

Amy Erickson

[amyerickson@blueyonder.co.uk](mailto:amyerickson@blueyonder.co.uk)

History of Population and Social Structure, University of Cambridge

## **Identifying Women's Occupations in Early Modern London**

ESSHC, Amsterdam, March 2006

“For the sixteenth century onwards, historians have adopted the rule of thumb that women’s work was increasingly confined to occupations which were an extension into the public arena, limited in scope, of tasks carried out in the household. This argument fits the known facts, and explains the invisibility of such work, but has a tendency to be circular. It is desirable, if possible, to particularise.”<sup>1</sup>

The argument that women’s work constricted over a long eighteenth century originated with Alice Clark in 1919.<sup>2</sup> The opposite argument that women’s work expanded over the same period originated with Ivy Pinchbeck in 1930. Amy Froide has recently offered the theory that married women’s labour force participation contracted while opportunities for singlewomen simultaneously expanded.<sup>3</sup> But the fact is that we still have very little idea of the occupational geography of women in early eighteenth-century England which might make it possible to measure the extent and direction of change over a long eighteenth century. The problem is how to identify women’s work or occupations in this period, since most of the known sources identify men by their occupation (‘William Jeffreys, tanner’, for example) but women by their marital status (Martha Custis, widow).<sup>4</sup>

In this attempt to particularise, I have initially limited my survey to London, on the assumption that the largest commercial and manufacturing concentration would be the best-documented location. My starting point is the only survey of the female labour market in London in this period, by Peter Earle. He used the depositions from the church courts in the

---

<sup>1</sup> Maggie Pelling, ‘Older women: Household, caring and other occupations in the late sixteenth-century town’, in Pelling, The Common Lot: Sickness, Medical Occupations and the Urban Poor in Early Modern England (Longman, London & NY, 1998), p.159.

<sup>2</sup> See also Judith Bennett, Ale, Beer and Brewsters in England: Women’s Work in a Changing World 1300-1600 (Oxford University Press, 1996); Deborah Valenze ‘The art of women and the business of men: Women’s work and the dairy industry’, in Past and Present 130 (February, 1991) then in The First Industrial Woman (Oxford UP, 1995).

<sup>3</sup> Amy M. Froide, Never Married: Singlewomen in Early Modern England (OUP, ) p.88.

<sup>4</sup> I initially thought that women’s occupations did not appear in records because their legal status – and many of the sources for the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century are legal records – is their marital status, and not their occupational status. However, men’s legal status is not strictly defined by their occupation either. A late medieval statute requiring men to state their occupation in some courts may have created a habit which spread to all courts.

late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, where women consistently comprised around one third of witnesses (or deponents), and in which is found the question, 'How and by what means do you gett your liveing and are you maintained?'.<sup>5</sup> This is a fantastically useful question from a historian's perspective.

Nearly three quarters of women appearing before the church courts (74%; 613 of 831) reported that they maintained themselves wholly or partly by their own employment. This rate was obviously highest for spinsters and widows, but 60% of wives also claimed an occupation other than 'wife'.<sup>6</sup> The fact that most women supported themselves seems surprising in an age heavily influenced by a housewife-breadwinner model. Earle observes that a very similar proportion of single and widowed women were ascribed occupations in the 1851 census; only married women reported a lower rate of occupational activity in 1851, at 40%, than in the earlier church court records.<sup>7</sup>

Table 1 here is Earle's, grouping into occupational sectors the 613 women either wholly or partly maintained by their own employment: one quarter were in domestic service, another fifth in making and mending clothes. These proportions seem intuitively correct, and they fit with the assumption that women's public work was largely an extension of household tasks. Nevertheless, Earle's early 18<sup>th</sup> century result showing 25% of employed women in domestic service is only half of other estimates for London at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century which suggest over 50% of employed women.<sup>8</sup>

### Companies

Earle conceded that his church court sample was 'probably somewhat biased towards the poorer women of London', but that "the great majority of women were unable to work in 'male' trades and, since nearly three-quarters of women wanted to or had to work for a living, they necessarily competed intensely for the work which was left, much of it of a casual nature and none of it organised by guilds or livery companies."<sup>9</sup> It is a commonplace

---

<sup>5</sup> Peter Earle, 'The female labour market in London in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries', Economic History Review 2<sup>nd</sup> series 42/3, August, 1989, p.330. Earle suggests that this question was only asked in the period 1695-1725. In fact, it was asked both before and after this period, so offers possibilities for longer-term analysis.

<sup>6</sup> Earle, p.337.

<sup>7</sup> Earle, pp.341-2. Also Leigh Shaw-Taylor, 'Unlocking the secrets of the census: Towards an assessment of female employment in 1851' (unpublished paper).

<sup>8</sup> Patty Seleski, 'Women, work and cultural change in eighteenth and early nineteenth-century London', in Tim Harris (ed.) Popular Culture in England, c.1500-1850 (Macmillan, 1995) p.144. She cites for this assertion T. McBride, The Domestic Revolution (NY 1976), p.14; D.A. Kent, 'Ubiquitous but invisible: female domestic servants in mid-eighteenth century London', HWJ 28 (1989), p.112; Schwarz, London in the Age of Industrialisation (1992), p.15. But Kent actually suggests that 10% of all Londoners 1750-60 (c.67,500) were servants and Schwartz's calculation was based on the 1851 census.

<sup>9</sup> Earle, p.332, 342.

that the guilds -- in London called the city livery companies -- excluded women. In fact, the records of the companies show a much more complicated picture.

There were more than 80 companies in London in 1700. It is estimated that up to three quarters of male householders within the city were freemen of the companies,<sup>10</sup> although that proportion would have been much lower in the rapidly expanding suburbs outside the city walls. Some of the companies (like the Paviers and the Scriveners) took less than five apprentices in a year; others (like the Barber Surgeons, Haberdashers, Joiners, and Merchant Taylors) took over 70 apprentices annually; the Weavers took over 100.<sup>11</sup> And while women were apparently technically barred from full membership of these companies, the apprenticeship records make clear that girls were indeed apprenticed, mostly in small numbers but still many more than we previously thought, and that boys as well as girls were set apprentice to women 'masters' of the trade, who would of course have been called 'mistresses'.

Table 2 shows the proportion of female apprentices and apprenticeships to women in 57 of the London companies in the surviving records between 1600 and 1800.<sup>12</sup> They are ordered from the highest percent of apprentices set to mistresses, down to the lowest percent. The proportions of women among masters ranged from over 13% among the Pinmakers and over 12% among the Horners (I discount the Tobacco Pipemakers because their numbers are so small), down to none among the Combmakers, Fruiterers and Gardeners. The numbers for the latter three companies are very small, which probably accounts for the absence of women: many of these registers are only partial. The distribution is not at all what might be expected on the basis of assumptions about traditional female occupations. The lowest proportion of female masters registered in the Apothecaries (0.57%), which might -- on the basis of women's traditional association with healing and the treatment of illness -- be supposed to have more women than, say, the Carmen (8.47%) or Saddlers (4.79%). The embroiderers too come near the bottom of the list (2.16%). Overall, less than 3% of company apprentices were set to a mistress. The proportions are less striking than the actual numbers: 202 children were apprenticed to

---

<sup>10</sup> CRH Cooper, 'The archives of the City of London livery companies and related organisations', *Archives* xvi, no. 72, Oct 1984, p.22.

<sup>11</sup> CLRO: COL/CHD/OA/03/31. By 1800 these companies had largely become social clubs so that a member of the Skinners may just as well have been a butcher or a clockmaker. But in 1700 the great majority of members and their apprentices still practised the trade of the company.

<sup>12</sup> I am extremely grateful to Cliff Webb for sharing his data. The numbers of female apprentices represented here are minimums because they do not include gender-ambiguous names. Companies that Webb has not yet analysed are the Bakers, Barbers, Carpenters, Clockmakers, Clothworkers, Coopers, Cordwainers, Drapers, Fishmongers, Goldsmiths, Grocers, Haberdashers, Joiners, Leathersellers, Mercers, Merchant Taylors, Pewterers, Salters, Scriveners, Shipwrights, Stationers, Vintners, and Weavers. There are no detailed records for the Girdlers, Watermen or Wheelwrights.

female carmen; 306 to female blacksmiths. (The number of masters and mistresses is less than the total number of apprenticeships because any master could take more than one apprentice, although most took only one.) These figures do not necessarily reflect a full two centuries of London carmen or blacksmiths, or pinmakers for that matter, since most of the record sets are incomplete. What we can say is that at the very least, more than 3600 apprentices were set to mistresses rather than masters in the London companies.

And while less than 1% of the total number of apprentices were girls, that amounted to well over 1000 girls. Interestingly, the rank order of companies taking female apprentices bears no relation to the order of women taking apprentices. While the pinmakers and the glovers had high proportions of female apprentices, they were also two of the sweated, poorly paid trades.

While these companies are not a major portion of the female occupational map of London, they are nonetheless considerably more important than is commonly thought. And of course the numbers in this table are only the visible women. The actual number practicing at any time in any of the companies' trades must have been much greater than the number recorded as apprentices or taking apprentices. The mistresses we see in this table were predominantly widows, and most of them may not have served an apprenticeship in the company. (All but 5 of these companies<sup>13</sup> had a higher proportion of mistresses taking apprentices than they did female apprentices.) So it appears it was possible to acquire sufficient mastery of a trade not merely by serving an apprenticeship but also by virtue of being married to a man in that trade and practicing with him. Without that reputation it seems exceedingly unlikely that the company would have sanctioned a widow taking an apprentice. So my assumption is that in between the girls serving apprenticeships and the (largely widowed) mistresses are the married women working in the same trade with their husbands, who are hidden in this source.

However, it is often claimed that the widows taking apprentices were simply taking them over from their newly deceased husbands in order to see out a pre-existing apprenticeship. It has also been suggested to me that girls apprenticed in the companies were not really learning the skills of that company but were actually used as household labour instead. I will look at these suggestions in detail in the records of the Clockmakers company.

---

<sup>13</sup> The Pinmakers, the Glovers, the Spectaclemakers, the Embroiderers and the Gardeners .

Clockmaking was a highly skilled and well-remunerated trade. Between 1672 and 1784 the Clockmakers took at least 70 female apprentices.<sup>14</sup> Of the girls apprenticed, two thirds were apprenticed either to a woman or to a couple jointly. Does this suggest a greater emphasis on housewifery than on clockmaking? Isaac and Anne Loddington, for example, jointly took the first of four female apprentices in 1727.<sup>15</sup> Two years later, according to parish records, Anne gave birth to their seventh and last child.<sup>16</sup> Were the apprentices learning clockmaking or taking care of the children and the house?

Well, firstly, we must assume that Anne at least was an active clockmaker. There appears to have been no necessity to include a master's wife on a girl's apprenticeship merely for reasons of propriety, since 31 girls were set to a male master alone.<sup>17</sup> I cannot tell whether Anne served an apprenticeship because I do not know her maiden name.<sup>18</sup> But it is clear that an apprenticeship was not required for a female master to satisfy the company of her skills. Jane Saxby, for example, never served an apprenticeship. As a mistress, she was never identified as a widow. But parish records show a Jane marrying a clockmaker named Saxby in 1754/5.<sup>19</sup> Her husband never took an apprentice -- apparently because he had his wife instead. After he died five years later, Jane alone took on the first of a series of at least seven male apprentices, who themselves took the freedom.<sup>20</sup> So for women there were two ways into the city livery companies: by apprenticeship and by marriage.

Secondly, we know that at least some girls apprenticed in the Clockmakers' Company did take the freedom and practice successfully while remaining unmarried. Eleanor Moseley, apprenticed to George and Lucy Tyler in 1718, earned her freedom in 1726. Over the next thirteen years she took seven apprentices, all female.<sup>21</sup> We may speculate about why she took only female apprentices: perhaps she had to be careful about

---

<sup>14</sup> An anonymous researcher in the 1980s made a list of the 'Female Apprentices of the London Clockmakers Company' (London Guildhall: AHS pam51). Based on the the year totals provided in that list the proportion was 1.39% of the 5019 apprentices taken in that period. However, that list of 70 should be taken as a minimum because the author may have missed ambiguous christian names. I have looked only at the apprentices A-C, but one girl named Zarah Abrahams was missed out.

<sup>15</sup> LG: AHS pam 5. It is impossible to ascertain whether Anne served an apprenticeship because her birth name has not been found: no record appears in the IGI.

<sup>16</sup> 26 in the first instance and 5 turned over. LG: IGI 1992 fiche

<sup>17</sup> LG: AHS pam 51, corrected to include Zarah Abrahams, the only omission in A-C.

<sup>18</sup> There are two apprentice Annes at about the right time.

<sup>19</sup> A Christopher Saxby who took the freedom in 1749, and a Christopher Saxby married Jane Bass in Westminster St George Mayfair 26 Feb 1754; and a Jane Bass b. 17 Sep 1724 in Westminster St Martin in the Fields. (LG: IGI 1992 fiche)

<sup>20</sup> In 1760, 1762, 1764, two in 1768 and two 1770. She took no female apprentices, but there may have been more males: I have only looked in the index under A-C. Joanna May, another apparent widow, took at least four male apprentices whose names started with A, B or C, and one female apprentice, between 1690 and 1710.

<sup>21</sup> Two in 1727; then in 1732, 1734/5, 1737, 1738, and 1739.

her sexual reputation; perhaps there was some stigma attached to apprenticing boys to a mistress; perhaps she was renowned and other clockmaking families wanted their daughters to train in her workshop. But it is fairly certain that she was not using her apprentices for household service. Indeed, a girl who was not receiving adequate training in her promised trade could -- and did -- complain of the fact to the Quarter Sessions.<sup>22</sup> But the Clockmakers' Company too would not have sanctioned an apprenticeship for girls which failed to transmit the skills of the company because to do so would clearly risk bringing the company into disrepute. However, we also know that Eleanor Moseley's apprentices, like most female apprentices, never took the freedom of the company.

Rather than assuming that the failure to take the freedom was a reflection of the inadequacy of the training, I suggest that we look on female apprenticeship as a form of dowry, making them more desirable marriage partners to male clockmakers. Because women changed their name upon marriage, it is extremely difficult to trace the marital fortunes of Eleanor Moseley's apprentices, to find out whether they themselves practiced and took apprentices as married women or as widows.

Let's turn now to the boys set apprentice in the Clockmakers. Some 2.0% of boys were apprenticed to mistresses. (Note that this is 2% of boys alone, so it represents a higher figure than those in Table 2, column 3.)<sup>23</sup> 'Turnovers' from one master to another are regularly recorded in the register, but I have found not one apprentice turned over from a deceased master to his widow.<sup>24</sup> Most mistresses, like most masters, took only one apprentice. But the widows did not take over their husbands' apprentices just to see out terms of service. Which suggests that the widows were practicing on their own account.

All of the evidence suggests that girls apprenticed to clockmakers learned to make clocks, that Anne Loddington was in fact still practicing clockmaking despite having had six children. Either her labour in clockmaking was not always available, what with the children, or the family business was extremely successful, and hence she and her husband required apprentices. (There may have been more apprentices who were male, but their names did not begin with A, B or C.) The girls set apprentice to the Loddingtons must have been learning clockmaking, and not just minding the children, because the Clockmakers'

---

<sup>22</sup> Dorothy George, *London Life in the XVIIIth Century* (1930) Appendix IV, which lists 34 apprenticeship cases from Middlesex QS, of which 4 are girls, apprenticed to two mantua makers, a hair-twister and a victualler, who complain of ill use including failure to be taught.

<sup>23</sup> Sample of the 1502 apprentices whose last names began with A, B or C who were apprenticed in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, from *The Company of Clockmakers Register of Apprentices 1631-1931* (privately printed, 1931).

<sup>24</sup> One was turned over from a widow to a man with the same last name, possibly her son: Peter Buckle, son of a Citizen and Upholder, apprenticed 4 May 1741 to Elizabeth Webster, turned over to Henry Webster, clockmaker, with £8.

Company expected them to learn clockmaking. Anne and Isaac almost certainly hired domestic servants, or perhaps even had an apprentice in housewifery, which they could have got from the parish. But the Clockmakers' Company had no involvement in that aspect of their life.

We cannot assume that all male clockmakers' wives were themselves clockmakers but it is clear that a significant minority were.

Are there other sources that might tell us about occupations which lay somewhere in between the skilled trades of the city livery companies and the "household extensions" work which predominates in the church courts? The registers of **Christ's Hospital** record all of the children taken in and the adults to whom they were later discharged and apprenticed. Founded in the mid-16th century for the education of foundlings and poor children, by the later 17<sup>th</sup> century the foundlings had all but disappeared and every admission was the child of a Citizen of London and Freeman of a livery company.<sup>25</sup> These children were, nonetheless, relatively impoverished (no children of clockmakers) and the Hospital only admitted one child from any family. Approximately 15% of these children were girls.<sup>26</sup> They were rarely, if ever, apprenticed within a livery company themselves, but these were certainly trade apprenticeships of a lower order because the mistress's occupation was almost invariably specified.

The vast majority of parents petitioning Christ's Hospital to take their child were widowed mothers.<sup>27</sup> But only the company and occupation of the (usually deceased) father was ever specified. Nevertheless, it appears from the petitions to the hospital that these women worked outside the home and that both they and the governors of the hospital expected them to work outside the home. Elizabeth Gurney's tallowhandler husband died "five years since leaving her in very poor and miserable circumstances with five children, for whose maintenance she is forced to goe a washing and scouring"; Katherine Powell had been a widow for six years with three children "whom by her utmost industry she cannot

---

<sup>25</sup> There is a marked rise in the number of admissions to the Hospital, as well as the social status of the admissions, in the 1680s. This appears to have been a long-term trend exacerbated by the 1682 collapse of the Court of Orphans. The lack of their inheritance might explain why the children of freemen came to displace foundlings and ordinary orphans in Christ's Hospital. The clientele of the Hospital appears to have been similar to that of the Burgerweeshuis in Amsterdam. Anne McCants, Civic Charity in a Golden Age: Orphan Care in Early Modern Amsterdam (U Illinois Press, 1997).

<sup>26</sup> I estimate that approximately 25 girls per year were apprenticed from the hospital, or a total of perhaps 1700 between 1682, when the orphans' court collapsed, and 1750, although the trade specification declines by 1750.

<sup>27</sup> In 1702, 75 women and 27 men presented children to the Hospital. The women were predominantly single: widows (63) and women whose husbands had absconded or were at sea (4). Other women presenting were remarried widows (3) or another kinswoman of unspecified marital status (5). Men were widowers (16), other kinsmen (6) and married men, probably remarried widowers (3).

maintaine”; Elizabeth Tickhill, a salter’s widow, had two children “and she incapable of following any imployment, being an infirme woman”.<sup>28</sup> It is significant that most men who presented their children to the Hospital were widowers, suggesting that their impoverished state had something to do with the loss of a wife, just as the widows’ impoverished state had something to do with their loss of a husband.

A sample of the girls admitted to Christ’s Hospital were apprenticed mostly to mistresses, but also to masters, in 38 different trades. Most of these women were not in the company trades, but they must have been of a respectable trade in which they made a decent living, given the relatively higher social status of the families from which the apprentices came.

Sixteen girls in the sample were set apprentice to women married to men with an occupational descriptor. These are listed in the form of ‘Mary Constable the wife of John Constable cheesemonger’, which seems to suggest that it is he who is the cheesemonger although the designation is certainly ambiguous. However, I think it almost certain that in that minority of cases where a separate occupation is not specified for a married mistress, she can be assumed to share her husband’s occupation, for the simple reason that ‘Mary Constable, cheesemonger, the wife of John Constable, cheesemonger’ is never entered. In the church courts, it was unusual for a husband and wife to share the same trade.<sup>29</sup> But it is clear from the company records that in those trades it was quite normal for a couple to work in the same trade. So it seems reasonable that some, although not most, of the women who took apprentices from Christ’s Hospital practiced in the same trade with their husbands.

Table 3 represents a range of female occupations in the Christ’s Hospital sample, by listing: a) the girls apprenticed to mistresses; b) the girls apprenticed to masters; c) the girls apprenticed to women married to a man with an occupational identifier, on the assumption that these women shared their husbands’ trades; and finally d) the boys apprenticed to women.

The church court figure of 60% labour force participation, which is taken to be very high, is actually likely to be an *underestimation* of the rate of married women’s occupational activity. Firstly, the question on maintenance was only asked of a minority of witnesses.<sup>30</sup> Not all witnesses in the same case were necessarily asked, and women were

---

<sup>28</sup> Christ’s Hospital Presentation Papers, MS 12818A/7 (1703-1705), no page numbers.

<sup>29</sup> Earle, p. 338 and Appendix A. Dorothy George identified 86 married couples (1730-1800) in the Old Bailey records, almost all of whom were also in different occupations. London Life in the XVIIIth Century (1930), Appendix VI.

<sup>30</sup> My estimation, confirmed by Alice Wolfram who has also worked with these records. In Commissary Court’s testamentary depositions 1669-92, in a sample of 33 deponents 10 were women, and only 6% of deponents were asked about maintenance (LG: 9065 A/8). In 1713-22, 31% of deponents were female (23 of

more often asked the question than men.<sup>31</sup> Secondly, it was always asked at the behest of the opposition.<sup>32</sup> It seems likely that it was therefore asked in circumstances where the witness's source of income was questionable. The question was clearly resented by some witnesses: some refused to answer it outright; other women dodged the question by claiming they were married to – and therefore maintained by -- soldiers who were abroad, which seems deeply implausible. Simply claiming to be married and maintained by a husband – who himself did not appear in court so whose existence cannot be confirmed -- could in some circumstances have been an evasion of the question. Thus the level of female employment particularly among married women is likely to be underestimated. (The level of employment among all women is also likely to be underestimated insofar as work which might call into question a deponent's good name, such as receiving stolen goods, say, or the exchange of sexual favours for economic consideration, was not mentioned in the courts, although it was probably 'firmly within the general pattern of female employment'.<sup>33</sup>)

If we compare Christ's Hospital with the church courts, the proportion of occupational sectors looks quite different. Not one of these girls in the late 17<sup>th</sup> and early 18<sup>th</sup> centuries went into domestic service. Nor is there any evidence that these formal apprenticeships were hiding domestic service. From the Foundling Hospital (a different institution) later in the 18<sup>th</sup> century the records are much patchier but from there most girls there were apprenticed to 'household business', although necklace-makers and milliners also sought their apprentices there.<sup>34</sup>

In Christ's Hospital more than twice as many women were in making and mending clothes. In Earle's making and mending clothes category there is range of trades from the Hospital, which looks very like that in the church courts, dominated by the mantua makers and sempstresses, but including a variety of other trades. Some of these women were married to men in related trades like a hatmaker, a haberdasher or a weaver. In other words, they are at the prosperous end of the clothing trades. Those women married to a packer, a

---

74) and half of all deponents were asked about maintenance (LG: 9065A/11). NB: the non-testamentary material from this court does not survive. In the Court of Arches, 30% of deponents of (33 of 109) were female, and 18% of the women (6) were asked about maintenance.

<sup>31</sup> In the 18th-century sample above, 65% of women (15 of 23) but only 45% of men (23 of 51) were asked.

<sup>32</sup> Anne Tarver, *Church Court Records* (Phillimore, 1995), p.18. The question may appear anywhere in the interrogatories (there may be up to 20 of these), although it is usually toward the beginning. Within a single case, it will always be the same number interrogatory.

<sup>33</sup> Faramerz Dabhoiwala, 'The pattern of sexual immorality in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century London', in Paul Griffiths and Mark Jenner (eds) *Londinopolis* (Manchester University Press, 2000), esp p.94. Note the list of prostitutes' *clients'* occupations from 1713 on p.101.

<sup>34</sup> London Metropolitan Archives A/FH/A12/1/2/1. The Foundling Hospital, like Christ's, used pre-printed forms to record apprenticeship petitions, but as yet I have found no register of Foundling children as there was for Christ's from the beginning when it was still a foundling institution. This is unfortunate since the number of girls was equivalent to the number of boys in the Foundling Hospital and so would have yielded a very large body of information.

porter or mariners were probably at the poorer end of the clothing trades, although we must assume that they were still respectable because Christ's Hospital paid £5 with its apprentices and had its reputation to uphold. The Hospital records show only one third the proportion of the church courts in charring/laundry and one half in catering/victualling, and a tiny fraction in nursing/medicine. Those that were in those categories in Christ's Hospital were probably in the higher end trades. There was a higher proportion in shopkeeping.

Another source for these higher end trades is insurance records, where the proportion of insured businesses which were owned by women, ranged from 60% of milliners and mantua makers, through 11% of fellmongers, saleswomen and shopkeepers, down to 4% of mercers, hatters and booksellers.<sup>35</sup> These proportions are certainly minimums since married women are very unlikely to appear and there would have been factors other than marriage limiting the number of tradeswomen insuring in their own names. The type of trades found in manufacturing and 'miscellaneous services' were fairly similar in the church courts and in Christ's Hospital. What differs is their proportions: more than three times as many women in services and four times as many in manufacture in Christ's Hospital.

A third source with yet again a different spread of occupations is another court: the Old Bailey. As in the church courts, one third of the witnesses in the Old Bailey criminal trials were women. But the cases represented here were overwhelmingly theft, with the occasional murder. A small sample of the occupations of female prosecutors and witnesses in three months' cases in the 1740s is listed in Table 4.

What is surprising here is how different the criminal court population looks from the church court population. The proportion of maidservants and clothing industries in the criminal courts is only half that in the church courts. But this discrepancy can be understood better by remembering the types of cases heard in each court. The women in the ecclesiastical courts were testifying in cases relating primarily to marriage and disputed inheritance. Servants are likely witnesses of the sexual transgressions, clandestine marriages, deathbed wills, etc. that turn up in the church courts.<sup>36</sup> As for making and mending clothes, sewing was undoubtedly a major female employment. But on the other hand, if you had anything at all to hide, and your reputation was challenged in the church

---

<sup>35</sup> Margaret R. Hunt, The Middling Sort: Commerce, Gender and the Family in England, 1680-1780 (University of California Press, 1996), Table 3, p.133, using records for 1775-87. The insurance records cover all of England but are heavily biased towards London and the better-off tradespeople.

<sup>36</sup> In the Latin heading of each deposition, which routinely gives male occupations, among the women only the domestic servants are identified. This fact alone is likely to produce an overrepresentation of servants. (NB: the 'domestic servant' of the heading may turn out to be skilled in the maintenance interrogatory.)

court with the question, “How and by what means do you get your living?”, you couldn’t say you worked in a shop because that was a public occupation that could be verified with an employer. So you are liable to have said in your defence that you took in sewing (which would be virtually untraceable).

The thefts and occasional assaults or murder heard in the Old Bailey took place largely in the streets, which must partly explain the fact that more than twice the proportion of witnesses as in the church courts were in catering/victualling, double the proportion in manufacture, (although still small), and nearly ten times as many in miscellaneous services. These witnesses worked in public. The level in catering/victualling reflects its importance in the trade structure of London, male as well as female.<sup>37</sup> In fact, the most striking thing about the women’s trades reflected in the Old Bailey is how similar they are, at least in categories, to what we know about the male trades of London.<sup>38</sup> The only marked difference is that women are in domestic service and men are in the building trades.

What is clear is that the women who appeared in the church courts did not represent an occupational cross-section of the population. While admittedly using small samples from Christ’s Hospital and from the Old Bailey records, it is clear that quite different occupational patterns appear not only in different types of record but even in different types of court. A great deal more work remains to be done on the occupational geography of London. But this survey of three different sources demonstrates the value of particularising, both in place and in sources, in order to achieve a clear picture as possible of what work women really did. These new sources in themselves cannot support either a theory of 18<sup>th</sup> century improvement or 18<sup>th</sup> century decline for women in the labour force. But with larger studies they will provide a point of comparison for the 1851 census, and produce a picture of change over time for both married and single women.

---

<sup>37</sup> Sara Pennell, “‘Great quantities of gooseberry pye and baked clod of beef’: victualling and eating out in early modern London”, in *Londinopolis*, ed. Paul Griffiths and Mark Jenner (Manchester UP, 2000).

<sup>38</sup> A.L. Beier, ‘Engine of manufacture: the trades of London’ in *The Making of Metropolitan London 1500-1700*, ed. A.L. Beier & Roger Finlay (Longman, London & NY, 1986). For the problems of comparing trades and classifications over time, see L.D. Schwarz, *London in the Age of Industrialisation: Entrepreneurs, Labour Force and Living Conditions, 1700-1850* (Cambridge UP, 1992), Appendix 1.

**TABLE 1: Occupations of London women in church courts, 1695-1725**

Domestic service	25.4%
Making/mending clothes	20.2
Charring/laundry	11.1
Nursing/medicine	9.1
Catering/victualling	8.7
Hawking/carrying	7.2
Shopkeeping	7.7
Textile manufacture	4.6
Misc services (schoolteacher etc)	2.9
Misc manufacture	2.0
Hard labour/daywork	1.1

*Source: Earle, Table 10, p.339.*

**TABLE 2: Proportion of female masters and apprentices by company**

Company	Total Apprenticeships	No. Women	% Women	No. Girl	% Girl
		Masters	Masters	apprentices	Apprentices
Pinmakers	336	44	13.1	146	43.5
Tobacco Pipemakers	8	1	12.5	0	0.0
Horners	146	18	12.3	0	0.0
Fanmakers	33	3	9.1	2	6.1
Carmen	2384	202	8.5	4	0.2
Poulters	1385	78	5.6	17	1.2
Feltmakers	3591	174	4.9	3	0.1
Saddlers	188	9	4.8	0	0.0
Musicians	718	34	4.7	26	3.6
Curriers	2714	126	4.6	7	0.3
Glaziers	1176	53	4.5	5	0.4
Pattenmakers	1258	53	4.2	8	0.6
Glovers	990	41	4.1	124	12.5
Plumbers	1931	78	4.0	0	0.0
Cardmakers	299	12	4.0	1	0.3
Cooks	2977	117	3.9	9	0.3
Fletchers	103	4	3.9	1	1.0
Founders	2993	116	3.9	26	0.9
Distillers	1537	59	3.8	0	0.0
Dyers	1920	73	3.8	3	0.2
Spectaclemakers	764	29	3.8	39	5.1
Basketmakers	1352	50	3.7	32	2.4
Woolmen	565	20	3.5	14	2.5
Tallow Chandlers	6008	196	3.3	52	0.9
Painters	3900	124	3.2	82	2.1
Needlemakers	1475	46	3.1	33	2.2
Butchers	9269	278	3.0	26	0.3
Bowyers	479	14	2.9	10	2.1
Brewers	4350	124	2.9	4	0.1
Tinplateworkers	1846	51	2.8	6	0.3
Innholders	1499	41	2.7	8	0.5
Lorimers	447	12	2.7	3	0.7
Paviours	908	24	2.6	5	0.6
Blacksmiths	11672	306	2.6	59	0.5
Gold Wyredrawers	774	19	2.5	5	0.7
Turners	7304	179	2.5	21	0.3
Wax Chandlers	1123	27	2.4	14	1.3
Frameworkknitters	125	3	2.4	1	0.8
Farriers	3694	88	2.4	18	0.5
Ironmongers	2821	64	2.3	47	1.7
Cutlers	5160	116	2.3	38	0.7
Upholders	1314	29	2.2	25	1.9
Broderers	880	19	2.2	48	5.5
Armouers	3426	73	2.1	10	0.3
Bowstringmakers	269	5	1.9	4	1.5
Skinners	9866	164	1.7	100	1.0
Gunmakers	1812	28	1.6	5	0.3
Brown Bakers	651	10	1.5	0	0.0
Masons	1963	30	1.5	6	0.3
Coachmakers	3381	50	1.5	2	0.1
Plasterers	2762	40	1.5	39	1.4
Glass-sellers	889	10	1.1	0	0.0
Bricklayers	3660	35	1.0	17	0.5
Apothecaries	5769	33	0.6	4	0.1
Combmakers	3	0	0.0	0	0.0
Fruiterers	113	0	0.0	2	1.8
Gardeners	116	0	0.0	7	6.0
<i>Total/average</i>	<i>129096</i>	<i>3632</i>	<i>2.8</i>	<i>1104</i>	<i>0.9</i>

### **Table 3: Female Occupations in Christ's Hospital (107)**

#### a) Girls apprenticed to a mistress (96):

blackwork maker	(3)
bonelace maker	
broker	(2)
buttonmaker	(3)
chandler	(2)
childs coat maker	(3)
clock line maker	
confectioner	
edger of hats	
embroiderer	
fanmaker	
flagmaker for shipping	
framework knitter	(2)
fringemaker	(2)
mantuamaker	(16)
milliner	(2)
pastry cook	(2)
peruke/perriwig maker	(4)
plainworker	(2)
quilter	(2)
schoolmistress	(5)
sempster/sempstris	(21)
shopkeeper	(2)
slopseller	
starcher	(6)
tavern keeper	
unidentified	(7)
washer of paint[?] &c	

#### b) Girls apprenticed to a master (12):

barber surgeon	
bodicemaker	
framework knitter	
haberdasher	
mantuamaker	
peruke/perriwig maker	(3)
skinner	
staymaker	
tailor	
watchmaker	

#### c) Girls apprenticed to a mistress whose husband's trade only is identified (16):

bacon salesman	
bodicemaker	
bookbinder	
carpenter	
cheesemonger	
clogmaker	
dyer	
embroiderer	
glover	

haberdasher  
mantua maker  
pastry cook  
salesman (2)  
scrivener  
shoemaker

d) Boys apprenticed to a mistress (18):

barber & periwig maker (2)  
brasier  
butcher  
cane chair maker  
cooper  
fishmonger  
framework knitter  
gardener  
glazier  
haberdasher  
keeps a haberdashers shop in Pudding Lane  
merchant  
painter  
painter stainer  
wire drawer or flatter of silver wire  
unidentified (2)

**TABLE 4: Occupations of female witnesses in the Old Bailey, 1740-46**

Alehousekeeper	
Charwoman	2
Coffee house keeper	
Day labourer washing & ironing	
Gentlewoman / Stocking shop keeper	
Glover	
Landlady (as only occupation given)	7
Lodging house keeper	4
Maid servant	7
Mantuamaker	3
Nurse in hospital	2
Nursekeeper	2
Pawnbroker	2
Public house keeper	4
Rag shop keeper/green shop keeper	
Serves in alehouse	2
Shoe seller (probably in street)	
Shopkeeper	3
Shucks oysters in stall on Temple Bar	
Silkwinder	
Silver spoon maker	
Takes in plain work	
Tallow chandler	
Tavern keeper	2
Trussmaker (apprentice)	
Upholsterer	
Washer of gentlemen's linen	
Washerwoman	3
TOTAL	58

**TABLE 5: Occupations of London women**

	Church courts 1695-1725	Christ's Hospital 1687-1725	Old Bailey 1740-46
Domestic service	25.4%	0.0%	12.1%
Making/mending clothes	20.2	46.5	10.3
Charring/laundry	11.1	5.4	10.3
Nursing/medicine	9.1	0.8	6.9
Catering/victualling	8.7	4.7	19.0
Hawking/carrying	7.2	0.0	1.7
Shopkeeping	7.7	10.1	8.6
Textile manufacture	4.6	7.0	1.7
Misc services (eg schoolteacher)	2.9	8.5	22.4
Misc manufacture	2.0	17.1	5.1
Hard labour/daywork	1.1	0.0	1.7

*Sources: Earle, Table 10, p.339; Christ's Hospital records in the Guildhall Library, London; [www.oldbaileyonline.org](http://www.oldbaileyonline.org).*