



Shepard, A. (2015) Crediting women in the early modern English economy. *History Workshop Journal*.

Copyright © 2015 The Author

<http://eprints.gla.ac.uk/99584/>

Deposited on: 19 February 2015

Enlighten – Research publications by members of the University of Glasgow
<http://eprints.gla.ac.uk>

ARTICLES AND ESSAYS

Crediting Women in the Early Modern English Economy

by Alexandra Shepard

An important assertion of recent development economics is that the reduction of gender inequality can promote economic growth, although it is more doubtful whether economic growth can, by itself, lessen gender inequality.¹ The same logic also informs concerns among campaigners for UK women's rights that the government's programme of austerity measures risks widening gender inequality. A report published by the Fawcett Society in 2013 warned that cuts in the public sector have disproportionately affected women, whereas the sectors identified for investment (business and manufacturing) are male dominated. The analysis also showed that the gender pay gap in Britain may be increasing for the first time since official records began. The report urges the government to heed its legal duty to assess the impact of policies on gender equality. The apparent neglect of such concerns gives a hollow ring to the championing of western democracy's commitment to gender equality. More immediately, the report cautions that women's skills and talents should not be overlooked in the drive for economic recovery and growth.²

From a historical perspective, one of the most interesting features of this report is the doubt it casts as to whether the relatively recent upward trend in women's labour-force participation is sustainable. This in turn, challenges the validity of the U-shaped curve conventionally used to represent trends in women's economic activity over the longer term. From a hypothetical pre-industrial peak, women's apparent retreat from the labour market during the nineteenth century has been linked by historians to rising household incomes, shifting farming systems, and industrialization.³ Women's subsequent return to work, especially after 1950, has been explained as a product of rising educational attainment and insatiable consumer desire.⁴ Recently critiqued as a 'statistical mirage' by Jane Humphries and Carmen Sarasúa, the nadir in women's labour-force participation is attributed to a product of the myopia of census-takers who overlooked women's work while assuming men's full-time employment.⁵

Debates regarding the pre-industrial period, by contrast, have rarely questioned high *levels* of female productive activity, but have disputed its

University of Glasgow

Alex.Shepard@glasgow.ac.uk

character. Commercial and capitalist development has largely been assumed to have been detrimental to women's work opportunities, which have overwhelmingly been cast in negative terms.⁶ Other 'pessimistic' accounts of narrowing work prospects for women over the course of the early modern period cite the pressure of population on resources and a hostile economic climate as much as the processes of capitalist growth.⁷ In connection with either economic expansion or contraction, therefore, women's roles have persistently been represented as subject to growing constraints and marginalization. However, any suggestion that diminishing opportunities for women might have been preceded by a 'golden age' has also been firmly rebuffed. Far from equal partners in family enterprise, enjoying a 'rough and ready equality', women have been shown to be clustered in the lowest paid and lowest valued sectors, denied access to formal training, and paid derisory wages by contrast to men.⁸ The most sceptical rejection of any change in women's productive status (either for better or worse) is Judith M. Bennett's concept of 'patriarchal equilibrium' which emphasizes the enduring adaptability of male privilege.⁹ Stressing the long-term continuities in the relative status of women to men, as represented by pay differentials, the narrower range of women's work and the limited value attached to it, Bennett has argued that there was no 'great divide' between medieval and modern women.¹⁰

The purpose of this essay is neither to rehabilitate sixteenth and seventeenth-century England as a 'golden age' for women, nor to assert the destructive potential of commercial expansion for gender equality. The discussion instead stems from my unease about the extent to which focusing on women's disadvantages relative to men risks eclipsing the significance of their contribution at a time when their economic participation was extensive. This is not to suggest that gender inequality is an unimportant aspect of economic history, but to argue that we need to explore women's impact in the early modern economy as much as the early modern economy's impact on women. Paradoxically, an emphasis on the extent to which women were handicapped by patriarchal structures and practices contributes to and even licenses their persistent neglect in macro-narratives of change. This is not least because both such narratives overwhelmingly depend on anachronistic measures, in the form of occupational identities (most of which were male specific) and the generation of cash income. Given historians' increasing emphasis on the extent of pre-industrial growth, that has contributed to the rejection of classic accounts of industrialization as a seismic shift triggered by technological advances, it is particularly important that we pursue approaches that encompass women's input.¹¹ Too often women appear as shadowy bystanders in such assessments of early modern economic development on account of their relative 'invisibility', and their work is disregarded owing to its characterization as piecemeal, irregular and difficult to compute. When their activities do provide the focus of analysis, women are often cast as victims of wider

economic trends rather than agents within them. At best, their contributions are approached as supplementary rather than intrinsic either to survival or commercial expansion.¹² I argue here, however, that there is sufficient evidence to confirm that early modern growth was predicated as much on women's as men's initiative and industry, even if it did not deliver equal benefits. We can learn as much about the early modern economy from women as we can about women from the early modern economy.

There are, of course, some important recent exceptions to these longer-term historiographical trends. First, Jan de Vries's concept of an 'industrious revolution' takes the family unit rather than the individual male as the prime mover in economic change. As a precursor to the industrial revolution, de Vries posits a shift in which the labour of married women was reallocated from household production for home consumption towards more commercially oriented activity. This shift, which according to de Vries took place between 1650 and 1850, was driven by an increased demand for non-durable consumer goods. It was also accompanied by 'an augmentation of the decision-making centrality of the wife' associated with her greater autonomy as an earner.¹³

Secondly, and by contrast, another set of claims has focused on the importance of singlewomen's contribution to the pre-industrial economy. As a feature of the north-western European marriage pattern (with its late age of marriage and high proportions who never married) an army of singlewomen is credited with 'girl power' by Tine de Moor and Jan Luiten van Zanden. The wage labour they performed contributed to 'a highly commercial environment, in which households interacted frequently with labour, capital, and commodity markets', and was thereby a dynamic component of the commercial quickening that produced northwest Europe's early and distinctive pattern of growth.¹⁴ Singlewomen in England have also been acknowledged as significant creditors of the economic growth that is discernible from the mid seventeenth century if not earlier. The English legal convention of 'coverture' – whereby men assumed ownership of their wives' moveable property on marriage – has long been approached by historians in terms of the constraints it placed on married women's agency.¹⁵ However, it also granted singlewomen relative autonomy over their assets, which they appear to have used with increasing frequency and skill to generate interest from loans. Making a compelling case for why we need to incorporate women's agency into our accounts of change, Amy Erickson has argued that the credit released by singlewomen's investing held causal significance in the precocious economic development evident in early modern England.¹⁶

This article builds on but also takes issue with these arguments by examining further evidence of women's centrality to the early modern economy. The discussion is based on the terms in which early modern women themselves represented their productive activity, which were recorded when they

appeared as witnesses in court. In what was arguably the most litigious age in western history, witness depositions have bequeathed an extraordinarily rich archive of quotidian observation. One estimate suggests that as many as one in seven adults appeared as witnesses before the English church courts alone between the mid sixteenth and mid seventeenth centuries.¹⁷ From around the 1560s until the decline of church court business from the later seventeenth century, it was conventional in these courts to interrogate witnesses about their creditworthiness and general social standing. In particular, witnesses were asked to provide an account of what they were worth in goods, with their debts paid (in other words, they were asked to provide an appraisal of their net moveable wealth). Witnesses were also often required to supply details of how they ‘maintained’ themselves in addition to the social/occupational titles that were recorded as part of a brief biographical preamble at the outset of each deposition.¹⁸ Interrogation about maintenance was closely linked to the question of witnesses’ worth, since it was assumed that the ways in which witnesses might generate a living were directly related to the means in their possession. When included in the strategies for examining witnesses, these two questions – what witnesses were worth and how they maintained themselves – were asked indiscriminately, regardless of the gender or marital status of those who testified in court.

This article draws on a dataset of over 13,500 witness responses to the questions of their worth and how they maintained themselves, collected from the dioceses of Canterbury, Chester, Chichester, Ely, London, Salisbury and York, the archdeaconries of Lewes and Richmond, and the Cambridge University courts. Although the material spans the period between 1550 and 1728, it is richest between 1580 and 1640 and not all jurisdictions are evenly represented over the entire period, especially as cases from London became increasingly dominant from the later seventeenth century.¹⁹ A quarter of the witnesses in the dataset were women. In some jurisdictions, and in parts of the period covered, their proportions were considerably higher, as detailed in [Table 1](#).

Table 1. Proportions of female witnesses by jurisdiction and over time

Jurisdiction	1550-99 %	1600-49%	1657-1728%	1550-1728%
Cambridge & Ely	21.4	21.1	27.7	22.0
Canterbury	23.5	27.2	28.3	27.3
Chester & Richmond	16.3	25.2	46.9	25.1
Chichester & Lewes	12.2	24.1	21.7	21.4
London	28.9	39.7	48.3	41.7
Salisbury	20.4	18.3	21.1	19.2
York	6.5	10.8	15.4	10.0
ALL	18.4	23.6	35.8	24.3

There is much about the ways they represented themselves in court that could be cited to confirm women's relatively weak purchase on occupational identities; their concentration in marginal and poorly paid sectors; and the limits on married women's economic agency. However, I wish to argue that closer attention to the terms in which women themselves spoke about their creditworthiness and the means by which they lived suggests a more complex and varied picture – one that should encourage us to rethink our approaches to early modern economic activity as well as the sources of growth. This article attempts to do just that by developing three main lines of argument. First, women did indeed contribute an army of wage labour to the early modern economy. However, it was not exclusively populated by single women but also included married and widowed women in a process of increasing wage dependency that considerably predated the onset of 'industriousness' posited by de Vries. Married women were well represented amongst the growing numbers of the wage dependent from the early seventeenth century. Secondly, and in a related argument, marriage was the point at which women undertook more varied and independent forms of commercial activity. Historians have often identified widowhood as the gateway to relative liberation for women, when they could assume direct control of resources (providing there were any) and authority as household heads.²⁰ However, in terms of the forms of work they undertook, a wider gulf separated wives and widows from singlewomen than from each other.

This is not simply to assert a more optimistic appraisal of women's opportunities to undertake either wage labour or commercial activity, not least because that would continue to privilege measures of 'participation' that fail to take account of the full range or character of early modern productive activity. There is indeed evidence to suggest a greater degree of gender convergence in men and women's working lives than is often apparent. But there is also more to it than simply identifying more ways in which women found opportunities to undertake economic roles traditionally associated with men. This is not least because many of the terms in which male as well as female witnesses described how they provided for themselves departed from the conventions that are often assumed to characterize work by economic historians.

The third and final assertion of this article is that married as well as widowed women contributed a crucial form of work that has often been overlooked owing to the conceptual chasm that separates modern and early modern understandings of making a living: a form of work which we might call asset management. Early modern people thought more in terms of having a living than getting one. They associated wealth mainly with the possession of goods rather than seeing it as the product of work-related income. One form of women's work that is routinely missed, therefore, is their responsibility for saving and for keeping track of household resources.

This placed them at the heart of the credit relations on which quotidian exchange and the bulk of economic activity depended.

LABOURING WOMEN

The activities of labouring women provide an exemplary case of the inadequacies of occupational descriptors to account for what people actually did for a living. Not one woman was described as a ‘labourer’ in the biographical preamble that headed most depositions, whereas nearly a quarter said that they lived ‘by their labour’ in response to the question of how they maintained themselves. Typically the brief biography at the outset of each deposition included the witness’s name, age, place of residence (and sometimes their residence history), and an ‘addition’ which for men was usually a social/occupational descriptor and for women an indication of marital status. Whereas eighty-five percent of male witnesses claimed a social/occupational title at the outset, only nine percent of female witnesses did so. However, witnesses’ responses to the question of how they maintained themselves suggest a far more complex picture. Some simply rehearsed or reiterated an occupational title, while others detailed specific tasks whereby they got a living. The majority, however, spoke in general terms, which were as much about the social relations structuring work as about the tasks undertaken, and which provide some insight into how early modern people conceptualized productive activity and resources.

Table 2 shows the gender distribution of the general categories of response to the question of how witnesses maintained themselves. Of over-riding importance was the degree of independence claimed by witnesses, whose responses ranged from (on the one hand) assertions of self-sufficiency, couched as the ability to live of oneself or one’s own means, or on one’s lands, or by an occupation, to (on the other hand) admissions of dependence associated with being in service or being

Table 2. General sources of maintenance, by gender*

General source of maintenance	Men (%)	Women (%)	ALL (%)
Labour	24.1	22.5	23.6
Own means	21.7	6.9	16.9
Depends on others	9.1	30.0	15.9
Occupation	22.6	2.2	15.9
Specified task(s)	8.7	17.1	11.5
Service	4.7	18.2	9.1
Land/farming	12.6	1.4	9.0
Other	6.8	10.1	7.9

*Note: sources of maintenance have been counted inclusively in cases when witnesses referred to more than one, which is why the total percentages in this table amount to more than 100.

maintained by others. Occupying somewhat ambiguous middle ground were the high proportion who claimed to ‘live by their labour’ – the most common category of response. None of these categories was gender specific, although assertions of self-sufficiency and claims to skills and assets were skewed towards men, while acknowledgements of dependence on others as spouses or servants were skewed towards women. Even so, the disparity suggested by the distribution of some of these responses – particularly references to an occupation or being dependent on others – masks points of overlap which will be explored more fully below.

But to begin with, it is worth focusing on the most striking point of gender convergence, which was in the proportions of men and women claiming to live by their labour. Besides providing a corrective to women’s apparent absence from the ranks of ‘labourers’, this also contrasted with the proportions of men who described themselves as ‘labourers’. Table 3 shows the disparity between the proportions of male witnesses who adopted the title ‘labourer’ compared with the proportions of men and women detailing the source of their maintenance who claimed to live by their labour.

Nearly a quarter of all women and men asked about how they maintained themselves responded in this way. There was considerable variation between jurisdictions, with much higher proportions of labouring people in the south-east than in the north-east and north-west. This corresponds with what we already know about the south-east as the crucible of commercial quickening and restructured agrarian social relations in the early modern period.²¹ (The relatively low levels of London witnesses living by their labour are explained by the high proportions who detailed specific and often specialized tasks as the means by which they lived, which in turn reflects metropolitan opportunities for specialization.) More noteworthy is the fact that in all jurisdictions with the exception of Salisbury, higher proportions of women than men lived by their labour.

Table 3. Proportions of male witnesses with a social/occupational title described as ‘labourers’ compared with proportions of witnesses (male and female) detailing their maintenance who lived by their labour

	% men styled ‘labourer’	% men ‘living by labour’	% women ‘living by labour’
Canterbury	3.7	23.6	30.0
Cambridge & Ely	7.4	16.5	38.3
Cheshire & Richmond	1.0	7.6	10.3
Chichester & Lewes	0.3	45.2	46.4
London	2.5	8.8	10.5
Salisbury	1.6	31.2	31.0
York	6.7	14.0	18.2
ALL	3.4	24.1	22.5

In fact, by tracking responses over time (as shown in Table 4), the possibility emerges that it was women who were at the leading edge of the gradual proletarianization that becomes increasingly evident from the early seventeenth century. The proportion of all women witnesses depending on their labour increased between 1550–99 and 1600–49, whereas the proportion of all men living by their labour decreased. This may simply be a product of an upward shift in the social profile of the male witness population over time (although, if so, it begs the question as to why this was not the case for female witnesses). The proportions of lower-ranking witnesses who lived by their labour (represented by husbandmen) did in fact increase. However, it is instructive that women were at least equally if not more heavily represented than men during a critical period when wage dependency became normal throughout the life-cycle for a significant and growing proportion of the population. After peaking between 1600 and 1649, the proportions of both men and women claiming to live by their labour declined from the mid-seventeenth century; this was a product of the changing social and regional composition of the witness sample (with the growing dominance of London) rather than any break on the processes of proletarianization. Whereas only seven percent of London women lived by their labour in the final phase (1657–1728), nineteen percent of women resident elsewhere cited labour as the source of their maintenance. This figure was not far below the overall proportion of extra-metropolitan men living by their labour after the mid seventeenth century, which was twenty-six percent. Women therefore continued to comprise a proportion of the rural labour force that was comparable to men throughout the seventeenth century, and while the proportions of men and women living by their labour declined in the overall dataset the figures for husbandmen suggest that they continued to increase amongst the lower ranking.

From the incidental details supplied by witnesses living by their labour, it is clear that in the majority of cases they were referring to waged work rather than more broadly defined manual work. Women and men living by their labour often spoke of their ‘day labour’, and made it clear that they depended on others for it – such as a Sussex widow who lived by her ‘paynes taking for such as doe sett her to woorcke’.²² Such women and men were

Table 4. Proportions of men and women ‘living by their labour’, over time

	1550–99 (%)	1600–49 (%)	1657–1728 (%)
All women	26.9	32.5	9.5
Singlewomen	-	29.7	6.2
Wives	23.7	33.3	8.1
Widows	34.8	39.7	13.4
All men	27.5	26.9	16.2
Husbandmen	40.4	47.7	55.1

disproportionately drawn from the lowest social ranks and they had very little claim to any other resources. A Wiltshire 'husbandman', for example, responded in 1602 that he was 'a poore labouring man' living 'onely by his labour', while a Kentish woman in 1636 replied that 'she and her husband are poor folks' maintaining themselves 'by their labour'.²³ Women and men living by their labour were much more likely than other witnesses to declare that they were worth little or nothing, or to describe themselves as poor.²⁴ Indeed, many made it clear that labouring for a living was a consequence of their poverty: it was *because* they were worth nothing, and had nothing on which to live, that they sought waged work. Sara Ladd, a 'spinster' from Canterbury, responded in 1646 that she was 'worth the Cloths of her Backe, & nothing else & she lives by her worke & hath nothinge but what she earnes'.²⁵

A few witnesses living by their labour provided details of the tasks they performed, which were largely gender specific. Only four activities were cited by both men and women: gardening, selling ale, carrying tubs and spinning, and the only male to refer to spinning was a youth aged fifteen and living under his mother. The majority, though by no means all, of the women living by their labour were spinning. Others referred to carding, sewing, threadwork, knitting, silk winding, cap-making, washing, scouring, nursing children, weeding, harvest work and inn-keeping.²⁶

The pursuit of separate tasks, however, did not stop women and men talking in the same general terms. Both sexes spoke of their 'hard labour', their 'handiwork', their 'true labour', their 'painstaking' and 'industry' when asserting their honesty and creditworthiness as witnesses in court. Women were as vocal as men in asserting their 'industriousness' in defensive measures against the routine assumption that poverty was the product of idleness. Such claims grew in volume from the early seventeenth century and it is likely that the celebration of industriousness that emerged in print as part of discourses of 'improvement' during the Commonwealth period in the mid seventeenth century actually drew upon labouring people's own assertion of the virtue attached to their work in the hostile economic climate that predated it.²⁷ The celebration of industriousness therefore had its roots in the experiences of labouring women and men as much as the minds of social commentators.

Although women undertook different tasks from men, the general terms with which they described their work suggest they enjoyed a shared sense of occupational pride and some solidarity with their male counterparts. This is particularly evident in the ways in which wives spoke of their joint labours with their husbands, such as when Mercy Impett (who claimed the occupational title 'spinster') responded in 1625 that 'neyther her husband nor her self have any thinge to live by but onely what they get by their fingers ends and that they labor for'. In the same case, a blacksmith's wife declared that 'she and her husband be labouringe people and have nothinge but what they gett by their owne labor'.²⁸ Very occasionally, labouring men

acknowledged the contributions of their wives in similar terms, such as a Wiltshire husbandman who declared in 1619 that 'he and his wife both labour for their living' and a Yorkshire weaver who in 1667 claimed that 'he lives by his owne & wives labor by knittinge'.²⁹ Most men, and, it should be emphasized, many married women, simply referred to their own labour without mention of their spouse. The failure of labouring men to acknowledge their wives' work suggests that it was taken for granted rather than that it constituted a negligible contribution. Craig Muldrew's recent calculations of women's earnings from spinning alone confirm their importance in keeping many households afloat, not to mention supplying a burgeoning textile industry.³⁰ It is also likely that in some cases a wife's labour contributed more to a household's economy than her spouse's. A Cambridge woman, for example, responded in 1600 that 'ever since hir comeinge to this towne [she] hath lyved by hir needle & seweing', adding that 'hir husband at this present dothe keepe & all this winter tyme hath kept Mr Lylles his horses [or] geldings, and that before that tyme he did sometyes worke at Mr Michaell Wolfs, & sometyes at Trinitye Colledge as a laborer, & was before ostler at the red Hart in the Petty Curie in Cambridge'. Her statement suggests that her income stream was less piecemeal and very possibly more secure than her husband's. Their labours were sufficient to necessitate and support a maid servant, who confirmed that 'as for hir dame... she hath lyved in good manner by hir needle & seweing, And for hir Mr:... he hath lyved in good sorte by his labor'.³¹

MARRIED WOMEN'S ENTERPRISE

This last case is a nice example of a dual-income household, of which there were many in early modern England. Such arrangements were not exclusive to labouring people, but stretched up the social scale. Women's productive activity – and especially married women's productive activity – cannot therefore simply be explained as necessitated by hardship, or chalked up to the inevitable drudgery of a subsistence economy. Historians of women have recently begun to focus again on the market-oriented activities of wives. Extensive evidence of wives' independent enterprise as well as their 'assisting work' suggests the need for the firmer incorporation of married women's productive skills within broader accounts of commercial growth.³² Married women's enterprise across the social scale is also discernible in witnesses' statements about how they got a living.

The commercial activities of married women have remained hidden owing to women's routine categorization in terms of marital status in most contemporary listings. Whatever their marital status, women only rarely assumed occupational titles; instead, they referred to their work in terms of the tasks they performed. Only nine percent of female witnesses were referred to in terms other than their marital status in the biographical preamble to their depositions. With two exceptions (a bonelace weaver and a periwig maker) the only titles with occupational associations claimed by

singlewomen were servant and spinster, and the extent to which the latter described productive activity is debateable.³³ The use of occupational titles by both married and widowed women was also severely limited, with only four percent of wives and six percent of widows referring to themselves in these terms. The title adopted by two-thirds of these wives and half of the widows was 'spinster', although they also included a cooper, a coal merchant, a greengrocer, a tallow chandler, a milkwife, a chapwoman, mantuamakers, sewsters, several victuallers, midwives, nursekeepers and a clerk. A few women also asserted professional proficiency, such as a Wiltshire wife who claimed in 1673 that she had 'some skill in the Mystery & Cunning of Midwifry'.³⁴

Incidental observations of women's work, expressed in verb-form, suggest however that the occupational titles that women did adopt represented a proverbial tip of an iceberg.³⁵ As shown in Table 5, for one 'sewster' there were twenty-four other women who referred to doing sewing, needlework, embroidery, plain work, or thread work. There were twenty women who referred to washing or starching alongside just one 'laundress' and one 'washer woman'. Many women mentioned selling a wide variety of goods and produce, while only a very few claimed a formal title associated either with production or retail. These patterns mirrored the trends whereby only two percent of women responding to the question of how they maintained themselves referred in general to a trade or occupation (compared with twenty-three percent of men), whereas seventeen percent of women spoke of getting a living from specific tasks (compared with only nine percent of men). The discrepancy between occupational titles claimed by women and their incidental descriptions of the work they did suggests that a multiplier of around six would begin to produce a credible minimal estimate of the numbers of women actually performing the tasks in relation to their formal adoption of occupational titles. This would result in 'occupations' for at least nine percent of wives and twenty-two percent of widows (including

Table 5. Noun-oriented and verb-oriented descriptors of women's work

Noun form	No.	Verb form	No.	Verb:noun ratio
Sewster	1	Needlework/embroidery/ Sewing etc	24	24.0
Laundress/washer woman	2	Washes/starches	20	10.0
Throwster	1	Winds silk	8	8.0
Nurse(keeper)	3	Nurse keeping/tends others	20	6.7
Retail titles	7	Selling/keeping shop	30	4.3
Bone lace weaver	1	Makes lace	4	4.0
Mantua maker/tailor	6	Makes clothes	21	3.5
Innkeeper/victualler	3	Sells/brews ale/keeps an inn	10	3.3
TOTAL	24	TOTAL	137	5.7

those formally describing themselves as ‘spinsters’), and that is before taking into account the so-called ‘assisting labour’ of wives in their ‘husband’s’ trades, and the remainder of the waged work of those otherwise living by their labour but providing no details of what they did.³⁶ These figures, however speculative, do not compare too unfavourably to the thirty-three percent of the male witness sample who claimed comparable occupational status by referring to a craft or trade or service-related activities (although, importantly, with reference to a much wider range of work).

A significant level of discrepancy between the titles assumed and the work performed was not a gender-specific phenomenon, and applied to men too (albeit to a lesser extent). This was not just a case of men undertaking ‘by-employments’ that have preoccupied historians of early manufacturing and proto-industry.³⁷ It is clear that, besides the many so-called ‘husbandmen’ who were in fact day labourers, at least ten percent of men claiming an occupational title were undertaking unrelated work. Occasionally this was the result of specialization and upward mobility. More often, however, it appears to have been the consequence of misfortune which necessitated an economy of makeshifts and partial employment involving serial and piecemeal activities – in other words the kind of work that is often characterized as ‘female’ (not least in justifications for why women’s work cannot be incorporated into the macro-analysis of occupational structure). Occupational descriptors for men were heavily invested with connotations of status, and dynastic overtones which were by no means the exclusive preserve of the gentry. We should no more assume that occupational titles reflected men’s work than we should expect that women were solely characterized by their marital status.³⁸

Marriage did not, therefore, prevent women from undertaking commercial activities, and even, on occasion, assuming occupational titles. In fact, it appears that marriage enabled women’s productive work. (This is not by any means to argue that marriage was without constraints for women). This becomes clear when we compare the range of tasks undertaken by women according to their marital status, as detailed in Table 6.

Table 6. Categories of work performed by women, according to marital status

Category of work	Singlewomen (%)	Wives (%)	Widows (%)
Nursing/medicine	-	19.5	12.3
Making/mending clothes	9.1	16.9	22.6
Catering/victualling	-	11.5	7.5
Hawking/carrying	2.5	10.6	7.5
Charring/laundry	0.8	9.7	15.1
Retail	2.5	8.8	5.7
Textile manufacture	2.5	8.8	10.4
Domestic service	82.6	8.8	5.7
Misc services	-	1.8	10.4
Misc manufacture	-	1.8	0.9

The extent to which married women's work resembled that of widows is striking. Singlewomen, by contrast, were concentrated in service.³⁹ Their work principally served the interests of their employers. In fact, it was the deployment of servants that at least partly enabled married women's productive activity, since servants provided a good proportion of the childcare required to free up married women's, and indeed men's, time. The co-called 'girl power' ascribed to the high numbers of servants in the north western European economy was not necessarily girl empowerment – especially during a period of falling real wages when a longer period in service was required to accumulate the resources needed to set up an independent household on marriage.⁴⁰ The singlewomen in service, together with a significant proportion of married and widowed women who took in young children to nurse, supplied the essential economic infrastructure that is childcare, thereby facilitating the productive activity of other women as well as men.

That childcare solutions were available to married women is suggested by the fact that nearly sixty percent of them responding to the question of their maintenance explicitly claimed responsibility for at least part of their living. These included a few wives who claimed to depend on their husbands for their maintenance yet went on to detail their own sources of income. The wife of the rector of St Pancras church, Chichester, for example, tucked a reference to her own enterprise rather incongruously within a claim to be maintained by her husband when she responded in 1617 that 'she being a married woman...cannot saye that she hath any estate which she can properly call her owne for yt is her husbandes whoe with her owne industrie in teachinge children to sowe doth maynteyne her'.⁴¹ Such statements cast suspicion on some wives' claims that they were dependent on their spouses. The proportions of women stating that they were maintained by their husbands increased with social position (so far as this can be judged from their spouse's occupational title). Such claims may well have functioned as expressions of relative status rather than accurate accounts of female economic activity. Similar trends are evident in the declarations of adult children who depended on their parents, which also increased with status and which were intended as assertions of relative privilege.⁴²

Many more wives (around a third) detailed the source of their maintenance without explicit reference to their marital status, however. A London woman, married to a gentleman, simply responded in 1624 that she 'getteth her lyving by starchinge of bands to shoppes'.⁴³ Most visible among wives professing to maintain themselves were those working independently from their husbands. In some cases both partners contributed waged work to the household economy; in other cases one partner earned wages in addition to the other's trade; while in a few cases a 'double business household' can be identified, such as that comprising a painter and an embroiderer in 1688, or a broadsilk weaver and a petty chapwoman in 1710.⁴⁴ A minority of the wives describing their working activities (fourteen percent) who also named their husband's occupation stated that they worked alongside their spouse,

such as a Cheshire woman who declared that she sold ale with her husband or the wife of a Stepney porter who responded that ‘her husband and self gett their liveing by carying of tubbs and other such hard labour’.⁴⁵ However, this figure is likely to underestimate the extent to which many of the wives who claimed to be maintained by their husband’s trade were actually active participants in it. Occasionally wives claimed the same occupational status as their husbands, such as the London women who, married to a baker, responded in 1720 that ‘shee is by trade a baker’.⁴⁶ By contrast, wives sometimes constructed their work in terms of ‘help’, such as a fruiterer’s wife from the west end of London, who responded in 1687 that ‘she helps to get her liveing as well as her Husband by selling fruit and Chandlery ware’. However, ancillary roles were not gender specific. In 1747, a labourer from the eastern suburbs of London described a collage of makeshifts whereby he got his living, including ‘setting of Copper Grates and such like jobbing work’ and day labour for bricklayers or scavengers, adding that ‘a Woman whom he lives with and goes for his Wife deals in Old Cloaths and he sometimes goes out with her to carry her Bundles’.⁴⁷

Independent enterprise was considerably more visible in the metropolitan environment where the range of work detailed by women was broadest, as shown in Table 7.⁴⁸ The wider range of activities cited by London women reflects the opportunities for specialization that shaped men’s as well as women’s work in the capital, rather than the relative inactivity of women elsewhere.⁴⁹ In textile production, provincial women’s contribution was heavily concentrated in spinning, whereas in London spinsters were under-represented compared with their more skilled counterparts such as silkwinders and ribbon weavers. London also supported large numbers of women who could devote the bulk of their working lives to clothes production and to retail. These tasks also occupied rural women, but not

Table 7. Categories of work performed by women resident in London and women from elsewhere

Category of work	Witnesses in London			Witnesses elsewhere		
	Single (N = 95) %	Wife (N = 87) %	Widow (N = 70) %	Single (N = 149) %	Wife (N = 71) %	Widow (N = 36) %
Making/mending clothes	9.5	21.8	30.0	-	-	4.7
Retail	6.3	21.8	17.1	-	-	-
Nursing/medicine	-	21.8	15.7	-	5.6	9.3
Catering/victualling	-	13.8	10.0	-	5.6	7.0
Charring/laundry	2.1	12.6	17.1	-	1.4	7.0
Textile manufacture	6.3	11.5	14.3	5.4	80.3	58.1
Misc services	1.1	3.4	18.6	-	1.4	2.3
Misc manufacture	-	1.1	1.4	-	-	-
Domestic service	75.8	1.1	5.7	94.6	4.2	4.7
Misc	-	-	-	-	-	2.3

exclusively nor entirely for commercial purposes. Selling the surplus fruits of domestic production was one of the many skills associated with rural wives, and to single this or any other by-employment out as *the* means by which women maintained themselves would have seemed unnecessary.

Whether in country or town, it is likely that productive and retail activities encompassed within the skills lumped together as 'housewifery', lent occupational connotations to the term 'wife'.⁵⁰ We might additionally include the gifts and favours circulated between women that formed a significant part of early modern exchange but which historians tend to overlook because they were not overtly 'commercial'.⁵¹ Contemporary expectations of economic parity in marriage partners also suggest that women did not simply assume their husband's social status, but matched it.⁵² While nevertheless indirectly expressed, the relative status of a yeoman's wife or a husbandman's wife (for example) was indicative of a woman's own social origins and the resources at her disposal, just as direct claims to these titles by men had dynastic overtones and were linked to hierarchies of wealth and status as much as men's productive roles.⁵³ 'Wife', like the status descriptors 'yeoman' and 'husbandman', therefore represented a complex amalgam of identity rather than a straightforward reflection of economic contribution, of social status, or of legal entitlement to marital property. This complicates the easy distinction between marital and social/occupational status on which we have relied.

Economic lives were only partially differentiated from social lives, and this was principally because they were understood more firmly in terms of access to resources than in terms of what people did. In other words people thought in terms of *having* a living rather than *getting* one. This situation entailed a further form of women's work that also tends to get overlooked in histories of early modern economic development, and that is the asset management on which credit, and therefore the bulk of exchange, rested.

CREDITING WOMEN

The expanding early modern economy depended almost entirely on credit to function. Craig Muldrew has estimated that at least ninety percent of transactions were carried out on credit, and has highlighted the importance of *reputation* in facilitating the necessary relations of trust. Credit had ethical foundations, and was a form of currency that circulated through the wider public perception of people's virtuous attributes.⁵⁴ While it is clear that a reputation for virtuous attributes, particularly thrift and honesty, was the oil lubricating relations of trust, it is also clear that people in the early modern period were astutely aware of the value of moveable property in each other's possession which served as the cogs of exchange. Judgements informing credit relations were principally based on assessments of a person's 'worth', in terms of the net value of moveable goods. It was assumed that such information was common knowledge, not least by an expanding state that used varying thresholds of net moveable worth (such as 40 shillings, £5,

£10, £40 and £100) to demarcate fiscal liability and eligibility for various forms of political participation. Knowledge of people's worth was central to the 'common fame' about individuals and part of a wider culture of appraisal that informed early modern social relations.⁵⁵ What one had, therefore, was as important as what one did to assessments of economic standing, which is why a significant proportion of witnesses responded to the question of how they maintained themselves by asserting that they lived 'of their own means' or 'of themselves' (see Table 2).

Women as well as men were highly skilled in the forms of evaluation this entailed. A household was constituted by its possessions (in terms of goods and chattels) as well as by its members.⁵⁶ Moveable property combined the productive resources on which people depended for their maintenance as well as household goods or 'stuff', much of which was provided by women on marriage. As historians we have been so preoccupied with novel consumption patterns (linked to the detection of greater levels of comfort, and the pursuit of fashion) that we have too often overlooked the significance that early modern people themselves attached to their 'stuff'. Household goods were also, and indeed for the bulk of the early modern period, *principally*, repositories of wealth, cash equivalents and the security for credit. Goods were a form of savings, and a more reliable basis for exchange than money which was both vulnerable to theft and of variable quality (not to mention scarce in quantity). Certain kinds of goods, particularly clothes and linens, circulated as cash equivalents often through the hands of women, and household goods were regularly recycled through second-hand markets.⁵⁷ In cases of default, it was a household's goods that were liable to distraint, which is why concrete knowledge of them and levels of indebtedness was critical.⁵⁸

In contemporary accounts of the duties of spouses, wives were assigned responsibility for saving, increasing and accounting for goods. Even the most conservative idealizations of the gendered division of labour acknowledged women's responsibilities for saving and accounting for a household's goods. Despite charging husbands to 'travell abroade, to seeke [a] living' and wives to 'keepe the house', remaining solitary and 'boast[ing] of silence', and assigning the role of provision entirely to men, the clergymen John Dod and Robert Cleaver recognized a wife's duty to 'gather [goods] together, and saue them' and 'to giue account of all'.⁵⁹ This was not a trivial responsibility, however much it was entwined with prescriptions that women should be chaste, silent and obedient. Such ideals were not new, but had their roots in ancient mores derived from the circulation of Xenophon's treatise on household management, *Oeconomicus* (available in English translation from 1573).⁶⁰ However, such responsibilities may have taken on heightened significance in a period during which an increasing proportion of a household's resources was invested in household goods which in turn served as the security for credit in a cash-scarce but rapidly quickening economy. Married women received praise for managing and increasing a

household's assets as represented by its 'stuff'. In a case heard in York in 1602, for example, witnesses were asked to comment on whether one Jane Paite had 'carefullie & with great paines governed her house & that by her great deligence & foresight the same hath bene mainteyned & the goods encereased' notwithstanding her husband's proclivities for 'beinge verie carelesse & geven to the keepinge of company & waistfull spendinge'.⁶¹ We might think of household goods in terms of a household's savings account, and the security for the trust necessary for exchange. One way of approaching the probate inventories that were a feature of the mid-sixteenth to early-eighteenth centuries, therefore, is to treat them rather like bank statements, establishing the cash equivalence of goods in people's possession. It is clear that, despite coverture, married women retained a sense of entitlement to the goods they brought to marriage even if they relinquished formal ownership.⁶² It was the pooling of marital resources that enabled a household to function independently, and in practice married women had as great a stake in them as married men.

It is also clear from the incidental details they provided in the church courts of credit and debt relations that married women were active as borrowers and lenders in the early modern economy, not unlike their single and widowed counterparts.⁶³ Indeed 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 coverture.⁶⁴ Women's responsibility for asset management was particularly important in a period when wealth was defined as much in terms of the possession of goods than as a product of work-related income. The management of household resources was, in other words, an essential component of women's work. As savers and accountants of household goods married women were critical brokers of the informal credit relations through which the early modern economy functioned. That husbands were beneficiaries of the associated assets and skills was occasionally explicitly acknowledged, in reminders that marriage entailed interdependence between men and women rather than the straightforward subordination of the latter. In the early seventeenth century a Kentish man facing death remarked that had his wife predeceased him he 'could not tell what shift to make or howe to lyve'. In gratitude he insisted that any remaining goods after his death should go to her, since without her (and the money she had lent him via her children) he 'might have starved'.⁶⁵

The novel forms of consumption that historians have detected from the later seventeenth century, which gave greater priority to non-durable and status-bearing goods (and which shifted emphasis from the stock of household goods to their flow) did not just involve a reconfiguration of the deployment of a household's labour resources therefore, but entailed a reconfiguration of the relationship between people and their things.⁶⁶ Indeed, the 'industriousness' identified by Jan de Vries as a feature of the

long eighteenth century may well need to be uncoupled from novel consumption habits as it appears to predate them.⁶⁷ Craig Muldrew has detected more intensified 'industriousness' from the early seventeenth century which he links to labouring people's need to work harder to maintain standards of living in the face of rapid inflation, and which might also be associated with the growing wage dependency traced here.⁶⁸ Earlier signs of 'industriousness' are also evident amongst middle ranking people whose relative wealth sky-rocketed during the same period.⁶⁹ Contributing to these trends, married women's work was becoming more visible, both in terms of wage labour and specialist enterprise which suggests that shifts in the nature of women's work were bound up with more complex processes than the aspiration for novelties.

The new consumption patterns that have been identified from the later seventeenth century, involving greater expenditure on non-durables, need to be placed within the context of changing concepts of wealth rather than interpreted as expressions of shifting consumer desire. New consumption habits were linked to and precipitated a shift of emphasis in the culture of appraisal from the stock of a household's goods to their flow. From the second half of the seventeenth century, expectations that the value of a household's goods might be widely known (whether by tax officials or one's neighbours) began to recede, so the appraisal of wealth and credit became more partial and more dependent on particular forms of display.⁷⁰ A likely consequence is that women became increasingly associated with spending and consuming resources rather than with saving and increasing them, and, while their importance as informal brokers of credit continued, over the longer term a greater proportion of lending was taken over and regulated with the formalization of pawnbroking and a greater proportion of household savings was invested as cash via financial services.⁷¹ Although it is debateable whether novel consumption patterns amounted to a 'consumer revolution', it seems not co-incidental that they occurred alongside a gradual reconceptualization of wealth that was underway from the later seventeenth century. In conjunction with a shifting emphasis on the *flow* rather than the *stock* of goods in people's possession as indicative of relative wealth and status, greater importance began to be attached to *getting* rather than *having* a living. This was evident in the church courts from a gradual shift away from questions about witnesses' worth in terms of the net value of their moveable property towards questions about how they maintained themselves or got a living that can be documented from the later seventeenth century. This transition was partly a consequence of the growing wage dependency that has been touched on here, as well as widening opportunities for economic specialization – although expectations that people, let alone households, might depend on a single source of income would not become predominant until after industrialization. The growing emphasis on getting, rather than having, a living was also part of a wider shift of emphasis towards income generation and occupational identity

rather than asset management and social status, and on cash rather than goods as a signifier of wealth. Whether these shifts represented a change in the fortunes of women relative to men over time, and more particularly an augmentation in married women's decision-making authority, is open to debate, not least since there is suggestive evidence that women's commercially oriented activity long preceded the period when consumption patterns began to change. However, in the longer term, these shifts may have precipitated a reduction in married women's informal (but no less important) claims upon and access to marital property directly invested in a wide range of goods (the management of which was wives' responsibility) without delivering increased stakes in occupational identity.

* * *

If we look at women in terms of the extent to which they could function like men, we will surely end up with a depressing tale indeed. That is not to say it is an unimportant tale. But it should not license the continued disregard of women's contributions in economic analysis which assumes that adult males were the prime or even the sole movers. Just as the Fawcett Society report demonstrates the need for economic models that take women's work into account, so we need to shape our understanding of the early modern economy on the basis of what women were doing as well as men. I would re-iterate that it is not my desire to rehabilitate a pre-industrial golden age for women, nor to underestimate the constraints placed on their economic agency. But I do want to emphasize women's central contribution to a period of growth, as waged workers, as enterprising suppliers of goods and services, and as informal bankers and providers of credit, that suggests we need to expand our understanding of the early modern economy rather than simply bemoan the fact that women did not conform to or fit within it. The distinction between marital and occupational status that apparently maps so readily on to gender difference neither precluded occupational identities for 'wives' nor supplied an accurate account of men's productive activity. For the very few women claiming a formal occupational title – expressed as a noun – there were scores who detailed the tasks on which they lived in verb form. This was particularly the case for wives, whose working activities closely resembled those of widows, no doubt facilitated by the childcare provision secured from servants and other working women. Another aspect of women's work was asset management, and it was particularly vital in an economy in which the goods in people's possession functioned as cash equivalents, repositories of wealth, and the security for credit. All these activities should be credited in our assessment of economic development. Indeed, paying attention to the ways in women themselves conceptualized their productive activity, rather than over-looking it on account of the difficulties of accommodating it within economic models that are not only male-centric but anachronistic, promises not only a more

inclusive account of economic development but also opportunities for its reconceptualization. We can make a start by placing less emphasis on occupational identity and more on tasks; by recognizing the occupational dimension of 'housewifery'; and by heeding the importance of having as much as getting a living in early modern England.

Alexandra Shepard is Reader in Early Modern History at the University of Glasgow, and has published on the history of gender and class in early modern England, including her recent book, *Accounting for Oneself: Worth, Status, and the Social Order in Early Modern England* (2015). She is currently working on a history of childcare, family and economy in Britain, 1650–1850.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

This paper has its origins in a lecture I delivered at the North American Conference on British Studies in Portland, Oregon, 2013. I am grateful to the conference organizers for inviting me to present it and to Maria Ågren, Karen Harvey and Margaret Hunt for their comments on draft versions. I am also grateful to seminar participants at the University of Connecticut for discussing this as work in progress while I was Gender and History Visiting Scholar in November 2013.

1 The World Bank, *World Development Report 2011: Gender Equality and Development*, Washington, 2011. See also Esther Duflo, 'Women Empowerment and Economic Development', *Journal of Economic Literature* 50: 4, 2012.

2 'The Changing Labour Market: Delivering for Women, Delivering for Growth', Fawcett Society, April 2013. With roots dating back to 1866 and the campaign for women's suffrage, the Fawcett Society remains the UK's leading campaigning organization for women's equality and rights.

3 See, for example, Ester Boserup, *Women's Role in Economic Development*, New York, 1970; Louise A. Tilley and Joan Scott, *Women, Work and the Family*, New York, 1978; Pat Hudson, 'Women and Industrialisation', in *Women's History: Britain, 1850–1945*, ed. June Purvis, London, 1995; Sara Horrell and Jane Humphries, 'Women's Labour Force Participation and the Transition to the Male-Breadwinner Family, 1790–1865', *Economic History Review* 48: 1, 1995; Colin Creighton, 'The Rise and Decline of the "Male Breadwinner Family" in Britain', *Cambridge Journal of Economics* 23: 5, 1999.

4 Claudia Goldin, 'The U-shaped Female Labor Force Function in Economic Development and Economic History', in *Investment in Women's Human Capital*, ed. T. Paul Schultz, Chicago, 1995; Jan de Vries, *The Industrious Revolution: Consumer Behaviour and the Household Economy, 1650 to the Present*, Cambridge, 2008.

5 Jane Humphries and Carmen Sarasúa, 'Off the Record: Reconstructing Women's Labor Force Participation in the European Past', *Feminist Economics* 18: 4, October 2012.

6 The classic statement remains Alice Clark, *Working Life of Women in the Seventeenth Century*, London, 1919. See also Louise Tilley and Joan Scott, *Women, Work and the Family*, New York, 1978; Judith M. Bennett, *Ale, Beer and Brewsters in England: Women's Work in a Changing World*, Oxford, 1996. For a historiographical overview, see Pamela Sharpe, 'Continuity and Change: Women's History and Economic History in Britain', *Economic History Review* 48: 2, 1995.

7 Mary Prior, 'Women and the Urban Economy: Oxford 1500–1800', in *Women in English Society 1500–1800*, ed. Mary Prior, London, 1985; Katrina Honeyman and Jordan Goodman, 'Women's Work, Gender Conflict, and Labour Markets in Europe, 1500–1900', *Economic History Review* 44: 4, 1991; Merry E. Wiesner, *Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe*, Cambridge, 1993, chap. 3; Marjorie Keniston McIntosh, *Working Women in English Society 1300–1620*, Cambridge, 2005.

8 Eileen Power, 'The Position of Women', in *The Legacy of the Middle Ages*, ed. Charles G. Crump and Ernest F. Jacob, Oxford, 1926, p. 410. Peter Earle, 'The Female Labour Market in London in the Late Seventeenth and Early Eighteenth Centuries', *Economic History Review* 42: 3, 1989; Judith M. Bennett, "'History that Stands Still': Women's Work in the European Past", *Feminist Studies* 14: 2, 1988.

9 Judith M. Bennett, *History Matters: Patriarchy and the Challenge of Feminism*, Manchester, 2006, chaps 4–5.

10 Judith M. Bennett, 'Medieval Women, Modern Women: Across the Great Divide', in *Culture and History 1350–1600: Essays on English Communities, Identities and Writing*, ed. David Aers, London, 1992.

11 E. A. Wrigley, 'The Divergence of England: the Growth of the English Economy in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 6th series: 10, 2000; E. A. Wrigley, 'The Quest for the Industrial Revolution', *Proceedings of the British Academy* 121, 2003; Jan de Vries, 'Economic Growth Before and After the Industrial Revolution: a Modest Proposal', in *Early Modern Capitalism*, ed. Maarten Prak, London, 2001; Jan Luiten van Zanden, 'The "Revolt of the Early Modernists" and the "First Modern Economy": an Assessment', *Economic History Review* 55: 4, 2002; Jan Luiten van Zanden, *The Long Road to the Industrial Revolution: the European Economy in a Global Perspective, 1000–1800*, London, 2009.

12 For a recent example see Jan de Vries and Ad van der Woude, *The First Modern Economy: Success, Failure, and Perseverance of the Dutch Economy, 1500–1815*, Cambridge, 1997. See also Gregory Clark, *A Farewell to Alms: a Brief Economic History of the World*, Princeton, 2007, which includes a chapter entitled (uncritically) 'The Emergence of Modern Man'. For an account of the deep historical roots to the neglect of women's contribution, see 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*, ed. Maria Ågren and Amy Louise Erickson, Aldershot, 2005.

13 Jan de Vries, 'The Industrial Revolution and the Industrious Revolution', *Journal of Economic History* 54: 2, 1994, pp. 261–2; Jan de Vries, *The Industrious Revolution: Consumer Behaviour and the Household Economy, 1650 to the Present*, Cambridge, 2008. See also Mary S. Hartman, *The Household and the Making of History: a Subversive View of the Western Past*, Cambridge, 2004.

14 Tine de Moor and Jan Luiten 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: 1, 2010, p. 1. For a critical assessment of arguments linking growth to the European Marriage Pattern, see Tracy Dennison and Sheilagh Ogilvie, 'Does the European Marriage Pattern Explain Economic Growth?', *Journal of Economic History* 74: 3, 2014.

15 On coverture see especially Amy Louise Erickson, *Women and Property in Early Modern England*, London, 1993; Tim Stretton, 'The Legal Identity of Married Women in England and Europe 1500–1700', in *Europa und seine Regionen: 2000 Jahre europäische Rechtsgeschichte*, ed. Andreas Bauer and Karl H. L. Welker, Köln, 2006. See also *Married Women and the Law in Premodern Northwest Europe*, ed. Cordelia Beattie and Matthew Frank Stevens, Woodbridge, 2013.

16 Amy Louise Erickson, 'Coverture and Capitalism', *History Workshop Journal* 59, spring 2005. See also Judith Spicksley, "'Fly with a Duck in thy Mouth": Single Women as Sources of Credit in Seventeenth-Century England', *Social History* 32: 2, 2007; Judith Spicksley, 'Usury Legislation, Cash and Credit: the Development of the Female Investor in the Late Tudor and Stuart Periods', *Economic History Review* 61: 2, 2008.

17 Colin R. Chapman, *Ecclesiastical Courts, their Officials and their Records*, Dursley, 1992, p. 7.

18 For a full description of the process whereby witnesses were interrogated about their worth, see Alexandra Shepard and Judith Spicksley, 'Worth, Age and Social Status in Early Modern England', *Economic History Review* 64: 2, 2011.

19 There was also a hiatus in the business of the church courts in the 1640s and 1650s. The dataset is more fully described in Alexandra Shepard, *Accounting for Oneself: Worth, Status and the Social Order in Early Modern England*, Oxford, 2015. The compilation of this dataset was funded by a research grant from the Economic and Social Research Council (RES-000-23-1111), and with the assistance of Dr Judith Spicksley, for which I am deeply grateful.

20 *Widowhood in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, ed. Sandra Cavallo and Lyndan Warner, Harlow, 1999; Pamela Sharpe, 'Gender in the Economy: Female Merchants and Family Businesses in the British Isles, 1600–1850', *Histoire sociale/Social History* 34: 68, 2001.

21 Leigh Shaw-Taylor, 'The Rise of Agrarian Capitalism and the Decline of Family Farming in England', *Economic History Review* 65: 1, 2012.

22 West Sussex Record Office [WSRO], Ep II/5/8, fo. 108.

23 Wiltshire & Swindon History Centre [W&SHC], D1/42/20, fo. 41av; Canterbury Cathedral Archives [CCA], DCb/PRC 39/46, fo. 123.

24 Two fifths of the men, and over half of the women. See also Alexandra Shepard, 'Poverty, Labour and the Language of Social Description in Early Modern England', *Past & Present* 201, 2008.

25 CCA, DCb/PRC 39/49, fo. 197v.

26 The tasks identified by men 'living by their labour' included husbandry, threshing, ditching, hedging, felling wood, mowing, thatching, hurdling, buying and selling hay, weaving, wool work, carrying cloth, brewing, and going with a horse and cart.

27 Craig Muldrew, *Food, Energy and the Creation of Industriousness: Work and Material Culture in Agrarian England, 1550–1780*, Cambridge, 2011. See also Paul Slack, *From Reformation to Improvement: Public Welfare in Early Modern England*, Oxford, 1999, chap. 5; Craig Muldrew, 'From Commonwealth to Public Opulence: the Redefinition of Wealth and Government in Early Modern Britain', in *Remaking English Society: Social Relations and Social Change in Early Modern England*, ed. Steve Hindle, Alexandra Shepard and John Walter, Woodbridge, 2013.

28 CCA, DCb/PRC 39/38, fos 88v; 89v.

29 Borthwick Institute [BI], University of York, CP.H.2698, 26 July 1667.

30 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: 2, 2012. See also Beverly Lemire, "'In the Hands of Work Women": English Markets, Cheap Clothing and Female Labour, 1650–1800', *Costume*, 33: 1, 1999.

31 Cambridge University Library [CUL], Cambridge University Archives [CUA], V.C.Ct.II.2*, fos 48v–49, 50.

32 Jane Whittle, 'Housewives and Servants in Rural England, 1440–1650: Evidence of Women's Work from Probate Documents', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 6th series 15, 2005; Jane Whittle, 'Enterprising Widows and Active Wives: Women's Unpaid Work in the Household Economy of Early Modern England', *History of the Family* 19: 3, 2014; Amy Louise Erickson, 'Married Women's Occupations in Eighteenth-Century London', *Continuity and Change* 23: 2, 2008; Amy Louise Erickson, 'Eleanor Mosley and Other Milliners in the City of London Companies 1700–1750', *History Workshop Journal* 71: 1, 2011; Alexandra Shepard, 'The Worth of Married Women in the English Church Courts, c.1550–1730', in *Married Women and the Law*, ed. Beattie and Stevens. See also the Special Issue of *Continuity and Change*, 23: 2, 2008, on 'Partners in Business? Spousal Co-operation in Trades in Early Modern England and the Dutch Republic'; *Female Agency in the Urban Economy: Gender in European Towns, 1640–1830*, ed. Deborah Simonton and Anne Montenach, London, 2013.

33 Judith Spicksley, 'A Dynamic Model of Social Relations: Celibacy, Credit and the Identity of the "Spinster" in Seventeenth-Century England', in *Identity and Agency in England, 1500–1800*, ed. Henry French and Jonathan Barry, Basingstoke, 2004; Amy M. Froide, *Never Married: Singlewomen in Early Modern England*, Oxford, 2005, chap. 6. See also Amy Louise Erickson, 'Marital Status and Economic Activity: Interpreting Spinsters, Wives, and Widows in Pre-Census Population Listings', Cambridge Working Papers in Economic and Social History 7, 2012, http://www.econsoc.hist.cam.ac.uk/working_papers.html (accessed July 2014); Shepard, *Accounting for Oneself*, pp. 221–2.

34 W&SHC, D1/42/61, fo. 53.

35 On a 'verb-oriented' approach to work, see 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: 3, 2011. See also Sheilagh C. Ogilvie, *A Bitter Living: Women, Markets, and Social Capital in Early Modern Germany*, Oxford, 2003.

36 Ariadne Schmidt, 'The Profits of Unpaid Work: "Assisting Labour" of Women in the Early Modern Urban Dutch Economy', *History of the Family* 19: 3, 2014.

37 For a summary, see Sebastian A. J. Keibek and Leigh Shaw-Taylor, 'Early Modern Rural By-employments: a Re-examination of the Probate Evidence', *Agricultural History Review* 61: 2, 2013.

38 Shepard, *Accounting for Oneself*, chap. 7.

39 The extent to which singlewomen were concentrated in service may be exaggerated by this source, since domestic servants were frequent witnesses to the kinds of dispute heard by the ecclesiastical courts. For the extent to which singlewomen were clustered in service, see Froide, *Singlewomen*, chap. 4.

40 Whittle, 'Servants in Rural England'.

41 WSRO, Ep III/5/1, fo. 49.

42 Shepard, *Accounting for Oneself*, chap. 6.

43 Guildhall Library [GL], London, 9189/1, fo. 200v.

44 Erickson, 'Married Women's Occupations', p. 276. For lists of the occupations of husbands and wives in London, see Erickson, 'Married Women's Occupations', pp. 280–1, 283, 296–8; Earle, 'Female Labour Market', pp. 348–52; Shepard, 'Worth of Married Women', pp. 208–11.

45 Cheshire Record Office [CRO], EDC 5(1641)/13; London Metropolitan Archive [LMA], DL/C/242, fo. 32v.

46 GL, 9065A/11, fo. 341v.

47 LMA, DL/C/242, fo. 68; DL/C/637, fo. 214r-v.

48 See also Eleanor Hubbard, *City Women: Money, Sex and the Social Order in Early Modern London*, Oxford, 2012, chap. 4.

49 On the productive activities of rural wives, see Whittle, 'Enterprising Widows and Active Wives'.

50 The parallels between 'housewifery' and 'husbandry' are explicit in Thomas Tusser, *Five Hundreth Pointes of Good Husbandrie as well for the Champion or Open Countrie, as also for the Woodland or Severall, Mixed in Everie Month with Huswiferie, Over and Besides the Booke of Huswiferie*, London, 1585. See also 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, London, 1985.

51 Maria Ågren, 'Emissaries, Allies, Accomplices and Enemies: Married Women's Work in Eighteenth-Century Urban Sweden', *Urban History* 41: 3, 2014. On the gifts which partly provisioned gentry households, see Jane Whittle and Elizabeth Griffiths, *Consumption and Gender in the Early Seventeenth-Century Household: the World of Alice Le Strange*, Oxford, 2012, chaps 3–4.

52 Diana O'Hara, *Courtship and Constraint: Rethinking the Making of Marriage in Tudor England*, Manchester, 2000, chap. 6. See also Jane Whittle, 'Servants in Rural England c.1450–1650: Hired Work as a Means of Accumulating Wealth and Skills before Marriage', in *Marital Economy*, ed. Ågren and Erickson.

53 Shepard, *Accounting for Oneself*, chap. 7.

54 Craig Muldrew, *The Economy of Obligation: the Culture of Credit and Social Relations in Early Modern England*, Basingstoke, 1998.

55 Shepard, *Accounting for Oneself*, chap. 2.

56 Natasha Korda, *Shakespeare's Domestic Economies: Gender and Property in Early Modern England*, Philadelphia, 2002; Alexandra Shepard, 'Family and Household', in *The Elizabethan World*, ed. Susan Doran and Norman L. Jones, London, 2010.

57 Beverly Lemire, 'Consumerism in Preindustrial and Early Industrial England: the Trade in Secondhand Clothes', *Journal of British Studies* 27: 1, 1988; Sara Pennell, "'All but the Kitchen Sink': Household Sales and the Circulation of Second-Hand Goods in Early Modern England', in *Modernity and the Second-Hand Trade: European Consumption Cultures and Practices, 1700–1900*, ed. Jon Stobart and Ilja van Damme, Basingstoke, 2010. See also *Alternative Exchanges: Second-hand Circulations from the Sixteenth Century to the Present*, ed. Laurence Fontaine, New York, 2008, and Laurence Fontaine, 'Women's Economic Spheres and Credit in Pre-Industrial Europe', in *Women and Credit: Researching the Past, Refiguring the Future*, ed. Beverly Lemire, Ruth Pearson and Gail Campbell, Oxford, 2001.

58 Garthine Walker, *Crime, Gender and Social Order in Early Modern England*, Cambridge, 2003, pp. 249–62. See also Muldrew, *Economy of Obligation*, pp. 263, 275, 286.

59 John Dod and Robert Cleaver, *A Godlie Forme of Householde Government*, London, 1612, pp. 167–8. Sir Thomas Smith also described the 'diverse sorte . . . of care of the familie' as requiring '[t]he man to get, to travaile abroad . . . the wife, to save that which is gotten, to tarrie

at home', *De Republica Anglorum*, ed. Mary Dewar, Cambridge, 1982, p. 58. See also Korda, *Shakespeare's Domestic Economies*, chap. 1. For women's accounting roles, see Whittle and Griffiths, *Consumption and Gender*, pp. 30–3; Christine Wiskin, 'Accounting for Business: Financial Management in the Eighteenth Century', in *Women and their Money 1700–1950*, ed. Anne Laurence, Josephine Maltby and Janette Rutterford, London, 2009; *The Business and Household Accounts of Joyce Jeffreys, Spinster of Hereford, 1638–1648*, ed. Judith Spicksley, Oxford, 2012, pp. xxiii–xxvii.

60 Joan Thirsk, 'Making a Fresh Start: Sixteenth-Century Agriculture and the Classical Inspiration', in *Culture and Cultivation in Early Modern England: Writing and the Land*, ed. Michael Leslie and Timothy Taylor, Leicester, 1992.

61 BI, CP.H.54, 15 Apr 1602. See also Hubbard, *City Women*, pp. 125–35.

62 Amy Louise Erickson, 'Possession – and the other one-tenth of the Law: Assessing Women's Ownership and Economic Roles in Early Modern England', *Women's History Review* 16: 3, 2007, p. 370; Joanne Bailey, 'Favoured or Oppressed? Married Women, Property and "Coverture" in England, 1660–1800', *Continuity and Change* 17: 3, 2002.

63 Shepard, *Accounting for Oneself*, chap. 6.

64 B. A. Holderness, 'Credit in a Rural Community, 1660–1800: Some Neglected Aspects of Probate Inventories', *Midland History*, 3, 1975–6; Beverly Lemire, 'Petty Pawns and Informal Lending: Gender and the Transformation of Small-Scale Credit in England, circa 1600–1800', in *From Family Firms to Corporate Capitalism: Essays in Business and Industrial History in Honour of Peter Mathias*, ed. Kristine Bruland and Patrick O'Brien, Oxford, 1998; *Women and Credit*, ed. Lemire and others.; Craig Muldrew, "'A Mutual Assent of Her Mind'" Women, Debt Litigation and Contract in Early Modern England', *History Workshop Journal* 55: 1, spring 2003; Beverly Lemire, *The Business of Everyday Life: Gender, Practice and Social Politics in England, c. 1600–1900*, Manchester, 2005, chap. 2; Marjorie K. McIntosh, 'Women, Credit, and Family Relationships in England, 1300–1620', *Journal of Family History* 30: 2, 2005.

65 CCA, DCb/PRC 39/31, fos 131–3. For further examples of husbands' expressions of gratitude for the industry of their wives, see Sue Wright, "'Churmaids, Huswyfes and Hucksters': the Employment of Women in Tudor and Stuart Salisbury", in *Women and Work in Pre-Industrial England*, ed. Lindsey Charles and Lorna Duffin, London, 1985, p. 105.

66 The pioneering thesis is Neil McKendrick, 'The Consumer Revolution of Eighteenth-Century England', in *The Birth of a Consumer Society: the Commercialization of Eighteenth-Century England*, ed. Neil McKendrick, John Brewer and J. H. Plumb, London, 1982. For various revisions of the timing, motives, social inclusiveness and scale of the 'consumer revolution', see Margaret Spufford, *The Great Reclothing of Rural England: Petty Chapmen and their Wares in the Seventeenth Century*, London, 1984; Lorna Weatherill, *Consumer Behaviour and Material Culture in Britain 1660–1760*, London, 1996; Muldrew, *Economy of Obligation*, pp. 20–1; Mark Overton, Jane Whittle, Darron Dean and Andrew Hann, *Production and Consumption in English Households, 1600–1750*, London, 2004, chaps 3–4; Gregory Clark, 'The Consumer Revolution: Turning Point in Human History, or Statistical Artifact?', unpublished paper, www.econ.ucdavis.edu/faculty/gclark/papers/Consumer%20Revolution.pdf (accessed July 2014).

67 De Vries, *Industrious Revolution*.

68 Craig Muldrew, *Food, Energy and the Creation of Industriousness: Work and Material Culture in Agrarian England, 1550–1780*, Cambridge, 2011. Cf. Robert C. Allen and Jacob L. Weisdorf, 'Was there an "Industrious Revolution" before the Industrial Revolution? an Empirical Exercise for England, c. 1300–1830', *Economic History Review* 64: 3, 2011.

69 Shepard and Spicksley, 'Worth, Age and Social Status'.

70 This shift, and the trends outlined in this paragraph, are more exhaustively documented in Shepard, *Accounting for Oneself*, chaps 7–8.

71 Lemire, 'Petty Pawns'; Melanie Tebbutt, *Making Ends Meet: Pawnbroking and Working-Class Credit*, London, 1983. On savings, see Craig Muldrew, 'From Credit to Savings? An Examination of Debt and Credit in Relation to Increasing Consumption in England (c.1650 to 1770)', *Quaderni storici* 46: 2, 2011; Craig Muldrew, 'From a "Light Cloak" to an "Iron Cage": Historical Changes in the Relation between Community and Individualism', in *Communities in Early Modern England: Networks, Place, Rhetoric*, ed. Alexandra Shepard and Phil Withington, Manchester, 2000; Lemire, *Business of Everyday Life*, chap. 6.