# Labouring Bodies: Gender, Work and Skill in Early Modern England, with Special Reference to Yorkshire, c. 1660-1750

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**Abstract**

In recent years, historians have drawn attention to the many ways in which our knowledge of women's work in the early modern period is still lacking. Questions have been asked about how we analyse sources, where we look for evidence of work and the importance of regional studies. Despite this evolving scholarship, I suggest there are still gaps in the scholarship. Namely, in regard to analysing how women's work was valued in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and examining how labour skills were embodied by women. In particular, I take issue with the fact that scholars have overlooked descriptions of skill in contemporary sources.

Before looking at specific types of labour, chapter one of this thesis explores how work was viewed in this period. Chapters two through five are divided into four categories of labour: tailoring, midwifery, service and housewifery. Using a range of sources from Yorkshire, from testimonials to household accounts and beyond, a wealth of information about *how* women laboured is discussed. Women's bodies are at the core of this research. Carnal sociology has shown how the body is affected by social surroundings, and I seek to demonstrate that this can be applied to gendered labour practices and knowledge transfer in the early modern period. With skill embodiment at the crux, this thesis is an original contribution to the scholarship on gender and work in its use of novel methodologies and interpretations. It also examines many hitherto neglected sources from Yorkshire, showing the need to move beyond London and the South in order to fully understand gender and work.

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**Author's declaration**

*I declare that this thesis is a presentation of original work and I am the sole author. This work has not previously been presented for an award at this, or any other, University. All sources are acknowledged as References.*

## Conventions

Titles and quotations are provided in the original spelling, with the exception that *u*'s and *v*'s, long *s*'s are regularised. All in-text abbreviations have been expanded for ease of clarification (i.e. 'yᵉ' has been expanded to 'the', etc.). Throughout this thesis the year is taken to start on 1 January and end on 31 December.

**Introduction: Skill in Early Modern England**

> Her skill in raising a Turky or a Goose-Pye, is clearly to be valu'd at the rate of two hundred pound; her knowledge in marketing is worth two hundred pounds more, and her skill in preserving at the other hundred pound; there's as good as five hundred pound of the Kings best Coyn in *England*.[1]

This valuation of skills, used by an anonymous author, was a satirical exaggeration about the importance of a wife who was brought up well in housewifery. Perhaps striking to the modern reader who might expect early modern writers to denigrate the wife's work, the author was putting a price on women's skill and knowledge, even if through humour. A woman educated in thrift, cookery and market knowledge provided the most valuable portion in marriage.

Outside of jests, the skills of women were addressed in a number of ways. Ten miles north of York, in the parish of Sheriff Hutton, vicar Samuel Taylor and two of his churchwardens signed a testimonial declaring that the female neighbours of Catharine Burwell attested to her '*good skill* in the office and employment of midwifery' in November 1673. Similarly, five months later in the West Riding parish of East Keswick, six women testified that Mary Morris was of '*commendable industry* and experience about women in the time of childbirth'.[2] Over sixty years later the Yorkshire timber merchant James Fretwell, mourning the death of his mother, described her industry as a housekeeper: 'She was *a prudent manager* of her family affairs, and a true pattern of a good housewife…as great an enemy to idleness…as most I ever see, for *she was rarely to be seen without her hands at work* about her lawful business (except when she was about her more needful and pleasant work of reading or praying)'.[3]

The study of women's work in the early modern period is not new, although questions of women's skill have seldom been addressed. Olwen Hufton shed light on the paradox surrounding the history of women and work in the 1980s—we know that women worked in pre-industrial England, and that their work must have been crucial, yet, historians have devoted little research to 'the nature and importance of their labour'.[4] Nearly forty years later, there is still insufficient attention paid to the activities involved in women's work. As

[1] *Fifteen Real Comforts of Matrimony* (London: Printed for Benjamin Alsop and Thomas Malthus, 1683), 38.

[2] The Borthwick Institute of Historical Research (BIHR), Nom. M. 1673/1; Nom. M. 1674/2. Emphasis added.

[3] C. Jackson and H. J. Morehouse, eds., *Yorkshire Diaries and Autobiographies in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (Edinburgh: Surtees Society, 1877), 216. Emphasis added.

[4] Olwen Hufton, 'Women in History. Early Modern Europe,' *Past & Present* 101 (1983), 131.

recently as May 2019, Jane Whittle could still point out how women's work continues to be undervalued and overlooked.[5]

Historians have recognised the need to approach questions about gender history in new ways. In terms of history of crime and violence, Garthine Walker and Jenny Kermode argue that 'female activity is marginalised if it is measured only against male criminality', and that the 'prevailing methodologies of historians of crime' are restrictive rather than expansive.[6] By using sources that specifically focused on crimes associated with men, or in documents created by men, criminality appears predominately male. One can easily replace 'crime/criminality' with 'work/labour'. By focusing on documents that find women in much smaller proportions than men, such as guild records or probate records (in which men are described by occupation, and women are categorised by marital status), historians have found women's work as less-than—both in quantity and in quality. This takes away from female agency, while at the same time creates a concept of what is 'naturally' female or male that breaks down when scrutinised in depth.[7] Amy Louise Erickson demonstrates how taking a deeper look at records, such as those of London's livery companies and the Christ's Hospital, helps overcome problems of women being identified by their marital status rather than occupational identity.[8] Furthermore, Erickson demonstrated evidence of married women's work varies markedly depending on the type of sources, with women with gainful employment appearing at a higher frequency in criminal courts than in church court records.[9] Her study not only shows the potential that lies within a variety of sources, but also supports the argument that women in all levels of society were engaged in employment.

Overcoming the dichotomisation and favouring of men's work requires more than just using diverse source material. Whittle criticises historians, economists and feminist theorists alike for their failure to establish 'a clear terminology with which to describe [women's] work', taking up the particular issue of inconsistently defining 'domestic'.[10] Scholars discuss women's work inconsistently, favouring 'domestic' industry, family industry, market economy or labour force participation to various degrees, all of which undervalue women's contribution to the pre-industrial economy. Women's work, particularly the realm of housework, has often fallen outside of definitions of economic labour. This attitude stretches

[5] Jane Whittle, 'A Critique of Approaches to "Domestic Work": Women, Work and the Pre-Industrial Economy,' *Past & Present* 243, no. 1 (May, 2019), 37.

[6] Jenny Kermode and Garthine Walker, eds., *Women, Crime and the Courts in Early Modern England* (London: UCL Press, 1994), 4.

[7] Garthine Walker, *Crime, Gender and Social Order in Early Modern England* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 3, 75, 84.

[8] Amy L. Erickson, 'Married Women's Occupations in Eighteenth-Century London,' *Continuity and Change* 23, no. 2 (2008).

[9] Ibid., 270.

[10] Whittle, 'A Critique of Approaches to "Domestic Work",' 42-43.

back as far as Adam Smith, who provided a narrative of those such as servants, and women, partaking in 'non-work or anti-work'.[11] According to Smith, labour should be measured by its exchangeable worth and in its production. By that reasoning:

> The labour of the menial servant does not fix or realize itself in any particular subject or vendible commodity. His services generally perish in the very instant of their performance, and seldom leave any trace or value behind them for which an equal quantity of service could afterwards be procured.[12]

Rather than the manufacturer who added to the value of his materials and who supported his own maintenance, domestic workers' 'maintenance…never is restored'. Such views deny that domestic labour—predominantly taken on by women—was (and is) a resource that is essential for the wellbeing of a household, and by extension, a society.

Inconsistencies in defining work, from Smith onwards, have resulted in limited and scattered studies that overlook the diversity of early modern women's labouring lives. However, in the past decade two studies have helped redefine the ways in which we study the subject. 'The Gender and Work Research Project' at Uppsala University, led by Maria Ågren, seeks to expand our knowledge of working habits in early modern Sweden (the first phase ran from 2010-2014, but the group continues to put out content). One of the major outcomes of this project has been the creation of the 'verb-oriented method', in which scholars include labour-related actions, rather than relying on work-related titles.[13] Incorporating the actions of early modern people, such as 'mowed hay' or 'sold herring', rather than simply counting occupational descriptors ('labourer', 'fisherman') allows historians to establish a more comprehensive study that includes the work of women, children and those who had varying or inconsistent roles. This also helps us to avoid making general assumptions, as the researchers in Uppsala realised that occupational titles often said little about what a person actually did or could simply be social positions.

The 'Women's Work in Rural England, 1500-1700' project, based at the University of Exeter, has made important contributions to our understanding of the 'everyday experience of women's work'.[14] The project gathers a wealth of information about work activities

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[11] Carolyn Steedman, *Labours Lost: Domestic Service and the Making of Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 16.

[12] Adam Smith, *Wealth of Nations: Books I-III*, ed. Andrew Skinner (London: Penguin, 1999), 430.

[13] Rosemarie Fiebranz, Erik Lindberg, Jonas Lindström and Maria Ågren, 'Making Verbs Count: The Research Project "Gender and Work" and its Methodology,' *Scandinavian Economic History Review* 59, no. 3 (2011); Maria Ågren, 'Making Her Turn Around: The Verb-Oriented Method, the Two-Supporter Model, and the Focus on Practice,' *Early Modern Women: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 13, no. 1 (Fall, 2018). The researchers also acknowledge their debt to the work of Sheilagh Ogilvie and her attention to descriptive detail in *A Bitter Living: Women, Markets, and Social Capital in Early Modern Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

[14] Jane Whittle and Mark Hailwood, 'The Project', Women's Work in Rural England, 1500-1700, Leverhulme Funded Project at University of Exeter: Adopting a New Methodological Approach to Early

derived from incidental references in court documents, particularly with the aim of illuminating the nature of unpaid work. Over the three years it was first active (2015-2018), the project repeatedly drew attention to the uncertainties that still remain about the significance of women's work to the pre-industrial economy. The researchers on these two projects have also highlighted the importance of regional studies. Their research shows that grand theorising and generalisations about the state of 'English' or 'Swedish' women's work leave major gaps and do not properly capture women's participation in work activities.

From Erickson to the Uppsala project, there is a strong historiographical basis for studying gender and work. Historians have shown the importance of using a variety of source material and of rethinking how we study work. However, the historiography has never fully achieved a discussion about the 'how' of women's work: that is to say, skill, techniques and knowledge are all significantly absent in studies about women's work. My primary objective is to start to fill that gap and to acknowledge the skilled bodies of women in order to establish a broader understanding of women's labour activity.

This introduction will provide an overview of how skill was discussed in the early modern period in order to situate how the term has historically been used, specifically in relationship to women's labour. Next, I will demonstrate historians' failure to properly acknowledge skill in relation to women's work and show how this has been detrimental to the study. Throughout this thesis, I draw upon a number of methodologies. My use of carnal sociology in particular is novel in terms of gender and work history. Therefore, I will outline the importance of the body in labour studies and then provide a brief discussion of the key points of carnal sociology and show how they can be used in a study such as this. Finally, I will provide a summary of Yorkshire at this time, as I draw upon sources from that region throughout this thesis. The importance of regional studies has been acknowledged by a number of historians, yet the North has hitherto not been included in a comprehensive study of women's work. Taking all of this into account, the research done in this thesis is new and original in terms of its focus, its methodologies and its sources.

## Valuing skill in the early modern period

The descriptions of women's labour given at the start of this introduction came from a number of different perspectives—jests, testimonials, diaries—yet together they paint a picture of the diverse ways women worked in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and the skill, industry and handiwork that could be expected of them. Such accounts support the contemporary opinion that women's productive activities, many of which today we would

Modern Women's Work, last modified January 2019, accessed 7 May 2019, https://earlymodernwomenswork.wordpress.com.

consider ‘domestic work’, were talked about in terms of skill and capacity. First published in 1615, Gervase Markham’s *The English House-Wife* was successful, reaching nine editions by 1683. Markham praised the virtues of a good English housewife, repeatedly touching on her skills. He discussed her ‘most approved skill’ in many ‘generall imploiments’, proclaiming that it was by her hand that her household could learn to ‘sustaine man in that godly and profitable sort’.[15] The ability to pair practical knowledge with competence is a key part of ‘skill’, Markham acknowledged.[16] First, he listed knowledge in cookery. This played into the patriarchal hierarchy of the time rather than subverting it: without having knowledge in cookery, ‘shee cannot serve and keepe [her husband] with that true dutie which is ever expected’.[17] The housewife also had to be able to direct her servants, possess a capacity to clothe her family, maintain the cleanliness and the neatness of her household and its members, and to have an intimate knowledge of activities such as malting, brewing and baking.[18] It is important to note that the housewife in Markham’s descriptions was an ideal: for skill in all areas was something that had to be worked for and was not attained by everyone. Nevertheless, the way in which he described the multitude of roles in which his ideal housewife should be proficient points to the fact that women’s work was something that could be learnt.

Beyond housewifery, contemporary accounts discussed women’s needlework, accounting and service using terms such as value, skill and knowledge.[19] Penmanship was one area in which women could excel, reflecting how handiwork was central in a woman’s skillset. The Quaker pamphleteer John Batchiler praised Susanna Perwich (possibly his sister-in-law) for her penmanship, which in ‘being an accountant, *her skill was more than ordinary women have*’.[20] The ways a woman mastered various tools of the hand were praiseworthy endeavours. Needlework in particular was often noted. The needle was a symbol of feminine knowledge, skill and chastity.[21] Rozsika Parker showed that the needle

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[15] Gervase Markham, *The English House-Wife* (London: Printed for R. Jackson, 1615), 1-2.

[16] “skill, n.6,” OED Online, December 2019 (Oxford University Press) https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/180865?rskey=0DXPt4&result=1 (accessed January 13, 2020).

[17] Markham, *The English House-Wife*, 36.

[18] Ibid., 100, 120.

[19] Joseph Hall, *Contemplations, the Fifth Volume* (London: Printed by E. Griffin, 1620); J. Shirley, *The Accomplished Ladies Rich Closet of Rarities* (London: Printed by W. W., 1687); N. H. *The Ladies Dictionary; Being a General Entertainment For the Fair Sex* (London: Printed for John Dunton, 1694); *The English Midwife Enlarged Containing Directions to Midwives* (London: Printed for Thomas Sawbridge, 1682).

[20] John Batchiler, *The Virgins Pattern, in the Exemplary Life and Lamented Death of Mrs Susanna Perwich* (London: Printed by Simon Dover, 1661), 7. Emphasis added; Isabella Rosner, ‘A Cunning Skill Did Lurk: Susanna Perwich and the Mysteries of Seventeenth-Century Needlework Cabinet,’ *Textile History* 49, no. 2 (2018), 3. Rosner discusses the possibility of a certain cabinet being the work of Perwich. If so, it would demonstrate that she was indeed skilled at the needle.

[21] Rozsika Parker, *The Subversive Stitch: Embroidery and the Making of the Feminine* (London: I. B. Tauris & Company, Limited, 2010), 63-74.

was an instrument of womanhood, and a symbol of how femininity was inculcated at a young age.[22] The seventeenth-century poet Robert Aylett made the biblical Susanna the subject of one of his religious narrative poems. Amongst her many virtues (such as ordering her household, industriousness and chastity), Aylett described levels of needlework. While Susanna's maids used their nimble fingers to work at robes for orphans and the poor, Susanna possessed more skill, which was shown in the caps she constructed for her husband that made 'him be more honour'd in the land'.[23] Through exercise and practice in her craft, Susanna was able to produce works of higher value that elevated her husband when he wore them. Four years later, a Welsh writer, William Vaughan also used Susanna as a model of womanhood in his colonial propagandist piece, demonstrating how women learned skills from their mothers.[24] He professed that Susanna learned her honour from her mother, 'as Mothers are, so will the Daughters be'. Part of the woman's skillset was, once again, industriousness, as Susanna 'daily wrought, Sometimes on Needle' or 'spunne by Distaffe, or the Wheele…Sometimes on Loome'. Through her daily labours '*her skil she would vnfold*'.[25] Both texts valued needlework, but also discussed the diversity of skills that were taught to women within the home, embodied from childhood—their fingers learning stitches, their hands adapting to fabrics, their practices perfected through muscle memory—and influenced by their gendered social surroundings.

Even forms of domestic service were seen to possess various levels of skill, not all of which could be achieved by one woman. This will be discussed in depth in chapters four and five, but some examples can be included here to show the breadth of contemporary rhetoric that assessed the abilities involved in women's labours. The oft-quoted John Shirley provided 'compleat instruction' to various types of maids, who intended to one day be ladies of their own houses. He included a variety of tasks for the chambermaid to accomplish, including keeping the chambers in good order, managing her accounts and having a good regard for the linen, plates and furniture under her command. But she also had to possess '*skill* in Dressing and Attiring her Mistriss, be *skilfull* making Spoon-meates, Pickling things…Washing and Starching Tiffanies, Lawns, black and white Sarsnet, Points, and other curious Lace'. The requirements did not end there, and once again Shirley used the term 'skilfull' in reference to acts such as scouring silver and gold, and taking spots out of 'Linnen, Silks, Stuffs or

[22] Ibid., 82-83.

[23] Robert Aylett, *Susanna: or, the Arraignment of the Two Unjust Elders* (London: Printed for John Teague, 1622), 13.

[24] Ceri Davies, 'Vaughan, Sir William [*pseud*. Orpheus Junior] (c. 1575-1641),' *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, accessed 24 Feb 2020, https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/28151.

[25] William Vaughan, *The Golden Fleece Divided into Three Parts* (London: Printed for Francis Williams, 1626), 71. Emphasis added.

Cloth'.[26] Even tasks that have since been deemed unskilled in modern-day convention, such as scouring and laundry, were described by contemporaries as activities in which one could be adroit. Shirley stated that there were a number of 'secrets' about how to achieve these tasks, reflecting how female knowledge transfer played a large role in the ways in which such skills were learned and shared. The abilities required of women will be discussed throughout 'Labouring Bodies'; however, here we can begin to see the many ways in which they were discussed by contemporaries. Such texts have often been overlooked in comprehensive studies of women's work.

## Skill in historiography

In citing these sources, I am not trying to find proto-feminist empowerment in women's extensive work during the period, as Judith Bennett has accused many scholars of doing.[27] Nor am I engaging in the debate about whether the early modern period contained a golden age of women's work.[28] Instead, I am highlighting the failure of gender and economic historians to acknowledge that women's productive activities were talked about in terms of skill in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. This is exemplified in Bennett's own critique of historians who seek to establish a 'golden age' of women's work and female empowerment:

> In 1350 and again in 1700, in any village or any town, women's work was considered to be less skilled and less valuable than the work of men. 'Skill' is a tricky concept, and I rely here, and throughout, on contemporary standards. I cannot spin, nor can I weave; both strike me as skilled occupations; but to medieval people, the former was unskilled and the latter skilled.[29]

Even though she presents herself as reluctant to point out that women's work was considered unskilled, Bennett dichotomises the work of men (weaving) and women (spinning) as skilled versus unskilled. And in doing so she overlooks the numerous texts throughout the period that discussed women's expertise and labour value, as shown by the examples above.

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[26] Shirley, *The Accomplished Ladies Rich Closet,* 91-92. Emphasis added.

[27] Judith Bennett, *History Matters: Patriarchy and the Challenge of Feminism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), 87.

[28] Some such as Alice Clark, Caroline M. Barron and P. J. P. Goldberg have argued that women had increased economic opportunities in the middle ages, while others such as Bennett and Marjorie Keniston McIntosh argue that women's position as workers remained consistently inferior. Alice Clark, *Working Life of Women in the Seventeenth-Century*, 1st ed., new-impression (London: Frank Cass & Co. Ltrd., 1968), 13; Caroline M. Barron, 'The 'Golden Age' of Women in Medieval London,' *Reading Medieval Studies* 15 (1989): 35-58; P. J. P. Goldberg, *Women, Work, and Life Cycle in a Medieval Economy: Women in York and Yorkshire, c. 1300-1520* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992); Bennett, *History Matters*; Marjorie Keniston McIntosh, *Working Women in English Society 1300-1620* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005). Others cite the period leading up to the Industrial Revolution as the focal point of women's labour opportunities, such as Tine de Moor and Jan Lutten van Zanden, 'Girl power: the European marriage pattern and labour markets in the North Sea region in the late medieval and early modern period,' *Economic History Review* 63, no. 1 (2010), 1-33.

[29] Bennett, *History Matters*, 85-6.

In her pioneering study on women's lives, Alice Clark established three categories of trade that women could participate in (outside of agriculture and textiles): skilled trades, retail trades and provisions trades. Clark defined skilled trades as those which were 'more or less highly organised and specialised by means of Gilds'.[30] While Clark admitted women could sometimes gain access to these, she noted that access was limited, and when women played a large role it was through happenstance rather than an organised effort. Furthermore, from the seventeenth century onwards women were squeezed out of these trades. Skill played an important role in Clark's assertion that 'family industry'—in which all members of the family participated in the production of goods—gave way to a 'capitalist industry'—where production took place outside of the household. As capitalism and industrialisation began to spread, women felt the effect of their limited skillset: 'The want of technical skill and knowledge which so often hampered the position of women in the Skilled Trades, was a smaller handicap in Retail Trades, where manual dexterity and technical knowledge are less important than general intelligence and a lively understanding of human nature'.[31] By discussing the 'skilled' trades, which excluded women, in opposition to trades such as retail, Clark set a precedent of de-skilling labouring women in the early modern period—explicitly differentiating their work as 'unskilled'.[32]

Perhaps Mary Prior did not know when she penned her oft-quoted observation, 'what men did was definite, well-defined, limited…what women did was everything else' that she was establishing a framework to be used for decades to come, as historians subscribed to this gender division, often without a second thought.[33] Even in passages that attempt to describe, in limited detail, the actions of women, historians draw on Prior's interpretation. For instance, Maxine Berg's argument that when patrons favoured employing women over trained artisans because the former were cheap labour, implies that women lacked skill: 'This laborious work [pencilling] was done by women, and so was regarded as an unskilled process which bypassed the employment of the highly paid [men] who engraved and used wooden painting blocks'.[34] She concludes that because women did the work it was unskilled, not that the labour-intensive act of pencilling designs by hand (over and over) required some sort of

[30] Clark, *Working Life of Women*, 150-151.

[31] Ibid., 197.

[32] For a discussion on Alice Clark's assessment of women being edged out of skilled and semi-skilled trades by capitalism see Laura Gowing, 'Alice Clark 100 Reading Group: "Crafts and Trades",' *The Many-Headed Monster* (blog), August 27, 2019, accessed October 30, 2019. https://manyheadedmonster.wordpress.com/2019/08/27/alice-clark-100-reading-group-crafts-and-trades/. Also see the other contributions to the 'Alice Clark 100 Reading Group.'

[33] Mary Prior, 'Women and the Urban Economy: Oxford 1500-1800,' in *Women in English Society 1500-1800*, ed. Mary Prior (London: Methuen & Co., 1985), 95.

[34] Maxine Berg, 'Women's Work, Mechanisation and the Early Phases of Industrialisation in England,' in *The Historical Meanings of Work*, ed. Patrick Joyce (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 83.

manual technique. If, as historians, we consider skill to be acquired through the guild system or define it as highly organised and well paid, we limit where we find labour value. This leads to assumptions about labour that do not pay attention to the skill that was actually required in various work activities.

Recently Jane Humphries and Jacob Weisdorf have examined the wages of women from 1260 to 1850, basing their analysis on a ranking of 'unskilled' and 'skilled' occupations derived straight from the occupational coding scheme HISCO (*Historical International Standard Classification of Occupations*), and its social class scheme HISCLASS. Humphries and Weisdorf's use these schemes to discuss women's work without discussing what 'skilled' and 'unskilled' mean in relation to specific labour activities.[35] Developed in 2005, HISCO provides a systematic classification of occupations that can, in theory, be applied to any period, place and/or language.[36] Through this they have catalogued tens of thousands of occupational titles. The group has also broken occupations down into social class categorisation with HISCLASS, which distinguishes types of labour, based on manual versus non-manual, level of skill and economic hierarchy.[37] The HISCLASS scheme is ambitious, covering 1,600 historical occupations and providing an admirable attempt to trace change over time. But its pursuit of objectivity ignores the fact that the nature of certain occupations has changed over time and that rankings of skill are ahistorical. The group determines skill level based on 'higher level of training and longer training', which even they admit is problematic as they must 'attribute roughly required skill level of the occupations without having information on the actual skills of individuals working in those occupation'.[38] Such a grading automatically excludes a majority of women's work, that was not based on a 'higher level of training', without taking into consideration the skill embodiment required of it or physical requirements of various types of labour.

HISCLASS and the historians who rely on it fail to address the fact that it is built upon the modern, Western tradition of associating skill and knowledge with explicit, academic learning, and excludes occupations in which 'informal, on the job' training requires physical adaption and the honing of manual skills. The next section will address how we can expand our understanding of knowledge transfer and how we should include the physical requirements of work in any discussion of skill. Humphries herself has begun to critique the

[35] Jane Humphries and Jacob Weisdorf, 'The Wages of Women in England, 1260-1850,' *The Journal of Economic History* 75, no. 2 (June, 2015), 409-410.

[36] M. H. D. van Leeuwen, Ineke Maas and Andrew Miles, 'History of Work Information System,' HISCO Database, https://historyofwork.iisg.nl/.

[37] Marco H. D. van Leewuen and Ineke Mass, *HISCLASS: A Historical International Social Class Scheme* (Leuven, Belgium: Leuven University Press, 2011).

[38] Ibid., 49-50.

terms ‘skilled’ and ‘unskilled’ in her most recent work, including a footnote that claims the use of ‘unskilled’ in reference to spinning ‘reflects the condescension towards the attributes of women’s work that has long marked labour market studies’, without wrestling with the fact that she had been a contributor to this problem in earlier works.[39]

Methodologies

HISCO and HISCLASS are excellent examples of how skill has been intellectualised. That is to say, it is often analysed according to mental capacities. However, in this thesis I argue that work practices require the mind and body to function together. Social theory, particularly carnal sociology, shows that we need to appreciate bodily work, as well as how a person’s social body shapes their work and is shaped by their work. Therefore, we must reinsert the body into the history of gender and work.[40]

The traditional vilification of the body in favour of the mind has heavily influenced most fields of historical study.[41] This is particularly true of women’s bodies. Due to the Galenic, one-sex model, for most of Western history, bodies were believed to be shaped by the humours. Women’s bodies were seen as underdeveloped, too wet and too cold to be fully formed. In one sense, the history of the body has not escaped this wet world—the history of women’s bodies has been pigeonholed into a ‘woman-only ghetto culture stained by menstrual blood and the pollutions of parturition’, from which it is still slowly emerging.[42] The historiography has been defined by biological phases, particularly menstruation, childbearing and breast-feeding. *The Routledge History of Women in Early Modern Europe* contains a chapter on women’s bodies which is structured specifically ‘in relation to the stages of their reproductive lives’.[43] Even historians who criticise this narrow view struggle to break free of it. In Patricia Crawford and Laura Gowing’s *Women’s Worlds in Seventeenth-Century England,* the editors critique the history of women’s bodies for being ‘fundamentally ahistorical, an account of childbearing and rearing’, and yet the sources they discuss in relation to the body are focused on just that: parturition, lactation and menstruation are central, while other physical lived experiences are ignored. ‘Health and Beauty’ is the only chapter not explicitly linked to procreation.[44] While valuable to the field, focusing on

[39] Jane Humphries and Benjamin Schneider, ‘Spinning the Industrial Revolution,’ *Economic History Review* 72, no. 1 (2019), 128, fn8.

[40] Throughout this thesis ‘gender’ is used in reference to early modern cultural concepts of gender and therefore refers to a binary of men and women.

[41] Roy Porter, ‘History of the Body,’ in *New Perspectives on Historical Writing*, ed. Peter Burke (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992), 206.

[42] Ibid., 220.

[43] Sarah Toulalan, ‘Bodies, Sex and Sexuality,’ in *The Routledge History of Women in Early Modern Europe,* ed. Amanda L. Capern (London: Routledge, 2019), 29.

[44] Patricia Crawford and Laura Gowing, eds. *Women’s Worlds in Seventeenth-Century England: A Sourcebook* (London: Routledge, 2000), 13-42.

the body in medicinal and reproductive terms continues to limit our knowledge. Women's bodies have not only bled and bore children, they were active participants in other forms of labour, bolstering economies and maintaining homes.

In recent years, discussions of touch have played an important part in re-examining the many roles that a body could fulfil. Gowing has since led the way in breaking from procreation history, producing research on women's touch and power. Through this lens, Gowing looks at the ways in which women's bodies took up social space, crossed political boundaries and established a sense of domestic proximity.[45] Kate Smith also uses touch to explore women's haptic relationships with their surroundings, particularly in the market place.[46] In a similar vein, Serena Dyer shows how historians can and should use the body in combination with other historical fields, such as the history of consumption in which we can study women's physical interactions with everyday objects.[47] Discussing how women used their bodies to assess goods or perform acts of submission frames them within larger social histories. This thesis will build upon the work of Gowing, Smith and Dyer to draw attention to the fact that the body was often central in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century discourses about women's labour.

Archaeologists have recognised diverse ways of examining the historical body at work. For instance, Roberta Gilchrist notes the differences between female and male skeletons from the medieval Yorkshire village, Wharram Percy. Gilchrist's findings reveal that female skeletons had a higher prevalence of 'squatting facets' and impact on their legs and backs, due to the nature of their work involving carrying water or squatting near hearths to cook. On the other hand, men had more vertebral trauma from activities such as shovelling or digging.[48] Simon Mays has discovered that in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, women in Spitalfields, an area of London made up predominantly of weavers and their families, were prone to loss of cortical bone and fractures in the wrists and hands, even at a young age, supporting contemporary ideas that wives and daughters of weavers were subjected to particular injuries due to working with the handloom.[49] The way that work was determined by gender, and the way that the culturally driven categories of work impacted the

[45] Laura Gowing, *Common Bodies: Women, Touch and Power in Seventeenth-Century England* (London: Yale University Press, 2003).

[46] Kate Smith, 'Sensing Design and Workmanship: The Haptic Skills of Shoppers in Eighteenth-Century London,' *Journal of Design History* 25, no. 1 (2012), 1-10.

[47] Serena Dyer, 'Shopping and the Senses: Retail, Browsing and Consumption in 18th-Century England,' *History Compass* 12, no. 9 (2014), 694-703.

[48] Roberta Gilchrist, *Medieval Life: Archaeology and the Life Course* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2012), 60-61.

[49] Simon Mays, 'Age-Dependent Cortical Bone Loss in Women from 18th and early 19th Century London,' *American Journal of Physical Anthropology* 112 (2000), 359-360.

bodies of men and women differently, are important examples of carnal sociology, which will be explained below.

So far, the body has been discussed as a physical actuality, a subject that can be studied for how it existed in the world. On the other hand, we can look at how the body acted as an active tool for learning skill. Archaeology also helps us to understand the body as a site of knowledge and an instrument which enacted learned skills. In reflecting on knowledge transfer in craft apprenticeships, carpenter and archaeologist Harald Bentz Høgseth discusses the physical impact of know-how, both on a craftsman's body and their tools. In reference to carpentry, Høgseth notes how learning a craft requires experience and embodied knowledge, which 'range from the selection of the raw materials to the use of tools' and require physical perception such as 'finger feeling' or visual estimation. Høgseth acknowledges that manual and cognitive skill—or as he refers to them, the 'knowing how' (physical knowledge, movement) and the 'knowing what' (level of reflection and knowledge)—are crucially linked. For Høgseth, 'knowing how' and 'knowing what', when in practice, 'function as integrated parts, closely woven together'.[50]

While Høgseth focuses on the 'knowing how' and the 'knowing what' being transferred through an official guild system, the idea that knowledge is gained through practice and experience takes place in a number of other general environments, including the 'domestic'. Anthropologists have also commented on the centrality of the body, and the body's capacity for 'grounding our work in the "real world" against overly cognitive or ideational perspectives'.[51] Tim Ingold analyses the body's role in 'becoming knowledgeable', although he has often done so through a focus on the feet and walking in the world. For instance, the way in which humans learn about and adapt to their surroundings based on the physical experience of walking through various environments.[52] Not only does the individual body represent the lived experiences of a person, but it also reflects the regulations and controls placed on it by work or society. One example of this latter point is the impact of industrialisation on body time and work discipline.[53] It is here where the history of work needs new methodologies in order to think about knowledge and skill transfer in areas beyond the guild, in a range of social and cultural settings.

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[50] Harald Bentz Høgseth, 'Knowledge Transfer: The Craftsmen's Abstraction,' in Wendrich, *Archaeology and Apprenticeship*, 62-4.

[51] Tom Boellstoff and Johan Lindquist, 'Bodies of Emotion: Rethinking Culture and Emotion through Southeast Asia,' *Ethnos* 69, no. 4 (2004), 440.

[52] Tim Ingold, 'Footprints Through the Weather-World: Walking, Breathing, Knowing,' *Journal of Royal Anthropological Institute* 16 (2010), S121-S139.

[53] Nancy Scheper-Hughes and Margaret M. Lock, 'The Mindful Body: A Prolegomenon to Future Work in Medical Anthropology,' *Medical Anthropology Quarterly* 1, no. 1 (1987), 7-8, 22.

Some historians have recognised that sociology, archaeology and anthropology teach us that the body is a 'crossroads between self and society'.[54] Carnal sociology takes this further, revealing how the body is influenced by its social surroundings, and then, in turn, the body impacts work practices. The work of Marcel Mauss, a founder of carnal sociology, and in particular his discussion of 'techniques of the body', demonstrates how the body should be included in a study of gender and work. Mauss originally outlined the concept in a 1934 conference paper (*Les Techniques du corps*), which was translated into English by Ben Brewster as a part of a collection of Mauss's essays in 1979.[55] As described by Mauss, techniques of the body are the ways in which 'men'—and women—know how to use their bodies, and how such uses are impacted by the social. By Mauss's definition, these techniques are technical, traditional and efficient.[56] They are technical in that they are 'constituted by a specific set of movement or form'.[57] They are efficient due to the fact that all techniques serve a definitive purpose. And, most importantly, they are traditional, for 'there is no technique and no transmission in the absence of tradition'—meaning that techniques are learned through education, training and/or oral transmission, or tradition.[58] The theory of body techniques begins to tie in the historical ideas of habits of industry, which will be discussed more in depth in chapter one.

As described by Mauss's techniques, the body is a tool, agent and object, where tacit knowledge is learned and transmitted. As such, different bodies are (socially) adapted to execute different tasks. This is further supported by the work of Pierre Bourdieu and his concept of 'habitus' and the theory of practice. In Bourdieu's words, the 'habitus' is 'the durably installed generative principle of regulated improvisations', or a 'structured and structuring structure'.[59] That is to say an individual, a group or an institution is *structured* by past and present conditions that are actively working (*structuring*) to shape one's current or future practices, within a systematically ordered *structure* (such as society), rather than through arbitrary happenstance. Through this structuring, the 'habitus' generates practices, which are socially particular—the habitus enables certain bodies to possess power and status, determined by gender, class and/or race, to create social inequality. This is supplemented by

[54] Porter, 'History of the Body,' 207.

[55] Marcel Mauss, *Sociology and Psychology*, trans. Ben Brewster (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979).

[56] Ibid., 104.

[57] Nick Crossley, 'Body Techniques, Agency and Intercorporeality: On Goffman's Relations in Public,' *Sociology* 29, no. 1 (1995), 134.

[58] Mauss, *Sociology and Psychology*, 104.

[59] Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice,* trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 78-79; Michael Grenfell, ed. *Pierre Bourdieu: Key Concepts*, 2nd ed. (Durham: Acumen, 2012), 50.

the theory of practice which 'acknowledges that cultural structures constrain the actions of individuals by shaping their perceptions of their world'.[60]

John Smail demonstrates how the theory of practice can be seen at play in the world of eighteenth-century manufacturers in Halifax, Yorkshire, while Gowing argues that early modern women's habitus was embodied in a way that reflected the contemporary social hierarchy—girls were taught submissiveness, learning passive gestures and demeanours that reflected their social position.[61] As discussed above, Parker demonstrated the way in which embroidery and needlework were techniques that embodied ideals of femininity in girls from such a young age that some mistook the traits as innate.[62] This thesis takes the theories of carnal sociology further, looking at a variety of types of labour to show the diverse ways that women embodied labour skills. Textiles and needlework required a delicate and precise hand that could manage small stitches, and contemporaries warned against the effects of the work on their eyesight and posture.[63] Midwives had to have slender hands that could work both with the mother and baby's bodies, while also being strong enough to attend long births.[64] Women in lower positions, such as cooks and laundry maids, were expected to have sturdier bodies, and as such were formed by a different social habitus than women running large households.[65] A housewife was expected to oversee the household and embody gestures of superiority, as she guided her household.[66] Social ideas of gendered work practices shaped women's bodies, from childhood, and provided them with manual techniques that could be perfected through experience and repetition. Therefore, the body cannot be ignored in a study of gender and work.

In recognising that women's labour skills were something to be acquired, we must also understand that there were many instances in which women did not fully achieve them or were limited in their ability. We can turn to another eighteenth-century manual to better appreciate this concept. In discussing midwifery, John Maubray wrote that 'all Arts and Sciences require Instruction, Application, Pains, and Time, for qualifying any person to become a *Master* in the practice of them…where it is quite wrong for any persons, *who have not a Body and Mind particularly adapted to this Business*, to spend their time in qualifying

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[60] John Smail, *The Origins of Middle-Class Culture: Halifax, Yorskhire, 1660-1780* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1994), 46-47.

[61] Smail, *The Origins of Middle-Class Culture*; Laura Gowing, 'The Manner of Submission: Gender and Demeanour in Seventeenth-Century London,' *Cultural and Social History* 10, no. 1 (May 2015), 26.

[62] Parker, *The Subversive Stitch*, 83.

[63] Bernardino Ramazzini, *A Treatise of the Diseases of Tradesmen* (London: Printed for Andrew Bell et al., 1705), 193-196.

[64] John Maubray, M. D, *The Female Physician, Containing all the Diseases Incident to that Sex* (London: Printed for James Holland, 1724), 173.

[65] Shirley, *The Accomplished Ladies Rich Closet,* 201; N. H., *The Ladies Dictionary*.

[66] Ralph Houlbrooke, *English Family Life, 1576-1716: An Anthology from Diaries.* New York, NY: Basil Blackwell, 1989), 69-70.

themselves…to the Performance of this Office'.[67] While Maubray was specifically addressing midwives, his ideas can be applied to a number of tasks. Work took time and practice; even with this, not everyone was qualified, physically and/or mentally, to perform particular work activities. Not all women would perfect the various roles discussed here, as will be seen with some apprentices in chapter one or Lady Sarah Cowper in chapter five, but all the work nevertheless required physical and mental adaption.

By thinking about skill and knowledge embodiment in this way, my research aligns with certain scholarship on early modern apprenticeship and knowledge transfer. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, women predominantly relied on tacit knowledge, or knowledge that was learned through action and repetition rather than written, formal knowledge. This can be compared to apprenticeship, which involved the transmission of knowledge from a teacher to a pupil, or group of pupils.[68] In the guild structure in particular, apprentices spent years honing a craft, as masters passed down specialised language and traditional methods. As historians of early modern apprenticeship such as Patrick Wallis have acknowledged, craft apprenticeship often required 'a blend of tacit and propositional knowledge', particularly in crafts where 'didactic instruction is insufficient and sometimes ineffective where skilled practitioners find it difficult to articulate how they perform some complex operations'.[69] Willeke Wendrich lists the main purposes of apprenticeship as 'the development of dexterity, skill, endurance, memory, consideration, and properness, while gaining knowledge, inspiration, and/or motivation'.[70] According to Wendrich, dexterity is the 'physical ability to perform a required action' while skill is the ability to perform this action 'in the proper sequence at the proper time, following an internalized set of rules of "how things are done"'. While it is easy to see how the apprenticeship system allowed for its members to acquire dexterity and skill, these could also be acquired outside an apprenticeship setting. Including tacit knowledge in a study of work reinforces the nuanced connection of the manual and the cognitive.

In 'Labouring Bodies', I follow Wendrich's basic definition of skill: 'the right conduct of movements, timing and organisation'. This definition stresses that skill is not only cognitive but also manual and social, and these are all linked. For example, the master tailor had to be able to assess different fabrics, through bodily senses such as touch and sight, but she also required a knowledge of the market value of that fabric, while possessing social skill

[67] Maubray, *The Female Physician*, 171. Emphasis added.

[68] Patrick Wallis, 'Apprenticeship and Training in Premodern England,' *The Journal of Economic History* 68, no. 3 (Sept., 2008), 832.

[69] Ibid., 847.

[70] Willeke Wendrich, *Archaeology and Apprenticeship: Body Knowledge, Identity, and Communities of Practice* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2012), 3.

in her attraction of and interaction with patrons. The midwife had to evaluate a mother and baby through touch, have the dexterity and endurance to work through long labours, learn the correct body position to help a labouring woman, while also possessing intellectual skills needed to correct dire situations. 'Skills', in the context of this thesis, were learnt techniques, attitudes and movements that were embodied and shaped by social contexts.

## Yorkshire and sources

The benefit of regional studies has been accepted by a number of historians. However, many who make the case for local studies, such as Tim Meldrum and Pamela Sharpe, remain focused on London or the South.[71] This thesis moves beyond these regions and draws particular focus to Yorkshire, which contains a wealth of hitherto untapped sources. In the early modern period, Yorkshire was divided into three historical ridings, the North, West and East, with the City of York situated roughly at the centre.

*Figure 1: Map of the Yorkshire Ridings*


*Source: 'Yorkshire Geography,' http://yorkshire.estate/Geography.*

[71] Tim Meldrum, *Domestic Service and Gender, 1660-1750: Life and Work in the London Household* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2014); Pamela Sharpe, *Adapting to Capitalism: Working Women in the English Economy, 1700-1850* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1996).

In the seventeenth century, the population of Yorkshire constituted approximately a tenth of the English population, and York was one of the nation's five most populous cities. However, over this period, populations largely plateaued. York maintained around 12,000 residents until the end of the eighteenth century. Historians have noted how York's trade declined in the late-seventeenth and eighteenth century, as it was overshadowed by other Yorkshire commercial centres such as Leeds and Hull: 'Leeds is nearer the manufacturers and Hull more commodious for the vending of them'.[72] However, the city continued to appeal to country gentry, and, as the antiquary Francis Drake noted, 'the great variety of provisions, with which our markets abound, makes it very easy to furnish out an elegant table at a moderate rate'.[73] Corporations maintained their stronghold throughout the seventeenth century while York came to cater more and more towards the entertainment of these sorts, with dances and horse racing.[74] Although the overall population remained stagnant, like many other eighteenth-century urban centres York experienced a trend of young women migrating to the city. The city's growing number of gentry families provided chances for young women to labour in textiles and domestic service, as will be seen throughout this thesis.[75] Contemporaries also noted that York stood out for its quality in the education of gentry children, particularly girls, which helps to explain the number of women involved in creating household accounts in the eighteenth century.[76]

The West Riding was the most populous and the most prosperous of the three Ridings. In the late seventeenth century, its population equalled that of the East and North combined.[77] Daniel Defoe described the West Riding as 'the largest and most populous'. He wrote that it 'contains the greatest Number of Towns, as well as the most considerable, and likewise the best Manufactures, and consequently the greatest Share of Riches'.[78] As the popularity of wool and worsted goods spread in the eighteenth century, the West Riding established its dominance in England's clothing trade, in which women played a significant

[72] Perry Gauci, *The Politics of Trade: The Overseas Merchant in State and Society, 1660-1720* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 48-50.

[73] Francis Drake, *Eboracum: Or, the History and Antiquities of the City of York* (London: Printed by W. Bowyer, 1736), 240.

[74] S. D. Smith, 'Inexorable Decline or Successful Adaptation? The York Merchant Taylors' Company, 1662-1776,' in *The Merchant Taylors of York: A History of the Craft and Company from the Fourteenth to Twentieth Centuries*, eds. R. B. Dobson and D. M. Smith (York: Borthwick Publications, 2006), 73.

[75] Jane Holmes, 'Domestic Service in Yorkshire, 1650-1780' (D. Phil, University of York, 1989), 42-43.

[76] Drake, *Eboracum*, 240; Women such as Ann Gossip and Henrietta Maria Vanbrugh were both involved with running their households throughout their marriages, as will be discussed below.

[77] May F. Pickles, 'Labour Migration: Yorkshire, c. 1670 to 1743,' *Local Population Studies* (1996), 32.

[78] Daniel Defoe, *A Tour Thro' the Whole Island of Great Britain*, vol. 3 of 3 (London: Printed and Sold by G. Strahan, 1724), 77.

part.[79] In 1700, Yorkshire was producing twenty per cent of England's wool, a figure that rose to sixty per cent by 1800.[80] Towns such as Doncaster manufactured stockings and other knitted items, while some of the larger towns participated in more specialised aspects of the clothing trade. In the words of David Hey, 'Leeds set the pace for Yorkshire's towns', with its blossoming market and manufacturing of cloth, 'expertly finished by dressers, croppers and dyers'.[81] In the eighteenth century Leeds had one of the greatest markets 'in all the North of England', and historians have noted its unique capacity to capitalise on the 'putting-out' system combined with the use of specialised wage labourers.[82] Halifax also underwent a major boom in cloth manufacturing and developed a thriving rural textile industry. The town provides an excellent example of how the expansion of middle-class culture was heavily tied with an economy driven by textiles and manufacturing, as shown by Smail.[83] The West Riding also controlled the charcoal iron industry during this period, led in particular by Sheffield. Largely due to the success of its cutlery trade, Sheffield saw a spike in its population at the start of the eighteenth century—half of all occupations in parish records were concerned with cutlery or other metal trades.[84] The increase led to the Cutlers Company expressing its concern, in 1711, that too many people were entering its trade, but it also created a substantial group of well-off inhabitants.[85]

While the North Riding also manufactured knitted and woollen goods, most of its production was centred on making goods for the home or local village. There was more focus on agriculture and husbandry in the North Riding, whose population was about 4,376 households per 1,000km$^2$, compared to that of the West Riding, which was about 5,374 households per 1,000km$^2$.[86] Defoe claimed that the North Riding had the best oxen and finest horses in the North of England, with the town of New Malton holding 'the best Market in the County for Horses, Cattle, and Provisions; and it is noted for Utensils in Husbandry'.[87] The North Riding did not see the industrial development that the West did. However, its population remained fairly stagnant, suggesting that families were able to maintain work in the agricultural parish or move into the towns to find other forms of employment.[88]

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[79] Matthew Kadane, *The Watchful Clothier: The Life of an Eighteenth-Century Protestant Capitalist* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 91-92.

[80] David Hey, *Yorkshire from AD 1000* (London and New York: Longman, 1986), 230.

[81] Ibid., 139.

[82] Defoe, *A Tour*, 115; Kadane, *The Watchful Clothier*, 20.

[83] Smail, *The Origins of Middle Class Culture*, particularly 42-47.

[84] Hey, *Yorkshire*, 227-228.

[85] Ibid., 228.

[86] In total, the North Riding was 5,500km$^2$ with 24,070 households listed in the 1670 hearth taxes. The West Riding was 7,170km$^2$ and listed 38,531 households in the 1672 hearth taxes. Pickles, 'Labour Migration,' 31.

[87] Defoe, *A Tour*, 139.

[88] Pickles, 'Labour Migration,' 46.

The least populous riding was the East Riding, which was cut through by the Yorkshire Wolds, limiting arable land and stretching the distance between households. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the population in the East Riding declined from an estimated 15,152 families to 12,622, or a 16.7 per cent decrease, as people moved towards industrial centres in the North and West.[89] Nevertheless, there were a number of yeoman farmers, such as Henry Best of Elmswell, who maintained large swaths of land, experimented with innovative farming techniques and prospered through buying and selling livestock.[90] The county town of Beverley became a prosperous commercial centre, with principal trades of 'making Malt, Oatmeal and tann'd Leather'. Defoe recorded that 'the poor People mostly support themselves by working Bone-lace, which of late has met with particular Encouragement'.[91] Ports provided important routes for commerce and trading. Hull was a significant site for exporting wool and cutlery from the West Riding, while importing corn and other goods from the Baltic. Of it, Defoe said, 'I believe more Business is done in Hull, than in any Town in Europe…In a word, all the Trade that Leeds, Wakefield, and Halifax, of which I have spoke so particularly, is negotiated here'.[92] He went on to claim that no other merchants any other British port towns were of 'greater Credit, or a fairer Character, than the Merchants of Hull'.[93]

Given that most of the population resided in the West Riding, it is no surprise that many of the sources in this thesis originated there, although not all of them. Parish records from across the Ridings, such as register of burials, baptism register, registers of marriages and overseers' accounts, have been used in order to determine quantitative information such as women's ages, the use of occupational descriptions and marital status. Cause papers from the diocesan courts of the Archbishopric of York have been consulted to establish not only statistics, but also to gather incidental information, such as how women described labour activities or called themselves servants or midwives. Similar attention has been paid to assize court depositions, which are particularly numerous in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and provide glimpses into living and working conditions of women's lives.[94] Account books from a number of Yorkshire households have been consulted, as well as some

[89] Ibid., 45.

[90] Holmes, 'Domestic Service in Yorkshire,' 39; Donald Woodward, *The Farming and Memorandum Books of Henry Best of Elmswell, 1642* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984).

[91] Defoe, *A Tour*, 171.

[92] Ibid., 179.

[93] Ibid., 180.

[94] The National Archives (TNA), Assizes: Northern and North-Eastern Circuits: Criminal Depositions and Case Papers, 1613-1972, ASSI 45/5/5 – 45/23/4.

family correspondences and diaries.[95] Chapter two relies heavily on sources from the York Company of Merchant Taylors, particularly apprenticeship registers and the enabled masters list. Chapter three focuses on midwifery nominations, ranging from 1662 to 1736, and spanning all three ridings. In chapter four I include a range of printed material from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, predominantly domestic manuals and conduct literature. Lastly, chapter five uses household accounts, domestic manuals and a case study of the manuscript diaries of Lady Sarah Cowper from Hertfordshire.

## Chapter outlines

In re-evaluating skill, I am calling on historians to study women's productive activities as valued labour, which has implications for how we study work in the past as well as how we analyse gender in the modern workforce. The first chapter lays the groundwork by developing general propositions about labour through understanding seventeenth- and eighteenth-century thoughts about women's work and their industrious capacities. By re-evaluating what work, labour and oeconomy meant for early modern women, a study in which it is accepted that 'work' has a wider definition can be undertaken. This makes particular use of carnal sociology in order to examine *how* women were embodying skills, further redefining the framework of labour, and discussing its value and diversity.

Having established contemporary commentary on labour and the effects of these views, the following four chapters examine specific types of work. While occupational labels were not definite, there were certain areas and taskscapes in which women had a large impact. Chapter two looks at textile work, with a particular focus on York's Company of Merchant Taylors. Despite textile work (particularly from the eighteenth century) being one of the most common types of female labour cited by historians in gender economic studies, York and its Merchant Taylor's Company have been neglected. Exploring contemporary texts about tailoring in tandem with the Company's records helps demonstrate what was involved in the work of a tailor or mantua-maker. Using family reconstruction and parish registers, personal connections can be tracked through the guild records that suggest there were diverse social and manual skills required to be a successful master tailor. I start with this trade in order to look at how women could sometimes take advantage of 'feminine' manual tasks and muscle memory (such as embroidery) in order to gain status through a guild. Having started with a structured, guild-related trade, I then break away from the

[95] See chapter four for a detailed list of the households used in this thesis, including the Gossip family, the Battle-Wrightson family, the Horton family and Vanbrugh family. The diary of Adam Eyre and the autobiography of William Stout have also been referenced.

traditional/accepted route of formal apprenticeship, to show how women were involved in the early modern oeconomy in less formal ways.

Chapter three, on midwifery, follows neatly from tailoring, as midwives also required some form of institutional recognition. However, it stands apart, as midwifery was not tied to a guild structure. It was a recognised occupation that was almost exclusively made up of women at the start of the period, however it did not employ many people and as such has seldom been used by historians in the discussion of women's work. Midwifery was a valued labour that relied on skill, as seen from the hundreds of testimonials that provide the bulk of sources for this chapter. It was a physical occupation, both in the physical exertion and the physical knowledge required of midwives. Like tailoring, midwifery was also undergoing changes relating to gender at this time. However, where tailoring saw an increase in women taking part in the occupation, male midwives or surgeons were slowly overtaking their female counterparts. This change allows for an interesting discussion of the value of social versus intellectual skills in the birthing chamber and how both of these were gendered in the period.

The final two chapters address the role of women in the household. Chapter four explores the hands that helped run the household. Servants have been discussed in social and cultural contexts (as well as in gender history), yet their role in the maintenance of the household is still largely overlooked. Even more so, servants are regarded as low skilled: even girls of a middling sort who were employed by close relations are seen as simply completing a step in the life-cycle employment. I argue that understanding the complexities of servants' work alongside the social role they played portrays their labour in a different light. This requires thinking of their tasks as physical labours that had to be learned, and which could be done poorly—either purposefully or unintentionally. This chapter primarily draws on contemporary literature (servant manuals, etc.), as well as household accounts, letters and case records from Yorkshire. This type of labour is connected to tailoring and midwifery in that it required skills that had to be acquired, even if for servants this was done outside of an official system and was almost completely unregulated. Reinterpreting *low* skill as *informal* skill expands the narrative surrounding not only women's work, but also labour value in general.

Finally, chapter five turns its attention to the women who ran households: housewives. Unlike the previous chapters, this chapter largely focuses on 'management' or tactical skill, rather than tacit/physical skills. The skills of the housewife were intellectual and social: the larger the household a woman governed, the less physical her role was. The diaries of Lady Sarah Cowper (the housewife of a disordered home) demonstrate that housewifery

was indeed a skill that had to be mastered, as not all women were inherently born with the ability to complete these 'womanly' household tasks. Indeed, when a woman was not proficient in the household it had negative effects on the oeconomy. Therefore, this chapter, like the others, argues that skill acquisition was never inherent. The accounts and letters from Lady Henrietta Maria Vanbrugh of Heslington, as well as court records from the York diocese, further reveal the nature of the housewife's work.

Due to scope and time this thesis cannot address all varieties of women's labour, so certain activities have been left out, such as nursing, caring, victualling and instances when widows took over 'masculine' occupations from their husbands.[96] Some of these have been discussed at length in other studies, although never through an embodied lens, and therefore, more research can still be done in order to establish a more complete understanding of women's work.[97] The types of work included in 'Labouring Bodies' have been selected because they demonstrate a diversity of work that has been found lacking in a number of studies thus far. In all of these chapters, the body and skill are central to understanding women's work.

[96] For example, women, often widows, can be found as horn makers, butchers, blacksmiths and other 'male' trades in the City Apprenticeship records; York City Archives (YCA), Y/COU/3/4/3.

[97] Erickson, 'Married Women's Occupations'; Jane Whittle, 'Enterprising Widows and Active Wives: Women's Unpaid Work in the Household Economy of Early Modern England,' *The History of the Family* 19, no. 3 (2014); Amy Froide, *Never Married: Singlewomen in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

## Chapter 1. The effects of labour in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century England

By combing through the Yorkshire Assize court records, I found nearly 170 women named in depositions and examinations, both as witnesses and defendants, between 1658 and 1748.[1] From Mary Mease, a servant girl who went out before sunset on 13 December 1670 in order to fodder her mistress's cattle to the widow Elizabeth Slack, who went out spinning until an hour before sunset in November 1681, these records tell stories of women's labour that has largely been overlooked.[2] Take for instance Mary Jenkinson of Hull who would be known only as the wife of Matthew if one relied solely on biographic descriptors.[3] Her 1665 deposition gave a glimpse into the many roles she took on as the wife of an innkeeper, from going about in the garden to keeping account of the household's coal. In fact, she was able to tell approximately how much coal had been taken from their stock since she last took count. Even in a short deposition about theft, such as Mary's, women could provide insight into their working lives that easily goes unnoticed by a historian merely looking at descriptors or labour titles. In a different case sixty years later, Frances Watson was simply described as 'the wife of William Watson'.[4] However, in her deposition against Elizabeth Cunny, who was accused of infanticide, Frances described how she was frequently about in the house of Anne Stoney, who herself was pregnant, 'near her Time & weak'. Since Anne was physically unable to do a number of tasks in her own household, Frances stepped in to help about the house, and detailed duties such as milking, making beds and doing field work. Frances was doing all of these jobs despite the fact that Anne had a maid and had Elizabeth in her house as a temporary hired labourer.

The depositions were formulaic to some degree. The preamble to each case recorded biographical information about the witness or examinant. When it was a woman in question this information included her name, place of residence, her marital status—spinster, single woman, wife of someone or widow—or her father's name, the date the statement was recorded and the approximate date of the crime. When a man's name was given it was almost always followed by his occupation, however only sixteen women were described by an occupational descriptor—eleven as 'servant' and five as 'midwife'. Then the witness's statement was recorded, which the clerk turned into a third person account. Charmian Mansell draws attention to the way in which 'depositions were…circumscribed by the questions asked, and filtered and shaped by the court scribe who transcribed and transformed

[1] The National Archives (TNA), ASSI 45/5/5-ASSI 45/23/4.
[2] TNA, ASSI 45/9/3/38; ASSI 45/13/1/20.
[3] TNA, ASSI 45/7/2/34.
[4] TNA, ASSI 45/18/2/20.

them into a third-person narrative'.[5] This is in addition to the recognition by historians, from Natalie Zemon Davis onwards, that depositions are not unmediated or unbiased and that we must be aware of the fictive nature of legal depositions.[6]

Nevertheless, records from various courts provide information about labour tasks in the past that are not replicated anywhere else. Whether they were attesting to a woman's infanticide, or they had been going about the market and been pickpocketed, or they were working in their master's shop and witnessed theft, the depositions reveal a variety of female labour that is not included by historians who rely on modern-day definitions of work and economy.[7] As discussed in the introduction, the 'verb-oriented method' developed by the 'Gender and Work Project' at Uppsala has been influential in expanding the ways in which historians think about methods of data collection from these sources.[8] Following their lead, in the Yorkshire Assize courts we can find that more than the eleven who were given the occupational description of 'servant' were participating in service work—at least 31 women incidentally described their work as *service* with more discussing roles that could follow under the broad category of domestic labour.[9] These projects have shown how there are a number of women whose labours are yet to be noted by historians.

Complementing such methods, this chapter moves beyond thinking about the ways in which early modern people described their labour activities to examine the ways in which early modern society thought about work, labour and vocation. After reassessing definitions of 'economy', this chapter will discuss the moral imperatives that drove work in the early modern period. This includes anxieties about idleness, incentives for poor relief and contemporary opinions about habits of industry, which prefigure modern ideas of carnal sociology. The next section builds off of ideas of instilling habits of industry in the poor and turns to look at pauper apprenticeships. Using indenture dissolutions, I argue that even poor girls had labour habits instilled in them, which were often of a physical nature. Dissecting

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[5] Charmian Mansell, 'The Variety of Women's Experiences as Servants in England (1548-1649): Evidence from Church Court Depositions,' *Continuity and Change* 33 (2018), 318.

[6] Natalie Zemon Davis, *Fiction in the Archives: Pardon Tales and their Tellers in Sixteenth-Century France* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1987); Malcolm Gaskill, 'Report Murder: Fiction in the Archives in Early Modern England,' *Social History* 23, no. 1 (1998), 1-30.

[7] TNA, ASSI 45/5/6/22; ASSI 45/16/1/48; ASSI 45/16/5/96.

[8] Rosemarie Fiebranz, Erik Lindberg, Jonas Lindström and Maria Ågren, 'Making Verbs Count: The Research Project "Gender and Work" and its Methodology,' *Scandinavian Economic History Review* 59, no. 3 (2011); Maria Ågren, 'Making Her Turn Around: The Verb-Oriented Method, the Two-Supporter Model, and the Focus on Practice,' *Early Modern Women: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 13, no. 1 (Fall, 2018).

[9] TNA, ASSI 45/5/6/22; ASSI 45/5/7/100; ASSI 45/6/2/54; ASSI 45/10/2/114; ASSI 45/10/3/34; ASSI 45/13/1/15; ASSI 45/13/2/17; ASSI 45/13/2/18; ASSI 45/13/2/39; ASSI 45/14/1/34; ASSI 45/14/1/145; ASSI 45/14/2/151; ASSI 45/15/1/7a; ASSI 45/15/3/28; ASSI 45/15/3/62; ASSI 45/15/4/31a; ASSI 45/15/4/106; ASSI 45/15/4/142; ASSI 45/16/1/18; ASSI 45/16/2/59; 16/2/61; ASSI 45/16/3/1c; ASSI 45/16/5/27; ASSI 45/16/5/96; ASSI 45/17/1/47; ASSI 45/18/2/10; ASSI 45/18/2/44; ASSI 45/18/3/24b; ASSI 45/19/4/13; ASSI 45/19/1/31; ASSI 45/23/4/13a.

ideas about drudgery shows that there were thoughts about good physical labour and bad physical labour. Next, I will show how modern-day concepts of 'workplace' do not align with early modern labour locations, briefly discussing the range of spaces occupied by women as well as the theory of taskscapes. Lastly, I present other issues of occupational descriptors and demonstrate how this thesis builds on current historiography to further break down notions of 'work'.

The word 'economy' has eleven entries in *The Oxford English* but today when we think about *the* economy we tend to think solely about the first entry: 'The organization or condition of a community or nation with respect to economic factors, esp. the production and consumption of goods and services and the supply of money (now frequently with *the*); (also) a particular economic system'.[10] It is understood in relation to Gross Domestic Product (GDP), global markets and the value of a country's currency, terms which often leave out women's work, unpaid labour and subsistence-oriented production.[11] However, there are two bygone definitions which bring to mind concepts of household organisation or management of bodies, neither of which are much on our minds when we hear 'economy':

> The manner in which a household, or a person's private expenditure, is organized or managed. Now *rare*.
>
> The proper management of the body; (also) the rules which control a person's mode of living; regimen, diet. Obsolete. Rare.[12]

This shift in our lexicon has created difficulties for understanding the history of early modern women's work.

We are still inclined, as Kate Aughterson argues, to 'see work as a paid activity which takes place outside the home and which defines an individual's identity', a definition which fits nicely into ideas of supply of money and the 'economic system'.[13] There are three residual issues that derive from this anachronistic interpretation: in order to be considered 'working'—as part of *the* economy—one must be *paid* for an occupation, which generally takes place *in a regular location outside of the home* and through which one can gain an *occupational label*. At certain times women in early modern England could tick one of these boxes, but almost never all three. As such, women's labour is rarely considered as 'work' when viewed through this tripartite lens. In order to better write the history of women in the

[10] "economy, n.", OED Online. March 2019. Oxford University Press. http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/59393?redirectedFrom=economy (accessed April 12, 2019).

[11] Jane Whittle, 'A Critique of Approaches to "Domestic Work": Women, Work and the Pre-Industrial Economy', *Past & Present* 243, no. 1 (May 2019), 36.

[12] "economy, n.", OED Online. March 2019. Oxford University Press. http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/59393?redirectedFrom=economy (accessed April 12, 2019). Original emphasis.

[13] Kate Aughterson, ed., *Renaissance Women: A Sourcebook* (London: Routledge, 1995), 189.

early modern period, we must shake off these modern-day preconceptions, or at least remould them, so as to understand the significance of women's work.

The second and third definitions of economy presented above provide an excellent starting point for re-evaluating the subject. Keith Wrightson points out that in the early modern era 'the notion of *an* economy or *the* economy in the modern sense can scarcely be said to have existed in England'.[14] In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the term 'oeconomy' was almost exclusively used, rather than 'economy'. Although sharing a common goal of proper management, when used with the prefix 'o-' as per the classical Greek spelling, the term is expanded to refer to household management. Its focus was on the house 'as both an economic unit and human society', elevating the role of the home and its effects on the wider social or regional world.[15] The ways in which the marital 'oeconomy' and the household component of labour have historically been obscured due to the shift of focus on the national economics has begun to be acknowledged by historians such as Michael Roberts, however the oeconomy has not gained the focus it deserves in early modern historiography.[16]

Oeconomy therefore could refer to housewifery or work *in* the household. When modern feminist theorists attack the idea of housewifery, or housework, as 'the most pervasive manipulation, and the subtlest violence that capitalism has ever perpetrated against any section of the working class', after the manner of Silvia Federici, they do so from a position of capitalist critique.[17] While Federici recognises that capitalism seeks to convince women of the 'unavoidable' nature of housework, she fails to take a deeper look into the household prior to capitalism in such a manner as to understand our female predecessors' position before this takeover. In the 1970s, the global feminist movement The Wages for Housework Campaign sought to 'disentangle women's identity from this unwaged, unvalued caring work'. Yet this begs the question: was this identity so unvalued, or undervalued, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, prior to industrialisation and capitalism?[18] The Campaign had many focuses: one was to acknowledge women's labour, notably reproductive labour, as the foundation of industrial work; another was to view women as producers and

[14] Keith Wrightson, *Earthly Necessities: Economic Lives in Early Modern Britain, 1470-1750* (London: Penguin, 2002), 30.

[15] Karen Harvey, 'Oeconomy and the Eighteenth-Century House,' *The Journal of Architecture, Design and Domestic Space* 11, no. 3 (2014), 380.

[16] Michael Roberts, 'Recovering a Lost Inheritance: The Marital Economy and its Absence from the Prehistory of Economics in Britain,' in *The Marital Economy in Scandinavia and Britain, 1400-1900, The Marital Economy in Scandinavia and Britain, 1400-1900* eds. Maria Ågren and Amy Louise Erickson (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), 239-256.

[17] Silvia Federici, *Revolution at Point Zero: Housework, Reproduction, and Feminist Struggle* (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2012), 16.

[18] Selma James, 'Is Transformation Possible? They say we can't. We say we must,' *Off Our Backs* 38, no. 1 (2008), 42.

maintainers of the workforce; furthermore they wished to recognise women's work as wage labour. The work of the Campaign is essential and important, however it is lacking in its acknowledgment of the history of women's work. Contrasting this to women's labour of the early modern period, historians can ask how women's work differed from today, notably in the way in which it was valued as an essential part of the overall oeconomy. The way in which housework is undervalued in the economy and the GDP is not comparable to how housework fit into early modern concepts of the *oeconomy*.

But oeconomy could also refer to work that contributed to the household as *a social structure*, so when we refer to household work it is not limited to the physical location of the household. A consequence of using oeconomy as the preferred homonym is that the household occupies a more powerful position in the early modern period than it does for economies in the twenty-first century. Studying women's work in the early modern period with expanded definitions of oeconomy can show that household labour in the past, including that which was an extension of the household such as midwifery, laundry, cooking and service, were in some means closer to the ideals of the Wages for Housework Campaign. Women's labour, even if not remunerated well nor treated equal to 'men's' work, was considered necessary for the greater good rather than unavoidable and undervalued as described by Federici or Selma James. Many modern-day concerns about gender and economics—allocative and valuative discrimination, as well as 'within-job wage discrimination'—are largely centred around wages (gender wage gap) and biases towards different human capital.[19] Similar concepts cannot be used to evaluate the gendered nature of work in the early modern period, especially as we have seen how definitions of economy and what contributes to *the* economy have changed over time. Having acknowledge the need to expand our definitions of work and oeconomy, we can now look at early modern interpretations of labour.

## Moral imperatives

Notions of vocation or calling, ordained by God, were widespread in the early modern period, seen in the doctrines of Luther and Calvin, as well as being a key element to the Puritan movement. From the early days of Protestantism it was concluded that every man and woman was able to fulfil some form of vocation, as Luther stated: 'The works of monks and priests, be they never as holy and arduous, differ no whit in the sight of God from the works

[19] Trond Petersen and Laurie A. Morgan, 'Separate and Unequal: Occupation-Establishment Sex Segregation and the Gender Wage Gap,' *American Journal of Sociology* 101, no. 2 (Sept., 1995): 330, 338; Doris Weichselbaumer and Rudolf Winter-Ebmer. 'A Meta-Analysis of the International Gender Wage Gap,' *Journal of Economic Surveys* 19, no. 3 (2005), 508.

of the rustic toiling in the field or *the woman going about her household tasks'*.[20] Secular callings as well as pious ones played an important role in maintaining society. Throughout the seventeenth century, calling remained a central tenant of the teachings of Reformation Protestants, such as the theologian William Perkins. According to Perkins, 'the General calling is the calling of Christianitie, which is common to all that live in the Church of God. The Particular, is that special calling which belongs to some particular man'.[21] While all Christians had a common 'general' calling to live a life devoted to God, each person also had an individual 'particular' calling which they were meant to undertake. The particular calling ought to contribute to the general, in that an individual's vocation should allow him or her to live a devout life, as it was 'ordained and imposed on Man by God for the common good'.[22] Particular callings, or the abilities that allowed one to partake in certain vocations, were given by God. Perkins contended that every godly calling was worth doing, for 'every man must do the duties of his calling with diligence and therefore Saloman saith, whatsoever is in thy hand to doe, doe with all thy power'.[23] And by diligently going forth in their calling, each person contributed to society, just as each body part performs not for itself, 'but for the good of the whole body'.[24] In coming to terms with one's vocation, the individual attained certain sets of skills that benefitted the 'whole body'. A vocation necessitated the skills that were particular to the person, or gender, set out for that particular vocation. Whereas industrial capitalism has fostered ideas of labour-time commodity, in which time is something of value to be spent and from which one earns an income, early modern work had a wider definition, framed not only by oeconomic potential, but also by religious and social duty.[25] Men and women contributed to the familial, parochial or national wealth through labour. For as Perkins concluded, 'every person of every degree, state, sexe, or condition without exception, must have some personal and particular calling to walke in' whether this calling be 'publicke, or private…in the Church, or common wealth, or familie'.[26]

The belief that one had to fulfil their particular calling in order to lead a devout life continued to be supported by Restoration clergymen such as Richard Allestree. 'For as the spirituality of their essence renders them more agile and active', Allestree stated, 'so that

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[20] Quoted in Michael Roberts, '"Words they are Women, and Deeds they are Men": Images of Work and Gender in Early Modern England,' in *Women and Work in Pre-Industrial England*, ed. Lindsey Charles and Lorna Duffin (Beckenham, Kent: Croom Helm, 1985), 131. Emphasis added.

[21] William Perkins, *A Treatise of the Vocations, or, Callings of Men* (London: Printed by John Legat, 1603), 13.

[22] Ibid., 2.

[23] Ibid., 11-12.

[24] Ibid., 6.

[25] E. P. Thompson, 'Time, Work-Discipline and Industrial Capitalism,' *Past & Present* 38 (Dec., 1967), 61.

[26] Perkins, *A Treatise of the Vocations*, 6, 25.

activity is perpetually exercised in employing the divine abilities they have received, to the glory of God the donor'.[27] While there were diverse callings, most were still part of a devout life if they were correctly fulfilled. In his text *The Gentleman's Calling*, Allestree detailed that, 'mens Callings and employments become so various, not only by the free choices of several men, but even by the direction and assignation of God'.[28] In his follow-up work, *The Ladies Calling*, Allestree outlined the many callings that were 'universally necessary to all Women in all Ages and Circumstances of their lives'.[29] Most of the virtues he detailed as her callings had to do with temperament or behaviour, such as modesty and meekness. Nonetheless, they all aided her in supporting her household, for it was traits such as compassion and charity that allowed her to be industrious and diligent in acquiring wealth.[30] So while the callings outlined for women both in scripture and Reformation works may have been textually limited to households or aiding husbands and fathers, their vocations were nonetheless acknowledged as proper occupations, expanding the interpretations of work. Religious emphasis on the household affirmed its importance in society, and as women played a large role in determining the health and success of the household, their labours were valued for their oeconomic worth.

The biblical story of sisters Mary and Martha framed many didactic works that contemplated a woman's general and particular callings. Luke 10:38-42 tells the story of the sisters receiving Jesus into their home, by way of invitation from Martha. However, once the Lord is within their home, the two represent vastly different archetypes of feminine behaviour. When the Lord begins his teachings, Martha 'cumbered about much serving', while Mary sat at His feet and listened to His every word. When Martha protests that her sister has left her to attend to their home on her own, Jesus admonishes her, saying 'thou art careful and troubled about many things: But one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her'. Biblical scholars continue to evaluate what this passage conveys in terms of the need for active housework versus a life of contemplation.[31] It is not only modern scholars who have tackled this issue: early-modern analysis of the passage provided a dialogue about women's precarious position between contemplation and household duties. From the time of Augustine, common opinion was that the actions of Martha were by no means wrong, they were simply not as good as those of

[27] Richard Allestree, *The Gentleman's Calling* (London: Printed by R. Norton, 1673), 3.
[28] Ibid., 8.
[29] Richard Allestree, *The Ladies Calling: Written in Two Parts* (Oxford: 1673), 4. As will be noted in chapter three, midwifery was also listed as a calling in sources.
[30] Ibid., 48.
[31] Giles Constable, *Three Studies in Medieval Religious and Social Thought: The Interpretation of Mary and Martha, the Ideal of the Imitation of Christ, The orders of Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

Mary, and that Mary devalued the hard work of her sister by setting a more righteous example. In other words, hands could stop moving when they were tied up in praying. James Fretwell, cited in the introduction, praised his mother, who was 'rarely to be seen without her hands at work…except when she was about *her more needful business and pleasant work of reading or praying.*'[32] Martha could be praised for staving off idleness and busying herself around the house, but there was a time and a place in which she should put her hands to housework or prayer.

The Renaissance poet Martha Moulsworth wrote about the position of Martha in the early seventeenth century. Moulsworth penned autobiographical poems that reflected on her namesake, confronting the contradictory call for women to be able to maintain both inward and outward management, or in other words religious 'housekeeping' and literal housekeeping. Mary Jane Humphrey notes Moulsworth's ability to 're-conceptualise the role of hostess as one who puts her inward house in order and makes it ready to receive God', citing the line in Moulsworth's poem in which she supplicates God to give her grace, 'my Inward house to dight (equip/prepare)'.[33] Moulsworth provided an example of how avoiding idleness and working on one's household was in itself a calling leading to the path of righteousness. Her reflections depicted a woman who took on the best traits of both sisters. Women continued to take inspiration from the sisters' story through the turn of the eighteenth century. In Susannah Hopton's *A Collection of Meditations and Devotions*, printed posthumously in 1717, Hopton used the story to 'reconcile the active and contemplative Life', beseeching the Lord to, 'make me conscientious to do my Duty in both, neither neglecting my Calling in the one, or my bounden Duty of Praises to thee in the other'.[34] Hopton acknowledged a woman's calling as a housewife (Martha), working to maintain the household, as well as her Christian duty (Mary).

Theological imperatives to find a calling waned in the eighteenth century; however, the importance of labour and industry as Christian obligations persisted. Jeremy Gregory argues that social history overlooks the role of the Church and religion in eighteenth-century life, including its relationship with labour.[35] Gregory shows how eighteenth-century parishioners continued to attend Sunday service, especially when there was a sermon.[36]

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[32] C. Jackson and H. J. Morehouse, eds., *Yorkshire Diaries and Autobiographies in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (Edinburgh: Surtees Society, 1877), 216. Emphasis added.

[33] Mary Jane Humphrey, 'Saving a Life,' *Critical Matrix* 10, no. 1 (January 1996), 64.

[34] Susannah Hopton, *A Collection of Meditation and Devotions, in Three Parts* (London: Printed for D. Midwinter, 1717), 198-199.

[35] Jeremy Gregory, '"For all sorts and conditions of men": the Social :ife of the Book of Common Prayer During the Long Eighteenth Century: or, Bringing the History of Religion and Social History Together,' *Social History* 34, no. 1 (Feb., 2009), 30.

[36] Ibid., 39.

Sermons from the period attest to the fact that clergymen continued to emphasise industry, duty and labour. These ideas were clearly in the consciousness of York clergy, and through extension, society. A sermon preached at the March assizes held at York, in 1724, reinforced the idea that the household was a little 'model' of the government, and that each member of the household was 'Duty bound' to perform 'his proper Functions with Honesty, and to assist his Fellow-Servants'. All such labour would allow 'that Houshold…to increase and grow in Wealth, in Union, in Order, in Virtue and every thing'.[37] Twenty years later, in the York parish of St Michael le Belfrey, Laurence Sterne included in his sermon an anecdote to show how honest labour and industry were beneficial both for this mortal world, 'as all his Life long to earn and eat his Bread with Joy and Thankfulness', as well as in the next world: 'to be train'd up, to such a Sense of his Duty, as may secure him an Interest in the World to Come'.[38] Another St Michael le Belfrey sermon that was given to celebrate the anniversary of the charity school's opening, reinforced the importance of bringing children up in industry and employment, a theme that will be discussed below. In direct comparison to labour, this last sermon touched on a common concern: idleness. The rector delivering the sermon noted that 'there are a sort of Poor, who have no Claim, no Title to our Charity, such as those, who spend all their Time in sloth and idleness at home'.[39] The Archbishop of York also published a sermon that reflected earlier concepts that God ordained particular talents to every person in order for them to best practice their calling:

> If we are represented by the sacred writers, as having a number of *talents* committed to our care; whatever be the degree of trust reposed in us, whatever be the value or measure of these talents, we are made accountable to our Master for the right use and application of them. If we are said to be sent forth, as *labourers into his vineyard*, we are to be rewarded in proportion to our work and service; and whether we are appointed *to plant or to water*, we ought to contribute all we can to the main design of *bringing its fruit to perfection*.[40]

Just as Perkins encouraged his flock that 'whatsoever is in thy hand to doe, doe with all thy power', eighteenth-century Protestants encouraged work and service in all labours ordained by God.[41]

Throughout the eighteenth century, the moral imperative behind labour was increasingly combined with discussion of the poor and idleness. Since the late-medieval ages

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[37] Thomas Clarke, *The True Foundation of a Nation's Greatness. A Sermon Preached at the Assizes Held at York, March 7, 1724* (York: 1725), 21-22.

[38] Laurence Sterne, *A Charity-Sermon, Preach'd on Good-Friday, April 17, 1747. In the Parish Church of St. Michael-le-Belfrey* (York: Printed for J. Hildyard, 1747), 32.

[39] William Stainforth, *A Sermon Preach'd March 30th 1711. Being Good-Friday, in the Parish-Church of St. Michael le Belfreys, in the City of York* (York: Printed by John White, 1711), 9.

[40] John Green, *A Sermon Preached in Ely-Chapel, on Sundar March 22, 1752* (Cambridge: Printed by J. Bentham, 1752), 4. Original emphasis.

[41] Perkins, *A Treatise of the Vocations*, 11-12.

notions of 'deserving' and 'undeserving' poor made their way into common social discourse. By the late sixteenth century, there emerged more diversified views concerning the category of the population who were unable to support themselves through their own labours, either because of lack of opportunities or poor-paying employment. Political action gained momentum with An Acte for the Releife of the Poore, passed in 1598 (39 Eliz I c3), then reworked and reiterated in 1601 (43 Eliz 1 c2). Laws continued to evolve over the following century and a half, attempting to regulate, shame or aid the poor.[42]

Historians have examined the poor in the early modern period in terms of state administration, micro politics, institutions (hospitals, charity schools), gender and class relations and pauper agency.[43] However, the way in which parishes dealt with the poor in relation to concerns about idleness has received less attention. These are important topics to include in any study about work and the labouring body. We can see how carnal sociology, and particularly techniques of the body, were foreshadowed in concerns about idleness and sloth as negative bodily habits. This is shown in the ways that parishes attempted to inculcate good labour behaviours, particularly in the poor youth. Moreover, we can see how poor relief in the form of workhouses demonstrates that women at all levels of society were expected to work in order to maintain themselves and their families. The desire to inculcate labour discipline relate to wider themes of this thesis, such as skill and practice.

At their roots, discussions about idleness were religious. Proverbs 19:15 warns that 'Slouthfulnesse casteth into a deep sleepe: and an idle soule shall suffer hunger'. 1 Timothy 5:11-13 specifically cautions against the ills of idleness for young women, who, 'having damnation, because they have cast off their first faith' go on to 'learne to bee idle, wandering about from house to house; and not onely idle, but tattlers also, and busybodies, speaking things which they ought not'. In one of the earliest printed vernacular texts on husbandry and housewifery, John Fitzherbert sought to teach wives and husband not to be idle, quoting Solomon: 'the idle folk shall not joy with the chosen folks in heaven, but they shall sorrow with the reproved and forsaken folks in hell'. He also quoted St Jerome, saying 'always be doing of some good works, that the Devil may find thee ever occupied'.[44] Perkins warned

[42] For a comprehensive history of the English poor laws, see Paul Slack, *The English Poor Law, 1531-1782* (Cambridge: The Economic History Society, 1990).

[43] Sidney Webb and Beatrice Webb, *English Poor Law History, Part I: The Old Poor Law, English Local Government* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1927); Slack, *The English Poor Law*; Mary E. Fissell, *Patients, Power and the Poor in Eighteenth-Century Bristol* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Steve Hindle, *On the Parish?: The Micro-Politics of Poor Relief in Rural England c. 1550-1750* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); Tim Hitchcock and Robert Shoemaker, *London Lives: Poverty, Crime and the Making of a Modern City, 1690-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

[44] John Fitzherbert, *The Book of Husbandry*, in *Renaissance Women: A Sourcebook*, ed. Kate Aughterson (London: Routledge, 1995), 192. The speculation about authorship of this book will be discussed in chapter five.

that ‘slouth and negligence…are a disorder against that comely order which God hat set in the societies of mankind both in Church and common wealth’, meaning that they were corruptive forces that prevented prosperity.[45]

But beyond religion, texts about idleness were concerned with industry and the well-being of the parish. The didactic literature can be seen to anticipate theories that would be established by Mauss and Bourdieu in the twentieth century. The moral philosopher and theologian Joseph Butler paid particular attention to the habits both of body (activities and motions) and of mind (obedience, conduct, industry and self-governance). He explained how habits of the mind, and therefore habits of industry, were ‘produced by repeated Acts’, as in bodily training: ‘And in the like manner as Habits belonging to the Body, are produced by external Acts; so Habits of the mind are produced by the Exertion of inward practical Principles, *i.e.* by carrying them into Act, or acting upon them’.[46] Butler emphasised repetition, exercise and practice for both types of habits.

Contemporaries attempted to put Butler’s ideas into practice in workhouses, which were a means through which the poor, and particularly poor children, could acquire practical instructions and tacit knowledge (habits of the body) while also learning inward principals of industry (habits of the mind). Workhouses were established to tackle the issue of the able-bodied poor who were simply out of work, particularly to combat the fear that they would indulge in sloth, vice and vagrancy.[47] They were ‘presented as a means of educating the poor to their religious duty of social subservience, enforcing a powerful work discipline, and as a disincentive that would prevent the workshy from applying for relief’.[48] The target of reforming the mind and shaping the body particularly applied to poor children, as contemporaries believed that sloth and idleness were traits that could be passed on—particularly within families or households—if society did not work to prevent their transmission.

Both good habits of body and habits of mind, in theory, would allow children to become active participants in the labour market throughout their lives. Daniel Defoe held up Halifax, in the West Riding, as a town where this was put in practice, describing the hardworking ‘lusty fellows’ he saw in and about Halifax. There Defoe and his company met few people outdoors, since most were inside at work, ‘some at the Dye-vats, some at the Loom, others dressing the Cloths’. The women and children were employed at work,

[45] Perkins, *A Treatise of the Vocations*, 12.

[46] Joseph Butler, *The Analogy of Religion, Natural and Revealed, to the Constitution and Course of Nature* (London: Printed for James, John and Paul Knapton, 1736), 82-3.

[47] Dorothy Marshall, *The English Poor in the Eighteenth Century: A Study in Social and Administrative History* (1926; London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969), 22-3. Citations refer to the reprinted edition.

[48] Hitchcock and Shoemaker, *London Lives*, 121-122.

spinning or carding, 'scarce any thing above four Years old, but *its Hands were sufficient for its own support*'.[49] The industriousness of this town meant that not a beggar was to be seen, 'nor an idle person'. The very ancient, who were past working years, could be found in the alms-house. Halifax, therefore, represented a town in which each parishioner was brought up in good labour habits. Their bodies and hands were constantly employed due to society shaping body techniques from an early age, as per Mauss's theories.

The sermons and tracts on workhouses emphasised that it was necessary to inculcate good habits from a young age for the best results. Workhouses were set up to 'make Labour a Diversion to [children]…better than letting them go home constantly to their Parents, who cannot give them such good Provisions, and are bad Examples'.[50] What is more, 'the Children might be bred up in Habits of Industry, that will make their Service be sought for rather than refused, as is now by many'.[51] The carnal aspect of such habits was central to many, such as the merchant and economic writer, Sir Josiah Child, who warned:

> The children of the Poor are bred up in Beggary and Laziness, do by that means become *not only of unhealthy bodies and more than ordinarily subject to many loathsome diseases*…and if any of them do arrive to years and strength, they are, *by their idle habits contracted in their Youth*, rendered for ever after indisposed to Labour, and serve only to stock the Kingdom with thieves and beggars.[52]

This was reinforced by rules and regulations put in force in the workhouses, such as ensuring the children were up by six in the summer and eight in the winter, with their hands and faces washed, maintaining a strict regime of cleanliness and good order.[53]

In a 1711 sermon 'upon occasion of the Charity-Schools' preached at St Michael le Belfrey in York, the rector William Stainforth explained to his parish the importance of charity schools. He focused particularly on the fact that childhood was a crucial age: '[it] is the most proper Season to put our Boys and Girls to honest Labour, and train them up in useful Industry and Imployments'.[54] It was essential to instil such behaviours within them in youth, 'that as yet, they have contracted no lazy Habits, no Slothful Customs, which may have created in them any great Unwillingness and Aversion to Labour'. This last point in particular reflected the belief that once such idle habits were learned, they would affect a

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[49] Daniel Defoe, *A Tour Thro' the Whole Island of Great Britain*, vol. 3 (London: Printed for S. Birt, et al., 1753), 137-138. Emphasis added.

[50] *An Enquiry into the Melancholy Circumstances of Great Britain: More Particularly in the Regard to Oeconomy* (London: Routledge, 1926; London: Printed for W. Bickerton, 1740), 44.

[51] Ibid., 45.

[52] Sir Josiah Child, *A Discourse about Trade* (London: Printed by A. Sowle, 1690), 56.

[53] Tim Hitchcock, *Down and Out in Eighteenth-Century London* (London: Hambledon and London, 2004), 101.

[54] Stainforth, *A Sermon Preach'd March 30th 1711*, 5. Emphasis added.

person for the rest of their life and prevent them from ever prospering. Stainforth also discussed how such habits were *bodily*:

> And therefore, it may easily be suppos'd, that they will readily submit to any Labour and Business, if it be but moderate, and *proportion'd to the Strength of their Bodies*, and the *capacities of their Understandings*: And when they have once been us'd and accustom'd to it, they will take pleasure and Delight in it, and their Delight, *as well as their Strength and Skill*, will increase with their Years.[55]

Charity schools and workhouses that focused on training children in certain employments and accustoming their bodies to labour were essential for the health of the parish and the future of the nation as a whole.

An anonymous compiler of information about the country's workhouses echoed this statement fourteen years later, claiming that workhouses would have the effect of ensuring 'that the next Generation of Persons in lower Life will be made better', when the children of the poor were put to work, 'instead of being bred up in Irreligion and Vice, to an idle, beggarly, and vagabond Life, [they] will have the Fear of God before their Eyes, *get Habits of Virtue, be inured to Labour, and thus become useful to their Country*'.[56] Up through the mid-eighteenth century, workhouses were seen as modes of embodying habits of industry and labour, 'proper Schools to train up the Children of the Poor to Religious Sobriety and Industry, who would otherwise be brought up in Sloath, Ignorance, and Vice'.[57]

The inclusion of girls and women in workhouses was two-fold. On the one hand, *An Account of Several Work-Houses* documented a number of workhouses that were made up of a majority of women because it was more acceptable for them to seek aid.[58] 'Women had a perhaps readier claim on charity', Tim Hitchcock explains, 'and certainly seem to have been able to make better use of institutions such as workhouses'.[59] For example, the report for a workhouse in St James, Westminster listed four wards for women, compared to the two for men, and one each for boys and girls. Each ward contained eighteen beds, regularly filled up, equalling about 72 women, 36 men and 36 children. The women and girls were expected to knit stockings, while those men who were able would 'Card Wool, or assist the Cook in tending the Fire, and Coppers'.[60] The work embarked upon in these locations was seen as better suited for feminine skills. The Hamlet of Ratcliff had a workhouse for thirty people, 'mostly women', who were given a weekly pension of 12*d*. on top of what they earned

[55] Ibid., 5. Emphasis added.

[56] *An Account of Several Work-Houses for Employing and Maintaining the Poor* (London: Printed and Sold by Joseph Downing, 1725), ix. Emphasis added.

[57] William Bailey, *A Treatise on the Better Employment, and More Comfortable Support, of the Poor in Workhouses* (London: Printed for, and sold by, the Author, 1758), 2.

[58] *An Account of Several Work-Houses*, 54.

[59] Hitchcock, *Down and Out*, 9.

[60] *An Account of Several Work-Houses*, 54.

through their own industry.[61] These additional earnings reflected the ultimate goal of a workhouse: for the poor to embody labour skills that would allow themselves and society to profit.[62] Examples such as these not only demonstrate that there was a high proportion of female poor set to work, but also that the types of tasks that could be considered work often varied. Although modern-day readers might deem these as inconsistent jobs only worth a pittance, contemporaries considered it work, both in the sense that it was labour and in that it was functioning to prevent idleness.

On the other hand, there was a higher percentage of women due to the contemporary belief that young girls left to idleness were particularly susceptible to debauchery and falling into prostitution. It is not surprising therefore, that certain workhouses had routes for young girls to learn housewifery or other 'female' trades, something that was possible due to the common presence of a mistress who ran, or helped to run, the workhouse. Take for example one workhouse in which the mistress selected certain girls to 'better qualify' them for housewifery, by teaching them to 'wash the School, wash and mend Linnen, scour and wash Dishes, and do such other Business'.[63] Moreover, 'when their Hands are brought into that Sort of Work, [they] are again reliev'd by two or three others, at the Discretion of the Mistress', indicating that that 'sort of work' was such that could be learned and mastered, through physical embodiment, hence 'their Hands' being adapted to the tasks.[64] Similar concerns about idleness led the 1758 magistrate John Fielding to craft a plan for a public laundry where young girls could be trained to not only wash and iron, but also read, write and sew, and other tasks that would make them better fit for domestic service.[65] Such cases underline the understanding that feminine labour skills had to be practiced in order to be embodied.

The training of girls was made possible in workhouses since many were overseen by women. In St Michael le Belfrey, a fairly wealthy parish near the Minster in York, the workhouse, though small, was overwhelmingly female at all levels. In the 1740s it was run by Thomas and Rachel Plaxton, a couple in their fifties. Rachel's participation was recorded more frequently, such as the entries that recorded the expenditure of 10 shillings that was paid so that she could go to Knaresborough to 'be instructed to manage the workhouse'.[66] In the Plaxtons' workhouse there were usually only two to four poor in at any given time. The

[61] Ibid., 70.
[62] Hitchcock, *Down and Out*, 139.
[63] *An Account of Several Work-Houses*, 29.
[64] Ibid., 30.
[65] Louise Falcini, 'Cleanliness and the Poor in Eighteenth-Century London,' (PhD diss., University of Reading, 2018), 108.
[66] The Borthwick Institute of Historical Research (BIHR), PR/Y/MB/53.

first entry in the overseers' book of admissions listed one woman being put to work winding silk, one spinning cotton and one spinning linen, while a seven-year-old orphan boy was put to work carding wool. Most women only stayed a few months, although Elizabeth Spurr was recorded bringing in money from June 1744 until December 1749. Over the five years for which there were entries, a total of twelve women were noted as having brought in money knitting, spinning or winding. The work of two orphan boys was also noted: John Hague and Martin Allen both carded wool, but their work only brought in about 1½s per entry, compared to Elizabeth Spurr's average of 3s 4d per entry. Some were young girls, only temporarily put to work until they could be put out as an apprentice, such as Mary Cooper who was recorded winding silk from June 1744 until August when she was put apprentice to Thomas Walker, a local butcher.[67] Mary Cooper's case shows how girls could participate in the workhouses and through pauper apprenticeships, both of which were 'a school of industry'.[68]

## Apprenticeship

Steve Hindle explains, 'the widespread campaign to apprentice children at parish expense was motivated both by the desire to lessen the burden of expenditure in poor households and by the imperative to inculcate labour discipline in a plebeian class whose idleness appeared to be inherited, if perhaps even congenital'.[69] This imperative was driven by the need for parents to support and maintain a household, as well as by the social fear that children of the poor could be brought up in 'a school of idleness' rather than 'a school of industry'.[70] Therefore, parish apprenticeship tended to start as young as eight so that a child could start learning such habits, and to help ease the burden on the parish—in January 1724, two Justices of the Peace confirmed that Katherine Mason of Skipton could be put out apprentice, 'it being made apparent to this Court that she is above Eight years old'.[71] However, given that many parish apprenticeships lasted about seven years, and many stipulated it was until a girl obtained the age of twenty-one or married, it is more likely the age at the start of the indenture was between twelve and fourteen.[72] For eighteenth-century London parish apprentices, Alysa Levene found that the average age that pauper children

[67] BIHR PR/Y/MB/54.

[68] Hindle, *On the Parish?*, 195.

[69] Steve Hindle, 'Labour Discipline, Agricultural Service and the Households of the Poor in Rural England, c. 1640-1730,' in *Accommodating Poverty: The Housing and Living Arrangements of the English Poor, c. 1650-1800*, eds. Joanna McEwan and Pamela Sharpe (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 173.

[70] Hindle, *On the Parish?,* 191-223, especially 195; Tim Wales, '"Living at their own hands": Policing Poor Households and the Young in Early Modern Rural England,' *The Agricultural History Review* 61, no. 1 (2013), 27.

[71] West Yorkshire Archive Service, Wakefield (WYAS), QS10/14.

[72] BIHR, PR/Y/HTG/48.

were bound was 12.5 years for girls and 12.0 for boys.[73] Not only did pauper apprenticeships remove a child from a home where they might be taught the 'trade of begging and idleness', but some parishes withheld relief from parents who refused to put their child out as an apprentice.[74]

In the most basic ways, parish apprenticeships were gendered. The parish records of Holy Trinity Goodramgate, within the city walls, offer a rare glimpse into urban poor apprentices in York. Of York's twenty-nine parishes, Holy Trinity is the only one with extant poor apprenticeship records from this time period. Located in the north-east of the city, near to the Merchant Taylors' guildhall, this parish was of middling wealth. With 2.8 hearths per household listed in the 1672 Hearth Tax, Holy Trinity Goodramgate fell right below the York median of 2.85.[75] In terms of number of households, it had 63 households recorded compared to the median of 73.[76] Over the years spanning from 1679 to 1759, there were 243 parish apprentices of which girls made up 38 per cent, or a total of ninety-two girls.[77] The language used in the indentures shows a shift in the period, during which time girls became more regularly apprenticed. Prior to 1705, the pre-printed forms left blank spaces for the name of the apprentice, the name of the master or mistress and for the occupation they would be 'learned and taught in'. However, the forms were prewritten with all male pronouns and when either the apprentice or the master was female, the clerk would cross out 'he/him' and write 'she/her' above it. After 1705 the forms changed and where pronouns referring to the apprentice were needed, the space was left completely blank, reflecting the increased use of poor girls as parish apprentices. All spaces in which an apprentice's gender would be noted were now blank so either a girl or boy could be discussed without having to change the form.[78]

The power of gendered language comes across in these choices and changes, and it is still one we can reckon with today. The decision to use the term 'master' as gender-neutral was one that I struggled with throughout this thesis. Ultimately, I chose to use master (signifying them as 'female' when necessary) when discussing women who would have been

[73] Alysa Levene, 'Parish Apprenticeship and the Old Poor Law in London,' *Economic History Review* 63, no. 4 (2010), 924.

[74] Hindle, *On the Parish*?, 64, 153.

[75] Peter Muir Tillott, ed., *The Victoria History of the Counties, A History of Yorkshire: the City of York* (Published for the Institute of Historical Research by the Oxford University Press, 1961), 163-4.

[76] TNA, E 179/260/22.

[77] BIHR, PR/Y/HTG/48.

[78] This differs slightly from pauper apprenticeships in London, in which Laura Gowing has found that girls' indentures were more often in manuscript form, therefore individual changes were easier to make. However, she notes that by 1750 manuscript forms had largely fallen out of use and printed documents with blank spaces instead of gendered pronouns became more frequent, similar to in York. Laura Gowing, 'Girls on Forms: Apprenticing Young Women in Seventeenth-Century London,' *Journal of British Studies* 55 (July 2016), 460-462.

the only person instructing their specific apprentices. This is particularly necessary in chapter two, as the Merchant Taylors' Company itself uses the term master to refer to women. However, I use master and mistress to discuss husbands and wives who take on apprentices together and mistress to discuss women who ran their own households, to distinguish them from their husbands. I hope to use master to subvert the false universal (the concept that the exclusive use of masculine terms creates a false narrative that they are the norm, showing that so called universal language actually tends to exclude women) and fold women into the narrative, rather than further support the masculine universal discussed below.[79] The lack of a truly gender-neutral term to describe one who has *mastered* a trade is an issue that continues to be reckoned with.

*Table 1.1: Masters and mistresses of parish apprentices in Holy Trinity Goodramgate*[80]

| | ***Indentured to a man*** | ***Indentured to a woman*** | ***Indentured to a husband and wife*** | ***Indentured to a man, 'to be taught by his wife'*** |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1679-1689 | 2 | 3 | 1 | - |
| 1690-1699 | - | 6 | - | - |
| 1700-1709 | 3 | 5 | 2 | - |
| 1710-1719 | 7 | 6 | 3 | - |
| 1720-1729 | - | 7 | 5 | - |
| 1730-1739 | 4 | 8 | 1 | 6 |
| 1740-1749 | 1 | 3 | - | 5 |
| 1750-1759 | - | 5 | - | 8 |
| **TOTAL (91)** | **17** | **43** | **12** | **19** |

This issue of language can be seen with the way in which female power came to be subverted in the Holy Trinity Goodramgate indentures. In later years they minimised or completely wrote out the authority of the mistress. Before 1731, when listing the master, a man or a woman could be listed. When husband and wife were included, the wife's occupation would usually be listed when she was first introduced. For example, Ellen Braithwaite was indenture in June 1691 to 'Elizabeth the wife of William Harte, seaman…to be Learned and Taught in the Trade, Mystery or Occupation of a Seamstress'.[81] Table 1.1 shows how this changed in the 1730s, as it became more common for the indenture to only list a man and his occupation and then later in the form, when discussing the nature of the

[79] Hilda Smith, *All Men and Both Sexes: Gender, Politics, and the False Universal in England, 1640-1832* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002), x.

[80] BIHR, PR/Y/HTG/48.

[81] BIHR, PR/Y/HTG/58, 3 June 1691.

indenture, would state 'to be learned and taught in the trade and mystery of [trade] which [name] the wife of the said [master's name] now useth'. While this clarified who was taking on the role of teaching the girl, it is interesting that it became less common to list a woman as a mistress in her own right. Of the forty-two indentures from 1730 onwards, nineteen used this new format. The change in language relating to masters and mistresses was part of a system that crafted a false, male universal.[82] It further shows how we have to use thorough methods of locating women in the archives, as if someone were to just read the first name presented in the indenture it could be assumed fewer women were acting as mistresses after 1731.

*Table 1.2: Occupations in Holy Trinity Goodramgate apprenticeships, 1679-1759*[83]

| ***Category*** | ***No.*** | ***%*** |
|---|---|---|
| Making/mending clothes | 81 | 88.0 |
| *Seamstress, mantua-maker, merchant tailor, button maker, glover, spinster, quilt and hoop maker, linen draper, peruke maker* | | |
| Not listed | 4 | 4.3 |
| Cook | 3 | 3.3 |
| Housewifery | 2 | 2.2 |
| Laundress | 2 | 2.2 |
| **TOTAL** | **92** | **100.0** |

It is difficult to establish a full picture of the work that young girls were doing as parish apprentices. Table 1.2 lists the occupations to which the ninety-two girls were apprentices. An overwhelming majority of the trades dealt with clothing, 88 per cent in total. Within that category, thirty-nine went to seamstresses, twelve to mantua-makers and nine to merchant tailors. Only four were not given specific occupations, trades or arts to learn: Ann Dickinson was indentured to John Midgley, a button maker, and Abigail his wife, 'to serve in honest labour'; Jane Austin was apprenticed to James Dodsworth, apothecary, and Ann his wife 'as a poor apprentice to serve his wife'; Jane Smith was indentured to Thomas Parker but no information was given about his trade nor what she would be instructed in; and Mary Cunningham was apprenticed to Margaret Waite, the widow of a baker, to be 'learned and taught in such business as her said mistress shall think proper to set her about, within her own house'. For Jane Austin and Mary Cunningham at least, it would seem that their apprenticeships would consist largely of housework and helping the woman of the house.

The parish of Holy Trinity Goodramgate provides a rare glimpse into urban parish apprenticeships. Despite being 'a poor child' a girl could be apprenticed into a household

[82] Smith, *All Men and Both Sexes,* 73-108, particularly 101.
[83] BIHR, PR/Y/HTG/48.

where she was expected to learn a trade in order to become an industrious member of the parish. Since few parishes left such detailed records, other sources, such as court records, need to be consulted in order to better trace pauper apprentices. Between 1650 and 1750, the West Riding Quarter Sessions contain upwards of a hundred cases of town, parish or poor apprentices in which women were involved—both as mistresses or apprentices—to either discharge or confirm an indenture. Both apprentices and their masters brought cases to the quarter sessions in order to end an indenture early. The legal framework that bound young girls and boys reflects the structured reality of expectations of labour.

Of the 85 cases in which an apprentice was discharged, a majority stated that enough evidence was provided to the court without explaining what that evidence was. However, six of the twenty-eight cases that went into detail involved the apprentice getting pregnant—the other cases included the apprentice attaining the age of twenty-one, committing theft or their master being unable to instruct them properly. In one case, Ann Dickinson took on her father-in-law's apprentice, Isabell Shyers, after the death of both her original master and Ann's husband, Isabell's second master. However, in 1681, a year before Ann petitioned the court, Isabell ran away and became pregnant. Ann voluntarily maintained the young mother 'all the tyme of her delivery', given that the father of Isabell's child had fled the country. However, Ann made the move to petition for Isabell's discharge so that she would not be accountable for both the mother and child.[84] In Wakefield, Mary Martin, who also came to be responsible for her husband's apprentice upon her spouse's death, petitioned the Court before her apprentice, Mary Johnson, gave birth to a bastard child. In her petition, brought to the quarter sessions in 1743, Martin claimed that Johnson had served her about eight or nine years but had run away and returned pregnant. Martin described Johnson as 'Big with Bastard Child and is near the time of her delivery and quite unfit for Service', the last part the crucial reason for why the indenture of apprenticeship ought to be discharged.[85] On the one hand, having an apprentice who would or had given birth to a bastard child—particularly one whose father was no longer in the same parish—added to the financial burden of the household. The physical effects of pregnancy and childbirth were also a central concern, as they impacted a woman's ability to carry out the tasks required of her. The loss of the apprentice's labour, due to her being physically unable to work, was reason enough to dissolve an indenture.

Other forms of physical incompetence could lead to a dissolution. In 1708, Martha Clare was apprenticed to Jeremy Ward of Sheffield, a button maker. Later she was discharged, with Jeremy describing her as 'a Lame decrepid diseased girl and not fit to

[84] WYAS, QS10/8.
[85] WYAS, QS10/19.

perform any service'.[86] David Turner shows how terms of physical impairment were subsumed into terms such as 'lame', 'decrepit' and 'diseased', which all conveyed a sense of devaluation.[87] Descriptions such as lame often referred to an infirmity which may not have been permanent nor automatically disqualified a person from being able to work. However, cases that used such physical descriptors indicate that there was a bodily aspect to girls' training. If Martha was indeed to help her master in his occupation of button maker, then physical attributes of precision, delicacy and dexterity would have been of utmost importance and any number of ailments could have been described as decrepit and reason to dismiss her. Mental capacities were also called into question. Dianah Jackson was put apprentice to John Ferrand in Netherton and was meant to serve until the age of twenty-one. However, the indenture was discharged early, 'it appearing to the court that the said Child is an Idiot and unfit for Service'.[88] While neither petition was forthright in stating what precise service would be required of the young girls, it is obvious that physical ability and a basic form of mental aptitude was required, even of the poor parish apprentice. Being unable to fulfil labours, or even menial tasks, was reason enough to discharge an apprentice.

The concern about idleness was evident. Even at the poor and rural level, it was hoped that young children would pick up skills that would allow them to be economically viable in the future. The requirement both that an apprentice be put to labour, and that a master had to be fit and able to provide a form of education, be it in manual labour or button making, demonstrate this desire. Therefore, the mistreatment of the youth by their master was also a reason for ending an apprenticeship. In one such instance, the Court ordered that Susannah Bentley be discharged 'for reason of the bad usage of her said Master' in 1719, although it goes into little detail as to what 'bad usage' entailed.[89] A master could also declare themselves unfit to take on an apprentice. In 1704 Ann Shertliffe, a widow, declared that the overseers of the poor in her parish of Ledston bound an apprentice to her, despite her being 'a very infirm Woman', and there being 'several other substantial Inhabitants in the said Town more fit to take the Said Apprentice', Mary Bramham.[90] Ann's infirmity meant that she could neither instruct nor support a young apprentice, as would be expected of her. In the January 1739 sessions, the court ordered Elizabeth Combsmith of Morley to be discharged from William Readshaw as 'it hath been sufficiently made appear to the Satisfaction of this Court that the said Master is not capable of education and bringing up the said apprentice according

[86] WYAS, QS10/12.
[87] David M. Turner, *Disability in Eighteenth-Century England: Imagining Physical Impairment* (London: Taylor and Francis, 2012), 18-23.
[88] WYAS, QS10/18.
[89] WYAS, QS10/13.
[90] WYAS, QS10/11.

to the Terms of the said Indenture'.[91] These cases demonstrate that there was an expectation of masters, though not in a traditional guild apprenticeship sense. Masters and mistresses were expected to educate apprentices and shape them into hardworking members of the parish, as well as provide necessaries for them in a similar manner stipulated by formal apprenticeship indentures.

Parish apprenticeships were a direct result of the cultural concern over preventing idleness amongst the poorer sort. However, efforts such as pauper apprenticeships were not always successful in combating idleness. The more detailed records that exist for areas closer to London help demonstrate the continued problems and concerns with idle girls. In Middlesex, indenture dissolutions often went into specific detail about the reason that one party or the other sought to end an apprenticeship. 'Idleness, laziness, slothfulness and sluggishness' were regularly cited to prove a girl was unruly or unable to embody labour discipline.[92] In 1715 Sarah Ball was apprenticed to Thomas Griffith in order to learn clear starching and the cleaning of ribbons, but Thomas found his apprentice to be 'a loose idle, sluttish and disorderly girl', whose ill temper and refusal to do her duty as an apprentice made her unfit for his service.[93] Thomas argued that one of the reasons he ought to be allowed to dissolve the indenture was the fact that he was unaware of her distemper—which he attributed to 'the foul disease' acquired when a man debauched her—before he took charge of her. In the same year, Joseph Stephenson had taken 14-year-old Catherine Richmond as an apprentice to 'learn the art of reading writing sewing knitting & housewifery', serving him until she attained the age of 19.[94] Like Thomas, Joseph found his apprentice to be 'loose idle and disorderly', and on top of that she was frequently running away, thus not doing her duty of helping with his business. Idleness was a specific threat often linked with bad-mannered young girls, reflecting the above-mentioned idea that idle girls were more susceptible to debauchery and prostitution. Therefore, girls, just as much if not more than young boys, had to be indoctrinated in industriousness, something to be learned and embodied from youth.

The voices of poor young girls are almost non-existent in records from this time, but the quarter sessions allow some glimpse into their situation. Young girls appear to take on tasks that were more physically demanding than sewing or knitting. The cases in which they were discharged reveal a desire for full body strength and ability. That they had physical

[91] WYAS, QS10/18.

[92] Laura Gowing, 'The Manner of Submission: Gender and Demeanour in Seventeenth-Century London,' *Cultural and Social History* 10, no. 1 (2013), 31.

[93] London Metropolitan Archives (LMA), Middlesex Sessions, Session Papers (SM/PS), 3rd May 1715 London Lives (*LL*), LMSLPS150250002 (www.londonlives.org, version 1.1, 17 June 2012).

[94] LMA, SM/PS 3rd Mary 1715 *LL*, LMSLPS150260074.

requirements expected of them was seen by the fact that they were not allowed to be idle or physically incapacitated (i.e. pregnant, lame, diseased). Girls had the right to expect certain standards from their masters and mistresses, showing the systematic desire to insure poor or vagrant children could be brought up to learn tasks that would allow them to contribute to society and the economy. Disfigurements from accidents, diseases contracted in the master's household or over-correction, leading to physical injury, acquired during an apprenticeship could present barriers to future work.[95]

Apprenticeship dissolutions also reveal contemporary anxieties about negative types of work; about drudgery in particular, the flipside of idleness. Early modern literature discussed drudgery in four predominant ways, which often overlapped: scholarly, religious, 'class' and servile drudgery, the last of which was often gendered. In simple terms, drudgery was seen as a menial and repetitive task, particular one that did not produce some sort of profit. This is most evident by the ways in which contemporaries used the term to describe the tedious undertakings that were required of scholars. Such tasks included transcribing, translating and reading collections of knowledge, such as the seventeenth-century physician and natural philosopher Walter Charleton referring to the 'unprofitable drudgery of transcription' or the drudgery of reading vast collections.[96]

In religious terms, drudgery was seen as a consequence of the Fall, depicted as the labour forced upon sinners by the Devil. Genesis 3:19 describes 'the sweat of thy face'—from efforts expended in labour—that Adam will endure until he returns to the ground, due to him having eaten of the tree. The theologian Isaac Barrow warned of 'what toil and drudgery [sinners] will sustain in the service of *Satan*, in pursuit of sin, in the gratification of vanities and lust'.[97] Those who immodestly pursued worldly goods or vice endured drudgery 'in driving on projects of ambition and avarice'.[98] Such ideas also worked to warn Christians of the pointlessness of earthly pleasures and 'vanities'.

The Devil imposed drudgery on his servile followers, or sinners, but the term was also used to describe the temporal, corporeal life, separate from the eternal soul, which transcended earthly toils. In John Armstrong's 1677 tract, which instructed the public on how to lead one's soul to a course of eternal salvation, the author emphasised the importance of

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[95] Margaret Pelling, *The Common Lot: Sickness, Medical Occupations and the Urban Poor in Early Modern England* (London: Longman, 1998), 130.

[96] Walter Charleton, *Chorea Gigantum, or, The Most Famous Antiquity of Great-Britan* (London: Printed for Henry Herringman, 1663), 17; Thomas Comber, *Christianity no Enthusiasm, or, The Several Kinds of Inspirations and Revelations Pretended to by the Quakers Tried and Found Destructive to Holy Scripture and True Religion* (London: Printed by T. D., 1678), 28.

[97] Isaac Barrow, *Of Industry, in Five Discourses viz. in General, in our General Calling as Christians, in our Particular Calling as Gentlemen, in our Particular Calling as Scholars* (London: Printed by J.H., 1693), 112.

[98] Ibid., 95.

distinguishing the body and the soul, noting 'far be it from us, to count [our souls] so worthless, as to be abused to the basest drudgery, to be poisoned with sin and sensuality, or to be ventured for a thing of nought'.[99] In this context, basest drudgery referred to acts of the body, whether sexual or gluttonous. The implication of this religious rhetoric is that drudgery was hard labour meant for the lesser part of man, his body's sacrifice for the adorned soul. The corporeal connection demonstrates how hard labour impacted the body and was deeply intertwined with it.

The final two ways in which drudgery was referenced do more to elucidate the manner in which the term was used in the indenture dissolution cases and help place the hard labours of women within a larger framework. The first of these frameworks of drudgery was almost always used in the context of the baser or lesser types, that is to say, the lower classes: vagrants, slaves—particularly African or Native American slaves—Jews, and, of course, women were those most often described as bearing the drudgeries of others. It was highlighted as being an action of the meanest sort or a punishment. Not surprisingly, the term was often found in texts on slavery. In the 1685 publication *Geographia universalis*, P. Duval described the population of America. When it came to describing the hard work that was to be done in the territories, Duval stated, 'the Negroes are transported into *America*, from *Angola*, and other parts of *Africa*, to labour in the Mines, which drudgery the *Americans* are not able to support'.[100] This suggested that drudgery had a heavy physical impact that required sturdy bodies to take on the laborious grunt work of building the colonies, bodies that were always described en masse rather than individually. It is also made physical by the author's belief that the bodies of Native Americans could not handle the required drudgery.

John Locke made note of the toil, which he explained was reserved for those 'men of low and mean Education, who have never elevated their thoughts above the Spade and the Plough, nor look'd beyond the ordinary Drudgery of a Day-Labourer'.[101] The clergyman John Edwards supported the religious pairing of drudgery and slavery; in one of his many works on the Christian faith, Edwards described the use of mills to grind corn:

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[99] John Armstrong, *The Souls Worth and Danger, or A Discourse Exciting and Directing to the Due Care of its Eternal Salvation upon the Words of our Blessed Saviour* (Cambridge: Printed for the Author, 1677), 31-32.

[100] P. Duval *Geographia Universalis: The Present State of the Whole World Giving an Account of the Several Religions, Customs, and Riches of each People* (London: Printed by H. Clark, 1685), 15. Original emphasis.

[101] John Locke, *The works of John Locke, Esq; In three volumes,* vol. 3 (London: Printed for John Churchill and Sam. Manship, 1714), 396.

> The grinding at Mills was counted an inferior sort of Work, and therefore *Prisoners* and *Captives* were generally set to it: whence *so take the Milstones, and grind Meal*, is part of the Description of a *Slave*, Isa. 47.2… However, this was counted a very Laborious and Slavish employment. And this was in use not only among the *Jews* and *Philistines* but the *Egyptians* also, and thence there is mention of the *Maid-Servant being the Mill*, i.e. thrusting it forward with her Arm, *Exod*. 11.5…But for the most part the *Women-Servants* were employed in this Drudgery, as is deducible from *Mat*. 24.24.[102]

In this, Edwards encapsulated all those who are considered lesser, forced into drudgery to earn their keep—Slaves, Jews, Philistines, Egyptians and 'Women-Servants'—while also describing the types of labours that could be considered toilsome, such as working at a mill. He references instances in the Bible in which people were in bondage or slavery to show that certain kinds of work bear down on people more than others.

The English translation of an oft-reprinted work of Agrippa von Nettesheim discussed the Roman city women, explaining 'that none of them should be put to the grynde or do Kitchin-drudgery, or any such servile employment'.[103] This exhibited a common theme of relating drudgery to menial housework, particularly within the kitchen. This sort of labour was below the city woman—sometimes literally as well as figuratively—who was the head of her household. Robert Campbell, noted for his commentary on various London occupations, also argued that apprentices were to be kept away from drudgery. If not, they could not fulfil their true purpose of being an apprentice, the point of which was to learn a trade. It was the role of the master to communicate his teachings and to pass on skills, Campbell explained, for if not, 'the Youth may serve his Seven Years, and in spite of Diligence and Application, may come out of his Time as ignorate of every Thing relating to his Trade (*except the mere Drudgery*) as he went into it'.[104] What is of note here is the inclusion of 'mere Drudgery', which an apprentice could pick up with ease. This stresses that apprentices were distinguished from servants, who attended to a master's household needs, because the former were meant to be *instructed* rather than simply pick up 'mere drudgery'.

The other, and final, context within which drudgery was employed was to reference the toil and physical labour of servants, emphasising the baseness of physical labour. As mentioned, drudgery was seen as reserved for the body in distinct opposition to the soul and mind. It was believed that there would be negative physical effects on the body for those who

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[102] John Edwards, *A Discourse Concerning the Authority, Stile, and Perfection of the Books of the Old and New-Testament* (London: Printed and Sold by Richard Wilkin, 1693), 123. Original emphasis.

[103] Agrippa Von Nettesheim, *Female Pre-Eminence, or, The Dignity and Excellency of that Sex above the Male an Ingenious Discourse. Written Originally in Latine by Henry Cornelius Agrippa; Done into English with Additional Advantages by H. C.* (London: Printed by T. R. and M. D., 1670), 69.

[104] Robert Campbell, *The London Tradesman. Being a Compendious View of all the Trades, Professions, Arts, both Liberal and Mechanic, Now Practiced in the Cities of London and Westminster* (London: Printed by T. Gardner, 1747), 22. Emphasis added.

were forced to toil. Beyond this, bodily drudgery was associated with the basest parts of the body. Anthropologist Tim Ingold, in an attempt to rework the historiographical narrative concerning feet, acknowledges the historical tendency to value the head and hands over the heels and feet.[105] This is consistent with seventeenth- and eighteenth-century descriptions of drudgery, which often involved body parts other than the head or delicate hands. If it was accepted that the hands were the 'instruments of rational intelligence', then it was also to be accepted that the 'Feet or Other vile Parts' were those which do the 'common drudgery of the Body'.[106] As such, drudgery debased an apprentice and brought her instruments of technique—her hands—to ruin. Whether it is through the contrast between the body and the soul, between various classes, races and genders, or distinguishing higher parts of the body from lower ones, drudgery was contemporarily acknowledged to be a corrupting labour not fit for someone meant to be in a position where she was acquiring lifelong skills.

Drudgery was used rhetorically within courts, particularly in relation to the last two themes, to establish that an apprentice was above a slave or a servant, with physical value that needed to be maintained. Dissolutions were vital for the sustainability of apprenticeship, as Patrick Wallis shows, and both men and women participated in this form of economic agency and skillset investment.[107] While Wallis looked more generally at dissolutions, my own examination of petitions involving female apprenticeships has found that the vast majority mentioned her forced participation in 'drudgery' or similar labour, more so than for their male counterparts. Without understanding the bodily context of drudgery, a lot can be missed. For instance, the use of the term shows that a young girl was not to be debased to the toils and troubles of the meaner sort. Her parent or guardian therefore desired to terminate her apprenticeship if she was being forced into drudgery. The application of such language demonstrates workingwomen creating a legal rhetoric, in which they placed themselves above social and physical connotations of base toil.

Historians have questioned whether girls were simply being used as cheap labour, taken on under the guise of apprentices but put to work as domestic servants.[108] However the number of girls and women in the Middlesex session papers that detailed how they sought to

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[105] Tim Ingold, 'Culture on the Ground: The World Perceived through Feet,' *Journal of Material Culture* 9, no. 3 (November 2004), 315.

[106] William Durham, *Encouragement to Charity a Sermon {reached at the Charter-House Chapel Dec. 12, 1678, at an Anniversary Meeting in Commemoration of the Founder* (London: Printed for Matthew Gilliflower, 1679), 10.

[107] Patrick Wallis, 'Labour, Law, and Training in Early Modern London: Apprenticeship and the City's Institutions,' *Journal of British Studies* 51 (October, 2012), 800-801. Wallis found that amongst causes such as mistreatment (lack of food, unreasonable chastisement) and failures in training, the most common cause brought by male apprentices was nonenrolment.

[108] For example, Gowing discusses the risk of women 'being absorbed into domestic work', in 'The Manner of Submission', 40.

break with their master or mistress due to not being instructed in their said trade alludes to the fact that there was a level of understanding that female apprentices were not simply drudges. Beyond the misuses of an apprentice there were issues of poor instruction from the master or mistress. As seen in the Yorkshire cases, when the apprentice was not adequately taught in the trade there was a notion that the master or mistress had failed her. Ann Askew, a spinster, was apprenticed to Archibald Lovet to 'learn the arts of making gold and silver lace, wash & starch all sorts of Dressing'. In her petition for the dissolution of her indenture she stated that Archibald had turned her over to his daughter, where she had 'been taught nothing of the gold and silver trade' and 'only does housework'.[109] Housework here was juxtaposed with the arts that Ann was meant to be learning. The fact her master turned her over to his daughter exacerbated Ann's removal from the trade—here physical distance from instruction and knowledge gave Askew cause for concern. The failure was still on Archibald, not his daughter, for he legally held a certain responsibility to Ann.

Parents or siblings could file a petition on behalf of the girls, showing that families, as well as the individuals themselves, held stake in their potential for future employment. George Perry submitted a petition on behalf of his daughter who he had put apprentice to John Appleby and his wife in order to learn washing and plain work. However, he claimed 'they have put her to do all drudgery and not instructed her in the said art'. Not only were they not giving her instruction, but they gave her 'immoderate correction', such as kicking her down the stairs.[110] It demonstrates how there was a concept of difference between housework, or drudgery, and more specific trades such as washing which required particular teaching and experience. Such cases further complicate historical narratives of housework as a single type of labour, showing there was a hierarchy of domestic tasks. Women and their families had ideas of what they ought to be doing in an apprenticeship, particularly in terms of how it was setting them up to be economically successful in the future and took legal action when these ideas were opposed.

Even if a trade was atypical for women, an apprentice could still expect to learn her master or mistress's craft. Elizabeth Parry was apprenticed to Joyce West, a widow who had taken on her late husband's occupation of cork cutting, and the language she used demonstrates that she expected to learn the art. Elizabeth sought to end the apprenticeship after having 'not been instructed in the trade or mystery', her time being 'spent in hard labour and slavery, not only to her mistress, but she is also obliged to do the same drudgery in her son in law's family', and if she opposed she was beaten and bruised.[111] Once again the

[109] LMA, SM/PS, 9th July 1691, *LL*, LMSMPS50017001.
[110] LMA, SM/PS, December 1692, *LL*, LMSMPS500240001.
[111] LMA, SM/PS, 29th May 1723, *LL*, LMSMPS502110009.

domestic is referred to as drudgery and hard labour, in direct contrast to the labour that one expected to learn, in this case cork cutting. In fact, Elizabeth refers to herself as 'in slavery', referring to the way in which she was forced into doing the petty labour of both families.

Margaret Pelling has highlighted the fact that clothing and appearance were key social issues, especially as indications of the health and well-being of apprentices. Early modern ideas linked outward cleanliness with inner welfare, and, as mentioned above, there was an emphasis that the cleanliness of clothing could also reflect one's social standing.[112] As Pelling describes, 'there was a direct relationship perceived between clothing and health, not only in terms of protection from the weather, but particularly because at all levels of society changes of clothing were seen as the main means of maintaining the cleanliness of the body'.[113] As an apprentice to Elizabeth Matthews, a spinster, Mary Smith signed an indenture to 'learn the art and skill of making women's clothes'.[114] However, in her petition to end her term, she said that 'instead of working at her said trade [she] is constantly employed in some laborious works about the house, washing, scowering, cleaning of rooms & such like', acts 'by which…she wears out more clothes and apparel than her father can provide to her'. The wearing down of clothing implied the wearing down of hands and health, a damage that could be detrimental to Mary's future employment and capital—in this period, clothes represented the body and the state of one's clothing shaped their social capital.[115] The laborious works of washing, scouring, cleaning rooms and the like were in direct contrast to the 'skill' that Mary had expected to learn.[116]

Because 'for early modernity dress was nearly always imagined in conjunction with the body', insufficient 'necessaries' or 'necessities' was a common cause for the dissolution of an indenture—deficiencies in provisions were seen as the root of disease and other troubles.[117] Not only was there an aspect of healthfulness reflected in proper clothing, but also there were social prejudices surrounding women and their material appearances.[118] This could work against an apprentice, if she presented herself negatively through poor or

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[112] David Howes, and Marc Lalonde, 'The History of Sensibilities: Of the Standard of Taste in Mid-Eighteenth Century England and the Circulation of Smells in Post-Revolutionary France,' *Dialectical Anthropology* 16, no. 2 (1991), 129; Hitchcock, *Down and Out*, 99-100.

[113] Margaret Pelling, 'Apprenticeship, Health and Social Cohesion in Early Modern London,' *History Workshop*, 37 (Spring, 1994), 43.

[114] LMA, SM/PS, October 1736, *LL, 1690-1800*, LMSMPS503190077.

[115] Hitchcock, *Down and Out*, 98; Keith Thomas, 'Cleanliness and Godliness in Early Modern England,' in *Religion, Culture and Society in Early Modern Britain: Essays in Honour of Patrick Collinson*, eds. Anthony Fletcher and Peter Roberts (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 56; Susan Vincent, 'From the Cradle to the Grave: Clothing the Early Modern Body,' in *The Routledge History of Sex and the Body: 1500 to the Present*, eds. Sarah Toulalan and Kate Fisher (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), 165.

[116] For a similar petition see: LMA, SM/PS, 2nd July 1716, *LL*, LMSMPS501540183.

[117] Vincent, 'From the Cradle to the Grave,' 165; Pelling, 'Apprenticeship, Health and Social Cohesion,' 43.

[118] Gowing, 'The Manner of Submission,' 35.

inappropriate clothing it could be difficult to gain employment. But it could also reflect a master's inability to provide or care for an apprentice, which was often a part of their contract. Thomas and Sarah Spurway, a couple to whom Margaret Christian had been apprenticed 'to learn the art of child's coat maker', had sworn in their indenture to provide the necessary apparel, and her father gave them the sum of £16 at the start of her term to ensure this.[119] Not only did they fail to provide for Margaret but they also seized what clothes she did possess in order to pawn them for a profit. Beyond this they neglected to instruct her in the art she was meant to be learning, and in all aspects left her ill-qualified to work in the trade. Margaret was indeed subsequently discharged from service. One other example demonstrates how masters could take away more than necessaries and clothing. In 1744 Elizabeth Stenton filed for the dissolution of her indenture, proclaiming that her mistress, Susanna Wood, had 'struck her with an Iron Spindle and dislocated your petitioner's elbow so that your petitioner must have lost the use of her right hand had it not been for the great Care of the Surgeon of the London Infirmary'.[120] While physical correction was sometimes seen as acceptable, Susanna's abuse of Elizabeth was not only excessive, but threatened her future chances of work. Just as drudgery and hard labour wore down the hands and physically burdened apprentices, as seen above, abuse in which the body could become disabled prevented the apprentice from carrying out a successful trade.

From conceptions of vocation to anxieties about idleness and the instructive literature on how all members of society could be expected to acquire habits of industry, it becomes clear that ideas about work in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries do not always align with modern-day concepts of occupation. With the health of the oeconomy at the centre of cultural beliefs, labour was important for all members of society. Religion and societal ideas of familial duty called on everyone, men and women, to participate in labour, meaning even those who were not earning a regular income—particularly women—had some value within the oeconomy. Texts both instructed people on how to avoid idleness, but also warned about the negative ways in which people could by employed, such as in drudgery. How specific tasks and trades were learned and completed by women will be analysed to a greater extent in the following chapters, but it is important to reconsider present definitions of work in order to better understand, and value, female labour in the past.

## Location

Modern-day concepts of economy overwhelmingly frame work as something that takes place outside of the home, with the rare exception of those who are privileged enough

[119] LMA, SM/PS 15th July 1723, *LL*, LMSMPS502440195-LMSMPS502440197.
[120] LMA, SM/PS 13th September 1744, *LL*, LMSMPS503770032.

to 'work *from* home' (something different than working *in* the home).[121] Housework, the preoccupation of a large number of women, has been presented as something that was *other* than work, and therefore anything taking place in the home, for the home, has become undervalued both in terms of money and reputation. While the situation was far from equal in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and women were often limited to 'feminine' labour, they could be well occupied, or 'make an honest living', within or without the home. In particular, we need to consider all of the spaces which were treated as an extension of the home to better understand housework. With the frame of oeconomy shaping our study, we can reconsider housework and demonstrate that 'work' was not inherently located outside of the home. Women were not confined inside by their household duties, although they rarely had a set 'place of work', a fact that fails to align with modern-day ideas of 'the workplace'.

Notions of oeconomy help to break down the once strong structure of 'separate spheres' or the 'public/private sphere' model that was applied to the early modern period throughout much of the twentieth century. This placed men outside of the home, where they participated in work, in line with Aughterson's description above, while women's history was presented as taking place in the private sphere, or the home. The model of 'separate spheres' has been criticised by those such as Amanda Vickery who recognise that the concept was based on particular readings of 'didactic and complaint literature' which led to a lack of 'ensuing primary research…to test the reliability or significance of this sort of evidence'.[122] Recent work, particularly by gender historians and historians of the household, has sought to demonstrate the way in which the public and the private interacted and integrally relied on one another for the success of both the household and society on a larger scale.[123] Although women could arguably be seen as working in a closer vicinity to the household, notions such as 'private' and 'public' are not only limiting, but create false implications about the impact of women's work.

Housewifery will be discussed further in chapter five, but as a ubiquitous role that took women to a number of places, it is important to consider here. Fitzherbert helped start the trend of providing instructions for the housewife in his *Book of Husbandry*, one of the earliest works to detail the work involved in housewifery. Fitzherbert's instructions provide a picture of the many tasks that the wife of a husbandman was expected to undertake. A wife

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[121] Alan Felstead, Nick Jewson, Annie Phizacklea and Sally Walters, 'The Option to Work from Home: Another Privilege for the Favoured Few?' *New Technology, Work and Employment* 17, no. 3 (2002), 204-223.

[122] Amanda Vickery, 'The Golden Age of Separate Spheres? A Review of the Categories of Chronology of English Women's History,' *The Historical Journal* 36, no. 2 (1993), 385.

[123] Jan de Vries, *The Industrious Revolution: Consumer Behavior and the Household Economy, 1650 to the Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 103, 211; Naomi Tadmor, *Family and Friends in Eighteenth-Century England: Household, Kinship, and Patronage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 7-8.

was told to 'milk thy kine, feed thy calves', to 'provide for thy husband's breakfast, dinner, supper', to 'make butter and cheese when thou maist, serve thy swine both morning and evening', and when the times was at hand she was expected to gather up the eggs of the family's hens, ducks and geese. Such activities complicate definitions of domestic—the pig was not in the parlour, but was agricultural work an extension of the home? Jane Whittle presents the problematic nature of the division between labour force participation and unpaid work in the home, of which farming was a part.[124] Tasks completed by the woman of the family took her outside of the hearth and home, outside of the private, whether it was farming or going to market.

While being a housewife may not be a trade in the modern sense, as a woman did not go six days a week to a specific location in order to bring home a regular income, she was partaking in the household oeconomy. This is particularly true for the peasant and labouring classes, in which a single breadwinner household was unrealistic, and the burden of running the household, including market involvement, necessarily had to be shared by the women of the family. A hundred years after Fitzherbert, Gervase Markham published a similar treatise about good husbandry and good housewifery. Markham dedicated 230 pages to housewifery, compared to the 150 dealing with general husbandry. His section on housewifery was divided into seven chapters: 'her general vertues in Physicke'; 'the outward and active knowledge of the Housewife', as it related to herbs, gardening and cookery; textiles, such as wool, flax, hemp and linen; dairying; her office as 'malster'; dealing with and profiting from oats; and finally, the offices of brewing and all other things relating to bread or drink.[125] Her role could not be confined to a singular location and was not consistent day to day. Women's work adapted to the needs of the family, of her neighbours or of the local market.

Whether a housewife or not, women's work was fluid in terms of location. An anonymous letter published in the *Gentleman's Magazine* in 1739 described the many trades that girls could be apprenticed in once they had learned 'all the Arts of Oeconomy, Writing, and Book-keeping'. These trades, which the author deemed 'genteel and easy', included those of 'Linnen or Woollen Drapers, Haberdashers of small Wares, Mercers, Glovers, Perfumers, Grocers, Confectioners, Retailers of Gold and Silver Lace, Buttons, &c.'.[126] The anonymous author sought to demonstrate the retailing ability that could be gleaned from an economic education. While such an emphasis could draw them into a 'public' life, by working as or with retailers or haberdashers and such, it is important to note the use of the

[124] Whittle, 'A Critique of Approaches to "Domestic Work",' 36.

[125] Gervase Markham, *A Way to Get Wealth, by Approved Rules or Practice in Good Husbandry and Huswifrie* (London: Printed for Roger Jackson, 1625).

[126] *Gentleman's Magazine and Historical Chronicle*, vol. 9 (London: Printed by Edward Cave, 1739), 525.

term ‘oeconomy’, as described above. Though girls could—and according to some, *should*—put their skills to use in a shop, their ultimate goal was to support the oeconomy, the household market, rather than the economy, the public market. This of course depended on the situation of the woman’s family. The author was speaking about girls who were expected to have a husband who could maintain a family but who would benefit from the book-keeping skills she offered. Poor women, however, would be expected to make a feeble living, ‘either at Home by Spinning, winding Silk, &c. or by going Abroad to wash, scour, sell Fish, or do any Thing else to get a Penny’.[127]

Such women needed to contribute to their micro-oeconomy out of necessity, and there were stereotypes that accompanied their work. While the housework of the wife of a husbandman and certain genteel tasks for proper ladies were lauded, the fish selling and hawking of poor women were looked down upon, often in a derogatory manner, while still deemed necessary.[128] Take one of the stories found in numerous editions of *Joe Miller’s Jests*, a collection of contemporary witticisms:

> A Gentlewoman who thought her Servants always cheated her when they went to Billingsgate to buy Fish, was resolved to go thither one Day herself: and asking the Price of some Fish, which she thought too dear, she bid the Fish-Wife about half what she ask’d. Lord, Madam, said the Woman, I must have stole it to sell it at that Price, but you shall have it, if you will tell me what you do to make your Hands look so white. Nothing, good Woman, answer’d the Gentlewoman, but wear Dog Skin Gloves. D—mn you for a lying B—ch, reply’d the other, my Husband has worn Dog-Skin Breeches these ten Years, and his A—se is as brown as a Nutmeg.[129]

The joke reveals the ignorance of the rich woman who did not have a working knowledge of market prices, nor was comfortable physically going into the market. Although she often ordered her servants to go, the gentlewoman herself never ventured there. She had to resolve herself to enter this domain, which leads to the second point: the knowledge of market goods. Her servants were depicted as comfortable within these markets and shown to have knowledge of product prices. Even though at the start the woman believed she was being swindled, her lack of awareness when she came across the actual price of fish reveals that her servants were being truthful. The third point also demonstrates this in that the fishwife commented on the whiteness of the woman’s hands. While she attributed this to the wearing of dog skin gloves, it accentuated her difference, physically demarked, which was attained by a life in which her hands attended more to needles, pens and books rather than picking out

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[127] *An Account of Several Work-Houses*, 70.

[128] For a detailed analysis of the specific role and reputation of the female oyster seller, see Charlie Taverner, ‘Consider the Oyster Seller: Street Hawkers and Gendered Stereotypes in Early Modern London.’ *History Workshop Journal* 88 (2019), 1-23.

[129] Elijah Jenkins, Esq, *Joe Miller’s Jests: or the Wit’s Vade-Mecum,* 9th ed. (London: Printed by T. Read, 1747), 28. Original emphasis.

products, washing or scouring. The white distinction of her hands further placed her as one whose domain was the home rather than the streets or fields, a concept explored more in chapter five.

Finally, the punch line, delivered by the fishwife in the last few lines, categorises the multitude of female spaces. She not only used several crude words, confirming the stereotype of fishwives and hucksters being crass, but she also joked about her husband's 'brown arse' and why it could not be white. This played upon the view that fishwives were disorderly, loud, rude and disruptive.[130] The fishwife, who was out on the streets earning for herself and potentially her husband, was deemed crude and of a lower nature, looked down upon by the gentlewoman, whose reaction one can only imagine. This anecdote provided commentary on the diverse locations that women occupied in their daily dealings, shedding light on the separation of such locations that existed even within 'feminine' spaces. Portrayals of the immoral, foul fishwife were based on anxieties about the economic mobility of women on the street hawking their wares.[131] Their relative freedom on the streets—even if it was limited to certain areas, such as Billingsgate—led to such women being equated with prostitutes; yet however poor, the fishwife was still putting herself to work and earning her place in the market.

The idea of making one's own living also appeared in the inner dialogue of one of Daniel Defoe's most famous characters, Moll Flanders. As the daughter of an unmarried convict, Moll spent most of her youth in the house of a foster mother, but upon finding out that she was destined to go into service when she reached a certain age, Moll reacted negatively. Moll believed that with her upbringing in needlework and such she could earn her living without going to service. Furthermore, she feared that if she were forced into that line of work, she would be able to 'do but very little…except it was to run of Errands, and be a Drudge to some Cook-Maid…which put me into a great Fright'.[132] For Moll, being a woman of service was the antithesis of a gentlewoman and one of the worst outcomes for a girl, shown by the use of 'drudge', as discussed above. She cried tears of worry because she did not believe she could do housework in someone else's home: in her child's eye a gentlewoman was one who was able to work for themselves, to do work which would allow her to 'get enough to keep me without that terrible Bug-bear *going to Service*'. Indeed, Moll's

[130] Alena Buis, Christi Spain-Savage and Myra E. Wright, 'Attending to Fishwives: Views from Seventeenth-Century London and Amsterdam,' in *Mapping Gendered Routes and Spaces in the Early Modern World*, ed. Merry Wiesner-Hank (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015), 179, 182.

[131] Christi Spain-Savage, 'The Gendered Place Narratives of Billingsgate Fishwives,' *SEL Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* 56, no. 2 (Spring, 2016), 425-426.

[132] Daniel Defoe, *The Fortunes and Misfortunes of the Famous Moll Flanders, &c..* (London: Printed for, and Sold by W. Chetwood, 1722), 5.

ideal gentlewoman was a laundress she knew, 'a Woman that mended Lace, and wash'd the Ladies Lac'd-heads, she, *says I*, is a Gentlewoman, and they call her Madam'.[133] Such an understanding of being a proper woman allows the audience to laugh at Moll for her naivety, yet it shows in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries there was a clear hierarchy of women from those who worked in others homes to those gentlewomen who could afford to bring others into their homes.

While tasks such as hawking wares or working in the household of others may have been seen as lesser than making a living from one's own home, as seen in the narrative of Moll's early life, it was the reality for a vast number of young women, particularly in urban centres.[134] This life often meant a rotation of locations. Chapter two discusses the mobility of tailor apprentices throughout Yorkshire. Women working as midwives, discussed in chapter three, were required to travel great distances, sometimes ten miles in each direction, to attend women around her parish. Even if one had the fixed role of 'servant' they might have moved employers throughout their lifetime or work in a variety of homes, as will be seen in chapter four. Even within the household, specific locations held different labour associations, and the size of the household, as seen in chapter five, could determine the type of work a woman undertook. Contemporary literature represented a diverse world in which a woman could partake in work in a vast number of locales. There was a hierarchy within the fluid nature of labour locations, in which a woman's status could be based on where she moved around. Thinking about location not as a place of work but a backdrop in which women were routinely practicing and developing skills, places of labour can be expanded to include homes, marketplaces, shop doorways and a vast number of places.

Another term is more apt to describe the landscapes of labour women occupied: *taskscapes*. While not physical spheres to be moved between, taskscapes highlight an important aspect of the settings that women were navigating. Ingold coined the term *taskscape* twenty-five years ago in an article discussing the temporality of landscapes. The term was created to put a name on the 'pattern of dwelling activities', in which, Ingold claims, temporality is inherent.[135] Taskscapes are intrinsically temporal because they represent continuous and interconnected tasks or actions that an individual or group performs. In regard to embodiment, Ingold emphasises incorporation over inscription, meaning that in navigating taskscapes, whether consciously or subconsciously, one is imbued with a certain set of skills through repetition.[136]

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[133] Ibid., 9.
[134] Ibid, 5.
[135] Tim Ingold, 'The Temporality of the Landscape,' *World Archaeology* 25, no. 2 (Oct., 1993), 153.
[136] Ibid., 157.

Anthropologists and archaeologists have used 'taskscapes' in order to determine gendered and occupational spaces, that are often culturally constructed. Sara K. Becker, an anthropologist studying labour from a bioarchaeological perspective, shows how 'taskscapes bring human activities to the foreground because they can quantify and delimit the actions of embodied agents'.[137] Through a case study of Ghana over the last three centuries, Amanda Logan and M. Dolores Cruz showed that 'on a macro level, a gendered taskscape approach can relate seemingly small daily actions to larger political economic and environmental shifts.[138] Their theory about the impact of gendered taskscapes can also be seen in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century England. Taskscapes can be considered within the contexts of labour locations and the way in which women moved through their worlds, all while interacting with their surroundings via oeconomic activity. Despite contemporary opinions towards certain tasks, they were all means of labouring through which women interacted with their surroundings.

Didactic literature provided cultural grounding for women's taskscapes. In the mid-eighteenth century, William Ellis provided instruction for all wives in the countryside, from the farmer's to the yeoman's to the gentleman's wife.[139] His work focused mainly on 'the management of good oeconomy', which meant providing instructions for frugality, preserving meats and fattening hogs, how to save by making household products and other such means to be prudent. In some instances Ellis provided methods relayed to him by country women, such as his report on the practice of housewives throughout the countryside: 'the Practice of a Hertfordshire Housewife for improving the Meal of grown Wheat' he described as 'a good Piece of Housewifery', whether rich or poor.[140] Other times he provided instruction, like how to make bread 'more substantial than ordinary' or 'that will keep moist and good very long', the latter of which required boiling sliced pumpkin, straining it through a cloth and using that to make the dough.[141] It was not expected that a woman could memorise the nearly four hundred pages worth of instructions, however the length of Ellis's work, like Markham and Fitzherbert before him, detailed the wide varieties of tasks expected of a housewife, particularly rural housewives.

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[137] Sara K. Becker, 'Labor across and Occupational and Gendered Taskscape: Bones and Bodies of the Tiwanaku State (A.D. 500-1100),' *Bioarchaeology International* 3, no. 2 (2010), 119.

[138] Amanda L. Logan and M. Dores Cruz, 'Gendered Taskscapes: Food, Farming, and Craft Production in Banda, Ghana in the Eighteenth to Twenty-first Centuries,' *African Archaeological Review* 31, no. 2 (June 2014), 205.

[139] William Ellis, *The Country Housewife's Family Companion* (London: Printed for James Hodges, 1750).

[140] Ibid., 11.

[141] Ibid., 192.

Nearly all such works were written by men, even those that used the advice or recipes of women, such as Ellis's *Companion*. However, some women contributed their own words, and these books could attain popularity and could be reprinted over decades. Elizabeth Grey, Countess of Kent, wrote *A Choice Manual of Rare and Select Secrets in Physick and Chyrurgery*, which also included *A True Gentlewomans Delight, wherein is contain'd all manner of COOKERY.*[142] This recipe manual was originally printed in 1653, and was regularly reprinted over the next three decades. Kent's instructions tended to be more detailed than her male counterparts' spending about half a page or more on each direction, compared to some instructions in contemporary works that were limited to a few sentences. However, Kent focused purely on recipes, omitting instruction for a variety of other household tasks.[143] Hannah Woolley was another prolific female author of domestic manuals. She will be discussed more in depth in chapter four; however, her works, such as *A Supplement to The Queen-like Closet*, printed in 1684, continued the tradition of women exhibiting their expertise in a number of household domains.[144]

Similarly, Eliza Smith, writing fifty years later, gained success with her collection of recipes printed first in 1728.[145] Although entitled 'the compleat housewife', Smith too focused particularly on recipes for cookery, preserving, cakes, cordials and the like, including bills of fare for every month to help her fellow housewife keep her home in order. However, later editions, published after 1750, expand to include more than recipes, with instructions for tasks such as going about the market or setting the table for various occasions. Like Kent and Woolley, Smith was very detailed, and often more corporeal in her instructions than male authors. Take for instances her instruction for making a plum cake compared to that of *The Accomplish'd Housewife*. The latter, male-authored work instructed the reader to 'put a little Ale-Yeast and a Pint of Milk into three Pounds of Flour, to this add a Pound of Sugar, a Pound of Butter, and a little Spice, and make the whole into Dough, and after that work in as

[142] Elizabeth Grey, Countess of Kent. *A Choice Manual of Rare and Select Secrets in Physick and Chyrurgery* (London: Printed by G. D., 1653).

[143] Such works have provided a rich historiography in relation to women and recipes in the early modern period. See: Elaine Leong. 'Collecting Knowledge for the Family: Recipes, Gender and Practical Knowledge in the Early Modern English Household,' *Centaurus* 55, no. 2 (2013), 81-103; Elaine Leong and Sara Pennell. 'Recipe Collections and the Currency of Medical Knowledge in the Early Modern "Medical Marketplace",' in *Medicine and the Market in England and its Colonies, c. 1450 - c. 1850*, eds. Mark S. R. Jenner and Patrick Wallis (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 133-152; Sara Pennell, 'Perfecting Practice?: Women, Manuscript Recipes and Knowledge in Early Modern England,' in *Early Modern Women's Manuscript Writing: Selected Papers from the Trinity/Trent Colloquium*, eds. Victoria E. Burke and Jonathan Gibson (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), 237-258; Wendy Wall, *Recipes for Thought: Knowledge and Taste in the Early Modern Kitchen* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016).

[144] Hannah Woolley, *A Supplement to The Queen-Like Closet* (London: Printed for R. Chiswel, 1684).

[145] Eliza Smith, *The Compleat Housewife: or, Accomplished Gentlewoman's Companion* (London: printed for J. Pemberton, 1728).

many Plums as you please'.[146] This required a lot of knowledge from the reader as far as consistency and baking, or indicated a lack of such knowledge from the author. Smith, on the other hand, gave the ingredients—including the particular spices to use, nutmeg, cloves and mace—then directed the reader to mix it well, let it boil, add butter until it is melted and the batter is 'blood warm', then after mixing in a few more ingredients, 'make up your Cake, mixing it well with your Hands; cover it warm, and set it before the Fire to rise for half an hour'.[147] Smith's recipes not only detailed the corporeal efforts that were included in cooking, but she also described things in a physical manner—a reader can relate to 'blood warm' in a visceral sense.

The embodied tacit skillset of Smith's readers will be discussed more in-depth in the following chapters, but they provide a good example of gendered taskscapes. In examining how women not only learned various skills but also embodied them and displayed them in everyday activities, I seek to expand our appreciation of the labour enacted by everyday women in various roles. Women moved through their various landscapes and taskscapes, all the while being seen as labouring. Location will be developed in regard to different trades and labours, but nonetheless, the study of work cannot be confined to present-day constructions of workplace.

## Occupational descriptors

Modern-day concepts of work consider a trade's ability to define an individual's identity of key importance. There are still limitations that can be found in censuses in terms of occupational titles. Patterns of activity listed in censuses are unlikely to represent the population's time use.[148] But the inconsistencies are more frequent the further back in the records we go. Before the last hundred years or so, very few women—and men for that matter—defined themselves by a precise occupational descriptor. It was not until the 1841 census (forty years after the first official census was taken in England and Wales) that detailed occupational data was collected.[149]

While parish registers and court records listed occupations of some men, and fewer women, any historians using these sources must address discrepancies. For instance, E. A. Wrigley notes that parish registers leave out the occupations of nonconformists.[150] Michael

[146] *The Accomplish'd Housewife; or, the Gentlewoman's Companion* (London: Printed for J. Newbery, 1745), 234.

[147] Smith, *The Compleat Housewife*, 123.

[148] E. A. Wrigley, 'The PST System of Classifying Occupations,' *Unpublished paper, Cambridge Group for the History of Population and Social Structure, University of Cambridge* (2010), 1.

[149] Matthew Woollard, *The Classification of Occupations in the 1881 Census of England and Wales: Historical Censuses and Social Surveys Research Group Occupational Paper No. 1* (Essex: University of Essex, 1999), 2.

[150] Wrigley, 'The PST System of Classifying Occupations,' 4.

Roberts provides examples of how occupational ascriptions in sixteenth-century London were a means to assert political and social aspirations, and often merely signified guild membership rather than actual occupational activity.[151] Alexandra Shepard estimates that within the witness responses in church courts, 'at least ten percent of men claiming an occupational title were undertaking unrelated work'.[152] This does not include men who used various descriptions to convey social status rather than labour identity.[153] 'We should no more assume that occupational titles reflected men's work', Shepard claims, 'than we should expect that women were solely characterized by their marital status'.[154] Occupational descriptors were not directly related to the type of work, or works, being undertaken by an individual, and thus cannot be used as a definitive calculation of labour.

Men frequently (eighty-five per cent in Shepard's study) provided a social or occupation title, even if it may not have been identical to their work practices; however, women were rarely described in this way.[155] Instead, the biographical information they provided related to their marital status—spinster, wife or widow. Language and gender have an intricate relationship, in which the use of discourse and linguistic structure enforces power relations. Women's description in terms of marital status was due both to the fact that women were limited in legal language and because clerks recording women's statements determined what identifying information was included. Coverture—the legal convention that designated men's ownership over their wives' goods and property—further worked to supress women's agency within the rhetoric of court documents.[156] Due to women's legal status being subsumed under her marriage, information about married women's lives is difficult to discover. Just as Shepard concludes that 'it seems highly unlikely that the credit-bearing skills acquired by singlewomen and visible in widow's dealings were not put to good use by married women, even if the legal status of such transactions was less secure on account of

[151] Roberts, '"Words they are Women",' 139.

[152] Alexandra Shepard, 'Crediting Women in the Early Modern English Economy,' *History Workshop Journal* 79 (Spring, 2015), 12.

[153] For information on language, rhetoric, civility and citizenship see Phil Withington, *The Politics of Commonwealth and Freemen in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), especially 138-139; Claire Benson, 'Boundaries of Belonging in Early Modern London, 1550-1700,' (PhD Thesis, University of York, 2018), especially 14-15, 33-34. For more on the language of credit and labour in courts see Alexandra Shepard, *Accounting for Oneself: Worth, Status, and the Social Order in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015); Hindle, *On the Parish?*.

[154] Alexandra Shepard, 'Crediting Women,' 12.

[155] Ibid., 6.

[156] For more on coverture in early modern England, see Amy Louise Erickson, *Women and Property in Early Modern England* (London: Routledge, 2002); Joanne Bailey, 'Favoured or oppressed? Married women, property and "coverture" in England, 1660-1800,' *Continuity and Change* 17, no. 3 (2002), 351-372; Tim Stretton and Krista K. Kesselring, eds., *Married Women and the Law: Coverture in England and the Common Law World* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2013).

coverture', it also seems highly unlikely labour skills acquired in their youth were not put to good use during women's married lives.[157]

In the rare instances where a woman was given an occupation in parish registers, it was almost always as midwife: for example Isobel Rounding, who was a certified midwife in Ulrome, Skipsea in 1712, was described as both 'old widow' and 'midwife' in the parish burials register when she died in 1740.[158] In the York courts, women's occupational titles align with Shepard's findings that 'the only titles with occupational associations claimed by singlewomen were servant and spinster, and the extent to which the latter described productive activity is debatable'.[159] The language that was used to describe women at this time had to be threaded through conventional norms and, as a woman was often defined by her male relationships, it would first be noted whether or not she had a marital tie to a man. Unlike Isabel Rounding, a number of women who were certified midwives were still described by their marital status in the burial registers, such as Jane Hilileigh, who was nominated midwife in 1712 but described as 'widow' when she was buried in 1719.[160] In the same records men were described by their occupation, such as wheelwright. It was not only the language available to women in describing their situation that created a barrier within sources; creators of these sources, such as clerks and scribes, were themselves men, and so were more familiar with the ways in which fellow men occupied themselves, hence were more apt to describe such specialised tasks than the diverse and diffuse feminine vocations.[161]

As discussed in the introduction, historians are beginning to rely more and more on the verb-oriented method to uncover women's work.[162] Women provided incidental information of how they made their living in verb form, such as sewing, washing, selling or going abroad to do laundry. This did not mean that women were not actively 'occupying' a trade, rather that because women were considered to 'do' various kinds of work and were not identified by occupational titles, they were more likely to be listed in terms of marital status. Shepard reckons that 'the discrepancy between occupational titles claimed by women and their incidental descriptions of the work they did suggests a multiplier of around six would begin to produce a credible minimal estimate of the numbers of women actually performing the tasks'.[163]

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[157] Shepard, 'Crediting Women', 17.

[158] BIHR Nom. M. 1712/9; PR/AC/4 (1740). See chapter three for more information on 'midwife' as a title.

[159] Shepard, 'Crediting Women', 10-11.

[160] BIHR Nom. M. 1712/4; PR/Y/ASP/1/111.

[161] Fiebranz, Lindberg, Lindström and Ågren, 'Making Verbs Count,' 278.

[162] Fiebranz, Lindberg, Lindström and Ågren, 'Making Verbs Count,'; Ågren, 'Making Her Turn Around.'

[163] Shepard, 'Crediting Women', 11.

Returning to the assize court records introduced at the start of this chapter, we can see the ways in which women incidentally described a variety of labours without using occupational language. Women talked about going to the marketplace, providing lodging or victuals for various people, conducting business on behalf of their husband, doing fieldwork, working with animals, working about their house or another's house, shop keeping and general housework. In 1658 Phillippa Leason described how her neighbours, Matthew and Ann Reed, required her service to come and attend to a wound Matthew had sustained. Leason described the breadth and depth of the wound and stated she used 'her best endeavours for the cureing of [the] wound', but never described herself as a healer or a nurse.[164] Whether it was going out in the field to gather sticks, washing clothes by a river amongst other women, selling pewter and cloth or carding wool, women described their activities incidentally.[165]

Although women's contribution to the household economy has begun to be recognised by historians, the nature of their labours still remains underexplored. Beyond the incidental descriptions of the *kinds* of work they were undertaking, we can also explore the *nature* of that work. Women detailed the physical nature of the labours or the hours they expended, such as the woman who had to carry sticks upon her back or the one who spent all night brewing in her master's house or even the woman who had to go out at two in the morning to undertake wash in another's home.[166] Some of these tasks, such as hawking, selling or doing work in another's home, were done for financial gain, while other activities were for direct contribution to the oeconomy, such as working in their husband's field, buying wheat or milking their own cows; nevertheless, all of them, directly or indirectly, were work. Frances Watson, introduced at the start of this chapter, was helping her neighbour Anne, who was too weak to physically take on the tasks required of a woman in charge of a household. The interaction between these two women was not 'economical', but it reflects Anne managing her oeconomy by bringing in physical assistance when she was unable to perform her tasks. Furthermore, neither woman is described in any sort of occupational way. Yet it would be problematic to discount their work, the physical skills they required and the tasks they were performing.

In the early modern period men and women were conducting themselves under legal and linguistic terms that do not align to modern-day formulas. Historically, terms could either allow for a loose definition of one's work or restrict their legal status, depending on the situation. Historians have acknowledged that the lack of occupational descriptors applied to

[164] TNA, ASSI 45/5/5/4.
[165] TNA, ASSI 45/10/1/149; ASSI 45/10/3/126; ASSI 45/14/1/10; ASSI 45/14/1/61.
[166] TNA, ASSI 45/14/1/32; ASSI 45/18/2/20; ASSI 45/18/5/84.

women in court and church records did not mean that they failed to contribute as 'an army of wage labour'.[167] Rather the means by which they described themselves simply do not fall in line with modern-day characterisations of work. By beginning to address the problematic historiography that has been created through the nineteenth-centuries models of male breadwinners and modern-day definitions of 'work', we can acknowledge that we have been restricted in fully grasping the contributions of women within the historic workforce. Looking beyond paid work, workshops and legal occupational descriptors, women can be seen as participating in familial and local oeconomies. The remaining chapters examine a variety of women's labours that took on a number of different forms, but all required skill embodiment. This will start with a group of women, who despite being prevalent in the records of York's Merchant Taylors Company, were almost never described as tailors or mantua makers in parish registers or elsewhere. The tailoring women of Yorkshire are an excellent example of the additional methods historians need to use to fully understand early modern women's work.

[167] Shepard, 'Crediting Women,' 5; Roberts, '"Words they are Women",' 139.

## Chapter 2. 'Merchant Tayloris': Skill transfer and textile work[1]

A great number of texts extolling the virtues of muses and mortal women alike included skilled needlework and handiwork as recurring themes. The early-eighteenth-century poet John Hughes praised the lady Molinda, describing her 'smiling Train of Arts' that 'court Improvement from her curious Hand'.[2] Indeed, she 'with like Skill the Pen and Needle guides; By this we see gay silken Landskips wrought'. The novelist Penelope Aubin similarly captured the great capacities of Charlotte Du Pont, 'an English lady', claiming she 'us'd her Needle with as much Art and Skill, as if *Pallas* had been her Mistress'.[3] As we saw in the introduction, contemporaries contemplated and appreciated the work of the woman's hand as it plied her needle.

Needlework has long been recognised for its role in girls' education in the early modern period, and, more recently, historians have begun to discuss the importance of spinning in the early modern oeconomy.[4] But women were participating in the textile trade at multiple levels, not just working their needles at home or going to the homes of others to participate in spinning or sorting cloth. Women were unlikely to leave behind shop inventories, and it is difficult to rely on written sources to establish a picture of their work.[5] While few relevant written records survive, garments themselves are even rarer, and so there is little physical evidence of the work that women were doing, with the exception of some elaborate court mantuas. Forty years ago, Madeleine Ginsburg noted that although 'the ladies are dust' and we cannot 'appreciate the skill with which the eighteenth-century mantua-

[1] Borthwick Institute of Historical Research (BIHR), MTA 6/2. 'Tayloris' was used to designate a female tailor in the enabled masters lists.

[2] John Hughes, *Poems on Several Occasions* (London: Printed for J. Tonson and J. Watts, 1735), 111.

[3] Penelope Aubin, *The Life of Charlotta Du Pont, an English Lady* (London: Printed for A. Bettesworth, 1723), 3. Pallas was Athena, the Greek goddess of wisdom and handicraft.

[4] Lena Cowen Orlin, 'Three Ways to be Invisible in the Renaissance: Sex, Reputation, and Stitchery,' in *Renaissance Culture and the Everyday*, ed. Patricia Fumerton and Simon Hunt (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 1996), 183-203; Amy Louise Erickson, *Women and Property in Early Modern England* (London: Routledge, 2002), 57-58; Sarah Randles, '"The Pattern of All Patience": Gender, Agency, and Emotions in Embroidery and Pattern Books in Early Modern England,' in *Authority, Gender and Emotions in Late Medieval an Early Modern England,* ed. Susan Broomhall (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 156; R. C. Allen, 'The Spinning Jenny: A Fresh Look,' *Journal of Economic History* 71, no. 2 (June, 2011), 461-464; Craig Muldrew, '"Th'ancient Distaff" and "Whirling Spindle": measuring the contribution of spinning to household earnings and the national economy in England, 1550-1770,' *Economic History Review* 65, no. 2 (2012), 498-526; Jane Humphries and Benjamin Schneider. 'Spinning the Industrial Revolution,' *Economic History Review* 72, no. 1 (2019), 126-155; Historians of early modern America were slightly earlier in acknowledging the important role of spinning in the colonial home, particularly Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, 'Wheels, Looms, and the Gender Division of Labour in Eighteenth-Century New England,' *The William and Mary Quarterly* 55, no. 1 (Jan., 1998), 3-38.

[5] Rozsika Parker has noted that wills and personal inventories of wealthy women 'disclose the formidable use of embroidery', but it is more difficult to track women's involvement in the tailoring *trade*. Rozsika Parker, *The Subversive Stitch: Embroidery and the Making of the Feminine* (London: I. B. Tauris & Company, Limited, 2010), 41, 70.

maker was able to "flatter all complexions and favour all shapes"', we can still acknowledge other aspects of her expertise.[6] While few relevant written records survive, garments themselves are even rarer, and so there is little physical evidence of the work that women were doing, with the exception of some elaborate court mantuas. However, a lack of material evidence does not mean that we should 'underestimate the level and specialisation of the skills required in making middling and labouring women's gowns from light fabrics', as John Styles has recently argued.[7]

This chapter starts with a discussion on textiles and tailors in early modern England through the use of manuals and trade guides. I touch on the evolution of women in the trade and the impact of the mantua, before considering the links between textile relationships and young women. Emphasis is given to the physical nature of tailoring, as well as the gendered embodiment that began at a young age for girls in this period. Following this, I examine the York Merchant Taylors' Company in-depth. After reassessing the statistics and demographics of female participation, I show how crucial biographical information about members of the Company has been overlooked. Through an examination of parish registers, I have traced a number of female networks that reveal that women took full advantage of their status in the Company to transfer their embodied knowledge. These include both familial connections and masters' reputations. This section ends with a discussion about the Company's use of language and the implications of gendered discourse that shaped the experiences of female tailors. By looking at the evidence and asking different questions, this chapter not only expands our knowledge of York's Merchant Taylors, but also of female skill transfer in the early modern period.

## Early modern textiles

In England, the tricks of the textile trade were closely guarded by corporations and artisans: 'the hand that plied the needle hardly ever held the pen'.[8] Labour and economic historians can extract some information about financial aspects from bills, inventories and account records, and some statistical information about members can be gathered from guild registers. However, little has been written about the nature of tailoring. Even less has been said about women in the trade. The story in France is rather different, where written records

[6] Madeleine Ginsburg, 'The Tailoring and Dressmaking Trades, 1700-1850,' *Costume* 6, no. 1 (1972), 68.

[7] John Styles, 'Clothing the North: The Supply of Non-élite Clothing in the Eighteenth-Century North of England,' *Textile History* 25, no. 2 (Autumn, 1994), 155.

[8] Ginsburg, 'The Tailoring and Dressmaking Trades,' 64.

and visual depictions of the tailor's workshop are more numerous. Through combining the more detailed French records about production processes with extant English accounts, certain scholarly work, such as Lynn Sorge-English's in-depth study of the staymaking trade in the long eighteenth century, has begun to expand our understanding.[9]

While tailors were reluctant to write about their craft, trade guides revealed contemporary opinions about tailoring. One such guide was Robert Campbell's *The London Tradesman*, printed in 1747. For Campbell, the tailor not only made society's clothes, but also made the man: 'to some he not only makes their Dress, but in some measure, may be said to make themselves. Through quantitative analysis, economists Moshe Justman and Karine van der Beek determine that Campbell's observations offer 'an unparalleled source of information on trade-specific wages in mid-eighteenth-century London'.[10] Indeed, his commentary provides insight into tailoring that is difficult to find elsewhere. While *The London Tradesmen* is full of common tropes and stereotypes, particularly when it came to women's work, the way in which it is consistent with contemporary trade guides, such as *A General Description of all Trades* discussed below, suggests that his observations on various occupations were relatively reliable.[11] And one particularly popular theme he discussed was that of hierarchy within trades.[12] Campbell distinguished the master tailor from the mere helping hands of the industry: 'Any Bunglar may cut out a Shape when he has a Pattern before him,' he claimed, 'but a good Workman takes it by his Eye in the passing of a Chariot', having 'a quick Eye to steal the Cut of Sleeve, the Pattern of a Flap, or the Shape of a good Trimming at a Glance'.[13]

Campbell and his contemporaries acknowledged that like many other artisanal crafts, the tailoring trade had a firmly established tradition of apprenticeship. Beginners spent the first few years of their apprenticeships taking on the more menial tasks required by their masters. This could include cleaning the workshop, running errands such as delivering clothes, or finishing off items to make sure they were ready for delivery. After two years or so performing miscellaneous tasks, apprentices moved on to practicing more detailed aspects of the trade such as learning the numerous types of stiches—'basting, back and fore, side,

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[9] Lynn Sorge-English, *Stays and Body Image in London: The Staymaking Trade, 1680-1810* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2011).

[10] Moshe Justman and Karine van der Beek, 'Market Forces Shaping Human Capital in Eighteenth-Century London,' *Economic History Review* 68, no. 4 (2015), 1196.

[11] Ibid., 178.

[12] For a discussion of early modern hierarchy and sorts, see chapter IV.

[13] Robert Campbell, *The London Tradesman. Being a Compendious View of all the Trades, Professions, Arts, both Liberal and Mechanic, now Practiced in the Cities of London and Westminster* (London: Printed by T. Gardner, 1747), 191-3.

back, backpricking, forepricking stitch, serging cross and button stitch'.[14] Although not in the trade himself, Campbell recognised one of its most sought after skills, the ability to cut, without wasting any fabric or ruining the attire, and doing so from one's own knowledge, not from a pattern. Marla R. Miller, in her examination of female artisans in early New England, found that this held true across the Atlantic as well, stating that 'the key to understanding the role of artisanal skill in the production of clothing is the distinction between cutting a garment and sewing it'.[15] The former skill was the most sought after as it required 'cultivated expertise'. Clare Crowston also sees this reflected in paintings depicting French tailors, who are shown cutting fabrics while the younger apprentices can be seen stoking fires for the irons or stitching.[16] As there were no published texts devoted solely to tailoring, the skills of the craft had to be gained from experience, passed from master to apprentice.

Throughout most of the early modern period, and particularly prior to the eighteenth century, tailors were responsible for men and women's clothes, including riding garments, doublets, gowns and coats. As seamstresses, women were the helping hands to the tailor—their status even below that of the apprentice—completing the basic stitching and other busywork. However, in the 1680s, changes in fashions brought over from the continent shifted the tailoring industry, most notably seen in the rising popularity of the mantua. In France a decree from King Louis XIV in 1675 gave 'women the right to dress their own sex'; however, the gendering of the trade was far less regulated in England.[17] There, Sorge-English posits, 'the change from male to female [tailors] might have been so gradual that it was never recorded as a change worthy of note'.[18] Nevertheless, the impact of the mantua was undeniable, and by 1688 English authors of trade manuals were noting the expanded role of women in the tailoring trade, predominantly as mantua-makers.[19]

By the time Campbell was writing, mantua making was an established trade made up primarily of women. Unlike the traditional gown, the mantua was a looser garment that required pleating to fit a woman's body. Mantuas were often made of linen and cotton, which were light, delicate fabrics, in contrast to the gown and its parts, such as the whalebone stays. As the mantua did not need to be moulded to a bodice, the skills were also different: 'the

[14] Ginsburg, 'The Tailoring and Dressmaking Trades,' 65-6.

[15] Marla R. Miller, 'Gender, Artisanry, and Craft Tradition in Early New England: The View through the Eye of the Needle,' *The William and Mary Quarterly* 60, no. 4 (Oct., 2003): 750-1.

[16] Clare Haru Crowston, *Fabricating Women: The Seamstresses of Old Regime France, 1675-1791.* Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2001), 119.

[17] Sorge-English, *Stays and Body Image*, 11.

[18] Ibid., 13.

[19] Randle Holme, *The Academy of Armory* (Chester: Printed for the Author, 1688), 98.

essential skill required for making and fitting a mantua was that of pleating and draping the light silk fabric over a foundation of bone stays'.[20] This level of fitting also required more up-close contact with a customer's body, so societal decorum meant that women were seen as better suited for this intimate role. The mantua-maker 'must keep the Secrets she is entrusted with, as much as a Woman can', wrote Campbell, 'For, though the Stay-Maker does his Business as nicely as possible, and conceals all Deformities with the greatest Art, yet the Mantua-Maker must discover them at some times; she must see them, and pretend to be blind, and at all times she must swear herself to an inviolable Secrecy'.[21] A corresponding skill of the mantua-maker was concealment: she had to 'learn to flatter all Complexions, praise all Shapes, and, in a word, ought to be compleat Mistress of the Art of Dissimulation'.[22]

As a mantua-maker, a woman could only participate in limited parts of the tailoring trade, specialising in the mantua, women's undergarments, nightgowns, petticoats and children's clothes. Nevertheless, it could be a respectable trade. The *A General Description of all Trades*, also printed in 1747, was directed at parents putting their children out to apprentice. The author explicitly referenced mantua making, in which a woman had to have 'a clever knack at Cutting out and fitting, handsome Carriage, and a good set of Acquaintance' in order to establish herself.[23] In other words, mantua making was skilled in accordance to Willeke Wendrich's definition, established in the introduction: it was cognitive, manual and social. The mantua-maker also had to follow changing fashion trends, being a 'perfect connoisseur in Dress and Fashions', like her brother the tailor, and know the ins and outs of different fabrics, which would support her role as mistress in the art of dissimulation, mentioned above.[24] What is more, a woman had to go through an apprenticeship process if she hoped to establish herself in the trade.

Women in most labouring and middling homes would have been taught basic needlework and embroidery, in a way that embodied feminine traits as well as manual skill: '[embroidery] was taught to inculcate obedience and patience during long hours sitting still, head bowed over an increasingly technically complex, demanding art'.[25] But the more

[20] Styles, 'Clothing the North,' 155.
[21] Campbell, *The London Tradesman*, 227.
[22] Ibid., 227.
[23] *A General Description of all Trades, Digested in Alphabetical Order* (London: Printed for T. Waller, 1747), 134.
[24] Campbell, *The London Tradesman*, 227.
[25] Parker, *The Subversive Stitch*, 82-83.

specialised work of the mantua-maker was less widespread.[26] Through his analysis of women's work in eighteenth-century workhouses, Styles found that even though inmates were expected to take on basic spinning activities, the overseers paid outsiders for more specialised tasks such as making linen inner garments, shifts and caps. That is to say that women were either too infirm to perform the skills required to make these goods, or alternatively, 'many poor women could simply not sew well enough'.[27] Styles supports this latter theory with the fact that many tracts revealed anxieties about the deficiencies of poor children in respect to sewing skills. Apprenticeship, therefore, was important for enhancing skills that young girls may have begun to learn in their own homes. Although families could choose to put their daughters to an apprenticeship for a variety of reasons—socialization, accumulation of skills for their futures as wives or a step up the social ladder—girls who completed an apprenticeship gained valuable vocational training and improved their potential to contribute to an oeconomy.[28] Like boys who were apprenticed to tailors, girls spent the first months or years doing menial tasks, such as running errands or sweeping spare cloth off the floor.[29] After this initial period, they could go on to advance their sewing skills and learn other aspects of the business, such as how to take a client's measurements, assess the correct amount of cloth for a project or cut the cloth.

Although not all aspects of the tailoring trade were open to women, it is likely that a girl would have specialised in certain tasks, according to her mistress's preferences. This was certainly the case throughout seamstress guilds in France, where one apprentice recorded her experience of being asked to make an article of clothing that was outside of her skillset:

> In the seamstresses' profession each worker attaches herself to the work which seems to her the most advantageous, some making only stays and nothing else, others working for common people, others for middling people, and others for the most distinguished people, without being possible for any of these workers to succeed in making articles other than those which they have practiced.[30]

No records detail the work of apprentices in England with comparable precision, but the fact that trade manuals noted the variety of clothing a mantua-maker might make—women's shifts, sleeves, handkerchiefs, underdresses—indicates there was likely specialisation

[26] Styles, Clothing the North,' 153.
[27] Ibid., 154.
[28] Crowston, *Fabricating Women*, 308-9.
[29] Ibid., 124.
[30] Ibid., 79.

amongst the women who practised the trade.[31] Recognising skill gradation and specialisation reinforces that women's work, even of a particular type, cannot be studied as a monolith.

Crowston draws attention to another important feature of female apprenticeship: girls were often apprenticed around the onset of puberty, and so they spent formative years of their young adult lives working closely with sexually mature women who were often not their mothers. It was typical for a girl to start menstruating at around the age of fourteen, with a girl starting her period much younger than that being viewed as having a 'hot womb'.[32] When compared to York, where most girls were apprenticed around fifteen, a girl's apprenticeship and biological development could occur around the same time. In a period when literature often intertwined womanhood and needlework, it is not surprising to find texts that detail a young girl picking up her needle representing the start of her adult life. For instance, in the 1723 *Authentick memoirs of Sally Salisbury*, the author described how Sally came to be an excellent needle-woman and how it was part of a female world: 'At the very budding of her *Puberty Sally* commenc'd *Woman*, and the first Use she made of her *Needle* was at her Mother's Expence'.[33]

Female apprentices, Crowston suggests, 'learned to be sexually mature women at the same time they acquired trade skills'.[34] Girls were learning skills of the trade from their female masters, while also transitioning into 'the next stage of…womanhood', undergoing physical and emotional changes. These latter changes were of a concern to early modern thinkers, who equated the start of menstruation with sexual awakening, and as such a female master could play a crucial role in instructing these young women on social behaviours, such as modesty and chastity.[35] Masters also taught young women how to be responsible with the economic freedom that came with learning a trade. Campbell warned that when a 'young Creature' finished her apprenticeship and had no friend to advise her or check her conduct, 'it is more than ten to one but she takes some idle, if not vicious Course', such as prostitution.[36] Campbell, whose texts skewed towards misogynistic even for the time, nevertheless demonstrated the important role a master tailoress played. Beyond needlework and fashion, she taught an apprentice aspects of womanhood and female demeanour. This is further

[31] Holme, *The Academy of Armory*, 97-98.
[32] Sara Read, *Menstruation and the Female Body in Early Modern England* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 60.
[33] Captain Charles Walker, *Authentick Memoirs of the Life, Intrigues and Adventures of the Celebrated Sally Salisbury* (London: 1723), 10. Original emphasis.
[34] Crowston, *Fabricating Women*, 310.
[35] Read, *Menstruation*, 45-47.
[36] Campbell, *The London Tradesman*, 227-8.

supported when considering the length of the girls' apprenticeships. As Bridget Hill has argued, the fact that apprenticeships were, on average, seven years long indicated that masters and mistresses not only taught skills in the trade, but also they were 'responsible for their general upbringing and education, for their religious and moral training, and for preparing them for the role they would be called on to play as adults', roles that were highly gendered.[37]

Female tailors did not just embody cultural norms learnt from their masters, they also shaped and adapted their bodies for the trade.[38] Cultural concepts of gender meant that from a young age, girls were adjusting their hands to work with needles and learning postures that were suitable to long hours of sewing. For those women who became tailors, their bodies were impacted even more. We know that male tailors took on a very particular posture, sitting on top of their worktable, cross-legged, bent over their work. They could be sat in this position for the majority of the day, particularly apprentices or journeymen who did more of the handiwork and tedious labour. In the winter season, tailoring could cause even more stress on the body, as many hours of work had to be done by candlelight, hence why '[a tailor] ought to have a strong sharp Sight'.[39]

The negative aspects of these physical conditions were noted in pamphlets and manifestos, such as that of 1721 when a group of young tailors protested that by 'sitting so many hours in such a position…their spirits [are] exhausted, nature is wearied out and their health and sight are soon impaired'.[40] The Italian physician Bernardino Ramazzini warned that tailors, who led a sedentary life, were prone to particular diseases, and that their bodies would be 'form'd as to have their Back bended or bow'd, with wry Neck, or their Heads hanging down'.[41] The cross-legged posture of the tailor was believed to lead to 'Numbness in the Legs, a Lameness, and the Sciatica'. In addition, Ramazzini cautioned that tailors and needlewomen, who worked indoors all day, barely walking around, could become scabby, ill-complexioned, 'and the whole Habit of the Body is defiled'. Ramazzini's warnings about the ill habit of the body, shaped by the work environment, hark back to Joseph Butler's thoughts

[37] Bridget Hill, *Women, Work and Sexual Politics in Eighteenth-Century England* (London: UCL Press, 1994), 97.

[38] See 'Introduction', 11, for a discussion how occupations shaped the skeleton of workers.

[39] Campbell, *The London Tradesman*, 193.

[40] Ginsburg, 'The Tailoring and Dressmaking Trades,' 66.

[41] Bernardino Ramazzini, *A Treatise of the Diseases of Tradesmen* (London: Printed for Andrew Bell et al., 1705), 193-196.

about how habits of the body were formed, discussed in the previous chapter: 'Habits belonging to the Body, are produced by external Acts', particularly through repetition.[42]

Campbell noted that while the trade did not require much muscular strength, 'the Custom of sitting cross-legged, always in one Posture, bending their Body, makes them liable to Coughs and Consumptions', adding that 'You rarely see a Taylor live to a great Age'.[43] Because of the effects the trade had on the body, Campbell believed that 'a sickly tender Constitution, or a Habit the least inclinable to a Consumption, is very unfit for a Taylor'. The habits of the body that accompanied tailoring were embodied deep within the trade. Warnings about the physical impact of the trade continued over the next century, with physician Charles Thackrah noting that tailors and dressmakers alike could not 'have respiration, circulation, or digestion well performed', due to sitting all day with their legs crossed and their spines bowed. Echoing Campbell's sentiments, Thackrah stated, 'we see no plump and rosy tailors, none of fine firm and strong muscle'.[44] Even if all those who practised the trade did not encounter the many diseases discussed in these tracts, tailoring in this period was an extremely physical occupation.

Both Ramazzini and Thackrah alluded to the fact that needlewomen adopted similar sedentary positions, but overall, women's tailoring work was described in less detail. Crowston notes that in French paintings, seamstresses or women working on textiles are not depicted in the cross-legged posture but rather are shown seated on chairs, with their work either on a table or in their lap.[45] As she points out, the different postures likely resulted from cultural norms and ideas of female modesty. A woman sitting cross-legged was not in line with contemporary female decorum, nor would it have been easy for her to sit in such a position in her dress or skirts. These social standards forcing women to adapt different sewing techniques is an example of carnal sociology. Despite the ways that men and women embodied the skills differently, the latter could be expected to spend most of their time bent over their work in similar ways to male tailors, and this no doubt took its toll.

The physicality of a trade went two ways; it was not just that the tailor kept long hours, during which their posture and the straining of their eyes could have negative physical effects, but it was also the case that their bodies impacted their work. *A general description of*

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[42] Joseph Butler, *The Analogy of Religion, Natural and Revealed, to the Constitution and Course of Nature* (London: Printed for James, John and Paul Kanpton, 1736), 82-3.

[43] Campbell, *The London Tradesman*, 193.

[44] Charles Turner Thackrah, *The Effects of Arts, Trades, and Professions, and of Civic States and Habits of Living, on Health and Longevity*, 2nd ed. (London: Longman, et al., 1832), 25-30.

[45] Crowston, *Fabricating Women*, 119.

*all trades* emphasised the tacit and physical abilities required of a mantua-maker. The author explained that tailoring 'requires very good Eye-sight and a quick Hand to make good Wages at it'.[46] The latter two points highlight how women's experience in crafting simple undergarments and basic mantuas could be expanded upon in order for them to establish themselves within the Company. According to the author, 'the most dexterous Part is Cutting-out, on which depend the Fitting and Shape', once again highlighting the skill of the hand.

Little is known about women's workday in the industry or the time spent on the trade. As mentioned, journeymen tailors claimed they were made to work fifteen-hour days. Crowston found that French seamstresses worked twelve- to fourteen-hour days, usually starting around sunrise and ending around eight or nine o'clock at night, no matter the season. Later, in the nineteenth century, Thackrah claimed that although milliners and dressmakers were meant to keep ten- or twelve-hour days, they often worked from six in the morning until midnight.[47] In York, a journeymen tailor was expected to work from six o'clock in the morning until eight o'clock at night, with an hour off for lunch.[48] This meant they could work up to 78 hours a week, as Sunday was their only free day. If women were keeping similar hours, this could mean extremely long hours in the summertime when new clothing was most in demand. However, some of the female master tailors in York's Company participating in the company were mothers of young children, so unless they brought in outside help for childcare, it can be assumed that they had different hours than their male counterparts.

Women working in the production of cloth certainly kept long hours. Their hours were tied to how much they could produce in a day rather than having set hours as artisans did, such as those who worked strictly from sunrise to eight in the evening. In November 1681 the widow Elizabeth Slack of St Mary's parish in Halifax claimed she was out spinning all day until an hour before sunset.[49] Later in 1735, Mary Clay of Elland in the West Riding, carded wool in one John Ellam's home 'all the day' and did not return home until eleven in the evening.[50] Women working in the early stages of cloth production were subject to different hours from those who were tailoring, sewing or selling garments, but nevertheless, a woman could be occupied throughout most of the day in all aspects of textiles, particularly if

[46] *A General Description of all Trades*, 206.
[47] Thackrah, *The Effects of Arts, Trades and Professions*, 29-30.
[48] Bernard Johnson, *The Acts and Ordinances of the Company of Merchant Taylors in the City of York* (York: Privately published, 1949), 91.
[49] The National Archives (TNA), ASSI 45/13/1/20.
[50] TNA, ASSI 45/20/2/27.

the woman was single and childless. Styles has noted that there is no evidence to support the argument of nineteenth-century antiquarians that most Northern families made nearly every article of dress in their own homes.[51] Rather, as the making of women's outer garments became more feminised, the market opened up for female tailors, a trend reflected in the records of York's Merchant Taylors Company.

## Merchant tailors in York

In 1949 a former master of York's Merchant Taylors Company, Bernard Johnson, wrote that it was 'a woman's hand' that helped the Company regain its influence in York's economy at the turn of the eighteenth century.[52] Later, in a 2005 study of the same Company, S. D. Smith found a direct correlation between the admittance of women into the tailor's guild and its survival. Smith states that: 'Outside York, the failure to regulate women mantua-makers effectively was a contributory cause of company decline; within York, the eventual demise of the tailors' trading privileges can also be linked to the decline of female admissions'.[53]

Johnson was interested in the survival of the Company and Smith sought to examine the differences between male and female members of the Company, providing a context for why York departed 'from the norms followed by other tailors' guilds in England'. Yet, neither fully explained women's active participation as tailors.[54] While Smith offers an excellent quantitative analysis of the Company's membership from 1693-1776, providing statistics on age, participation and paternal occupation lineage, his data is affected by errors such as counting a handful of women twice when they appear under a maiden name and a married name.[55] To better understand women's relationship with the trade and the Company, the remainder of the chapter will look beyond the number of women in the Company, and instead take a deeper interest in female networks to highlight the skill and sociability that was at play.

In the middle of the eighteenth century, when the Company was at its strongest—in terms of numbers and influence—it also had the highest proportion of female apprentices in its history. While only a handful of women—mainly widows of masters or mothers of apprentices—took on apprentices between 1660 and 1710, the number of female masters

[51] Styles, 'Clothing the North,' 149.
[52] Johnson, *The Acts and Ordinance*, 81.
[53] S. D. Smith, 'Women's Admission to Guilds in Early-Modern England: The Case of the York Merchant Taylors' Company, 1693-1776,' *Gender & History*, vol. 17, no. 1 (April 2005), 122.
[54] Ibid., 102.
[55] See the description of Hannah (Dawson) Beckwith below.

increased nearly tenfold by 1719. As shown below in Table 2.1, after 1710 women made up about a quarter or more of all masters taking on apprentices, reaching 45 per cent in the 1750s. Girls were even more prominent as apprentices. Like masters, there were negligible numbers of female apprentices prior to 1710: only 3 per cent of apprentices from 1660 to 1709 were girls. However, from 1710, they made up nearly half of all apprentices. Despite a slow uptake, once women became established and their success was cemented, the trend was hard to reverse.

*Table 2.1: Female involvement in the York Merchant Taylor Company*[56]

| | ***Male Apprentices*** | ***Female Apprentices*** | ***% Female*** | ***Male Masters**** | ***Female Masters**** | ***% Female*** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1660-69 | 147 | 0 | 0 | 145 | 2 | 1.4 |
| 1670-79 | 82 | 0 | 0 | 81 | 1 | 1.2 |
| 1680-89 | 127 | 0 | 0 | 125 | 2 | 1.6 |
| 1690-99 | 129 | 2 | 1.5 | 128 | 3 | 2 |
| 1700-09 | 112 | 17 | 13 | 123 | 6 | 5 |
| 1710-19 | 60 | 63 | 51 | 94 | 29 | 24 |
| 1720-29 | 85 | 97 | 53 | 125 | 57 | 31 |
| 1730-39 | 112 | 89 | 44 | 126 | 75 | 37 |
| 1740-49 | 92 | 42 | 31 | 97 | 37 | 28 |
| 1750-59 | 66 | 83 | 56 | 84 | 68 | 45 |
| **TOTAL** | 1012 | 393 | 28 | 1129 | 279 | 20 |
| | | **Total apprentices:** | **1,405** | | **Total masters†:** | **1,408** |

***** This is master per apprentice, meaning a single master is counted each time they took on an apprentice. This method has been chosen to better demonstrate the master to apprentice gender ratio and better calculate the proliferation of female masters.

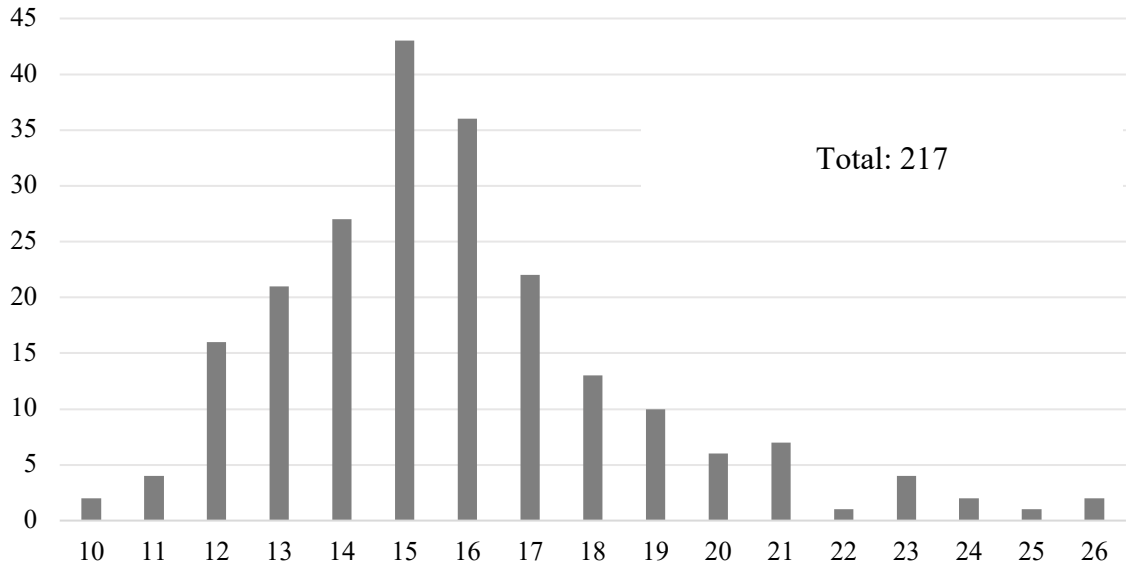
† The +3 total masters accounts for when an apprentice was turned over to a different master

As discussed in the introduction, York's population in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was fairly stagnant, although there was an influx of female migrants to the city. This affected the marriage market as well as the economic market, with many young twenty-something women remaining unmarried as they started an occupation. York's Merchant Taylors' Company, one of the city's largest companies, felt the impact of the inflow of female labourers. According to Smith, one factor that led to more female apprentices was the rising average of age at which women were married, which was about 24.3 at the end of the seventeenth century.[57]

[56] BIHR, MTA 9/1 and MTA 9/2.

[57] Chris Galley, *The Demography of Early Modern Towns: York in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1998), 124-130.

*Table 2.2: Female Age at Start of Apprenticeship*[58]

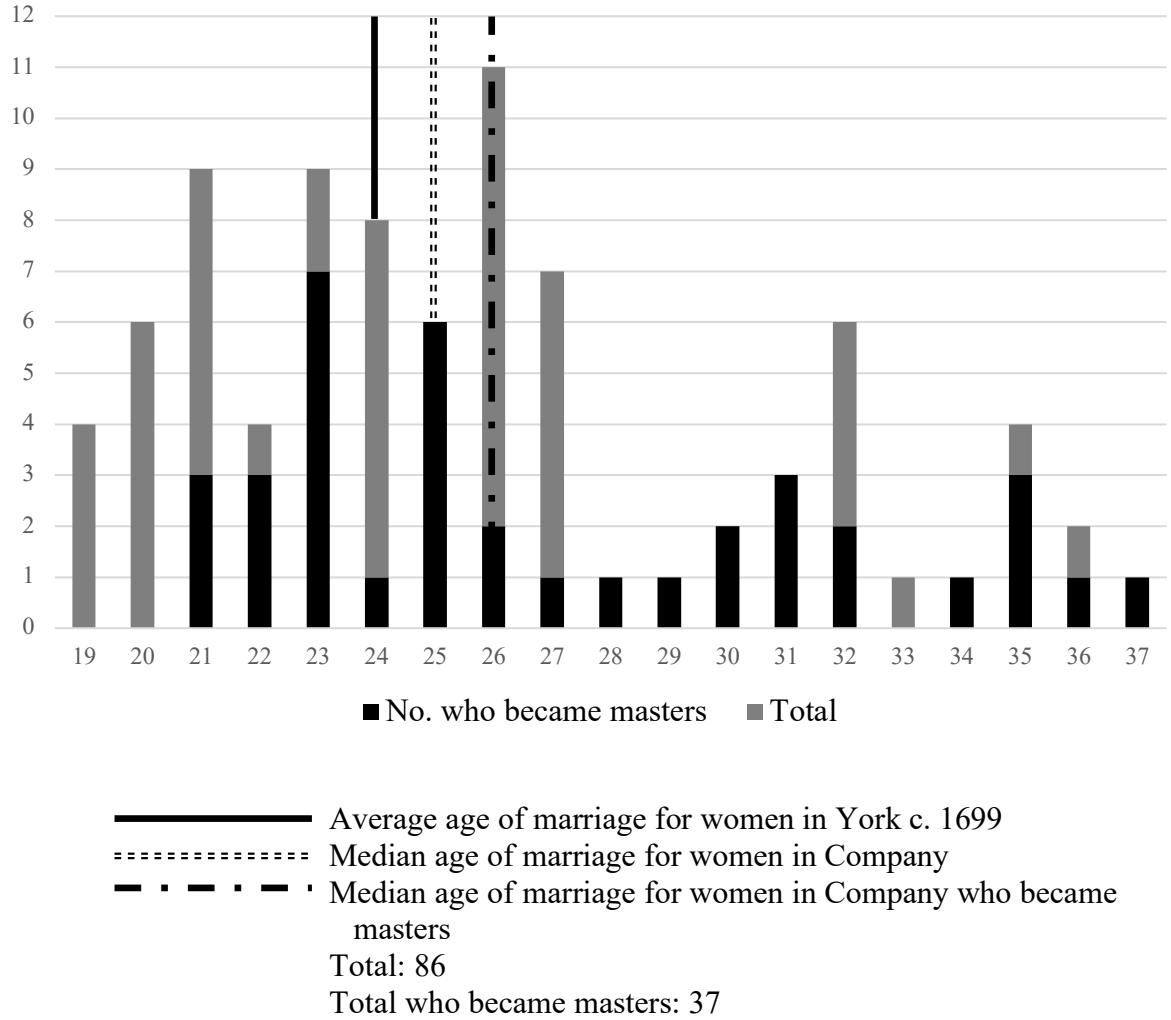



Since the girls in the Company usually started their apprenticeship around 15.8 years old, as seen in Table 2.2, they would have had time to take up and successfully complete a seven-year apprenticeship prior to marriage. Through the use of parish registers, I have tracked the marriage age of eighty-six women in the Company, charted in Table 2.3. The median age of marriage for Merchant Taylor women was 25.7 years old, leaving even more time for girls to complete an apprenticeship before marriage. Women appear to have balanced a life in the textile trades alongside marriage—those who were masters tended to marry even later, at a median age of 27. Women could be enabled as a master tailor before or after marriage, showing that women adapted depending on individual circumstances. Indeed, of the eighty-three women who were enabled as master tailors in the company, only fifteen are recorded as 'wife', and of those fifteen, eight are also referenced by their maiden name, possibly to ensure that if a woman established herself under one name, she could continue as a master under her new married name (For example, 'Ann Goddard otherwise Atkinson now the wife of William Atkinson was enabled a Merchant Taylor', or 'Ann Graham alias Haynes now the Wife of John Haynes').[59] While there is an interesting correlation between the age of marriage and the end of apprenticeships that deserves some acknowledgment, I do not argue that they alone can account for the rise in women's participation in the Company.

[58] BIHR, MTA 9/1 and MTA 9/2; PR/Y/ASP/1-2; PR/Y/HTG/2-3; PR/Y/MC/135-136; PR/Y/MG/2-3; PR/Y/SAV/1A.

[59] BIHR, MTA 6/2.

*Table 2.3: Marriage age of women in the Merchant Taylors' Company*[60]




Smith relies heavily on these demographic changes as the reason for women's enrolment in the guild, while Johnson took a legal, Company-centric approach—not surprising given his position as a member of the Company. Johnson especially cited the legal disputes between Mary Yeoman and the Company, which lasted two years and cost the Company around £40 in litigation fees.[61] The Company enlisted four lawyers to process their 1698 indictment against Mary, who had been exercising the trade of tailor for at least a year. This was after the Company had already spent time and money trying to entrap Mary,

[60] BIHR, MTA 9/1 and MTA 9/2; In order to determine marriage ages, I used parish marriage registers, as well as baptism registers. Only women who were in the parish mentioned in the Merchant Taylor records were considered, as well as those whose father or husbands' names were given. If a name was too common or there was more than one woman of that name, they were not counted. This was done with the aid of online resources such as findmypast.co.uk and parish records located in the Borthwick Institute, BIHR/PR. Average age of marriage for York women from Galley, *The Demography of Early Modern Towns*, 124-130.

[61] Johnson, *The Acts and Ordinances*, 83-85.

sending the Searchers to visit her on at least four occasions and paying four different witnesses to bring mantuas to Mary to elicit her services. The results of the 1698 case are not recorded, but Mary was indicted and sued again at the Lent Assizes in 1699, demonstrating her persistence in practising her trade. Despite the Company attempting to indict and sue her throughout the year, incurring costs such as the £3 3s. 10d. spent on refreshments during and after another trial, at some point Mary reached an agreement with the Company and she gained Freedom of the Company on 20 December 1699. Although women were never admitted in equal numbers, apart for some exceptional years (in 1721, of the eight new enabled masters, seven were women), Mary Yeoman started a precedent for fellow women tailors.[62]

*Table 2.4: Enabled Masters by Decade*[63]

| ***Decade*** | ***Men*** | ***Women*** | ***Total*** | ***% Women*** |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1693-99 | 61 | 2 | 63 | *3.2* |
| 1700-09 | 58 | 2 | 60 | *3.3* |
| 1710-19 | 47 | 22 | 69 | *31.9* |
| 1720-29 | 39 | 28 | 67 | *41.8* |
| 1730-39 | 32 | 19 | 51 | *37.3* |
| 1740-49 | 52 | 15 | 67 | *22.4* |
| **TOTAL** | **289** | **88** | **377** | **23.3** |

While the above factors—rising population and legal pressures—played a part in the increase of women tailors, by focusing on these aspects exclusively, both Smith and Johnson have portrayed women as passive recipients benefitting from changes in demography, fashion or the Company's attitude. Yet it cannot be a simple case of more women living in the city and more gendered fashion trends, or else the trend witnessed in York would have likely been replicated throughout the country. An explanation, perhaps, lies elsewhere. David De la Croix, Matthias Doepke and Joel Mokyr have recently explored various means of knowledge dissemination and technological process in the centuries preceding the Industrial Revolution. The process they describe resulted in an increase of 'productivity in the economy'.[64] Tailoring women in York, at a micro-level, made up what can be termed a 'clan system', in which knowledge was transferred through specific, female relationships. Clan dissemination

[62] BIHR, MTA 6/2.
[63] BIHR, MTA 6/2.
[64] David de la Croix, Matthias Doepke and Joel Mokyr, 'Clans, Guilds, and Markets: Apprenticeship Institutions and Growth in the Pre-Industrial Economy,' *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 133, no. 1 (2018), 3.

relies on 'reputation and trust', and women used the official guild system to establish their reputations, as seen by the number of apprentices taken on by certain women. York was, as noted in the introduction, exceptional for education opportunities for young girls and also for catering to the fashion preferences of the country gentry. These, in combination with specific women possessing reputation and skill, provided an optimal setting for women to establish networks. As we will see, it is apparent that knowledge was transferred generationally, and that women capitalised on 'clan' connections and reputations to create labour opportunities.

First, we can think about what women were doing in the Company. Smith speculates that they were predominantly taking part in the early-stage production aspects of tailoring (sorting cloth, etc.), rather than crafting or selling goods. He comes to this conclusion by reviewing the proportion of masters who gained civic freedom. Theoretically, one had to be a freeman of the City in order to sell and participate in the market without molestation, although it is difficult to discern how strictly this was regulated.[65] Nearly 90 per cent of male masters took the freedom of the city, whereas only eight of the eighty-nine enabled female Merchant Taylors did the same.[66] While Smith acknowledges that this could indicate a mutual understanding between female masters and the Company, in which women would trade without persecution despite not being freemen, he ultimately favours a different argument, suggesting that the low number of women gaining the freedom meant that most women were working on the lower end of the economic scale in the tailoring market.[67] Smith's favouring of the latter argument leads to conclusions about women's restricted abilities.

Evidence from both the start of women's participation and from when they were prominent members suggests that women moved beyond these boundaries, participating in customer-facing roles and crafting garments. First, we can return to Mary Yeoman, the woman the Company had legally pursued in the 1680s. The Company paid women to solicit her business, which had produced enough evidence to suggest that Mary did actually *make* mantuas, 'and was therefore occupied in a branch of tailoring in contravention of…the By-laws of the Company'.[68] Although language will be discussed more in-depth below, it is

[65] Besides the low number of women taking the freedom, men conversely were registered taking their Civic Freedom in a higher number than there were male entries into the Company suggesting that there was poor cooperation between the civic authorities and the Company; Johnson, *The Acts and Ordinances*, 82.

[66] Mary Blyth, 1691; Mary Yeoman, 1696; Elizabeth Yeoman, 1702; Grace Priestley, 1704; Margaret James, 1713; Ann Hawkins, 1726; Agnes Uevers (née Lee), 1726; Dorothy Mallson, 1750; *Register of the Freemen of the City of York: Vol. 2, 1559-1759*, ed. Francis Collins )Durham: Andrews & Co., 1900).

[67] Smith, 'Women's Admission to Guilds in Early-Modern England,' 120.

[68] Johnson, *The Acts and Ordinances*, 84.

worth noting here that women were being described in precise terms, denoting their different but specific occupations, such as mantua-maker, staymaker or inlay mantua-maker, which suggests that they were partaking in special branches of the trade that involved more than basic cloth work. Because they dominated these branches of the trade, it is likely that they also made up the majority of those selling these specialised garments, and if they were anything like the London mantua-makers described by Campbell, their roles certainly required both dexterous skill in crafting garments and social skill in engaging and maintaining a customer base. The late eighteenth century directory of York tradesmen lists a number of mantua-makers and their shops, such as Ann Robinson and Ann Hudson, who had been apprentices in the Company, as well as Ann Crofts, who was likely the niece of Hannah Beckwith, discussed below.[69] Mary Askwith, who was enabled a merchant tailor in 1745, was likely the mother of the Mary Askwith listed as a milliner in the 1787 directory. These and other women in the directory demonstrate that there was certainly an acceptance of trading done by women in the tailoring occupations.

Learning more about the status of the apprentices and the networks leads to conclusions about the specialised knowledge acquired and shared by these women. There is some detail given in the apprenticeship registers about the background of the apprentices. In about 70 per cent of the entries for female apprentices, a parent's name and occupation is given. Table 2.5 demonstrates that about 12 per cent had a father in the clothing industry, a percentage which is much lower than their male counterparts: 39 per cent of boys had a father who was some sort of tailor, draper or mercer.[70] On the other hand, more girls had fathers who were yeoman or gentleman, with 32 per cent falling into this category middling or well-to-do families.

[69] The men in the Crofts family certainly carried on the patrilineal trade, as James and Martin Crofts are listed as 'plumbers and glaziers' in *The York Guide*.

[70] Smith, 'Women's Admission to Guilds in Early-Modern England,' 107.

*Table 2.5: Parental Occupations of Female Apprentices*[71]

| ***Category*** | ***No.*** | ***%*** |
|---|---|---|
| Not listed | 128 | 32.6 |
| Yeoman | 48 | 12.2 |
| Gentleman | 36 | 9.2 |
| Clothing/Textile | 31 | 7.9 |
| *Tailor, milliner, cordwainer, weaver, linen draper, hosier, pinner, heckler, haberdasher* | | |
| Educated/Religious profession | 21 | 5.3 |
| *Clerk, minister, reverend, schoolmaster, clergy, attorney* | | |
| Manual labour | 18 | 4.6 |
| *Brick maker, bricklayer, joiner, paver, plumber* | | |
| Victualing/Food | 17 | 4.3 |
| *Baker, melder, confectioner, butcher, inn holder, ale draper, wine merchant, beer brewer* | | |
| Mother/Widow | 16 | 4.1 |
| Metal work | 14 | 3.6 |
| *White Smith/Black Smith, Brass caster, brazier, pewterer, cooper, cutler* | | |
| Merchant | 13 | 3.3 |
| *Mercer, merchant, merchant adventurer, factor* | | |
| Craftsman/Trader | 11 | 2.8 |
| *Jeweller, pipe maker, book binder, stationer, tallow chandler, tobacconist, apothecary, glazier* | | |
| Husbandman/Unidentified labourer | 9 | 2.3 |
| Poor girl/Trustee | 8 | 2.0 |
| Mariner/Sailor | 6 | 1.5 |
| Manual craftsman | 6 | 1.5 |
| *Fellmonger, tanner, saddler* | | |
| Service | 5 | 1.3 |
| *Cook, gardener, coachman, carrier* | | |
| Fishmonger | 2 | 0.5 |
| Barber surgeon | 2 | 0.5 |
| Esquire | 1 | 0.25 |
| Collier | 1 | 0.25 |
| ***Total*** | 393 | 100.0 |

In York 33 per cent of the yeomen's daughters and a quarter of the gentlemen's daughters were apprenticed to male masters. This would suggest that they were taking into consideration the skills they would be learning in their apprenticeship rather than learning social norms from a female master, as Crowston suggested in the Parisian case.[72] The second bulk of girls came from 'the middle level', their fathers being artisans, merchants, craftsmen or in educated professions. Similarly, Crowston's suggestion about girls from this level learning 'useful skills' that would likely be cast aside in favour of marriage is not entirely applicable to York. A number of girls who went on to become masters in the Company came

[71] Occupations are sorted by the nature of the work rather than the 'sort', that is to say, not by social standing. Some work within one category may have extremely various social status or worth.

[72] Crowston, *Fabrication Women*, 308.

from a variety of backgrounds, a majority of them being of the 'middling sort'. The joiner Joseph Abbey apprenticed two of his daughters in the trade, both of whom took on multiple apprentices, before and after their respective marriages. Beer brewers and yeomen alike had daughters who spent time as apprentices, were enabled masters in the Company and then took on their own apprentices. A similar pattern appears when we look at the Company's most prolific female master, Elizabeth Priestley. Priestley was taking girls from a variety of backgrounds, from clerks' daughters to a coachman's daughter, from a plumber who paid a £10 premium to a minister who paid £21. This suggests that York families across social levels had aims of educating their daughters in useful textile skills, either as a step towards becoming more oeconomically productive or as a step up the social ladder—or both.

Although the occupation of the mother was rarely cited, family reconstruction demonstrates that a number of girls had a female relation within the trade. Sometimes the records themselves listed relationships, but in other cases I used data from the apprenticeship records, such as father's names, occupations, and parish of origins in order to construct family lineages through parish records. From those whose names can be confirmed there are at least ten girls whose mothers were also Merchant Taylors.[73] In addition to mother-daughter ties, there were at least six sets of sisters who were both involved in the trade. Sisters Mary and Elizabeth Yeoman of Wakefield were not only some of the first women to be enabled as masters to the trade but also were both registered Freemen of the City.[74] Grace Priestley, one of the most eminent masters of the company regardless of gender, took her sister Sarah as her first apprentice. Jane, Grace's niece (through her brother), gained her freedom and traded as a milliner, taking on a number of apprentices of her own. In a 1787 directory, Jane is listed as owning a milliner's shop in Stonegate, representing over eighty years of Priestley women being established in the trade.[75] Elizabeth Palister took on her younger sister, Anne, as apprentice in 1715, as well as Anne's daughter. Dorothy Rymer and her sister, Henrietta, of New Malton, took on five apprentices between them. Mary and Diana Mitley of Featherstone were apprenticed three years apart from one another, to the same master, William Townson.

[73] Mary (née Merry) and Mary Knapton; Mary and the younger Mary Morley; Faith and the younger Faith Banks; Beatrix and Elizabeth Stephens; Elizabeth and the younger Elizabeth Silburn; Alice and Elizabeth Walker; Jane (née Dobson) and Ellen Boddy; Alice (née Abbey) and Hannah (née Crofts) Beckwith and their respective daughters Alice and Elizabeth.

[74] *Register of the Freemen of the City of York: Vol. 2, 1559-1759*, ed. Francis Collins. (Durham: Andrews & CO, 1900).

[75] *The York Guide: Containing a Description of the Cathedral, with Other Public Buildings in the City. To which is Added an Alphabetical Directory to the Merchants and Principal Tradesmen Resident in York* (York: Printed and sold by A. Ward, 1787), 47.

The sisters Elizabeth and Mary Mempson of Malton were both apprenticed in 1738, each to a different woman.

The Beckwith family is one of the most noteworthy examples of women making familial occupational ties. Malby Beckwith, a jeweller, inherited his trade from his father and passed it on to his son, Ambrose. However, the male members of the family were not the only ones to participate in a hereditary occupation: the Beckwith women also formed a familial network as merchant tailors. Malby's first wife was Alice Abbey. Alice started her trade as an apprentice in 1714 at the age of 15.[76] In 1721, she was enabled as a master of the Merchant Taylors and then married Malby later that year.[77] Alice managed to take on three apprentices in between eight pregnancies. Alice's first three children died in infancy, but while she was pregnant with her fourth in 1726, she took on her first apprentice. After the birth of this child, Alice took on another apprentice, a young girl who previously had been set to Elizabeth Freer, with three years remaining in her indenture. The fact that Elizabeth's indenture was transferred implies that she was an apprentice who hoped to learn the trade and was not just a young girl acting as cheap labour in the guise of an apprentice. Alice took on her third apprentice in 1731 only a few months after giving birth to yet another child, Alice the younger, who would herself become a Merchant Taylor, showing *skills* were being transferred. Given the short birth intervals—four surviving children born in the space of five years—and the fact that she continued to take on apprentices when her children were young, may suggest that Alice employed a wet nurse, as was common for women businesswomen at the time.[78] Among her apprentices was Alice's younger sister: Sarah Abbey started her apprenticeship in 1723 and was enabled a master 'tayloriss' in 1730, immediately after her apprenticeship. She took on at least one apprentice before her marriage to George Harrison, and at least two after as 'the wife of George'.[79] The senior Alice died in 1735, shortly after giving birth to her eighth child.

After the death of his Alice, Malby quickly married again, this time to the young widow Hannah Dawson (née Crofts).[80] Malby likely knew his second wife through his first, as they were both prominent, enabled merchant tailors.[81] Hannah had started her

[76] BIHR, MTA 9/1.

[77] BIHR, MTA 6/2; BIHR, PR/Y/HTK/144.

[78] Amy Louise Erickson, 'Esther Sleepe, Fan-Maker, and Her Family,' *Eighteenth-Century Life* 42, no. 2 (2018), 24; Gill Newton, 'Infant Mortality Variations, Feeding Practices and Social Status in London between 1550 and 1750,' *Social History of Medicine* 24, no. 2 (2011), 260-280.

[79] BIHR, MTA 6/2, 9/2; PR/Y/HTG/3.

[80] BIHR, PR/Y/MB/6.

[81] Both had also been apprenticed to successful and well-known women: Alice was apprenticed to Ann Hawkins who had twelve apprentices throughout her career and had gained civic freedom; Hannah was

apprenticeship in 1722, at the age of 18. Seven years later she married William Dawson before being enabled as a merchant tailor a few months later. William died only a year into their marriage, but as a widow Hannah took on five apprentices. She then married Malby, with whom she bore three children. Hannah then went on to take eleven more apprentices, the first of which she took on when her children were all still under the age of four, and while responsible for raising Alice's surviving children.[82] The fact that a number of these girls also went on to take their own apprentices shows that there was transmission of skill, rather than the apprentices simply being used as domestic help. By uncovering the fact that Hannah took apprentices before and after her second marriage, her total number of apprentices comes up to sixteen, a fact missed by Smith, who does not include her in his list of women taking on over fifteen apprentices.[83] Among her apprentices were the sixteen year-old Alice, Malby's daughter from his first marriage, and her own daughter, Elizabeth, who was thirteen when she started her apprenticeship. The young Alice Beckwith went on to take her own apprentices, starting in 1756. Hannah also served as master to her brother's daughter, Jane Crofts, who was apprenticed to her aunt at the age of sixteen.[84] The tailoring women in the Abbey/Beckwith/Crofts clan demonstrate that the female economy could be hereditary, with women passing on their knowledge and their trade to female relations. They are examples of strong female kinship surrounding the tailoring industry, but also of women who continued their trade while being mothers. Both of Malby's wives laboured to contribute to their family's maintenance, creating connections within the Company while raising children with whom they could share their skills.

Viable networks within the Company were also created through marriage. Mary Vanner came from a family of Merchant Taylors—Mary's father, John, was her master and her brother, John the younger, had connections within the company. The younger John's wife, Mary Farmery, took on her in-laws' trade in widowhood, apprenticing one girl. Some women married fellow Merchant Taylors, for instance Elizabeth Bealby married Robert Beeforth in 1722 after completing a seven-year apprenticeship. Between them, the Beeforths took on at least six girls as apprentices. Elizabeth (née Gell) and Thomas Terry were both masters, each taking on at least one apprentice. Such connections demonstrate that there was an undeniable social aspect to the way in which women took part in the Company of

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apprenticed to Joanna Bellingham who took on seven apprentices and was prominent in both the Merchant Taylor records and the York City's Register of Apprenticeship Indentures.

[82] BIHR, PR/Y/HTG/3.

[83] Smith, 'Women's Admission to Guilds in Early-Modern England,' 104-105.

[84] BIHR, YDA/11/102/5; Jane is also mentioned in Hannah's will, PR/Y/HTK/144.

Merchant Taylors, but it also shows how both men and women in the Company could benefit from the inclusion of the latter sex within its ranks. Social links allowed women to gain reputations. Some used their spouse's established business in order to take on their own apprentices, while others, like the younger Alice Beckwith, learned the trade from their female relatives and set out on their own, remaining unmarried as they made their path as masters.

*Table 2.6 Female apprentices' regions of origin*[85]

| ***Origin*** | ***No.*** | ***%*** |
|---|---|---|
| York | 140 | 66.0 |
| West Riding | 18 | 8.5 |
| *> 20 miles* | *4* | *1.9* |
| *< 20 miles* | *14* | *6.6* |
| East Riding | 14 | 6.6 |
| *> 20 miles* | *5* | *2.4* |
| *< 20 miles* | *9* | *4.2* |
| North Riding | 35 | 16.5 |
| *> 20 miles* | *27* | *12.7* |
| *< 20 miles* | *8* | *3.8* |
| Outside Yorkshire | 5 | 2.4 |
| ***Total:*** | 212 | 100.0 |

While parental occupation is one traceable aspect in the apprenticeship registers, another is geographical origin. This can give us information about the structure, socialisation and reputation of a master. Such evidence reveals that cities outside of London were developing populations of 'well-to-do tradeswomen', similar to those found in the capital by Amy Louise Erickson.[86] Overall, as seen in Table 2.6, 34 per cent of girls came from outside of the city of York. In tracking the towns and cities of origins of the apprentices, it becomes apparent that those who came from further away typically found masters who were women of note, meaning women who took on multiple apprentices or came from a prominent tailoring family. For example, between the years 1730 and 1739 there were twenty-three girls who came from without York to take on an indenture with a female master.[87] Of these girls, all but one were apprenticed to a master who took multiple apprentices or was of a notable family. Interestingly, the majority of these girls came from the West Riding, which was noted for its

[85] BIHR, MTA 9/1 and 9/2.

[86] Amy Louise Erickson, 'Eleanor Mosley and Other Milliners in the City of London Companies 1700-1750,' *History Workshop Journal* 71 (Spring, 2011), 150.

[87] See Appendix 1 for a sample of Merchant Taylor Masters and the origins of their apprentices.

own textile trade, perhaps suggesting that skilled masters apprenticed girls who already had a connection to tailoring. Female masters were attracting girls from afar based on their ability. Three of the twenty-three girls had origins outside of Yorkshire; one girl was from Ely, Cambridgeshire, another from Lincoln and a third from Newcastle-upon-Tyne. The notable master included Alice Waind, who drew in three girls from outside of the City, ranging from Selby to Sedbergh, all in the West Riding; Ann Hawkins took on twelve apprentices in total, one of which was Hannah Carter, the daughter of a yeoman from Selby; and Jane Jackson was the master to Mempson sisters of Malton, mentioned above, as well as Margaret Tennant, the apprentice from Ely. This trend demonstrates that social skill played a key role in bringing in apprentices. Women who were established both through family connections and ability took on girls from farther afield due to their reputations.

The recognition that apprentices travelled from a distance to work with specific masters reflects female workmanship found in other parts of England at this time. Erickson provides an analysis of milliners in London from 1700-1750, focusing on specific women that were found in various companies, and discovers similar trends. Erickson argues that women milliners 'drew on their kinship and their training networks to establish and maintain businesses, and they used the London companies to further what can only be called their career ambitions'.[88] The same was true of the women of York. While problems arise in accounting for the day to day business life of Merchant Taylors, using the taking on of apprentices as a basis for ascertaining a master's success demonstrates that a number of women were building reputations as effective masters who could provide occupational and social education through their training. The mechanism of using reputation to share tacit knowledge was more effective in York because of its small size, educational opportunities and gentry consumption mentioned earlier. Population and geographical scope play a role in the proliferation of knowledge dissemination, with larger cities not allowing a sustainable environment for such a mechanism.[89] These factors played a role in the success of women tailors in York during this period.

It is clear from the type of women who were attracting girls from market towns or rural areas that status mattered: a woman's ability to transfer knowledge increased her intake of apprentices. This, along with evidence such as the premiums paid, supports the argument that girls were used for more than menial tasks, as families invested in their daughters to

[88] Ibid., 165.
[89] De la Croix, Doepke and Mokyr, 'Clans, Guilds, and Markets,' 13.

travel afar in order for them to work with someone established in the Company. Given the number of girls who were enabled masters and those who did not marry until at least seven years after the start of their indenture, it appears a majority of them completed apprenticeships, allowing them to acquire, at the minimum, manual skills, if not managerial skills, which would contribute to their future family economy. Just as Erickson found in London, the women of York indicate that single-women, wives and widows had the ability to acquire a trade, particularly those of artisanal or prosperous backgrounds.[90]

Smith notes the occupational descriptors that were applied to the enabled Merchant Taylors of both genders, although he fails to denote any important differences. Though slight, the changing language used to describe the members was far from inconsequential; rather it reflects the Company's attitudes towards women. While tailor is technically a gender-neutral term, its definition still carries masculine connotations. The Oxford English Dictionary defines tailor as 'a maker of the outer garments *of men*, also *sometimes those of women, esp. riding-habits*' and provides historical contexts that connote gender differentiation, such as the 1530 use 'a woman tayllyour'.[91] These refer to the gendered nature of the products a tailor produced, however whether a tailor worked on women's or men's clothes still bore influence on the masculinity—or lack thereof—of the maker, as seen in the Shakespearean dialogue about Feeble, a woman tailor, when Falstaff claims 'if he had bin a mans tailer hee'd a prickt you'.[92]

Documents of the Company followed the tendency to distinguish between men and women's work, particularly as the eighteenth century progressed. It was not a simple distinction of master and mistress, as women were still enabled as 'masters', but rather it was a subtle distinction to denote the women's *otherness*.[93] During the 1690s and early 1700s, when women admitted into the company were few, they were recorded as simply being 'admitted free of the said society', without any particular title given to them. As their presence became more prominent, they were noted as being 'abled (enabled) Merchant Taylor*is*' for the first decade or so, distinguishing their difference from the male members who were 'abled a Master Merchant Taylor'. This term dropped off by the 1720s, from which point on they were noted as being 'enabled a Merchant Taylor'. This was consistent with the

[90] Erickson, 'Eleanor Mosley and Other Milliners,' 166.

[91] "tailor, n.1". OED Online. September 2019. Oxford University Press. https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/197091?rskey=Kz0ZJ2&result=1&isAdvanced=false.

[92] William Shakespeare, *The Second Part of Henrie the Fourth* (London: Printed by V. S., 1600).

[93] See note 56 above for a discussion on distinguishing between master/mistress/female master in this thesis.

apprenticeship records, shown in Table 2.7, in which 'tayloress' was used sporadically in the early stages. By the 1720s, when female participation in the Company had risen to nearly fifty per cent, the term all but ceased to be used. At this point women were either listed by just their name or simply as merchant taylor. This change may have reflected a simple change in clerks, with the new clerks not feeling the need to distinguish the genders. However, it is likely not a coincidence that the decades in which the term was most used were those in which women were most prominent as masters. The title was slowly replaced with that of 'mantua-maker' in the 1750s, as women's participation plateaued, and by 1755 either no title was given to the female master or she was called a mantua-maker.

*Table 2.7: Descriptors Applied to Female Masters in the Apprenticeship Registers*[94]

| | ***None*** | ***Widow*** | ***Wife*** | ***Draper*** | ***Merchant Taylor*** | ***Merchant Tayloress*** | ***Mantua-maker*** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1682-1702 | 1 | 3 | - | 2 | - | - | - |
| 1703-1712 | 6 | 1 | - | - | 1 | - | 1 |
| 1713-1722 | 27 | - | 1 | - | 1 | 5 | - |
| 1723-1732 | 33 | - | 7 | - | 24 | 3 | - |
| 1733-1742 | 6 | - | 5 | - | 51 | - | - |
| 1743-1752 | 22 | - | 1 | - | 21 | - | 1 |
| 1752-1758 | 4 | 1 | - | - | - | - | 39 |
| **TOTAL (267)** | **99** | **5** | **14** | **2** | **98** | **8** | **41** |

Even women who had been previously referred to as merchant taylor began to be denoted by the more feminine occupation title. Hannah Beckwith was called a merchant taylor throughout the 1740s but in 1753, when she took on her thirteenth apprentice, she was listed as a mantua-maker and from that point on that was her only title. This switch was mirrored in the inconsistencies between the titles given in the enabled masters list and the apprenticeship records, inconsistencies that rarely occurred when addressing men. Some women who were described as Merchant Taylors when enabled were listed as mantua-makers when they took on apprentices, such as Elizabeth Rider (1747) or Elizabeth Silburn (1748)—the latter being specifically called an 'inlay mantua-maker'.[95] The discrepancies demonstrate that to some degree the terms may have been controlled by the whims of the clerk keeping

[94] BIHR, MTA 9/1 and 9/2.
[95] BIHR, MTA 6/2, 9/1 and 9/2.

the records; however, the fact that such inconsistencies only existed for the female members of the Company suggests that there was a grappling with how to describe the women.

This change took place long after the mantua came into English fashion, but the delay could reflect how long it took to spread both to the North and into everyday use. Erickson also notes how the title of mantua-maker outlived the fashion of the mantua itself, further demonstrating how language and fashion were not always instep.[96] When it comes to gender differences the case of the staymaker shows how male specialisation was treated differently. As mentioned in the first section, the popularity of the mantua also led to the creation of the staymaker as a separate tradesman, and this was slow to take effect in York as well. In1753 that the Company called for the creation of a branch to deal specifically with stays.[97] As the mantua-maker was the sister of the staymaker, it is not surprising that these changes occurred in the Company around the same time. However, men's titles within the apprenticeship registers never changed throughout the period and, as mentioned, staymakers were considered as separate to the company, meaning that they truly occupied their own space and ruled over themselves as distinct traders. Women were still regulated by the Company, even if they were making different garments, and the changing of their titles highlights the need to use language and titles that separated the 'other' within the Company: women.[98]

However, these titles were a double-edged sword. They also represent the constraints of language and how it bound women into their places. Joan Scott argues that language and gender have an intricate relationship, in which power relations are constructed through discourse.[99] The Company's need to create a term that differentiated the women from their male counterparts reflects this intricate relationship and suggests a need to maintain women's otherness, and perhaps inferiority. The failure of the Company to ever regularly use the term 'mistress', either calling women 'master' or some form of 'tayloress' reflects a long tradition of guilds using sex-specific terminology that inadvertently excluded women and maintained men as the universal norm.[100] The use of language and power in descriptors must be noted as it emphasises the situation of women tailors and reminds us that their labour was still limited by the control of the guild within which they exercised their trade.

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[96] Erickson, 'Eleanor Mosley and Other Milliners,' 156; Laura Gowing, 'The Manner of Submission: Gender and Demeanour in Seventeenth-Century London,' *Cultural and Social History* 10, no. 1 (May 2015), 29.

[97] Johnson, *The Acts and Ordinances*, 91.

[98] Smith, 'Women's Admission to Guilds in Early-Modern England,' 106.

[99] Joan W. Scott, 'The Evidence of Experience,' *Critical Inquiry* 17.4 (Summer, 1991), 773-797.

[100] Hilda Smith, *All Men and Both Sexes: Gender, Politics, and the False Universal in England, 1640-1832* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002), 73-108, particularly 101.

The Company records certainly do not reveal the whole story of women and tailoring in York in the early modern period. Women were active in textile apprenticeships outside of the Company's parameters. In the parish records of Holy Trinity Goodramgate, mentioned in the previous chapter, three women associated with the Company signed parish apprenticeship indentures that were not mentioned in the Company records. As part of the guild Elizabeth Dove took on four apprentices between 1712 and 1734. Additionally, Dove took on at least three poor parish apprentices, to teach and instruct them in the art of mantua making, from 1726 to 1733, nearly doubling her total number of apprentices. Katherine Bell was enabled a master in the Company and Frances Thirkill was an apprentice in it, but neither were noted in the Company records as taking on apprentices of their own. Yet each took on a poor child in the parish. Dorothy Bradwith was apprenticed to 'Richard Bell and Katherine his wife…to be learned and taught in the Trade and Mystery of a Merchant Taylor which Katherine wife of the said Richard Bell now useth'.[101] Seven years after her apprenticeship, Frances took on Grace Plumer, to teach her the 'Trade and Mystery of a Mantua-maker' for the term of seven years. These women are just a sample from one parish, showing that the women's labours were widespread and their capacity to disseminate knowledge occurred both within and without the Merchant Taylors' Company.

Source material outside of apprenticeship is limited. Unlike London, where Erickson has been able to find trade cards advertising women's occupational ventures, similar evidence has yet to be found for Yorkshire.[102] An initial search of contemporary newspapers such as *The York Courant* do not reveal any advertisement connected to merchant tailors. Most of the evidence for Yorkshire supports knowledge transfer but reveals little about bodily skill. Nevertheless, given what is known about tailoring in the period and the relationships that are traceable, it can be inferred that embodiment was an essential part of the female tailor's labour. Due to the fact that women were listed as mantua-makers when the first directory of York businesses appears, it can also be supposed that women were building upon material knowledge, which was physical. Girls and women continued to make up a majority of apprentices and masters involved in the company until the 1780s, by which time numbers dropped dramatically regardless of gender. The decline of women's involvement in this period suggests more about overall trends of industrialisation than changes in gender, although of course the latter is tied to the former. Women benefitted from needlework skills

[101] BIHR, PR/Y/HTG/48.
[102] Erickson, 'Eleanor Mosley and Other Milliners,' 154-156.

and textile knowledge, but the way in which these were transmitted was impacted by the decline of guilds and later, in the nineteenth century, the spread of machines and establishment of factories, which changed the landscape of textile work as a whole. Prior to this, women participated as apprentices and masters, whose networks of knowledge and relationships can be traced via the prominent women who left their mark.

## Chapter 3. Laid by her Hand: The skill of midwives

'A super annuated Chamber-Maid perceiving the Midwife to be so well pay'd, and have a great deal of Moneys at her Mistresse's Christening, resolved to study that Art, and *having got some Notions out of Books, declared her self a Proficent*'.[1] So begins the jest of the chambermaid-made-midwife in *England's Merry Jest* of 1693. What the maid did not know was that her mistress was 'a witty Woman', who knew that a simple reading of texts was not a sufficient way for a woman to qualify herself in the art of midwifery. And so, the mistress tricked the chambermaid by introducing her to a 'smock-fac'd beardless Youth', telling her that he was a young cousin come to lie in. When the youth pretends to be in the throes of labour, the chambermaid, failing to realise this young cousin was actually a boy, 'immediately fell to grabbling, and catching hold of his Label of Morality, fell a tugging at it, as supposing it part of the Child'. The new midwife went on to claim, 'I'll assure you 'tis Labour, for here is one Leg in the World already', leading everyone present to burst into laughter and causing the woman to not only leave her service but to forswear the practice of midwifery all together. The story of a woman mistaking a young man's 'label of morality' for a baby's leg fulfilled the book's aim of 'increasing merriment', but it also revealed contemporary beliefs about midwifery. The story provided humour for its audience but also alluded to contemporary beliefs about midwifery, such as women who foolishly declared themselves proficient in the art merely from having read some instructions in texts. The jest also gives a sense, intentionally or not, of the manual skill required of a midwife and the importance of touch—not only can the woman not perceive the deception through feeling, but the use of 'superannuated' to describe the chambermaid implies she may be physically past her prime and unable to fulfil the office.

After briefly discussing the historiography that surrounds early modern midwifery, and its shortcomings, this chapter will use midwifery testimonials from Yorkshire to evaluate the role of the midwife and establish what made a good midwife, beyond reading texts on the subject. The essential elements of the above jest present early modern midwifery in a different light from the historiography surrounding it, which overemphasises social reputation of midwives to the detriment of viewing their practice as a skilled occupation. My analysis of the testimonials not only provides more information about who some of the midwives were, by quantifying certain statistics such as age and experience, but it also shows that we need to

[1] J. S. *England's Merry Jester: or Court, City and Country Jests* (London: Printed by J. Wilde, 1693), 22-3. Emphasis added.

revaluate midwifery as an occupation rather than a social function. I will re-evaluate the role of religion in the process of obtaining a licence and evaluate the language used in the testimonials to argue that midwifery required knowledge and physically embodied skills. This chapter will end by discussing two eighteenth-century midwifery manuals, one by a male physician, Percival Willughby, and the other by a midwife, Sarah Stone. Picking up from Ernell Fife's observation that midwifery manuals were highly gendered, I will compare the two manuals, while keeping in mind what each author said about the ability of midwifery.[2] Both the testimonials and the manuals are prime examples that show how historians have overstated the social skills of midwives, neglecting the manual and physical skills detailed by contemporaries.

Historians have grappled with many questions about midwives, from ideas about the midwife-witch to questions about their social standing and how they learned their trade. In the 1960s, Thomas R. Forbes laid the groundwork, compiling studies about the trade and detailing certain regulations of the female profession of midwifery.[3] Yet he also began the problematic trend of discussing the midwife in association with witchcraft, anachronistically soiling the reputations of these early modern women.[4] Forbes exemplifies the branch of scholars who viewed early modern midwives as unskilled women who, due to their lack of education, were easily swept up in witchcraft. His introduction to an early article read: '[the midwife] seems, particularly in rural areas, in most cases to have been the victim of ignorance, superstition, and degrading tradition, and it is no wonder that she sometimes fell in evil ways'.[5] Forbes cited 'little formal instruction' and ignorance as proof that midwives lacked any actual skill and therefore strayed towards witchcraft. Thomas Szasz repeated Forbes's interpretation of the midwife as witch in his argument that witches were female healers persecuted for their knowledge, which could inspire awe and fear in their clients.[6] In particular, Szasz relies on Forbes's argument that when a birth went wrong, witch-midwives were charged with causing an abortion or destroying the foetus in utero, in order to support his overarching argument that scapegoating is an inevitable component of human society and the midwife-witch was a perfect candidate for this when she did not perform well.

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[2] Ernelle Fife, 'Gender and Professionalism in Eighteenth-Century Midwifery,' *Women's Writing* 11, no. 2 (2004).

[3] Thomas R. Forbes, 'The Regulation of English Midwives in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries,' *Medical History* 8, no. 3 (July, 1964), 235-244.

[4] Thomas R. Forbes, *The Midwife and the Witch* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1966).

[5] Thomas R. Forbes, 'Midwifery and Witchcraft,' *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences* 17, no. 2 (April, 1962), 264.

[6] Thomas S. Szasz, *The Manufacture of Madness: A Comparative Study of the Inquisition and the Mental Health Movement* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1971), 84-85.

On the other side of the midwife-witch discussion are scholars such as Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English who see midwives as women who, because of their specialty knowledge, were pushed into witchcraft or were easy victims of accusations. Ehrenreich and English discuss the midwife-witch within the context of second-wave feminism, claiming that midwives were persecuted due to their knowledge being a threat to the patriarchal society.[7] This leads them to cast the midwife as a 'good witch' who was victimised and hunted because she possessed 'secret skills'. In a desire to recreate a narrative of the 'good witch' they sought to combat the 'lasting effect' of the witch hunts, which have left 'an aura of contamination…especially around the midwife and other women healers'.[8] Despite the authors admitting in their introduction to the 2010 second edition of their book that their original 1973 work was 'written in a blaze of anger and indignation', Ehrenreich and English do not provide a thorough revision to their main arguments.[9] They acknowledge it is not possible to create generalisations about the occupations of women accused of witchcraft but it does not stop them from trying. Nor do they acknowledge the fact that historians have since shown that there is little evidence of midwives being amongst those accused of witchcraft.[10] For example, Robin Briggs has found the myth 'appears to be totally unfounded, for a painstaking check of all known British cases reveals precisely two rather dubious instances in England, and 14 of some 3,000 accused in Scotland'.[11] In recent decades a number of quantitative studies have drawn the midwife out of the shadow of the witch.[12] In 1990 David Harley declared that the history of midwifery 'needs to be painstakingly reconstructed', in order to liberate women's early modern health care from the 'romantic mythology of martyrs' that Ehrenreich and English helped create.[13] In the thirty years since, a number of historians have attempted to answer Harley's call.[14]

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[7] David Harley, 'Historians as Demonologists: The Myth of the Midwife-witch,' *Social History of Medicine* 3, no. 1 (1990), 20.

[8] Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English, *Witches, Midwives and Nurses: A History of Women Healers*, 2nd ed. (New York: Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 2010), 32-33.

[9] Ibid., 7.

[10] Ibid., 18.

[11] Robin Briggs, 'Women as Victims? Witches, Judges and the Community,' *French History* 5, no 4. (1991), 439.

[12] J. A. Sharpe, 'Witchcraft and Women in Seventeenth-Century England: Some Northern Evidence,' *Continuity and Change* 6, no. 2 (August, 1991), 187; Harley, 'Historians as Demonologists,' 1-26.

[13] Harley, 'Historians as Demonologists,' 21.

[14] Adrian Wilson, *The Making of Man-midwifery: Childbirth in England, 1660-1770* (London: UCL Press, 1995); Doreen Evenden, *The Midwives of Seventeenth-Century London* (New York; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Fife, 'Gender and Professionalism in Eighteenth-Century Midwifery'; Samuel S. Thomas, 'Early Modern Midwifery: Splitting the Profession, Connecting the History,' *Journal of Social History* 43, no. 1 (Fall, 2009); Adrian Wilson, *Ritual and Conflict: The Social Relations of Childbirth in Early Modern England* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013).

One debate stemming from this new research is how and when the male physician eclipsed the female midwife. Michael Stolberg cites the rising importance of personal observation and anatomy, particularly in the inspection of 'female otherness', as the cause for the surgeons' appropriation of childbirth in the seventeenth century.[15] Mary Fissell and Lisa Cody both cite wider political and religious effects on the study of reproduction and bodies as possible reasons for the switch, with gender relations at the core. For Fissell this occurred with the Civil War and the 'gender troubles of the 1640s', encouraged by works such as Nicholas Culpeper's, whereas Cody places the change during the Enlightenment.[16] Adrian Wilson presents the mother's acceptance of the man-midwife in the eighteenth century as the impetus for change, although he stops short of explaining how such a takeover was completed in a system that fully accepted midwives' authority.[17] Doreen Evenden draws attention to another factor, seen in the 1730s: the increasing competition among male practitioners, in which 'young surgeons and apothecaries, struggling to become established, were enticed into midwifery as an untapped, pseudo-medical area of expansion and by the prospect of acquiring the family of the new mother as prospective patients for general practice'.[18] Wilson echoes this theory in his more recent work, examining what he calls the 'competition theory of man-midwifery'.[19] These various positions show that there was a multitude of factors contributing to the male takeover, with no clear-cut timeline. These studies have attempted to answer the when and why of the transformation, yet their attention on the takeover prevents them from focusing on the women who practised midwifery.

Recent historians have maintained focus on gendered aspects of early modern medicine in order to discuss the midwife's role as a female practitioner. Samuel Thomas describes midwives as being 'at the intersection of the public and private spheres', indicating 'their liminal status as female representatives of patriarchal authority'.[20] Thomas links the male physician's take over with theories about gender disorder—that is to say the disruption

[15] Michael Stolbery, 'A Woman Down to Her Bones: The Anatomy of Sexual Difference in the Sixteenth and Early Seventeenth Centuries,' *Isis* 94, no. 2 (June 2003), 290-2.

[16] Mary E. Fissell, *Vernacular Bodies: The Politics of Reproduction in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 135, 143; Lisa Forman Cody, *Birthing the Nation: Sex, Science and the Conception of Eighteenth-Century Britons* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 8.

[17] Wilson, *The Making of Man-midwifery*; Wilson, *Ritual and Conflict*, 212.

[18] Evenden, *The Midwives of Seventeenth-Century London*, 176.

[19] Adrian Wilson, 'Midwifery in the "Medical Marketplace",' in *Medicine and the Market in England and its Colonies, c. 1450 - c. 1850*, eds. Mark S. R. Jenner and Patrick Wallis (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 153-174.

[20] Samuel S. Thomas, 'Midwifery and Society in Restoration York,' *Social History of Medicine* 16, no. 1 (April, 2003), 11.

of gender norms—that were constructed in the early modern period.[21] Fife examines the writing of Jane Sharp and Sarah Stone in comparison to three male-midwife manual authors, William Smellie, William Hunter and Thomas Denmen.[22] Fife uses literary analysis to demonstrate the way in which the female authors humanised their patients, treating them as women rather than as vessels or experimental bodies. She argues that at this time medicine underwent an important transformation from treating the patient as a subject to treating them like an object. Therefore, the midwife's technique was outdated and overtaken by male physicians and the object-focused study of obstetrics.[23] Fife's argument about professionalism in medicine certainly holds weight, however focusing solely on the language of midwifery manuals overlooks other primary evidence such as testimonials, nominations and licenses.

Harley's own studies have often focused on the social standing of midwives, stating that '[the midwives'] character and the choices made by their clients need to be reconstructed if women are not to be seen as passive victims of the rise of the man-midwife'.[24] This has established a new strain of historiography that is working to create a profile of who midwives were. Harley seeks to demonstrate that midwives were women of experience, who likely had some degree of education or training, who were used as trustworthy witnesses, stressing that 'in all their functions, the integrity of the midwives was paramount…discretion and modesty were primary qualifications for a midwife'.[25] Julia Allison follows Harley's claim that 'the historic role of the midwife has been underestimated', crafting a prosopographical study of midwives in sixteenth-century rural East Anglia that 'seeks to establish a profile for midwives…including their family and professional lives'.[26] Through her archival research, Allison draws conclusions about the character of the midwives, namely that they were almost exclusively married or widowed women with children of their own, that they had reputations 'beyond reproach by the courts' and were regarded 'as the "expert opinion" of a "good, honest, creditable and discreet" woman'.[27] Focusing on a particular geographical cohort, Evenden has completed extensive research on the testimonials and legal statistics of

[21] D. E. Underdown, 'The Taming of the Scold: the Enforcement of Patriarchal Authority in Early Modern England,' in *Order and Disorder in Early Modern England*, eds. Anthony Fletcher and John Stevenson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 116-136.

[22] Fife, 'Gender and Professionalism in Eighteenth-Century Midwifery,' 185-200.

[23] Ibid., 198.

[24] David Harley, 'Provincial Midwives in Lancashire and Cheshire, 1660-1760,' in *The Art of Midwifery: Early Modern Midwives in England*, ed. Hilary Marland (London; New York: Routledge, 1993), 27.

[25] Ibid., 35.

[26] Julia Allison, 'Midwives of Sixteenth-Century Rural East Anglia,' *Rural History* 27, no. 1 (2016), 1.

[27] Ibid., 16.

midwives in seventeenth-century London.[28] Evenden used ecclesiastical records to better understand the socioeconomic lives of the London midwives, as well as information about their clients, their character, their ages and marital status. This work possibly comes the closest to recognising the value of skill and competence, although Evenden strictly sticks to her focus on London and the peculiarities that small, well-documented parishes can afford, such as an ability to track registration and reputation.[29]

An understanding of what types of women were practicing the art of midwifery is important, helping to demonstrate that these were working women integrated within their communities. However, even Harley and Allison, who briefly acknowledge that midwifery was a skill, are more concerned with the midwives' social characteristics, reputation, literacy and reliability as witnesses rather than acknowledging what it took to be a midwife, which was the focus of the contemporaries who crafted manuals or witnesses who attested to a woman's practice. When historians do address the skills of the midwife, they are limited to social characteristics. According to Wilson, the three most prominent characteristics of the midwife were her power, the payment she could demand and the fact that she alone 'was entrusted with the right to touch the mother's "privities"'.[30] To Wilson, power was the defining characteristic of the midwife's office, and yet he overlooks what constituted such power and how a woman could master this skill.[31] The favouring of a midwife's religious reputation and good social status as the ways in which she secured work depicts the female midwife as passive in complying with societal expectations.[32] This implies that her ability did little to influence whether or not she was hired as a midwife while also suggesting that society's views on her godliness carried more weight than the value of her skill, which she worked to develop. If midwifery is to be understood as a role involving knowledge and aptitude, the midwife should be studied as an active member of society who had to demonstrate her abilities, and testimonials provide an excellent study to do just that.

## Yorkshire midwives

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries women had to provide testimonials in order to be nominated for a midwifery license. Midwifery was the only predominantly female occupation that was regulated in this way. Scholars have demonstrated how ecclesiastical

[28] Evenden, *The Midwives of Seventeenth-Century London*.
[29] Ibid., 74.
[30] Wilson, *The Making of Man-midwifery*, 26.
[31] Wilson, *Ritual and Conflict*, 156.
[32] Forbes, 'The Regulation of English Midwives in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries,' 235; Thomas, 'Midwifery and Society in Restoration York,' 1.

licensing was never implemented for a single purpose, but instead differed by diocese, time and economic situation, which can be reflected in the different forms testimonials take.[33] Despite their inconsistent history, these documents provide valuable information about who the early-modern midwives were, and the Yorkshire testimonials in particular demonstrate how society valued the skill and experience of a midwife above her social reputation. The archives for the diocese of York contain testimonials for approximately 275 midwives stretching over half a century, from 1660 to 1736, as well as some letters and miscellaneous documents pertaining to licensing.[34] Despite being some of the richest midwifery records from the period, few historians have made use of the testimonials.[35] Samuel Thomas has used the Yorkshire midwives, but his is a case study focused on the court records surrounding a particular woman, Bridget Hodgson, and her network of midwives, which included her maidservant, Martha Stopford.[36] Thomas uses three testimonials from Upper Poppleton to demonstrate that the parish was invested in always having at least one working midwife, as the elder midwife would resign her office to a younger one, but that is the extent of his use of the Yorkshire nominations.[37]

The testimonials reveal some information about the women who were practising midwifery in Yorkshire, although their socio-economic status can be difficult to ascertain. Five testimonials mentioned the poor financial status of the midwife or argued that the licence was necessary for the woman's subsistence.[38] Beyond these rare examples, none stated that a woman was practising out of financial need. Julia Allison found that the average lifespan of midwives in rural East Anglia was about seventy-three years, surpassing the average life expectancy of the time. She argues that this suggests, 'given that they had a home and financial security, they appeared to enjoy a comfortable life by standards of the day', similar to the London women assessed by Doreen Evenden.[39] Of the few women whose lives can be traced in the Yorkshire records, it would appear some certainly lived to at least seventy, similar to Allison's findings.

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[33] Evenden, *The Midwives of Seventeenth-Century London,* 34; Wilson, *Ritual and Conflict*, 160.

[34] Located in the Borthwick Institute of Historical Research (BIHR).

[35] The genealogist Joan E. Grundy provided an index of the Yorkshire midwives' nominations paired with a brief history of the role of the midwife, however, given her genealogical motivations, she does not go into an analysis of the nominations. Joan E. Grundy, *History's Midwives: Including a C17th and C18th Yorkshire Midwives Nominations Index* (Bury, Lancashire: The Federation of Family History Societies, 2003), 93-134.

[36] Thomas, 'Midwifery and Society in Restoration York,' 1.

[37] Ibid., 4.

[38] BIHR, Nom. M. 1663/1, Nom. M. 1666/2, Nom. M. 1673/1, Nom. M. 1680/1, Nom. M. 1726/11, Nom. M. 1707/3.

[39] Allison, 'Midwives of Sixteenth-Century Rural East Anglia,' 7.

For a handful of women, their husband's title was given in the testimonial. Of the fourteen husbands with noted occupations, five were yeoman, two were husbandman, and the rest were a labourer, a weaver, a builder, a victualler, a cottager, a barber and a shoemaker.[40] From the known occupations it would appear that for the most part women were not driven into the occupation by economic need, but rather ability or desire to help. As for the economics involved in the practices, licences required a payment of fees. In the Yorkshire testimonials three listed the fees at 13s. 6d (Jane Smith from Seamer and Averill Watson from Kirkby, both nominated in 1701, and Sarah Leake from Sandall in 1709), two listed 13s. 4d (Mary Cozens, nominated from Harthill in 1704 and Susannah Raynar from Wakefield in 1712), and one is torn but appears to be 13s. 8d (Anne Wily from Marfleet in 1704).[41] Harley estimates that both yeoman families and overseers of the poor would pay about between two or five shillings for a midwife's services, meaning that a woman would have to attend up to six births in order to earn enough to pay for the Yorkshire licensing fees.[42] The average caseload is difficult to assess, given both demographic changes and poor records regarding midwives' attendance at births, however this would likely take three to four months of midwifery work to obtain. Both Evenden and Allison discuss the difficulties as well as the drawbacks of attempting to determine the annual caseload of midwives. Evenden also argues that attributing a midwife's success to the number of births she attended is detrimental to the study and overlooks women's other domestic responsibilities.[43]

Court cases alluded to the fact that midwives were paid for their time, even when the woman they delivered was not in a position to pay. In a 1703 York case the father of a bastard child was reported to pay the midwife, while in another case ten years later, the mistress of a manor paid the midwife when she brought her in to help a young woman delivering a bastard child in her home.[44] In Wakefield, the midwife Susannah Cooper petitioned the court because she had been working for the master of the House of Correction to attend and search several women prisoners 'and Delivered severall others of Children', but she had not received any compensation. In 1727 the court ordered that she be paid 'fifteen

[40] BIHR, Nom M. 1694/3, Nom M. 1700/2, Nom M. 1702/3, Nom M. 1705/1, Nom M. 1710/1, Nom M. 1716/1, Nom M. 1716/3, Nom M. 1719/2, Nom M. 1726/7, Nom M. 1726/9, Nom M. 1726/14, Nom M. 1729/1, Nom M. 1732/1, Nom M. 1733/5.

[41] BIHR, Nom. M. 1701/2, Nom. M. 1701/3, Nom. M. 1704/4, Nom. M. 1704/5, Nom. M. 1709/1, and Nom. M. 1712/10.

[42] Harley, 'Provincial Midwives,' 33-34.

[43] Allison, 'Midwives of Sixteenth-Century Rural East Anglia,' 11; Evenden, *The Midwives of Seventeenth-Century London*, 14, n. 75.

[44] BIHR, CP.I.101; CP.I.301.

shillings for her labour and Trouble in the Business'.[45] The occupation, therefore, allowed for some source of income, albeit inconsistent and likely unreliable. Unfortunately, information about the fees paid, payment earned, and the economic position of families is fairly limited, but can be inferred that while there was an economic element to the role, there were other factors at play that led women to becoming licensed midwives.

One aspect of social standing that historians have focused on is marital and maternal status, with most historians emphasising that a midwife had to be a family woman, with children of her own.[46] However, nearly 60 per cent of the testimonials refrained from mentioning any marital status let alone if the woman had children. As Table 3.1 shows, of the testimonials that provide marital statuses, sixty-seven were described as the wife of someone and thirty-seven were widows. While parish registers can confirm that at least thirty-three additional women were wives or widows, the fact that their status was not deemed necessary to include, shows that those constructing the testimonials did not consider a woman's marital or family status as influential in her ability to be a midwife.[47] Although some provide a title such as Mrs, Ms or Miss, this is not necessarily indicative of marital status. Amy Louise Erickson found that the term Mrs 'identified neither a woman's male protector nor her sexual availability', rather, it 'indicated economic activity at least as much as it indicated gentility'.[48] If this is true for the women recorded as such in the testimonials, the title could imply that they were seen as economically active in their office of midwife, and therefore of a more advanced age. The titles are used seemingly arbitrarily and do not determine marital status.

In regards to family status, only one case claimed the woman was a mother, Anne Crowther from Southowram, West Riding, in 1707, and this was in order to demonstrate how she would benefit from the licence for the sustenance of her children, not her qualities as a mother: 'for and towards her & childrens subsistence is desirous to follow the office of a Midwife and to have a Licence for the same '.[49] At least twenty-three other women were

[45] West Yorkshire Archive Service (WYAS), Wakefield, QS10/14.

[46] Allison, 'Midwives of Sixteenth-Century Rural East Anglia,' 16; Thomas, 'Early Modern Midwifery,' 119; Jeanne Achterberg, *Woman as Healer,* (London: Rider, 1991), 118; Laura Gowing, *Common Bodies: Women, Touch and Power in Seventeenth-Century England* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2003), 76.

[47] In order to determine these, I used parish marriage registers, as well as baptism registers. Only women who were in the exact parish mentioned in the nominations were considered. If a name was too common or there was more than one woman of that name, they were not counted. This was done with the aid of online resources such as findmypast.co.uk and parish records located in the Borthwick Institute, BIHR/PR.

[48] Amy Louise Erickson, 'Mistresses and Marriage: or, a Short History of the Mrs,' *History Workshop Journal* 78 (Autumn, 2014), 52.

[49] BIHR, Nom. M. 1707/3.

mothers, as confirmed by parish registers, and this number was likely much higher, just untraceable in the documents.[50] The lack of citations about a woman's maternal ability and the language that was actually used in the testimonials demonstrate the importance of a woman's abilities and professional strengths above familial role. While a woman could be a good mother and provide for her children, it was predominantly through her occupational ability that she acquired a licence.

*Table 3.1: Marital/Social Status of Midwives*[51]

| ***Marital/Social Status*** | ***No.*** | ***%*** |
|---|---|---|
| Mrs | 6 | 2.1 |
| Miss/Ms | 2 | 0.7 |
| Wife | 67 | 24.4 |
| Widow | 37 | 13.5 |
| Not Listed | 163 | 59.3 |
| **TOTAL** | **275** | **100.0** |

Historians have noted the difficulty of discovering how a woman became a midwife as there was no official apprenticeship system for the office.[52] It seems likely that in some areas of the country, particularly in London, women performed as a deputy midwife, assisting another woman before they practised on their own. A small number of Yorkshire woman can be confirmed to have followed this tradition. In 1695, it was attested that Elizabeth Green of Whitby 'did accompany her [late] mother…when called by a woeman in travaile to doe the office of a midwife' as an assistant, and performed the office after the interment of her mother.[53] One testimonial was written by the midwife who taught the woman in question and another referred to the women she had laid 'since the time of her instruction'.[54] While these two demonstrate there was some form of informal training occurring in certain cases, they are rare exceptions for the detail they provide.

There appears to be some sort of network, as Thomas suggests, made evident by the women who submitted for a licence after the death of another local midwife (see Appendix 2

[50] In order to determine if a woman was a mother, I used cases where a husband's name was given. Then I searched through baptism records where the children's father's name was listed. As with marital status above only records that were in the confirmed parish, of a reasonable time and that could not be conflated with someone of the same name were counted. This was done with the aid of online resources such as findmypast.co.uk and parish records located in the Borthwick Institute, BIHR/PR.

[51] BIHR, Nom M 1660-1739.

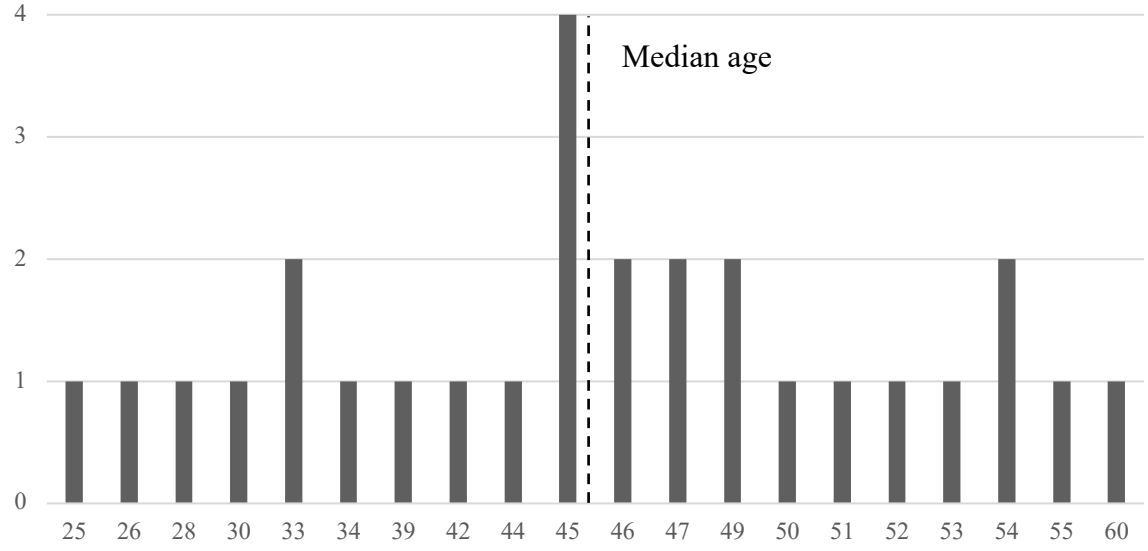
[52] Wilson, *The Making of Man-midwifery*, 31.

[53] BIHR, Nom. M. 1695/1.

[54] BIHR, Nom. M. 1723/2; BIHR, Nom. M. 1736/1.

for the parishes listed in the nominations). The abovementioned Elizabeth Green had nineteen neighbours who 'thought for a Common good to Testifie, desiring that shee may be licenced for the necessary imployment of a Midwife in this populous Towne of Whitby, where shee may doe good service, Two midwives being lately dead'.[55] Mary Gedney's 1721 testimonial claimed that 'Jane Jonson of this town [Elstronwick, Holderness], midwife, being deceseased', was the reason behind her application, suggesting that parishes required at least one working midwife.[56] The same Jane Jonson had a testimonial submitted on her behalf six years earlier in the same town, suggesting a network where the midwives had knowledge of one another's workings, a knowledge that may have affected when a woman applied for a licence.[57] The testimonials that provide a glimpse suggest that the women learned through an apprenticeship-like system, sometimes on purpose, sometimes incidentally, however more research into this system is still needed.

*Table 3.2: Age of Midwives at Nomination*[58]




Age may have determined if the woman was trained or had acted as a deputy midwife prior to her licensing. However, few testimonials provide concrete evidence to the age of the woman. Of the four ages given in the Yorkshire nominations, all were forty or older.[59] As mentioned above three were referred to as Mrs, three were described as matrons and thirty

[55] BIHR, Nom. M. 1695/1.
[56] BIHR, Nom. M. 1721/1.
[57] BIHR, Nom. M. 1715/3.
[58] BIHR, Nom M.; BIHR, PR/Y, Parish Records, Parish Baptisms.
[59] BIHR, Nom M. 1683/1 stated she was over forty, Nom M. 1689/1 gave her age as about 60, Nom M. 1715/3 stated she was 48, and Nom M. 1725/1 said she was 60.

were widows, suggesting, but not decisively declaring, they were of a mature age. In tracing the women through baptisms registers, I have determined the age at nomination for twenty-eight of the midwives, shown in Table 3.2.[60] These ranged from twenty-six to sixty, with the median age of this sample being 45. The advanced age could mean that women were licensed once they had raised a family of their own, or, once they had gained enough experience. It may also support Harley's theory that midwives only obtained licences after they had been reported for practicing without one, and this became more and more likely with increasing age.[61] Evenden's work on London midwifery similarly shows that age was rarely cited and when it was, the woman tended to be of a more mature age. She lists seven women whose ages were given and states, 'if these women are at all representative, licensed London midwives were mature women with long experience in their chosen calling, who began practicing midwifery in their thirties and forties'.[62] Her conclusions can be applied to the Yorkshire women as well, but the fact still remains that too little is known about the age at which women began their practice.

Conversely, a midwife could not be too old, for, as discussed, the position required a woman with a strong body who could work for long hours, hence why John Maubray, a physician, described the best midwife as a 'woman of a good middle Age, of solid Parts, of full Experience'.[63] The deterioration of skill with age was also reflected in the diary of eighteenth-century Yorkshireman James Fretwell. He recounted the travails of his grandfather's second wife, Sarah, 'which shews something of the mother's temper' and her obstinacy.[64] According to Fretwell, when Sarah, found her labour drawing near she sent for an old midwife, whose skills had become 'slender'. Despite the old woman waiting on Sarah for several days, she was unable to help bring about a child in that time. Sarah's husband desired to 'go for some other, who might be more skillful', but as Sarah was so stubborn, he had to go for the younger, more skilful midwife, Mrs Dearlove, in secret. Dearlove refused to lay a hand on Sarah without her consent, and it was only after more ill symptoms that Sarah finally allowed Mrs Dearlove to 'take her case under *hand*', after which Sarah was safely

[60] BIHR, PR/Y, Parish Records, Parish Baptisms.
[61] Harley, 'Provincial Midwives,' 30.
[62] Evenden, *The Midwives of Seventeenth-Century London*, 111-12.
[63] John Maubray, M. D., *The Female Physician, Containing all the Diseases Incident to that Sex* (London: Printed for James Holland, 1724), 173.
[64] C. Jackson and H. J. Morehouse, eds, *Yorkshire Diaries and Autobiographies in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (Edinburgh: Surtees Society, 1877), 177.

delivered of a son in a short time.[65] Even though age helped establish a woman's reputation, it could also deteriorate her physical ability.

The testimonials may not provide solid evidence for how a woman became a midwife, but they do indicate that many women had experience. While the Church and its officers, particularly local rectors or vicars, wished to enforce the licensing of those who had specialised knowledge, nominations show that women frequently practiced as midwives before being licenced. As mentioned, Harley theorised that most women only obtained a licence after a parish visitation found them practising without one. He notes that the licensing system 'rested on custom and power, as there was no legal authority for the penalties imposed for unlicensed practice'.[66] Allison presents a number of theories for why experienced midwives did not seek to become licensed, such as not being able to gain the support of local women, her low social standing or the fees being too high.[67] The first idea in particular supports that a woman had to demonstrate her competence in order for her neighbours to support her licensing.

Regardless of why a midwife decided to become licensed, most crafted a narrative that maintained the choice was their own. Contrary to Wilson's argument that it was ecclesiastical pressure that led women to seek a licence, testimonials did not mention such pressures from officials.[68] Only one testimonial, that of Anne Clarke in 1666, implied that unlicensed experience was a transgression. Clarke was described as being 'heartily sorry that she transgresse the law of your honourable Court', and asked to be licensed in order to practice lawfully.[69] While Clarke's was the only testimonial to mention wrongdoing, Lydia Newlove's 1708 nominations presented a scenario where she was pressured by the religious leaders in her community, but did not entirely submit.[70] After moving approximately five miles from Wetwang to Huggate, in the East Riding, Newlove asked her new rector for a licence. It is revealed she clashed with her former vicar, George Colebatch, when he pressured her to get a licence. Written vertically on the side of the testimonial is a postscript asking to clarify if the licence from Huggate would also suffice in Wetwang, since Colebatch told her it would not. This case demonstrates both the local church's attempt to enforce licensing upon practiced midwives and that Newlove had an established working reputation

[65] Ibid., 178. Emphasis added.
[66] Harley, 'Provincial Midwives,' 30.
[67] Allison, 'Midwives of Sixteenth-Century Rural East Anglia,' 5.
[68] Wilson, *Ritual and Conflict*, 160.
[69] BIHR, Nom. M. 1666/1.
[70] BIHR, Nom. M. 1708/2.

amongst her former neighbours, as she hoped her new licence would allow her to continue to work in Wetwang. The testimonial lacked any admonishment of Newlove.

In fact, no testimonial mentioned a reprimand for practising without a licence, notwithstanding the witnesses sometimes were often rectors, vicars or ministers.[71] This is despite the fact that about 40 per cent of the nominations explicitly mentioned some form of experience, with even more implicitly suggesting that a woman was qualified due to practice. That being said, the testimonials rarely went into detail about the length of time a woman had been practicing, with most generically stating 'several years'. The longest specific declaration of years was Jane Goodwin of Rawmarsh who, as of 1663, 'hath exercised the Arte of Midwifery for these ten yeares last past And have (through Gods blessing upon her endeavour) bene very helpful to very many in her sayd calling'.[72] The vicar and rector of Rawmarsh, as well as three women, were witness to her service.

*Table 3.3: Witness of experience in Yorkshire midwifery testimonials*[73]

| ***Witness Status*** | ***No.*** | ***%*** |
|---|---|---|
| Only women | 79 | 70.5 |
| Women and clergy | 16 | 14.3 |
| Only clergy | 8 | 7.1 |
| Only unidentified men | 5 | 4.5 |
| Women and laymen | 3 | 2.7 |
| Only surgeons | 1 | 0.9 |
| **TOTAL** | **112** | **100.0** |

In both the 1660s and 1730s over 60 per cent of women were described as having some form of experience, so there was no great change that made women more or less comfortable with admitting they had practised without a licence. Table 3.3 shows that women were the favoured witnesses in cases that explicitly stated that the woman had experience, with 71 per cent having exclusively female witnesses.[74] The clerical witnesses did not admonish a woman for not applying sooner, while the female witnesses confirmed that she was a successful, trusted midwife.

If the clergy sought to punish misconduct, a woman would have benefitted from describing her experience as having occurred from necessity, yet this rhetoric was only used

[71] See Table 3.7 below for the statistics of witnesses.
[72] BIHR, Nom. M. 1663/8.
[73] BIHR, Nom. M.
[74] This includes cases that simply state a woman has experience or are more detailed in the length; this excludes any that only mention knowledge or skill, since this could be presumed.

in 4 per cent of the cases that listed experience. When necessity was mentioned it had a multifaceted purpose. On the one hand, it demonstrated witnesses' thankfulness for the woman being willing to practice. For example, Alice Bradford of Owston (West Riding) was described as 'a woman who in cases of necessity has been very ready to help women in travell & hath had very good success therein', her readiness to help being beneficial to the women.[75] Also, the abovementioned Newlove 'hath sometimes in case of necessity performed the office to great satisfaction'.[76] It is important to consider what was meant by necessity here: it could be that the labouring woman may have been poor or needy and could not afford the fees a licensed midwife required; or perhaps the parish did not have a practicing midwife or she was abroad helping a woman in the neighbouring town so a woman became well-skilled when she stepped in to aid women in the absence of a licensed midwife. The network of women in a parish and the rituals of the female birth chamber lent themselves to situations where an unlicensed woman may have frequently intervened as a temporary midwife, building her proficiency and knowledge prior to officially taking part in the office.

On the other hand, discussing a woman's experience from necessity may have been an attempt to reduce the licensing fee or persecution. In 1674, witnesses for Margaret Clarke in the parish of Marske in the North Riding stated that 'We whose names are underwritten do certify that some of us our selves in time of necessity have made use of the help of Margaret Clarke as a midwife, and have found Gods blessing upon her indeavours, and shall be glad that she may be able to exercise that emploiment without being exposed to any trouble and molestation'.[77] Twenty-seven women and one man signed her nomination. This shows that Clarke must have encountered opposition because she was not licensed, as the nomination directly mentions trouble. But she was also well-practiced, and it is likely that she would not have suddenly changed her mind after assisting at least twenty births. Likewise, in a letter to Mr Thomas Jubb, the curate of Bridlington mentioned an unnamed midwife who appeared unable afford the licensing fees, but he hoped for her licensing nonetheless: 'I just now spoke the husband of the other, & he tells me he hath not seen her this two days & cannot tell whether she hath got a certificate or no: in the main I believe they are very short of money at present but I shall call upon her presently till she have got license'.[78] The fees, which were submitted with testimonials in order to receive the certificate, may have prevented a number

[75] BIHR, Nom. M. 1679/2.
[76] BIHR, Nom. M. 1708/2.
[77] BIHR, Nom. M. 1674/10.
[78] BIHR, Nom. M. 1726/11.

of women from ever applying for a licence. They may have also driven them to describe the scenarios that brought them to practice without a licence in the hopes of having their fees reduced. For example, in 1663 the witnesses for Anne Doughty, who lived just outside the city of York, certified 'that shee is very poore & hath very small Employment', which may have urged the court to not only take pity on her for finding work where she could, but also to reduce her midwife fee in order for her to earn a living from her practice.[79]

When experience was mentioned, it was seen as a positive quality. Witnesses preferred a woman who had learned the ways of the office. Elizabeth Simpson was 'well skilled in Midwifery as has been experienced in cases of Necessity, so [we] desire that she may be Licensed to Practice', according to her neighbours in Wold Newton, in the East Riding.[80] In the same year, 1687, Mary Roper of York was called a woman 'well skilled in midwifery as has been experienced in Cases of necessity. And wee desire that she may be licensed to practice the said art of Midwifery'.[81] Skill, discussed in more detail below, was a basis for reputation.

Witnesses to the testimonials had first-hand connections with the midwives. The nomination of Mary Emmerson was witnessed by nine women from the village of Menstrope (now South Kirkby) who were listed by their name, their husband's name and their number of children, indicating their personal knowledge of Emmerson's skill.[82] Often testimonials were witnessed by women who had been delivered by the midwife, styling themselves as 'we who have been under her hand' or 'laid by her'.[83] In Elizabeth Champyan's case four witnesses wrote some variation of 'Elizabeth Champyan hath layd me of a child safe & well, witness my hand', three were in first-person and one in third-person.[84] The seven women who were witness to Alice Rogers stated that they 'hath Recofered veary well under hir hands'.[85] The emphasis on the hand or the woman's touch is important, in that this physicality was key to the skill of a midwife. Eve Keller has discussed how midwifery was seen as a work of the hand; in this sense it was distinguished as manual medicine opposed to other branches which were more mental, 'thinkers and not touchers'.[86]

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[79] BIHR, Nom. M. 1663/1.
[80] BIHR, Nom. M. 1687/1.
[81] BIHR, Nom. M. 1687/2.
[82] BIHR, Nom. M. 1716/8.
[83] For example, BIHR Nom. M. 1666/4, Nom. M. 1683/2, Nom. M. 1684/1.
[84] BIHR, Nom. M. 1716/5.
[85] BIHR, Nom. M. 1675/2.
[86] Eve Keller, 'The Subject of Touch: Medical Authority in Early Modern Midwifery,' in *Sensible Flesh: On Touch in Early Modern Culture*, ed. Elizabeth D. Harvey (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), 70.

The midwife used her hands to turn a child, warm a mother and administer other methods of care to her. Touch was important at all stages of the midwife's work: 'the design of touching,' the obstetrician William Smellie wrote, 'is to be informed whether the woman is or is not with child; to know how far she is advanced in her pregnancy; is she is in danger of a miscarriage; if the *os uteri* be dialeted'.[87] He continued that, 'in time of labour, to form a right judgment of the case from the opening of the *os internum,* and the pressing down of the membrane with their waters', and—what the ignorant chambermaid lacked—'to distinguish what part of the child is presented'. The late eighteenth-century midwife Elizabeth Nihell used touch and the hand to argue against the male physician's increasing use of instruments. In her 1760 *Treatise on the Art of Midwifery*, she responded to the argument that the midwife would be obliged to call in a male physician when her hands failed her by claiming: 'Where, in short, is the person that would prefer iron and steel to a hand of flesh, tender, soft, duly supple, dextrous, and trusting to its own feelings for what it is about: a hand that has no need of recourse to such an extremity as the use of instruments, always blind, dangerous, and especially for ever useless?'[88] The testimonials' inclusion of the hand reflect that there was a physical skill, a 'trusting to its own feelings' that the experienced hand of the midwife provided.

Touch and dexterity made up just part of the midwife's skillset. Before looking at how skill was represented in the testimonials, it is necessary to return to the historiography and how it has so far dealt with the reputation of early modern midwives. One factor that historians have concentrated on has been the midwife's relationship with religion. As part of the licensing process, midwives swore an oath, which has led John R. Guy to argue that the licensing of midwives was deemed so important because they were on the front line for preventing recusancy.[89] Laura Gowing shows how over the course of the seventeenth century the midwife's oath, which once promoted baptism, evolved to emphasise the correct behaviour of both the midwife and her client.[90] The behaviour was still shaped by Christian morals, as the oath required the woman to swear that she would work for both the rich and poor, to abstain from using witchcraft, to prevent infanticide and, in cases of bastardy, to reveal the secrets of the mother about who the father was. The midwife also swore to prevent

[87] William Smellie, *A Treatise on the Theory and Practice of Midwifery*, 4th ed. (London: Printed for D. Wilson, 1762), 184.

[88] Elizabeth Nihell, *A Treatise on the Art of Midwifery* (London: Printed for A. Morley, 1760), 36.

[89] John R. Guy, 'The Episcopal Licensing of Physicians, Surgeons and Midwives,' *Bulletin of the History Of Medicine* 56, no. 4 (1982), 539.

[90] Gowing, *Common Bodies*, 159.

'any child she delivered to be baptised in the Catholic faith'.[91] However, Wilson contends that historians have overstated the role of the midwife in baptisms and Evenden shows that the midwife's only duty relating to baptism was 'to report any child who was not baptised into the faith'.[92] Ann Giardina Hess has also shown the complicated relationship between midwife licensing and religion, claiming local churchwardens used licenses, or the lack thereof, to prosecute Quaker midwives, harassing them 'by repeated presentments for unlicensed practice and refusal to attend church'.[93]

The oath, which was sworn prior to the granting of a licence, enforced a midwife's religious duties, whereas the testimonial shed light on her religious character. In regard to their morals, Harley maintains that 'religious conformity was also one of the key characteristics of the ideal licensed midwife'.[94] Religious conformity, however, was not of the utmost importance to the officials who granted licences in Yorkshire. In this sample, it was not until the 1670s that a woman's relationship with the Church was first mentioned in a testimonial. Evenden presents one possible explanation for this later rise as the passing of the Toleration Act in 1689, although her study's focus is on London, where religious repercussions for official acts would have been different than rural Yorkshire. One thing that the Act did do was take away clerical power to enforce oaths, showing a move away from enforcing religious regulations towards secular reasons for licensing.[95] Even prior to the Act, however, few testimonials mentioned a woman's religious standing. In total, only 19 per cent cited the woman as 'conformable to the Church of England', with most including this was 'by law established'. These descriptions diverted from the individualised accounts of aptitude and qualifications and were much more formulaic. Table 3.4. shows the four different formulas the testimonials used to document a woman's 'conformity'. While clergy would attest a woman being churchgoing, they did so in a much more prescriptive manner than the neighbourly witnesses who confirmed a woman's abilities. Even if this is expanded to include incidental mentions of a woman's religious affiliation, from being called 'pious' or a 'frequenter of church services' to stating she had already delivered some babies by God's

[91] Sara Read, *Maids, Wives, Widows: Exploring Early Modern Women's Lives 1540-1714* (Barnsley: Pen and Sword, 2015), 19.

[92] Evenden, *The Midwives of Seventeenth-Century London*, 28.

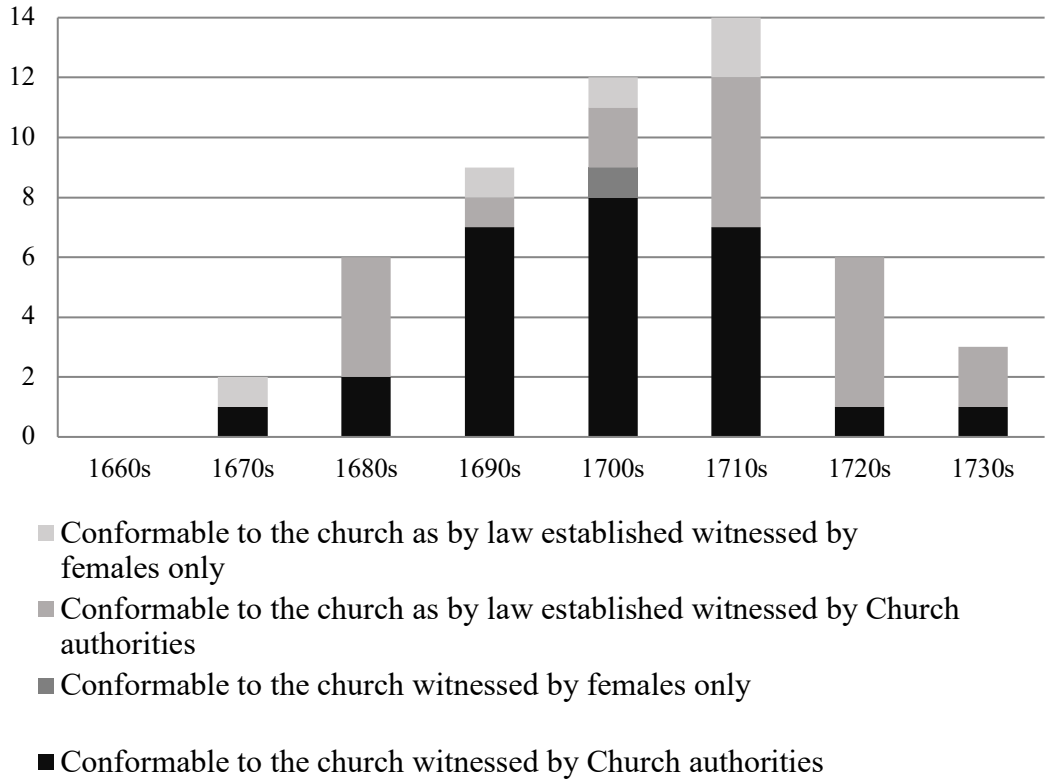
[93] Ann Giardina Hess, 'Midwifery Practice among the Quakers in Southern Rural England in the late Seventeenth Century,' in *The Art of Midwifery: Early Modern Midwives in Europe*, eds. by Hilary Marland (London; New York: Routledge, 1993), 52.

[94] Harley, 'Provincial Midwives,' 35-39.

[95] Evenden, *The Midwives of Seventeenth-Century London*, 70.

blessing, the percentage remains low, as seen in Table 3.5, with only about 36 per cent of all testimonials including any religious identification.

*Table 3.4: Religious character by decade*[96]

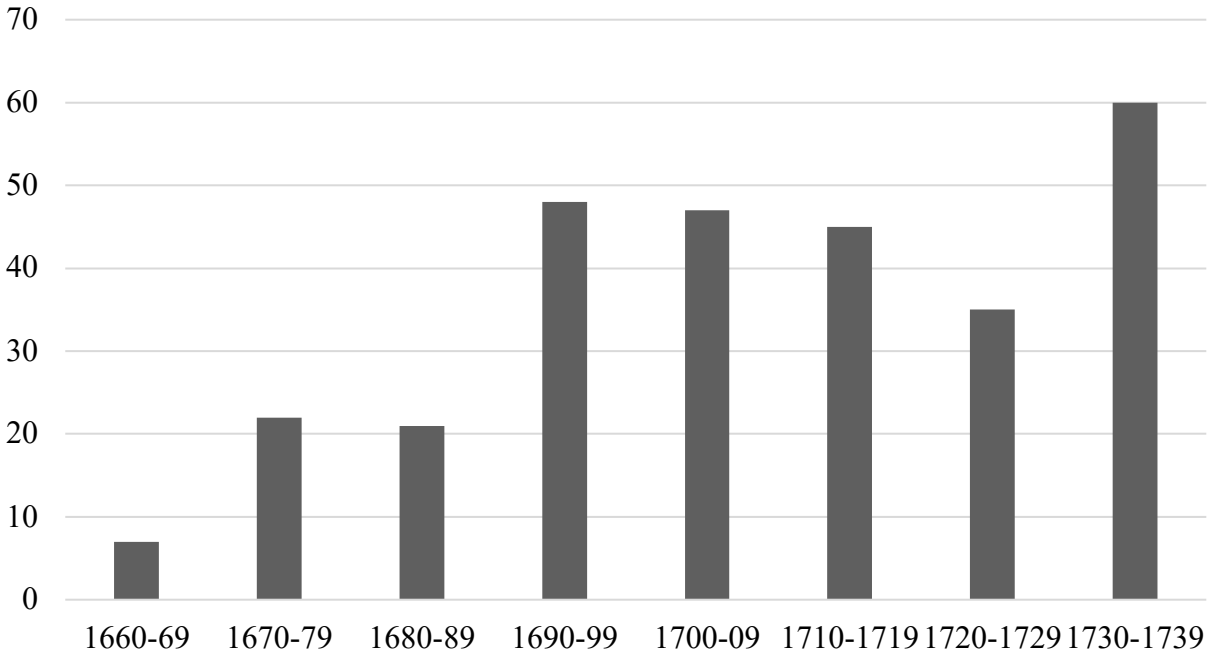



In regards to family status, only one case claimed the woman was a mother, Anne Crowther from Southowram, West Riding, in 1707, and this was in order to demonstrate how she would benefit from the licence for the sustenance of her children, not her qualities as a mother: 'for and towards her & childrens subsistence is desirous to follow the office of a Midwife and to have a Licence for the same '.[97] At least twenty-three other women were mothers, as confirmed by parish registers, and this number was likely much higher, just untraceable in the documents.[98] The lack of citations about a woman's maternal ability and the language that was actually used in the testimonials demonstrate the importance of a woman's abilities and professional strengths above familial role. While a woman could be a

[96] BIHR, Nom. M.
[97] BIHR, Nom. M. 1707/3.
[98] In order to determine if a woman was a mother, I used cases where a husband's name was given. Then I searched through baptism records where the children's father's name was listed. As with marital status above only records that were in the confirmed parish, of a reasonable time and that could not be conflated with someone of the same name were counted. This was done with the aid of online resources such as findmypast.co.uk and parish records located in the Borthwick Institute, BIHR/PR.

good mother and provide for her children, it was predominantly through her occupational ability that she acquired a licence.

*Table 3.5: % of Yorkshire testimonials noting religious affiliation by decade*[99]




Wilson states that the primary characteristic of the midwife was her power and authority.[100] His discussion of the rise of the man-midwife argues that the battle of eighteenth-century obstetrics was not between the midwife and the male-midwife, but rather 'it was between two parties of men-midwives struggling for hegemony over practice and theory', while he paints the midwife as only being present the '*managing* [of] easy natural labours'.[101] In this light the midwife is a passive character, present for social and managerial reasons, rather than for her technique and capability at the bed of a labouring woman. Isobel Grundy goes as far to suggest that Wilson's assessment of male-midwives' scientific and mechanical skill with forceps assumes 'the non-existence of skilled women'.[102] Grundy's critique is a stretch as Wilson touches on their skill during childbirth elsewhere, however it is evident that his emphasis was on the midwife's social skills, authority and management. This is particularly seen in Wilson's later work, in which he stresses that a midwife's testimonial

[99] BIHR, Nom. M.

[100] Wilson, *The Making of Man-midwifery*, 26.

[101] Adrian Wilson, 'Politics of Medical Improvement in early Hanoverian London,' in *The Medical Enlightenment of the Eighteenth Century*, eds. Andrew Cunningham and Roger French (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 35-36.

[102] Isobel Grundy, 'Sarah Stone: Enlightenment Midwife,' in *Medicine in the Enlightenment,* ed. Roy Porter (Amsterdam; Atlanta, GA: Rodopi, 1995), 129.

focused on the affirmation that 'she was of "sober life and conversation"', again emphasising reputation as the foremost description.[103] He proposes that the purpose of the testimonial was to prove that a woman had 'some degree of local support', and in doing so emphasises the social nature of the role while downplaying that evidence for a woman's skill. The psychologist Jeanne Achterberg, whose book on the female healer traces women in medicine from ancient to modern times, claims that 'the qualifications for acting as midwife, until about the nineteenth century, related little to the skills needed for the profession', emphasising instead their need to 'not be "young", and be Christians in good standing'.[104] This is an example of how popular histories of female healers have reinforced the stereotype that social, and in Achterberg's case, religious standing was more important than skill, despite what we find in early modern manuals.

Contemporary conceptions of 'good life and conversation' did not always align with modern ideas of reputation. The physician Maubray agreed that a midwife should be a 'true Fearer of GOD'—not because her religious reputation amongst her neighbours was important, but rather because she was present during the critical moment of new life coming into the world: 'Matters of the greatest Moment are committed to her Care, and depend entirely upon the faithful Discharge of her Duty'.[105] Therefore her religious character related back to her duty and the skilful execution of her role, which required physical dexterity, mental capacity and 'Compassion, and Tenderness to Mankind'. One religious duty of the midwife was to help the poor as well as the rich, so while she had to be a good Christian, this should be understood in the context of her occupational role.

As the jest about the ignorant chambermaid suggested, it was acknowledged that midwifery required a mixture of intellect, learned knowledge and manual skill. Physical dexterity and endurance played a key role. Maubray's eighteenth-century book relating to 'all the diseases incident to that [female] sex' discussed the requirements a midwife should fulfil. At the top of the list was that she should be physically solid, 'of a healthy, strong, and vigorous Body, with clever small Hands: Since *nothing can be more agreeable and conducive to the Art of MIDWIFERY, than slender Hands, long Fingers, and a ready Feeling*'.[106] Maubray also listed physical ability and fortitude, followed by mental judgment, as the most important aspects of midwifery, although he conceded that for more difficult

[103] Wilson, *Ritual and Conflict*, 160.
[104] Achterberg, *Woman as Healer,* 118.
[105] Maubray, *The Female Physician*, 173-4.
[106] Ibid., 173. Emphasis added.

cases, the female midwife had to submit herself to the 'ablest Practiser' or the more 'Learned' male physician. Smellie detailed a birth he attended that left him physically exhausted: 'I had been called to many such cases, yet I was never more fatigued. I was not able to raise my arms to my head for a day or two after this delivery'.[107] Percival Willughby, in his *Observations in Midwifery* discussed the physical aspects of delivering a woman in labour, such as the sweat that runs down the midwives' faces.[108] Each of these male authors acknowledged the physicality and knowledge that were required of midwives, and the Yorkshire testimonials support the contemporary opinion that embodied techniques were key.

Despite historians' suggestions that 'the licensing of midwives had more to do with their moral character than with their skill', I have found that the Yorkshire midwives and the witnesses who supported them appealed more to their ability.[109] In an analysis of the language used in the testimonials, seen in Table 3.6, the number of women described in terms relating to a sober life and conversation, including the variants as good, honest or civil, only comprise about 30 per cent. The most common descriptions were in fact some variation of skilful, dexterous or knowledgeable. Towards the end of the early modern period 'skill' was used in terms of capability, ability and expertise, with knowledge at the core, as skill was learnt through experience and practice.[110] Therefore, the skill that the testimonials referred to was something that had to be acquired through repetition. It could be demonstrated through a midwife's ability to assist the mother and safely deliver a child. The midwife's talents were developed and knowledge was transferred in accordance with trade skills defined by the likes of Willeke Wendrich and Harald Bentz Høgseth outlined in the introduction.[111] 'Skill' referred to the woman's performance specific to midwifery, whereas being of 'sober life and conversation' referred to her broader reputation.

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[107] Fife, 'Gender and Professionialism in Eighteenth-Century Midwifery,' 194.

[108] Percival Willughby, *Observations in Midwifery* (H. Blenkinsop, 1863; Reprinted edition, Wakefield: SR Publishers, 1972), 32.

[109] Lucinda McCray Beier, *Sufferers and Healers: The Experience of Illness in Seventeenth-Century England* (London; New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1987), 15.

[110] "skill, n.1". OED Online. September 2016. Oxford University Press. http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/180865?rskey=59wd72&result=1&isAdvanced=false (accessed October 17, 2016).

[111] Willeke Wendrich, *Archaeology and Apprenticeship: Body Knowledge, Identity, and Communities of Practice* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2012); Harald Bentz Høgseth, 'Knowledge Transfer: The Craftsmen's Abstraction,' in Wendrich, *Archaeology and Apprenticeship*, 61-78.

*Table 3.6: Descriptions of character in Yorkshire midwifery testimonials (by decade)*[112]

| ***Description*** | ***1660s*** | ***1670s*** | ***1680s*** | ***1690s*** | ***1700s*** | ***1710s*** | ***1720s*** | ***1730s*** | ***%*** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Relating to occupational/technical skill* | | | | | | | | | |
| Skilful, able or qualified | 3 | 8 | 29 | 16 | 25 | 30 | 36 | 16 | **37.0** |
| Fit or dexterous | 3 | 6 | 17 | 6 | 4 | 13 | 4 | 0 | **12.2** |
| Knowledgeable | 3 | 0 | 5 | 4 | 1 | 5 | 5 | 3 | **5.9** |
| Experienced | 4 | 1 | 3 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 4 | 2 | **3.6** |
| Reputed | 0 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 5 | 3 | **3.2** |
| Helpful, useful, or serviceable | 3 | 2 | 0 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 0 | 0 | **2.5** |
| Of good judgment | 1 | 2 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 1 | **2.5** |
| Capable | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 1 | **1.5** |
| | | | | | | | | *% occupational/technical skill* | **68.4** |
| *Relating to social skill/religious character* | | | | | | | | | |
| Life & conversation | 3 | 3 | 10 | 7 | 17 | 22 | 12 | 8 | **18.6** |
| Of good behaviour | 0 | 0 | 4 | 1 | 3 | 3 | 1 | 4 | **3.6** |
| Sober | 0 | 1 | 3 | 4 | 2 | 2 | 0 | 2 | **3.2** |
| Discreet | 1 | 0 | 3 | 4 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 1 | **2.5** |
| Grave | 1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 2 | **1.7** |
| Matronly | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | **1.1** |
| Of good report | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | **0.9** |
| | | | | | | | | *% social skill/religious character* | **31.6** |
| **TOTAL (441)** | **22** | **25** | **83** | **52** | **55** | **87** | **73** | **44** | **100.0** |

This is emphasised by the fact that fitness and dexterity followed as the third most common descriptions in the testimonials. Used either individually or collectively, 'fit and dexterous' outnumbered descriptions of the women's social character, such as 'of modest behaviour', 'noble', 'grave' or 'honest'. Being 'fit' for a position entailed a person being 'well adapted or suited to the conditions or circumstances of the case, answering the purpose,

[112] BIHR, Nom. M.

proper or appropriate'.[113] Shakespeare used the term to denote who was worthy of a particular position and Daniel Defoe used 'fit' while describing his father as having the best *knowledge* of a subject.[114] Dexterity more specifically referred to the possession of 'manual or manipulative skill' as well as 'mental adroitness or skill'.[115] From the mid-sixteenth century onwards, dexterity was used to demonstrate both ability and the superiority of the subject who possessed it. Both of the terms implied that whoever had such qualities were talented in their field. The qualities such as fitness and dexterity were highlighted in contemporary texts such as *The Female Physician,* in which Maubray claimed that 'it is quite wrong for any persons, *who have not a Body and Mind particularly adapted to this Business*, to spend their time in qualifying themselves for, and applying themselves to the Performance of this good Office'.[116] That is to say that there were physical and mental qualities that could not be mastered by just anyone.

As already established, skill was often used in the testimonials that described a woman as already having experience. This meant that the witnesses could explain how the woman had aided them, equating proficiency with usefulness. No doubt a midwife being skilled in safely delivering babies was beneficial to the community, and so her success depended on the safe handling of those she attended. The language in the testimonials demonstrated this, along with the willingness of a number of women to attest to their experience. About a tenth of the testimonials that mention experience indicated the witnesses' safe or successful delivery. For example, the testifiers for Jane Jonson, noted above as one of the two midwives from Estronwick, stated that she 'hath good skill in the art of midwifery as appears to us in the good success she had under God in the absence of a licensed midwife in bringing us safely to bed in Childbirth'.[117] Four women signed or marked this testimonial, noting that their labours went well under Jonson's hand. They specifically claimed that skill in the art was demonstrated through the safe delivery. Eight women testified that Margaret Coakes, 'having deliver'd Some of our neighbours with great Safety, & dexterity', was

[113] "fit, adj.". OED Online. September 2016. Oxford University Press. http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/70747?rskey=hpVdgT&result=6&isAdvanced=false (accessed November 14, 2016).

[114] William Shakespeare, *The Two Gentleman of Verona* in *Mr. William Shakespeares comedies, histories & tragedies*, 1st Folio (1 vol.), (London: I. Iaggard and E. Blount, 1623) STC 22273, I.ii.45; Daniel Defoe, *Religious Courtship: Historical Discourses, on the Necessity of Marrying Religious Husbands and Wives Only* (London: 1722), i, 24.

[115] "dexterity, n.". OED Online. September 2016. Oxford University Press. http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/51666?redirectedFrom=dexterity (accessed November 14, 2016).

[116] Maubray, *The Female Physician*, 171. Emphasis added.

[117] BIHR Nom. M. 1715/3.

worthy of being licensed due to her abilities, and they 'earnestly desire that the Court would be pleased to license her for that Purpose'.[118] Six women represented 'some of those several [Mary Johnson] hath safely deliver'd in Child birth', and so they were able to prove that she was 'skilful in the Art of Midwifery'.[119]

Some of the later testimonials are more detailed in describing the labouring women's experiences. Eight women, in 1735, vouched for Sarah Moor's skill, claiming 'that neither any of us nor any other of our neighbours ever suffered any damage by her to our knowledge', and that 'she doth assist many of her poor neighbour in case of necesity'.[120] Moor also possessed the positive social traits of a midwife, like the ones listed by Maubray, in her assistance to the poor. Anne Winn's 1736 case differed slightly in that it was a letter written by a man, John Cockell, on behalf of a number of women. Cockell's listed ten women in an around Loftus, North Yorkshire, by name and claimed, 'a Great many others' from around Loftus had all done very well by Winn, and to his knowledge none ever 'fail'd under her hand'. In a separate passage beneath the letter nine women certified the truth of his statement. The women verified that, beyond being successful, Winn had 'done a great deal of Good in that Way [as midwife]'.[121]

Knowledge and judgment were key aspects of skilfulness. When the terms 'good skill and judgment' were paired together, the testimonials were more assertive in desiring that the woman be licensed. For example, the ten women who were witness to Alice Harrison's capability proclaimed that she had practiced 'with good successe', and so they 'her neighbours in the parish of Beeford', having 'experienced her will & dexterity & examined her judgment hope that for the future she may be usefull & (under god) an instrument for good amongst us'.[122] In the year 1674 Katherine Storr and Jane Mawger were both described as being 'a person of good skill & judgment', therefore they were called 'well qualified to perform the office' and it was seen fit that they obtain their licences.[123] Six women were signatories to Mary Hewitt's testimonial, stating they had observed Hewitt frequently showing great skill and judgment, leading them to say: 'And it is our opinion that should their Office condescend to Grant her a Faculty for the public profession of the said Art of Midwifery It might be a real Benefit as well to this neighbourhood [Ackworth] as to other

[118] BIHR Nom. M. 1697/4.
[119] BIHR Nom. M. 1732/2.
[120] BIHR Nom. M. 1735/3.
[121] BIHR Nom. M. 1736/1.
[122] BIHR Nom. M. 1684/2.
[123] BIHR Nom. M. 1674/11; BIHR Nom. M. 1674/12.

places'.[124] Judgment is a faculty that is learned through experience, particularly when it concerns a specific profession. This is especially so for midwifery, as good judgment was a matter of life and death, both for mother and child.

Judgment was supported by knowledge of the female body, particularly the womb. Although a woman may have experienced childbirth, understanding reproduction, the womb and the vagina was not intuitive, and therefore midwifery required special knowledge that would have been acquired through instruction and practice. Similar to the women who were described as having good judgment, those who possessed knowledge in the art of midwifery were requested by their neighbours to be licensed. The four women who signed Silence Barker's testimonial affirmed that she was 'of such skill and knowledge in the practice of Midwifery that we do think her very fit and well qualified for the same and do humbly desire she may be Licenced accordingly'.[125] Anne Tattersall was described in a like manner, as she was 'of such skill and knowledge' that those who experienced her handiwork found her 'very fit to be Licenced to Practice the same'.[126] Seven others were described as possessing 'good skill and knowledge', or a comparable variant of the two.[127] Although knowledge and judgment were used less than 'good life and conversation' to denote a woman's qualities, it is suggestive that they were almost never used on their own but rather in conjunction with skill. This signifies that they were virtues that proved a woman's ability as a midwife.

The prioritisation of skill is not to say neighbourliness was not valued: in many of the cases the skill of a midwife was a benefit to her neighbours, and it was other women who authorised her skill. Over two hundred of the testimonials had at least one female witness, with ninety-one having exclusively female witnesses, seen in Table 3.7. Similar to the way in which experience had to be observed by females to be credible, as seen above, skill was attested predominately by neighbouring women. Women who had already been delivered by the midwife were common witnesses. In some cases they were listed as having made use of her, such as the fourteen women in the parish of Filey who attached their names to Ellis Gopton's testimonial being described as 'the underwritten being such as have been safely laid by her in Childbearing'.[128] Other times their positions were described as attachments to their signatures, as in the case of the case of Elizabeth Champyan detailed above or like the four

[124] BIHR Nom. M. 1716/3.
[125] BIHR Nom. M. 1719/2.
[126] BIHR Nom. M. 1712/5.
[127] BIHR Nom. M. 1727/10; BIHR Nom. M. 1727/1; BIHR Nom. M. 1730/1; BIHR Nom. M. 1712/8; BIHR Nom. M. 1703/1; BIHR Nom. M. 1696/2; BIHR Nom. M. 1689/1.
[128] BIHR Nom. M. 1717/2.

witnesses to Mary Gedney's skill whose names were followed by the term 'safe deliver'd'.[129] Anne Doughty and Anne Brookesbank's witnesses all described themselves at the beginning of the testimonials as 'we the childbearing women' of their respective villages.[130] The authority given by the female witnesses is important to consider because it demonstrates that skill was derived from safely and successfully delivering women, and doing so in such a way that those women would vouch for their skill.

*Table 3.7: Status of witnesses in Yorkshire midwifery testimonials*[131]

| ***Witness Status*** | ***No.*** | ***%*** |
|---|---|---|
| Only women | 91 | 34.0 |
| Women and clergy | 56 | 21.0 |
| Only clergy | 48 | 17.9 |
| Distinguished segments for women and clergy | 44 | 16.4 |
| Only unidentified men | 14 | 5.2 |
| Women and laymen | 11 | 4.1 |
| Women and surgeons | 2 | 0.7 |
| Only surgeons | 2 | 0.7 |
| **TOTAL** | **268** | **100.0** |

Table 3.8 tracks the terms used in discussion of midwifery as an occupation, the most common of which was 'office'. This term is recognised by historians as having enforced the midwife's public identity as a woman with an occupation, a public identity Margaret Pelling argues was 'akin (although hardly equal) to that of men'.[132] This is further supported by Thomas, who notes, 'this language is identical to the terms used to describe official positions held by men, such as parish clerk and schoolmaster, indicating that midwives were seen in a similar light'.[133] No other feminine duty was so consistently described in this capacity, hence the importance of these nominations in demonstrating the social standing of the midwife. The use of the term implied the public legitimisation of a predominantly female role.

Second to office, midwifery was referred to as an art, which was normally 'practised'. By definition, an 'art'—which was a common word to describe a variety of occupations in

[129] BIHR Nom. M. 1721/1; BIHR Nom. M. 1716/8.
[130] BIHR Nom. M. 1663/1; BIHR Nom. M. 1712/9.
[131] BIHR, Nom. M.
[132] Margaret Pelling, *The Common Lot: Sickness, Medical Occupations and the Urban Poor in Early Modern England* (London: Longman, 1998), 155.
[133] Thomas, 'Midwifery and Society in Restoration York,' 11; Thomas, 'Early Modern Midwifery,' 123.

this period—required the mastering of a subject, once again enforcing the idea that midwifery was an employment requiring a person distinguished in its knowledge.[134] The midwifery manuals, discussed below, refer to their work predominantly as an art, implying both pride and knowledge. Sarah Stone referred to her work as 'that valuable Art' in the title of her manual and denoted its importance as 'an Art where Life depends', although she often also referenced midwives as her 'Sisters of the *Profession*'.[135] Edmund Chapman often made references to nature being unable to produce a child on her own and so he had to resort to his art.[136] He also characterised practitioners of midwifery as artists. Art could also be paired with the term 'mystery', echoing the language used in the description of many male crafts: 'it was common, of course, for men to use the language of mystery to establish the arcane nature of work ranging from carpentry to alchemy'.[137] In using the terms of art and mystery, midwives were establishing their authority and knowledge of the trade. Mystery also indicated that the skills of the trade were acquired from knowledge that others, particularly men, lacked.

[134] "art, n.1". OED Online. September 2016. Oxford University Press. http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/11125?rskey=rzymX1&result=1&isAdvanced=false (accessed October 22, 2016).

[135] Sarah Stone, *A Complete Practice of Midwifery* (London: Printed for T. Cooper, 1737), xvii, xiv. Emphasis added.

[136] Edmund Chapman, *An Essay on the Improvement of Midwifery* (London: Printed by A. Blackwell, 1733), 23, 66.

[137] Thomas, 'Early Modern Midwifery,' 123-124.

*Table 3.8: Occupational descriptors in Yorkshire midwifery testimonials (by decade)*[138]

| ***Description*** | ***1660s*** | ***1670s*** | ***1680s*** | ***1690s*** | ***1700s*** | ***1710s*** | ***1720s*** | ***1730s*** | ***%*** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Office | 4 | 7 | 19 | 9 | 17 | 16 | 3 | 4 | **37.6** |
| Art | 1 | 2 | 11 | 4 | 7 | 9 | 13 | 4 | **24.3** |
| Practice | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 7 | 5 | 2 | **9.0** |
| Employment | 2 | 4 | 7 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 0 | **8.1** |
| Business | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 4 | 7 | **7.2** |
| Profession | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 2 | 1 | **3.3** |
| Mystery | 0 | 0 | 2 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | **2.9** |
| Duty | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | **2.4** |
| Faculty | 0 | 0 | 1 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | **2.4** |
| Calling | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | **1.4** |
| Industry | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | **1.4** |
| **TOTAL (210)** | **11** | **15** | **44** | **22** | **31** | **39** | **29** | **19** | **100.0** |

Although these nominations leave certain questions unanswered, they provide information about what a society expected out of the women in the public office of midwife. As reputation was a keystone in early modern culture and the testimonials required the support of fellow women and local clergy, it is no surprise that good character would have to be demonstrated by a woman before she could obtain a licence; yet, the precise nature of the desired characteristics was not always as straightforward as scholars suggest. Historians have often cited either the motherly nature of a woman, or that 'most midwives were respectable married women or widows, almost all churchgoers', emphasising her family status and her Christian reputation as sought after qualities in a midwife.[139] The omission of many women's marital status meant that their abilities overruled their familial situation. Only a third made reference to a woman's religious standing, and the majority of those mentioned it in a systematic manner suggesting that it was what the licensing authorities wanted to hear but it was not what neighbours sought in a midwife. On the other hand, nearly all made some mention of skill, ability, fitness, knowledge or a combination of those qualities. These were

[138] BIHR, Nom. M.

[139] David Cressy, *Birth, Marriage, and Death: Ritual, Religion, and the Life-Cycle in Tudor and Stuart England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 60; Thomas, 'Early Modern Midwifery,' 119; Harley, 'Provincial Midwives,' 35; Hess, 'Midwifery Practice among the Quakers,' 50.

active characteristics that a woman would have to work in order to gain, rather than passive descriptions such as modest behaviour or conformability to the Church and State.

Although there were multifaceted systems at work when it came to the licensing of a midwife, reputation being one factor, a woman's facility in the position of midwife has been disproportionately discounted. This is despite the fact that other contemporary sources, beyond testimonials, favoured the knowledge of a woman's body, the importance of touch, keeping the woman safe, and not just delivering a living child, but ensuring it was healthy. Nihell rested her argument about the superiority of the female midwife on the dexterity of the woman, as delivering a child 'requires a very nice skilful hand; with which, where it is found, surely no instrument, no other invention, can come into competition'.[140] Maubray valued knowledge, instruction and a solid woman. Eighteenth-century manuals provided first-hand accounts that cautioned their readers about what could befall those who lacked certain capacities. They also echoed the jest cited at the start of this chapter: midwifery was not an art that could be learned through merely reading books about the subject, but rather required practise and experience.

## Midwifery manuals

Midwifery books have a long history, stretching back thousands of years, but in England the earliest printed midwifery text was *The Byrth of Mankynde,* a 1540 translation of a 1513 German text, which 'quickly became the "standard work" on childbirth for the sixteenth century.[141] Midwifery manuals were divided between those written in the vernacular, often aimed at 'the woman reader', and those in Latin which were intended to be read by the male physician. The majority of English midwifery manuals were written by men, and some of these, such as William Smellie's *Treatise on the Theory and Practice of Midwifery*, were aimed at their fellow male surgeon-midwives.[142] Fife has made important observations about the gender differences between female- and male-authored works. In the works by women, 'the writer and audience share the same gender and similar experience as patients or their potential for becoming patients', which shaped the tone of their work. She also notes that the women's language, while more metaphorical and discursive, also demonstrated a greater sensitivity to her patient's pain, whereas the men's language was

[140] Nihell, *A Treatise*, 360.

[141] Helen King, '"As if None Understood the Art that Cannot Understand Greek": The Education of midwives in Seventeenth-Century England,' in *The History of Medical Education in Britain*, eds. Vivian Nutton and Roy Porter (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1995), 185-187.

[142] Fife, 'Gender and Professionalism in Eighteenth-Century Midwifery,' 187.

analytical, technical and treated the labouring woman as a subject.[143] These trends reflect similar themes of gendered authorship that will be discussed in more detail in chapter 5.

Helen King has also explored the role of the midwives' books in the education of women, noting how, although most were addressed at the woman reader, the use of the vernacular was accompanied by 'a belief in the limited intellectual capacities of women'.[144] King questions if the use of the vernacular really implies that midwives, or women in general, were the intended or the actual readers of these texts. Some women were known to own some of these texts, such as Susanna Mortemer, likely of Wakefield, who inscribed in her copy of William Giffard's 1734 *Cases in Midwifery*, 'Steal not this Book for Fear of shame for hear You see the owners Name' on 8 April 1752.[145] However it is difficult to ascertain whether or not the rural midwife had access to these works. King concludes that 'the written word, used in isolation, is far from being simply a means of imparting necessary information' and that the midwives' books actually included very little on midwifery itself.[146] Therefore, the midwifery texts should be read more for their commentary on the role of the midwife or as physicians' discussions of the female anatomy, and not as direct instruction.

While an important subject of study, the literacy of midwives is not the focus of this section. Rather, I am analysing manuals to explore contemporary discourse about the art of midwifery and the nature of the office. The two authors analysed here—Percival Willughby and Sarah Stone—were selected because they both used observations from their own practice in order to discuss the office of midwifery. While Jane Sharp was another proclaimed midwife of her time, her work relied primarily on others' stories and focused more on the female body, pregnancy and reproductive issues such as infertility, rather than the specificities of practising midwifery. What is more, Katharine Phelps Walsh has called into question whether Sharp practiced midwifery, or if the author was even a woman, given the level of plagiarism, formal discussion of the birthing process and lack of evidence of midwifery experience.[147]

The first work, Percival Willughby's *Observations in Midwifery*, is one of the most frequently cited texts by historians of early modern midwifery. The work was originally written around 1672, although it remained in manuscript form until it was first printed in

[143] Ibid., 186-187.
[144] King, '"As if None Understood the Art",' 187.
[145] Susanna Mortemer's copy of William Giffard's *Cases in Midwifery* (1734), held in the Milnes Walker Collection, in the Borthwwck Insitute (BIHR).
[146] King, '"As if None Understood the Art",' 188, 192.
[147] Katharine Phelps Walsh, 'Marketing Midwives in Seventeenth-Century London: A Re-examination of Jane Sharp's *The Midwives Book*,' *Gender & History* 26, no. 2 (August, 2014), 223-224.

1863.[148] Willughby's advice was based both on readings and on his own experience, which he stated began in 1630, and stretched over forty years. After being trained in London, under a Dutch physician, Willughby returned to his home of Derby, where the majority of his practice took place. It is important to keep in mind when reading Willughby's *Observations*, that his experiences were, in his own words, 'structured by the specific ways he was called to deliveries'.[149] That is to say, as a male physician, Willughby was often called as a last resort in a difficult birth, and usually when the child was already dead, and so his observations were of a particular nature.

In discussing female midwives, Willughby was adamant that the best midwife knew how to follow natural proceedings. He repeatedly stated that 'all that ever I would have the midwife to do, is but to receive the child, when it commeth into the world, or to alter an unnaturall birth'.[150] For him, the most skilful midwife was, first, a servant to nature and, second, a knowledgeable woman. The more a woman knew how to read the signs of nature and let a labour proceed without her interference, the better. Like the jest at the start of this chapter, Willoughby wrote that the knowledge of a midwife could not be learned through books exclusively, just as a sailor could not learn how to master the sea simply by reading.[151] Midwifery was not an occupation learned quickly nor without effort: 'It is education, with practice, that teacheth her experience; And Midwives have need of good memories to help their judgments in all undertaking'.[152] While the midwife was primarily 'Nature's servant', she had to be knowledgeable in cases of unnatural births, such as a baby being born breech or feet first.[153] Willughby advocated for traits such as 'knowledge' and 'judgement' that fell in line with the testimonials discussed above.

However, while Willughby claimed that knowledge was required, he did not provide instruction or teachings to help improve his readers' own understanding. Rather, he took to admonishing the ignorance of pretenders, providing examples of mistakes and malpractice. According to him, the purpose of writing down his observations was to 'inform the ignorant

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[148] Audrey Eccles, *Obstetrics and Gynaecology in Tudor and Stuart England* (London: Croom Helm, 1982), 14; Michel Thiery has found that a version of the work was translated into Dutch c. 1754 and had a limited circulation, although the translator did remove many of Willughby's case reports and rearranged the text. Michel Thiery, 'Willughby's Observations in Midwifery: The Dutch Translation,' *Vesalius* 2, no. 2 (1996), 106-110.

[149] Adrian Wilson, 'A Memorial of Eleanor Willughby, a Seventeenth-Century Midwife,' in *Women, Science and Medicine: 1500-1700*, eds. Lynette Hunter and Sarah Hutton (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 1997), 146.

[150] Willughby, *Observations in Midwifery*, 241.

[151] Ibid., 73.

[152] Ibid., 73.

[153] Ibid., 5.

common midwives', hence why he used the vernacular and simple language.[154] Ignorance, officiousness and hastiness were three negative characteristics which Willughby repeatedly warned against. Early on he stated that 'the younger, more giddy, and officious midwives are to bee rebuked…lest they should seem unskilful…being impatient of a competent expectation, by their desire to hasten and promote the birth'.[155] He valued the patient, practiced midwife because of her ability to help the childbearing woman. By describing the negative types of midwives, he inadvertently highlighted the positive attributes.

Willughby also warned that 'the meanest of the women, not knowing how, otherwise, to live, for the getting of a shilling, or two, to sustain their necessities; become ignorant midwives' who would cause the travailing women to 'suffer tortures', such as the subject of the jest at the start of this chapter.[156] However, it was not only poor women who sought to make profit from their inexperience. Willughby had even harsher words for men who came from other professions, claiming to be men-midwives, and caused harm to the women and children they attended. He drew attention to apothecaries who 'leave the beating of their mortars' to become man-midwives, who were 'as yet, escaping their due reward, in not pacing the hangman's black stumbling horse, or the receiving of the hot iron in their hands, for their reward and just deserts'.[157] Most of his descriptions of women stick to the terms 'ignorant' and 'officious', and while he was not fond of these women, his description of the man pretending to be a man-midwife was even worse: 'He was an ignorant, impudent, shameless evan mountebank, and had five pounds for cutting off the child's arme, and so murthering the child'.[158] And indeed a woman-midwife had to come in after him to safely deliver the woman of the rest of the child's body. The pretend man-midwife was worse, for he sought profit and credibility from falsehoods, whereas the ignorant women were merely trying to put an end to the woman's labour.

Unlike Jeanne Achterberg's reading of the *Observations*, which exclusively picks out his description of the 'meanest of the women' mentioned above, and pitches him as a detractor of women, one can see from his writings that Willughby had faith in educated and practiced midwives, praising the patient women and even citing instances where he learned techniques from observing women-midwives.[159] He also taught his daughter the trade, and

[154] Ibid., 2.
[155] Ibid., 30-1. Emphasis added.
[156] Ibid., 72-3.
[157] Ibid., 248.
[158] Ibid., 249.
[159] Achterberg, *Woman as Healer*, 119; Willughby, *Observations in Midwifery*, 49.

she took on some cases he was unavailable to attend, signifying his faith in her.[160] Willughby's work was written in order to differentiate between the ignorant women who hastily delivered a woman to earn a shilling, and the patient, knowledgeable and experienced women who demonstrated the true skill of a midwife.

Another work of observations in midwifery provides a rare female point of view on the profession. Sarah Stone was a midwife in the beginning of the eighteenth century, when she started her work in Taunton, Somerset before moving to Bristol and finally London. Her work, entitled *A Complete Practice of Midwifery*, was published in 1737 and detailed over forty difficult deliveries that she attended. The purpose of her work was to instruct midwives, specifically women, in what she called the Art of Midwifery. Like Willughby, Stone warned against the ignorance of 'unexperienc'd pretenders', as her full title described them; however, her tone was less scolding than Willughby's. Her work was driven by an overlying note of sympathy for the suffering mother. According to Stone, male practitioners were typically much worse than a woman trying her hand at midwifery. The reason being was two-fold: these men often knew nothing about childbirth except for what they had seen at anatomical dissections of the impregnated woman's body; women, on the other hand, had the advantage of 'natural sympathy' because they likely had gone through the 'pangs of childbearing' themselves.[161] As Stone summarised, 'dissecting the Dead, and being just and tender to the Living, are vastly different' and labour being a circumstance 'which no man can be judge of'.[162] This warning against male practitioners was also due to Stone's fear that the female sex would lose all dignity if men took over her field: 'I am well assured, unless the women-midwives give themselves more to the Study of this Art, and learn the difficult part of their business, that the Modesty of our Sex will be in great danger of being lost, for want of good women-midwives, by being so much exposed to the Men professing this Art'.[163] Her full title revealed the threat she saw in the male sex, described as 'boyish Pretenders' that would have their inexperienced way with women if Stone's own sex did not heed her instructions.[164]

It was in difficult deliveries or unnatural births where skill was most put into play. Like Willughby, Stone had a high regard for nature, however she viewed the midwife as having a more active role in the birthing chamber. Stone considered knowledge to be the cornerstone of a midwife's skill. Many midwives were let down by their 'want of knowledge

[160] Willughby, *Observations in Midwifery*, 134-5.
[161] Stone, *A Complete Practice of Midwifery*, xv.
[162] Ibid., xiv, xv.
[163] Ibid., xi.
[164] Ibid., vii.

when to assist a Woman, and when to omit it'.[165] But unlike Willughby's suggestions, Stone asserted that a midwife must be ready to act if the difficult labour was long and slow, for waiting on nature in an atypical birth was the work of 'illiterate and unskilful Midwives'.[166] Knowing the signals of impending labour and false labours, as well as what various pains meant, aided a woman in bringing about the birth at a proper time. Bolstered by a strong resolution, a midwife had to be capable of managing difficult deliveries, hence why Stone wrote her manual: 'I could enumerate vast numbers of these Observations; but have set down only a few which, I hope, will prove beneficial to my sex in general, when in my Grave'.[167] In undertaking these difficult cases, a midwife needed 'patience, justice, good judgment, and full resolution, with God's blessing' in order to succeed.[168]

Beyond this, Stone saw a midwife's skill as constituted by physical strength, criticising women who she viewed as too old, and therefor unfit, for the position. One woman was 'a feeble ancient Woman', unable to properly fetch her woman's afterbirth due to her physical restraints, which caused great distress, mirroring the story from Fretwell above.[169] Stone's observations were often extremely physical, and she even brought up the fact that having been the only midwife in Taunton able to assist in these difficult births was so physically taxing that she was forced to move to a bigger city, Bristol. To support this, she shared the details of a birth in which the baby was breech, and her efforts to turn the child and keep it in a correct position 'greatly fatigued' her, so much so that she even wished to relinquish her occupation.[170] The physical exertions show that beyond the mental, intellectual aptitude, a midwife was required to possess manual ability and bodily strength in order to truly be a skilled midwife.

Stone provided a rare, and thus valuable, example of explaining the education process of a midwife. As an apprentice to her mother, Stone credited her good success to this first-hand experience. Once again reproving the barber-surgeons who sought to imitate midwives, Stone stated, 'but had I inspected into them [dissections] all my life, and not been instruct'd in Midwifery by my mother…it would have signified but little'.[171] According to Stone, a woman should be employed under 'some ingenious woman practising this Art' for at least three years, asserting that three years was the shortest amount of time possible 'to be

[165] Ibid., xvii.
[166] Ibid., 45.
[167] Ibid., 139.
[168] Ibid., 43.
[169] Ibid., 55.
[170] Ibid., 153.
[171] Ibid., xvi.

instructed in an Art where Life depends.[172] This echoed the ideas of Maubray, who asserted that midwifery was similar to 'all Arts and Sciences [which] require Instruction, Application, Pains and Time, for qualifying any Person to become a MASTER in the Practice of them'.[173] Stone followed her own beliefs and transferred her knowledge to the next generation, training her daughter in the profession. The younger Stone worked ten years as a midwife by the time *A Complete Practice* was written.[174]

Both of these first-hand manuals were attacks on ignorance, and promotions of knowledge as the most successful quality that a midwife could possess. Experience, paired with the ability to know when and how to properly assist a woman in her delivery, helped a midwife become a professional. The two authors focused on skills, or lack thereof, as their main concerns in their observations, but rarely touched on what kind of reputation or neighbourly characteristics a midwife needed. Being professionally upright—which involved not swindling women for money—was the only character quality that Willughby or Stone mentioned. Just like the testimonials, the observations show that a midwife had to be active, in experience, knowledge and ability, in order to excel in her office, which differs from the passive woman that is often depicted in the gendered history of early modern obstetrics.

Stone also emphasised the physicality of midwifery: a midwife had to be both manually dexterous, to support the mother and child, and have an understanding of the mother's body, which was why a woman would make a better midwife. As touched on in the discussion of textile tracts in the last chapter and similar to the domestic service manuals that will be analysed in the next, the gendered differences in the writings of midwifery texts is important in that it shows how work was embodied by women. While Willughby had more experience in the role than the men writing about maids, there was still a distance in his writing when it came to discussing the female body and the environment of the birthing chamber. Stone went into detail about her cases and revealed the physical actions she took in the birthing room, whereas Willughby focused more on admonishing ignorant women. In Stone's work, there was a greater emphasis on being patient and embodying empathy for the mother, as a female midwife could know what the pangs of labour felt like and a man-midwife never could. That is not to say a man could not be sympathetic to his patient's travails, but empathy would be harder for him to master.

[172] Ibid., xvii.
[173] Maubray, *The Female Physician*, 171.
[174] Stone, *A Complete Practice of Midwifery*, 148.

The study of midwifery encapsulates the way in which skill, particularly embodied and gendered skillsets, are often left out of the history of gender and work. The division between the 'practical (female) know-how' of midwives and the '(male) intellectual experimentalism' of the physicians and surgeons reflects the negative dichotomisation between the unskilled body and the skilled mind introduced at the start of this thesis.[175] Using untapped sources such as testimonials and re-examining contemporary manuals for what has been missed in regard to women's work is critical for a wider understanding of women, work and knowledge transfer.

[175] Sara Pennell, 'Perfecting Practice?: Women, Manuscript Recipes and Knowledge in Early Modern England,' in *Early Modern Women's Manuscript Writing: Selected Papers from the Trinity/Trent Colloquium*, eds. Victoria E. Burke and Jonathan Gibson (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), 246.

## Chapter 4. 'The Hands by which the good Husbandman does subsist and live': Domestic service[1]

The eighteenth-century novelist Henry Fielding wrote that 'Mankind are first properly to be considered under two grand Divisions, *those that use their Hands, and those who employ Hands*'.[2] Although this distinction was presented in a satirical account of the underworld schemer, Jonathan Wild, who used others' hands for his nefarious gains, Fielding was nevertheless highlighting the divisions of society that were based on the degree and manner in which one used their hands. The next two chapters will examine the two halves of this divide as they relate to domestic affairs—which in this case refers to the household and its full oeconomy. The first will deal with 'those that use their own hands', but who did so in the employment of others. The next chapter will discuss those who employed the hands of others and how they managed the hands within their household.

In debates about the value use of domestic labour, historians such as Maureen M. Mackintosh, tend to agree that 'domestic labour is production, it produces goods and services which contribute to the standard of living in our society'.[3] This is particularly true for the early modern period, during which, as discussed in previous chapters, the household was the basic economic unit. As servants were often considered essential members of the household they ought to be understood as a part of this basic economic unit. Historians have been attempting to recognise the servant and their role for over seventy years, since Dorothy Marshall's call to acknowledge the value of the domestic servant.[4] J. Jean Hecht built upon Marshall's brief research, using contemporary literature to assess contemporary views about servants, although he has been rightly criticised for focusing more on male servants, servants of large households and London based servants.[5] Ann Kussmaul provided a comprehensive study about servants in husbandry in early modern England, starting a trend of thinking of service as a life-cycle occupation used to build skills before marriage. However, as her focus was largely on husbandry and she was focused on establishing a qualitative survey, she failed to fully grasp the diverse experience of servants, and it has taken nearly four decades for historians to overcome those 'typical and more orthodox experiences being prioritised and

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[1] Timothy Nourse, *Campania Foelix, or, A Discourse of the Benefits and Improvements of Husbandry* (London: Printed for Thomas Bennet, 1700), 201.

[2] Henry Fielding, *Miscellanies. The Life of Jonathan Wild*, vol. 3 (London: Printed for the Author, 1743), 89.

[3] Maureen M. Mackintosh, 'Domestic Labour and the Household,' in *Fit Work for Women*, ed. Sandra Burman (Abingdon: Taylor & Francis, 2012), 189.

[4] Dorothy Marshall, *The English Domestic Servant in History* (London: Historical Association, 1949); Bridget Hill, *Servants: English Domestics in the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996); R. C. Richardson, *Household Servants in Early Modern England* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010).

[5] J. Jean Hecht, *The Domestic Servant Class in Eighteenth Century England* (London: Routledge and Paul, 1956); J. Fisher, 'Reviewed Work,' Review of *The Domestic Servant Class in Eighteenth Century England,* by J. Jean Hecht, *The British Journal of Sociology* 7, no. 4 (Dec., 1956), 360.

speaking for the experience of all those employed as servants in early modern England'.[6] Overall, historians have grappled with how to assess the value of domestic service, even if we can decisively state that 'it is avowedly work rather than non-work'.[7]

One reason that the history of domestic servants remains underdeveloped is that servants, and especially their bodies, have largely been left out of the narrative, as the dominant historical approach to the subject of domestic service and domestic labour has been through the perspective of the employer or master of the household. Tim Meldrum demonstrates through his use of witness depositions that the 'definitive master-narrative', which 'demands a corrective', can be ameliorated by using more varied sources.[8] Yet the recent works devoted to service, such as Meldrum's and the 2010 monograph of R. C. Richardson's, which use a greater variety of literary, court and church records, are geographically limited by their focus on London. The field can be expanded not only by bringing the body of female labourers into focus but also by using sources outside of the metropolis.

This chapter will add to the discussion of servants by first looking at the female servants as a physical presence, specifically as the hands of the household. This will include a deeper, gendered reading of domestic service manuals to think about the servants' body at work and to support the recent trend of including domestic labour within a larger history of economy and society. After considering the maid and the physical nature of her work, I will look at the categories of servants in large households in order to better understand the diverse nature of service. Although the majority of women domestic servants were not working in these settings, magnifying the household and exploring the range of categories of servants allows us to appreciate the range of embodied practices that may or may not be mastered by maids. After going through the kinds of servants, I will scale back to look at the more common maid of all work, who occupied these various taskscapes. Building on the crucial recent work of Charmian Mansell, who has drawn attention to the importance of using depositional material to widen our understanding of the variety of servants' experiences, I use witness depositions from the Yorkshire assize and church courts.[9] As with the other types of work throughout this thesis, the body will be considered within this framework in order to better understand the impacts that such drudgery had on women who laboured for the benefit

[6] Ann Kussmaul, *Servants in husbandry in early modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); Charmian Mansell, 'The Variety of Women's Experiences as Servants in England (1548-1649): Evidence from Church Court Depositions,' *Continuity and Change* 33 (2018): 316.

[7] Tim Meldrum, *Domestic Service and Gender, 1660-1750: Life and Work in the London Household* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2014), 135.

[8] Ibid., 5.

[9] Mansell, 'The Variety of Women's Experiences as Servants in England,' 315-338.

of their household. Whether it was the maidservants who lived in the Pepys household and rose at four in the morning to attend to the wash or it was a twenty-seven year-old woman who, some days, travelled three and a half miles from her home in Armthorpe to her sister and brother-in-law's public house in Doncaster to 'assist her said sister in her said husband's house', arriving there before eight in the morning, or it was the cook maid in a London family who cleaned the floor in the parlour in the evening 'after the lady and the family were gone to bed', the tasks of female servants were diverse and took up many hours of the day, and this diversity deserves attention.[10]

## Hands of the household

Despite the fact that domestic service was, and is, a physically intensive labour, the body of servants is not immediately thought of when studying domestic history. However, when we scratch below the surface of primary sources, it becomes obvious that the body was front and centre in contemporaries' considerations of servants. Seventeenth- and eighteenth-century works testified to the societal value of servants' bodies as part of the household. At the turn of the eighteenth century, Timothy Nourse, in his work on agricultural improvements, had many negative thoughts about servants, who, he claimed were insolent, proud and perfidious, concluding that the state of the generality of servants needed remedying. However, in the same breath he conceded that 'Servants…are a Part or Portion of our *English* Commonwealth, at present; where it must be acknolwedg'd, in the first place, that they are the Instruments, or rather the Hands, by which the good Husbandman does subsist and live'. On that note, someone who had the good fortune of meeting with faithful, reliable sorts 'has found, doubtless, one of the greatest Blessings of which this Life is capable'.[11] So intertwined were the hands of the household that they had the capacity to influence a husbandman's fate, whether to prosperity or ruin. This echoed the nonconformist minister Richard Mayo's earlier reflections in *Present for Servants* that, 'as the Hands need the Head for Guidance and Direction, so does the Head need the Hands for Work and Service'.[12] Such commentary underlines Fielding's argument that there were two types of people, those who use their hands and those who employ the hands of others. This analogy did not only suggest that servants were a necessary part of the successful running of the home—and by extension the oeconomy—but it also reinforced the physicality of their

[10] Samuel Pepys, *The Diary of Samuel Pepys: A New and Complete Transcription*, eds. William Matthews and Robert Latham. Vol. V (London: Harper Collins, 2000), 11 January 1664; Borthwick Institute of Historical Research (BIHR), CP.I.3081; Meldrum, *Domestic Service and Gender*, 85.

[11] Nourse, *Campania foelix*, 200-201. Original emphasis.

[12] Richard Mayo, *A Present for Servants; From their Ministers, Masters, Or other Friends* (London: Printed by T. Warren, 1693), 5.

labours, creating images of the manual acts and handiwork they did day in and day out. It was the hands that were in direct, physical contact with all the materials of the home while the head, or the household manager, could observe at a distance.

For women, the image of the hand particularly resonated, but it was also much more than a metaphor. The cleanliness of a woman's hand was a key mark of social distinction.[13] When the housework moved beyond the wife to the maids, the work transferred from the stainless hands of the former to the soiled hands of the latter. Kate Smith details the role the hand played for genteel women 'intent on self-fashioning' in the eighteenth century, as they used the hand 'as a potent symbol of their own social identity'.[14] The hands were seen as 'natural' markers of distinction, and genteel women relied on a number of recipes and home remedies to maintain white, soft hands distinguishable from the coarse and roughened hands of labouring women. Smith notes that the clean, smooth hand of genteel women, along with white gloves and other supplies they used to maintain their hands, were objects through which they shaped 'their materially embodied selves, practices, and relationships'.[15] But we can also see servants' embodied selves and labour practices being shaped by their interaction with objects such as scouring brushes, lye, dirty linens and even meats and produce. For female servants in particular, much of their work was done through their hands in relationship with the objects listed above, and their status was being displayed on their skin, with calluses or cracks or dirt under the nails. Women in these positions were less likely to remedy their situations, as the recipes for softening and whitening hands required time, finances and materials that servants typically did not have.

Even amongst maids, the degree to which their hands were dirtied and coarsened denoted the type of role they filled. All servants' hands possessed some form of muscle memory which ranged from that linked to the delicate needlework of a lady's maid to the coarse scrubbing of linen done by a washerwoman. Both had to know the nature of the materials they worked with and relied on tacit knowledge. This plays out in Samuel Richardson's novel *Pamela*, first published in 1740. Following the death of her mistress and after the mistress's son, Mr B, made advances on her, Pamela wrote to her parents about returning home to them. In her letter she bemoaned the fact that it would be difficult for her to get work in their poor, rural neighbourhood: 'What a sad Thing it is! I have been brought

[13] Keith Thomas, 'Cleanliness and Godliness in Early Modern England,' in *Religion, Culture and Society in Early Modern Britain: Essays in Honour of Patrick Collinson*, eds. Anthony Fletcher and Peter Roberts (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 70.

[14] Kate Smith, 'In Her Hands: Materializing Distinction in Georgian Britain,' *Cultural and Social History* 11, no. 4 (2014), 489.

[15] Ibid., 490.

up wrong, as Matters stand'.[16] She detailed how her mistress instructed her to have a good voice, to dance, and explained that she learned 'to flower and draw too, and to work fine Work with my Needle; why, all this too I have got pretty tolerable at my Fingers Ends'. Her body was adapted to delicate, fine work, even dancing, but she recognised that these skills would 'make me but ill Company for my rural Milk-maid Companions'.[17] Pamela noted that she would have been better off learning to wash, scour, brew, bake and such-like. These latter skills, fit for housemaids or maids of all work rather than lady's maids, would certainly be tough on the hands and dirtier than needlework. She knew that her hands were not adapted to the tasks of a rural working woman, recounting how days earlier she had tried to finish scouring the pewter plate that Rachel, the housemaid, had begun to do: 'I see I could d't by Degrees; tho' I blister'd my Hand in two Places'.[18] Not only could she not fully finish the job, only doing it to degrees, but the work of the housemaid blistered her hands, and as Smith noted, 'if Pamela kept scouring, her hands would soon reveal and represent a labouring identity'.[19]

Hannah Woolley, the prolific domestic manual author, provided an anecdote that reveals the flipside to Pamela's situation. In a postscript letter in her manual, *A Supplement to the Queen-Like Closet*, Woolley detailed the life of a girl newly arrived in her mistress's house. After her mother inquired whether her Lady was satisfied with her performance, the girl replied that her Lady approved of her dressing and starching, encouraged her in her point-work, but that she 'will not let me wash her Chamber because I should not spoil my Hands for Work'.[20] The chamber, as will be shown below, was the location for particular anxieties in regards to uncleanliness and personal filth, and thus was left to the lowlier chambermaids or charwomen. The letters of Sir William Chaytor of Croft, in the North Riding, to his wife, Peregrina, provide additional evidence that a maid's hands could influence her position in a household. Writing to his wife, William described a maid, Mary, that the family could take on temporarily, noting 'she may serve till a better please'. His description reveals that while she was a pleasant enough girl, her physical drawbacks prevented her from being best suited to the work of lady's servant: 'Shee has been in town but a year and half, sings at her worke and handles a needle well tho *her finger be not the smallest and her hands [not] the whitest that ever court lady had, nor so small in the midle as*

[16] Samuel Richardson, *Pamela; or Virtue Rewarded*, 4th ed. (London: Printed for C. Rivington, 1741), 92.

[17] Ibid., 92-93.

[18] Ibid., 94.

[19] Smith, 'In Her Hands,' 494.

[20] Hannah Woolley, *A Supplement to The Queen-Like Closet* (London: Printed for R. Chiswel, 1684), 152.

*be drawn throw a ring,* but if shee be honest and true shee may serve a turn'.[21] William made the case to his wife that she would suffice in the short term because of her character, however her hands, which were not delicate nor particularly white, were not made for the work of a lady's maid. The Chaytors seemed to have been in the market for a girl whose hands were more like Pamela's or unsoiled like the young girl in Woolley's letter. This is reinforced in a letter William sent to his wife the following week, noting how Mary was waiting to know if Peregrina wanted her as a servant. Again, he contrasted her agreeable personality with her unsuitable physical appearance: 'They count her an honest and chearfull young woman but her *clumsy coarse hands and arms which looks like a worklass* may not please'. [22] The coarse hands and arms of a 'worklass' would be better suited for the rural maid of all work or perhaps a lower maid, rather than for the position of Lady Peregrina's maid.

One of the lowest domestic positions a woman could fill was that of the charwoman, hired in to take on the labours that the maids themselves could not complete. Mary Collier lamented the incessant nature of a charwoman's labour, describing how as evening comes, 'not only sweat, but Blood run trickling down Our wrists and Fingers; still our work demands the constant action of our labr'ing Hands'.[23] The charwoman's hands were the dirtiest, engrained with the grime of their work as well as their own blood and sweat; however, they were some of the busiest and hardest working hands. Charwomen had to learn the basics of all housework skills so that they could fulfil any role that the mistress needed.

The many ways that female servants and their hands intertwined is a prime example of the connection between the social and the organic body, or as Smith highlighted in terms of genteel women, the 'interactions [with objects] shaped their materially embodied selves, practices, and relationships'.[24] Society defined female domestics by their handiwork because it was through their hands that they impacted their workspace and had the potential to help with the running of the household. Their social and economic position shaped their bodies: instead of being *made* for domestic work, young women had to *learn* how to embody these skills, just as Pamela did. There was a need for a servant—from chambermaid to housekeeper—to acquire an embodied knowledge of the household and its many objects. As Paul Connerton states, 'habit is a knowledge and a remembering in the hands and in the body', and whether or not they be recognised as a workforce, women labouring in homes gained habits of industry.[25] Carolyn Steedman emphasises this in greater detail, stating

[21] M. Y. Ashcroft, ed., *The Papers of Sir William Chaytor of Croft, 1639-1721: A List with Selected Transcripts* (North Yorkshire County Record Office Publications, No 33, 1984), 138. Emphasis added.
[22] Ibid., 143. Emphasis added.
[23] Mary Collier, *The Woman's Labour* (London: Sold by J. Roberts, 1739), 14.
[24] Smith, 'In Her Hands,' 490.
[25] Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 95.

'servants spent half their life cleaning, scouring, pounding, washing, scraping, chopping, cooking, making…things'. She goes on to underline how 'they *knew* [the houses'] contours, their crevices, the place dirt collected in them…they *knew* cracked china and bent forks…*knew* of burned wooden spoons and how you might use one to get the worst off before you boiled the baby's clouts'.[26] This knowledge was acquired through physical practice, and determined by their embodied roles.

In *Pamela*, the heroine described how her body was moulded through the instruction of her mistress. This was the case for most servants, who learned through instruction and experience, although some could supplement this with reading and partaking in other means of knowledge transfer. Woolley touched on this in *A Supplement,* in which she stated 'experience with much reading' was what provided knowledge, reinforcing the idea that women's skills were learned.[27] However, a closer look at servant manuals is required to understand how instruction and practice related, and how gender could affect both of these. From Hecht to Richardson, historians have relied on conduct literature in order to gain an insight into the lives of servants, particularly as the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries saw an increase in rates of publication of domestic manuals aimed at women, both as housewives and servants.[28] However, one aspect of these manuals that is often overlooked is the complexities involved in the authorship and what the gender of the author can say about the embodied experience of skill acquisition. Katharine Phelps Walsh and Monica Green have demonstrated that male authors of medical and midwifery texts were known to publish under female pseudonyms in order to 'strategically market' the 'experiential authority of women'.[29] Because women had personal experience with the field of midwifery in the seventeenth century, a male author might use female authority, either through donning a female name or writing as if in conversation with a woman, in order to claim validity of their views. As seen with Jane Sharp in the previous chapter, a similar trend can be found in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century servants' manuals in regard to topics for which women possessed hands-on knowledge.

A prominent example of this is the number of unauthorised works attributed to Hannah Woolley, the prolific female author of domestic manuals in the seventeenth

[26] Carolyn Steedman, *Labours Lost: Domestic Service and the Making of Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 348. Emphasis added.

[27] Woolley, *A Supplement to the Queen-Like Closet*, A4r.

[28] Meldrum, *Domestic Service and Gender*, 43.

[29] Monica Green, *Making Women's Medicine Masculine: The Rise of Male Authority in Pre-Modern Gynaecology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 240; Katharine Phelps Walsh, 'Marketing Midwives in Seventeenth-Century London: A Re-examination of Jane Sharp's The Midwives Book,' *Gender & History* 26, no. 2 (August, 2014), 224.

century.[30] The authority of her domestic manuals, which all saw multiple reprints, came from her own experiences. Not much is known of Woolley's childhood or about her father but the importance of her female relations is reinforced as she cited her mother and sisters as sources of knowledge, giving her authority generational credence.[31] Woolley was herself a servant to a noblewoman from the age of seventeen until her marriage to a schoolmaster, when she began to manage her own home.[32] It is from this experience that much of her knowledge is derived. Between her own experience working in service and 'being a schoolmaster's wife, and undoubtedly [being] involved in teaching herself', her writing, as Sara Pennell neatly summarises, was 'less about display, and more about didacticism'.[33] A number of her books were directed at 'gentlewomen' and focused on housewifery and cookery, reinforcing her views that 'domestic expertise [was] the key to social mobility'; however, she also addressed maids and servants and, as mentioned, drew from her experience at different levels of the household.[34]

Woolley's authorship of multiple texts, such as *A Guide to Ladies, Gentlewomen and Maids* (1668) and *The Ladies Delight* (1672) can be confirmed, but three additional books were falsely attributed to her, including *The Gentlewomans Companion* (1673), which heavily recirculated material from her previous books and which she herself denounced in *A Supplement to the Queen-Like Closet*. Woolley detailed how the work was supposed to be something of her own creation, an enlargement of her earlier book *The Ladies Guide* (1662). However, the publisher, Mr. Newman, hired another for the task, someone who transformed it to such a degree that Woolley lamented it was 'nothing like what I had written'.[35] The work is a combination of cited materials, 'much-borrowed' texts and fictionalised autobiographical material that claimed to be about Woolley's life, leading to the persisting confusion over who was the actual author of the text.[36] Elaine Hobby's analysis of *The Gentlewomans Companion* shows how the text bears out a famous remark from Virginia Woolf: 'in works by men, women are "seen only in relation to the other sex"', that is to say that women can

[30] Wendy Wall, *Recipes for Thought: Knowledge and Taste in the Early Modern Kitchen* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), 40.

[31] Woolley, *A Supplement to The Queen-Like Closet*, 8, 10-11.

[32] Wall, *Recipes for Thought*, 40-41; Elaine Hobby, 'A Woman's Best Setting out is Silence: the Writings of Hannah Wolley,' in *Culture and Society in the Stuart Restoration: Literature, Drama, History*, ed. Gerald Maclean (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 182; John Considine, 'Wolley [other married name Challiner], Hannah (b. 1622? D. in or after 1674), author of works on cookery, medicine, and household affairs,' *Oxford Dictionary of National* Biography, accessed 28 July, 2018, https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/29957.

[33] Sara Pennell, 'Making Livings, Lives and Archives: Tales of Four Eighteenth-Century Recipe Books,' in *Reading and writing recipe books, 1550-1800*, eds. Michelle DiMeo and Sara Pennell (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), 230.

[34] Wall, *Recipes for Thought*, 40-41.

[35] Woolley, *A Supplement to The Queen-Like Closet*, 131.

[36] Hobby, 'A woman's best setting out is silence,' 185.

only be described in reference to men.[37] Indeed, in the works actually written by Woolley, romance, courtship and male-female relationships were hardly touched on, yet in *The Gentlewomans Companion* there were many instances of the female sex being told how to carry themselves around the opposite sex—the woman's body was framed by the man's presence. Hobby demonstrates how the book clearly fits in with 'the tradition of male-authored advice and courtesy books' that reveal 'contemporary expectations of correct female behaviour', rather than works with a concept of women's *a posteriori* knowledge of domestic tasks.[38] Suzanne Hull puts it in simple terms, stating that male-authored books were 'practical, how-to-do-it guides', but their instructions remained general and moral, not first-hand.[39]

*The Ladies Dictionary*, written by the unidentified N.H., is another example of the difficulty for male writers to demonstrate authority relating to women's household tasks. Although the author, or authors, attempted to compile encyclopaedic entries for a female audience, they do not give personal accounts for most of the entries. The unfamiliarity with most women's labour forced the compilers to take whole sections of other works verbatim, particularly Woolley's writings in regard to housework. John Considine and Sylvie Brown reason that certain terms are given multiple entries—such as 'housemaids', which can be found under 'house-maids' and 'maids, (House) in Great Houses'—due to the fact that there were multiple men working on the dictionary, most likely John Dunton (the publisher) and John Shirley, the author of *The Accomplished Ladies Rich Closet of Rarities*.[40] The content of the definitions also shows that the authors were dependent on other texts rather than experience. Their brief descriptions of types of service failed to provide in-depth instruction.

This contrasts with Woolley's works which provided great detail about domestic tasks. The books that can be attributed to Woolley include more personal commentary, demonstrating her experiential authority. And, as suggested by Wendy Wall, 'the female figures populating [her] books…are unified in their belief in, even their *adoration of*, hands-on involvement with work'.[41] The frontispiece of *The Ladies Guide* shows a number of women with their sleeves rolled up as they prepared food, collected water and were hands-on in the kitchen. The instructions offered by Woolley are more in-depth than male authored counterparts, but they also are reflective of other cookery books and recipe manuscripts in

[37] Ibid., 188.
[38] Ibid., 189.
[39] Suzanne Hull, *Chaste, Silent and Obedient: English Books for Women, 1475-1640* (San Marino, CA: Huntington Library, 1988), 61.
[40] N. H., *The Ladies Dictionary; Being a General Entertainment For the Fair Sex* (London: Printed for John Dunton, 1694), 183, 326-327; John Considine and Sylvie Brown, introduction to *The Ladies Dictionary (1694)* (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2010).
[41] Wall, *Recipes for Thought*, 41. Original emphasis.

that they required the reader to possess some of her own knowledge.[42] Woolley expected that women would be able to supplement her instructions with some familiarity of domestic tasks. For example, in her instructions on how to wash white sarsenets (a particular type of very fine fabric), she ended by stating, 'when you come to take them out, be sure you dip them very well all over, and then fold them up to a very little compass, and squeeze them smooth betwixt your hands'.[43] In instances such as this, it was up to the reader to know how well 'very well' was and how 'smooth' should feel between her hands. Woolley, who earned a living by teaching and writing, recognised that her instructions were limited in writing, but even this could be ameliorated by the fact that she had experience in housework: 'But you may imagine that if you did learn a little by sight of my doing, you would do much better; For if my Pen can teach you well, how much better would my Tongue and Hands do?'[44] Once again, the hands were of central importance in the teaching and learning of household tasks, and the hands were a means through which Woolley could demonstrate female experience as a woman who had been a maid and a housewife herself.

Another female-authored work that provides examples of women giving more precise details is Eliza Haywood's *A present for a servant-maid*. First published in 1743, Haywood's work was more general than Woolley's, who often referenced specific categories of female servants. Haywood instead focused on the often invisible 'maid-of-all-work'. Her preface demonstrated how the good behaviour of a servant was important for the whole household. In criticising her era as one of pride, she stated that 'corruption, tho' it begins at the Head, ceases not its Progress till it reaches the most inferior Parts', and Haywood believed that in curing these inferior parts, all of the 'body' of the household could be contented.[45] When the lower extremities of the house were stable, then order could be maintained throughout. Haywood's authorial expertise was derived from managing a household rather than herself being a servant—little is known about her early years, but she makes no mention of service. This is reflected in the way that much of the text is devoted to the character of servants and how they should behave themselves for the sake of the household. Despite her concern about character, Haywood still provided direct instruction on how to perform domestic tasks and recognised female labour in a way that male authors failed to do.

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[42] For recipes books as examples of female cultures of knowledge see Wall, *Recipes for Thought*, 210-213; Sara Pennell, 'Perfecting Practice?: Women, Manuscript Recipes and Knowledge in Early Modern England,' in *Early Modern Women's Manuscript Writing: Selected Papers from the Trinity/Trent Colloquium*, eds Victoria E. Burke and Jonathan Gibson (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), 237-258.

[43] Woolley, *A Supplement to The Queen-Like Closet*, 5.

[44] Woolley, *A Supplement to The Queen-Like Closet*, 61; Rozsika Parker, *The Subversive Stitch: Embroidery and the Making of the Feminine* (London: I. B. Tauris & Company, Limited, 2010), 103-104.

[45] Eliza Haywood, a preface *A Present for a Servant-Maid. Or, the Sure Means of Gaining Love and Esteem* (London: Printed and Published by T. Gardiner, 1743).

Precise directions were given for identifying the quality of meats such as pigeons which, when old, 'have generally red Legs, and are blackish in some Parts' compared to the young and new birds whose 'Flesh looks all of one Colour, and are fat in the Vent'.[46] When it came to dressing the victuals, Haywood combined instruction with the expectation that the servant maid would use her senses, such as taste and sight, to perfect the dishes. For example, to cook chicken, the maid had to 'fry them in Butter till they are of a *fine brown*: Beat the Yolks of Eggs, a little Pepper, Salt, and *enough of pickl'd Walnut to give it a Flavour*'.[47] Similar to Woolley, Haywood's instructions were precise enough to get the maid started, but they left room for the maid to use her own embodied knowledge to carry out the tasks through to the end, for example knowing how much pickled walnut was actually enough.

It is important to consider the readership of these works, as it is likely that they were meant to be read by those organising a household, or who could potentially be in the position to do so one day, like young girls who were maids only before starting their own home. The knowledge gleaned from the works gave mistresses the authority to govern the activities of even the lowest sorts of servant. The degree to which a housewife could actually participate in the tasks will be discussed in the next chapter; however, it must be said that if the author intended to instil authority in their audience, the texts, particularly the serious and comprehensive ones written by women, had to include details on how to actually perform the roles of various female servants.

In considering the audience, another eighteenth century work is worthy of discussion here for what it reveals about the contemporary anxieties about servants and subordinates. Jonathan Swift's incomplete *Directions to Servants* was a collection of fragments that he had been working on for nearly three decades, published posthumously in 1745.[48] The work was not well admired by his contemporaries and is largely overlooked by scholars of Swift.[49] However, literary scholar Shirshendu Chakrabarti draws attention to the fact that *Directions* is not only a prime example of Swiftian satire, but also highlights how its blurring of the master-servant relationship provides commentary on wider anxieties about the reorganisation of society that was taking place during Swift's lifetime.[50] The 'directions' from Swift bordered on the absurd, offering social commentary rather than actual advice. For instance,

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[46] Ibid., 56.

[47] Ibid., 66. Emphasis added.

[48] Carol Houlihan Flynn, *The Body in Swift and Defoe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 181.

[49] Kelley Wezner notes that 'scholars commonly consider it either a set of detailed observations of duplicity or a mixture of low content and uneven humor' in 'Directions to Servants and Eighteenth Century Machiavellian Thought,' *Pennsylvania Literary Journal; Cochran* 2, no. 2 (2010), 9.

[50] Shirshendu Chakrabarti, 'Master and Servant: Social Mobility and the Ironic Exchange of Roles in Swift's Directions to Servants,' in *Tradition in Transition: Women Writers, Marginal Texts, and the Eighteenth-Century Canon*, eds. Alvaro Ribeiro and James G. Basker (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996), 112-113.

Chakrabarti notes, the servants represent 'the disruptive and dislocating influence of money that is often condemned in contrast to a stable social order rooted in relationships based on land', hence the plethora of advice to the servants on how to earn more money, acquire vails and other tips or to use their master's goods in the preservation of their own.[51] Most importantly, themes of household hierarchy are abundant throughout the *Directions*; however, it is a disrupted hierarchy, and as such the work fits well within the context of eighteenth-century social conflict in which 'the poor and serving classes were being resented for their awkward intrusion in "civilized" life'.[52]

When considering the absurdity of the advice it is clear that such ridiculous task descriptions were not for the benefit of the servants themselves. Michael Suarez explains, 'the purpose of satire for Swift…is less the reformation of the target [servants], who [are] typically too foregone or ill-disposed for amendment, and more about the moral education of the reader'.[53] Rather than dealing with the subject of service, Swift used satire in order to improve the awareness of his reader who would be hiring servants. The maids in this text were particularly cunning at cutting corners, and so Swift's audience, their masters and mistresses, could catch them out and, in turn, reform them. Through satire, Swift portrays the corruption of servants concerned with their own versions of economy and expediency, and the advice can allow his readers to think through the mind of such servants. For example, one can imagine a mistress would not be pleased to find her chambermaid followed Swift's advice that, 'when you are in a haste, sweep the dust into a corner of the room, but leave your brush upon it', but perhaps the mistress could be more aware of where to look for examples of corruption.[54] At the same time these absurd instructions might have assuaged readers' fears that their servants were indeed seeking to avoid punishment through impropriety.

The body of the maid presented particular concerns. Through her duties of emptying chamber pots and cleaning the dirtier materials in a room, the chambermaid was a girl who 'dabbled' in 'other Folks' urine' and was thus the epitome of Swift's satirical ability to 'frighten masters and mistresses, his gentle readers' who would be the victims of the maid spreading muck throughout the household.[55] The cook, who was often associated with dirt and drudge in the period, also threatened the dinner table, which was a symbol of the 'social ritual emblematic of the traditionally ordered patriarchal household'.[56] She had the ability to

[51] Ibid., 113.
[52] Flynn, *The Body in Swift and Defoe*, 167-168.
[53] Michael F. Suarez, 'Swift's Satire and Parody,' in *The Cambridge Companion to Jonathan Swift*, ed. Christopher Fox (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 115.
[54] Jonathan Swift, *Directions to Servants in General* (London: Printed for R. Dodsley, 1745), 81.
[55] Flynn, *The Body in Swift and Defoe*, 182.
[56] Chakrabarti, 'Master and Servant,' 113.

dirty serving dishes or muddle the tablecloth—Swift insisted that 'it is ill Housewifery to foul your Kitchen Rubbers with wiping the Bottom of the Dishes you send up, since the Table-cloth will do as well, and is changed every Meal'.[57] The bodies of servants, which Swift presented as crowding the household, were both necessary to their masters and constantly threatening the established order.

Swift's contemporaries who read the *Directions* may have been in agreement with Carol Houlihan Flynn that the work 'examines perhaps too closely the inconsistencies and difficulties implicit in a system that depends upon subordination'.[58] Or perhaps the work reaffirmed to the reader the need to maintain the domestic hierarchy and fight back against servants' attempts to subvert household order. Either way, the anxieties that Swift addressed bring into focus the importance of the categorisation of servants amongst contemporaries. Swift was ensuring that his audience could recognise the various positions of the household, and it is these various positions that will be examined next in order to magnify the diversity of body practices in 'servants' work'. Although the majority of women hired as servants in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were working in a single maid household, far removed from large households where specialised roles were assigned, examining the subdivisions of female servants can help us to understand the skill differentiation that was involved in the vast category of 'servant'. Piece by piece, recognising the roles of the household also puts emphasis on skill variation and allows us to understand the reality of servant's lives, and can perhaps help us to value their position in the early modern oeconomy.

## Sorts of servants

'There is scarce any general Name of a *Calling*, that contains under it such different kinds of Persons as this of a *Servant*'.[59] Thus begins the late-seventeenth century tract *A present for servants*. According to the author, Richard Mayo, this diverse calling could be categorised into ranks: servants of state 'that make up the retinue of Great Men and Nobles'; slaves and vassals who were 'sunk in the lowest state of misery in the World'; and the third sort, those who 'by Reason of Poverty, or a meaner Condition in the World, have voluntarily submitted themselves, by Contract, for a certain time, to the Disposal of others'—in other words, waged servants.[60] Mayo was not the only author concerned with categorising servants, who, if manuals alone are anything to go by, were abundant and growing in number. In the mid-eighteenth century, William Blackstone proposed that there were four 'sorts' of servants: the menial servant, or *intra moenia*, those domestics who lived within the walls of their

[57] Swift, *Directions to Servants*, 38.
[58] Flynn, *The Body in Swift and Defoe*, 162.
[59] Mayo, *A Present for Servants*, 1. Original emphasis.
[60] Ibid., 2-3.

masters' homes; apprentices, indentured to serve their masters, usually living-in as well; day- or week-labourers who lived apart from their masters; and the superior sort, such as stewards and bailiffs. Kussmaul found that servants in husbandry, particularly males, tended to be contracted on an annual basis, moving to new positions yearly.[61] For women in service, they were often divided between casual, daily wage labour and annual service, which usually included board and other necessities. The wages of such women have recently been charted by Jane Humphries and Jacob Weisdorf, who conclude that the trends in women's wages did not achieve the same post-Black Death 'golden age' that men's wages saw.[62] A majority of the women included in this thesis were part of the second category, hired on an annual basis, but unlike servants in husbandry, they tended to stay on in the same household for most of their time as maids, as seen in Table 4.3 below.[63] It was not uncommon for young women to partake in such labour; according to Blackstone, 'all single women between twelve and forty, not having any visible livelihood, are compellable by two justices to go out to service, for the promotion of honest industry', highlighting the societal expectation that most young women would put themselves to menial service and reemphasising the contemporary value of industry.[64]

Yet even this 'menial' category was diverse, with servants of this sort needing to be further distinguished still. Daniel Defoe offered a short list of such sorts of servants in his critique of those pursuing these callings, naming 'Cooks, Gardeners, Butlers, Coachman, Grooms, Footmen, Pages, Maid-Servants, Nurses, &c'. In the same vein as Blackstone, Defoe described these servants as 'all kept within Doors, at Bed and Board; that is to say, such as have Yearly or Monthly wages'.[65] Such taxonomy ensured that the maidservant was aware of her specific place, and the particular classifications denoted the precise roles that were assigned to her. These subdivisions were only applicable in large households with multiple servants; however, the fact that they were discussed at length by Mayo, Blackstone and others demonstrates a wider eighteenth-century concern with ordering society 'in small gradations, like rungs on a ladder', an order that was shaped by 'history, convention and custom'.[66]

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[61] Kussmaul, *Servants in Husbandry*, 3-4, 71.

[62] Jane Humphries and Jacob Weisdorf, 'The Wages of Women in England, 1260-1850,' *The Journal of Economic History* 75, no. 2 (June 2015), 405-447, particularly 430.

[63] This supports Mansell's findings for the south of England, as she found that for women, 'employment periods were more varied and length of service was not limited to full years' in Mansell, 'The Variety of Women's Experiences as Servants in England,' 329-330.

[64] William Blackstone, *Commentaries on the Laws of England, in Four Books* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1765), 1:413.

[65] Daniel Defoe, *The Behaviour of Servants in England Inquired into* (London: Printed for H. Whittridge, 1726), 8-9.

[66] Frank O'Gorman, *The Long Eighteenth Century: British Political and Social History 1688-1832*, 2nd ed. (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), 21.

Within a world of changing economic conditions and philosophical and scientific advancements, contemporaries used social order and hierarchy to help make sense of their surroundings. One of the prime examples of such social analyses and categorisation is that of Gregory King, who wrote *Ranks, Degrees, Titles and Qualifications* in 1695, dividing the English people into formulaic social categories. Although King's findings have since been recognised as extremely conservative and misrepresentative of the true state of England's society, they nonetheless reflect an important trend that was on the rise: the ability to *categorise* society.[67] Late-seventeenth- and early-eighteenth-century thinkers, dealing with new questions of science, theology and providence, were contemplating questions of order and disorder and the ability to categorise society helped in the wider process of self-organisation.[68] One aspect of this desire for ordering is what Keith Wrightson has termed the 'language of sorts', used particularly in reference to the emergence of a 'middling sort'.[69] In Penelope J. Corfield's words, 'sort', and other such terms, were used as 'classificatory terms, referring to generic socio-economic position, into which an individual could rise or fall, rather than to lineage'.[70] The household, as a microcosm of society, was a space in which a categorisation of ranks and orders was implemented. This hierarchy placed maids on a 'graduated ladder of subordination', just as Mayo categorised a gradient of servants.[71] By examining the spectrum of service, we can study the occupation in more depth.

In order to better understand the categories of servants, I have used manuals as well as the household accounts of four Yorkshire households. The first is that of William and Isabell Wrightson of Cusworth Hall, Doncaster in the West Riding. William served in parliament and held a post in the Pipe Office of the Exchequer while Isabell possessed some wealth in her own right, through inheritance and her first marriage. The couple moved to Cusworth Hall in 1724, after William inherited the family estates from his elder brother, and the accounts range from 1725 to 1732.[72] The second is the accounts of Lady Vanbrugh, who is discussed in-depth in the following chapter. Her accounts, spanning from 1729 to 1745, are

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[67] H. R. French, 'The Search for the "Middling Sort of People" in England, 1600-1800,' *The Historical Journal* 43, no. 1 (March, 2000), 279; G. S. Holmes, 'Gregory King and the Social Structure of Pre-Industrial England,' *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 27 (1977): 41-68.

[68] Jonathan Sheehan and Dror Wahrman, *Invisible Hands: Self-Organization and the Eighteenth Century* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2015), 9-10.

[69] Keith Wrightson, 'Estates, Degrees and Sorts in Tudor and Stuart England,' *History Today* 37, no. 1 (January, 1987), 3-6; Keith Wrightson, '"Sorts of People" in Tudor and Stuart England,' in *The Middling Sort of People: Culture, Society and Politics in England, 1550-1800*, eds. Jonathan Barry and Christopher Brooks (London: Houndmills, Basingstoke, etc., Macmillan, 1994), 28-51.

[70] Penelope J. Corfield, 'Class by Name and Number in Eighteenth-Century Britain,' in *Language, History and Class*, ed. Penelope J. Corfield (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991), 112.

[71] Wrightson, '"Sorts of People",' 28.

[72] Brian Barber, 'William Wrightson (1676-1760), the Pipe Office of the Exchequer, and the Re-Building of Cusworth Hall,' *Yorkshire Archaeological Journal* 82, no. 1 (2010), 287-289; Battie-Wrightson Family, Doncaster Archives (DA), DD/BW/A/1.

from her household in Heslington Hall, in the East Riding, which she ran after her husband's death.[73] The third Yorkshire household is that of the Gossip family. The gentleman William Gossip and his wife, Anne, were at the head of a growing family who had property in York but mainly lived in the manor of Thorp Arch Hall, nearly equidistant between York and Leeds. Their household accounts span from 1732 to 1740. During this time, the couple also wrote a number of letters in which they discussed servants.[74] The final accounts are of the Horton Family of Howroyd Hall, Barkisland, also in the West Riding, from 1750 to 1766. The master of the house was Joshua Horton, a local justice of the peace, although little is known about the family.[75]

In large households where there was a hierarchy of service, the various bodies at work in the household adapted to their roles and embodied social practices according to their place in the hierarchy. Like Pamela, who was trained as a lady's maid and therefore could not do the work of the housemaid, different manual skills were dependent on the social specialisation in a household. The body is not outside of social categorisation; indeed, it has been increasingly recognised as an important conveyor of social messages.[76] The physical hierarchy of the body has been alluded to briefly above, in recognising that the whiteness of a woman's hand could indicate her labouring status. But physical socialisation impacted the entire body. Laura Gowing has recently emphasised that 'the politics of gesture embody, and reveal, the stark social hierarchies of early modern England'.[77] Women in particular adapted their bodies in order to submit to hierarchy. John Walter has demonstrated the importance of praxis for the acquisition of gestural language. Communal codes were described within conduct manuals and contemporary texts, but there was also an aspect of specialised gesture that could be learned within one's social situation. Walter describes these 'gesture communities' who subscribed to, but also departed from, the 'common gestural code'.[78] The gesture community of female domestics was made up of girls who observed their peers in order to learn the correct gestural language according to their position within the household hierarchy, which often included physical gestures of submission. The way in which girls mastered techniques of the body in relation to their role in a household, as reflected by

[73] BIHR YM/VAN/17.

[74] West Yorkshire Archive Services (WYAS), Leeds, WYL1015/1/21/3.

[75] WYAS, Bradford WYB20/2.

[76] Gerhild Scholz Williams, 'Body Language: Keeping Secrets in Early Modern Narratives,' in *Mapping Gendered Routes and Spaces in the Early Modern World*, ed. Merry Wiesner-Hanks (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015), 101.

[77] Laura Gowing, 'The Manner of Submission: Gender and Demeanour in Seventeenth-Century London,' *Cultural and Social History* 10, no. 1 (May 2015), 26.

[78] John Walter, 'Gesturing at Authority: Deciphering the Gestural Code of Early Modern England,' in *The Politics of Gesture: Historical Perspectives*, ed. Michael J. Braddick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 103.

manuals and incidental descriptions given in depositions, is an example of carnal sociology playing out, specifically shaped by gender and social habitus.

Take for instance two different maids in an adultery case cited by Meldrum. The young, newly-hired cook maid was unable to provide much information about her mistress's behaviour, emphasising how she made the best efforts to keep out of her lady's way, staying out the lady's bedchamber and dining rooms and only going into the parlour before or after the family were in bed. This was in direct contrast to the lady's maid, who not only helped make the lady's bed but would 'much attend upon her person in her chamber'.[79] The maids carried themselves in different manners and made themselves present or absent in various parts of the house depending on their roles. In embodying the skills associated with particular domestic roles, women participated in the household hierarchy.

This example reveals an important aspect of politics of place: the higher in the hierarchy a servant was, the closer they were to their master's or mistress's physical body. At the top, housekeepers or lady's maids had privileged, intimate access to the body of the mistress. Conversely, the lower maid's contact with her employer's intimate materials such as soiled bed sheets or chamber pots, was viewed in a more negative light.[80] The servants who dealt with the dirtier aspects of one's life, such as the scullery maid or even the kitchen maid, were kept at a distance. Wealthier households over the eighteenth century even developed specialised rooms that allowed for spatial segregation, with servants eating in the kitchen as opposed to in the hall with the family.[81] Amanda Flather draws attention to the way that Samuel Pepys defined his sister's status in the household by controlling her physical space, forcing 'his sister Paulina's status downwards in the domestic hierarchy' by deciding 'she would take her place "not as a sister but as a servant", and declared, "I do not let her sit at table with me"'.[82] Learning one's place in the household came from studying fellow servants or from direct orders.

As seen by the order they were addressed and their proximity to the mistress, housekeepers sat atop this chain of domestic being. They tended to be older women, possessing maturity, experience and competence in their role. *The Compleat Servant-maid* stated that housekeepers 'must in their Behaviour carry themselves grave, solid and serious; which will inculcate into the beliefs of the persons whom they are to serve, that they will be

[79] Meldrum, *Domestic Service and Gender*, 85.

[80] For example see the discussion of the laundress and her ties with prostitution due to her associations with bedsheets and dirt in Wendy Wall, 'Why Does Puck Sweep?: Fairylore, Merry Wives, and Social Struggle,' *Shakespeare Quarterly* 23, no. 1 (Spring, 2001), 101.

[81] Mark Overton, Jane Whittle, Darron Dean and Andrew Hann, *Production and Consumption in English Household, 1600-1750* (London: Routledge, 2004), 130-131.

[82] Amanda Flather, *Gender and Space in Early Modern England* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press in association with The Royal Historical Society, 2007), 63.

able to govern a Family well'.[83] Once again physical carriage conveyed social position, and a solid presence demonstrated to their mistresses, as well as fellow servants, that the housekeeper was capable of being in charge. While specific duties might vary from household to household, their overarching role was management, particularly of the other female servants. According to Woolley, they 'must likewise endeavour to be careful in looking after the rest of the Servants, that every one perform the Duty in their several Places, that they keep good hours in their up-rising and lying down, and that no Goods be either spoiled or embezelled'.[84]

This desire for grave and solid behaviour was not just confined to manuals, but also was looked-for by masters and mistresses. William Gossip and his wife, Anne, discussed the running of their household in letters. Anne was often in correspondence with her husband and a number of other acquaintances, and regularly mentioned her servants, even if only in passing. In a letter to her husband, Anne claimed that she would not have the housekeeper's a position filled by a woman 'under four and twenty, for [she had] already found the inconvenience of young giddy girls'.[85] The fact that her minimum required age was twenty-four, when many other positions were filled by girls as young as fourteen, reflects the desire for a woman who could provide strict management and organisation. Such expectations were reiterated in letters to William when an acquaintance recommended a housekeeper who could understand 'family affairs'.[86] The housekeeper was expected to have knowledge of all roles within the household in order to ensure that it was a well-oiled machine, but she was also in charge of overseeing lower servants' labour and managing their behaviour.

The housekeeper's responsibilities were compensated, as she was the highest paid female servant. In the Horton household, Mary Hall was hired as housekeeper in 1753 and paid £3 a year. This can be compared to the chambermaid, Alice Chadwick, who was paid £2 10*s* (for details about length of stay of female servants in each household see Appendix 3).[87] As the years progressed, wages for all servants increased, but the housekeeper continued to be the highest paid. Sarah Whitley came as housekeeper in May 1765 and was hired at £10 a year. This was compared to Sarah Riley, a cook, who was hired at £7 or Fanny Holland, a housemaid who was paid £4 10*s*.[88]

One York Church Court case from 1696 provides details about the role of the housekeeper. The exact meaning of the term 'housekeeper' was a key point of contention in

[83] Woolley, *The Compleat Servant-Maid*, 35-36.
[84] Ibid., 36.
[85] WYAS, Leeds, WYL1015/1/3/2.
[86] WYAS, Leeds, WYL1015/1/24/4.
[87] WYAS, Bradford, WYB20/2.
[88] WYAS, Bradford, WYB20/2. See Appendix 3.

the case that could affect the plaintiff's standing. Alexandra Shepard has highlighted the difficulties of assessing identities of laboring people based on terms such as 'servant', but the dialogue in this case nevertheless shows that the term 'housekeeper' was essential to the plaintiff's identity and character.[89] In 1696 Mary Graveson brought a defamation case against Theophilous Young and his wife, Jane, claiming they had spoken ill of her.[90] The Youngs countered her claim, stating that Mary was the housekeeper of Marmaduke Butler, and that many of the witnesses were his servants, and they were untrustworthy people of no credit. The Youngs stressed that the witnesses were under Mary's 'power, command and influence' as the housekeeper, and due to her sway, they were 'of lewd lives and Conversations'. However, in her own testimony, Mary was reluctant to state her exact position, stating that she was a '*servant or housekeeper*', implying she was equal to her fellow servants. Furthermore, she emphasised that she had 'noe power, Command or Influence over her fellow servants there', and nor could she 'prevail [them] to depose an Untruth'. Her ambiguity was shaped by the contemporary view that a housekeeper had her hand in all family affairs and was largely to blame or be credited for the behaviour of the lower servants: according to the Youngs, Mary was a poor housekeeper as evidenced by the behaviour of her subordinates.

The cook was next down from the housekeeper in the household hierarchy. The skills of a cook maid depended on the social level of the household she worked in, for if her master could not afford all types of flesh or fowl, she would not have access to practice all sorts of sauces and preparation. In larger households, she was expected to be 'skilful in dressing all sorts of Flesh, Fowl, and Fish, to make variety of sawces proper for each of them, to raise all manner of Pastes and Kickshaws, to be curious in garnishing your dishes, and making all manner of Pickles, *&c.*'.[91] In smaller households, thrift and frugal ingenuity were important skills for the cook maid, such as knowing how to save the remains of a meal in order to 'make both handsome and Toothsome dishes again, to the saving of your Masters purse, and credit of his Table'.[92] The multitude of skills required of the cook were reflected in her salary, which amongst female servants was second only to the housekeeper's. In the Gossip household, cooks were paid on average three pounds a year, ten shillings more than the housemaids.[93] When Betty Heaton came to work in the Horton household, she was hired for

[89] Alexandra Shepard, *Accounting for Oneself: Worth, Status, and the Social Order in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 155-156.

[90] BIHR, CP.H.4456; CP.H.4548.

[91] Hannah Woolley, *The Compleat Servant-Maid: or, the Young Maiden's Tutor* (London: Printed for T. Passinger, 1677), 113.

[92] Ibid., 113-114.

[93] WYAS, Leeds, WYL1015/1/18/5.

four pounds a year, but only four months later, in February, Ellen Silverwood was offered five pounds a year as her replacement. By April she was replaced by Mary Savile, who came to the Hortons' as a cook at six pounds a year. With the offer of seven pounds a year, Horton finally began to find cooks who lasted more than six months. The longer lengths of stay correlating to the rates of pay may have been a coincidence, or perhaps the Hortons found it difficult to find a woman who suited their expectations. The fact that the longest lasting cook was Sarah Shaw, who came to the household as a chambermaid before being made a cook—a position that came with a two-pound raise—indicates Sarah had time to learn the workings of the household before securing her role in the kitchen. She remained in the household as a cook for nearly two years.[94]

Mrs Lætitia Pilkington, an Anglo-Irish poet, shared an anecdote in her memoirs in which she delighted at the simplicity of her cook maid. Underlining the story was a sense of the amount of labour that went into the role. After the death of her husband, a bailiff attended Mrs Pilkington in preparation for the inventorying of the late Mr Pilkington's goods. He also came to generally help out around the house. Mrs Pilkington reported that her cook maid awoke in the morning to find 'her Fire made, her Dishes washed, and every thing set in good Order', for the bailiff had obeyed his orders so well that he completed these tasks before the young woman came down to the kitchen. However, since he had gone out to the garden before the young girl awoke, and 'the Maid not recollecting there was any such Person in the House', she fell to prayer, 'crossing herself, and praying to the Blessed Virgin and all the Saints in Heaven', believing the work to have been done by the ghost of her deceased master.[95] While there is a touch of humour in the image a young woman blessing a ghost for completing her tasks, it hints at the laboriousness of her duties, which included building a fire, washing and cleaning.

The kitchen and dairy were required to be kept spotless, with much stress being placed on the cleanliness of utensils such as pans and drinking vessels.[96] The hands of those who worked with the food that the family put into their body had to be particularly clean, even if the cook had a dirty reputation. Keith Thomas has shown how early modern conceptions of bodily cleanliness were focused predominantly on the hands: he quotes William Vaughan's directions 'wash thy hands often, thy feete seldome, but thy head never'. The manual writer, Eliza Haywood, emphasised that a cook's hands must be 'very well wash'd', and her nails 'close pared' before she dealt with food or the utensils of the kitchen.[97]

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[94] WYAS, Bradford, WYB20/2.
[95] Lætitia Pilkington, *The Memoirs of Mrs Lætitia Pilkington* (London: Sold by R Griffiths, 1748), 201.
[96] Thomas, 'Cleanliness and Godliness,' 73.
[97] Haywood, *A Present for a Servant-Maid*, 11.

According to Haywood, even those mistresses who might overlook dirty chambers would pay close attention to the cleanliness of those bodies that were involved in the dressing of victuals, for 'tho' Cleanliness in your own Person, and the Goods committed to your Charge, be highly commendable, yet it is more especially so in dressing of Victuals. To see any thing nasty about what is to go into the Mouth, creates a Loathing'.[98] Within the same passage Haywood illustrated how social bodily habits could affect the work of a servant, as she warned against the taking of snuff, since the powder would stain the hands of the user and then be transferred to the work of the servant, be it the food or the linen that could be soiled.

In discussing how to choose a wife, one anonymous author rebuked 'I'le not have a Cook-Maid, for she is too black; And when she doth sweat, her Smock sticks to her Back. She'l scold, and she'l brawl, you may hear her a mile'. [99] The blackness and the sweat that the author complained about could be attributed to the laborious nature of her tasks, which brought her into contact with soot and ash, as well as the location of her work in the hot kitchen, where she toiled over open fires. The retelling of a gentlewoman's poor behaviour at her dinner table in *The Gentlewomans Companion* used the cook maid as a baseline for sweat. The author claimed, 'I have seen the good Gentlewoman of the House sweat more in cutting up of a Fowl, *than the Cookmaid in rosting it*', implying that because of roasting and labouring over fires, the cook was known for her sweat-inducing toils.[100] Other authors noted that work was 'greasy and smooty', though *The Ladies Dictionary* warned that she ought to take care not to be 'nasty'.[101] There is a carnality in the labours of servants that touched everything they managed, for what could stick on the body (sweat, clothing), or what could come off of it (dirt) all intertwined with their labour practices.

The cook exemplified the physicality of domestic labour through more than her relationship with dirt and cleanliness. In particular, she had to engage with her senses, such as sight, smell and taste. The author of *The Accomplished Ladies Rich Closet of Rarities* dedicated nearly one fifth of their text to cook maids and the various methods of boiling, frying, stewing or roasting, as well as pie-making and instructions for several sauces. Such preparations relied on the cook having a familiarity with the materials she was working with. In the section on roasting a shoulder of mutton, for instance the author advised 'making holes in convenient places, stuff them in as you see convenient', rather than providing precise notes.[102] Haywood described the need to feel and manipulate various meats in order to

[98] Ibid., 11-12.
[99] J. Shirley, *The Accomplished Ladies Rich Closet of Rarities* (London: Printed by W. W., 1687), 100.
[100] Hannah Woolley, *The Gentlewomans Companion; or, a Guide to the Female Sex* (London: Printed by A. Maxwell, 1673), 66. Emphasis added.
[101] N. H., *The Ladies Dictionary*, 433.
[102] J Shirley, *The Accomplished Ladies Rich Closet of Rarities*, 103.

determine their freshness. If ox beef was young, the cook could 'dent it with your finger', and it would immediately rise again. Haywood also explained how old meat 'will be rough and spungy', with the dent of the finger remaining.[103] Young mutton should feel tender when pinched and pork skin should be thin, which could be tested with a nip of the nail.[104] This again revealed the ways in which servants were the hands of the household, as touch was a key component of their work. Along with honed senses of sight and smell, the cook possessed an embodied knowledge in her hands that she used to assess the quality of foods. A woman could read the advice of Haywood to gain some knowledge, but it was through practice and experience that she would understand what made meat 'rough and spongey' or what constituted tender mutton or how much stuffing was 'convenient'.

Another area of the house that had a specific maid assigned to it was the chamber. Chambermaids were often used as tropes in plays and poems, yet they were near the bottom of the domestic hierarchy. In many literary works the chambermaid acted as the go between for her mistress, fetching lovers to come to her chamber, giving her title a double meaning.[105] The chambermaid may have had access to a number of secrets, but this also led to her being viewed as a notorious gossip. In a satirical poem about the goings-on of courtiers, poet and playwright Sir Aston Cokayne encapsulated her stereotypical traits, writing, 'ask but a Chamber-maid (which are the froth of vain discourse) what her young Lady doth'.[106] The chambermaid became a sort of domestic whose role allowed her to be especially intimate with her lady's chamber. The chambermaid dealt with a number of personal material objects that could hold private information; not only did she see the contents of a chamber pot, but, she was also expected to 'make your Ladies bed; lay up and lay out her Night-clothes; see that her Chamber be kept clean, and nothing wanting which desires or requires to be done', thus accessing clothing and bed linens.[107]

Despite her physical proximity to the lady, contemporaries stressed that the chambermaid was at the bottom of the hierarchy of female servants: girls 'many times [content] themselves to serve as Chamber-maids, because they have not the Accomplishments of a Waiting-woman or an House-keeper', the latter of whom were concerned more with management and personal needs of the mistress.[108] The low status of the chambermaid is seen in a York defamation case from 1729.[109] Mrs Lacon was accused by

[103] Haywood, *A Present for a Servant-Maid*, 51.
[104] Ibid., 52.
[105] *The Fifteen Comforts of Rash and Inconsiderate Marriage* (London: Printed for William Crooke and Matthew Gillyflower, 1694), 43.
[106] Sir Aston Cokain, *A Chain of Golden Poems* (London: Printed by W. G., 1658), 35.
[107] Woolley, *The Gentlewomans Companion*, 207.
[108] Ibid., 204.
[109] BIHR, CP.I.886.

one Mr Barker of using provoking language against him. She stated in her defence that he had said that she was 'nothing but a Chamber-Maid' and that he would 'reduce her to her former Business of emptying chamber pots or the like'. Mrs Lacon suggested that the use of the term 'chambermaid' and the threat to reduce her to this business were cause for her to defend herself. The dispute between Lacon and Barker focused on the most notorious and perhaps dirtiest role of the chambermaid, emptying chamber pots, a task which led to her association with urine and bodily fluids. Writer Timothy Nourse mused about how the 'paltry Chambermaid', who 'came but just now all perfum'd from emptying and cleansing the Vessels of the Chamber' would soon 'appear at Table in her Flower'd Manteau, and her tottering Commode, forsooth'. [110] The role of scent is particularly crucial for establishing social roles, as odour was closely tied to health and status. Foul smells were not only a sign of dirt but of disease as well. The passage also reflects the belief that chambermaids would dress above their station in hopes of rising above their lowly status, using clothing to mask the lingering smell and filth of the 'vessels of the chamber'. Nourse was quick to remind the chambermaid of reality, for 'notwithstanding all, upon every trivial Accident and Turn, [she] will not fail to shew her self to be a meer errant Cat, destin'd by Nature to feed on meaner Fare'.[111] Even if maids dressed above their station, the truth of their social position always lay beneath—through smell or coarseness of their hands or the cleanliness of their skin—and hence they would always be confined to the lower rungs of the household.

Chambermaids teetered between filth and propriety; they were menial servants, but their work did not require them to toil in as much dirt as charwomen, laundry maids and washerwomen. As 'extra-household' servants, these sorts of women were more strongly associated with filth. Servants were warned against bringing in charwomen to complete their work. For instance, in *The Compleat Tradesman* the author N. H.—to whom *The Ladies Dictionary* discussed above is also attributed—warned the housekeeper against those who 'are the Flies which attend the Flesh of others Tables, and requite you with their Maggots; such as your *Chare-women,* and men at a call, who make it their work to rob you under a finer notion than that of plain stealing'.[112] The charwoman, portrayed as a poorer sort, was a threat to servants who brought them into their place of employment to do their tasks for them. Although her role was to make the home clean, she was described in terms of filth: flies,

[110] Mark S. R. Jenner, 'Civilization and Deodorization? Smell in Early Modern English Culture,' in *Civil Histories: Essays Presented to Sir Keith Thomas*, eds. Peter Burke, Brian Harrison and Paul Slack (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 131. For a discussion of scent and the domestic sphere, see Alain Corbin, *The Foul and the Fragrant: Odor and the French Social Imagination,* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986), 161-164

[111] Nourse, *Campania Foelix*, 203-204.

[112] N. H. *The Compleat Tradesman: or, the Exact Dealers Daily Companion* (London: Printed for John Dunton, 1684), 14-15. Emphasis added.

maggots and the like. Similarly, laundresses were associated with the dirt they were responsible for expelling rather than the cleanliness they might achieve, and example of carnal sociology. They also became physically warped by their business, and thus were the subjects of derision, 'mocked for her compromised physical posture in wading into streams and bending over to beat clothes'.[113] Both of these types of work shaped a woman's body, and in turn opened it up to social judgments based on their physical appearance. However, the work taken on by charwomen and laundresses could also be done by a maidservant who was employed in a small household, and whose lot was more common for the majority of young English women in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

## Maid of all work

The taxonomy of servants reflects the early modern predilection for categorisation; however, it overlooks the fact that the majority of households could not afford diverse female domestics. In reality, many young women who went to service did so as a 'maid of all work'.[114] Having examined the various types of maids, we can now bring their work together in order to look at how all service required a range of embodied practices that women may or may not have mastered. Defoe summarised the dichotomy between the desire for categories of servants and the reality of most households in a fictionalised anecdote included in *Every-Body's Business*. The story presented a young woman who had come looking for a position in the house of the narrator's sister.[115] The narrator let her in, at first thinking she was a guest due to her appearance, once again reflecting Defoe's concern about maids dressing above their station. When the sister came down and the confusion was cleared, an on-the-spot interview took place. The girl stated she sought work at eight pounds a year—a rate rarely even attained by housekeepers in large Yorkshire households—and the sister asked what work deserved such wages. So commenced a back and forth discussion about what tasks the girl was capable of.[116] The girl claimed she could clean a house and dress a common dinner, but after seeing the size of the house she declared that it would be too much for her. Upon interrogation it was revealed that she could not wash or get up linen, dress a dinner for company or scour various items. The sister criticised the young girl stating, 'Young Woman…you have made a Mistake, I want a House-Maid, and you are a Chamber-Maid'. Defoe, who regularly criticised the 'servant problem', used the maid to voice his concern

[113] Wall, 'Why Does Puck Sweep,' 101.
[114] Kirstin Olsen, *Daily Life in 18th-Century England* (London: Greenwood Press, 1999), 129.
[115] Daniel Defoe, *Every-Body's Business, is No-Body's Business; or Private Abuses, Publick Grievances* (London: Sold by T. Warner, 1725), 17-19.
[116] One of the longest serving maids in the Yarburgh household, Nanny, earned seven pounds a year, sometimes being given seven shillings as a 'bonus'. This is the highest consistent wage.

about girls who expected great wages for little work.[117] In this work, his suspicions of servants was represented by this 'servant-wench' who claimed the narrator should hire specific maids: 'if you wash at Home, you should have a Laundry-Maid; if you give Entertainments, you must have a Cook-Maid'.

While Defoe used the body of the servant as a generative metaphor of the 'servant problem' he saw plaguing society, the story alludes to the amount of work that fell to the majority of women labouring as domestics: cleaning, scouring, washing and getting linen, dressing dinners for family and company alike, needle work and anything else that was asked of them.[118] The conclusion of the story detailed the lived experience of many young women:

> In great Families indeed, where many Servants are requir'd, these Distinctions of Chamber-Maid, House-Maid, Cook-Maid, Laundry-Maid, Nursery-Maid, &c. are requisite, to the End, that each may take her particular Business, and many Hands may make the Work light: But for a private Gentleman, of a small Fortune, to be oblig'd to keep many Idle Jades, when one might do the Business, is intolerable, and matter of great Grievance.[119]

Mary Collier provided one of the earliest first-hand accounts of such work.[120] In 1739 she published *The Woman's Labour*, a woman's response to Stephen Duck, a fellow wage labourer. Donna Landry and William Christmas have both tracked how Collier used traditional literary forms, such as the georgic or the neoclassical epistle, to comment on the state of the labouring woman's work in an unprecedented manner.[121] Landry in particular highlights the paradox in which Collier was 'resigned to the fact that her talents were not so much rewarded as exploited by patrons and audiences', allowing herself to be served up to the elite while recognising her situation would not change.[122] Collier appropriated literary tropes, such as the use of classical allusion and intertextuality, in order to 'engage in combative persuasion' to gain recognition for the labouring woman. While Landry perhaps puts too much weight on Collier's work as proto-feminist poetry, she nevertheless does a good job of presenting how Collier became a literary celebrity in her own time and how she mastered popular forms of dialogue being used by the likes of Pope, Richardson and Fielding. Collier's poetic discourse was 'safe and publishable because it borrows from and is

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[117] Sandra Sherman, 'Servants and Semiotics: Reversible Signs, Capital Instability, and Defoe's Logic of the Market,' *ELH* 62, no. 3 (Fall, 1995), 551.

[118] Ibid., 558.

[119] Defoe, *Every-Body's Business*, 19.

[120] William Christmas, *The Labr'ing Muses: Work, Writing, and the Social Order in English Plebeian Poetry, 1730-1830* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2001), 115.

[121] Christmas, *The Labr'ing Muses*, particularly 'Stephen Duck and Plebeian Poetry in the 1730s,' 63-114; Donna Landry, *The Muses of Resistance: Laboring-Class Women's Poetry in Britain, 1739-1796* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), particularly 'The Resignation of Mary Collier: Some Problems in Feminist Literary History,' 56-76.

[122] Landry, *The Muses of Resistanc*e, 70.

aligned to a tradition of published plebeian poetry' from the 1730s, allowing her to provide testament to the working conditions of a woman whose labours were never done.[123]

The first half of Collier's discourse detailed the agricultural aspects of a woman's work, in direct response to Duck's assertion that women idled and prattled in the field, asserting 'so many Hardships daily we go through, I boldly say, the like you never knew'.[124] The second half of her poem was used to, in the words of Christmas, 'explode Duck's tunnel vision in figuring only men's work as wage-earning labour with an impassioned account of a [woman's] labour'—she centres women's labours and material production in order to counter Duck's criticism that women were more prone to prattle than productive work.[125] In this section, Collier depicted the work of charwomen, washerwomen and laundresses, work that could also be shared by a live-in housemaid. Collier described the heaps of linen these women were expected to go through and the types of fabric of which they had to be aware, as well as the brass and iron they spent all of their strength on scouring.[126] Collier could not escape the association of physical filth that came with their labours. Already quoted above in discussing the blood and sweat involved in a labouring woman's handiwork, Collier's text demonstrates the physical, and often dirty, nature of a plebeian woman's labour. In completing the demands that the mistress laid on her, one of which was to 'mind Her Linen well, nor *leave the Dirt behind'*, there came the sweat and blood, trickling down their wrists and fingers, as a product of 'the constant action of our labr'ing Hands'.[127] The sweat, blood and dirt that were associated with the variety of domestic toils were a constant threat to the clean order of the household, yet Collier used the dirt and ruin of the body to discuss the value of woman's work. In this sense she inverted the social distinction of the white hand of the genteel woman described above, finding pride in the way her hands defined her social status, testifying to the strength and resolve of the female labourer.

While Collier used poetic discourse to appeal to a wide readership, the voices of other female servants come through a mediated form in depositional materiality. Since the pioneering work of Natalie Zemon Davis, scholars have recognised that court material records cultural narratives rather than indisputable facts.[128] However, such documents can still be used as a basis for establishing information about the lives of early modern labouring women. The fluidity of a woman's work was demonstrated in one seventeenth-century

[123] Christmas, *The Labr'ing Muses*, 118.
[124] Collier, *The Woman's Labour,* 12.
[125] Christmas, *The Labr'ing Muses*, 122.
[126] Collier, *The Woman's Labour*, 13, 15-16.
[127] Ibid., 13-14. Original emphasis.
[128] Natalie Zemon Davis, *Fiction in the Archives: Pardon Tales and their Tellers in Sixteenth-Century France* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1987).

consistory court case relating to tithe payments in Hovingham, a village in the North Riding. The eighteen-year-old Elizabeth Lee was named in her witness deposition as a 'household servant', working in the house of Thomas Worsley for the space of seven years, but throughout the deposition she also referred to herself as his milk maid. By describing herself as a milk maid, she established her authority to provide information about Worsley's cows, for example, how many he owned at a given time, when they had calves, how to feed them and take them to pasture.[129] Elizabeth was the only servant of Worsley's to be a witness, and so perhaps his only servant with wide-ranging duties, but in the context of the case she emphasised her role as milk maid.

Yorkshire court cases also reveal that a maid's work spanned all hours of the day. Certain tasks kept them up all night, such as washing linen as early as two in the morning, or brewing all through the night.[130] In one 1691 assize case, a woman reported that her servant's sleeping hours were from approximately eleven in the night until six in the morning, although this was in March when days were short.[131] Servants working for their masters, such as Anne Beatrice who was working in her master's shop in the Beverley Shambles at eight in the evening, attested to being there at a variety of hours.[132] The witness testimony of a Skipton husbandman, John Moorehouse, described how in 1718 his maidservant assisted him and his men in the field making hay until six in the evening, at which time the maid returned home to milk his cows, which is how she discovered the house had been broken into.[133] The fewer the number of servants, the more diverse the number of tasks and the longer the hours a woman had to keep.

Although the diversity of time and location of the maid of all work does not explicitly reveal information about the skills she was required to master, it exhibits that the situation could be varied and that a woman had to be adaptable. The way that a maid interacted with her master and mistress ties back to ideas of embodied gestural habits and learned social praxis. The maid of all work was expected to be everywhere, while maintaining a degree of invisibility, productive yet out of the way. Mary Algar, a thirty-year-old single woman from York, had been a maid for Elizabeth and Samuel Tireman for five years at the time of the 1703 case in which she provided a witness deposition. Elizabeth brought to court a case of matrimonial dispute against Samuel, who verbally abused her. Mary, as a live-in maid, was in close proximity to the couple in a multitude of ways. On the one hand, when she was about her work on the lower floor of their lodgings, there were often times when '[she] heard

[129] BIHR, CP.H.1715.
[130] The National Archives (TNA), ASSI 45/18/5/84; ASSI 45/18/2/20.
[131] TNA, ASSI 45/16/2/59.
[132] TNA, ASSI 45/16/5/96.
[133] TNA, ASSI 45/18/1/19.

[Samuel] soe much abuse [Elizabeth] that she has been forced to run up to them into their roome and rescue her the Mrs from him'.[134] In particular, Mary remembered one instance where she 'did hear a great noise and quarrelling' and ran into the room, only to find Samuel dragging his wife along the ground, and so Mary had to step in. According to Mary, Elizabeth later confided in her maid that had she 'not come up to her assistance she beleived that he would have choaked her'. At other times when Mary was about her business, she witnessed Samuel come home late in the evening 'overtaken with strong drinke'. Some nights, Mary claimed that Samuel would so verbally abuse his wife and misuse her that Elizabeth was 'forced to leave his Bed & come to [Mary's] apartment till his passion or fury was over'. While Mary's work kept her out of the way—she described having to run *into* the other rooms to help her mistress—she could also gain access to the entire house and Elizabeth positioned herself physically close to Mary in times of trouble.

Along with witnessing marital abuse, maids often testified to adultery due to their near-constant presence in the home and occupation of the domestic taskscape. In Hatfield, a parish in the West Riding, Elizabeth Dearman's twenty-year-old maid, Anne Martin, was one of the four witnesses (and the only female witness) to testify against her in an adultery suit brought to court in 1711. Anne detailed the multiple times that she witnessed Allen Cockin come to her master's house and spend 'several times an hour and other times less' shut behind closed doors in her mistress's room, where she had first-hand knowledge that her mistress was 'in naked bedd'.[135] Her mistress was not afraid to kiss or partake in other 'indecent behaviour' with Cockin in front of the maid, showing either the trust between a mistress and her maid or the maid's invisibility. Perhaps Elizabeth, and others like her, considered her maid a part of the house and overlooked her presence, or possibly she took her loyalty as an employee for granted.

Anxieties about maids dressing above their station, briefly touched on above, further reveals the gestural and physical habits of maid servants. As discussed in chapter one, clothes can be seen as an extension of carnal sociology, particularly in relation to the servant class. An anonymous author of *The Maid-Servants Modest Defence,* who claimed to be the defendant of maidservants, provided a counterargument that sheds light on the important role clothing and physical presentations played in a maid's work. The self-titled 'lady's woman' provided a three-fold defence for the wearing of nice clothing. On the one hand, there was the simple fact that mistresses often gifted their maids with hand-me-downs and slightly worn-out clothing.[136] While some might have viewed these clothes as above a servant's station, the

[134] BIHR, CP.I.169.
[135] BIHR, CP.I.282.
[136] *The Maid-Servants Modest Defence* (London: Printed and Sold by J. Peele, 1725), 12.

mistress could be insulted if her maid did not appreciate such gifts. Indeed, in the church court records of the York diocese, the issue of gifting clothing comes up more than once. One witness in a 1704 defamation case Martha Roberts, a thirty-eight-year-old laundress from Doncaster, stated that she 'frequently received diverse wearing cloths and other gifts and presents' from Mrs Gough, for whom she was washerwoman.[137] By mentioning the gifted clothing she validated the bond between her and her employer. In some cases, it was the cause of contention. For instance, Elizabeth Johnson, of Bawtry, brought charges against Esther Cosens.[138] Esther had been hired servant to Elizabeth and her husband, Thomas, for about a year, in 1710. However, one evening Elizabeth found Esther and Thomas 'kissing or saluting each other very familiarly'. Thomas's excuse was that he was much overcome with liquor, but Elizabeth accused Esther of taking advantage of her master's state and called her an 'impudent hussey'. Esther replied she was no more an impudent hussy than her mistress. After this incident, Elizabeth left Esther downstairs with her child while she went up to bed to take care of her husband. But in the morning, she awoke to find that Esther had fled, leaving the child unattended and the doors to the home wide open. When the maid came and collected her wages and clothing, ill words were exchanged; however, 'some small time after…Esther Cosens took her wages and her clothes and parted from her said service and her good master and mistress in good friendship and reconsiliation'. This good friendship did not last long though, and Elizabeth accused Esther of returning to her home and demanding some clothes which Esther 'pretended' her mistress had given her. According to Elizabeth, it was her refusal to concede to this lie that led to Esther spreading rumours and slander about her. The arguments brought forth by both sides reveal that the exchange of clothing was a common aspect of the servant-master relationship, supporting the 'lady's woman's' argument that a maid should not be criticised for wearing hand-me-down fineries.

The case between Elizabeth and Esther also shows how clothing played a role in the power relationship between servant and master: the superior controlled the inferior's body through the latter's access to clothing. The mistress not only gifted her maid clothing, but she also managed the clothing that was in her maid's possession, as masters did with their apprentices. This responsibility could also be manipulated. In one Hull defamation case from 1716 Mary Hesson, accused her former mistress, Mary Gall, of slandering her good name, clothing played a central role.[139] One witness, Frances Wardman, described how she had attempted to help Hesson retrieve her clothes from her former mistress, who had kept them when she turned out her maid. When Frances went to Gall's house, rather than relinquishing

[137] BIHR, CP.I.506.
[138] BIHR, CP.I.228.
[139] BIHR, CP.I.350.

the clothes, Gall had also accused Hesson of being so inebriated she had let the Galls' daughter fall and injure herself. Through withholding Hesson's clothes, Gall prevented her from being able to go and find new work in the town. Hesson required the clothes to present herself to future employers and Gall's refusal to give them to her was the mistress's way of controlling the maid's reputation as a good or bad employee.

The second argument that *The Maid-Servants Modest Defence* presented was that, 'those, who are *Honest, Careful* and *Pains-taking* should lay out the *Wages* they work for, in such Cloathing, as well for *Ornament* as *Use*, to their Satisfaction.[140] The author played upon ideas that painstaking labours and honest work were worthy of profit. And John Styles has found that a number of female servants chose to spend their wages in this way—in an analysis of 28 female servants in the Yorkshire worsted manufacturer, Robert Heaton's household, Styles found that all but one of the women for whom Heaton provided detailed accounts 'devoted the bulk of what they spent out of their wages to the purchase of clothing'.[141] Although pamphlets and ballads derided maids for spending their wages on expensive and fashionable clothes, masters such as Heaton seemed to indulge their servants' purchases, allowing them to borrow from him when they overspent and generally supporting their sartorial purchases.[142] This links to the next point.

Clothing and appearance also played an important role in gaining employment, which 'was more readily available to those who were neatly turned out'.[143] The final point of *The Maid-Servants Modest Defence* called attention to the expectations of personal presentation that a maid had to live up to, stating that mistresses 'will not take into their *Service* for *Waiting-women*, or *Chamber-Maids*, those who have not *Cloathing* suitable to the *Families* into which they are to be hir'd'.[144] Through the examples of gifts, careful money management and personal appearance, the 'lady's woman' appealed to contemporary customs and values to argue against critiques of maids dressing above their station. *The Gentlewomans Companion* reminded young women that while it was acceptable to dress according to their station, they should not go any further, 'for to see a Maid finely trickt up, having a fine show without and not one good qualification within, is like a jointed Bartholomew-Baby [hand-carved doll], bought for no other use than to be look'd upon'.[145] This stressed the tension between presenting oneself well and not dressing too extravagantly.

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[140] *The Maid-Servants Modest Defence*, 10. Original emphasis.

[141] John Styles, 'Involuntary Consumers? Servants and their Clothes in Eighteenth-Century England,' *Textile History* 33, no. 1 (2002), 13.

[142] Ibid., 18-19.

[143] Thomas, 'Cleanliness and Godliness,' 72.

[144] *The Maid-Servants Modest Defence*, 10-11. Original emphasis.

[145] Woolley, *The Gentlewomans Companion*, 211.

A maid's correct embodiment of her role contributed to the success of the household, while poor physical comportment or attempts to carry oneself above their stations were viewed negatively and seen as disruptive to the household.

As well as being properly dressed, a maid's body had to be in good health. The maid of all work in particular had to maintain a physical strength because she moved throughout the entire house, putting her whole body into her work, sweeping and scrubbing and carrying large amounts of linens—as Keith Thomas rightly notes, 'the amount of energy, particularly female energy, which in the early modern period went into scrubbing floors, boiling clothes, scouring pots and pans and polishing furniture is incalculable'.[146] While the energy might be incalculable, it was certainly physical. The servant's body was central in the instructions of nonconformist minister, Richard Baxter, who listed, '1. Strength, 2. Skill, 3. Willingness' as the three things necessary to make a servant, a position he saw as integral to the happiness of the family. According to Baxter, each of these was useless without the other, but noted it was folly to 'expect labour from one that is *unskillful and unexercised*' in service.[147] It was crucial therefore, to choose a servant who was 'healthful…for to exact labour from one that is *sickly*, will seem *cruelty*'. He went on to describe the strength required of the body: 'though they should have grace, a phlegmatic, sluggish, heavy body will never be fit for diligent service**,** no more than a tired horse for travel'.

Masters and mistresses could also turn away their servant if they were sick or require that she had already been exposed to certain illnesses to maintain the health of their home. The clergyman Ralph Josselin had two daughters who went into service but returned home when they contracted protracted illnesses. One of the daughters, Anne, also had other health problems that affected her work in service, such as one illness that affected her eyes and lead to quarrels with her mistress.[148] In the early eighteenth century, Yorkshireman William Chaytor asked whether or not a girl had had smallpox prior to taking her in to his service.[149] Anne Gossip sent Jane Shackleton away in 1736 after only a few days service, paying her one shilling for her time and citing sickness as the reason for the termination.[150] Anne also required that women coming to her service already had smallpox so that the risk of the

[146] Thomas, 'Cleanliness and Godliness,' 73.

[147] Richard Baxter, *The Practical Works of the Late Reverend and Pious Mr Richard Baxter, in four Volumes*, vol. I. (London: Printed for Thomas Parkhurst, Jonathan Robinson and John Lawrence, 1707), 386. Emphasis added.

[148] Margaret Pelling, *The Common Lot: Sickness, Medical Occupations and the Urban Poor in Early Modern England* (London: Longman, 1998), 127.

[149] Ashcroft, ed., *The Papers of Sir William Chaytor of Croft*, 100. Jane Holmes suggests this was to ensure they would not contract the disease while in his service in 'Domestic Service in Yorkshire, 1650-1780' (D. Phil, University of York, 1989), 64.

[150] WYAS, Leeds, WYL1015/1/21/3.

disease entering their home would be limited.[151] In 1760, Joshua Horton of Howroyd Hall sent away his chambermaid Ann Thornton after only five and a half weeks of service due to an irrecoverable sickness.[152] Such incidents reveal the impact a servant's body could have on a household in a different manner—an ill or addled body slowed the progression of the household, and the maintenance of its members. On the other hand, masters and mistresses were charged with caring for the health of their servants and providing them with necessities and had cause to do so in order for servants to maintain their workload. This was also part of the role of master as patriarch, who was charged with maintaining the health of his household.[153]

Age was another factor in both a woman's social position in the household and her ability to learn domestic tasks. Court records reveal the ages of many such women, statistics which are often not present in household accounts or other such sources. Historians such as Kussmaul argue that many women engaged in domestic service while they waited for marriage, in order to gain housewifery skills, suggesting they would be of an age somewhere between childhood and marriage, and that service was just one stage in the life-cycle.[154] It is certainly true that a number of girls were sent to the homes of others and service was an excellent way for them to gain knowledge about running their own households after marriage, particularly for women of the lower or middling sorts. However, the diversity of ages found in depositional material reinforces that the individual experiences of maids did not always fit into a simple pattern, as Charmian Mansell has shown for the south of England. Moreover, it complicates the narrative that women participated in service to acquire skills that would help them in marriage. Just as recognising the diversity of skills in the hierarchy of large households, acknowledging the range of ages in which women were in service forces us to question if skill embodiment was exclusively for the purpose of a woman learning to be a good housewife.

[151] WYAS, Leeds, WYL1015/1/3/2.
[152] WYAS, Bradford, WYB20/2.
[153] Margaret Pelling, 'Apprenticeship, Health and Social Cohesion in Early Modern London,' *History Workshop*, 37 (Spring, 1994), 41.
[154] Kussmaul, *Servants in Husbandry*, 3.

*Table 4.1: Age at time of case (in Consistory Court)*[155]

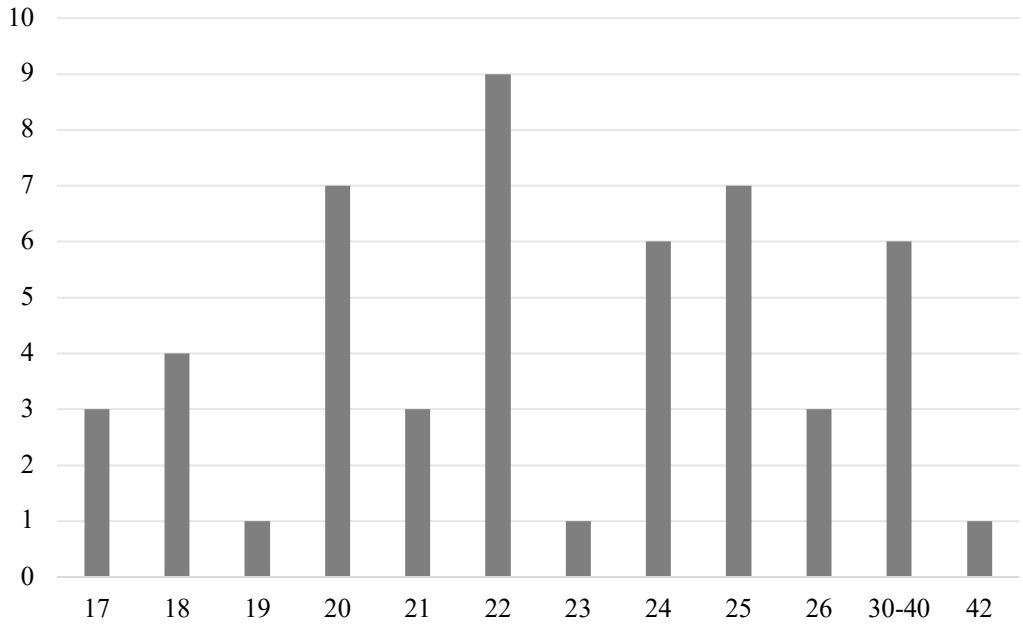



*Table 4.2: Age at start of service (in Consistory Court)*[156]

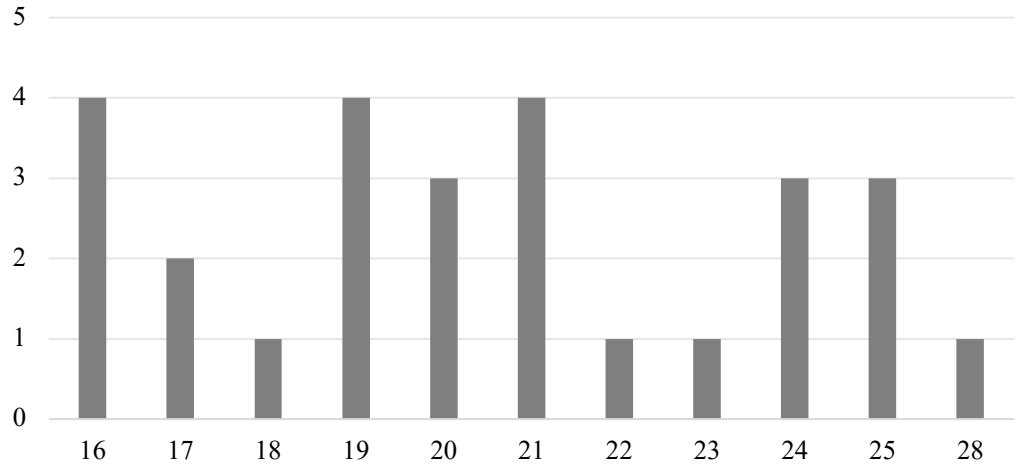



Table 4.1 shows that witnesses were typically in their mid-twenties when they testified, whereas Table 4.2 charts their age at start of service, when it was provided. Most girls in Yorkshire started domestic work in their late teens, although some were in their late twenties. Although a small sample, the Yorkshire cases studied here support Mansell's argument that 'service filtered into all stages of the life cycle from childhood through to old age, and the circumstances in which women entered service, their aspirations and experiences while in service, cannot adequately be explained by the life-cycle model'.[157] More attention

[155] BIHR, Cause Papers in the Diocesan Courts of the Archbishopric of York, 1300-1858 (CP).
[156] BIHR, CP.
[157] Mansell, 'The Variety of Women's Experiences as Servants in England,' 321.

can be given to the women who described their experience in the assize courts, even if they did not directly provide their age.

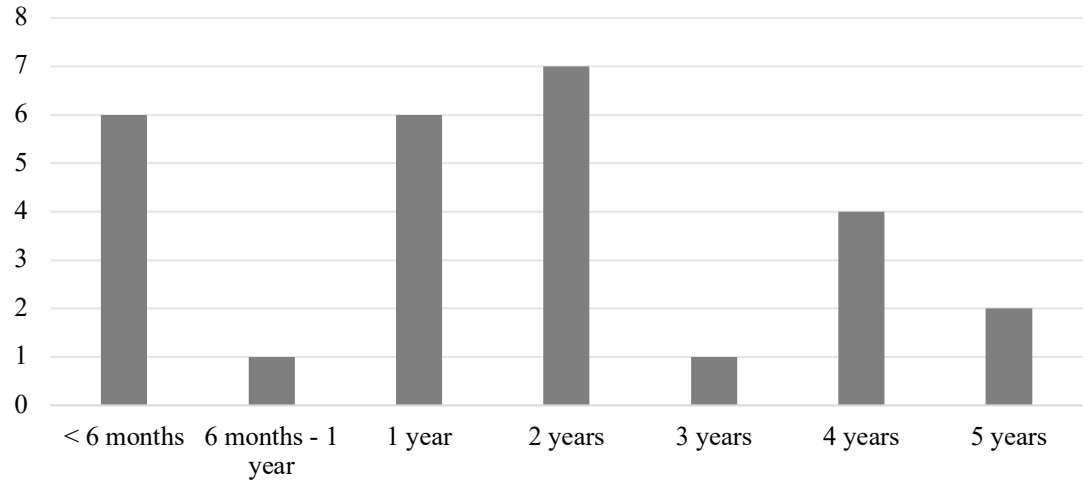
In the assize court, cases of married women working in another's home can be used to expand our concepts of work and to consider that a woman acquired skills not just to be a good wife but also to contribute to the household and local oeconomy. For instance, in South Frodingham, Frances, the wife of William Waton, would journey to the house of John and Anne Stoney when Anne was pregnant in order to 'Milk & help her in the House'. A number of women were a part of the Stoneys' household, such as Waton who was temporary hired help, the spinster Elizabeth Cunny who came to work the harvest in the spring of 1724—the subject of the court case, as she gave birth to a bastard child while in the Stoney's service—and another unnamed maid who went about the entire house.[158] Another woman, Agnes Bullock, the wife of a labourer from the North Riding, went daily to the house of the yeoman John Brown 'in the absence of his servant maid', during which time she had responsibilities in the house that included paying some of Brown's other temporary workers and aiding in the field.[159] In Leeds, Elizabeth Pullen, the wife of John, detailed that she went abroad to the house of Mr Richard Nottingham 'about five of the clock this morning (12 December 1734)' in order to clean pewter, which she had been doing for two hours when she was alerted of a fire within the house.[160] All these women were described as married, allowing us to estimate that they were in their late twenties or older. Although none of them gave occupational descriptors or were called servants, the work they described was wage-labour that occurred in another's home, typical of service. Skills acquired in service were not just put to use in women's own households, but they continued to be hired for their skills outside of their own homes, even in marriage. In this way, they contributed to family and parish oeconomies.

R. C. Richardson places great emphasis on the mid-eighteenth-century quip that young female servants 'are as restless as a new equipage running from place to place', advocating for the commonplace habit of mobility in the domestic labour market.[161] Vickery similarly found that housewives often lamented the loss of servants and an 'ever-shifting labour force'.[162] However, this once again relies on the employers' points of view. When we look at witnesses in the York consistory courts, the majority of female servants stayed in one household for at least a year, if not more, as shown in Table 4.3. Of the twenty-seven women who provided information about the length of their service, 72 per cent had been in their master's household for a year or more. And those who had been servants for under a year had

[158] TNA, ASSI 45/18/2/20.
[159] TNA, ASSI 45/23/3/65b.
[160] TNA, ASSI 45/20/1/46.
[161] Richardson, *Household Servants*, 74-75.
[162] Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter*, 157-159.

not necessarily left their service, but sometimes had only been at that home for that duration at the time of their testimony. Similar to the dioceses of Exeter, Gloucester and Winchester, the majority of women in Yorkshire spent more than a year in continuous employment in one household, countering the stereotype that they were restless and flittered from house to house.[163] While Mansell uses this evidence to support her case for variation in service, it also supports the argument that women were acquiring specific skills through *practice and repetition*, as significant time spent in the same household allowed for more consistent experience.

*Table 4.3: Length of Service (in Consistory Court)*[164]




Even in the large Yorkshire households, such as the Gossips, who Richardson cites in his study, the length of service often depended on the position.[165] As Table 4.4 shows, while the length of service was rarely consistent, it was common for maids to stay for a year or more, with only six of the twenty-two staying for less than that. Interestingly the majority of maids who left their service after only a few months came in later years, perhaps suggesting strife in the household or other outside circumstances. Housemaids and lady's maids tended to stay the longest, such as in the Gossip household where housemaids stayed an average of one year, with Betty Gosland staying two and a half years.[166] Sarah Dronsfield, the lady's maid to Mrs Horton of Howroyd Hall, stayed with the family for a total of ten and a half years. And while it seems their chambermaids tended to have shorter terms of service, most staying between six months and a year, one chambermaid, Alice Chadwick, was with the

[163] Mansell, 'The Variety of Women's Experiences as Servants in England,' 330.
[164] BIHR, CP.
[165] See Appendix 3 for more maids' length of service in more Yorkshire households.
[166] WYAS, Leeds, WYL1015/1/18/5.

family for four and a half years, while another, Sarah Shaw was promoted to cook after half a year, in which position she stayed for nearly two years.[167]

*Table 4.4: Length of Service for Gossip Family Maids*[168]

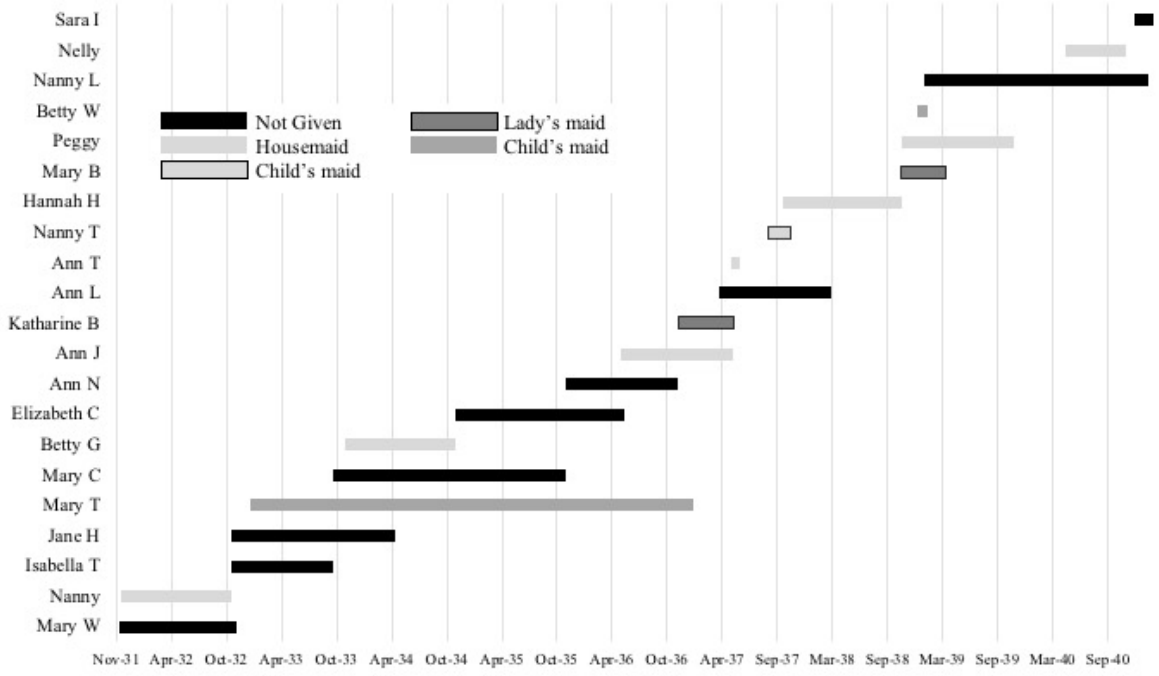
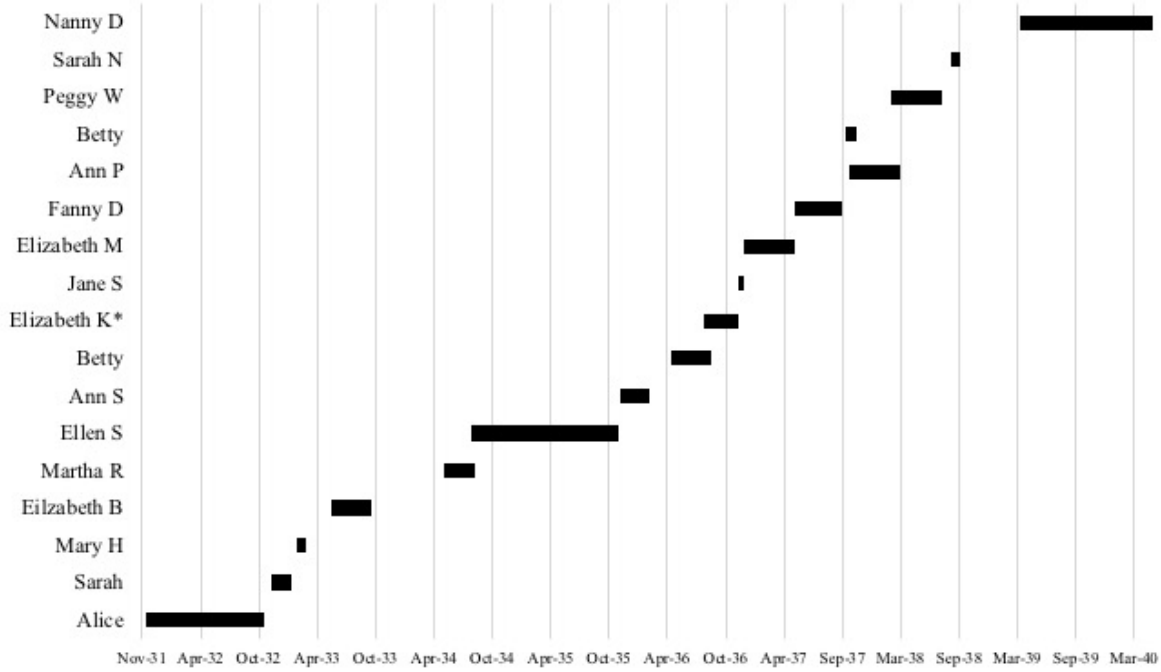



*Table 4.5: Length of Service for Gossip Cooks* [169]




[167] WYAS, Bradford, WYB20/2.
[168] WYAS, Leeds, WYL1015/1/21/3.
[169] Ibid.

Cooks tended to have the highest turnover, which could be due to a number of factors. In some cases, it may be that their role demanded high standards, requiring a very skilled and knowledgeable woman to fill the position. Or perhaps the specialised position allowed for women to move more frequently when they were in high demand. While Richardson cites William Gossip's alarm at the high turnover of cooks in his household, he fails to note that three of the fourteen that came into the household stayed for a year, suggesting perhaps it was Gossip's pickiness that drove most away, rather than the failures of the women. The Wrightson Family of Doncaster tended to have better luck with cooks, with two cooks, Alice and Betty, staying in their service for at least two years.[170] Although various positions had faster turnovers than others, it is nonetheless an exaggeration to state that female servants were prone to accelerated mobility, as shown in the stability of many Yorkshire maids. While London may have been prone to more movement of servants, due to the high population of female servants and the diversity of households, it is necessary to understand that there was regional variety when it came to the experience of female servants at this time.

Early modern domestic service was certainly a way for women to acquire skills that would be beneficial in marriage; however, service did not function solely for this purpose. Servants were considered as a workforce that were an essential part of the household—the hands of the household. The variety of positions in large households shows that there was a range of skills involved in service, and women could gain—or fail to gain—any number of these. The housekeeper was expected to have managerial skills, as well as knowledge of the way to work linen or present victuals. The cook had to physically master the sensory knowledge that was necessary for recognising what products were suitable to serve as well as their market value. Even the lowly chambermaid had to be able to judge the quality of linen through touch and must possesses the physical stamina to sweep, shine and scrub the entire house. The experience of the maid of all work—the more typical position for young women—was also varied: she had to adapt her skill depending on the household and her own aspirations and life circumstances. Elizabeth Pullen, who did not live in the house she worked in, filled a different role than Mary Algar, who had lived in her master's house for five years at the time of her deposition. Women's bodies were shaped through social praxis in order to fill specific service positions that contributed to the overall running of the household, and therefore the oeconomy at large.

The next chapter will turn to the women who employed the hands of the household. As noted, a number of women who ran smaller houses had experience of being servants

[170] DA, DD/BW/A/1.

themselves, and this was a large part of how they gained their housewifery skills. However, women of larger households may not have had the same experiences in their youth, and as such had to acquire distinctive type of skills in a different manner.

## Chapter 5. 'A wise woman buildeth her house': Housewifery and household governance[1]

In 1704 a case was brought to York's Consistory Court, in which Jane Greaves, of Beverley, sought separation from her husband, John, citing cruelty and abuse suffered under his hands. In one instance, 'on a Sunday at night the Maid Servant had not dressed the said John Greaves supper to his likeing, whereupon he fell abeating his said wife Jane in the most cruell & Inhumane maner Imagineable'.[2] This was just one example Jane provided of John's physical cruelty, but it is an important one. Why did John beat his wife when it was the maidservant who improperly dressed the meal? The next section of the complaint reveals more about the workings of the Greaves' household: 'And the very servant that was in the fault stood by and laughed all the time and he [John] encouraged her to it, as he did all his servants'. In fact, John 'constantly bid [the servants] never shew her any respect nor take any heed to what she said'. Beyond the physical and verbal abuse in the Greaves household, what was happening in the marriage?

John was a well to do shopkeeper—according to witnesses attesting to his estate—who had once served as mayor for their city of Beverley, and he was the head of a household that had multiple servants (at least four at the time of the incident).[3] But his wife's plaint against him gives insight into a household in which governance was crumbling, at least in Jane's views of the basic spousal responsibilities John owed to her. In the early modern household, the husband held the most authority; however, as contemporary literature, household manuals and personal writings reveal, the wife was expected to be a skilled governor in her household, particularly when it came to ordering servants. In the case of the Greaves, Jane and her servants used rhetoric that showed a husband subverting his wife's role in supervising her household, with the subtext revealing the breakdown of the power structure of the household.

Perhaps Jane did not have the skills to control the servants and John took advantage of this. Indeed, one servant stated that Jane herself was prone to quarrelling. And in one instance when Jane was 'turned out' by her husband, Margaret Perritt and her fellow servant opened the doors and 'desired their mistress to come in' but Jane obstinately refused, choosing instead to stay out in the yard all night. However, three other servants were witness to John's cruelty and claimed that Jane was a good, virtuous woman. In fact, the twenty-five-year-old Peter Harper used language similar to his mistress, in his version of the story Margaret had

[1] John Dod and Robert Cleaver, *A Godly Forme of Household Government* (London: 1598), 87-8.
[2] Borthwick Institute of Historical Research (BIHR), CP.I.88.
[3] Fay Bound, 'An "Uncivil" Culture: Marital Violence and Domestic Politics in York, c. 1660 - c. 1760,' in *Eighteenth-Century York: Culture, Space and Society*, eds. Mark Hallett and Jane Rendall, 50-58 (York: Borthwick Publications, University of York, 2003), 54.

told. He claimed that when John turned out his wife at eight o'clock in the evening, his master forbade the servants from opening the door 'nor suffer her to come in again', stating Jane 'was forced to stay all that night in the yard & stable and on the next morneing He found her sett upon an old Chest in the Stable very much out of order & almost starved'. Not only was Jane 'out of order' from spending a night outside, an event that happened more than once, but the household order was disrupted by these incidents as well. So perhaps Jane had the basic skills of household governance, as most of the servants spoke of her virtues as a wife and mistress. Reading it in this light, the supper incident was John's way of taking Jane's role of housekeeper completely out of her hands and turning it fully against her, and this was the main issue in the case. The Greaves' case gives a sense of household authority and—by its absence—a woman's role in governing therein. While the social relations involved were complicated and different from case to case, Jane's complaint about how John corrupted the servants and sabotaged her role as housekeeper demonstrates gendered expectations of how the early modern oeconomical unit should have run.

Governing servants was one aspect of the housewife's labour, labours which were often cited as intrinsic to the prosperity of the household oeconomy. Many conduct books and religious manuals quoted Proverbs 14.1, which stated 'a wise woman buildeth her house, but the foolish destroyeth it with her own hands'. From the earliest editions of Robert Cleaver and John Dod's popular tract, *A Godlie Forme of Household Governance*, the authors reflected on a wife's power in the success of the household, as her husband's helper: 'indeed her industries and wisedome may doe so much herein, that though her husband should bee much wanting in his dutie, yet shee might holde in the goale'.[4] The goal, at least for Cleaver and Dod, was household order. That is to say, to have a house that was well provided for, in which no one was idle, but none put to work more so than necessary. A housewife had to be wise and prudent as the instructor of her household, and she had to be 'diligent and painful' in her business. A good housewife's skills were therefore less physical than others discussed in this thesis—although not completely disembodied—but she had to possess intellectual, social and managerial skills. Contemporaries recognised that the success of the household was in her hands, even if only metaphorically.

'Household', as nearly all historians now accept, referred to a wider range of people in the early modern period than it does today. Contemporary authors who wrote manuals about the household considered it to include the husband and wife, parents and children, but also everyone else living under the same roof, such as elderly family or single siblings, who may be brought in to be cared for or provide extra help. Servants, lodgers, journeymen and

[4] Dod and Cleaver, *A Godly Forme of Household Government*, 87-8.

apprentices were also members of a household, and could play a critical role in the makeup of a successful oeconomy. Naomi Tadmor explains that 'the boundaries of these household-families are not those of blood and marriage, they are the boundaries of authority and of household management'.[5] With the full breadth of the home in mind, the role of household management provided women with opportunities to assert themselves. Within the household, there were particular female relationships of power. Housewives had to act in accordance with the politics of household authority, which will be discussed below; however, as a number of historians have begun to emphasise, a woman's 'constant activity' was required for the success of their household in ways that have previously been overlooked or undervalued.[6] Women were also 'negotiating' and 'accommodating' gender relations within the household in ways that complicate standard narratives of a husband's authority.[7]

Household management has garnered much attention in recent decades as historians have drawn on a wider range of sources.[8] Amanda Vickery, for instance, uses the personal documents of gentry Georgian women to discuss their daily routines, which she notes were filled with the managing of domestic servants, particularly female staff.[9] Women's involvement in the household has been studied through the lenses of consumption, accounting and recipe books, expanding our understanding of their daily activities.[10] For instance, Jane Whittle and Elizabeth Griffiths devote a chapter to household management of Alice Le Strange in the context of consumption and gender, discussing the planning that precedes shopping and consumption.[11] However, apart from these specialised—and necessary—articles, most historians reserve merely a paragraph or a page to discuss the managerial and oeconomic competence required of a 'good wife' without going into much

[5] Naomi Tadmor, *Family and Friends in Eighteenth-Century England: Household, Kinship, and Patronage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 24.

[6] Keith Wrightson, 'The Politics of the Parish in Early Modern England,' in *The Experience of Authority in Early Modern England*, eds. Paul Griffiths, Adam Fox and Steven Hindle, (London: MacMillan Press, 1996), 15.

[7] Bernard Capp, 'Separate Domains? Women and Authority in Early Modern England,' in *The Experience of Authority in Early Modern England*, eds. Paul Griffiths, Adam Fox and Steven Hindle, (London: MacMillan Press, 1996), 125-130.

[8] 'Management' and 'governance' will both be used in reference to a housewife's work. Contemporary texts discussed 'household governance' but they also spoke of parents managing their children, husbandmen and their wives managing affairs and women could 'manage well' a great home.

[9] Amanda Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter: Women's Lives in Georgian England* (New Haven, Conn: Yale University Press, 1998), 138-147.

[10] See Serena Dyer, 'Shopping and the Senses: Retail, Browsing and Consumption in 18th-Century England,' *History Compass* 12, no. 9 (2014), 694-703; Amanda Vickery, 'His and Hers: Gender, Consumption and Household Accounting in Eighteenth-Century England,' *Past & Present* Supplement 1 (2006), 12-38; Elaine Leong, 'Collecting Knowledge for the Family: Recipes, Gender and Practical Knowledge in the Early Modern English Household,' *Centaurus* 55, no. 2 (2013), 81-103.

[11] Jane Whittle and Elizabeth Griffiths, *Consumption and Gender in the Early Seventeenth-Century Household: The World of Alice Le Strange* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 26-48.

detail about her specific skills.[12] But the labour value of household management was key to the early modern oeconomy, as well as to the upkeep of social networks. As discussed in the first chapter, early modern texts about the household were concerned with the oeconomy, or, the 'practice of managing the economic and moral resources of the household for the maintenance of good order'.[13] It was this idea of a household oeconomy that led Gervase Markham to describe the English housewife as 'the Mother and Mistress of the family,' who 'hath her most general *imployments* within the house where from the general example of her vertues, and *the most approved skill* of her knowledge, those of her Family, may both learn to serve God'.[14] As housewives were *occupied* with the success of their household oeconomy—be that in their more 'general employments', through their intellectual skills or in their faculty as moral teacher—their labours should be included in any study of women and work in the early modern period. In assisting with the running of a household, women were navigating physical and intellectual skillsets—more so the first for smaller households and the latter for larger ones—in order to achieve an end: successful domestic order, which in turn was a means for oeconomic subsistence.

This chapter demonstrates how a woman could be occupied in the household, first through an examination of household order and authority. By looking at cases of marital breakdown, such the case of the Greaves, I argue that a successful household required a wife to maintain a degree of governance. Next, I include a case study of the diaries of Lady Sarah Cowper, with particular attention to her marital difficulties, her relationships with her servants, her reliance on religious discourse and her failure to convert written instruction into successful practice. Having used her case to demonstrate the ways in which a woman could poorly manage her home, I turn to contemporary ideas of housewives' duties, including supervision, management and accounting, with particular attention given to the account books and letters of the Yarburgh and Vanbrugh women. This chapter ends with a discussion of small households, showing how the wife's role differed depending on her circumstances. Despite these differences, women's labours in all households should be viewed as work.

## Household order

The authority of the husband has been a central tenet in the history of early modern marriage. Recently, historians have slowly begun to develop more comprehensive

[12] For instance the limited space accorded in Keith Wrightson, *Earthly Necessities: Economic Lives in Early Modern Britain, 1470-1750* (London: Penguin, 2002), 65.

[13] Karen Harvey, *The Little Republic: Masculinity and Domestic Authority in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 22.

[14] Gervase Markham, *The English House-Wife* (London: Printed for Hannah Sowbridge, 1683), 1-2. Emphasis added.

understandings of the early modern household, and at its core is a sense of marital partnership. As early as 1977 Kathleen M. Davies discussed the role of Puritanism changing marriage partnerships, and the balance between Puritan writers advocating for male authority as well as 'Puritan' views on marriage as a partnership and the mutual duties, particularly in bring up children in a godly home.[15] In terms of the household, Keith Wrightson has acknowledged that partnership should not be overlooked, noting that 'the mutuality in marriage is a less dramatic aspect of moralistic advice than their assertions of male authority, but it was of equal importance to the writers…and should never be ignored'.[16] Mutuality did not amount to equality, as the husband was still the ultimate head of the household; however, as Amy Louise Erickson suggests, the success of the oeconomy 'depended overwhelmingly on the industry of husband and wife, and on their capacity to cooperate'.[17] Historians have continued to recognise the varying degrees of cooperation, teamwork and 'marital interdependence'.[18] Case studies such as Anne L. Murphy's examination of the late-seventeenth century letters between Elizabeth and Samuel Jeake of Rye help to illuminate the complexity of early modern marital partnerships. Murphy found that while 'the type of labour performed by Elizabeth Jeake is invariably lost', as it was recorded under the name of her household. But by reading the letters exchanged between husband and wife, it can be gathered that Elizabeth was trusted by Samuel to conduct business matters on his behalf and she worked throughout their marriage 'to support the marital economy'.[19]

Murphy emphasises the undocumented commercial roles that wives played in their husbands' businesses, but wives' sociability, consumption and household labour were also important in the smooth running of a household. Looking at the governance of the household of Thomas Turner, a shopkeeper and overseer of the poor, Naomi Tadmor argues that Thomas's wife, Peggy, played an essential role in maintaining both the household's business affairs and the family's reputation within the parish. Thomas was busy cultivating male conviviality amongst his fellow parishioners. Equally important, however, was Peggy's social interaction amongst her peers: 'the female and mixed social circles she cultivated served to complement the male sphere of governance…to contain its tensions and harmonise disputes

[15] Kathleen M. Davies, 'The Sacred Condition of Equality: How Original Were Puritan Doctrines of Marriage?' *Social History* 2, no. 5 (1977), 567, 569-570.

[16] Keith Wrightson, *English Society: 1580-1680* (London: Hutchinson, 1982), 66.

[17] Amy Louise Erickson, 'The Marital Economy in Comparative Perspective,' in *The Marital Economy in Scandinavia and Britain, 1400-1900* eds. Maria Ågren and Amy Louise Erickson (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), 1.

[18] Joanne Bailey and Loreen Giese, 'Marital Cruelty: Reconsidering Lay Attitudes in England, c. 1580 to 1850,' *The History of the Family* 18, no. 3 (2013), 293.

[19] Anne L. Murphy, '"You do manage it so well that I cannot do better": the Working Life of Elizabeth Jeake of Rye (1667-1736),' *Women's History Review* 27, no. 7 (2018), 1203-1204.

while at the same time cementing neighbourliness and assisting trade'.[20] Peggy hosted wives of local officials while also completing other tasks such as running errands, preparing tobacco for sale in her husband's shop and readying goods for audit. Whether husbands were gone long distances for extended periods of time, such as in the case of the Jeakes, or heavily occupied with public roles, such as Thomas Turner, both business and household management often fell to their wives. In such instances, household authority was much more fluid than previously recognised.

Household governance, in terms of overseeing and maintaining servants, was a key feature of marital cooperation. This was one task where women could hold more authority, particularly over female servants; however, the husband's input was still important, and necessary. For example, when the Jeakes did discuss domestic affairs rather than business matters, their letters 'indicate that the management of the household was a shared concern'.[21] Marital cooperation, however, did not always run as smoothly as in the case of the Jeakes. Much work has been done on marital breakdown in terms of abuse, particularly when separation cases were filed due to spousal violence, particularly as cases had to prove physical violence occurred to obtain separation via the court.[22] When marriages were brought to court, the root of the issue was often the disruption of domestic authority, whether that was on the part of the husband taking advantage of his powers through physical brutality or the woman subverting her husband's authority by making him a cuckold.[23] However, violence and adultery were not the only forms of domestic disruption, and studies focused on physical abuses or infidelities overlook other manners in which marriages could break down. The household, seen as 'a little commonwealth, the kingdom as a family writ large' was headed by the adult male, who represented self-control and moral constancy, and who was supported by his wife, the 'first among the household's subsidiary members', and disruption to this order came in many forms.[24]

Adam Eyre was a Yorkshire yeoman whose diary covered only a few years from 1647 to 1649.[25] After having served as a captain in the Civil War, for the parliamentary cause,

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[20] Naomi Tadmor, 'Where was Mrs Turner? Governance and Gender in an Eighteenth-Century Village,' in *Remaking English Society: Social Relations and Social Change in Early Modern England*, eds. Steve Hindle, Alexandra Shepard and John Walter (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2013), 104.

[21] Murphy, '"You do manage it so well that I cannot do better",' 1197.

[22] Bailey and Giese, 'Marital cruelty'; Bound, 'An "Uncivil" Culture'; Elizabeth Foyster, *Marital Violence: An English Family History, 1660-1857* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

[23] David M. Turner, *Fashioning Adultery: Gender, Sex and Civility in England, 1660-1740* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 118, 131-4, 142; Martin Ingram, *Church Corts, Sex and Marriage in England, 1570-1640* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 171-187.

[24] Cynthia B. Herrup, *A House in Gross Disorder: Sex, Law, and the 2nd Earl of Castlehaven* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 70-71. Also see page 73-77 to see how the Castlehaven household was a microcosm of disorder and household tensions.

[25] The original manuscript is located in West Yorkshire Archives Service (WYAS), Kirklees, KC 312/5/3. It was believed to be lost up until 1988, before which times most historians relied on the 1875

Adam returned to the estate of Hazlehead, in the West Riding parish of Penistone.[26] Adam was an important member of his parish and held much local authority, but despite this he faced domestic strain and discontent with his limited control over his wife.[27] He was comfortable with his wife, Susannah, participating in the household oeconomy to some degree. On certain occasions he recorded her engaging in financial interactions on his behalf, such as when 'Godfrey Bright bought my horse of my wife, and gave her 5*l*, and promised to give her 20*s* more'. In that same entry, Susannah earned money on her own behalf, taking 'in the corne sale 4*l*', and in other instances she sold goods for the household.[28] At other times, Adam gave Susannah money so she could purchase goods and necessaries.[29] Adam would leave Susannah in charge of the household on the numerous occasions he went to London, during which time his diary entries would cease, so we are left to wonder the exact activities of either spouse.[30]

However, the partnership would break down when Susannah mustered too much control over her husband's economic situation, sometimes through denying him financial help. On 20 May 1647, Adam complained of his wife's refusal to 'furnish' him with 200*l*, for which he was willing to 'secure her all Hazlehead for her life, and she should have the half of it for the present, if Edward Mitchell (his tenant) would part with it'.[31] It was not only financial control that Adam resented, but also Susannah's attempt to control him socially, as she prohibited him from going to bowls and berated him for his drinking. Conversely, it appears that Susannah was discontented with her husband's attempts to police her apparel and appearance, as Eyre threatened not to come to bed with her until she 'tooke more notice of what I formerly had sayd to her' about her clothing.[32]

A number of times Susannah attempted to take complete control of the household as well, shutting the gates to her husband and claiming 'shee would be master of the house for that night'.[33] Keys, and the household authority they represented, were cited in a number of separation cases as one's access to them or denial thereof was imbued with symbolism.[34] Both spouses' actions have led certain historians to conclude that the Eyres were 'obstinate

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Morehouse transcription. Citations in this thesis are from the transcription. C. Jackson and H. J. Morehouse, eds. *Yorkshire Diaries and Autobiographies in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (Edinburgh: Surtees Society, 1875). For more on the history of the diurnal, see Andrew Hopper, 'Social Mobility during the English Revolution: The Case of Adam Eyre,' *Social History*, 38, no. 1 (2013), 27.

[26] Jackson and Morehouse, *Yorkshire Diaries*, 352-3.
[27] Hopper, 'Social Mobility during the English Revolution,' 31-2.
[28] Jackson and Morehouse, *Yorkshire Diaries*, 16; 50.
[29] Ibid., 63.
[30] Ibid., 22-4.
[31] Ibid., 36.
[32] Ibid., 43; 51.
[33] Ibid., 54.
[34] Bailey and Giese, 'Marital Cruelty', 296-7; BIHR CP.I.88.

people and their marriage was correspondingly stormy', however this focuses on the moments of outburst and overlooks the day-to-day successful partnership that benefited their household. Furthermore, in the middle of the diary, after a terrifying storm, the Eyres reconciled to be better partners:

> This morne I used some words of persuasion to my wife to forbeare to tell mee of what is past, and promised her to become a good husband to her for ye tyme to come, and shee promised mee likwise shee would doe what I wished her in anything, save in setting her hand to papers; and I promised her never to wish her therunto. Now I pray god that both shee and I may leave of all our old and foolish contentions, and joyne together in His service without all fraud, malice, or hypocrisye; and that Hee will for ye same purpose illuminate our understandings with His Holy Spirit.[35]

Throughout the remainder of his diary, clashes between husband and wife were rare, and when they did occur, repentance was quick to follow.[36] Adam's diary ended before his life did, and the marriage might have taken a turn when he became a civil servant in London and made large land purchases in later life.[37] Nonetheless, the last half of the diary was quiet in regard to his marriage, perhaps suggesting that the couple indeed found a way to 'joyne together' in a more harmonious partnership. At the very least, his interactions with his wife were agreeable enough as to not take centre stage in his writings.

Susannah's statement that she would be master of the house reflects contemporary ideas of gender authority within the household. A 1673 ballad recounting the life of a young farmer and his churlish wife, intended to provide 'mirth for citizens', additionally detailed concepts of gender and authority in the household.[38] In the story, the farmer married a woman for her beauty, but quickly came to regret his decision when his new bride asserted 'she would be Master, and all the whole houshold guide'. Once his wife took control, he described the many tasks she made him do, tasks usually reserved for the wife: 'I do get up in a morn, and for her make a fire…sugar-sops must be ready, and I forsooth wait on her…at dinner she is stout, that by her I must now stand, to wait with a Napkin on my arm, and a Trencher in my hand'.[39] The ballad reveals contemporary anxieties about women subverting their husband's marital authority while also reinforcing the importance of partnership. A woman had to be a suitable partner in marriage, she could not be too passive nor too boorish.

As mentioned, another cause of disharmony in the household was often infidelity, yet even in cases of adultery, the issue of a woman's right to govern her household could be the root of the marital problems. When Jane Curver of York sought an annulment from her

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[35] Jackson and Morehouse, *Yorkshire Diaries*, 84.
[36] Ibid., 99.
[37] Hopper, 'Social Mobility during the English Revolution,' 26.
[38] Abraham Miles, *Mirth for Citizens. Or, A Comedy for the Country*, (London: Printed for P. Brooksby, 1673).
[39] Ibid.

husband, Henry, it was due to his alleged cruelty and adultery. In detailing the nature of this later issue, Jane revealed the state of her household affairs. She explained that, 'during all this time [she] cohabited with [Henry] or the most of it he…constantly kept one woman or other of noe good Reputation in house with him *to whom he committed the charge and care of his house and household affairs* and with whom he was suspitiously and scandalously kinde'.[40] While Jane later went on to attest to the more physical aspects of these 'scandalous' relations, it is important to consider why she referenced these occurrences of women being invited into her home in such a way. Clearly, she, and most likely her neighbours and peers, saw Henry's relationships with these women as mimicking that of man and wife. It should have been Jane's right, as mistress of the home, to manage the household affairs, and Henry doling out her duties to other women exasperated the problem beyond physical adultery. The last line, about Henry being scandalously kind to them, also showed the respect and affection Jane felt was her right as his lawful wife. In this case, a man not only took away his wife's household authority for himself, but he bestowed it on other, 'immoral' women. Although in a different way to John Greaves, Henry subverted his wife's role as governor within her own household.

The cases brought to the church courts provide a peek into the way in which servants and household management tested the limits of partnership. In order to better understand to what degree power relations were part of the housewife's skillset, we can turn our attention to a case farther south, to the diaries of Lady Sarah Cowper (1644-1720). These provide an excellent case study for examining how one gentlewoman attempted to manoeuvre and master the skills it took in order to run a household, although it can be argued she never fully achieved them.

## Lady Sarah Cowper: A case study

Lady Sarah Cowper's first-hand narratives reveal a woman managing her household—or at least attempting to manage it. Little is known about Sarah's early life, except that she was born in 1643 to the London merchant Samuel Holled and his wife, Anne. Both her parents died prior to her marriage to the rising lawyer, William Cowper, in 1664. Sarah brought at least modest wealth to the marriage, having received one third of her father's estate and the entirety of her mother's upon their respective deaths.[41] While the Cowpers seemed to procure some status socially—William became Baronet of Hertfordshire Castle during the couple's first year of marriage—the management of the estate and its

[40] BIHR, CP.H.4662. Emphasis added.

[41] Anne Kugler, *Errant Plagiary: The Writing Life of Lady Sarah Cowper (1644-1720)* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), 1.

finances seemed to be a constant point of tension between the couple, whose partnership was strained from the start.

Sarah's diaries are a rare example of a first-hand account of household management, yet they have seldom been used by historians of early modern marriage and gendered household roles.[42] The diaries span both married life and widowhood, representing a range of authority as both a partner and the sole head of a household. Overall, Sarah's writings make up seven volumes and over 2,000 pages, spanning 1700 to 1716, when her failing health and poor eyesight stopped her from carrying on writing. In the early years of her marriage, Sarah kept commonplace books, in which she cited authors she read, and collected prescriptive texts to reflect upon.

About thirty-five years into her marriage, she switched from commonplace books to diaries. These acted as a spiritual journal used for self-examination. However, it is important to note that the self-examination was not spontaneous, and clearly, was not without bias. As Adam Smyth endeavours to show, diary writing was not, as some historians have described, impulsive, rather they were 'a retrospective, mediated, intertextual process'.[43] For Sarah, diary keeping was unquestionably an intertextual process. Many entries contain biblical extracts, reflect on sermons or refer to other texts in her possession. Anne Kugler, the author of the most in-depth historical analysis of Sarah's diaries, is quick to point out, as her title *Errant Plagiary* suggests, that Sarah incorporated text straight from the numerous books, sermons and tracts she interacted with. One main push of Kugler's argument is that the diaries need to be read as a text that seamlessly borrows heavily from other writers amalgamated with her own personal observations. As such, they reflect the crafted thoughts of a woman concerned with maintaining proper social practices of her day, who at the same time was documenting her frustrations with her day-to-day situation. The titles that Sarah noted in her Catalogue of Books support the claim that she was aware of contemporary social and religious conduct, such as her use of John Kettlewell's *The measures of Christian obedience,* Thomas à Kempis's *Christian pattern*, Jeremy Collier's *Essays upon several moral subjects* and several other instructional books.[44]

Kugler notes that the diaries began at a pivotal moment in Sarah's life, at a time when she was amidst 'a desperately unhappy marriage, insecure social standing, a lifelong habit of

[42] Kugler's *Errant Plagiary* is the only full-length study on Sarah's writings. Clare Gittings discusses her diaries specifically in the context of how she deals with life and death, while Vickery briefly touches on her discussions of authority, but usually in order to provide context to other contemporary sources. Clare Gittings, 'The Hell of Living: Reflections on Death in the Diary of Sarah, Lady Cowper, 1700-1716,' *Mortality* 2, no. 1 (1997), 23-41; Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter*, 14, 18.

[43] Adam Smyth, *Autobiography in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 2-3.

[44] Kugler, *Errant Plagiary*, 197-205.

reading and writing, and the crisis of Spencer's [her younger son's] trial'.[45] With her life in such turmoil, it should come as no surprise that Sarah used the diaries as a 'safe outlet for anger'.[46] Nowhere is this more evident than in her entries about her husband, the tensions that arose in him undermining her household authority and by extension the troubles that existed with servants, for which she primarily blamed William. Kugler errs on the side of presenting Sarah as a 'self-righteous' woman, yet a deeper look into how household authority played out for Sarah as a housewife can provide answers as to what unfolded when a woman did not master governance skills.

Sarah's household was typically made up of five servants: a cook; a chambermaid; a lady's maid; a footman and a coachman. J. Jean Hecht calculated that five was the average number of servants kept by the lesser gentry, and yet it was enough to cause Sarah constant strife over the years.[47] In one entry from December 1700, Sarah bemoaned the fact that, 'there is but one of the five at this time whose service is easie to me, and she after many obligations, I find unsincere'.[48] A later entry from 1709 reflects the tendency for the Cowpers' servants to quickly come and go, as Sarah detailed that of the five servants she kept, the 'eldest'—the one who had been there the longest—had only been with her six months. Even with such young blood in the house, Sarah claimed 'I already discern in two of 'em much fraud, deceit and other wickedness'.[49]

Sarah's entries concerning the management of these servants while her husband was alive provide excellent insight into the contemporary ideals of household authority and partnership discussed above. As a socially conservative woman, Sarah believed strongly in the husband being the head of the household, seamlessly including tracts that supported a wife being subordinate to her husband in between her own words.[50] Within those roles, Sarah shaped her position in the household: 'my servants I can only *admonish or instruct* not rule or govern them, being my self subordinate to the will of another'.[51] Sarah may have subscribed to notions of household authority—related to gender and marital position—but she also saw this structure as the root cause of all domestic authority being misaligned. Rather than blaming herself, she blamed a top-down poisoning of the household, in which everything was out of sorts: 'Most things of this world are to me as tho' I had them not. A hus[band] I have

[45] Ibid., 3.
[46] Ibid., 9.
[47] J. Jean Hecht, *The Domestic Servant Class in Eighteenth Century England* (London: Routledge and Paul, 1956), 7.
[48] Hertfordshire Archives and Local Studies (HALS), D/EP F29, Diary of Sarah, Lady Cowper, vol. 1 (1700-2), 39.
[49] HALS, D/EP F32, Diary of Sarah, Lady Cowper, vol. 4 (1706-9), 338.
[50] Kugler, *Errant Plagiary*, 48.
[51] HALS, D/EP F31, Diary of Sarah, Lady Cowper, vol. 3 (1705-6), 126.

without mutual complaisance or right correspondence. Children without society or kind conversation, a house and servants without authority or command'.[52] Instead of finding ways to regain any control of her household, as perhaps a skilful housewife might, Sarah retreated into her diary, stating that her satisfaction 'must arise from the contentment of my own mind…pious life gives power, liberty, ease and peace'.[53]

Within the family hierarchy the ultimate authority—particularly in hiring and firing—lay with the husband. However, amongst the mistress's responsibilities, instruction was key and she led the everyday activities of her servants. Sarah expected certain domestic powers as instructor, and many entries reveal a constant inner war that raged between wanting to maintain control of her family and to respect William's authority. One entry reflects this early on, in which Sarah laments her miserable state: 'To be yoak'd for Life to a disagreeable Temper; to be Contradicted in every thing, and bore down not by Reason by Authority of a Master whose Will and Commands a Woman cannot but despise at the same time She Obeys them'.[54] Sarah took issue with William undermining her due jurisdiction over such matters and she believed that given her way she would rule with reason. This is seen most plainly when Sarah lamented the poor state of her household's organisation, or 'the ill constitution' of her family. As Fay Bound has argued, 'in most cases once a marriage was breaking down household spaces became sites of conflict for a series of negotiations over the respective rights and obligations of spouses'.[55] Therefore, while many aspects of the Cowpers' marriage may have been failing, Sarah tended to focus on the space where she sensed she should have some degree of control: domestic servants. She noted that the role of housewife possessed much power in the rest of the world, but in her case, her authority was so weak amongst her servants that she 'must daily suffer the untoward consequences of so prodigious mismanagement'.[56]

In one early entry, she complained that she was left alone all day with a servant, who despite her will, had been in their house for seven years, and whom 'by the mismanagement of Sr Wm encourages to prodigious boldness, so as I can by no means be reckon'd Mrs of the family'.[57] William may have been—in Sarah's opinion—a poor manager, but it may also be true that servants took advantage of the marital breakdown. Servants could have resisted Sarah's authority, knowing that William's presence would limit the severity of her retaliation, or indeed they may have circumvented her authority altogether, going straight to William.

[52] D/EP F29, 33.
[53] D/EP F29, 33.
[54] Ibid., 161.
[55] Bound, 'An "Uncivil" Culture', 53.
[56] HALS, D/EP F30, Diary of Sarah, Lady Cowper, vol. 2 (1703-5), 292.
[57] D/EP F29, 16.

For instance, when Sarah gave the above-mentioned servant a month's warning to take leave, William told the girl that she might leave when she pleased.[58] Similarly, a cook who Sarah believed to be cheating her accounts was also given a month's warning, but upon this the cook 'presently ran to her Master to complain of me, and found him ready courteously to receive it'.[59]

It was not just that her authority was demeaned, for if William ruled with a firm hand, Sarah would have supported him. Indeed, this was the issue: William's mismanagement was due to his leniency. He did not even attempt to gain the skill of household manager, but rather chose to ignore any means of running a proper, pious household. At one point he told Sarah that it was his compassionate nature that made him so different to his wife, suggesting that 'the only way to be quiet [in the home], is to let [servants] do as they like'. But Sarah saw this as a direct affront to her, in which he subjected himself to the servants' neglect in order to spite her.[60] One of the moments that best demonstrates the wrestling of power between husband and wife came when Sarah decided to completely abandon her role as housekeeper to protest the limiting and undermining actions of William. In an entry that can be seen as defiant, particularly for a woman who so respected the ideas of hierarchy prescribed in her day, Sarah renounced her household duties:

> Since the priviledg of a wife and a mistress is deny'd me, nay the common power of all house-keepers it is; to dispose of the women servants, it resembles the tyranny of Pharoah to demand brick without straw…I will resign the whole to the management of Sr Wm and resolve to live quiet in my chamber, meddling no further to put out or take in any servant but she that must wait on me.[61]

When William wanted to go to Hertford, Sarah decided not to go with him so that their situation would not become public, explaining that 'it is a great folly to go there, to expose our selves, by letting the Town know he is *turn'd House-keeper* and misrules the Maids'.[62] The notion that it would be shameful for a husband to be seen as the housekeeper reinforces the idea of gender roles for man and wife within the management of the home. The fact that he was a manager of the female domestics, and a bad one at that, enforced how shameful the Cowper household was. Resolute not to meddle in affairs, Sarah made several mentions of the mismanagement that continued in her home, which she refused to correct. She did not relinquish full control, taking steps like letting go a lady's maid for her 'insufferable habit of Lying'. Nevertheless, she continued to take the back seat for nearly a year, only returning to her position when William solicited her to do so in October 1702. In the end, she admitted

[58] Ibid., 19.
[59] Ibid., 146.
[60] Ibid., 216.
[61] Ibid., 168.
[62] Ibid., 230, emphasis added.

that leaving her position had not provided an answer to her aims, 'which was to live in peace and quiet', but had been quite troublesome.[63] Although Sarah continued to be critical of how William chose to keep up his end of household management, and the ways in which he inappropriately and frustratingly interfered, she preferred to have some authority as housewife.

Despite attributing most of the household's failing to her husband, problems with servants continued even after his death in 1706. In fact, Sarah was eventually forced to admit that while before her widowhood she had thought that if she were the sole authority in the home, she would be able to manage servants to her content, the reality was that servants continued to fatigue and trouble her. In certain moments, usually after angry outbursts, Sarah was able to partake in some self-reflection and wondered what more she could do, or how she could adjust her instruction, although these moments are few and far between, and were often simply plagiarised advice from prescriptive texts. While her religiously motivated self-reflection was most prominent in later years, it occurred throughout her diaries. In one particularly retrospective entry from 23 March 1701, Sarah considered her own prejudices against 'most of that rank', wondering if 'perhaps I ought to consider the blame belong more to our selves than them who for want of instruction, good order and management become worse than otherwise they should'. Although this sentiment is at odds with most other entries that relate to servants, it is important for it shows the emphasis on good management that was required of the mistress. As this entry was from when her husband was still alive, it could be a subversive comment about his mismanagement in the home, but it nonetheless acknowledges that the housekeeper required a certain level of skill in order to maintain good servants. Six years later, when frustrated by her chambermaids' inability to follow what she saw as 'a positive command very easy to perform', Sarah once again took the opportunity to reflect, while still enforcing the idea that servants were of a different rank: 'But perhaps I as little follow the rules set myself which is … not to instruct stupid and dull understandings, for they will resist your instructions as a wall resists and drives back the Rays of the Sun'.[64] The mixture of self-reflection and outbursts reveal that Sarah had limited skill in terms of management, heavily ascribing to contemporary ideas of household hierarchy without having the means to smoothly enforce them within her own household.

Sarah lacked any ability to instruct her servants. It would appear most of Sarah's knowledge came from reading texts, not from experience, so she only knew what it took to run a household in theory rather than in practice. In one entry she critiqued the way in which

[63] Ibid., 219, 288.
[64] D/EP F32, 25.

one ‘Sir W L—’ ran his estate, the first problem being that despite the sheer size of his property, he hired ‘no more than one maid servant and a fine house-keeper’. Although she claimed she did not want to judge rashly, she decided that the ‘oeconomy’ was ‘very unaccountable to me’, as everything in his home was dirty and the food was poorly prepared. She finished her critique by noting ‘I am apt to think secret instruction is wanting for the whole management seems without discretion’. Within her criticism of others, she was able to list what a good oeconomy required: a mistress to instruct the servants in cleanliness, care and cooking. Similarly, the prescriptive literature she referred to clearly defined the role of mistress and servant. The ideal of the latter is one with ‘a lazy toung and a busie hand’, while it is the former’s job to adequately guide the said hand.[65] Yet when it came to her own household, it seems one could equally judge her poor instruction and failure to guide busy hands.

We can briefly examine the Yorkshirewoman Lady Margaret Hoby for a comparison of a first-hand account of a well-managed household. Although written much earlier—at the turn of the seventeenth century, before the idea of ‘servant problem’ was popularised—Margaret demonstrated how a woman could work in accordance with her servants. Like Sarah, Margaret was a woman greatly concerned with religious morality, as a ‘godly householder in the recusant north’, yet it would appear she had actually mastered how to put theory into practice.[66] Margaret rarely recorded servants being wicked, improper or flawed. Rather, she regularly recorded moments where she ‘instructed some of my familie (meaning servants)’, ‘tooke order of thinges’ and busied herself with her maids.[67] Margaret’s willingness to spend time with her servants may have come from her having a slightly smaller household, requiring more hands-on activity, but it also suggests that she recognised how to be a good housewife and took responsibility for her servants’ actions in ways that Sarah did not. Since Margaret’s diary was ‘a record of her relentless efforts…to change how Protestantism was lived and practiced in England’, it can be read as a woman striving to present herself as the ideal Protestant housewife; nevertheless, she seemed to be living in accordance with a good Christian lady’s calling in a way that Sarah was not. This is clearly seen by the way that Sarah, even in widowhood, still evaded responsibility for a disorderly household, blaming the ‘wicked and profligate’ age that produced vile servants.[68]

[65] Ibid., 193, 212.

[66] Julie Crawford, ‘Reconsidering Early Modern Women’s Reading, or, How Margaret Hoby Read Her de Mornay,’ *Huntington Library Quarterly* 73, no. 2 (June 2010), 194.

[67] Lady Margaret Hoby, *Diary of Lady Margaret Hoby, 1599-1605*, ed. Dorothy M. Meades (London: Routledge, 1930), 89, 96.

[68] HALS, D/EP F33, Diary of Sarah, Lady Cowper, vol. 5 (1709-11), 297.

As the master in a servant/master relationship, Sarah saw herself as better than her servants, a view she used to justify her actions, even if she was not the best of rulers. As with most things, this viewpoint had a religious undertone, as she reflected upon the examples of Jesus and how he mentored his disciples. She used the prescriptions of clergy and sermons to construct her relationship with her servants. In one passage, Sarah borrowed particularly heavily from the works of Simon Patrick, the bishop of Ely, whose texts she appeared to be very familiar with. On May 12 1705, she wrote:

> A servant will not be corrected by words—is not to be amended by reason or perswasion, no nor by reproofs or threats, a stubborn obstinate servant whose Heart is harden'd against all words that can be spoken to 'em good or bad – if a wise man contendeth with a foolish man whether he rage or laugh there is no rest – as much as to say he shall get nothing if contend with a fool but either to be derided or provok'd to Anger by him.

This passage was an amalgamation of Patrick's reflections in *The proverbs of Solomon paraphrased* (1683). Patrick noted that not all servants refused to answer, stating that the Proverbs spoke of servants who did not amend their faults for which they had already been reproved, 'which is not the quality of all *servants*; and there I have said *slave*. Or else we must interpret it…a *stubborn, obstinate servant*'. This distinction is crucial as it points to the character of the servant, who refused to listen rather than one who was incapable of doing so.[69] The second part of the passage refers to Proverbs 29:9: 'if a wise man contendeth with a foolish man, whether he rage or laugh, there is no rest'. Patrick pointed out that there was some debate as to whether it was the wise man or the fool who raged and laughed, but ultimately it was the master who would be 'derided or provoked to anger', and it was clear that Sarah followed his interpretation.[70] Throughout her diary she bemoaned moments when she was driven to anger; however, by incorporating Patrick's analysis she could partially shift the blame, being provoked to anger rather than having an angry disposition. Religious overtones gave Sarah credence in seeing herself as a mistress in charge of the spiritual health of her household, or her family. And when servants did not respond to her religious instruction, she used language such as 'chide', once more reflecting the contemporary view that the master or mistress was like the parent, and the servant was like the child, unconcerned with their parents' words or unable to comprehend them.[71]

The biggest fault that Sarah saw in her servants was lying, a topic that Sarah returned to regularly, insisting 'a liar shall not dwell with me'.[72] There was more than the religious

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[69] Simon Patrick, *The Proverbs of Solomon Paraphrased* (London: Printed by M. Flesher, 1683), 517.
[70] Ibid., 510.
[71] D/EP F29, 273; D/EP F32, 286; HALS, D/EP F34, Diary of Sarah, Lady Cowper, vol. 6 (1711-13), 6.
[72] D/EP F29, 219.

morality that drove Sarah to detest lying. A lying servant had the capacity to undermine a mistress's managerial skills, for if they lied about their tasks and a mistress did not catch them in their lies, she was not successful in her own position. This is reminiscent of contemporaries' belief that in order to maintain household hierarchy, those at the top had to control the bad behaviours of those below. It also reflected the fears that servants who were inwardly unclean could outwardly besmirch the home.[73] So, while Sarah took a moral stance, there were underlying currents of anxiety that were revealed when she agonised over the honesty of her servants.

But lying was just one trait that caused Sarah anxieties about her household. Indeed, her diaries are full of allusions to the ways in which she suffered at the hands of her inferiors. One particularly colourful anecdote is revelatory of how the servants made Sarah feel:

> Alas after all my days pass away unprofitable at best I bid my waiting woman get me a piece of Chalk that I might score up every days peace which they let me have among 'em, and said should I live another whole year a little Bit wou'd serve; whereas were it to mark the Hourly offences and provocation given me which nothing do's but what is wicked, A lump big as her head wou'd serve no long time.[74]

According to her, the offences against her far outweighed the peace that hired help should have provided her. We can use hyperboles like the lump of chalk to think about Sarah as a mistress and the reality of the 'hourly offences' her servants caused her. Perhaps her servants were not only dissatisfied with her mismanagement, but also retaliated in their own ways. Since Sarah rarely went into detail about specific task expectations and corresponding failures in terms of servants' abilities, her complaints about their provocation hint that they may have been implementing what James C. Scott entitles 'weapons of the weak'. In his anthropological studies Scott details the ways in which 'relatively powerless groups' participated in informal and covert tactics of everyday resistance, such as 'foot dragging, dissimulation, desertion, false compliance, pilfering, feigned ignorance, slander, arson, sabotage and so on'.[75] In Sarah's diaries we can certainly see, at least according to her, that the servants weren't afraid to participate in these small acts of resistance, such as dragging their feet in what she believed to be simple tasks. While 'servants most characteristically expressed discontent about their relationship with their master by performing their work carelessly and insufficiently', as Sarah attested they did, she could retaliate in little ways, refusing 'extra fringe benefits' but she was 'still obliged to maintain [servants] at a subsistence level if [she] did not want to lose [her] investment completely'.[76] Servants were

[73] For further discussion see Chapter 4.

[74] D/EP F34, 267.

[75] James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1985), 29.

[76] Ibid., 33.

waged, and time and money was spent on setting them up in the household and providing necessaries, only making them replaceable to a degree, and therefore, they were somewhat able to be insufficient or resist.

While Sarah recognised that they were an investment, even if she did not explicitly use those terms, it did not stop her from continually referring to her suffering. At various times she referred to her house as 'an emblem of Hell' or 'Bedlam'.[77] She attributed much of this to her servants' character, as she did in May 1706, saying 'I have pass'd some daies very unquietly with servants whom Idleness, fullness of bread and too much sleep, have even stupify'd, insomuch that I sometimes purpose to give ore all endeavour to amend 'em'. At times Sarah put such behaviour down to the state of service within the nation, at other times she made it seem as if no others suffer the way she does, claiming that 'it is not to be express'd or scarce imagin'd by those who feel it not, how much my vile and wicked servants do perplex and terrify mee, the circumstance whereof cannot be related'.[78]

Over the span of her diaries, Sarah continually referred to her servants as 'wicked', 'lewd', 'vile' or 'base'. The early modern anxiety connected to idleness was noted in chapter one, but Sarah took this further, equating idleness with wickedness that had the potential to corrupt entire households and oeconomies. There could be some truth to their nature being so base, however, it is more likely that contemporary writings, particularly religious texts and sermons, influenced Sarah. Many preached against the wickedness of servants, either by warning masters about who they brought into their household or telling them how to instruct servants in industry and diligence. The Puritan pastor Samuel Annesley cautioned his followers 'take heed who you admit into your Family', explaining 'as good servants bring a blessing along with them into the Families where they come; so sometimes wicked servants bring a curse with them into the house where they come'.[79] A wicked servant would be insolent and adverse to Christian teachings due to their nature and 'baseness from the Cradle'.[80] As we have seen, Sarah constantly placed the blame for her lot on William; however, one particular entry does this explicitly. In September 1705, Sarah wrote, 'at this time I groan under the most exquisite provocations given me by Sir Wm and his wicked servants that can be imaginable', unequivocally placing the 'wicked servants' under his ownership, akin to the wicked servants who serve the Devil.

On the flip side, in decrying her wicked, vile, irreligious servants Sarah was inadvertently professing her failures as a mistress. One of her primary roles was that of

[77] D/EP F32, 328; D/EP F34, 6; 208.
[78] D/EP F33, 86.
[79] Samuel Annesley, *A Supplement to the Morning-Exercise at Cripple-Gate* (London: Printed for Thomas Cockerill, 1676), 450.
[80] Ibid., 448.

religious mentor and curator of morality. By constantly disparaging the state of her household and never providing examples of chaste, upright servants in her home, one is led to wonder what Sarah was doing wrong in either her teachings or household instructions. Defoe's *Religious Courtship* provided a paradigm for mistress as mentor, a woman whose success Sarah never mirrored: a woman counselling her niece explained how she reformed her servants, stating, 'I have had a loose wicked irreligious Servant or two, who by taking some pains with them, have been brought to be very serious and very religious…it is not so hopeless a thing, however, as you may imagine; for if a Girl has any Modesty, she cannot but listen a little to the Instruction of those that wish her so well'.[81] It cannot be that all of Sarah's servants completely lacked modesty, and while it is clear that she had some concern for their spiritual wellbeing, it could be questioned whether she actually provided instruction or indeed wished her servants well.

At the diaries' core, it would appear that Sarah did not have a grasp on how to skilfully manage her household, and the failure to be a moral mentor was just one aspect of this. While other diarists discuss some direct involvement with household labours and work (Thomas Turner wrote about his wife working alongside the maid in the kitchen, Margaret Hoby wrote about working amongst her maids), Sarah seemed to be physically distant from her own servants.[82] This was a performative gesture, as Sarah physically removed herself to write her diary, and thus enforced her position as separate from, or above, the household. Her inability to go into detail about servants' specific failures indicate she may not have even been aware of what particularities she was looking for, whether it be in the kitchen, her bedroom or the stables. The complaints against servants rarely cited faults specific to their various types of work, except when it came to the cook and her male counterpart, the coachman, who were often chastised for their drinking. One cook was accused of short-changing Sarah in her accounts, something manuals of the time warned about. Another cook was described as forgetting her orders and keeping the family waiting for their dinner. However, it is helpful when reading such entries to think of the cook's point of view and other reasons she may have been delayed in her work. For example, Sarah's management could cause problems in the way her servants navigated their positions: perhaps she was not in touch with the quality of the food that her servants bought from the market and was more concerned with not being cheated out of money.[83] Yet another cook led the rest of her house in disorder, causing Sarah to fear her 'three females to be whores', detailing that 'the bastard-

[81] Daniel Defoe, *Religious Courtship: Being Historical Discourses, on the Necessity of Marrying Religious Husbands and Wives Only* (London: Printed for E. Matthews) 336-7.
[82] Tadmor, 'Where Was Mrs Turner?,' 104; Hoby, *Diary of Lady Margaret Hoby,* 89.
[83] D/EP F29, 129; 204.

bearing Cook is provided so with the coachman. The house wench with the footman shrewdly suspected…in short I had kept a bawdy-house all this winter'. And although she rid herself of 'all that crew', she feared that she would not find any better, 'the generality of servants are so very lewd'.[84] Once again, this reflects how she would often avoid pondering upon her own mismanagement and rather repeat the general commentary that was common amongst her peers: that their age was suffering from a 'servant problem'.

Sarah's failure to cite specific grievances regarding servants' household tasks, leads the modern reader to question if the servants were actually bad at performing their roles, or if they were even wicked. Rather the conflict she recorded was likely reflective of her unhappiness in her position in the household, her struggle between accepting traditional ideas of authority and finding her managerial place, as well as being a self-reflection, criticising a poorly managed household while using others—servants and her husband—as scapegoats for this criticism. By bringing managerial skill, or in Sarah's case, the lack thereof, into the fold we add another dimension of household tension: Sarah's own failures as a mistress and her inability to accept or reconcile them.

Ultimately, while Sarah struggled in governance, her diaries demonstrate that skill was required to successfully manage a household, as 'all authority over others is a talent entrusted with us by God'.[85] Not all blame can come back to Sarah, particularly if her coachmen did love a drink and William undermined her authority, yet her frustrations show that she never fully grasped housewifery skills. Indeed, in one instance it is reported that a certain 'lady of quality' reported that an old servant had called Sarah 'a bad mistress'. Sarah responded by saying it is difficult to be blamed when she has had such 'vile and wicked servants', but perhaps this rare glimpse into the other side's opinion, revealing that problems were partially due to the mistress herself. Maybe she could not fully give clear instructions or did not even know what she wanted, apart from abstract qualities such as honesty and diligence. On the other hand, it was possibly because Sarah's idea of good oeconomy was harsh severity, as seen in how she dealt with one cook, who she was 'forc'd to make a hasty Riddance of' based on her actions, stating that 'there is no greater virtue than to govern well a part whereof is oeconomy, wholesome severity is better than remiss liberty'.[86] While her complaints may arise from contempt towards the servant rank, they also demonstrate the difficulties of running a smooth household. The fact that she often physically removed herself from her servants, writing in a private room or in her chamber, suggests she was not comfortable with gestures of authority or that she did not physically embody the commanding

[84] D/EP F32, 335.
[85] D/EP F31, 19.
[86] D/EP F32, 124.

posture of a mistress. Sarah recognised the importance of good oeconomy and how it was tied to overseeing servants, though she never fully obtained it.

## Contemporary literature to and from the housewife

What, then, was good practice when it came to the 'management' of the household—a term, when considered in regard to the early modern period meant overseeing order and overall governance? For the author and translator Robert Codrington, management was of utmost importance for young ladies to learn, stressing that 'to govern a House is an excellent and a profitable imployment: there is nothing more beautifull than a Household well and peacebably governed', a line which the compiler of *The Gentlewomans Companion* borrowed for their own work.[87] In the 16 May 1710 issue of *The Tatler*, the author and politician, Richard Steele, mused about the souls of Man and Woman, deciding that they were 'made very unlike, according to the Employments for which they are designed'. Steele was quick to note that the 'Ladies will please to observe' that the qualities are different, not superior and inferior: the masculine virtue of wisdom is equally matched with that of feminine prudence. Among other things, prudence involved managing a family, which done well, 'is as worthy an Instance of Capacity, as to execute a great Employment'.[88]

The employment of housewifery involved wide-ranging tasks. Upon the death of his wife Margaret, Sir Anthony Ashley Cooper, the first earl of Shaftebury, reflected that she had been devoutly religious and of 'admirable wit and wisdom beyond any I ever knew'. He went on to lament the qualities that were lost with her, the 'most noble and bountiful mind…exceeding all in anything she undertook, housewifery, preserving, works with the needle, cookery…She was in discourse and counsel far beyond any woman'. Cooper was extoling his wife's virtues from a position of grief, yet all the same his words demonstrate the many skills a good housewife could possess: practical ones such as needlework and cookery; the ability to counsel and be a partner in the household; and wisdom and wit, which benefitted Margaret when it came to managing her household.[89] Glimpses of such supervisory roles and governing skills are found in contemporary writings by women, such as Lady Ann Clifford and Lady Sarah Cowper.[90] Beyond having to possess an awareness of one's own household, management and the positive quality of frugality required advanced intellectual skills from a woman. For instance, a housewife had to be wise when buying items

[87] Robert Codrington, *The Second Part of Youths Behaviour, or, Decency in Conversation Amongst Women* (London: Printed for W. Lee, 1664), 76; Woolley, *The Gentlewomans Companion*, 108.

[88] Steele, *The Tatler*, 44.

[89] Ralph Houlbrooke, *English Family Life, 1576-1716: An Anthology from Diaries* (New York, NY: Basil Blackwell, 1989), 69-70.

[90] Wendy Wall, *Staging Domesticity: Household Work and English Identity in Early Modern Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 21.

from the market, from knowing the best season for various products to being able to assess the quality of a product in relation to its price to recognising when goods were nearly spoiled or rotten. Even those who 'discharged' such a duty had to be knowledgeable about frugality according to contemporaries such as author James Bland.[91]

Being the mistress of a house, particularly one in which many servants lived and worked, was a time-consuming activity. Historians have estimated that women were occupied with household work for six or seven hours a day, yet as Amanda Flather notes, this varied depending on the wealth of the household, as well as the husband's occupation.[92] In addition, poets and ballad writers of the time quipped that a woman's work was never done.[93] The diaries of women such as Margaret Hoby do not record precise hours spent on work; however, they do demonstrate that it was spread throughout the day, indicating that almost any waking hour could be spent dealing with household management. For Margaret, she could be occupied with housework in the morning between breakfast and dinner, and again in the afternoon between dinner and supper, although she was often busy about the house before breaking fast. For example, one December morning she awoke, prayed, read the bible, 'after to work, then to breakfast: and so about the house'.[94] Through her diaries it becomes clear that Margaret could be active anytime from around 6 in the morning until 10 at night. Sarah Cowper often complained that the maids she hired failed to keep her expected hours. In one entry she grumbled that her maid rarely arrived in her chamber before seven, although her desire 'is they wou'd get up at 6' so that they could get the fires started. Sarah herself would get up as early as half past 5 in order to ring a bell and awake her maids, although this technique did not always work. And the maids' delay affected the smooth running of the house, as Sarah was prevented from performing her own duties before eight as she would have preferred.[95] In another instance a cook maid quit the family's service rather than rise at half six in the morning, as Sarah demanded.[96]

While these hours may have been more exhausting for the servants who were participating in physical labour at these times, the mistress nevertheless had to wake early to ensure the duties were being completed and usually stayed awake to oversee their completion. Several times Samuel Pepys noted the hours that his wife Elisabeth kept either to

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[91] James Bland, *An Essay in Praise of Women: or, a Looking-glass for Ladies* (London: Sold by J. Roberts, 1733), 59.

[92] Amanda Flather, *Gender and Space in Early Modern England* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press in association with The Royal Historical Society, 2007), 81.

[93] Mary Collier, *The Woman's Labour* (London: Sold by J. Roberts, 1739); *A Woman's Work is never done* (London: Printed for John Andrews, 1660).

[94] Hoby, *Diary of Lady Margaret Hoby*, 86.

[95] D/EP F31, 162.

[96] D/EP F29, 306.

ensure the maid was at her work or working alongside servants. One night Elisabeth stayed awake until two in the morning in order to wake up the maid so the two of them could start washing, while another night Pepys went to bed just past eleven, 'leaving my wife and the maid at their Linnen to get up'. [97] However, as the Pepys' financial situation improved, Elisabeth's involvement became less direct. A little over three years after these two instances, she awoke at early hours, usually four in the morning, but on these occasions she was simply awake to 'call the maids to *their* wash' or to clean.[98] Elisabeth's case excellently demonstrates the way in which women with more wealth, more maids and more authority—gained through social or economic standing—were able to be less hands-on, even if they still had a time-consuming role in the household.

The hours that are revealed in contemporary diaries are consistent in some ways to the working hours Hans-Joachim Voth traces of traders in eighteenth-century London. Using witness statements Voth finds that most work in the city began shortly before seven in the morning, which is on average when women of the household began tending to household affairs. However, Voth notes that 'skilled craftsmen, apprentices, and masters often worked until 7:00 pm or 8:00 pm', while some other unskilled labourers finished even earlier.[99] Unlike many of London's trades, the work of a mistress often continued after supper, into various hours of the evening depending on the state of the household. For example, Margaret Hoby worked later when the house had to be prepared for holy days or guests. The hours of unpaid labour are difficult to track, and the same is true for a woman's hours spent running a household. However, sources demonstrate that her working hours, while not the same day in and day out, were often lengthy.

One thing that can be determined is that in a large household the housewife usually took a hands-off approach, such as with Elisabeth Pepys. An early seventeenth-century sermon by Robert Wilkinson extolled the mistress who, though 'too high to stain her hands with bodily labour' could 'overseeth the waies of her household…and eateth not the bread of idleness'.[100] This reference to idleness is important: as noted in chapter one, idleness was a major concern for moralists of the time, and by acknowledging that a mistress could avoid idleness through governance conceded that it was indeed work. In praising his wife Katherine, Samuel Clarke detailed the ways in which she was an excellent mistress. In regard to her maids, she not only gave them good counsel and wholesome instructions, but she was

[97] Pepys, *The Diary of Samuel Pepys,* November 1660; 23 November 1660.
[98] Ibid., 11 January 1663/4; 21 January 1663/4, emphasis added.
[99] Hans-Joachim Voth, 'Time and Work in Eighteenth-Century London,' *The Journal of Economic History* 58, no. 1 (1998), 33.
[100] Robert Wilkinson, *The Merchant Royall: A Sermon Preached at White-Hall before the Kings Majestie* (London: Printed by Felix Kyngston, 1607), 26.

skilful in finding the balance between 'encouraging them in what was good' and instructing them in their ignorance—a quality Sarah Cowper clearly lacked. What was perhaps the most important quality of Katherine, was that she 'her self (being an active, and stirring disposition, and *having her hand in most business*) set them a Pattern, and gave them an Example how to order the same'.[101] Figuratively having a hand in all household duties without actually soiling one's body was the epitome of a good housewife.

As the early modern period progressed, writers tended to shift their focus away from instructing women on how to actively or 'creatively' participate in the production of their household and moved towards instructions on governing from a removed position, which some historians have understood to mean that over the eighteenth century 'the mistress's skills atrophied'.[102] Alice Clark championed this interpretation a century ago, noting the transition from production to consumption and 'the cultivation of ornamental qualities'.[103] However, this has been challenged recently by historians such as Amanda Vickery, or Laurel Thatcher Ulrich in her study of early-modern American women,. While productivity may not have been a mistress's contribution, as she stepped away from the spinning wheel, she contributed in other ways, symbolised alternatively by the memorandum book or the pocket, depending on the historian.[104] This thesis agrees with these later analyses, arguing that that the housewife was represented by the active, observing eye, cited by the likes of contemporaries such as Wilkinson. While the degree to which a woman soiled her hands varied, the gentlewoman's keen eye nevertheless demonstrated that the knowledge behind the hands had to be in place no matter the rank. In order to supervise, housewives had to have a knowledge of the domestic chores that were required for a clean home or the orders that had to be given in order for meals to be acceptably prepared and laid out on time.

A mistress's capacity to actually do the tasks she asked of her family is difficult to track. As discussed in the previous chapter, genteel women were concerned with maintaining soft, white hands, which indicated, at least on the surface, that they were not physically involved in the manual labours of the household. This accounted for the number of prescriptive pamphlets that provided recipes and instructions for beautifying hands.[105] Kate Smith argues that 'by employing the white hand as a means of confirming social distinction

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[101] Samuel Clarke, *A Looking-Glass for Good Women to Dress themselves by* (London: Printed for William Miller, 1677), 22-3.

[102] Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter*, 132; Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, 'Wheels, Looms, and the Gender Division of Labour in Eighteenth-Century New England,' *The William and Mary Quarterly* 55, no. 1 (Jan., 1998), 4-5.

[103] Alice Clark, *Working Life of Women in the Seventeenth-Century*, 1st ed., new impression (London: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd., 1968), 40.

[104] Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter*, 132.

[105] Kate Smith, 'In Her Hands Materializing Distinction in Georgian Britain,' *Cultural and Social History* 11, no. 4 (2014), 491-492.

between themselves and their servants, genteel women at once demonstrated the significant and divisive role that physical labour played in their lives'.[106] Though difficult to ascertain the degree to which they were physically involved, we know prudent management was crucial to the smooth running of the oeconomy, and this required working closely with the household servants.

If a mistress did not want to be taken for a fool or tricked by her servants, she had to be aware of the intricacies of her household in order to thoroughly check the work of her servants. A gentry woman's skills were located in her capacity to judge and ability to delegate, rather than physically perform, but the relationship between delegation and knowledge of a task was complicated. 'The ambiguity of elite commentary on the matter [of labour]', Vickery highlights, 'combined with the tendency to take the presence of servants for granted make it hard to ascertain with certainty how much physical drudgery a genteel mistress took upon herself'.[107] The women who noted their presence amongst their servants in their writings rarely went into detail about the tasks performed, or, like the eighteenth-century diarist Elizabeth Shackleton, they failed to systematically differentiate between the tasks performed by herself and those performed with help from servants and those performed by servants alone. Even Margaret Hoby, who noted her presence amongst servants, described delegation of tasks rather than hinting that she was occupied in the minute details. She could look over her pewter and assess its cleanliness and beauty, or she could note if a dinner was poorly dressed, but her actual ability to do those tasks herself is never proven. Sarah Cowper never provided any detail about the work of the servants, which could be read as a limited knowledge about household tasks.

Mary Collier suggested that the mistress of the household was out of touch with the more precise workings of their labours. The passage about the work of the washerwoman featured a mistress who, 'watches over her workers to "inform Herself, what Work is done that very Morn", and at the same time scolds them for using too much soap and fire, the very resources necessary to ensure that the work is completed'.[108] The mistress in this scenario was concerned with frugality, as expected of housewives, but could not balance this concern with ensuring that tasks such as washing were carried out correctly. Like other occupations, the role of housewife was one that could be mastered, but that did not mean it was inherent, as seen by Sarah Cowper. Girls could observe their mothers or read a number of the manuals mentioned above, as well as discuss household governance with their peers. However, it was

[106] Ibid., 493.
[107] Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter*, 146.
[108] Collier, *The Woman's Labour,* 13-14; William Christmas, *The Labr'ing Muses: Work, Writing, and the Social Order in English Plebeian Poetry, 1730-1830* (Newark: University of Deleware Press, 2001), 123.

practice and repetition that allowed a woman to sharpen her skills as she matured, and this required active work.

The housewife may not have been scrubbing the pewter or making the beds, but she did have other duties. Accounting was one of the most important aspects of a woman's skillset, as a wife, a singlewoman or a widow, as seen by the way in which housewifery manuals increasingly prioritised accounting throughout the eighteenth century. This skill deserves particular focus as it represents not only changing expectations of the housewife, but it also epitomises the intellectual abilities of certain women. Beverly Lemire and others have suggested that women's improved skills in accounting were due to the increase in prescriptive literature that encouraged wives to learn numerate skills, which boomed in the eighteenth century.[109] But the trope of the wife being frugal and managing the household's pocket strings predated 1700. In the sixteenth century, authors like Thomas Tusser emphasised that the wife had to be thrifty—economical as well as oeconomical. Within his many couplets on what makes a good housewife, Tusser compared ill housewifery, in which one thing or other was craved, with good housewifery in which 'nothing but nedefull will haue'. In another instance he reflected that 'ill huswifery wanteth with spending to fast, good huswiferye scanteth, the lenger to last'. Most concretely a bad housewife 'bringeth a shilling to naught', while a good housewife kept the coffers full, and saved for the future. But it was not just frugality, a mistress also had to know how to keep the household in order so as not to waste anything, as a good housewife would mend used goods rather than 'reneth and casteth as side' goods as the ill housewife would.[110]

Women had long been expected to keep track of household goods; however, with the spreading mastery of numeracy in the eighteenth century, these skills began to take form in official records and bookkeeping. Manuals, such as Hannah Woolley's, instructed young women in the ways of arithmetic. In *The compleat servant-maid*, Woolley provided instructions for young women who wished to one day run a household of their own. Before numeracy could be mastered, handwriting was key to running a household. In discussing how the body remembers, Paul Connerton considers the act of writing and its relationship with the body:

[109] Beverly Lemire, *The Business of Everyday Life: Gender, Practice and Social Politics in England, c. 1600-1900* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), 193.

[110] Thomas Tusser, *A Hundreth Good Pointes of Husbandry lately Maried vnto a Hundreth good Poynts of Huswifery* (London: Printed by Henry Denham, 1570), 39.

> It is certainly true that writing, the most obvious example of inscription, has an irreducible bodily component…Each of these acts [forming letters]…is accompanied by a corresponding muscular action. The way in which we generally adhere to the same method of forming the same character in handwriting demonstrates that writing entails a minimal muscular skill…We could of course consider a quite different case where the practice of good handwriting is conceived of as part of the training of a docile body.[111]

While today handwriting is a skill that could be taken for granted, as it is imbued in us as early as we can remember, it should not be overlooked that it was something that had to be learned and mastered, hence why the seventeenth-century account keeper Sarah Fell is commented on for being outstanding in her time for the legibility of her accounts.[112] Woolley's instructions certainly point to this: handwriting was not something accessible to all, but it was a valuable skill for young women who someday wanted to be mistresses of their own household. The particularities that Woolley felt necessary to share not only reveal the physical skill involved, but also demonstrate that handwriting had to be learned. 'Hold the pen in the right hand', Woolley instructed the young maid 'with the hollow side downward, on the left side place your Thumb rising in joynt, on the left side your middle finger near half an inch from the end of the Nib, and your forefinger on the top, a small distance from your Thumb'.[113] When a manual skill such as handwriting is mastered, we do not even need to think about how we hold a writing utensil; however, the fact that directions for each finger were given show that handwriting was an unfamiliar skill for most young women, but one that could be learned.

As Connerton shows, the bodily component is not limited to the hand. Good handwriting requires the entire body. For that reason, Woolley included instructions about how to sit when writing, which involved choosing a place with good lighting, stressing the visual aspects and the need to maintain good eyesight. The other directions were put in place to maintain a good posture, a characteristic of a docile woman: 'hold your head up…hold not your head one way nor other, but look right forward…draw in your right elbow, turn your hand outward and bear it lightly, gripe not the pen too hard, with your left hand stay the paper', connecting women's activities and gesture.[114] Woolley also included basic instructions, such as how to fill the pen with ink, what a good pen entailed, and how to master various type of hand, such as Roman or Italian, including not only written instruction but also examples to be copied. Girls preparing themselves to govern a household of their own first

[111] Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 77.
[112] Rebecca E. Connor, *Women, Accounting and Narrative: Keeping Bookes in Eighteenth-Century England* (London: Routledge, 2004), 64-65.
[113] Hannah Woolley, *The Compleat Servant-Maid: or, the Young Maiden's Tutor* (London: Printed for T. Passinger, 1677), 17-9.
[114] Ibid., 19.

embodied writing skills, which then could be paired with accounting. Among the many praises John Batchiler (cited in the introduction) bestowed upon Susanna Perwich, was that she was 'good at the pen', meaning 'she *writ* well, *cypher'd*, cast *account*, Could tell to what the *sums* amount Spent in the House', showing how writing was integral to accounting.[115]

After instructing how to master good handwriting, Woolley included a section entitled 'Directions of Arithmetick'. The order in which she introduced these reflects the hierarchy of skills. The section on arithmetic is haltingly brief, containing short introductions to numeration, addition and subtraction, the value of English money and how many pence and shilling make up a pounds. She finished the short section by stating that she had 'briefly and plainly shewn you so much of Arithmetick, as is necessary for your keeping account of what you receive and disburse', quickly moving on to 'some directions for carving'.[116] The brevity of instruction supports the contemporary belief that women only needed to know the basics of arithmetic in order to manage household accounts, opposed to more masculine trades such as butcher, blacksmith or architect who had to deal with finance, cost and various measurements.[117]

An anonymous guidebook for housewives printed seventy years later went into more detail, dedicating five times as many pages to the subject, but still calling itself 'an easy and familiar introduction' to the subject, 'particularly adapted to the service of the Fair Sex'.[118] *The Accomplished Housewife* supported the idea that arithmetic should be a part of a young girl's education, stressing she should be acquainted with the art by the age of seven.[119] In addition to directions similar to Woolley's, the author included a table for multiplying figures, division, compound addition for money and tables to help not only with English coin, but various types of weights, wine measurements and time—although perhaps interestingly among the many types of measurements they include, fabric is not amongst them. The values given by the author go up to the millions, and while a household would never have an income of such value, these sums allowed a woman to thoroughly practice her arithmetic and helped to establish the trustworthiness of the author and his numerical knowledge.[120] But even with all this information, the author concluded in a similar tone to Woolley, implying female

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[115] John Batchiler, *The Virgins Pattern, in the Exemplary Life and Lamented Death of Mrs Susanna Perwich* (London: Printed by Simon Dover, 1661), 54. Original emphasis.

[116] Woolley, *The Compleat Servant-Maid*, 21-9.

[117] Elizabeth Spencer, 'The Description and Use of Women's Clothing in Eighteenth-century England: With special reference to the counties of Yorkshire and Nottinghamshire' (PhD Thesis, University of York, 2017), 122.

[118] *The Accomplished Housewife; or, the Gentlewoman's Companion* (London: Printed for J. Newbery, 1745), 85.

[119] Ibid., 7-8.

[120] Natasha Glaisyer has examined the growing field of numerical handbooks and the concern whether these could be trusted in 'Calculating Credibility: Print Culture, Trust and Economic Figures in early Eighteenth-Century England,' *Economic History Review* 60, no. 4 (2007), 685-711.

numeracy should be intentionally limited: 'we shall not puzzle our Female readers with any farther Forms of Arithmetical Calculations; but shall close this Branch of their Education, with giving them *a transient Idea of the best Method for keeping their Account of Cash*'.[121]

Amy Froide observes that the education of women, particularly urban tradeswomen and gentlewomen, routinely included arithmetic.[122] Froide identifies examples of schools that promoted arithmetic as well as schoolmistresses advertising their services to teach young ladies arithmetic, often in tandem with 'writing a good Hand' and other necessary female accomplishments.[123] Even if it was limited, accounting was essential for a woman to successfully help her household. The ways in which handwriting and arithmetic were introduced to girls, particularly how authors included posture and recognised the limits of this education, demonstrate how feminine skillsets were embodied, similar to the way Rozsika Parker described embroidery's role in instilling ideal feminine traits.

In her study on gentry accounts in which consumer responsibility was split between the husband and wife, Vickery acknowledges that these sources 'are a representation of the way the allocation of financial responsibility between husband and wife was conceptualised'.[124] Examining the types of entries by female and male hands can shed light on how household responsibilities were divided. Vickery argues that women's spending was more daily, repetitive and mundane, compared to men's spending, which was impulsive and what she deems 'occasional'. If true, this supports the idea that women had a hand in the daily affairs of the home, beyond just child-rearing and managing female servants. Arguments that women's spending was not only concerned with the day-to-day but also relied on thriftiness suggest that they had to be attuned to the many needs of the household.[125] A housewife's capacity to adapt to the changing domestic situation required a learned intellectual ability that was crafted through her education as young girl, shadowing her mother and other women, reading and using advice manuals.

It is possible that some women were keeping accounts alongside their husband in order to prepare for a scenario in which they became the head of the household, such as in widowhood or during long physical absences by their husbands. Daniel Defoe stressed that 'every Tradesman make his wife so much acquainted with his trade, and so much mistress of the managing part of it, that she might be able to carry it on if she pleased, in case of his

[121] *The Accomplished Housewife*, 123, emphasis added.
[122] Amy Froide, 'Learning to Invest: Women's Education in Arithmetic and Accounting in Early Modern England,' *Early Modern Women* 10, no. 1 (Fall 2015), 4.
[123] Ibid., 4-5.
[124] Vickery, 'His and Hers,' 16.
[125] Wrightson, 'The Politics of the Parish,' 15.

death'.[126] And while this applied to business and not the home, it makes sense that similar expectations were held for the household affairs. Indeed, Fitzherbert instructed both husband and wife to keep account of their spending and to keep an eye on household expenses.[127] It is important to note, however, that the act of female accounting, while demonstrative of the growing numeracy and skillset of housewives, was not equal to more marital freedom. As touched upon, the household, even in one where there was a sense of oeconomical partnership, was still operated by male authority. A husband's control over his wife's books and her expenditures were a means of emphasising a woman's subordinate position.[128] Although accounting was a shared intellectual site between husband and wife, it was also a practise that helped create and confirm the former's domestic authority.

Adam Smyth has sought to demonstrate the expressive nature of financial accounts in this period, in order to use them as sources in 'accounting for a life'. He recognises that they are not only templates for autobiography, but that they are also complex documents, 'more…than a simple collection of facts'.[129] We can return to Yorkshire for a deeper look at a large household in which the wife was fairly active in daily affairs. Lady Henrietta Maria Vanbrugh (née Yarburgh) kept a number of accounts, both alongside her husband and throughout much of her widowhood. They can be used, as Smyth suggests they ought, to illuminate her life as a housewife. Henrietta Maria was born to Colonel James Yarburgh, of Snaith Hall, and his wife, Anne, in 1693. She was only 15 when her father died and her mother inherited the family estate of Heslington Hall—a manor house in York, acquired from Anne's father, Thomas Hesketh. It seems likely that during her young adulthood she learned much about the ways of keeping a household from various women in her life, including her mother, who remained unmarried until her death in 1741. Henrietta Maria was not the first woman in her family to record her activity in household affairs. Letters received by her paternal grandmother Lady Henrietta Maria Yarburgh—presumably her namesake and referred to here as Yarburgh to avoid confusion—reveal many ways in which women shared knowledge with one another.

A wide range of topics relating to the household, such as servants, medicine and textiles, were covered by Yarburgh and her acquaintances.[130] In one instance, one H. Wyvill, who called herself 'Your ladyship's dutifful daughter', wrote to Yarburgh about a servant she

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[126] Daniel Defoe, *The Complete English Tradesman* (London: Printed for Charles Rivington, 1727), 291.

[127] John Fitzherbert, *The Book of Husbandry* (1540), 63v.

[128] Harvey, *The Little Republic*, 16; Christine Wiskins, 'Accounting for business: Financial management in the eighteenth century,' in *Women and their Money 1700-1950: Essays on Women and Finance*, eds. Anne Laurence, Josephine Maltby and Janette Rutterford (Abingdon: Taylor & Francis, 2008), 73-9.

[129] Smyth, *Autobiography in Early Modern England*, 9; 59.

[130] BIHR, YM/CP/1.

hoped would join her household. Wyvill complained that she was lacking domestic help, hoping one Betty Wraith could come to her, stating 'I understood that she had got a place which was the reason I said nothing more of her but if she be not in service, I desire her as soon as may be having none in that place'. Clearly Wyvill and Yarburgh had discussed the matter of servants before, as the former stated, 'as for the other servant which your Ladyship recommended, I hope you will not take it ill that I did not hire her but call to mind that I told you I had got one at the time when you mentioned her to me'. The way in which the women corresponded about servants reinforces women's role in maintaining their household and managing the right number of servants.

Two letters received from Millicent Banks and her husband Robert of Hull detail another situation with servants, this one less positive. Yarburgh had recommended Jane Harrison to the service of the Banks, but Jane apparently could not overcome her poor reputation, the account of which 'eclipsed' any good credit. Indeed, the rumours that were spread around Hull about Jane were so much that 'her pride not being able to bear it', she eventually took a dose of poison 'that they say could have kill'd a Horse' and was dead within 30 hours. Robert reported that Jane suffered from the rejection of Mr Legard's coachman alongside the slander, which drove her to claim, 'I have lost my Reputation, & I value not my Life'. The letter from Millicent reveals that as Jane was dying, Robert questioned her about a black tabby petticoat Yarburgh claimed the young girl took from her. While these exchanges were driven more by gossip than management, they still capture the relationships between servants and their mistresses. Other letters received by Yarburgh discussed clothing purchases and detailed descriptions of textile accounts, such as prices, quality, styles and quantities. The ability to discuss the materials purchased for the home formed a large part of the younger Henrietta Maria's accounts as well.

In 1719, the young Henrietta Maria married Sir John Vanbrugh, the architect and dramatist; she was 26 and he was 55.[131] After their marriage, they spent most of their time at Vanbrugh's London estate, returning only occasionally to Heslington. The extant household accounts by John began in 1715 and continued until his death in 1726. These accounts mainly pertain to the family's house in Greenwich, called Vanbrugh Castle, or its nick-name Goose-Pie House, a small townhouse that was in Whitehall where John spent his last days. In his account keeping, John primarily recorded rents paid and received, taxes, interests and annuity paid to family members, as well as bills paid to a variety of people, such as tanners, tailors, saddlers or joiners doing work on his various properties.[132] On occasion he also recorded

[131] Kerry Downes, 'Vanbrugh, Sir John (1664-1726),' *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/28059, accessed 10 January 2019.

[132] BIHR, YM/VAN/16.

payments for small goods, like jugs or pans, and clothing, such as 'lining for a wastecoat' or 'muslin neckcloths', but on the whole his monthly and yearly expenditures were considerably larger than those of his wife. He also recorded servants' wages, which at the start of the account were usually paid quarterly, although female servants were more likely to be paid in full at the end of a year's service or when they left the household. While John was still alive, Henrietta simultaneously kept accounts from 1721 onwards, although only for payments towards 'odd things', 'eatables' and 'utensils'. These were the objects used for the household, like foodstuffs and kitchenware. Henrietta's account dealt more with the daily household materials, while John's dealt with larger estate issues, similar to Vickery's findings in other households.

However, when considering the accounts from after John's death in March 1726, it becomes apparent that Henrietta was developing her skills in household management throughout her marriage, and probably even before. After his death, John's account book simply switched to Henrietta's hand, and she kept up the same accounts, including rents and annuity paid to John's sister. This was used until August 1726, and then Henrietta started up a new one of her own, combining the same expenditures her husband had been recording as well as the daily needs of the household. Henrietta also kept some accounts relating to her sole surviving child, Charles, throughout his teenage years, instructing him through example. It is interesting to note that many of her entries were more detailed than her husband's, particularly when it came to describing the bills she paid to the maids or clothing that was purchased. For example, once Henrietta took over from her husband, she listed a bill paid to Mary Rooth, one of the family's long-term servants, 'for making three gowns and peticoates, and two suits of headcloths'.[133] This is compared to the many instances where John simply recorded that he 'paid a bill' to whomever.

Similar gendered difference of description can be seen in court cases where a husband and wife both discussed items being stolen. Within the assize court records there are a number of women who showed knowledge of products, particularly in comparison to their husbands. For example, in 1658, both Dorothy Outhwaite and her husband George, of Kirkbymoorside in the North Riding, testified about an incident three years prior in which they were robbed. Dorothy described the items that were taken from their cupboard in great detail, saying 'this Informant did misse out of the saide cubbord sixe silver spoones & seavan shillings sixe pence in mony, three of which were Apostle Spoones & the other two were lesse, one of which was a plaine one with an E & A B upon itt the other two were knott'. In comparison, George simply stated, 'this informant had five or sixe silver spoones taken out of

[133] BIHR, YM/VAN/16.

a Cubbord'. He spent more effort describing how the cupboard was broken into (a board raised up, nails drawn, etc.). Not only was Dorothy more familiar with the stolen items, she remembered them in detail even three years later.[134]

When Margaret Davison, alias Elinor Jefferson, was accused of stealing linen and wool from Peter Staphord of the West Riding in 1659, it was Peter's wife, Anne, who acted witness in the case, and it was she who described the types of clothing that were taken and their monetary value. As she was described as Anne, his wife, not a widow, we can presume he was still living at the time. This would suggest that Anne, as the housewife, had more knowledge of the waistcoat, petticoat and stockings that were taken.[135] A similar incident occurred in the North Riding in 1665 when Elizabeth, the wife of Humfrey Blackston, recounted what happened in the aftermath of their linens being stolen:

> And that this morning she (Elizabeth) with John Armstrong the Constable and Bartholomew Bell goeing to search for the same (linens stolen from her husband) in the Towne of Haltwish after the searching in severall other places they came to the house of John Snawdon and they tould his wife (Ann) they were come to search for cloath stolne as aforesaid who prsently rose from the place where she was bakeing and went into an upper loft as if she would show them what cloath she had.[136]

It was Elizabeth who went about trying to find the linens, presumably because she would be better at identifying them, even if they were described as being stolen specifically from her husband. Furthermore, when they suspected that Ann Snawdon was hiding the linens up her petticoats, John and Bartholomew attempted to search her room and person. Ann then made a large uproar suggesting it would be indecent for men to search her personal area and therefore it was Elizabeth who went alone to search Ann and found the exact possessions she was missing. These cases shine light on the relationship between a housewife and household goods, particularly clothing or kitchenware.

The reasons why such descriptions were included by the mistress of the house and not by the master could be varied. On the one hand, it may indicate that Henrietta had more time to dedicate to her accounts than her husband and thus could afford to add more detail. On the other hand, perhaps Henrietta felt more of a need to justify her purchases on materials for the household and in describing them she could better keep track of what was being procured, using notes to remind her why or how often certain items of clothing were being bought. Maxine Berg has suggested it was because women had more sentimental attachment to

[134] The National Archives (TNA), ASSI 45/5/5/9-10.
[135] TNA, ASSI 45/5/6/10.
[136] TNA, ASSI 45/7/2/137.

clothing, gendering household purchases in a much more stereotypical manner.[137] However, this would likely result in such accounts being one off, as each woman might have different relationships with different items of clothing. There certainly may have been a material attachment to these items, but men almost certainly also had attachments to certain items and yet did not include more details about textiles or the like.

A more complex reason could relate back to the idea of skill. Women's relationship to certain market goods and their prevalence in particular occupations such as tailoring have already been discussed. In a similar vein, Henrietta and other women's descriptive textile accounts may reflect a gendered embodied knowledge, demonstrating an awareness of textile products. Maybe the wife had more time or a greater need to justify her purchases, but equally, women such as Henrietta likely knew the worth of different materials. This knowledge, which would accumulate over time as she supervised purchases and the apparel of all the members of her household, would be easier for her to incorporate into the accounts. Conversely, it would make sense for John to include in his account what specific projects he was paying joiners for and the like, reflected in the way in which he was more detailed in his accounts for work on the estates or George Outhwaite discussing the cupboard. With familiarity comes ease in noting the precise nature of items and materials relating to the part of the household where one held authority.

Henrietta's numeracy did not relate simply to textiles and clothing. Throughout most of her adult life she had continued correspondence with her brothers in Yorkshire, particularly the surviving Yaburgh heir, Hesketh.[138] These letters reported family affairs but also often dealt with finances, particularly in relation to mortgages and legacies from deceased family members. Henrietta was entrusted with the finances for her family, as shown in one letter to Hesketh about what they received from their uncle, in which she claimed that 'the hundred pound you have drawn for shall be ready when the bill comes, but if each of my Brothers draws for as much I must sell out of the stocks again'. While she frequently asked for her brother's permission to move forward, she also demonstrated a degree of authority and financial knowledge. For example, in a later letter she stated that she would be willing to lend Hesketh a thousand pounds, if he ordered Mr Mayer to 'draw out the mortage & Bond in a proper manner'. She was also in charge of dealing with her sister's affairs (it is not clear what precise relation this 'sister' was, her blood sister, sister-in-law or some other close female relation), a task that combined financial and textile knowledge. In dealing with the unnamed deceased sister's clothes, Henrietta told her brothers 'I will have them praised &

[137] Maxine Berg, *Luxury and Pleasure in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 227.

[138] BIHR, YM/CP/2.

sold if my Brothers will have them', but then offered her opinion about the materials: 'I think it will be most extremely pitifull, it being usual where there are much better things to give them to the servants & my maid I really think deserves something having waited of her & washed her small things, for the whole time she was here, without any advantage, my sister always promised to make her amends'. As with her grandmother before her, Henrietta's correspondences demonstrate a range of domestic skill, be that financial, managerial or material.

Henrietta and her peers are examples of how, in large households, a housewife was essential, with her skills tending to be intellectual more than physical.[139] While finance was just one aspect of the different roles that mistress had to fulfil, it demonstrates how managerial, intellectual and embodied skill were key to a harmonious and successful home. Knowing how to govern the household for its smooth running was a part of female authority, and when not mastered, there could be unpleasant side effects for all those involved, as seen by the example of the less than capable Lady Sarah Cowper. Sarah relied on the use of manuals and didactic literature, but early modern women certainly were partaking in knowledge transfer. As seen by Henrietta Maria, housewives could expect to learn from other women, often their mothers, grandmothers, acquaintances or women in another household they lived in. Women in smaller households likely learned how to run their homes in a similar manner, embodying feminine roles throughout their childhood. However, their duties differed in some respects from the women discussed above.

## Small households

'Even from the Court to the Cottage'—this was how James Bland described the many 'ranks and degrees' of praiseworthy housewives in 1733.[140] It is true that household management was not just a phenomenon in large households; indeed, some such as Mary Collier might have argued that governance was even more important for those wives who could only afford one servant or none at all. Beyond the intellectual skill that was required of the woman of a large family, for those who were in smaller households, physical skills, often similar to that of servants previously discussed, were a necessity for a successful household. As touched on, the lower class a woman was, the dirtier her hands and the more physical her labour. Although sources for housewives of smaller homes are fewer and further between, it was a major occupation for a number of women in the early modern period and therefore deserves some attention in such a study.

[139] For exceptional cases of gentry Yorkshire women and their knowledge of financial markets, stocks and shares, see Anne Laurence, 'Women Investors, "That Nasty South Sea Affair" and the Rage to Speculate in Early Eighteenth-Century England,' *Accounting, Business & Financial History* 16, no. 2 (2006), 251-260.

[140] Bland, *An Essay in Praise of Women,* 23.

Crucially, the hands of such housewives were active; they *sought* work out, for, as discussed earlier, idleness was the greatest fault. Written either by John Fitzherbert, a landowner, or his younger brother Anthony, a judge, *The Book of Husbandry* by 'Master Fitzherbert' was originally published in 1523 and reprinted a number of times throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.[141] Although earlier than the time frame of the thesis, *The Book of Husbandry* was one of the most detailed early modern texts about housewives in small households and it laid the groundwork for many succeeding texts, and therefore is worthy of inclusion here.

The author described the life of a woman who was married to a husbandman: in the morning she engaged her hands in prayer, and then her hands did not stop moving throughout the entire day, as she attended to her duties. She swept the house; dressed up the dish board; ordered the affairs of the house; milked the cows; woke up the children and readied them for the day; prepared the family's (including servants') breakfast, dinner and supper; baked and brewed as needed; collected corn and malt and dealt with the mill so that the miller did not take advantage of the family ('thy measure again beside the toll, or else the miller dealteth not truly with thee, or else thy corn is not dry as it should be'); made butter and cheese; fed the swine in the morning and the evening; knew what the hens, ducks and geese needed in the various seasons in order to get eggs from them and protect them from other beasts. This was on top of the other seasonal duties, which required a vast knowledge of various goods and plants, such as herbs, seeds and flax, the last of which the wife had to know how to sow, weed, pull, water, wash, dry, beak, brake, taw, heckle, spin, wind, wrap and weave. It was also up to the wife to make malt, wash, make hay, shear corn, help her husband fill the dung cart, load hay and go to the market in order to sell goods such as milk, cheese, eggs and so on, as well as to buy the things necessary for the household. Fitzherbert drew attention to a wife's skill in frugality and recognizing the value of various market goods. While women of large households did this through accounting and numeracy, a woman whose household subsisted on what they gained from selling goods was required to be wise in getting the right price for their items. Such knowledge was gained over time and constantly adapted based on the season and the changing markets. A wife's abilities had to be shaped to fit the size and type of her household and the various needs of its members.

For such activities, particularly dealing with flax and wool, Fitzherbert was quick to note that he would not instruct in detail, for the woman was 'wise ynough', implying that the knowledge required to make all household goods and so forth was learned by women before

[141] Edwin F. Gay, 'The Authorship of *The Book of Husbandry* and *The Book of Surveying*,' *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 18, no. 4 (Aug., 1904), 588-93.

they come to be housewives or as new wives.[142] Fitzherbert's reluctance to go into detailed instruction also reflects a gendered knowledge gap, as seen repeatedly in this thesis through the manuals regarding textiles, midwifery and domestic service. Although certain tasks may have been undertaken by both man and wife, the precise nature of housewifery was still something explicitly shared amongst women, with girls watching other women in their households and embodying the tasks specific to their gender. While Fitzherbert was able to list all the activities of a country housewife, it was up to her own discretion how to carry out her occupation.

It is important to recognize the fact that such roles were considered work, within the social and economic definitions of the time. If a wife idled or did not uphold all of her duties, a house could easily slip into disarray, affecting the work of her husband. Of the many activities listed by Fitzherbert, a fair amount can be considered subsistence work, in which the woman was producing goods for household consumption as well as market sale. For example, if a woman worked in a household without sheep, she 'may take wool to spin of cloth-makers, and by that means she may have a convenient living', while still having time for her other occupations.[143] As mentioned, it could also be up to her to go to the market 'to sell butter, cheese, milk, eggs, chickens, capons, hens, pigs, geese and all manner of corns', items that were all largely under her jurisdiction in the household'.[144] This was an example of the dealing and trading that a woman was expected to be in charge of, dealings which took her outside of the home and across a literal and economic landscape.

As alluded to by Fitzherbert's lack of detail, women learned these skills by participating in female networks of knowledge transfer, although the way in which they participated was different than women of the upper ranks. Some could still hope to learn from their mothers, while others might be educated in the ways of the household by the wife of a man to whom they were apprenticed. A number of poor girls in York were apprenticed to a man and woman with the explicit purpose of learning housewifery. In 1681, Mary Lund of Holy Trinity Goodramgate was apprenticed to Mark Forester, a joiner, and his wife, 'to be Learned and Taught in the Trade, Mistery, or Occupation of huswifery, sowing and knitting' for the period of six years. Seventy-five years later, in the same parish, this type of education was continuing as Elizabeth Simpson, a poor child, was apprenticed to Robert Wait for the term of seven years to be 'learned and tought the trade and mistery of Housewifery and

[142] Fitzherbert, *The Book of Husbandry*, 61r-62v.
[143] Ibid., 62v.
[144] Ibid., 62v-r.

Seamstress which Mary his Wife now useth'.[145] As mentioned in the previous chapter, others used periods of service to hone their domestic skills.

A ballad from 1660 sought to caution young women to enjoy what pleasure they could before marriage, since 'a Womans work is never done'.[146] The ballad detailed the daily activities of the wife, who claimed ever since she married she had lived a solid life, meaning she had little rest. From early in the morning, before she could attend to herself, 'I sweep & cleanse the house as need doth require, Or if that it be cold, I make a fire: Then my husbands breakfast I must dress'. After her husband was fed, it was time to attend to the children, who she had to wake, feed and get ready for the day. The children that were old enough went off to school, 'all save one sucking Childe, that at my brest Doth knaw and bite, and sorely me molest'; but even once he was down to sleep, 'I am constrain'd the house to keep'. Whether she was giving her body to feed her children or bending her back to hang the pottage-pot, the wife embodied physically intensive tasks for the sustenance of her household. From knitting to spinning, washing to wringing, 'when the game with me is at the best, I hardly in a day take one hours rest'. From dinner, at eleven in the morning, until supper, at nine in the evening, the body of the housewife of a small home was heavily burdened, taking such pains 'until my back, and sides, and arms do ake'. But it was her body that was her main tool. Mixed with some of the managerial and intellectual skills of the housewife higher up the social scale, this sort of housewife had to embody an assortment of physical skills that both impacted and were impacted by the household oeconomy.

In introducing his chapter on industry, James Bland focused on the housewife, leading his reader into her story: 'and herein let us observe her daily Employment, and how unaccountably diligent she is in the Operation of her Hands'.[147] Once again, the woman's hands were brought to the fore in order to examine her work, and that was because the handiwork of the housewife helped drive the home. One of the most illuminating descriptions of domestic handiwork comes from a sermon that expounded upon the positive characteristics a wife should possess.[148] First, the preacher acknowledged the wife of a family that was too small to have any maids. In this description, it was stressed that the skill of housework was learned and embodied, for 'though she bring in nothing with her, yet through her Wisdom and Diligence, great things come in by her', and it was primarily through her hands that these great things came: 'she brings in with her Hands, for she putteth her Hands to the Wheel'. Conversely, if she did not earn her keep through labours, that earning hand

[145] BIHR PR/Y/HTG/48.
[146] *A Womans Work is Never Done* (London: Printed for John Andrews, 1660).
[147] Bland, *An Essay in Praise of Women,* 20.
[148] *The True Character of a Virtuous Wife, being a Wedding Sermon Preached on Board the English Admiral* (London: Printed for M. Fabian, 1702), 22.

turned into the hand of a thief. The sermon contrasted these hands with those of wives who were 'too high to stain [her] Hands with bodily Labour', a woman who could afford to be the mistress of the house. Like those who cited housekeeping as an employment, house*work* done by the wife was an important occupation that required 'wisdom and diligence'.[149]

Almost two centuries after Fitzherbert, similar advice was still being doled out to housewives so they could manage their domestic life oeconomically. William Ellis, a Hertfordshire farmer, wrote many works for the 'modern husbandman', but also included a whole book dedicated to the country housewife in 1750. Once again frugality was brought to centre stage, as the main subheadings on the title page stated that the book would show 'how great savings may be made in housekeeping', among many other things. Ellis went into much more detail than Fitzherbert, as he himself was a farmer and therefore had first-hand knowledge to build on. In the introduction, Ellis acknowledged that writing 'a serviceable Book…requires an Author who lives amongst its Practice', establishing himself as witness to good housewifery.[150] Beyond accounting, Ellis's main focus was on the various animals, their products and other foodstuffs that the wife would deal with, and indeed the majority of his contents list various types of food and how to treat them. Preserving held a special place in Ellis's work as it was good both for the household oeconomy and its future. Ellis's work is full of anecdotal examples and specifics, from which a woman could learn, but he still emphasised that practice and experience were necessary to create a good housewife.

William Stout, a grocer from Lancaster who was writing around the same time as Ellis, reflected on his mother's industriousness in his autobiography, capturing the ideal characteristics of a woman from the middling sort.[151] Time and again, when discussing his mother, Stout revealed the numerous tasks that she had to keep track of in order to 'manage the estate in husbandry'. When Stout's father died, his mother continued to manage the home, while at the same time 'she was employed in looking after her servants in the feilds and dressing her corn and going to market with the same as she usually did'.[152] Since his mother could afford the help, she was skilled in directing her servants and reserving the more manual labours for her maids: 'And [she] also kept a woman servant to do the hardest house service and harrow work, hay, and shear in harvest, so that the family and concerns was managed in good order as could be expected'.[153] His only surviving sister, Ellin, was taught from a young

[149] Wilkinson, *The Merchant Royall*, 25.
[150] William Ellis, *The Country Housewife's Family Companion* (London: Printed for James Hodges, 1750), iii.
[151] William Stout, *Autobiography of William Stout*, ed. J. D. Marshall (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1967), 68, 72.
[152] Ibid., 76.
[153] Ibid., 76.

age how to spin and the art of needlework, but unlike her brothers, her education took place in the home. She was 'early confined to wait on her brother', instilling within her the household gestures of the subordinate gender from a young age.[154] Ellin was twenty when her father died, and after his death she 'was diligent in assisting [their] mother in her housewifery'. Stout's sister also provides an example of how physical strength and health were required of a housewife. In her twenties, Ellin continued to live with her mother and to help in 'managing their husbandry', yet when it came to the question of her marriage, she proved not industrious enough for the role of housewife. Although she had many offers of marriage from 'country yeoman of good repute and substance', her mother advised against it, stating it was best she remain single due to her infirmities—Ellin suffered from ulcers amongst other ills.[155] While she was able enough to be a productive member of a household made up of a hardworking mother, two brothers and at least one female servant to help, she was not physically capable of being the mistress of her own home.

As Stout's sister shows, a housewife's work was not simply innate; rather, it was fostered in girls from their youth. The way in which a woman adapted her body to the needs of the household was largely based on her class. In satirical texts, class and the way in which it affected how a woman grew into her role was made clear. *The Altar of Love*, a collection of poems by the 'most eminent hands', apparently including Alexander Pope, provided a number of commentaries on love and relationships. In one particular poem, while taking a dig at the airy education of more genteel ladies, the anonymous narrator described a farmer's daughter, laying out the ways in which a girl could make a good wife: rather than being bred for the 'foppish Modes of *France*, *Jantè* to tread an airy Dance', the farmer's daughter spared no pains. Amongst other accomplishments, she could dress a 'Dish of Meat, keep her Pewter clean and Neat', pick out wool, spin, make linen, churn, bake, brew, make cheese, wash the house, feed and care for pigs and cows alike, and milk the latter as well.[156] The poem also mocked the clerk's daughter who was not taught to sew her own clothes, demonstrating how a housewife was valued in differing classes. The extensive list of activities made up the daily education in which the farmer's daughter participated, with the hopes of shaping herself into the perfect wife.

Even girls of the poorest sort were instructed on how to be industrious so that they could contribute to a future household. Poor young girls in the Greenwich Girls' School were taught by the Mistress how to wash various rooms, mend linen, scour dishes and 'other such

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[154] Ibid., 69.
[155] Ibid., 116.
[156] *The Altar of Love. Consisting of Poems, and other Miscellanies. By the Most Eminent Hands* (London: Printed for H. Curll, 1727), 72-4.

business'. They were explicitly taught this type of labour so that 'their Hands [could be] brought into that Sort of Work' when they left the workhouse.[157] In York a workhouse was established in 1682 so that the poor could be prevented from begging and 'be imployed in working'. While it was ordered to be set up by one Robert Newham, it was his mother, the Widow Newham, who was brought in to teach the women to spin, keeping them employed and occupied.[158]

Unpaid labour is still a topic of much debate and understanding how early modern housewives were valued as part of the oeconomy can influence how we deal with modern day domestic labours. Statistics show that women continue to shoulder the burden of household labour, taking part in 60 per cent more unpaid work than men. According to the Office for National Statistics, if such labours were paid, they would make up a monetary value of £1.01 trillion, or the equivalent of approximately 56 per cent of the United Kingdom's GDP.[159] While similar statistics are not possible to compute for the early modern economy, it is clear from sources how much time and effort was put into the household, and the oeconomy, by women. Before the concept of being at work was capitalised and constructed as 'employment' that had 'profit', women's employment in the household was valued, if not explicitly than implicitly in how it was seen as an essential requirement for the success of the household, and its wider outputs.[160] While this valuing is not a solution to the way that domestic work is treated today, with its exclusion from the 'conventional definition of work', it is nonetheless an important starting point for studying how women's work and the skills that were required within this concept were established, valued and managed.

Although housewifery then, as now, was not included amongst the categorisation of formal occupations, it was nonetheless written about frequently and with a definite purpose. Contemporary authors recognised that the skills of a good housewife needed to be learned, such as with the farmer's daughter or with gentry housewives who studied accounting or instructed and governed their servants. The degree to which one soiled her hands distinguished the gentry from lower sorts but was seen as a mark of good housewifery for women who worked in smaller homes. The symbol of the managing hand should not be overlooked, for it follows the theme explored throughout 'Labouring Bodies', in which

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[157] *An Account of Several Work-Houses for Employing and Maintaining the Poor* (London: Printed and Sold by Joseph Downing, 1725), 29-30.

[158] York City Archives (YCA), Relief of Poor Folks, Y/SOC/2/1/1.

[159] "Women Shoulder the Responsibility of 'unpaid Work'", Office for National Statistics. Nov 10, 2016, accessed Nov 07, 2018. https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/earningsandworkinghours/articles/womenshouldertheresponsibilityofunpaidwork/2016-11-10.

[160] Lourdes Benería, 'The Enduring Debate Over Unpaid Labour'. *International Labour Review* 138, no. 3 (1999), 288; 291.

women's skill was often communicated through their handiwork. After all, wives, daughters, widows and the female servants they commanded were an essential part of the early modern oeconomy, for they were 'the Hands by which the good Husbandman does subsist and live'.[161]

[161] Timothy Nourse, *Campania Foelix, or, A Discourse of the Benefits and Improvements of Husbandry* (London: Printed for Thomas Bennet, 1700), 200-201.

## Conclusion

As I was coming to the end of my PhD, I was gifted a crocheting kit. I had never attempted to even pick up a hook, let alone crocheted, and so my fingers fumbled as I tried to learn the basic skills of the craft. Teaching myself through written instructions without the help of someone experienced in crochet seemed near futile. While I urged my fingers to pick up the techniques, I thought about a woman I had seen at a conference a few years earlier. Her hands had moved seamlessly as she crocheted a scarf. Not only did her fingers move quickly, she maintained the diligent work all while devoting full attention to the speaker, asking questions at the end of the speech to indicate she was engaged. Although this woman was likely crocheting as a hobby, to keep her hands active, rather than as a source of income, my inability compared to her mastery makes me reflect on all the handiwork that had to be mastered by women in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and the scale to which they could become proficient in these activities.

Work, and particularly women's work, has been acknowledged as an important branch of historical study. The outputs of the 'Women's Work in Rural England, 1500-1700' project have shown how incidental evidence from historical documents can expand our knowledge of women's work activities, but such research has only begun to scratch the surface. This thesis adds to our understanding of women's work in the pre-industrial period by looking at sources beyond the South. Besides the use of diverse sources, I have sought to emphasise the importance of studying the complexities of women's work, as they participated in a number of labour activities throughout Yorkshire. Studies need to move beyond studying 'work' as a singular subject. Moreover, women have been discounted from the traditional historiography as they were rarely described by their occupation in court records or guild archives. This is despite the fact that, when we dig deeper, we find labouring women, whose monetary support to the oeconomy can be inferred: such as Elizabeth Confit, from Hovingham, North Riding, who nine women testified was 'skillfull and very fit for that office [midwifery]'; or Grace Priestley, the master tailor who took on over twenty apprentices in her forty-year career; or Sarah Shaw, the maid who improved her status in the Horton household from chambermaid to cook and earned a raise of two pounds.[1]

Beyond using new source material, this thesis has pushed the boundaries of *how* we study women's work. In particular, historians have downplayed or overlooked the role of

[1] Borthwick Institute of Historical Research (BIHR), Nom M 1681/2; BIHR, MTA 9/1 and MTA 9/2, Apprenticeship Registers, 1606-1751 and 1751-1862; West Yorkshire Archive Service (WYAS), Bradford, WYB20/2.

skill in relation to women's work in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Interdisciplinary studies can enhance this field, as sociology and anthropology help us to consider factors such as embodied habits and culturally specific impacts of gender stereotypes on access to work. Then, as now, social norms have played a large role in determining the work that is available to certain genders, classes or races, as well as the behaviours that allow them to participate in types of work.[2] Therefore, insights developed in sociology can be used to better appreciate how work activities were decided and assigned. What is more, carnal sociology helps us to understand how women could embody techniques that allowed them to be successful in certain types of work. Through themes of female knowledge transfer, skill embodiment and body techniques, I have expanded this field of research by exploring women's work and its value to the oeconomy. The last theme in particular draws upon carnal sociology to shape how we think about the body at work: each type of labour explored here required some degree of dexterity, strength or manual expertise, as women transformed their bodies into oeconomical tools, more similar to the competent crocheter than my own inexperienced hands.

The first chapter questioned how we define 'work' and 'economy' in order to show that we have further to go in crafting narratives of women's work. I have shown how we need to approach certain fields of study—such as the history of poor laws—in new, innovative ways. Noting what the establishing of workhouses and parish apprenticeships said about attitudes towards working practices reveal that all sorts of people were defined by their work. Acknowledging how early modern discussions of idleness and drudgery reflected ideas about labour and habits of industry allows us to better situate women's activities within a discussion of labour. Chapter two built upon this concept of expanding our concepts of work, while also taking into account the findings of historians such as Amy Louise Erickson and Jane Whittle, who have shown the importance of diverse sources as well as in-depth analysis of such sources. Tailoring employed the embodied textile knowledge of women, seen not only in manuals but through the female networks I have traced within the Merchant Taylors' Company. Even in instances where women partook in more 'traditional' paths of knowledge transfer, such as guilds, they still relied on female networks to embody labour practices, as seen in the case of the female tailors of York.

[2] Gaëlle Ferrant, Luca Maria Pesando and Keiko Nowacka, 'Unpaid Care Work: The missing link in the analysis of gender gaps in labour outcomes,' *Boulogne Billancourt: OECD Development Center* (2014), 7-8.

Midwives did not have a formal system of apprenticeship, at least none was recorded in Yorkshire, but a woman could establish herself in the role through a female network, in which she learned how to use her hands to safely deliver a baby. Chapter three once again demonstrates the importance of using sources from throughout England, as the Yorkshire testimonials provide local voices that attest to midwives' abilities. While the introduction of this thesis shows the multitude of ways in which contemporaries acknowledged women's skills, this chapter narrowed in on the skills of the midwife in particular and showed the importance of reassessing the language used in sources such as testimonials. It also began the discussion of how the authorship of various early modern manuals can be studied through a gendered approach, a theme that recurred throughout this research. Once again, knowledge transfer can be seen as heavily gendered in this period.

By breaking down domestic service into different types, and then looking at the experiences of maids of all work, chapter four reinforced the argument that women's work was highly varied. The performance and capabilities required of all types of servants supports the argument that we need to reconsider what we categorise as 'skilled work'. Although not learned in a formal setting, embodied skills once again played an important role in this type of labour. Additionally, the degree to which a woman physically laboured was an integral means of distinguishing which type of servant a woman was. What a woman could do with her body—from the dirty work of the chambermaid to the delicate handiwork of the lady's maid—was an important indication of her place in the household hierarchy. The impact of labour on the maid of all work was recorded by Mary Collier, who presented the labouring woman as an essential part of the oeconomy and society. Taking in to account the many tasks a woman could master demonstrates that the lived labour experiences of women were numerous. The final chapter explored how a housewife, who possessed intellectual abilities, such as frugality, numeracy and governing skills, was essential to the smooth running of the oeconomy. Most housewives also had to have some physical knowledge of their household (such as the value of certain goods or the ability to discern the cleanliness of a room) that would be taught to them from their youth by the other women in their families, such as in the case of the Henrietta Maria Vanbrugh. This chapter also established that housewifery required skills that were not innate. It was work in which one could fail, as seen by Lady Sarah Cowper.

In the limited time and space of a thesis it was possible to discuss only certain types of work, and therefore more questions can be asked about how other labours fit in to concepts of skill. For instance, care work could be considered, and in particular, recipes and manuals

describing remedies could be looked at in relation to ideas about female knowledge transfer. While some historians have taken the gendered nature of recipes into consideration, they have yet to be discussed within a framework of *labour*.[3] Moreover, the physical aspects of care work are deserving of more attention. The same could be said in relation to women's agricultural work. The court cases and witness depositions allude to a number of women working fields, farming or dealing with livestock. These could provide a starting point for analysing the physical requirements of women in such positions. Questions of how masculinity shaped the labouring practices of men could also be explored. As servants, men were more associated with footwork, whether it was through carrying messages or cultural depictions of the footman running, an interesting companion to the handiwork of the maid.[4] Certain work has been done in comparing the gendered roles in specific labours, such as the garden, however the physical embodiment of tasks has yet to be analysed.[5] Such a study could compliment this research.

Knowledge transfer was gendered, and as the economic world changed and expanded, women's knowledge became viewed as less valuable to society. The female master tailors of York's Merchant Taylors Company gained traction in the early eighteenth century, building social connections and demonstrating their mastery based on the number of apprentices they took on. Changing markets and industrialisation displaced the hands of the 'tailoresses', and women's textile work largely receded into undocumented work within the home, in which their outputs were restricted to self-consumption.[6] Similarly, the work of the midwife, which had been primarily passed between a community of women, was taken over by the man midwife and the surgeon, who largely gained knowledge through textbooks or attending anatomy lectures and even dissections. The success of tools such as the forceps overshadowed the woman's handiwork, and subsequently historiography has erased the skilled aspects of female midwifery in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in favour of

[3] Elaine Leong. 'Collecting Knowledge for the Family: Recipes, Gender and Practical Knowledge in the Early Modern English Household,' *Centaurus* 55, no. 2 (2013), 81-103; Elaine Leong and Sara Pennell. 'Recipe Collections and the Currency of Medical Knowledge in the Early Modern "Medical Marketplace",' in *Medicine and the Market in England and its Colonies, c. 1450 - c. 1850*, eds. Mark S. R. Jenner and Patrick Wallis (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 133-152; Sara Pennell, 'Perfecting Practice?: Women, Manuscript Recipes and Knowledge in Early Modern England,' in *Early Modern Women's Manuscript Writing: Selected Papers from the Trinity/Trent Colloquium*, eds. Victoria E. Burke and Jonathan Gibson (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), 237-258

[4] David Carnegie, 'Running over the Stage: Webster and the Running Footman,' *Early Theatre* 13, no. 1 (2010), 121-136.

[5] Jennifer Munroe, *Gender and the Garden in Early Modern English Literature* (Aldershot, Hampshire: Ashgate Publishing, 2008).

[6] Shahra Razavi, 'The Political and Social Economy of Care in a Development Context: Conceptual Issues, Research Questions and Policy Options,' *Trabajo y empleo* (2007), 3-5.

religious character. The expanding labour market of the mid-eighteenth century meant that the household oeconomy became less of a focus. This was bolstered by the creation of a middling class in which men sought to portray an image of the male taking care of his family, making the care work of the housewife and domestic servants less visible.[7] Further questions can be explored in relation to the changing nature of women's labour and how its value decreased as the economy surpassed the oeconomy. As notions of oeconomy and the health of the household fell out of popularity, women's work, in all its variety, and its value as a means of sustaining the household seem to have decreased. This is an important next step in a study that can provide answers about today's issues.

In a 2013 report to the UN, Magdalena Sepúlveda Carmona, the Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, acknowledged how domestic and care work, primarily done by women, continues to be devalued.[8] This poses a problem in the present day, as the 'heavy and unequal responsibility for unpaid care is a barrier to women's greater involvement in the labour market, affecting productivity, economic growth and poverty reduction'. Carmona also argues that 'because of structural discrimination, the work women do in the home is seen as unskilled and less valuable to society, meaning that men not only receive higher earnings but also more recognition for their contribution'. This raises the question: did this type of work become assigned to women because it was unskilled, or did it come to be thought of as unskilled because it was associated with women? Looking at the early modern views and the ways in which women managed to master skills, usually of the domestic type, I argue for the latter. Certainly women's work was constrained by gender conventions that barred them from the labour market, but the capacity for women to work in textiles, the gendered work of the midwife, the hierarchy of service or drudgery and the essential skills of the housewife were acknowledged by contemporaries as necessary to the oeconomy.

Much of what women did in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, even when it was paid, has fallen into the category of uncounted work due to the way it was—or in many cases, was not—recorded, the lack of occupational titles given to women and because it often took place in or around the home, or if it was in the market, it was an extension of the home's productive work. However, re-evaluating how sources document work activities (helped by regional studies) and appreciating the ways in which skill was valued in pre-industrial

[7] Catherine Hall, *White, Male and Middle Class: Explorations in Feminism and History* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992), 187.

[8] Madgalena Sepúlveda Carmona, 'Report of the Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights: Unpaid Care Work and Women's Human Rights,' *Available at SSRN 2437791* (2013).

oeconomies, presents a vast potential to expand our understanding of women's work in seventeenth and eighteenth-century England. The hands of women were often central in contemporary dialogue about women's labour, be that in midwifery testimonials or servant manuals, and so appreciating the role of the women's body at work allows us to further develop this study. Although the structural discrimination faced by women around the world today requires large, long-term change, it is important to understand the history of gender and work, particularly how we came to view women's work as unskilled and less valuable to society.

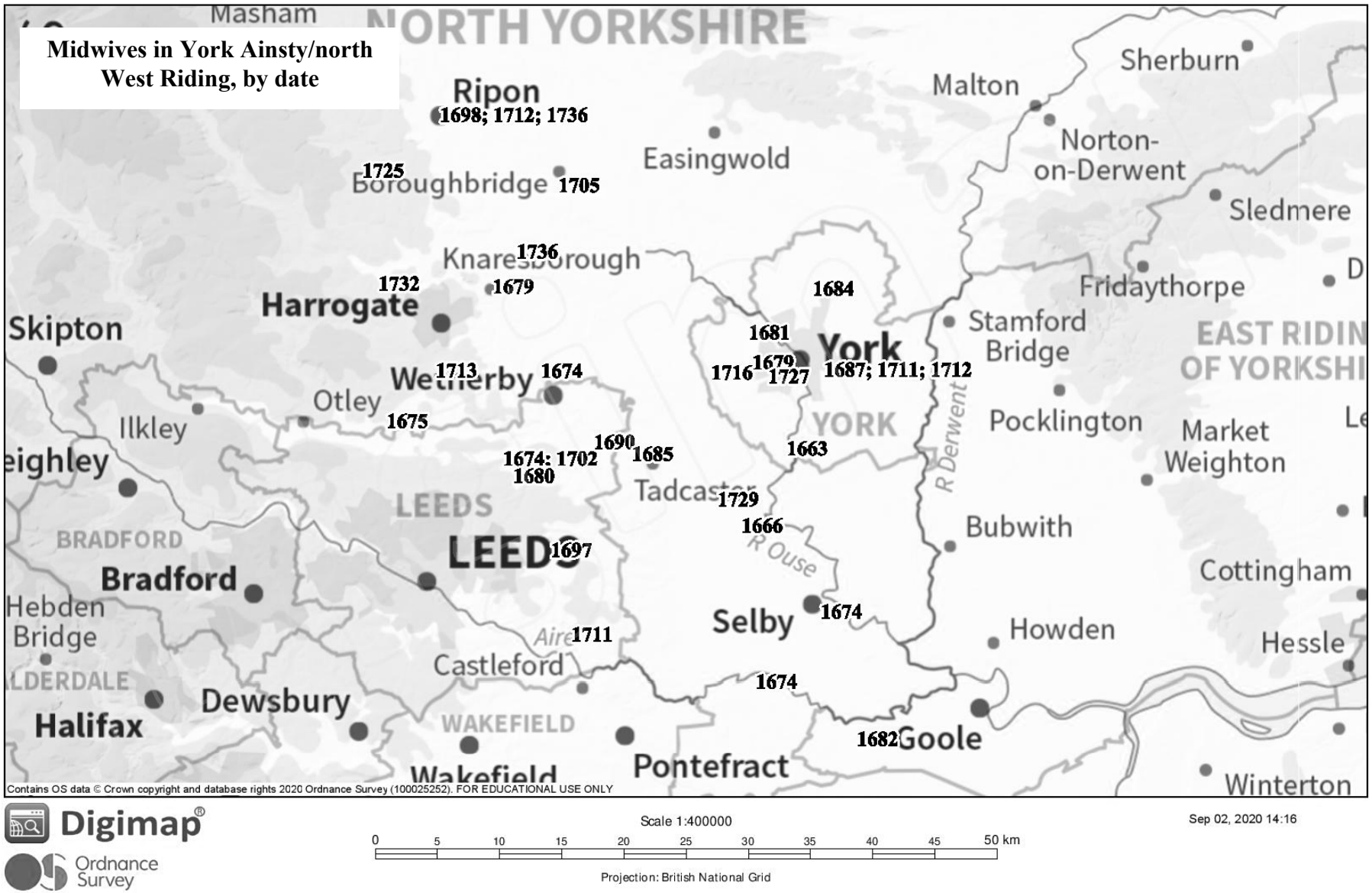
**Appendix 1. Sample of Merchant Taylor Masters and the origins of their apprentices**

| Master | Apprentices' origin | Distance from York (km) |
|---|---|---|
| Ann Hawkins | St Martin Coney St, York | - |
| | St Martin Coney St, York | - |
| | St Martin Coney St, York | - |
| | Cawood | 17 |
| | Selby | 23 |
| | Beverley | 52 |
| | Scarborough | 65 |
| Jane Mason | St Mary Bishophill the Elder, York | - |
| | Leeds | 39 |
| | Ripon | 40 |
| Mary Merry | St Helen York | - |
| | Holy Trinity Kings Court, York | - |
| | St Sampson, York | - |
| | Copmanthorpe | 7 |
| | Bolton Percy | 15 |
| Elizabeth Yeoman | New Malton | 31 |
| | Leeds | 39 |
| | Wakefield | 48 |
| | Dewbury | 53 |
| | Notthnghamshire | 109 |
| Hannah Beckwith | Holy Trinity Goodramgate, York | - |
| | Holy Trinity Kings Court, York | - |
| | St Sampson, York | - |
| | St Sampson, York | - |
| | Holy Trinity Kings Court, York | - |
| | Holy Trinity Kings Court, York | - |
| | Holy Trinity Kings Court, York | - |
| | St Crux, York | - |
| | Sutton on Forest | 14 |
| | Harwood Dale | 70 |
| | Kettlewell | 85 |
| | Berwick on Tweed | 142 |
| Joanna Bellingham | Holy Trinity Kings Court, York | - |
| | St Mary Castlegate, York | - |
| | Brotherton | 35 |
| | Brandesburton | 62 |
| Mary Todd | St Sampson, York | - |
| | St Helens, York | - |
| | Knaresborough | 30 |
| | Scruton | 58 |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Jane Jackson | All Saints Pavement, York | - |
| | Holy Trinity Kings Court, York | - |
| | St Mary's Castlegate | - |
| | Malton | 30 |
| | Wakefield | 48 |
| | Conisbrough | 65 |
| | Ely, Cambridgeshire | 230 |
| Mary Wilson | St Sampson's, York | - |
| | St Margaret's, York | - |
| | St Sampson's, York | - |
| | North Cave | 26 |
| | Halifax | 64 |
| Elizabeth Terry | St Martin Coney St | - |
| | Selby | 23 |
| | Newcastle Upon Tyne | 80 |
| Elizabeth Kold | Holy Trinity Goodramgate, York | - |
| | Escrick | 7 |
| | Knaresborough | 30 |
| Alice Waind | St Helens, York | - |
| | York | - |
| | Selby | 23 |
| | Skipton | 44 |
| | Sedgbergh | 75 |

## Appendix 2: Sample midwife locations


Midwives in East Riding, by date
1687
Norton-
n-Derwent
Flamborough Head
1690
1685; 1726
Bridlington
Sledmere
1726
1685
Bridlington
Bay
Driffield
1662; 1684
1702
idaythorpe
Skipsea
1712
1685
Stamford
Bridge
1708; 1733
EAST RIDING
OF YORKSHIRE
York
1727
1682
1680
1684
Hornsea
1713
YORK
Pocklington
Leven
1723
1666
Market
Weighton
1704
1726
1719
caster
1716
1685; 1694; 1697
CITY OF KINGSTON
UPON HULL
1732
1688; 1732
1726
1706; 1726
R Ouse
1727
Cottingham
1708
1723
Kingston
upon Hull
1713; 1714 1726
1715; 1721
Selby
1696; 1726
1713
Howden
Hessle
1685; 1704
1674
Withernsea
1726
1726
1733
1733
1726
Goole
Barton-upon-
Humber
1716; 1717; 1719; 1721
1730; 1734
1732
ntefract
1685
Winterton
Immingham
Thorne
NORTH
LINCOLNSHIRE
Ulceby
Askern
Grimsby
Spurn Head
Contains OS data © Crown copyright and database rights 2020 Ordnance Survey (100025252). FOR EDUCATIONAL USE ONLY
Digimap®
Ordnance Survey
Scale 1:400000
0 5 10 15 20 25 30 35 40 45 50 km
Projection: British National Grid
Sep 02, 2020 14:01


Midwives in York Ainsty/north West Riding, by date
NORTH YORKSHIRE
Masham
Ripon
1698; 1712; 1736
Easingwold
Malton
Sherburn
Norton-on-Derwent
Sledmere
1725
Boroughbridge
1705
1736
Knaresborough
1732
1679
Harrogate
1684
Fridaythorpe
Skipton
1681
York
Stamford Bridge
EAST RIDIN OF YORKSHI
1713
Wetherby
1674
1716
1679
1727
1687; 1711; 1712
Otley
Ilkley
1675
YORK
Pocklington
Market Weighton
1690
1685
1674; 1702
1680
1663
R Derwent
Tadcaster
1729
LEEDS
1666
BRADFORD
LEEDS
1697
Bubwith
R Ouse
Bradford
Cottingham
Hebden Bridge
Selby
1674
Howden
Hessle
Aire
1711
Castleford
1674
Dewsbury
Halifax
WAKEFIELD
1682
Goole
Pontefract
Wakefield
Winterton
Contains OS data © Crown copyright and database rights 2020 Ordnance Survey (100025252). FOR EDUCATIONAL USE ONLY
Digimap
Ordnance Survey
Scale 1:400000
0 5 10 15 20 25 30 35 40 45 50 km
Projection: British National Grid
Sep 02, 2020 14:16

**Midwives in sample area of West Riding, by date**




Digimap

Ordnance Survey

Scale 1:400000

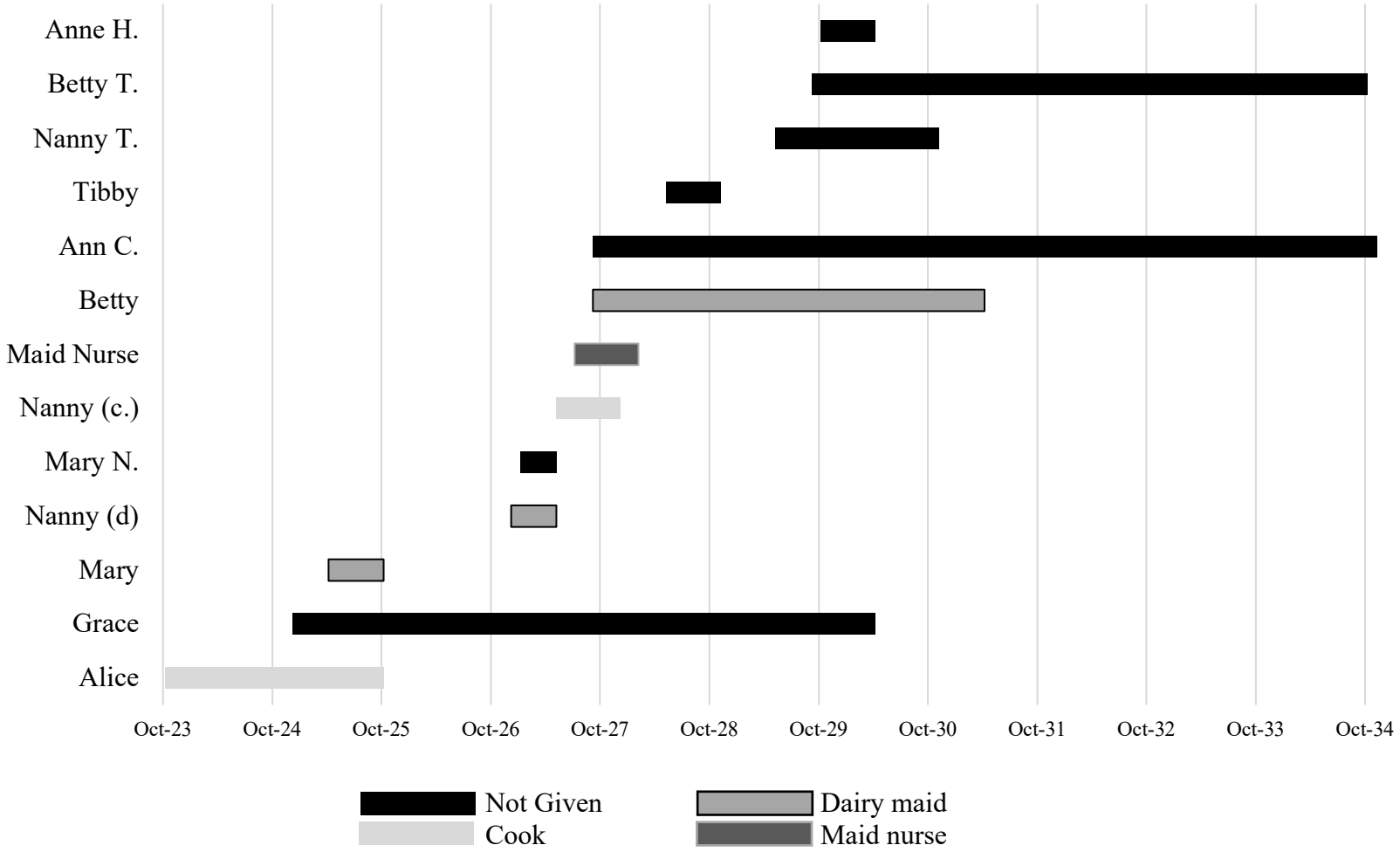
0 5 10 15 20 25 30 35 40 45 50 km

Projection: British National Grid

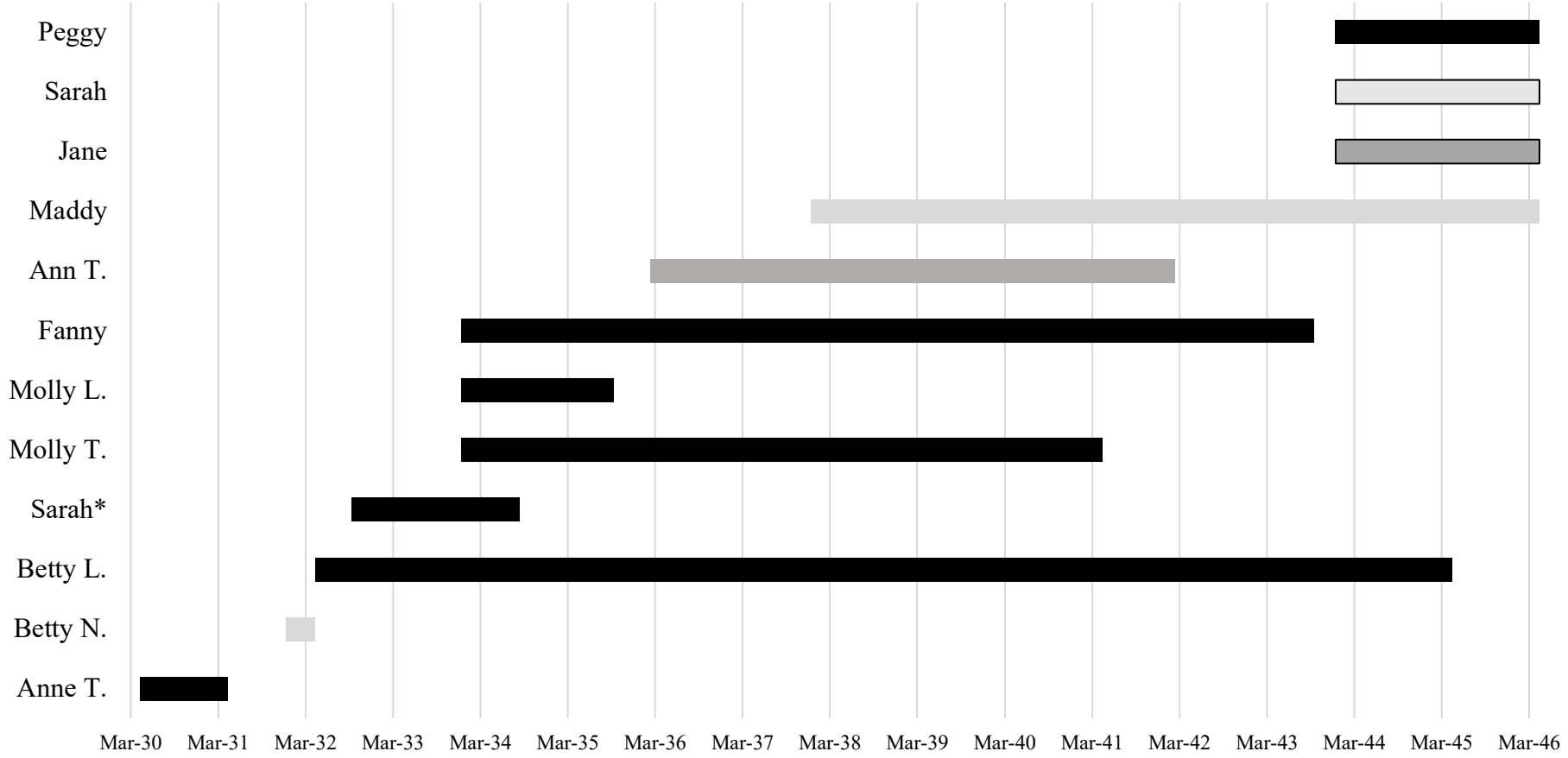
Sep 02, 2020 14:32

**Appendix 3. Household length of service in four Yorkshire households**

*Wrightson Family (November 1723 - January 1735)*
Cusworth Hall, Doncaster, West Riding
DA DD/BW/A/1



*Wrightson Family continued (January 1730 - June 1736)*

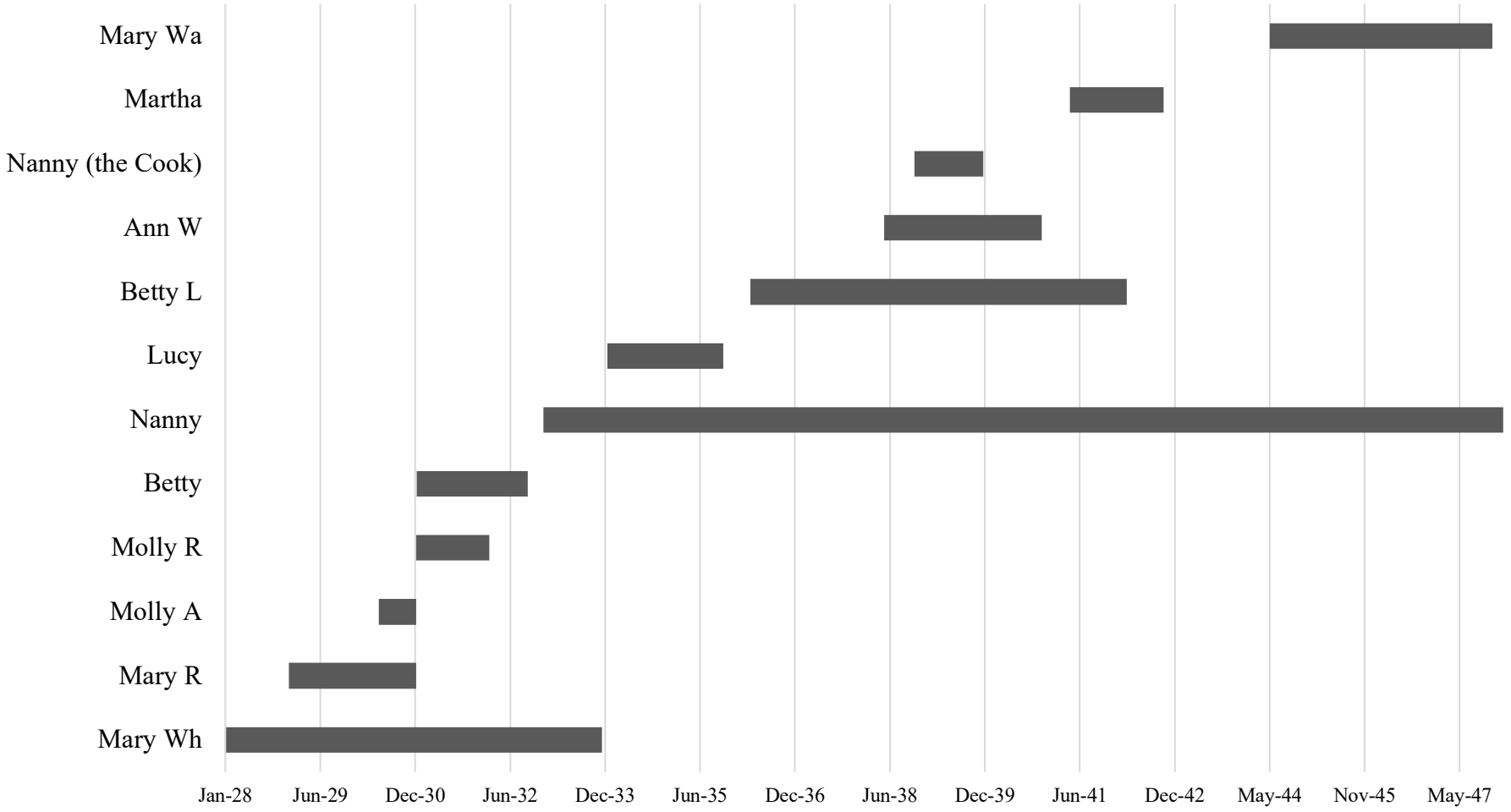


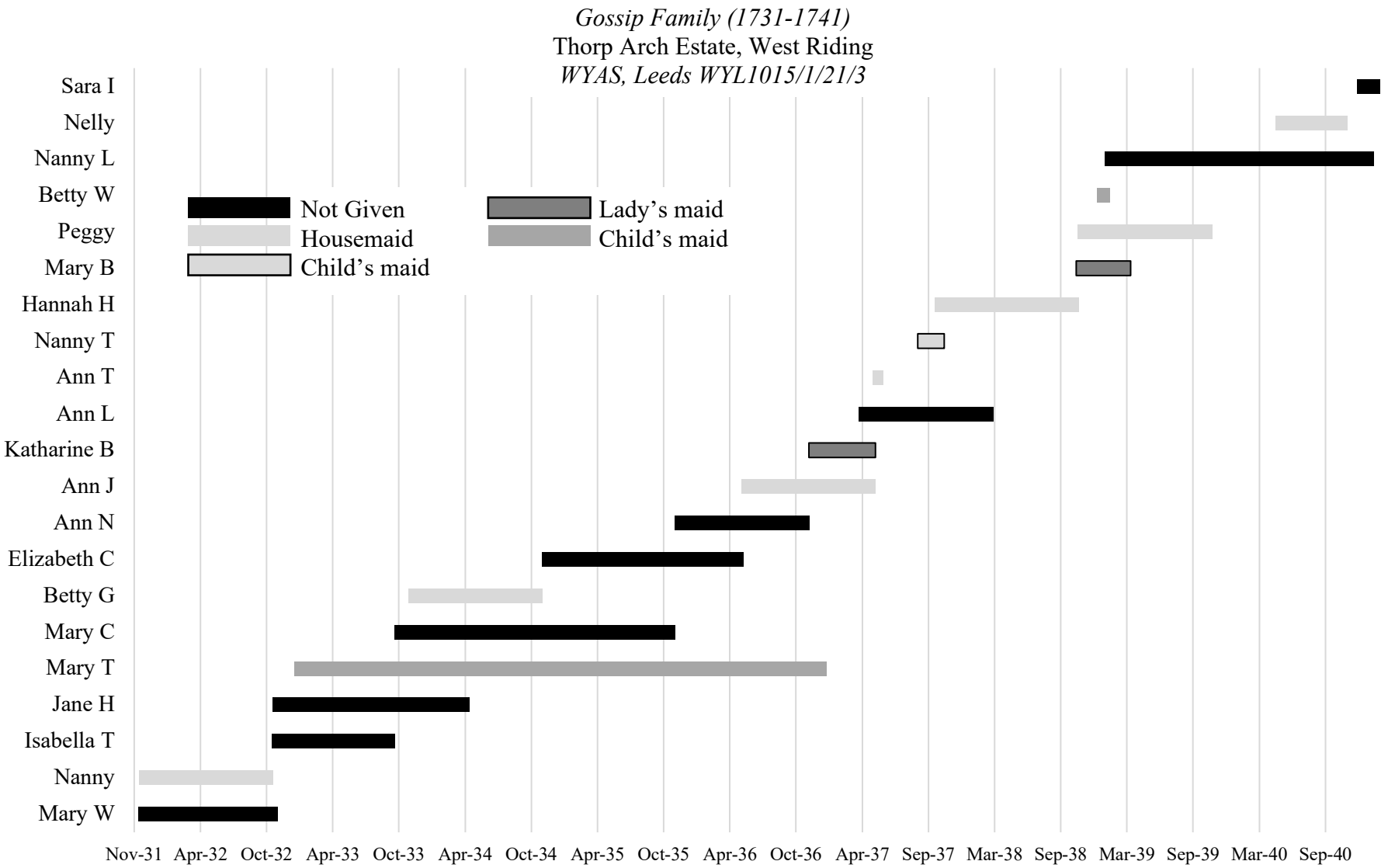

*The family paid for Sarah's apprenticeship fees.

Not Given
Cook
Dairymaid
Kitchen maid
Washer woman

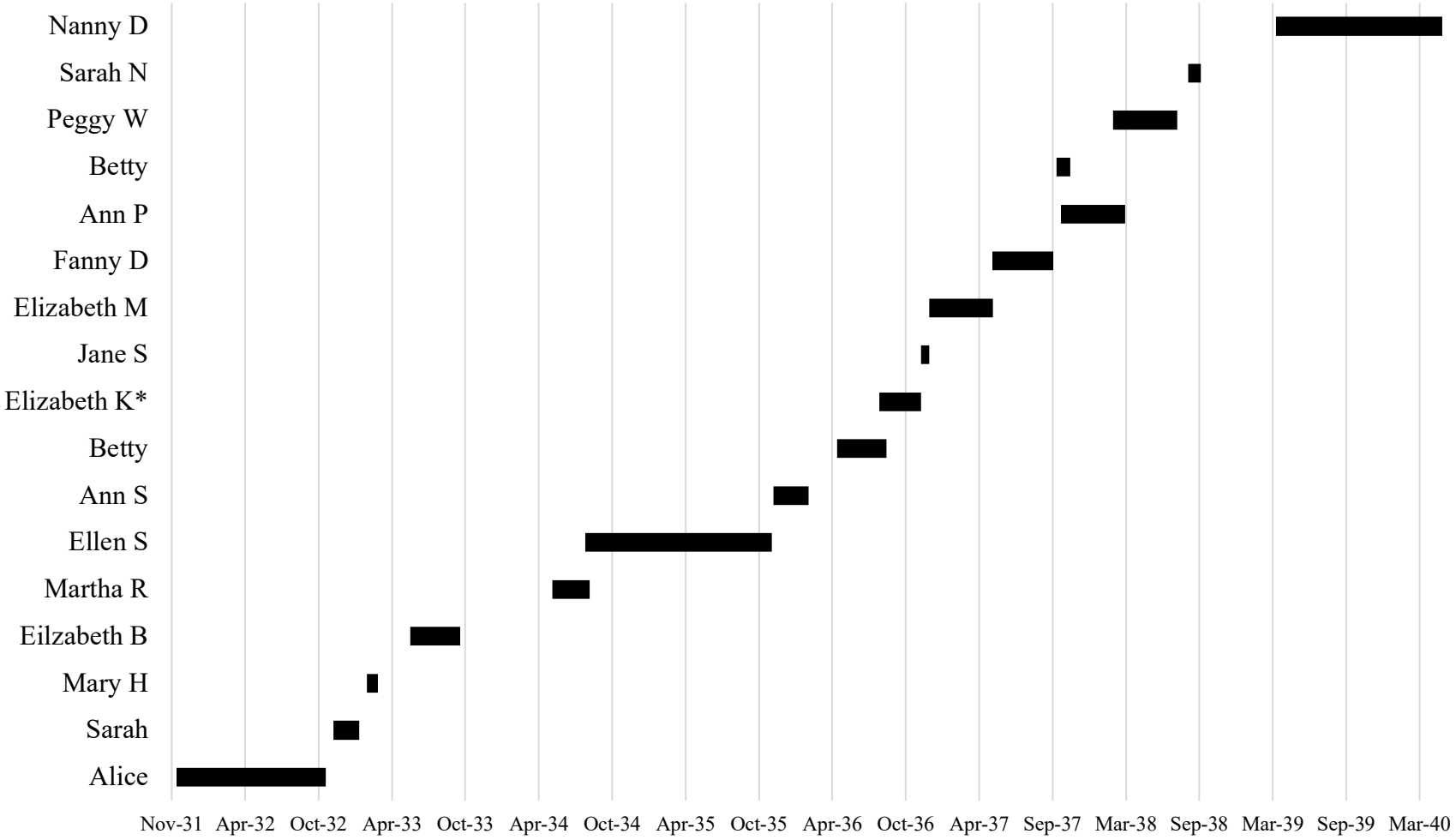
*Lady Vanbrugh (1728-1748)*
Heslington Hall, East Riding
BIHR YM/VAN/17

(titles not given)



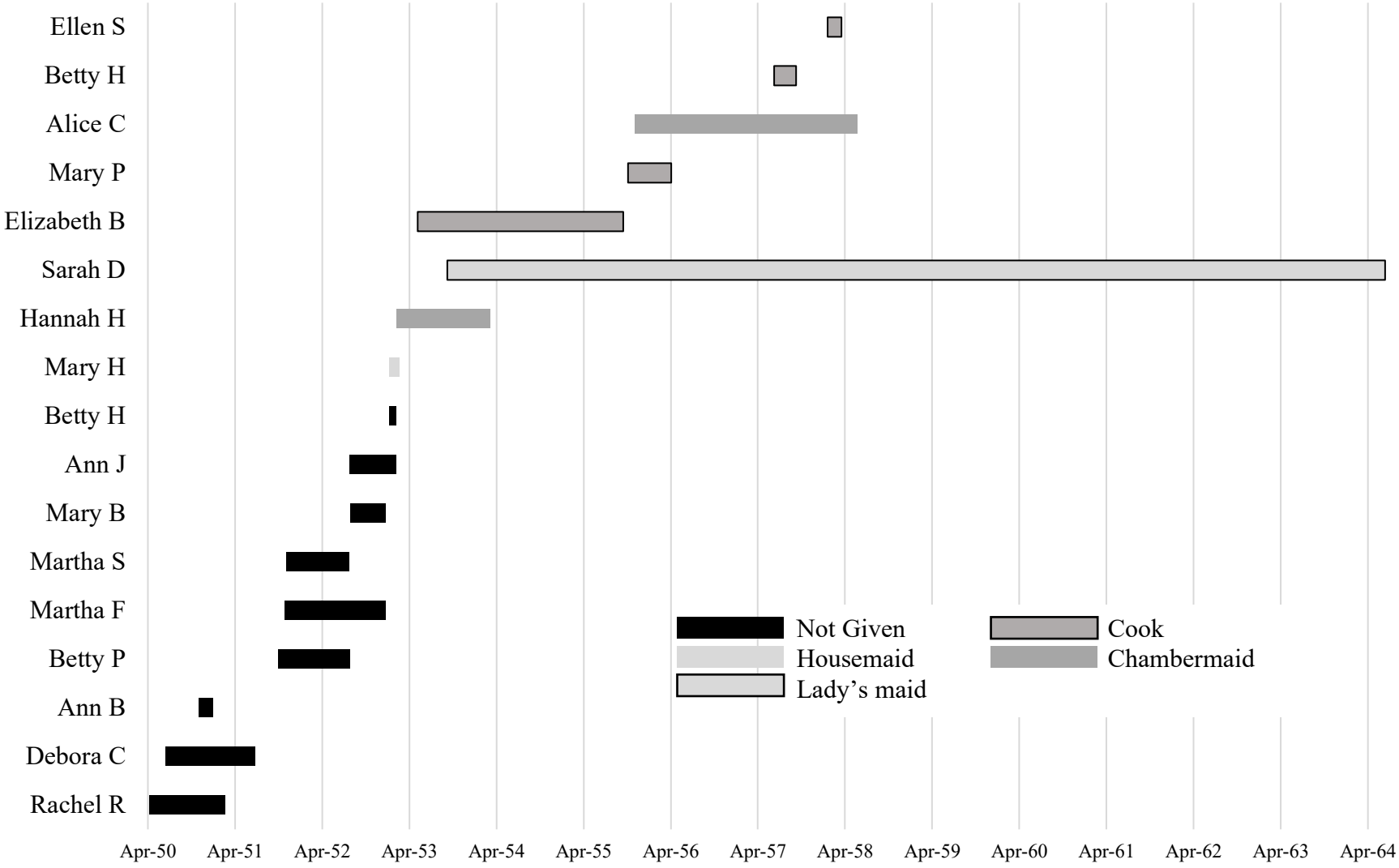

*Gossip Family (1731-1741)*
Thorp Arch Estate, West Riding
*WYAS, Leeds WYL1015/1/21/3*
Sara I
Nelly
Nanny L
Betty W
Peggy
Mary B
Hannah H
Nanny T
Ann T
Ann L
Katharine B
Ann J
Ann N
Elizabeth C
Betty G
Mary C
Mary T
Jane H
Isabella T
Nanny
Mary W
Not Given
Housemaid
Child's maid
Lady's maid
Child's maid
Nov-31
Apr-32
Oct-32
Apr-33
Oct-33
Apr-34
Oct-34
Apr-35
Oct-35
Apr-36
Oct-36
Apr-37
Sep-37
Mar-38
Sep-38
Mar-39
Sep-39
Mar-40
Sep-40

*Gossip Family (1731-1740)*
**Cooks only**

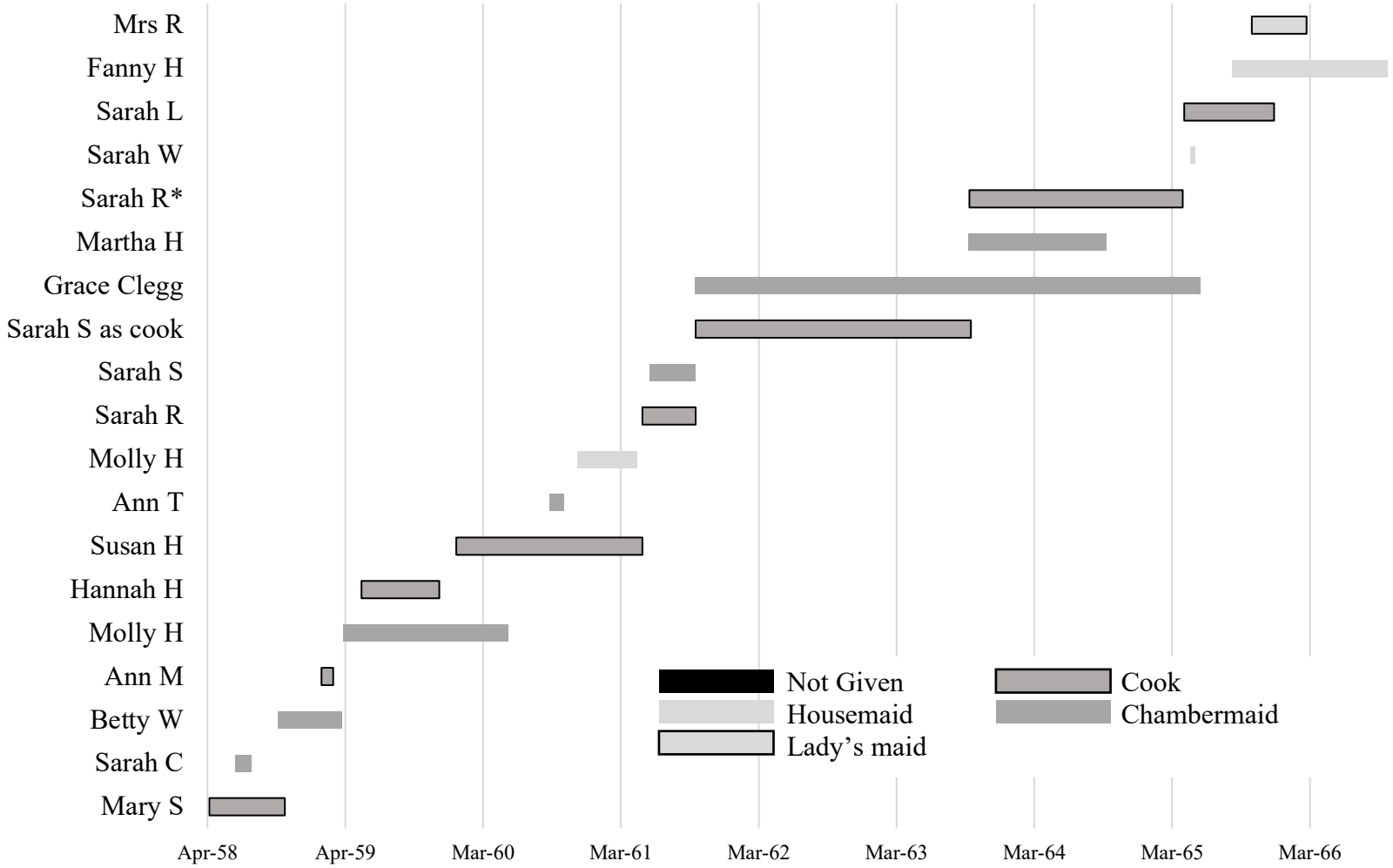



*Specifically called a cookmaid, opposed to cook

*Horton Family (1750-1764)*
Howroyd Hall, Barkisland, West Riding
*WYAS, Bradford WYB/20/2*



*Horton Family continued (1758-1766)*




*Sarah Riley first came in May 1761-October 1761,
and then again October 1763-April1765

## List of Abbreviations

| | |
|---|---|
| The Borthwick Institute of Historical Research | BIHR |
| Doncaster Archives | DA |
| Hertfordshire Archives and Local Studies | HALS |
| London Metropolitan Archives | LMA |
| The National Archives | TNA |
| West Yorkshire Archive Service: Bradford | WYAS/Bradford |
| West Yorkshire Archive Service: Kirklees | WYAS/Kirklees |
| West Yorkshire Archive Service: Leeds | WYAS/Leeds |
| West Yorkshire Archive Service: Wakefield | WYAS/Wakefield |
| York City Archives | YCA |

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— Dean and Chapter Court of York Probate Records.
YDA/11/91/31, Will of Elizabeth Napier.
YDA/11/95/24, Will of Alice Walker.
YDA/11/102, Will of Elizabeth Carr.
YDA/11/104/161, Will of Katherine Bell.

— Merchant Taylors' Company of York.
MTA 9/1, Apprenticeship Registers, 1606-1751.
MTA 9/2, Apprenticeship Registers, 1751-1862.

— Nominations, Midwives, 17th – 18th century. Nom. M.
1662/1 – 1736/4.

— Parish Records of Acomb, St Stephen, 1632-2014.
PR/AC/4, Register of Burials, 1634-1749, 1760-1986.

— Parish Records of York, All Saints, Pavement, 1296-2013.
PR/Y/ASP/1-2, Parish Registers, 1555-1690, 1690-1738.

— Parish Records of York, Holy Trinity, Goodramgate, 1559-2009.
PR/Y/HTG/2-3, Parish Registers, 1654-1689, 1700-1752.
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