

'Dirty Linen: Women, Class and Washing Machines, 1920s-1960s', *Women's Studies International Forum* 15 (1992), pp. 173-85; S. Bowden and A. Offer, 'Household Appliances and the Use of Time: The United States and Britain since the 1920s', *Economic History Review* 47 (1994), pp. 725-48. For developments since the 1970s see *Social Trends*, 19 (1989), p. 104, 27 (1997), p. 112, 29 (1999), p. 175.

12. Schwarz Cowan, *More Work for Mother*, p. 201.

13. See R. Jowell *et al.* (eds), *British Social Attitudes: The 1984 Report* (Aldershot, 1984), pp. 133-6; R. Jowell *et al.* (eds), *British Social Attitudes: The 5th Report, The 9th Report and The 15th Report* (Aldershot, 1988, 1992, 1998), pp. 182-5; pp. 89-103; pp. 30-3; *Social Trends* 19 (1989), pp. 20-1; 26 (1996), p. 216; 27 (1997), p. 215.

II

PAID WORK

Deirdre McCloskey

The story of women in paid work in the twentieth century is that until the 1950s and especially the 1970s they mainly didn't have it. In Britain and in most rich countries until late in the century women worked first and often last at home. The question is, why were British women so largely homemakers in 1900 and why did they emerge in the last quarter of the twentieth century from the home?

In 1900 about 30 per cent of women over age 10 worked for wages, at wages half those of men. This labour force participation rate stagnated for decades, as did the wage gap. Yet by the 1990s the labour force participation rate of women (aged 15-64) had risen to around 65 per cent (the men's rate was 85 per cent, and falling); wage rates had risen from half up to three-quarters of men's. In other words, women rose from being only 14 per cent of the nation's wage bill around 1900 to 36 per cent in the 1990s. In a commercial society honour and power attends on money. Women by the 1990s earned more of it for themselves. They went out to work.

Why, then? Because, as we shall see, life expectancy rose and the number of children fell; and because women wanted it to be so, an ideological change that swept the Western world. The same answer can be given, with small lags or anticipations relative to the British story, about the United States, the Netherlands, Scandinavia or Japan. A Brito-centric view would be a mistake.

Bourgeois Women Kept from Work for Wages

Like much in British history during the past two centuries, women's work was influenced by social class. The bourgeois Victorian family separated the spheres, and kept its women out of the marketplace. Florence Nightingale's unpublished *cri de coeur*, *Cassandra* laments that her upper middle-class sisters 'sink to living from breakfast till dinner, from dinner till tea, with a little worsted work, and looking forward to nothing but bed'.¹ The bar to work was even stronger against married bourgeois women, and hysterical against mothers of any class working

outside the home. The bourgeois pattern was imitated when possible among the middle-and-upper working class, the wives of engine drivers and clerks and cabinetmakers. The Victorian strength of feeling against wives and mothers working in the labour market shows in a Mrs Bayley's paper to the National Association for the Promotion of Social Science, in 1864:

the wife and mother going abroad for work is, with few exceptions [presumably Mrs Bayley herself, on the lecture platform], a waste of time, a waste of property, a waste of morals and a waste of health and life and ought in every way to be prevented.²

So it was in 1900. The distance that educated women of the upper middle class had yet to go may be seen in the list of The First British Woman As: school board member (1870), mayor (1908), chartered accountant (1910), banker (1910), elected MP (1918 – an Irish revolutionary), sitting MP (1919 – an American heiress), barrister (1921), cabinet minister (1929), president of the Trade Unions Congress (1943), prison governor (1945), diplomat (1946), King's Counsel (1949), life peer (1958), bank manager (1958), ambassador (1964), High Court judge (1965), member of the Stock Exchange (1973), leader of a political party (1975), prime minister (1979), Lord Mayor of London (1983). These of course are not dates of equality. By the 1950s only a handful of women had in fact become chartered accountants; by the 1990s women were pouring into the profession.

Working-class Women: The Disemployment Down to 1900

In the lower but respectable working class before the Great War, earning 'round about a pound a week', the margin was narrow, and the wife often worked for pay. Even an unexpected funeral, for example, was a disaster:

For months afterwards the mother and remaining children will eat less in order to pay back the money borrowed. The father of the family cannot eat less. He is already eating as little as will enable him to earn the family wage. To starve him would be bad economy.³

Families falling into Seeborn Rowntree's category of 'primary poverty,' that is 'earning insufficient to obtain the minimum necessities for the maintenance of mere physical efficiency' needed women to go out to work, or to engage in homework for pay. In Elizabeth Roberts's great survey of memories in Barrow, Lancaster and Preston

we need look no further than men's earnings [in the first decades of the twentieth century] . . . to find the explanation why so many women had

to go out to work. . . . It was rare for a family where the father's wage was near the poverty line, not to have the mother and later the children in paid employment.⁴

For the rest, few women worked in 1900, or 1930, and very few married women. As Eric Richards argued in 1974,

Karl Marx and R.M. Hartwell may well be correct in saying that the Industrial Revolution created the possibilities for emancipation [from household tyranny by working for pay]. . . . but for the overwhelming majority of women this particular benefit of industrialization did not accrue until the middle of the twentieth century.⁵

The rise of industrial employment and decline in agriculture, 50 years earlier in Britain than in America or France, left married women alone in city rooms with the children, more or less removed from the workplaces of the men, and sometimes from other women, too. In the countryside women helped with the harvest, tended the animals, gathered wood, crossing the men at work all day. In the older cities the bourgeois wife lived over the shop, and helped in it. By 1900 the women did much less beyond their housework.

The disemployment of women in the nineteenth century can be overstated: official, market jobs are what we count, and we do not count even all the work for pay that women did – minding a working neighbour's children, for example. Non-bourgeois women engaged in much by-employment poorly accounted in censuses. John Benson argues that 'penny capitalism', legal and illegal, some of it women's work – clothes washing, taking bets, sewing, gardening, running a dram shop on the side – was the chief support of one in ten working-class families and the partial support of four in ten by the late nineteenth century.⁶ Yet on balance it seems that Eric Richards was correct in claiming that there was a U-shaped movement of women's market employment, perhaps flatter than he claimed: high in the rural economy of the eighteenth century, falling in the nineteenth (despite the importance of female textile workers), and slowly rising in the twentieth.

By 1900 jobs for women were constricted more than at any time before or since, and except in textiles and pottery (big exceptions but regionalised) and clothing at the sewing machine, their jobs were not of the First Industrial Revolution. Two in every five women in market work in 1901 were employed in domestic service. There were few changes in domestic technology and a maid-servant in 1900 was making beds, serving meals and polishing silver in much the same way she would have done two centuries before. The workers of the newly prominent trades of industrialisation – coal miners and iron puddlers and railway workers – were men. Richards speaks of a 'cumulative differentiation of employment' down to 1900 or so. In 1900 men did men's paid work, women did women's paid work, and little enough of that.

War and the Composition of Industry?

Why then over the next century did it change? The wars are commonly noted: women first went on the buses as conductresses during the First World War; the airplanes for the Battle of Britain against Hitler were assembled by women. War was the great social solvent, it is said. But like its effect on improving technology, war's effect on liberating women can be exaggerated. Labour force participation was hardly affected by the First War: when the boys came home, the girls went home, too. The Second War had more lasting effects, but not as revolutionary as popularly believed, Penny Summerfield has argued.

The jobs changed during the early twentieth century in a way that favoured women a little. Fewer coalminers and more light assembly workers, and then at the end of the century more brain workers, meant more work for women. In the 1920s and 1930s (a desperate time for shipbuilding, coal, steel, textiles) the Second Industrial Revolution of motors, glass, plastic, oil and electrical appliances gave work to women, in the Midlands and around London (though Richards points out that the sharp decline in domestic service during and after the Great War meant that in total no higher percentage of young women went out to work).

Longer Lives and Fewer Children

The pattern of family histories was more important than war or the structure of industry. It is this, not the direct effect of the Second World War, that explains most of the tripling of married women's labour force participation, between 1931 and 1961, from 10 to 32 per cent.

For one thing, life expectancies rose over the twentieth century. By the 1960s a 20-year old young woman could expect to live to 76 years (see Table 6.1, p. 87). That meant a longer period of childlessness in middle age than her great grandmother could have expected at age 20 in 1900, and more time therefore for a second serving of market work. And slowing population growth meant more older women, a narrowing of the age pyramid.

For another, families became smaller. In 1900, as at the end of the century, most British women married and most had children. Marriage was a given constraint on the labour force participation of most British women until the 1970s. The power of this constraint depended on the prevailing ideology of the 'home'. If you married you had children, and women of course were presumed to bear the weight of care. Completed family size fell sharply, from a little over four children for women married in the 1890s to a little over two children for women married in the early 1930s (see Figure 1.1, p. 7). Despite the temporary rise in the postwar baby boom, the constraint of childcare declined dramatically since the 1960s resulting in women's increased ability to go out to work.

In short, rising life expectancies and falling size of families left millions of British women by the 1970s with labour years on their hands. A 'typical'

great-grandmother of a 15-year-old British woman in 1970 had worked in the mill from age 13 to 25, married with four children to take care of from 25 to 45, died at age 55 – supplying 15 or 20 years of work for pay. By contrast the great-granddaughter could expect to work from 17 to 25, marry but have only two children, carefully planned, and go back to work at age 38, working full or part-time until age 65, and then have a long retirement financed by a work-related pension: 35 years of work for pay, double her great-grandmother's supply. Half as many children; twice as much market work. The upshot was at first a rise in part-time paid work among women who would not earlier have worked for pay at all. In 1980 44 per cent of working women were part-timers (which can be viewed as a scandal or a 'good thing', as a measure of the subordination of women or a tribute to their good sense in a rich and postindustrial age). By the 1990s in any case the work had become more full-time.

The Ideological Change, 1965–80

But there was an unexpected social earthquake during the 1960s and 1970s which drove these figures higher than the demographics would have led one to expect. In 1965, before the earthquake had been truly felt, though the new arithmetic of family size and survival had become clear, Viola Klein could write

It is not suggested here that it is – or likely to become so in the near future – the general practice for married women to accept employment away from their homes. Housewives without outside jobs, after all, still [in 1957, it would appear, when the survey was first taken] outnumber those in employment by 2 to 1.⁷

Yet that 'general practice' is precisely what happened in the 'near future'; in fact, while she was writing. The labour force participation of British women aged 25–34 (the prime years for having pre-school children) rose from 29.5 per cent in 1961 to 38.4 per cent in 1971 to 48.6 in 1981 – think of it as 1 percent-age point of rise each year, after 60 years of no change outside of war work. The ratio of 2 to 1 in 1957 reversed: working for wages rapidly became the 'general practice' of married women. By 1980 of every 100 women married or cohabiting, 60 were working (over half part-time) as against 35 'economically inactive' (with 5 per cent reporting themselves as unemployed and therefore part of the workforce).

In other words, women decided they were market workers. So did their husbands. Between two large-scale surveys of British opinion about women's work, in 1957 and 1980, married women reported a shift in their husbands' attitudes, from definite opinions (for instance, 58 per cent of housewives reported in 1957 that their husbands did *not* want them to work) to a much

larger percentage of hands off: it's her decision. Women still quit work to have children. In 1981 among 25–34 year olds, married women's participation was in the high 40s out of a hundred while that of single women was in the low 80s. But they went back to work after the children went to school in unprecedented numbers: in 1951 only a quarter of married women aged 35–54 worked for wages; by 1981 64 per cent did. The age group 35–54 had by then the highest rather than the lowest labour force participation rate before retirement.

The way to judge whether a labour force participation rate is high or low is to put it into comparative or historical perspective. In 1992, for example, the UK's rate of 64.8 was a little below the 68.9 of the USA and well below the rates of 79 per cent attained in Denmark and Sweden (one might take 80 per cent as a practical limit nowadays; it approaches the falling rate of men). Out of 24 economically advanced countries the British rate was eighth, and at about 65 per cent was far above the 40 per cent in the Irish Republic, or the 34 per cent of Turkey – or the 30 per cent of Britain in 1900.

What had happened? In a phrase, ideological change. It is ideological as much as demographic change that sent women out to work late in the century. Still in 1955 the model was Grace Kelly, as a pop tune put it, 'Marry the Prince of Monaco'. Give up your career as a movie actress to have the marriage of your dreams. Such attitudes changed during the next decade and a half among progressive women with astonishing speed. It was part of the break of the 1960s, 'between the end of the *Chatterly* ban/And the Beatles' first LP' and what followed from it. In the fictional 1971 of Fay Weldon's satirical novel, *Big Women*, everyone agreed that:

Obviously women need men. Everyone needs men. Masculinity is all. Armies need men, and government and business and technology and high finance. . . . Offices, except for the typing pool, which is female, need men. It's homes which need women, except for the lawn which is male. . . . Layla and Stephanie, friends, mean to change all this. *A Woman Needs a Man like a Fish Needs a Bicycle*.⁸

Weldon's narrator later reflects 'How fast things change. . . . all it takes is a handful of determined and energetic women; big women not little women'. By 1979, 61 per cent of women of working age worked, up from 54 per cent eight years before, again about a 1 percentage point increase every year. And the trend continued, if less dramatically, for the remainder of the century.

Of course material conditions mattered to the ideological change of the 1960s and 1970s. The weight of childcare fell as the postwar baby boom subsided. The longstanding equality in secondary education and the burst of new universities in the 1960s open to women created more 'human capital', unwastable. By 1976, 27 per cent of the female labour force was already 'professional and scientific', two-thirds of people with such occupations, though nearly half of these were part-time and therefore subordinate on the job. A breakout had occurred of educated women after the war.

But there was something remarkable, and international, about the ideological shift. A higher percentage of American women went to university, and so it is no surprise that the revolt against the *Feminine Mystique* began there.⁹ Worldwide during the 1970s the ideological shift was ratified in legal change. Britain's Equal Pay Act of 1970 (in force in 1975; made necessary by Britain's entry into the Common Market) made a legal case for equal pay for (exactly) equal work. It was amended under pressure from the European Court in 1983 as work of equal 'value' – even if the man's and the woman's job were different. Under pressure from the European Court the labour market that British women faced was affected by the international current of ideas. The Sex Discrimination Act of 1975, introduced by a Labour government, was directed against discrimination in education, advertising and public facilities, enforced by an Equal Opportunities Commission able to investigate. In the same year (more Labour progressivity) the Employment Protection Act prevented the sacking of women for pregnancy, instituted maternity leave and mandated that a woman could return to the same job within four months of giving birth.

The ideological nourishment supporting such laws was of course long in the baking. Middle-class women worked without pay as volunteer social workers c. 1900 (we hear the poor largely because middle-class women spoke for them, and spoke because the speakers needed more of life than 'a little worsted work'). After the First World War the bourgeois bar to paid work was slowly, slowly breaking down, and advanced thinkers commenced sneering at domestic science. Winifred Holtby, a feminist writer of interwar England, declared 'The consciousness of virtue derived from well-polished furniture or rows of preserving-fruit bottles is too lightly acquired'. And yet Cambridge did not admit women to equal degrees until 1948, and the character of a Cambridge scientist Rosalind Franklin (1920–58), the co-discoverer of DNA, 'has been used – vastly warped to fit the purpose – to provide reasons why men who work with intelligent women should resent them'.¹⁰

In the 1930s the equal-rights feminism of the bourgeois women seemed foolish to many working-class women with an unemployed husband and five children: for them the problem was getting *any* job, and keeping it; and minding the children; and preventing being viciously exploited on the job. The issue was 'protection': laws that forbade the employment of women at night or long hours; that required humane conditions; that protected, to use an image popular then, the mothers of the race.

The problem was that a protected woman was someone who could not be a supervisor (because she could not be there after the last subordinate had gone home). She could not work at night because she could not be on the streets, or else would be treated as a prostitute. In the 1930s Helena Swanwick wrote in her autobiography that she was of course as a girl not allowed to walk about at night: 'When it was explained to me that a young girl by herself was liable to be insulted by men, I became incoherent with rage at a society which, as a consequence, shut up girls instead of the men.'¹¹ Middle-class women, for example members of the National Union of Societies for Equal Citizenship, were

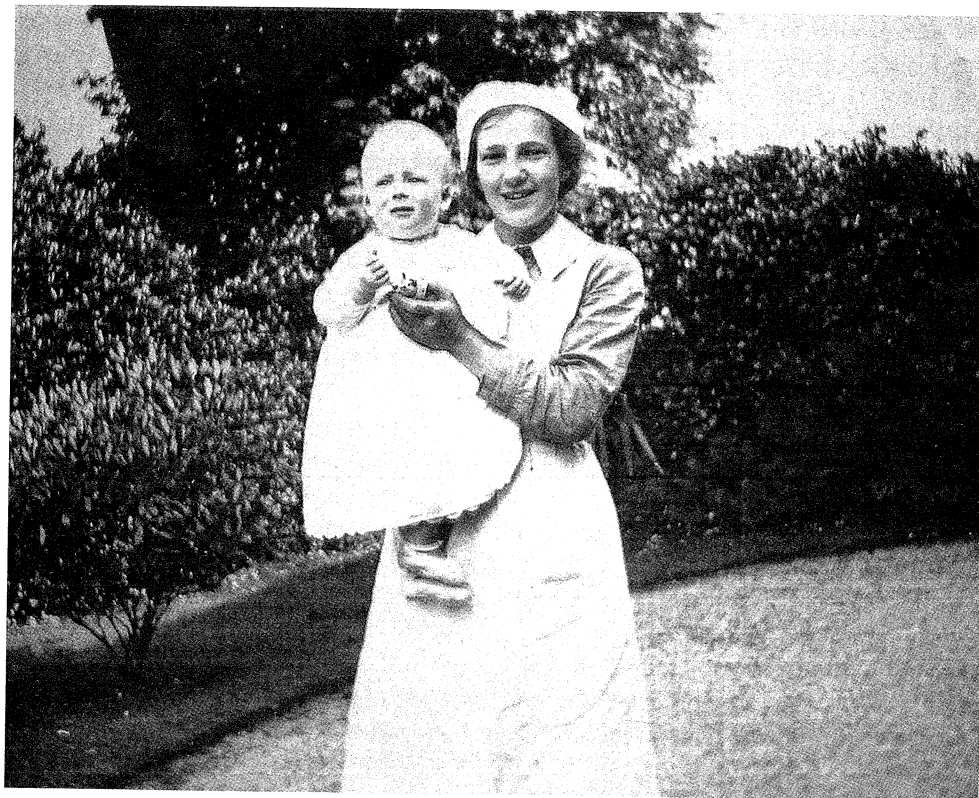


Plate 11.1. A nanny with child, early 1920s. Domestic service was the largest occupational category for women until the Second World War.

opposed to protection. By such 'protection', said the bourgeois Equal Right feminists, freedom of competition was abridged: we ask merely to be able to compete in the same field as men.

The women's trade union movement by contrast favoured protection. In conditions of mass unemployment the working-class case seemed more relevant. Such 'welfare feminism', protecting women and the 'family [that is, the man's] wage', characterised the 1920s and 1930s and 1940s, creating a body of law and custom that needed to be broken in the 1970s. Working-class women before the last war were not on the whole indignant about the resulting inequality of wages: 'I don't remember any of our women ever raising the issue of equal pay', recalled the (female) personnel manager of an English shoe factory in the 1930s. 'There was the general view that the man was the breadwinner and that it was therefore reasonable that he should have more money than a woman.' Trade unions approved marriage bars, that is, dismissal of a woman on her wedding day. As Carol Dyhouse notes, 'Labour politics and the emergence of social welfare in early twentieth-century Britain certainly served to institutionalize a conservative vision of family life.'¹²

IN FOCUS: Images and Sounds of Working-Class Emancipation

Working-class women eventually benefited from the ideological change after 1965. A photograph in Angela Holdsworth's book of the BBC series *Out of the Doll's House* (1988) captures the optimistic story of increasing human capital: the matriarch was a domestic servant, hired at a fair in 1905; her daughter was a shop assistant; hers a typist; hers a shipyard engineer (p. 60). The great-granddaughter in Holdsworth's photo, to be sure, is an *apprentice* engineer. But she is the only one of the four generations, this last in 1988, who intends to keep her job on marriage.

The engineer in the photograph parallels the heroine of Peggy Seeger's serio-comic ballad of 1971, 'I'm Gonna Be an Engineer' (Seeger was an American married to the Scottish folksinger Ewan McColl):

When I went to school I learned to write and how to read,
Some history, geography, and home economy,
And typing is a skill that every girl is sure to need,
To wile away the extra time until it's time to breed,
And then they had the nerve to say, 'What would you like to be?'
I says, 'I'm gonna be an engineer!'
 'No, you only need to learn to be a lady,
 The duty isn't yours for to try and run the world,
 An engineer could never have a baby,
 Remember, dear, that you're a girl.'

.....
As soon as Jimmy got a job, I studied hard again,
Then busy at me turret-lathe a year or so and then
The morning that the kids were born, Jimmy says to them,
'Kids, your mother was an engineer.'
 'You owe it to the kids to be a lady,
 Dainty as a dishrag, faithful as a chow,
 Stay at home, you got to mind the baby,
 Remember, you're a mother now.'

.....
But now that times are harder and my Jimmy's got the sack,
I went down to Vicker's, they were glad to have me back,
I'm a third-class citizen, my wages tell me that,
But I'm a first-class engineer!
 The boss he says, 'I pay you as a lady,
 You only got the job because I can't afford a man,
 With you I keep the profits high as may be,
 You're just a cheaper pair of hands!'

Peggy Seeger

© Copyright 1976, 1979 by STORMKING MUSIC, INC.
All rights reserved. Used by permission.

The Gap that Remains: 1980 until 2000

The ideological change is not of course complete. Women were still paid less than men: that 'wage gap'. The traditional wage gap was 50 per cent of the male wage. The Second World War resulted in a 40 per cent gap, that is, a female wage amounting to 60 per cent of the male, maintained down to the 1970s. Equal pay for women in British teaching came in the mid-1950s (the marriage bar for teachers had been abolished in 1944), as in the civil service and local government, after decades of agitation. The wage gap then narrowed from 40 per cent of the male wage in 1967 to 28 per cent in 1994 (most of the change was a burst in the 1970s, after the Equal Pay Act). The US gap narrowed by about the same amount over the same period (38 to 24 per cent), though most of its change was in the 1980s. Both were still well below Swedish or Australian or Norwegian gaps of only 10 or 12 per cent, and well above the Japanese, stagnant since 1967 at about the traditional 50 per cent of the male wage.

Various studies have concluded that 'human capital', that is, educated skill, explains *only* half of the male-female wage gap. But half is a lot, showing it is wrong to ignore economic productivity as an explanation of wages. The woman in Seeger's song does not expect equal pay unless she's equally skilled as men are at the turret-lathe.

Yet a portion of the gap unjustified by productivity remains: 'I'm a third-class citizen, my wages tell me that.' Why? The gap arises, and arose, from segregation of jobs and the ideological convictions that support it. Women were long forbidden to become airline pilots, for example (stewardess, yes, at a quarter of the pay). The justifications were once frankly sexist: 'No, you only need to learn to be a lady,/The duty isn't yours for to try and run the world,/An engineer could never have a baby,/Remember, dear, that you're a girl.' A woman who had learned welding in the shipyards of the Second World War was rebuffed for *thirty years* afterwards in repeated attempts to get back into the trade: 'I wonder what the boys would say', one of the bosses said on rejecting one of her applications, 'if I employed a woman.'¹³ The Sex Discrimination Act finally got her the job.

Cynthia Cockburn observes that 'In a world where so many things are gendered, from shampoo and deodorants to entire environments as local as the "ladies toilet" and as large as the North sea oil rig, it is not surprising that occupations are often gendered too'.¹⁴ Down to the 1960s there was little change in the amount of occupational segregation. In an imagined world in which there were literally no occupational segregation, or differences in human capital (setting aside therefore the dispute about which it is), all the following in the 1986 occupational categories in Britain would have been 50 per cent instead of what they were: managerial, high level, 11 per cent women; clerical, 74 per cent; construction and mining, 0.4 per cent; catering, cleaning, hairdressing and other personal services, 76 per cent.

One can generalise such figures by thinking of an 'index of gender segregation' – simply the percentage of women in an occupation that would need to



Plate 11.2. Margaret Thatcher aged 28, with her twins, 1954. Recently called to the Bar, she defended the rights of the working mother in *Onward*, a Conservative party monthly magazine, April 1954; 'it all depends on the woman'. While domesticity will suit some women, 'if she has a pronounced bent in some other direction in which she has already achieved some measure of success then I am sure that it is essential both for her own satisfaction and for the happiness of her family that she should use all her talents to the full. With a little forethought she will find that most things are possible.'

take over men's jobs to bring the share to the perfect 50 per cent. An occupation with all women (virtually, pre-school childminding) would imply an index of necessary shifted workers of 50 per cent; an occupation with 50–50 women an index of zero. In America the average segregation index by major occupation (such as executive, or service, or operators, i.e. machine minders) fell from 41.8 to 33.8 between 1972 and 1995. That is, by 1995 *only* one-third of the women would have to replace men to bring employment to parity. Similar trends occurred in Britain and elsewhere.

Yet still one-third. As Cockburn puts it, 'If we think of occupations as being separate cells, each with its own cell wall, men reach out and penetrate into more of them. We could say that women do not "defend" their cell walls'. The radical question posed by Walby is: Is gender segregation, 'a rational economic practice (as conservative economists argue) or ... a patriarchal protection racket'? Economists of all schools would have to concede that it is for the most part a patriarchal protection racket. 'If a man shares an occupation with a woman he feels his status tremble', writes Cockburn. She found cutters in the clothing trades who 'felt the industry had lost its masculinity', that is, the men-only spaces. A mail order firm was letting men resign with a large severance package rather than take up 'women's work'. 'They couldn't bring themselves to work alongside women. One said the idea made him feel giddy.'¹⁵

The economist Myra Strober argued in 1976 that 'occupational segregation has been maintained because all other systems in the society have so strongly

supported it' and that what is needed to break out of the mutually reinforcing system is a 'jolt'.¹⁶ She mentions the shift of clerical work, the jolt being the coming of the typewriter. By 1911 women were 20 per cent of clerks in Britain, by 1931, 46 per cent, by 1971, 72 per cent. But of course this gets us nowhere: all-male jobs became all-female, and the social system that kept men and women separated in the office was maintained.

The story of women's market employment since 1900 shows in short what economic sociologists call 'embeddedness'. That is, the economy is 'embedded' in the wider society, like flowers in their beds. As the economic historian Claudia Goldin put it in describing her work on the gender gap, 'The [strictly economic] framework had to be bent to fit the historical reality. We economists still don't know how to incorporate changing norms, and I was researching a subject in which norms played a major role.'¹⁷ This does not mean, however, that economics is mistaken or useless and that sociology reigns. A sociologist will reckon she has rejected economics by showing that markets are not 'smoothly' functioning. But perfection is not needed for markets to have force. Supply and demand 'works', even if roughly. A cleaner with widely available skills earns less than a barrister. In the years before 1914 in which the career choice for a girl was service or some factory work, *and nothing else*; or the 1950s in which it was nursing, typing, teaching, *and nothing else*, supply and demand suggests that wages in such fields would be crowded down. Or quality would be crowded up: many a nurse recruited in 1960 would have become a business executive in 1990.

But the embeddedness point is that supply and demand happen within a society. The demand for pork products is low (officially zero) in many Muslim countries. The culture matters. The employment of married women at all, and the employment of single women in most occupations, was for much of the twentieth century like eating pork: taboo. Yet the interaction is two-way. For example, whether or not the family wage happens – the assignment of men to the paid workforce exclusively – will depend strongly on the traditions of female work. In Blackburn in the 1930s, it was said, 'wages have always been fixed . . . on the assumption that several members of the family will be working'. In Preston the wages of male weavers were so low that virtually all women worked; one of the women, a ring spinner, reported that 'I never wound a clock up in all my married life, I never made a fire and I never chopped wood and I never made a bed. . . . [My husband] would look to the boy and I would look to the girl'.¹⁸ In other words, the culture affected whether women worked, but the economic decision to work outside the home fed back into the cultural assumptions about men's and women's housework. As Roberts concludes, 'patterns of women's employment [that is, the economics] cannot be ignored in the study of role-relationships [that is, the sociology] with marriage'.

For a long time, and still at the end of the century, some men won't work with women, as for a long time whites wouldn't work with blacks in the United States. The pronounced taste of half the population gives an incentive for bosses to hire men into segregated workplaces, which keeps the nurse's aide separate from the road worker. Gender anxiety on the part of men can explain the long

life of gender ghettos on the job – lorry drivers just *are* men, the male workers declare, and make it so. Some occupations come to be valued more than others even when there is no more training or strength or intelligence involved. New jobs get categorised as 'male' and then get paid more. The history of women's work makes vivid the dance between attitudes and conditions: embeddedness.

And it raises an old set of questions about our economy. Is the market enslaving or emancipatory? Was capitalism good for women? Or was it socialism that saved us? The answers are not open and shut: we don't know enough (Janet Thomas concluded in 1988). Unions and the welfare state long supported the family wage and segregation of women. Yet it was the state, supported by some of those very unions (though compelled by the European Community), that began the dismantling of discrimination in the 1960s and 1970s. Employment for women has widened, but some of the wage gap remains. Some women are fulfilled in market jobs, some are still drudges. Capitalism leaves women with a second shift of housekeeping; or does it lead them out of the home entirely?

Conclusion

The upshot will please neither side in the deeper questions – about the ultimate sources of women-hating or the ultimate role of capitalism in emancipation – though it leaves plenty of research to be done: a Scottish verdict, 'unproven'. What is proven is the constraint on women's work for wages and the reasons for its partial relaxation: longer lives, fewer children and above all a new social attitude towards women on the job.

Bibliographical Note

Elizabeth Roberts has done crucial surveys of working-class memories, including work experience: *A Women's Place: An Oral History of Working-Class Women 1890–1940* (Oxford, 1984); and *Women and Families: An Oral History, 1940–1970* (Oxford, 1995). At the other end of the qualitative/quantitative methodological divide is H.E. Joshi, R. Layard and S.J. Owen, 'Why Are More Women Working in Britain?', *Journal of Labour Economics* 3, 1 (1985), pp. 147–76. J. Martin and C. Roberts, *Women and Employment: A Lifetime Perspective: The Report of the 1980 Department of Employment/Office of Population Censuses and Surveys Survey* (London, 1984) is essential. The situation in the 1990s is covered in *Social Trends and Living in Britain: General Household Survey*, from the government, as is *Social Focus on Women and Men* (London, 1998), which brings together data from recent official sources. An earlier survey is V. Klein, *Britain's Married Women Workers* (London, 1965). A good resource for comparative statistics and for insights into the economics involved is F.D. Blau, M.A. Ferber and A.W. Winkler, *The Economics of Women, Men, and Work* (Upper Saddle River, NJ, 1998). C. Goldin, *Understanding the Gender Gap: An Economic History of American Women* (New York, 1990) is fundamental.

Still valuable, though its conclusions have been softened by later work, is E. Richards, 'Women in the British Economy since about 1700: An Interpretation', *History* 59 (1974), pp. 337–57. A more recent survey of the longer story is J. Thomas, 'Women and Capitalism: Oppression or Emancipation? A Review Article', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*,

28 (1988), pp. 534–49. C. Dyhouse, *Feminism and the Family in England 1880–1939* (Oxford, 1989) is social history at its best. An older work still useful is M. Hewitt, *Wives and Mothers in Victorian Industry* (London, 1958) and the popular book by A. Holdsworth on the condition of women generally in the twentieth century, *Out of the Doll's House: The Story of Women in the Twentieth Century* (London, 1988) is finely done.

The surprisingly small role of the wars in getting permanent work for women is argued in P. Summerfield, 'Women and War in the Twentieth Century', in J. Purvis (ed), *Women's History: Britain, 1850–1945* (London, 1995). The decidedly mixed role of unions is examined in S. Lewenhak, *Women and Trade Unions* (London, 1977); and K. Purcell, 'Militancy and Acquiescence among Women Workers', in S. Burman (ed), *Fit Work for Women* (London 1979).

The recent history of segregation of the workplace is well treated in C. Cockburn, 'The Gendering of Jobs: Workplace Relations and the Reproduction of Sex Segregation', in S. Walby (ed), *Gender Segregation at Work* (Milton Keynes, 1988); and C. Hakim, *Occupational Segregation* (London, 1979). Resegregation at the typewriter is discussed in M. Zimmeck, 'Jobs for the Girls: The Expansion of Clerical Work for Women, 1850–1914', in A. John (ed), *Unequal Opportunities: Women's Employment in England 1800–1918* (Oxford, 1986).

Notes

1. Quoted in C. Dyhouse, *Feminism and the Family in England 1880–1939* (Oxford, 1989), p. 9.
2. Quoted in M. Hewitt, *Wives and Mothers in Victorian Industry* (London, 1958).
3. M. Pember Reeves, *Round About a Pound a Week* (London, 1913), p. 68.
4. E. Roberts, 'Working Wives and Their Families,' in T. Barker and M. Drake (eds), *Population and Society in Britain, 1850–1980* (London, 1982), pp. 144, 146.
5. E. Richards, 'Women in the British Economy since about 1700: An Interpretation', *History* 59 (1974), pp. 348, 352.
6. J. Benson, *The Penny Capitalists: A Study of Nineteenth-Century Working-Class Entrepreneurs* (Dublin, 1983).
7. V. Klein, *Britain's Married Women Workers* (London, 1965), p. 21.
8. F. Weldon, *Big Women* (London, 1997), pp. 5–6, 66, 226.
9. B. Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York, 1963).
10. Quoted in Dyhouse, *Feminism and the Family*, p. 48; A. Sayre, *Rosalind Franklin and DNA* (New York, 1975), p. 197.
11. Quoted in Dyhouse, *Feminism and the Family*, p. 21.
12. Quoted in A. Holdsworth, *Out of the Doll's House* (London, 1988), pp. 74–5; Dyhouse, *Feminism and the Family*, p. 5.
13. Quoted in Holdsworth, *Doll's House*, pp. 78, 82.
14. C. Cockburn, 'The Gendering of Jobs: Workplace Relations and the Reproduction of Sex Segregation', in S. Walby (ed), *Gender Segregation at Work* (Milton Keynes, 1988), p. 38.

15. Cockburn, 'Gendering of Jobs', p. 38; Walby, *Gender Segregation at Work*, p. 2.
16. M. Strober, 'Toward Dimorphics: A Summary Statement on the Conference on Occupational Segregation', in M. Blaxall and B. Reagan (eds), *Women and the Workplace* (Chicago, 1976), p. 295.
17. C. Goldin, 'The Economist as Detective', in M. Szenberg (ed), *Passion and Craft: Economists at Work* (Ann Arbor, MI, 1998), p. 107.
18. Roberts, 'Working Wives', pp. 151, 152.