</sup> which indicates there were those amongst the middle class who needed additional forms of economic support.

Alastair Owens has recently pointed to the lack of research undertaken on informal welfare strategies amongst the middle class, particularly those that relate to post-mortem inter-generational estate provision. He has suggested that in order for the interests of some family members to be promoted, this often came at the expense of others, particularly women.<sup>26</sup> He concludes from his recent study of property transmission amongst Stockport's middle class between the years 1800 to 1857, and in line with the Davidoff and Hall thesis, that 'inheritance did more to constrain the married women of industrialising urban communities than it did to socially or economically empower them'.<sup>27</sup> Is this generally true for all industrial towns of the early nineteenth century? Did inheritance practices really contrive to exclude women from economic activity? How far were widows and spinsters able, or content, to live off a rentier income? Could our views be altered by examining the differences that existed

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<sup>24</sup> David Green, 'Merry Widows and Sentimental Spinsters' in J. Stobart and A. Owens, (ed.), *Urban Fortunes: Property and Inheritance in the Town, 1700-1900*, (forthcoming).

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> I am grateful to Alastair Owens for providing me with a copy of his paper, "The Duty and Paramount Obligation of Every Considerate and Rational Man": Will-Making, Inheritance and Middle-Class Welfare Provision in an Industrial Town'. Paper prepared for the *Social History Society of the United Kingdom Annual Conference*, University of York, 2-4 January 1999.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

outside of larger industrial centres and the metropolis, by looking at towns in the context of regional industrial development?

The prevailing economic environment in which women lived, and died, is as important for our understanding of their economic participation as any religious and social discourse exhorting middle class women to their proper role in life. It is likely, moreover, that if women were pushed to the periphery when it came to property holding or engaging in business, as some historians have argued, it would become an even greater necessity for women to protect themselves from economic insecurity. This was especially important for those women inhabiting the fringes or lower ranks of the middle class.<sup>28</sup> This research shows that the paradoxical elements that linked women's economic activity and their middle class status ensured that they continued to figure large in the economy of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Evidence from small towns in the East Midlands shows that inheritance strategies could equally promote economic participation as well as prevent it. Indeed, the findings presented in Chapter 2.0 suggest that economic activity amongst women of the lower middle classes was probably more important for maintaining their position and in acquiring the trappings of status. Business activities were not confined to wealthier women. Poorer women traded as hucksters, hawkers and pedlars traded in urban and rural areas. Milk women, for example, were normally the wives of labourers and with a small amount of capital had

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<sup>28</sup> The 'fringes' of the middle class would include those Earle has described as those 'petty capitalists' whose 'activities not only fed and clothed them but also enabled them to accumulate on a regular basis and improve themselves.' P. Earle, *The Making of the English Middle Class*, (London, 1989), pp. 4-5. Davidoff and Hall consider the distinguishing features of the lower ranks of the middle class to include the single person enterprise, belonging to a local social circle and investment in houses and buildings. For the full list of criteria see *Family Fortunes*, p. 24.



bought a milk walk or round.<sup>29</sup> Some of the activities of these women can be found along with those of the 'middling' sort in Chapter 3.0.

## **Labouring Women - Sectors of Work**

### **(i) Agriculture**

Throughout the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries women were employed in agriculture, but to what degree, and in what type of labour is debated. There are historians who have argued that prior to the middle of the eighteenth century women were engaged in a wide variety of agricultural tasks. As far as Alice Clark was concerned, in the seventeenth century 'there was hardly any agricultural work from which women were excluded'.<sup>30</sup> Pinchbeck, on the other hand, examining the hundred years from 1750, traced a contraction in the opportunities for women in agriculture as a consequence of enclosure and engrossing of the land. However, from the end of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries she saw an expansion of women's day labour, which hitherto had been 'mainly seasonal and for short periods', as large farms produced a greater need for weeding and cleaning, and hoeing of root crops.<sup>31</sup> The most influential research in recent years to point to a decrease in the range of women's work in agriculture is that of Keith Snell. Using wage and unemployment data generated largely from settlement examinations, Snell argued that for the predominantly arable

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<sup>29</sup> Pinchbeck, *Women Workers*, p. 298-9.

<sup>30</sup> Clark, *Working Life of Women*, p. 62.

<sup>31</sup> Pinchbeck, *Women Workers*, See chapters. 2 and 3, p. 53.

south-east of the country, with its intensification of grain production from the middle of the eighteenth century, there was a movement of women away from activities associated with the harvest to those of the spring. This he asserts, is indicative of the appearance of a sexual specialisation in the agricultural labour force. Whereas, formerly, men and women had generally shared agricultural tasks equally, women were gradually confined to activities such as weeding and stone picking usually carried out in the early part of the year, and to the rapidly shrinking dairying and calving season. Furthermore, women's exclusion from harvest work, he also suggests, resulted from the growing use of heavier hand tools, and in particular, the scythe, which was never used by women. Ultimately, these changes led to a decrease in women's participation in the agricultural work force.<sup>32</sup>

Snell's conclusions for the south-east of England have, of late, been challenged. Pamela Sharpe has commented how Snell's findings for farm servants have been used to refer to all women workers in agriculture. Her study of female weekly and day work in Essex showed no change of significance in the sexual division of labour. Women employed on farms and estates were, for the most part, occupied in the same tasks in the second half of the eighteenth century as were those working in the seventeenth and sixteenth, i.e., for example, spring weeding, haymaking and cleaning operations associated with the harvest. The introduction of the scythe, moreover, did not immediately replace the sickle and these two implements co-existed in the south east well into the nineteenth century, and thus she disputes the notion that the female reaper

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<sup>32</sup>K.D.M. Snell, *Annals of the Labouring Poor: Social Change and Agrarian England, 1600-1900*, Cambridge, 1985), pp. 15-66.

was displaced by the male mower. Additionally, Snell's unemployment data which he uses to argue for a shift of female labour to the spring, Sharpe suggests, is probably showing, for some counties and regions, employment opportunities in the fashion industries, since fluctuations in unemployment were not purely a reflection of changes in the demand for agricultural labour. Furthermore, she asserts the decline of spinning rather than the loss of work in agriculture is largely responsible for the deterioration in female farm servants' wages, noted by Snell, in the second half of the eighteenth century.<sup>33</sup>

Snell argues that women in the Midlands alternatively became concentrated in the tasks associated with dairying and stock-rearing, with work also in the hay harvest. While this division had been detrimental to women in the predominantly grain-growing south-east, it benefited those in pastoral districts. He found for Leicestershire and Nottinghamshire that female wages generally kept up with male, with only a minimal deterioration in yearly earnings for women in comparison with men's occurring from 1760, although real wages were to fall in the later stages of the eighteenth century.<sup>34</sup> Robert Allen drew a picture of decline in the agricultural workforce in the south Midlands. He estimates, that between 1700 and the early 1800s, the employment of women dropped by 29 percent, and that of men by some 24 percent.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup>P. Sharpe, *Adapting to Capitalism*, (London, 1996), pp. 73-100.

<sup>34</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 46-49.

<sup>35</sup>R.C. Allen, *Enclosure and the Yeoman*, (Oxford, 1992), p. 235.

The value of using settlement examinations for an investigation of female agricultural work is debatable. Sharpe has shown that estate records are much more useful in this respect and these provide direct evidence of women's day labour. Information from Leicestershire and Nottinghamshire estates shows that women from the beginning of the eighteenth century had been confined to supporting tasks, for example, weeding, twitching and clodding, and haymaking. Thus there is very little evidence to support the view that women shared in agricultural work on an equal basis with men. Chapter 4.0 contains a detailed discussion of female labour in agriculture.

## **(ii) Domestic Service**

Domestic service prior to the nineteenth century has received only minimal attention, although in recent years research in this area appears to be gaining some momentum. Historians have discussed, for example, service as an important life-cycle stage conferring skills and abilities that could be utilised in marriage, but also recognise that for a minority of women this form of employment could become a career for life. Moreover, 'service as a migration experience' allowed women to move from rural to urban areas and gave them the opportunity to 'shift' for themselves while serving an expanding middle class. The growth of domestic service, furthermore, with the assimilation of large numbers of people into ways of urban living, and importantly, into the values and lifestyles of their employers and thus also enhancing social mobility, is

seen as forming part of the modernising process of western societies.<sup>36</sup> Reference has also been made to the ‘feminisation’ of domestic service, with some historians placing this phenomenon after 1800,<sup>37</sup> although others have linked it to the years immediately following the introduction of a tax on male servants in 1777.<sup>38</sup> In addition, historians argue that the demand for female servants began to increase in the second half of the eighteenth century, and with the loss of opportunities in other sectors of work, women had little choice but to enter this type of employment.<sup>39</sup> It is likely that domestic service had always provided the greatest amount of work for labouring women. This is suggested by the evidence presented in Chapters 4.0 and 5.0. The pastoral areas of the East Midlands helped accentuate this trend by increasing the number of women employed as dairy maids. This occupation, it is argued, is much closer to domestic service work than that of agriculture.

A good deal of the research we currently have on domestic service has focused on London, and while the metropolis acted like a magnet drawing young women from rural areas, as did all towns,<sup>40</sup> numerous women were employed as servants in the provinces. However, in some counties by 1851 women in textiles and the clothing trades

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<sup>36</sup>See B. Hill, *Servants: English Domesticity in the Eighteenth Century*, (Oxford, 1996); T. Meldrum, ‘Domestic Service in London, 1660-1750: Life-cycle, Gender, Work and Household Relations’, (Unpublished PhD Thesis, London, 1997); Sharpe, *Adapting to Capitalism*, pp. 101-129; D.A. Kent, ‘Ubiquitous But Invisible: Female Domestic Servants in Mid-Century London’, *History Workshop Journal*, Autumn, (1989) pp. 110-128; T. McBride, *The Domestic Revolution: The Modernisation of Household Service in England and France 1820-1920*, (London, 1976). For earlier work see J. Hecht, *The Domestic Servant Class in Eighteenth Century England*, (London, 1956); D.N. Stuart, *The English Abigail*, (London, 1946).

<sup>37</sup>McBride, *The Domestic Revolution*, p. 9.

<sup>38</sup>C. Davidson, *A Woman’s Work is Never Done: A History of Housework in the British Isles 1650-1950*, (London, 1982), p. 179; P. Horn, *The Rise and Fall of the Victorian Servant*, (London, 1975), p. 9.

<sup>39</sup>Hill, *Servants*, p. 37; Sharpe, *Adapting to Capitalism*, p. 128.

<sup>40</sup>P. Corfield, *The Impact of English Towns 1700-1800*, (Oxford, 1982), p. 99.

outnumbered those in domestic work. These included the East Midlands counties.<sup>41</sup>

The findings of Chapter 5.0 show that the domestic service sector covered a wide range of occupations and resulted in varying experiences for women. Additionally, these findings demonstrate the importance of domestic casual work. This is an area of service that remains under investigated.

### (iii) **The Hosiery Trade**

Maxine Berg has highlighted the contribution that women made to the industrial sector during the period of the industrial revolution. Flexible and adaptable, women were often the major workforce in the new high-productivity industries.<sup>42</sup> Compared with some industries, little is really known about women's work in the hosiery trade in the eighteenth and very early nineteenth centuries. Yet large numbers of women were employed as spinners, seamers, and later as knitters. This is mainly because very few sources exist on which to base a discussion. Women's historians have, however, focused on the hosiery industry, in the later nineteenth century. It has been argued, for example, that the sexual division of labour as it existed in hosiery families at the beginning of the nineteenth century became manifest and amplified in the reorganisation of the production processes over the rest of the century to the detriment of working women.<sup>43</sup> However, their contributions to family incomes remained important. Rose found that at Arnold,

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<sup>41</sup>D. Bythell, 'Women in the Workforce', in P. O'Brien and R. Quinault, (eds.), *The Industrial Revolution and British Society*, (Cambridge, 1993), p. 37.

<sup>42</sup>Berg, 'What Difference Did Women's Work Make to the Industrial Revolution?'; and *The Age of Manufactures 1700-1820*, (London, 1994), Chapter 7.0.

Nottinghamshire, in the period from 1851 to 1881, the expansion in seaming undertaken in the home allowed women to continue making a significant contribution to the family economy, even as domestic industry became superseded by the factory system.<sup>44</sup>

In other respects the hosiery industry has proved a fertile ground attracting the attention of historians wishing to examine the economic, political and technological developments of the trade, or the population growth and economic restructuring of the region.<sup>45</sup> However, only very occasionally does this literature shed any light on women's activities in the hosiery industry and frequently then only as a passing or incidental comment. Investigations into the development and demographic consequences of proto-industrialisation which have deployed family reconstitution as a research method have provided new perspectives on the hosiery industry and, importantly, brought women into the analysis. In his study of the Leicestershire village of Shepshed, Levine argued that the arrival of proto-industrialisation led to a decline in the age at first marriage as economic opportunity effectively removed the barriers that would delay marriage.<sup>46</sup> Carpenter's research on another village in the county, however, challenged Levine's findings. She contends that agrarian change and the diversification of the Countesthorpe population into hand knitting resulted in a lowering of the age at first

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<sup>43</sup>N. Grey Osterud, 'Gender Divisions and the Organisation of Work in the Leicester Hosiery Industry' in A.V. John (ed.), *Unequal Opportunities: Women's Employment in England 1800-1918*, (Oxford, 1986), pp. 45-68.

<sup>44</sup>S. Rose, 'Proto-Industry, Women's Work and the Household Economy in the Transition to Industrial Capitalism', *Journal of Family History*, 13:2 (1988), pp. 181-193.

<sup>45</sup> See Chapter 1.0, footnote 64. W.G. Hoskins, *The Midland Peasant*, (Leicester, 1949); J.D. Chambers, 'The Vale of Trent 1670-1800', *Economic History Review*, Supplement 3 (1957).

<sup>46</sup>D. Levine, *Family Formation in an Age of Nascent Capitalism*, (New York, 1977).

marriage which predated the take up of framework knitting.<sup>47</sup> Only minor consideration has been given gender differences when discussing age at first marriage and these are important since the reasons for entering into marriage might well have been different.

In the absence of evidence for the activities of labouring women engaged in the hosiery trade an argument rests mainly on the imputation made from what we know of the course of women's work in other sectors of employment and the growth of the industry from its pauper origins. Thus the decline in the average age of female first marriage which occurred before that of males, it is argued, was in large part promoted by the lack of economic opportunities for women, rather than because of them. See Chapter 6.0.

## **Work and Wages**

Women's historians of the medieval period to the modern have observed the sizeable difference between the money wages received by men and women, which could range from as little as one third to one half. This discrepancy they have concluded indicates that women's wages were the product of custom and not equality in the labour market. Furthermore, this disparity some historians see as arising from women's position in the family which places them as dependent rather than as fully independent

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<sup>47</sup>R. Carpenter, 'Peasants and Stockingers: Socio-Economic Change in Guthlaxton Hundred, Leicestershire, 1700-1851', Unpublished PhD Thesis, (Leicester University, 1993).



economic agents.<sup>48</sup> Thompson believed that ‘customary consciousness and customary usages were especially robust in the eighteenth century.’<sup>49</sup> He also contended that as the eighteenth century progressed there was a greater emphasis on labour discipline.<sup>50</sup> The role of custom, however, in determining wage levels is difficult to ascertain with any precision, given that it is not always clear what other factors at different times and locations may have been contributory. Woodward has described custom as ‘that great stand-by of the social historian and frequently invoked explanation for all that is difficult to understand.’<sup>51</sup> However, his comments with regard to women’s pay place stress on the role of custom. ‘The low rates of pay given to most women in the early modern period were rooted in convictions - underscored by biblical authority - about their physical, economic and social, intellectual and political inferiority...which has characterised English society into the present century.’<sup>52</sup> Recently, Sharpe has argued for the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries that women’s wages contained both a customary and market element.<sup>53</sup>

In a stimulating article, Joyce Burnette has taken this a step further, and asserts that for the industrial revolution period women were in general paid market wages.

Moreover, she argues that the notion of a customary wage has arisen because of errors

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<sup>48</sup>J.M. Bennett, ‘Medieval Women, Modern Women: Across the Great Divide’, in D. Aers (ed.), *Culture and History 1350-1600*, (London, 1992), p. 161; M. Berg, ‘What Difference’, p. 31; D. Valenze, *The First Industrial Woman*, (Oxford and New York, 1995), p. 89; J. Humphries, “‘Lurking in the Wings...’ Women in the Historiography of the Industrial Revolution”, *Business and Economic History*, 20 (1991), p. 39; M. Barrett and M. McIntosh, ‘The “Family Wage”’, in E. Whitelegg et. al.(eds.), *The Changing Experience of Women*, (Oxford, 1982), p. 79.

<sup>49</sup>E.P. Thompson, ‘Custom and Culture’, in *Customs in Common*, (London, 1991), p. 1.

<sup>50</sup>Thompson, ‘Time, Work Discipline and Industrial Capitalism’, in *Customs in Common*, pp. 352-404.

<sup>51</sup>D. Woodward, *Men at Work*, (Cambridge, 1995), p. 181.

<sup>52</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 197.

in measurement and differences in the productivity levels of men and women. If wage discrimination did exist, it occurred in areas of the labour market that were the least competitive.<sup>54</sup> One of the problems that women's historians have in determining trends over time in wage rates or the differences in wage levels that existed between men and women is the absence of data beyond a handful of examples. Historians have attempted to produce series of annual wages of servants in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.<sup>55</sup> Less effort has been expended on trying to produce trends in female daily wages, largely because procuring such data is extremely difficult. Nonetheless, with persistence this information can be obtained and long term trends in women's wages are essential if we are going to answer questions about changes in the standard of living. The acquisition of such data also allows the testing of the long held, but recently challenged, belief that women were paid a customary wage for their labour. An empirically based discussion demonstrating that historians have been correct in assuming that custom played a large part in determining the wages of women is given in Chapter 7.0.

## **Women and Poverty**

In the study of the standard of living during the industrial revolution period, historians have found optimism amongst wage series created from male occupations. Lindert and Williamson have argued, for example, that between 1781 and 1851 there

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<sup>53</sup>P. Sharpe, *Adapting to Capitalism*, (London, 1996).

<sup>54</sup>J. Burnette, 'An Investigation of The Female-Male Wage Gap During the Industrial Revolution in Britain', *Economic History Review*, 50:2 (1997), pp. 257-281.

were impressive net gains in the standard of life: over 60 percent for farm labourers, over 86 percent for blue-collar workers, and over 140 percent for all workers. The hardships faced by workers at the end of the Industrial Revolution cannot have been nearly as great as those of their grandparents.

Most of these gains they consider occurred after 1820.<sup>56</sup> Some historians are critical of an approach to the standard of living for 'all workers' that is based on 'a selection of daily and weekly wage rates from eighteen male occupations.'<sup>57</sup> They argue that such standard of living indices do not take account of, for example, family earnings, women's earnings, regional and county differences, periods of underemployment and unemployment.<sup>58</sup> Nicholas and Oxley have examined the question of the changes in the standard of living of women during the industrial revolution. Data on the height of female convicts transported to New South Wales and from the registers' of prisoners in Newgate Prison showed that the height of rural born women declined between 1785 and 1815, and did so significantly more than for urban born women, and urban born men. Thus they concluded, industrialisation had a negative effect on women's living standards, especially on those from rural areas.<sup>59</sup>

A deterioration in the standard of living of women raises the issue of relationships of dependence. The dependence of women on men is generally always implicit in the

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<sup>55</sup> Sharpe, *Adapting to Capitalism*, p. 115; Snell *Annals of the Labouring Poor*, *passim*; R.S. Neale, *Writing Marxist History: British Society, Economy and Culture Since 1700*, (Oxford, 1985), p. 120.

<sup>56</sup> P.H. Lindert and J.G. Williamson, 'English Workers' Living Standards During the Industrial Revolution: A New Look', *The Economic History Review*, 36:1 (1983), p. 24.

<sup>57</sup> R.S. Neale, *Writing Marxist History: British Society, Economy and Culture Since 1700*, (Oxford, 1985), p. 112.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid; J. Humphries, "Lurking in the Wings..." Women in the Historiography of the Industrial Revolution', *Business and Economic History*, 20 1991, p. 36.

<sup>59</sup> S. Nicholas and D. Oxley, 'The Living Standards of Women During the Industrial Revolution, 1795-1820', *Economic History Review*, 46:4 (1993), pp. 723-749; and 'Living Standards of Women in

discussions of historians concentrating, as they often do, on women's vulnerability because of a lack of economic security when they remain unmarried or widowed.<sup>60</sup> The question of their dependence becomes explicit, moreover, when the sectors of work open to them become closed.<sup>61</sup> Whether the availability of economic opportunities propelled women headlong into an early marriage<sup>62</sup>, or conversely encouraged their economic independence as has been argued by Sharpe,<sup>63</sup> the lack of employment leaves historians in no doubt that marriage was the only option for them. Thus as a consequence of a loss of employment opportunities and declining real wages, in the later eighteenth century, and unfavourable poor relief policies towards single women, historians have argued that there was little choice for them but to search for an economic refuge in marriage.<sup>64</sup> Historians have, perhaps, put more thought into the ways in which systems of poor relief assisted those in need, and less about how individuals survived who fell outside this form of assistance. And, just how easy was it for a woman to find a man to marry her?

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England and Wales, 1785-1815: New Evidence From Newgate Prison Records', *Economic History Review*, 49:3 (1996), pp. 591-599.

<sup>60</sup>O. Hufton, 'Women Without Men: Widows and Spinsters in Britain and France in the Eighteenth Century', *Journal of Family History*, Winter (1984), pp. 355-376.

<sup>61</sup>I. Pinchbeck, *Women Workers and the Industrial Revolution, 1750-1850*, (London, 1930 repr. 1969); S. Horrell and J. Humphries, 'Women's Labour Force Participation and the Transition to the Male Breadwinner Family, 1790-1865', *Economic History Review*, 48:1 (1995), pp. 89-117.

<sup>62</sup>D. Levine, *Family Formation in an Age of Nascent Capitalism*, (New York, 1977), Chapter 7.

<sup>63</sup>P. Sharpe, 'Literally Spinsters: A New Interpretation of the Local Economy and Demography in Colyton in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries', *Economic History Review*, 44 (1991), pp. 46-65.

<sup>64</sup>B. Hill, 'Marriage Age and the Demographers', *History Workshop Journal*, 29 (1989), p. 137; P. Sharpe, *Adapting to Capitalism*, (London, 1996), p. 140; L. Davidoff and C. Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class 1750-1850*, (London and Chicago, 1987), p. 273; J. Gillis, *For Better, For Worse, British Marriages 1600 to the Present*, (Oxford, 1985), p. 113; Humphries, 'Lurking in the Wings', p. 36.

The evidence from the East Midlands suggests that growing numbers of women had to look for alternative methods of income earning in these years. The rising tide of poverty affected the whole of the labouring poor, not only those affected by their inability to find work or a marriage partner. Throughout history people have resorted to criminal activities to help make ends meet. How far they did, and do so, is dependent on economic conditions. In the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and earlier, countless men and women either supported themselves or their families by illegal means. For those women who could not find a husband, illicit sexual relationships, prostitution or informal marriages enabled women to combat the economic hardship of this period. These themes are explored in the final chapter.

## **Methodology and Sources**

The economic trends of the period, while indicating that the region is the correct unit of analysis for this research, had to be reconciled with the limitations of a doctoral thesis. Local case studies are often the form that doctoral research takes these days. The constraints attached to a project of this kind usually ensure that tightly focused research is undertaken. Thus we are often treated to an examination of a particular historical problem via an industry, a town, parish or company, and frequently through the fruits of a single source, for example, newspapers or church court records.

Without entering into a debate about the content and methodological approaches employed in the pursuit of doctoral research, it is worth emphasising that some units of

analysis, or the heavy reliance on a single source may not always be appropriate, or possible, for the exploration of certain topics, and this was the certainly the position here. The examination of women's working lives by class and sector for the East Midlands region would clearly be too large an undertaking. Therefore, an alternative approach had to be developed. A way around this difficulty was provided by focusing on the area that experienced the most sustained changes in economic development - Leicestershire. Additionally, only the three main sectors of employment for labouring women were included, agriculture, domestic service and the hosiery industry. While Leicestershire became the focal point for this research, it was decided that a comparative case study would be adopted for some themes. For example, the exploration of agricultural work on specific estates allowed differences between Nottinghamshire and Leicestershire to be discussed.

In order to carry out empirical research and properly address the questions relating to the range of economic activity undertaken by women in the East Midlands during this period, a broad base of source materials was required. Historians of women's work are frequently frustrated by the problems of finding data that can be quantified or is capable of providing meaningful information across a lengthy period of time. Thus as Sharpe notes, 'the necessity of imaginative recovery of women from invisibility is still evident when trying to learn more about the lives of labouring women. The documents that there are take much sifting through to elicit any information.'<sup>65</sup> There is no alternative to this process and, tedious as it might be, it has to be done if we are to find

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<sup>65</sup>Sharpe, *Adapting to Capitalism*, pp. 152-153.

ways to answer questions about women's labour force participation over time, produce wage information or, equally, determine their roles in business.

The main categories for manuscript source drawn upon for this investigation fall into four broad categories. These are farm and estate records; probate records; documents concerned with the administration of the law; and finally, poor law records. In addition use has been made of diaries and correspondence. Probate records are useful for examining the relationship between property ownership and business, and with trades directories can be used to pinpoint those different economic interests that formed the backbone of 'middling' women's wealth and methods of earning income.

A primary concern that arises from the use of evidence garnered from criminal and poor law records is that these sources are likely to 'under and misrepresent' the lives and activities of the majority of women.<sup>66</sup> One set of records that avoids this criticism are those of farms and estates. These documents can be a very rich source, providing in particular material on the labour of women in agriculture and domestic service. They also shed light on the relationships between these sectors of work. Understandably, estate records were heavily utilised in the course of this research. A discussion of the merits of each type of source and the purposes to which they have been put is given at the beginning of each chapter.

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<sup>66</sup>Sharpe, *Women's Work: The English Experience*, p. 6.

## 1.0 THE EAST MIDLANDS: POPULATION AND ECONOMY

Before embarking on a discussion of women's work in a regional economy, the background against which women's fortunes and misfortunes were played out in this important period of English history needs to be considered. The degree to which structural change to the economy was a gradual inexorable movement interrupted by periods of consolidation, or a fundamental shift in economic development visibly enshrined in the years of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, probably depended as much on geographical location as anything else.<sup>1</sup> Beckett and Heath have argued that although the East Midlands region had a well developed economy prior to 1780, it did not exhibit the characteristics, at least to any degree, normally associated with the industrial revolution period, for example, a factory system, significant technological innovation and enhanced capital investment, until 1840 and after. They further suggest that 'the railway...did far more for the East Midlands than canal or road improvements and provided a communications network which made full-scale industrialisation possible.'<sup>2</sup> Whilst this may have been so, in the age before the railway, albeit in a well developed economy, there still existed pre-industrial patterns of existence. Trade cycles and numerous wars in Europe and America could have a

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<sup>1</sup>Maxine Berg and Pat Hudson have taken issue with the current dominant gradualist perspective of economic and social development arguing that the industrial revolution was much more than an event which historians have chosen to measure within a macro accounting framework. 'Rehabilitating the Industrial Revolution', *Economic History Review*, 45:1 (1992), pp. 24-50. P. Hudson, (ed.), *Regions and Industries: A Perspective on the Industrial Revolution in Britain*, (Cambridge, 1989).

<sup>2</sup>J.V. Beckett and J.E. Heath, 'When Was the Industrial Revolution in the East Midlands?', *Midland History*, 13 (1988), pp. 74-94. The East Midlands counties here refer to Leicestershire, Nottinghamshire, Derbyshire and Lincolnshire.



damaging impact on the population in one form or another.<sup>3</sup> The seasonality of prices and work regimes was punctuated by failed harvests and in each decade from the 1740s until the early years of the nineteenth century there was a period of hunger.<sup>4</sup>

The East Midlands region was closely interconnected with others. The movement of people and goods moving backwards and forwards across county boundaries characterised central England, and brought a wider contact between the east and west. The circulation of domestic and farm servants throughout the Midlands counties, for example, or the transit of pauper apprentices from Leicestershire to work as ribbon weavers in Warwickshire, with a flow of children in the opposite direction indentured as framework knitters, illustrates a less than insular economic and social outlook.<sup>5</sup> Trading links particularly were central to the promotion of inter-regionalism. Indeed, by the early eighteenth century patterns of inter-regional trade between the counties of the east and west Midlands and the northern counties of Lancashire, Cheshire and Yorkshire were apparent. Furthermore, a national trade connecting the Midlands with distant markets, especially London, was firmly established, thus overlaying the much earlier pattern of intra-regional trade.<sup>6</sup> A growing regional specialisation centred on textile manufacture and the mining of minerals. In addition, much of the agrarian economy of the region was taken up by animal husbandry, with farmers chiefly engaged in stock-rearing and dairying. As women's work in mining is excluded from this study a discussion of this sector is omitted. The hosiery trade and

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<sup>3</sup>T.S. Ashton, *Economic Fluctuations 1700-1800*, (Oxford, 1959).

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 36.

<sup>5</sup>Apprenticeship Records, L.R.O; Settlement Examinations, L.R.O. and N.A.O.

agrarian specialisation will be considered below. First, we begin with the demographic environment of the period. In a term stretching over one-hundred and thirty years there were many changes to the region that impacted on the labour of women and on their opportunities for business. This chapter will sketch in broad terms the demographic, and spatial, and economic environment of the East Midlands in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries tracing developments that were to have a profound impact on the lives of many.

### **1.1 Population Growth, Migration and Urbanisation**

An examination of the levels of population, the sex ratios that prevailed and migratory movements is important in explanations of the changes that affected the economies of women. Demographic trends, moreover, are at the heart of theories of labour release and labour absorption. Chambers, for example, argued that the growth of a manufacturing workforce was created by the expansion in population rather than a release of labour from agriculture.<sup>7</sup> The extent to which women and men were detached from the land or drawn into manufacturing either as a consequence of structural change or population growth is therefore of great significance. However, in respect of female labour, developments in the service sector were as important as those in agriculture and manufacturing. The population of England as a whole increased rapidly from the second half of the eighteenth century. In the very late seventeenth

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<sup>6</sup>B. Travers, 'Trading Patterns in the East Midlands 1660-1800', *Midland History* 15, (1990), p. 68.

<sup>7</sup>J.D. Chambers, 'Enclosure and Labour Supply in the Industrial Revolution', *Economic History Review*, 5 (1953), pp. 319-43.

century the number of people in England and Wales had numbered about 5.2 million, but by 1801 the population had grown to over 8.6 million.<sup>8</sup> The East Midlands counties of Leicestershire, Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire covered an area of some 2,671 square miles, which is 5.3 percent of England's land surface.<sup>9</sup> (See Map 1.1). The size of the population of the East Midlands at the end of the period is, with the benefit of the census, far easier to establish than at the beginning. At the end of the eighteenth century the counties also held around five percent of the population, and in 1801 recorded 431,573 persons. In 1831, the population had risen to 660,100. Information relating to Warwickshire is also included in Table 1.1 since this county is adjacent to Leicestershire and is important in understanding the wider regional labour market.

As well as population differences between counties, the divisions between town and country became more important throughout the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, as the movement from the countryside saw a burgeoning of urban areas. Enclosure of open fields about small towns enabled land owners to sell prime building sites. Numerous parishes adjacent to the borough of Leicester, for example, were enclosed during the early period of Parliamentary enclosure.<sup>10</sup> The population of the town grew from 12,784 in 1785 to 38,994 in 1831. Nottingham in 1779 had 17,584 inhabitants which had risen to 50,220 in 1831. The population of Derby in 1791 stood at 8,563 and by 1831 the town had increased its population to 23,627. This was small,

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<sup>8</sup>E.A. Wrigley and R.S. Schofield, *The Population History of England 1541-1871, A Reconstruction*, (Cambridge, 1993), p. 175.

<sup>9</sup>Maps, 1831 Census Abstracts.

however, compared to the population of Birmingham which had reached an estimated 23,000 by 1750 and by 1831 a staggering 143,986.<sup>11</sup> The vigorous industrial communities of the west Midlands specialising in the production of small metal wares account for the high population density shown in Table 1.1.<sup>12</sup> By the end of the eighteenth century the proportion of people living in English towns of 2,500 inhabitants or more is estimated at 30 percent.<sup>13</sup> In Leicestershire, the area with the heaviest concentration of framework knitting communities in 1811, 27 percent of the county were urban dwellers on this criterion, although a further 17 percent lived in settlements of above 1,000 inhabitants, but below 2,500.<sup>14</sup> This is indicative of the flood of people to proto-industrial communities. It is also probable that the highest density of population in Leicestershire could already be found in the industrial west, rather than the pastoral east of the county by 1760.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>H.G. Hunt, 'The Chronology of Parliamentary Enclosure in Leicestershire', *Economic History Review*, 10:2, (1957), p. 267.

<sup>11</sup>P. Corfield, *The Impact of English Towns 1700-1800*, (Oxford, 1982), p. 129 and p. 183; 1831 Census Abstracts.

<sup>12</sup>M.B. Rowlands, 'Continuity and Change in an Industrialising Society: the Case of the West Midlands Industries', in Hudson (ed.), *Regions and Industries*, p. 119; W.H.B. Court, *The Rise of the Midland Industries 1600-1830*, (London, 1953), p. 21.

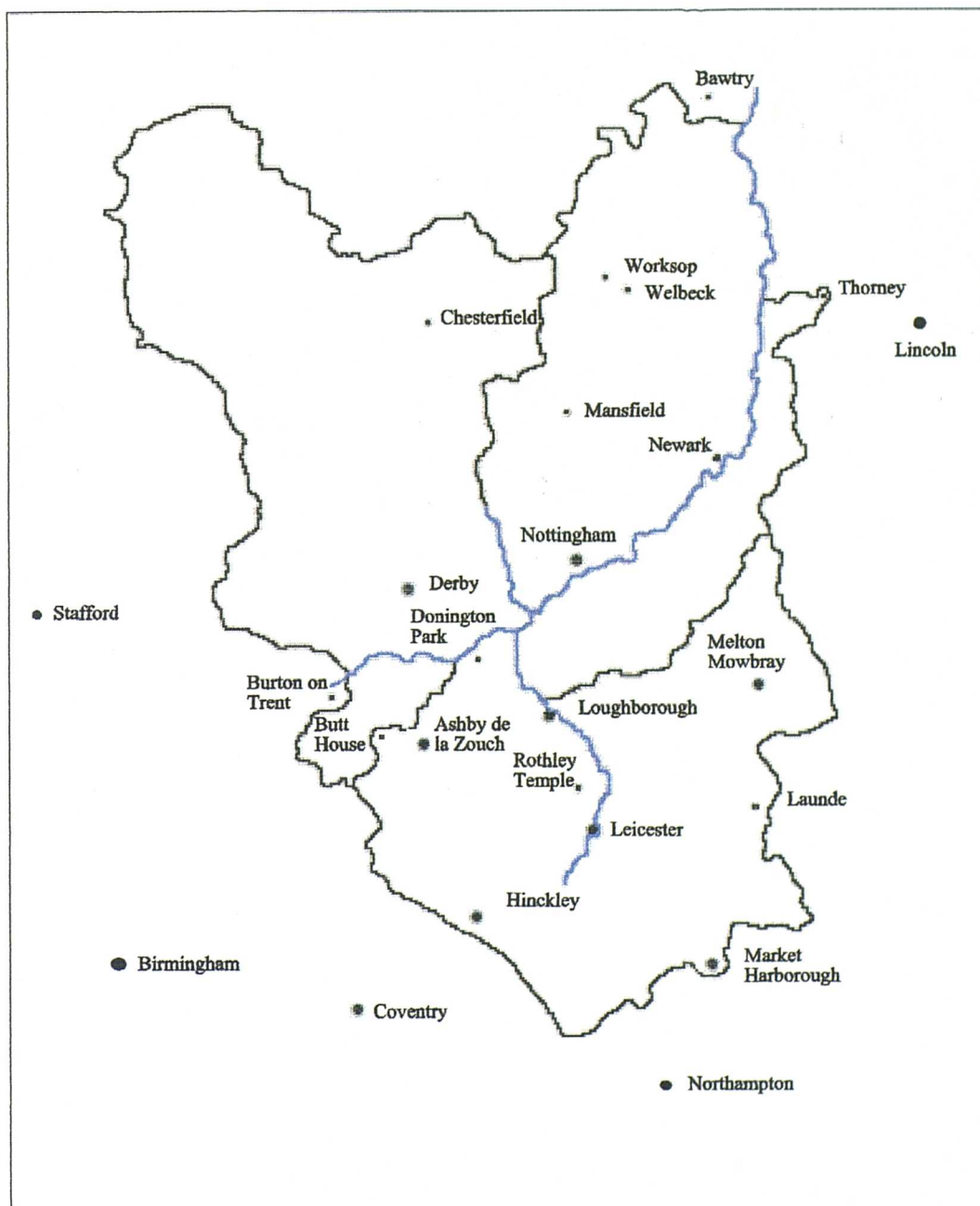
<sup>13</sup>Corfield, *The Impact of English Towns 1700-1800*, p. 2.

<sup>14</sup>Census Abstracts, 1811. A population of 1,000 inhabitants is thought to be the lowest appropriate mark of an urban area at this time. P. Clark, 'Small Towns in England 1550-1850: National and Regional Population Trends', in P. Clark (ed.), *Small Towns in Early Modern Europe*, (Cambridge, 1995), p. 102.

<sup>15</sup>J. Thirsk, 'Agrarian History 1540-1950', W.G. Hoskins and R. McKinley, (ed.), *The Victoria County History of Leicestershire*, II, (Oxford, 1954), p. 237.

## MAP 1.1 - THE EAST MIDLANDS

### Places Mentioned in the Text



**TABLE 1.1 - THE POPULATION OF SELECTED COUNTIES IN THE  
MIDLANDS IN 1801 AND 1831†**

County	Year	Pop'n N.	%Increase	Pop'n Per Sq. Mile
Leicestershire	1801	130,081	51.4	244 (806)
	1831	197,003		
Nottinghamshire	1801	140,350	60.5	269 (837)
	1831	225,327		
Derbyshire	1801	161,142	47.5	231 (1028)
	1831	237,770		
Warwickshire	1801	208,190	61.7	375 (897)
	1831	336,610		
All	1801	639,763	55.8	279 (3568)
	1831	996,710		

Source: Census Abstracts 1831.

†Although the Census of 1801 is not without problems when relating it to later enumerations, it does seem that these figures can be compared directly with those of 1831. See discussion in Wrigley and Schofield, *The Population History of England*, pp. 122-126.

The smaller towns of the period witnessed considerable population growth coupled with greater economic and social sophistication. The towns of the Midlands (especially those located in the west) were particularly dynamic in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, the urban environment became important for ostentatious displays of wealth, and it fell to women of the upper classes to 'exhibit to the world', and to take advantage of the growing leisure activities and shopping facilities that were available in provincial towns.<sup>17</sup> Royle has argued that Leicestershire had seen the 'functional divergence' of its market towns by the mid-nineteenth century. Hinckley and Loughborough, for example, were primary centres for the hosiery industry while Melton Mowbray's economy became inextricably tied to fox hunting. The growth of the town of Coalville was assisted by the exploitation of a concealed

<sup>16</sup>Clark, 'Small Towns in England', p. 100, p. 108.

<sup>17</sup>J. Ellis, 'On the Town: Women in Augustan England', *History Today*, (December, 1995), pp. 22-23.

coal field in the 1820s. However, Market Harborough and Lutterworth remained little changed in character from earlier times.<sup>18</sup> Not all towns, however, were to have a dominant industrial specialism. In Nottinghamshire the economies of Newark and Mansfield, for example, developed 'two or three large scale industries which complemented rather than superseded the towns' former economic interests.' These were textiles, malting and brewing; and at Mansfield the mining of coal and the quarrying of stone were of importance, as was the production of flour at Newark.<sup>19</sup> The diversification and/or consolidation in the economic base of towns in the eighteenth century had implications for the position of women in the labour market and in business, although certain sectors of employment and enterprise were often readily accessible in any urban area.

Mobility and migration were central to the lives of most working women and movement characterised much of their employment or attempts to look for it. Women had formed a large proportion of migrants to towns in the second half of the seventeenth century in search of work opportunities. As a result, imbalances in sex ratios were created in rural areas as well as urban.<sup>20</sup> An enumeration of the inhabitants of Northampton taken in 1746, for example, showed that in the parishes of All Saints and St Giles female heads of households numbered 846 compared to 707 headed by

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<sup>18</sup>S. Royle, 'Functional Divergence: Urban Development in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Leicestershire,' Leicester University Geography Department, Occasional Paper, 3 (1981), pp. 1-23.

<sup>19</sup>C. Smith, 'Image and Reality: Two Nottinghamshire Market Towns in Late Georgian England', *Midland History*, 17 (1992), p. 63.

<sup>20</sup>P. Clark and D. Souden, (eds.), *Migration and Society, in Early Modern England*, (London, 1987), p. 23.

males.<sup>21</sup> In Leicester in the 1690s there were 87.1 males to every 100 females, and in 1821 and 1831 the ratios for the town were 93.5 and 95.0 respectively.<sup>22</sup> On the basis of Rickman's burial data, counties in the South and East Midlands between 1700 and 1750 seem to have had a generally even distribution in sex ratios, thus indicating the absence of sex specific migration. After this date, however, the tendency was towards higher numbers of women in the population. In Nottinghamshire, for example, this trend is observable in the 1760s and in Leicestershire in the 1770s and 1780s. However, this differentiation remained less acute than in the southern areas of the country where there was a movement towards a greater surplus of males in the south-east, and females in the south-west of England.<sup>23</sup> Also of significance were imbalances by age group. In the census of 1821 the breakdown between men and women in terms of age is given. In Leicestershire as a whole there were 95.0 males to 100 females, exactly the same as that for Leicester, but for the 20 to 30 year age group the ratio was 89.5, and for Leicester 81.5.<sup>24</sup> The apparent contrast in this age group needs to be treated with caution since census figures for 20 to 30 year old females were inflated due to women misrepresenting their ages.<sup>25</sup> Nonetheless, the disparity in the numbers of men and women in the Midlands is important as these spatial differences are illustrative of pull and push factors as a consequence of the creation or loss of work

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<sup>21</sup>F.M. Eden, *The State of the Poor*, III (1797), p. 534.

<sup>22</sup>Clark and Souden, *Migration and Society*, p. 35; Census Abstract 1821, Census Abstract 1831.

<sup>23</sup>D. Souden, 'East, West Home's Best? Regional Patterns in Migration in Early Modern England', in Clark and Souden, (eds.), *Migration and Society*.

<sup>24</sup>Census Abstract 1821, p. 170.

<sup>25</sup>Wrigley and Schofield, *The Population History of England*, p. 109.



opportunities. But it is also possible that women migrated for other reasons, for example, to improve their marriage prospects by saving for a dowry.<sup>26</sup>

Removals documented in the Leicestershire Quarter Sessions records for the period 1745 to 1830 give a rough indication of the movement of labour through and round the region and within the county. Most of the cases brought before the sessions involved the removal of families or individuals from within the Midlands. Over 40 percent of the 2,313 cases recorded concerned the removal of families and above a quarter were related to women either alone or accompanied by offspring.<sup>27</sup> A breakdown and distribution of these cases is included in Chapter 8.0, Table 8.1 and Figure 8.1. In all periods the majority of people were returned to parishes located a relatively short distance away and within the county of Leicestershire itself. However, a considerable number of removals were from other locations in the Midlands, i.e. Nottinghamshire, Derbyshire, Warwickshire and Northamptonshire, and give the impression of a very distinct regional labour market. As mentioned earlier, this is supported by settlement examinations for Leicestershire and Nottinghamshire. The periods 1761 to 1780, and 1781 to 1800, showed the highest proportions of people removed to these counties, coinciding with agrarian change and industrial development. Unfortunately, these records do not give any insight into the corresponding movement there may have been back to Leicestershire from elsewhere. A partial analysis has been carried out of the removal orders for the early nineteenth century, documented in the

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<sup>26</sup>B. Hill, 'Rural-Urban Migration of Women and their Employment in Towns', *Rural History*, 5:2, (1994), p. 190.

<sup>27</sup>QS3/1/5-12, L.R.O.

Nottinghamshire Quarter Sessions. These demonstrate a correlation between levels of removals and framework knitting centres and mining areas. Furthermore, removals were noticeably between parishes set at short distances from each other.<sup>28</sup> The data from the Leicestershire Quarter Sessions records mirrors these findings. They also confirm those of Carpenter whose research on the migration patterns in the Guthlaxton Hundred of Leicestershire, using removal orders and settlement certificates from parish collections, illustrated that most migration was inter-village, rather than rural-urban. Her data also showed a significant movement of parents and children from agricultural to industrial parishes.<sup>29</sup> Whether as part of families or on their own, women formed the bulk of those removed in the period. Given their generally weak economic position, they had greatest potential for coming into contact with the poor law authorities. However, not all women got the respect and care they needed, and regional specialisation and population growth forced them to adopt other economic strategies, many of them in the informal economy, see Chapter 8.0.

No discussion of population growth and movement can omit the consequences of the introduction of proto-industry to the region. Levine has argued that proto-industry reduced the mobility of the poor by providing employment and attracting other economic migrants. He also asserts that the growth of proto-industrial employment opportunities at Shepshed led to an earlier age at first marriage.<sup>30</sup> It is unlikely that

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<sup>28</sup>H. Collins, 'The Pattern of Poor Law Removals in Nottinghamshire in the Early Nineteenth Century', *Local Population Studies*, 27 (1981), pp. 71-78. Unfortunately, Collins did not discuss those removals that were external to Nottinghamshire.

<sup>29</sup>R. Carpenter, 'Peasants and Stockingers: Socio-Economic Change in Guthlaxton Hundred, Leicestershire, 1700-1851', Unpublished PhD Thesis, (Leicester University, 1993), p. 135.

<sup>30</sup>D. Levine, *Family Formation in an Age of Nascent Capitalism*, (London, 1977).

such a simple relationship existed between the introduction of framework knitting and a fall in the age at which people married. Other research suggests more complex demographic regimes sensitive to other factors besides the availability of this type of employment. In the framework knitting village of Countesthorpe, for example, a reduction in the age at marriage, it is argued, had been a response to pressures on land leading to the diversification of the population into hand knitting, 'and so had obviated the need to delay marriage.' This had occurred before framework knitting had become widespread.<sup>31</sup> Moreover, the study of proto-industrialisation in England, and elsewhere suggests that the characteristics of development and effects on communities defy easy generalisation.<sup>32</sup>

The influence of proto-industry or for that matter work of any kind on a woman's decision to marry is extremely difficult to determine. Bridget Hill has pointed out the paradoxical arguments. On the one hand, increased earnings or maximum earning potential of males and females promoted early marriage, but on the other, the necessity of a woman's labour and the money she could make to support a family unit during economic adversity are also given as a reason for entering the married state.<sup>33</sup> Nevertheless, the age at first marriage for females in England as a whole appears to have declined rapidly from 1750.<sup>34</sup> As we shall see, for women in the East Midlands the origins of this decline are clearly demonstrable, and were rooted in a labour surplus

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<sup>31</sup> Carpenter, 'Peasants and Stockingers', p. 11.

<sup>32</sup> P. Hudson, 'Proto-industrialisation in England', in S. Ogilvie and M. Cerman, (eds.), *European Proto-industrialisation*, (Cambridge, 1996), pp. 49-66.

<sup>33</sup> B. Hill, 'The Marriage Age of Women and the Demographers', *History Workshop Journal*, 29 (1989), pp. 138-140.

<sup>34</sup> Wrigley and Schofield, *The Population History of England*, p. 255.

and limited earnings. This brief survey of the demography of the region demonstrates the dynamics of growth and movement in which women of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries were immersed. We now turn to developments in the economy of the region.

## **1.2 Agriculture: Enclosure and the Conversion to Pasture**

This section will begin by outlining the characteristics of the agricultural economy of the East Midlands before moving on to discuss the social consequences of agrarian change. In the early eighteenth century, a well known social commentator wrote, from Dunstable onwards

You enter deep clays, which are surprisingly soft, that is perfectly frightful to travellers, and it has been the wonder of foreigners, how, considering the great numbers of carriages which are continually passing with heavy loads, those ways have been made practicable...From Hockley to Northampton, thence to Harborough, and Leicester, and thence to the bank of the Trent, these terrible clays continue.<sup>35</sup>

Daniel Defoe's description of the Midlands serves as a view of the breadth of the claylands, but this image of a land intractable to the traveller and the transporter of goods is somewhat out of focus. The comment, however, concerning the usage of the roads by carriages loaded with merchandise supports the current view of a much

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<sup>35</sup>Quoted in W.G. Hoskins, *Midland England: A Survey of the Country Between the Chilterns and the Trent*, (London, 1949), p. 3.

traversed and solid road system.<sup>36</sup> Trends in agricultural commodities as well as soil types were to dictate the agricultural specialisms of the region. In Leicestershire, pastoral farmers in the seventeenth century recognising the advantages of serving new markets had adapted their husbandry from wool production to meet the demands of urban areas, particularly London.<sup>37</sup> With land unsuited to intensive grain production, and aided by the buoyancy in the markets for dairy produce and meat, from the second half of the seventeenth century, farmers in the Midlands had by the end of the eighteenth century become specialists in livestock farming on land much of it now permanent pasture.<sup>38</sup> Defoe remarked of Leicestershire that,

The whole county seems to be taken up in country business...particularly in breeding and feeding cattle; the largest sheep and horses in England are found here, and hence it comes to pass too, that they are in consequence a vast magazine of wool for the rest of the nation.<sup>39</sup>

The story of the conversion of arable to pasture is bound up with that of enclosure of the land. Midlands counties had a long history of enclosure prior to the eighteenth century. Indeed, pre-parliamentary enclosure in other counties of the Midlands likewise accounted for significant land areas of Northamptonshire and Rutland, and

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<sup>36</sup>It is now realised that eighteenth century roads were not as incapable of being traversed as once thought. Turnpikes are now considered an innovative response to the ever growing volume of traffic. J. Chartres, 'Road Transport and Economic Growth in the Eighteenth Century', A. Digby, C. Feinstein and D. Jenkins (eds.), *New Directions in Economic and Social History*, II, (London, 1992), pp. 51-63.

<sup>37</sup>Thirsk, 'Agrarian History', p. 220.

<sup>38</sup>J. Broad, 'Alternate Husbandry and Permanent Pasture in the Midlands, 1650-1800', *Agricultural History Review*, 28:2 (1980), pp. 77-89.

<sup>39</sup>Quoted in Thirsk, 'Agrarian History', pp. 220-1.

smaller areas of Nottinghamshire and east and south Derbyshire.<sup>40</sup> In the Parliamentary enclosure era those counties of the East Midlands that were to have over 40 percent of their land area enclosed were Leicestershire, Rutland and Northamptonshire. Nottinghamshire and Lincolnshire were also affected with 36.4 and 38.7 percent respectively.<sup>41</sup>

Of all the counties of England, it is the enclosure history of Leicestershire about which most is known, but interestingly the county along with five others was untypical in its chronology compared with the rest of the country. Whereas most enclosure in England occurred in the seventeenth century, the eighteenth century 'was the great age of enclosure in Leicestershire.' Research suggests that prior to 1700 over 50 percent of the county already stood enclosed, with over 33 percent of this occurring between the years 1600 and 1699. Only a further 6.7 percent of land underwent enclosure in the sixty years following, while the increase in parliamentary enclosure accounted for another 35.5 percent between 1760 and 1799.<sup>42</sup> Hunt has argued that while parliamentary enclosure in Leicestershire can be seen as partly driven by an increase in population, the prices of foodstuffs, favourable rates of interest, and soil type, also of importance in the timing was the distribution of land ownership, and the example set by adjacent parishes. No single reason dominated, but instead a combination of different factors, some more relevant than others depending on the particular case. The most sustained period of enclosure by Act came in the twenty years between 1759 to 1779,

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<sup>40</sup>R. Butlin, 'Agrarian Changes in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries: The Experiences of the East Midlands', *Historian*, 6 (1985), p. 12.

when no less than two-thirds of the Acts were passed. From the late 1750s food prices had begun to creep upwards and enclosure was likely to give a better return on capital outlay than it had done previously. Moreover, the cattle disease that had been rife in the countryside had almost disappeared by 1757.<sup>43</sup> In Nottinghamshire, the areas most affected by enclosure before 1700 were those in the 'pasture district', i.e. three main sections of the county which covered the townships on the rivers Trent and Soar, the area known as the Wolds and the Vale of Belvoir in the southern Nottinghamshire. Similarly, as with Leicestershire, the trend towards conversion to pasture for sheep farming and cattle grazing was a phenomenon well underway in parts of Nottinghamshire before 1700.<sup>44</sup> Ownership was also of primary importance here with land generally held by a single proprietor being the first enclosed.<sup>45</sup> Whatever the method of enclosing the land, however, the conversion to pasture following enclosure remained the distinguishing feature of the movement in the Midlands.<sup>46</sup>

The extent of changes in land use following enclosure radically altered the face of Leicestershire and Nottinghamshire and the Returns made to the Board of Agriculture in 1800 indicate that land under cultivation for the growth of such crops as wheat, barley and pulse declined significantly. This looks to have been especially the case in Leicestershire where nearly 3,800 acres of open arable fields that once grew

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<sup>41</sup>J.R. Wordie, 'The Chronology of English Enclosure 1500-1914', *Economic History Review*, 36:4 (1983), p. 501.

<sup>42</sup>*Ibid.* pp. 498-501.

<sup>43</sup>Hunt, 'The Chronology of Parliamentary Enclosure in Leicestershire', pp. 265-272.

<sup>44</sup>J.D. Chambers, *Nottinghamshire in the Eighteenth Century*, (London, 1932, repr. 1966), pp. 144-150.

<sup>45</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 168.

<sup>46</sup>Butlin, 'Agrarian Changes in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries', p. 12.

wheat disappeared. In Nottinghamshire this loss was less severe, and the decline of wheat accounted for fewer than 1,000 acres. Both counties lost their share of pulse but increased their crops of oats following enclosure. Barley growing decreased in Leicestershire but increased in Nottinghamshire. However, stock-rearing and dairying most often followed enclosure.<sup>47</sup> Such was the decline of land under arable cultivation in the south and east of Leicestershire that it was not uncommon to find some grazing farms without any whatsoever.<sup>48</sup>

Although an over-emphasis on the strict division between the agricultural districts of Leicestershire and Nottinghamshire based on soil type is unwise, there were areas within these geographical locations that can be said to have had dominant agricultural systems. The area of heavy clay soil in the east and south-east Leicestershire provided the best land for fattening cattle. The lighter soils that were characteristic of the country to the west of the Soar meant that pasture farming had not become quite so overwhelming as it had in the east of the county. Districts above and below the Charnwood forest area were roughly equally divided between pasture and arable in the first part of the nineteenth century. Grazing farms were unusual in the west, and dairy farms with herds of twenty or thirty cows were common. Dairy farms and sheep pastures were frequently found on the eastern uplands and in the north of Leicestershire and, so too, in the Vale of Belvoir.<sup>49</sup> The Vale of Belvoir stretched its way into south-east Nottinghamshire and the grassland located there made 'specially

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<sup>47</sup>K.D.M. Snell, *Annals of the Labouring Poor: Social Change and Agrarian England 1660-1900*, (Cambridge, 1985), pp. 160-163.

<sup>48</sup>Thirsk, 'Agrarian History', p. 233.



good 'fattening' pasture'. As mentioned earlier, land about the townships situated on the contours of the Soar and south bank of the Trent was suited to dairying and cattle rearing. Likewise in the Wolds farmers were mainly concerned with pastoral farming. Two districts of marl clay constituted the chief arable growing areas in Nottinghamshire, the first positioned in the area known as the Trent Hills towards the south-east, and the second running from the edge of Nottingham up through the centre of the county to the eastern border with Lincolnshire.<sup>50</sup>

The enclosure of waste land also took place in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Thirsk has argued that the shortage of waste in Leicestershire gave rise to a fuel problem as early as the first half of the sixteenth century. With the exception of those parishes on the periphery of Charnwood Forest, (an area of 12,000 acres), few had access to waste land during the period. People were dependent on coal brought over long distances, the poor, alternatively, made do with dried cow dung, furze and haulms. The forest itself accounted for approximately 3.5 percent of Leicestershire's land area, and perhaps there existed a further 1.5 percent<sup>51</sup> of waste land. At the beginning of the nineteenth century the two main areas of waste became enclosed; Ashby Wolds, some 3,000 acres of land, in 1800, and Charnwood Forest in 1808. (See Map 4.1, Chapter 4.0). By 1844 little common, or waste land, existed anywhere in Leicestershire.<sup>52</sup> This is in stark contrast to Nottinghamshire where as much as 68,000 acres of waste remained open by 1794, and a further 50,000 acres of

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<sup>49</sup>Ibid., pp. 221-232.

<sup>50</sup>Chambers, *Nottinghamshire in the Eighteenth Century*, p. 144 and pp.152-3.

<sup>51</sup>Thirsk, 'Agrarian History', pp. 211-2.

common field and common land in 1800. Nonetheless, some 30,000 acres of forest, moor and fen had been enclosed and brought into cultivation, and probably as much as a further 9,000 acres for plantation. Much of the waste left was of little value. Two districts of waste, for example, that lay in the north of the county were unproductive, apparently only capable of sustaining rabbit warrens.<sup>53</sup> The contribution to the economies of the poor from the commons and waste lands, become an increasingly important issue in the later eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries as population pressure and structural change affected particular groups in society. However, it is clear that in Leicestershire access to waste had ceased to be a reality for many working people before the eighteenth century.

The social consequences of the move to agrarian capitalism have been debated by historians. Historians have, for example, focused on the effects of enclosure on the small landowner and the antecedents of a surplus rural labour force.<sup>54</sup> Chambers in a key article argued that enclosure created new jobs such as hedging, draining and ditching and a greater regularity of work for men. As noted earlier in this chapter, he also contended that an increase in population promoted by improved yields produced the labour for an industrial workforce.<sup>55</sup> Such optimism about the effects of enclosure have been challenged in recent years. Snell, using the date of applications for poor relief as a proxy for unemployment seasonality, asserts that from a relatively regular

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<sup>52</sup>Hunt, 'The Chronology of Parliamentary Enclosure in Leicestershire', pp. 270-1; Wordie, 'The Chronology of English Enclosure', p. 496.

<sup>53</sup>Chambers, *Nottinghamshire in the Eighteenth Century*, p. 149, p. 161, p. 165.

<sup>54</sup>For a discussion in the developments in the historiography of the effects of enclosure in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries see M. Turner, *Enclosures in Britain 1750-1850*, (London, 1984).

<sup>55</sup>Chambers, 'Enclosure and Labour Supply', pp. 319-343.

distribution across the year in the demand for labour, after enclosure the opposite was true. The need for labour appears to have become more acutely seasonal, particularly in the grain growing regions of the south and east of England. In predominantly pastoral areas such as in Leicestershire and Nottinghamshire the seasonal demand for labour remained the least changed following enclosure.<sup>56</sup> This interpretation is in direct opposition to the findings of Allen, who argues that labour requirements were most reduced in those regions where enclosure meant a conversion to pasture. Moreover, enclosure and the amalgamation of farms conspired together to produce a diminution in employment, rather than enclosure alone.<sup>57</sup> In 1774 Edward Dawson steward of the Earl of Huntingdon felt sufficiently moved to write to the Countess about the deleterious effects of large farms thus:

Your Ladyship's picture of the miserable state of the poor weavers in Ireland carries a strong likeness of the present situation of most of the manufacturers of this country particularly those of the hosiery business in Leicestershire. The very low state of that manufacture together with the high price of every necessary of life make it almost impossible for one half of the workmen to get bread for their families and the wretched policy that prevails in every part of England of suffering land to be engrossed in such large farms hath driven so many in every kind of manufacture that was our trade as flourishing as it was some years ago the hands I am persuaded would be too many for it. Your Ladyship hath undoubtedly heard and read much in favour of large farms but certainly, upon one of five hundred a year, if five families can be maintained decently and comfortably with each of them employing as near as many labourers and servants, which is a fact that cannot be doubted, it is better both in a political and moral sense than that one over grown farmer should occupy the whole though he may employ half a score of servants and labourers under him. I am far from thinking madam this is the only evil which occasions the present distress of every order of our manufactures or the very high price of provisions but surely it contributes very much both the one and the other.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>56</sup>Snell, *Annals of the Labouring Poor*, p. 158.

<sup>57</sup>Allen, *Enclosure and the Yeoman*, pp. 215-216.

<sup>58</sup>HAF/97/2165, H.L.

In Nottinghamshire from the late eighteenth century farms on the western side of the county became transformed into holdings of 300 to 500 acres. However, in the south-eastern clay region they were much smaller ranging from 70 to 150 acres. Dairying, for the most part, took place on small farms, but those mainly concerned with the grazing of sheep and cattle were extensive.<sup>59</sup> In Leicestershire, Edward Dawson's view of the existence of 500 acre farms is an accurate one. For the hundred years following 1760, Thirsk notes that the agricultural improvers in the county conducted their experiments on farms of 200 to 500 acres rather than on those of 100 to 200 acres.<sup>60</sup>

While Snell and Allen differ about whether it was arable areas, or those where a conversion to pasture and the amalgamation of farms had occurred following enclosure, that sustained the greatest losses in agricultural labour, they are united in their agreement that women were most affected by changes in agriculture. Snell argues that the conversion of land to pasture in the Midlands allowed the female farm servant to maintain her importance. Thus

In Nottinghamshire and Leicestershire, where the least changes occurred after enclosure for men, there was also much continuity in the pattern of female seasonal unemployment. The peak in April/May indicates the system of spring hiring fairs affecting women here, as one would find in some areas further west, or in Wales itself. And while men shared the May insecurity of employment prior to enclosure, after enclosure this seems mainly to have persisted for women. It may be that the hiring fair (at least in May) came to deal more strictly with women, who may have survived longer as farm-servants, given these counties' agricultural specialisations...Taking a spring hiring fair as one

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<sup>59</sup>W. Page (ed.), *The Victoria County History of Nottinghamshire*, II, (London, 1906), p. 137.

<sup>60</sup>Thirsk, 'Agrarian History', p. 231.

manifestation of pastoral agriculture, the evidence for Nottinghamshire and Leicestershire suggests a growing specialisation of women in pastoral farming.<sup>61</sup>

Allen also argues that women's employment prospects were enhanced by a move to pasture, but sees this advantage lost with increased farm size, which promoted a reduction in the female agricultural workforce overall. Allen estimates that in the South Midlands between 1700 and the early 1800s, the employment of women dropped by 29 percent, and that of men by some 24 percent.<sup>62</sup> A further shedding of labour from agriculture in the eighteenth century and population growth had considerable implications for the employment prospects of women and men. But whatever the origins of the industrial workforce in the East Midlands, proto-industry, argues Allen, only partially absorbed this surplus,<sup>63</sup> and it is to this sector of employment we now turn.

### 1.3 The Hosiery Trade: Origins and Development

The origins and development of the hosiery trade have been well documented by historians of the last and present centuries.<sup>64</sup> Hosiery manufacture, a trade that grew into an industry serving distant markets, had its foundations in the hand knitting of

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<sup>61</sup> Snell, *Annals of the Labouring Poor*, p. 158.

<sup>62</sup> R.C. Allen, *Enclosure and the Yeoman*, (Oxford, 1982), pp. 216-217, p. 235.

<sup>63</sup> Allen, *Enclosure and the Yeoman*, Chapter 12.

<sup>64</sup> G. Henson, *History of the Framework Knitters*, (1831 repr. 1970); W. Felkin, *History of the Machine-Wrought Hosiery and Lace Manufacturers*, (1867 repr. 1967); F.A. Wells, *The British Hosiery and Knitwear Industry: Its History and Organisation*, (Newton Abbot, 1972); S.D. Chapman, 'The Genesis of the British Hosiery Industry, 1600-1750', *Textile History*, 3 (1972), pp. 7-49, and 'Enterprise and Innovation in the British Hosiery Industry, 1750-1850', *Textile History*, 5 (1974), pp.

stockings. This early trade appears to have been established in Nottingham by 1519 and Leicester by the mid-sixteenth century.<sup>65</sup> Hand knitting had arisen in the region in response to the subsistence needs of the poor in open parishes largely as a result of insufficient agricultural employment particularly in the months between September and February. Also instrumental in this development were changes in the supply and quality of wool and the ease with which hand knitting integrated into the family structure. By the end of the sixteenth century hand knitted goods from the region were supplying the London market. According to a petition of 1673/4 hand knitting employed about 2,000 women, men and children in Leicester and its surrounding villages.<sup>66</sup> Knitters took their stockings to hosiers in the town, where they would collect supplies of materials. From the mid-seventeenth century hosiers began to combine both manufacture and marketing.<sup>67</sup>

There are a number of reasons why hand knitting continued. Chapman argued, for example, that hand knitting remained competitive with framework knitting because the emphasis of the early industry was on fashioned goods which were not given to standardised production. Moreover, fashions changed quickly making it easier for hand knitters to adjust to changes in the market than could operatives of a complex knitting machine. Labour for hand knitting was extremely cheap and flexible, and capital investment in textiles industries in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, limited.

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14-37; D. Wykes, 'The Origins and Development of the Leicestershire Hosiery trade', *Textile History*, 23:1 (1992), pp. 23-54.

<sup>65</sup>Chapman, 'The Genesis of the British Hosiery Industry', p. 8; Wykes, 'The Origins and Development' p. 23. Chapman, however, dates hand knitting in Leicester to 1597.

<sup>66</sup>Ibid., p. 10 and 19; Ibid., pp. 23-24 and p. 27.

<sup>67</sup>Wykes, 'The Origins and Development', p. 25.

Further, although the knitting frame could theoretically manufacture six pairs of worsted stockings in a week, knitters tended to work only three or four days. Greater productivity was exhibited by hand knitters who, if accomplished at their craft, could produce a pair in a day, and do it while tending to other business such as watching over animals.<sup>68</sup> Wykes argues that in Leicestershire hand knitting remained the most important branch of the hosiery industry until the end of the seventeenth century,<sup>69</sup> and in Nottinghamshire framework knitting only seems to have over taken the hand sector by 1750.<sup>70</sup> Framework knitting, however, became the dominant method of production in the eighteenth century.

The invention of the stocking frame by William Lee of Calverton, Nottinghamshire, in the late sixteenth century, whether as a consequence of an unrequited love, as a result of boredom with his role as a country clergyman, or to raise the productivity and thereby the earnings of his less wealthy parishioners, laid the groundwork for the modern industry.<sup>71</sup> Whatever the motivating factor behind Lee's efforts to perfect the frame, his achievement though unrewarded in his lifetime, had a dramatic effect on the economy of the region. Lee's machine enabled the mechanical knitting of a fashioned stocking, which would ultimately lead to the expansion of the industry. Framework knitting in the seventeenth century spread slowly for the reasons outlined above, and because in the early stages of the machines' development the product manufactured on the stocking frame was inferior to the hand knitted article.

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<sup>68</sup>Chapman, 'The Genesis of the British Hosiery Industry', pp. 9-10.

<sup>69</sup>Wykes, 'The Origins and Development', p. 23.

<sup>70</sup>Chapman, 'The Genesis of the British Hosiery Industry', p. 10.

The first frames were expensive to build and maintain and needed a skilled operator.<sup>72</sup> Two important changes saw the industry take off in the East Midlands: firstly, technical advances towards the end of the seventeenth century meant that the knitting machine became less expensive to produce and not so difficult to operate, and secondly, the relocation of the industry in the first part of the eighteenth century from London to the East Midlands.

The removal of the hosiery industry to the region resulted from a number of factors. Historians have cited, for example, the pre-existence of a considerable manufacture of hand knitted goods in the region, a plentiful supply of cheap labour, proximity of raw materials, low house rents and food prices.<sup>73</sup> In the seventeenth century following the return from France of William Lee's brother to London and then eventually to Nottingham, there had been two main centres of the hosiery trade. In the formative years of the industry, the London branch was the most important.<sup>74</sup> However, the provincial trade's struggle with the Worshipful Company of Framework Knitters was a characteristic feature of the early years of the eighteenth century. The attempts of the Company to regulate the trade in the provinces met with only limited success in Nottingham, and in Leicester none at all. The collapse of the Company in the 1730s saw the movement of the industry to the Midlands gathering momentum and market forces in respect to capital and labour were unleashed fully. Hosiers began to indenture large numbers of apprentices and from 1730 to the middle of the century,

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<sup>71</sup>Henson, *History of the Framework Knitters*, pp. 38-39; Wells, *The British Hosiery and Knitwear Industry*, p. 18; Chapman, 'The Genesis of the British Hosiery Industry', p. 8.

<sup>72</sup>Wells, *The British Hosiery and Knitwear Industry*, p.18 and p. 23.



800 frames were taken from London to Nottingham where they were sold cheaply.<sup>75</sup>

Chapman tells us that ‘the second half of the eighteenth century was clearly a period of great prosperity and rapid expansion in the east midlands hosiery industry. Capital and enterprise flowed into the industry and a buoyant London and overseas market offered the promise of continued growth’.<sup>76</sup>

**TABLE 1.2 - GROWTH IN THE NUMBER OF KNITTING FRAMES IN THE EAST MIDLANDS**

	Frames in England	Frames in Midlands	Frames in Leicestershire	Frames in Nottinghamshire
Year	N.	N.	N.	N.
1669	650	150	50	100
1714	7,700	3,650	600*	400*
1753	13,200	10,000	1,000*	1,500*
1812	27,165	25,163†	13,183	7,280
1832	30,500	28,500†	11,200	10,500

**Source:** *PP*, Report of the Commissioners into the Condition of the Framework Knitters, 1845, p. 15-16.

\* Leicester and Nottingham only.

†Leicestershire, Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire.

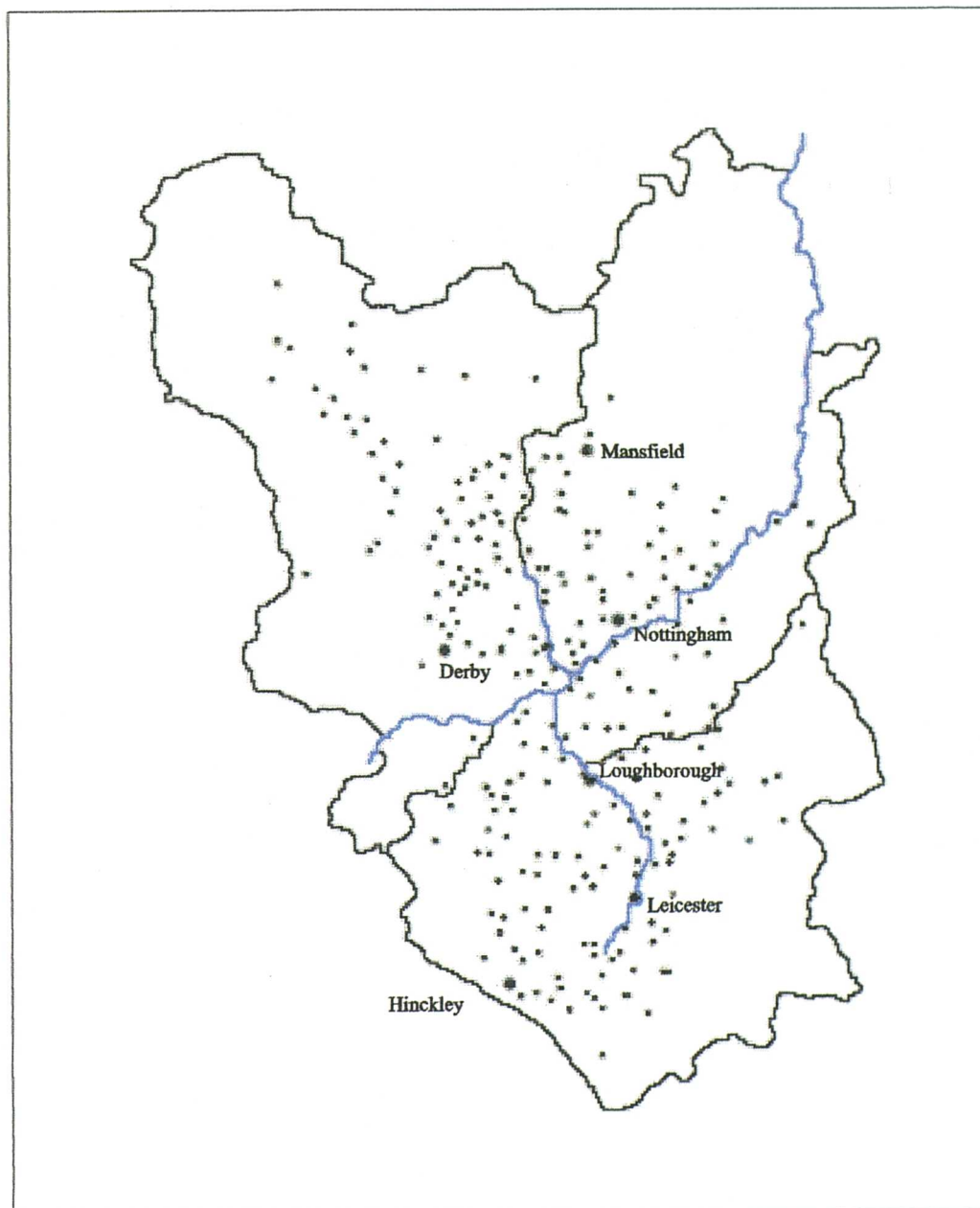
<sup>73</sup>Ibid., pp. 47-59; Chapman, ‘The Genesis of the British Hosiery Industry’, p. 11.

<sup>74</sup>Wells, *The British Hosiery and Knitwear Industry*, pp. 22-23.

<sup>75</sup>Chapman, ‘The Genesis of the British Hosiery Industry’, pp.14-16.

<sup>76</sup>Chapman, ‘Enterprise and Innovation’, p. 20.

MAP 1.2 - THE DISTRIBUTION OF THE HOSIERY INDUSTRY  
IN THE EAST MIDLANDS COUNTIES, 1812



Source: Adapted from S.D. Chapman, 'The Genesis of the British Hosiery Industry', *Textile History*, 3 (1972), p. 15.

In Table 1.2 the expansion of framework knitting in the East Midlands in terms of the number of frames is demonstrated. By the middle of the eighteenth century it can be seen that the East Midlands held over 90 percent of the national total of frames. What is also significant is that by the beginning of the nineteenth century Leicestershire had the greatest share of the hosiery business. Map 1.2 shows the distribution of the hosiery industry across the region in 1812. The industry appears in the middle of the region, round the county towns and putting out centres. Again, Leicestershire's dominance at this date is shown with most of the trade situated in the west of the county. It is unclear precisely why Leicestershire should have eventually become the primary focus of the industry. Nottingham's close relationship with the London trade saw it develop along similar lines, in that silk goods were produced until cotton stockings became popular and technical advances overcame the shortage and quality of spun cotton. With several silk-throwing mills appearing at Derby in 1717, this ensured that silk became the staple of Derbyshire.<sup>77</sup> Leicestershire, on the other hand, had always specialised in the cheaper woollens and worsteds. These specialisations appear to have always been present and not the result of a divergence as historians have argued.<sup>78</sup> However, these divisions were not rigid, and cotton hose for example, rather than worsted, was produced at Hinckley in Leicestershire.<sup>79</sup> Leicester, by 1750, produced 1,000 dozen pairs of worsted hose each week for the domestic market.<sup>80</sup> Annually this approximated to about 50,000 that were manufactured on the stocking frame or hand knit. Estimates suggest that by the end of the seventeenth century, the

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<sup>77</sup>Wells, *The British Hosiery and Knitwear Industry*, pp. 49-57.

<sup>78</sup>Wykes, 'The Origins and Development', p. 29.

<sup>79</sup>J. Nichols, *The History and Antiquities of Hinckley*, (1782), p. 23.

size of the export market had reached 100,000 dozen pairs of worsted and woollen stockings, with most of these going to central and southern Europe each year. This had risen to 200,000 dozen pairs by the middle of the eighteenth, although the balance between those stockings which were hand knit and those made on the knitting machine is unknown.<sup>81</sup>

The growth of the industry in terms of the number of frames is easier to gauge than the numbers of workers in employment. On a visit to the region early in the eighteenth century Defoe remarked on the importance of the hosiery industry as an employer of labour in Leicestershire. He was to comment, 'A considerable Manufacture carry'd on here and in several Market Towns round Weaving of Stockings by Frames; and one would scarce think it possible so small an Article of Trade could employ such Multitudes of People as it does; for the whole County seems to be employ'd in it: as also Nottingham and Derby.'<sup>82</sup> In Leicestershire in the early years of the eighteenth century the number of hands including weavers and spinners was reckoned to be about 13,000.<sup>83</sup> In Nottinghamshire by the mid-eighteenth century the number of frames in the county had reached 3,000 with 1,200 of these in Nottingham. Together it is estimated that over 4,000 people were employed as framework knitters, sizers, seamers, winders, woolcombers, sinker-makers, setters-up and needlemakers.<sup>84</sup> Nichols considered that 43 percent of the population of

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<sup>80</sup>Wells, *The British Hosiery and Knitwear Industry*, p. 48.

<sup>81</sup>Chapman, 'The Genesis of the British Hosiery Industry', p. 12.

<sup>82</sup>Quoted in Wykes, 'The Origins and Development', p. 35.

<sup>83</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 34.

<sup>84</sup>Wells, *The British Hosiery and Knitwear Industry*, p. 48.

Leicestershire in 1795 were dependent on some branch of the industry.<sup>85</sup> By 1866 Felkin estimated that the industry occupied about 100,000 women and children in the various production processes. However, Wells considered that the industry would have employed twice as many women as men.<sup>86</sup> The expansion of the hosiery trade gave work to large numbers of people in the region and became a substantial financial accumulator for business people. The industry experienced difficulties from time to time in the eighteenth century and problems of underemployment and low wages, until finally reversing into stagnation and decline in the first part of the nineteenth century.

The previous discussion of demographic change, urbanisation and developments in the economy of the East Midlands region can leave us in no doubt that the years between 1700 and 1830 were dramatic. The overwhelming impression is one of a rapidly changing environment. Although the move towards regional specialisation had its origins in an earlier period, the acceleration of these processes in the eighteenth century impacted heavily on the lives of men and women, rich and poor. The effects of these changes would be felt at different times and in different ways. For some women, the period offered work opportunities and for other individuals new forms of financial gain and advancement, while for others still, life would be tempered by increased hardship and a need to survive.

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<sup>85</sup>J. Nichols, *The History and Antiquities of Leicestershire*, I:II (1811), p. 620.

<sup>86</sup>Wells, *The British Hosiery and Knitwear Industry*, p. 156.

## **PART I**

### **‘THOU DOST BESET ME BEHIND AND BEFORE’?: CASE STUDIES OF WOMEN, BUSINESS AND TRADE**

## 2.0 Business, Property and Inheritance: The Processes of Wealth Creation and Income Generation In Leicestershire Towns<sup>1</sup>

This chapter will begin first by exploring patterns of inheritance as they relate to widows in a small industrial town in the East Midlands. It will be argued that the provision men made for wives, family members and other kin frequently obviated any idea that their widows would become economically inactive. Secondly, the examination of wills left by widows and spinsters from two very different towns suggests that industrial development created opportunities for women's property holding and wealth creation.

Before discussing the findings of this urban study in detail, it first must be placed in context. As we have seen, trends with their origins in previous centuries saw the economic landscape of the East Midlands transformed as pastoral farming came to dominate agriculture, and framework knitting the industrial sector.<sup>2</sup> Nowhere were these changes felt more than in the county of Leicestershire. Towns were deeply interconnected with the processes of economic change. Urban areas functioned as important centres of exchange and distribution, promoters of industrial development, providers of specialist services and sources of capital investment.<sup>3</sup> However, it is only in relatively recent times that the economic, social and cultural role of small towns, (i.e.

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<sup>1</sup> A version of this chapter has been published in J. Stobart and A. Owens, (eds.), *Urban Fortunes: Property and Inheritance in the Town, 1700-1900*, forthcoming.

<sup>2</sup> J. Thirsk, 'Agrarian History 1540-1950', W.G. Hoskins and R.M. McKinley (eds.), *The Victoria County History of Leicestershire*, II (Oxford, 1954); J. Broad, 'Alternate Husbandry and Permanent Pasture in the Midlands, 1650-1800', *Agricultural History Review*, 28:2 (1980), pp.77-89; W. Felkin, *History of the Machine-Wrought Hosiery and Lace Manufacturers*, (1867 reprinted, 1967); F.W. Wells, *The British Hosiery and Knitwear Industry*, (Newton Abbot, 1972), S.D. Chapman, 'The Genesis of the British Hosiery Industry, 1600-1750', *Textile History*, 3 (1972), pp. 7-49 and 'Enterprise and Innovation in the British Hosiery Industry, 1750-1850', *Textile History*, 5 (1974), pp. 14-37.

those of a few thousand people), has claimed the attention of historians.<sup>4</sup> The economic diversity within and between towns in the region is important, since this had the propensity to determine types of property, affect levels of wealth and inform patterns of inheritance.

The two towns selected for this study are Ashby de la Zouch and Hinckley in Leicestershire (see Map 1.1). Towards the end of our period in 1831 Hinckley's population had risen to nearly 6,500, whilst Ashby's stood at 4,400.<sup>5</sup> Ashby located in north-west Leicestershire had a typical market town economy. It stood thirteen miles from Leicester, nine miles from Burton on Trent and some fourteen from Derby. At the end of the eighteenth century, it was said to be inhabited by 'shopkeepers, innkeepers, manufacturers of woollen and cotton stockings and hats, farmers and labourers'.<sup>6</sup> Ashby retained an air of gentility, and apparently a reputation on which local antiquarian John Nichols could remark in 1811, 'the town is the Earl of Huntingdon's...The inhabitants especially the better sort, are generous and sociable beyond those of most towns...This place has long been famed for convivial musical meetings'.<sup>7</sup> In keeping with the prevailing ambience of the town, the discovery of a spring in a coal pit in the nearby village of Moira led to the building of the Ivanhoe Baths in the early 1820s. In this period hotels were erected to accommodate visitors and a theatre was built in 1828.<sup>8</sup> By 1830, Ashby stood in sharp contrast to the industrial centres of the region, and as one

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<sup>3</sup>P. Corfield, *The Impact of Towns 1700-1800*, (Oxford, 1982); P. Clark and P. Corfield (eds.), *Industry and Urbanisation in Eighteenth Century England*, Centre for Urban History, University of Leicester, Working Paper 6, (Leicester, 1994).

<sup>4</sup> P. Clark, 'Small Towns in England 1550-1850: National and Regional Population Trends', P. Clark, (ed.), *Small Towns in Early Modern Europe*, (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 90-92.

<sup>5</sup> 1831 Census Abstract.

<sup>6</sup> K. Hillier, *The Book of Ashby de la Zouch*, (Buckingham, 1984), p. 93.

<sup>7</sup> J. Nichols, *The History and Antiquities of Leicester*, III ii, (1811), pp. 612-3.

<sup>8</sup> W. Scott, *The Story of Ashby de la Zouch*, (London, 1907), p. 231 and p. 245.



commentator described the people of the town are 'chiefly engaged in general trade, and as there is but one small ribbon manufactory in the town, it is consequently free from the noise and the unwholesome effluvia of a populous manufacturing place.'<sup>9</sup>

Hinckley, on the other hand, could probably be described in these latter terms. This town, situated in the extreme west of the county close to Warwickshire, separated only by Watling street. The nearest major urban areas to the town are Coventry and Leicester which were both approximately twelve miles distant. The town soon became an organising centre for the hosiery industry. The stocking frame made its first appearance at Hinckley in 1640 and by 1778 an estimate suggests there were some 764 frames in operation.<sup>10</sup> Although worsted was the main type of hosiery produced in Leicestershire, at Hinckley and the nearby villages of Barwell and Earl Shilton manufacturers were engaged in the production of fully fashioned cotton hose.<sup>11</sup> In 1782 Nichols wrote, 'the introduction of stocking-manufactory has considerably augmented the traffick of the town, which is supposed to contain 750 houses and 4,500 inhabitants.'<sup>12</sup> A Mr Robinson, described the change that had come over the town as well as 'other improved places'. He believed that, 'as learning advances, ridiculous credulity retires. Superstitious tales and traditinary legends lose credit daily, and wear away very fast. The inhabitants in general are an industrious set of people, and of much more polite and gentle address than formerly.'<sup>13</sup> This description indicates a break with the past, and is couched in progressive and modernist terms. However, such confidence did not last,

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<sup>9</sup> Quoted in S. Royle, 'Functional Divergence: Urban Development in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Leicestershire', Leicester University Geography Department Occasional Paper, 3 (1981), p. 10.

<sup>10</sup> Nichols, *The History and Antiquities of Leicester*, IV, ii, (1811), p. 679.

<sup>11</sup> W.G. Hoskins, and R. McKinley, (eds.), *The Victoria History of the County of Leicester*, (Oxford, 1954), p. 5.

<sup>12</sup> J. Nichols, *The History and Antiquities of Hinckley*, (1782), p. 22.

for the heavy reliance on the cotton branch of the hosiery industry proved a mixed blessing. While offering employment to its citizens, the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were punctuated with riots and other incidents as the industry suffered several setbacks. By the 1840s poverty was rife and nearly 40 percent of the town's population received poor relief.<sup>14</sup> On the basis of these descriptions we might consider that Ashby offered a pleasanter, more 'genteel' environment for the widow or spinster, but when it came to money-making and property holding, it was Hinckley that seems to have offered the greatest opportunity.

## **2.1 Wills: A Source for Examining Women's Economic Activity**

Wills only document some of those occupations and interests in which men were involved, and record less information still when it comes to those of women. Moreover, the evidence also tends to be weighted towards financial activity rather than business concerns. However, systems of inheritance, especially those aimed at wives, are particularly revealing. The lack of probate inventories in this period places heavy reliance on the information in wills, but wills are advantageous in that they describe a person's real property.<sup>15</sup> In order to explore the themes outlined above, three sets of wills have been selected for these towns. Two data-sets, one from either place includes information from all the wills left by women proved in the Archdeaconry Court of Leicester between 1750 and 1835. Of the several hundred wills that remain extant

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<sup>13</sup> Nichols, *History and Antiquities of Hinckley*, p. 64.

<sup>14</sup>H. J. Francis, *A History of Hinckley*, (Hinckley, 1930), p. 64; S. Royle, "'The Spiritual Destitution is Excessive - the Poverty Overwhelming': Hinckley in the Mid-Nineteenth Century', *Transactions of the Leicestershire Archaeological and Historical Society*, (1978-9), pp. 51-60.

<sup>15</sup>See M. Spufford, 'The Limitations of the Probate Inventory', in J. Chartres and D. Hey (eds.), *English Rural Society, 1500-1800*, (Cambridge, 1990).

approximately one fifth are for women.<sup>16</sup> The third data-set has been constructed by taking a random sample of 88 men's wills, i.e. some 26.0 percent of all those for Hinckley covering the same years and proved in the Archdeaconry Court.<sup>17</sup> Although this does mean that many of the elite members of these towns, especially those dying after 1800, were more likely to have their wills proved at the Prerogative Court of Canterbury, and are thus excluded.<sup>18</sup> Additionally, the concentration on small towns inevitably means that insufficient data is generated in some cases with which to determine trends over time or between categories. Identifying the boundaries of the middle class in any urban population is problematic, and it is equivocal how far women could by their own enterprise and property holding claim middling status. Nevertheless, the concentration on wills proved locally means that this study will focus, for the most part, on the least wealthy women, those who we might expect would need to engage in trade, and who would have been very mindful of the welfare systems of inheritance.

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<sup>16</sup> Berg notes that while women in various parts of the country left around 10% of all wills, women in Birmingham and Sheffield left 22.8% and 18.1% respectively. 'Women's Property', p. 237. These proportions are also commensurate with those found by Alastair Owens. However, David Green's study of London shows that the proportion of wills left by women was much higher. D. Green, 'Merry Widows and Sentimental Spinsters: Independent Women, Wealth and Wills in Nineteenth Century London' and A. Owens, 'The Duty and Paramount Obligation of Every Considerate and Rational Man': Property, Will-making and Estate Disposal in an Industrial Town, 1800-1857' in J. Stobart and A. Owens, (eds.), *Urban Fortunes: Property and Inheritance in the Town, 1700-1900*, (forthcoming).

<sup>17</sup> The data acquired from men's wills forms part of that generated by the Leverhulme Funded Project, 'Urban and Industrial Change in the Midlands 1700-1840', co-ordinated by the Centre for Urban History, University of Leicester.

<sup>18</sup> As there is no comprehensive index of wills proved in the Prerogative Court of Canterbury existing for the county for the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries identifying those for a specific place would be extremely difficult. D. Wykes, 'Sources for a Study of Leicester Trade and Industry, 1660-1835', *Business Archives*, 45 (1979), p. 11.

## 2.2 Married Women and Inheritance

Patterns of inheritance as they relate to married women set out in men's wills for the town of Hinckley are presented in Table 2.1. Frequently, but certainly not in all cases, widows suffered an economic decline, as estates became dissipated by the payment of debts, legacies, testamentary expenses and funeral costs. The severity of this decline depended on a number of factors. As we might expect, very few women were the sole beneficiary of their husband's will. Just 9 widows were bequeathed all their spouse's real and personal estate.

The necessity of providing for dependants immediately brought into play a different set of inheritance strategies. Widows in these circumstances were less likely to inherit real estate outright, but would 'enjoy' a life interest. However, this is not inconsistent with earlier periods.<sup>19</sup> The proportion of married women 29.4 percent, inheriting real estate 'for their own use' contrasts with the widows and spinsters from Hinckley and Ashby, bequeathing real estate, see Table 2.3. This proportion is significant, highlighting the differences between the towns, and between groups of women. It further illustrates that women could, and did in sufficient numbers, own this form of property. Only in a minority of cases did men liquidate all their real estate in order to provide an income for their wives and younger children. As the holding of real property took the form of a few cottages or tenements, rents already provided a steady source of income for families. This type of inheritance ensured continuity. Nonetheless, it cannot be ignored that over a half of widows would have inherited their deceased

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<sup>19</sup> A.L. Erickson, *Women and Property in Early Modern England*, (London, 1997), p. 216.

husband's real estate for the term of their natural life only. The importance of real estate in the process of wealth creation and as a method of generating income for women will be discussed further below.

**TABLE 2.1 - THE CHARACTERISTICS OF INHERITANCE AS THEY RELATE TO WIDOWS, HINCKLEY 1750-1835**

	N.	%
Men who predeceased their wives:	60	68.2
Men who made their wives the sole beneficiary of their will:	9	15.0
Number of married men bequeathing real estate:	51	85.0
Widows inheriting all or part of their husband's real estate:	15	29.4
Widows with a life interest only in their husband's real estate:	26	51.0
Other: real estate liquidated, none to bequeath, etc.	10	19.6
Personal estate:		
Widows inheriting most or part of their husband's personal estate:	34	56.7
Widows with a life interest only in husband's personal estate:	15	25.0
Widows maintained by annuities, or at son's discretion etc.	11	18.3
Widows inheriting businesses (specifically stated):	12	20.7
Proviso of remaining 'my widow': (58)	17	29.3
Men with their widows recorded as executors:	34	56.6
Men with their widows recorded as trustees:	5	8.3

**Source:** Men's wills proved in the Archdeaconry Court of Leicester, L.R.O.

Given the wish to want to preserve real property for heirs, and provide a life income for widows, the finding that 56.7 percent of them inherited personal estate is not

surprising. It was, of course, common for married women to inherit household goods.<sup>20</sup> However, in all but 7 of the 34 cases, widows had the residue of their husbands' personal estates, once debts and legacies had been paid. Although, again, if we exclude those widows who were bequeathed household goods alone with gifts of cash, held a life interest in their deceased partner's estate or were supported by an annuity, then less than 50 percent received a legacy of personal estate for their own use. The patterns of inheritance as they relate to married women in Hinckley in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries can be said to support both the orthodox and revisionist perspectives on women's property holding. While it can be argued that inheritance strategies in families marginalised married women in terms a substantial group held property that they could personally control and dispose of. But whatever form inheritance strategies took, many wives became economically disadvantaged at the onset of widowhood. It is worth considering the contents of men's wills in more detail because it cannot always be assumed that a rentier income was sufficient to maintain women or that they became less inclined to participate in their husbands' businesses or trades. Indeed, some inheritance strategies aimed to keep women in business.

### **2.2.1 Widows and Business**

Widows inheriting unconditionally or controlling personal estate during their life time is indicative of many widows continuing to engage in enterprise. In Hinckley, of those testators that left specific instructions that their spouses were to 'carry on' in

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<sup>20</sup> In Stockport in the early nineteenth, for example, household goods were the item wives were most often bequeathed see Owens, 'The Duty and Paramount Obligation'.

business, or where widows could be located in trades directories, 20 percent of widows continued to do so. In Stockport in the early nineteenth century wives inheriting businesses appears to have been rare, with less than 9 percent documented.<sup>21</sup> In some of those cases where widows were entrusted with the management of businesses they were maintaining them for a son to take over when they reached the age of twenty-one. Mary Wale, for example, was bequeathed the grocery shop and real estate but only until her son George came of age.<sup>22</sup> William Ward, a blacksmith, left his personal estate 'unto to my wife and son to enable them to carry on in business'.<sup>23</sup> Similarly, the will of John Lockton recorded in 1824 that 'I do hereby direct that my wife shall carry on and follow the trade of framesmith and shall leave the stock tools and implements of trade for her own use and benefit until my son shall attain the age of twenty-one years and when he shall have attained that age...the said trade shall be carried on for their mutual benefit and advantage'.<sup>24</sup> However, unlike the first of these examples, the wives of William Ward and John Lockton have their role affirmed even after their sons have reached the age of twenty-one. Sometimes widows were given the choice of whether to liquidate estate or not, and this again shows that in some instances wives rather than sons were given primary responsibility for the family business. William Moore made a bequest to his wife Elizabeth of 'all my household goods, furniture, brewing vessels, stock in trade, money debts, which may be due to me at the time of my decease and all my other personal estate and effects'. She was to make 'a true and perfect inventory thereof' and after paying his just debts and testamentary expenses, 'either carry on my businesses of a butcher and victualler with the assistance of my son William Moore or sell and convert

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<sup>21</sup> Owens, 'Will-making, Inheritance and Middle Class Welfare Provision'.

<sup>22</sup> Will of John Wale, Broker, 1811/234, L.R.O.

<sup>23</sup> Will of William Ward, Blacksmith, 1762/267, L.R.O.

<sup>24</sup> Will of John Lockton, Framesmith, 1824/129, L.R.O.

into money my said personal estate and effects as may be advantageous'. In either case, Elizabeth was to maintain herself and bring up the younger children.<sup>25</sup>

The business acumen demonstrated by women undoubtedly differed as widely as it did among men. But husbands would not have instructed their wives to carry on in trade, and support their children, and hold together an important part of the estate, if these women had not first been active within the business or capable of preserving it. Although, numerous women provided the linkage that connected the businesses and trades of one generation of males with another, and their part can certainly be viewed as 'carers' or 'custodians' of property, there was often a more public and responsible role for widows. Moreover, as women had the capability of looking after the business in her husband's absence,<sup>26</sup> we must question how far her new role may have departed from her previous one. How then did this affect a woman's social status? A strict interpretation of the evidence in wills can be misleading. As we have seen, a significant number of Hinckley widows inherited most of their spouse's personal estate, and we should not discount the possibility that they kept businesses intact, even when it is not expressly stated that they should do so. Given women's strong association with the food and drink trades particularly,<sup>27</sup> we would expect this. Indeed, in 1821 William Boyer, victualler, bequeathed half of his household goods, stock in trade, casks, book and other debts,

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<sup>25</sup> Will of William Moore, Butcher and Victualler, 1827/134, L.R.O.

<sup>26</sup> I. Pinchbeck, *Women Workers and the Industrial Revolution 1750-1850*, (London, 1930 repr. 1969), p. 282.

<sup>27</sup> M. Prior, 'Women and the Urban Economy of Oxford 1500-1800', in M. Prior (ed.), *Women in English Society 1500-1800*, (London, 1985), p. 106; S. Wright, 'Holding Up Half the Sky: Women and their Occupations in Eighteenth Century Ludlow', *Midland History*, 14 (1989), p. 63.



sums of money to Ann Pulsford 'who lives with me'.<sup>28</sup> The following year Ann could be found running the 'Board' in the borough of Hinckley.<sup>29</sup>

We cannot infer from wills that the bequests made to wives in the form of rents from real estate and annuities were sufficient to support a widow or that they were their only sources of wealth and income. Daniel Greatrex, a carrier, made provision for his widow in this way. However, the following clause written in his will does not suggest that he expected her to, or necessarily believed, she would live off this income alone. Thus, 'if Elizabeth Greatrex my wife through affliction or infirmity shall stand in need of more support than the profits from the rents and interest will allow they [the trustees] shall take a sufficiency from the principal for her comfortable support during the term of her natural life.'<sup>30</sup> It was also recognised that some women might actually want to keep businesses going on their own account. Robert Goode, a pawnbroker and hosier, recognised that his wife Lydia may survive him and had entered in his will that if she 'chooses to carry on the pawnbroking business or any other business' she must pay his six children 'their equal portions of one half of the residue of my personal estate over and above the legacies of £60 each'. Robert Goode's personal estate was stated to amount to less than £3,500: a considerable sum of money.<sup>31</sup> However, these legacies would have depleted the estate and Lydia would have to work hard to recoup this wealth. No stranger to enterprise, this had been Lydia's second marriage and upon the death of her

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<sup>28</sup> Will of William Boyer, Victualler, 1821/19, L.R.O.

<sup>29</sup> Pigot's *Commercial Directory*, 1822/3. The term 'who lives with me' may imply that Ann was a servant or a female relative. However, usually, if women fell into these categories they were identified as such. In this, and in another woman's case, Ann inherited this legacy from a man who had no children and no close relatives, although the other half of the estate provided legacies for distant kin. Whatever, the nature of the relationship, she obviously performed the duties within the business normally associated with a wife.

<sup>30</sup> Will of Daniel Greatrex, Carrier, 1820/68, L.R.O.

<sup>31</sup> Will of Robert Goode, Pawnbroker and Hosier, 1835/86, L.R.O.

first husband George Ball, had been charged with continuing 'my business as a framesmith in my now accustomed manner'.<sup>32</sup>

The use of trustees grew over the period; between 1750 and 1799, the mean number of trustees across the sample of male wills as a whole was 1.0. From 1800 to 1835, however, the mean increases to 1.26. The men who acted as trustees were often friends and business associates of the deceased. But as Maxine Berg noted, apart from trusts being a device used by the less wealthy members of the middle class, many of the trusts set up by all male testators in the Hinckley sample focused on the care of children and, for example, ensuring the payment of legacies, as well as for the maintenance of wives. In only 8 cases (8.3 percent) did women act as trustees and just 5 of these were wives. This is in marked contrast to the 54 percent of women who were executors. Davidoff and Hall have argued that since women were increasingly viewed as dependent, they had to rely on males to operate trusts or act as financial agents.<sup>33</sup> But just how much control trustees had over women when it came to using 'their discretion to the best of their judgement and ability' to carry on a business for the benefit of a testator's wife and children is unclear. In 1835 John Holt instructed his friends to... 'permit my wife and son to carry on my business as a Grocer so long as they can agree to manage the same with profit and advantage and not otherwise and not without the consent and approbation of my trustees'.<sup>34</sup> Edward Dawson specified these terms in his will.<sup>35</sup> However, his wife Mary is listed as a 'bookseller and stationer' in the town's entry in

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<sup>32</sup> Will of George Ball, Framesmith, 1822/6, L.R.O.

<sup>33</sup> Davidoff and Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class 1780-1850*, (London, 1987), pp. 277-278.

<sup>34</sup> Will of John Holt, Grocer, 1835/105, L.R.O.

<sup>35</sup> Will of Elliott Dawson, Hosier and Stationer, 1809/65, L.R.O.

Pigot's directory for 1822/3, and had obviously continued in this branch of her husband's business over a decade after his death.<sup>36</sup>

In an age when mortality ensured that women would probably have more than one husband, some men were obviously greatly concerned that their property did not find its way into some other family, especially if that might be at the expense of their children. In 29.3 percent of cases men ordered that their widow's interest in the estate would not continue if they chose to remarry.<sup>37</sup> John Orton's will included the clause if 'my wife shall happen to marry again and take a second husband' she would receive twenty shillings and 'she shall not have the benefit or advantage' of his personal and real estate.<sup>38</sup> The use of this clause appears to have increased in Hinckley over the period, and only three wills include it before 1780. While, again, this practice can be seen as helping 'to "lock" wives into widowhood', it could promote economic activity as well as prevent it. The provision made for a widow could well be insufficient on its own, but its importance might not be worth losing by entering another marriage. As we shall see, widows may well have chosen to rely on their own efforts and keep their independence.

A widow's life interest in estate was not just about preserving family property for children. In 1784 Thomas Parson's a hosier, bequeathed his wife four messuages which after her death would pass to his two daughters as tenants in common. However, if these girls died prematurely before reaching the age of twenty-one years or left no issue,

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<sup>36</sup> Barker has shown that women continued to engage in this trade well into the nineteenth century. H. Barker, 'Women, Work and the Industrial Revolution c 1700-1840', in H. Barker and E. Chalus, (eds.), *Gender in Eighteenth Century England*, (London, 1997).

<sup>37</sup> This is higher than the 20 percent found by Alastair Owen for Stockport. 'Will-Making, Inheritance and Middle Class Welfare Provision'.

<sup>38</sup> Will of John Orton, Carpenter and Joiner, 1754/160, L.R.O.

the beneficiaries of Thomas' real estate would be his cousin, Robert Baines, for the term of his natural life and then pass to Robert's children.<sup>39</sup> In a number of cases real and personal estate went to relatives, other than children, on the death of the widow. Thomas Smith, for example, left all his household goods, all his stock plus his horses, gigs and carriages with money, credits and all other personal estate in trust to his two 'friends'. He directed they should 'suffer and permit my wife Ann' to have the 'use and enjoyment' for her natural life or until she remarried. At this point, Thomas' estate would be liquidated and shared amongst his brother and sister. Ann's efforts would not go entirely unrewarded, however, as she was to receive 'a third to dispose of as she wishes',<sup>40</sup> although it might well have aggrieved Ann that it was her work that would maintain her in-laws' legacies. This discussion has shown that inheritance practices did as much to encourage the economic participation of wives, as they did to exclude it. Historians need to give much more emphasis to those determinants embodied in the processes of property transmission that pushed women into the economy.

### **2.3 Types of Business**

Historians have pointed to women's participation in business as being determined by a close proximity to the home, particular female knowledge and skills, a limited capital outlay, or trades which did not require specialist craft skills. While these factors are important, they do not always account for women's economic participation or lack of it. In Table 2.2 the businesses and occupations documented in trades directories between

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<sup>39</sup> Will of Thomas Parsons, Hosier, 1784/144, L.R.O.

<sup>40</sup> Will of Thomas Smith, Victualler, 1831/159, L.R.O.

**Table 2.2 - Women Listed By Type Of Business In Hinckley And Ashby De La Zouch,  
Leicestershire, 1791-1835**

	Hinckley		Ashby de la Zouch	
	N.	%	N.	%
<b>Clothing:</b>				
Dyer	1		-	
Dyer and Trimmer	1		-	
Hosiery	-		2	
Mercer	-		1	
Milliner	2		3	
Milliner and Dressmaker	19		12	
Straw Hat Maker	4		7	
Umbrella and Parasol Maker	-		2	
Tailor	1		-	
	<b>28</b>	<b>42.4</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>42.9</b>
<b>Food, Drink, Accommodation &amp; Sundries:</b>				
Baker and Flour Dealer	1		-	
Corn and Flour Dealer	1		1	
Confectioner	1		-	
Confectioner and Pastry Cook	1		-	
Confectioner, Pastry Cook and Poulterer	1		-	
Grocer	1		-	
Grocer and Tea Dealer	3		2	
Malster	1		-	
Wine and Spirit Merchant	-		1	
Public Houses and Innholders	6		5	
Lodging House Keepers	-		2	
Lodging and Boarding House Keepers	-		3	
Shopkeeper	1		1	
Shopkeeper and Dealer in Sundries	1		1	
Shopkeeper, Dealer in Sundries and Groceries	1		2	
	<b>19</b>	<b>28.8</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>30.1</b>
<b>Education:</b>				
Boarding and Day Schools	7		10	
	<b>7</b>	<b>10.6</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>15.9</b>
<b>Other:</b>				
Basket Maker	2		-	
Blacksmith	1		-	
Bookseller and Stationer	1		-	
Bookseller, Stationer and Printer	1		-	
Stationer	-		1	
Cooper	1		-	
Farmer	-		1	
Framesmiths	2		-	
Pawnbroker	2		-	
Post Mistress	1		1	
Saddler	-		1	
Tallow Chandler	-		1	
Toy Shop	1		-	
Turner in Wood	-		1	
Watch and Clock Maker	-		1	
	<b>12</b>	<b>18.2</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>11.1</b>
	<b>*66</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>*63</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Source:** Trade Directories - *Holden's* 1805-11, *Pigot's* 1822/3, 1828/9, 1830, 1835; and the *Universal British Directory* 1791-8. \*A number of women were involved in more than one business in the groups listed, therefore a small number have been double-counted.

the years 1791 to 1835 are displayed. Not unsurprisingly, apart from the clothing trades the majority of widows who continued to run businesses were located in the food, drink and accommodation sector. Those historians who have researched women's economic activities in towns in the early modern period have found that this is the sector in which women were most often occupied. Hinckley will show that victualling and grocery businesses were routinely left to wives. Gender differences within family businesses were also displayed when it came to making provision for widows and children. When Thomas Hefford died in 1800, he left his wagons and horses to his son while his wife appears to have continued with the grocery shop.<sup>41</sup> However, what is not always clear, is how involvement in victualling opened up avenues to other types of businesses. This really is the problem with trades directories because they often only record one aspect of person's economic interests. Money lending and frame letting are connected to victualling and are discussed below. (The coaching and carrying trade is discussed in the following chapter.)

The manufacture and repair of stocking frames was undertaken by framesmiths. Men regularly left their wives to run these businesses. We have seen examples of this already, and Edward Gunton is another. His personal estate was worth nearly £5,000 in 1812, when he left both his framesmith and pawnbroking businesses to his wife Sarah.<sup>42</sup> And Sarah continued to head these businesses for the next few years. The manufacture of frames took place in workshops, and even if frames were repaired where they stood, as the majority of them were located within a six-mile radius of the town this would have meant a framesmith or his workmen not venturing very far. Sarah may well have had

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<sup>41</sup> Will of Thomas Hefford, Carrier, 1800/103, L.R.O.

more to do with the pawnbroking business. However, while widows did not physically undertake the work of a framesmith, they organised and managed these businesses, and so spread their influence well beyond the domestic sphere.

The frequency with which framesmiths left wives in charge of businesses contrasts with hosiers, who do not seem to have had a similar faith in their wives' ability. There are two outstanding examples of women running hosiery businesses. In the late seventeenth century Elizabeth Pougher when she died looks to have controlled the largest hosiery undertaking in Leicester. Her personal estate was valued at over £750.<sup>43</sup> Ann Wood's husband Henry had died in June 1768. When Henry Wood died he stipulated that Ann was to place all his personal estate in trust with all of it converted into money, apart from the household goods, and put out at interest. Ann decided otherwise, however, and with seven children aged between three and twelve years, she continued for the next forty years in business on her own and then with the assistance of her sons.<sup>44</sup> Similarly, a story from the middle of the eighteenth century relating to a merchant hosier's wife which describes her travelling on horseback one-hundred and thirty-eight miles from Sutton-in Ashfield in Nottinghamshire to London to settle accounts and collect orders has been dismissed thus: 'in view of the dangers of the roads at this time it is difficult to lend much credence to the story.'<sup>45</sup> We should guard against accepting these comments, though women such as these appear to have been rare. No hosiers from Hinckley during the period left their wives to run businesses. In an unusual

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<sup>42</sup> Will of Edward Gunton, Framesmith, 1815/80, L.R.O.

<sup>43</sup> D. Wykes, 'The Origins and Development of the Leicestershire Hosiery Trade', *Textile History*, 23:1 (1992), pp. 26-27.

<sup>44</sup> D. Wykes, 'The Oldest Firm of Hosiery Manufacturers in Leicester: the Early History of Wolscy', *The Leicestershire Historian*, 4:4 (1996), pp. 23-25.

<sup>45</sup> Chapman, 'The Genesis of the British Hosiery Industry', p. 30.

case, Mary Spires' will made in 1770 documents that she bequeathed her son Joseph Lea, 'all my loomes and other utensils belonging to the weaving business'.<sup>46</sup> Nonetheless, Thomas Parsons, another hosier in 1782 bequeathed his wife Catherine all his household goods, other goods, ready money, securities or securities for money, stocking frames, book debts, wearing apparel, chattels and personal estate whatever for her own use.<sup>47</sup> Given the arguments made earlier that women could have kept businesses going, it is possible that Catherine Parsons might have done so. But, overall, it does appear that hosiers' widows were less likely to follow their husbands' trade. In 1799, John Boulton arranged for his father-in-law, Edward Gunton, to carry on his business as a hosier in order that his wife Catherine could be maintained.<sup>48</sup> Another hosier by the name of John Boulton, probably the other John's father, arranged for his brother, a Leicestershire hosier, to continue his business and apply the profits for the maintenance of his wife and son.<sup>49</sup> It does seem that if widows did have an input in these businesses it required male assistance. Elliott Dawson, for example, traded as both a hosier and stationer before he died, but Mary his wife continued with only the latter business. However, Elliott's trustees had been instructed to carry on both his trades.<sup>50</sup> The most likely reason for this stems from the need to access to business networks, although lack of capital might well have been another reason. A further factor which might have aggravated the difficulties of widows remaining in business was the structural changes taking place within the hosiery industry that complicated the production process. (see Section 2.4.3 for a discussion of these changes in relation to frame renting).

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<sup>46</sup> Will of Mary Spires, 1770/186, L.R.O.

<sup>47</sup> Will of Thomas Parsons, 1784/144, L.R.O.

<sup>48</sup> Will of John Boulton, Hosier, 1800/24, L.R.O.

<sup>49</sup> Will of John Boulton, Hosier, 1790/28, L.R.O.



Given the difficulties of locating sources for the study of women in business and tracing their activities it is not easy to determine how women fared. The length of time a woman remained in business depended on a number of factors. Ann Pulsford died a year after receiving her bequest from William Boyer.<sup>51</sup> Mary Dawson continued in business as a bookseller and stationer for over a decade. Other women chose to remarry. Lydia Ball ran her business for only two years before she married Robert Goode, a pawnbroker and hosier in 1828. We can only speculate why she married him. Lydia had four children and Robert six. She may have found it difficult to continue in business as a framesmith given that the hosiery industry was in decline. With her mother, Sarah Gunton, she had gained the knowledge, skills and experience in the pawnbroking business. She also contributed £400 to invest in Robert's commercial activities.<sup>52</sup>

A woman who stayed in business for over twenty-five years. Mary Gamble of Loughborough provides a good illustration of a woman's business activities over the life-cycle. Mary's husband Richard Gamble, a Brazier and Ironmonger, died in 1807 leaving a personal estate valued at less than £1,000. She had been made the executor of her husband's will, and was bequeathed freehold and leasehold property, household goods and stock-in-trade for her natural life and support of herself and the maintenance of their seven children. In 1811, Mary is recorded as a Cutler, and in subsequent years until 1833 she appeared in trades directories under the headings of 'braziers and tin plate workers', 'ironmonger' and 'seedsman'. She seems to have 'retired' three years before she died, in that time sustained by investments and her probable activities as a money lender. This example also demonstrates that the evidence of rentier incomes so frequently found in

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<sup>50</sup> Will of Elliott Dawson, Hosier and Stationer, 1809/65, L.R.O.

women's wills were in many cases an expression of old age rather than economic marginalisation.<sup>53</sup>

## **2.4 Widows and Spinsters: Wealth Creation and Income Generation**

Having seen how inheritance strategies could promote economic activity amongst widows, in the second part of this chapter we turn to the characteristics of inheritance, wealth creation and income generation demonstrated in women's wills. Historians have identified the preponderance of female legatees in the wills made by widows and spinsters. Personal preference, friendship, motives of equity, and concerns of the relative economic position of women encouraged testators to commonly bestow cash gifts, household goods, wearing apparel, but also real estate, shares, stocks and bank deposits.<sup>54</sup> Bequests also demonstrate the sources of business and financial activity. Mary Alt of Ashby, for example, ran the post office and had a millinery business. Her will dated 3rd March 1808 revealed that she also had money out at interest to a gentleman in Ravenstone, and had shares in the Ashby canal.<sup>55</sup> Regional and local economies impacted on the ability of women to create wealth and earn a living.

Figure 2.1 suggests that women in the industrial town of Hinckley were better off in this respect. Altogether, 89 of the 141 wills left by women in both towns documented the value of a woman's personal estate during the probate process, and this enables some

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<sup>51</sup> Will of Ann Pulsford, Victualler, 1823/151, L.R.O.

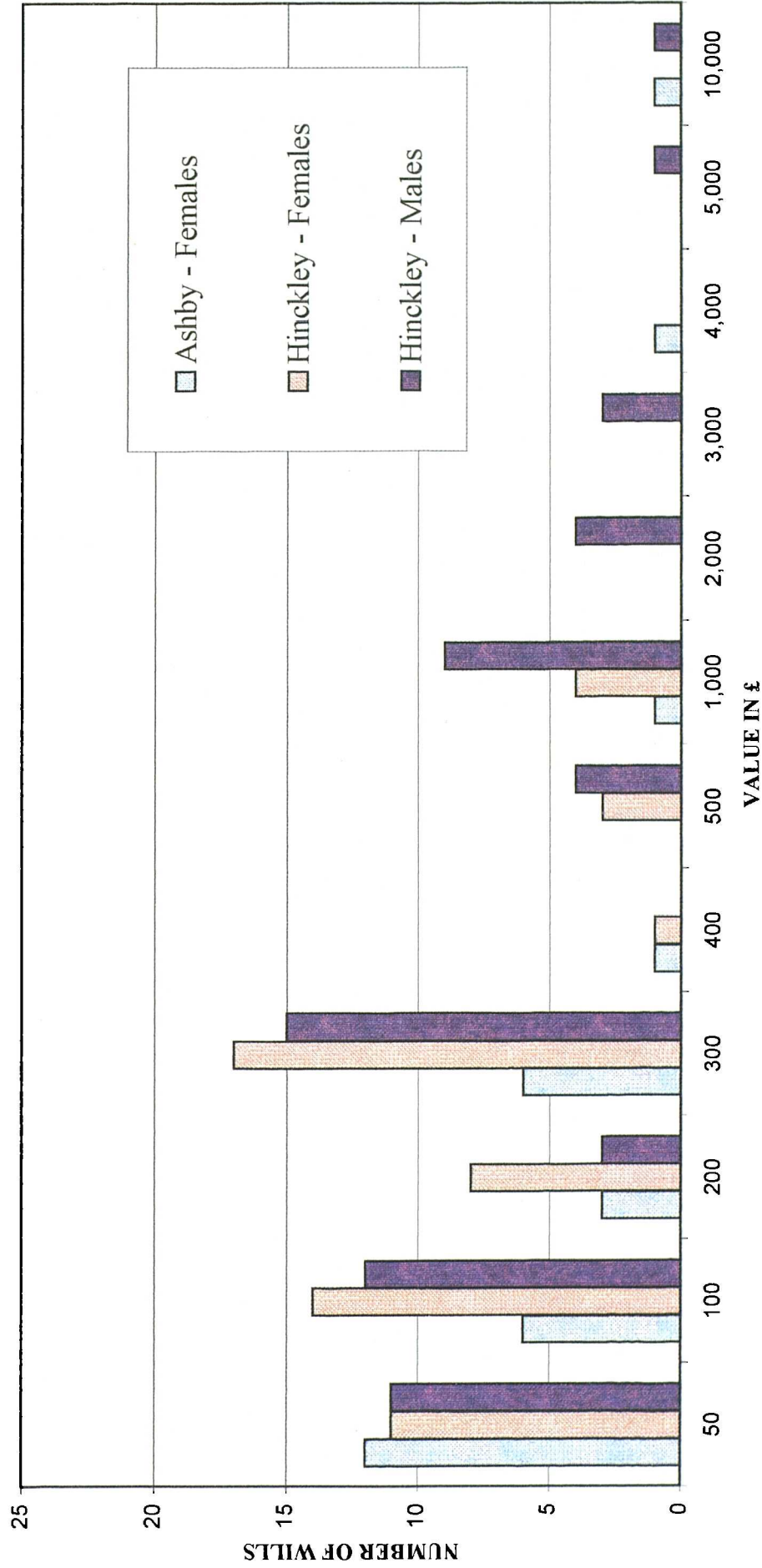
<sup>52</sup> Will of Robert Goode, Pawnbroker and Hosier, 1835/86, L.R.O.

<sup>53</sup> Pigot's Leicester Directories, 1822/3, 1828/9; 1833, Will of Richard Gamble, Brazier and Ironmonger, 1807/66; Will of Mary Gamble, 1836/68; Loughborough Census 1811, DE667/188, L.R.O.

<sup>54</sup> Erickson, *Women and Property*, pp. 212-216; Green, 'Merry Widows and Sentimental Spinsters'.

<sup>55</sup> *Universal British Directory*, (1790-1798); Will of Mary Alt, Widow, 1826/6, L.R.O.

**FIGURE 2.1 - VALUE OF PERSONAL ESTATE - 1750-1835†**



Source: Wills, L.R.O.

†The vast majority of these values are drawn from the period 1775-1835

distinctions to be made between the levels of wealth of these groups of women. These values do not record exactly how much the goods were worth, only that their value was less than for example, £100.<sup>56</sup> Women leaving wills in Hinckley appear, on the whole, to have been wealthier than those in Ashby, although most women in either town left a personal estate valued at £200 or below. In both cases, spinsters did not rank amongst the highest values, but the worth of their personal estates was not noticeably lower than the average overall. Most of these values relate to the early nineteenth century, and they show that between the years 1799 and 1835 the average amount of personal estate left by women in Hinckley was over £200 (£219) compared with the £164 left by women from Ashby.<sup>57</sup> A more detailed examination of this evidence revealed that the largest amounts were left by Ashby women, no woman from Hinckley, for whom information remains, had her goods valued at more than £1,000. At the other end of the spectrum, where we find the least wealthy, Ashby women occurred most frequently, with 23.3 percent of them leaving personal estates of £20 or below compared to Hinckley's 18.9 percent. When we include those of 63 men, we find that men were generally wealthier than both sets of women. This confirms, not unsurprisingly, that lone women were in a weaker position economically. However, a substantial proportion of males, 41.3 percent, left personalty valued at less than £200.<sup>58</sup> The wide range of values and the limited number of observations does not allow an adequate discussion of the changes in

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<sup>56</sup> These figures neither take account of a testator's debts. However, it is assumed that women in Hinckley were no more debt ridden than those in Ashby. Fifty-five percent of Ashby wills recorded a personal estate value compared to 68 percent of those for Hinckley.

<sup>57</sup> In order to give a more realistic picture of women's wealth in Ashby the mean excludes two large personal estates of £3,500 and £9,000.

<sup>58</sup> It is of course possible that these figures are distorted by the exclusion of wills proved at the Prerogative court of Canterbury.

relative values of these personal estates.<sup>59</sup> But given the rise in prices from the third quarter of the eighteenth century, this must have bitten hard into the incomes of many women and men in both towns.

**TABLE 2.3 – EVIDENCE OF INCOME EARNING ACTIVITIES APPEARING IN WOMEN’S WILLS, 1750-1831**

	Ashby de la Zouch		Hinckley	
	N.	%	N.	%
Women leaving wills	59	100.0	82	100.0
Women leaving real estate‡	14	23.7	35	38.0
Type of real estate where known:				
Buildings†	5	8.5	16	19.5
Land	5	8.5	17	20.7
Women referring to the following in their wills				
Security or securities for money	10	16.9	21	25.6
Money at interest	9	15.3	1	1.2
Money Lending: bonds, etc.	8	13.6	9	11.0
Credits	7	11.9	12	14.6
Book debts or other debts	2	3.4	4	4.9
Ready Money	12	20.3	25	30.5
Frames	0	0.0	9	11.0
Women involved in agriculture and Bequeathing animal stock	4	6.8	7	8.5

**Source:** See Table 2.1

‡Real Estate (other than for own use)

†Includes messuages which could, in come cases, incorporate land as well as a garden.

<sup>59</sup> This is especially true for Ashby where there are only 30 observations for the entire period. Moreover, as wealthier individuals were more likely to have their wills proved at the Prerogative Court of Canterbury after 1800, this makes comparisons overtime with this data even more unsatisfactory.

Displayed in Table 2.3 are the various methods recorded in wills that were the sources of women's wealth and income. At first sight this data may seem to support the view of those historians that believe that economic change and women's growing dependence on men disinclined them to participate or have an interest in business, since the emphasis is clearly on financial activity. Although precisely what dealings lay behind such terms as 'credits', 'security or securities for money' is often not clear, but given the previous discussion, this is more likely to be a consequence of the bias within the source rather than the reality.

#### **2.4.1 Real Estate**

Historians of the early modern period believe that women generally preferred to deal in investments and real estate because they believe less risk was attached to this method of income earning.<sup>60</sup> It is also considered that more people had the opportunity to live completely or partly off investments from the early years of the eighteenth century, of whom spinsters and widows formed a substantial proportion, though we cannot assume that 'safe' investments disinclined women to participate in business.<sup>61</sup> Real estate, as we noted earlier, is often documented in wills and it was found that 29.4 percent of married women from Hinckley were bequeathed real estate. When this is compared with that left by women leaving wills in Ashby and Hinckley, we find that some 23.7 percent of those from Ashby and 38.0 of women from Hinckley did so. However, while the data confirms that women owned and controlled real estate, these proportions are less than the 48.0 percent left by women in the large industrial towns of

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<sup>60</sup> Jordan, *Women and Credit*, pp. 77-78.

Sheffield and Birmingham during the eighteenth century.<sup>62</sup> These distinctions are also notable when compared with London, where this form of wealth played only a very minor role in the bequests of female testators in the first part of the nineteenth century.<sup>63</sup> When it came to disposing of real estate women from Ashby and Hinckley most frequently favoured females, although significant numbers of males also received similar legacies.

The higher proportion of women bequeathing real estate in Hinckley, rather than inheriting it, is indicative of unmarried women owning real property, but was also because widows and spinsters added to their holdings. We know from the Hinckley Poor Rate book of 1790 that Susannah Nutt, the widow of Joseph Nutt, apothecary, had at least thirty-five houses, a malt kiln, two shop premises, stables, a barn, an orchard and two lots of land within the town itself. Her will of 1799 also refers to a tripe house and 'a lately erected messuage' situated in the area of Stockwell Head. This suggests that she had bought property since her husband's death and not relied on rents from her current holdings to provide her maintenance. In addition, she also received income from monies owing on mortgages, bonds and contracts. Susannah appears to have had no relatives or none she cared to leave her real property and personal wealth to. She stipulated that her entire estate was to be sold to satisfy her own debts, and importantly, the unsatisfied legacies bequeathed by her sister, with the residue to be shared amongst her executors.<sup>64</sup> Unpaid debts or legacies, as well as providing for relatives must have

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<sup>61</sup> Hunt, *The Middling Sort*, p. 146.

<sup>62</sup> Berg, 'Women's Property', p. 241.

<sup>63</sup> See Green, 'Merry Widows and Sentimental Spinsters'.

<sup>64</sup> Will of Susannah Nutt, Widow, 1799/34; Hinckley Poor Rate Book 1790, 1243/218, L.R.O.

given women a further incentive to create additional wealth as well as live off the rents and interest payments from inherited property.

That more women from Hinckley bequeathed real property illustrates how some towns could provide greater scope for investment in real estate. The growth in the population of the town on the back of the expansion of the hosiery industry created the need for living accommodation and workshops. Framework knitters' cottages from the early part of the eighteenth century became a popular investment for 'all classes of people' in Leicestershire and Nottinghamshire.<sup>65</sup> Of those women from Hinckley who mentioned real property in their wills, nearly two thirds held messuages, tenements, cottages and land within the town itself, whereas less than half of Ashby women did so. While it is possible that women had migrated to the town from elsewhere which may account for this contrast, it seems more probable that differences in land ownership, and more specifically industrial enterprise in Hinckley, produced the potential for opportunities in real estate. This is further indicated by direct references to real property. Unfortunately, it is not possible to determine the exact amount owned, but the wills made by women from Hinckley describe 'several' or two or three messuages or tenements, which suggests that the rents from these buildings combined well with other forms of income. This also partly explains why women from the town had more ready money at their disposal. Women from Ashby, on the other hand, were less fortunate. As much of the property in around the town was owned by the Earls of Huntingdon and later the Earl of Moira, building and land ownership would have been much more circumscribed. This is the most probable reason why the majority of real estate held by

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<sup>65</sup>Chapman, 'The Genesis of the British Hosiery Industry', p. 38.



Ashby women was located elsewhere in other counties of the Midlands, principally Staffordshire, Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire. Hinckley women also owned real property in the first two counties and also Warwickshire.

#### **2.4.2 Money Lending and Investments**

Women's role in money lending in the early modern period has been well documented by historians. Women functioned in this business at every level of society, from those with quite meagre resources to the very wealthy women who supported the elite.<sup>66</sup> It has been argued that in English rural society for the four hundred years following 1500 money lending was 'the most prominent economic function of the widow'.<sup>67</sup> Women within towns also served in this capacity. As the system of credit was so ubiquitous, evidence of financial activity regularly occurs in probate records. Although the figures are small, money lending as a form of income was probably more important to women living in Ashby, as they seem to have had greater emphasis on lending, with money out at interest, for example, on bonds and notes. Women from Hinckley, alternatively, showed a greater proportion of women with access to ready money and security or securities for money. The expansion of the hosiery industry was in part supported by people wanting to extend their interests.<sup>68</sup> Wills occasionally record to whom money was lent and list a variety of trades people, and individuals connected to the hosiery industry. One of the few surviving probate inventories for this period shows that spinster Mary Taylor of

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<sup>66</sup> See W. Chester Jordan, *Women and Credit in Pre-Industrial and Developing Societies*, (Philadelphia, 1993); R. Tittler, 'Money-Lending in the West Midlands: the Activities of Joyce Jeffries 1638-49', *Historical Research*, 67 (1994); B.A. Holderness, 'Widows in Pre-Industrial Society: An Essay Upon Their Economic Functions', in R.M. Smith (ed.), *Land, Kinship and Lifecycle*, (Cambridge, 1984); and *Credit in a Rural Community, 1660-1800*, *Midland History*, 3 (1975).

<sup>67</sup> Holderness, 'Widows in Pre-industrial Society', p. 435.

Hinckley in 1781 had money secured on bonds, notes and a mortgage to a bricklayer, two framework knitters and a gentleman.<sup>69</sup> Money lending could sometimes lead to the acquisition of a client's property. Alice Drought, for example, came 'into the peaceable possession' of two tenements when a borrower failed to keep up payments on a mortgage.<sup>70</sup>

Developments in the regional infrastructure also provided further avenues for women to invest their money. Turnpike trusts were a popular investment in the latter part of the eighteenth century and much of the money raised by trusts came from people making small loans. Spinster Mary Birch of Ashby, for example, received the interest of £30 'secured upon the tolls from the Tamworth and Sawley Ferry Road' which she then bequeathed to Ann Shepherd for the term of her natural life, and thereafter the principal sum with any arrears of interest went to Ann's son.<sup>71</sup> Canals also became an important avenue of investment as the profitability of the early waterways and the possibilities for trade that this form of transportation could bring were realised. Investments, however, did not always yield the expected return. The Ashby canal, for example, was opened in 1804, but dividends were not paid out to investors until 1828, and the original shares of £100 had dropped in value to £10.<sup>72</sup> The bequest Mary Alt made her sister Frances Hextall in 1808 included 'everything else I may be entitled from the Ashby canal'.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Chapman, 'The Genesis of the British Hosiery Industry', p. 40.

<sup>69</sup> Probate inventory of Mary Taylor, Spinster, 1781/73, L.R.O.

<sup>70</sup> Will of Alice Drought, Wife, 1788/57, L.R.O.

<sup>71</sup> Will of Mary Birch, Spinster, 1808/20, L.R.O.

<sup>72</sup> C. Hadfield, *The Canals of the East Midlands*, (Newton Abbot, 1976), p. 152.

<sup>73</sup> Will of Mary Alt, Widow, 1826/6, L.R.O.

Provision in the form of annuities for female relatives and friends was more common. Women in both towns arranged for mothers, sisters, nieces and female friends to have the interest from a principal sum during their lifetime. However, concern for a relation and family obligations occasionally only lasted as long as the legatee remained unmarried. Analogous to those provisos made by husbands restricting their wives interest in real and personal estate until they remarried, some female testators felt compelled to add a similar clause in their wills. In 1765 Susannah Milward arranged that her sister-in-law would lose the interest from £200 should she marry again.<sup>74</sup> Brothers and nephews were also chosen as the beneficiaries of annuities, and while they did not figure so often as recipients, these legacies should not just be seen as a means of supporting economically inactive women.

Women's strong involvement in money-lending helps explain perhaps why cash gifts and income generated from investments were so common. These bequests reflected women's own wealth and areas of expertise, and some widows were keen to protect these interests from son-in-laws or their daughters' prospective husbands. Elizabeth Pullin, for example, left her daughter the Bulls Head and outbuildings with her money on notes and bonds, and all other personal estate on the understanding that these were for Rebecca's 'sole and separate use...and shall not be liable to the debts, control or engagement of her present or future husband'.<sup>75</sup> Likewise, Elizabeth Richards stipulated in her will that each of her two daughters 'shall have the free and entire disposal each of their own share by deed and will as fully as if she or they were unmarried and in default

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<sup>74</sup> Will of Susannah Milward, Widow, 1765/142, L.R.O.

<sup>75</sup> Will of Elizabeth Pullin, Widow, 1799/152, L.R.O.

of such appointment the same shall go and belong to the child or children of them'.<sup>76</sup>

Clauses protecting women's property and concerns about husbands 'intermeddling' can be regularly found in both men's and women's wills. This is something that Maxine Berg found in her study of Birmingham and Sheffield.<sup>77</sup>

### 2.4.3 Frame Rents

Property in the form of stocking frames gave women an alternative method of income earning that blended well with, and reflected, their role as money lenders. Traditionally, the story of frame renting in the first part of the nineteenth century in particular, is one of oppression. The framework knitter characterised as the skilled independent craftsman of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, became part of a sweated domestic industrial workforce ground down by such practices as stinting, the truck system and an inflated frame rent.<sup>78</sup> These practices were, of course, extremely detrimental to those working in the industry, and caused a great deal of distress amongst knitters and their families. However, there were very definite benefits to certain categories of individuals; women who did not necessarily have much money to invest were one. Although the expansion of frame renting came to be much reviled by knitters, and indeed, by some hosiers, it nonetheless, afforded those women with connections to the hosiery industry opportunities to add to their incomes, and from this perspective, the letting of frames in this later period cannot be seen in an entirely negative light.

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<sup>76</sup> Will of Elizabeth Richards, Widow, 1779/171, L.R.O.

<sup>77</sup> Berg, 'Women's Property', p. 248.

<sup>78</sup> See minutes of evidence, Report from the Commissioner to Enquire into the Condition of Framework Knitters, PP, 1845, XV.

The system of renting out frames predated the second half of the eighteenth century. The precise origins of the practice are unknown, and while the renting of machines occurred in other textile industries it never became as widespread as in the hosiery trade.<sup>79</sup> Women in the East Midlands had, if not a unique opportunity, then certainly one that benefited women in the region. Those who were situated in or close to one of the putting out centres could take advantage of an industrial structure that by the fourth decade of the eighteenth century had made it less usual to find a knitter who owned their own frame. By 1800 it was rare to find one that did.<sup>80</sup> So often women's historians have discussed the exclusion of women from business and industry, but freedom from regulation, systems of organisation, technological change and expansion, brought women into the hosiery trade rather than pushed them out.

Nine women's wills document bequests of stocking frames, all of them from Hinckley. Women also made bequests of money to buy frames. Sarah Seller, a spinster, set aside £10 for her brother to buy his son a stocking frame.<sup>81</sup> This form of legacy is similar to those that provided for the purchase of craft tools or for the funding of an apprenticeship. Men's wills also show that framesmiths and others involved in the trade left frames for relatives, and frequently to women as an additional method of financial assistance.

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<sup>79</sup> Wells, *The British Hosiery and Knitwear Industry*, p. 63.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., p. 64. A useful investment for the widow or spinster but a source of unceasing hardship for workers in the industry. One of the major complaints made at the 1845 enquiry into the condition of the framework knitters was that as wages had declined frame rents remained static. See *Minutes of Evidence*, PP, 1845, XV.

<sup>81</sup> Will of Sarah Seller, Spinster, 1812/183, L.R.O.

Most of the frames were located within villages and small towns and situated roughly within a six mile radius of the three main organising centres of the hosiery trade of which Hinckley was one.<sup>82</sup> Although the industry's structure 'hardly altered' in the one hundred years from 1750,<sup>83</sup> the emergence of middlemen in the trade in later years of the eighteenth century must rank as a change of some significance. As the industry grew, hosiers began to conduct business on a much larger scale, and some hosiers found it less practical for workers to fetch yarn and return finished goods directly to hosiers' warehouses. Instead middlemen were employed to perform this process for the manufacturer. However, as time went on middlemen became more independent of the hosiers, and began to employ operatives themselves and also to market goods. Many of these agents had risen from the ranks of knitters and from amongst local grocers and general dealers keen to exploit the opportunities that the industry offered.<sup>84</sup> The blame has been placed on middlemen, especially the bag-hosier for the spread of frame renting and the evils associated with it, because they not only bought frames, which they effectively forced knitters to rent on pain of not receiving work, but they also sub-let independent frames.<sup>85</sup> Middlemen seized the opportunity of using frame letting as a way of making larger profits, which was something hosiers had begun to do from the second

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<sup>82</sup> D. Mills, 'Rural Industries and Social Structure: Framework Knitters in Leicestershire, 1670-1851, *Textile History*, 13:2 (1982), p. 185.

<sup>83</sup> Chapman, 'Enterprise and Innovation', p. 14.

<sup>84</sup> Wells, *The British Hosiery and Knitwear Industry*, p. 62; Hoskins and McKinley, (eds.), *The Victoria County History of Leicester*, III, pp. 9-10.

<sup>85</sup> PP, 1845 XV, Part I, Q.886. The term 'middlemen' encompasses a number of different types of individual who came between the hosier and framework knitter. An undertaker, for example, was different from the bag-hosier (or bag-man) inasmuch as he distributed yarn supplied to the knitters which they made up into goods contracted for between the undertaker and hosier. The bag-hosier, alternatively, had his own yarn made up by operatives and then marketed the finished goods. As bag-hosiers began to expand their market and work for the bigger manufacturers the distinction between bag-hosiers and large-scale undertaker became less clear. It was, however, the 'bag-hosier' most frequently associated with the abuses in the industry. Hoskins and McKinley, (eds.), *The Victoria County History*, III, p. 9; Wells, *The British Hosiery and Knitwear Industry*, p. 63.

decade of the eighteenth century. Moreover, greater numbers of women took advantage of this organisational shift. The presence of middlemen was not consistent throughout the county, and in the town of Hinckley they were not overly influential. In the villages adjacent, however, they were more in evidence.<sup>86</sup> In the 1840s, at Stoke Golding, a village three miles away from the town, of the 217 frames in the vicinity, all but 10 were under the control of middlemen, as were many of the frames in neighbouring Barwell and Earl Shilton.<sup>87</sup> Thus to these outlying parishes many of the frames held by private investors from Hinckley went, illustrating the intensification of the putting-out system that led to a partial reorganisation of the industry and the integrated nature of the rural and urban regional economy.

What proportion of the rent paid by the knitter, we may reasonably wonder, would eventually find its way to the female frame owner? In 1779 investment in frames yielded a net return of between 5 and 10 percent whereas a return of 4 to 5 percent could be expected from money lending. It also seems to have been the case, by the 1840s, and this may have true of earlier decades, that while frames were less costly in Leicestershire, frame rents were the highest.<sup>88</sup> Although frame renting may have been very profitable for hosiers and middlemen, we cannot be sure that women benefited equally. Evidence suggests that people owning independent frames did not. Working out the arrangements that existed between women who owned the frames and hosiers or middlemen is almost impossible, as there never seems to have been any hard and fast rules governing the

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<sup>86</sup> Information compiled from trades directories for the last fifty years of the nineteenth century shows that in some areas bag-hosiers were well entrenched while in others they were apparently non-existent. Hoskins and McKinley, (eds.), *The Victoria County History of Leicester*, III, pp. 20-23. W.G. Hoskins, also noted that at Wigston the majority of knitters worked to middlemen who themselves were linked to hoisers in Leicester. *The Midland Peasant*, (London, 1957), p. 274.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid. p. 5 and p. 10.

amount charged for frame rent. However, sums of 9d, 1s and 1s 3d were known to have been collected for the use of a narrow frame in the early nineteenth century. Apparently, middlemen sub-letting frames from hosiers would pay the hosier more in rent than they would to owners of independent frames. Speaking before the Commission of 1845, Boulton Brooks, a framesmith from Hinckley (and brother of Mary Towers) was of the opinion that a manufacturer employing independent frames would give the owner 8d, while the operative would be expected to pay one shilling.<sup>89</sup> In a sense we can see the position of women who invested in frames as not so far removed from that of the knitter, because sub-letting frames benefited hosiers and middlemen at the expense of the owner in other ways. In times of low demand these machines would be the first to stand idle while those belonging directly to middlemen and hosiers would be sure to get some work, and importantly, they the rent. Boulton Brooks also considered that it would take 3d or 3.5d a week to keep a 'common narrow frame' in repair.<sup>90</sup> Set against the income from a frame rent of 8d, this sum is considerable, and presumably, it would be the owner who was responsible for paying it. A group of women who may have received a better return were those who inherited hosiery businesses from their husbands.

Sidney Chapman has argued that in the early decades of the eighteenth century this type of investment was popular with 'a large group of widows' who acquired a 'small income' from the ownership of a few frames, and in so doing, avoided a visit to the overseer of the poor. The importance of the rent to widows and spinsters of a small number of frames is demonstrated in wills. Mary Towers in 1823 bequeathed two

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<sup>88</sup>*PP*, 1845, XV, Report From the Commissioner, p. 48.

<sup>89</sup>*Ibid.*, Part I, Minutes of Evidence, Q.4462.

<sup>90</sup>*Ibid.*, Q.4458.



stocking frames to her niece Mary Ann Wallin as well as all her household goods.<sup>91</sup> In men's wills this type of legacy is even more noticeable. However, whilst two women left personal estates of below £20, three others had theirs valued at less than £200, £300 and £600. This suggests that frame-letting could be sufficiently profitable to interest all types of women, not only the least wealthy. Much of the capital for the industry came from individuals in the drink trades, although people from most occupations also invested heavily in frames.<sup>92</sup> The will of Elizabeth Jee proved in 1806, illustrates that she operated as a victualler, owned stocking frames and held real estate.<sup>93</sup> In a number of cases it is clear that the rents from stocking frames were part of a wider portfolio of money lending activities. Ann Smith lent money on bonds and notes in addition to profiting from frame rents, as did Mary Towers who entrusted £140 to her brother, a framesmith.<sup>94</sup> Investment in stocking frames, in much the same way as annuities, real estate and investments all formed part of those combinations of income earning and wealth creating activities that helped women spread financial risks. These women, as Churches has pointed out for the economically active widows in the town of Whitehaven in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century, were 'not just a backwater through which property made its sluggish way before finally returning to the mainstream in the hands of a male heir.'<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Will of Mary Towers, Widow, 1823/95, L.R.O.

<sup>92</sup> Chapman, *The Genesis of the British Hosiery Industry*, pp. 39-40.

<sup>93</sup> Will of Elizabeth Jee, Victualler, 1806/20, L.R.O.

<sup>94</sup> Will of Ann Smith, Spinster, 1827/168; Will of Mary Towers, Widow, 1823/95, L.R.O.

#### 2.4.4 Executors: Relatives and 'Friends'

We saw in the earlier part of this chapter that the majority of men chose their wives to act as executors. Whilst female testators favoured female legatees, their preference when it came to executors, as other historians have found, was usually for men.<sup>96</sup> Over three quarters of women from Hinckley entrusted males to act for them. For Ashby it was lower at 67.8 percent, see Table 2.4. This is a reflection of the larger number of spinsters in the Ashby data that selected women rather than men to oversee their wills. As this function carried with it great responsibility, the majority of executors were close male and female relatives, for example, sons and daughters, sisters and brothers. However, women also chose 'friends' but some of these were probably also distant kin. D'Cruze has identified the existence of a significant minority of men in the middling sort who had a 'heightened public role' in the community of early eighteenth century Colchester. These men functioned at the core of the political, business and social networks of the town. Importantly, it was via such individuals that others within the middling ranks had to operate since the 'community brokers', as they have been described, were the conduits to credit, political status and office. These men were powerful allies and would be sought out to act, for example, as trustees, executors and witnesses.<sup>97</sup> Jon Stobart, however, offers a different perspective from these hierarchical

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<sup>95</sup> Churches, 'Women and Property', p. 178.

<sup>96</sup> Erickson, *Women and Property*, p. 220; see also Green, 'Merry Widows and Sentimental Widows' and Owens 'The Duty and Paramount Obligation'.

<sup>97</sup> S. D'Cruze, 'The Middling Sort in Eighteenth Century Colchester: Independence, Social Relations and the Community Broker', J. Barry and C. Brooks, (eds.), *The Middling Sort of People: Culture, Society and Politics in England, 1550-1800*, (London, 1994), pp. 190-9.

social links. In the towns of early eighteenth century Cheshire and south Lancashire, a testator's executors were generally found to be of the same social status.<sup>98</sup>

**TABLE 2.4 - THE APPOINTMENT OF EXECUTORS, 1750-1835**

	<b>Females</b>		<b>Males</b>		<b>Females/Males</b>	
<b>Ashby de la Zouch:</b>	<b>N.</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>N.</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>N.</b>	<b>%</b>
	14	23.7	40	67.8	5	8.5
<b>Hinckley:</b>	<b>N.</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>N.</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>N.</b>	<b>%</b>
	13	15.9	63	76.8	6	7.3

**Source:** Wills, L.R.O.

Bonds of friendship and neighbourliness amongst men bound up with associated business interests make it easier to determine what might have informed these relationships. For women, on the other hand, this is not as straightforward. Of course, the friends of a widow were very likely to be those of her dead husband. These men acted as executors and trustees and assisted with the care and maintenance of children and wives. Male relatives, we know, were frequently called upon on this regard. The appointment of executors and trustees, and the legacies made to 'friends' and relatives help demonstrate a number of different aspects of business, community and economic change. Davidoff and Hall have argued that growing women's dependence meant greater recourse to financial agents. The manner in which women conducted business and their

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<sup>98</sup> Jon Stobart, 'Social and Geographical Contexts of Property Transmission in the Eighteenth Century', in J. Stobart and A. Owens, (eds.), *Urban Fortunes: Property and Inheritance in the Town, 1700-1900*, (forthcoming).

financial affairs was probably not very different from the ways in which men did.

However, this would be dependent on the activity, as we have seen, some widows took over and ran businesses after their husbands' demise. Women in the victualling trade, for example, appear to have had little trouble in this regard. Nonetheless, other businesses and economic activity required male assistance.

As we noted earlier, the rapid development of the hosiery industry in the second half of the eighteenth century was accompanied by structural change with the emergence of middlemen and the extension of frame letting. Some women may have rented out their frames directly, but it is probable that this function was more often performed by a male member of their family or kin. Sarah Bolesworth, for example, bequeathed to her second cousin her from nearby Burbage 'stocking frames or machines now in his possession.'<sup>99</sup> If women had no close relatives, distant kin or friends would act with them or form them. Where frames were being worked or employed by relatives we are presented with a more difficult problem concerning rent as it is possible that women did not charge for their use. However, in the same that women charged family and kin interest on money borrowed, the income from capital in the form of stocking frame would have been just as important. Sarah Hurst, spinster, made hosier, John Basford, the sole executor of her will and left him 'securities for money, stocking frames, book and other debts...for his own use and benefit.'<sup>100</sup> The interaction between sociability and business often demonstrated no boundaries, while assisting women to buy and rent out frames or conduct other aspects of business can be seen as a means of helping women to secure an income, there could be less altruistic motives behind these actions.

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<sup>99</sup> Will of Sarah Bolesworth, Spinster, 1819/20, L.R.O.

The networks engendered by family ties or friendship had a fundamental relationship at their core: manufacturers, masters and middlemen needed money to invest in their businesses or stocks of frames to sub-let and run their work. Middlemen did not operate to any degree within the town of Hinckley but appear to have commonly let frames in the surrounding village areas, and this is where many of the 'independent' frames owned by widows and spinsters went. Erickson contends that 'women made wills out of a need to thank and acknowledge small favours, out of a sense of personal attachment to material goods, in order to help out family and friends in need and from a sense of personal integrity.'<sup>101</sup> However, relatives and 'friends' had a more significant role in that they linked women to the wider economy, and in this sense, these men were not just performing 'small favours'. These relationships are important, and their systematic study will help us better understand the impact of industrial development on social and cultural change.

## **2.4 Conclusions:**

The evidence delineated in this chapter has shown that women's experiences of property holding could be diverse. While some historians have seen the characteristics of women's property rights in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries as promoting a marginalisation in women's economic position, this study has shown that a host of economic imperatives arising from inheritance strategies ensured women's continued economic participation. This was especially true for those in the lower ranks of the middle class. The majority of spinsters and widows were unlikely to be as wealthy as

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<sup>100</sup> Will of Sarah Hurst, Spinster, 1809/107, L.R.O.

men, and financial security uneasily obtained. Women, therefore, spread financial risks by engaging in a variety of income earning and wealth creating activities. Whether, for example, caring or supporting family members, preserving businesses for themselves or starting new ones, or investing in real estate, women had a far greater part in economic life than the 'hidden investment' concept implies. The role of women, it can be argued, could be as much about gaining the trappings of status by the accumulation of wealth, as it was through the pretence of economic inactivity. Some women, clearly, actively sought to engage in business and extend their interests. Can we really say that these women did not, or should not, have aspired beyond self-support, as some historians have suggested was the aim of the middle class widow with no other financial provision?<sup>102</sup>

The reasons for women remaining in business appear to have changed little over the period. However, they were dependent on the economy of the region, the commercial foundations of the towns in which they lived and the social circles they inhabited. Far from placing constraints on women, the industrial development in the East Midlands which created 'great prosperity and expansion' in the hosiery industry in the second half of the eighteenth century gave women in the industrial towns additional opportunities to generate income and increase their levels of wealth. Women, whether as widows or spinsters expanded their economic interests with the industrial development in the region.

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<sup>101</sup> Erickson, *Women and Property*, p. 209.

<sup>102</sup> Davidoff and Hall, *Family Fortunes*, p. 287.

### **3.0 SUPPLYING GOODS AND SERVICES: BUSINESS WOMEN AND AN ARISTOCRATIC ESTATE, 1695-1810**

#### **The Merits Of An Alternative Source**

From exploring women's methods of wealth creation and income earning in the region's towns, we now turn to the countryside to consider the activities of women who supplied goods and services to an aristocratic estate in Leicestershire. The findings presented in this chapter confirm those of Chapter 2.0. Although women tended to operate in particular sectors of the economy, they participated in a wide range of businesses, and continued to do so after 1800.

Our perceptions of women's participation in enterprise are coloured by the evidence that has come down to us, since often only certain aspects of trade were recorded. Historians of women and business have drawn upon and continue to use a range of sources. These are, for example, those exploited in the previous chapter, i.e. trades directories, wills, and probate inventories. Other historians have examined apprenticeship records, insurance registers, newspaper advertisements and bankruptcy listings and literary material.<sup>1</sup> One source that appears to have been overlooked generally by historians interested in the study of women's economic activities is estate records, or more precisely, the estate accounts. Ivy Pinchbeck, who was not enthusiastic about the merits of this type of information, considered that family and institutional accounts can 'throw valuable light on the numerous activities in which

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<sup>1</sup>See the types of evidence deployed by those historians responsible for the studies listed in the introduction.

women were engaged', but they can 'give us no definite information as to the scale of business, the manner in which it was conducted and how far the owner was successful'.<sup>2</sup> Let us examine these assertions by turning our attention to estate accounts belonging to Donington Park, the country seat of the Hastings family. Can estate accounts help to further the study of women in business in this period? This chapter suggests that these records can provide an interesting alternative avenue of investigation and are not quite so limited as Pinchbeck assumed. Nonetheless, this source requires others such as family correspondence to aid discussion. It should be noted at the outset that no quantification of the estate records has been undertaken. That is not to say this source is beyond this method of analysis, but an approach that requires the careful and painstaking reconstruction of accounts even for sample years, let alone over a very long period, is outside the bounds of this particular study.

The geographical position of the Donington Park is in the north-west corner of the county of Leicestershire abutting the border of Derbyshire (See Map 4.1, Chapter 4.0). The parish of Melbourne is positioned immediately to the west and the river Trent draped its way round the estate from the west to the north. The village of Castle Donington lies one mile to the east and the grounds of the park covered approximately three hundred acres of land.<sup>3</sup> A map produced in 1735 shows that woodland covered much of the area. To the south there existed a series of meadows and closes that were ancient inclosures and had long been in the ownership of the Earls of Huntingdon.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>I. Pinchbeck, *Women Workers and the Industrial Revolution, 1750-1850*, (London, 1933, repr. 1969), p. 286.

<sup>3</sup>A. Squires, *Donington Park and the Hastings Connection*, (Leicester, 1996), p. 5.

<sup>4</sup>Today the ancient inclosures are covered by a well known international racing circuit. *Ibid.*, p. 33.



The interests of the Hastings stretched into the parishes of south Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire. In Leicestershire alone they owned over 10,000 acres of land.<sup>5</sup> The nearest market town in the county to the estate was Ashby de la Zouch, but the closest major urban area, Derby, stood roughly seven or eight miles away. About nine miles into Staffordshire was Burton on Trent, while the county town of Leicester was fifteen miles or more distant. Derby appears to have been the place with which members of the household had much of their dealings. Receipts show an interaction between the trades people of the town reflecting the sale of goods and use of local services. Items were bought from women in the corn market, for example, and the cost of letters posted in the closing years of the eighteenth century were charged by the post mistress, Martha Chamberlain.<sup>6</sup> The period under review saw three Earls of Huntingdon and later the Earl of Moira, whose political, economic and social obligations took them about the region and further afield. These were, firstly, the eighth Earl, George Hastings, (1677-1704), and the ninth Earl, Theophilus Hastings, (1696-1746). Theophilus Hastings married Selina Shirley daughter of Earl Ferrers of Staunton Harold, Leicestershire in 1728, who spent much of her time in the promotion of Methodism and survived her husband by some forty-five years.<sup>7</sup> We are fortunate in having her correspondence. The tenth Earl, Francis Hastings (1729-1789), remained unmarried and died without a legitimate heir. In 1789, his nephew, Francis Rawdon-Hastings (1754-1826), the second Earl of Moira, became the new owner of the estate.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>J. Thirsk, 'Agrarian History 1540-1950', in W.G. Hoskins and R. McKinley, (eds.), *The Victoria County History of Leicestershire*, (Oxford, 1954), p. 241. The Hastings family had lands and estates in a number of other counties in England and also Ireland.

<sup>6</sup>HAF/53/7, HAF/65/2 & 5, H.L.

<sup>7</sup>Squires, *Donington Park*, p. 35.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 29 and pp. 34-5.

During the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries the Earls, amongst other things, farmed, bred horses, extracted minerals, manufactured bricks and collected rents, and also took part in the negotiations on the enclosure of lands in which they had an interest.

### **3.1 Provisions: Food and Drink**

Victualling, as historians have made us aware, is a sector in which women's businesses have traditionally flourished. In eighteenth century Ludlow in Shropshire, for example, approximately a quarter of the businesses women recorded in the town's Easter Books between the 1720s and the middle years of the 1830s were victuallers.<sup>9</sup> Similarly, in Oxford from the sixteenth to the end of the eighteenth century the food and drink trades were those in which women were generally found.<sup>10</sup> It did not require quantification to illustrate that the food and drink trades occupied the majority of women who appeared in the Donington Park accounts. As well as family members, a large complement of indoor servants plus those whose duties were outdoors, in addition to guests, meant that large quantities of food and drink were needed to keep the Hastings household fully stocked. Receipts demonstrate that women were, for example, grocers, butchers, 'ale women' and 'milk women'.

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<sup>9</sup>S. Wright, 'Holding Up Half the Sky: Women and Their Occupations in Eighteenth Century Ludlow', *Midland History*, 14 (1989), p. 63.

<sup>10</sup>M. Prior, 'Women and the Urban Economy of Oxford 1500-1800', in M. Prior, (ed.), *Women in English Society 1500-1800*, (London, 1985), p. 106.

Any aristocratic household drew on the resources of trades people from within their immediate locality, from elsewhere in the region, in this case notably Derby, and as far afield as London. Judging by the accounts the Earls and their households ate well. In the early part of the eighteenth century all manner of foodstuffs made their way through the transport network to Donington, crayfish and oysters were but two. The Countess of Oxford, likewise, had flounders and sole sent along the river Trent to her estate at Welbeck in Nottinghamshire.<sup>11</sup> However, much of the food brought to Donington Park and other estates was bought of local tradespeople. The purveyors of foodstuffs appear in the housekeepers' bills sometimes with purchases of kitchen utensils, which were frequently from the same supplier. Women over the period furnished a range of commodities such as chickens, geese, turkeys, and other meat, dairy produce, eggs, sugar, raisins, lemons, Turkish coffee and nutmegs.<sup>12</sup> On a less formal level women traded with the estate as higglers, petty dealers and hawkers. Until 1772 licenses were needed to sell and buy, for example, cheese, eggs and poultry.<sup>13</sup> Of the nineteen women taking out licenses at the Derbyshire Quarter Sessions at Michaelmas 1766 as badgers, many were married, some possibly unmarried, and only two listed as widows.<sup>14</sup> The activities of these women were undertaken in the market, but many also traded with farms and estates.<sup>15</sup> At Ledstone in Yorkshire, another country residence belonging to the Hastings family, the accounts illustrate similar practices. Women have often been associated with poultry keeping and the

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<sup>11</sup>DD/4P/58/83/42, N.A.O.

<sup>12</sup>HAF, H.L. Series. Purchases of foodstuffs are evenly distributed through the estate accounts.

<sup>13</sup>W. Thwaites, 'Women in the Market Place: Oxfordshire c. 1690-1800', *Midland History*, 9 (1984), p. 24 and p. 28.

<sup>14</sup>Pinchbeck, *Women Workers*, p. 298, footnote 1.

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.* p.24.

local marketing of eggs, butter and milk. The housekeeper's records in 1759 show such purchases. Chickens were bought of an Elizabeth Wheater, and a Mrs Shutliffe, while a Mrs Eltoft provided dairy produce and also wheat.<sup>16</sup> Possibly the household at Donington Park had transactions with women who took to the road during a time of dearth as provision dealers, although it was more than likely that they lived in the vicinity or were the wives of estate workers who were known also to sell their produce to estate kitchens.<sup>17</sup>

In one aspect of business women are ubiquitous within the Hastings accounts, as innkeepers, licensed victuallers and alehousekeepers. As their Lordships travelled about the region and conducted their business affairs receipts show they also sampled the services of these women. Moreover, throughout the eighteenth and into the nineteenth century, the meetings of the manor courts at Loughborough, Whitwick, Packington, Barrow, Ashby de la Zouch and Melbourne, and the tenants' rent day dinners, and similar events, gave those women engaged in provisioning, the opportunity to feed gentleman, juryman and tenant alike.<sup>18</sup> Within this sector, business women are clearly seen in the records running establishments as part of a husband and wife team, as widows, or with the assistance of sons and daughters.<sup>19</sup> For much of the period, that

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<sup>16</sup>HAF/43/2, H.L.

<sup>17</sup>P. Sharpe, *Adapting to Capitalism*, (London, 1996), p. 78. Other household accounts for earlier periods, for example, those of Haddon Hall in Derbyshire illustrate how a wide range of commodities found their way to regions and were acquired from towns, purchased in markets and fairs or brought directly to the door by local women. D. Hey, *Packmen, Carriers and Packhorse Roads*, (Leicester, 1980), pp. 187-190.

<sup>18</sup>Receipts recording payment to numerous women for Court Dinners over the course of the eighteenth and early years of the nineteenth century and are scattered throughout the HAF, H.L. series as are those for Rent Day Dinners.

<sup>19</sup>Examples can be located throughout the HAF Series, H.L.

is, until the 1780s, the Court Dinners were generally charged at £1. In 1798, the cost of the Court Dinner at Whitwick came to £2 3s 7d, and as well as providing twenty-nine dinners, it also included liquor, ale, servants and care of horses.<sup>20</sup> Similarly, on the 7th September 1747, Mary Ward received payment for her part in 'treating ye tenants at Packington at [the] Venison Feast'. Venison feasts were also held at Ashby de la Zouch and Donington.<sup>21</sup> Such occasions not only gave business to those occupied in the food and drink trades, they helped cement the relations of deference between the social ranks while also encouraging tenants to part with the rent money.

The provision of court and rent day dinners with their focus on the same parish and venue allow us to track innkeepers' families, and importantly, women's roles across most of the century. The court dinner at Packington, for example, continued to be arranged by members of the Ward family at the beginning of the nineteenth century as it had in the early eighteenth. In 1737, a Mary Ward appears and this name remains in the records until 1759, but the signature for payment which became a mark, suggests that a female relative assisted her or had taken over the business. Many years later in 1781 and 1782, an Elizabeth Bottom was recompensed for court dinners at Packington on behalf of a widow Ward. By 1783 Elizabeth had taken the name of Ward, and between the years 1785 and 1796, the bills became those of a Thomas Ward for Court and rent day dinners at Ashby de la Zouch. It is probable that Elizabeth and Thomas had been running two establishments, one at Ashby and the other at Packington, (these two parishes are approximately a mile apart). In 1798 and 1799 their daughter

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<sup>20</sup>HAF/65/13, H.L.

Dorothy took payment initially 'for the use of my father', and then in 1801 after her marriage, 'for the use of my husband'.<sup>22</sup> Whoever the money officially belonged to, it was women rather than men, the wives, daughters, other female relatives and servants, who were generally the people who ran alehouses and Victualling establishments.<sup>23</sup>

Much alcohol in one form or another was consumed and supplied to the estate from various locations. In 1695 Widow Eaton the 'Ale Woman' from Derby wrote, 'Sir, I have sent you a barrel of ale...32 gallons at 1s 4d a gallon, £2 2s 8d; for carriage £1; for ye barrel if it come not again 6s 6d'.<sup>24</sup> Towards the end of our period drink still came from Derby. However, the widows of London Vintners and Wine Merchants also provided much of the wine and liquor drunk at Donington.<sup>25</sup> Brewing for the household also ensured that constant reserves of malt and barley were required. In 1729, for example, Elizabeth Printon sent a quota of 120 strikes of malt in the months of May and June at a cost on each occasion of £32.<sup>26</sup> Men carried out the actual process of brewing as they did at Welbeck.<sup>27</sup> Nonetheless, women were still engaged in domestic brewing and could be found brewing on farms in the region at the end of the century.<sup>28</sup> Workmen and labourers were also given food and ale and women furnished this on site. Supplying ale was a common practice wherever builders were

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<sup>21</sup>HAF/40/11, H.L.

<sup>22</sup>HAF/38/5, HAF/40/11, HAF/43/16, HAF/54/7, HAF/55/8, HAF/56/9, HAF/58/14, HAF/65/13, HAF/66/5, HAF/68/8, H.L.

<sup>23</sup>P. Clark, *The English Alehouse: A Social History 1200-1830*, (New York, 1983), pp. 205-206.

<sup>24</sup>HAF/27/15, H.L.

<sup>25</sup>HAF/36/5, H.L.

<sup>26</sup>HAF/34/23, H.L.

<sup>27</sup>DP/4P/58/83/44, N.A.O.

<sup>28</sup>Pinchbeck, *Women Workers*, p. 296; DE690, L.R.O.

employed in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries,<sup>29</sup> and for workers engaged in other tasks. At the estate at Ledstone, for example, in May 1759, three women each received 13s for serving ale to the men who were driving the deer in the park.<sup>30</sup>

The role of daughters and female relatives in keeping inns has been observed, and they were also important in other aspects of the retail trade.<sup>31</sup> In May 1786, for example, Mary Richardson accepted for her father payment for brandy and wine at Richardson's Wine Vault, Irongate, Derby.<sup>32</sup> Hannah Darbyshire did likewise, and is also documented as being reimbursed for sugar and butter, with other items sold to the estate by her mother.<sup>33</sup> Daughters often assisted their parents in their shops, and their role probably differed very little from that of a servant employed for a similar purpose. Servants too are also found in the accounts receiving monies on behalf of those for whom they worked.<sup>34</sup> In these situations employees represented their employers in the community. It would make little sense for a woman in business to do work that could effectively be carried out by someone else, while she turned her attention to more important matters. In the farm accounts of John Simmons many of the business people with whom he recorded transactions appear integrated into his social circle.<sup>35</sup> Business and socialising were vital to any enterprise and much of it automatically occurred in the private sphere.

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<sup>29</sup>D. Woodward, *Men at Work*, (Cambridge, 1995), p. 239.

<sup>30</sup>HAF/43/2, H.L.

<sup>31</sup>P. Earle, *The Making of the English Middle Class: Business, Society and Family Life in London 1660-1730*, (London, 1989), p. 162.

<sup>32</sup>HAF/57/12, H.L.

<sup>33</sup>HAF/56/6, H.L.

<sup>34</sup>HAF/58/8, H.L.

<sup>35</sup>DE690, L.R.O.

A central feature of these bills and receipts is the prefix 'Mrs' to many of the names of women whether they were engaged in food or drink, or for that matter, in those areas of enterprise listed below. That women and other female relatives helped the male heads of businesses either as partners or assistants is not questioned. However, determining the marital status of individuals in these accounts is not always easy, and probably many were actually run by the unmarried. The main problem arises from the use of the title 'Mrs' (mistress) by single women which remained common throughout most of the eighteenth century.<sup>36</sup> For example, in the 1770s a Mrs Barker, a butcher, supplied a varied assortment of cuts of meat to the Huntingdon household, but always the money went into the hands of an Anthony Spencer for the 'use of Mrs Barker'.<sup>37</sup> Sometimes it is just the name of the woman that is used, but other times with 'Mrs'. It would certainly appear to be the case that unmarried women are in danger of being underrepresented. The clearest indication of a woman's status is when she is recorded as a 'widow', as these women often were. Again, though, we cannot always be sure of a woman's marital status as instances occur of known widows still carrying the title of 'Mrs'. And, as the delay between presenting a bill and its payment could be considerable, a widow might remarry in the interim. Elizabeth Darbyshire, for example, whose name appears on her bills, sold foodstuffs and kitchen utensils to Donington Park in the 1780s.<sup>38</sup> Before this date a man with the same surname did so, presumably Elizabeth's husband or another relative. He may have died, but given the intractability of the source in this respect, it is also possible that he worked, or became

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<sup>36</sup>L. Davidoff and C. Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780-1850*, (London, 1987), p. 273.

<sup>37</sup>HAF/53/2, H.L.

<sup>38</sup>HAF/56/6, H.L.



engaged in business elsewhere. Some women no doubt preferred to keep their marital status quiet as it could affect their position as a *femme sole* trader, which effectively precluded husbands from assisting in their wives' trades lest they became liable for their debts.<sup>39</sup> Other receipts, and those for London trades people suggest that many businesses were indeed partnerships between husbands and wives.

Social status is a further factor that complicates determining the marital status of many women who supplied goods and services to Donington from within the region, since it is generally only a person's name that is given on the top of a receipt. Peter Clark argues that by 1700, there was not only a move to suppress unlicensed alehouses but also to limit Victualling to more respectable people who ran larger establishments.<sup>40</sup> It is likely that given the social status of this household in most cases it procured goods and services from women of the 'better' sort. An examination of the signatures on the receipts of those women who arranged court and rent day dinners suggests this, albeit on the basis of evidence of signatures alone. Apart from two instances, one in the 1730s and another in 1750s, all the women accepting payment for themselves, or others, wrote their names. In businesses, overall, the majority of women recorded in the Hastings accounts, where they did so, could sign for their money.

Although being patronised by the aristocracy was beneficial to any business, payment for goods and services could be extremely irregular. In some instances, years

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<sup>39</sup>M. Hunt, *The Middling Sort: Commerce, Gender and the Family in England 1680-1780*, (London, 1996), pp. 139-140.

<sup>40</sup>Clark, *The English Alehouse*, p. 180.

could pass before a tradesperson, or for that matter those unfortunate individuals who purchased goods for members of the family, received what they were owed. A note from a Mrs Shirley probably to the housekeeper, shows as we would expect, that she was eager to recover her money. Thus, 'Lady Huntingdon desired me to buy her two pounds of tea which I did and sent to her by ye Ashby Carrier, it was about Michaelmas 1729, it cost two guineas which I suppose she has forgot and desire you would speak to my Lord's steward for it'. She finally received payment on the 5th November 1733.<sup>41</sup> However, when bills were paid depended on the circumstances, and examples of bills settled promptly or otherwise can be found. Widow Hickinbotham from Melbourne in Derbyshire had to wait until May the following year to be paid for Court Dinners she had provided at Lady Day and Michaelmas 1731.<sup>42</sup> Conversely, in November 1733 she was recompensed on the very same day the Court dinner was held.<sup>43</sup> For others who were in the grocery and livestock business, bills seem in a number of instances to have been settled half-yearly or towards the end of the year. This reflects the payment of wages which in turn parallels the financial cycle of the aristocracy when ready income became available from the payment of annual or half-yearly rents. As with other aspects of the economy, business operated at all levels and when a tradeswoman actually secured her money sometimes rested on the means by which she supplied her customers. In many respects the itinerant trader passing by the kitchen door was in a better position since she would obtain payment for goods on the spot, the money coming as it did direct from the housekeeper's account.

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<sup>41</sup>HAF/36/7, H.L.

<sup>42</sup>HAF/25/4, H.L.

<sup>43</sup>HAF/36/7, H.L.

### 3.2 Farming and the Sale of Agricultural Commodities

Widows managing their deceased husbands' farms were not uncommon in the countryside. Martha Cooper, a Quaker whose religious beliefs, along with those of other dissenting sects, saw little shame in women profiting from business, especially if it aided the household,<sup>44</sup> took over the running of the farm on the death of her husband in the late eighteenth century. In the early years of the nineteenth century, in the 'Account of the Sufferings of Friends', Martha had several sheep, a cow and a quantity of hay taken from her to pay the tithes owing to Jerome Dyke the rector of Burbage.<sup>45</sup> The sale of animals when they were not being wrested from women ensured an income as did that from crops. The markets of the local towns were also places where women would have engaged in the corn trade and other commodities.<sup>46</sup> As the eighteenth century wore on, the local market for goods would turn increasingly on a pastoral economy. Even though the acreage for grain growing in the region had declined, farmers disposed of small amounts of oats, wheat and barley. However, as the number of small farmers began to shrink,<sup>47</sup> fewer women in the region would have been involved in this area of the economy.

The records of the Hastings collection show a number of female farmers selling goods to the estate at Donington. Mary Tafts, for example, in 1795 received £58

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<sup>44</sup>A. Fraser, *The Weaker Vessel: Women's Lot in Seventeenth Century England*, (London, 1984), p. 427.

<sup>45</sup>12D39/35, L.R.O.

<sup>46</sup>Thwaites, 'Women in the Market Place', p. 26.

‘being in payment for a rick of hay delivered at Donington Park as per bargain’.<sup>48</sup>

Other commodities sold were reeds, thatch, coal and charcoal.<sup>49</sup> Foodstuffs for horses and other animals, as well as for human consumption appear most. Leicestershire was noted for the breeding of horses, and since pigs were widely kept and fattened mainly on barley meal by the 1780s, although occasionally peas and beans,<sup>50</sup> inevitably the arable crops of the area would need to be drawn upon to feed livestock. Bad harvests would have given women an additional opportunity to make the most of their produce. The stables at the estate and those located at Arnold in Nottinghamshire were sent numerous deliveries. Widow Hall in 1729, for example, supplied straw, hay and oats, while a Mrs Bulstrode sold old oats and peas between the years 1757 and 1765.<sup>51</sup> Similarly, Martha Shakespeare, Mary Earp and a Miss Orton all supplied barley, straw and oats to the stables in 1796. Trading in agricultural commodities continued into the nineteenth century and we still find women in the accounts to 1810, that is, until the source becomes taken up with other matters, rather than because they ceased to be involved in this kind of business.<sup>52</sup> In some instances it is likely that some of those who dealt in grains were working as factors or dealers. Unfortunately, it is not possible to identify these women directly as such.

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<sup>47</sup>R. Carpenter, ‘Peasants and Stockingers: Socio-Economic Change in Guthlaxton Hundred, Leicestershire 1700-1851’, (University of Leicester, PhD Thesis, 1993), p. 37; W.G. Hoskins, *The Midland Peasant*, (Leicester, 1949), p. 261.

<sup>48</sup>HAF/62/9, H.L.

<sup>49</sup>HAF/40, HAF/56/5, HAF/45/5, H.L.; DD/4P/58/756, N.A.O.

<sup>50</sup>G. Fussel, ‘Four Centuries of Leicestershire Farming’, W.G. Hoskins, (ed.), *Studies in Leicestershire Agrarian History*, (Leicester, 1949), p. 167.

<sup>51</sup>HAF/25/5, HAF/42/11, HAF/45/15, H.L.

<sup>52</sup>HAF/71/Unsorted Bundle, H.L.

Pinchbeck, with reference to Alice Clark, noted how aristocratic women had begun to take less of an interest in the management of their households and estates in the seventeenth century. But she argued that those of the upper classes maintained an involvement for much of the century following.<sup>53</sup> It is, however, the degree of interest in the workings of estates and farms that is difficult to determine. In the early part of the eighteenth century, the correspondence between Selina, Countess of Huntingdon, and her stewards, suggests that she was very active in decision making. In June 1730, Isaac Brisbane wrote to her Ladyship discussing the food and beer for tenants who were 'coming so far with their Coals.' He also told her of his intention to 'set ye Labourers on to mow this week.'<sup>54</sup> Similarly, the new steward John Blake in August 1737 informed Selina that tenants' goods would be appraised if they were not soon forthcoming with the rent. He also enquired of her 'if my Lord, will dispose of the bigger of the two young horses.'<sup>55</sup> And, furthermore, in a letter to Theophilus, Blake wrote that, 'the py'd Dutch heifer has a bull calf...If it is to be reared I think a cow should be bought for it to run with; but I shall be glad to know my lady's pleasure.'<sup>56</sup> The Countess, not the only woman of quality in this period who had to organise farm and estate affairs, heard from Anna Maria Browne in August 1734 telling her about a person who would make her a suitable lady's maid; she apologised for not writing earlier, 'but ye harvest has made me not able to do it sooner'.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>53</sup>Pinchbeck, *Women Workers*, p. 283.

<sup>54</sup>HA/71/1006, H.L. Interestingly, this letter has been wrongly classified as sent from Isaac Brisbane to the ninth Earl of Huntingdon.

<sup>55</sup>HA/77/771, H.L. This letter too appears to have been written to Selina and not the Earl.

<sup>56</sup>HA/77/769, H.L.

<sup>57</sup>HA/75/13236, H.L.

Drawing on evidence from two diaries written by the wives of farmers, Davidoff and Hall have made comparisons between the role of the farmer's wife in the later years of the eighteenth century and the 1820s. The first documented her activities in the earlier period and described what she did, for example, as 'helping to manage the farm and work people', and 'travelling extensively on horseback' to markets and shops. She also wrote of seeing her lawyer and visiting the theatre. She recorded, in addition, that she brewed and sold agricultural produce. Conversely, her early nineteenth century counterpart, a woman living on the Warwickshire/Leicestershire border in the 1820s is noted taking an interest in the renovations of the farmhouse, going to church, social visits, philanthropy and family affairs. Moreover, while the latter's activities were also common to the woman of the earlier period, this nevertheless, it is argued, illustrates the marginalisation of middling women's economic role.<sup>58</sup> However, anecdotal evidence has to be treated with caution when determining any chronology of change.

John Simmons, a wealthy farmer living at Butt House, set on the Leicestershire/Derbyshire border in north-west Leicestershire, (see Map 1.1), wrote of important daily events and transactions in his diary and farm accounts for the years 1796 until his death in November 1803. In his diary he entered some of the activities of his wife and daughters. Nowhere for these years is there any passage relating to work Mrs Simmons may have done on the farm. John Simmons, however, thought it important to record her philanthropic work in that for example, she 'walked into Ashby

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<sup>58</sup>Davidoff and Hall, *Family Fortunes*, p.306-7; endnote 169, p. 516 and endnote 72, p. 513.

with Miss Joyce to buy clothing for the poor' on the 25th May 1801.<sup>59</sup> Also listed were Mary Simmons' social visits and her attendance at the theatre, as were her walks to various villages or local towns, the reasons for which remained unspecified.<sup>60</sup> These may possibly have had some important function other than social or philanthropic. Are we to deduce from the absence of any recorded economic activity for John Simmons' wife that she did not need, or care to be concerned with such matters, thereby indicating that farmers' wives had retreated from such work at an earlier date? Or did Mr Simmons think any labour she performed so mundane that it did not warrant an entry in his diary? Over the period 1695 to 1810 the business activities of women documented in the Hastings accounts suggest little change in the type or manner in which they were undertaken. Mary Simpson, of the Launde estate in the far east of Leicestershire, continued noting payments to labourers through the beginning of the nineteenth century until the accounts finish in the 1840s.<sup>61</sup> Farmers' wives worked at many tasks and their role may have been circumscribed in relation to the production of dairy produce in the first part of the nineteenth century,<sup>62</sup> but much of what they did had always focused their attention on the home environment. Women participated fully in enterprise without having physically to do the labour or even be present.

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<sup>59</sup>DE690, L.R.O.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid.

<sup>61</sup>6D52/280/34, L.R.O.

### 3.3 The Carrying Trade

While estate records highlight those very prominent areas where women conducted business, we also get the opportunity to discover something about those less visible sectors of enterprise, for example, the transportation of goods. The necessity of carrying agricultural commodities to towns and about the countryside, not to mention a growing array of consumer goods, and the products of the hosiery industry, created a large amount of work for hauliers, even with the advent of a canal system. Historians have observed that the location of inns on transport routes coupled with women's dominant position in catering gave them access to the coaching business and to the short haul trade.<sup>63</sup> We know they also acted as carters and carriers although this has been little commented upon. This is largely because evidence for provincial carriers in the eighteenth century is generally hard to come by.<sup>64</sup> That women are rarely mentioned in later periods is most likely due to their absence from trades directories, a source which has been employed for the discussion of this subject.<sup>65</sup> In earlier periods, however, for example, the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, women are documented as carting materials to and from building sites.<sup>66</sup> These activities are further recorded in estate accounts for the eighteenth century. Haulage is the type of enterprise that women could continue with some ease after the loss of their husbands or engage in if a spinster. The transportation of goods from one destination to another did

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<sup>62</sup>D. Valenze, 'The Art of Women and the Business of Men: Women's Work and the Dairy Industry 1740-1840', *Past and Present*, 130 (1991), pp. 142-169.

<sup>63</sup>Davidoff and Hall, *Family Fortunes*, p. 299.

<sup>64</sup>Turnbull, 'Provincial Road Carrying in England in the Eighteenth Century', *The Journal of Transport History*, 4 (1977-8), p. 19.

<sup>65</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 17-39.



not involve any craft skill or the maintenance of stock, but rather the initial capital investment of horses and carts, and then someone to drive them. The high turnover of 'common carrier' firms suggests there were few obstacles preventing people from engaging in the trade.<sup>67</sup>

Before discussing the material found in the Hastings accounts, we should note the distinction between the 'common carrier' and the private carrier. The 'common carriers' were expected to convey at a reasonable price 'all traffic brought to them from all towns to which they professed to carry'. The private carriers, on the other hand, were, for example, farmers who sought out opportunities to employ their horses and carts during less busy periods or looked for a return load after transporting their goods to market. Moreover, they could pick and choose what they carried and how much they charged their customers.<sup>68</sup> Women appear to have operated at both these levels and much of the carriage work documented in the estate accounts was clearly undertaken by private carriers. Indeed, part-time carriers can be found offering their services to country estates.<sup>69</sup>

The upkeep of a large estate and lands with their innumerable buildings, walls and fences in association with agricultural and other activities ensured that large loads of items such as sand, wood, coal, bricks, tiles, iron, lime, hay, straw were carried to and fro on the Donington estate and to property beyond. Estate records suggest that

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<sup>66</sup>Woodward, *Men at Work*, p. 89.

<sup>67</sup>Turnbull, 'Provincial Road Carrying in England', pp. 24-25.

<sup>68</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 19.

<sup>69</sup>Hey, *Packmen, Carriers and Packhorse Roads*, pp. 205-206.

widows in the region were very active in this form of business. In October 1755, Elizabeth Houghton of Nottinghamshire was paid 12s for twenty-four journeys for the transportation of rabbits and game,<sup>70</sup> while on the 16th May 1738, for example, Widow Farrow received payment of 8s for the carriage of four loads of wood and other materials for the repair of the mills. Although, strictly speaking, the signature of Moses Plant on the reverse of the receipt indicates that he accepted the payment for her.<sup>71</sup> Similarly, in 1757, Widow Taylor charged the Earl for transporting 'sand to ye park wall' and 'hay out of the Wigge'.<sup>72</sup> Again, the money for undertaking this service was received by a John Peach. These men were clearly employed when needed to do the actual work, and a labourer or labourers were hired to load goods or crops onto the wagon. Occasionally, women do appear to have taken payment themselves and while we cannot discount the possibility that women were actively involved in the work itself, it is much more likely that their role was purely managerial and administrative. This should not be taken as an inability or an unwillingness to do the work, but rather that hiring men or relatives was a necessity since women were often engaged in another business elsewhere. Nevertheless, higglers were known to travel about the countryside with a horse and cart and as women took out licenses, it is probable they drove the cart themselves as well as travelling on foot. Milk women it seems used carts to transport milk.<sup>73</sup> In the opening chapter of Thomas Hardy's novel, *The Woodlanders*, first published in 1887, we are introduced to Mrs Dolliery, a carrier. She is described as

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<sup>70</sup>DD/4P/58/83/35, N.A.O.

<sup>71</sup>HAF/38/2, H.L.

<sup>72</sup>HAF/42/11, H.L.

<sup>73</sup>Pinchbeck, *Women Workers*, pp. 298-9.

‘driving’ the carrier’s van half filled with passengers most of whom were women.<sup>74</sup>

Mrs Dolliery falls into the category of the village or country carrier who in the late nineteenth century transported passengers as well as goods.<sup>75</sup> Nonetheless, where the carriage of goods and passengers were part of businesses managed by women higher up the social scale it is more likely that a man would be employed to do the driving.

Women rarely confined their operations to one aspect of business and it was wise that they did not, since the business world of the eighteenth century was fraught with dangers and insecurity for the middling sort.<sup>76</sup> The aforementioned Widow Taylor not only transported building materials, and other goods, she also sold deals (planks of wood) to the Donington Park estate.<sup>77</sup> She signed for the deals with an educated hand, but not for the carriage receipts, which as seen earlier, were signed for by men, suggesting that the movement of goods would, indeed, be in the hands of a male relative or other hired worker, while the Widow Taylor herself managed a retail outlet. Two, ten foot deals were bought of her in June of 1764, and at other times before at Cavendish Bridge. Opened probably in 1758, Cavendish Bridge was an important point of departure on the road network, became part of the main highway between Derby and Nottingham.<sup>78</sup> Widow Taylor by positioning herself at this junction was perfectly placed to take advantage of any haulage business that came her way. At the Welbeck estate in Nottinghamshire in the 1720s, women carriers transported lime from the estate

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<sup>74</sup>T. Hardy, *The Woodlanders*, 1887, (Penguin Classics, 1998), p. 6.

<sup>75</sup>Turnbull, ‘Provincial Road Carrying in England’, p. 19.

<sup>76</sup>Hunt, *The Middling Sort*, p. 31.

<sup>77</sup>HAF/40/17, HAF/45/13 & 14, H.L.

<sup>78</sup>C. Hadfield, *The Canals of the East Midlands*, (Newton Abbot, 1970), p. 33.

to Worksop and iron to and from Bawtry to Welbeck.<sup>79</sup> These loads of lime and iron were carried approximately eight to ten miles, and Elizabeth Taylor we know worked only two and half miles away from Donington at Cavendish Bridge. The majority of carrier traffic was local whether it was undertaken by the common or private carriers, with the majority of goods were transported within twenty miles.<sup>80</sup> However, while women may have undertaken most of their carriage work locally, they were clearly part of the wider regional and national transport network. Bawtry was an inland port on the river Idle, and Defoe wrote of its significance. He described Bawtry as ‘famous all over the south part of the West Riding of Yorkshire, for it is the place wither all their heavy goods are carried.’<sup>81</sup> Other historians have commented on women’s involvement in carriage businesses that took goods to places far distant. Approximately ten percent of all carrier services from towns were bound for London.<sup>82</sup> A woman from Ludlow in Shropshire, for example, whose two former husbands were both carriers, kept a shop in the town and a warehouse in London.<sup>83</sup>

Although women entered into the transactions of transportation themselves sometimes a group of carriers appear to have worked together in order to complete work on the estate. Five, for example, including two who were widows, delivered coal to the park from the parish of Coleorton on 4th June 1757, and Thomas Robinson received payment for all this work in November 1757. Additionally, he also had the

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<sup>79</sup>DD4P/58/78, N.A.O.

<sup>80</sup>Turnbull, ‘Provincial Road Carrying in England’, p. 26; Turnbull and Chartres, J.A. Chartres and G.L. Turnbull, ‘Road Transport’, in D. Aldcroft and M. Freeman, (eds), *Transport in the Industrial Revolution*, (Manchester, 1983), p. 82.

<sup>81</sup>Hadfield, *The Canals of the East Midlands*, p. 30.

<sup>82</sup>Turnbull, ‘Provincial Road Carrying in England’, p. 27.

costs for hauling twenty-three loads of hay which had been divided between four different people.<sup>84</sup> The amount of money owed to each suggests that Thomas Robinson did not sub-contract this work since he is listed as earning so much a load as the others. It is possible that in much the same way as those workers engaged in piece work at harvest time chose a leader to negotiate a price for them so those individuals looking for carriage work from the same area worked together.

One particular business that stands out within the Hastings estate accounts is that of the Spooner family. In the year 1732 a Mrs Mary Spooner makes her first appearance. On four occasions between the 26th May and the 14th August Mrs Spooner's vehicles transported well over 17,000 bricks.<sup>85</sup> In the following April she is recorded as conveying another 300 bricks and 200 tiles.<sup>86</sup> Furthermore, on the 13th December 1736 she was given 13s for the carriage of 6,500 bricks to the 'house on the millbank'.<sup>87</sup> The presence of clay in the area meant that brick-making for the maintenance of buildings and for retail proved a useful enterprise to the Hastings family, and of course, provided work for the carriers of the region.<sup>88</sup> Later on in the century a Walter Spooner operated as a carrier and through the months of April to November 1771 carried coals to the brick kiln at Ashby, with his sister Jane Spooner

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<sup>83</sup>Wright, *'Holding Up Half the Sky'*, p. 58.

<sup>84</sup>HAF/42/11, H.L.

<sup>85</sup>HAF/36/9, H.L.

<sup>86</sup>HAF/36/7, H.L.

<sup>87</sup>HAF/37/12, H.L.

<sup>88</sup>There were several brick kilns in the area, for example, at Packington, Donington and Ashby de la Zouch. There were also lime works located in such parishes as Ticknall in Derbyshire, Breedon and Barrow. HAF/36/7, HAF/49/11, H.L.

accepting payment.<sup>89</sup> In October and November of 1773, we have a Catherine Spooner active on the estate transporting wood, tiles, bricks and mortar for which she received 15s 3d.<sup>90</sup> Several years later she is found selling corn to the stables which suggests that she also did not engage in the haulage business alone.<sup>91</sup> The final record of her activities comes in 1781 when a final payment came for work completed in October, but mainly November of that year. In that period her carts or wagons had shifted 14,500 bricks, 2,921 tiles, 10 loads of sand and 3 loads of thatch sheaves.<sup>92</sup> It seems that the money paid went 'for the use of Mrs Spooner's representatives, indicating that she had subsequently died in the years following this work. Interestingly, there is an entry in the Hastings financial records for the year 1759, some fourteen years earlier, that states, 'An account of the Personal Estate of the right Honourable Lady Selina Hastings deceased...paid to Catherine Spooner in full of her legacy, wages & etc. £59 2s 5d.'<sup>93</sup> Is this the same Catherine Spooner perhaps? If so, had she used her legacy and wages, and importantly, the patronage of the Hastings family to support her business and find work for her carriers on the estate? As the carrier's role at this time did not just consist of moving goods to one place to another, but could mean, for example, shopping for groceries and clothing, and taking items for repair. The personal relations between carrier and some of their customers, as well illustrated in the correspondence of the Purefoy family,<sup>94</sup> suggests that the theory regarding Catherine Spooner is a credible one. Indeed, providing a personalised service for gentry and

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<sup>89</sup>HAF/49/11, H.L.

<sup>90</sup>HAF/51/8, H.L.

<sup>91</sup>HAF/53/1, H.L.

<sup>92</sup>HAF/54/7, H.L.

<sup>93</sup>HAF/43/2, H.L.

<sup>94</sup>Turnbull, 'Provincial Road Carrying in England', p. 22.

county families formed one of the foundation stones for the development of carrier services. However, this particular role it seems had all but disappeared by the late eighteenth century.<sup>95</sup>

Although women were not confined to the transportation of goods at the local level, we do not know enough about women's involvement in the haulage business to determine how their experiences might have differed from those of men. As with many other forms of business, women whether as single women or widows were able to participate fully in their running, and make them a success. Haulage in many ways was an ideal enterprise for women. Men could be hired easily for much of the work and women did not need specialist skills, knowledge or tools. Women were essentially organisers and managers and exercised their abilities to secure business in the transportation of goods. Although, for example, widow Taylor had a shop, as did many women in the eighteenth century, her activities were not confined in, or close to, the domestic sphere in that she was clearly able to operate in the wider community and integrate into the economy of the region. However, a woman remaining in business on the death of her husband frequently depended on family circumstances rather than the type of enterprise.

As mentioned earlier, an examination of trades directories for the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries for the towns of Ashby de la Zouch, Hinckley, (and others), do not list any women as carriers. However, the final reference to a

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<sup>95</sup>Chartres and Turnbull, 'Road Transport', p. 94.

woman paid for the carriage of 'bastard stone' for Ashby Highways appears in the Hastings accounts for 1824.<sup>96</sup> It has been argued that 'women such as these could find a foothold in the [passenger] transport business through the management of inns, but they faced competition from men who started with capital resources and business experience'.<sup>97</sup> Testamentary evidence confirms the presence of women. Of those carriers who left wills at Hinckley, one left his business to his daughter whose husband was also a carrier; another left his wagon and horses to his son while his wife appears to have concentrated on the grocery shop; and lastly, a Daniel Greatrex stipulated in 1814 that all his personal estate was to be sold and his wife maintained from the rents and profits arising from his real estate.<sup>98</sup> Two further wills made in 1820 and 1832, this time by victuallers with carriage and coaching businesses, illustrate in both cases that women were left the entire personal estates of their husbands including horses, gigs, stock of spirits, live and dead stock.<sup>99</sup> In order to be willed these goods and, as we have seen, in some cases specified to carry on business in 'a like manner' to the husband, women on widowhood had to have had the business experience already. While carriage work on estates may have declined before the end of the eighteenth century, the transportation of agricultural and industrial products, and other supplies for the retail trades ensured that whether as spinster, wife or widow, women remained in the haulage business.

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<sup>96</sup>HAF/ 79/Unsorted bundle, H.L.

<sup>97</sup>Davidoff and Hall, *Family Fortunes*, p. 299.

<sup>98</sup>Hinckley wills, 1787/17, 1800/103, 1820/68, L.R.O.

<sup>99</sup>Hinckley wills, 1831/159, 1833/159, L.R.O.



### 3.4 The Clothing and Needle Trades

The clothing sector employed considerable numbers of women and it attracted much female enterprise. However, although the Hastings accounts do highlight individuals who made clothing for the Countesses of Huntingdon at one time or another, not unexpectedly, links were with business women from London rather than with those located in the towns of the region. In 1813 London traders Madame Burzio, a ‘milliner, French corset maker and fancy dress maker’, and a Mary Jolson who specialised in child bed and ready made linen had items bought from them.<sup>100</sup> For earlier in the period, the Earl’s bankers, Messrs Hoar and Company and later Coutts were frequently instructed to pay London based milliners. The Motts in the 1730s and later their relatives, probably daughters Jane and Catherine Mott from the 1750s, continued in the family tradition as suppliers of *haute couture*.<sup>101</sup> Payments were made to them, and others, in April/May and September/October, again reflecting other forms of remuneration for wages and bills. Sums of £20, £30 and £50 10s were regularly received by Mary and Hannah Mott in the 1730s and 1740s.<sup>102</sup> An account for Lady Selina’s and Lady Mary’s Clothes, undated, but from the early part of the eighteenth century demonstrates that the sale of clothes and accessories for wealthy young women and children could be very lucrative. A Mrs Wilks charged £220 5s 6d for ‘Lace, Edgins and Holland’, although we do not know how long she had waited for payment, while Mrs Parker was paid £7 8s 6d for gloves and Mrs Henderson £17 2s 6d ‘for lawn

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<sup>100</sup>HAF/72/14, H.L.

<sup>101</sup>These instructions to pay are spread throughout the Hastings accounts. HAF Series, H.L.

<sup>102</sup>HAF Series, H.L.

quilting, gerdells [and] stockings'.<sup>103</sup> The milliner stood at the apex of the clothing trade and had sufficient remuneration for her endeavours to make it a good proposition for women of 'considerable social standing'.<sup>104</sup>

In sharp contrast to the cost of the finery that adorned the Hastings family, it is in the clothing of servants and 'objects of charity' that we find examples of local business women. Servants needed to be decently clothed and their garments kept in good repair since they were reflection on their employers. Livery probably purchased from London is known to have been supplied by a Mrs Farmer in the 1750s.<sup>105</sup> Repairs and certain items of clothing would have been obtained locally from towns in the region. Elizabeth Leake's bill in 1737 shows that, in this instance, she mainly mended and repaired clothes, but she did make nine shirts at 2s each, although we do not know who they were for.<sup>106</sup> If hirelings required less expensive cloth, then rank and status determined that persons of the lower orders also be clothed accordingly. In 1749, Selina's charitable work rewarded Elizabeth Hicks with £1 8s for 'making cloaths for twelve poor widows and children at Loughborough', and in addition, twelve pairs of gloves at 14s.<sup>107</sup> Likewise, Mary Smedley was paid for needlework on less expensive garments in January 1821. The bill also contained items of cloth, cording and silk; the machining of four bonnets costing 4s and thirty days work at 1s 6d a day.<sup>108</sup> The farmer John Simmons and his family had greater recourse to the women of the locality for his

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<sup>103</sup>HAF/67/4, H.L.

<sup>104</sup>Pinchbeck, *Women Workers*, p. 287.

<sup>105</sup>HAF/41/11, H.L.

<sup>106</sup>HAF/38/1, H.L.

<sup>107</sup>HAF/40/13, H.L.

<sup>108</sup>HAF/74/Unsorted Bundle, H.L.

family's cloth and millinery. His farm accounts for the early years of the nineteenth century show purchases of feather bonnets and hats from a Mrs Roe while gowns, stockings, hats and yards of cotton, muslin and cloth were also acquired of a Mrs Thornely. Further, a Mrs Joyce is noted as undertaking needlework and selling cloth for members of the Simmons' household.<sup>109</sup> The clothing trades were a significant sector of business and work for women in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century and will be discussed further in Chapter 3.0, section 3.6.

### **3.5 The Craft Trades**

From what we see in the Hastings accounts there is little to offer any encouragement to those historians that believe women were more involved in craft trades in the eighteenth century than they were in the early nineteenth. Women in these businesses were rare in comparison with those of provisioning or haulage. If the role of daughters in business was significant, then so was that of sons. The relationship between mothers and sons was important in the craft trades, and the example of the Moss family business illustrates how women provided the linkage between one generation of males and another. In May 1782 a receipt headed 'Widow Moss, Smith, her bill' indicated that she had taken over the enterprise from her husband who had in earlier times regularly undertaken work for the estate. Her husband's trades were that of ironmonger, saddler and blacksmith. For the next three or more years, work continued to be done and her annual bills are recorded for 1783 as £27 2s 6d, and for

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<sup>109</sup>DE690, L.R.O.

1785, £21 18s. However in 1785 a Joseph Moss received payment for the bill, presumably Sarah's son, although it certainly could have been another male relative. By 1790, after seven years had elapsed, it is he who appears to have taken over the running of the business since it was now 'Joseph Moss's bill'.<sup>110</sup> Sarah Moss had either died or retired. With this sort of enterprise the woman often acted as a caretaker or manager. We cannot assume that women immediately stepped aside as soon as a son came of age. For example, in August 1795 a Thomas Sills accepted payment of £15 'for his mother' for glazing and other work in the hothouse and gardens between April 1794 and June 1795, as did William Slater for wood and repairs made at Ashby.<sup>111</sup> As we have seen, there were women who did not readily relinquish the reins and the age and enthusiasm of the woman surely must have played a part in that decision.

If no male relative was available or a son was too young, this was another matter entirely and a woman would have to hire journeymen and labourers to do the work.<sup>112</sup> Elizabeth Boulton in 1790 paid for repairs which involved washing the outside of Kings Mill in September and on another occasion painting. A George Garton was working for her at 2s 2d a day; she also employed a labourer at 1s 6d a day in November.<sup>113</sup> There are a number of reasons for the absence of women in this type of trade. The location of the work was of less importance than some historians have suggested.<sup>114</sup> Certainly, many did not have the specialist knowledge that would have

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<sup>110</sup>HAF/55/6, HAF/56/5, HAF/57/12, HAF/59/6, H.L.

<sup>111</sup>HAF/63/11, HAF/58/13, H.L.

<sup>112</sup>Pinchbeck, *Women Workers*, p. 285.

<sup>113</sup>HAF/60/3, H.L.

<sup>114</sup>A. Clark, *Working Life of Women in the Seventeenth Century*, (London, 1919, repr. 1992), p. 170; Woodward, *Men at Work*, p. 87.

enabled them to be craftswomen in the truest sense that men were. However, married women and widows had substantial co-ordinating roles precisely because family enterprises rarely focused on one aspect of business, and in these other areas women's participation brought the most benefit. Moreover, the organisation and work of carriers, for example, was not done in a workshop.

Ivy Pinchbeck's assessment of the value of estate accounts to the historian of women is in many respects an accurate one. These records, as Pinchbeck wrote, often only illustrate the sectors of work in which women engaged. Nevertheless, while estate records might highlight the importance of the food and drink trades, they also provide evidence for women's engagement in haulage, an area of business that has attracted very little comment from historians.

A more systematic approach to the study of estate records than the one taken here might further reveal the level of business formation, the breadth and depth of local and regional markets, and how women's involvement in business and trade might differ between geographical locations. Moreover, the investigation of several estates in a location may enable us to identify women's dealings across a broader area, and make some assessment of the scale of a business or 'how far the owner was successful', especially if these could be linked to other local business records or good collections of family papers. In any event, what has been shown here, with the evidence presented in Chapter 2.0, is the need to revise our view of middle class women becoming increasingly marginalised from 1800 onwards. The extent of a woman's commercial

activities was governed by regional and local economies, the sector or sectors she chose to engage in, her personal circumstances and her own knowledge and skills.

## **PART II**

### **LABOURING WOMEN: WORK AND WAGES**

#### **4.0 AGRICULTURE: FEMALE FARM SERVANTS, WEEKLY AND DAY LABOUR**

If women of the middling ranks had a choice in whether or not they worked, this certainly did not apply to labouring women. Women from the largest and poorest section of the population toiled for most, if not all, of their lives, and the majority expected little but the simplest existence. In this first chapter of Part II the work of women in agriculture is investigated and it begins with an examination of the weekly and day labour of men and women on Leicestershire and Nottinghamshire estates. It will be argued here that no discernible change can be detected in the sexual division of agricultural labour in the region from 1700, and the opportunities for women in this form of employment were already limited. Further, it will show that from the third quarter of the eighteenth century the gap between male and female day wages began to broaden significantly. The chapter will then go on to explore the work of women who were hired servants, and suggest that the labour in dairying that we think of as often forming part of the agricultural sector should actually be considered as closely affiliated to that of housewifery, and therefore, domestic service.

##### **4.1 Day Labour in Leicestershire and Nottinghamshire**

Elizabeth Gilboy's study of labour on the Thornborough estate in Yorkshire first showed the value of estate records for examining agricultural work. Using the account book covering the years 1749 to 1773, she determined the work that men and women did, the amounts they were paid in money and in kind, and in some instances



calculated yearly earnings.<sup>1</sup> However, this type of source has limitations like any other, and Gilboy observed how women could be employed but their wages sometimes omitted from the accounts. Sharpe has also pointed to the possibility of incompleteness, and the probability that the work of women on small farms would have been much more diverse than on commercially oriented farms for which accounts survive.<sup>2</sup> There are two further problems of importance. Firstly, it is not always apparent from these records if female labourers received part of their daily or weekly wages in food or drink or in some other form. Male labourers could have received part of their wage, for example, in wood or coal. Secondly, an entry in the accounts can give the impression of being a payment for a daily wage, but in fact, may well have been one for piece work. Both forms of payment were common. However, while these difficulties exist, with care, estate accounts are an extremely useful source, and do have major advantages. Importantly, they allow the identification of agricultural tasks with some specificity, which is something settlement examinations do not, and we can also distinguish the sexual division of labour as it existed in these localities in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. We can, likewise, examine how the work of female non-servant labour fits into the pastoral economy of the East Midlands.

As the period covered by this study extends over a duration of one hundred and thirty years it was not possible to find estate and farm records that provide information over the complete period. Some estates provide better material for the earlier part of

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<sup>1</sup>E.W. Gilboy, 'Labour at Thornborough: An Eighteenth Century Estate', *Economic History Review*, 3:3 (1932), pp. 388-98.

<sup>2</sup>P. Sharpe, *Adapting to Capitalism*, (London, 1996), p. 77.

the eighteenth century and others for the later years, and others for the beginning of the nineteenth. The Hastings accounts, which were made use of in Chapter 2.0, are an invaluable source for this exercise, since they do document agricultural and outdoor labour for much of the time at Donington Park. The other Leicestershire estate and family records exploited are from Launde, an estate in the far east of Leicestershire on the Lincolnshire border and enclosed very early between 1450 and 1550. In the eighteenth century land in the north and the south of this side of Leicestershire became increasingly turned over to pasture. The Babington estate at Rothley Temple situated a short distance north of Leicester, in the centre of the county, where the land was relatively evenly balanced between grassland and arable. Rothley was enclosed in the period of Parliamentary enclosure.<sup>3</sup> (See Map 4.1). The two north Nottinghamshire estates included here were located at Welbeck and Thorney. Map 1.2 in Chapter 1.0 shows that these estates were free of the hosiery industry. Welbeck, near Worksop, came into the possession of the Duke of Portland in 1734.<sup>4</sup> Thorney Hall on the western boundary of Lincolnshire was home to the Neville family. The parish of Thorney like Welbeck, underwent enclosure from waste land without Parliamentary sanction in the eighteenth century. Land at Thorney was reclaimed from the 'small sandy tongue' in the far east of the county, and at Welbeck from the forest district close to Derbyshire.<sup>5</sup> (See Map 4.2). Reference is also made, or information used

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<sup>3</sup>J. Thirsk, 'Agrarian History, 1540-1950', in W.G. Hoskins and R. McKinley (eds.), *The Victoria County History of Leicester*, (Oxford, 1954), p. 232. Maps accompanying M. Beresford, 'Glebe Terriers and Open Field Leicestershire', W.G. Hoskins (ed.), *Studies in Leicestershire Agrarian History*, (Leicester, 1949), pp. 76-77.

<sup>4</sup>J. Throsby, *The Antiquities of Nottinghamshire*, III, (1796).

<sup>5</sup>'The Nevilles of Thorney Hall', *The Lincolnshire Historian*, 2:7, (1966) p. 22; J.D. Chambers, *Nottinghamshire in the Eighteenth Century*, (London, 1932, repr. 1960), pp. 144-145, p. 350 and p. 352.

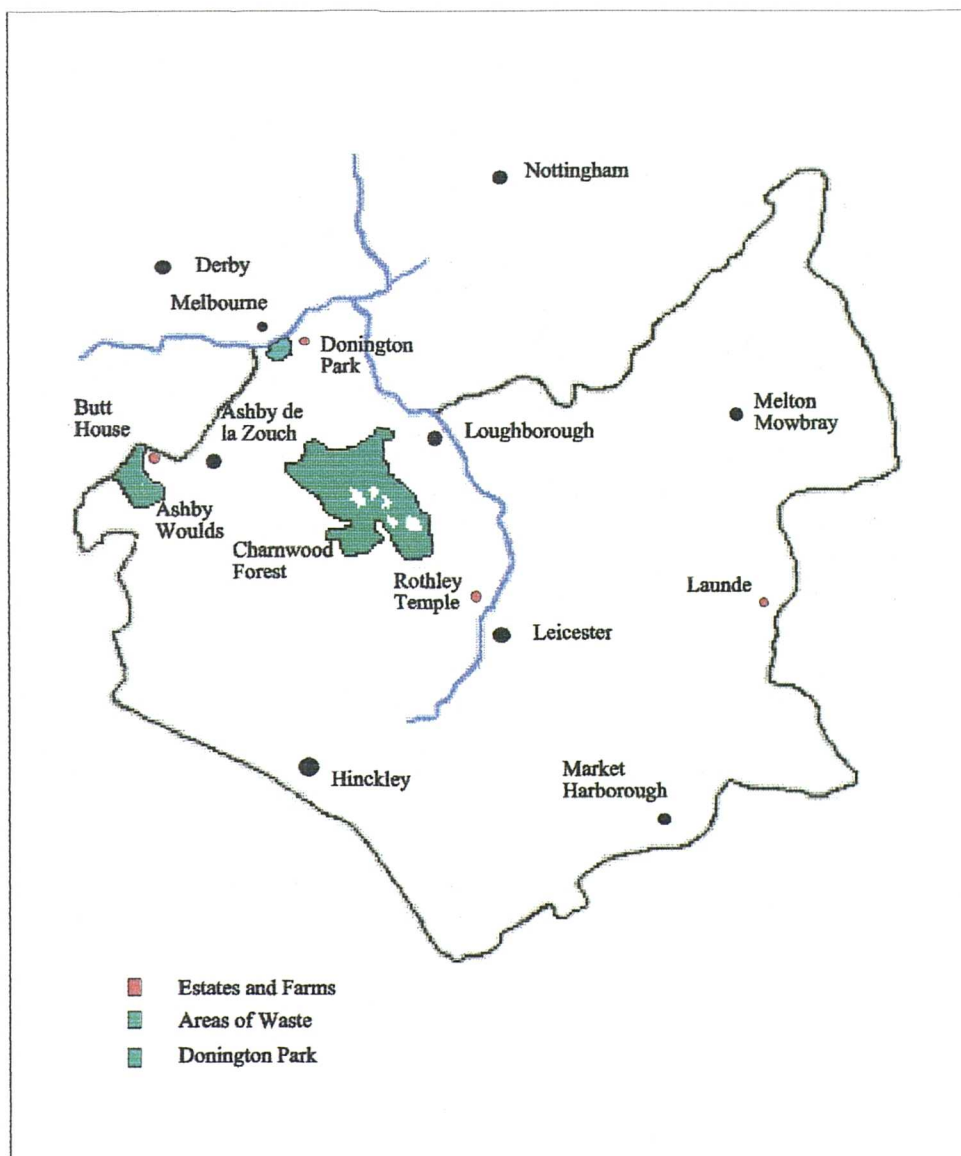
from the Ledstone estate in Yorkshire (another estate of the Hastings family), and the diary and farm accounts of John Simmons, farmer, of Butt House in north-west Leicestershire. The geographical location of these estates enables differences, if they exist, to be drawn between localities and within the region. It is recognised that the information presented here relates only to examples of districts in Leicestershire and Nottinghamshire, and may not necessarily be characteristic of the situation as it existed for women's agricultural work in other places.

Before we investigate the work and wages of women agricultural labourers in the East Midlands, it is helpful to contrast the results of studies from the north and south of England. At the Thornborough estate in the north riding of Yorkshire in the second half of the eighteenth century, women were found performing some of the same tasks as men, for example, shearing and reaping, although mowing, ditching, ploughing were visibly an exclusively male preserve.<sup>6</sup> Comparing this with the Hastings estate at Ledstone in the west riding of Yorkshire during 1770 and 1771, agricultural tasks to a degree also overlapped. Both men and women were engaged in weeding, and one woman helped load the hay cart, although it was men that normally did so. It was men alone who worked as mowers, but on the other hand, women seemed to have raked behind the cart in the harvest, and in the springtime, worked at dressing, i.e. spreading manure. It is possible, however, that men also worked at spreading.<sup>7</sup> A further division of labour was apparent within the task of weeding itself, as a single male was

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<sup>6</sup>Gilboy, 'Labour at Thornborough', p. 392

MAP 4.1 - LOCATIONS OF SELECTED FARMS AND  
ESTATES IN LEICESTERSHIRE



<sup>7</sup>HAF/48/2, HAF/49/4, H.L.

recorded 'mowing weeds in the wilderness' while women consistently found work weeding gardens and pavements.<sup>8</sup> As we saw earlier, a uniformity in female tasks stretching over three centuries on estates and farms in Essex saw women mainly occupied in haymaking, stone-picking, and weeding. Thus, as far afield as Yorkshire in the third quarter of the eighteenth century and Essex, the similarity in the sexual division of labour demonstrates that, for the most part, women were located in tasks associated with assisting and cleaning. What of the East Midlands? In Table 4.1, agricultural and outdoor work plus the daily wage rates for women on Leicestershire farms and estates are shown. The work listed over the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth centuries illustrates considerable consistency, in that women were clearly confined to weeding, spreading, clodding and twitching usually in the early part of the year, with their main contribution coming in the summer months during the hay harvest. The Nottinghamshire wage data shown in Table 4.2, although less comprehensive, illustrates a similar pattern. However, there is more evidence of women working in the autumn months. The period of the hay harvest generated the majority of work for women, and this is where Snell saw increased opportunities for female servants in husbandry. An analysis of the male agricultural day and weekly labour on the Donington Park estate shows that men to the middle of the eighteenth century were involved in mowing, ditching, hedging, cutting wood, spreading, threshing, winnowing, loading and carting hay, and washing and shearing sheep.<sup>9</sup> Similarly, on the Babington estate at Rothley Temple in the 1720s, only men were engaged in fencing, ditching,

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<sup>8</sup>HAF/46/4, H.L.

<sup>9</sup>The information relating to agricultural work at Donington Park is contained throughout the Hastings accounts. HAF, H.L.

**TABLE 4.1 - DAILY WAGE RATES OF AGRICULTURAL/OUTDOOR TASKS FOR WOMEN ON LEICESTERSHIRE ESTATES AND FARMS, 1706-1831**

Year	Task	Day Rate
May 1706	Weeder Woman	4d
July 1719	Haymaker	6d
Aug 1719	Harvest	8d
July 1720	Haymaker	6d
August/September 1720	Harvest	8d
July 1721	Haymaker	6d
August 1721	Harvest	8d
April 1729	'Cloting' Oats	?
1730	Weeding	?
February 1731	Spreading 'Hillorks'	?
July 1731	Haymakers	6d
August 1731	Harvest	8d
September 1731	Harvest	6d
April/June/July 1732	? and Haymaking	6d
August 1732	Harvest	8d
June 1736	Haymaker	6d
March 1737	Spreading and Clodding	4d
June 1737	Haymaker	6d
June 1737	Nursery	6d
June/July 1738	Haymaker	5d
June 1738	Nursery	6d
April 1739	Spreading and Clodding	4d
July 1739	Haymaker	6d
July 1739	Weeding in Garden	4d
June/July/ Aug 1743	Haymaker	6d
May 1744	Rucking Barley	8d
June 1744	Haymaker	6d
Sept 1744	Rucking Pease	8d
1763	Assisting at Oats	?
July 1764	Haymaker	6d
June/July/ Aug 1767	Work in Garden	6d
July/Aug 1767	Haymaker	6d
June 1769	Haymaker	6d
July 1778	Carrying Wood	1s
April 1803	Clodding	8d
Summer 1809	Hay Harvest	1s
Spring 1810	Twitching and Clodding	9d
Summer 1810	Hay Harvest	1s
Summer 1810	Corn Harvest	1s 6d
Autumn 1810	Getting Potatoes	9d
1810	Hoeing Turnips	9d
1810	Weeding	9d
November 1811	Work in Garden - Weeding	10d
April/June 1831	?	10d
July 1831	Harvest	1s 2d
October/November 1831	? [Potatoes]	10d

Source: Hastings Financial Papers: HAF/29/13, HAF/34/22, HAF/34/28, HAF/37/2, IIAF/38/5, IIAF/38/16, HAF/39/4, HAF/40/2, HAF/46/9, HAF/53/7, HAF/71/Unsorted Bundles, H.L.; Simmons Diary and Farm Accounts: DE690; Babington Estate Papers: 2D31/283; Dawson Estate Papers: 6D52/280/34, L.R.O.

mowing and cutting thorns.<sup>10</sup> At Launde in the 1830s men were again hedging, draining and ditching, and by this time women were hardly to be seen.<sup>11</sup> The information for Leicestershire very noticeably indicates that tasks relating to the crops of oats, barley and peas are absent from 1763. In the case of the latter, for example, in the sixteenth century forty-six out of every one-hundred acres in tillage grew peas and beans, by 1801 this crop accounted for only 8.5 percent of the diminished arable area of the county.<sup>12</sup>

A similar picture was found in Nottinghamshire. At Welbeck in the first half of the eighteenth century women could be found ‘dressing’, making hay, locking rushes and helping at the hay stack and weeding.<sup>13</sup> Men, on the other hand, worked at, amongst other things, banking, dykeing, ‘stibbing’ furze, thatching corn stacks, threshing and mowing.<sup>14</sup> In north Nottinghamshire the use of gangs of harvesters may have concealed from view some women workers. It is likely that harvesters brought in during the summer, for example, at the Thorney Hall estate from the 1760s, and at Welbeck in the 1750s, were paid by the acre and may have included some women occupied at shearing during the harvests. Overseers sometimes paid the travelling expenses of single women so that they could tour the country with these workers.<sup>15</sup> Since those who led the companies were paid what the group as a whole was owed, it

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<sup>10</sup>2D31/283, L.R.O.

<sup>11</sup>6D52/280/34, L.R.O.

<sup>12</sup>Thirsk, ‘Agrarian History’, p. 242.

<sup>13</sup>DD/4P/58/78; DD/4P/58/83/86, DD/4P/58/83/26, N.A.O.

<sup>14</sup>DD/4P/58/78; DD/4P/58/83/86, DD/4P/58/83/16, DD/4P/58/84/84, N.A.O.

<sup>15</sup>I. Pinchbeck, *Women Workers and the Industrial Revolution 1750-1850*, (London, 1930 repr. 1969) p. 55.



**TABLE 4.2 - WORK AND DAILY WAGE RATES OF WOMEN IN  
AGRICULTURAL/OUTDOOR WORK ON FARMS AND ESTATES IN  
NOTTINGHAMSHIRE 1724-1829**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Task</b>	<b>Day Rate</b>
Summer 1724	Haymakers	6d□
Summer 1724	Assiting in Corn Harvest	8d□
Spring 1726-9	Dressing in Close	?
Oct-Dec 1743	?	6d
June-August 1744	Weeding and Haymaking	6d
July-Aug 1755	Haymaking/Locking Rushes	6d
July-Aug 1755	Helping at Hay Stack	6d
Aug-Sept 1755	Corn Harvest	1s 0d
Nov-Dec 1769	?	4d
April 1770	?	4d
Summer 1770	Haymaking	6d*
Aug-Sept	Corn Harvest	8d*
Jan-June 1771	?	5d
July 1771	Haymaking	6d
September 1771	Corn Harvest	1s 2d
Jan-June 1772-5	?	5d
July-Aug 1772-4	Haymaking	6d
September 1772-4	Corn Harvest	1s 0d
September 1795	Work in Kitchen Gardens	7d
October 1795	Work at Kitchen Gardens	6d
May 1826	Breaking Manure	10d
June-Aug 1826	Haymaking	10d
July-Aug 1827	Haymaking	9d
December 1827	?	8d
August 1829	Haymaking	8.5d/10d
October 1829	Gathering Potatoes	1s 0d

**Source:** Portland Estate Papers: DD.4P/58/78, DD.4P/58/83/26 and 86, DD.4P/756/10 & 15; Donston/Neville Estate Papers: DD.N/213/5-19, N.A.O.

W. Page (ed.), *The Victoria County History of Nottinghamshire*, II, p. 295 and p. 374.

□ Rates set by magistrates at Rufford. Half these rates were payable if the woman received food.

\* Rates payable with board.



is not possible to identify women that may have been employed.<sup>16</sup> Chambers notes, however, that in 1723 the daily wage rate of a woman reaper was assessed at 8d.<sup>17</sup> In other areas of the Midlands women certainly reaped. In the parish of Tysoe in Warwickshire women continued at this task into the second half of the nineteenth century.<sup>18</sup> Many of the women listed in the accounts were the wives or daughters of male labourers working on the estates. In Nottinghamshire and at Donington Park, the estate workers, male and female, seem to have assisted in the work of the hay and corn harvest, and were paid by the day or week, while the companies were remunerated by the acre. This is consistent with the organisation and payment of labour in nineteenth century harvests.<sup>19</sup>

If Alice Clark was right about the extensive involvement of women in agricultural work in the seventeenth century, we would expect to see some evidence of this at the beginning of the eighteenth century. However, the only evidence in support of Clark, found amongst the Hastings manorial papers, is the example of women pinners employed by the Court Leet at Ashby de la Zouch. These women acted as constables with the job of rounding up stray animals. Until 1708, Mary Braddock and Mary Dickins impounded pigs, hogs, horses and sheep that had either been found wandering in the town or placed on the common against the rules of access. As well as making sure the stray animals were driven to the pinfold, en route the pinners might expect a rescue attempt from the animals' owners, which happened on at least two

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<sup>16</sup>DD.N 213/5, DD/4P/58/83/16, N.A.O.

<sup>17</sup>Chambers, *Nottinghamshire in the Eighteenth Century*, p. 283.

<sup>18</sup>D. Morgan, 'The Place of Harvesters in Nineteenth Century Village Life', in R. Samuel, (ed.), *Village Life and Labour*, (London, 1975), p. 33.

occasions.<sup>20</sup> A Dorothy Goddard likewise served as a pinner with a John Spencer for the Loughborough Court in 1722 to 1724. She appears to have taken over this role from Moses Goddard, a male relative, probably her husband or father.<sup>21</sup> From this period onwards, women ceased to act in this role for the Court Leet. Women in the eighteenth century were also cryers. Undertaken at markets ‘crying’ alerted people to the recovery of stray animals. Margaret Dalby was paid 1s in 1732 for this task.<sup>22</sup> However, whether the shilling was given as a daily rate or for the specific task is unclear. In Leicestershire the crying of animals occurred in the second half of the eighteenth century, although the gender of individuals is indistinguishable. Overall, although some similarity occurs in the types of work performed by men and women, there is little to suggest a wide ranging equability followed by a gradual specialisation of male and female labour. Women had specific agricultural tasks at the beginning of the century and these appear to have shown little or no differentiation over time.

From a discussion of the sexual division of labour in agriculture, we now direct our attention to the level of earnings. The day wages listed in Table 4.1 and 4.2 mirror the inconsistency in demand for agricultural labour throughout the year, and therefore, what people could earn. The spring months and autumn normally paid the least well. If we take, for example, an annual cycle of earnings in the first half of the eighteenth century on the Leicestershire estates, we find that a woman weeding or spreading and clodding might expect 4d a day in April and May, as a haymaker in June, July and

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<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 46.

<sup>20</sup>HAM/4/2-6, HAM/OS/2, H.L.

<sup>21</sup>HAM/28/13, H.L.

<sup>22</sup>HAF/35/4, H.L.

August she received 6d, and in the corn harvest in August and September, 8d. Men, similarly, demonstrated the same pattern of wage earning with the lowest day wages coming outside of summer months. Men in the middle years of the eighteenth century in the two counties at spring time might get 10d a day, 1s 2d when it came to mowing in the hay harvest, and 1s 4d for bringing in the corn. The earnings from the summer were invaluable to families, and the opportunity for near full employment allowed them to accumulate the earnings that would sustain them through periods when less work was available.<sup>23</sup>

In some cases local conditions created fluctuations in wage levels. For a reason which is unknown, in 1738 female haymakers at Donington earned 5d, instead of the usual 6d.<sup>24</sup> At Thorney in the corn harvest of 1771, women workers unusually attained a rate of 1s 2d a day. Men, in comparison, earned either 1s 4d to 1s 6d. However, the rate for women was 1s in the corn harvest of 1770, and also in the summers of 1772 to 1775. Men, alternatively, maintained their daily wage of 1s 4d or 1s 6d throughout these years.<sup>25</sup> These wage rates for men and women in the corn harvest were found at Welbeck in 1755 which suggest a stability in the day wages that had lasted for some considerable time.<sup>26</sup> In 1770 in Yorkshire at Ledstone, mowers were paid 1s 4d and female haymakers 7d; these were also the same rates in the following year.<sup>27</sup>

Interestingly, males received the equivalent wage as those doing the same work at Donington, but a female's day wage at haymaking was 1d above. At Thornborough

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<sup>23</sup>Morgan, 'The Place of Harvesters', p. 38.

<sup>24</sup>HAF/38/5, H.L.

<sup>25</sup>DD.N/213/5 and 11, N.A.O.

<sup>26</sup>DD/4P/58/83/86, N.A.O.

earnings were higher with 8d achieved by women for haymaking from 1768; in the earlier period they had been paid 6d.<sup>28</sup> The anomalies which occasionally show higher wages are largely associated with male labour shortages. For example, although prices began a further upward trend from 1770, this does not appear to have affected wage levels at Thorney. The increase in women's harvest wages in 1771, however, coincided with a rise in the numbers of men in the armed forces. These went from 51,000 in 1770 to 75,000 in the following year, and in 1772, they fell back to 57,000, declining to 50,000 by 1775.<sup>29</sup> At Thornborough the wages of male haymakers in 1771 rose to 1s from 8d/10d.<sup>30</sup>

The question of whether women working in agriculture received a customary or market wage is taken up in Chapter 7.0. But what can be discussed here is that the wage data for males and females from estates in the East Midlands illustrates clearly that women were, in general, confined to tasks that paid significantly less than men. The important issue is not only that women were paid a half or three quarters of what men earned a day for the same work, but that the sexual division of labour, more often than not, meant women were limited to those tasks that would always ensure they would receive lower wages. If we take, for example, the daily earnings that women acquired in the hay harvest, which for much of the eighteenth century was 6d, and compare this figure to the wages of male mowers, we see that in 1719 women got 60 percent of the male wage. In the 1730s it was a half, and in subsequent years until

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<sup>27</sup>HAF/48/2, HAF/49/4, H.L.

<sup>28</sup>Gilboy, 'Labour at Thornborough', p. 391.

<sup>29</sup>T.S. Ashton, *Economic Fluctuations 1700-1800*, (Oxford, 1959), p. 187.

<sup>30</sup>Gilboy, 'Labour at Thornborough', p. 391.

1775, women's earnings as a percentage of male earnings hovered between 33 and 50 percent. Apart from a wide discrepancy in what money men and women could expect to get in the hay harvest, we see in this wage data the gradual inverse movement in the daily earnings of men and women, and this is amply demonstrated in Figure 4.1.<sup>31</sup>

Although higher wage rates in agriculture were found in the industrialising regions from the 1760s, women's wages clearly failed to keep pace with those of men. In the country as a whole the East Midlands and the north of England had some of the best paid agricultural workers.<sup>32</sup> The disparity in the wages between the sexes had implications for the standard of living of families as prices rose from the 1770s, and labour from agriculture was shed.

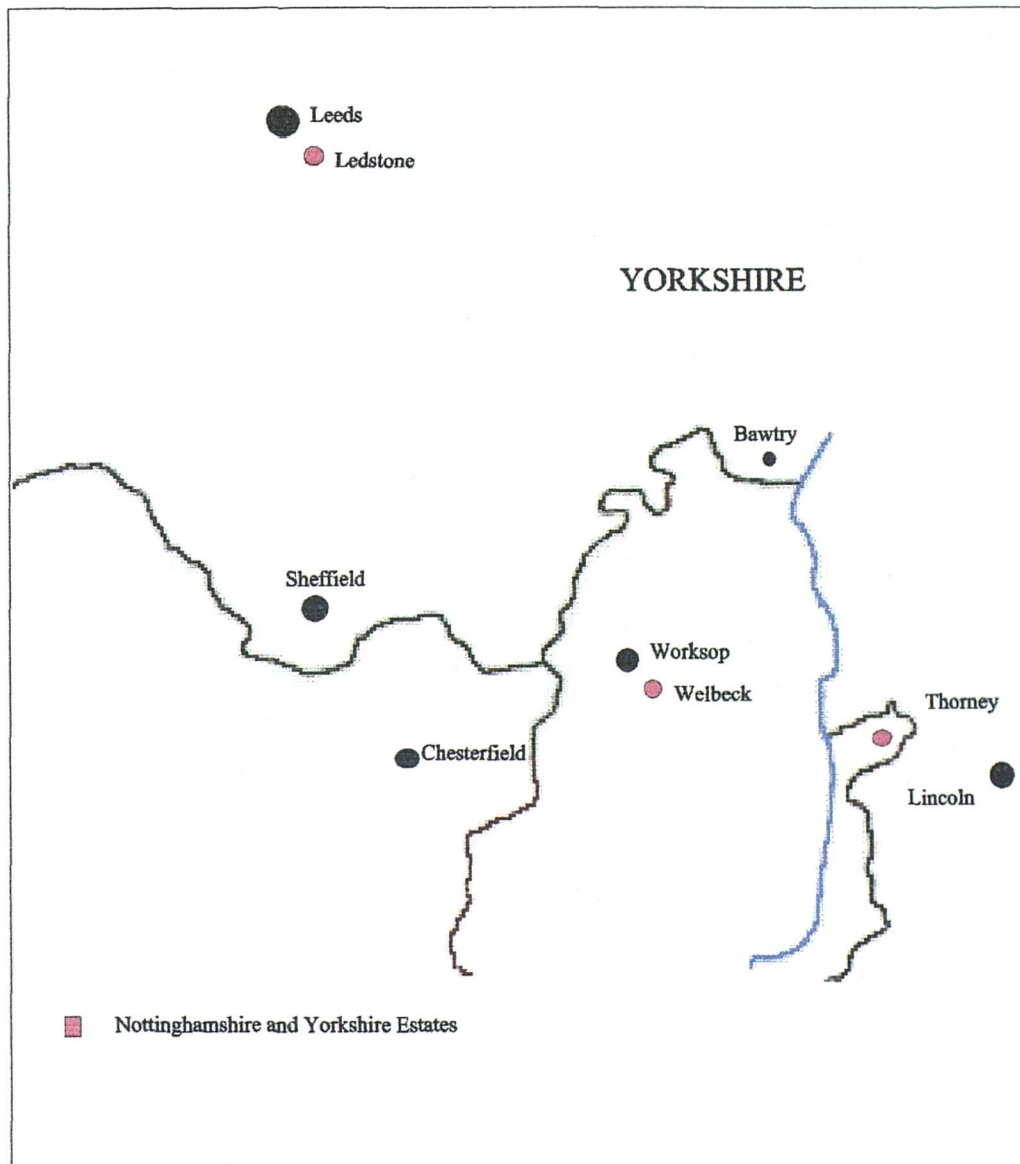
If we examine the last fifty-five years of the period shown in Figure 4.1, we can see that the inequality in wages is much more apparent and very significant when set against price increases. Weeding, for example, remunerated at 4d a day at Donington

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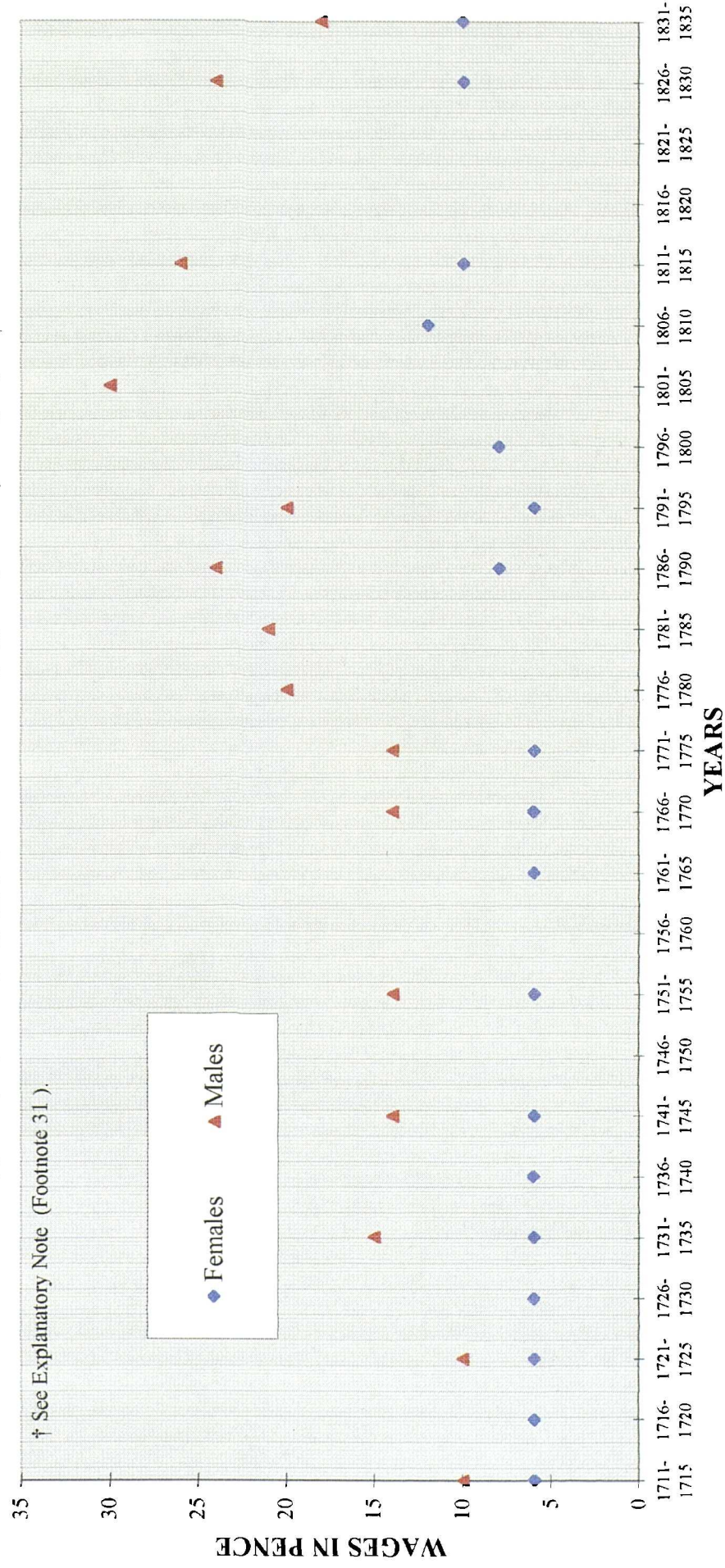
<sup>31</sup> As the wage data is not consistent over the long term, the daily wage earned by women in the hay harvest is considered a good indicator of wage trends, since this was the time of year when the majority of women were employed. For males the earnings from this time of year are also plotted. As male wages were sometimes scaled, the mean is included in the graph. Lacking information for the latter period required the incorporation of three wage points from the daily wages paid to women for domestic service employment. The inclusion of this data is valid, as there was a great deal of continuity between wages paid to women for agricultural work and that for charring or helping in the kitchen. See Table 5.3. It should be remembered that Figure 4.1 is primarily concerned with demonstrating the growing disparity between male and female wage levels and prices, and does not profess to show definitive changes in daily earnings.

<sup>32</sup> E.H. Hunt, 'Industrialisation and Regional Inequality: Wages in Britain 1760-1915', *Journal of Economic History*, 46 (1986), pp. 938-940.

MAP 4.2 - LOCATIONS OF SELECTED ESTATES IN  
NOTTINGHAMSHIRE AND YORKSHIRE



**FIGURE 4.1 - TRENDS IN AGRICULTURAL DAY WAGES FOR FEMALES AND MALES  
IN LEICESTERSHIRE AND NOTTINGHAMSHIRE, 1711-1835†**



**Source:** Hastings Estate Papers: HAF. H.L. Babington Estate Papers: 2D31/286; Dawson Estate Papers: 6D52/280, L.R.O: Donston/Neville Estate Papers: DD.N/213/5; Portland Estate Papers: DD.4P/58 & 756. N.A.O.

in 1706, was in 1809 at Butt House farm, a short distance away and over a hundred years later, paying 9d.<sup>33</sup> At Thorney, a similar pattern of declining female earnings in relation to male is evident. Between the years 1804 and 1828 men worked at thatching, sheep shearing, and in the harvest and received a daily rate of 1s 9d/2s 9d depending on the task. Conversely, in the period 1826 to 1829 women earned 10d for breaking manure, 9d for the harvest and 1s for gathering potatoes.<sup>34</sup> This is comparable with the earnings for women in Leicestershire in the war year of 1810 when they got 9d/10d for spring and autumn work and 1s for work in the hay harvest.<sup>35</sup>

The wages paid to women while helpful are relatively meaningless unless we have some idea of the rates of participation. Historians have constantly highlighted the seasonality of agricultural employment. However, trying to determine the amount of time spent on various work is much more difficult, if not almost impossible. Nevertheless, if we are to gauge the impact of seasonality on people's livelihood throughout the year some attempt must be made to establish the time spent on this type of work. In the majority of cases, people in the early modern period worked six days in a week, when fully employed. Over the course of an entire year they could theoretically work 313 days excluding those which were holidays.<sup>36</sup> Thus, a summary of the actual number of days women were employed set against the number of days they could have possibly worked in a given period provides us with a level of the demand for female labour in agriculture. Of course, it has to be remembered that the

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<sup>33</sup>HAF/29/13, H.L., DE690, L.R.O.

<sup>34</sup>DD.N/213/19 and 21, N.A.O.

<sup>35</sup>HAF/ 71/ Unsorted Bundle, H.L.



amount of work which occupied an individual is related to a number of factors not least the level of demand in other employment.

The effect of alternative employment on a woman's participation in agriculture is demonstrated in an example that highlights some of the tasks performed by a woman on the Donington Park estate during the second quarter of the eighteenth century. In November 1736, Ann Smith received £1 19s 6d on 'Account of what I have done for ye Honourable Earl of Huntingdon'. The work listed is given below:

for spreading	7s	[21 days at 4d]
for three days work in ye house	1s	[3 days at 4d]
2 days scouring and washing	1s 6d	[2 days at 9d]
for haymaking 4 days and cleaning in ye house 21 days	12s 6d	[4 days at 6d; 21 days at 6d]
for being in the laundry 35 days	17s 6d <sup>37</sup>	[35 days at 6d]

This rich description of one woman's work shows that of the 86 days listed, 61 days (70.9 percent) were taken up with domestic service employment, and 25 days (29.1 percent) on agricultural tasks. Ann Smith had been working at Donington from at least January 1729 when she is observed under 'casuals'.<sup>38</sup> It is not certain whether this list recorded her work for the whole year on the estate, but it probably does. Another woman, Mary Bird, had her labour allocated in the same manner moving between weeding in the gardens, cleaning and haymaking.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>36</sup>D. Woodward, *Men At Work*, (Cambridge, 1995), p. 128. Wage lists for Donington Park show workers employed for 6 days in the week in the hay harvest period.

<sup>37</sup>HAF/37/2, H.L. Ann Smith did not write this list herself but signed it with her mark.

<sup>38</sup>HAF/34/22, H.L. Ann Smith was paid 2s 6d for 4 days work, although what she was doing is unknown.

<sup>39</sup>HAF/38/5, H.L.

These examples also raise the question of just how long labouring women had to wait to get paid. Were 'casual' women paid at the end of the year or was Ann Smith's list merely for accounting purposes, as some historians may argue? Other wage listings suggest that women and men had to wait weeks, sometimes months, for their remuneration. Wages may actually have been received in some instances at the end of the day or week, which looks to have been the case for Mary Bird. We saw that the money owed to trades people could occasionally be paid promptly. In other cases, a significant length of time would pass before it was received. It is quite possible that casual workers could be paid by the day or year, and if remunerated annually, this would, unquestionably, have had implications for women of the 'poorer sort'. The fewer days worked in agriculture by Ann Smith Mary Bird and suggests that opportunities were limited, with their labour supplied on a supplementary basis when needed. How far was this proportion of agricultural work paralleled by other women on the estate or elsewhere? Sometimes estate records can likewise furnish us with detailed listings of the number of days a group of women spent working in agriculture over a given period. The evidence presented here is probably not completely representative of all the agricultural work undertaken by women. Nonetheless, the study of lists of work does help to determine the level of women's participation in agriculture in a locality at a certain time. And it is not unreasonable to assume that the majority of day work, excluding that of harvest companies where they were used, was given to estate workers' wives and daughters rather than to external labour. Let us look first at Welbeck in 1744. Between the 18th June and 4th August, out of a possible 42 working days, 21 females were employed between 31.5 days and as little as a single day at 'Weeding part of the Oak Plantations or in Making Hay'. If we examine

the number of days worked in more detail, we find that 12 women were employed for less than half the period they could have been. Wages were paid at 6d a day and most women made earnings of between 5s 7.5d and 15s 9d. If we contrast this with the last months of the previous year, 24 males worked on an average 25.5 days and 17 women 3.7. The maximum number of days that any woman was employed for was 8.75, and they were each paid 6d a day.<sup>40</sup>

Just over a decade later we have two full accounts of women's work for the periods covering the 7th July to the 11th August and from 23rd August to 23rd September, 1755. In the first period when women were 'Making Hay and Locking Rushes and Helping at the Hay Stack', 21 women were employed, exactly the same number as in 1744. Of these, 6 women worked 9 days or less, and the others between 12 and 22 days. Total wages ranged from 2s 3d for 4.5 days and 11s for the full 22. During August and September when men and women were engaged in 'Corn Harvest Work' at Welbeck, women got 1s a day. Fifteen women were documented as working 3 to 15.5 days of the 28 they might have done. Twenty-five men, conversely, worked between 3 and 19.5 days only.<sup>41</sup>

A number of observations can be made about these findings. Firstly, not unsurprisingly, the hay harvest offered women the greatest opportunities for work in agriculture. Nevertheless, while the summer months were the time within the agricultural calendar when labour was at a premium, women were not fully employed.

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<sup>40</sup>DDP4/58/78, N.A.O.

<sup>41</sup>DD/P4/58/83/26 & 86, N.A.O.

During the hay harvest at Welbeck in 1755, only 71 percent of the 31 working days available were worked by any woman, while in the corn harvest of August and September a maximum of 55 percent saw women in the fields. It is possible, of course, that other workers were involved but did not appear in the accounts. The corn harvest it seems did not offer full employment to men either. But this may be connected to the fluctuations in the demand for other labour on the estate. Agricultural work at the Welbeck estate, as elsewhere, had a core and supplementary workforce. In each case in 1744 and 1755 there were women and men who worked for a few days while others were more consistently employed. Of course, it is possible there existed additional agricultural work on farms and estates elsewhere, but as agricultural operations in the East Midlands were *seasonal*, women only had the opportunity to work at certain times of the year, and could only work in one place at any given time. It is much more likely that domestic work offered more consistent employment. Estates were not concerned with agriculture alone, work for men may have included general labouring during the erection or repair of buildings, the care of plantations and perhaps mineral extraction. Ann Smith and Mary Bird were representative of those women who formed the rear guard in any agricultural operation, but spent much of their other time in domestic or proto-industrial employment, if it were available. Mary Collier, ‘the washerwoman poet’ well understood the indoor and outdoor work of women in the south of England, and in a poem written in the 1730s, gave a description of women’s work, that included raking and turning hay, cooking, bed-making, feeding pigs, setting the table, serving meals, dressing and feeding children, reaping or gleaning while minding the small children, gathering cut corn and cutting peas. After the harvest she cleaned pewter and

kitchen utensils and brewed for a gentlewoman.<sup>42</sup> Much of the year was taken up with domestic rather than agricultural work.

How do these examples of labour demand compare with a year during the French Wars? According to Pinchbeck the appearance of a new class of women day labourers from the latter half of the eighteenth century arose from 'the inadequacy of the male labourer's wage, the loss of by-industries, the new capitalistic farming with its demands for cheap, irregular labour, and lastly the French Wars which withdrew many men from agricultural work.'<sup>43</sup> There exists a comprehensive list of women's agricultural employment for a year for the Earl of Moira's 370 acre farm at Donington Park in 1810. We are also fortunate in having a description of the land use there in 1808 included in Pitt's revised *General View of the Agriculture of the County of Leicester*. This indicates seventy acres were under permanent grass, 35 acres consisted of meadows on the Trent, 100 acres were given over to a course of wheat, barley, oats and beans. A further 35 acres grew green crops, which left roughly 130 acres most of which grew clover and a few acres of 'oddments'.<sup>44</sup> The document recording women's agricultural work at Donington not only gives the seasons of the year and type of work carried out by women, but also the number of days each worked. In 1810, 17 women were employed on the farm. Eleven were employed in the spring, with 7 working for more than 55 days, the rest from between 6 to 29. In the hay harvest all 17 were employed and worked on average 45.3 days, the range being between 23 to 48, but 14

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<sup>42</sup>M. Roberts, 'Words They Are Women and Deeds They Are Men': Images of Work and Gender in Early Modern England, in L. Duffin, (ed.), *Women and Work in Pre-Industrial England*, (London, 1985), p.146.

<sup>43</sup>Pinchbeck, *Women Workers*, p. 57.

working 35 days or above. All but 1 worked in the 'corn harvest month' when 13 women worked 24 days or more. Finally, 5 women worked on average 5.6 days in the autumn picking potatoes. Thus we see the same seasonal pattern of work demonstrated. The examples of seasonality given earlier were for periods on the estate at Welbeck in the autumn/winter and summer months. However, our wage data suggests that spring was also important. We can see that at Donington in 1810, some women had regular employment in the spring, although very little work in the autumn. Twitching and clodding, the hay harvest and the corn harvest remained the chief agricultural employment for women. If we apply our 313 working days for the full year, we see that of 17 women, 6 were employed for 125 days or more i.e. between 40 and 48.5 percent of the year, and 11 women for between 43 and 98 days, which equates to 13.7 to 31.3 percent of the working year of women so occupied.<sup>45</sup> In sum, these 17 individuals were able to earn from £2 1s 3d to £6 19s 3d. In all, the total number of working days at Donington for women in 1810 were 1,566. In other words, this amount of agricultural work would have kept only 5 women employed for a whole year.

The farm at Donington was of medium to large proportions,<sup>46</sup> and it is possible that women had more employment in 1810 than they might have had in the middle of the eighteenth century, but since no full description of work exists for Welbeck or

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<sup>44</sup>G. Fussel, 'Four Centuries of Leicestershire Farming', W.G. Hoskins (ed.), *Studies in Leicestershire Agrarian History*, p. 168.

<sup>45</sup>HAF/71/Unsorted Bundle, H.L.

<sup>46</sup>Allen gives a range of pastoral farm sizes of between 50 and 700 acres for the south Midlands, suggesting that a farm of 370 acres would be mid-way in his scheme. Thirsk, however, describes medium sized farms as those of 100-200 acres in Leicestershire for the period 1760-1860. R.C. Allen, *Enclosure and the Yeoman*, (Oxford, 1992), p. 194; 'Agrarian History', p. 231.

Donington, that can be used to make a direct comparison, we cannot be sure.

Reference to the employment of male 'superior' (2s 6d) and 'inferior' (1s 10d)

labourers at Donington in 1811 suggests that the female workers were a set workforce.

'The employing of occasional labour is to be avoided as much as possible because they will require greater wages than those who are constantly employed who may on account become dissatisfied with their wages.'<sup>47</sup> Thus 'occasional' workers were not encouraged. Hoskins considered that raised prices during the wars did little to change the balance of grassland and arable in Leicestershire.<sup>48</sup> Thirsk disagrees, and argues that the crop returns for the years 1793 to 1795, and 1801, are an indication of the county contributing to the country's increased corn production. She sees a rise in the amount of arable land, with more of the acreage cropping oats, peas and beans and barley, as well as corn.<sup>49</sup> If we return to Table 4.1, the fact that employment in the corn harvest appears at this date, and no other, suggests that a reconversion of some of the pasture land to arable land had occurred at Donington. This would account for any increase in women employees rather than a male labour shortage, since women were engaged in the same types of work as they always had been. Sharpe concluded for Essex, that although the French Wars initially created more opportunities for women in agriculture, overall there is no evidence for a significant increase in employment.

Moreover, women continued within tasks associated with female workers, i.e. stone-

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> W.G. Hoskins, 'The Leicestershire Crop Returns of 1801', in W.G. Hoskins, (ed.), *Studies in Leicestershire Agrarian History*, p. 139.

<sup>49</sup> Thirsk, 'Agrarian History', p. 242.

picking, haymaking and turnip singling, while labour shortages were dealt with by farmers by contracting male labour.<sup>50</sup>

Evidence based on the crop returns of 1801 for Leicestershire suggests that at the beginning of the nineteenth century of an estimated arable acreage of 70,000 acres, 79 percent grew oats, barley and wheat. The potato crop was negligible since they were cultivated mainly in gardens. The output of potatoes at Launde kept eight children employed for only two days in October 1832, for which they each earned a shilling.<sup>51</sup> At the beginning of the nineteenth century turnips covered about 11.5 percent of the arable area, and a further 8.5 percent cropped beans and peas.<sup>52</sup> Later in the nineteenth century, however, beans and peas, appear to have provided work for women and children in Leicestershire and Nottinghamshire. At Worksop between 400 to 500 women and children were employed in family groups at pea-pulling.<sup>53</sup> In the fen districts of Lincolnshire the seasonality of the tasks associated with agricultural employment for women and children show hardly any distinction between those described above, in that these workers were picking twitch and spreading manure, hoeing, setting potatoes and weeding crops in March and April with most activity coming with the hay harvest in the summer. By October, women and children were again twitch picking, spreading manure and harvesting potatoes.<sup>54</sup> Not much had changed in the East Midlands in over one-hundred and sixty years. However, women's

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<sup>50</sup>Sharpe, *Adapting to Capitalism*, pp. 85-86.

<sup>51</sup>6D52/280/34, L.R.O.

<sup>52</sup>Hoskins, 'The Leicestershire Crop Returns', pp. 136-137. The total cultivated area of the county in 1807 was 480,000.

<sup>53</sup>J. Kitteringham, 'Country Work Girls in Nineteenth Century England', in R. Samuel (ed.), *Village Life and Labour*, (London, 1975), p. 107.

<sup>54</sup>*Ibid.* p. 100.



experiences of agricultural weekly and day labour across the region during the period were not uniform and differed from district to district. At Kibworth Beauchamp in Leicestershire, Eden recorded that pasture land accounted for about nine-tenths of the parish.<sup>55</sup> Similarly at Wigston Magna the conversion of land to pasture after enclosure in 1766 meant the loss of 1,400 acres, almost 50 percent of the parish, that had once grown arable crops. Concerns were voiced all over the county that parishioners could no longer feed themselves after enclosure witnessed the decline in corn production.<sup>56</sup> Nottinghamshire, however, did not suffer such a severe reduction in its arable area as Leicestershire. Not only did women's work opportunities in agriculture contract, but their real wages fell. They also lost out in other ways. The gleaning of corn, barley and peas and beans, for example, formed an important contribution to the income of labouring families.<sup>57</sup> The decrease in these crops coupled with those difficulties outlined would have affected many families and were extremely detrimental to women on their own. Allen has argued that

at the end of the seventeenth century the labour market in the south Midlands had been reasonably tight. Three-fourths of the men were fully employed in agriculture. Most women, indeed, worked full time on the farm. A very large share of the rural population was needed to bring in the harvest.<sup>58</sup>

Evidence for the opening years of the eighteenth century suggests that agricultural weekly and day labour had not kept women fully employed for some time. Pools of female pauper labour were appearing in open parishes, and handknitting from the mid-

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<sup>55</sup>F.W. Eden, *The State of the Poor*, II (1797), p. 379.

<sup>56</sup>W.G. Hoskins, *The Midland Peasant*, (London, 1957), p. 262.

<sup>57</sup>P. King, 'Customary Rights and Women's Earnings: The Importance of Gleaning to the Rural Labouring Poor', *Economic History Review*, 44:3, p. 463.

seventeenth century helped to soak it up. The trends that were set to further remove female agricultural work in Leicestershire and Nottinghamshire had begun before 1700.

#### **4.2 Housewifery, Dairying, and the Care of Small Animals: Agriculture or Domestic Service?**

Historians wishing to affirm a decline in women's status and their productive functions in the home as a consequence of capitalism have stressed that in past times the role of the housewife encompassed many more different elements than it does today.<sup>59</sup> The tasks undertaken by a housewife of the medieval period have been described thus:

The pre-industrial family was a self-sufficient economic unit and consequently domestic work had a much wider definition than it does now. It might well involve brewing, dairy work, the care of poultry and pigs, the production of vegetables and fruit, the spinning of flax and wool and also medical care - nursing and doctoring.<sup>60</sup>

Dairying, the care of animals, tilling the soil of the vegetable patch and brewing can be said to form the foundation of that work performed by the annually hired female servants in husbandry of the early modern period.<sup>61</sup> While recognising that these tasks of housewifery were undertaken for the household, historians tend to associate them with women's employment in agriculture rather than women's domestic work attached to the home, or as part of the duties of a domestic servant. Caroline Davidson has

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<sup>58</sup>Allen, *Enclosure and the Yeoman*, p. 261.

<sup>59</sup>C. Hall, 'The History of the Housewife', in C. Hall, *White, Male and Middle-Class: Explorations in Feminism and History*, (Cambridge, 1992), p. 43-71. B. Hill, *Women, Work and Sexual Politics in Eighteenth Century England*, (London, 1994), pp. 122-123.

<sup>60</sup>Hall, 'The History of the Housewife', p. 44.

pointed out that the production of food for home consumption has been excluded from the discussion of housework because it is difficult or impossible to distinguish it from farming and animal husbandry. Comment has also been made on the interconnectedness of the two as they relate to female apprenticeship, and how an indenture to one could actually mean work in the other.<sup>62</sup> The relationship between housewifery and women's work in agriculture is, therefore, a close and overlapping one.

The cross over between domestic and farm labour is also a problem in the analysis of the work of farm servants. Female servants in husbandry are mysterious figures. According to Pinchbeck, these women were 'more numerous than dairymaids'. They laboured 'mainly at outdoor agricultural work', which 'consisted of such tasks as weeding, following the harrow, leading horses at the plough, feeding stock, and weeding. At such times as they were not employed in the fields, they were engaged in domestic duties in the farmhouse.'<sup>63</sup> Ann Kussmaul's study of farm servants included only a small amount of information about women. She, however, thought that they were found, apart from in the dairy, in caring for small animals, (for example, poultry), weeding and 'the principal tasks ancillary to agriculture', ale-making and cooking. Men, on the other hand, worked with draught animals and looked after cattle and sheep. Additionally, other male work included ploughing, harrowing and carting.<sup>64</sup> In his pamphlet, 'A Method Proposed for Hiring and Recording of servants in

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<sup>61</sup>C. Davidson, *A Woman's Work is Never Done: A History of Housework in the British Isles 1650-1950*, (London, 1982), p. 3.

<sup>62</sup>K.D.M. Snell, *Annals of the Labouring Poor*, (Cambridge, 1985), p. 283, (Footnote 30).

<sup>63</sup>Pinchbeck, *Women Workers*, p. 16.

Husbandry...in Leicester and Notts.’, Thomas Parkyn considered that in the early 1720s, £2 10s per annum should be paid ‘to the best woman servant in charge of baking and brewing and kitchen and milkhouse’.<sup>65</sup> The usual assessment at this period for female farm servants was 30s to £2 2s, which means the organising skills of women in these areas were especially valued. We have seen, however, that in the early part of our period women worked as pinners. The animals that women rounded up were frequently the hogs or cows that other women had left to roam in the streets, and since dairying and pig-keeping were an element of female domestic labour the role of the pinner is not so far removed from women’s work.

Dairying remained a central component of the agrarian economy of the East Midlands throughout the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. London cheesemongers were importing 1,400 tons of cheese every year from Derbyshire by 1730.<sup>66</sup> Closer to home even women of the highest rank took an interest in the dairy. In March 1735/6 Thomas Carte wrote to the Earl of Huntingdon that, ‘Lady Huntingdon was so good as to offer to supply me with some of her Donington cheese, when I wanted; I have not a morsel left in this season of Lent, when something is very necessary to enable me to follow the rules I prescribe my self in that season.’<sup>67</sup> Leicestershire had gained a national reputation for its Stilton cheese originally developed by Mrs Elizabeth Orton of Little Dalby who had ‘learned her art’, incidentally, when she worked as a housekeeper prior to her marriage. Varieties of red

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<sup>64</sup>A. Kussmaul, *Servants in Husbandry*, (Cambridge, 1981), p. 34.

<sup>65</sup>Quoted in Chambers, *Nottinghamshire in the Eighteenth Century*, p. 283.

<sup>66</sup>B. Travers, ‘Trading Patterns in the East Midlands 1660-1800’, *Midland History*, 15 (1990), p. 76.

<sup>67</sup>HAF/76/1239, H.L.

cheese were also produced in the southern area of the county, but never gained the popularity of Stilton. Altogether some 1,500 tons of cheese were exported each year from Leicestershire in the first half of the nineteenth century. Thirsk equates this tonnage to the output of 7,500 cows. If this is so, and dairy maids looked after between 10 to 12 cows, this approximates to a range of between 625 and 750 dairy maids in employment.<sup>68</sup> Although, of course, this does not account for cheese made for consumption in the county. During the war years the tonnage of cheese sent to London from Derbyshire to feed the navy increased from 2,000 tons in 1789 to 5,000 in 1809. The increased output of cheese from the region was facilitated by improvement to the river Trent, and the expansion and integration of the canal network.<sup>69</sup>

Most of the dairy farms in the region were smaller than those used for grazing sheep or cattle fattening. In the west of Leicestershire farms specialising in milk and cheese were populated with 20 and 30 cows.<sup>70</sup> Dairies for much of the eighteenth century came under the remit of the mistress of the house. She organised the work of the maids whose day could begin at three or four o'clock in the morning and did not end until late at night. On average, each woman milked between 10 and 12 cows twice a day, which indicates that on those Leicestershire farms, mentioned above, each would have given work to two or three dairy maids. Women in the dairy worked at making cheese and butter, and their level of skill and ability could seriously affect the produce. Although maids may have also fed poultry, pigs and calves, they also spent their time carding and spinning, which formed an additional income. However, in cheese dairies

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<sup>68</sup>Thirsk, 'Agrarian History', pp. 232-233..

<sup>69</sup>Travers, 'Trading Patterns in the East Midlands', p. 77.

the length of the working day dictated that such work was confined mainly to the winter months.<sup>71</sup> Given the hours that dairy maids worked in the summer, it is unlikely that they could have participated in the hay harvest, or other outdoor work for that matter, which suggests a very clear demarcation between the dairy maids and other female workers in husbandry. Thus it could be argued that much of their work was characteristic to that outlined earlier as housewifery.

The interaction between domestic service and the office of dairy maid is visibly demonstrated by the example of Jane Burgaland who earned £3 in 1739 for performing the duties of a housemaid for the year. She thereafter rehired herself at £1 8s 6d for working half a year as a dairy maid. The care of poultry, which is strongly associated with housewifery, is a task that appears among those listed for domestic servants in the Hastings household. Mary Chapman, for example, employed for ‘taking care of the fowls’ is associated with laundry maids, housemaids and still room maids.<sup>72</sup> Her work would have included preparing and dressing poultry, as well as feeding the birds, cleaning their coop and collecting eggs. It has also been argued that domestic servants assisted with outdoor tasks when additional labour was needed.<sup>73</sup> On small farms this may have been the case but the only evidence of ‘domestic’ servants helping with the harvest at Donington, were either female casual, daily workers, women like Ann Smith and Mary Bird, and the coachman and postillion who were paid 5s for ‘helping with

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<sup>70</sup>Thirsk, ‘Agrarian History’, p. 232.

<sup>71</sup>Pinchbeck, *Women Workers*, pp. 10-16.

<sup>72</sup>HAF/38/5, HAF/65/11, H.L.

<sup>73</sup>B. Hill, *Servants in the Eighteenth Century*, (London, 1997), p. 14.

hay' in 1778.<sup>74</sup> Moreover, the 'dual role' as it relates to domestic servants and agriculture puts stress on dairy work, care of pigs and poultry.<sup>75</sup>

If we now return to the arguments of Keith Snell and Robert Allen delineated in the introduction, it will be remembered that Snell saw *opportunities for employment for* women in Leicestershire and Nottinghamshire arising from the agrarian specialisations of dairying and stock rearing, but also haymaking. The focus of Allen, on the other hand, was on dairying and he considered that the conversion to pasture following enclosure and, importantly, the amalgamation of farms progressively led to a shedding of labour, and, in particular, female labour. The shift to a pastoral economy had much of its emphasis on cattle and sheep. Enclosures listed in Young's *General Report*, and tabled by Snell, demonstrate that stock-rearing frequently followed enclosure. Of those 238 enclosures listed for both Leicestershire and Nottinghamshire that were moves to stock-rearing or dairying, or remained unchanged in either specialism, 73.5 percent were to grazing and the fattening of animals.<sup>76</sup> Since it would fall to men to deal with sheep and cattle for beef production, we must conclude along with Allen, that the conversion to pasture and an emphasis on stock-rearing led to a decrease in employment for women. In some instances the emphasis on grazing cattle for meat meant a decline in dairy produce. This happened at Wigston.<sup>77</sup> At Bottesford, in the Vale of Belvoir, in the early nineteenth century a move away from grazing and fattening

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<sup>74</sup>HAF/52/5, H.L.

<sup>75</sup>Hill, *Servants in the Eighteenth Century*, p. 14.

<sup>76</sup>Snell, *Annals of the Labouring Poor*, pp. 160-163.

<sup>77</sup>Hoskins, *The Midland Peasant*, p. 262.

to dairy farming had the opposite effect.<sup>78</sup> What of the hay harvest? Presumably, there was some employment created here, but this would have been fleeting in the context of a year. How did the decline of arable farming, especially in Leicestershire, affect farm servants' outdoor work? It is likely, since the concentration of this employment was in the summer months, much of it would have been undertaken by female day labour.

Snell's unemployment data for women in Leicestershire and Nottinghamshire that shows a peak in April and May denoting a 'system of spring hiring fairs affecting women' which he used to interpret as a greater specialisation of women in pastoral farming is something of a puzzle. Female depositions often did not record the season of hiring but those that do, scant though the information is, illustrate that autumn was when most women were hired.<sup>79</sup> Kussmaul, moreover, highlighted autumn as the primary season for marrying in the Midlands in the period from 1741 to 1820, and observed, for example, that the tasks of milking, cheese and butter making could be carried on all year, but where they were not, the slack period was the autumn.<sup>80</sup> Sharpe has commented on some of the difficulties inherent in the use of settlement examinations as a measure of women's unemployment associated with labour in agriculture, particularly as they refer to domestic as well as farm servants. Settlement

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<sup>78</sup>D. Levine, *Family Formation in an Age of Nascent Capitalism*, (New York, 1977), p. 90.

<sup>79</sup>There are very few settlement examinations surviving for females in the region. Of 133 hirings recorded in a sample of 67 settlement examinations for women between the period 1719-1813, 91, 64% were unknown. Of those remaining, only 3 (2.3%) show spring hiring, with 39 (nearly 30%) occurring in the autumn. All depositions for single women from Nottinghamshire were included and a high proportion of those from Leicestershire. Settlement Examinations, L.R.O. and N.A.O.

<sup>80</sup>A. Kussmaul, *A General View of the Rural Economy of England, 1538-1840*, (Cambridge, 1990), p. 92.



examinations for Essex, she argues, show the majority of women engaged in domestic employment.<sup>81</sup>

Hill has suggested that ‘for women, the decline of farm service was one more factor contributing to the overall contraction in opportunities for productive work in agriculture.’ She also considered that from the middle of the eighteenth century the decline in farm service and the merging of work in husbandry with that of domestic service meant a greater sexual division of labour, with women consequently losing the ability to share tasks with men.<sup>82</sup> Did a different, more equitable, sexual division of labour exist for women in farm service from that of women in day labour? As we will recall, information from estates in Nottinghamshire and Leicestershire indicate that women supplied the majority of their labour to the harvest and in cleaning operations. If female servants in husbandry undertaking work other than that in the dairy ‘were more numerous’, we might wonder what agricultural work kept them going. It is extremely doubtful that large groups of women worked outdoors performing the same tasks as men, or participating in a wider range of employment than that of females who worked by the day. Hill notes that ‘there were domestic servants who did as much work out of the house as inside and a declining remnant of female servants in husbandry who did as much indoor domestic work as they did work in the fields and the dairy.’<sup>83</sup> The merging of tasks between farm and domestic servants that Hill sees as occurring in the eighteenth century and becoming separated by the end, it is argued, was probably weighted in favour of domestic work long before the later years of the

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<sup>81</sup> Sharpe, *Adapting to Capitalism*, p. 75.

<sup>82</sup> Hill, *Women, Work and Sexual Politics*, pp. 83-84.

eighteenth century. Work in dairies and the care of small animals had always been domestic work.

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<sup>83</sup>Hill, *Servants in the Eighteenth Century*, p. 14.

## 5.0 'HONEST, INDUSTRIOUS HOUSEWIFERY': DOMESTIC SERVICE

If true agricultural work had only a limited role in the working lives of women during the period, then housewifery whether paid or unpaid, with clothing and textiles, had the largest. Domestic service encompassed a number of different occupations carrying varying degrees of status. Work in this sector of employment ranged from that of housekeepers and ladies' maids who tended and cared for the aristocracy and gentry, to the charwoman who went to clean for a gentlewoman. The most common type of female servant was, however, the 'maid of all work', who was expected to do everything. A reading of the Hannah Cullwick diaries illustrates vividly the unending drudgery associated with the life of the solitary servant.<sup>1</sup> That 'maids of all work' or 'general servants', as they were known, were so prevalent might have been because people aspired to keeping a servant as a sign of gentility and status, but the practical importance of a wife's labour to her husband often necessitated the hiring of a servant.<sup>2</sup> As 'maids of all work' were relatively inexpensive to hire, even some artisans and wage labourers kept a servant.<sup>3</sup> Thus, female domestics served at nearly every level of society, the majority of them in the least wealthy households. Women, therefore, cooked, brewed, scrubbed, scoured, washed, mended clothes, cleaned, nursed the sick, cared for children and managed households, not only for themselves, but in the employment of others.

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<sup>1</sup>L. Standley, (ed.), *The Diaries of Hannah Cullwick, Victorian Maidservant*, (London, 1984).

<sup>2</sup>P. Sharpe, *Adapting to Capitalism*, (London, 1996), p. 103.

<sup>3</sup>D.A. Kent, 'Ubiquitous But Invisible: Female Domestic Servants in Mid-Eighteenth Century, London', *History Workshop Journal*, 28 (1989), p. 119. C. Fairchilds, 'Masters and Servants in Eighteenth Century Toulouse', *Journal of Social History*, 12 (1978-9), p. 369.

This chapter examines work and earnings of domestic servants. It will focus on either end of the service spectrum to argue that while there may have been some interaction between the domestic service and proto-industrial employment, the changing character of service that placed emphasis on the respectability of servants and their level of skills, effectively precluded the majority of women from industrial communities from participating in this area of work. Thus in the eighteenth century in the East Midlands, economic specialisation created a divergence in women's employment that saw the end of the flexibility in women's work, making it less easy for them to move between different sectors of employment.

One of the reasons for our relatively limited knowledge of domestic service in this period is the lack of evidence, especially for those servants that worked in shops, inns and humbler households. Nevertheless, the sources that provided an insight into agricultural work can also illuminate women's work in service. Estate and farm records are particularly useful as work, and sometimes occupational designations are given. They are likewise a gold mine of information on casual workers and, for example, demonstrate the regularity with which laundresses and washerwomen trekked to their clients' homes to help with the laundry. These sources can also furnish material on wages and the other payments and gratuities that combined to form the income of domestic servants. Despite their ambiguities, settlement examinations have been used to assist with the formulation of wage data, which is shown in Tables 5.1-5.3 and Figures 5.1 and 5.2. Also drawn upon where relevant are a number of other kinds of documentary evidence, namely, wills, correspondence and material associated with the administration of poor relief and the law.

## 5.1 Servants

Contemporary comment suggests that the demand for servants was rising in the country as a whole.<sup>4</sup> Given that the Midlands had witnessed significant agrarian change and the relocation of industries within its borders, we can assume that the need for servants increased with the wealth of farmers, hosiers, merchants and entrepreneurs, and so too, the tradesmen and purveyors of goods and services which the better off needed or desired. A greater demand for women workers, many of them casual, is likely to have ensued as increased commerce and improved transport networks in the region meant more inns and victualling houses to cater for a growing number of travellers. This would certainly have been the case at Market Harborough, which with Lutterworth, remained important coaching centres in the eighteenth century. As discussed earlier in Chapter 1.0, growing urbanisation created opportunities for women to work in service in the retail trade or in the surroundings of a 'middling' home. Some towns specialised in dealing with a regular influx of visitors. Melton Mowbray, for example, became equipped with the services to maintain the wealthy hunting fraternity who visited the town to participate in the hunts of Quorn, Belvoir and Cottesmore. Indeed, Melton Mowbray and Market Harborough were to become the principal capitals of hunting in England in the later eighteenth century,<sup>5</sup> thereby creating opportunities for servants and casual staff. Furthermore, the accumulation of wealth by the

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<sup>4</sup>B.Hill, *Servants: English Domesticity in Eighteenth Century England*, (Oxford, 1996), p. 6.

<sup>5</sup>R. Carr, *English Fox Hunting: A History*, (London, 1976), p. 68.

county's farmers and graziers<sup>6</sup> must have added to the call for female domestic servants in rural areas.

Entry into service occurred from the age of thirteen or fourteen years, sometimes earlier, and normally lasted until a woman reached her mid-twenties and married.<sup>7</sup> In the parish of Chilvers Coton, Warwickshire, for example, some 43 percent of women between the ages of 20 to 24 were in service in 1684,<sup>8</sup> and this proportion would have been higher if we knew what it was for women of younger ages. Often girls were sent away to another household as soon as they were thought old enough by their parents usually because they were unable to support a large number of children at home.<sup>9</sup> Although life as a servant meant long hours of work and a loss of independence it enabled a woman to save enough money for her to marry and set up a household. In March 1734, Lady Catherine Wheeler wrote to Selina, Countess of Huntingdon, lamenting the sudden loss of her cook, 'she having the offer of a very good match.'<sup>10</sup> Service was also the most common system of education and training for girls. Young women who worked in areas of dairy farming could acquire the skills that allowed them to transfer between such posts as housemaid, cook or dairymaid and thus move between town and country. Davidson has suggested, however,

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<sup>6</sup>J. Thirsk, 'Agrarian History 1540-1950', in W.G. Hoskins and R. McKinley, (eds.), *Victoria County History of Leicester*, II, (Oxford, 1954), pp. 230-231.

<sup>7</sup>B. Hill, *Women Work and Sexual Politics*, (Oxford, 1989), p. 131.

<sup>8</sup>M. Roberts, "'Words They Are Women, Deeds They Are Men": Images of Work and Gender in Early Modern England', in L. Charles and L. Duffin, (eds.), *Women and Work in Pre-Industrial England*, (London, 1985), p. 127.

<sup>9</sup>P. Sharpe, *Adapting to Capitalism*, (London, 1996), p. 102.

<sup>10</sup>HA/13236, H.L.

that sometimes mistresses were disinclined to train their servants beyond a certain level of skill because they were soon likely to leave.<sup>11</sup>

One of the ways servants working in less wealthy establishments can be observed is through depositional evidence obtained from criminal cases brought before the quarter sessions. Women occasionally talked of their work when describing the circumstances in which alleged criminal acts took place.<sup>12</sup> For example, Hannah Kidger in 1807, gave an account of how she was busily washing bottles in the kitchen of her master, a surgeon in Loughborough, when she noticed his thermometer being stolen from the wall outside.<sup>13</sup> When a fracas broke out between two labourers who had been sent to ditch and hedge, Elizabeth Handley, the farmer's maidservant, came upon it when sent into the field with 'their dinners about two o'clock in the afternoon'.<sup>14</sup> Violence could be an occupational hazard for women working in inns and public houses, as it still is for the modern day barmaid. On Bosworth fair day in 1768, Ann Alsopp working as a maidservant at an inn in the town was brutally attacked by a customer during a dispute concerning the payment for a pint of ale.<sup>15</sup> However, since the work of these women was very much peripheral to other events not as much information as we would like was recorded. Try as we might to piece together the lives of these domestic servants, thrashing around in fragments of evidence can only be so rewarding. It is, generally, in aristocratic homes and those of the gentry that we

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<sup>11</sup> C. Davidson, *A Woman's Work is Never Done: A History of Housework in the British Isles 1650-1950*, (London, 1982), p. 165.

<sup>12</sup> For some of the very best examples of servant depositions obtained from court records see P. Humphrey, 'What the Servants Knew', in V. Frith, (ed.), *Women and History: Voices of Early Modern England*, (Toronto, 1995), pp. 51-80.

<sup>13</sup> QS3/37/11, L.R.O.

<sup>14</sup> QS3/249 (1776), L.R.O.

<sup>15</sup> QS3/211-213 (1768), L.R.O.

find the most consistent information on women in service in this period. However, as the social status of the employers could differ very markedly as servants moved from job to job, women who were hired could find themselves gaining experience of households right across the social spectrum, or so it is argued.<sup>16</sup>

The earnings of servants could be made up in many different ways and how and what they were paid could vary considerably. Some women would only receive food and clothing while others were paid quite handsomely. By way of illustration of how far money wages could vary over the course of a woman's working life consider the following. Sarah Allen hired for the wages of £2 10s in 1761, the following year she increased this sum to £3 by moving to a new employer with whom she then stayed for another two years. From the country she relocated to the borough of Leicester and earned £4 4s, and where she continued to live for a further year and a half. Sarah was thereafter hired to James Burrows of Coventry for an annual wage of £7. After serving him a year she moved to Sow in Warwickshire for a wage of £5, where she remained for seven years. At the end of this hiring she 'worked for herself' in Sow for a year before being hired to William Holmes in Lutterworth, Leicestershire, for a wage of £3.<sup>17</sup>

Unfortunately, the settlement examinations for Leicestershire and Nottinghamshire rarely give examples of this kind. McBride has described a cycle of wage earning for

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<sup>16</sup>Humphrey, 'What the Servants Knew', p. 53.

<sup>17</sup>DE2559/76/27, L.R.O.



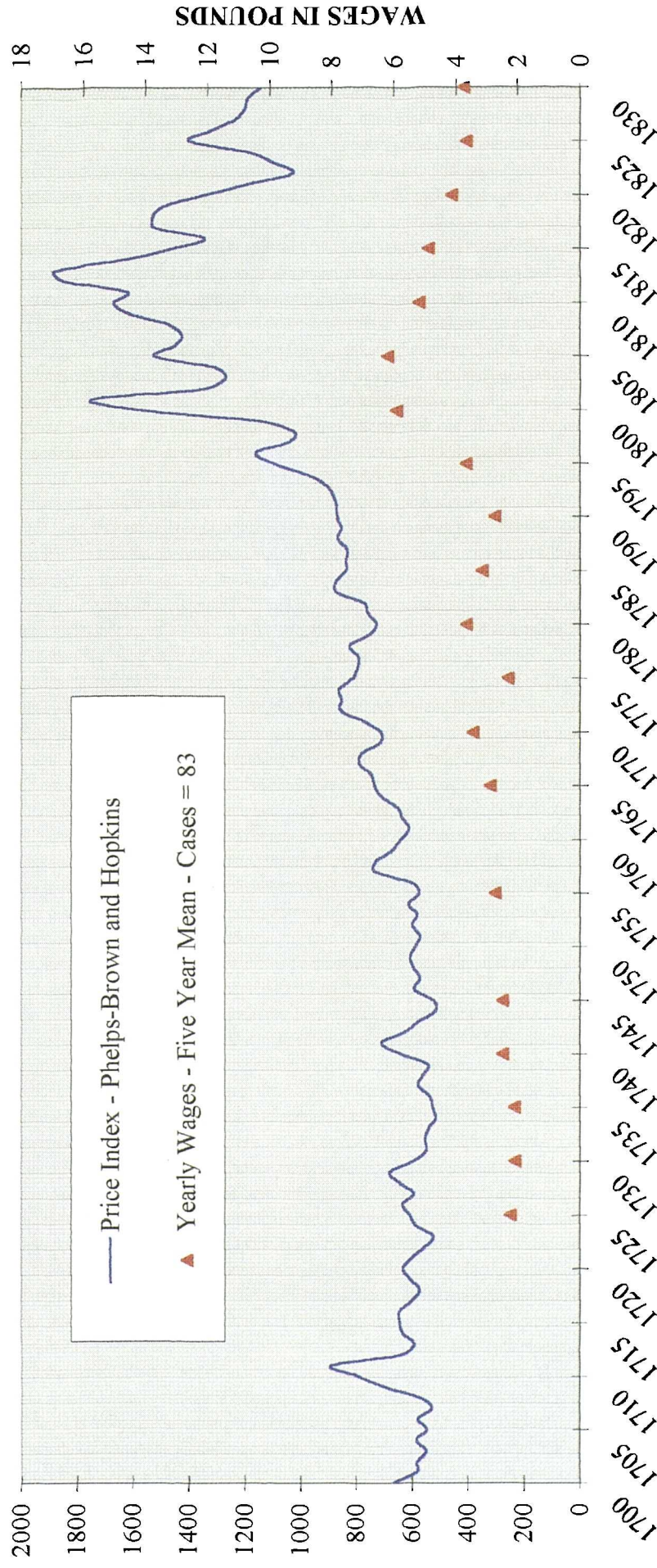
**TABLE 5.1 - ANNUAL WAGES OF FEMALE +SERVANTS IN LEICESTERSHIRE AND NOTTINGHAMSHIRE 1725-1812**

YEAR	£	s	£	s	£	s	YEARS	N.	$\bar{x}$ £
1725	2	5	(2)	-	-	-	1720-25	2	2.25
1728	2	10	(2)	-	-	-			
1729	1	10	-	-	-	-			
1730	1	19	-	-	-	-	1726-30	4	2.11
1731	1	19	-	-	-	-			
1732	1	19	-	-	-	-			
1733	2	10	-	-	-	-	1731-35	3	2.13
1738	2	10	-	-	-	-	1736-40	1	2.50
1742	2	10	-	-	-	-			
1743	2	10	-	-	-	-	1741-45	2	2.50
1753	2	10	-	-	-	-			
1754	3	0	-	-	-	-	1751-55	2	2.75
1761	2	10	-	-	-	-			
1762	3	0	-	-	-	-			
1763	1	10	2	0	-	-			
1764	3	0	3	15	-	-			
1765	3	0	(3)	4	4	-	1761-65	10	2.89
1766	2	15	-	-	-	-			
1767	2	0	3	5	7	0			
1768	3	0	5	0	-	-			
1769	2	0	3	0	-	-			
1770	3	0	-	-	-	-	1766-70	9	3.44
1771	3	0	-	-	-	-			
1773	2	0	-	-	-	-			
1774	2	0	-	-	-	-	1771-75	3	2.33
1776	3	0	-	-	-	-			
1777	3	0	-	-	-	-			
1778	3	10	-	-	-	-			
1780	3	10	4	0	5	0	1776-80	6	3.66
1781	2	0	-	-	-	-			
1782	2	12	3	15	5	0			
1785	2	10	-	-	-	-	1781-85	5	3.16
1786	2	10	-	-	-	-			
1788	3	0	-	-	-	-	1786-90	2	2.75
1792	3	10	-	-	-	-			
1794	3	10	-	-	-	-			
1795	4	0	-	-	-	-	1791-95	3	3.66
1796	4	0	5	5	7	7			
1798	5	5	-	-	-	-			
1800	6	6	7	7	-	-	1796-1800	5	5.91
1801	5	5*	6	6	7	7			
1802	6	6	7	7	-	-			
1803	7	7	8	8	-	-	1801-05	7	6.21
1812	7	7	-	-	-	-	1811-15	1	7.35

**Source:** Settlement Examinations, N.A.O and L.R.O. Donston/Neville Papers: DD.N213/13, N.A.O; Babington Estate Papers, 2D31/286; Simmons Dairy and Farm Accounts DE690, Quarter Sessions Rolls: QS3/105/58, QS3/86/153, QS3/229-231, L.R.O. **Total Number of Cases = 66.** The annual wages given record a single case except where shown in brackets. +Includes both domestic and 'farm' servants. \*Plus vails.



**FIGURE 5.1 - PRICE INDEX AND TRENDS IN YEARLY WAGES FOR FEMALE SERVANTS IN LEICESTERSHIRE AND NOTTINGHAMSHIRE, 1700-1830**



**Sources:** Phelps-Brown and Hopkins, 'Seven Centuries of the Prices of Consumables'; Settlement Examinations: L.R.O. and N.A.O. Wage data for 1806-1830 taken from Snell, *Annals of the Labouring Poor*, p. 416. Donston/Neville Estate Papers: DD.N213/13, N.A.O.; Babington Estate Papers: 2D31/286; Simmons Diary and Farm Accounts, DE690; Quarter Sessions Rolls: QS3/105/58, QS3 86/153, QS3/229-231, L.R.O.

nineteenth century domestic servants which very much parallels that of Sarah Allen. Older servants and those with experience could expect their wages to gradually increase until maximum earnings were reached at about the age of thirty-five years when, thereafter, they would decline as length of service no longer resulted in wage increases.<sup>18</sup> While age and experience in the eighteenth century definitely contributed to levels of earnings, other influences such as custom and the economic circumstances prevailing affected wages. It seems that the system of wage assessment by Justices of the Peace had broken down by the end of the seventeenth century, and Woodward suggests that market forces were probably more important.<sup>19</sup> Unfortunately, it is not possible in this study to determine how far wage assessments were adhered to. Also of relevance is whether servants received clothes or other forms of non-monetary income. Identifying the different factors affecting wage levels can therefore be very problematic.

Table 5.1 shows annual wages for servants in Nottinghamshire and Leicestershire. Although settlement examinations were the main source used, also included is data taken from estate and farm accounts and quarter sessions records. This has meant that from the period 1725 to 1800 there are considerably more data points than in the wage information shown in Snell's Table of mean wages for 'farm' servants in the same counties. However, his data for 1806-1830 is incorporated into Figure 5.1. As well as constructing a measure of central tendency, the individual wage is presented separately, which is probably more helpful, because it illustrates the difficulty of trying

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<sup>18</sup>T. McBride, *The Domestic Revolution; The Modernisation of Household Service in England and France 1820-1920*, (London, 1976), p. 64.

<sup>19</sup>D.M. Woodward, 'The Assessment of Wages by Justices of the Peace 1563-1813', *Local Historian*, 8 (1968-69), pp. 293-299.

to produce a meaningful time series, not only from a limited amount of data, but data that could clearly vary greatly. It may appear, for example, that wages were rising in the latter part of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, which they were, but comparable wages of £5 and £7 were also achieved by women in 1767 and 1768. We may recall, that trends in day wages for women in agriculture showed a rigid continuity until 1775, before then marginally increasing, but failing to keep up with those of males and, importantly, prices. Looking at the wage data on the far left of Table 5.1 in its raw form, it shows a good deal of continuity until 1795, when prices really began to soar, although certainly from the middle of the eighteenth century real wages began to decline. The trends illustrated in Figure 5.1 are broadly consistent with those in Figure 5.2 for domestic day labour. We will return to the data in Tables 5.1 and 5.2 shortly.

Although the turnover of domestic servants could be extremely high, Kent has argued that domestic service in London had sufficient advantages and attractions to make it preferable to marriage, and comments that good servants were likely to be paid more since they had skills that were valued.<sup>20</sup> Undoubtedly, there were those women who on finding an employer that suited them decided to stay, and this loyalty and their particular skills were rewarded with higher wages. John Simmons in his diary and accounts recorded the details of servants who came and went from his farm between the years 1796 and 1803. Hannah Poutney, for example, was first hired on the 25th July 1790, although it is not until 1796 that her actual wage is given. From 1796 to 1798, she earned £5 5s; we do not know what her wages were in 1799 for they were

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<sup>20</sup>Kent, 'Ubiquitous But Invisible', pp. 115-119.

not written down, but for the following three years her wage remained at £7 7s, then finally in 1803, increased to £8 8s. Similarly, Eliza Rose, hired this time in October 1799, received £6 6s for the three years following, although at the end of 1802, a note was made of the negotiation of her wage to £7 7s.<sup>21</sup> Of course, these earnings were also influenced by rising prices.

Although John Simmons detailed the wages he paid to his servants he did not describe the work they did. However, there are clues. Kitty Bates left Butt House in October 1799, and got paid for fourteen weeks which came to £2 2s. In 1797, a person by that name, in all likelihood the same woman, brewed on the farm. Moreover, on the 1st May 1801, Simmons' diary records, 'made cheese at Butt House, being the first'.<sup>22</sup> These servants were all hired for a whole year, and it is only in 1803 that 51 week hiring occurred. However, while preventing settlement, Simmons paid the women the same wages as if they had been hired for a year, that is, £5 5s and £6 6s respectively. If we were to add these wages to Table 5.1, we would see that for the year 1803, an annual wage ranged from five to eight guineas. Men also had the opportunity to negotiate for higher wages. John Power was hired in October 1800 at £4 4s, the following year his wage was increased to £5 5s, and in 1803 it was to be £6 6s.<sup>23</sup> Comment has been made that for some servants a long length of time, indeed years, could elapse between one rise in annual wages and another, although male servants were likely to have their wages augmented more often than females.<sup>24</sup> The

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<sup>21</sup>DE690, L.R.O.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid.

<sup>24</sup>Hill, *Servants*, p. 25.

example of John Power with the female servants of John Simmons shows that for whatever reason, he was not paid as much as some of the women servants. There are several issues here, some of which have already been touched upon. The age of an individual played a role in the amounts that people were paid but the ages of the individuals discussed here are unknown. The years of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century were economically difficult. John Simmons found, for example, that the educational costs of his daughters were rising throughout these years.

There were also some women and girls recorded in settlement examinations who received very low wages, for example, '10s and cloaths' or just 'meat and cloaths'.<sup>25</sup> In the former case, the recipient was aged fourteen years. In much the same way as employers were encouraged to take on pauper apprentices or employ members of the poor on their farms these women were taken in because they could not find a hiring in the normal way. Hill asserts that the supply of pauper servants was as significant in the eighteenth century as it was in the nineteenth. Moreover, the low or non-existent wage levels of these domestic workers must be taken into account, since they were likely to have reduced female wages in relation to male.<sup>26</sup> It is also possible, that some of these individuals were found living 'idly' and thus compelled into service by Justices of the Peace.<sup>27</sup> Service with a relative could also mean that women and

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<sup>25</sup>DE432/13/41, L.R.O, PR/12268, N.A.O.

<sup>26</sup>Hill, *Servants*, p. 129, p. 148.

<sup>27</sup>C.P. Ketchley, 'The Law as to Servants in the XVIII Century', *Amateur Historian*, 2 (1954-6), pp. 334-336. Apparently, two JP's could compel a woman into serving by the year, week or day, if she were between the ages of 12 and 40, unmarried and found to have no service. The wages these women earned were dependent on what the JP's considered appropriate.

girls were poorly paid or only received clothes and food.<sup>28</sup> Elizabeth Week, in 1778, described how as a fifteen year old she had visited her relation at Appleby, a widow Sheldorpe, where she stayed for a year although never officially hired, and was given some money for her services prior to being ‘dismissed’.<sup>29</sup> Perhaps she was one of those ‘difficult adolescent daughters’ that were removed to a relative’s house to act as housekeeper.<sup>30</sup>

What we have in the domestic service sector is a tremendously wide diversity in occupations and status which was also mirrored in wage payments. In Table 5.2, standing in sharp contrast to the annual wages given in Table 5.1 are those for female domestic servants from Donington Park. These wages give a very different impression of the period 1771 to 1795. The higher wages paid are influenced by the fact that this is an aristocratic household. In the first two columns of the table the wages paid to housemaids are shown. Those in the first column are taken from the accounts for Donington and in the second column are wages reported for selected years by Hecht. Both columns demonstrate a compatibility in the data in the period from 1771. Hecht drew on wage rates advertised in newspapers, and those recorded in diaries and other sources, and it would seem that these figures are most representative of servants who were better paid, and of the higher wages found in London. However, the housemaid’s wage of eight guineas in the 1790s is not so far removed from the figures for those years given in Table 5.1.

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<sup>28</sup>Hill, *Servants*, p. 116.

<sup>29</sup>DE495/17/4, L.R.O.

<sup>30</sup>Hill, *Servants*, p. 125.

Neale assembled wage data for domestic servants working in Bath and argued 'that there was no discernible change in the annual money wages received by female domestic servants in Bath' for the period 1730 to 1865.<sup>31</sup> But it suffers from the same problems as other wage information for servants in that some years illustrate such a wide disparity of wages and earnings that it is difficult to discern a trend. Sharpe has observed these difficulties with servants' wages but notes that Neale's figures were higher than for those for Essex,<sup>32</sup> as indeed, they are for those of Leicestershire and Nottinghamshire. However, in the years from 1730 to the last third of the eighteenth century the Bath wages show a comparability with those displayed in Table 5.2. The sums of £5-£6 are consistent with the earnings of Donington servants. As the wage levels of domestic workers could differ markedly, it is probable that Neale's figures contain the pauper and kin-servants as well as those who were better off.

The wages paid in an aristocratic household, however, could be as diverse as any elsewhere. At Thorney Hall in Nottinghamshire in 1781, the annual wage of the cook Hannah Haugh due at Martinmas was £10 10s.<sup>33</sup> This sum is far below the £20 given to Hannah Mansfield who worked at Donington in 1775/6,<sup>34</sup> and appears less still when set against her replacement, a male cook, William Gunter, who earned an annual

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<sup>31</sup>R.S. Neale, *Writing Marxist History: British Society, Economy and Culture Since 1700*, (Oxford, 1985), p. 120.

<sup>32</sup>Sharpe, *Adapting to Capitalism*, p. 191, endnote 55.

<sup>33</sup>DD.N213/13, N.A.O.

<sup>34</sup>HAF/52/16, H.L. The salaries of £10 10 to £20 is consistent with those paid to other female cooks. J.J. Hecht, *The Domestic Servant Class in Eighteenth Century England*, (London, 1956), pp. 146-147.



**TABLE 5.2 - FEMALE SERVANTS' ANNUAL WAGE RATES,  
1692-1821**

	Housemaid (Donington Est.)	Housemaid□ (Hecht)	Cook/ Housekeeper (Donington Est.)	Laundrymaid/ Under Laundry (Donington Est.)	Still Room Maid/ Kitchen Maid (Donington Est.)
YEAR	£	£	£	£	£
1692	3	-	-	-	-
1729	5	-	/7	-	-
1730	5	-	-	-	-
1734	-	6	-	-	-
1747	3	-	/10 8s	-	-
1748	3	-	/10 8s	-	-
1749	3	-	-	-	-
1750	3	5/6	-	-	-
1771	6	6/7/10gns	/20	-	/7
1774	6	7/8/8gns /20	-	-	-
1775	-	-	20/25	-	/7
1776	6/8	6/10gns	20/25	-	-
1777	7/8	7	-	-	-
1778	7/8	-	/25	7	-
1779	7/8	-	/25	7	7/8
1780	7/8	-	/30	7	7/8
1781	7/8	-	/30	7	7/8
1782	7*/8*	-	/30	7/5 5*	7/8
1783	7/8	-	/30	7/5 5*	7/8
1784	7*/8	8gns	/30	/6 6*	/8
1785	7	7/8gns	/35	/6 6*	7/
1786	7	-	/35	/6 6*	7/
1788	8	-	-	-	-
1789	8	-	/35	-	-
1790	8	8	-	-	-
1792	-	9gns/11 -	-	-	-
1793	-	8	-	-	-
1795	8*	-	-	-	-
1821	-	-	/31 10	-	-

**Source:** Hastings Financial Papers: HAF/25/48, HAF/34/41, HAF/40/18, HAF/49/13, HAF/50/11, HAF/51/5, HAF/52/16, HAF/53/10, HAF/53/13, HAF/54/12, HAF/54/17, HAF/55/9, HAF/56/7, HAF/57/10, HAF/58/12, HAF/59/12, HAF/60/1, HAF/63/9, HAF/64/9, H.L.

□J.J. Hecht, *The Domestic Servant Class in Eighteenth Century England*, (London, 1956), p. 147.

\*Plus 1 Guinea Tea Allowance.

1755 - Cookmaid and Chambermaid - annual wage £3.

salary of £36 15s. Many of the Donington servants moved about the country to London and Bath, and the wage differentials in other localities were something the servants of elite families were likely to be cognisant of, therefore, ensuring for themselves the highest wages.<sup>35</sup> However, it is probable that since these households required the most skilled, well trained, capable and efficient of female servants the aristocracy were prepared to pay for them.

While there was some movement between persons of a lower social status across the range of the social hierarchy, work in the service of the elite demanded that women not only had a certain level of skill and training, but came well recommended, were of good character, of a modest and humble demeanour, and above all, had the appearance of 'respectability'. The suitability of a servant in this regard, especially if she would have close contact with her employer, as the following letter shows, was essential. In 1734, Anna Maria Browne wrote from her home in Stretton to the Countess at Donington, thus,

I last week met accidentally with a person, I think will fit your Ladyship for your own servant, if your Ladyship is not fix'd already. She is sister to ye schoolmaster at Atherstone [Warwickshire] and her father was a clergyman and ye whole family are sinsable [sensible] prudent people, she never lived but in one service which was ten and half [years] with Mrs Knightly of Offchurch, and left her place because of late they had but indifferent cooks, and it was quite too hard for her, she was housekeeper and Mrs Knightly's one maid, she washed her mistress's best lace, really she is a good looking woman, and not conceited, I have no acquaintance with her, but went last week to stay a night or two with my sister Chambers and came to see old Mrs Sherman, and ye moment I saw her and knew who she was, I wished

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<sup>35</sup>Ibid., p. 151; Kent, 'Ubiquitous But Invisible', p. 122.

your Ladyship might not be provided because I think you'll like her...I beg your Ladyship will let me know if you have got one.<sup>36</sup>

The debenture rolls of the Hastings accounts survive for the majority of years covered by the fourth quarter of the eighteenth and the early years of the nineteenth century, and are useful not only because they provide insight into the wages paid to household servants, of which use has already been made, but they are, in addition, suggestive of mobility and literacy. Historians contend that female servants were amongst the most illiterate members of society. An examination of literacy amongst servants on the basis of a signature or a mark only is, however, questionable, and we must take heed of those who argue against this method of measurement as any true reflection of those who could actually read and write.<sup>37</sup>

From the middle of the 1770s to the beginning of the nineteenth century, 44 women working, for example, as housemaids, kitchen maids, laundry maids or still room maids joined the Hastings household. Thirty-five, some 79.5 percent of them, were able to sign their names when they received their wages. However, it should be noted that 3 did not sign particularly well, and a further 3, who had originally been unable to do so, eventually were able to write their names, suggesting thereby, that some servants were given tuition. In addition, found amongst the miscellaneous bills, separate from the permanent members of the household contained in the salaries and pensions accounts, are payments to temporary workers, those who seem either to have

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<sup>36</sup>HA/75/1067, H.L.

<sup>37</sup>Hill, *Servants*, p. 226.

helped out, but still came in regularly.<sup>38</sup> Women whose work was described, for example, as ‘helping in the kitchen’ or ‘being in the laundry’ can be taken as this type of workers. Of nine women whose activities were so depicted in the intervening years between 1783 and 1802, all but 2 accepted their wages with a mark. If we compare the above with data taken from settlement examinations, we see a similar picture. A random sample of 59 women whose depositions given between 1750 and 1800 in Leicestershire and Nottinghamshire that documented a specific hiring or hirings as a servant,<sup>39</sup> show that 9, otherwise 15.2 per cent, signed their names. The hirings in settlement examinations were to employers listed, for instance, as farmer, victualler, mercer, hatter, baker, butcher, carpenter and joiner. The ability of a few women recorded in settlement examinations to sign their names is borne out by information for other workers. Of the 21 women who were employed weeding and haymaking at Welbeck in 1755 none signed their names when receiving their wages, and at Donington in 1810 only 4 of 17 did so.<sup>40</sup> It comes as no surprise, therefore, that these figures confirm that the wealthiest households across the region contained the most literate of female servants. This likewise suggests that the majority of those servants who could read and write would be less inclined to work in households of a humbler origin. This throws into question how far women did work in service across the social spectrum. These women would have had little contact with proto-industry.

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<sup>38</sup>Wage information in miscellaneous bills, pensions and salaries - Boxes HAF/51 through to HAF/69, H.L.

<sup>39</sup>This sample excludes those young women and girls who were apprentices or mill workers. Settlement Examinations, L.R.O and N.A.O.

<sup>40</sup>DD/P4/58/83/86, N.A.O; HAF/71/Unsorted Bundle, H.L.

The Donington data also raises the issue of advancement, for it suggests that even attachment to the household of an Earl did not necessarily mean access to education, and certainly did not for the casual workers who were employed. Further, one of the female servants whose occupation is clearly delineated, and who continued to sign for her wages with a mark, was Mary Chapman who looked after the fowls. Therefore, proximity to the inner household may have been important. What is also noticeable is the steady stream of younger sisters or other female relatives who joined the household presumably on the recommendation of those well established family members, they having already, undoubtedly, impressed by their good conduct. Were women aiding their relatives in career and social advancement? In January 1790, Sarah Brookes signed neatly for her wages of £2 2s for her half year's salary which had been due at Michaelmas last.<sup>41</sup> Two other women of the same surname joined the household, Elizabeth and Mary, in following years. Elizabeth joined in 1791 and could only sign her name with a mark as could Mary in 1799. Unfortunately, the salaries and wages rolls are missing for the early years of the 1790s and Elizabeth seems to have left in that time, as does Sarah. Mary, however, came in 1799 and two years later continued to sign for her wages with a mark. Whether she chose not to avail herself of the opportunity of education or that her work precluded her from doing so is unclear. However, a Sarah Ruff, who joined the household at the same time signed with a mark, but soon began writing her name.<sup>42</sup> There were also the Moss's. Elizabeth Moss, who we shall hear more of shortly, was eventually joined by Sarah, Alice and Frances Moss. All of them could write their names, but Sarah did so badly, and like Alice, only

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<sup>41</sup>HAF/59/12, H.L.

appears to have stayed only briefly. They were probably temporary workers as both of them were paid for periods of less than a year.<sup>43</sup> Frances and Elizabeth received seven shillings a week board wages between April 1794 and March 1795, but then disappears from the records after accepting her wages in November 1796.<sup>44</sup> On the whole, the level of turnover amongst female servants varied. Some would stay for nearly ten years or more, while others remained for only a year, two or possibly three. As the Hastings household would be a better place to work than most, it is to be expected that greater stability would be demonstrated by female servants. Perhaps two or three years were sufficient to acquire some of the skills and knowledge that would help them in the future. We saw earlier, however, that most women entering the household were able to write their names. As Hill notes, literacy must have been obtained elsewhere, either in another elite household, or prior to entering service.<sup>45</sup> Just how far social betterment could result from service is debatable. Very few women escaped the station they were born into, and even if they acquired some of the trappings and status that might come through employment in an elevated position, it did not necessarily mean that a working woman would be remunerated with an equivalent wage or receive the same respect as someone of 'genteel' status. Nonetheless, some may have used their experiences as a stepping stone to a better position on the career ladder.

The wages paid to servants were, indeed, also dependent on the background and social status of the servant in question, since domestic service was not confined to

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<sup>42</sup>HAF/61/1, HAF/65/11, HAF/68/7, H.L.

<sup>43</sup>HAF/59/12, H.L.

<sup>44</sup>HAF/62/8, HAF/64/9, H.L.

<sup>45</sup>Hill, *Servants*, p. 231.

women of the labouring classes. In order to illustrate that social status influenced earnings it is worth considering two ‘career’ servants Elizabeth Moss and Mary Dawson. On the 15th of March 1781, Elizabeth Moss began work in the Earl of Huntingdon’s household as an under laundry maid at the annual wage of £5 5s. She remained in service at least until 1802, by which time her salary had increased to £11 1s, inclusive of a guinea tea allowance, being by that time apparently the highest paid female employee in the household. During her period of employment she had managed to nearly double her salary, excluding the tea allowance. In 1797, she had also been reimbursed £2 15s 2d ‘being payment of a bill on the house account’. Moreover, a ‘bill for sundries and house account’, which Elizabeth paid, indicates that she was purchasing items from local traders and paying washerwomen and charwomen that came to work at Donington Park.<sup>46</sup> This shows that her role within the household had undergone some change suggesting in particular that she carried out at least some of the work of a housekeeper. Unfortunately, from 1784 the occupations of servants are not given in the lists. However, comparing Elizabeth’s annual wage to other women in the household is an indication that her wage was not greatly in excess of what others earned. Her annual wage is comparable with that of the housemaids, laundry maids and ‘maids of all work’ listed by Hecht.<sup>47</sup>

On the other hand, Mary Dawson, a housekeeper and the sister of Edward Dawson, the steward, appears in the records of the estate from 1771 at a salary of £20 a year. Four years later her annual salary had increased to £25 and continued to rise in

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<sup>46</sup>HAF/54/17, HAF/69/13, H.L.

this way until in 1785 she earned £35 a year.<sup>48</sup> Set against the wages of housekeepers generally Mary Dawson got the full rate and later probably above that normally paid. She also looks to have had a pre-eminent position in the household, much more so than the other housekeepers over the period, and, importantly, seems to have been of a higher social status. A Mrs Austin, Housekeeper at Ledstone in Yorkshire received in 1771, £20. This was equal to the salary of Mary Dawson but Mrs Austin had been in service and was now leaving. Her replacement, Mrs Kerby, took over in 1772 at £10 a year.<sup>49</sup> It may be that Mary Dawson co-ordinated the running of each of the households of the Earl of Huntingdon and the female servants within that warranted her higher wages. But while type of job, and length of service were important for gaining increments in wages, a servant's rank and background, especially in wealthy households, looks to have influenced an individual's wages.

An annual wage or salary, as historians have pointed out, formed only part of the earnings accrued over the course of a period of employment. In September 1730, Ann Merry hired herself to the Babington Estate at Rothley Temple for £1 19s. Additionally, recorded in the labourers' account book were the clothes, a handkerchief and stays bought for her.<sup>50</sup> There were a number of ways in which a servant could profit and which could add considerably to overall earnings. These included vails, i.e. gifts of money to servants from the people who visited the household and perquisites

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<sup>47</sup> Hecht, *The Domestic Servant Class*, pp. 147-149.

<sup>48</sup> HAF/49/13-HAF/

<sup>49</sup> HAF/47/3, HAF/48/1, HAF/50/5, H.L.

<sup>50</sup> 2D31/286, L.R.O.



e.g. money and cast off clothes, and tea money.<sup>51</sup> A guinea tea allowance regularly supplemented female servants' wages at Donington Park in the later years of the eighteenth century. Tea drinking may have been a way for servants to emulate their 'betters', but on a more practical level, tea was a refreshing beverage. This was not inconsequential for those women at work in the laundry, much more so than the benefit of spirits which were thought a necessary accompaniment in a hot environment.<sup>52</sup>

The most important of these additional forms of income were board wages. Information on board wages is not as easy to come by as that for annual salaries and wages. However, board and lodging, usually constituted approximately two-thirds of female remuneration.<sup>53</sup> Board wages were generally paid each week in place of meals, though they might be only a temporary arrangement, for example, in an employer's absence or when the servant undertook a journey. But they could also be a permanent part of servants' wages.<sup>54</sup> Although we cannot be sure that board wages were received all the time, from the Hastings accounts it does seem as though many of the servants, female as well as male, during some periods in the eighteenth century were consistently paid.<sup>55</sup> This extra income when included in the contracted wage could greatly enhance the amount a woman could earn. For example, in the 1740s the housemaid Betty received 2s a week board wages which when added to her £3 a year would have given

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<sup>51</sup>Hecht, *The Domestic Servant Class*, pp. 156-157.

<sup>52</sup>Sharpe, *Adapting to Capitalism*, p. 124. Any woman who has ever had the misfortune to engage in heavy hand washing will know that drinking hard spirits would be the last thing a person would wish to do.

<sup>53</sup>McBride, *The Domestic Revolution*, p. 63

<sup>54</sup>Hecht, *The Domestic Servant Class*, p. 153; Hill, *Servants*, p. 71.

<sup>55</sup>Payments of board wages are to be found distributed throughout the accounts HAF, H.L.

her a total income of at least £8 4s.<sup>56</sup> In 1734, the dairymaid, Mary Bromely's weekly board wages were higher, set at 4s a week, but a shilling less than the 5s a week paid to the male brewer and gardener.<sup>57</sup> In 1795, when Elizabeth Moss was earning £8 plus 1 guinea tea allowance, she also had seven shillings a week board wages amounting to a further £18 4s. These women were extraordinarily well off when compared to others in different occupations, even with the effect of rising prices on real earnings in the second half of the eighteenth century. The example of a woman by the name of Mary Moss, possibly some relation of Elizabeth's, in charge of the workers at the Ivanhoe Baths at Ashby de la Zouch in the 1820s, gives a splendid illustration of the variety of ways in which women could benefit financially from being in service. Mary's basic wage was £10 10s a year in 1822, but she received two shillings a week lodging allowance, a further seven shillings board wages, and 'extra wages for care'. This came to £36 10s and does not include the additional monies from perquisites.<sup>58</sup> Other women and men working at the baths also received extra wages which were viewed by their employers 'as a stimulus to good conduct.'<sup>59</sup>

When a servant retired from a wealthy family she could probably expect to get a pension. However, since she would be living away from the household, and no longer in receipt of board wages, her standard of living would have declined. Nevertheless, Mary Wakefield would have been grateful for the £10 she received for the half year in

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<sup>56</sup>HAF/40/18, HAF/40/5, H.L.

<sup>57</sup>HAF/36/7, H.L.

<sup>58</sup>HAF/76/(Unsorted bundle), H.L.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid.

1789.<sup>60</sup> For those working for less well off individuals there were additional ways they could benefit. Often these came through the death of their employer. Of those women leaving money to their servants in Ashby and Hinckley the sum of £5 commonly occurs in the early part of the eighteenth century and later on in the period £10, although one fortunate woman received £30.<sup>61</sup> Besides money, women were left clothes, household goods, ‘mourning’ and even animals. The legacies and bequests to servants provide an interesting insight into the relationships between mistress and servant. There were various reasons behind the inclusion of a servant in a will. Bequests and legacies could be an indication of the length of service, the efficiency with which a servant carried out her duties, the degree of affection between servant and mistress and the financial position of those leaving the will.<sup>62</sup> Some wills only specify money to ‘such servants as shall be living with me at the time of my decease’. Or the servant could be identified specifically, for example, Ann Cramant £10 ‘as a testimony to her faithful service to me.’<sup>63</sup> Certainly, a good servant was a valuable asset, and as the Countess of Stafford noted in a letter to the Countess of Huntingdon in July 1731, ‘I am prodigious glad your Ladyship likes your housekeeper for changing servants is very disagreeable.’<sup>64</sup> But while the loss of a servant was a trial to women of the upper classes, they did not necessarily always put their own needs before those of their servants and could be kind. Lady Catherine Wheeler wrote in March 1734/5 that

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<sup>60</sup>HAF/58/12, H.L.

<sup>61</sup>Wills: PR/T/1725, PR/T/1741, PR/T/1778/60, PR/T/1779/171, PR/T/1810/8, PR/T/1830/1-2, L.R.O.

<sup>62</sup>Hecht, *The Domestic Servant Class*, p. 174.

<sup>63</sup>PR/T/1779/71, L.R.O.

<sup>64</sup>HA/73/13201, H.L.

I at present Lie under a very inconvenient misfortune which all Mistress's of Families are subject too, the parting with two of my most useful servants...my Housekeeper and Cook, the former I have known of some time (she going to settle again with her husband) ...But my Cook leaving me is very sudden...as she has been a good servant and it really would be an injury to the poor woman to make her lose the best offer [of marriage] she ever had or may have. I have inconvenienced myself by letting her go a fortnight before the new one can come.<sup>65</sup>

Provisos, however, attached to legacies suggest that employers were keen to maintain a level of coercion and control, and a legacy could be a means of ensuring that actions agreed would actually occur after the testator's death. Therefore, promising money was a means of maintaining the services of a highly regarded servant. Elizabeth Goodman, bequeathed £5 would receive it on condition 'she continue as my servant...and three suits of my worst clothes'.<sup>66</sup> Similarly, in 1829, Elizabeth Abney wrote

my servant Sarah Lowe, if still in my service otherwise not, a suit of mourning to consist of two articles each to be made up and given to her at my funeral...also the bed I sleep in with bedsteads and hangings, coverlid, blankets sheets, mattress and all other articles of furniture belonging...and also a small set of oak drawers now in the house occupied by the honourable Mrs Forbes provided that for six months after my decease...she assist Frances Dean...and also to pay her the same rate.<sup>67</sup>

There does seem also to have been an awareness of the practicality of leaving certain items to women to aid them in their maintenance, which is perhaps to be expected since those leaving wills, in these instances, were widows or unmarried women. For example, in 1759, Sarah Partridge left to Sarah Bray 'who lives with me all my

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<sup>65</sup>HA/13236, H.L.

<sup>66</sup>PR/T/1741, L.R.O.

household goods linen and woollens and also my cow which I have in Hinckley'. Her former servant, a man, received two guineas.<sup>68</sup> Wages, legacies and loans between mistress and servant could also become entangled as they did for Hannah Jones, who on the death of her employer gave evidence in 1815 that she, Hannah Jones, had £25 owing to her which had been 'lent and advanced' to Elizabeth Fielding and which was in part 'for work and labour done and performed' as her servant.<sup>69</sup> If a woman became beholden to her servant and could not pay her, then she was unable to dismiss her.<sup>70</sup> However, the inability of a servant to secure her wages could have had considerable consequences for her future.

In the introduction it was noted that historians have attempted to place a chronology on the 'feminisation' of domestic service. Evidence for the existence of male servants who have been described as 'quite common' in the seventeenth and eighteenth century,<sup>71</sup> comes in a large part from the concentration of historians on domestic service in aristocratic houses and the homes of the gentry. In terms of male servants, the households of the Earls of Huntingdon at Donington Park in the eighteenth century could boast almost a full complement of servants within the hierarchy described by Hecht.<sup>72</sup> At Donington in the last years of the seventeenth century, a list giving details of servants who came and went from the estate, which seems to have been completed by the eighth Earl, George Hastings, shows that of the

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<sup>67</sup>PR/T/1826/147/1-4, L.R.O.

<sup>68</sup>PR/T/1759/149, L.R.O.

<sup>69</sup>PR/T/1815/61/1-4, L.R.O.

<sup>70</sup>Stuart, *The English Abigail*, p. 127.

<sup>71</sup>Davidson, *A Woman's Work*, p. 179.

<sup>72</sup>Hecht, *The Domestic Servant Class*, pp. 35-70.

33 servants recorded between 1692 and 1695, only one, a housemaid, Helen Gilbert, was female. As well as footmen, postillions, a steward, tutor, *valet de chambre*, for example, there were kitchen boys, and a succession of male cooks who seem to have only rarely given satisfaction, they either being 'an ill cook', 'ignorant in his trade' or 'wilful and expensive'.<sup>73</sup> The absence of women from this list could perhaps be construed by some historians as proof that domestic service has not always been primarily a woman's sector of work. It is possible that female servants were resident, but not recorded. Helen Gilbert's stay in the household was very brief, arriving as she did early in April 1692, and departing at the end of May in the same year. However, in other sections of the financial papers in this period, women were listed but their occupations not given, except in the case of Mrs Cross the washerwoman. In all probability, much of the 'female' domestic work might well have been taken up by casual staff. The male servants in the Hastings household during the eighteenth century were paid more than women and their purpose was generally decorous, administrative, and above all, they were there to denote status. The work of these male servants does not suggest any real alteration in the sexual division of labour either before or after the eighteenth century. The three main areas of domestic work - cooking, cleaning and washing were done by women. To be sure, butlers cleaned plate and waited at table, as did footmen when not acting as escorts and male cooks were frequently found in these houses. However, there was no discernible fundamental break with the past, since aristocratic families today still have their butlers, footmen and estate managers. Therefore the 'feminisation' of domestic service can be said to be overdrawn or,

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<sup>73</sup>HAF/25/48, H.L.

indeed, the term could be described as something of a misnomer. McBride has argued that ‘maids of all work’ accounted for two-thirds of all servants in the nineteenth century, but they became even more numerous at the end of the nineteenth century as household staff size declined.<sup>74</sup> It is also possible that they were more prevalent prior to the mid-eighteenth century when the demand for domestic servants began, and our attention has become too focused on the greater gradation of domestic service occupations. The sharp end of service, in the shape of ‘maids of all work’ and the ‘casuals’, should be an additional focal point for historians interested in domestic service in the eighteenth century, and while female pauper servants may have affected wage levels, so for sure, must those of casual employees.

## **5.2 ‘Washing’ and ‘Charring’, ‘Helping’ and ‘Assisting’**

Occasionally, a woman would remain in service all her life, even when married she might continue in waged employment, as a young mother with a number of small children or as a consequence of widowhood, working as either washerwoman or charwoman. However, the dichotomy between unmarried women resident in service and married women or widows as chars or washerwomen is not a strict one, since women who were separated matrimonially or geographically from their husbands might work in service, as in the case of Lady Catherine Wheeler’s housekeeper referred to earlier. Laundering and charring were very common occupations prior to the

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<sup>74</sup>McBride, *The Domestic Revolution*, p. 12.

eighteenth century and whatever stage society had reached in the early modern period, women were needed to wash and clean. Washing and cleaning, furthermore, had always been women's work and only very rarely undertaken by men if they were unable to pay a woman to do it for them, and then usually behind closed doors under the cover of darkness so as to avoid censure and ridicule from neighbours.<sup>75</sup>

Laundresses and washerwomen have appeared in the historical records for many centuries<sup>76</sup> and the journey that women made to other people's homes to assist with their washing remained a common feature until the present century,<sup>77</sup> although in urban areas women were more likely to take people's washing into their own homes.<sup>78</sup> Washing linen and clothes was a lengthy, arduous process which often involved carrying vessels filled with several gallons of water and pounding clothes probably with a wooden instrument known as a 'beetle'. The whole event began early in the morning, starting as early as 3 a.m. and finishing the following day at noon.<sup>79</sup> Davidson suggests that the weekly wash became more popular with the upper classes during the eighteenth century.<sup>80</sup> Although people showed a greater concern for cleanliness, washing the laundry of others was a none too pleasant affair. John Simmons wrote on the 26th August 1798 that he had received 'a very curious letter' from his daughter Maria, and with it, 'a pile of stinking clothes'.<sup>81</sup> Entries made in his diary and account book for the

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<sup>75</sup>Davidson, *A Woman's Work*, p.120 and p. 136.

<sup>76</sup>E.P. Malcomson, *English Laundresses, A Social History, 1850-1930*, (Chicago, 1986), p. 3.

<sup>77</sup>Davidson, *A Woman's Work*, p.136.

<sup>78</sup>Sharpe, *Adapting to Capitalism*, p. 124.

<sup>79</sup>This example refers to the washing created by ten people and undertaken by three washerwomen in the third and fourth decades of the nineteenth century. Davidson, *A Woman's Work*, p. 151.

<sup>80</sup>*Ibid.* p.150.

<sup>81</sup>DE690, L.R.O.



years 1798 to 1801, show that three or five washerwomen called at the farm usually every four weeks to do the wash for which each received a shilling. This is consistent with the shilling wage paid to the two washerwomen who worked for James Woodforde of Norfolk in 1799; they began work on the Monday morning and left Tuesday evening.<sup>82</sup> The women who came to Butt House were sometimes joined in their work by Elizabeth Heap. She worked for John Simmons undertaking various aspects of casual labour. However, she is perhaps best described somewhat incongruously as the 'permanent casual'. At the Babington Estate at Rothley Temple in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries two women filled this role. In less wealthy households much of the work would have been undertaken by these women and they were therefore as important as the domestic servants.<sup>83</sup>

In large households in the eighteenth century laundry maids needed extra women drafted in to assist. As we have seen this happened at Donington Park over the course of the century. Ann Smith, for example, as noted earlier, helped in the laundry when required. Likewise other women were called upon to perform a set task. In 1738 Mary Choice spent four days washing twelve pairs of sheets and six dozen napkins and got 1s 8d.<sup>84</sup> In Table 5.3 the wages paid to washerwomen and charwomen in Leicestershire and Nottinghamshire are illustrated and are further displayed in Figure 5.2.<sup>85</sup> The payments made to women are not dissimilar from those made to women in

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<sup>82</sup>Davidson, *A Woman's Work*, p. 152.

<sup>83</sup>DE690, 2D31/286, L.R.O.

<sup>84</sup>HAF/38/5, H.L.

<sup>85</sup>The continuity in the daily wages paid to workers for agricultural and domestic work has meant the inclusion in Figure 5.2 of three data points for agricultural work in the 1760s. See Chapter 4.0, footnote 31.

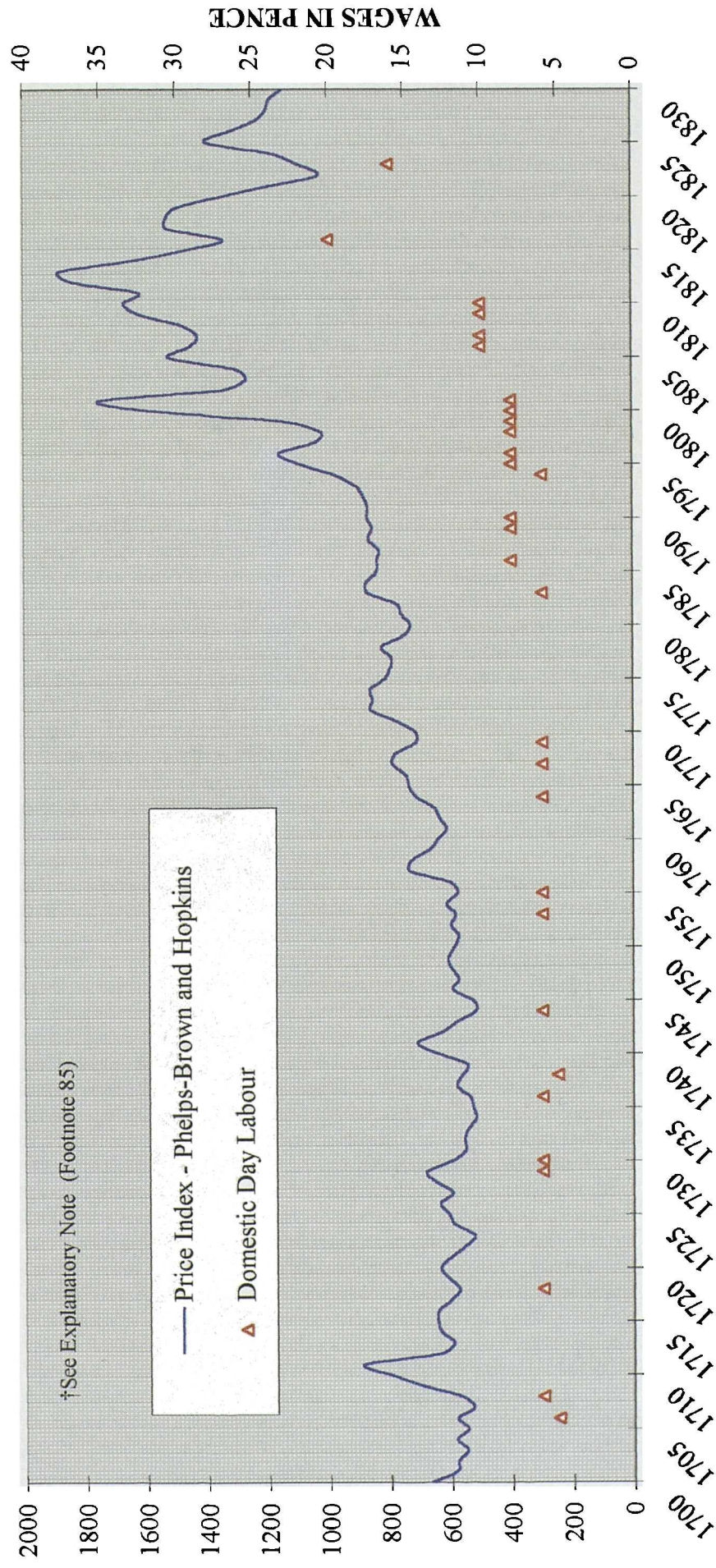
**TABLE 5.3 - WAGE PAYMENTS MADE TO WASHERWOMEN AND  
CHARWOMEN ON LEICESTERSHIRE AND NOTTINGHAMSHIRE FARMS AND  
ESTATES, 1706-1823**

Year	Task	Day/Task Payment
1706	Washerwoman	5d
1708	Washerwoman	9d (2 days)
1718	Washerwoman	6d
1729	Washing and Scouring	6d
1730	Washerwoman	6d
1730	Chairwoman	6d
1736	Cleaning in House	4d
1736	Washing and Scouring	9d
1736	For being in Laundry	6d
1738	Washing	5d
1744	Charring	6d
1753	Washerwoman	6d & 9d
1755	Scouring	6d
1783	Being in Laundry	6d
1783	Helping in Kitchen	6d
1786	Assisting in Kitchen	7d
1786	Washing	1s
1786	Assisting in Laundry	8d
1789	Charring	8d
1789	Washing	1s
1790	Charring	8d
1790	Ironing	8d
1790	Washing	1s
1794	Charring	6d
1794	Charring	1s 4d
1795	Assisting in Kitchen	8d
1796	Charring	8d
1798	Washing	1s
1800	Washing	1s
1801	Washing	1s
1806	Washerwoman	1s 2d
1807	Woman in Kitchen	10d
1807	Washerwoman	1s 2d
1809	Washerwoman	1s 2d
1810	Washerwoman	1s 2d
1816	Washing	2s 6d
1823	Charring	2s

**Sources:** Hastings Financial Papers: HAF/29/13, HAF/33/22, HAF/34/22, HAF/37/2, HAF/38/5, HAF/41/10, HAF/60/3, HAF/62/8, HAF/64/9, HAF/68/8, HAF/73/8, HAF/74/(Unsorted bundle), HAF/OS/1, H.L.; Simmons Diary and Farm Accounts: DE690, Babington Estate Papers: 2D31/403, L.R.O; Portland Papers: DD/4P/58/80, DD/4P/58/83, N.A.O.



**FIGURE 5.2 - PRICE INDEX AND TRENDS IN DAY WAGES FOR FEMALE DOMESTIC LABOUR IN LEICESTERSHIRE AND NOTTINGHAMSHIRE, 1700-1830<sup>†</sup>**



**Sources:** Phelps-Brown and Hopkins, 'Seven Centuries of the Prices of Consumables'; Hastings Estate Papers: See Table 5.3; Simmons Diary and Farm Accounts, DE690; Babington Estate Papers: 2D31/403, L.R.O; Portland Papers: DD/4P/58/80, DD/4P/58/83, N.A.O.

agricultural work. But the apparent financial advantage for washerwomen in the early nineteenth century is reminiscent of the very long hours worked.<sup>86</sup> However, when we take this into consideration, we again see that wages for daily domestic work failed to keep pace with prices, and therefore women witnessed a decline in their real wages.

Account records are sometimes additionally misleading and confusing about the precise nature of the payment made. Mary Choice's wages were probably based on the number of items washed rather than the time she spent working. When the Earl and Countess of Huntingdon were resident in their London home in 1768, 11s 7d was paid to Sarah Brown for doing the weekly wash which consisted of 102 pieces of linen. The washing bills at Bath in 1763 and at Donington in 1794, for example, were also charged in this way.<sup>87</sup> Women could be paid by the day or piece which is perfectly consistent with methods of payment to washerwomen in the nineteenth century.

As well as financial remuneration for work done, washerwomen often received meals<sup>88</sup> or board money. At Donington Park the housekeeper's bill for 1796 demonstrate that she paid them for the ironing, washing, charring and also board. Unfortunately, as the costs of the work and board are combined, it is not possible to determine the amount paid in lieu of meals.<sup>89</sup> Nevertheless, the wage payments show a consistency with the following period, in that women in a private establishment earned between 2s and 2s 6d for a lengthy day, and this sum is shown as being earned by a

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<sup>86</sup>J. Burnette, 'An Investigation of the Female-Male Wage Gap', *Economic History Review*, 50:2 (1997), p. 269.

<sup>87</sup>HAF/45/3, HAF/46/11, H.L.

woman in 1816. From 1786 and probably earlier, one shilling appears to have been the norm, although the peripatetic washerwomen who went into private homes also got 1s to 1s 6d in the nineteenth century.<sup>90</sup>

Board wages were also given to those who cleaned and these women sometimes found their way into their employers' wills. Jane Lawson, in 1796 bequeathed a guinea to her charwoman Rebecca Watkins.<sup>91</sup> As with washing, charring was the other avenue of work for married women in domestic employment, and similarly, the number of women engaged in this occupation grew over the period.<sup>92</sup> Although normally fewer hours were spent on scrubbing and scouring than washing, as is sometimes reflected in the wages received, a charwoman's work could be, nonetheless, equally laborious and often unpleasant. If we return to the example of Ann Smith, we saw that when she was not engaged in agricultural work or located in the confines of the laundry, she was to be found 'cleaning in ye house'. With any farm, aristocratic estate, or parsonage etc. in the region, women supplied the casual labour that met the growing preoccupation with cleanliness. Women were hired, for example, to clean the Quaker meeting house at Hinckley during the second half of the eighteenth century, while in 1828 others were employed at the parish church working at 'cleaning, scouring and oiling pews', with male co-workers.<sup>93</sup> Normally, as with washing, men rarely performed cleaning tasks indoors. However, there were men in the London area

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<sup>88</sup>Malcomson, *English Laundresses*, pp. 13-14.

<sup>89</sup>HAF/64/9, HAF/62/8, H.L.

<sup>90</sup>Malcomson, *English Laundresses*, p. 113.

<sup>91</sup>PR/T/1797/118, L.R.O.

<sup>92</sup>Sharpe, *Adapting to Capitalism*, p. 124.

<sup>93</sup>12D39/7, 27, 33; 1225/66, L.R.O.

who worked as cleaners and, for example, used lead to dry-rub oak floors.<sup>94</sup> Perhaps cleaning pews was not viewed in the same manner as other types of cleaning. However, a more likely explanation is the dire state of the hosiery industry and men laboured at work where ever they could find it.

Davidson has argued that ‘between 1670 and 1820 the status of cleaning became transformed; it ceased to be a peripheral aspect of housework and became one of central importance.’<sup>95</sup> The Donington Park estate records indicate that the employment of a housemaid and laundry maid at the beginning of the century, and before, show an attention to the removal of dirt. Payments made to women ‘casuals’, moreover, regularly appeared within the housekeeper’s kitchen accounts sandwiched for instance between the cost of a bowl, a visit by the chimney sweep or the not infrequent entries of exotic foods. For the most part, the records remain silent on precisely what it was that women cleaned and how they cleaned it. Although as they were documented ‘scouring’ indicates that they were probably using sand to clean floors, stairs and cooking utensils, and no doubt they were kept busy sweeping hearths and polishing furniture.

Ascertaining the amount of time in a year a woman spent cleaning for others is as difficult as that for determining work in agriculture. However, at Welbeck in 1755, a receipt dated the 24th September states that ‘John Turner for his wife Mary Turner £1 7s 6d, received by her husband for scouring and other work in the house’. She had

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<sup>94</sup>Davidson, *A Woman's Work*, p. 120.

worked 55 days at 6d a day.<sup>96</sup> It is probable that this receipt is a record of Mary Turner's domestic employment over the course of one year. Interestingly, she does not appear in the lists of agricultural workers at Welbeck for that year. She may have undertaken casual work for another employer. However, we can see that the work of casuals while in some cases giving regular employment, for others could be intermittent. Nonetheless, the information from Leicestershire and Nottinghamshire suggests that charwomen and laundresses were widely employed as casual workers in the eighteenth century. Charwomen formed a growing percentage of the servant class from 1851 as people were less able to afford servants and people preferred to maintain their own private space.<sup>97</sup> If women in the second half of the nineteenth century needed to augment their incomes then countless numbers of women in the equivalent period of the eighteenth century certainly needed to do the same.

### 5.3 Other Kinds of Service

As well as domestic service and the day and weekly labour that women performed as laundresses and charwomen, there was a range of other activities that fell within working women's 'domestic' sphere. Child care was an important aspect of paid domestic work. Maternal mortality in the eighteenth century frequently ensured women were called upon or took the opportunity to look after young children and keep house for a widower. On the death of her sister in 1768, Jane Linsey kept house for

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<sup>95</sup>Ibid. p. 128.

<sup>96</sup>DD/4P/58/83/29, N.A.O.

<sup>97</sup>McBride, *The Domestic Revolution*, p. 111-113

her brother-in-law, a framework knitter and cared for his three young children. She received £3.<sup>98</sup> Marriage would often follow and then their employers had a free childminder, housekeeper and sexual partner at no cost. In those areas of the East Midlands where women worked the frames young girls between the ages of eight and twelve years were employed to look after children while the mother worked. In the face of declining earnings after 1815 especially, the more hours a woman could spend in the frame the better. Girls came to the houses of knitters and managed children and also sometimes seamed. This was certainly done out of expediency rather than any desire for any reasons of status. The rates for such work were between 1s 9d and 2s 6d in the 1840s. However, the sum paid would depend on the girl's skill with a needle since not all could seam a stocking. It seems also, that those families who paid the full 2s 6d additionally had their weekly wash done by their child minder's mother.<sup>99</sup> Girls rarely continued to look after children beyond this age and as soon as they were able were placed in the frame.<sup>100</sup>

The administration of the poor law often provided work for women as midwives, wetnurses, and caring for children. As the population grew from the second half of the eighteenth century, the numbers of people seeking assistance increased, along with the need for the services that assisted the indigent. It was also a way for poorer women who were perhaps in need of help themselves to earn some money.

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<sup>98</sup>DE495/17/2, L.R.O.

<sup>99</sup>PP, 1845, XV, Report From the Commissioner to Enquire into the Condition of the Framework Knitters, p. 283.

<sup>100</sup>Ibid.



Nursing the sick was such an activity. Women were sometimes asked, for example, to care for a member of the parish or look after a sick person as they were transported from one parish to another. Sometimes disputes between parishes would occur about whose costs they actually were. In 1719, the Leicestershire quarter sessions record a quarrel between Wykin in Leicestershire and Stanford in Nottinghamshire over the sum of 16s, the price of transporting two vagrants, a sick man and a child over three days. A woman had been employed to care for the sick man and child for which she had received 2s.<sup>101</sup> The lying-in of women could also be an expensive, especially if the mother became ill.<sup>102</sup> A roughly written letter on behalf of Ann Rile states:

Justice Ashby order[ed] them after he had commit me to [the] Bridwell to take proper care of me in my month and find me a proper nurse wile I was thear prisoner which they would not, my husband took them before him again and he hordered them to quit me from prison, they told him to his face they would not quit me.<sup>103</sup>

Attached to the letter, undated, were the costs of midwife 5 shillings and a nurse 2s 6d. Whatever the outcome of this case, poor law administrators were concerned to reduce expenses. A lying in could cost as much £1 10s in the middle of the century and if cutting costs in nursing could be achieved overseers were likely to do it. Even for those births where a midwife had been called, it could sometimes be difficult to extract payment. Catherine Cooper, sworn midwife, had to resort to the law in order to get 2s

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<sup>101</sup>QS3/21, L.R.O.

<sup>102</sup>Nursing the sick could sometimes be both lengthy and costly. In 1721, £1 2s 6d was the sum given to a nurse for looking and feeding a woman for four weeks, which is why overseers were anxious to recoup money from parishes they thought were responsible for the cost of the care of the individual. QS3/31, L.R.O.

<sup>103</sup>DE432/15/7 (undated), L.R.O.

6d owed her by the overseers at Worthington in 1749.<sup>104</sup> For those nurses whose charges failed to respond to their care or where members of the community had died, women could also earn some money by laying out the dead. The Quakers of Hinckley cared for the elderly women of their meeting and when Dorothy Dans died in 1771, amongst the funeral expenses was the 3s paid to two women for 'laying her out and attending'.<sup>105</sup> The workhouses also provided domestic work to women and they found employment as matrons, housemaids and nurses.

The previous discussion shows that one woman's experience of domestic service could differ very markedly from another. In some instances, service provided security, a relatively good income, and a pension on leaving their post. For many others service was a transient existence as they moved from job to job in order to increase their wages or find a more suitable position before saving enough money and eventually marrying. Although service could be wide ranging, women's work revolved around the basic tasks of housewifery, and from this perspective, a narrow band of employment. Before we turn to these workers two further points should be made. Firstly, that the findings and arguments in chapter 4.0, would indicate that domestic service had already emerged as the dominant sector of employment for women in the East Midlands in the first half of the eighteenth century, and possibly earlier. Secondly, a distinction can be made between servants that had the training and skills that were valued, those employed in elite households, and other women who served as casual weekly and day labour, or for the least wealthy employers. This latter point is

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<sup>104</sup>QS3/1/138-141, (1749) L.R.O.

important when considering the ability of women to move between sectors of employment.

In 1771, Elizabeth Reason wrote in her will that her daughter:

be by her Mary Alt brought up with mildness but not too much indulgence and with the advice of my most valuable and dear friends Miss Elizabeth and Jane Brandwood in a pious, humble, charitable, grateful and submissive manner also in honest industrious housewifery.<sup>106</sup>

Housewifery in whatever form created the greatest opportunity of employment for women throughout the period, and judging by this quotation, conferred in some instances, a gentility, and importantly, a respectability associated with certain modes of behaviour consistent with the ideal image of women in the eighteenth and other centuries.<sup>107</sup> Appearing to be of good reputation became increasingly significant for women in securing work as a domestic servant and, in 1792, legislation was passed enabling the punishment of a fine of £20 and up to twelve months in jail for those who used a forged character.<sup>108</sup> The respectability attached to domestic service ensured that the principal purpose of the 'the Asylum for young girls who were in a neglected and destitute station' set up by the ladies of Leicester's elite in 1782 was to train them in domestic service.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> 12D39/27, L.R.O.

<sup>106</sup> PR/T/1771/1741-2, L.R.O.

<sup>107</sup> M. Legates, 'The Cult of Womanhood in Eighteenth Century Thought', *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 1 (1976), pp. 21-39.

<sup>108</sup> McBride, *The Domestic Revolution*, p. 73.

<sup>109</sup> James Thompson, *The History of Leicester in the Eighteenth Century*, (Leicester, 1872), p. 225.

The differentiation between levels of respectability and domestic service is clearly discernible when it comes to the question of pauper servants. Many girls indentured by the parish were sent into people's homes as domestic servants. In Warwickshire between 1700 to 1834 housewifery formed a significant proportion of female parish apprentices.<sup>110</sup> As, indeed, did those from parishes located in western Leicestershire in the period from 1702 to 1828. Some 29 per cent of indentures were to housewifery, see also Table 6.1, Chapter 6.0. Historians have noted several characteristics about these girls, their training and the persons they were apprenticed to. The numbers of girl apprentices were highest amongst those that were paupers, and they were more likely to be put out by the parish than by their parents. Moreover, in general, female pauper apprenticeship had less emphasis on training than male and very much typified cheap labour.<sup>111</sup> Hill describes the prospects for such girls as 'almost inevitably domestic service at its most menial.'<sup>112</sup> It is also considered that coming from less prosperous backgrounds they were in large part impeded from entering almost all but the humblest of households. Often they went to those in business in the service sector or 'the lowliest manufacturers.'<sup>113</sup> Of the 77 girls sent from parishes in the west of Leicestershire that specified an apprenticeship to housewifery or included an additional occupation, all seem to have gone to modest, indeed, extremely modest households in most cases. These households typically belonged to craftsmen, framework knitters, labourers, innholders and widows, although some went to farmers

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<sup>110</sup>J. Lane, *Apprenticeship in England, 1600-1914*, (London, 1996), p. 83.

<sup>111</sup>D. Simonton, 'Apprenticeship: Training and Gender in Eighteenth Century England', in M. Berg, (ed.), *Markets and Manufacture in Early Industrial Europe*, (London, 1991) p. 245, p. 247.

<sup>112</sup>Hill, *Servants*, p. 133.

<sup>113</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 134.

and husbandmen.<sup>114</sup> Nonetheless, girls were also found, albeit far less frequently, in middle class households.<sup>115</sup> Young women were apprenticed to housewifery at a very tender age. They could be as young as six although nine years was not uncommon, however others could be older, if they were kept waiting for a place to be found.<sup>116</sup> Inevitably, as the population began to grow from the middle years of the eighteenth century, surplus female labour rose that had little opportunity for gaining the training or skills that would have given them work in a decent station. Furthermore, the proto-industrial sector, as we shall see, became so overstocked with labour and pauperised it offered little opportunity. For many, then, there was little prospect other than the roughest work.

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<sup>114</sup>Apprenticeship Indentures, L.R.O.

<sup>115</sup>Hill, *Servants*, p. 134; Lane, *Apprenticeship in England*, p. 127.

<sup>116</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 131; *Ibid.*, p. 127.

## **6.0 INDUSTRY: THE HOSIERY TRADE**

Work in domestic industry is the third sector of employment for working women in the economy of the East Midlands to be discussed here. In the two preceding chapters, it has been argued that the continued move towards a pastoral economy limited the opportunities available to women in agriculture, which were never extensive, while promoting growth in domestic service employment. Moreover, the skills required of many servants, plus the increasing stress on respectability in the later eighteenth century, conspired to preclude certain groups of women from the more reputable areas of domestic service. In this chapter the converse of this argument is explored. It begins first with women's involvement in hand knitting and argues that a decline in the age at marriage that historians see as a reflection of economic opportunity was in fact forced by women's low earnings, hence encouraging their early marriage. The chapter will then go on to suggest that while an acceleration of the decline in first marriage occasioned by the expansion of framework knitting might in the case of men be driven by economic opportunity and maximum earning potential, for women in the region, limited earnings and work opportunities encouraged the propensity to early marriage. Finally, it concludes that the worsening deprivation amongst knitters families and the absence of training and skills in other areas, in conjunction with the image of female industrial workers, meant many women in the region were unable to enter into alternative employment other than the lowliest forms of domestic service work. Thus regional specialisation created an occupational

specialisation that had by the early nineteenth century made it difficult for women to be as flexible in their working as they had once been.

If constructing wage data for women's labour in agriculture and domestic service is difficult, then for domestic industry in our period it is almost impossible. In fact, very little data survives at all which can highlight women's work in the hosiery industry. Inevitably, then, much of the discussion of women's work in the domestic system must in large part be conducted in the context of secondary sources and literature. Although there are few sources that can assist us in exploring women's work in the hosiery trade, apprenticeship records at least can give an indication of the need for poor law officials to find girls work, in addition to an increased demand for this juvenile labour in certain parts of the economy. Wage rates, earnings and payments for piece work taken from a number of primary and secondary sources are displayed in Table 6.3, although these are rarely available for the period before 1785. The document that provides most of the evidence for women's work in domestic industry is the 1845 Parliamentary Report into the Condition of the Framework Knitters, which although rather later than for the period under review, at least provides useful information for the early years of the nineteenth century.

## **6.1 The Domestic System**

In many respects the history of the hosiery trade as it relates to its workers is a story of poverty and opportunity. The balance between the two and the importance of

each as a motivating factor for marriage is difficult to determine. Nevertheless, if we are to discuss these aspects as they relate to women's employment in the domestic system, we must first return to the hosiery industry's origins. In chapter 1.0, we noted the presence of hand knitting in the region which had made its appearance in the sixteenth century. Hand knitting not only had significance for the development of the later trade, but has explanatory value for the course of women's work in the eighteenth century. The studies of Leicestershire proto-industrial villages referred to earlier in the introduction can aid analysis. Levine and Carpenter found a decline in the age at marriage, and although Shepshed and Countesthorpe exhibited a different chronology of change, both these historians argue that economic opportunities were influential in the decision for individuals to marry earlier. Thus, Carpenter states 'early age of female marriage in Countesthorpe was an established tradition; the product of hand knitting within an agrarian economy'.<sup>1</sup> An examination of mean and median age at first marriage illustrates that women in the period 1700 to 1749 were marrying considerably earlier than men.<sup>2</sup> Levine's statistics for Shepshed also show that the mean age at first marriage, demonstrably lower for women than for men in the same period, began to close in the years of proto-industrial expansion.<sup>3</sup>

Given what we know about agricultural and domestic service work in the first half of the eighteenth century, what does a significantly lower age of first marriage for women compared to men actually tell us about women's work opportunities? To

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<sup>1</sup>R. Carpenter, 'Peasants and Stockingers: Socio-Economic Change in Guthlaxton Hundred Leicestershire, 1700-1851', Unpublished PhD Thesis (University of Leicester, 1993), p. 194.

<sup>2</sup>D. Levine, *Family Formation in an Age of Nascent Capitalism*, (New York, 1977), p. 93.



answer this question it is worth reconsidering the characteristics of the hand knitters employed, and aspects of the hosiery business. Chapman describes hand knitting as 'practised by women, children, old people and others in need of subsistence during the period from September to February when the demand for agricultural labour was at its lowest.'<sup>4</sup> Hand knitting while not an entirely female occupation must, nevertheless, have given more employment to women than men. Furthermore, trends in agriculture in the region ensured that there were limited opportunities for women's day and weekly labour outside the harvest months in the early eighteenth century and, in all likelihood, earlier. Wykes states that 'from at least the mid-sixteenth century hand knitting provided an important subsistence income for the poor and landless in parishes where the labour supply outstripped the level of agricultural work'. In the seventeenth century, pauper knitting centred on those large open parishes that were situated south of Leicester and east of Hinckley.<sup>5</sup> The development of hand knitting finds resonance in the arguments of Gullickson. She has pointed to seasonal unemployment and landlessness, no matter what their causes, as the distinguishing features of proto-industrial regions.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, Gullickson has demonstrated that in the Caux region of France, the availability of female labour, unemployed throughout most of the year except for the harvest months, became much sought after by merchants and, therefore, instrumental in the development of cottage industry.<sup>7</sup> A salient feature of hand knitting

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<sup>3</sup>Levine, *Family Formation*, p. 63.

<sup>4</sup>S.D. Chapman, 'The Genesis of the British Hosiery Industry, 1600-1750', *Textile History*, 3 (1972), p. 10.

<sup>5</sup>D. Wykes, 'The Origins and Development of the Leicestershire Hosiery Trade', *Textile History*, 23:1 (1992), p. 23.

<sup>6</sup>G. Gullickson, 'Agriculture and Cottage Industry: Redefining the Causes of Proto-Industrialisation', *Journal of Economic History*, 43:4 (1983), pp. 831-850

<sup>7</sup>G. Gullickson, *The Spinners and Weavers of Auffy*, (Cambridge, 1986).

in Leicestershire and Nottinghamshire and a fundamental reason for its expansion from the mid-seventeenth century was the presence of cheap labour.<sup>8</sup> However, the important issue is that the growth of the industry coincided with the existence of a supply of pauper labour that was predominantly female. Thus pockets of unmarried labour must have sprang up in open parishes. Hence the need to apprentice girls to housewifery; and not all adolescents had the opportunity to enter other people's homes and become farm or domestic servants. Parish officials and the inhabitants concerned about growing numbers of paupers had by the eighteenth century come to see parish apprenticeship as an effective means of controlling the problem.<sup>9</sup> Sharpe has observed for Essex that poor law records in the early years of the eighteenth century showed that there were women who had never had a service.<sup>10</sup> As the wages earned by hand knitting were extremely low, and offered only a basic subsistence, it can be argued that the reason we find a reduced age at marriage for women in particular in some areas of the region is in fact indicative of limited earnings. Marriage therefore became an incentive for economic security. Women's historians assert that few opportunities and low wages at the end of the eighteenth century left many women with little choice but to marry. (See introduction). These arguments hold equally for those women who experienced such conditions in earlier periods. Furthermore, a *rising* age at marriage has been connected with women's choice to remain unmarried, as work opportunities

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<sup>8</sup>Chapman, 'The Genesis of the British Hosiery Industry', p. 10.

<sup>9</sup>J. Lane, *Apprenticeship in England, 1600-1914*, (London, 1996), p. 81.

<sup>10</sup>P. Sharpe, *Adapting to Capitalism*, (London, 1996), p. 31.

and a good remuneration in a domestic industry conducted outside of a family economy, 'promoted the independence of women as wage earners in their own right'.<sup>11</sup>

An individual's decision to marry may not be the same as their partner's or remain static over time. As mentioned earlier, historians have argued that pressure on land coupled with employment opportunities in the mechanised hosiery industry encouraged an earlier age at first marriage. Carpenter contends that although this was observable in Countesthorpe before the introduction of framework knitting, with its appearance 'the trend towards earlier marriage intensified'.<sup>12</sup> Similarly, according to Levine

the propensity among framework knitters to marry earlier can be explained by the relatively few obstacles a young man had to overcome before reaching his prime earning capacity. Moreover, there was a significant likelihood that a stockinger's wife would also be employed, so that it was not as difficult for a young couple to establish a household.<sup>13</sup>

Levine, although referring to the work opportunities of both men and women, places emphasis on the male decision to marry. The availability of employment in the context of a family therefore encouraged early marriage. But the distinction has to be made between opportunities and level of earnings. R.C. Allen contends that in the south Midlands from the beginning of the 1700s and for the century following, enclosure and the amalgamation of farms promoted a decline in the entire agricultural workforce, but

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<sup>11</sup>P. Sharpe, 'Literally Spinsters: A New Interpretation of Local Economy and Demography in Colyton in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries', *Economic History Review*, 44:1 (1991), pp. 46-65; at p. 55.

<sup>12</sup>Carpenter, 'Peasants and Stockingers', p. 93.

<sup>13</sup>Levine, *Family Formation*, p. 51.

which affected women disproportionately.<sup>14</sup> The findings of Chapter 4.0 support this view, and further suggest that agricultural work gave many women only limited opportunities before 1700. Thus technological advances made to the knitting frame in the later years of the seventeenth century, plus a reduction in its cost, in addition to the relocation of the industry from London to the Midlands in the early decades of the eighteenth century, would appear to have provided the ideal conditions for family formation. Given the argument that poverty was at the centre of women entering marriage how does this hold for the later period? Levine observes that his marriage statistics for Shepshed in the 1770s and 1780s suggest ‘that in response to deteriorating economic conditions men were deferring marriage. Their brides, conversely, displayed no such sensitivity to fluctuations in prosperity.’<sup>15</sup> The decline in age at first marriage is evident for women from the opening years of the eighteenth century in proto-industrial districts. An industry that had functioned from the outset on an expanding and poverty stricken labour force, much of it female, is likely to have helped promote an earlier age at marriage for women.

While evidence for the study of the hosiery trade in the early domestic system in the eighteenth century is in very short supply, there is one source that can prove helpful and this is apprenticeship records. Indentures have been used by historians to examine, for example, the training and education of young people, gender differences, and

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<sup>14</sup>R.C. Allen, *Enclosure and the Yeoman*, (Oxford, 1992), p. 215.

<sup>15</sup>Levine, *Family Formation*, p. 63.

business organisation interacting with social policy.<sup>16</sup> In comparison with the working female population as a whole, apprenticed labour accounted for the training and education of a relatively small number of young women. In the counties of Staffordshire and Essex in the second half of the eighteenth century, for example, girls formed about 9 percent of all apprenticed labour, the vast majority were parish apprentices.<sup>17</sup> Most acquired skills and training in other ways. This is important since not all types of work open to women appear in apprenticeship records, nor do they accurately reflect rates of participation. Nonetheless, leaving the chief weaknesses of this source aside, parish indentures are used here in an exploration of women's work in the context of industrial organisation and development in an area of the region. Additional sources have been drawn upon to discuss those occupations that rarely feature in indentures or fall outside them altogether.

Indentures were drawn from parishes mainly in the Hundreds of West Goscote, Sparkenhoe and Guthlaxton in the west of Leicestershire - the area we find most proto-industrial development. The parishes from which the indentures were drawn are shown in Map 6.1. Documents for girls have been taken from eighteen parishes which produced 267 records in all for the years from 1702 to 1828. Although the number for girls is relatively small, that for pauper boys is much larger, and the period

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<sup>16</sup>M. B. Rose, 'Social Policy and Business: Parish Apprenticeship and the Early Factory System 1750-1834', *Business History*, 31: 4 (1989), pp. 5-29. K.D.M. Snell, *Annals of the Labouring Poor*, (Cambridge, 1985), Chapter 6.0; D. Simonton, 'Apprenticeship: Training and Gender in Eighteenth Century England', in M. Berg (ed.), *Markets and Manufacture in Early Industrial Europe* (London, 1991), and 'The Education and Training of Eighteenth Century English Girls, with Special Reference to the Working Classes, PhD Thesis (University of Essex, 1988); Lane, *Apprenticeship in England, 1600-1914*.

<sup>17</sup> Simonton, 'Apprenticeship: Training and Gender', p.245.

MAP 6.1 - LEICESTERSHIRE PARISHES FROM WHICH  
APPRENTICESHIP RECORDS WERE TAKEN  
1700 -1834



**TABLE 6.1 - FEMALE PAUPER APPRENTICES, WEST LEICESTERSHIRE  
1702-1828**

<b>1702-1749</b>	<b>N.</b>	<b>%</b>
Housewifery	13	42.0
Clothing	9	29.0
Trades	1	3.2
Unknown	8	25.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>1750-1799</b>	<b>N.</b>	<b>%</b>
Housewifery	41	29.0
Agriculture	2	1.5
Clothing	81	57.4
Housewifery & Clothing	9	6.4
Trades	3	2.1
Other	3	2.1
Unknown	2	1.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>141</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>1800-1828</b>	<b>N.</b>	<b>%</b>
Housewifery	6	6.3
Housewifery & Clothing	8	8.4
Clothing	79	83.2
Other	2	2.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Source:** Apprenticeship Records: DE640/20, DE1425/97, DE373/63, DE394/44, DE812/23, DE123/76, DE2559/89, DE175/201, DE432/11, DE179/1, DE1668/80, DE390/27, DE1103/139 & 40, DE2401/4, DE491/6, DE400/45, DE495/20, DE516/92, L.R.O.

□Key to Categories:

Agriculture	= Husbandry.
Clothing	= Seaming, Spinning, FWK, Ribbon Weaver, Mantua Maker, Glover, Hat Maker, Calico Weaver, Weaver, Silk Weaver, Cotton Weaver, Lace Maker.
Housewifery	= Housewifery, Domestic Employment, Domestic Affairs, Household Business, Housekeeper and Dairy Business, A Farmer's Household and Housewifery, Housewifery and Husbandry.
Trades	= Basket Maker, Stocking Needle Maker, Turner.
Other	= Baker, Dealer in Earthenware, Felt Maker, Teaching School.
Housewifery & Clothing	= Spinning Jersey and Other House Business, Ribbon Weaver, Winding Silk and Domestic Employments.



**TABLE 6.2 - MALE PAUPER APPRENTICES, WEST LEICESTERSHIRE,  
1700-1834**

<b>1700-1749</b>	<b>N.</b>	<b>%</b>
Agriculture	4	8.5
Clothing	35	74.5
Trades	3	6.4
Other	5	10.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>1750-1799</b>	<b>N.</b>	<b>%</b>
Agriculture	22	6.3
Clothing	293	84.5
Trades	14	4.0
Agricult. & Other	1	0.3
Clothing & Other	1	0.3
Other	16	4.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>347</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>1800-1834</b>	<b>N.</b>	<b>%</b>
Agriculture	5	1.6
Clothing	242	76.8
Agricult. & Clothing	1	0.3
Trades	43	13.7
Other	22	7.0
Unknown	2	0.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>315</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Source:** Apprenticeship Records, L.R.O. (See Table 6.1)

**Key to Categories:**

Agricult. = Farmer, Yeoman, Husbandman/Husbandry, Grazier.

Clothing = Calico Weaver, Glover and Breeches Maker, FWK, Cordwainer, Tailor, Ribbon Weaver, Staymaker, Woolcomber, Tammy Weaver, Boot, Shoe and Pattern Maker, Lace Maker, Lace Manufacturer, Chape Maker, Buckle Maker, Collar Maker, Purl Weaver.

Trades = Mason, Blacksmith, Nailor, Stirrup Iron Maker, Lockfiler, Gunlockfiler, Cabinet Maker and Upholsterer, Brushmaker, Bricklayer, Carpenter and Joiner, Slate Cleaver, Cooper, Set Maker, Brick Maker, Bricklayer and Plasterer, Sinker Maker, Needle Maker, Smith and Farrier, Diesinker and Toolmaker, Harness Plater, Rake Maker, Sawyer, Potter, Stocking Needle Frame Maker, Turner, Chair and Wheelmaker, Wheelwright.

Other = Butcher, Baker, Barber and Puke Maker, Haircutter and Hairdresser, Coal Miner, Flax Dresser, Servant, Labourer, Skinner, Thatcher, Felt Maker, Comb Maker, Maker of Petrification, Chimney Sweep, Miller.

Agricult. & Clothing = Gardener and Woolwinder.

Agricult. & Other = Farming and Miller.

Clothing & Other = Breeches Maker and Fellmonger.



1700 to 1834 yielded 655.<sup>18</sup> Parish indentures do not survive for all parishes but of those that do, these are spread evenly through the area. Two town collections are also included i.e. Ashby de la Zouch and Lutterworth. No collection of apprenticeship records survives for Hinckley which is unfortunate since this where we would have expected to find many young people apprenticed to textile trades. Females comprised of nearly a third of parish apprentices in Staffordshire and Essex in the second half of the eighteenth century.<sup>19</sup> For the same period, the Leicestershire sample, excluding Lutterworth indentures, shows a similar figure of 32.4 percent.

In Tables 6.1 and 6.2 an analysis of indentures by sector of work for young girls and boys is shown. Firstly, some general observations can be made about the data contained in these tables. In the first fifty years of the eighteenth century indentures to clothing trades were more important for boys than girls. Girls were apprenticed to housewifery. In the following period 1750 to 1799, housewifery still accommodated many young women, but the clothing trades had become more significant. This sector was even more important for boys. In the first third of the nineteenth century, 83.2 percent of apprenticeships for girls were to clothing. This proportion increases to 91.6 percent when we include those apprenticeships where a girl's work is in part given as the clothing sector. Boys, it seems, had more opportunity to advance themselves in a broader range of trades such as blacksmith, cabinet maker and wheelwright. Nevertheless, the clothing trades still accounted for more than three-quarters of boys

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<sup>18</sup> As the town of Lutterworth produced a comparatively large number of indentures for young men a systematic sample of 1:3 was taken. All the female apprentices were included.

<sup>19</sup> Simonton, 'Apprenticeship: Training and Gender', p. 245.

apprenticed. The data presented is broadly reflective of economic change, in addition to aspects of local social policies. We can observe, for example, the declining importance of agriculture as an employer of young men. It is also possible to detect shifts indicative of gender differences in relation to prevailing definitions of skill and status. Girls apprenticed by the parish, as Simonton has shown, tended to congregate in areas of the economy with jobs conferring low status and little in the way of future prospects.<sup>20</sup>

Of those 186 apprenticeships that involved or included some aspect of the clothing trades, 61, 32.7 percent, 53 girls were apprenticed to either framework knitting, and only 8 to seaming and spinning. Some 42.6 percent of female apprentices to hosiery trades came from parishes that had no industry present in the parish. Over a third of these went to either Hinckley or Leicester; the others were destined for other heavily industrialised villages, for example, Wigston Magna, Shepshed, Earl Shilton and Blaby. Urban and industrial expansion was fuelled by the growing number of apprentices. Already by 1781 Nichols described how ‘in the yards and back buildings’ at Hinckley ‘there are many children and apprentices’.<sup>21</sup>

Figures 6.1 and 6.2 show in more detail the trends affecting male and female apprenticeship. In Figure 6.1 the number of children being apprenticed in these parishes increases with the exception of the decade 1770-79 when male apprentices fell

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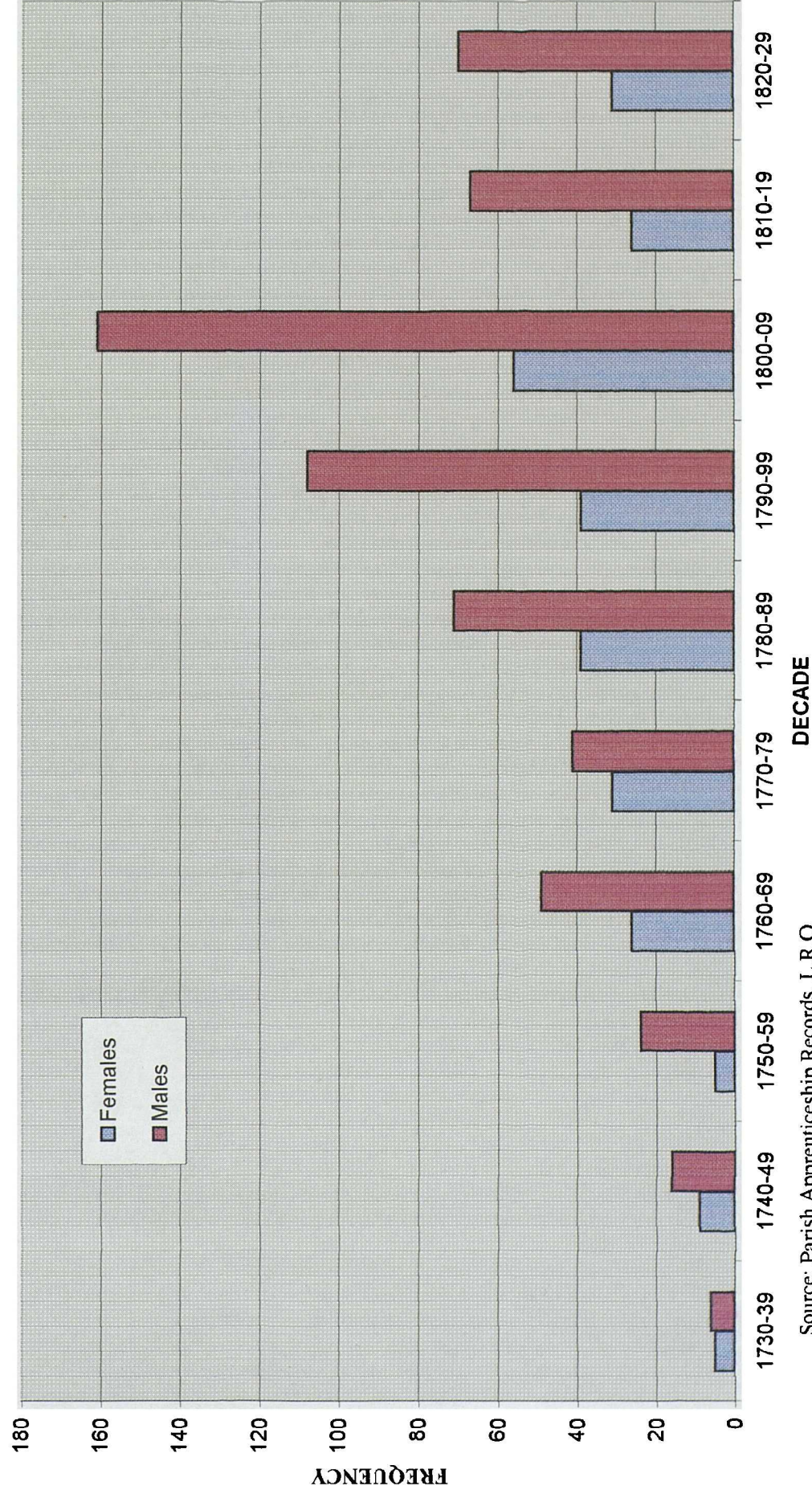
<sup>20</sup> Simonton, ‘Apprenticeship Training and Gender’, p. 255 and ‘The Education and Training of Eighteenth Century English Girls’.

<sup>21</sup> J. Nichols, *The History and Antiquities of Hinckley*, (1782), p. 84.

back on the previous decade. The rising numbers of men in the armed forces in these years may account for this drop in the early years of the 1770s. The diminution in the number of girls apprenticed in the 1750s may be anomalous as apprenticeships are relatively few for these earlier decades. Nonetheless, a difference that is distinguishable in Table 6.1 is clearer still when we examine the occupations to which girls were apprenticed in the first two decades. This is the changeover from housewifery as an outlet for the female parish poor and the greater recourse to industrial occupations as an alternative. Thus housewifery accounted for over half of those girls apprenticed in the 1730s and 1740s. In the following decade, by contrast, of those girls apprenticed four went into Warwickshire to become ribbon weavers while one other remained in Leicestershire, and is described as being apprenticed to 'spinning and other household business'. Boys were already well represented in industrial occupations at this period with more than a half of apprentices in these early decades becoming framework knitters.

The expansion of the textile industries and the requirement of unrestrained, inexpensive labour in conjunction with the wish of parish officials to off-load the rising tide of child paupers is very apparent in Figure 6.2. Increasing numbers of children were apprenticed to framework knitting from the middle years of the eighteenth century with peak saturation occurring in the first decade of the nineteenth century when the worsted branch of the hosiery industry was buoyant. Young women and girls contributed to this influx into the industry but are unlikely to be represented properly in these figures. In the home environment, women took to working the frame without

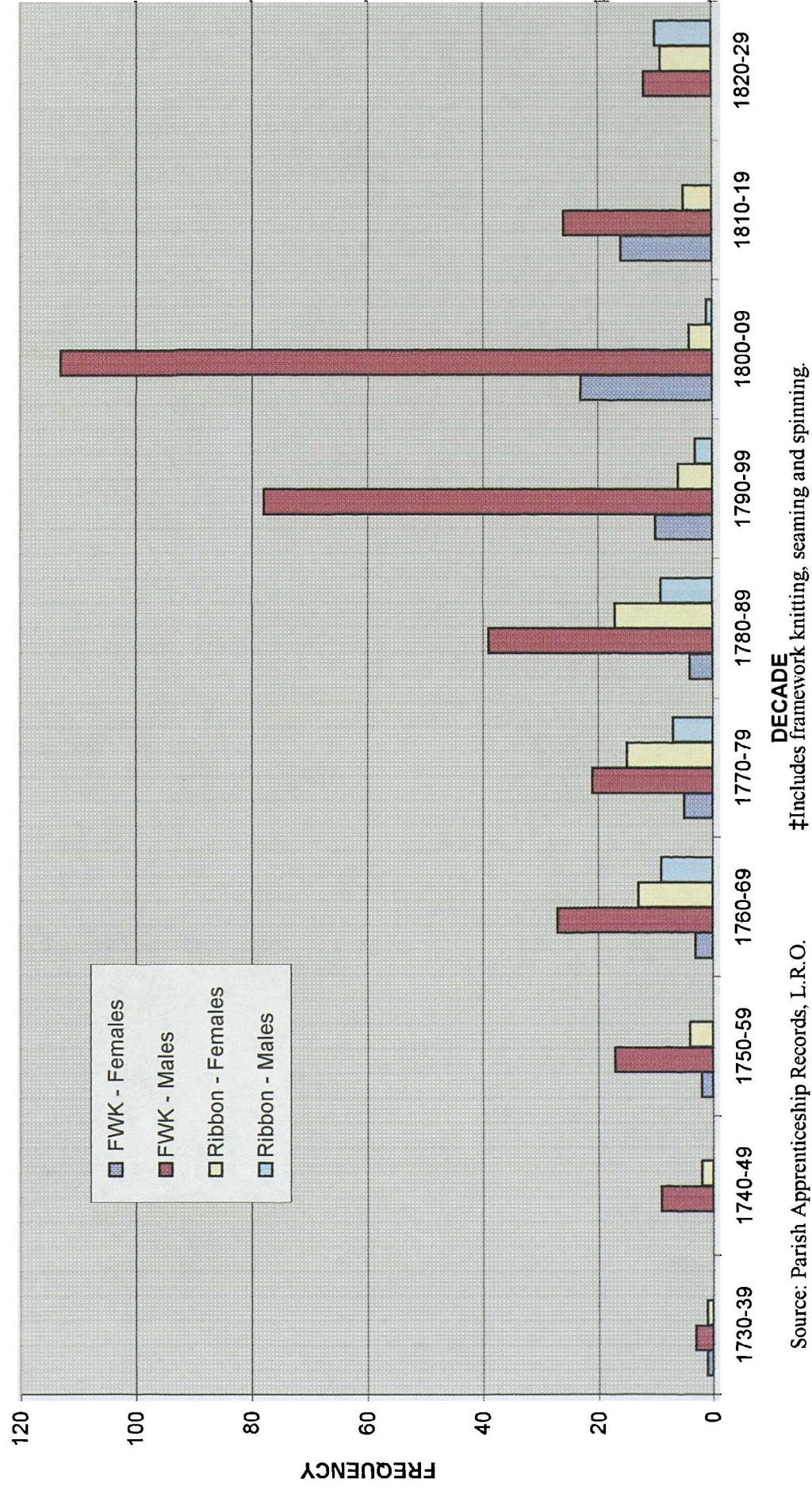
**FIGURE 6.1 - DISTRIBUTION OF LEICESTERSHIRE PARISH APPRENTICES, 1730-1829**



Source: Parish Apprenticeship Records, L.R.O.



**FIGURE 6.2 - DISTRIBUTION OF PARISH APPRENTICESHIPS TO FRAMEWORK KNITTING WITH ASSOCIATED HOSIERY OCCUPATIONS‡ AND RIBBON WEAVING, 1730-1829**



any need of an apprenticeship and could combine this work easily with seaming. These later figures for females might also be offset by the greater number of girls sent to textile mills (see section 6.2). We should also remember that although we associate women with working frames in the later stages of our period, Chapman notes that as many as 200 women might have been working frames at Nottingham in the early eighteenth century.<sup>22</sup> What is particularly interesting about this data is the oscillating trend between ribbon weaving and framework knitting. In those decades before the 1790s a girl had more chance of becoming a ribbon weaver in Warwickshire than she did a framework knitter in Leicestershire. However, those parishes apprenticing girls redirected this labour into the hosiery industry when women moved into operating frames on a much greater scale, as they did boys, until the collapse of the industry following a cessation of hostilities in 1815. In the 1820s no girls were apprenticed to framework knitting; instead those becoming ribbon weavers again increased. The data presented here broadly follows the pattern of rising prices, and it is difficult to state with any precision how far these trends relate to worsening economic conditions, parish policy towards paupers or the labour requirements of the hosiery industry.

As we have observed, very few girls were ever apprenticed to seaming or spinning. Spinning, while occupying large numbers of females, rarely appears in apprenticeship records.<sup>23</sup> Hand spinning, unlike hand knitting, rested solely with women, but likewise had strong pauper connections. A sixteenth century commentator

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<sup>22</sup> S. Chapman, 'The Genesis of the British Hosiery Industry', *Textile History*, 3 (1972), p. 15.

<sup>23</sup> Simonton, 'Apprenticeship: Training and Gender', p. 244.



**TABLE 6.3 - FEMALE WAGE RATES AND EARNINGS<sup>1</sup> IN CLOTHING AND TEXTILES IN LEICESTERSHIRE AND NOTTINGHAMSHIRE, 1785-1844**

	WAGES		
	WEEKLY	DAY	PIECE
<b>LEICESTERSHIRE:</b>			
1785/6 Spinning Hemp			8d lb
1790 Spinning and Twisting Flax			15.75 lb
1794 Spinning Yarn			4d lb
1795 Wool Spinners	1s 6d-3s		
1795 Worsted Spinners		4d-8d/6d-10d	
1796 Spinning and Twisting Flax			15d lb
1807 Winding Yarn			1s 6d per doz
1819 Seaming Worsted	1s 6d		
1820 Spinning Herds			8d lb
1821 Needlework		1s 6d	
1827 Hosiery Factory Wareroom	3s		
1844 Seaming Worsted Hose	1s 6d/2s		
1844 FWK - Worsted Hose*	1s 3d/1s 6d/1s 9d/ 2s 6d/3s		
<b>NOTTINGHAMSHIRE:</b>			
1792 Cotton Manufacture	4s		
1793 Cotton Manufacture	4s 6d <sup>2</sup>		
1794 Cotton Manufacture	4s 6d <sup>2</sup>		
1795 Cotton Manufacture	5s		
1795 Flax Spinning		4d	
1796 Cotton Manufacture	5s		
1804 Seaming Gloves			1s 9d per doz
1836 Seaming Plain Silk Hose			2.5d-1s per pair
1844 FWK, Hlf Hose & Wrght			1s 3d/2s 8d/3s 9d/4s
1844 Seaming Cotton Drawers			4s 9d-6s 3d
1839-1844 Seaming Gloves			8d/9d/10.5d per doz

\*Net Earnings

<sup>1</sup>Plus one guinea a year.

<sup>2</sup>These wage rates and earnings should be treated with caution since they may be affected by problems of mismeasurement. See Chapter 7.0.

**Source:** Hastings Accounts: HAF/57/12, HAF/60/3, HAF/74/Unsorted Bundle.  
 Simmons Diary and Farm Accounts DE690; Babington Estate Papers 2D31/400 & 403.  
 L.R.O. Settlement Examination: PR/2/162, N.A.O. *The Leicestershire Herald*, 22nd  
 August 1827; Report From the Select Committee on the Framework Knitters Petition, 1819;  
 Report From the Commissioner Appointed to Inquire into the Condition of the Framework  
 Knitters, 1845; F.M. Eden, *The State of the Poor*, II, pp. 374-389, and III, pp. 565-583.

recognised it as an occupation which could not keep the female worker fully supported.<sup>24</sup> The early framework knitting industry depended on the pauper labour to prepare yarn for knitters. Indeed, the well-being of the industry and its social function of giving employment to the ‘many thousands of poor people that have nothing to live upon but their labour’, were deeply intertwined.<sup>25</sup> Valenze has argued that in spite of an increase in the demand for thread in the eighteenth century, spinners did not earn wages that corresponded accordingly. Moreover, in districts where agricultural labour supplemented earnings from spinning, ‘wages for spinning were abysmally low.’<sup>26</sup> Pinchbeck noted that while earnings were small in the seventeenth century, fluctuations in the woollen and worsted industries in the eighteenth century could create changes in the wage rates of spinners. She also suggested that workers in these branches could obtain up to 7s and 8s a week, although after the 1740s wages fell significantly.<sup>27</sup> These earnings would be far in excess of what a woman could get for a week’s work in the corn harvest in the East Midlands at the same period, and spinning was subject to irregular cycles making wages inconsistent. In other areas of the Midlands spinning in the 1780s is thought to have averaged between 6d and 10d a day.<sup>28</sup> This would equate broadly with the earnings made in agricultural and domestic day labour in the region. This level of income for a day’s work is displayed for worsted spinners in Leicestershire in 1795. However, as is clearly shown from Table 6.3, we have little information about the money that accrued to women from this form of employment. Moreover, the data

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<sup>24</sup>D. Valenze, *The First Industrial Woman*, (Oxford, 1995), p. 69.

<sup>25</sup>Wykes, ‘The Origins and Development’, pp. 34-5.

<sup>26</sup>Valenze, *The First Industrial Woman*, p. 72.

<sup>27</sup>I. Pinchbeck, *Women Workers and the Industrial Revolution, 1750-1850*, (London, 1930 repr. 1969), p. 140.



points that we do have may be affected by problems of mismeasurement, in that we do not always know the number of hours spent on a task or the number of individuals actually involved in producing a piece of work.<sup>29</sup> Pinchbeck also recognised the difficulty of reaching any firm conclusions about the earnings of spinners and considered ‘the whole question of spinning wages is attended with difficulty...and it is impossible to make decisive statements about the earnings of spinners generally.’<sup>30</sup> Historians have pointed to merchants or putter-outs maximising profits at the expense of the spinsters as responsible for the widespread illegal practices of embezzlement and false reeling amongst women.<sup>31</sup> While low wages would certainly have encouraged such practices, the immense demand for worsted yarn during the hosiery industry’s expansion must have also been instrumental in influencing women’s decision to generate additional income as well as poor wage rates. Nonetheless, the Worsted Act of 1777, which embodied stricter regulations against embezzlement etc., authorised the setting up of committees of masters in regions producing worsted hosiery. Inspectors were employed to locate and ensure the conviction of offenders.<sup>32</sup> This crackdown, furthermore, came at a time when many women were feeling the effects of rising prices. In 1795 the relationship between the poor spinner and the hosier was still in evidence in parts of the East Midlands, and in particular, Leicestershire.<sup>33</sup> Eden noticed that in the parish of Kibworth Beauchamp ‘spinning

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<sup>28</sup>Ibid., p. 142.

<sup>29</sup>See discussion by Joyce Burnette in ‘An Investigation of the Female-Male Wage Gap During the Industrial Revolution’, *Economic History Review*, 50 (1997), pp. 640-656.

<sup>30</sup>Pinchbeck, *Women Workers*, p. 141.

<sup>31</sup>Valenze, *The First Industrial Woman*, pp. 73-74.

<sup>32</sup>Pinchbeck, *Women Workers*, p. 146.

<sup>33</sup>F.A. Wells, *The British Hosiery and Knitwear Industry: Its History and Organisation*, (Newton Abbot, 1972), p. 71.

worsted, with the two-handed wheel is very generally used here'.<sup>34</sup> This type of spinning wheel was actually specified in the indenture of Mary Smith in 1759.<sup>35</sup> The two-handed spinning wheel became well established in England by the eighteenth century; it was awkward to operate and extremely burdensome for those women using it who tried to raise their productivity in times of difficulty.<sup>36</sup> Nevertheless, we cannot discount its presence as an indication that people were attempting to make the most of the need for yarn, though by the later years of the eighteenth century poverty rather than opportunity would account for its continued use. The diminution in real wages was the real problem of the worsted spinner.

Although the production of worsted occupied the majority of spinners, other women can be found spinning flax and hemp. The farm and estate records utilised throughout this thesis show that these materials were produced for both domestic use and sale, and local women were employed. For example, an account book of sundries for the Babington estate for the year 1794 lists the work of casual employees on the estate. Along with the domestic labour performed and payment for foodstuffs, there are also entries of payments to women who had spun hemp and flax. Between May and October five women spun various amounts of yarn which seems to have been paid at between 4d and 7d a pound. David Davies thought that if a woman 'sits closely at her wheel the whole day, she can spin 2lbs of coarse flax'.<sup>37</sup> This would equate to earnings of between 8d and 1s 2d a day, which are comparable with others for the

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<sup>34</sup>F.M. Edcn, *The State of the Poor*, II (1797), p. 379.

<sup>35</sup>Apprenticeship indenture: DE255/89/171, L.R.O.

period. As we will recall, in the 1790s, 8d could be earned for a day's charring while 1s 2d was paid for the lengthy day of the washerwoman. Seven pence for spinning a pound of flax is given as the rate in Staffordshire in 1779.<sup>38</sup> At Worksop at the end of the eighteenth century, the distribution of flax to poor women earned few 'above 4d a day'.<sup>39</sup> However, 4d would only be consistent with spinning two-thirds of a pound of flax. Reference to 'Preston's wife' points to the wives of estate workers as the women involved. A note for the carriage of hemp from Rothley to Leicester also suggests that the nearby county town provided a ready market for the estate's produce.<sup>40</sup> The domestic and commercial spinning of flax declined in the course of the eighteenth century as farmers and cottagers cultivated the crop less.<sup>41</sup>

The application of technology to spinning had different consequences for women in the region, and would ultimately remove one of the most important areas of female employment. The first pair of cotton stockings according to Henson were fashioned at Nottingham in 1730.<sup>42</sup> The popularity of cotton hose gave a boost to the Nottinghamshire branch of the hosiery trade. However, women in the East Midlands used to spinning long wool could not produce thread equal to the much finer cotton imported from India by London merchants. Thus lacking suitable supplies of yarn, it was not until inventions with spinning machinery that this branch in the later years of

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<sup>36</sup>W. Endrei and R.P. Maines, 'On Two Handed Spinning', in D. Hafter, *European Women and Pre-industrial Craft*, (Indianapolis, 1995), pp. 37-38.

<sup>37</sup>Quoted in Burnette, 'An Investigation of the Female-Male Wage Gap', p. 263.

<sup>38</sup>Pinchbeck, *Women Workers*, p. 133.

<sup>39</sup>Eden, *The State of the Poor*, II, p. 581.

<sup>40</sup>2D31/286, L.R.O.

<sup>41</sup>Pinchbeck, *Women Workers*, p. 131.

<sup>42</sup>G Henson, *History of the Framework Knitters*, (1831), p.165.

eighteenth century began to grow.<sup>43</sup> With the arrival of James Hargreaves in Nottingham and the setting up of a small mill at Hockley, cotton yarn was soon supplied to local hosiers. It was not long before a large number of jennies were sold to hosiers and spinners,<sup>44</sup> though it seems that the coarse cotton yarn produced by the jenny was of insufficient quality to use in the fine articles manufactured at Nottingham for the fashion market. The demand for the coarser yarn was met primarily by spinners in north and west Derbyshire.<sup>45</sup> The initial siting of the spinning jenny in a domestic and small workshop setting environment allowed women to continue in this work. Cotton spinning with the jenny initially resulted in higher wages, although again, the wage differentials between hand and spinning with the jenny was unclear.<sup>46</sup> The spinning of woollen and worsted kept the majority of spinsters in the region occupied.<sup>47</sup>

The supply of yarn was likewise a problem in worsted hosiery manufacture. The expansion and concentration of this branch in the East Midlands, especially in Leicestershire, and the dependence on the traditional techniques of spinsters and woolcombers led to a bottleneck in production. Hosiers were forced to send as far afield as Worcester, Bristol, Yorkshire, and Aberdeen, but this does not seem to have affected the industry's development.<sup>48</sup> The cheap labour of domestic spinners and technical difficulties associated with transferring the spinning process to machinery

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<sup>43</sup>Wells, *The British Hosiery and Knitwear Industry*, pp. 50- 53.

<sup>44</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 54.

<sup>45</sup>S.D. Chapman, *The Early Factory Masters: The Transition to the Factory System in the Midlands Textile Industry*, (Newton Abbot, 1967), pp. 49-50.

<sup>46</sup>M. Berg, *The Age of Manufactures*, (London, 1994), p. 150, p. 238.

<sup>47</sup>Pinchbeck, *Women Workers*, p. 132.

<sup>48</sup>S.D. Chapman, 'The Pioneers of Worsted Spinning by Power', *Business History*, 7 (1965), p.98; Wells, *The British Hosiery and Knitwear Industry*, p. 58.

helped keep worsted spinning unmechanised. In addition, when the process was finally achieved with some success at Leicester in 1785, violent opposition to Joseph Brookhouse's invention forced him to leave the district. Employers reluctant to upset a clearly volatile workforce forewent any ideas of using the method in Leicester. Worsteds yarn therefore continued to be produced in the traditional way.<sup>49</sup> Given the importance of worsted spinning to women in the county the ferocity of the outcry is not surprising. The earnings of spinners were of great significance in the context of family budgets. In the late 1780s, master comber Joseph Whetstone, one of the largest worsteds manufacturers in Leicester, and one of Brookhouse's backers, had approximately 1,000 to 1,500 spinners working for him.<sup>50</sup> Nonetheless, although worsted spinning continued into the early nineteenth century it was soon no longer viable as domestic spinning from the late eighteenth century would become undermined by factory made worsteds from the North of England.<sup>51</sup> In the 1845 Report into the Condition of the Framework Knitters, a Leicestershire hosiery worker declared that the work of women 'was done away with through the introduction of the spinning-jennies, and if they had not got into the frames they must have been idle.'<sup>52</sup> The commentator was from Anstey in Leicestershire where the staples were cotton, but mainly woollen and worsteds. The jenny had been initially too small to use in woollen spinning but a larger and better machine deployed to spin yarn spread quickly in the 1770s.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>49</sup>Chapman, 'The Pioneers of Worsteds Spinning', pp. 97-116.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid., p. 99.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid., p. 116.

<sup>52</sup>PP, 1845 XV, Report into the Condition of the Framework Knitters, pp. 102-103.

<sup>53</sup>Berg, *The Age of Manufacturers*, p. 237.

The other main subsidiary role in the hosiery industry for women was seaming. Like spinning this only very infrequently appears in indentures, and when it does, it is usually with another occupation. A stocking, manufactured flat on a frame, afterwards required seaming in order to produce the finished article. As the number of frames in the region grew, so did this form of employment. Nancy Grey Osterud gives this description of the sexual division of labour in families engaged in Leicester hosiery industry in the early nineteenth century

As in the other putting-out industries, the household was the basic work unit, and all family members participated in income-producing labour. Jobs were allocated on the basis of age and sex. In a typical family, the husband and father would work the knitting frame while children wound bobbins and the wife and mother seamed the stockings; in large families, older daughters might help with the seaming while the wife or an older son might work a second frame.<sup>54</sup>

Thousands of women and girls were kept employed in family units. Allen argued that the three main employers of female labour i.e. spinning, pillow lace making and straw plaiting, in the South Midlands, were a 'disaster' since these failed in the late eighteenth or early nineteenth centuries.<sup>55</sup> However, Allen makes no mention of seaming, although he notes that female work opportunities in manufacturing in the eighteenth century were favourable.<sup>56</sup> While spinning declined in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, seaming work with the introduction of wide frames in Leicester and Nottingham and elsewhere increased. Instead of a stocking fashioned on a frame that was afterwards seamed along the selvedged edge, a stocking could be cut directly

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<sup>54</sup>Grey Osterud, 'Gender Divisions and the Organisation of Work', p. 45.

<sup>55</sup>Allen, *Enclosure and the Yeoman*, p. 246.

from a piece of fabric, and then seamed. These articles or 'fraudulent work' were thus manufactured faster than fashioned goods and required less skill. The take up of manufacturing garments in this way was blamed for adding to the industry's woes.<sup>57</sup> Nonetheless, by 1845 wide frames constituted 26.8 percent of those in the three East Midlands counties, while over half of these were located in Leicester and Nottingham.<sup>58</sup> As the wide frame required larger workshops and the strength of men to operate them, seaming became the main occupation of women engaged in the production of cut-up work.<sup>59</sup>

We are hampered by the same problem of not having reliable wage rates for seamers before the nineteenth century, Table 6.3. In all the minutes of evidence recorded in the Report of 1845, only two women appear. They were from Nottingham and both were seamers. The evidence of Mary Hatfield highlights a further variation on how expenses could be charged to hosiery workers. She took in work seaming gloves, and also put out part of this work to young women, mainly girls who came to her home. Mary Hatfield and her co-workers all earned the same amount for the work produced, although she stated that the girls 'allow me 6d a week for standing in the house, fire and candles; and I run all the risk of losses.'<sup>60</sup> These girls seamed for approximately thirteen hours a day, and longer when an order needed to be filled. However, they rarely had a full week's work. The girl who could earn most on piece

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<sup>56</sup>Ibid., p. 247.

<sup>57</sup>Wells, *The British Hosiery and Knitwear Industry*, p. 80.

<sup>58</sup>S.D. Chapman, 'Enterprise and Innovation in the British Hosiery Industry, 1750-1850', *Textile History*, 5 (1974), p. 29.

<sup>59</sup>Grey Osterud, 'Gender Divisions', pp. 49-50.

<sup>60</sup>PP, 1845, XV, Minutes of Evidence, Part II, p. 65, Q.643-Q.650.

work sewing gloves got between 3s 9d and 4s. She did this by working from Monday morning until Saturday. This, alarmingly, equates to only 7.5d-8d a day. This shows the level of hardship in the industry by this date. Seaming alone would have given few women the opportunity to live an independent existence. In towns middlemen often had control of the auxiliary tasks and sometimes they had seaming shops where they employed women. Chambers thought women like Mary Hatfield acted as overseers for the middlemen. These women were also found in Leicester.<sup>61</sup> Women who could organise a group of women and girls in this way and extract additional money above their work, actually had the best opportunity to live and work outside the nuclear family. Chambers also made the dichotomy between town and country and considered that in rural areas a stockinger's wife would undertake the seaming in the family unit.<sup>62</sup> It is, however, possible that such arrangements that operated in the town may also have done so in the countryside.

Employment opportunities for families in proto-industry are seen to bring greater stability to communities. In the village of Countesthorpe in the second half of the eighteenth century, it was particularly noticeable that the proportion of the surviving females remaining resident in the village was higher than that for the preceding fifty year period. Whereas the proportion of surviving males had increased by only 0.4 percent from 56.3 percent; for surviving females there was a rise of 16.1 percent, making the proportion remaining in the village 54.5 percent.<sup>63</sup> Carpenter

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<sup>61</sup> *PP*, 1845, XV, Minutes of Evidence, Part I, p. 103, Q.1592.

<sup>62</sup> J.D. Chambers, *Nottinghamshire in the Eighteenth Century*, (London, 1932 repr. 1966), p. 131.

<sup>63</sup> Carpenter, 'Peasants and Stockingers', pp. 110-111.



suggests that these young women, who would have been seeking work in the period 1765 to 1825, learnt aspects of the trade in the village and may have become knitters, 'but many of them would have been employed in seaming.' She concludes 'as the framework knitting industry developed in the region there was little motivation to widen employment horizons.'<sup>64</sup> Several points can be made about these findings. It would certainly be the case that women brought up in the stocking trade would stay in it, if they could find marriage partners in the village, especially as seaming was an adjunct to the production process that was generally carried on within a family context. But it is important to remember that they were also unlikely to have the level of skills to become servants to the 'better sort'. Dairy maids had to be highly competent in what they did, and even the 'maid of all work' who we often think of as a drudge, actually required skills, for example, cooking. In all probability, those girls apprenticed to housewifery who went to stockingers undertook seaming as well as basic domestic work, as some clearly did. Moreover, as we have seen, there were also fewer opportunities for employment in agriculture. As most of the women engaged in proto-industry in Countesthorpe were seamers, this occupation on its own would have been insufficient to keep women independent. Indeed, as seaming took place, for the most part, within the family structure, understandably, women would want to marry early, not in response to the opportunities provided by domestic industry, but because their opportunities were limited.

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<sup>64</sup>Ibid., p. 111.

The living conditions of the framework knitters as described in the 1845 report, which by this time were at their worst, had echoes of the inner city slums of the period. Stockingers' children received very little or no education as they were employed at home.<sup>65</sup> Ben Humphries of Nottingham, a framework knitter in the plain glove branch, asked if it was common for knitters' children to be brought up to work in the industry, replied 'almost invariably the framework knitter is wedded to the trade, and by his poverty-stricken state all his family are so too; they are born in it, they remain there, and they die there - that is the general maxim of it.'<sup>66</sup> With only the experience of the industry to commend them, women and girls had little hope of alternative employment. A Mr Wright from Arnold described how 'this place is so very poor, that they are not able to employ charwomen, or to get assistance in any other way, and they are obliged to resort to seaming, or the framework branch, in any way they can.'<sup>67</sup> Historians of this period have partly explained female crime in terms of a level of deprivation that effectively excluded individuals from obtaining work. Domestic service required presenting a clean as well as respectable front, and if a woman had not the clothes, she was effectively unemployable, hence her recourse to crime.<sup>68</sup>

Some female labour did, however, find an alternative niche. Opportunities in the Midlands lace trade which centred on Nottingham must have soaked up part of the female workforce. In 1812, an estimated 20,000 women and children were employed, some of them at wages in excess of those made by male framework knitters. By 1831

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<sup>65</sup>*PP*, 1845, XV, Minutes of Evidence, Part II, pp. 107-119.

<sup>66</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 45, Q.360.

<sup>67</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 134, Q.2022.

the number of lace workers is recorded as 110,000.<sup>69</sup> The 1831 census records demonstrate that several Leicestershire parishes close to Nottinghamshire had benefited from the lace trade. At Plungar and Barkstone, for example, women and children worked at spotting and flowering lace, while the increase in population at Loughborough was attributed to the extension of lace manufacture and the shoe trade.<sup>70</sup>

At Hinckley, one of the places worst hit by the depression in the hosiery industry in the 1840s, a commentator spoke of the very young age at which women married, and the very high levels of bastardy amongst the female population.<sup>71</sup> (See Chapter 8.0, section 8.3). Throughout this chapter the link has been made between poverty, women's earnings from proto-industrial work and early marriage. From the beginnings of the hosiery industry, women generally earned wages that best served them if living in a family unit. Manufactures and poverty went hand in hand, hence landowners' attempts to control their spread, and thus the poor rate. William Hutton writing in 1749 found the indigence among stockings and their families such that the prospect of marriage was 'horrifying' to him.<sup>72</sup> Although conditions worsened in the second half of the eighteenth century as the population grew and the legions of surplus labour increased, the low age at marriage witnessed for women in the early industrial communities was an omen for what was to come on a much larger scale later in the

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<sup>68</sup>L. Zedner, *Women, Crime and Custody in Victorian England*, (Oxford, 1991), pp. 51-54.

<sup>69</sup>P. Sharpe and S.D. Chapman, 'Women's Employment and Industrial Organisation: Commercial Lace Embroidery in Early Nineteenth Century Ireland and England', *Women's History Review*, 5:3 (1996), pp. 328-329.

<sup>70</sup>Census Abstract 1831.

<sup>71</sup>*PP*, 1845, XV, Minutes of Evidence, Part I, pp. 249-250, Q. 4246-4247.

period. Regional specialisation helped produce an intensification of the difficulties that would make life extremely difficult for many women living in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

## 6.2 Mills and Manufactories

Although we are primarily concerned with domestic industry, the arguments put forward to hypothesise that women's employment in the eighteenth century in the East Midlands became less compliant to flexible working are equally applicable to the girls and young women who entered the region's mills and early factories. Following developments with roller spinning and the application of water power in Derbyshire, and then the adaptation of the steam engine, cotton mills began to appear across the region's landscape.<sup>73</sup> From 1769 to 1800 five cotton mills, and a single worsted mill, were established in Leicestershire, in contrast to the eighty-one cotton mills and four worsted mills concentrated in Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire.<sup>74</sup> Eden in 1795 reported that at Newark, a cotton mill employed about 300 hands, largely women and children, earning between one and five shillings a week. In Nottingham there were several mills for twisting and spinning silk and cotton where women could obtain a weekly wage of 10d to 4s, while eleven mills gave employment to 1,000 people, again mainly women and children, at Derby. A further three cotton mills were constructed at

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<sup>72</sup>Chambers, *Nottinghamshire in the Eighteenth Century*, p. 292.

<sup>73</sup>Wells, *The British Hosiery and Knitwear Industry*, pp. 55-56.

<sup>74</sup>Chapman, *The Early Factory Masters*, p. 12.

Derby in the early 1790s and employed 500 hands, including children.<sup>75</sup> However, by 1815 cotton spinning was becoming concentrated in Lancashire and the industry in the East Midlands had begun to decline. Nonetheless, in 1836 there were still sixteen cotton mills in Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire, giving work to some 4,450 people.<sup>76</sup>

Rose has highlighted the need to view apprenticed labour in terms of a social policy as much as a business one. She argues that the growing propensity of parish officials heavily burdened by paupers to apprentice children in batches from the late eighteenth century, for example, created mobility in the child labour market and aided the centralisation of production. Apprentices sent over long distances to textile mills and in batches were more likely to work for those larger firms that could overcome recruitment problems by accessing distant labour markets.<sup>77</sup> However, the majority of children were apprenticed individually and came from the locality in which mills were situated.<sup>78</sup> The relationship between social policy and business has been demonstrated earlier in the chapter with the channelling of apprentices into framework knitting when the needs of the Leicestershire hosiery industry and worsening economic conditions demanded it. This interaction can be further illustrated by looking at the characteristics of apprenticeship to textile mills in the East Midlands and, importantly, the outcome of a social policy linked to labour requirements.

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<sup>75</sup>Eden, *The State of the Poor*, II, p. 565, p. 574 and p. 129.

<sup>76</sup>Wells, *The British Hosiery and Knitwear Industry*, pp. 56-57.

<sup>77</sup>Rose, 'Social Policy and Business', pp. 5-29.

<sup>78</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 13-14.

Within the collection of indentures used to compile Tables 6.1 and 6.2 there are records that relate to the apprenticeship of pauper children to two, possibly three, textile mills in the latter part of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. These mills were located at Measham in Derby and Ashby de la Zouch. Chapman notes that a local entrepreneur, Joseph Wilkes, opened a cotton mill at Measham in or before 1783, and another in 1802. Wilkes had a variety of interests in the area including mining and a brickworks. He also engaged in the promotion of canals and turnpikes, and in reclaiming part of the Ashby Wolds and other areas of waste for agricultural purposes.<sup>79</sup> According to a local history of Ashby de la Zouch, Joseph Wilkes also seems to have introduced a cotton mill into the town. The mill was situated in what became known as Cotton Mill Lane, and which had by 1837 been renamed Bath Street,<sup>80</sup> no doubt reflecting the new economic importance of the Ivanhoe Baths. However, the indentures for children to calico and cotton weaving in Ashby are documented to Messrs M.C. Pilkington, Thomas and Webster,<sup>81</sup> for the years 1800 to 1812. These men were described at various times as merchants, cotton factors and later as Leicester Calico Manufacturers. Middlemore Pilkington had connections with the town, and he and his father appear in the will of a second Jane Pilkington where he was bequeathed a small legacy of £10.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>79</sup>Chapman, *The Early Factory Masters*, p. 86.

<sup>80</sup>W. Scott, *The Story of Ashby*, (1907), p. 230.

<sup>81</sup>The indentures are rather confusing as to whom apprentices were apprenticed since a M.C. Pilkington and Thomas Webster are recorded on those from the parish of Packington while indentures from Ashby de la Zouch indicate that there was three individuals involved in the enterprise, i.e. Pilkington, Thomas and Webster. As the mill was actually in the town of Ashby it is assumed the latter is correct.

<sup>82</sup>PR/T/1778/160, L.R.O.

In the years 1792 to 1816, 21 children, 8 boys and 13 girls were sent to work in the mills at Measham.<sup>83</sup> The parishes from which the children came had little or no domestic industry. Significantly, the mill drew on juvenile labour situated a very short distance away, since the furthest of these parishes in north-west Leicestershire was only some eight miles distant.<sup>84</sup> This is less than the cotton mill at Emscote, Warwickshire which drew on labour, most of it female, within a twenty mile radius to the south of Warwick.<sup>85</sup> The mill at Measham would have unquestionably pulled some of the surplus labour from neighbouring parishes in Derbyshire. The mills at Measham appear to have had little difficulty in obtaining labour they needed. Indeed, some of those Leicestershire parishes that sent children to the mill also took the opportunity to apprentice others to framework knitting in the south-west of the county.

The function of the early mills and manufactories to employ the poor<sup>86</sup> is consistent with the perception of handknitting and spinning with the alleviation of poverty. While the early factory masters could acquire labour in the form of pauper apprentices to ease their labour needs, parish officers took the opportunity to employ their poor. The mill at Ashby provides us with the perfect example of this. The poor law records of the town of Ashby de la Zouch have been widely utilised in the course of this study and any historian viewing their contents can be left in no doubt of the hard line that parish officials took in keeping a tight rein on poor relief. The characteristics of those apprentices working at the mill help to demonstrate that reducing the level of

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<sup>83</sup> The ages of 9 apprentices were not recorded.

<sup>84</sup> DE432/11, DE179, DE1668/80, L.R.O.

Ashby paupers, especially female paupers, was a primary purpose of this enterprise. Between the years 1800 to 1814, 29 pauper apprentices, 19 girls and 10 boys made their way to the mill. Twenty-two of the children, nearly 76 percent, came from within the town. The others came from the adjacent parishes of Packington and Osgathorpe. When the ages of male and female apprentices are compared with those entering the mills at Measham the Ashby apprentices were noticeably younger. Boys and girls at Measham had a mean age of 12 years in contrast to a mean of 10 years for those from Ashby.<sup>87</sup> These ages are both lower than for the twenty-three female apprentices sent to the Emscote mill as the greater number of these girls were aged 16.<sup>88</sup> This suggests that overseers were keen to rid themselves of children of quite tender ages. Indeed, over half of those girls apprenticed at Ashby were aged 10 years or under. As we have seen, places like Ashby offered little employment for girls and young women beyond domestic service, and so any additional means of employing them would have been welcome.

Pilkington, Thomas and Webster had taken over the mill at Ashby from Joseph Wilkes, whose intention to sell may have been connected to an incident at the beginning of September in 1796, when a Jane Stanford was charged with 'breaking with stones the windows and shutters of the...manufactory...and collecting a mob, and threatening the overlookers.' Moreover, it was on the oath of Thomas Jewsbury, Wilkes' partner,

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<sup>85</sup> J. Lane, 'Apprenticeship in Warwickshire Cotton Mills 1790-1830', *Textile History*, 10 (1979), p. 162.

<sup>86</sup> Rose, 'Social Policy and Business', p. 13.

<sup>87</sup> Measham apprentices: males 12.1, females 12.0; Ashby apprentices: males 10.5, females 10.3.

<sup>88</sup> Chapman, *The Early Factory Masters*, p. 169; Lane, 'Apprenticeship in Warwickshire Cotton Mills', p. 162.



and superintendent of the cotton manufactory at Ashby, that Jane Stanford was committed.<sup>89</sup> Frederic Eden visited Ashby in August 1795, and no mention of a mill is made in his discussion of the parish included in *The State of the Poor*,<sup>90</sup> so it is likely it had only recently begun to operate. The apprenticeship of girls to cotton mills long distances away from their home parishes caused public concern.<sup>91</sup> However, likely reasons for the riot at Ashby might have included the bad reputation that Wilkes had as an employer and the opposition of the poorer inhabitants of the town having their children confined to the manufactory on the instruction of the Overseers. Although Ashby is known to have had hosiery workers, it was nowhere near the scale at Hinckley. Eden, doubtless prompted by the comments of poor law administrators, saw fit to document the perceived inadequacies of the knitters thus:

It is observed, that near four-fifths of the now chargeable inhabitants here belong to manufactories; and that notwithstanding they have higher wages than the labourers in husbandry, the latter maintain their families much better than the former...the labourer is more economical, and does not so much frequent the public-house...the manufacturer, being more exposed to temptation, and too often connected with drunken associates, generally spends that money in the ale-houses, which ought to be appropriated to domestic purposes; and having once applied to the parish for relief, he becomes totally regardless of that sense of shame, which is the best preservative of independence.<sup>92</sup>

In order to keep the manufacturing population to a minimum, Ashby paupers were apprenticed to framework-knitting in other parishes and only two children were apprenticed in the parish in the early years of the nineteenth century, and one of these

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<sup>89</sup>QS3/329/1, L.R.O.

<sup>90</sup>Eden, *The State of the Poor*, II, pp. 374-377.

<sup>91</sup>A riot by some of the parishioners of Witney, Oxfordshire in 1805 against five girls being sent to Rock Mill in Emscote, Warwickshire, a distance of 35 miles away is given as its possible cause. J. Lane, 'Apprenticeship in Warwickshire', pp. 168-169.

<sup>92</sup>Eden, *The State of the Poor*, Vol. II, p. 377.

to his own father<sup>93</sup> It does, in fact, seem that the mill functioned as a means of disposing of pauper children as this specific purpose is mentioned in Scott's *History of Ashby*.<sup>94</sup> Indeed, given the 'genteel' image of the town, removing pauper children from not only the poor rate, but from sight, and placing them in an environment where they could be controlled provided the ideal solution, and constructed the perfect relationship between poor law administration and business. The premiums to the mill in Ashby were appreciably higher than those at Measham, ranging from £5 to £9 but this was because children were taken at younger ages. It is not clear, however, whether the children boarded in accommodation adjacent to the mill or in their own homes.

The Ashby mill appears to have been similar to others, in that between 30 and 40 girls, 'besides children' were indentured at any one time.<sup>95</sup> Historians have frequently highlighted the deliberate policy of overseers of the poor to apprentice children out of the parish to avoid them later becoming chargeable by virtue of gaining a settlement.<sup>96</sup> It is therefore surprising, given the eagerness of the administrators of the poor law, that there collected a pool of labour that would eventually require relief. The main problem for girls apprenticed to textile mills, and contemporaries were aware of this, is that they were trained in an occupation that they had no hope of continuing when they were adults. Observations on the mills of Derbyshire led J. Farey to comment that:

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<sup>93</sup>DE432/11, L.R.O.

<sup>94</sup>Scott, *The Story of Ashby*, p. 231.

<sup>95</sup>Ibid., p. 165.

I could not learn that more than a few of these [girls] were retained on wages at particular Mills, after the expiration of their Apprenticeship; but too often, such truly unfortunate young Women, disperse themselves over the Country, and for want of friends or employ, prematurely and inconsiderately get married to, or more improperly associate themselves with Soldiers, or other loose and unstationary men, and at no distant periods, are passed home to Parishes they were apprenticed in,...with several Children, to remain a burden thereon.<sup>97</sup>

We also find such cases in Nottinghamshire. A young woman who was bound apprentice for nine years by the churchwardens of Bristol to Robert Davidson and John Hawksely at their worsted mill in Arnold was left unemployed when the mill stopped working six years into her apprenticeship. She went to Mansfield where she had worked in several cotton mills and became pregnant.<sup>98</sup> Girls at various times and for various reasons were turned away. As cotton and worsted spinning relied on the good fortune of the hosiery industry, there were periods when disruption to trade meant hands were laid off, and a number of firms in the region became bankrupt during the French wars.<sup>99</sup> Moreover, as we noted earlier, cotton spinning became increasingly focused on Lancashire. Girls brought up in the domestic hosiery trade frequently had little education or training, so too the female apprentices, and because of this, finding alternative work was difficult. With the cotton and worsted mills closing down, lace making and other needle trades could have only absorbed so much surplus female labour in the region.

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<sup>96</sup> Rose, 'Social Policy and Business', p. 9; Lane, 'Apprenticeship in Warwickshire', p. 170.

<sup>97</sup> Quoted in Pinchbeck, *Women Workers*, pp. 184-185

<sup>98</sup> Settlement examination PR/2437, N.A.O.

<sup>99</sup> Chapman, *The Early Factory Masters*, p. 163.

## 7.0 A CUSTOMARY OR MARKET WAGE?

In the preceding chapters of Part II, we have seen that labouring women were, for the most part, clustered into those areas of the economy that were considered unskilled. Thus they were often found in the supporting role of haymaker, cleaner or seamer. An important aspect so far absent from the discussion on work, is whether women were actually paid a market wage for their labour. We know that in most cases they were paid less than men. In this chapter, Joyce Burnette's assertion that women in general were paid a market wage during the period of industrial revolution is challenged.<sup>1</sup> It is argued, albeit mainly through a process of elimination of market factors, rather than a discussion of custom, that although the evidence is in some cases contradictory, it is too early to reject the notion that women suffered wage discrimination in the labour market.

It is certainly true that difficulties arising from the way wages/earnings were documented can lead to misinterpretation, and Burnette is correct to highlight these problems. Likewise not taking account of the number of hours worked by men and women, would have a spurious effect on the female-male wage gap. However, not all the wages Burnette quotes have been proved to be subject to the problems she describes, nor are the differences between men and women's ability to move heavy external objects sufficient to account for sometimes widely contrasting wage levels. There were many factors that influenced the earnings of women during the period from

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<sup>1</sup> J. Burnette, 'An Investigation of the Female-Male Wage Gap During the Industrial Revolution in Britain, *Economic History Review*, 50:2 (1997), pp. 257-281.

1700 to 1830. Some of these factors are easier to detect than others. These could include, for example, the urgency of the job that needed to be done, the availability of male labour, age, length of service, and rank, as in the case of some domestic servants. Although we have information about the payments made to women and these were, with the exception of those for the hosiery trade, readily identifiable in sources, data relating to the hours and conditions of work in the eighteenth century is much more difficult to come by. Nonetheless, sufficient information remains for an exploration of the foundation of some of Burnette's assertions in the context of the East Midlands economy and economies elsewhere.

The work that both men and women did in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was heavy and laborious, and remained so, even with the advent of technology.<sup>2</sup> There is plenty of evidence to show that working women were no strangers to hard manual labour and were introduced to it from an early age. Pinchbeck wrote of the strength and endurance of the 'sturdy women' who walked from village to village carrying perishable goods, hardware or smallwares for sale. She also drew attention to Hannah Snell who apparently spent twenty-one years in the army before traversing the countryside with a basket of goods strapped to her back.<sup>3</sup> In addition, there is also the story, attributed to John Locke, of the mighty Alice George who could reap on a par with any man, and earned as much.<sup>4</sup> Women's exertions did, however, also provoke negative comment. Male contemporaries were surprised, or

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<sup>2</sup>R. Samuel, 'Workshop of the World: Steam Power and Hand Technology in Mid-Victorian Britain', *History Workshop Journal*, 3 (1977), p. 8.

professed surprise, at the heavy work of women involved in dairying. The sight, for example, of a maid turning a heavy Cheshire cheese, weighing in some cases over one hundred pounds, caused dismay among some observers.<sup>5</sup> Often greater concern surfaced from what commentators thought fit work for women, even amongst men of their own class. At the Enquiry of 1845, John Geary a framework knitter from Anstey considered, 'The thing is quite inconsistent with reason that a woman should ever work a frame at all: it is too heavy and too laborious for any female to work in', although he also observed that 'there is a difference in the strength of women as well as in that of men'.<sup>6</sup> Women, were therefore, capable of regular back-breaking manual labour, much more so than the women in this present age of obesity, and there were also others of such Amazonian proportions they were the equal of most men. But we know that men in general were, and are, stronger than women. Burnette demonstrates this fact by referring to various physical tasks carried out by women and men in the United States Army of today. She notes that while the differences between the sexes were minimal when it came to performing sit-ups or running, men could lift twice as much as women. Given that manual work during the industrial revolution period often required strength this 'led to differences in productivity, and thus differences in market wages.' She then goes on to extrapolate from nineteenth century productivity studies

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<sup>3</sup>I. Pinchbeck, *Women Workers and the Industrial Revolution 1750-1850*, (London, 1930 repr. 1969), p. 298, Footnotes 4 and 5.

<sup>4</sup>Woodward, *Men at Work*, p. 110.

<sup>5</sup>D.Valenze, *The First Industrial Woman*, (Oxford and New York, 1995), pp. 59-60.

<sup>6</sup>PP, 1845, XV, Report From the Commissioner To Enquire into the Condition of the Framework Knitters, p. 103.

of male and female labour to argue that the productivity ratio between men and women was ‘about 0.6’, and which should be included in wage ratios.<sup>7</sup>

**TABLE 7.1 – MALE AND FEMALE DAY WAGES FOR COMPARABLE WORK**

Year	Task	Males	Females	Ratio1†	Ratio2††
1723	Mower/Reaper	12d	8d	0.66	0.80
1723	Haymaking	12d	6d	0.50	0.60
1767	Work in Garden	12d	6d	0.50	0.60
1770	Weeding	16d	7d	0.44	0.53
1771	Loading Hay	16d	7d	0.44	0.53
1778	Carrying Wood	16d	12d	0.75	0.90
1811	Work in Garden	22d	10d	0.45	0.54
1821	Loading Bricks	24d	15d	0.62	0.75

Source: Hastings Estate Papers: HAF/46/9, HAF/48/2, HAF/49/4, HAF/53/7, HAF/71/Unsorted Bundle, HAF/75/Unsorted Bundle, H.L.; Page (ed.), *The Victoria County History of Nottinghamshire*, II, p. 295; Chambers, *Nottinghamshire in the Eighteenth Century*, p. 283.

†Ratio 1 is the proportion of female - male wages.

††Ratio 2 is the female-male wage ratio based on the assumption that women worked two hours less than men in a 12 hour working day.

The productivity of an individual in past times could be affected by many things such as the level of fitness or degree of motivation. It has been found, for example, that in the medieval agrarian economy of the fourteenth century customary labour was less productive than hired labour.<sup>8</sup> In Table 7.1 there are a number of tasks in which men and women were paid by the day. If we were to alter the ratios on the basis of productivity differences along the lines that Burnette suggests, then yes, we could agree women were indeed paid market wages. However, in some of these tasks it is not at all clear that women would have been less productive, because they did not have the skills

<sup>7</sup>Burnette, ‘An Investigation of the Female-Male Wage Gap’, pp. 275-277.

to do the job, or the strength. Let us first examine haymaking, work in the garden and loading hay. Haymaking involved tossing and loosening the mown grass, before spreading it out and turning it occasionally so as to expose it to the sun's rays. While this work was arduous it was not beyond the capabilities of many women to perform this work on or near equal terms with men and it is doubtful that productivity differences alone would account for the disparity in wages. Pitching hay upwards on to a cart was a much more strenuous exercise. However, a single female is recorded as undertaking this task at Ledstone in 1771. Unfortunately, as with many wage rates, we do not know the circumstances in which people were working or their full conditions of employment. Presumably, however, this woman was selected, first because there was no man available to load hay, and second, she was capable of doing a job roughly equal to her male counterparts. Yet she received less than half the male wage. 'Work in the garden' at both dates showed similar disparities in daily earnings. However, again, it is unlikely that productivity differences based on men being better at undertaking severe labour account for this wage differential, but we cannot be entirely sure of this. In terms of the male mower and the female reaper, the wage ratio of 0.66 conforms to a productivity ratio of two-thirds for reaping judged by contemporaries as representative of the differences between men and women at this work, and noted by Burnette.<sup>9</sup> The other example in her support is that of the male weeder who we know from an earlier discussion in Chapter 4.0 mowed weeds while women were extracting them from between cracks in the pavement. Thus, in this instance, we are not dealing strictly with

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<sup>8</sup>D. Stone, 'The Productivity of Hired and Customary Labour: Evidence From Wisbech Barton in the Fourteenth Century', *Economic History Review*, 50:4 (1997), pp. 640-656.

<sup>9</sup>Burnette, 'An Investigation of the Female-Male Wage Gap', p. 275.



the same type of work. Mowing with a scythe whether hay, weeds or otherwise, required great strength and was considered to be one of the most arduous of all agricultural operations.<sup>10</sup>

Work where it is very apparent that strength was needed and greater productivity overall would clearly be exhibited by men could be found in the building trades, for example, when it came to lifting wood or masonry. Woodward has shown that women worked as labourers on sixteenth and seventeenth century building sites in northern England and were found carrying gravel, sand, water and lime. These materials unlike large solid objects were easily divided into manageable lots and so could be carried by women. However, although women were visible in this type of employment they formed a very insignificant element of this labour force'.<sup>11</sup> In Table 7.1 there are two jobs of this kind, carrying wood and loading bricks. Women undertaking this type of work very rarely appeared in the estate accounts or other sources used in this study, which suggests little change from earlier centuries. In 1778 to the south-west of Donington Park, at the Melbourne coppice, a lone woman, Ann Hattler, was employed with three men who worked for three days at removing wood. She was the only woman recorded participating in the work from July to September which saw men engaged in felling, cleaving and carrying timber.<sup>12</sup> The wage of 1s a day is consistent with the time of year, August. It is probable that her employment arose from a shortage of male labour. Of the work listed, this example gives the

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<sup>10</sup>Stone, 'The Productivity of Hired and Customary Labour', p. 651.

<sup>11</sup>Woodward, *Men at Work*, p. 109.

<sup>12</sup>HAF/53/7, H.L.

highest female-male wage ratio of 0.75. Over forty years later, however, we find women this time on a building site at Ashby de la Zouch. We saw in earlier chapters that women had invested in the Ivanhoe Baths, worked in them as domestics, and were also involved in their construction. In January 1821, three females were occupied in loading bricks ‘for the use of Ashby Baths’.<sup>13</sup> This example, conversely, comes at a time of year when there would be the least demand for labour, and when we would assume there would be little need to employ women. However, it is possible that in this case the cost of labour as well as the speed with which the task was carried out was important, and this is perhaps why we see women occasionally employed in this kind of work. We saw in Chapter 4.0, that at the Donington Park farm in 1811 those in charge of hiring workers made the distinction between ‘superior’ and ‘inferior’ labour and the differences in expenditure on each. Employers were concerned about labour costs and by reducing them and still completing the work when specified, labour productivity increased. Before discussing productivity as a reflection of human capital differences, we turn to other perceived reasons for the female-male wage gap.

If the evidence for differences in productivity based on muscle power is not conclusive, what of the effect of mismeasurement? One of the causes of mismeasurement of earnings, it has been argued, is the failure to take account of the fact that married women worked fewer hours than men. It is noted, for example, that married women undertaking agricultural work in the parish of Sheepy Magna in Leicestershire in 1843 only worked between 8 and 9 hours a day, as they required the

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<sup>13</sup>HAF/75/Unsorted Bundle, H.L.

extra hour in the morning to get breakfast for their families. This, it is suggested, was also similarly the case at Thornborough in the eighteenth century, with women starting one or two hours later.<sup>14</sup> If we consider the final column in Table 7.1, 'Ratio2' and compare it with that for 'Ratio1', we can see that based on the assumption that women worked two hours a day less than men, in some cases the female-male wage gap is not so pronounced. In those areas where strength differences were of minor importance the wage gap is still significant. However, the fewer hours argument is really concerned with married women. Staying at home to cook breakfast would not have been as applicable to the unmarried. Interestingly, if we calculate weekly earnings for haymakers in 1753 at Thornborough, on wages of 10d and 6d a day respectively, we find that on the basis of a 6 day week, with women working a full two hours less a day than men, then they were earning the equivalent of 0.6d an hour and men 0.83d an hour. However, as argued earlier, it cannot be concluded that men were more productive than women in this work. Above all, since individuals were paid by the day it made little sense for them to labour as if on piece rates.

If we consider other wage information from Essex in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, differences in hours worked as explanation for the female-male wage gap is not supported. Female weeders in 1570 were paid at the rate of 3d a day for wives, 4d for girls and 5d for widows. Male weeders also received 5d.<sup>15</sup> Could this be related to the fact that widows worked the same hours as men? No, since wives would have had to work a full four hours a day less than their husbands in order to get

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<sup>14</sup>Burnette, 'An Investigation of the Female-Male Wage Gap', p. 268.

anywhere near an equivalent hourly wage rate. Sharpe interprets the lower wages of wives as an outcome of them working alongside their partners, and therefore, custom dictated that the women should be paid less. In the 1630s, a man and wife employed at weeding were both given 6d a day. In the harvest, however, the labourer got 12d while his wife only earned 6d at 'making the stake of hay'.<sup>16</sup> But, again, even if two hours a day are reduced from the wife's wages, she was still paid less than her husband. On the assumption that a man worked 12 hours a day in the summer and was paid 12d, and his wife 10 hours a day, this would be equal to a male wage rate of 1d per hour compared to a female rate of 0.6d. Can it be proven that this woman's productivity was significantly lower than her partner's? The difference in wages had less to do with productivity based on physical advantages as the scarcity of labour at the time of year. In the case of weeding, it could be argued that women were actually more efficient at this task, since weeding is so closely associated with them in any century, and therefore, they should have received higher wages than men.

The hours that women could work in the hosiery trade were also affected by other duties in the home. Evidence given by William Felkin, for example, supports the view that women were unable to spend as many hours as men employed in domestic industry. On a visit to framework knitters' shops in Leicester Felkin described how he found 'a female at work between 9 and 10 o'clock at night; her husband and two journeymen at work above her head, up the step ladder over the kitchen place she was occupying...The mother of fifteen children; 10 of whom were bred up stockingers. She

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<sup>15</sup>P. Sharpe, *Adapting to Capitalism*, (London, 1996), p. 79.

could not work before breakfast, but laboured every night until 10 o'clock.' He also noted that she 'was cheerful, uncomplaining, thankful, and pious in her manner and speech.'<sup>17</sup> A list of the hours that men and women spent working in various branches of the trade showed that the highest number was 18 for men and 16 for women. The average however, was 15 and 13 respectively.<sup>18</sup> It certainly appears to be the case that many married women did not work the same hours as men. Felkin was probably more aware than most about what actually went on in a stockinger's home. However, other investigators and social commentators had ideas about the suitability of certain work for women, and what role they should play in the home in terms of mothers and homemakers. These men may have assumed that women spent a certain proportion of time on their household duties when in fact they did not. In the hosiery trade young girls were used to cook and care for children while the mother laboured. However, economic circumstances dictated that women worked to maintain their family, even if that family at times suffered from neglect. In the 1840s, a Dr Shaw from Leicester considered that the high infant mortality in the town resulted from mothers not having time to care for their children because they spent so much of it working in a stocking frame.<sup>19</sup> Therefore, economic need would have prevailed over emotional need when it came to determining the number of hours knitting or seaming. A Jane Withers, aged 31 from Leicester with a family of six (including herself) was reported working 16 hours a day, the same as her husband, at sewing up worsted hose. Her earnings of 2s a

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<sup>16</sup>Ibid., pp. 79-80.

<sup>17</sup>PP, 1845, XV, Part II, Minutes of Evidence, p. 15.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., Part II, Minutes of Evidence, pp. 18-22.

<sup>19</sup>PP, 1845, XV, Report, p. 103.

week were separated out from those of her husband's and son's.<sup>20</sup> Here the wages paid and hours were given, but even if investigators reported earnings alone it cannot be assumed that married women worked fewer hours than men because of household duties.

The fact that identical piece rates can be found is not very significant. At the Welbeck estate in 1743, for example, men and women were paid 18d a bushel for gathering acorns.<sup>21</sup> What is important is in the number of cases Burnette has drawn on, reports and studies that had been undertaken at times of economic misfortune. She cites, for example, the Parliamentary Report of 1845 to show that female framework knitters were paid the same rate of wages as male. However, the industry was in such a depressed state, wages were at their lowest levels. Moreover, male concern emerged about the growing numbers of women in the trade having contributed to the decline in wages. Thomas Hartshorne thought that 'if there were no women employed we might have half as much more I should think.'<sup>22</sup> The entry of women into an industry previously restricted to 'skilled' men, as historians have observed with other trades, prompted a rapid decline in the wage rate.<sup>23</sup> Thus, it was not so much that women were getting the same wages as men, as that men were receiving the same rates as women. Perhaps, it can be argued that women were getting a market wage, but it was one that had come to signify unskilled proletarianised labour.

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<sup>20</sup>Ibid., pp. 18-19.

<sup>21</sup>DD/4P/58/78, N.A.O.

<sup>22</sup>PP, 1845, XV, Report, p. 103.

As we will recall, wages did not only consist of money payments. Food commonly supplemented a wage. In the Victorian period washerwomen were sometimes given bread and cheese and occasionally cast off clothing by their employers.<sup>24</sup> Contemporaries were also cognisant of the necessity of an adequate food intake when withstanding the rigours of hard work. Eden, for example, recorded that in the workhouse at Derby ‘women when they wash, and other persons, during severe labour, have an additional allowance of victuals.’<sup>25</sup> The argument has been made that in-kind payments should be added to the wages of men and women in order to establish a more accurate wage ratio. For farm servants, on the assumption that it would cost two-thirds as much to board a woman, as a man, this being the opinion of Arthur Young, the wage ratio of the farm servants’ wages Burnette reviewed would increase from ‘a little more than one third to over a half.’<sup>26</sup> However, women were still paid less than men, and again, productivity differences were thought to account for much of the gap that remained. This would mean that a greater proportion of women’s wages comprised of in-kind payments, as they were for unskilled workers generally. In 1723 an assessment of wage rates for men and women working in the hay harvest was set at 10d and 6d, as shown in Table 7.1. If food was not provided, wages dropped to 6d and 3d,<sup>27</sup> which is equal to a reduction of 40 percent of the male wage and 50 percent of that of the female. If we apply the two-thirds proportion of payments in-kind, then women’s wages should have been reduced by 2.6d, not 3d. However, this is of less importance than the loss of half a woman’s wage to food and drink costs. It is likely

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<sup>23</sup>L.D. Schwartz, *London in the Age of Industrialisation*, (Cambridge, 1992), p. 46.

<sup>24</sup>E.P. Malcomson, *English Launderesses: A Social History, 1850-1930*, (Chicago, 1986), p. 13.

<sup>25</sup>F.M. Eden, *The State of the Poor*, II (1795), p. 379.

that most married women took the full 6d where it was offered, as they could not afford to see half their wage lost to their families. Thus women at times of economic adversity were the first to suffer in terms of their calorific intake.<sup>28</sup> In some cases this would have affected their ability to work, and hence their productivity.

As we saw in Chapter 5.0, board wages were sometimes paid to servants in lieu of meals. If we take the weekly board wages paid to Mary Bromley, dairymaid, John Ward, brewer, and Thomas Clarkson, gardener, in 1734, we find that both men received board wages of 5s and Mary Bromley 4s.<sup>29</sup> We may suppose that there is an equality based on the fact that men would consume a larger quantity of food than women, and would therefore require more board wages. But this is by no means certain given the very long working hours of a dairymaid and the fatiguing nature of her work. It is clear, however, that board wages were affected by other factors than purely the need to maintain a person's level of nutrition. The payment of the monthly board wages in 1794 and 1795 show that senior males received 10s 6d, and male servants of a lower status 7s a week.<sup>30</sup> What we see operating in the payment of board wages are not only variations in the prices of foodstuffs, but also such differences as rank and status, and quite possibly custom. Unfortunately, there is insufficient information for female servants to make a direct comparison. But surely estimating boarding costs for men and women on the basis that females secured two-thirds of those of males may not

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<sup>26</sup>Burnette, 'The Female-Male Wage Gap', pp. 270-271.

<sup>27</sup>J.D. Chambers, *Nottinghamshire in the Eighteenth Century*, (London, 1966), pp. 282-283.

<sup>28</sup>M. Mitchell, 'The Effects of Unemployment on the Social Condition of Women and Children in the 1930s', *History Workshop Journal*, 19 (1985), p. 111.

<sup>29</sup>HAF/36/5, H.L.

<sup>30</sup>HAF/62/8. H.L.



be realistic in all circumstances. Furthermore, the greater visibility of male servants would have provided them with more opportunity to extract other forms of payment from guests, such as vails. This would have increased earnings at least until after the mid-eighteenth century when vail giving began to diminish.<sup>31</sup>

**TABLE 7.2 - MALE AND FEMALE SERVANTS' YEARLY WAGES IN £'S  
(Donington Park)**

Years	Occupation - M/F	Male	Female	Ratio†
1693	Footman/Housemaid	4	3	0.75
1729-30	Footman/Housemaid	7	5	0.71
1729-30	Cook/Housekeeper	25	7	0.28
1775-6	Footman/Housemaid	15	7/8	0.53/0.46
1775-6	Butler/Housekeeper	31.5	25	0.79
1778/1775	Cook/Cook	36.75	20	0.54
1783	Footman/Housemaid	15	7/8	0.53/0.46
1783	Cook/Housekeeper	42	30	0.71

**Source:** Hastings Estate Papers: HAF/25/48, HAF/34/41, HAF/52/16, HAF/53/10, HAF/56/7, H.L.  
†Ratio is the proportion of female to male wages.

In Table 7.2 the yearly wages of a number of male and female domestic servants are illustrated. In each case the contrast in the wages paid to men and women within the servant hierarchy demonstrates that women were in most cases paid considerably less than men. A further reason suggested for the differences in market wages is that women lacked skills and training, and so this meant they were not as productive.<sup>32</sup> In these domestic service occupations minor importance would be attached to the productivity of manual labour, except perhaps in the case of housemaids, and more emphasis in this scheme would be placed on differences in human capital. One of the

<sup>31</sup>J.J. Hecht, *The Domestic Servant Class in Eighteenth Century England*, (London, 1956), p. 163.

causes put forward for women's lack of comparative productivity is their low level of literacy. However, as we have observed, female servants at Donington Park were much more likely to be literate than other women workers. Many of these female servants had the skills and rank that were not dissimilar to those of their male counterparts, for example, for the years 1775-6, the housekeeper and butler. A very wide disparity appears in 1729-30 between the housekeeper and the male cook. This may be partly accounted for by the social status of the housekeeper who in this instance was probably not of the middling sort. Again immediately noticeable for the 1770s, is the large difference between the salaries of male and female cooks. A male cook who could perform his art in the French style became highly sought after as the eighteenth century wore on. Sometimes it was advantageous to a woman when looking for a position to stress that she had worked under a 'man-cook' and could prepare food in the French manner. It might help her job prospects but she was still considered inferior despite having the skills and training.<sup>33</sup> Therefore, it was not just a question of the right skills. Since male servants were employed for the purposes of prestige as well as any practical function they might perform, it is difficult to argue that women were paid disproportionately on the basis of productivity or human capital differences. Women received a lower wage because they were women, and therefore, of less value. Burnette refers only to farm servants in her article and no real mention is made of domestic servants. The nearest she gets to discussing domestic service is in connection with workhouse administrators. Discrimination existed in this area of work but Burnette argues that this can be accounted for by a non-competitive market.

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<sup>32</sup>Burnette, 'An Investigation of the Female-Male Wage Gap', p. 272.

What is clear is that the wage ratio for a footman and housemaid in 1693 in comparison with that for 1783 shows women's weakening position in the labour market. Towards the final years of the eighteenth century domestic service was the only avenue of employment for those who had the skills and respectability to work in people's homes. Many women brought up in the hosiery industry were effectively excluded. There may have been less demand for 'women's skills', however, were these skills ever genuinely valued when set against those of men? Historians are aware of the effect produced on female wage levels by male labour shortages and the availability of alternative employment but a flexibility that breaks with custom is not evidence for a market wage. We need to know much more about work and wages in the eighteenth century before we can form any real opinion on the mechanisms that affected wages in regional and local labour markets. The notion of a customary wage for women cannot as yet be rejected, and why if women experienced widespread discrimination outside the market should it generally stop inside?

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<sup>33</sup>Hecht, *The Domestic Servant Class*, pp. 64-65.

## **8.0 POVERTY AND DEPENDENCE: RESPONSES TO A CHANGING ECONOMY**

The path charted by working women over the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries within the East Midlands was frequently not an easy one. Moreover, the last fifty years of our period can be viewed as the most difficult. As we have seen, women's wages failed to keep pace with prices and fell back in relation to those of men. The hosiery industry following the French Wars went into stagnation and decline and what work opportunities there were in this area brought little financial reward. This final chapter brings together themes around the subject of changes in the standard of living and women's ever growing dependence on men. The various strategies deployed by the poor have become an important area of research in recent years. Historians have shown the ways in which women interacted with the various institutions which were there to aid them while others have considered alternative methods of support.<sup>1</sup> The intention here is to examine two additional ways in which women responded to endemic and worsening poverty, namely crime and sexual relationships. It is argued firstly, that the system of poor relief while apparently giving generous assistance to women, actually failed many others, who looked for alternative means of supporting themselves, especially in the unfavourable conditions of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Secondly, in Section 8.2, it is suggested that there were no fixed boundaries between formal and informal income generation for poor women. Some criminal activities were far from being associated

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<sup>1</sup>T. Hitchcock, P. King, P. Sharpe, (eds.), *Chronicling Poverty: The Voices and Strategies of the Poor, 1640-1840*, (London, 1997). Symposium: 'Making Shift: The Survival Strategies of the Poor in England c. 1600-1800', University of Warwick, 28th May 1997.

with a deviant minority, but were actually considered by many as a legitimate form of work. A form of work, moreover, which in certain economic conditions and personal circumstances became central to the livelihoods of countless women. Thirdly, in Section 8.3, we direct our attention to the question of women's relationships with men where it is reasoned that while women may have had little choice but to marry, circumstances often prevented them from doing so. Therefore, the rise in the number of consensual unions and levels of bastardy that historians have noted from the middle years of the eighteenth century<sup>2</sup> are in part a reflection of an alternative strategy. Women thus entered into sexual relationships for economic motives. Poor relief, charity, casual and seasonal employment, crime and attachments with men, formed some of the methods which enabled women to eke out a living in this period. However, crime and sex, arguably, became more important from the late eighteenth century as women had less opportunity to work or to move between sectors of employment in which they were engaged.

The geographical focus is Leicestershire because this is where much of the economic restructuring in the region focused. It was in this county, perhaps more so than Nottinghamshire, that women would most be in need of other sources of income. The evidence drawn upon for this discussion is located in the documents of the Leicestershire Court of Quarter Sessions. The quarter sessions rolls contain depositions, prisoner lists and indictments. These records often relate colourful

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<sup>2</sup>Gillis, *For Better, For Worse*, pp. 92-95; P. Laslett and K. Oosterveen, 'Long Term Trends in Bastardy in England: A Study of Illegitimacy Figures in the Parish Registers and in the Reports of the Registrar General', *Population Studies*, 27 (1973), pp. 255-286.

episodes which some historians would perhaps view as untypical of the lives of the majority of the working poor. However, if we look beyond the dramatic aspects of these events and into the context of the narratives, and at other information that not infrequently accompanies these accounts, we can see more of eighteenth and early nineteenth century life than at first might appear. This evidence is more than a little suggestive of how women responded to endemic poverty and economic exigencies. In addition, the quantification of cases listed in the Court Order books allow us to *determine trends in removals and illegitimacy*. The data taken from the Quarter Sessions documents will be discussed further below. Additionally, material from the manorial court records of the Hastings has been utilised, which provides background information on women's activities in the forest and waste areas of north-west Leicestershire.

## **8.1 Women and Poverty**

Before we examine strategies based on crime and sex in detail, we turn first to the subject of poverty. Poverty was a familiar aspect of life to the labouring population. In the eighteenth century, it has been suggested, it was probable that in good years some 10 percent of the population were not in a position, without help, to buy enough bread for themselves, even if all the money they had was used for this purpose. In hard years this could increase to as much as 20 percent and in a crisis

year 45 percent.<sup>3</sup> The worst periods of poverty brought unrest and the Midland hunger riots of 1766 saw popular discontent on an unprecedented scale in the region. Workers in the hosiery industry were amongst those most affected. Williams argues that the riots had less to do with corn prices than with the price of butter and cheese and local market practices. The severity of the riots can also be accounted for by the export of local foodstuffs, hence the attacks by rioters on wagons leaving the area.<sup>4</sup>

Prisoner lists in years of hardship illustrate the relationship between rioting, food prices and hunger. In the month of September 1800, following a poor harvest, there were outbreaks of violence in Leicestershire. In Ashby de la Zouch rioters had endeavoured to obtain food from dealers and farmers. At Barwell, a crowd of ‘upwards of a hundred’ people wanting corn, bread and money threatened Mary Frith, a farmer’s wife. Similarly, at Queniborough a farmer’s stacks were threatened with fire, while at Anstey the crowd through threats and intimidation succeeded in persuading the purveyors of cheese and butter to sell their produce ‘at prices below the market price’.<sup>5</sup> Worsening poverty provoked various methods of action from sufferers who hoped for redress, especially if they saw the food they needed in the hands of others. In the late eighteenth century the framework knitting community at Hinckley and its environs was experiencing distress. The constable, between the 1st June 1795 and 25th February 1796, kept ‘an account of damages and losses

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<sup>3</sup>D. Hay, ‘War, Dearth and Theft in the Eighteenth Century: The Record of the English Courts’, *Past and Present*, 95 (1982), p. 132.

<sup>4</sup>D.E. Williams, ‘Midland Hunger Riots in 1766’, *Midland History*, 3:4 (1976), pp. 260-265, p. 283.

<sup>5</sup>QS3/345/1, L.R.O.

sustained by the following persons in and about the Town of Hinckley and Neighbourhood'. In that period cattle and other animals were maimed or killed and walls 'thrown down'. Stables, a cowhouse, barn, wagon and several hay ricks were destroyed by fire, as were quantities of wheat and oats. Grain was also stolen. He also documented the threatening letters that were sent to local farmers and others telling them to reduce the price of their wheat and barley. Otherwise, for example, 'your sheep and cattle shall be killed and your house burned with fire directly.'<sup>6</sup> Given that men were the most literate, they were likely to be the authors of these works. However, women played an important role in other ways. E.P. Thompson noted the high profile of women in food riots. Women's actions were promoted by their involvement in, and knowledge of the workings of the local market place. They were therefore 'the first to have to work out economies and strategies of survival when dearth threatened. This role made them as much guardians of the household's survival as were men, who might earn the greater part of the family income.'<sup>7</sup> However, surviving was more difficult for women who were left alone.

The workings and the effects of the Old Poor Law have left us in no doubt about the particular vulnerability of women. The death of a partner, desertion, pregnancy or illness combined with disruptions in the economy could make life extremely precarious. Women who lived without men were likely to be poorer than

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<sup>6</sup>'An Account of Damages and Losses Sustained by the Following Persons in and About the Town of Hinckley and its Neighbourhood in the County of Leicester', *The Atkins Archive* (Private Collection).

<sup>7</sup>E.P. Thompson, 'The Moral Economy Reviewed', in *Customs in Common*, (London, 1993), pp. 305-336, at p. 322.



their married counterparts. With poverty always on the doorstep spinsters often looked to kin or others in a similar position in an effort to find a degree of security.<sup>8</sup> For women who married, the worst time in their life-cycle was around the age of thirty-four years when they would have a number of young children and be most in need of income. If women were deserted or became widowed they were also likely to descend faster into poverty than men.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, as we have seen from earlier chapters, female wage levels more often than not fell well below those of male, particularly from the last third of the eighteenth century, and so it was women who figured most in the poorest section of the population.

Historians have viewed the Old Poor Law as relatively generous in its scope, especially when compared to that of other European states.<sup>10</sup> Women were helped and provided, for example, with monetary payments, clothes and work. However, while it was women who were readily identifiable as those frequently in need of assistance they did not always get relief, regardless of how 'deserving' they may have been. Nor were they always willing to accept it on the terms it was offered. In 1813 the mother of John Norton of Kilby lost her two shillings a week poor relief because she refused to have him apprenticed. At nine years of age she thought him too young. She managed to support him and his younger brother for a further two

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<sup>8</sup>Hufton, 'Women Without Men', pp. 361-362.

<sup>9</sup>R. Wall, 'Some Implications of the Earnings Income and Expenditure Patterns of Married Women in Populations in the Past', in J. Henderson and R. Wall, (eds.), *Poor Women and Children in the European Past*, (London, 1994), p. 322.

<sup>10</sup>P. Solar, 'Poor Relief and English Economic Development Before the Industrial Revolution', *Economic History Review*, 48 (1995), 1-22.

years before agreeing to have John apprenticed and therefore again receive money from the parish.<sup>11</sup>

The generosity of relieving officers could differ considerably between parishes and regions of England.<sup>12</sup> At the town of Newark in Nottinghamshire the growing tide of paupers had brought a harsh reaction to those claiming relief. Eden reported in May 1795 that

the badge appointed by the Act of King William, is worn by the Paupers of this parish: it was laid aside a few years ago, but the Poor having increased very much, it was resumed last year; and the consequence has been, that several persons, who had before made regular applications to the parish, have now declined asking for relief.<sup>13</sup>

**TABLE 8.1 - SETTLEMENT CASES, QUARTER SESSIONS, 1745-1830**

Type	N.	%
Man and woman	396	17.12
Parents with children	992	42.89
Women with children	327	14.09
‡Women alone	278	12.01
†Pregnant women	39	1.73
Men alone	216	9.34
Men with children	29	1.25
Children	33	1.43
Other	3	0.13
<b>Total Cases</b>	<b>2,313</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Source:** Quarter Sessions Court Order Books, QS6/6/5-15, L.R.O.

‡This category includes all women listed as alone e.g. separated, widows or unmarried.

†The listing of woman as pregnant did not become part of the standardised entries until 1804. Thus it is very likely that some women in other categories were also pregnant at the time of their removal.

<sup>11</sup>QS6/1/12, L.R.O.

<sup>12</sup>S. King, 'Poor Relief and English Economic Development Reappraised', *Economic History Review*, 50: 2 (1997), p. 365, and footnote 25.

<sup>13</sup>F.M. Eden, *The State of the Poor*, II (1795), p. 571.

Charitable gifts, furthermore, were not uniformly distributed, and often a discussion of a woman's background and character took place before she could qualify as an 'object of charity'. In her will dated 3rd Jan 1734/5 Sarah Farryan arranged that five pounds be put out at interest 'and of the same yearly received at the Feast of St Thomas the Apostle and layd out in one gown and given unto one poor widow of honest reputation belonging to Hinckley',<sup>14</sup> thus clearly indicating the importance of the recipient's character. In Chapter 3.0 we noted that a number of women in Ashby and Hinckley left bequests to their indigent sisters. Sums of money were to be distributed to 'the poor' as the minister and church wardens saw fit, or alternatively, the interest from money was to be given out annually.<sup>15</sup> The payments made to those women who found favour with the local worthies no doubt proved invaluable. However, the degree of poverty that fell on many parishes would require more to alleviate it than the money that came from poor relief or acts of charity.

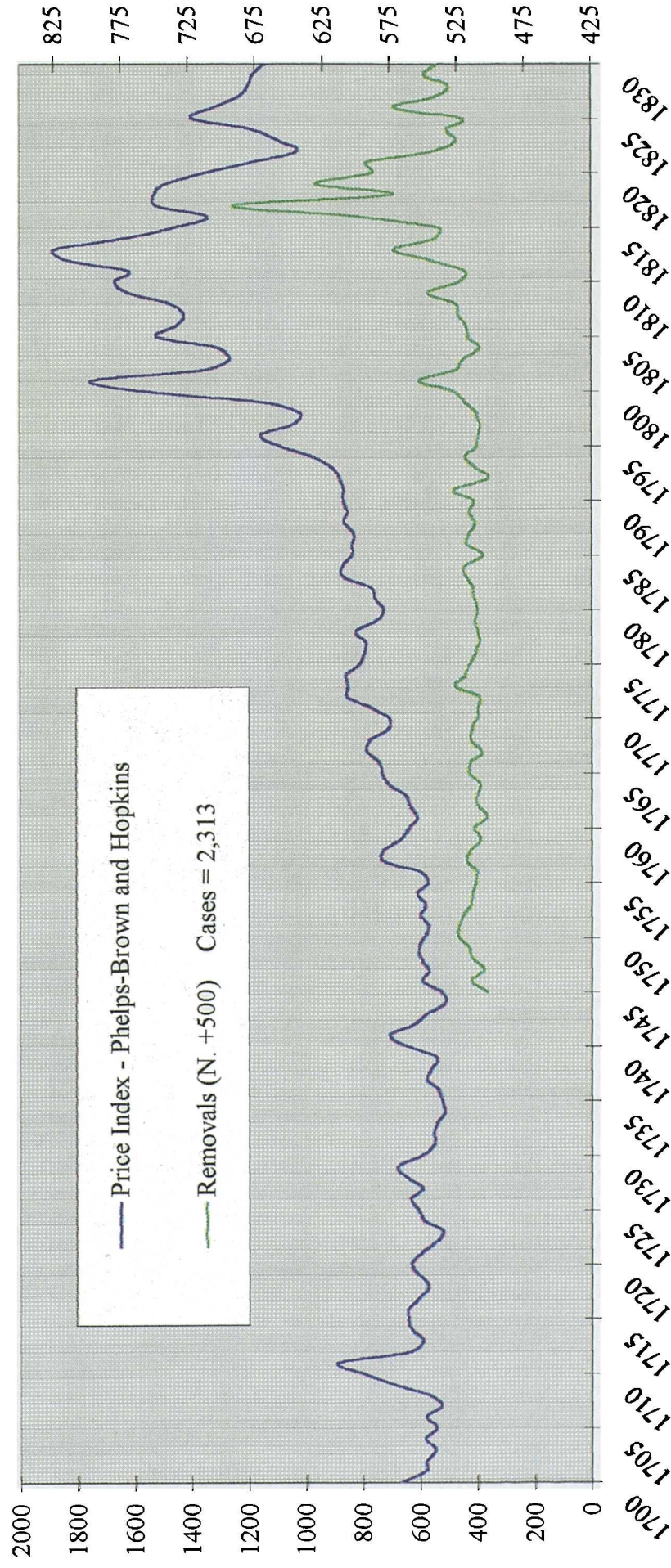
In Figure 8.1 the trend in the number of removals brought before the Quarter Sessions is shown and illustrates a worsening poverty, especially from the beginning of the second decade of the nineteenth century, and a determination by parish officials not to support individuals and families if it could in any way be avoided. The mass of the poor were dealt with at the parish level and were never the subject of proceedings, particularly since such actions could be costly and time consuming.

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<sup>14</sup>PR/T/1735, L.R.O.

<sup>15</sup>For example, PR/T/1752/158; PR/T/1741, (Mary Lynes); PR/T/1725, (Mary Piddocke), PR/T/1721, (Anne Wainwright), L.R.O.

**FIGURE 8.1 - PRICE INDEX AND REMOVAL ORDERS FROM THE LEICESTERSHIRE  
QUARTER SESSIONS IN THE EIGHTEENTH AND EARLY NINETEENTH CENTURIES**



Source: Phelps-Brown and Hopkins, 'Seven Centuries of the Prices of Consumables'; Quarter Sessions Court Order Books, QS6/1/5-QS6/1/12, L.R.O.



A breakdown of these cases given in Table 8.1 shows that the composition is not untypical of those that were undisputed, in that the majority of removals dealt with parents with children or consisted of just couples. However, nearly 28 percent of cases concerned women either on their own, pregnant or accompanied by children. The number of cases involving a single male very probably relate mainly to individuals who were elderly or infirm since it was generally the young, unmarried and able-bodied males who went untroubled by the poor law administrators.<sup>16</sup> The number of pregnant women may have been in excess of that shown in Table 8.1. As one form of settlement was conferred through birth, officers were keen to remove women who were likely to have their babies in their parish.<sup>17</sup>

A case from 1740 gives an illustration of what could be suffered by these individuals. Documented in the examination of Elizabeth Reading, described as a vagrant, was a journey which began at Market Harborough where she had probably been unwelcome. Elizabeth is documented as being taken ill at Uppingham in Rutland but one of the constable's servants took her on horse back and deposited her in the parish of Harringworth in Northamptonshire. She was thereafter conveyed in the same manner through two more parishes. At Gretton she went into labour and was given 2d and again moved on. Two hours after being set down in the parish of

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<sup>16</sup> J.S. Taylor, *Poverty, Migration and Settlement in the Industrial Revolution*, (California, 1989), p. 174.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16.

**TABLE 8.2 - DEFICIENCIES BETWEEN EARNINGS AND EXPENSES FOR STOCKING WEAVERS' FAMILIES AT  
STOKE GOLDING, LEICESTERSHIRE, 1845**

Family Size+	Earnings (Weekly)	Known Expenses (Weekly)				Food Costs		Weekly Deficiency
		Food*	Fuel	House Rent	Other	% Exp	% Erng	
2	7s 0d	4s 2d	1s 0d	1s 6d	1s 5d	51%	59%	-1s 1d
2	5s 0d	4s 2d	1s 0d	2s 0d	1s 5d	48%	83%	-3s 7d
3	8s 6d	5s 4d	1s 0d	2s 0d	1s 1.5d	56%	63%	-0s 11.5d
4 (widow)	1s 6d	3s 2.5d	0s 8d	1s 4d	0s 7.5d	56%	+100	-4s 3d
4	11s 0d	7s 1.5d	0s 10d	2s 1d	1s 7.5d	61%	65%	-0s 8d
4	4s 0d	3s 11d	0s 8d	2s 0d	0s 9.5d	53%	98%	-3s 4.5d
4	12s 6d	8s 6d	1s 0d	2s 0d	1s 3d	67%	68%	-0s 3d
5 (widow)	7s 0d	7s 4d	1s 0d	2s 0d	1s 0d	65%	+100	-4s 4d
5	7s 0d	6s 8d	0s 8d	1s 3d	0s 7.5d	72%	95%	-2s 2.5d
5	9s 6d	7s 3d	1s 0d	2s 0d	1s 3d	63%	76%	-2s 0d
5	7s 6d	4s 4d	0s 8d	1s 3d	1s 3d	58%	58%	0s 0d
5	7s 6d	6s 9.5d	1s 0d	1s 6d	1s 5d	63%	90%	-3s 2.5d
5	7s 6d	5s 11d	0s 8d	2s 2d	1s 6d	58%	79%	-2s 9d
6	12s 6d	10s 0d	1s 0d	1s 9d	2s 0d	68%	80%	-2s 3d
6	8s 6d	7s 5d	1s 0d	1s 11d	1s 8d	62%	87%	-3s 6d
7	11s 0d	9s 3d	1s 0d	1s 6d	1s 0d	72%	84%	-1s 9d
7	9s 6d	8s 2d	0s 8d	2s 0d	1s 3d	67%	86%	-3s 5d
8	11s 0d	12s 0d	1s 0d	1s 9d	1s 9d	73%	+100	-5s 6d
10	19s 6d	14s 0d	0s 8d	Free	2s 1d	83.5%	72%	+2s 9d

+ Refers to parents and children unless stated otherwise.

\*Food: potatoes, bread, flour, meat, tea, coffee, milk, sugar.

Other: soap, candles, clubs, schooling.

Weekly expenses calculated from known items of expenditure. There were other expenses not included, e.g. frame rents and clothes, making the deficiencies between earnings and expenses conservative estimates.

Source: *Report From The Commissioners, 1845, XV, Minutes of Evidence, Part 1, p. 222.*

Little Weldon she gave birth.<sup>18</sup> At no time does it appear that official channels were called upon to deal with her situation. Episodes such as these must have become more common as pauperdom began affecting women on a greater scale in the later stages of our period. In the south of England vagrancy began to increase from the 1770s,<sup>19</sup> and in the East Midlands the evidence points to a similar situation.

Social commentators and historians have used budget data to assess the contributions of family members and the shortfalls between earnings and expenses.<sup>20</sup> Eden thought that the budget information given to him by a Leicester woolcomber must be ‘erroneous in some particulars for the man has not lately received any assistance from the parish.’<sup>21</sup> Pinchbeck understood that families made up these deficits by stealing or poaching. She also recognised that people did not always have the benefit of poor relief.<sup>22</sup> In Table 8.2, the deficiencies between earnings and expenses for stocking weavers’ families at Stoke Golding in 1845 have been calculated. These examples are for a later period and by this time the New Poor Law was in operation. However, they show the level of poverty that could be visited on a population as the result of industrial and trade crises. In this instance weavers could obtain no relief unless they were sick, and if they worked, no matter how small their income, they would get nothing. The deficiencies are considerable and, of course, those giving evidence to the Committee were not in all circumstances

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<sup>18</sup> Settlement Examination: 347p/137, Northamptonshire Record Office.

<sup>19</sup> Sharpe, *Adapting to Capitalism*, p. 130.

<sup>20</sup> Eden, *The State of the Poor*, II, see for example, pp. 380-381; Pinchbeck, *Women Workers*, p. 46; Horrel and Humphries, ‘Women’s Labour Force Participation’, pp. 89-117.

<sup>21</sup> Eden, *The State of the Poor*, II, pp. 388-389.

neutral observers. Nonetheless, the severity of the depression in the hosiery industry in the 1840s badly affected workers. We can also see from Table 8.2 that the most glaring disparities between earnings and expenses were for those families where the household was headed by a woman or where families were large, and presumably, the children young. Also noticeable is the large proportion of earnings taken up with food costs. The preceding discussion has shown that often circumstances were such that income needed to be obtained from a variety of sources other than those that were parochial or charitable. We now turn to some alternatives.

## **8.2 Work on the Margins: Poor Women and the Informal Economy<sup>23</sup>**

In the eighteenth century people understood that a living was made in a variety of ways.<sup>24</sup> A strategy of pursuing a variety of income-earning activities, including a base of non-wage resources created the possibilities of survival for poor women. Women's historians have provided a number of terminologies and models for this kind of work. Most notable for the early modern period is Olwen Hufton's 'an economy of makeshifts'.<sup>25</sup> For poverty studies of the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries we have 'women's strategies', the 'informal economy', 'hidden economy' and 'intermediate economy'. These terms cover a range of pursuits, for

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<sup>22</sup>Pinchbeck noted that families in the Midlands who did not receive parish relief were very poor. *Women Workers*, p. 50, footnote 1.

<sup>23</sup>A version of this section has since been published. P. Lane, 'Work on the Margins: Poor Women and the Informal Economy of Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Century Leicestershire', *Midland History*, 22 (1997), pp. 85-99.

<sup>24</sup>R.W. Malcomson, 'Getting a Living in Eighteenth Century England', in R.E. Pahl, *On Work*, (Oxford, 1988), p. 48.

<sup>25</sup>O. Hufton, *The Poor of Eighteenth Century France*, (Oxford, 1974), p. 109.



example, laundering, sewing, and child minding for others; they also include taking in lodgers, outwork, scavenging and payments in money or kind from kin and neighbours.<sup>26</sup> In addition, in the 'hidden economy' and 'intermediate economy', was theft. As Ayers notes for dockland families in the 1930s, 'the working-class family economy consisted of monetary and non-monetary, personal and impersonal, formal and informal, legal and illegal elements'. She also suggests that such methods of income earning were not developed in the years of depression but were a permanent feature of a port economy and became more visible in times of hardship.<sup>27</sup> The 'economy of makeshifts' comprises activities that could be described as informal but separates out those which are viewed as criminal.<sup>28</sup> Therefore we have an ambivalence surrounding earnings made from 'crime' in the sense that they are noted as contributing to the livelihood of women, but then they are set apart as something quite different. This occurs because such activities are considered as 'crime' and not 'work', and the women who engaged in such activity, depicted as criminal. As Olwen Hufton herself has written, 'criminal women can perhaps be shrugged off as a deviant minority, but they were obviously part of a larger mass of unmarried women and widows who might not have had a relationship with a family'.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup>E.M. Roberts, 'Women's Strategies, 1890-1940', in J. Lewis, (ed.), *Labour and Love: Women's Experience of Home and Family 1850-1940*, (Oxford, 1986), pp. 223-247; P. Ayers, 'The Hidden Economy of Dockland Families: Liverpool in the 1930s', in P. Hudson, and W.R. Lee, (eds.), *Women's Work and the Family Economy in Historical Perspective*, (Manchester, 1990), pp. 30-31; D. Gittins, 'Marital Status, Work and Kinship 1850-1930', in Lewis (ed.), *Labour and Love*, pp. 249-267; E. Ross, 'Survival Networks: Women's Neighbourhood Sharing in London Before World War I', *History Workshop Journal*, 15 (1983), p. 7.

<sup>27</sup>Ayers, 'The Hidden Economy', p. 287.

<sup>28</sup>Hufton discussed the 'economy of makeshifts' in two chapters of her book whilst theft, prostitution etc. are discussed separately in others.

<sup>29</sup>Hufton, 'Women Without Men', p. 356.

Research into crime has illuminated our understanding of the lives of women, and identified continuities in their involvement that stretch across time, for example, that women on the basis of criminal statistics, were less involved in crime than men, and when they were, it was generally for crimes against property.<sup>30</sup> However, the focus, in the main, has tended towards the characteristics of crime and punishment, with rather less attention being paid to the circumstances surrounding women's criminal activity.<sup>31</sup> Naturally, perhaps, these historians consider that they are discussing 'crime', not 'work'. Nevertheless, there are historians who have identified the link between the incidence of female crime and women's work, if sometimes only in passing. They acknowledge necessity as a prime motivation for theft arising from either a lack of work, limited earnings and their vulnerability to prosecution at different stages in the life-cycle. Moreover, more women resorted to theft during years of dearth and periods characterised by high enlistment.<sup>32</sup> It is surprising therefore, that more research has not been undertaken on the borders of work, poverty and crime given that poor women's activities and earnings are so frequently associated with the marginal and informal. The intention here is to provide a definition of the informal economy, which in this instance comprises women's work in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that was or became

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<sup>30</sup>B. Hanawalt, 'The Female Felon in Fourteenth Century England', *Viator*, 5 (1974), p. 255; L. Zedner, *Women, Crime and Custody in Victorian England*, (Oxford, 1991), p. 27, p. 37.

<sup>31</sup>See introduction to J. Kermode and G. Walker, (eds.), *Women, Crime and the Courts in Early Modern England*, (London 1994).

<sup>32</sup>See for example, J.M. Beattie, 'The Criminality of Women in Eighteenth England', *Journal of Social History*, 8 (1974-5), p. 103; D. Hay, 'War, Dearth and Theft', p. 135; F. Lynn, *Crime and Punishment in Eighteenth Century England*, (London, 1989), p. 132; P. Linebaugh, *The London Hanged: Crime and Civil Society in the Eighteenth Century*, (London, 1993), p. 338; A recent exception to this lack of contextualisation is P. King, 'Female Offenders, Work and Life-Cycle Change in Late Eighteenth Century London', *Continuity and Change*, 9 (1996), pp. 61-90.

criminalised, for example, gleaning, and wood collecting; also included is income from what women saw as perquisites, and additionally, theft (petty or otherwise), illegal trading, fraud and prostitution.

Before proceeding to illustrate women's relationship to the informal economy in Leicestershire, we return briefly to the question of sources. There has been much debate about the uses and inadequacies of crime statistics. One main concern is their representation of actual crime since the extent of the 'dark figure' (i.e. criminal behaviour that is never reported or prosecuted), can never be known.<sup>33</sup> It is with care that we consider the assertion that women's involvement in crime declined over time from a relatively high point in the first half of the eighteenth century when women formed some 45 percent of those indicted, to a low of 10 percent at the beginning of the twentieth century.<sup>34</sup> However, we can say that women's participation in activities deemed illegal in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was significant. Research for the south of England shows that there was a 'strong upward trend' in crimes against property in rural areas in the last twenty years of the eighteenth century, but with a general rise beginning earlier in the 1760s or just after.<sup>35</sup> Beattie comments that 'there is so frequently a close tie between the indictment level and indicators of economic conditions that a great deal of such crime seems explainable in terms of necessity.'<sup>36</sup> Women were generally less

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<sup>33</sup>J.A. Sharpe, *Crime in Early Modern England 1550-1750*, (London, 1984), p. 42.

<sup>34</sup>M. Feeley and D. Little, 'The Vanishing Female: The Decline of Women in the Criminal Process, 1687-1912', *Law and Society Review*, 25:4 (1991), p. 722.

<sup>35</sup>J.M. Beattie, 'The Pattern of Crime in England 1600-1800', *Past and Present*, 62 (1974), p. 78.

<sup>36</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 85.

well represented in crime figures, certainly if we accept the view that in rural areas offences by women may possibly have been dealt with informally.<sup>37</sup> Some individuals would not reach the courts at all, and a good deal of crime by its very character remained undetected. The relationship between women's formal earnings and those of the informal economy can best be discussed by the illustration of individual cases, rather than via quantification particularly since the assize records for the midland circuit are no longer extant. Qualitative evidence is also not without its problems. Is the evidence given in depositions an accurate representation of events or a standardised view of 'criminals' and 'criminal behaviour'? This is not always clear. Nevertheless, with careful use, such evidence can provide valuable insights into the relationships between the informal and formal economy. The issue to be dealt with here is not the numbers of women who operated in the informal economy, but how and why they did so.

An important area of the agricultural economy in which customary right and usage played a part was access to the open fields and commons. As we noted in Chapter 1.0, in the middle of the eighteenth century some 237,000 acres of open fields, common land and waste still existed in Leicestershire.<sup>38</sup> However, well over 90 percent of the county was enclosed by 1800, and by 1844 there were practically no commons or waste land existing anywhere.<sup>39</sup> Gleaning was certainly one of the

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<sup>37</sup>Beattie, 'The Criminality of Women', p. 108.

<sup>38</sup>H.G. Hunt, 'The Chronology of Parliamentary Enclosure in Leicestershire', *Economic History Review*, 10:2 (1957), p. 265.

<sup>39</sup>J.R. Wordie, 'The Chronology of English Enclosure 1500-1914', *Economic History Review*, 36:4 (1983), pp. 497-498.

most significant activities undertaken by women. Estimates suggest that gleaning contributed up to one-eighth of the annual earnings of a poor household, and an even greater proportion in those households headed by widows.<sup>40</sup> In general, gleaning appears to have continued at similar levels in the country as a whole between 1750 and 1850.<sup>41</sup> In Leicestershire, however, as we have observed, by 1809 in parts of the central, east, and south of the county there were no tillage lands left.<sup>42</sup> In Kibworth Beauchamp, for example, a parish in the south of the county, the increase in the poor rates was attributed to enclosure with the concomitant loss of the production of corn which had provided occupations at threshing, reaping and also the collection of corn by gleaning.<sup>43</sup> The loss of gleaning led some to steal wheat out of the shocks instead.<sup>44</sup> Whereas the gleaning of wheat was looked upon favourably by farmers, some took exception to women taking barley or beans since these were used to feed animals. Barley, of course, was the essential element in brewing, and this probably is why this type of gleaning was prosecuted.<sup>45</sup>

Historians have shown the importance of common rights to the labouring population and the vigour with which they sought to defend such rights.<sup>46</sup>

Humphries has also illustrated the importance of common rights to women, and their

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<sup>40</sup>P. King, 'Customary Rights and Women's Earnings: The Importance of Gleaning to the Rural Labouring Poor 1750-1850', *Economic History Review*, 44:3, (1991), p. 474.

<sup>41</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>42</sup>J. Broad, 'Alternate Husbandry and Permanent Pasture in the Midlands, 1650-1800', *Agricultural History Review*, 28 (1980), p. 81.

<sup>43</sup>Eden, *The State of the Poor*, II, p. 384.

<sup>44</sup>QS3/398, L.R.O.

<sup>45</sup>QS3/108/61, L.R.O.

<sup>46</sup>See for example, J. Neeson, *Commoners: Common Right, Enclosure and Social Change in England 1700-1820*, (Cambridge, 1993).

families. Grazing a cow on the commons and foraging for fuel or foodstuffs formed a significant part of their household economy. She argues that the progressive elimination of common rights saw an increased dependence on wage labour, and with it creeping Proletarianization.<sup>47</sup> Women who did not own a cow, or those who found themselves with no place to graze one, acquired milk by other means. Ann Stevens, for example, in 1790 was held 'on suspicion of milking three cows and stealing away the milk.' So too, Hannah Cresswell in 1814, stood charged with milking one of the cows of Joseph Hooley.<sup>48</sup> Similarly, in 1781 sisters Sarah and Cornelia Baggerley were indicted for using snares to kill rabbits in Bradgate Park, whilst Martha Hughes and Mary Wardle were charged with taking coal from Gilmore Field in Worthington.<sup>49</sup> Many activities that were once undertaken as of right were to become criminalised. The extent of opposition to enclosure in the Midlands is impossible to determine given the absence of the assize records. Moreover, the activities associated with a continuing use of the commons, stealing wood, for example, is the type of offence that would have been heard summarily and therefore left unrecorded. However, Edward Dawson wrote to the Earl of Huntingdon in 1771, that

Sir John [Danvers] is a very active Justice of the Peace and though he has the character of being a very old man he is certainly nonetheless a very useful one as a magistrate being the terror of all poachers, pond robbers [and] wood stealers. In the article of wood stealing...I have had a very good instance of

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<sup>47</sup>J. Humphries, 'Enclosure Common Rights and Women: The Proletarianisation of Families in the Late Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries', *Journal of Economic History*, 50 (1990), pp. 31-32, p. 41.

<sup>48</sup>QS3/304, L.R.O.

<sup>49</sup>QS3/292/T/87/5; QS3/266/EP/81/15; QS3/112, L.R.O.

his attention to your Lordship's interest in Charnwood Forest where the people are far from being [taught?] that your Lordship's property is not common.<sup>50</sup>

We do find the odd reference in the Leicestershire records of the people's opposition to enclosure. In 1796 two women were committed to the county gaol for pulling down fencing poles at Bosworth Park.<sup>51</sup> The Hastings manorial papers also record destruction of enclosures. On the 22nd of July 1799 rioters broke into enclosed fields on Ashby Wolds and damaged crops of oats and barley. At Whitwick a group of stockingers who had no rights of common were found to have pulled down fences.<sup>52</sup>

Areas of waste were made use of by people in the East Midlands. In the forest area near Mansfield, for example, a whole community of cottagers and squatters survived on the waste by growing vegetables which they supplied to the local markets.<sup>53</sup> The two significant areas of waste still existing in Leicestershire at the start of our period were situated in the north-west of the county (see Map 4.1, Chapter 4.0). People had encroached and built on these waste areas early in the eighteenth century as the Hastings manorial records show. Thus individuals would be regularly fined for building or laying down balks (i.e. an untilled boundary grass strip). At the Court Leet and Court Baron at Ashby de la Zouch in October 1712,

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<sup>50</sup>HA/96/2089, H.L. There were several pieces of land within the Forest area that were enclosed and deemed private property. It must have been these areas that people ventured into for their wood etc. HAM/46/9.

<sup>51</sup>QS3/329/1, L.R.O.

<sup>52</sup>HAM/5/26, H.L.

<sup>53</sup>J.D. Chambers, *Nottinghamshire in the Eighteenth Century*, (1932, repr. 1966), p. 161.

widow Sowter, for example, was fined 2d for building a shop whilst widow Clark had to pay the same sum for constructing a house and laying down a balk. Other erections put up included a malt house, porches and sign posts. Altogether eighty-three people were charged with building on the waste.<sup>54</sup> According to documents relating to the enclosure of these areas twenty-nine parishes claimed rights of common in Charnwood Forest whilst ten did so for Ashby Wolds.<sup>55</sup> A letter discussing the enclosure of Charnwood Forest dated the 31 December 1804 written from John Claridge to the Earl of Moira describing the Forest land in its present state as 'yielding very little return to the general benefit of the proprietors at large and only advantage to the persons residing on the verge of it'.<sup>56</sup> Persons on the 'verge' grazed cattle and sheep and gathered fuel. Their loss would be considerable. The gradual disappearance of the remaining waste areas in the East Midlands and elsewhere was detrimental to many, and often women. An examination of the rents at Markfield (one of those parishes that claimed rights of common in Charnwood Forest) in 1756 and 1770, showed that women were non-existent among those paying chief rents, but formed nearly a half of those paying waste rents in 1756, and constituted about a quarter of those paying at the later date. A number of these women were clearly without men.<sup>57</sup> Poor women were thus truly out on the periphery. People living on waste areas of the Hastings lands were becoming increasingly scarce. In April 1811 a 'Petition from Certain Framework Knitters and

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<sup>54</sup>HAM/OS/2, H.L.

<sup>55</sup>HAM/46/9, HAM/6/22, H.L. Charnwood Forest covered just under 18,000 acres and Ashby Wolds roughly 3,000.

<sup>56</sup>HAM/46/9, H.L.

<sup>57</sup>HAM/45/20, 26, H.L.



Labourers' to the Earl of Moira followed a notice to quit the waste houses in Barrow on Soar. The document expressed their fear that leaving their homes would cause them 'great difficulties and distress, having' as they pointed out, 'by our own little earnings, erected and kept them in good repair'. Thirty-eight people signed the petition but only four were women.<sup>58</sup> We could speculate that the pressure of people on land may well have pushed women even beyond these borders and into towns to search for casual domestic work or into other areas of the informal economy.

Hosiery workers were highly visible amongst those who suffered from the loss of commons and areas of waste. However, employment in the industry offered alternative opportunities to increase earnings. A popular form of income supplementation for women in industrial districts came from the practices known as false and short reeling. These techniques basically involved the spinners using less of the material than they were supposed to in the production of yarn.<sup>59</sup> A worsted spinner during the 1770s, it has been estimated, could probably boost her income by selling on embezzled materials by some 6 percent.<sup>60</sup> If women sought to enhance their income to take account of difficulties in the economy as well as their personal condition, then certain practices perpetrated on them by employers, for example, withholding part of their wages, the infamous truck system, and payment in

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<sup>58</sup>HAM/45/28, H.L.

<sup>59</sup>J. Styles, 'Embezzlement, Industry and the Law in England 1500-1800', in M. Berg, P. Hudson, M. Sonensher (eds.), *Manufacture in Town and Country Before the Factory*, (Cambridge, 1983), p. 176.

<sup>60</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 181.

counterfeit coinage would also have made embezzlement an attractive, if not a legitimate option.<sup>61</sup> Many workers, furthermore, did not consider such action as theft but saw the appropriation of materials as a customary right. In the eighteenth century wages in many occupations were often paid in part by what the employee produced as well as in a monetary form. However, during periods of depression and rising prices hosiers were less likely to turn a blind eye to appropriation of materials which in times of good trade they might overlook.<sup>62</sup> It was, therefore, precisely at times when women were most in need of income from the informal economy that they were likely to be prosecuted. In 1795 Ann Brotherhood was committed to the county gaol for 'refusing to restore to its owner' a quantity of wool which she was supposed to have spun into worsted, and similarly, Mary Keeling was charged with stealing three tops of jersey.<sup>63</sup> Concern about the extent of false and short reeling which contemporaries believed to be endemic, led to the setting up of committees of worsted manufacturers to pay inspectors of worsted yarn to help prevent such practices. One such committee was established in Leicestershire in 1785.<sup>64</sup> The effects of this were immediately felt; five women were prosecuted from Great Bowden in that year, as were a number of others from different parishes.<sup>65</sup> Women were fined five shillings on a first offence, and on a second, they were likely to be sentenced to a month in the bridewell.<sup>66</sup> Thus by the later stages of the eighteenth century it was more difficult for spinners to bolster their incomes from this source,

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<sup>61</sup>Ibid., pp. 182-184, p. 186.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid., p. 187.

<sup>63</sup>QS3/323; DE432/9/13c, L.R.O.

<sup>64</sup>Styles, 'Embezzlement and the Law', p. 201, p. 196.

<sup>65</sup>QS3/286/EP/86/39, 43, 45, L.R.O.

and spinning itself was in decline. As noted earlier, the widespread use of the two-handed spinning wheel in some Leicestershire villages suggests that women were attempting to increase their productivity in an effort to sustain their level of earnings.

If embezzlement was made somewhat easier in the domestic system this did not prevent women from appropriating materials from the new manufactories and mills. This form of income earning was still practised and remained a means of either supplementing income by selling it on, or exchanging it for food or rent. In 1803, Elizabeth Hough, a widow, who worked at the mill of James Douglas and Company at Loughborough, confessed to regularly taking yarn from the mill and passing it on to Ann Polkey with whom she lodged.<sup>67</sup> Whether these forms of income supplementation were considered as ‘customary usage’ or ‘embezzlement’ for poor women they could mean the difference between having a little more to eat or a roof over one’s head, and it was income they could make from the informal economy. The importance of the informal economy to the poor can be demonstrated by considering the activities of family members acting together initially as appropriators, and then as receivers. In 1826, for example, Ann Shaw aged eleven with her sister Hannah aged twelve were committed to the county gaol on suspicion of stealing a quantity of marino wool. Their mother Elizabeth Shaw was also so held for having received it knowing it to be stolen.<sup>68</sup> The children of the poor may have been

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<sup>66</sup>QS3/306-309, L.R.O.

<sup>67</sup>QS3/363/55, L.R.O.

<sup>68</sup>QS3/470-472, 1826, L.R.O.

instructed from an early age how to 'piece together a living',<sup>69</sup> but it could also be argued, they were also shown the existence of an informal economy, one they could access when the opportunity, or necessity, arose. We also need to consider the knock-on effect and the interaction between the two economies, because as we have seen, fluctuations in the formal economy could seriously affect earnings made in the informal economy.

In the eighteenth century contemporaries were greatly troubled by the amount of petty theft committed by domestic and other servants.<sup>70</sup> This type of criminal behaviour is often seen as a combination of servants' low wages juxtaposed with the wealth of an employer, thereby giving women the opportunity and temptation to commit theft.<sup>71</sup> Servants in close proximity to a person's possessions took those that they recognised were of value and could be disposed of most easily. Moreover, servants often understood certain items to be part of their wage or were theirs by right. Cooks, for example, generally held on to bones and fat.<sup>72</sup> The male cook in 1692 at Donington Park got £20 a year and rabbit skins.<sup>73</sup> Domestic servants, as we saw in Chapter 5.0, received 'castings', that is the unwanted clothes of a master or mistress as gifts or as part of legacies. However, there is some ambiguity surrounding what constituted a customary right or petty theft. Foodstuffs were the most easily passed on or got rid of. In a deposition given in 1813, Ann

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<sup>69</sup>Hufton, *The Poor of Eighteenth Century France*, p.109.

<sup>70</sup>B. Lemire, 'The Theft of Clothes and Popular Consumerism in Early Modern England', *Journal of Social History* 24 (1990), p. 262.

<sup>71</sup>Lynn, *Crime and Punishment*, p. 124; Beattie, 'The Criminality of Women', p. 92.

<sup>72</sup>Linebaugh, *The London Hanged*, p. 251.

Hughes described how a fellow servant, Mary Croxall, dairy maid, ‘was in the constant habit of giving away to John Smith a labourer, bread, meat, cheese, milk and other articles of provision in the morning before the family woke up without their knowledge and consent’.<sup>74</sup> Or similarly, in 1769 Mary Saddington, apprentice to Ann Moulds, dyer, found herself indicted for ‘carrying away’ a leg of mutton, half a loaf and a pair of blew [blue] worsted stockings.<sup>75</sup> Thomas Wright recorded that after his wife died in 1777 one of the servants he employed ‘carried out [of the house] (whenever I was absent) to her father’s and relations, meal flour, butter, eggs, ribbons, small linen, beer and bottles or rum.’<sup>76</sup> Given the favourable earnings of servants in relation to those of other women, it does seem at first surprising that they should engage in this type of activity, since the immediate effects of poverty were not felt by them directly. However, in settlement examinations and other poor law documents ex-servants turn up with unceasing regularity, as this was one of the major sectors of employment for women. Most servants were not very far removed from hardship. Moreover, the declining earnings in the face of rising prices again made additional income welcome and probably staved off the worst effects of poverty on their families. Thus whether we consider this as theft or otherwise, supplying one’s family or passing stolen goods through the network of the poor was a means of maximising this form of income.

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<sup>73</sup>HAF/25/48, H.L.

<sup>74</sup>QS3/398, L.R.O.

<sup>75</sup>QS3/214-218 (1769), L.R.O.

<sup>76</sup>C. Davidson, *A Woman’s Work is Never Done: A History of Housework in the British Isles 1650-1950*, (London, 1982), p. 172.

Clothing was perhaps the item most often stolen. As Beverly Lemire has pointed out, 'clothing was the most sought after, and at the same time, most easily disposable commodity'.<sup>77</sup> Such was the need for second hand clothing in the country that even the full-time exponents of the informal economy were able to support themselves as the supply of new and second hand clothing was unable to keep up with popular demand.<sup>78</sup> In towns and villages, and at markets and fairs, clothes were bought and sold.<sup>79</sup> Women's role in the second hand clothes trade could take a number of forms, for example, as receivers in the distribution network, which is where many widows found a niche, or they could take stolen items to the pawn shop and exchange them for cash.<sup>80</sup> At the local level, it was common for items of clothing to be snatched while drying on a hedge, or for occupants of lodging houses to have their clothing taken while they slept. In March 1771, Elizabeth Robinson on passing by the parlour door, saw a young woman putting on her mistress's shoes about to walk out of the house with a bundle of wearing apparel tucked underneath her arm.<sup>81</sup> Clothing was easily converted into cash or kind. The Leicestershire market in second hand clothes was no exception, and clothes circulated in and out of the formal and informal economy. In the Loughborough of 1772, we can follow the progress of a neckcloth. Edward Gibbs bought a muslin neck cloth from the shop of Mary Harris, Milliner. He took it to his mother's house to be washed, but as it hung outside in the yard it was stolen. Three weeks or a

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<sup>77</sup>Lemire, 'The Theft of Clothes', p. 257.

<sup>78</sup>*Ibid.*, 265.

<sup>79</sup>A.Buck, 'Buying Clothes in Bedfordshire: Customers and Tradesmen 1700-1800', *Textile History*, 22 (1991), p. 227.

<sup>80</sup>Lemire, 'The Theft of Clothes', p. 267, p. 263.

month later it turned up in the custody of Mary Harris, she having had it brought to her by Ann Boss, who had it previously from Mary Harrison, wife of William Harrison, Baker. Ann Boss bought the neckcloth from Ann Wear [or Wain] for 18d, the woman suspected of stealing the neckcloth in the first place but who claimed that she, also, did not know it was stolen.<sup>82</sup> One suspects that Mary Harris may have been working in the formal and informal economy simultaneously, and if she was, this reminds us that it was not just the very poor who found the informal economy useful. In the business world of the eighteenth century the distinction between legitimate and illegitimate trading could be considerably hazy, particularly in respect of the second hand clothing trade.<sup>83</sup> Styles also notes that the customers of hawkers who sold fabric and clothes in rural areas of the north of England, found it extremely difficult to distinguish between stolen and legitimate goods because both were sold in the same manner.<sup>84</sup> Many women worked interchangeably between the two types of trade, and this, as with many other areas of work, attests to the need to see these sectors as forming a distinct whole. Throughout the period the second-hand clothing trade provided a means of alternative employment for women and was to continue into the nineteenth century until inexpensive manufactured clothes eventually came to replace second-hand goods in the market.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>81</sup>QS3/227, L.R.O.

<sup>82</sup>QS3/230/95, L.R.O.

<sup>83</sup>A. Williams, 'Male and Female Trading in the Eighteenth Century: A Case Study of Devon and Somerset 1735-1785', paper given at the *Second Exeter Gender History Conference*, 15th-17th July 1996.

<sup>84</sup>J. Styles, 'Clothing the North: the Supply of Non-Elite Clothing in the Eighteenth Century North of England', *Textile History* 25 (1994), p. 151.

Crimes against property, as mentioned earlier, increased in periods of severe hardship. For those not in a position to appropriate goods, stealing from shops, people's houses or directly from the person, or purchasing items with counterfeit coin was often the only option. Most theft by women appears to have occurred in urban areas<sup>86</sup> although it is possible that much rural crime was hidden. Action in this part of the informal economy involved passing on items to a receiver or selling them to an unsuspecting individual. Contemporaries were only too well aware that goods they might purchase or exchange may have been stolen. However, women selling goods employed narratives that would make them the most plausible. They used the language of the poor, and used the images of poor women which were deemed the most effective for bringing about the desired result, the sale. For example, in 1729 Grace Burton attempted to sell a kettle she had stolen by saying she was selling it for widow Coppson. Similarly in 1812, Anne Buck was claiming that she was offering for sale two fowls for her neighbour who was in 'great want', and that she and her family, i.e. her neighbour, 'would not have anything to eat until she got back'.<sup>87</sup> These examples illustrate clearly the types of women who were most in need in the community, the widow and the woman on her own with children. It suggests also, that the old poor law did not embrace everyone in need, with even those adjudged most worthy still having to find work in the informal economy.

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<sup>85</sup>B. Lemire, 'Peddling Fashion: Salesmen, Pawnbrokers, Tailors, Thieves and the Second-Hand Clothes Trade in England c. 1700-1800', *Textile History*, 22:1 (1991), pp. 79-80.

<sup>86</sup>Beattie, 'The Criminality of Women', p. 53.

<sup>87</sup>QS3/60; QS3/394/16, L.R.O.



Brewing was a female trade that by the seventeenth-century had increasingly become dominated by men, although women continued to work, for example, as petty retailers of ale and beer.<sup>88</sup> They also pursued other activities that allowed them to operate in the trade, though not formally. In earlier times, brewing and selling ale was encouraged as a means whereby the poor could earn a living, however, from the latter part of the seventeenth century magistrates became less willing to grant licenses to the poor, who they considered were likely to run disorderly houses.<sup>89</sup> According to Clark, this seems to have had a particularly negative effect on poor women.<sup>90</sup> In 1719 Charles Orme, victualler, of Ashby de la Zouch had been suspended from selling beer, ale and strong liquors without a license and charged with running a disorderly house. However, his wife Anne Orme continued to run the business until she too was suspended from doing so.<sup>91</sup> The prosecution of individuals for running unlicensed alehouses often corresponded to authorities perceiving a problem which needed to be brought under control.<sup>92</sup> The continuing drive towards respectability of drinking and victualling establishments in the eighteenth century meant that many women were working outside of the legal system.<sup>93</sup> Not unsurprisingly, selling ale or strong liquor without a license, or being in possession of stolen malt, were offences for which women in Leicestershire were prosecuted.<sup>94</sup> Susanna Walker described in December 1771 how she was ordered by fellow servant

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<sup>88</sup>J.M. Bennett, 'Medieval Women, Modern Women', in D. Aers, (ed.), *Culture and History 1350-1600*, (London, 1992), pp. 158-159.

<sup>89</sup>P. Clark, *The English Alehouse: A Social History 1200-1830*, (New York, 1983), p. 203.

<sup>90</sup>Cited in S. Wright, 'Holding Up Half the Sky': Women and their Occupations in Eighteenth-Century Ludlow', *Midland History*, 14 (1989), p. 55.

<sup>91</sup>QS6/1/3, L.R.O.

<sup>92</sup>Sharpe, *Crime in Early Modern England*, p. 44.

<sup>93</sup>Clark, *The English Alehouse*, p. 180.

Ann Warefoot to take 14 quarts of wort, the property of their master, to the dwelling house of Martha Wain, widow.<sup>95</sup> The theft of such items as barley, wort and malt indicate a thriving trade of domestic brewing, and sale, despite the authorities' attempts to control it. The theft of brewing equipment also suggests this. In 1810, Mary Hopkins alias Smith was charged, along with Thomas Smith of Asfordby, with stealing a brewing copper.<sup>96</sup> The activities of women in the brewing trade further confirm the view, that illegal or not, these methods were a viable way of making one's living.

Sometimes the official channels which aimed at assisting and controlling the poor were themselves exploited. The overseers of the poor in this case were the most likely to experience this kind of fraud. How many women supplemented their incomes in this manner we have no way of knowing, but the fact that women were prosecuted suggests that it was an alternative means of raising money. In 1818, for example, Mary Jackson obtained three shillings and sixpence from the Overseer at Hinckley 'under false pretences'.<sup>97</sup> The importance of clothing as an item of exchange is again demonstrated by the example of Elizabeth Palmer who was charged with 'divers acts of vagrancy' in 1779, and was also held in Leicester Bridewell and 'whipt', for selling different types of wearing apparel provided for her by the Overseer of the Poor of Lutterworth.<sup>98</sup> How are we to characterise this type

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<sup>94</sup>QS3/80; QS3/162-165 (1755); QS3/281, L.R.O.

<sup>95</sup>QS3/227/92, L.R.O.

<sup>96</sup>QS3/385/3, L.R.O.

<sup>97</sup>QS3/417-421 (1818), L.R.O.

<sup>98</sup>QS3/259/EA79/16, L.R.O.

of activity? Overseers, and others, would see them as the ‘undeserving’, those they could describe as ‘feckless’ or ‘incorrigible’, and therefore, refuse relief. Some historians may consider such behaviour as consistent with desperation, as it indeed was in some cases. However, poor women perceived the deception of parish officials as another legitimate avenue by which to profit. If an opportunity presented itself, regardless of source, the environment of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was sure to provide numbers of women willing to take advantage of it. For example, Hannah Cole in 1797 was picked up in the parish of Rearsby for begging whilst pretending to be dumb.<sup>99</sup> Moreover, others could pass themselves off as the wives of military men. In 1822, seven women were indicted ‘for obtaining money upon forged passes as soldiers’ wives’.<sup>100</sup> Thus whilst economic and social hardship promoted the need for organisational care of the poor, they found ways of making money for themselves to which they were not always entitled.

There were individuals who made their living totally from means that involved parting people from their money and goods, i.e. ‘professional criminal’. The growing urban centres of the eighteenth century to which women could migrate in search of better things provided a backdrop against which the displaced could maintain themselves. At markets and in the shops of the towns, women worked as pickpockets, engaged in shoplifting, or purchased goods and services with counterfeit coin. Numerous cases such as these present themselves in the available evidence. One historian suggests that, in the market place, ‘a woman could certainly

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<sup>99</sup>QS3/334/4, L.R.O.

make a living by joining this criminal sub-culture either as a prostitute or pickpocket or decoy for a gang of male criminals.<sup>101</sup> Unfortunately, the quarter sessions records give us very little idea whether women were professional or otherwise. However, some women obtained sufficient notoriety to give the impression of professional status. Ann Philips, alias Coventry Nan, and John Philips were committed to the county gaol on the 7th September 1795, for having assaulted and taken John Day's money on the previous Sunday evening on the road between Melton Mowbray and Leicester.<sup>102</sup> Similarly, Sophia Stone in 1781 was charged with highway robbery with Richard Lewis 'who calls himself her husband'.<sup>103</sup> Some historians have suggested that women rarely had the initiative or the nerve to involve themselves directly in robbery, but merely worked as accomplices to men.<sup>104</sup> The two examples given above may, on the face of it, support this. However, a women was able to avoid prosecution if the crime was committed in the presence of her husband or undertaken at his behest.<sup>105</sup> To plead in this way would inevitably relegate women to the sidelines, although in reality it was unlikely that they were as passive as has sometimes been supposed. Moreover, recent research for the late sixteenth and seventeenth century indicates that women who committed burglary, for example, preferred to work with other women rather than men.<sup>106</sup> The distinction of 'professional' and 'amateur' is actually unhelpful. For as Walker notes, 'women

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<sup>100</sup>QS3/450-455, (1822), L.R.O.

<sup>101</sup>W. Thwaites, 'Women in the Market Place: Oxfordshire c. 1690-1800', *Midland History*, 9 (1984), p. 37.

<sup>102</sup>QS3/325 (M/9/55), L.R.O.

<sup>103</sup>QS3/269, L.R.O.

<sup>104</sup>Sharpe, *Crime in Early Modern England*, p. 109.

<sup>105</sup>King, 'Female Offenders', p. 8.

who were prosecuted for various types of theft appear to have been involved in a predominantly female culture of dishonest activity.<sup>107</sup> This 'female culture of dishonest activity', or those involved in a 'criminal sub-culture' were, in fact, women viewing income generating activities in the widest possible terms. For the poorest particularly, there was no distinction between honest and dishonest activity, it was not one they could afford to make, or indeed, wished to.

A professional or amateur status, some would suggest, was no less evident amongst women who worked as prostitutes. Prostitution was a further means whereby women could either exist solely by this means, supplement their incomes or survive in times of extreme want. Whether one considers prostitution as the exploitation of poor women by men, or as a rational choice by women given their limited work opportunities,<sup>108</sup> prostitution is a clear example of how a job of work comes under the heading of crime, and again, illustrates how types of behaviour can bring difficulties over definition. In Leicestershire women appear in the quarter sessions records in towns where the military were in residence, either as prostitutes or as keepers of bawdy houses.<sup>109</sup> However, prostitution is always linked to the needle trades with contemporaries making a clear connection between the two. In London, poor pay and seasonality associated with the textile trades led some women

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<sup>106</sup>G. Walker, 'Women, Theft and the World of Stolen Goods', in Kermode and Walker (eds.), *Women, Crime and the Courts*, p. 85.

<sup>107</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>108</sup>L. Mahood, *The Magdalenes: Prostitution in the Nineteenth-Century*, (London, 1990), pp. 5-6.

<sup>109</sup>QS3/395/3; QS3/395/5, L.R.O.

to combine this work with prostitution, and poor relief,<sup>110</sup> and there is no reason to suppose women in Leicestershire were an exception. Prostitution is thought to have been largely an urban phenomenon, but that is not to say that it did not exist in rural areas, although perhaps on a less formal basis.<sup>111</sup> Sharpe suggests that prostitutes in rural areas and small towns were likely to be women who operated as part-timers, supplementing their income when necessary.<sup>112</sup> This ability to earn an income from prostitution, or to turn to men during periods of crisis has been offered as a possible reason for the differences in the levels of women's and men's crime in the eighteenth century.<sup>113</sup> During the terrible depression in the hosiery industry in 1845, one commentator considered that at Hinckley, 'hunger and distress were fast destroying all honesty in one sex and all chastity and decency in the other.'<sup>114</sup> Whatever the truth of this statement, throughout the period crises would have produced occasions when women saw prostitution, either of a casual nature or of a more professional kind, as a means of survival. Or more generally, it served as an occupation in which they could acquire income with which to live on a day to day basis. In either case prostitution proved a useful way of making a living, and importantly, these women were part of the community, not separate from it.<sup>115</sup> However, while prostitution

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<sup>110</sup>A.R. Henderson, 'Female Prostitution in London, 1720-1830', (Unpublished University of London PhD Thesis, 1992), p. 41.

<sup>111</sup>C.Z. Weiner, 'Sex Roles and Crime in Late Elizabethan Hertfordshire', *Journal of Social History*, 8 1974-5, p. 55 (endnote 31).

<sup>112</sup>Sharpe, *Crime in Early Modern England*, p. 110.

<sup>113</sup>Beattie, 'The Criminality of Women', p. 107.

<sup>114</sup>F.A. Wells, *The British Hosiery and Knitwear Industry*, p. 107.

<sup>115</sup>Henderson, 'Female Prostitution', p. 83.

may have been an occupation of the younger woman, it was a less likely alternative for those who were older,<sup>116</sup> who would need to obtain income from another source.

What is unmistakable is that poor women's income earning activities in the informal economy were as important as those within the formal economy, if not more so for some. Activities that were, or came to be viewed by legislators and others as criminal, and often treated by historians of crime as such, were not necessarily considered so by the women themselves. Theft of an item of clothing, for example, was a crime, but so was murder. 'Crime' in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, as at any other time, was not a homogenous category of behaviour. Much of the activity discussed here finds resonance in the present day. However, what is important to remember for this period is that there were significantly large numbers of people who were living at, or just above subsistence levels, of which women formed a substantial proportion. It was in this environment that they had to live and maintain themselves. It has been observed, that 'the role of petty crime in the economy of the urban female poor' can tell us about how women extended their household finances,<sup>117</sup> or that, 'stealing or working might well have been equally attractive methods of getting by.'<sup>118</sup> But as long as this is only alluded to, and we go on content to treat these activities as crime per se, rather than as a form of work, we will never be able to appreciate the full extent of how and why women worked on the margins.

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<sup>116</sup>Ibid., p. 46.

<sup>117</sup>Zedner, *Women, Crime and Custody*, p. 36.

<sup>118</sup>Sharpe, *Crime in Early Modern England*, p. 100.

### 8.3 Sexual Relationships and Material Need

At the outset of this chapter we noted that historians have suggested that marriage was a solution to women's economic problems. A simple enough idea in theory, this could be more difficult in practice. Migration patterns sometimes caused a sex imbalance in the population. A disparity between the sexes in Leicestershire and Nottinghamshire appears to have arisen from the middle of the eighteenth century. Towns noticeably contained more females. In Leicester in 1821, in the 20 to 30 year age group a surplus of women over men of nearly 23 percent is recorded.<sup>119</sup> In the county as a whole, females of this age outnumbered males by almost 12 percent. Even though these proportions may well be exaggerated, work opportunities could draw men and women off in different directions. Therefore in spite of a declining age at first marriage for women, not all of them would have been able to find partners. This was also apparent for those who were widowed. Remarriage in the eighteenth century was a phenomenon more often associated with men than women. Evidence suggests that men remarried on average within a year or two years of their wife's death. A remarriage occurred speedily when a man had several small children to care for. Conversely, the delay between a husband's death and a widow remarrying was much longer. Widowers and widows both usually chose unmarried people for their new partners. Importantly, the opportunity for women to secure a new partner declined the longer their first marriage lasted, and

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<sup>119</sup>Census Abstracts 1821.



with the size of their family.<sup>120</sup> In sixteenth century Abingdon, less wealthy widows were likely to remarry as an alternative to poverty. However, when work became available in the late seventeenth century the tendency was for them not to do so.<sup>121</sup> The relationship between poverty and marriage for women is again writ large. However, while the incidence of remarriage by women could be governed by their economic situation it also depended on men wanting to marry them. Marriage usually meant a sharp drop in the standard of living of working people so some men probably felt that it, rather than sex, should be avoided. Thus unfavourable sex ratios, the attitudes of men, age, and number of children, militated against certain groups of women marrying.

Even when women were successful in finding a man they could legally marry they must have realised that there was a strong possibility that he would not be with them for long. If death did not take him, then his majesty's forces or a militia regiment might, or some other woman. Thus the effort that historians and social commentators have assumed women put into getting a husband did not necessarily mean a stable outcome.<sup>122</sup> If we accept that in the eighteenth century increased

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<sup>120</sup>S. Ackerman, 'The Importance of Remarriage in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries', p. 169; C.A. Corsini, 'Why is Remarriage a Male Affair? Some Evidence from Tuscan Villages During the Eighteenth Century', pp. 388-391; H. Pali, 'Illegitimacy and Remarriage in Estonia During the Eighteenth Century', p. 476; all in J. Dupaquier, et. al. (eds.), *Marriage and Remarriage in Populations of the Past*, (London, 1981).

<sup>121</sup>B. Todd, 'The Remarrying Widow: A Stereotype Reconsidered', in M. Prior, (ed.), *Women in English Society 1500-1800*, (London, 1985), p. 78.

<sup>122</sup>One of the main reasons that lay behind the reform of the Poor Law in relation to bastardy was what commentators saw as women's ability to coerce men into marriage, extract money or lie about the paternity of their child through false-swearing and blackmail. U. Henriques, 'Bastardy and the New Poor Law', *Past and Present*, 37 (1967), pp. 103-110.

nuptiality and a declining age at marriage for women occurred partly as a consequence of economic marginality, then this very likely resulted in many more broken marriages. Historians are not unacquainted with the problems of desertion and separation, recognising that such difficulties were very likely to bring women into contact with the poor law.<sup>123</sup> When the country was gearing up for war or during a military campaign the number of women and families deserted in London, for example, was high. Abandonment, moreover, is thought to have frequently transpired when women were in early middle age and their offspring were young.<sup>124</sup> Evidence from Colyton, however, suggests that a separation could occur between a couple at any age and other factors were contributory besides the number of children. Poverty, almost invariably, was the root cause. From an analysis of the partners instigating separation, where they could be identified, it looks as though men generally were the initiators. Only in a minority of instances, 7.8 percent, did women do so.<sup>125</sup> The importance of a woman's economic security therefore and lack of options inclined her to stay with her husband. It is perhaps true to say that historians and demographers have focused too much on the relationships and first marriages of the young, for located in the fluidity of arrangements that existed beyond these initial encounters between the sexes lay some of the more salient experiences between women, men and the economy.

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<sup>123</sup> G.W. Oxley, *Poor Relief In England and Wales 1601-1834*, (London, 1974), p. 57.

<sup>124</sup> D.A. Kent, 'Gone for a Soldier: Family Breakdown and the Demography of Desertion in a London Parish 1750-1791', *Local Population Studies*, 45 (1990), p. 30 and p. 33.

<sup>125</sup> P. Sharpe, 'Marital Separation in the Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries', *Local Population Studies*, 45 (1990), pp. 66-69.

If prostitution offered itself as a survival strategy and was located at the opposite end of the spectrum from formal marriage, there was also a variety of relationships that existed in between. In some cases unions could hardly be distinguished from formal marriages while some encounters were only marginally removed from prostitution. Indeed, the term 'marriage' or the state of being 'married' not only depended on the attitudes and perceptions of the couple involved, but also on those of others in the wider community, who it must be said, could draw totally different conclusions, not least, if it related to a person's settlement. If a woman's husband left her she could be placed in the position of not knowing if he was alive or dead. However, after seven years she could 'remarry'. Concurrent marriages are thought to have been extremely common and it was not unreasonable to assume that past attachments would stay hidden. Charges of bigamy were usually only brought if a former partner wished to cause trouble.<sup>126</sup> In the eighteenth century the dichotomy of unmarried/married is not a clear one even with the passing of the Hardwicke Act in 1753.

As life was so unsettled for those at the sharp end of society and clearly becoming more difficult, it is not unexpected to find a variety of arrangements operating between couples. E.P. Thompson believed that the ritual sale of wives had its origins in the late seventeenth century and early eighteenth century. He considered that this custom, widely practised before 1790, may have peaked in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Such sales occurred regularly in the

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<sup>126</sup>Gillis, *For Better, For Worse*, pp. 210-211.

East Midlands and were particularly popular in proto-industrial communities. These were, Thompson argues, the result of marital breakdown and ‘were a device to enable a public divorce and remarriage by exchange of a wife (not any woman) between two men’. They were not a consequence of wars.<sup>127</sup> A Leicestershire case appears to have inspired the writing of the poem, ‘The Pleasures of Matrimony’ by William Hutton, and furthermore, may have been the basis for Thomas Hardy’s depiction of a wife sale in *The Mayor of Casterbridge*. Hutton’s friend William Martin, a stockinger, apparently purchased himself a wife in Hinckley and departed for Loughborough only to have the woman’s original ‘husband’ change his mind and request her return.<sup>128</sup> The poor law administrators had the ability to coerce couples into marriage, and even it seems, engaged in wife sales, when it suited them. *The Derby Mercury* reported in 1790 that a young woman from Swadlincote, whose husband had deserted her, was sold in the market by a parish officer.<sup>129</sup> However, in other cases the officials were concerned to repel any claims of settlement through marriage that they did not consider legal.<sup>130</sup> For example, the overseers at Ashby de la Zouch, who were not known for their generosity of spirit, saw fit to record in a deposition in 1732 that ‘both Mawbridge and Lauton swear they were married to the women they brought with them.’<sup>131</sup> The relationships that eventually resulted in a wife sale were not homogenous and some more tenuous than others. Sharpe observes that consensual unions, especially in urban areas of Essex, were

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<sup>127</sup>E.P. Thompson, ‘The Sale of Wives’, in *Customs in Common*, p. 409, p. 411, p. 443, p. 446.

<sup>128</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 433–4.

<sup>129</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 347, footnote 1.

<sup>130</sup>Examinations show that women claiming a settlement from their husbands were often questioned about the marriage ceremony.

‘surprisingly common’.<sup>132</sup> Given the preponderance of women in towns this is something we would expect. Weiner has argued that in Elizabethan England women could turn to lovers in times of difficulty and although they acquired monetary benefits from men did not perceive of themselves as prostitutes. She also suggests that this is a reason why more men were involved in crime than women.<sup>133</sup> It is likely that from the later years of the eighteenth century women were drawn in increasing numbers into short-term and thus more unstable relationships.

Settlement examinations and cases recorded in the court order books of the Leicestershire Quarter Sessions in the period from 1745 to 1830 show that desertion of one kind or another was common.<sup>134</sup> However, while poverty was largely responsible for the break-up of ‘marriages’, it also pushed women into new relationships. We find, for example, similar cases of those of Ann Flowers and Elizabeth Burton who both had illegitimate children by men while their husbands were serving abroad in the military.<sup>135</sup> Since the children born were chargeable or likely to become so, these relationships do not suggest a sense of permanency but undoubtedly filled a role for a time.

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<sup>131</sup> DE432/3/1, L.R.O.

<sup>132</sup> Sharpe, *Adapting to Capitalism*, p. 141.

<sup>133</sup> See footnote 118.

<sup>134</sup> QS6/1/5-16, L.R.O.

<sup>135</sup> QS3/182-185, QS3/226, L.R.O.

**TABLE 8.2 - LEICESTERSHIRE BASTARDY CASES, COURT ORDERS,  
1782-1827**

Period	N. of Years	N. of Cases	Mean
1782-1789	8	97	12.1
1790-1795	6	95	15.8
1796-1802	7	151	21.5
1803-1809	7	74	10.5
1810-1815	6	224	37.3
1816-1820	5	210	42.0
1821-1827	7	252	36.0

**Source:** Quarter Sessions, Court Order Books, QS6/1/8-15, L.R.O.

Two cases at either end of our period serve to demonstrate the merging of work, sexual relationships and, in the first example, ‘crime’. In 1734 Mary Benson caused a stir in the community of Nether Broughton on being found in bed with another woman’s husband. Depositions given by those involved in the dispute highlight a number of issues. Documented is the concern of the outraged wife, Ann Brecks, that her ‘husband John Brecks had always proved a loving and faithful husband until she Mary Benson seduced him from her... [and] that she [Mary Benson] is continuously enticing John Brecks to leave his wife notwithstanding that he has a child and an apprentice to take care of as well as she’.<sup>136</sup> As with all the depositional evidence used in this study, we cannot be sure how much of it was influenced by those listening to and recording events. However, it is highly probable that Ann Brecks saw her economic security threatened. In order to cause her rival as much trouble as possible, Ann further pointed out that Mary sold brandy and strong liquors without a license, and in so doing, illustrates one method by which Mary earned her living. The cuckold in the affair also gave evidence that shed light

on his relationship with Mary Benson. John Benson's 'wife' of five years very quickly became Mary Litherland or Caunt who 'he was never directly or indirectly married to...but that she has lived with him as his whore'. He also decided that 'upon her late misbehaviour' he would 'marry an honest woman and resolved never more to have anything to say to the said Mary'.<sup>137</sup> The introduction of officials into the situation caused the change in language. We could perhaps dismiss this as a mildly amusing episode of the sort that occasionally comes to light in records, but this would be unwise. Whether Mary Benson intended to entice John Brecks away from his wife, we shall never know. As Mary's two former surnames were given, apart from Benson, we can assume that she had had at least one other relationship. Moreover, as John Breck's wife had a single child there is a strong likelihood that the individuals involved were in their twenties. We can clearly see how poorer women lived and survived in the eighteenth century. A further example illustrates this point. John Claydon in his examination of 1817 over the settlement of his younger brother, gave an insight into the experiences of his mother. When his brother was born his mother was living with John Booth, his [John's] father. He further related how she 'has now left him and married another man, but he believes that his father...and his mother had never married, that they travelled about the country, ever since he remembers, mending chairs.'<sup>138</sup> Women in the course of their lives had a number of attachments with men that were interspersed with work in the

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<sup>136</sup> QS3/80, L.R.O.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

<sup>138</sup> QS3/413, L.R.O.

informal economy and casual labour. One way we can discern the increasing importance of sexual relationships is through trends in bastardy.

Bastardy has proved to be a topic of particular fascination to historians. They have focused on various aspects of economy and society that they see as influencing women's sexual behaviour.<sup>139</sup> It is not the intention here to grapple with the subject of illegitimacy in depth. However, it is important to note that bastard births resulted from various circumstances, and not all were the consequence of a 'marriage frustrated'. Depositions frequently indicate that a woman had been promised marriage,<sup>140</sup> but it was in the woman's interest to suggest this, and may not have actually been true. Even if the woman thought that she would be married, the man probably had no intention of marrying her, especially if he were already involved in a relationship with someone else. In Table 8.2 we can see that increases in cases of illegitimacy are recorded in the court order books of the Leicestershire Quarter Sessions are reflective of periods of economic hardship, the return of men into society, and quite possibly, shifting attitudes. Changes of fashion in the hosiery

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<sup>139</sup>See for example, E. Shorter, 'Illegitimacy, Sexual Revolution and Social Change in Modern Europe', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 2 (1971), pp. 237-272; L. Tilly, J. Scott and M. Cohen, 'Women's Work and European Fertility Patterns', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 6 (1976), pp. 447-476; C. Fairchild, 'Female Sexual Attitudes and the Rise of Illegitimacy: A Case Study', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 8 (1978); P. Laslett, K. Oosterveen and R. Smith, *Bastardy and Its Comparative History*, (London, 1980); A. Wilson, 'Illegitimacy and its Implications in Mid-Century London: The Evidence of the Foundling Hospital', *Continuity and Change*, 4 (1989), pp. 103-164; N. Rogers, 'Carnal Knowledge: Illegitimacy in Eighteenth Century Westminster', *Journal of Social History*, 23 (1989), pp. 335-375; T. Hitchcock, 'Unlawfully Begotten On Her Body: Illegitimacy and Parish Poor in St Luke's Parish Chelsea', and T. Meldrum, 'London Domestic Servants From Depositional Evidence, 1660-1750: Servant-Employer Sexuality in the Patriarchal Household', both in T. Hitchcock, P. King, and P. Sharpe, (eds.), *Chronicling Poverty: The Voices and Strategies of the English Poor, 1640-1840*, (London 1997).

<sup>140</sup>Quarter Sessions; bastardy examinations Ashby de la Zouch and Leicester DE432/7 and 24D65/L, L.R.O.



industry at the beginning of the nineteenth century led to a concentration of workers in the plain hose branch and the subsequent dropping off of trade saw all three branches of the hosiery industry showing signs of distress by 1810.<sup>141</sup> This may account for the increase in bastardy that is clearly visible in the period following 1809, and may be indicative of marriages that did not take place. Indeed, there were signs emerging of hardship in industrial districts. Richard Fowkes, a farmer living in the parish of Elmesthorpe, wrote in his diary in February 1811 that ‘some people have been robbed near Hinckley lately. The gallows grow for them to season again, Swingham Fair’. Early in April he noted ‘riots by the stockingmakers of Hinckley about the prices. On Saturday night breaking windows, plundering and burning and pulling down houses.’<sup>142</sup> However, it is not unreasonable to assume that the short-term sexual relationships that were and became much more a part of a woman’s strategy for life in the later years of the eighteenth and early nineteenth century are also mirrored in these figures. We know, for example, the women who worked frames in the Leicester hosiery industry during the Napoleonic Wars were ‘turned off’ on the cessation of hostilities and collapse of the trade in 1815. The return of a large number of men into the area must account for some of the increase that we see in the period 1816 to 1820. The distribution of cases for these years shows that the highest number occurred in 1816.<sup>143</sup> This suggests that relationships were quickly formed by women, and it is argued, economic imperatives influenced their decision.

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<sup>141</sup> W. Felkin, *History of the Machine-Wrought Hosiery and Lace Manufactures*, (Newton Abbot, 1867 repr. 1967), p. 435.

<sup>142</sup> Quoted in A. J. Pickering, *Footpath Rambles Around Hinckley*, (Hinckley, 1930), p. 50

Although Lindert and Williamson have been criticised for their approach to measurement of changes in the standard of living of workers in the period from 1781 to 1851, they did suggest that the 'inequality between workers and the very poor may also have widened'.<sup>144</sup> The evidence points to working women as one of those groups at the forefront of a lowering in the standard of living in this period. Contemporary research has shown that couples who cohabit are the least wealthy, and that the breakdown of these unions plunges women in poverty. Women in these relationships, moreover, are less likely to be employed than those who are married.<sup>145</sup> Similarly, for some poorer women in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, economic conditions, unfavourable sex ratios, austere poor relief policies, limited work and earnings put the emphasis less on marriage but rather on the informal economy and sexual relationships that would give them an enclave of security. This was particularly true for the period following the third quarter of the eighteenth century as the value of real wages declined and the pressure from surplus population increased.

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<sup>143</sup>QS6/6/13, L.R.O.

<sup>144</sup>Lindert and Williamson, 'English Workers' Living Standards', p. 25.

<sup>145</sup>S. McCrae, *Cohabiting Mothers: Changing Marriage and Motherhood?*, (London, 1993), pp. 28-29, p. 95.

## CONCLUSIONS:

The aim of this thesis was to explore the effects of economic restructuring on women's working lives in the East Midlands during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. In attempting to trace a more detailed and integrated pattern of regional change, this investigation has contributed alternative perspectives to the history of women. In particular it has shown how regional development could affect women in very different ways, and the importance of not viewing them as a collective group.

The underlying occupational continuities that historians have identified for this and other periods are apparent. For those property owning women who engaged in business, there was a heavy involvement in the retail and service sectors, while money lending and investment remained chief components of their financial activities throughout the period. The examination of inheritance practices amongst people from the lower middling ranks has shown that the constriction in women's property holding coupled with their inability to act in business, which some historians have seen taking place at the beginning of the nineteenth century, needs to be reconsidered, at least for this part of the middle class. Clearly women did not experience gender equality in these respects, but they were not as marginalised as some historians have suggested.

The ideal of the middle class woman as a 'hidden investment', in public exhibiting an economically inactive image, must have been unobtainable for many of those women inhabiting the lower middle ranks of small English provincial towns. The economic and social imperatives faced by women ensured that they would continue to participate in the economy. Women were, for example, entrusted to maintain estates

and care for children, they continued to run businesses and passed them on to the next generation. However, while women can be viewed to some degree as 'carers' and 'custodians' of property, this was only one aspect of their role.

The evidence which has been presented here suggests that women engaged in commercial activities for their own interests as well as their families. As we have seen, Mary Gamble of Loughborough continued in business for over twenty-five years after her husband's death in 1807.<sup>1</sup> Had the very public advertising of her businesses excluded her from the middling urban community? Like many women, Mary's involvement in the family business while her husband was alive enabled her to continue when she became a widow, and it is doubtful that she needed to act very differently, since wives, as historians have informed us, headed the enterprise in their husband's absence. Social inclusion could be as much about obtaining and keeping the material symbols of middle class status, and these could not be acquired without the generation of income and the accumulation of wealth.

The evidence of rentier incomes so frequently found in women's wills was in many cases an expression of old age rather than economic marginalisation. The provision made for younger widows did not necessarily mean that this was adequate or that they would not look to increase their wealth and incomes. Historians have dwelt too often on the information that points to women being excluded from property holding or engaging in trade. This study, on the other hand, has highlighted the

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<sup>1</sup> Will of Richard Gamble 1807/66; Loughborough Census of 1811; Pigot's Leicestershire Directories 1822/3, 1828/9, 1830; Will of Mary Gamble, 1836/68, L.R.O.

importance of giving greater emphasis to those ideological factors that militated against any withdrawal from economic participation. In recent years historians have begun to determine the constitutive elements that contributed to the incomes of the labouring poor.<sup>2</sup> Their attention has now turned to the welfare provision provided within families of the middle classes.<sup>3</sup> The standard of living of urban widows and spinsters requires research, only then might it be possible to determine at what level of wealth and income the image of the less economically active woman might have been a reality.

The difficulties of achieving economic security coupled with the responsibilities of family and kin meant women took the opportunity to spread financial risks by engaging in a variety of money-making activities. The type of activities and the extent to which women participated depended on the nature of regional and local economies. In the context of the economy of the East Midlands, the expansion of the hosiery trade clearly brought benefits to those women who could invest in stocking-frames, the goods of the hosiery trade, and who took the opportunity to assist themselves, and others wanting to make capital investments.

The manner in which women shared in the industrial developments of the region is also important for our understanding of their place in the economy. Historians have frequently highlighted those businesses undertaken in workshops, for example the craft trades, as easier for females to maintain. Women's strong involvement in the food and

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<sup>2</sup> 'Making Shift the Survival Strategies of the Poor in England c. 1600-1800', Conference held at the University of Warwick, 28<sup>th</sup> May 1997.

<sup>3</sup> Alastair Owens, "'The Duty and Paramount Obligation of Every Considerate and Rational Man': Will-Making, Inheritance and Middle Class Welfare Provision in an Industrial Town', Paper prepared for the *Social History Society of the United Kingdom Annual Conference*, University of York, 2-4 January 1999.

drink trades gave them opportunities to engage in other associated trades. The link between victualling and the hosiery industry, for example, in that inns and public houses acted as warehouses for the distribution of materials in rural areas, has been noted. Victualling is also connected with the coaching and carrying trades. These businesses were not undertaken within the domestic environment and yet women participated fully, with some of their business being conducted over a wide area. It is likely, for example, that women were much more involved in the transportation of goods than sources suggest. It is certainly the case that women utilised male workers, not just as craftsmen, but in a variety of ways to conduct and extend their businesses activities. Moreover, the deployment of others to do work should not be seen as evidence of women excluded from the public sphere. Much of the work that women did in running businesses required organisational and managerial skills. This often meant remaining near or in the home environment.

A further factor of importance besides proximity and association were social and business networks. These were highly significant and again illustrated how women's commercial influence could stretch beyond domestic confines. The appearance of these networks does not seem to have coincided with women's retreat from trade and their growing need for the services of financial agents. Social and business networks were interwoven through communities providing relationships that were reciprocal and which encouraged mutual support. Industrial development in the East Midlands clearly influenced the dynamic of networks in towns. The characteristics and functions of social and business networks should be the subject of future research, as these will better inform us how far women engaged in commercial and financial activities, or were reliant on male financial agents and entrepreneurs.

Many of the distinguishing features that characterised the lives of women from the middling ranks were not dissimilar to those of labouring women. If we return briefly back to the subject of continuity, women's work was conducted in very clearly defined sectors. The idea that from the middle of the eighteenth century labouring women working in agriculture gradually reached a position at which they were no longer able to share tasks on an equitable basis with men is questioned by the findings presented here. Evidence from estate records, a much better guide to agricultural work than settlement examinations, has shown that the tasks in which they were engaged changed little over the entire period. Women were confined broadly to the same ancillary tasks associated with the hay and corn harvest and, additionally, for example, weeding, picking potatoes, spreading, twitching and clodding.

The pattern of women's participation in agriculture demonstrates that their involvement was acutely seasonal with maximum earnings made in the summer. The seasonality of agricultural labour meant that the majority of women did not work throughout the year but resorted to the domestic service sector or domestic industry for employment. This is something they had done since the sixteenth century, and the emergence of redundant female labour in open parishes as a consequence of limited and irregular work, compounded by population growth, is important for our understanding of women's employment in the eighteenth century.

Regional specialisation impacted on, and helped exacerbate, these earlier problematic trends. It was a diminution in the amount of employment available in agriculture, rather than a contraction in tasks coupled with less work, that contributed to women's declining participation. The county of Leicestershire, particularly,

experienced the greatest conversion of arable land to pasture following enclosure. Importantly, the emphasis in women's work also shifted towards dairying and stock-rearing. Although this change initially increased the employment of farm servants, the amalgamation of farms progressively led to a shedding of labour.

The relationship between agricultural labour and domestic service, always a close one, became closer still with the greater employment of women in a pastoral economy. The tasks of dairy maids were so closely associated with domestic service work that women regularly interchanged between this occupation and others in service. This further sealed off the opportunities for women to be involved with true agricultural work. Although employment in domestic service may have increased over the course of the eighteenth century, this sector at the outset of this period, and earlier, had always supplied the bulk of the opportunities for women to earn a living. Sharpe's research for Essex also suggests this.<sup>4</sup>

It appears that towards the latter part of the eighteenth century work in domestic service required a greater semblance of respectability from those hoping to find work. The clean, respectable image of the domestic servant contrasts significantly with that of the women, and indeed, men of the industrial districts. The hosiery trade had from the very beginning been associated with the indigent. The decline in the mean age of first marriage of women, which is clearly observable in studies of proto-industry, before the decrease in the age at which men married, is indicative of the absence of work for females from 1700 and before.



This division that opened up between these employments was not, however, solely one of the perception of working women by their 'betters'. The growth in population exacerbated the problems of the poor. Given the limited access to training and skills and the immiseration of much of the industrial workforce, women locked into the hosiery trade could only hope to get the lowliest forms of domestic service. Hence, much of the earlier flexibility in women's work was lost. However, these effects were not felt uniformly across the whole of the East Midlands. Leicestershire particularly, as has been observed, took the full force of these changes. In Nottinghamshire, and a few places in Leicestershire, the lace industry provided employment and earnings higher than those of a male framework knitter.

While women remained working in the hosiery industry and continued to spin worsted their wages were extremely low. Nevertheless, they were vital to the support of single women and families. There was little opportunity here for working class domesticity. This study has shown that the work and wages of females in the East Midlands were clearly affected by custom. Women, it seems, only rarely had the chance to earn wages that were comparable with those of men. Where they did so, it seems that usually no man was available for the task. Moreover, from the third quarter of the nineteenth century there was a diminution in women's real earnings from agricultural and domestic day labour. War years offered periods when women had a greater likelihood of employment. However, the end of war not only meant a return of large numbers of men into the population, but the removal of women from their jobs. This was the case, for example, at the end of the French Wars in 1815 when women were 'turned off' stocking frames. The effects of war on women and the economy during the

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<sup>4</sup> P. Sharpe, *Adapting to Capitalism*, (London, 1996).

eighteenth century have remained unconsidered and this is an area of research that badly needs investigation.<sup>5</sup>

Faced with deteriorating economic conditions women in support of themselves and sometimes other family members exploited 'criminal' opportunities in the informal economy. For many women these activities underpinned a daily existence, and became more important in times of hardship. It has been suggested here that intermittent work, interspersed with 'crime' and diverse sexual relationships formed the basis of the economic and social lives of poorer women. In the latter years of the eighteenth century, evidence for this region and the south of England suggests that economic opportunities were reduced. However, this trend runs counter to the decline in women's criminal activities. As informal unions and liaisons grew, it could be perhaps that male support, rather than crime, offered the most viable means of survival. Overall, the findings presented here have shown that the economic and social trends we see in this period had their origins in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and it is to these origins that research should now turn.

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<sup>5</sup> Compared with the wealth of literature on aspects of women in the first and second world wars, the effects of the war years in the eighteenth century on women remains almost totally unexplored. Thus books such as H. V. Bowen's, *War and British Society, 1688-1815*, (Cambridge, 1998), makes no mention of the effects of war on women.

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Babington Estate Papers	2D31
Dawson Estate Papers	6D52

##### Probate Records: Hinckley and Ashby de la Zouch proved in the Archdeaconry Court at Leicester:

Wills	1700-1749 Ordered by Surname; 1750-1830 PR/T/[Year]
Inventories	PR/T/ [Year]

Loughborough Census 1811 - part of the town recorded in two volumes    DE667/188

##### Quarter Sessions:

Sessions Rolls	QS3/10-436
Court Order Books	QS6/1/5-15

##### Settlement Examinations:

Collections: DE432/3, DE495/17, DE1103/134, DE189, DE373/66, DE3367, DE179, DE175, DE240/12, DE2559/76, DE2707/34/19, DE934/3, DE1067/34, DE394/39, DE400/53.

##### Parish Apprenticeship Records:

Collections: DE64/20, DE1425/97, DE373/63, DE394/44, DE812/23, DE123/76, DE2559/89 & 90, DE175, DE432/11/1, DE179, DE1668/80, DE390/27, DE1103/139 & 140, DE2401/4, DE516, DE491/6, DE400/45, DE495.

##### Other Records Relating to the Poor Law:

Ashby de la Zouch:	
Miscellaneous Papers	DE432/15/7
Bastardy Examinations	DE432/7
Outdoor Relief - April-June 1780	DE432/15/2

Warrants to Convey Paupers and Vagrants	DE432/9
Hinckley: Church Warden's Accounts	1225/66
Overseers of the Poor Rate Book	1243/218
Leicester: Bastardy Examinations	24D65/L

Quaker Records:

Minutes of Hinckley and Sutton Monthly Meetings	12D39/27
An Account of the Sufferings of Friends 1794-1858	12D39/35

*Nottinghamshire Archive Office:*

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Estate Records:

Donston/Neville Estate Papers	DD.N/213
The Portland Estate Papers	DD4P/58

*Northampton County Record Office:*

Settlement Examination:

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The Hastings Collection:

Accounts and Financial Papers	HAF/box/folio
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*The Atkins Archive - (Private Collection)*

An Account of Damages and Losses Sustained by the Following Persons in and about the Town of Hinckley 1795-6  
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