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The Gender Division of Labour in Early Modern England

Jane Whittle and Mark Hailwood

Abstract

This article presents a new evidence of gendered work patterns in the preindustrial economy, providing an overview of women's work in early modern England. Evidence of 4300 work tasks undertaken by particular women and men was collected from three types of court documents (coroners' reports, church court depositions, and quarter sessions examinations) from five counties in south-western England (Cornwall, Devon, Hampshire, Somerset and Wiltshire) between 1500 and 1700. The findings show that women participated in all the main areas of the economy. However, different patterns of gendered work were identified in different parts of the economy: craft work showed a sharp division of labour, agriculture a flexible division of labour, while differences of gender were less pronounced in everyday commerce. Quantitative evidence of early modern housework and care work in England indicates that such work used less time and was less family-based than is often assumed. Comparisons with gendered work patterns in early modern Germany and Sweden are drawn and show strong similarities to England. In conclusion it is argued that the gender division of labour cannot be explained by a single factor, as different influences were at play in different parts of the economy.

In Street, Somerset, in 1551, Margaret Parsons, a servant, helped to plough a seven acre field,¹ while in Knook, Wiltshire, in 1622, Robert Griffin put mutton 'into the pot over the fire to make broth and some provision for his wife being great with child and their children'.² Both Parsons and Griffin challenge our assumptions about the gender division of labour in early modern England, prompting us to think again about the types of work women and men did in this period. Each gave evidence about their activities to the courts: Parsons to the church courts in a tithe dispute, and Griffin a confession of sheep-stealing recorded at the quarter sessions. This article presents new evidence of gendered work patterns in preindustrial England. It shows how records of work tasks from early modern courts can be classified and quantified to provide an overview of the gender division of labour. The findings reveal that patterns of gendered work were not uniform but varied between different parts of the economy: craft work showed a sharp division of labour, agriculture a flexible division of labour, while differences of gender were much slighter in work associated with everyday commerce. Quantitative evidence of early modern housework and care work in England is presented

¹ Somerset Record Office, D/D/Cd/6, pp.236-8.

² Wiltshire and Swindon Heritage Centre, A1-110-1622, p.231.

for the first time, and suggests that such work used less time and was less family-based than is normally assumed.

The following section reviews existing studies of women's work in England between the late medieval period and the early nineteenth century and demonstrates the need for new data. Section II introduces the methodology used, which simulates a modern random spot time-use study by using witness statements from early modern courts to construct an overview of gendered work patterns. Section III presents the raw data on work tasks, but also identifies two significant weaknesses with the data and explains how they can be mitigated. Section IV discusses the findings in more detail, presenting the gender division of labour in fifty-eight subcategories of work task. Particular focus is placed on three areas of work: agriculture, the manufacture of textiles and clothing, and commerce. Section V examines evidence of early modern housework and care work and argues that it differed substantially from modern housework and care work in form, context and organisation. Section VI compares the findings for England with similar studies examining early modern work patterns in Sweden and south-west Germany. In conclusion, the effectiveness of the methodology is appraised and implications for understanding the causes of gendered work patterns and change over time are considered.

I

Building on the pioneering work of Alice Clark and Ivy Pinchbeck in the early twentieth century,³ research since the 1980s has created a rich historiography of women's work in the English economy before 1800. This has revolved mainly around two debates, one on whether the late medieval period was a 'golden age' for women's work, and the second examining the impact of the industrial revolution on women's employment. Medieval historians such as Caroline Barron, Jeremy Goldberg

³ Clark, *Working life*; Pinchbeck, *Women workers*.

and Marjorie McIntosh have argued that the period of demographic decline begun by the Black Death of 1348-9 opened up new opportunities for women creating a brief 'golden age'. However, these gains were lost when renewed population growth in the sixteenth century once again led to increased restrictions on women's work.⁴ Maryanne Kowaleski, Judith Bennett and Mavis Mate have maintained a more pessimistic stance, stressing the continuity of women's economic marginalisation rather than change over time.⁵

In contrast, those studying the period 1700-1850 have a tendency to characterise the situation before 1700 as one of greater opportunities for women. The preindustrial family economy in which work was located in and around the home, with both men and women playing important roles, is contrasted with the capitalist wage economy. Industrialisation led to the separation of home and work, while reliance on individual wage payments ushered in the idea of a male breadwinner supporting other family members, with married women largely restricted to unpaid housework and care work at home.⁶ This model was first proposed by Alice Clark, but has since been echoed in different forms by Louise Tilly and Joan Scott, Keith Snell, Bridget Hill, and Deborah Valenze.⁷ Yet here too, historians such as Bennett and Amanda Vickery have emphasised the continuity over time between the early modern period and nineteenth century rather than change. Bennett stresses that women's work remained 'low-status, low-paid and low-skilled', while Vickery notes the continuity in

⁴ Barron, "'Golden age'", esp. pp.47-9; Goldberg, *Women, work and life-cycle*, esp. pp.336-7; McIntosh, *Working women* esp. pp.251-2.

⁵ Kowaleski, 'Women's work'; Bennett, "'History that stands still'"; Mate, *Daughters, wives and widows*, esp. pp.193-5.

⁶ As summarised by Berg, 'Women's work', pp.64-7.

⁷ Clark, *Working life*; Tilly and Scott, *Women, work and family*; Snell, *Annals*; Hill, *Women, work and sexual politics*; Valenze, *First industrial woman*.

ideas of separate spheres of work for men and women. Maxine Berg observes that there is little evidence for 'a great transition in women's lives with the advent of industrialisation'.⁸

The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries play a curious role in these debates. For the medievalists these centuries stand for the new, more highly commercialised economy in which women's economic freedoms were curtailed; while for historians of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries such as Snell, they represent the traditional economy – the heyday of family-based production before work was increasingly monetized and eventually removed from the home. As Pamela Sharpe noted in 1995, there is still less research on these centuries than the earlier and later periods.⁹

Michael Roberts and Amanda Flather have undertaken sensitive examinations of gendered patterns of work between 1500 and 1700, but do not quantify the patterns they observe.¹⁰ Craig Muldrew has estimated women's participation in spinning, and Peter Earle has studied women's occupations in London at the very end of this period, but the overall pattern of women's work, especially in the rural economy, is far from clear.¹¹

The patchwork of research that exists suggests that there were some significant changes in women's work patterns in England between 1500 and 1700. Muldrew shows that although spinning wool was always an important occupation for women, demand for spinners increased over time: providing employment for perhaps 19.0 per cent of the female population in 1700 compared to 12.5 per cent in 1580.¹² Women seem to have been excluded from some occupations in the sixteenth century.

⁸ Bennett, "History that stands still", p.278; Bennett *History matters*, p.62; Vickery, 'Golden age', esp. pp.401-13; Berg, 'Women's work', p.96.

⁹ Sharpe, 'Continuity and change', p.356.

¹⁰ Roberts, 'Sickles and scythes'; Roberts, "Words they are women"; Roberts, "To bridle the falsehood"; Flather, 'Space, place and gender'; Flather, *Gender and space*, ch.3.

¹¹ Muldrew, "Th'ancient distaff"; Earle, 'Female labour market'.

¹² Muldrew, "Th'ancient distaff", p.519 (for woollen weaving alone), compared with population figures from Wrigley and Schofield, *Population History*, pp.208-9.

They worked as weavers and tailors in the late medieval period,¹³ and from the late seventeenth century onwards,¹⁴ but women appear to have been absent from these crafts from 1500 to 1650. Women also lost their dominance of the brewing industry between 1450 and 1550.¹⁵ Studies of cities in continental Europe have noted women's increasing exclusion from skilled crafts in the sixteenth century.¹⁶ Guild regulations suggest a similar trend in English cities.¹⁷ Women's access to apprenticeship, and thus to many craft occupations, remains under debate. Most work has concentrated on cities with guilds. Numbers of female apprentices in London were very low before 1650, but showed some increase after that date.¹⁸ Outside of London, Ben Amos found that 10 per cent of apprentices in Southampton were female between 1609 and 1740, but numbers involved were small.¹⁹ Snell is the only historian to have quantified women's apprenticeships outside towns with guilds, however his data for before 1700 relates to pauper apprenticeships, which were more akin to compulsory service than apprenticeship.²⁰ He does show, however, that female craft apprentices were reasonably commonplace in southern England in the early to mid-eighteenth century, particularly in mantua making and tailoring, crafts women entered from the late seventeenth century onwards in London.²¹

¹³ Kowaleski, 'Women's work', pp.152-3; Goldberg, *Women, work and life cycle*, pp.93-99, 120-4, 146-7.

¹⁴ On weavers: Pinchbeck, *Women workers*, pp.156-60.

¹⁵ Bennett, *Ale, beer and brewsters*; McIntosh, *Working women*, pp.170-81.

¹⁶ Wiesner, *Working women*, Howell, *Women, production and patriarchy*.

¹⁷ Clark, *Working life*, pp.102-4; Goldberg, *Women, work and life cycle*, p.34; Bennett, *History matters*, pp.95-101 for a summary of recent research.

¹⁸ Bennett, *History matters*, p.98; Gowing, 'Girls on forms', p.450.

¹⁹ Ben Amos, *Adolescence and youth*, pp.135-6.

²⁰ Snell, *Annals*, pp.270-90; Dunlop and Denman, *English apprenticeship*, p.152; Hindle, *On the parish?* pp.191-223..

²¹ Snell, *Annals*, pp.292-3; Gowing, 'Girls on forms', pp.451-3.

The degree of women's participation in agricultural work is also unclear. Views range from Snell's assertion that 'there is abundant supportive evidence for a very wide range of female participation in agricultural tasks before 1750 in the south-east',²² to Sharpe's conclusion that 'before and during the industrial revolution, the demand from agriculture for female labour was limited', and that 'the types of farmwork women did ..., was not much different in the nineteenth century from the sixteenth century.'²³ Helen Speechley found that only 20 per cent of days worked by agricultural wage labourers in Somerset were undertaken by women in the period 1685-1870.²⁴ Women's involvement in commerce has not been quantified. McIntosh notes that as sellers of goods women 'were clustered within activities related to their work at home ... and they normally operated on a small scale'.²⁵

What is missing from these debates is any overview of women's work at a regional level for the period before 1800. Over time, some types of women's work were reduced and others opened up, but it is rarely clear how significant different types of work were in providing employment. It seems unwise to speculate about the causes of the gender division of labour when the actual pattern of work remains so poorly documented. As a consequence, this study began with two simple questions: what types of work did women do in the period 1500-1700, and how did this differ from the work done by men? The methodology used allows the work patterns of a broad swathe of the population to be observed, including those living and working on small farms, a common experience that has been very poorly represented in existing studies, given that an estimated 70 per cent of the English population lived in 'rural agricultural' households in 1600.²⁶ The findings relate to south-west England, but we hope to expand the research to take in other regions in the future. Providing

²² Snell, *Annals*, p.52.

²³ Sharpe, 'Female labour market', p.161 and p.179.

²⁴ Speechley, 'Female and child agricultural day labourers', p.57.

²⁵ McIntosh, *Working women*, p.250.

²⁶ Wrigley, *People, cities, wealth*, p.170.

quantified data about women's work patterns does not explain women's position in early modern society, as Bennett warns, 'we should beware of assuming that women controlled the value produced by their labour'.²⁷ But understanding what work women did, and how this differed from men's, is essential not only to an understanding of women's economic roles, but the development of the economy as whole.²⁸

Recent attempts to integrate women's work into frameworks of long term economic change have been based on unsubstantiated assumptions. In their study of British GDP from 1270 to 1870, Stephen Broadberry et al. estimated that women contributed '30 per cent of the total number of days worked in the economy' across the late medieval and early modern period. This is based on assumed 'labour force participation' rates of 97 per cent for men and 43 per cent for women, derived from the 1851 census returns. It implies that the majority of all adult women's work time was taken up with unpaid 'household duties and childcare' rather than work in the wider economy, while men did virtually none of this type of work.²⁹ Here we investigate whether this was the case, and argue that it was extremely unlikely the housework and child care took up such a high proportion of women's working lives.³⁰

II

The importance of understanding the nature of women's work was highlighted by the *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action* that arose from the fourth United Nations World Conference on Women in 1995. The declaration noted that the economic challenges facing women included not only violence, poverty and prejudice, but the poor recording of women's work. Lack of attention to

²⁷ Bennett, 'Medieval women, modern women', p.153.

²⁸ This argument is made for the later period in Berg, 'What difference'.

²⁹ Broadberry et al., *British economic growth*, pp.348-52.

³⁰ For a more detailed discussion of the place of housework and child care in the economy see Whittle, 'A critique'.

unpaid, informal and subsistence-related activities led to governments and development policies overlooking the quantity, form and value of women's work.³¹ The *Beijing Declaration* and the UN recommend conducting time-use surveys to collect datasets on gendered work patterns in developing economies.³² The challenge for historians is to retrospectively collect a body of data that has the same strengths as time-use surveys: recording paid and unpaid work, women and men, and the whole range of work activities. One technique for collecting time-use data is random spot observation, in which 'the enumerator observes the respondent at randomly chosen points of time during the recording period'.³³ Detailed court records from the preindustrial period allow us to construct something like 'random spot observation', recording what particular individuals were doing when something – a crime, misdemeanour or accident – happened.

The first historian to compile data of this type for the preindustrial economy was Barbara Hanawalt.³⁴ She analysed medieval coroners' inquests into accidental death from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, observing gendered differences in the location and type of tasks men and women were engaged in when an accident occurred. The analysis is restricted to a six page appendix of her book, but it was suggestive of the potential of this technique. Sheilagh Ogilvie was the first to adopt this methodology in a book-length study.³⁵ She used evidence of work from court documents to reconstruct the gender division of labour in rural Württemberg in south-west Germany for the period 1650-1800. The methodology has been further refined as the 'verb-orientated approach' used in the 'Gender and work' project examining preindustrial Sweden led by Maria Ågren.³⁶ All

³¹ *Beijing declaration*, para. 165 (UN, 1995).

³² *Guide to producing statistics* (UN, 2005), esp. p.10; Antonopoulos and Hirway, *Unpaid work*, pp.1-21.

³³ *Guide to producing statistics* (UN, 2005), p.16. Also described as the 'experience sampling method', see Gershuny, 'Time-use surveys', p.5.

³⁴ Hanawalt, *Ties that bound*, pp.269-74.

³⁵ Ogilvie, *A bitter living*.

³⁶ Fiebranz et al., 'Making verbs count'; Ågren ed., *Making a living*.

these approaches are characterized by a focus on work tasks or activities rather than occupations or wage payments. All draw their evidence heavily from court documents, which contain incidental and contextual information about the tasks people were engaged in when something happened or in relation to a particular crime or misdemeanour.

The data for early modern England presented here is drawn from the records of three types of court. First, like Hanawalt, we use coroners' reports into accidental death. Translated transcriptions of coroners' reports were made available by Steven Gunn from his project investigating accidental death in the sixteenth century.³⁷ Most of the data collected, however, is drawn from church court depositions (witness statements), and from quarter sessions examinations, which include statements made by both witnesses and by those accused of crimes at county-level criminal courts. All three types of documents provide vignettes of everyday activities. Using the methodology described by A.W. Carus and Sheilagh Ogilvie as 'turning qualitative into quantitative evidence', instances of specific people carrying out specific work tasks were collected and analysed.³⁸ In total, 4300 instances of work tasks are recorded in the database. It is these work tasks or activities, such as driving a plough, mending shoes or buying silver spoons,³⁹ undertaken by individuals specified as male or female, that form the quantified unit in the subsequent analysis.⁴⁰

Our methodology differs from the previous studies conducted by Ogilvie, and by Ågren and her team, in a number of small but important ways. First, we adopted a definition of 'work' provided by the economist Margaret Reid in her 1934 book on *Economics of Household Production* (explained

³⁷ 'Everyday life and fatal hazard in sixteenth-century England', see <http://tudoraccidents.history.ox.ac.uk/>.

³⁸ Carus and Ogilvie, 'Turning qualitative into quantitative evidence'.

³⁹ All these examples come from 1610, taken from the project database.

⁴⁰ For further details see <https://earlymodernwomenswork.wordpress.com/methodology/>.

below): a definition subsequently used by the UN in its guidelines on national accounting.⁴¹ This contrasts with the broader definition used by Ogilvie who collected ‘all references to women’s and men’s work’ and by the Swedish team who recorded ‘how people used their time to make a living’.⁴² For pragmatic reasons we also excluded the criminal activities which were central to the court cases examined and administrative activities related to the courts, as these would have swamped the database. In order to be able to track the relationship of the work activities recorded to the cases from which they originated, we labelled them as ‘integral’, ‘related’ or ‘incidental’, as is described in more detail in section III below.

Reid’s definition of work is particularly helpful in its approach to subsistence production and services. While paid work and the production of goods for sale can unproblematically be considered part of the economy, Reid suggested a rigorous approach to unpaid work. Her rule, known as the ‘third party criterion’, is that any unpaid work that could be replaced with paid work or purchased goods should be considered as work.⁴³ For early modern England, this definition allows all tasks related to running small farms to be included without having to make any assumptions about whether they were aimed at direct subsistence or sale in the market. It also means that housework and care work are considered to be work, as these could be (and commonly were) replaced with paid services via the employment of servants within early modern households.

Data were drawn from five counties in the south-west of England, but predominantly from Devon and Somerset, see table 1. The south-west is reputed to have been an area favourable to women’s employment in the early modern period. It was known for dairying, cloth production and lace-

⁴¹ Reid, *Economics of household production*, especially p.11. The UN provides an almost identical definition in its *System of national accounts 1993*, p.149. For further discussion see Whittle, ‘A critique’.

⁴² Ogilvie, *A bitter living*, p.23; Ågren ed., *Making a living*, p.2.

⁴³ See also Gershuny, ‘Time-use surveys’, p.15.

making, all of which employed more women than men.⁴⁴ Records of wage labour in farm accounts, and early nineteenth century descriptions of farming, also suggest that women were more likely to be employed in arable agriculture in this region than in south-east England.⁴⁵ The counties encompass a great deal of variety, with fishing on the coast, mining in Cornwall and Somerset, and woollen cloth production for international markets in Devon, Somerset and Wiltshire.⁴⁶ Farming ranged from cattle and sheep rearing in the uplands of Devon and Cornwall, stock fattening in the Somerset Levels, and dairying in east Devon and north-west Wiltshire, to arable farming in the clay vales of Devon and Somerset, and sheep-corn farming in the chalk lands of Wiltshire and Hampshire.⁴⁷ The sample is largely rural but all the information available from county or diocesan level courts was sampled, including work tasks in cities and towns. In 1524-5 the most important cities in the region, with their own governments and craft guilds, were Exeter, Salisbury, Southampton and Winchester, accounting for a total population of around 20,000.⁴⁸ Assuming their population had risen to c.30,000 by 1600, 4 per cent of the estimated total population of the region lived in these cities.⁴⁹ They provided 166 of the work tasks in the database, 3.9 per cent of the total.

⁴⁴ Sharpe, *Population and society*, p.93; Sharpe, 'Lace and place'.

⁴⁵ Sharpe, *Adapting to capitalism*, p.74; Pinchbeck, *Women workers*, pp.90-1.

⁴⁶ Clay, *Economic expansion*, II, p.14, 20, 49.

⁴⁷ Thirsk, *England's agricultural regions*, esp. pp.28-9; Wilson, *Forgotten harvest*; Croot, *World of the small farmer*; Speechley, 'Female and child agricultural day labourers', pp.50-5.

⁴⁸ Exeter c.7000, Salisbury c.6000, Winchester c.4000, Southampton c.3000. The Devon town of Crediton also had a population of c.3000 but was a market and wool-weaving town without guilds. Slack, 'Great and good towns', p.352.

⁴⁹ For population estimates see table 2.

Table 1: The Work Tasks Dataset

	Number of work tasks	Percentage
By Court		
Church court depositions	1621	37.6
Quarter sessions examinations	2447	56.9
Coroners' reports	232	5.3
By County		
Cornwall	35	0.8
Devon	1449	33.7
Hampshire	368	8.6
Somerset	1695	39.4
Wiltshire	753	17.5
By Period		
1500-1549	82	1.9
1550-1599	976	22.7
1600-1649	1779	41.4
1650-1699	1463	34.0
Total	4300	100

Sources: as for table A1.

Evidence is relatively scarce before 1550, but plentiful thereafter, and particularly rich for the early seventeenth century. The selection of data is geographically uneven. Table 2 compares the number of work tasks recorded per county with population estimates for 1600. Devon and Wiltshire are represented in proportion to their population, but work tasks from Somerset were overrepresented, while Hampshire and especially Cornwall are underrepresented. There were no surviving quarter sessions examinations for Cornwall and Hampshire for this period, while evidence from Cornwall was only drawn from the church courts of the Bishop of Exeter. Somerset was overrepresented because although a similar proportion of cases were consulted to Devon, those cases yielded more examples of work tasks in Somerset, suggesting that more detailed recording of evidence prevailed in the Somerset courts.

Table 2: Work task dataset and population estimates compared

By County	Estimated population in 1600	% of population	Number of work tasks recorded	% of work tasks
Cornwall	102892	13.7	35	0.8
Devon	258587	34.5	1449	33.7
Hampshire	104197	13.9	368	8.6
Somerset	168984	22.5	1695	39.4
Wiltshire	115163	15.3	753	17.5
TOTAL	749823	99.9	4300	100.0

Sources: population estimates from Broadberry et al., *British Economic Growth*, p.25.

The data are also uneven between the courts, with the quarter sessions providing most evidence. While church court depositions and quarter sessions records survive equally well, many more examples of work activities were found in the quarter sessions: 72 per cent of quarter sessions examinations contained evidence of work tasks, compared to 15 per cent of church court depositions. This made it much more laborious to collect information from the church courts.⁵⁰ The balance between the three courts used was also uneven over time. Only sixteenth-century coroners' reports were used, while quarter sessions examinations are only available after 1596. While church courts survive well from 1550 onwards, the types of cases varied over time: tithe disputes, which are particularly rich for agricultural work, were most common before 1600.⁵¹ This unevenness means it is not possible to reliably track change over time within the study period using this dataset.

III

⁵⁰ Quarter sessions examinations were sampled from one year in every decade with surviving records per county; and approximately one consistory court deposition book was sampled for each decade with surviving records per diocese. The number of documents searched for work tasks was: 567 coroners' reports, c.3400 quarter sessions examinations, and c.10700 church court depositions.

⁵¹ Of the 579 work tasks drawn from tithe disputes, 316 came from before 1600, 173 from 1600-49 and 90 from 1650-1700.

Table 3 shows the quantity of work tasks recorded in ten overarching categories of types of work. In total, just under 30 per cent of work tasks recorded were carried out by women. None of the categories was gender exclusive. There are, however, two issues with the raw data that need to be addressed. One is the underrepresentation of women, and the other is the influence of patterns of crimes and disputes in the courts on the work tasks recorded. Given that all work tasks were recorded, including housework and care work, the underrepresentation of women can only be accepted as a real reflection of the distribution of work if we agree that women worked less and had more leisure than men. All evidence from societies based on small scale agricultural production, as well as comments from the early modern period, suggests the opposite. The UN *Development Programme Report 1995* found that in the second half of the twentieth century ‘women work longer hours than men in nearly every country’. Women carried out 55 per cent of the total work undertaken in rural areas of developing countries, and 51 per cent in industrial countries.⁵² Farming advice books suggest the same was true in early modern England. Thomas Tusser wrote in his *Five Hundred Points of Good Husbandry* (1580) that ‘some respite to husbands the weather may send, but huswives affaires have never an end’; while Fitzherbert in his *Book of Husbandry* (1533) offered advice to farming housewives on time management, noting that it ‘may fortune somtyme that thou shalt have so many thinges to do, that thou shalt not well knowe where is beste to begyn’. Similar advice was not offered to the male farmer.⁵³

⁵² *Human development report 1995* (UN), p.88 and p.93.

⁵³ Tusser, *Five hundred points*, p.157; Fitzherbert *Book of husbandry* p.62 (fol.k4).

Table 3: Work tasks by category and gender (raw data)

Category	Total	Male	Female	% Female
agriculture and land	1077	864	213	19.8
care work	173	67	106	61.3
commerce	1187	834	353	29.7
crafts and construction	443	335	108	24.4
food processing	301	228	73	24.3
housework	297	79	218	73.4
management	221	148	73	33.0
mining and quarrying	28	25	3	10.7
transport	520	414	106	20.4
Other	53	45	8	15.1
Total	4300	3039	1261	29.4

Sources: as for table A1.

The underrepresentation of women, therefore, seems likely to be a consequence of using evidence from early modern courts, and in particular, the predominance of male witnesses. This is confirmed by Table 4, which shows that women made up only 26.5 per cent of witnesses in cases recording work tasks in the church courts and quarter sessions. This is very similar to the 24 per cent of female witnesses found by Alexandra Shepard in her study of 13,686 church court witness statements from across England.⁵⁴ Importantly, our analysis also demonstrates that both men and women were more likely to recount tasks undertaken by people of the same gender. Thus 91 per cent of male work tasks were witnessed by men, and 69 per cent of female work tasks were witnessed by women.

⁵⁴ Shepard, *Accounting for oneself*, pp.14-19. On gender in the criminal courts see Walker, *Crime, gender and social order*, and Shoemaker, *Prosecution and punishment*.

Table 4: The gender of witnesses and witnessing

	Total	Male	Female	% Female
witnesses	1874	1369	505	26.5
actors witnessed undertaking work	3056	2133	923	30.2
work tasks recorded	4300	3039	1261	29.3
tasks witnessed by each gender	4068 ⁵⁵	2969	1099	27.0
male tasks witnessed by gender	2841	2586	255	9.0
female tasks witnessed by gender	1227	383	844	68.8

Sources: as for table A1.

The figures can be adjusted to compensate for the missing women. Table 5 shows two possible methods. The ‘witness multiplier’ mitigates for the gender bias among witnesses, and shows the proportion of work tasks carried out by women that would have been recorded if 50 per cent of witnesses had been female. However, as women were more likely to describe men’s work than men were to describe women’s work, this results in 44/56 split in the total work tasks between women and men.⁵⁶ The ‘50/50 multiplier’ makes the more straightforward assumption that at least 50 per cent of work tasks must have been carried out by women.⁵⁷ This assumption is conservative in the light of evidence noted above. This multiplier has been used to provide the adjusted figures in the rest of the article. After applying the 50/50 multiplier it appears that women carried out over a third of work tasks in all the major categories, including agriculture and transport. Women made up 44 per cent of those engaged in the manufacturing categories, and 50 per cent or more of those undertaking tasks in commerce and management. Women dominated housework and care work, but men were not completely absent from these categories.

⁵⁵ This total is lower than the total number of activities in the database (4300) as it excludes activities from Coroners’ Reports (232) for which the gender of witnesses was not specified.

⁵⁶ 23% of tasks observed by women were done by men; 13% of tasks observed by men were done by women.

⁵⁷ The total number of male work tasks (3039) divided by the total number of female work tasks (1261) = 2.41. Thus each female work task is multiplied by 2.41.

Table 5: Per cent of work tasks carried out by women, by category, with multipliers applied

Category	Raw data	With witness multiplier	With 50/50 multiplier
agriculture and land	19.8	31.8	37.3
care work	61.3	75.0	79.2
commerce	29.7	44.5	50.5
crafts & construction	24.4	37.9	43.7
food processing	24.3	37.8	43.6
housework	73.4	83.9	86.9
management	33.0	48.3	54.3
mining and quarrying	10.7	18.5	22.4
transport	20.4	32.7	38.2
other	15.1	25.2	30.0
Total	29.3	44.0	50.0

Note: for explanation of multipliers see text.

Sources: as for table A1.

The second issue to address is the influence of types of crime and dispute on the type of work tasks and the gender of workers recorded. Table 6 shows the types of cases from which work tasks were taken. Church courts provide a wide range of cases, but the evidence from the quarter sessions was dominated by cases of theft. Some types of case were more likely to record women's work than others. Of the six most common types of case, a higher than average proportion of tasks carried out by women were recorded in defamation (44.6 per cent), matrimonial (42.1 per cent) and testamentary cases (39.1 per cent); a low proportion of women's work tasks were found in tithe cases (11.6 per cent) and cases of accidental death (14.7 per cent); while the proportion of women's tasks in theft cases (27.4 per cent) was close to the average (29.4 per cent).

Table 6: The types of court cases provided evidence of work tasks

Type of case (all courts)	Number of work tasks	% of work tasks
Theft	1968	45.8
Tithe	579	13.5
Defamation	397	9.2
Accidental death	232	5.4
Testamentary	220	5.1
Matrimonial	145	3.4
Physical assault	86	2.0
Paternity	88	2.0
Adultery	50	1.2
Rape/sexual assault	49	1.1
Church seating	22	0.5
Murder	8	0.2
Miscellaneous	187	4.3
Unclear	269	6.3
Total	4300	100.0

Sources: as for table A1.

The effect of crime patterns is demonstrated by the fact that 13 per cent of all the work tasks recorded in the database involved sheep. This is only partly a reflection of the prevalence of sheep farming in the region: it also reflects the prevalence of sheep stealing cases in the quarter sessions. The crime central to each court case was not recorded as a work task in the database, but other related tasks were. Thus, while sheep stealing was not recorded, the butchering and sale of sheep arising from sheep stealing were. In anticipation of this issue, each task entered into the database was labelled according to its relationship to the legal case from which it arose. Thus butchering a stolen sheep was considered 'integral' to the case. Agricultural work recorded in tithe disputes was considered to be 'related'. Work tasks that were completely unrelated to the case, such as a woman doing laundry in a case of disputed marriage contract, were labelled 'incidental'. As would be expected, integral tasks reflect patterns of crime and misdemeanour prosecuted in the courts most strongly: 67 per cent of work tasks involving sheep were 'integral' and recorded in the quarter

sessions, and many were connected to sheep stealing. Table 7 shows the categories of work according to their relationship to court cases. The commercial work tasks recorded were particularly likely to be integral to court cases as they often originated from theft cases in the quarter sessions and the defence that goods had been purchased rather than stolen.

Table 7: The relationship of work tasks to court cases

Category	% 'Integral'	% 'Related'	% 'Incidental'	% Total
agriculture and land	8.1	36.6	26.5	25.0
care work	0.7	6.2	4.5	4.0
commerce	50.9	16.2	19.0	27.6
crafts and construction	6.4	10.1	14.9	10.3
food processing	12.2	4.3	5.3	7.0
housework	3.9	5.5	12.2	6.9
management	5.5	4.6	5.5	5.1
mining and quarrying	0.2	1.1	0.5	0.7
transport	11.3	13.9	10.3	12.1
other	0.8	1.5	1.4	1.2
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Number	1317	1772	1211	4300

Note: for the meaning of 'integral', 'related' and 'incidental' see text.

Sources: as for table A1.

'Integral' work tasks are still helpful in examining the gender division of labour within categories, and are included in the data shown in tables 9 to 15 below. However, they do cause some categories to be over-represented, and thus distort the overall distribution of tasks undertaken by women or by men. The 'related' evidence is much closer in pattern to the 'incidental' evidence. Table 8 shows the distribution of women's and men's work across categories when only incidental and related evidence is included. The categories most overrepresented in the 'integral' tasks are commerce and food processing. When only 'incidental' and 'related' evidence is used commerce is still an important category of work task for women, but less so than housework or agriculture, which are of almost

equal importance. For men, commerce and food processing are reduced in importance in favour of agriculture and crafts and construction.

Table 8: Percentage of work tasks across categories by gender

Category	Female: all data	Female: 'incidental' and 'related' data only	Male: all data	Male: 'incidental' and 'related' data only
agriculture and land	16.9	21.0	28.4	37.7
care work	8.4	10.8	2.2	3.1
commerce	28.0	17.9	27.4	17.1
crafts & construction	8.6	8.9	11.0	13.4
food processing	5.8	5.6	7.5	4.3
housework	17.3	21.3	2.6	2.3
management	5.8	5.1	4.9	4.9
mining and quarrying	0.2	0.3	0.8	1.1
transport	8.4	8.4	13.6	14.3
other	0.6	0.8	1.5	1.8
Total	100.0	100.0	99.9	100.0

Sources: as for table A1.

Data gleaned from historical court documents can never be equivalent to a rigorous modern time-use survey: the sample could not be selected to weight the characteristics of the whole population, nor can the timing of spot-checks be controlled. As with modern spot-check time-use surveys, the duration of the tasks recorded is uncertain.⁵⁸ Nonetheless, the 'incidental' and 'related' evidence shown in Table 8 is as close as it is possible to get to a spot-check time use survey, and indicates the relative importance of the different types of work tasks engaged in by women and men in early modern England. This distribution sheds light on the confusion that has arisen in the existing literature about women's work patterns. Agriculture was one of the most important types of work

⁵⁸ Gershuny, 'Time-use surveys', p.5.

for women, but fewer work tasks in agriculture were carried out by women than men. Yet, in this largely rural sample, neither men's nor women's work was dominated by agricultural tasks. This is in part because running a small farm also involved commerce and transport, and because farming households were involved in food processing and crafts and construction as well as agriculture. Housework and care work were significant areas of work for women, but not to the exclusion of involvement in other areas: they do not appear to have taken up the majority of women's time; nor were men completely absent from this type of work.⁵⁹

IV

In the broad categories used so far, there is great deal of overlap in women's and men's work, as table 5 shows. However, when we look in more detail at particular areas of the economy a higher degree of gender segregation is evident. What is more, the extent of gender segregation varied substantially between different parts of the economy: agriculture was gendered, but in a flexible way that allowed the work to be done by the opposite gender if necessary; textile and clothing production demonstrated a sharp division of labour; while commercial and management tasks occupied very similar proportions of women and men. After surveying the overall pattern in 58 subcategories of work task, this section looks in more detail at the contrasting patterns of gender division of labour in agriculture, textile and clothing production, and commerce.

Table A1 in the appendix breaks down the major categories of work task into 58 subcategories, and it is at this level that types of work that were completely or almost (90 per cent or more) gender exclusive are encountered. Men dominated hunting and fishing, woodland management, working with stone, metal and wood, building work, mill operation, and transport using carts and boats. Women dominated dairying, childcare, midwifery, cleaning, laundry, and collecting water. The men who appear carrying out tasks in female-dominated work areas were typically helping: for instance,

⁵⁹ For similar conclusions see Ogilvie, *A bitter living*, p.321.

fetching the midwife or child-bed linen, or (literally) holding the baby. However, occasionally men were fully engaged in some female-dominated tasks: some men did collect water, empty chamber pots, and look after children. The women who engaged in male-dominated tasks were often doing something slightly different. The women working in wood husbandry were collecting rushes or gathering brushwood and brambles to make brooms; the one female metalworker recorded was 'working upon knives in a shop' in Exeter, perhaps a cutler rather than a smith; the woman engaged in mining was washing ore. Occasionally women had assisting roles, such as carrying thatch up a ladder. Women were sometimes fully engaged in work tasks normally carried out by men, such as ploughing or driving carts, just not very often. Only a minority of subcategories were 90 per cent or more gender exclusive: making up 18.6 per cent of male tasks and 11.3 per cent of female tasks. Of the most common work subcategories, for which a hundred or more examples were collected, only one (farm transport) was very strongly gendered (male).

Table 9 shows the gender division of labour in agriculture and reveals a significant overlap between men's and women's work that indicates a degree of flexibility. Well-paid work during the grain harvest has been a particular focus of previous research. Roberts drew attention to the fact that while both men and women used the sickle to reap crops, only men used the scythe to mow.⁶⁰ Traditionally the scythe was used to harvest barley, oats, and peas, but Snell argued that from the mid-eighteenth century this extended to wheat and rye, undermining an important source of women's employment in agriculture.⁶¹ Table 9a confirms that only men mowed with a scythe, while reaping with a sickle was a mixed activity. However, the adjusted figures suggest women made up only 35 per cent of those reaping, and 26 per cent of those undertaking tasks in the grain harvest.

⁶⁰ Roberts 'Sickles and scythes'.

⁶¹ Snell, *Annals*, p.50. There was one example, from Axminster in 1634, of a man mowing wheat: Devon Record Office, Chanter 866, pp.66-8.

Thus women's involvement in harvest work was not as great as men's even when the sickle was still in common use, and well before the eighteenth century.

Table 9: The gender division of labour in agricultural field work and animal husbandry

a: Field work

	Total	Male	Female	% Female	% Female adj.
prepare ground	103	96	7	6.8	15.0
sowing	14	9	5	35.7	57.1
weeding	14	1	13	92.9	96.9
hay harvest	71	57	14	19.7	37.4
grain harvest	181	158	23	12.7	25.8
other	12	10	2	16.7	33.3
Total	395	331	64	16.2	31.8
ploughing	46	45	1	2.2	4.3
mowing	37	37	0	0.0	0.0
reaping	38	31	7	18.4	35.4

b: Animal husbandry

	Total	Male	Female	% Female	% Female adj.
milking	56	3	53	94.6	97.7
cattle: other	46	40	6	13.0	25.9
horses	28	22	6	21.4	38.9
sheep: keeping	44	44	0	0.0	0.0
sheep: shearing	47	36	11	23.4	42.9
sheep: marking	23	22	1	4.3	8.3
sheep: other	25	21	4	16.0	32.3
pigs	5	2	3	60.0	77.8
dogs	4	3	1	25.0	40.0
poultry	9	5	4	44.4	66.7
bees	5	3	2	40.0	62.5
providing fodder	4	4	0	0.0	0.0
Total	296	205	91	30.7	51.7

Note: the adjusted figures apply the 50/50 multiplier to female work tasks

Sources: as for table A1.

Snell also argued that before the eighteenth century women had been involved in a wide range of agricultural tasks, such as ‘reaping, loading and spreading dung, ploughing, threshing, thatching, following the harrow, sheep shearing and even working as shepherdesses’.⁶² We found no examples of women loading or spreading dung, and only one woman involved in ploughing. Women did occasionally thresh small amounts of grain, but they dominated winnowing: 2 out of 42 threshers observed were female, compared to 12 out of 16 winnowers. There were no examples of women ‘following the harrow’, but they did sometimes work in similar processes, breaking down clods of earth and covering over seeds. Women made up a significant proportion of sheep shearers, including examples such as Anne Josse and Wilmota Smallridge, married women who were paid to shear 50 sheep at Holcombe Burnell in Devon yearly from 1632-4.⁶³ There were no examples of female shepherds. Thus Snell was correct in arguing that women did a wide range of agricultural tasks but, for south-west England at least, inaccurate about what exactly they did do. We cannot agree with Sharpe’s conclusion that ‘before ... the industrial revolution, the demand from agriculture for female labour was limited’.⁶⁴ This may have been true of the day labourers employed on large farms, but it is not true of agricultural labour overall. In the dataset women made up around a third of those carrying out field work tasks, and half of those doing tasks related to animal husbandry.

Textile and clothing production was the most important industry in the early modern economy. Devon, Somerset and Wiltshire all had export-orientated woollen cloth industries, located largely in small towns and villages. Women were well represented among textile and clothing producers. However, this work was marked by a sharp gender division of labour, as table 10 shows. In textile

⁶² Snell, *Annals*, p.52.

⁶³ Devon Record Office, Chanter 866, pp.22-3. See also Clark, *Working life*, p.62.

⁶⁴ Sharpe, ‘Female labour market’, p.161 and p.179.

production women dominated the preparatory processes: they cleaned, combed, and carded, and spun the wool. Men dominated the finishing processes of dyeing, weaving, and fulling. An account of making kerseys, a common form of woollen cloth in south-west England,⁶⁵ stated that 46 people were needed to sort, card and spin the wool, compared to 8 weavers and 6 finishers, in Yorkshire in 1588.⁶⁶ This corresponds closely to the proportion of work tasks recorded for the different processes in the dataset: 66 per cent of work tasks in textile production involved carding, spinning and winding wool, compared to 67 per cent in Yorkshire, while 14 per cent of work tasks involved weaving, compared to 13 per cent in Yorkshire.⁶⁷ It is therefore not surprising that the majority of tasks recorded in table 10 were carried out by women.⁶⁸ The only female weaver appears to have been engaged in small-scale linen production. Thomasine Green of Crediton 'wrought a breadth of Rosterne' in 1610, before selling it to another woman who made it into a 'falling band' or collar. It is likely that 'rosterne' was linen cloth: the only example of linen weaving in the database.⁶⁹

⁶⁵ On kerseys, see Kerridge, *Textile manufactures*, pp.16, 25.

⁶⁶ Muldrew, '“Th'ancient distaff”', p.504.

⁶⁷ See table A2 in the appendix.

⁶⁸ Clark, *Working life*, p.98.

⁶⁹ Devon Record Office: QS/4/Box 16, E13.

Table 10: The gender division of labour in textile and clothing production

a. textiles

	Total	Male	Female	% Female	% Female adj.
gathering wool	27	19	8	29.6	50.0
cleaning wool	14	7	7	50.0	70.8
carding/combing	8	2	6	75.0	87.5
spinning	37	2	35	94.6	97.7
winding yarn	3	2	1	33.3	50.0
organising	14	10	4	28.6	50.0
transporting	5	2	3	60.0	77.8
dyeing	7	7	-	0.0	0
weaving	21	20	1	4.8	9.1
finishing	8	8	-	0.0	0
other	3	3	-	0.0	0
Total	147	82	65	44.2	65.7

b. clothing and shoes

	Total	Male	Female	% Female	% Female adj.
accessories	9	3	6	66.7	82.4
bedding	4	3	1	25.0	40.0
felt	2	2	-	0.0	0.0
stockings	11	-	11	100.0	100.0
lace	3	-	3	100.0	100.0
mending	4	1	3	75.0	87.5
outer-clothing	32	29	3	9.4	19.4
shoes	8	8	-	0.0	0.0
tanning	3	3	-	0.0	0.0
under-clothing	10	2	8	80.0	90.4
other	2	1	1	50.0	66.7
Total	88	52	36	40.9	62.0

Note: the adjusted figures apply the 50/50 multiplier to female work tasks

Sources: as for table A1.

The same sharp gender division of labour was found in other parts of the clothing trade, shown in table 10b. All those engaged in lace-making and stocking knitting were women, as were the great majority of those making underclothing (shirts and smocks) and accessories (collars, handkerchiefs and gloves). On the other hand, all those making of shoes, felt and leather were men, as were the majority making outer-clothing (breeches, coats, gowns, 'clothes', or 'tailoring'). This division of labour accords almost exactly with the items made by female seamstresses listed in Randle Holme's *Academy of Armory* (1688), and the male apprenticed trades listed in the Statute of Artificers of 1563.⁷⁰ Alice Clark offered a rosy picture of the seventeenth-century textile industry, writing that 'the work of men and women alike was carried on chiefly at home, and thus the employment of married women and children was unimpeded; nor was there any sign of industrial jealousy between men and women.'⁷¹ Yet it appears women were excluded from certain tasks, typically the tasks associated with apprenticed trades.

Commerce, defined as buying or selling, going to a market or fair, or running a shop or stall, was the largest category of work task in the raw data collected. Early modern commentators depict a gendered pattern of selling and buying. For instance, in a passage repeated by other household advice books, Thomas Tilney's *Flower of Friendship* (1573) suggested that the husband was the seller and dealer, while the wife was the buyer who spent money:

.... The office of the husband is to go abroad in matters of profit, of the wife, to tarry at home, and see all be well there. The office of the husband is to provide money, of the wife, not to wastefully spend it. The office of the husband is to deal and bargain with all men, of the wife, to make or meddle with no man....⁷²

⁷⁰ Holme, *Academy of armory*, Book 3, ch. 3, pp.97-8; Statute of Artificers, in Tawney and Power ed., *Tudor economic documents*, 1, pp.338-50.

⁷¹ Clark, *Working life*, pp.94-5.

⁷² Tilney, *Flower of friendship*, p.120.

The dataset shows very little indication of any such division of tasks. The adjusted figures show a slight preponderance of men among sellers (52.9 per cent) and of women among buyers (51.6 per cent), but both women and men were heavily involved in buying and selling.

The gender of commerce only emerges when the types of goods being bought and sold are considered, as shown in table 11. McIntosh argued that 'as producers and sellers of goods, they [women] were clustered within activities related to their work at home (dealing with food, drink, and cloth/clothing)'.⁷³ Women did make up 60 per cent of those selling food and drink and 68 per cent of those selling clothing, but they sold many other products as well which were not connected to 'their work at home'. They dominated the sale of textiles, despite not weaving or finishing the cloth themselves. Three different women were selling (second hand) iron in Wiltshire and Somerset.⁷⁴ Women were also well represented among those selling unprocessed agricultural products, such as livestock, grain and wool. Similarly, when patterns of buying are considered it is evident that women were not simply making purchases for direct household consumption. They purchased grain, wool and textiles – all goods that required further processing, while men made up a significant proportion of those purchasing consumer goods.

⁷³ McIntosh, *Working women*, p.250.

⁷⁴ The cases refer to 'old iron', parts of a cart wheel, and iron mill-parts, respectively.

Table 11: The gender division of labour in buying and selling

Types of goods		Buying				Selling			
		F	M	total	% F	F	M	total	% F
raw materials	livestock	36	141	177	20	41	130	171	24
	wool	48	45	93	52	31	37	68	46
	grain	39	24	63	62	14	19	33	42
	wood/timber	0	12	12	0	2	14	16	13
manufactured products	textiles	60	18	78	77	48	18	66	72
	iron	2	7	9	22	10	4	14	71
	equipment/tools	2	17	19	11	0	13	13	0
consumer goods	food & drink	113	81	194	58	94	62	156	60
	clothing	65	31	96	68	48	23	71	68
	housewares	22	10	32	69	5	12	17	29
	light/fuel/cleaning	10	12	22	45	7	5	12	58
	silverware	5	3	8	63	10	2	12	17
	furniture	5	3	8	63	0	3	3	0
	books/paper	2	1	3	67	0	4	4	0
unclassified	unspecified	22	3	25	-	5	10	15	-
	unclear	5	1	6	-	2	1	3	-
Total		436	409	845	52	317	357	674	47

Note: this table uses adjusted figures (50/50 multiplier) for female work tasks

Sources: as for table A1.

V

Women did most housework and care work, yet these types of work tasks did not dominate their work repertoires. The adjusted figures in table 5 indicate that women did 87 per cent of housework and 79 per cent of care work; table 8 shows that housework accounted for 21 per cent of women's work tasks, and care work 11 per cent.⁷⁵ This suggests that housework and care work were unlikely

⁷⁵ Using the 'incidental' and 'related' work tasks only.

to have taken up 57 per cent of adult women's working life, as suggested by Broadberry et al.⁷⁶ It is also improbable that housework would have taken up the six or seven hours a day suggested by Amanda Flather.⁷⁷ Before settling for this conclusion, however, it is necessary to investigate the nature of housework and care work and the context in which these work tasks were recorded in greater detail. Modern housework and child care is typically understood as unpaid work undertaken for one's own family by married women working as lone adults within the home.⁷⁸ Early modern housework and care work differed substantially from this, as can be demonstrated by looking at the nature of the housework and care work recorded, by contrasting types of work that took place inside and outside, by looking at the marital status of female workers, and by investigating whether work was done for one's own family or 'for another'.

In the evidence collected, medical care and midwifery dominated women's care work. Few instances of child care were recorded, most likely because childcare was normally undertaken in parallel with other activities.⁷⁹ The provision of fuel, light, and water, which in modern households take up relatively little time, were a significant element of early modern housework (see Table A1).

'Housework' was not a term used in early modern England, and instead women's work was described as 'housewifery'. Housewifery included food processing and textile production, but we have separated out these tasks as they often involved producing goods for sale.⁸⁰ Another feature of early modern housework was that it was not restricted to inside work. In particular, collecting water and doing laundry were typically outside tasks.⁸¹ Table 12 shows the proportion of different work

⁷⁶ Broadberry et al., *British economic growth*, p.348.

⁷⁷ Flather, 'Space, place and gender', p.350.

⁷⁸ For instance, see Oakley, *Women's work*.

⁷⁹ There are very few studies of the practicalities of childcare in the preindustrial period. But see Hanawalt, *Ties that bound*, pp.175-84; Oja, 'Childcare and gender'.

⁸⁰ Whittle, 'Housewives and servants', pp.63-8; Whittle, 'A critique'; Markham, *The English housewife*.

⁸¹ Of the cases of collecting water, 14 specified outside wells, ponds or streams, while 3 mentioned wells that were inside houses.

tasks that were undertaken inside or outside. It reveals that the majority of work tasks recorded took place outside, although women's work was more likely than men's to take place inside. Perhaps more interestingly, it emphasises the fact that housework and care work were not the only categories of work that took place predominantly indoors. Crafts and construction, food processing and management all normally took place inside.

Table 12: Work tasks undertaken inside and outside

	All work tasks			Male work tasks		Female work tasks	
	Number	% In	% Out	% In	% Out	% In	% Out
Care work	110	79.1	20.9	57.8	42.2	93.8	6.2
Management	123	78.9	21.1	74.1	25.9	88.1	11.9
Food processing	192	78.1	21.9	76.4	23.6	84.1	15.9
Housework	234	65.4	34.6	74.2	25.8	62.2	37.8
Crafts and construction	249	64.7	35.3	61.9	38.1	75.0	25.0
Commerce	641	37.9	62.1	33.0	67.0	48.5	51.5
Agriculture and land	811	5.2	94.8	4.7	95.3	7.1	92.9
Transport	426	4.5	95.5	4.1	95.9	6.2	93.8
Mining and quarrying	24	0.0	100.0	0.0	100.0	0.0	100.0
Other	39	64.1	35.9	61.8	38.2	80.0	20.0
Percentage	-	34.3	65.7	28.5	71.5	48.7	51.3
Total (number)	2849	977	1872	577	1450	400	422

Note: 2849 work tasks could be identified as inside or outside, 1451 had no location specified. This table shows raw data rather than adjusted figures.

Sources: as for table A1.

The marital status of female workers carrying out different types of task is shown in table 13. Many women carrying out work tasks were of unknown marital status, 34.8 per cent of the total. However, if we compare the overall proportions of women who were noted as never married, married or widowed with the proportions undertaking particular categories of work task we can see that some forms of work assumed greater importance at different life stages. Never-married women were over-represented amongst those doing transport tasks and agricultural work; married women in the categories of crafts and construction, and management; and widows amongst those doing care

work. There is little indication that housework was the particular responsibility of married women, while married women are under-represented amongst those doing care work.

Table 13: Marital status and female work tasks

	Total	N	M	W	U	% N	% M	% W	% U
agriculture and land	213	32	82	9	90	15.0	38.5	4.2	42.3
care work	106	6	39	19	42	5.7	36.8	17.9	39.6
commerce	353	42	156	46	109	11.8	44.2	13.0	30.9
crafts and construction	108	7	54	10	37	6.5	50.0	9.3	34.3
food processing	73	9	34	10	20	12.3	46.6	13.6	27.4
housework	218	30	97	13	78	13.8	44.4	6.0	35.8
management	73	9	35	8	21	12.3	47.9	10.9	28.8
transport	106	20	36	15	35	18.9	34.0	14.2	33.0
other + mining	11	0	2	2	7	0.0	18.2	18.2	63.6
Total	1261	155	535	132	439	12.3	42.4	10.5	34.8

Note: Raw data. N= Never married; M = Married; W = Widowed; U = Marital status unknown.

Sources: as for table A1.

The communal, and often commercial, nature of early modern housework and care work is indicated by the fact tasks were often undertaken for or by non-relatives. Employment relations are not consistently recorded in court cases, but instances when work was described as undertaken for another person or for payment were noted in the database. If we assume that work that was done for a spouse, parent, child, or sibling, or for which no relationship was specified, was unpaid work within the family; then work undertaken for wages, as a servant, or for more distant kin or neighbours can be labelled as 'for another'. Table 14 reveals that care work in particular was dominated by work tasks that were either paid or conducted for other households. Women's housework was also commonly undertaken 'for another', although this was less likely to be case for men. Given that these are minimum estimates, these findings indicate that housework, and

particularly care work, were not necessarily undertaken mainly by married women as unpaid work for their own families, as is assumed for more modern centuries.⁸²

Table 14: Work tasks undertaken 'for another', selected categories only

	Total	Female		Total	Male	
		'For another'	% 'For another'		'For another'	% 'For another'
care work	106	89	84.0	67	59	88.1
housework	218	118	54.1	79	27	34.2
field work and animal husbandry	155	88	56.8	536	325	60.6

Sources: as for table A1.

The data presented suggest that early modern housework and care work differed significantly from modern housework and care work. The tasks were different; they were only some of a range of work tasks that took place inside houses; a third of housework tasks were done outside; they were often undertaken for non-family members; and a variety of people, not just married women, carried out these tasks. It seems very unlikely that housework and care work took up the majority of women's work time.⁸³ These findings sit very awkwardly with assumptions about the importance of unpaid housework and care work in early modern women's work repertoire, such as those made by Broadberry et al., but accord well with research on the early modern domestic environment which emphasises the lack of privacy in early modern homes, the widespread employment of servants, and the fact a variety of types of work often took place within the domestic house.⁸⁴

VI

⁸² Clark hinted at this, *Working life*, pp.5-12.

⁸³ Ogilvie comes to a similar conclusion: *A bitter living*, p.351.

⁸⁴ On privacy see: Johnson, *Housing culture*, esp. p.106; Orlin, *Locating privacy*; Hamling and Richardson, *A day at home*. On work in the house see Whittle, 'The house'; Whittle, 'Home and work'.

How did the gender division of labour in England compare with that in other regions of Europe during the early modern period? Table 15 compares the English dataset with similar studies of south-west Germany and Sweden, carried out by Sheilagh Ogilvie, and Maria Ågren and team, respectively. To make the data comparable, the whole English dataset was re-categorised, in each case, according to the work tasks categories used by Ogilvie and by Ågren et al.⁸⁵ Perhaps the most striking feature of table 15 is the strong similarities in the gender division of labour between England and south-west Germany and between England and Sweden. In all three regions women did between 37 and 50 per cent of agricultural work; between 40 and 47 per cent of work in crafts and construction; and between 76 and 82 per cent of care work. The proportion of transport undertaken by women in England and Sweden was similar, as was the proportion of housework in England in Germany.

Table 15: Comparisons between early modern England and other European regions
(a) With south-west Germany

Categories	Number adj. (G)	Number adj. (E)	Number F adj. (G)	Number F adj. (E)	% F adj. (G)	% F adj. (E)
Agriculture	919	1414	460	521	50.1	36.8
Brewing	5	83	2	65	40.0	78.3
Care work	316	293	239	241	75.6	82.3
Cart & boat transport	65	125	8	7	12.3	5.6
Commerce	485	1785	157	908	32.4	50.9
Crafts & construction	573	849	253	337	44.2	39.7
Errands	225	198	121	110	53.8	55.6
Gathering	191	322	82	124	42.9	38.5
Housework	448	794	376	638	83.9	80.4
Milling	209	24	46	7	22.0	29.2
Smaller categories	61	89	2	29	3.3	32.6
Total	3497	5976	1746	2987	49.9	50

⁸⁵ We are extremely grateful to Sheilagh Ogilvie, and to Maria Ågren and team, for sharing their data, methods, and time to make this possible. As a result of reworking the data, the figures in table 15 do not match those presented elsewhere in the article.

(b) With Sweden

Categories	Number adj. (S)	Number adj. (E)	Number F adj. (S)	Number F adj. (E)	% F adj. (S)	% F adj. (E)
Agriculture & forestry	1704	1548	768	588	45.1	38.0
Care	556	295	424	243	76.3	82.4
Crafts and construction	582	650	240	306	41.2	47.1
Credit	917	163	359	101	39.1	62.0
Food & accommodation	689	363	434	292	63.0	80.4
Hunting, fishing	247	86	12	0	4.9	0.0
Managerial work	1034	128	565	55	54.6	43.0
Military work	76	3	0	0	0.0	0.0
Teaching	45	27	12	12	26.7	44.4
Trade	2158	1717	1145	870	53.1	50.7
Transport	993	762	424	333	42.7	43.7
Other specified work	864	336	546	239	63.2	71.1
total	9865	6078	4929	3039	50.0	50.0

Notes and sources: F = work tasks undertaken by women. E = the English data as listed for table A1. The English data has been re-categorised to fit the categories used for Germany and Sweden, thus the categories are different in tables 15(a) and 15(b). The figures in the table are adjusted to account for the under-recording of women by multiplying women's work tasks to 50 per cent of the total. Table (a): G = Sheilagh Ogilvie's dataset from south-west Germany (Wildberg 1646-1800 and Ebhausen 1674-1800), see Ogilvie, *A bitter living*. Some the English data that could not be placed in equivalent categories was discarded (61 work tasks: 50 by men, 11 by women). For the German data women's work tasks were multiplied by 2.01; for England by 2.39. Smaller categories were work tasks categories that contained less than 50 examples for Germany and England combined. For table (b) S = Maria Ågren and team's dataset from Sweden 1550-1800, using only work tasks from court records: see Ågren ed., *Making a living*. For the Swedish data women's work tasks were multiplied by 3.12; for England by 2.41.

Ogilvie has emphasised the important role of guild regulation, which extended over the countryside as well towns in Württemberg, in structuring women's work patterns. The guilds excluded women who were not married to guild members from many areas of the economy including certain types of craft and retail work.⁸⁶ Women found employment in non-guilded crafts and other areas of the economy, such as agriculture, which were unregulated. The comparison shows a significantly higher proportion of women working in agriculture in Germany than in England. Interestingly, however, the proportion of women working in crafts and construction was slightly higher in Germany than in

⁸⁶ Ogilvie, *A bitter living*, esp. pp.326, 330-1.

England. As we have seen, despite the lack of guilds in the English countryside women here were also excluded from many crafts and skilled trades, in a similar pattern to Germany. On the other hand, the proportion of women engaged in commerce (buying and selling) was markedly lower in Germany than in England, perhaps as a result of the tight regulation of these activities in German communities.⁸⁷ Early modern Sweden had a less commercialised economy than England. Both farming and textile production were orientated towards local consumption, and textile production was much less dominant in the countryside.⁸⁸ The larger proportion of work tasks undertaken by women in crafts and construction and lower proportion in agriculture in England compared to Sweden might be explained by the greater importance of the rural textile industries in England, but overall, the gender division of labour was very similar in the two countries.

VII

This article has presented new data illuminating the gender division of labour in south-west England between 1500 and 1700. The dataset is most robust when revealing the division of work tasks between men and women within particular areas of the economy, such as agriculture, textile production or commerce. It demonstrates that women's contribution to agriculture was greater than records of wage labour from large farms would suggest, and thus records of wage labour cannot be taken as representative of the gender division of labour in the agricultural economy in the period before 1700. If the number of work tasks recorded is taken as a proxy for time use, as in table 8, the findings can indicate the typical work patterns of men and women. This suggests that on average women spent as much time engaged in agriculture as they did in housework, and more time in commerce than they did in care work. South-west England had a flexible gender division of labour: none of the major categories of work excluded men or women. However, the division of labour varied significantly between different sectors. In craft production there was a sharp division of labour, with women excluded from some processes and men virtually absent from others. Agriculture had a clear gender division of labour for some types of work, but there was a great deal of overlap in men's and women's tasks. Men and women were engaged in commerce in roughly equal numbers.

⁸⁷ Ogilvie, *A bitter living*, pp.167-8, 242-4, 263-5.

⁸⁸ Myrdal and Morell eds., *Agrarian history of Sweden*, ch.3 and ch.4; Ågren ed., *Making a living*, esp. pp.41-51.

Snell linked the changes in women's involvement in agriculture to technological change (the adoption of the scythe to harvest wheat) and farming systems (women found more work in pastoral agriculture than arable).⁸⁹ The evidence for both these theories is weak. Instead, the more important factor seems to have been the enlargement of farms and increased specialisation within the agricultural workforce as a consequence. Small farms found female workers, who could be deployed in a wide range of tasks as and when needed, useful. Female servants were preferred on small farms: they were flexible and cheap. Large farms preferred male servants and used day labourers, who were also predominantly male.⁹⁰ Farm accounts from Somerset, which survive only for large farms which depended on wage labour, demonstrate that around 80 per cent of day labouring work was done by men and 20 per cent by women.⁹¹ Large farms permitted more specialisation by workers, and large farmers could choose to employ workers they felt would be most efficient at undertaking particular tasks. The work task dataset from south-west England, an area where small family farms were common, demonstrates a higher participation of women in agriculture with 37 per cent of tasks undertaken by women. Other than milking, which was monopolised by women, there was little difference between women's level of participation in arable and pastoral tasks. It reveals a flexible division of labour: with some notable exceptions, such as mowing (male) and milking (female), men and women could step into each other's shoes when extra labour was needed, or a member of the opposite gender was lacking. Some consideration of men's greater upper body strength may have underpinned the types of tasks that were undertaken by men,⁹² but this was undoubtedly overlain with customary practice which trained men and women in different but overlapping sets of tasks. Many forms of work undertaken by women were physically demanding.

Turning to craft production, it is notable that the areas from which women were excluded were those that men entered via apprenticeship. As we have seen, guild regulation extended to only about 4 per cent of population and work tasks in the dataset. There were no guilds in market towns or the countryside where the majority of craft work was carried out.⁹³ However, the 1563 Statute of Artificers listed the crafts that had to be entered by apprenticeship whether or not guilds were

⁸⁹ Snell, *Annals*, esp. pp.40-50.

⁹⁰ Whittle, 'Housewives and servants', pp.53-61; Whittle, 'Introduction', p.10.

⁹¹ For the period 1685-1870: Speechley, 'Female and child agricultural day labourers', p.57.

⁹² Burnette, 'Female-male wage gap', pp.274-6.

⁹³ See also Wallis, 'Apprenticeship and training', pp.851-2.

present, and specified the social background from which apprentices should be recruited.⁹⁴ Yet the Statute did not stipulate the gender of apprentices, and Margaret Davies found that the apprenticeship clauses of the Statute were rarely enforced.⁹⁵ As we have seen, historians remain unclear about the extent to which women were apprenticed to crafts in this period and no evidence from rural areas or market towns, other than of pauper apprenticeships, has been forthcoming. The data presented here for 1500 to 1700 suggests that women were not commonly apprenticed and that this blocked their entrance into many craft occupations. Instead women clustered in those activities that were not regulated by apprenticeship such as spinning, stocking knitting and lace-making. Snell showed that women were apprenticed (in small numbers) into tailoring and weaving in Wiltshire between 1710 and 1760.⁹⁶ We also know that women worked in these crafts in the late medieval period.⁹⁷ Why they were excluded in the intervening period? Ogilvie contrasts the restrictive guild regime found in south-west Germany with the freer economies of England and the Netherlands.⁹⁸ Yet this study reveals a very similar pattern of gendered work in the crafts to Germany, suggesting factors other than guild regulations were important in excluding women from craft training and occupations.

Women's roughly equal participation in petty commerce, as sellers as well as buyers, is perhaps surprising as we might expect women's lesser access to property and credit to have had an impact on their commercial activities.⁹⁹ Here it is important to remember the nature of the evidence. Table 11 shows the quantity of transactions conducted by women and men. It does not take into account the value of transactions or institutional context in which they took place. In sixteenth-century Exeter, international trade and wholesaling was dominated by the merchants' guild. The very few women who took part in this trade were the widows of merchants.¹⁰⁰ In contrast, the work tasks data reveals the everyday market in goods in smaller towns and the countryside, and here women were well-represented. This is consistent with a pattern that restricted women to lower status

⁹⁴ Tawney and Power, *Tudor economic documents*, 1, pp.338-50. The statute applied to the whole country and apprenticeships were not organised by guilds unless guilds were present.

⁹⁵ Davies, *Enforcement of English apprenticeship*.

⁹⁶ Snell, *Annals*, pp.292-3. The 204 women apprenticed in Wiltshire were 7.4% of the apprenticeships recorded. Of these 66 were in mantua making, 36 in tailoring, 15 in millinery, and 21 in weaving.

⁹⁷ Goldberg, *Women, work and life cycle*.

⁹⁸ Ogilvie, *A bitter living*, pp.344-6.

⁹⁹ Erickson, *Women and property*, pp.21-31; McIntosh, *Working women*, pp.85-7; Hunt, *Middling sort*, pp.135-42.

¹⁰⁰ Personal communication from Paul Williams.

activities, but nonetheless emphasises women's active involvement in the grass-roots of early modern commerce. Comparison with Sweden indicates that women's active participation in everyday commerce did not vary greatly according to the level of commercialisation within the preindustrial economy.

The contrasting patterns of the gender division of labour found in different parts of the economy suggest that we should not look for one overall cause that determined women's position in the economy in relation to men. The data presented here establishes beyond doubt that women's work was essential to the most important sectors of the economy, but that women's economic role altered over time in subtle ways long before industrialisation. Increased farm size reduced women's participation in agriculture, and average farm sizes were increasing from at least 1550 onwards.¹⁰¹ Women were excluded from (around 1500) and then reintegrated into crafts such as tailoring (after 1650) and weaving (after 1700). If the volume of everyday transactions increased over time, then women's employment in petty commerce must have increased too. Bennett is correct that on the whole women's work can be characterised as 'low-status, low-paid and low-skilled'.¹⁰² However, cause and effect remain unclear. Did female workers concentrate on certain tasks because they were low status and low paid and thus eschewed by men, or did the fact women normally did those tasks make them low status and low paid? Women lacked the formal training acquired by some men through apprenticeship, but was women's work really low skilled, or just characterised as such because it was done by unapprenticed women? And why weren't women apprenticed? For women, status and work did not necessarily correlate. To explain women's patterns of work, and thus to explain forms of labour within the economy as whole, we need to look at laws, institutions, and culture, as well as economic change, as historians of women's work have repeatedly argued.¹⁰³

¹⁰¹ Shaw-Taylor, 'Rise of agrarian capitalism'.

¹⁰² Bennett, *History matters*, p.62.

¹⁰³ Weisner, *Working women*, pp.187-98; Howell, 'Gender of Europe's commercial economy'; Bennett, *History matters*, pp.54-81; Ogilvie, *A bitter living*, pp.320-52.

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Appendix

Table A1: the gender division of labour in work task subcategories

a. Agriculture and land	Total	M	F	%F	%F adj.
animal husbandry	296	205	91	30.7	51.7
collecting fuel	35	25	10	28.6	51.0
farm transport	118	113	5	4.2	9.6
field work	395	331	64	16.2	31.8
gardening	3	2	1	33.3	50.0
gathering food	60	21	39	65.0	81.7
Hedging	16	16	0	0.0	0.0
hunting and fishing	86	86	0	0.0	0.0
wood husbandry	68	65	3	4.4	9.7
Total	1077	864	213	19.8	37.3

b. Care work	Total	M	F	% F	% F adj.
childcare	17	3	14	82.4	91.9
education	20	15	5	25.0	44.4
healthcare	84	33	51	60.7	78.8
midwifery	32	4	28	87.5	94.4
other care	20	12	8	40.0	61.3
Total	173	67	106	61.3	79.2

c. Commerce	Total	M	F	% F	% F adj.
buy	590	409	181	30.7	51.6
sell	489	357	132	27.0	47.1
go to market	68	41	27	39.7	61.3
run stall / shop	19	14	5	26.3	46.2
exchange	21	13	8	38.1	59.4
Total	1187	834	353	29.7	50.5

d. Crafts and construction	Total	M	F	% F	% F adj.
textile production	147	82	65	44.2	65.7
clothes and shoes	88	52	36	40.9	62.6
Building	62	61	1	1.6	3.2
groundworks	25	24	1	4.0	7.7
mill operation	9	9	0	0.0	0.0

woodwork	33	33	0	0.0	0.0
metalwork	50	49	1	2.0	3.9
other maintenance / manufacture	29	25	4	13.8	28.6
Total	443	335	108	24.4	43.7

e. Food processing	Total	M	F	% F	% F adj.
butchery	168	148	20	11.9	24.4
dairying	7	0	7	100.0	100.0
threshing and winnowing	58	44	14	24.1	43.6
milling	11	8	3	27.3	46.7
malting and brewing	36	13	23	63.9	80.9
storage and preservation	18	12	6	33.3	53.8
tobacco	3	3	0	0.0	0.0
Total	301	228	73	24.3	43.6

f. Housework	Total	M	F	% F	% F adj.
cleaning	24	4	20	83.3	92.3
laundry	51	2	49	96.1	98.3
food and drink provision (cooking)	160	57	103	64.4	81.3
light and fire provision	25	10	15	60.0	78.3
collect water	27	3	24	88.9	95.1
attend guests	7	2	5	71.4	85.7
other housework	3	1	2	66.7	83.3
Total	297	79	218	73.4	86.9

g. Management	Total	M	F	% F	% F adj.
arranging work	62	48	14	22.6	41.4
financial (borrowing and lending money)	86	61	25	29.1	49.6
pawning	49	27	22	44.9	66.3
lend / borrow goods	21	11	10	47.6	68.6
other management	3	1	2	66.7	83.3
Total	221	148	73	33.0	54.3

h. Mining and quarrying	Total	M	F	%F	%F adj.
minerals	7	6	1	14.3	25.0
stone	5	5	0	0.0	0.0
marl / earth	13	11	2	15.4	31.3
turves	3	3	0	0.0	0.0
Total	28	25	3	10.7	21.9

i. Transport	Total	M	F	% F	% F adj.
carry goods	219	142	77	35.2	56.7
messages	15	13	2	13.3	27.8
passengers	10	9	1	10.0	18.2
droving	102	87	15	14.7	29.3
horses	51	44	7	13.7	27.9
carting	64	62	2	3.1	7.4
boats	10	10	0	0.0	0.0
loading	49	47	2	4.1	9.6
Total	520	414	106	20.4	38.2

Note: the table uses the raw data apart from the final column which is adjusted using the 50/50 multiplier (x 2.41). M = work tasks carried out men; F = work tasks carried out by women.

Sources: Records of work tasks were extracted from the following documents. Coroners' reports into accidental death 1500-71 and 1591-1600 for counties of Cornwall, Devon, Hampshire and Wiltshire (kindly provided by Professor Steven Gunn). Devon Record Office: Bishop of Exeter consistory court depositions: Chanter 855 (1556-61), Chanter 859 (1575-7), Chanter 864 (1593-8), Chanter 867 (1613-19), Chanter 866 (1634-40), Chanter 868 (1661-3), Chanter 875 (1673-5), Chanter 880 (1682-4), Chanter 899 (1688-92). Devon Record Office: Quarter Sessions examinations: QS/4/Box 5 (1598), QS/4/Box 16 (1610/11), QS/4/Box 24 (1620/1), QS/4/Box 32 (1630), QS/4/Box 43 & 44 (1640), QS/4/Box 55 (1650/1), QS/4/Box 66 (1660/1), QS/4/Box 84-8 (1670/1), QS/4/Box 104 & 105 (1680/1), QS/4/Box 126 & 127 (1690), QS/4/Box 145 & 146 (1700). Hampshire Record Office: Bishop of Winchester consistory court depositions: 21M65-C3-2 (1561-2), 21M65-C3-5 (1571-4), 21M65-C3-8 (1578-82), 21M65-C3-9 (1583-90), 21M65-C3-10 (1590-6), 21M65-C3-12 (1631-2).

Somerset Record Office: Bishop of Bath and Wells consistory court depositions: D/D/Cd/2 (1532-3), D/D/Cd/6 (1551-2), D/D/Cd/12 (1566-70), D/D/Cd/20 (1584-5), D/D/Cd/36 (1604-6), D/D/Cd/55 (1619-21), D/D/Cd/75 (1632-33), D/D/Cd/90 (1640), D/D/Cd/93 (1668-71), D/D/Cd (1680-3), D/D/Cd/106 (1694-5). Somerset Record Office: Quarter Sessions examinations: Q/SR/2-3 (1607-8), Q/SR/29, 31, 33 (1618-19), Q/SR/62 (1630), Q/SR/77 (1638), Q/SR/82 (1650/1), Q/SR/97-8 (1659-60), Q/SR/111 (1668/9), Q/SR/138-40 (1678-9), Q/SR/176-80 (1688-90), Q/SR/210-213 (1699).

Wiltshire and Swindon Heritage Centre: Bishop of Salisbury consistory court: D1-42-1 (1550-1), D1-42-6 (1565-8), D1-42-7 (1570-5), D1-42-10 (1587-9), D1-42-18 (1600-1), D1-42-30 (1615-16), D1-42-45 (1631), D1-42-56 (1638), D1-42-58 (1662-5), D1-42-61 (1671-80). Wiltshire and Swindon Heritage Centre: Quarter Sessions examinations: A1-110-1603 (1603), A1-110-1613 (1613), A1-110-1622 (1622), A1-110-1632 (1632), A1-110-1642 (1642), A1-110-1653 (1653), A1-110-1662 (1662), A1-110-1673 (1673), A1-110-1683 (1683), A1-110-1693 (1693).

Table A2: The labour required for making kerseys compared with work tasks recorded

	Kerseys 1588 (no. of people employed)		Adj. data (no. of work tasks recorded)	
	No.	%	No.	%
Sort/clean	6	10	24	15
Card, spin, wind	40	67	107	66
Weave	8	13	22	14
Finish (shear etc.)	6	10	8	5
Total	60	100	161	100

Sources: Kerseys 1588 from Muldrew, , ‘ “Th’ancient distaff”’, p.504. Work tasks: as for table A1