Women's work 1840–1940

Prepared for the Economic History Society by

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Some general questions about women's work

This pamphlet attempts to survey women's work in Great Britain in the century 1840–1940. This first chapter raises some of the general questions, problems and characteristics of women's work in the period; the second examines in more detail women's paid full-time work; the third chapter looks at some of the social and economic aspects of married women's work both paid and unpaid; and the last chapter considers changes in women's working conditions and status and the roles of government, employers and unions.

It is probably over-ambitious to try to cover such an enormous topic in such a small space and the best that can be hoped is that questions will be raised and problems aired. Generalisations are inevitable as are aggregated data. These tend to obscure very important differences between areas and indeed between towns: it is hoped that the examples given will illuminate some of these individual differences. 1840 seems a reasonable time to begin. By then, the Industrial Revolution (whatever we may mean by that term) was well established and it was a time when public discussion of women's work was flourishing and the government was beginning to legislate directly about certain aspects of that work. Equally, 1940 seems a useful final date; the beginning of the Second World War and the commencement of a period which was to see very great changes in the lives and work of women.

In the century 1840–1940 there were significant and radical changes in many areas of British economic and social life: were there parallel changes in the world of women's work? One way of approaching the question of women's work in this period is to trace the continuing effects of industrialisation on the types of jobs

done by women, or the number of women who worked for wages, the location of their work, their levels of skill and their degree of subordination to men (although it must be stressed that industrialisation happened at different rates in different areas with different consequences) [95]. However, anyone seeking fundamental alterations in job opportunities and in the status of and remuneration for women's work will not find them in this period.

In a brief treatment of women's work an attempt to look at the work of all classes of women would lead to excessive superficiality, therefore that of working-class women is given priority. There are, of course, difficulties in defining 'working-class', but generally the term is used to cover women who worked with their hands, who were paid wages, not salaries, and who did not employ other people; also, and most importantly, the wives and daughters of men who fitted the above description.

A proposed description of men's work might raise certain expectations in the reader, who would assume that the account would be of full-time paid work, which took place outside the home. No such assumptions can be made by those examining women's work in the period 1840–1940. Some women did indeed work full-time for wages in a place outside their home such as a workshop, shop or factory, or on the land, while others worked full-time for wages in their own homes or in other people's; others worked part-time for wages, both at home and away; and finally, very large numbers worked full-time at home for no wages at all. Unfortunately, since this work has never been paid it is somehow assumed that it is not 'real' work at all and consequently has become devalued in the eyes of many men and women.

This question of what is 'real' work is very important in any consideration of women's work [18]. Some historians have developed the idea that it is impossible to study women's role in the labour market without considering their role in the family as housewives and mothers. Women had a reproductive rather than productive role and as this reproductive work was unpaid society regarded it as having no economic value. This perception was translated to the labour market and a gender hierarchy of labour developed whereby women's work was given a lower social and economic value than that of men [57]. The complex interconnections between women's role in the home and family on one hand

and in the labour market on the other have been discussed by Tilly and Scott in *Women, Work and Family* [95]. Without understanding these interconnections and their complexities any study of women's work in this period is sterile.

Many aspects of women's work were controversial throughout the period. Women, married and unmarried, had always worked: they had been, for example, spinners, dressmakers, embroiderers, straw-plait and lacemakers; they had undertaken immense amounts of housekeeping and child-rearing. These activities did not appear to arouse controversy, but the public appearance of wage-earning working women, resulting from industrialisation, in certain areas like Lancashire, West Yorkshire and the Potteries produced (and continued to produce) endless comment, usually hostile, from contemporaries. Working wives and mothers especially were often regarded as unnatural, immoral and inadequate homemakers and parents. Male potters, in 1845, fearing a loss of work because certain machines were looked after by women, wrote a petition full of apparent concern for women and their children:

> To maidens, mothers and wives, we say machinery is your deadliest enemy. . . . It will destroy your natural claims to home and domestic duties and will immure you and your toiling little ones in overheated and dirty shops, there to weep and toil and pine and die. [24, *6*]

A year earlier, Lord Shaftesbury, speaking in the House of Commons on the Ten Hours Bill (finally passed in 1847), lamented that factory women were becoming like the roughest and worst kind of men:

> They meet together to drink, sing and smoke; they use, it is stated, the lowest, most brutal and most disgusting language imaginable. . . . What is the ground on which the woman says she will pay no attention to her domestic duties, nor give the obedience which is owing to her husband? Because on her devolves the labour which ought to fall to his share, and she throws out the taunt, 'If I have the labour, I will also have the amusement'. [41, *76–7*]

These two quotations, which could be replicated by hundreds of similar ones, encapsulate many of the criticisms made about factory women, especially those with husbands: that is, they were neglecting their duties at home, they were independent, they were immoral, and they were taking men's work. It is difficult to prove

or disprove these criticisms for the earlier part of the period but for the last fifty years of it, oral evidence indicates a very different picture [76].

Unmarried women were also attacked; for example, 'pit-brow' lasses who worked above ground sorting coal, were criticised for being rough and masculine. In certain areas (notably around Wigan) it was observed that they even wore fustian trousers! A delegate at the Miners' Union Conference in 1863 said that it was 'a most sickening sight to see girls and women who had been created and designed for a much nobler sphere of action, clad in man's attire on the pit banks. But it is a much sadder sight to see them day by day losing everything modest.' [50, *180–1*].

These criticisms arose out of contemporary assumptions about women's work and indeed about the inherent nature and functions of women themselves. There is considerable difficulty in writing about these assumptions which were not always clearly articulated, which were not universally shared and which were ambivalent and contradictory. Some nineteenth-century feminists, for example, believed that women had to make a choice between work on one hand and marriage and motherhood on the other. But they firmly supported a woman's right to work outside the home [59, *2*].

It is clear that the upper- and middle-class critics of working-class women did not in fact disapprove of *work* as such: indeed, it was seen as the 'sole correction and just retribution for poverty' [1, *62*]. Most objections seemed to arise around the matter of location and when women were seen working away from their proper sphere; that is, their own, or someone else's home.

Historians frequently refer to 'domestic ideology', and Catherine Hall has argued that it is possible to see the formation of this ideology in the period 1780–1830, when the industrial bourgeoisie was emerging as a result of the Industrial Revolution [32]. Hall admits that the ideas which developed at that time had already been formulated and promulgated by the Puritans in the seventeenth century. Whatever the origins of this ideology it can be seen to have affected, throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, many (but not all) of the prevalent attitudes of women and their work. Initially observable in the bourgeoisie, it spread to sections of all classes, and to members of both sexes. Expressed very simply, this domestic ideology saw the world divided into two

spheres, one for men and one for women. Men were to go out to work, make money and support their families, while women were to stay at home, creating a haven for themselves and their children and for their husbands to return to. Men were to be concerned with the public sphere of the labour market and money-making. Women were to be involved in the private sphere of the home, dependent on their husbands for financial support, and certainly not expected to earn on their own account. (Well-rehearsed and frequently quoted aphorisms developed from this basic domestic ideology; a woman's place was in the home; there was men's work and women's work; a man should be paid a living family wage so that there should be no necessity for his wife, or indeed his daughters to work.)

These ideas not only affected those from the middle and upper classes who criticised working-class women who worked outside their homes; they also had a bearing on the attitudes of many working-class men and the women themselves. The latter can consequently be seen to display very ambivalent attitudes to their own work. Working-class women found themselves in a difficult position. Financially they were forced to work. Unmarried girls' wages were needed to supplement the family income.

There were large numbers of unmarried women with no prospect of being married. The 1881 census showed that there were one million more women than men and obviously large numbers of them had to earn their own living. Often married women could not manage on their husbands' earnings and as they frequently said, they worked because they had to. But many were not ashamed of this work; rather they were proud, believing that they were supporting and helping their families by working outside the home. They saw paid work, not as an alternative to housework, but as a way of enabling them better to fulfil their duty as wives, mothers and homemakers.

However, in general working-class women did *not* regard full time paid work as something they would undertake for the whole of their adult lives. Despite the demographical evidence about 'surplus' women, girls were often unwilling to serve apprenticeships because they wanted the maximum wage possible between leaving school and leaving work when married. As Edward Cadbury observed in 1909 'few women expect to be life workers.

Practically all look forward to marriage as an escape from work' [22, *138*].

Married women who were compelled to work for financial reasons rarely continued to work when the financial crisis had passed and it was assumed that their husbands would again keep them. It may seem strange to modern readers that women as recently as the 1930s (or indeed later) genuinely saw their emancipation as being a move *away* from paid work outside the home towards staying there. It is perhaps more comprehensible when the strength of the domestic idyll is appreciated and the nature of the double burden of work carried by full-time working women is understood [76]. It is difficult to ignore working-class women's devotion to their families' need rather than their own. Indeed it is doubtful if they perceived any conflict between the two [76]. In the words of Jane Lewis: 'One point is clear, married women continued to believe firmly that their primary commitment was to home and family' [59, *4*]. Some time earlier she also argued, 'it is doubtful how far the majority of unskilled women workers have *ever* moved away from the ideal of working for the family economy and towards a more individualistic notion of working for their own satisfaction' [58, *173*]. This is rather in contrast to the argument advanced by Tilly and Scott [95].

Important as it is to understand this widely accepted ideology, it is equally important to understand the very considerable poverty experienced by so many working-class families in this period. This poverty has been very well described, if not always quantified [26; 61; 72; 82; 88]. Poverty drove many women to wage-earning work and it was widespread poverty which to some extent helps to explain men's defensive attitude against women working. E. H. Hunt wrote of the period 1850–1914:

> Men believed that a limited amount of work was available and suspected that allowing women to share work would cause some families to be without pay as a consequence of other families taking more than their fair share. [47, *24*]

Just as contemporaries held various assumptions about women's work, so have historians of the period under discussion. They, too, have been influenced by the 'domestic ideology' and have perhaps based their analysis of women and their role and their work too

firmly on the assumption of a real separation of and differentiation between the public and private spheres. They write persuasively of the novel separation of 'home' and 'work' with industrialisation. Historians of working-class women would do well to examine what it was the women expended their effort on. For them there could be no clear distinction between the public and private spheres, however much ideally they would have liked there to be one. Married women who sold food from their back kitchens or front parlours nicely illustrate the merging of the public and private spheres which existed in so many women's lives. The confusion between public and private spheres is also well shown by the lives of those women taking in lodgers [23]. Some landladies operated quite formal businesses in their own homes, charging lodgers for their room, food, washing, and so on. But oral evidence also reveals that the most usual kind of lodger was in fact a relative who might or might not, depending on age, health and job, have paid for the lodgings [76]. It is thus particularly difficult to categorise landladies as belonging to, and working in, either the private or the public sphere. Most importantly of all, the typical working-class female job, throughout the period, was domestic service. Industrialisation, for the majority of women, did not separate work from the home; for domestic servants, and indeed for housewives, work continued to be done in a home and not in a factory. It can even be argued that industrialisation, by creating more wealth for the middle classes, indirectly resulted in more women working as domestic servants in expanding middle- and upper-class households [5].

Historians looking at women's work have understandably attempted to indicate how many women were involved in different occupations at various times. On these calculations can be based generalisations about the extent to which women were involved in the labour market (their participation rate) and about changing patterns of employment. There are, however, quite serious problems in attempting to use the data from census returns. Firstly there are very considerable difficulties in interpreting the data, as can be seen when studying secondary sources, and secondly there are doubts among historians about the accuracy of the evidence, especially for the nineteenth century. A small example will illustrate the first point. My own calculation of the total of domestic

servants in Great Britain in 1851 is 1,224,419 (made by adding together the figures for England, Wales and Scotland). This includes domestic general servants, housekeepers, cooks, housemaids, nurses, inn-servants, charwomen, washerwomen and farm servants (indoors). It excludes nurses who were not domestic servants. Patricia Hollis gives a total of 1,135,000 [41], while Hunt suggests 1,027,000, but some of the difference here *might* be accounted for by his including only servants aged over 15 [47]. Burnett gives a figure of 751,641 but his is only for England and Wales [20]; the relevant figure for Scotland is 154,554, which still makes a much smaller final total than 1,224,419. The explanation of this discrepancy would appear to depend very much on who is defined as working in the capacity of domestic servant. (The census total for the whole of Great Britain is 1,234,212, which is different from the combined figures of England, Wales and Scotland. Could the difference be in the islands of the British seas?)

How reliable are the census data? There is an increasing awareness among historians that mistakes were made either by the original enumerators or by the householder or by both. (The enumerators' books are the documents on which the details of every household were recorded by the enumerator. This information was amalgamated into the published census returns. The enumerators' books are only open to inspection 100 years after their collection.) Edward Higgs, having looked at the data on the census enumerator's book for Rochdale and Rutland, suggests that the aggregated returns exaggerate the number of domestic servants. He argues that many 'domestic servants' enumerated as living with their extended families were not servants in the accepted sense of the word but either relatives helping out where, for example, the mother of the family was dead or where they were in fact acting as the female head of the house. Some enumerators appear to have used interchangeably the words 'housekeeper' and 'housewife' [37, 38]. There are various other definitional problems concerned with enumerating domestic servants. Farm servants (indoors), for example, undoubtedly also spent some of their time doing farm as opposed to domestic work; should they therefore be classed as agricultural workers? Again, domestic servants in retailing families unquestionably helped out in the shop, and were they therefore shop assistants?

Table 1.1 *Examples of differences between wage books and census returns*

Town and date		No. of women checked from wage books	No. and percentage of such women workers recorded with no occupation in the census returns (No.)	(%)
Penicuik	1851	26	12	46
Galashiels	1851	8	8	100
Walkerburn	1861	6	6	100
Walkerburn	1881	6	5	83

(The author is grateful to Professor Michael Anderson for drawing this information to her attention and for Professor John Holley's permission to use it.)

There are more serious difficulties with the census returns which historians now recognise. It seems very likely that part-time work (usually undertaken by married women) was grossly underenumerated. One reason for this was that part-time work was so often casual and seasonal (for example fruit- and hop-picking which never took place at the same time as the census). It has been suggested that more part-time jobs might have been enumerated more often had householders been asked about work rather than about occupation. Returns were, however, undoubtedly influenced by the widespread assumption that married women were 'housewives'.

More surprising than the omission of married women's part-time work from the census, was the failure on occasions to count even their full-time work. Admittedly the evidence for these mistakes is still sparse but it is of great interest. Comparisons of wage books with workers' names and addresses, and census enumerators' books, for identical days, demonstrate that married women's full-time work was seriously underestimated. John Holley has examined the wage books of woollen mills in the Border region, checking the names and addresses of married women employees with the data in the enumerators' books. His findings raise disturbing questions for those using census data for a study of

women's employment. Such data will be used in this book and obviously will continue to be used in similar historical work. They probably indicate trends adequately but exact figures and precise comparisons between years should be treated with very considerable caution. Some historians might well argue that census figures do not even indicate trends reliably. It is likely, for example, that the apparent downward trend in the number of domestic servants at the end of the nineteenth century is an effect of more accurate enumeration, especially of a more careful distinction between paid and unpaid labour [37; 38].

Did the percentage of women involved in the workforce increase, remain static or decline, both before and during the period 1840–1940? Historians writing about the Industrial Revolution are sometimes divided into two groups: the optimists and the pessimists. The 'optimistic' view argues that the Industrial Revolution gave women more job opportunities and led eventually to their emancipation [74]. R. M. Hartwell was especially enthusiastic:

> It was during the Industrial Revolution, and largely because of the economic opportunities it afforded to working-class women, that there was the beginnings of that most important and most beneficial of all social revolutions of the last two centuries, the emancipation of women. [35, *343*]

The 'pessimistic' group of historians and observers at the time are less enthusiastic about the results of industrialisation but are divided as to its effects on women's participation rates in the labour market and on their status as workers.

Contemporaries who held what has come to be called the 'prelapsarian' view argue that labour in the pre-industrial world was creative, satisfying and wholesome. The opinions of John Ruskin and William Morris fall into this category [63]. Historians, taking a less romantic view, have suggested that home and work were more integrated and men and women more equal in pre-industrial times [95]. Other 'pessimists' consider that industrialisation, although producing more jobs for women, had a disastrous effect on the women, their homes, and their families. Such disparate voices as Friedrich Engels and Lord Shaftesbury shared this view. Still other writers in the pessimistic school agree that more women worked but believe that this was because of their

Table 1.2 *Female participation rates 1871–1931 (the percentage of females of all ages in 'occupations')*

Year	England & Wales (%)	Scotland (%)
1871	31	28
1891	27	27
	35[a]	
1911	26	24
	32[b]	
1931	27	
	34[c]	

[a] Of those aged over 10.
[b] Of those aged over 10.
[c] Of those aged over 14.

families' great poverty (an argument familiar to oral historians: women worked because they had to, not because of any motives of emancipation).

On the other hand, there are historians who suggest that women lost jobs because of industrialisation. Admittedly there were the new employments such as weaving, carding, and so on in the cotton mills, but women in other spheres such as home spinning entirely lost their trades. It is also argued that most of the new jobs resulting from industrialisation (as in iron- and steel-making and railway building) offered no employment at all to women. These writers tend to ignore the new service jobs which developed as a result of increasing prosperity among the bourgeoisie. More dressmakers, tailoresses and domestic servants, for example, were needed.

It is probable that we can never be certain about eighteenth- and nineteenth-century participation rates for women. This is partly because reliable eighteenth-century statistics do not exist and also because of the difficulties already referred to of using nineteenth-century census data. Eric Richards takes a rather extreme view by arguing that before the Industrial Revolution there was substantial female participation and that subsequently, as a result of industrial-

isation, female participation rates fell [75]. Hunt takes a more balanced view:

> The proportion of women at work in nineteenth-century Britain was probably not larger than the proportion that had worked before the Industrial Revolution. [47, *17*]

Michael Kelly in his introduction to Tilly and Scott's work wrote: 'Their book should bury effectively the notion that industrialisation brought about the participation of a larger proportion of women in the workforce' [95]. Tilly and Scott also argue that there are clear continuities in women's work prior to and during the development of industrial capitalism [95]. Indeed, as has already been suggested, to debate women's employment solely with reference to industrialisation is a distortion of history. Even as late as 1861 only about 30 per cent of the *whole* labour force was employed in the new industries particularly associated with the Industrial Revolution [27, *109*]. To look solely at these industries ignores the work done by the great majority of the population, especially the women, who continued to work principally in their homes or small workshops and not in factories.

After 1851 female participation rates can be calculated from the censuses but the problems of enumeration must always be borne in mind, and the figures should be regarded only as a very approximate guide. Because of the nature of this pamphlet it has not been felt appropriate to include a mass of statistics, therefore census returns are given for 20-year intervals so that general trends can be observed. As the reader will see, two sets of figures are given for 1891, 1911 and 1931. This is because of the introduction of compulsory schooling after 1876. It was thought useful to include the percentage of all ages in work so that comparisons could be made throughout the period, and also percentages of those legally entitled to work who actually did so.

Throughout the period the combined processes of industrialisation and urbanisation appear to have had little impact on women's participation rates although again it must be emphasised that these figures hide much unenumerated work. It is only in the period after the Second World War that we see major changes in women's employment. Hakim gives the participation rates for 1951, 1961

and 1971 as 45, 47 and 55 per cent [31] and Breugel cites 62 per cent for 1978 [18].

Reference has already been made to the 'domestic idyll'. This appears to have had a significant effect on the rates of return of women to work after child-bearing. Once women left full-time work, they rarely returned unless they were widowed or deserted. This is suggested in oral testimony and is borne out by statistical evidence about the ages of women at work. Hakim records that for 1901, 77 per cent of women in the age group 15–34 were at work but only 13 per cent were at work in the next group, 35–44, and only 11 per cent of those aged 45–59. The relevant figures for 1971 were 44 per cent of those aged 15–34, 21 per cent of those aged 35–44 and 55 per cent of those aged 45–59 [31]. The figures for 1901 reflect the pattern of women leaving work when they could afford to; those for 1971 reflect a new, post-Second World War trend of women who returned to work when their children were grown [18].

The pattern of the typical woman worker in full-time, wage-earning work as a young rather than an older person undoubtedly had some effect on the generally lower wages women earned compared to those of men [14]. In many industries (but not all) older, more experienced, workers could expect to earn higher wages. Obviously there were far fewer older women in work who might have 'boosted' the average wages for all women. However, aggregated figures should not be allowed to obscure the fact that sometimes women did earn more than men. In the cotton industry oral evidence has revealed many examples of individual highly skilled women weavers earning more than their male colleagues. The same was true in the Potteries, a very important area for female employment. Low aggregated wage rates hide the fact that highly skilled women decorators (doing transferring, gilding and painting) were paid more than some of the male potters doing less skilled jobs.

Differences within the age structures of male and female workers were not the only reason for different aggregated wage rates. (This important question will be examined further in Chapter 4.) There were widespread assumptions held about the relative value of men's work and women's work. Reference has already been made to the way a woman's status in the labour market tended to be defined by her familial role.

Many men argued that they had greater physical strength than women and were more skilled; therefore they deserved higher wages than women. In some cases these assumptions appear to have been based on gender stereotyping rather than on reality. Women expended prodigious amounts of strength and energy in, for example, the mining industry, in agriculture and in domestic work. Yet, on the other hand, women weavers in both the cotton and woollen textile industries explained the absence of female overlookers by the fact that women were not strong enough to lift the finished 'beam' of fabric out of the loom [14; 79]. Women textile workers also believed that they were not strong enough to 'walk' a spinning mule.

Women were often skilled (see above). But it is also true that throughout the period women were concentrated in unskilled jobs. One reason for this would appear to be a definite policy by male employers and male workers to 'deskill' work done by women. This can clearly be seen during the First World War (see Chapter 4). In the nineteenth century women home knitters taken into the Leicestershire hosiery factories were divested of their previously recognised skills and given unskilled tasks and were assured of low wages and status [70]. Industrialisation in some industries (especially the sweated trades) came to mean extensive subdivision of the labour process and men fearful of losing skilled jobs and good wages insisted on women taking the less skilled, low-status jobs [51, *10*]. Charles More in *Skill and the English Working Class* has very little to say about women workers (they do not appear in his index). He writes:

> Women have not been considered because it is not possible to fit women's work in to the general hypothesis of skill and its acquisition advanced here. This is because women were excluded by custom not merely from apprenticed trades but from practically every occupation which led to the acquisition of skill. Excluded from these apprenticeships, women formed a vast pool of necessary unskilled labour which was usually paid less than the minimum wage of an unskilled male. [66, *229*]

He does not define 'custom' or suggest who made it, and ignores the skills of, for example, weavers, dressmakers and milliners. Snell argues that the loss of skilled occupations by women in the nineteenth century was part of a process which started in the

seventeenth century when women had worked in many artisan trades. Women progressively lost both apprenticeships and skilled work. He suggests that the sexual division of labour became stronger with the advance of industrialisation [85, *ch. 6*].

The ideal of a family wage whereby a male worker could support his family without his wife having to work was widely supported (and is still far from uncommon). The implication of a man receiving a family wage was that women should not do so as they did not support a family. Indeed in law, marriage and ideology, women were deemed to be dependants [55].

This attitude ignored the plight of widowed and deserted women and of single women supporting elderly relatives. The question of a family wage has been a source of endless debate and controversy both historically and among contemporary historians. Eric Hobsbawm has argued that few married women were in paid employment and that the pattern of male breadwinner and dependent wife was not simply an ideal but a fact of life [14]. Feminist historians would argue that married women often had to work because of the inadequacy of their husbands' wage [76; 78; 14]. This is not to say that most working-class women did not accept that in an ideal world men should still be the family breadwinners [59, *181*]. There was, not unsurprisingly, widespread support among women for the concept of the family wage (see Chapter 4). Jane Humphries has argued that this was not a sexist device adopted by nineteenth-century working-class men but a strategy adopted by both men and women against exploitation by the capitalist system. She maintains that without the family wage all wage levels would have fallen, forcing men and women members of the family to work. Continued flooding of the labour market would in turn force down wages. By restricting the labour market mostly to men and by holding up men's wages this form of exploitation was restricted [46]. On the other hand, Heidi Hartman sees the concept of the family wage coming directly from men's determination to maintain their privileges over women [34]. A direct criticism of Jane Humphries' views was made by Michelle Barratt and Mary McIntosh, who argued that the concept of a family wage enforced the dependency and oppression of women, reduced single, divorced and widowed women into dire poverty and divided the working classes [6].

Table 1.3 *Average earnings of females as a percentage of those for males in selected industrial groups, 1906–35*

Groups	1906	1924	1931	1935
Textiles	58.5	56.1	56.0	55.9
Clothing	46.3	49.1	50.2	51.2
Food, drink, tobacco	41.5	48.1	48.7	47.0
Paper, printing	36.4	39.6	39.4	37.3
Metal industries	38.1	44.7	47.6	45.7
Total (all industries)	43.7	47.7	48.3	48.0

Sources: [58; 16].

Some women feared the granting of equal wages for equal work because they thought it would lead to an employer automatically employing male workers. A Miss Whyte of the London Bookbinders made this complaint to the Trades Union Congress in 1900:

> As to the statement of the Trade Unions that they were willing to admit women, as long as they received equal pay with men, the women knew that such a rule would operate to the entire exclusion of women for if a woman offered herself in competition with a man for the same work the latter would be accepted. [64, *102*]

This apparent low self-evaluation of women, their skills and their work is a continuing theme of this period. And yet Miss Whyte may well have been talking sense, especially with reference to the printing industry.

Whatever the reasons, women's average wages remained low compared to those of men well beyond the end of the period. Hollis wrote: 'It was the coming of full employment in the twentieth century that was to transform men's wage rates. Women had to wait until the legislation of the 1970s' [41, *54*]. As long ago as 1902 Clara Collett wrote: 'There is no hardship in women working for a living, the hardship lies in not getting a living when they work for it' [51, *30*].

Some historians would, and do, argue that any evaluation of equal pay for equal work is somewhat misleading because of the segregation of work between men and women: