The Dawning of a New Era? Women's Work in England and Wales at the Turn of the Twentieth Century

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The early twentieth-century belief that jobs for women were increasing during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries belied the experience of the majority of women in earlier centuries and proved over-optimistic in its prognosis for the coming decades. The author sets out to discover what changes were observable in women's work from a series of individual-level census returns from the 1891, 1901, 1911, and 1921 censuses, taken from a selection of 13 registration districts across England and Wales. Examination of the published census reports, the instructions on the census schedules, and individual replies reveals that women did not likely experience a rise in full-time paid employment which they could report as their main occupation. There is a spectrum of "home duties", however, about which the census remains stubbornly silent.

La croyance du début du XX^e^ siècle voulant que le nombre d'emplois pour les femmes augmentait depuis la fin du XIX^e^ siècle démentissait l'expérience de la majorité des femmes des siècles précédents et traduisait un optimisme exagéré face aux décennies à venir. L'auteur essaie de déterminer que les changements pouvaient s'observer chez les femmes en examinant pour ce faire un ensemble de résultats des recensements de 1891, de 1901, de 1911 et de 1921 provenant de 13 districts d'enregistrement de l'Angleterre et du pays de Galles. Il apparaît peu probable, à la lumière des données publiées, des instructions sur les bulletins de recensement et des réponses individuelles, qu'il y ait eu chez les femmes de l'époque une augmentation du nombre d'emplois à temps plein qu'elles auraient pu déclarer comme leur travail principal. Le recensement demeure toutefois obstinément muet sur un large éventail de « tâches domestiques ».

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> The appearance of women in white collar jobs at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries seemed to contemporaries to herald a new increase in the number of working women. The proponents of women's rights suggested that the entry of women into formerly male fields meant the dawn of a new era .... Some of the women who entered white-collar jobs came from the middle classes. For them work for wages was a new development, a departure from the enforced leisure of middle-class daughters and wives. Commentators tended to equate the experience of these middle class women with the experience of all women. Hence they concluded that jobs for women increased absolutely in this period and even suggested that the existence of these jobs reflected new attitudes about women's position and abilities.[1]

SUCH BELIEFS, BASED as they were on early twentieth-century, middle-class perceptions, belied the experience of the majority of women in earlier centuries and proved over-optimistic in their prognosis for the coming decades, as Louise Tilly and Joan Scott demonstrate. Their statement above, however, highlights the significance attached to women moving into "the world of men" and how closely that world was associated with working "for wages". The ability of contemporary commentators to mislead future generations, unless their views can be tempered by a liberal dose of statistics showing the "true" state of affairs, is also evident. In Great Britain, Canada, and the United States the decennial censuses from the turn of the century provide us with "official statistics" depicting the course of male and female employment. In the case of women, however, such statistics may be at least as misleading as the more qualitative pictures painted by contemporary reporters.

The history of "women's work" is bedeviled by problems of definition and conceptualization. These occur at several levels. First is the question of exactly what qualifies as "work" and how this differs between the genders. Secondly there are the difficulties surrounding the collection and publication of "official statistics" on the subject, and thirdly the problems faced by those who wish to analyze and interpret these statistics to compare and contrast women's experience of work over time and across space.

In the dictionary the noun "work" is defined as "employment", while the verb "work" means "to be occupied in business or labour".[2] The same source defines "employment" as "occupation", "to employ" as "give work to", and "occupation" as "the state of being employed or occupied". "Work" therefore has connotations of things "done, achieved or made", of time spent productively. Increasingly over the nineteenth century, however, industrialization and capitalism engendered the closer association

1 L. A. Tilly and J. W. Scott, *Women, Work and Family* (New York: Methuen, 2nd ed., 1987), p. 150.
2 *Chambers English Dictionary* (Edinburgh: Chambers, 1990).

of "work" with "living earned" and "productive role in the economy";[3] when one spent one's time working to make money one was "gainfully occupied". A person could have his or her time fully committed to "useful employment", but if monetary remuneration was not forthcoming then he or she did not have a "paid job", was not "gainfully occupied", and therefore could not be seen as "a worker". The unpaid roles of wife and mother, while essential to maintain the reproductive functions of any economy, were, and still are, not viewed as "gainful" under such a framework and therefore, despite taking up a great deal of time and energy, have been treated in many respects as "non-occupations" since the final decades of the nineteenth century. As the spheres of "paid work" and "home" became inexorably separated as industrialization progressed, so the status of women's reproductive tasks steadily diminished as social, and indeed analytical, emphasis was increasingly placed on "ability to contribute productively to the economy".[4]

While conceptions of work altered, the language used to signify its different aspects did not evolve in step. Thus even today a woman cooking and cleaning for her family, unpaid, still does "house*work*"; someone "out *working* in the garden" is understood not to be receiving any wages (unless doing so as a professional gardener), but to be occupied in tasks contributing to the reproductive function of the household; whereas someone reported to be "*out at work*" is recognized as being away from home pursuing the employment by which he or she earns a living. All three individuals are "fully occupied" at the time at which they are observed; we have no indication from the language used, however, whether these are "full-time occupations" or not. As the disassociation of the "workplace" and "home" progressed, paid employment became more and more something one "went out" to. As women "stayed in" to do housework this disqualified their activities from being real "employment". Such reasoning suggests why there was so much concern over "home-working": not only was it symptomatic of the notorious practice of sweating but it also contravened the "home/work" dichotomy.[5]

Collectors of statistics on "occupation" or "work" therefore have a three-fold task. They have first to decide which particular aspect of work they wish to survey. Are they interested in how people "spend their time" or in which occupations people pursue in order to "earn a living"? Do they wish to monitor their subject's occupational status in the long run (what job

3 See B. Hill, "Women, Work and the Census: A Problem for Historians of Women", *History Workshop Journal*, vol. 35 (1993) pp. 78–94.

4 Hill argues in "Women, Work and the Census" that this conception of work arose from the thinking of classical economists such as Smith, Malthus, Ricardo, Mill, and Bentham.

5 On "sweating" see J. Morris, "The Characteristics of Sweating: The Late Nineteenth Century London and Leeds Tailoring Trades", in A. V. John, ed., *Unequal Opportunities: Women's Employment in England 1800–1918*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986).

a respondent generally does, or which job that person is trained for) or at a specific time (what occupation a person is pursuing at the time of the survey)? Or do they wish to view occupation in terms of contribution to the economy (whether people are "gainfully occupied", "retired", or "unemployed" and, if the latter, then how this should be defined — whether, for instance, "seeking work" should be treated in the same way as "housework")?

The second task in the collection of statistics is wording the survey questions to ensure that responses are compatible with the conceptual framework from which the questions originate: the subjects of the survey have to be clear about what they are being asked and how they should answer. Those collecting the information also have to be given precise instructions. For instance, in the era when taking the census involved enumerators copying out each household's completed schedule into an "enumerator's book", which was then dispatched to the Census Office, instructions had to be drawn up for the enumerators in an effort to reduce untoward bias or misrepresentation of the original responses.[6]

Having collected the responses to the questionnaires the collectors of statistics must, thirdly, create a digest of their findings for publication. At this stage both the conceptual framework of the survey, plus contemporary beliefs and prejudices, may influence the process of classifying numerous individual responses into orders of occupation for easier tabulation. Eddy Higgs has shown, for instance, that the original occupational classification system of the mid-nineteenth-century census reports of Great Britain, based on the material individuals worked with, was used because information was being sought on the health implications of particular occupations.[7] As we will see below, any changes in the classification procedure in the course of a series of surveys could compromise comparability across time. Both Margo Conk and Bridget Hill have demonstrated how different classification systems have made the comparison of published census statistics between nations extremely difficult, even when the questions asked have been very similar.[8]

6 Enumerators' books were used in all of the British censuses where individual-level data were collected from 1841 to 1901. Not only did the enumerator have to copy out the responses into his book but very often could fill out the forms for the less literate householders. The enumerator would thus impose his interpretation of the situation he was recording on the collected data. See E. Higgs, *Making Sense of the Census: The Manuscript Returns for England and Wales, 1801–1901* (London: HMSO, 1989). From 1911 onward the original schedules were sent directly to the Census Office for analysis.

7 E. Higgs, "Disease, Febrile Poisons and Statistics: The Census as Medical Survey, 1841–1911", *Social History of Medicine*, vol. 4, no. 3 (1991), pp. 465–478.

8 M. Conk, "Labor Statistics in the American and English Census: Making Some Invidious Comparisons", *Journal of Social History*, vol. 16, no. 4 (1983), pp. 83–102; Hill, "Women, Work and the Census".

The final level, involving problems of definition and conceptualization of occupation, particularly women's occupations, is the use of the published statistics derived from a census or survey. An increasing literature in this field divides into three schools, all of which agree that women's work was consistently under-recorded. The first school may be typified by the work of Margo Conk and Catherine Hakim and examines the census machinery for collecting statistics on occupation, showing how and why anomalies in the final reports occur.[9] The second body of literature comes largely from economic history where the changing nature and extent of women's contribution to the economy is the object of study. This literature takes the stance that it should be possible, making certain assumptions, to estimate the extent of any underenumeration and therefore to "correct" the statistics. Examples of this approach are found in the work of Higgs and of Marjorie Abel and Nancy Folbre.[10] The latter authors estimate that, on the basis of "probable participation" and several complementary assumptions in two Massachusetts settlements in 1880, married women's observed market participation rates of 10 per cent should be inflated to 47 and 68 per cent. The authors call for further efforts to revise and refine measures of women's participation in the market economy. The third school, represented by Hill among others, argues that while such revision may be desirable it is not advisable because we would "be perpetuating the same error as those who have manipulated [the data] in the past. Their prejudices which many of us are only just beginning fully to appreciate will be replaced by our own."[11] Hill and others of her ilk warn against uncritical acceptance of statistical material concerning women's labour force participation, but are of the opinion that researchers should live with the limitations of the figures, while attempting to avoid such shortcomings in any data we might create and leave behind for future generations.

The approach taken here probably fits somewhere between the first and the third schools involved in the debate. Having examined the picture of "women's work" painted in the published reports of the turn-of-the-century censuses, we set out to discover what changes were observable in women's work from a series of individual-level census returns taken from a selection of 13 registration districts (or locales) scattered across England and Wales from the 1891, 1901, 1911, and 1921 censuses. By employing the same coding frame for each of the four censuses we hope to obviate the problems of comparability that arise in the use of material from the published reports.

9 Conk, "Labor Statistics in the American and English Census"; C. Hakim, "Census Reports as Documentary Evidence", *Sociological Review* vol. 28 (1980), pp. 551–580.

10 E. Higgs, "Women, Occupations and Work in Nineteenth Century Censuses", *History Workshop*, vol. 23 (1987), pp. 59–80; M. Abel and N. Folbre, "A Methodology for Revising Estimates: Female Market Participation in the U.S. before 1940", *Historical Methods*, vol. 23, no. 4 (1990), pp. 167–176.

11 Hill, "Women, Work and the Census", p. 92.

However, this exercise highlights the importance of continuity in the wording of questions from one census to another if comparability is to be achieved, and therefore the census questions concerning occupation are scrutinized in considerable detail.

The period from 1891 to 1921, while perhaps too short and too late to be ideal for a study of the evolution of the concept of work for the two genders, is nevertheless of interest because individual-level data for 1901 to 1921 would not normally be available to present-day scholars, English and Welsh census data being subject to a 100-year confidentiality rule. Further, this period saw substantial revision of both the census questions employed to elicit information concerning occupation and the methods of tabulation used in the census reports, bringing the problems engendered by these two features of the data collection process into sharp focus. In the absence of access to the individual-level data, interpretation of the published reports for this period has proven particularly troublesome. B. R. Mitchell and Phyllis Deane found, when trying to compile standardized occupational statistics for males and females from the published census material, that total comparability was elusive.[12] We examine the national census results of Great Britain for the years 1881 to 1921 presented by Mitchell and Deane to set out the problems they faced and to place the findings of our study in a wider context.

Problems in Interpreting Census Results

Jane Lewis, in *Women in England 1870–1950,* describes the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century pattern of women's work derived from the census reports of the period as showing that the "overall female participation rate (excluding those in unpaid domestic work) actually declined from 1871 to 1901, increased 1911, declined 1921 and then rose to 1951".[13] Across the Atlantic in the United States, according to Abel and Folbre, the picture was one of steadily increasing participation rates between 1870 and 1900, followed by a peak in 1910 which would not be surpassed until the 1940 census.[14]

The difficulties of analyzing trends in women's occupations on both sides of the Atlantic via the published census reports have long been acknowl-

12 B. Mitchell and P. Deane, *Abstract of Historical Statistics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1962).

13 J. Lewis, *Women in England 1870–1950* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1984). The figures Lewis gives are for England and Wales (see Table 5, p. 147) and suggest that participation rates for women aged 15 and over stood at approximately 42% in 1871 (although this is a poor base as the number included the retired), 34.5% in 1901, 35.6% in 1911, and 33.7% in 1921.

14 Abel and Folbre, "A Methodology for Revising Estimates". The level of their figures is rather lower than that reported by Lewis, as they calculate participation rates for those aged 10 and over. The 1910 peak is, however, more marked than that in 1911 in England and Wales.

edged.[15] The number of persons recorded as pursuing a particular occupation could alter for any one of several different reasons. Of course, the actual number of workers in a particular niche in the labour market could certainly vary. The data had to pass through several stages before appearing in a published table, however, and at any of these points changes from one census to the next might alter the number of persons recorded under a given heading, even though in actuality the number of workers remained the same.

At the conceptualization stage the census authorities might decide to revise the question or questions they were going to ask, either in form or in substance. They might alter the instructions, causing those who were collecting the data to enter or omit information. It might also be decided to tabulate the data in a different way, redefining the classification system. Respondents might have reasons for altering the way in which they answered the question. It must also not be forgotten that what has been referred to as "individual-level" responses were in fact household responses with one member of the household (sometimes assisted by the enumerator) filling out the form for all the other residents. Answers may well have differed depending on who was appointed to fill out the schedule.

Table 1 illustrates some of the problems of comparability which result from a combination of such effects. This table is derived from Mitchell and Deane, who have standardized as best they can on the occupational classification scheme used in the 1911 census report.[16] While ideally in terms of the present discussion the table should show only England and Wales, Mitchell and Deane do not disaggregate their statistics below the level of Great Britain. The figures in panel A depict the proportion of those men reporting an occupation in each of the five censuses who were in particular sectors of the labour force; the equivalent figures for women are shown in panel B.

Let us first take the figures at their face value. Amongst the male workers perhaps the most noticeable change over the 40-year period is the declining proportion in agriculture, which fell from being by far the largest employer to only the fourth, behind metal manufacturing, transport, and the "all others occupied" category. Closer inspection of Panel A in Table 1 also reveals considerable decline in the proportion of males working in the

15 See, for example: Abel and Folbre, "A Methodology for Revising Estimates"; P. Hudson and W. R. Lee, "Chapter 1" in Hudson and Lee, eds., *Women's Work and Family Economy in Historical Perspective* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990), pp. 20–21; E. Jordan, "Female Unemployment in England and Wales, 1851–1911", *Social History*, vol. 13 (1988), pp. 175–190; Hakim, "Census Reports as Documentary Evidence"; C. Davies, "Making Sense of the Census in Britain and the U.S.A. ...", *Sociological Review*, vol. 28 (1980), pp. 581–609; S. O. Rose, *Limited Livelihoods: Gender and Class in Nineteenth Century England* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

16 Mitchell and Deane, *Abstract of Historical Statistics*, p. 59; Office of Population Censuses and Surveys, *Guide to Census Reports, Great Britain 1801–1966* (London: HMSO, 1977).

Table 1 Percentages of (A) Male and (B) Female Workers in Particular Categories of Occupation: Great Britain, 1881–1921

	A Males					B Females				
	1881	1891	1901	1911[a]	1921[a]	1881	1891	1901	1911[a]	1921[a]
Public administration	1.23	1.46	1.65	2.10	2.82	0.23	0.38	0.61	0.92	1.42
Armed forces	1.29	1.34	1.52	1.71	1.74	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Professional occupations	2.87	2.87	3.01	3.19	3.05	5.22	5.88	6.85	7.08	7.74
Domestic/personal services	2.69	2.93	2.95	3.53	2.73	45.19	45.34	42.12	39.31	32.37
Commercial occupations	3.97	4.49	5.17	5.71	6.65	0.28	0.58	1.60	2.90	10.30
Transport and communications	9.82	11.03	12.20	12.15	11.25	0.39	0.45	0.57	0.70	1.26
Agriculture, etc.	17.13	14.21	11.60	11.11	9.88	2.99	1.78	1.81	2.16	1.84
Fishing	0.65	0.53	0.44	0.41	0.38	0.08	0.02	0.00	0.00	0.00
Mining and quarrying	6.82	7.50	8.06	9.30	9.12	0.21	0.16	0.17	0.11	0.16
Metal manuf., machines, etc.	11.03	11.50	12.86	13.88	15.63	1.26	1.31	1.77	2.37	3.07
Building and construction	9.88	8.98	10.53	8.82	6.57	0.05	0.07	0.06	0.09	0.09
Wood, furniture, etc.	2.09	2.06	2.31	2.22	3.76	0.54	0.56	0.63	0.65	0.54
Bricks, cement, pottery, glass	1.25	1.19	1.32	1.12	0.74	0.69	0.71	0.78	0.78	0.79
Chemicals, etc.	0.81	0.89	1.00	1.20	0.68	0.23	0.38	0.65	0.85	0.61
Skins, leather, hair, feathers	0.82	0.80	0.75	0.70	0.53	0.41	0.45	0.57	0.59	0.58
Paper, printing, etc.	1.51	1.78	1.84	1.96	1.42	1.36	1.74	2.33	2.66	2.12
Textiles	6.26	5.93	4.82	4.94	3.01	19.17	17.70	16.72	16.08	12.30
Clothing	4.28	4.09	3.66	3.34	2.32	17.16	16.90	16.65	15.25	10.56
Food, drink, tobacco	5.58	5.97	6.07	6.23	1.68	2.52	3.63	4.54	5.69	2.16
Gas, water, electricity	0.27	0.38	0.54	0.67	—	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
All others occupied	9.73	10.08	7.68	5.73	16.07	2.01	1.98	1.58	1.81	12.07
Total number occupied	8,852	10,010	11,548	12,927	13,656	3,887	4,489	4,751	5,413	5,699
Total number of working age[b]	10,628	12,038	13,790	15,093	15,659	11,504	13,026	14,980	16,788	17,667
% of total who are "unoccupied"	16.7	16.8	16.2	14.3	13.3	66.2	65.5	68.3	67.7	67.7

a) Mitchell and Deane stress that figures from 1911 and 1921 are only in a few instances directly comparable.

b) 1921 figures are the proportion of persons aged 12 and over; in the other years the proportion is of those aged 10 and over.

Source: B. Mitchell and P. Deane, *Abstract of British Historical Statistics* (Cambridge University Press, 1962). For original figures and comprehensive notes, see pp. 59–61.

textiles, clothing, and food categories. Other sectors underwent noteworthy increases; roughly speaking both public administration and the commercial occupations doubled their contribution to the male work force. The growth of the heavy industries during this period is reflected in the rising proportion of miners and metal workers, the latter category also including those working in vehicle- and ship-building, as well as instrument and toy makers.

Amongst women the relative decline in the number reported to be in domestic service, textiles, and clothing is clear, as is the increasing role of commerce and the professions. It should be remembered, as the final line of the table shows, that those women who had an occupation returned in the census were in the minority at this period. Approximately 34 in every 100 women of working age were reported as having an occupation in the published census results of 1881 and 1891. In 1901 and 1911 this fell to about 32 per cent and remained around this figure in 1921, although by then the census authorities saw "those of working age" to be 12 years or over, rather than the 10 years or over of previous decades.[17] A further feature worthy of note in Panel B of Table 1 is the continuing concentration of women in only a small number of occupational classes. In 1881, 87 per cent of those reporting an occupation were working in just four sectors of the economy: service, textiles, clothing, and professions. Forty years later 63 per cent of women reporting an occupation were still in these four sectors, although by then there were also proportionately more women working in commercial occupations than in the professions. These five sectors then encompassed 73 per cent of the reported female work force, so some diversification appears to have been occurring.

Certain aspects of Table 1 suggest that the trends depicted should be interpreted with caution, however. Mitchell and Deane admit that, despite their attempts at standardization, "changes in each census render exact comparisons usually impossible".[18] There is in fact an irremediable disjuncture in the figures presented. In the census reports prior to 1921 individuals were classified according to the materials they worked with, rather than by the jobs they did within a particular sector of industry. Hence, for instance, pre-1921 dealers and labourers would be found scattered across most of the occupational categories listed. In 1921 a new categorization procedure collected "those doing similar jobs" together, explaining the decline in certain categories such as food amongst both men and women while contributing to the apparent growth in others such as commerce between 1911 and 1921 as "dealers" were redistributed. Mitchell and Deane suggest that very

17 Mitchell and Deane, *Abstract of Historical Statistics*, pp. 59–61. The authors, like the census authorities, take the working ages to be 10 and over for 1881–1911 and 12 and over for 1921, and so the 1921 figures suggest there had been a decline in female participation rates. Statistics refer to Great Britain.

18 Mitchell and Deane, *Abstract of Historical Statistics*, p. 59.

few of the categories shown in Table 1 are truly comparable for the 1911–1921 decade. Nineteenth-century trends in occupation cannot therefore be followed beyond 1911, using the published British census reports, even when standardized.

Even the pre-1921 trends depicted in Table 1 could be compromised without changes in the occupational classification system. The Registrar General noted that the number of workers whose occupation was difficult to classify was much reduced between 1901 and 1911 because in the latter year the census schedules included a question on the nature of the business undertaken by the respondent's employer.[19] Thus someone giving his occupation simply as labourer in 1901 would have had to be classified in the "all others occupied" category as it was unclear with which materials he worked. In 1911, although he again reported himself as a "labourer", he might have noted that his employer was a tanner, for instance, and therefore been classified in the "shoes, leather, hair" category. Our ability to make a useful comparison of the overall proportion in the "all others occupied" category between 1901 and 1911 is thus affected, and this has repercussions for the proportions in other categories.

The uncertainties affecting the numbers in each employment category from one census to the next have implications for analysis at even slightly more complex levels. Table 2 shows the proportion of each occupational category made up of women and girls. If an alteration differentially prevented males from being reported in a particular occupational category, then that category will appear to have experienced greater feminization than was truly the case.[20] For instance, we must ask whether the increasing proportion of women in the "all others occupied" category between 1901 and 1911 is exclusively due to a move of women into new spheres of work, or if it may be partially explained by the number of labourers, mostly male, being classified elsewhere. Many categories, such as public administration, skins, food, and paper, show apparently steady feminization from 1891 to 1921, while others see more dramatic increases, particularly in the final decade. Given the caveats discussed above, any attempt to explain the markedly

19 The Registrar General remarks that "indefinite classes" of occupation were much reduced by the inclusion of the question concerning the respondent's employer's business. Parliamentary Papers (hereafter PP) 1917, Cd. 8491, *Census of England and Wales 1911: General Report*, p. 98. Thus the number of "warehousemen" declined by 34%, that of "factory hands" by 67%, and that of "machine workers" by 75% (p. 100).

20 In his report on the 1911 Census the Registrar General noted that an abnormally large number of men were absent from home in 1901 on account of the Boer War (PP 1917, Cd. 8491, *Census of England and Wales 1911: General Report*, p. 58). This may have had some impact on the male/female balance in certain occupations, further distorting our view of the "feminization" process. However, women formed a slightly smaller proportion of the total reported work force in 1901 than in any of the other census years shown in Table 2, rather than increasing as might be expected, given the Registrar General's comment.

Table 2 The Percentage of Workers in Each Occupational Category Who Are Female: Great Britain, 1881–1921

	Census date				
	1881	1891	1901	1911	1921
Public administration	8	10	13	16	17
Armed forces	0	0	0	0	0
Professional occupations	44	48	48	48	52
Domestic/personal services	88	87	85	82	83
Commercial occupations	3	5	11	18	39
Transport and communications	2	2	2	2	4
Agriculture, etc.	7	5	6	8	7
Fishing	5	2	0	0	0
Mining and quarrying	1	1	1	0	1
Metal manuf., machines, etc.	5	5	5	7	8
Building and construction	0	0	0	0	1
Wood, furniture, etc.	10	11	10	11	6
Bricks, cement, pottery, glass	20	21	20	22	31
Chemicals, etc.	11	16	21	23	27
Skins, leather, hair, feathers	18	20	24	26	31
Paper, printing, etc.	28	30	34	36	39
Textiles	57	57	59	58	63
Clothing	64	65	65	66	66
Food, drink, tobacco	17	21	24	28	35
Gas, water, electricity	0	0	0	0	—
All others occupied	8	8	8	12	24
All occupied	30	31	29	30	30

Source: Mitchell and Deane, *Abstract of British Historical Statistics.*

increased proportion of female workers from 1911 to 1921 amongst those in commerce, the professions, bricks, and "all others occupied" must unravel whether it entailed an important and long-lasting shift in occupational structure, a short-term aftermath of World War I, or, more prosaically, changes in collection or classification procedures by the Census Office. We must also contemplate the possibility that the answer may be different for each of the four occupational categories.

This brief look at (standardized) figures derived from the published reports of the British censuses of 1881 to 1911 has shown how for men they depict a decline in the agricultural sector but a rise in heavy industry and the tertiary sector, while for women the most dramatic change is the decline of domestic service. The tables have come with several "health warnings", however, and therefore we cannot, for instance, use the figures to illustrate dramatic changes in the structure of the work force over the decade of World War I. The momentous rise in the proportion of women reported to have worked in commercial occupations and the accelerated decline in those reported as servants and textile or clothing workers could simply be the result of changing classification practices.

To ascertain whether these changes are "real", access to a series of individual census schedules is required so that the occupations can be classified to a standardized scheme, held constant from one census to the next. Our data set, drawn from 13 registration districts scattered across England and Wales and spanning the 1891, 1901, 1911, and 1921 censuses, enables us to avoid the problems arising from changing classification schemes, but is still affected by the ways in which the census questions concerning occupation altered over time.

Problems Relating to Census Questions

The censuses between 1841 and 1881 were relatively uniform in the information which they recorded on occupation. In 1841 the "occupation of every person, regardless of age or sex, was required to be stated other than wives or sons or daughters, living with their husbands or parents and not receiving wages".[21] The four succeeding censuses had a column headed "rank, profession or occupation" on their schedules; as Higgs points out, the responses did not necessarily equate with "paid economic activity".[22] However, in all four decades, the instructions accompanying each schedule contained a section addressing "Women and children", which stated: "The occupation of those regularly employed away from home, or who follow any business at home, is to be distinctly recorded."[23] Thus the individual-level manuscript returns should indicate whether a woman saw herself, or wished to be seen, or was seen by the person filling out the form as having regular employment, although payment was only implicit. Until 1871 the published census tables classified women who were engaged in the domestic chores of their household as having an occupation.[24] From that date on, however, the emphasis appears to have changed from gathering information on "tasks in which one's time was spent" to "tasks for which one received financial remuneration". This reconceptualization was emphasized by the inclusion from 1891 onwards of new questions concerning "employment".[25] By 1921 respondents were even being asked to supply the names

21 Office of Population Censuses and Surveys (hereafter OPCS), *Guide to Census Reports Great Britain 1801–1966*, p. 19. Although censuses had been taken in Britain on a decennial basis from 1801, the 1841 census was the first to record individual occupations. The form of the question emphasizes that *paid* occupation was to be recorded.

22 Higgs, *Making Sense of the Census*, p. 78.

23 The wording shown here is from the instructions of 1881. PP 1883, Cd. 3739, v. 80, *Census of England and Wales: 1881*, p. 116. The wording differs slightly in other years from 1851 to 1881, but the sense remains the same.

24 Lewis, *Women in England*, p. 146; Hakim, "Census Reports as Documentary Evidence".

25 To follow the evolution of the employment questions, see the 1891, 1901, 1911, and 1921 census instruction sheets provided as Appendices A to D in the census reports. The originals of the first three can be found in PP 1893, Cd. 7222, *Census of England and Wales 1891: General Report*; PP 1904, Cd. 2174, *Census of England and Wales 1901: General Report*; PP 1917–18, Cd. 8491, *Census of England and Wales 1911: General Report*, Appendix A. The 1921 Report was published by HMSO in 1927. See also Rose, *Limited Livelihoods*.

of their employers.[26] From 1881 women "wholly engaged in domestic labour at home" were classified in the published reports as being "unoccupied".

The 1881 census therefore marks something of a watershed regarding the collection and analysis of occupational data, particularly in regard to women. From 1891 to 1921 the census schedules were further revised and expanded. The alterations were not without problems. Ambiguity in the instructions printed on the schedules led to unexpected discrepancies in responses to questions from one census to the next. Attempts to tighten up laxity in earlier instructions resulted in comparability being compromised even further. As women's work is the focus here, we will discuss those instructions from each census principally affecting the female portion of the work force.[27]

In the general instructions on the 1891 census schedules the respondent was directed to state "the occupations of women and children ... as well as those of men", although the examples given tended to be couched in terms of males: for example "Sons or other relatives of farmers employed on the farm should be returned as 'farmer's son', 'farmer's brother' etc."[28] Also men employed on farms and living in the farmer's house could return themselves as "farm servants" but this term was not to be used for domestic servants in a farmhouse. Domestic servants, it was noted in special instruction 13, should indicate "the nature of their service".[29] In an attempt to separate workers from their masters and to suit the needs of the Board of Trade, the 1891 schedule included three new columns headed "employer", "employee", and "neither employer or employee".[30] A cross was to be inserted in the appropriate column by those working in trade or industry, but not by domestic servants. It was further noted, in general instruction 5, that "Married women assisting their husbands in their trade or industry are to be returned as 'Employed'. "[31] Such women were not, however, instructed to return an occupation in the "profession or occupation" column. The report on the 1891 census cast considerable doubt on the validity of the "employer/employee" data, as a large number of people had not crossed any box, or had returned themselves as belonging to more than one category.[32] We can only speculate that the uncrossed boxes might

26 1921 Census schedule, instruction 11.

27 These questions have been abstracted for convenience in the Appendix to this article.

28 1891 Census schedule, special instruction 10.

29 1891 Census schedule, special instruction 13.

30 See Higgs, "Disease, Febrile Poisons and Statistics"; OPCS, *Guide to Census Reports*.

31 1891 Census schedule, general instruction 5.

32 K. Schurer, "The 1891 Census and Local Population Studies", *Local Population Studies*, vol. 47 (1991), pp. 16–29. Schurer argues that the Registrar General's failure to analyze the "employer/employee" data might have arisen from a fit of pique as, against his judgement, the questions had been included at the behest of the Treasury Committee. Schurer further suggests that these data do in fact hold considerable research potential.

indicate that a person was unemployed, as this contingency does not appear to have been allowed for in the instructions. Multiple crosses would seem to be a perfectly logical response for someone under contract who in turn hired the rest of the labour he or she needed.

In 1901 the census instructions stated that vague terms such as "manager", "dealer", and "factory hand" must not be used alone: "Full and distinctive description of the occupation" had to be given.[33] The instruction to farmers' relatives remained, but agricultural workers were now told to enter themselves according to the particular type of work in which they were usually engaged. The terms "cattleman", "horse keeper", and "carter on farm" were to replace "agricultural labourer".[34] Shopkeepers and shop assistants received instructions to return themselves as such, but also to state their "branch of business",[35] while those who worked in a shop but were principally engaged in manufacture and repair were instructed not to return themselves as "shopkeepers".[36] (In 1891 there had been no distinction made between the two sorts of "shopwork".) Nurses were asked to specify the type of nursing they undertook.[37] Servants once again had to enter the nature of their service. They were to make sure to enter the word "domestic" in their replies if this was appropriate.[38] In combination these instructions may well have contributed to the decline between 1891 and 1901 in the proportion of men and women having to be classified in the catch-all "all others occupied" category in Table 1.

The distinction between "shopkeepers" and "makers of goods in shops" had obviously not been totally resolved by the 1901 instructions, as instruction 2 on the 1911 schedule reiterated that "Dealers, Shopkeepers ... as distinct from Makers, Producers or Repairers ... should leave no doubt as to whether they are Dealers or Makers."[39] Someone being both a dealer and a maker had to distinguish whether he or she was "chiefly" one or the other. There followed an explicit instruction that persons "out of work" ("unemployed" in the modern sense) were to state their "usual occupation". There was nowhere allocated for them to indicate that they were unemployed at the time of the census.

Another instruction pertained explicitly to women: "The occupations of

33 1901 Census schedule, instruction 3. As discussed previously, however, many persons still answered this question in very general terms. Only with the addition of a question in 1911 on the nature of the respondent's employer's business was much of the troublesome "vagueness" removed.

34 1901 Census schedule, instruction 10.

35 1901 Census schedule, instruction 11.

36 1901 Census schedule, instruction 11.

37 Davies, in "Making Sense of the Census in Britain and the U.S.A.", suggests that this was to enable hospital (or sick) nurses to be distinguished from those nursing (children) as a form of domestic service.

38 1901 Census schedule, instruction 14.

39 1911 Census schedule, instruction 2.

women engaged in any business or profession, including women *regularly engaged in assisting relatives in trade or business*, must be fully stated.''[40] As a logical corollary of this, under the instruction concerning farmers' relatives, the term ''farmer's daughter'' was included amongst the examples for the first time. Women involved solely in domestic duties were, under the 1911 instructions, to have the occupation box left blank.

In 1921, for the first time, those occupied ''mainly'' in unpaid domestic duties were to have the term ''home duties'' entered as their occupation. The use of the word ''mainly'' implies that some other form of occupation was also possible. The first instruction on the schedule concerning those ''working for payment or profit'' had directed people with more than one occupation to ''state that by which by which [their] living was mainly earned'', a form of words also used in 1911.[41] Prior to this a person was supposed to list his or her occupations in order of importance.[42] Employees, apart from domestic servants, also had to enter the name of their employer on the schedule, along with the nature of the employer's business. The unemployed were to enter their last employer's name, adding ''out of work''.[43]

While in 1911 respondents had been instructed that women *regularly* engaged in assisting relatives were to be recorded as occupied, the equivalent 1921 instruction read: ''For a member of the household who is *chiefly* occupied in giving unpaid help in a business by the head of household ... state the occupation as though it were a paid occupation.''[44] Thus in 1921 the household member concerned could be either male or female, and the help had to be that person's main occupation, whereas in 1911 the women involved simply had to be helping on a regular basis in order to have an occupation recorded.

To illustrate the impact of such revisions to the census questions, we examine the implications of the changing instructions concerning women helping their relatives in trade or business. The fact that the word ''regularly'' was not defined in the 1911 instructions is of considerable significance for our understanding of women's work patterns and how the census did or did not capture these.

The published census reports, and indeed many of the individual returns, give the impression that all the occupations recorded were pursued on a full-time basis. It can be demonstrated, however, that reality fell short of this. Men were not asked to specify if, and by what means, they supplemented

40 1911 Census schedule, instruction 4.

41 1921 Census schedule, instruction 9; 1911 Census schedule, instruction 1.

42 See, for example, 1901 Census schedule, instruction 2. Classification schemes would, however, use the first occupation listed thus reducing any list to one occupation.

43 1921 Census schedule, instruction given at the top of the ''Employment'' column.

44 1911 Census schedule, instruction 4; 1921 Census schedule, instruction 7.

their "main" income,[45] nor were they asked to state that they "helped out" friends and relations if they reported having an occupation of their own. Thus while "apparent full-time occupation" probably overstates men's contribution to the formal economy (part-time work, under-employment, and in some years unemployment going unacknowledged), their contribution to the informal and reproductive economies was very much under-recorded. Hakim suggests that over the nineteenth century there emerged the notion of a "personal occupation" — a "one main career imperative"[46] — and this does seem to be the model to which the census authorities were working in designing their schedules by the turn of the century: an "occupation" was not only gainful — it was also pursued full-time. While such a model was probably accurate for middle-class males pursuing a career, it undoubtedly fell short of the experience of the many semi- and unskilled working-class men who endured casual, under- and unemployment, and bore little relation to the lives of the majority of women with their "duality of roles".[47] In both the latter cases the recording mechanism of the censuses would have failed to capture the full complexity of the occupational strategies involved in balancing the household economy.

In comparing the work of men and women one fundamental difference has to be borne in mind. If a man left his "occupation" box blank it would be impossible to assign him to any group within a classification scheme except "not known"; a wife or daughter returning no occupation could be assumed to be undertaking "domestic duties" or doing "housework". The man had no identity but his economic, gainfully occupied one; the woman operated in two spheres, and the assumption could be made that if she was not found in one she must be in the other. The dimensions of possible overlap were never clearly defined, and thus, while the census probably misrepresents the occupational experience of men to some extent, it does so at a much smaller level of magnitude than appears in its failure to represent accurately the contribution of women to the productive economy. It can also be argued that those women who did return an occupation would, in the terms of the logic of the census, have been seen as full-time paid workers, and therefore their reproductive role goes unacknowledged.

If males and females are to be treated within the same logical framework, then "main occupations" have to be viewed as the "main way one spends one's time" to allow housewifery to be an occupation, albeit not a "gainful" one. "Apparent full-time" housewifery may not have qualified as *employment*, but it was certainly viewed as a legitimate, indeed an ideal, *occupation* for women. It was undeniably often very hard *work*:

45 Pre-1921 censuses did give respondents the option of entering more than one job, in order of importance, but some means of supplementing income may well not have been seen as "jobs".

46 Hakim, "Census Reports as Documentary Evidence".

47 T. McBride, "Women's Work and Industrialisation" in L. R. Berlanstein, *The Industrial Revolution and Work in Nineteenth Century Europe* (London: Routledge, 1992).

> [T]he life of the married women of the working class is often extremely hard, taking into account the large amount of work done by them at home, cooking, cleaning, washing, mending and making of clothes, ... also baking of bread, tendance of children and of the sick, over and above and all but simultaneously with the bringing of babies into the world.[48]

The late nineteenth-century belief in the desirability of the "family wage", the increasingly money-oriented economy, and the spatial separation of "home" and "work" not only served to relegate the role of housewife to an inferior status, but also confused the terminology of "work", "occupation", and "employment".

Whatever the philosophy of the census takers, peoples' answers would be influenced by the way in which questions were phrased, as this would affect their understanding of the nature of the information they were asked to supply. It is arguable that many people, poring over the 1911 census schedule in England and Wales, supplied the information requested concerning women's occupations exactly as instructed. With no guidance as to what constituted "regular" assistance, women who helped out a relative once or twice a week, or maybe just every Saturday afternoon for a few hours, were entered as having an occupation, one which would then have been analyzed as though it were pursued full-time. The emphasis in the instruction that no occupation should be returned for women *wholly* engaged in domestic duties probably served to bolster the conviction that any regular assistance at all qualified as an occupation. If this was the case, the logic that the census elicited a woman's *main* occupation was subverted in 1911. The authorities responsible for census taking appear to have believed that this is what happened, because in 1921 the equivalent instruction was changed so that only those (and now both sexes were included) who were *chiefly* occupied in giving help in a business carried on by the head of the household were to be returned as though in a (full-time) "paid occupation".

In both England and Wales in 1911 and in the United States in 1910, when very similar wording was used, the proportion of women reporting an occupation in the census rose sharply, and authors such as Abel and Folbre[49] argue that this should have prompted "reconsideration of estimates [of women's gainful economic activity] from previous years". Certainly, if the census had been attempting to monitor all forms of activity contributing to the market economy then the 1911 wording probably did a better job of catching certain aspects of women's participation in the labour force than did other censuses. However, given the "main occupation" framework under which the census operated, the 1911 figures were anomalous. If one set about adjusting data on female occupation from other years to bring them into line with those of 1911,

48 B. L. Hutchins, *Women in Modern Industry* (1915; New York: Garland, 1980).

49 Abel and Folbre, "A Methodology for Revising Estimates".

then for the sake of equality one would have to adjust the data on males as well to bring their part-time, possibly unpaid, secondary occupations into the picture. At this stage it becomes obvious that the census is being asked to supply data that it was not designed to collect. For the purposes of comparative history it is preferable to assume that the 1911 census over-represents the number of women in the paid, full-time work force and to adjust our interpretation of the trends we observe accordingly.

Perhaps the most confusing step taken by the census authorities in light of the conceptual framework under which they were operating, and certainly their greatest disservice to women, was their decision in 1881 to classify "housewifery" and "domestic duties" in the category "unoccupied" in the published tables. As a result, the main occupation of the majority of married women acquired resonances of being "without work" and "unproductive", while the truth is that industrial economies would have foundered without the full-time reproductive labour of wives and mothers. To clarify the rather confused picture of women's work which we have so far uncovered, we move on to examine individual responses drawn from manuscript returns from the censuses for England and Wales of 1891, 1901, 1911, and 1921.

Manuscript Census Returns for England and Wales

Under the rules laid down by the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys (OPCS), manuscript census returns for England and Wales are only released once 100 years have elapsed after their original collection. The latest micro-level census data available to the public in microfilm form are thus the returns for 1891, although researchers have access to confidential individual data from the 1971, 1981, and 1991 censuses via the Longitudinal Study conducted by OPCS and from anonymous individual data through the Sample of Anonymised Records released from the 1991 census.[50] Unlike the United States, England has no public-use sample of material from the early part of the present century. The Cambridge Group for the History of Population and Social Structure has, however, been privileged to acquire from the OPCS the anonymous, machine-readable census records of between 80,000 and 103,000 individuals from each of the censuses of England and Wales for 1891, 1901, 1911, and 1921.[51]

The individual records, copied from the census enumerators' books of 1891 and 1901 and directly from the enumeration schedules of 1911 and 1921, were taken from clusters of enumeration districts within 13 "locales". The 1891 Registration Districts in which these locales fell are shown in Figure 1, as are the three-letter codes used for each of the 13 study areas.

50 See A. Dale, "The OPCS Longitudinal Survey", and C. Marsh, "The Sample of Anonymised Records", in Dale and Marsh, *The 1991 Census User's Guide* (London: HMSO, 1993).

51 To ensure confidentiality all names and addresses were removed by OPCS before the Cambridge Group received the data.

Thus within the Registration Districts of Hendon and West Ham, for example, lie respectively our locales of Pinner (PIN) and Walthamstow (WAL).

The 13 locales are by no means a random sample; they were chosen to provide as wide a spectrum of life as possible at the turn of the century. Morland (MOR) and Saffron Walden (SAF) were chosen to represent rural areas, with Banbury (BAN), a thriving market town in the heart of an agricultural area, and Axminster (AXM),[52] including both a lace-making centre and a developing holiday resort set in a rural hinterland, also contributing to the rural picture. Bolton (BOL), a cotton centre, Earsdon (EAR), a mining community, and Stoke (STO) or more accurately Hanley, one of the "Five Towns"[53] forming the Potteries were chosen to represent industrial centres. Both Bolton and Stoke had substantial roles for women in their labour markets. York (YOR) and Swansea (SWA) were both sizable urban centres with considerable retailing sectors, but they too contribute to our industrial profile. The Welsh town of Abergavenny (ABY) served a market function and had, like York, some railway works. Its neighbour, Blaenavon, while having a considerable portion of its work force in the metal industry, also contributes a further dimension to our view of the mining industry. In addition we have enumeration districts taken from the rural areas nearby. The importance of London to the national picture is acknowledged by our choice of three locales to represent its diversity. Walthamstow (WAL) was a growing working-class suburb to the northeast, Pinner (PIN) a burgeoning middle-class suburb to the northwest, and Bethnal Green (BET) an acknowledged area of poverty encompassing a large immigrant population in the "East End". In combination we refer to the inhabitants of the 13 locales as the "OPCS population".

These locales should not be seen as representative of the nation as a whole. Rather they should be seen as separate case studies, each with its own idiosyncrasies providing a spatial dimension for comparison of women's experiences across different regions and economies, an opportunity not often granted in studies dealing with census data at the level of the individual. Our ability to recode individual replies to the occupational questions ensures greater comparability from one census to the next and avoids the major disjunctures evident when the tables in the published reports are compared in series. The individual returns also allow examination of personal characteristics such as age and marital status as well as observation of the household and family structures in which the women

52 The area we have dubbed "Axminster" does not, in fact, include any part of that town. More accurately this locale contains the town of Colyton and its near neighbour, Colyford, plus their agricultural surroundings, plus the nearby centres of Seaton and Beer.

53 In reality there were six towns: Stoke, Burslem, Tunstall, Longton, Hanley, and Fenton. Arnold Bennett omitted the last from his count in *Anna of the Five Towns* (1902; Harmondsworth; Penguin, 1967).

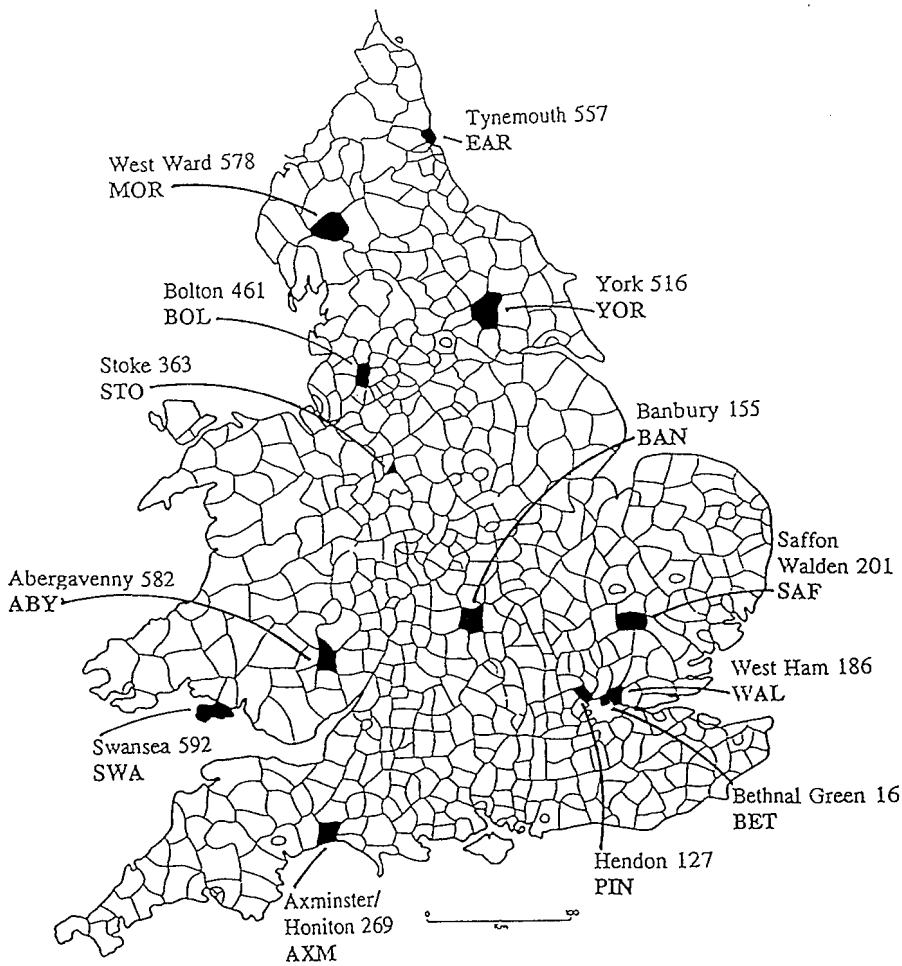


Figure 1 The location of the registration districts in England and Wales which contain the OPCS locales. York — name of registration district in which a locale lies; 516 — number of registration district in 1891; YOR — three letters used to identify a particular locale. (The authors are very grateful to Professor R. I. Woods of the Geography Department, University of Liverpool, England, for permission to use his outline map of registration districts in this diagram.)

lived. It is possible to conduct cross-locale studies or to examine the experience of the OPCS population *en masse*. Both approaches are employed in the following discussion.

As we have seen, the published census reports for 1891, 1901, and 1911 treated persons of 10 years of age and over as being of working age. By 1921 the minimum working age was considered to be 12. Here, however, we look at those individuals who were 15 years old or over. This allows

comparability across censuses and also enables the population to be divided more easily into equal five-year age groups.

The 1891 OPCS population includes approximately 27,000 women aged 15 and over. By 1921 this had risen to just short of 39,000. Over the first three censuses the proportion of married women in the OPCS population remained at a constant 51 per cent.[54] The proportion of single women rose from 37 to 39 per cent, while declining mortality contributed to reducing the proportion widowed from 11.7 to 10.2 per cent. In contrast, the 1921 figures partially reflect the impact of the First World War. The proportion of single women fell slightly to 36 per cent, while the proportion married rose by two percentage points. Levels of widowhood rose again, but at 11.1 per cent did not reach 1891 proportions. As can be seen from Table 3 the rise in widowhood in 1921 was selective: only the 20–34 age group experienced levels of widowhood greater than those of 1891; the levels for older women continued to decline, hence the relatively small overall rise in the proportion widowed between 1911 and 1921.[55]

Table 4 unravels women's changing experience further. Between 1891 and 1911, the proportion of single women rose in every age group. Comparing the 1911 figures with those of 1921, however, we see that this trend was abruptly reversed amongst the 20- to 34-year-olds, although it continued amongst those aged over 40. As single women were more likely to be reported as having an occupation, the OPCS population appears to have had an increasing pool of potential workers on which to draw, particularly between 1891 and 1911.

Over the decade of 1911 to 1921 marriage chances for younger women actually appear to have improved, despite the loss of young men during the First World War. Had the incidence of marriage remained at 1911 levels there would have been 7 per cent more single women in their twenties in 1921 than the actual numbers indicate. These figures have to be treated with caution, however. The census snapshot of our 13 areas may not be revealing changes in marriage patterns so much as changes in occupation. As will be demonstrated below, the proportion of women recorded as domestic servants fell dramatically between 1911 and 1921. Servants were predominantly unmarried, and if they were no longer being employed in such numbers and were seeking alternative employment elsewhere then areas in which they had previously been concentrated would have seen a decline in the proportion of single women in the female population.[56] At the national scale the

54 The proportion married includes all women stating that they were so, whether or not their husbands were present on census night. We have only two divorced women recorded, both in 1921. The latter women are not included in the tables which follow.

55 There is some evidence that remarriage after the death of a spouse was an increasing possibility for both men and women. This would to some small degree reduce the number of widows recorded.

56 National figures suggest that the proportion of women ever married rose between 1911 and 1921; if the migration of servants did contribute to the reduced proportions single in the OPCS population,

Table 3 Percentage of Ever-Married Women Widowed, by Age Group: Women Aged 15 or Over, OPCS Population 1891–1921

Age group	1891	1901	1911	1921
15–	2.1	1.5	6.8	3.2
20–	1.0	1.1	0.4	1.0
25–	2.3	1.9	1.3	3.7
30–	4.5	3.6	2.4	5.9
35–	6.6	6.0	5.0	6.4
40–	11.6	9.7	8.1	8.3
45–	15.4	14.6	13.1	11.3
50–	24.8	23.6	19.1	17.2
55–	29.1	30.9	26.3	23.7
60+	56.2	54.8	55.8	52.4

Source: Office of Population Censuses and Surveys (OPCS) census records.

Table 4 Percentage of Each Age Group Who Remain Single: Women Aged 15 or Over, OPCS Population 1891–1921

Age group	1891	1901	1911	1921
15–	97.8	98.6	98.8	98.1
20–	68.8	71.2	74.9	70.9
25–	36.9	39.0	43.1	39.0
30–	23.2	20.8	25.2	24.0
35–	14.8	16.8	18.8	18.7
40–	12.0	14.8	15.2	16.0
45–	10.7	11.2	14.1	15.5
50–	10.2	10.0	12.1	14.0
55–	9.7	8.8	10.3	12.7
60+	9.9	8.4	9.8	10.8

Source: Office of Population Censuses and Surveys (OPCS) census records.

potential servants would have been enumerated as single women elsewhere, but they may well have migrated "out of observation", thus distorting the marital status distribution in the OPCS population.

Figure 2 demonstrates, for 1891, how diverse the proportions in the various marital states could be from place to place. Single girls formed less than 30 per cent of the female population aged 15 and over in Bethnal Green, Earsdon, and Saffron Walden, whereas in middle-class Pinner they outnumbered married women, forming almost half of the adult female population. In Bethnal Green and Earsdon marriage came early, and here and in Saffron Walden those not marrying left to find jobs elsewhere. Pinner's

this only enhanced the more general picture of increased marriage chances. See Lewis, *Women in England*, p. 3.

middle-class population married late and there were large numbers of places for domestic servants, creating a concentration of unmarried females.[57]

Marital and occupational status were closely related. In most of our 13 locales the majority of single women were returned as working in the labour market. The column second from the right in Table 5 shows for the OPCS population the percentage of women of each marital status who were returned as having an occupation in each of the four censuses. Approximately 70 per cent of single women are so recorded, with a peak in 1911 of 73.5 per cent. Amongst married women whose husbands were living with them on census night, at most one in ten returned an occupation, again with the peak rate occurring in 1911, whereas amongst widows apparent employment rates lay at over 40 per cent until the dawn of the new century, but then dropped steeply. The apparent participation rates by age (not shown) indicate that the drop in employment rates amongst widows between 1901 and 1911 is mainly restricted to those aged 65 and over, suggesting the introduction of the old age pension in 1908 may have been playing a part.[58] The proportionately greater drop between 1911 and 1921 is evident in all age groups, however. Given the absence of widow's pensions until 1925,[59] this drop is much more difficult to account for, particularly as until 1911 widows under the age of 45 had participation rates on a par with single women, but in 1921 were only two-thirds as likely to return an occupation. A fourth group of women, those reportedly married but whose husbands were not present on census night, show apparent participation rates more akin to those of widows than of wives: an unsurprising discovery given that some of these women would have been abandoned by, or separated from, their husbands on a long-term basis. Others may well have been single mothers attempting to disguise their unmarried state and in need of employment to support themselves and their children. It is also possible that the absence of her husband may have left a woman freer to return an occupation than might have been the case had he been at home. However, in common with widows, the "married spouse absent" women display a marked decline in their reported participation rates between 1911 and 1921. This perhaps suggests a problem in the consistency of reporting occupations amongst these groups, rather than a welfare or cultural development, a point which remains to be investigated.

57 By 1921 the proportion of the adult female population who were single had not altered dramatically, although certain locales, such as Pinner and Swansea with a relatively large middle-class component, showed larger than average declines in the proportion of single women, adding weight to the "decline of service" argument. Nevertheless 41% of Pinner's adult female population remained single while the proportion in Earsdon was only 28%.

58 Initial legislation in Britain set the qualifying age for receipt of a state pension at 70 and was by no means universal. See M. Jeffreys, ed., *Growing Old in the Twentieth Century* (London: Routledge, 1989).

59 See J. MacNicol and A. Blaikie in Jeffreys, ed., *Growing Old in the Twentieth Century*; Lewis, *Women in England*, p. 64.

Figure 2: All women aged 15 and over: percentage by marital status, by OPCS locale, 1891.

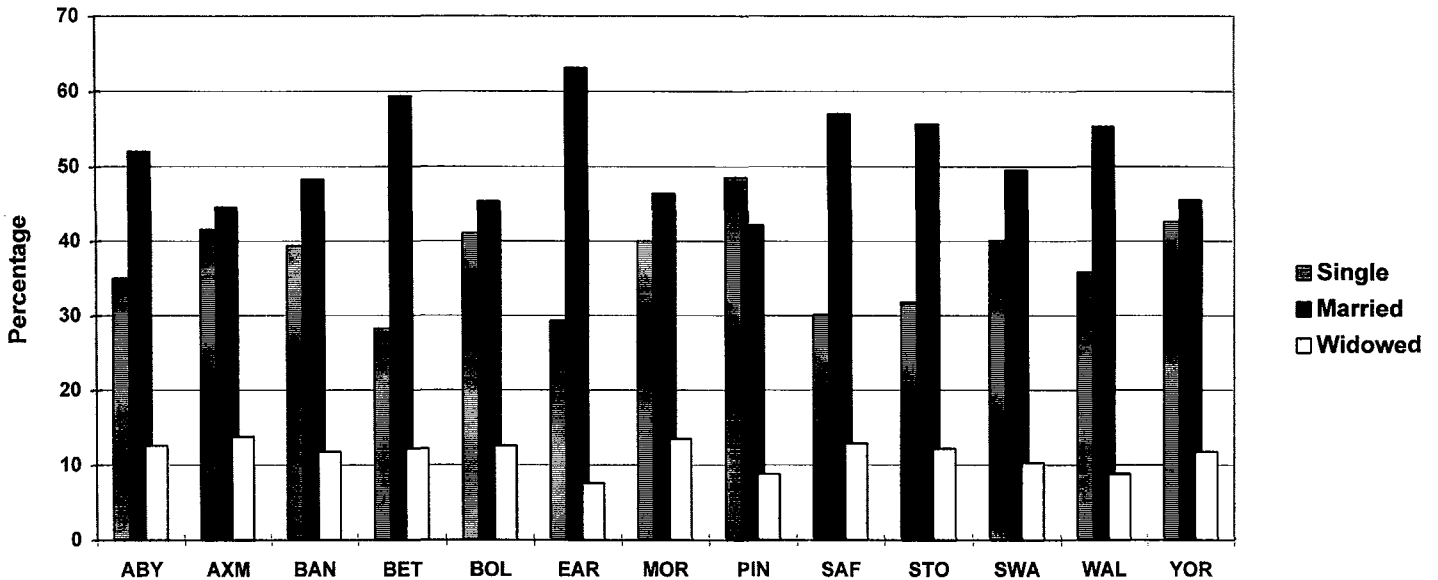


Table 5 Percentage of Women Aged 15 and Over Returning a Labour Market Occupation[a] in Each Census, by Marital Status and Age, OPCS Population 1891–1921

	Age groups								
	15–	20–	25–	35–	45–	55–	65+	All	N
Single									
1891	69.6	75.7	73.4	67.5	61.9	50.4	26.2	70.7	10,035
1901	69.4	75.5	71.4	64.3	65.0	47.8	29.6	69.8	12,101
1911	74.6	79.7	75.7	66.6	60.6	55.1	29.5	73.5	14,184
1921	68.5	77.5	71.3	64.1	57.2	47.1	26.4	68.2	13,845
Married — Spouse absent									
1891	(66.7)[b]	(30.6)	45.5	48.1	42.9	42.1	(34.2)	43.7	704
1901	(25.0)	31.2	31.9	44.0	39.0	43.5	26.1	37.2	893
1911	(0.0)	35.7	37.9	41.1	47.4	45.4	31.4	40.9	1,030
1921	(43.7)	25.6	27.4	30.5	29.9	31.0	8.1	27.9	1,180
Married — Spouse present									
1891	13.2	15.0	9.6	9.6	9.2	7.8	6.8	9.5	13,171
1901	9.5	10.1	6.8	8.0	7.1	7.5	5.7	7.5	15,390
1911	(12.5)	11.8	12.2	10.5	10.3	9.7	6.9	10.8	17,730
1921	14.9	12.1	8.2	8.0	7.0	6.2	3.3	7.6	19,320
Widowed									
1891	(50.0)	(66.7)	69.9	70.3	54.9	43.0	23.6	42.5	3,202
1901	—	(60.0)	73.1	63.9	55.0	39.1	22.9	40.4	3,461
1911	(75.0)	(60.0)	74.3	66.8	51.3	36.2	17.1	34.9	3,740
1921	(66.7)	(28.6)	44.8	42.1	42.1	27.2	10.8	25.5	4,306

a) Women not returning a labour market occupation include those returned as "scholars" or "students", those returned as "housewives" or considered to be undertaking "home duties", those stating that they were not working for some reason, and those whose "occupation" box was left blank.

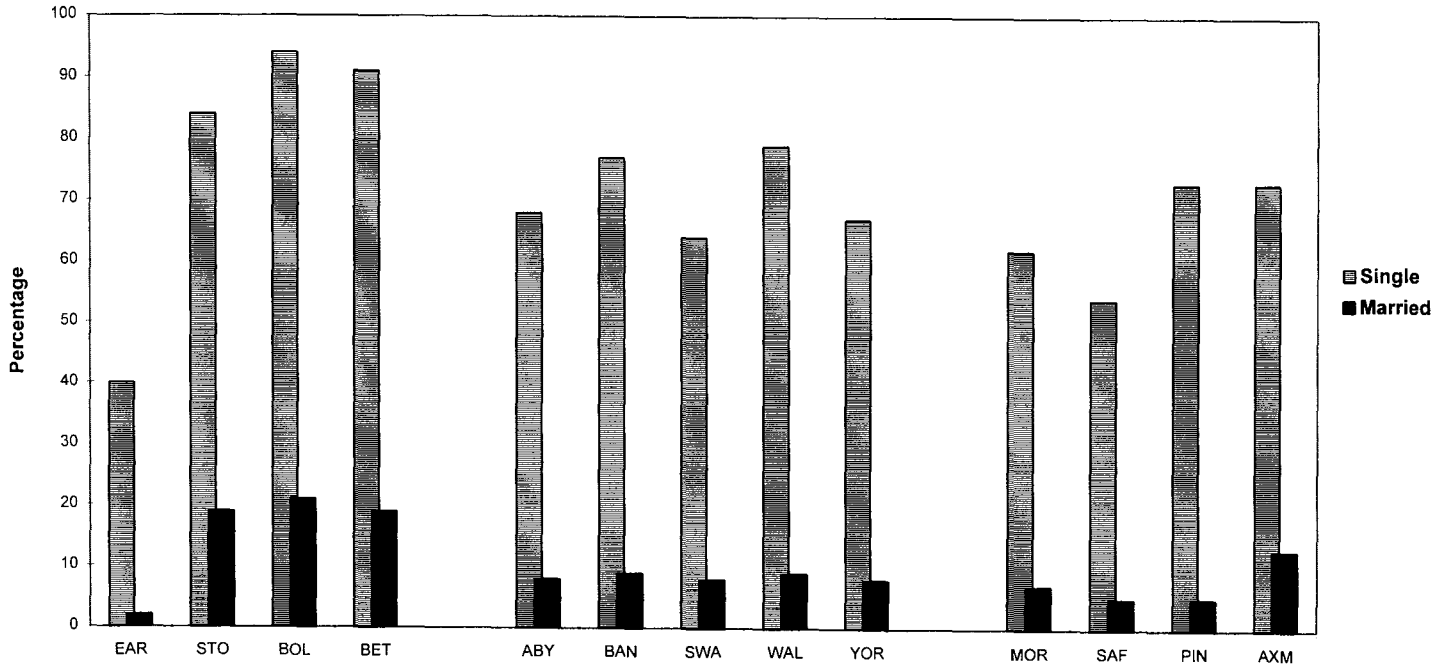
b) Numbers in parenthesis indicate percentages derived from fewer than 50 women.

Source: Office of Population Censuses and Surveys (OPCS) census records.

The proportion of women reporting an occupation diminished with age in every marital status category, although rates remained relatively buoyant for those in their late forties and early fifties. Beyond this, and particularly for those over the age of 65, rates dropped rapidly. Possibly by this stage women could call on relatives for support, maybe by exchanging "home duties" for financial and material assistance. Also the activities of older women in the labour market might have been of a kind overlooked by the census.

Figure 3 illustrates how diverse regional experience of "women's work" could be. In 1911 in Stoke, Bolton, and Bethnal Green over 80 per cent of single women reported having a paid occupation, while the norm for other areas lay between 60 and 80 per cent. In the mining community of Earsdon

Figure 3: The percentage of women aged 15 and over returning an occupation, by marital status and OPCS locale, 1911.



Note: 'Married' does not include those women whose spouse was absent on census night.

only 40 per cent of single women returned an occupation, reflecting the fact that there were few job opportunities for women outside the home and a large demand for help with domestic tasks within. Where the demand for women's industrial labour was high, as in the potteries of Stoke, the textile mills of Bolton, and the workshops of Bethnal Green, the level of married women's reported participation in the work force was also high at around 20 per cent. Elsewhere, closer to one in ten wives reported having a labour market occupation, Earsdon again having the lowest rate of only one in every 50 married (spouse present) women reporting an occupation. Middle-class Pinner, while having relatively high rates of single women in the work force, had the second lowest apparent participation rate amongst married women. The role of the young, single, mobile servant in such areas is thus highlighted once again. Taking the two extremes of Bolton and Earsdon in Table 6 we can see that work in the labour market was virtually universal for single women under the age of 45 in the former, but reported by fewer than half of the women in this age group in the latter. The growing proportion of older single women reporting an occupation in Earsdon suggests that having a job enabled one to keep one's independence longer. Amongst married women in Bolton apparent labour force participation diminished with age; as women's families grew they found it increasingly difficult to remain out at work, and as children grew older they could replace their mother's earning capabilities, freeing her to devote herself entirely to domestic chores.[60] The women of Bolton certainly do not appear to have found it necessary to give up work on marriage, whereas in Earsdon full-time, paid work and marriage appear to have been almost totally incompatible. Similarly Bolton's apparent participation rate for widows was by far the highest amongst the 13 locales in 1911; the availability of job opportunities in addition to the past labour market experience of women must have played a large part in enabling widows to return to employment. Elsewhere, if widows were eking out a living, they were doing so in ways that did not enrol them in the census returns as apparent full-time, paid employees.

In an attempt to demonstrate how "earning money" does not necessarily equate with an apparent full-time occupation, Figure 4 depicts the percentage of all (spouse present) married women in each locale for whom an occupation was reported in conjunction with the proportion who had at least one boarder in their household on census night, 1911. Keeping a boarder has tended to be seen as a woman's activity; although men share the house with the boarders they are seldom described as keeping them:[61] a reflection

60 See E. Garrett, "The Trials of Labour: Motherhood Versus Employment in a Nineteenth Century Textile Centre", *Continuity and Change*, vol. 5, no. 1 (1990), pp. 121–154; E. A. M. Roberts, "Women's Strategies 1890–1940" in J. Lewis, ed., *Labour and Love: Women's Experience of Home and Family 1850–1940* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986).

61 L. Davidoff, "The Separation of Home and Work? Landladies and Lodges in Nineteenth and Twentieth Century England" in S. Burman, *Fit Work for Women* (London: Croom Helm, 1979).

Table 6 Percentage of Women Returning a Labour Market Occupation[a] by Marital Status and Age, Bolton and Earsdon, 1911

	Age groups								
	15–	20–	25–	35–	45–	55–	65+	All	N
Single									
Bolton	95.8	97.1	93.4	90.3	(84.4)[b]	(95.4)	(46.7)	94.0	1,007
Earsdon	33.7	40.8	47.7	(50.0)	(70.0)	(80.0)	(66.7)	40.1	1,461
Married — Spouse present									
Bolton	—	30.6	27.0	21.0	13.1	14.8	(8.1)	20.7	1,060
Earsdon	—	2.6	1.4	1.5	3.5	2.6	(0.0)	2.0	1,013
Widowed									
Bolton	—	—	(100.0)	(77.4)	59.7	38.6	18.5	43.8	290
Earsdon	—	—	(60.0)	(52.9)	(14.3)	14.7	2.0	16.7	126

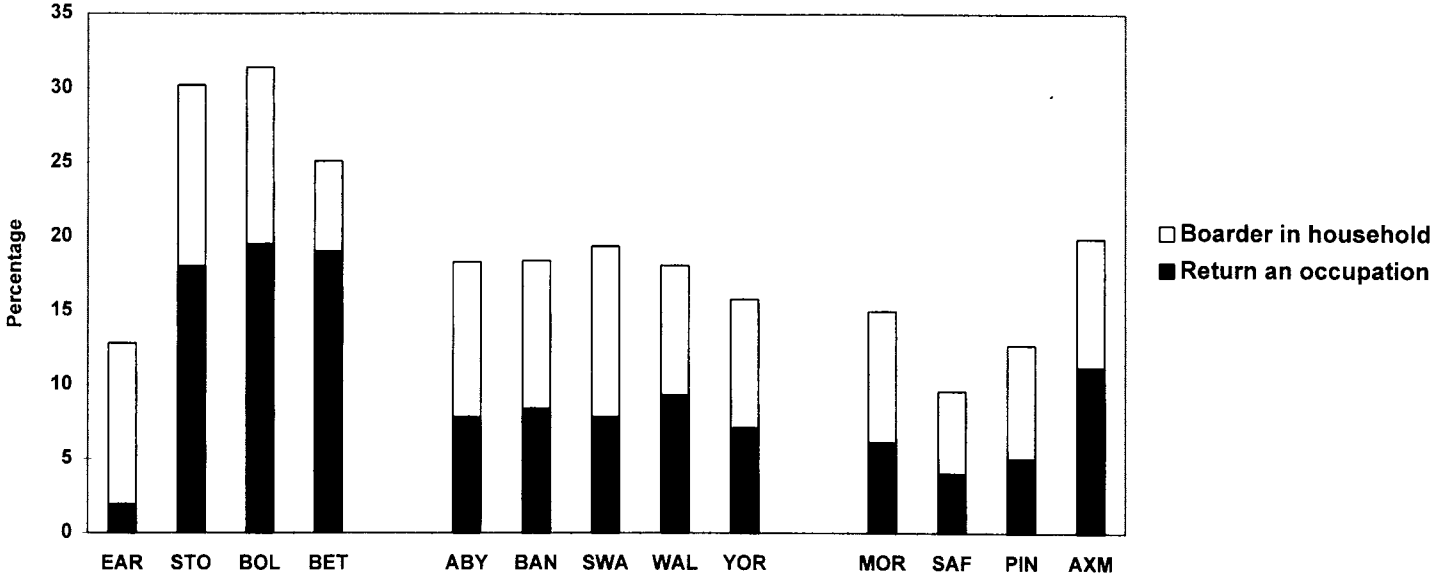
a) Women not returning a labour market occupation include those returned as "scholars" or "students", those returned as "housewives" or considered to be undertaking "home duties", those stating that they were not working for some reason, and those whose "occupation" box was left blank.
b) Numbers in parenthesis indicate percentages derived from fewer than 50 women.
Source: Office of Population Censuses and Surveys (OPCS) census records.

that most of the services boarders require are domestic functions. Obviously circumstances would determine both the demand for places as boarders and the ability for such demands to be fulfilled. In areas of large families but small houses such as Bethnal Green, space for boarders was limited, and in those agricultural areas such as Saffron Walden which were experiencing out-migration, few people sought to board. If we were to treat keeping a boarder as an apparent full-time occupation, an extra 5 to 10 per cent of wives in each area could be viewed as having paid employment: a feature the published census returns render invisible.[62]

In sum the data presented here do not indicate a dramatic, nor even a moderate, rise in the proportion of women having their main occupation reported as lying outside the home. The surge upward in reported participation in 1911, probably created by the different phraseology of the occupa-

62 Boarders who slept and ate as members of the household are much more easily identified in the censuses of this period than are lodgers, despite their many similarities. Census instructions directed that lodgers, who did not eat with their host family, should be recorded as living in separate households. The proportions of women having an extra income from renting out space in their homes is thus underestimated in Figure 4. It is possible that there was considerable, but unquantifiable, regional variation in the extent of this undercount. The low level of boarders in Bethnal Green, for instance, may reflect a preference for lodging in that area. Figure 4 does, nevertheless, indicate that earning strategies were available to women who appear to be without full-time paid occupation in the census returns.

Figure 4: The percentage of all 'wives of head of household' returning an occupation, and the percentage housing at least one boarder, OPCS locales, 1911.



Note: Those wives returning an occupation *and* keeping a boarder are included amongst the 'return an occupation' category.

tion question, gives an illusion of a rising trend. Indeed amongst husband-absent, married and widowed women the underlying trend was a markedly downward one. The number of women working certainly rose, but this appears to be due more to a growth in the population than to women increasingly infiltrating the "apparent full-time labour market".

The Changing Nature of Women's Employment

If the proportion of those occupied was not altering dramatically, the jobs which women were doing were changing demonstrably. At the national level (Table 1) the four main sectors where women were to be found in 1891 were domestic service, commerce, clothing, and textiles. Those working in the latter category were concentrated in the cotton and woollen areas of Lancashire and the West Riding of Yorkshire. The other three categories were dispersed more evenly across the country. Knowing that our locales were not a representative sample of the national experience, we appreciated that our view of textile workers would be highly coloured by the experience of Bolton. We applied the same logic to the pottery workers of Stoke, and therefore did not include these two groups in the following analysis,[63] instead looking at workers in dress, those who worked as dealers or dealers' assistants, those who were domestic servants, and all other women who returned a non-textile, non-pottery occupation, whom we have designated as being in "non-major occupations".[64]

In Table 7 women in the OPCS population have again been divided by marital status. Amongst single women the greatest occupational change was the decline of domestic service and of dress, replaced by jobs in other sectors of the economy. In 1891 every second never-married adult woman recording an occupation outside of textiles and pottery in the OPCS population was a domestic servant. By 1921 this number had fallen to fewer than one in three. Amongst married working women, too, the proportion returned as domestic servants fell from one in three to fewer than one in five. In this group the decline in dressmaking was even more dramatic. Elizabeth

63 The levels of married women's occupation outside the home can act as a barometer not only of the state of the industry in which the women are working, but also of the industries in which their husbands work. If male un- or under-employment is high in an area then the number of married women reported to be out at work increases. See Garrett, "The Trials of Labour". Bolton and Stoke saw considerable change in their fortunes over the 30-year period in question. To include the changing proportion of textile workers and potters in the following calculations would have had repercussions for the measurement of the proportion of women employed in other sectors; they were therefore omitted.

64 "Non-major" is here used in the sense of "not making up a major component" of the work force. In combination these occupations do make up a considerable proportion of the work force, but the constituent occupational groups each contribute only a relatively small proportion of the total. The "non-major" category thus includes all women reporting labour market participation except those in dress, dealing, domestic service, textiles, and pottery. Tables 1 and 2 give a full list of the categories included.

Table 7 Percentage of Women Aged 15 and Over Reportedly Employed in Industries Other Than Textiles or Pottery Who Are in Dress, Dealing, Domestic Service or "Non-major" Occupations, by Marital Status, OPCS Population 1891–1921

	1891	1901	1911	1921
Single women				
Dress[a]	15.7	17.9	16.2	11.2
Dealers[b]	7.9	7.6	8.9	12.2
Dealers' assistants	0.3	1.3	1.8	2.9
Domestic servants[c]	54.9	48.4	42.7	31.9
Non-major occupations[d]	21.3	24.9	30.3	43.2
Number reporting employment in occupations listed	6,107	7,253	9,039	8,383
Married women[e]				
Dress	23.6	21.3	12.0	9.9
Dealers	16.9	17.0	14.9	21.6
Dealers' assistants	0.2	0.2	12.1	2.9
Domestic servants	30.5	29.1	24.7	17.4
Non-major occupations	28.9	32.5	36.5	48.2
Number reporting employment in occupations listed	1,209	1,166	2,161	1,557
Widows				
Dress	13.7	13.6	9.9	6.9
Dealers	18.9	20.5	17.9	17.7
Dealers' assistants	0.0	0.1	0.5	0.2
Domestic servants	43.8	39.6	44.0	44.0
Non-major occupations	23.6	26.2	27.7	31.2
Number reporting employment in occupations listed	1,282	1,315	1,297	1,025

a) "Dress" includes all "dressmakers", "tailoresses", "milliners", "corsetmakers", and others in the making and repairing of clothes.
b) "Dealers" are all those reported to be "shopkeepers", "dealers", "shop assistants", etc., no matter in what commodity they are dealing.
c) "Domestic servants" are all those returned under an occupation with the words "domestic" or "domestic servant" appended to it, as well as those described by these terms alone, and thus would include kitchen maids, maids, domestic nurses, domestic governesses, domestic kitchen and laundry hands, mothers' helps, day servants and charwomen if they describe themselves as "in service".
d) The "non-major" category includes all women reporting labour market participation, excluding those in dress, dealing, domestic service, textiles, and pottery (see Tables 1 and 2 for full list of possible categories).
e) Married women include both spouse-present and spouse-absent wives.
Source: Office of Population Censuses and Surveys (OPCS) census records.

Roberts suggests that, with the increase of factory-made clothing and the rise of foreign competition, the demand for dressmakers and tailoresses diminished, married women being first, as usual, to withdraw their labour.[65] It may also be that opportunities for home-working in the industry diminished, and thus married women were no longer able to participate to the same extent as when they had been able to combine work and childcare.[66] Participation in dress declined amongst widows too, but service, atypically, retained a fairly constant proportion of those widows returning an occupation. The proportion returning non-major occupations rose as well, but not so rapidly as amongst the other two marital status groups. It might be suggested that the changes experienced at the opening of the new century worked through the population via generations of young workers who explored avenues of employment which had not been open to their elders. It was not that women moved wholesale out of the more traditional employments: young women apparently preferred not to enter them. Legally enforceable compulsory education had only been in place for approximately ten years by 1891. By 1921 the daughters of parents with only basic literary skills were entering the labour market equipped with more sophisticated reading, writing, and arithmetic abilities, and were looking for jobs in which to use these.[67] The jobs no longer being filled by the youngsters increasingly became the provenance of those in the later stages of their life cycle.

The figures in Table 7 also bring into sharp focus the impact of the change in wording in the 1911 census concerning women helping or assisting relatives on a regular basis. Previously apparent participation rates have been shown to rise amongst single and married women in 1911 only to decline again in 1921. Table 7 is more specific, showing the proportion of married women returned as "dealer's assistant" soaring from 0.2 per cent in 1901 to 12.1 per cent in 1911 but deflating to only 2.9 per cent in 1921. Amongst single women, dealers' assistants saw steady percentage growth

65 E. Roberts *Women's Work 1840–1940* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1988).

66 The decline in women's reported participation in the dressmaking industry may in part be attributed to the fact that the 1921 census was taken in June, rather than the more usual time of late March or early April, because of threatened industrial action at the latter time. See OPCS, *Guide to Census Reports*. Morris, however, reports that the busiest times of the year for dressmakers were March to August and October to December. These dates were for the London bespoke trade, and other regions of the country may have experienced different "off-seasons". J. Morris, "The Characteristics of Sweating: The Late Nineteenth Century London and Leeds Tailoring Trades" in A. V. John, *Unequal Opportunities: Women's Employment in England 1800–1918* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986).

67 The 1902 Education Act formed the foundation stone for a national secondary school system. Initially fees were charged but in 1907 grants were made to the schools, provisional on 25% of places being provided free for pupils from publicly run elementary schools. See A. M. Halsey, *Trends in British Society Since 1900* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1972), whose Table 6.2 shows that, by 1911, 18,900 12- to 14-year-olds and 33,000 15- to 18-year-olds were receiving "grant aided" secondary education. By 1921 the figures had grown to 186,000 and 82,000 respectively. See also J. Bourke, *Working Class Cultures in Britain 1891–1960* (London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 116–118.

with no "bounce" in 1911. This suggests that the wives of dealers were more likely than their daughters to be helping out on a "part-time but regular" basis in the family business. Knowing from the census manuscripts how individual household members were related to one another, we can test this supposition. Predictably, the story is not clear-cut.

All women returned as being either a "dealer" or a "dealer's assistant" were identified from the returns and all those reported to be the wife or daughter of the household head selected. They were then divided by whether or not the household head was a dealer and further divided into age groups. The results of this exercise are depicted in Figures 5A (for wives) and 5B (for daughters).

Relatively few wives of dealers were under the age of 30, dealing being an occupation requiring some accumulation of capital, perhaps involving the inheritance of premises or stock and thus favouring rather older persons who would in turn have rather older spouses. In 1891 and 1901 the OPCS population included approximately 1,200 men reported to be dealers. In 1911 there were 1,382 and in 1921 1,094. Around 3 per cent of these men had wives who were reported to be dealers or dealers' assistants in the first two censuses, but 20 per cent did so in 1911 and 13 per cent in 1921. The great surge in the number of dealers' wives reportedly working in dealing in 1911 followed by a decline in 1921 suggests that many dealers' wives helped out in the shop on a regular basis but far fewer did so on a relatively full-time basis, a situation captured by the wording of the 1911 and 1921 censuses in combination. The wives of non-dealers reported to be involved in dealing also rose in 1911. Under the 1911 instructions women could have been assisting relatives who resided in another household. It is possible that married women were helping out nearby kin in their enterprises on a part-time basis, but this is very difficult to prove.

The fortunes of dealers' daughters take quite a different path to that of non-dealers' daughters (Figure 5B). Amongst the former the number employed as dealers or dealers' assistants remained fairly constant over the first two censuses in each age group, but took the now familiar 1911 upswing followed by a downturn in 1921. The 1911 wording captured the help given by daughters in the family shop, but the experience of these women is eclipsed by the growing number of shop workers who came from families who did not own or run a shop. The new consumer era heralded a rise in demand for "shop assistants" to marshall stock and serve customers. The growing influence of large stores at the expense of small, family shops[68] greatly expanded this job market, a demand met by a better educated, working-

68 A point made by McBride in "Women's Work and Industrialisation". McBride highlights the fact that the advent of large stores reduced the opportunities for married women to work in family-run shops. It may also have contributed to the declining number of men reported to be "dealers" evident in the OPCS population, but this point requires further investigation.

Figure 5A: The number of 'dealers' and 'dealer's assistants' who were also returned as 'wife of head of household', by head's occupation and by age of wife, OPCS population 1891-1921.

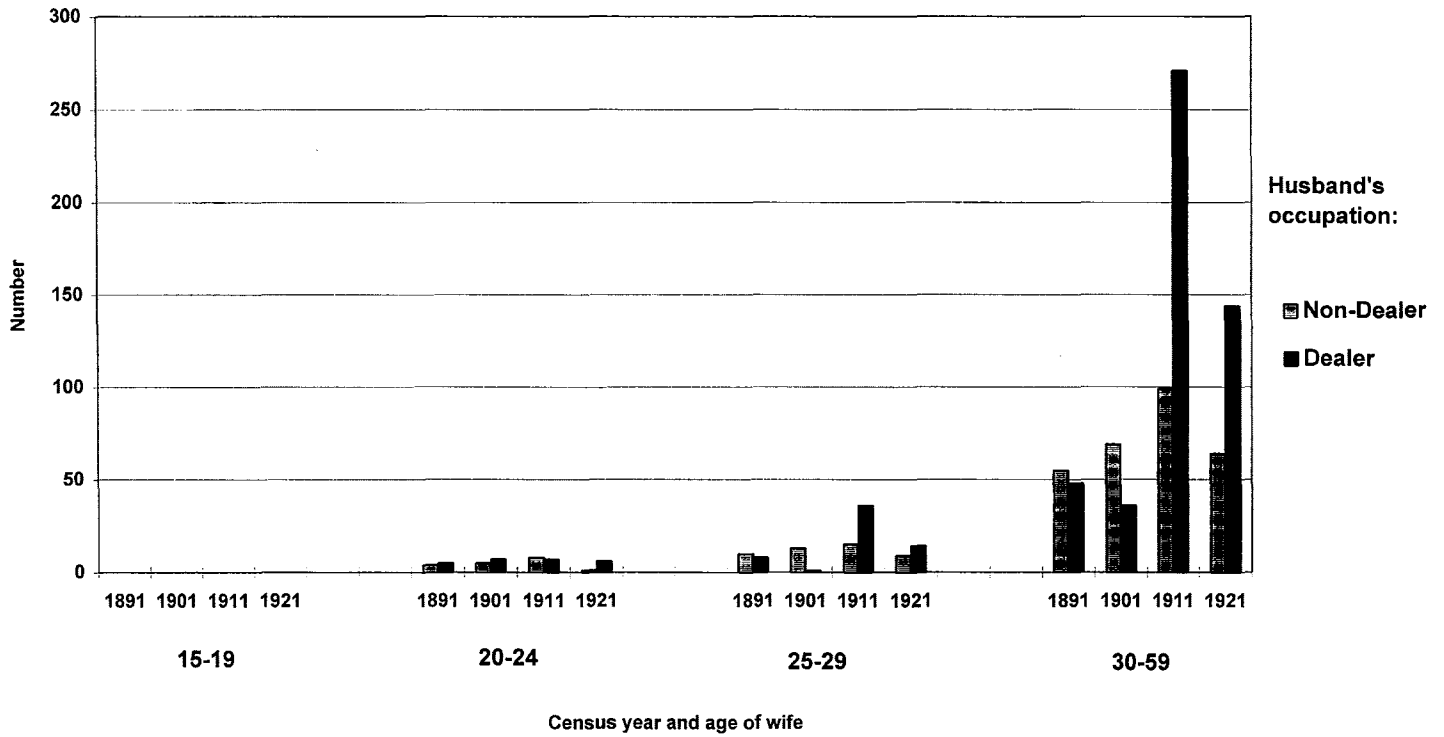
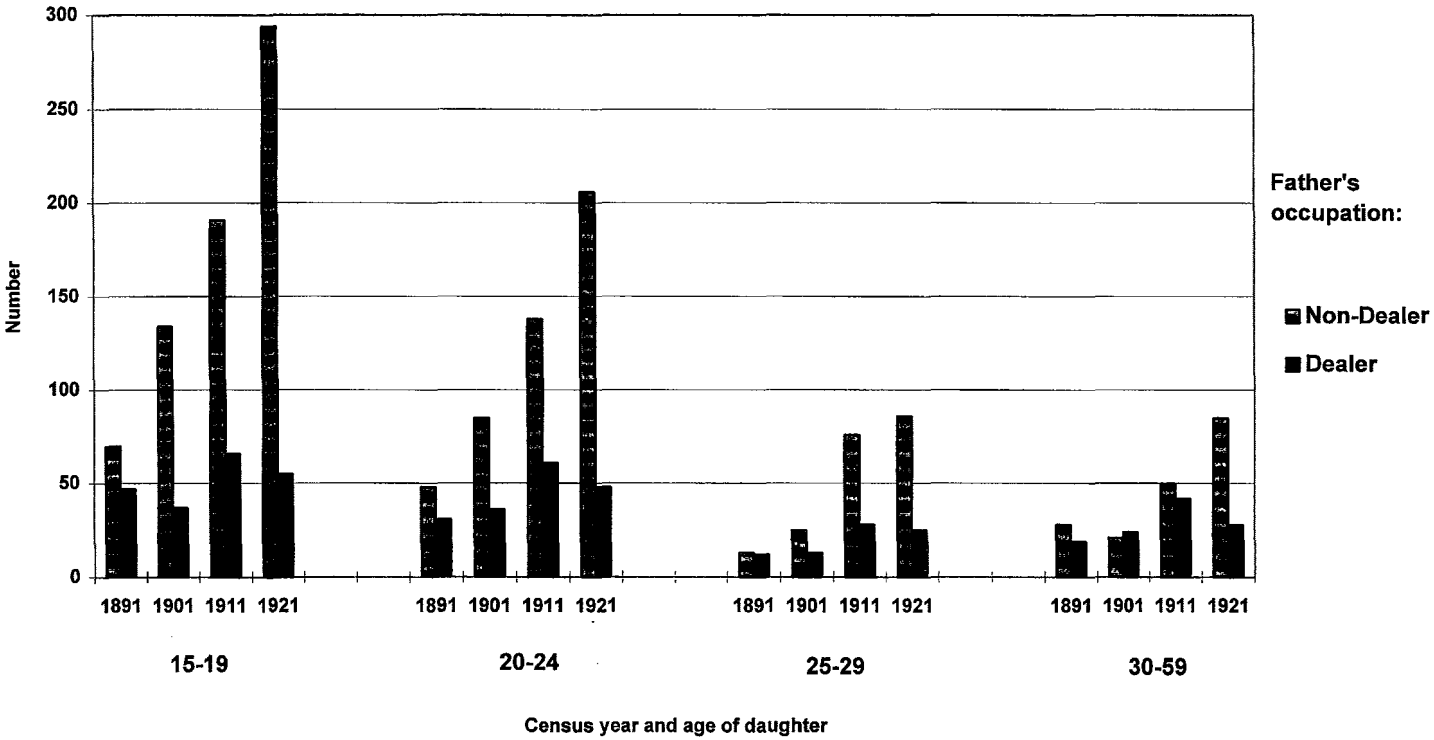


Figure 5B: The number of 'dealers' and 'dealer's assistants' who were also returned as 'daughter of head of household', by head's occupation and by age of daughter, OPCS population 1891-1921.



class female pool of labour with a desire to be respectable and work in a shop, much as Eliza Doolittle dreamed of in *Pygmalion*.[69] The dimensions of dealing and shopwork thus altered over our study period, not only in the number of women reported as participating, but also in the nature and the conditions of the work undertaken.

The changing nature of work as experienced by women is also evident if we examine women who were married, but whose husbands were not present on census night. It has been shown that such women comprise between 5 and 6 per cent of all married women in the OPCS population. However, much higher proportions of absent husbands are evident amongst married women reporting an occupation. Table 8 shows the percentages of married women in various occupations who were living apart from their husbands on census night. In certain occupations, such as domestic service, separation from one's spouse might be an expediency of the job,[70] but overall the impression given by the table is that many married women worked because they had to support themselves and their families in the absence of their husbands.[71] It is possible that, if the family lived in straightened economic circumstances, husband and wife might choose to separate so that each could find employment in a different locality, but this cannot be ascertained from the census returns, nor can we gauge how long such a separation might last. As the dress category became a less favoured occupation for married women (Table 7), so the proportion of spouse-absent women working in it rose (Table 8), possibly signifying a decline in social status for this group of occupations. The marked drop in the proportion of spouse-absent wives in the dealers and non-major occupation categories in 1911 may reflect a greater number of wives having been reported as assisting their husbands, resulting in higher numbers of women having been counted in these categories, thus reducing the proportion formed by the spouse-absent wives. Levels amongst the latter do not return to their 1901 base in 1921, however, suggesting other factors may be at play. The June date for the 1921 census, rather than the usual March/April date, may have affected the likelihood of spouses being separated on census night, for instance.[72]

69 G. B. Shaw, 1912. Roberts, in *Women's Work 1840–1940*, makes the point that "for many working class females working in [a] shop carried more social status than working in either a factory or in domestic service." The importance of "respectability" is rehearsed by Rose in *Limited Livelihoods*.

70 Comparing the living arrangements of those returned as servants across the censuses of 1891 to 1921, one finds some evidence that there was a decline in the proportion of servants who "lived in", particularly in 1921 after the First World War. Unlike other employees domestic servants were not required to supply the name of their employer in the 1921 census; thus we cannot determine whether a shift in the nature of service had taken place, with more servants living locally and going daily to their employers, or whether the rescheduling of the 1921 census to the summer months meant that more servants had travelled home to spend Sunday with their families.

71 It could also be surmised that in the absence of her husband a woman might be more likely to report having an occupation than when he was present.

72 Higgs, in "Women, Work and Occupations", suggests that the March/April dates had been chosen for the census to avoid distortions created by summer migration patterns.

Table 8 Percentage of Married Women Aged 15 and Over in Various Occupations Living Apart from their Husbands on Census Night, OPCS Population 1891–1921

	1891	1901	1911	1921
Pottery	12.9	14.2	13.7	8.8
Textiles	12.8	18.6	19.9	12.6
Dress	15.8	15.7	19.0	25.7
Dealers	23.1	20.7	12.2	13.8
Dealers' assistants	—	—	2.1	2.6
Servants	28.0	37.2	36.3	24.2
Non-major occupations	19.8	21.4	12.5	16.4
Those not returning an occupation	3.1	3.7	3.7	4.5
All	5.0	5.5	5.5	5.7

Source: Office of Population Censuses and Surveys (OPCS) census records.

The complexity of factors underlying the proportion of women in particular situations reported as having an occupation is thus further highlighted, and the need to standardize for age or marital status is underlined. In focussing further on the changing nature of women's work at the beginning of the present century, we concentrate on single women, who indisputably formed the bulk of the female paid labour force. In Table 7 the major feature amongst this group was the decline in domestic service and the rise in non-major occupations. The proportion of women reportedly occupied in the latter category doubled over the 30-year study period. Table 9 indicates how different age groups of single women were affected. For comparison the proportion of women in each age group not returning an occupation is included. Allowing for the problems with data from 1911, we can suggest that the proportion of single women in all age groups returning an occupation changed only marginally between 1891 and 1921.

The sort of jobs young women were doing altered markedly in the 30 years between 1891 and 1921, however. Amongst teenagers the proportion in service fell by 50 per cent, and single women in their early twenties reported a 43-per-cent decline. Again, bearing in mind the problems of the 1911 figures, all ages experienced a significant upturn in employment in the non-major occupation category by 1921, but those between 20 and 24 saw the greatest relative rise in this form of employment. The oldest age group was, perhaps not surprisingly, least affected by the encroaching changes.

What were the "non-major" occupations into which single women were moving? Table 10 breaks down this category into sectors and shows how the contribution of each component was changing. While it is impossible to discuss here in detail each individual sub-category, it is worth noting that the most dramatic rise was obviously amongst the white-collar occupations; within these, the major contribution to growth was made by women em-

Table 9 Percentage of Single Women in Various Age Groups Employed in the Domestic Service and Non-Major Occupation Categories and Not Returning a Labour Market Occupation, OPCS Population, 1891–1921

Age	1891	1901	1911	1921
Service				
15–	32.4	26.1	24.6	16.6
20–	35.6	31.9	29.0	20.2
25–	37.0	35.2	31.6	22.0
30–	30.6	28.6	28.2	22.3
60+	16.8	13.8	16.0	13.4
Non-major occupation[a]				
15–	11.8	16.0	19.0	25.7
20–	13.9	15.7	21.6	32.6
25–	15.9	13.6	21.2	28.7
30–	12.2	13.5	17.1	22.2
60+	8.3	8.2	10.0	12.1
Not returning a labour market occupation				
15–	30.3	30.6	25.3	31.5
20–	24.1	24.5	20.2	22.5
25–	25.5	26.5	21.8	25.4
30–	32.9	34.9	32.7	36.0
60+	62.4	60.7	59.5	62.7

a) Non-major occupation refers to any returned occupation other than textiles, pottery, dealing, dress, or domestic service (see Tables 1 and 2 for full list of possible categories).

Source: Office of Population Censuses and Surveys (OPCS) census records.

ployed in clerical jobs. Even though the number of women reporting professional occupations such as teaching rose from fewer than 300 in 1891 to over 500 in 1921, this group experienced a substantial proportional decline. It is also noticeable that within the non-major occupations the diversity of employment experience contracted dramatically in 1921. In the previous three censuses approximately 70 per cent of women reporting occupations in the "non-major" category were returning non-white-collar jobs. By 1921 this had dropped to 60 per cent. In the 13 OPCS locales the pace of women's movement into the white-collar sector and the level of their participation in 1921 varied widely. Table 11 shows that, while the proportion of women reporting "commercial"[73] (predominantly clerical and secretarial) white-collar jobs grew markedly between 1911 and 1921 in all 13 locales, almost one in five single women aged 15 and over reported being employed

73 Under the classification scheme used here "commercial" workers include: commercial clerks, those in bank service, salesmen and buyers, insurance clerks, those in advertising, and secretaries, as well as merchants, brokers, and factors. The great majority of women so classified were secretaries or clerks.

Table 10 Percentage of Single Women Aged 15 and Over Reported to Be Employed in "Non-Major Occupations"[a] in Each of the Occupational Sub-Categories, OPCS Population, 1891–1921

	1891	1901	1911	1921
White-collar				
Government service	1.6	2.6	3.3	3.5
Professional	22.7	20.6	19.6	14.8
Clerical	2.0	4.7	8.4	21.8
Total white-collar	26.3	27.9	31.3	40.1
Non-white-collar				
Transport and communications	1.6	1.1	1.1	2.6
Agriculture	10.4	4.9	6.1	2.3
Printing, bookbinding, paper	6.2	15.8	11.9	6.8
Food	22.9	26.8	26.0	18.9
General work	11.7	5.6	8.6	16.0
Other occupations in non-major category	21.0	17.9	14.9	13.2
Total non-white-collar	73.7	72.1	68.7	59.9

a) For definition of "non-major occupations" see Table 7.
Source: Office of Population Censuses and Surveys (OPCS) census records.

Table 11 Number of Single Women in "Commercial" White-Collar Occupations, per 1,000 Single Women Age 15–64, by Locale, OPCS Population 1891–1921

	1891	1901	1911	1921
ABY	1	2	5	20
AXM	4	1	8	17
BAN	4	7	13	40
BET	4	6	18	67
BOL	—	2	2	23
EAR	3	2	6	26
MOR	—	2	—	8
PIN	9	9	22	98
SAF	—	2	7	25
STO	3	3	12	31
SWA	2	7	11	52
WAL	14	37	77	198
YOR	—	9	17	88

Source: Office of Population Censuses and Surveys (OPCS) census records.

in this category in 1921 in predominantly working-class Walthamstow. In middle-class Pinner the equivalent ratio was almost one in ten; if servants are excluded from the calculation, which is necessary as there were five servants reported in Pinner for every one in Walthamstow, then Pinner's "commercial" ratio becomes one in six. The "metropolitan influence" on

the creation of such non-professional white-collar opportunities for women is demonstrated by the fact that the "commercial" ratio for "East End" Bethnal Green was surpassed only by York, a major regional centre, of the other OPCS locales. The other regional centre, Swansea, showed reported levels of women's "commercial" work on a par with those in Bethnal Green. (With servants removed from the calculation, York, Bethnal Green, and Swansea had respectively 108, 70, and 69 per 1,000 single women aged 15 and over reporting "commercial" occupations in 1921.) Women were moving out of domestic service and into the "service sector".

Conclusion

In conclusion to this examination of "women's work" as reported by the censuses as the current century dawned, let us return to the contemporary reports of an increase in the number of working women. The published census reports, the instructions on the census schedules, and individual replies given on the completed schedules for 1891 to 1921 reveal that it is likely that women did not experience a rise in full-time, paid employment which they could report as their "main occupation". The national picture of women slowly infiltrating the work force between 1891 and 1911, then withdrawing into the home in the wake of the Great War, appears to be an artefact of the census-taking process. The anomalous wording of the 1911 census reveals, however, that many women, particularly married women, who spent most of their time on domestic tasks could have been helping in family enterprises on a part-time basis. When such women went out to work in the labour market and were paid, this might be termed "direct earning", for they brought back money which could then be spent on goods required by the household. However, when the women helped out in a family shop or business without pay, they were "earning indirectly" in that the family saved money by not having to pay someone else to do the work; the family may actually have made more money because a sister, mother, or daughter was able to do work over and above that normally possible. It is difficult to judge from a present-day standpoint whether the women involved saw themselves as "working" or as undertaking their "duty" to family and household, just another facet of "housework".

Women were no more likely to be reported in employment after the First World War than they had been 30 years earlier; indeed married women and widows were rather less likely to be so. With the increasing idea that "work" was something one went out to, was paid for, and undertook on a full-time basis, so the number of wives and widows who thought of themselves as being in the "work force" diminished. With growing living standards many working-class wives may have been very relieved to discard the "double burden" of paid labour in conjunction with labour in the home.[74] The decline

74 J. Bourke, in *Working Class Cultures in Britain 1890–1960* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 127, quotes Elizabeth Roberts, *A Woman's Place* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1984), in this regard: "Women who

in reported occupations amongst widows remains a puzzle worthy of further research. Certainly the numbers in the female work force were growing, but this appears to have been a result of population growth, plus a greater proportion of women remaining single at each age, at least between 1891 and 1911. The proportion of women over the age of 40 who remained unmarried continued to grow over the war decade. More single women meant greater numbers of potential workers to be reported, even if their recorded participation rates remained static.

The proportion of single women in apparently full-time paid work may not have changed, but the nature of the work they were doing was altering, in such a way as to make women and their work more visible to men. From the contemporary reports cited by Tilly and Scott it seemed as though greater numbers of women were working because they appeared "in formerly male fields". It may be more accurate that women workers increasingly appeared in the public field, and therefore middle-class male observers became more aware of them. A man who had previously encountered servants in his home may not have thought of them as "women workers"; they were after all in women's proper place: the domestic sphere, "at home". The great majority of the middle classes had little call to venture into the textile factories, the pottery works, the sweatshops, or the fields where those not in service found paid employment. With the growth of the tertiary sector, however, middle-class men would increasingly have encountered women "going out to work": sharing their trains and trams as they travelled to their workplaces, taking their notes, doing their typing, filing their correspondence, serving them in the burgeoning department stores. While some of these women would have been middle-class, many came from working-class districts. The new white-collar jobs may have meant subordination in the workplace for the women involved, but it was certainly a step up from the servitude they would have experienced had they taken the more traditional path into domestic service. With the movement of women into the public arena the definition of work as something that one "went out to do" became stronger and the status of "housework" as an occupation dwindled. As we have observed, the census does not capture all the nuances of women's paid work, and it may also fall short in this respect in the case of men. Because the census was apparently designed to capture "how one spent the majority of one's time", many women were recorded as (or simply imputed to be) housewives. Yet we know very little about the labour that went on under this umbrella title. From the lady running her household of servants to the poverty-stricken single mother juggling part-time and casual jobs, child care, and survival, there is a spectrum of "home duties" about which the census remains stubbornly silent.

worked full-time were certainly not regarded as emancipated by their contemporaries, rather as drudges. Women whose husbands earned sufficient money to clothe, feed and house the family preferred to have a reduced workload rather than extra income."

If we really wish to uncover the changes in women's work at the dawn of the twentieth century we need a picture of women in the private, as well as the public sphere. The census, however, was conducted on the basis of logic conceived in the male, public sphere. While individuals within a household were listed, it was deemed sufficient to list "occupation", the criterion by which a man was placed on the social scale, to judge the individual's contribution to society. The census authorities failed to acknowledge the importance of the reproductive role played by the woman of the household. Thus we have in some respects even less knowledge of "women's labour" in the home and how much paid work it might actually have encompassed, than we do of "women's work" in the apparently full-time, paid labour market. Our understanding of the broad, national picture of the latter between 1891 and 1921 comes to us from the published results of the decennial censuses, refracted through the questions posed, the answers given, and the classification schemes used to tabulate the published statistics. While examining the manuscript census returns does not enable us to clarify the picture totally, it does allow us to compensate for the refraction. This permits greater understanding of the view of society held by contemporary census-takers and also forces a reappraisal of certain present-day conceptions of exactly what comprises "work for women".

APPENDIX A Instructions Given on Census Schedules 1891-1921, with Reference to Female Occupation

1891[a]	1901[b]	1911[c]	1921[d]
G.I.1. The precise nature of the occupation must be inserted.	1. The precise nature of the occupation must be inserted.	1. Describe the occupation fully. If more than one occupation is followed state that by which living is mainly earned.	9. If more than one occupation is followed, state only that by which the living is mainly earned. The occupation should be stated ... whether the worker is at work or not at the time of the census. (Instruction 1 at head of "Employment" columns: If at present out of work [state name of] last employer adding "out of work".)
G.I.2. A person following several distinct occupations must state each of them in order of their importance.	2. A person following more than one occupation should state each of them in order of their importance.	3. OUT OF WORK - if out of work ... at the time of the census, the *usual occupation* must be stated.	
G.I.4. The occupations of women and children, if any, are to be stated as well as those of men.	4. Children attending school and also engaged in a trade or industry should be described as following the particular trade or industry.	5. CHILDREN AT SCHOOL AND STUDENTS - for all persons over 10 years of age attending school write "school" ... if also engaged in any employment state the employment as "School, Newsboy".	2. EDUCATION - for persons attending a school or other institution for the purpose of receiving an education write "whole time" if attending daily .... For children under 12, [columns referring to occupation should be left blank].
G.I.5. Married women assisting their husbands ... are to be returned as "Employed".		4. THE OCCUPATIONS OF WOMEN engaged in any business or profession, inlcuding women *regularly engaged in assisting relatives in trade or business*, must be fully stated. No entry should be made in the case of wives, daughters or female relatives wholly engaged in domestic duties at home.[e]	5. For a member of a private household ... who is mainly occupied in domestic duties at home write "Home Duties"...
			7. For a member of a household who is chiefly occupied in giving unpaid help in a business carried on by the head of the household ... state the occupation ... as though it were a paid occupation.
S.I.9. SONS or other RELATIVES of FARMERS employed on the farm should be returned as "Farmer's Son" ... etc.	9. SONS or other RELATIVES of FARMERS employed on the farm should be returned as "Farmer's Son" ... etc.	8h. FARMER. State whether "Farmer", "Grazier" or "Farm Bailiff". Farmer's sons and other relatives assisting in the work of the farm should be returned as "Farmer's Son working on Farm" ... "Farmer's Daughter, Dairy work" ... etc.	
S.I.10. Men employed on Farms and living in the Farmer's house may return themselves as FARM SERVANTS, but this term should not be used for domestic servants in a farm house.		8l. FARM SERVANT state nature of work, and indicate if mainly in charge of horses, cattle etc.	

S.I.11 SHOPMEN and WOMEN should state in what branch of business they are employed - as "Draper's Assistant".	11. SHOPKEEPERS and SHOP ASSISTANTS should return themselves as such and should also state their branch of business ... persons wholly or principally engaged in manufacture or repair ... should return themselves as such and not "Shopkeepers"...	2. DEALERS, SHOPKEEPERS or SHOP ASSISTANTS as distinct from MAKERS, PRODUCERS or REPAIRERS ... should be so described as to leave no doubt whether they are DEALERS or MAKERS.	10b. Shopkeepers, Retail Dealers or Shop Assistants ... if selling only ... or if chiefly selling should use the word "shopkeeper" [if] chiefly engaged in making or producing, though also selling, should add "maker".
S.I.13. DOMESTIC SERVANTS should state the nature of their service, adding in all cases "Domestic Servant".	14. DOMESTIC SERVANTS should be entered according to the nature of their service adding in all cases "Domestic".	8n. DOMESTIC SERVICE state nature of service. 8o. SERVANTS, WAITERS IN HOTELS, CLUBS, RESTAURANTS AND BOARDING HOUSES state nature of employment and service in which engaged as "Hotel Cook".	In the case of Domestic Servants ... the work "Private" should be entered in [the "Employment" column] ... the name and business of the employer must NOT be stated.
18. LABOURERS ... should specify the nature of their employment - as "Navvy", "Bricklayer's Labourer", "General Labourer".	19. LABOURERS ... should specify the nature of their employment - as "Navvy", "Bricklayer's Labourer", "General Labourer".	LABOURER ... state nature of employment as "Bricklayer's Labourer" etc.	10g. *Labourers* should always state fully the type of work done ... but those accustomed to employment of different kinds of work should describe themselves as "General Labourer". The term "labourer" must not be used alone.
	13. NURSES - the term "Nurse" by itself is too indefinite. The kind of nurse should be stated, as "Hospital Nurse"...	8p. NURSE state whether "Nurse (Domestic)", "Sick Nurse" etc.	10e. *Nurses* state whether "nurse (domestic)" ... etc.
19. PERSONS FOLLOWING NO PROFESSION, TRADE ... deriving their income from land, houses, dividends or other private sources should return themselves as "Living on their own means".	21. LIVING ON OWN MEANS - Persons ... deriving their income from private sources, should return themselves as "Living on own means".	7. PRIVATE MEANS - for persons neither following, nor having followed a profession or occupation, but deriving their income from private sources ... write "Private Means".	8. For persons ... who are mainly dependent on others' earnings or upon ... private means write "None" or "Not occupied for a living". 1. *Relationship* any relative present in the dwelling ... who usually lives elsewhere should ... be described as "Visitor" and not as "Son", "Aunt" etc.

Sources: a) 1891 Census Report, General Report 1893, cd. 7222.
b) 1901 Census Report, General Report 1904, cd. 2174.
c) 1911 Census Report, General Report 1917-18, Appendix A.
d) 1921 General Report, cd. 84-91.
e) Stated in 1911 Report to particularly affect farmers' wives, lodging housekeepers' wives and dealers'/traders' wives.