

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Girls and their families in an era of economic change

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Abstract

The paper uses autobiographical accounts by 227 working women alongside a larger sample of men's life stories to compare girls' and boys' experiences of first jobs, schooling and family life in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. It asks whether girls were disadvantaged in seizing the opportunities and fending off the threats to wellbeing occasioned by economic change. Girls were more likely than boys to experience sexual harassment and this constrained the ways in which they could earn a living and live their lives. Fathers as breadwinners merited respect and often affection, but it was mothers with whom girls identified.

1. Introduction

On leaving school, aged 13 in the 1890s, Elizabeth Andrews (b. 1882) contemplated the local job opportunities for girls, the brickworks or colliery screens, and reported herself 'terrified' at either destination. A century earlier and the same age, Mary Ann Ashford (b. 1787) rejected 'the half-starved kind of life' associated with a dressmaking apprenticeship in favour of domestic service.¹ The intervening 100 years saw a massive economic change with extensively researched albeit contradictory and controversial implications for women's economic opportunities and wellbeing.² We know much less about girls' lives in this critical time. Were girls involved alongside boys in the child labour of the period? Was this at the expense of schooling? And how did their position in the family and expectations about future gender roles condition their experience? These are key questions not only for historians of childhood and child labour but also for those working on gender, family, education and industrialisation.

Most studies of youth, mirroring the sources available, focus on boys or young men.³ Yet some comparisons with girls are possible. Apprenticeship registers, census returns and wage data confirm that boys were more likely to be apprenticed (and so as men dominated skilled trades), had a wider range of possible jobs and saw a steadier progression of earnings with age.⁴ Literacy differentials in adulthood imply that boys enjoyed more schooling, and historians are also suspicious that they had more than their fair share of a family's food.⁵ Yet girls' frequent presence in early industrial workplaces suggests that gender stereotypes did not spare them

from such labour. Indeed, Mary Jo Maynes and her co-editors hypothesise that girls may have played a distinctive part in 'the story of Europe's path to industrial development'.⁶ Instead of lazily lumping girls together with boys as 'children' we need to gender the experience of proletarian childhood in this century of economic change.⁷

Working-class life stories afford a rare opportunity to begin this task since they contain descriptions of childhood and family of origin, educational achievements, economic activity and adult outcomes. Such a source, working-class autobiography, aided my earlier analysis of child labour in the British industrial revolution.⁸ However, this work was just as gender-disregarding as more conventionally sourced studies. Over 600 memoirs were drawn upon but all were written by men. Girls appeared in the life-stories and so in the synthesis but it was as daughters, sisters, childhood companions or sweethearts, all seen through men's eyes.

This paper redresses the imbalance by matching the material on boys with evidence of girls' early work, first jobs and experience of schooling. These are important topics, but my gender-selected sample was challenged more on the account of family life as on the economic impact of industrialisation. Ginger Frost, for example, questioned the claim that the mother-child bond was of central importance in working-class children's lives, suggesting instead that this was an artefact of the male sample: 'If Humphries had included girls' experiences, she would have had a more nuanced view ... Girls worked more closely with mothers and had more conflicts with them, so they were less idealistic about the mother-child bond ...'.⁹ Moreover, Julie-Marie Strange's recent study of working-class fatherhood, also based on autobiographical reminiscences though for a later time period, questioned the enduring stereotype of at best distant and at worst domineering men to which my study at least partially subscribed, while Emma Griffin's similarly sourced study has emphasised the prevalence of emotional and material neglect by mothers as well as fathers.¹⁰

Family relationships are important in this context for, although men's memoirs implicated mechanisation and the division of labour in the boom in early industrial child labour, fatherlessness and large families, common in these high-mortality and high-fertility times, also cast boys as supports for struggling mothers, pushed them into early and arduous work and laid a heavy hand on their later life chances. Any study of girls' employment and education must explore their status within the family and whether it left girls disadvantaged in seizing economic opportunities and fending off threats to wellbeing.

The life stories of 227 working women are analysed using the same combination of qualitative and quantitative methods as the earlier study, an approach that remains controversial as discussed below. The life accounts expose both similarities and differences in experiences. Girls and boys described their families in similar terms and both recognised fathers as their economic mainstays, though subtle differences in attitudes toward parents suggest that they were evaluated through a gendered lens. Girls shared in the dip in age at starting work experienced by boys in the classic era of industrialisation but had less education until the late nineteenth century and narrower job opportunities throughout the period. A further chilling finding is of girls' vulnerability to sexual predation, which constrained their independence and limited how they lived their lives.¹¹ The gendering of life chances spilled over from the economic to the demographic, for maternity looms over

the women's accounts, a destiny shared with mothers whom they had seen face childbirth without effective medical assistance or analgesics. Girls anticipated the gendered trials and tribulations which their mothers endured and this united them. Simultaneously, it drove fathers and daughters apart. Girls associated fathers with the pain and suffering that they perceived emanated from repeated pregnancies alongside the economic stress of adding new babies to already overcrowded households. Men withdrew from the risk and anguish of childbirth, just as they did from the day-to-day management of the household budget, apparently oblivious to the burden of additional children, so reneging, as their daughters often saw it, on their responsibilities.

The next section describes the materials from which life accounts reaching back into girlhood were extracted and compares their quantity and quality with those used to construct working-class boyhood. Section 2 explores the accounts of family life in these sources in comparison with those in the men's stories and with a mainstream family history in order to ground the supply of child labour and the demand for education. Section 3 compares girls' ages at starting work, and employment possibilities with the early labour market experience of boys. Section 4 compares girls and boys in terms of length of school attendance and whether they enjoyed or were miserable in school. Section 5 turns back to family relationships, and gendered assessments of parents. I conclude that the interface between the family and the economy had different implications for girls and boys and differentiated their experiences throughout the century of economic change.

2. Working women's life writing

British working-class life writing is an unusually rich source.¹² Strangely, it was neglected by the pioneers of 'history from below', except to provide an occasional colourful illustration from accessible accounts. This changed with the pioneering work of John Burnett and David Vincent, who publicised the source, and when David Mayall completed a major work of cataloguing: *The autobiography of the working class: an annotated, critical biography* (3 vols., 1984–1989). Many of these early-identified autobiographies, along with later finds, are now available in digital form thanks to the ongoing project at Brunel University which housed Burnett's original archive.¹³ From these beginnings, working-class life accounts are now widely used by historians from below.¹⁴

My study of child labour in the British industrial revolution was an early contribution to this literature. It was unique in combining close reading of the individual texts with a statistical analysis of the prosopography as a whole. Textual analysis remained crucial, not least because, as Vincent emphasised, how people understood their lives and reflected on their stories is as important for understanding historical experience as the stories themselves.¹⁵ But the introduction of quantitative methods was and remains controversial. Vincent rejected statistical summarisation of material that was plainly not a random sample, and other authors have echoed his concerns.¹⁶ However, a statistical overview prevents cherry-picking illustrations to support historians' priors and can identify tendencies that might otherwise remain hidden. It provides a 'distant reading method' which can be combined with textual analysis to obtain 'a collective jigsaw of individual lives'.¹⁷

Working women wrote about their lives much less frequently than men, a difference that is only partially explained by the gap in literacy.¹⁸ Separate spheres of activity constituted a less obvious but powerful barrier. Working-class men were active in the public sphere, involved with the political movements of the age: Chartism, trade unionism, cooperation, socialism, the Labour Party. These provided the institutional encouragement and motivation to write their own stories interwoven with those of the organisations and beliefs to which they had subscribed. Accounts of work and skills, of battles and voyages, of crimes and fellow criminals, even of a faith lost then found in a conversion narrative, all involved some experience of a wider world. When women underwent such exposure, they were drawn to write but such women were rare.¹⁹ For most women, their domain was their home and family, topics of little apparent interest to outsiders. Elizabeth Oakley's (b. 1831) account of poverty in Norfolk in the nineteenth century ends abruptly when her eldest son asked 'who will ever want to read about your poor boring life'.²⁰ The answer is historians for whom such accounts shine light into corners of working-class life that would otherwise remain hidden; they illuminate the ordinary.

The humble status of many women writers has a further advantage in that they were less prone to selection by achievement in later life and so less likely to represent a striving and successful echelon within the working class. Women's stories rarely tell a tale of orderly progression through life to a self-directed conclusion. Nor is it simply a question of overcoming 'the teleological fallacy'.²¹ Women seldom claimed mastery of their fate and their stories thereby reflect the disempowerment of the working class.

These features spill over from the content to the ways in which the stories are told, persuading W.J. Jones that 'Memories of New Quay' by Myra Evans (b. 1883) was not in fact a life account:

When this volume came into my hands I thought for a moment that it was an autobiography. But I soon saw that I was wrong. This is a woman looking at the area when she was a child, and as a child dances lightly from memory to memory, from anecdote to anecdote, from character to character . . . I sensed that it was a huge step for her to try putting in order the time, period and relationship . . .²²

Women's life accounts proceed in the shadow of families and communities, lack titles, are disordered, unfold episodically and seldom link up to a grander narrative. These stylistic features make contextualising events and establishing timelines difficult but they are consistent with, indeed reflect, lives spent by and large in domestic settings with limited autonomy and little scope for purposeful action.

The gendering of autobiographical presentation is dramatically illustrated by Elizabeth Parker's (b. 1813) story which is not written but stitched in evocative blood-red cross stitch, on a sampler held in the Victoria and Albert Museum.²³ Parker journeys from oppositional adolescence, through spiritual desolation and the contemplation of suicide, to something approaching emotional equilibrium. Few men's stories would have such content but no man's story could take this form.

However, the rarity of working women's autobiography does put a spanner in the statistical works and threatens a methodology which weaves the weft of individual accounts through a warp of quantitative findings that summarise the evidence as a whole. Autobiographies still provide the backbone of the evidence, 117 cases, but to boost the sample size I have resorted to four other sources. First, interviews with women reported in the Royal Commissions of the mid-nineteenth century provide 64 additional biographies.²⁴ Second, women writers often summarised the life stories of close relatives, providing useful accounts of mothers and grandmothers that add 20 cases.²⁵ Third, social investigators, such as Arthur Munby and Henry Mayhew, recorded conversations with working women, delivering a further 14 narratives.²⁶ Finally, male-authored family histories that include detailed memoirs of female relatives add 12 cases.²⁷

The sample is subdivided into cohorts by date of birth to facilitate comparison with the evidence for men and trace changes over time. The first cohort encompasses women born 1667–1790; the second those born 1791–1820; the third 1821–1850 and the fourth 1850–1878.²⁸ A fifth cohort covering later writers, while unmatched in the male sample and so not used in the statistical comparisons, provides additional qualitative material. In comparison with the male prosopography but consistent with the account of the nature of women's writing, the evidence is less systematic with more missing values meaning that specific analyses rely on smaller samples than the total implies, though large enough to draw conclusions.

I begin with what these memoirs say about the family economy in these decades and whether they tell a different story from those of men.

3. Family structure and functioning

Like their male counterparts, the women described their families as comprising mothers, fathers and children, occasionally extended to include grandparents, aunts, uncles or cousins. Children were often consigned, temporarily or permanently, to live with other relatives, and families were integrated into networks of kin and community. These findings challenge standard interpretations of English kinship. Periods of co-residence were sometimes motivated by mutual benefit as in Michael Anderson's classic interpretation of the frequency of extended families in accommodation-scarce, female labour-intensive, early industrial Preston.²⁹ But the exchanges were nuanced. The mother of the Norfolk Labourer's wife (b. 1825) came and nursed her 'when her babies came' and then looked after the children while her daughter worked: an instrumental accommodation, but facilitated by affection between the women and set in a rural not urban environment.³⁰ Similarly, the children in Mary Cox (b. 1806) and Louise Jermy's (b. 1877) families resided with relatives in response to overcrowding at home or when convalescing, companionship the only return.³¹ Mary Saxby (b. 1738) was left with her aunt and uncle when her soldier father enlisted and while he probably subsidised her keep, she repaid her relatives' kindness with childish rebellion.³² Unreciprocated assistance was common and help took many forms. Elizabeth Oakley's (b. 1831) mother's brother, 'the kindest of uncles', provided material and emotional support to his sister whose husband was mean and unloving.³³ Mrs Oakley 'always knew

where to get a shilling when she wanted one when she had him to go to', support sustained over several years with no prospect of reciprocation.

These nuclear families were linked to the economy principally through the employment of their male heads. Writers almost always reported fathers' occupations and usually early in accounts, clearly seeing them as of consequence in their later lives. In men's autobiographies, 86 per cent of fathers were given detailed occupational titles and in 29 further cases, the evidence was sufficient to locate them in broad occupational groups. For women who lived through the same decades, 68 per cent provided detailed occupational titles, rising to 77 per cent for broad occupational groups, the shortfall perhaps reflecting girls' reduced interaction with fathers.³⁴ Ann Candler's (b. 1740) father was 'a working glover', Catherine Exley's (b. 1779) 'a comber in the worsted business', Christian Watt's (b. 1833) 'a hardworking fisherman', while Deborah Smith's (b. 1858) 'worked in the quarries'.³⁵ These proportions appear stable over time, fathers' jobs assuming the same pre-eminence throughout the period.³⁶

Women saw their fathers' jobs as key points of reference in their early lives even when men reneged on family responsibilities. Lucy Luck's (b. 1848) moving narrative begins with the desertion of her father and the resulting consignment of herself, her siblings and her loving but frail mother to the workhouse. Thereafter, Lucy's father disappears from her life, but in this same opening paragraph where he slinks away, she provides us with his occupational title, 'experienced bricklayer', a man doubly condemned for his skills suggest he was capable of support.³⁷

Turning to wages, the interviews in the Parliamentary Papers, responding to the questions of the Commissioners, provide several observations but references could be spontaneous. Three women, reminiscing in the pages of a local newspaper remembered fathers and husbands earning from 6s to 8s a week as agricultural labourers in 1830s' Bedfordshire, a sum that had increased to 9–12 shillings by the 1840s.³⁸ Mrs John Sharp's (b. 1833) father earned 7s or 8s a week working on the roads, and 'that not regular employment'.³⁹ Towards the end of the nineteenth century, Bessie Harvey (b. 1875) gives a horseman's wages in East Anglia as 14s and 1s extra on Sundays, while Catherine Maclaughlin's (b. 1885) moulder father gave his wife a gold sovereign and 5s after deducting his beer money.⁴⁰ In more straited circumstances, a 'broke up' Norfolk father earned a shilling a day stone-breaking for the parish around 1835, a rate that apparently continued to be paid to unemployed Bedfordshire labourers 20 years later.⁴¹ Recorded wages are consistent with those mentioned in the men's memoirs and with data from independent sources.⁴²

Consistent with the prominence given to fathers' jobs, and whatever the wage level, families relied heavily on men's earnings.⁴³ 'Father . . . alone brought home the only means of subsistence' wrote Maud Clarke (b. 1887).⁴⁴ Indeed, fathering for both girls and boys was synonymous with material provision: a finding that is consistent with Julie-Marie Strange's interpretation of fatherhood.⁴⁵ Women, who as children lacked a father's support felt aggrieved. The Norfolk labourer's wife (b. 1825) whose elderly father was enfeebled before his children were grown, reported: 'I never seemed to have a father who could work for me and help me, like other children have, for he had allus been ailing'.⁴⁶ However, the ideology of a male breadwinner, able and willing to support a family, ran ahead of the reality.⁴⁷

Often, even when fathers worked in representative jobs and earned standard pay, their families appeared needy. Men were expected to be breadwinners, but in reality, they were *frail* breadwinners, in the women's accounts as in those of men.⁴⁸

The extent of distress is not surprising. The pioneering social surveys of the late nineteenth century acknowledged persistent poverty and categorised its causes: low wages; irregularity of work or unemployment; large families; and the death, incapacity or desertion of the chief earner.⁴⁹ All are implicated in the falling short of male breadwinner standards. Many fathers, try as they might, could not earn enough to support their families and when real wages stagnated through the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries,⁵⁰ improvements in living standards depended on an increase in labour supply per capita, in *industriousness*.

The life accounts showcase many hard-working fathers who increased their hours and days, searched for better paid work, and took on secondary jobs. Mrs Deacon's (no dob) forester father boosted his weekly wages by making coffins and digging graves and ate while at work to save time.⁵¹ Mrs Layton's (b. 1855) father responded to the pressures of a growing family by teaching himself tailoring to augment his salary and growing the family's vegetables.⁵² Mary Coe's (1888) father recognised that unless he obtained 'little jobs on the side' he would have to forego his tobacco.⁵³

Under pressure, a father's devotion could fray. Contemporary notions of masculinity discouraged men's involvement in homelife. Industriousness, by demanding that men work longer hours, move in search of employment, and work away from home, drove new wedges of time and space between them and those for whom they laboured, reinforcing this predisposition. Dora Tack (b. 1887), described her father as 'not very interested in homemaking. For him it was just a place to eat and sleep ...'. When the strains of his shifts as a London policeman were added to this indifference he became a harsh and unsympathetic figure, furious when his daughter, suffering from whooping cough, kept him awake at night.⁵⁴ Mrs Sargeant (b. 1888) praised her father for his diligence noting that 'he walked many miles to his work near Kettering' but reflected too on the corollary: 'often we children did not see him except on Saturdays and Sundays, as we were usually asleep when he had trudged home from work'.⁵⁵ Hilda Fowler (b. 1890) says 'I have only vague memories of my father, for in those days men normally worked from 6.00 a.m. to 6.00 p.m. and masters with small businesses worked the same hours ...'.⁵⁶ Thus, industriousness removed men from their families and strained the ties of affection and familiarity that underpinned breadwinning and the grinding effort it required. So, as a result, in some cases, especially if wages stagnated and families grew, the burden became too much and the bonds broke. Men deserted – if not their families, their role as breadwinner. Frequently away at sea, WHR's (b. 1843) sailor father, eventually disappeared, though whether he had died in Jamaica, where he had often talked of seeking his fortune, or simply deserted his family was not clear.⁵⁷ Similarly, Ellen Johnson's (b. 1832) father emigrated in search of advancement but thereafter lost touch and ceased support.⁵⁸ Mrs Barber's (b. 1726) father, never 'very steady, or attentive to his family', went off to claim a purported inheritance and when disappointed disappeared for 'five long months' leaving the family in despair and permanently damaging his wife's health.⁵⁹

Writers occasionally recognised the strain of breadwinning. Mrs Triggler (b. 1888) emphasised the effort required of her miner father 'just to keep going to work'.⁶⁰ But some subjects felt that fathers could have done more. Reproach was more likely to creep into the memories of women. Daisy Cowper (b. 1890) depicted her sea captain father as an increasingly inadequate breadwinner: 'As years passed, the intervals of his homestaying before seeking another command grew larger, and the successive commands smaller; the cash saved during one long voyage would all be drawn from the bank before he went off again ...'.⁶¹

Strange suggests that the toll which breadwinning took on fathers and how work made their love manifest often went unrecognised in childhood. Writers stumbled upon understanding as adults when they themselves were struggling to provide materially while preserving family life.⁶² Writing itself could make things clearer. Dora Tack (b. 1887) claimed to understand her father better as a result of the reflection involved in life writing. However, gendered spheres of existence, so evident in Dora's account of her family, undoubtedly contributed to the 'lack of communication' that blighted their earlier relationship.⁶³ Similarly, Margaret Bondfield (b. 1873) regretted not knowing her father 'when he was in his prime' as subsequently he became 'very remote'.⁶⁴ However, even later in life, women appear reluctant to recognise struggling fathers' earlier sacrifices probably because they were generally spared the duties of breadwinning. Even when fate cast them as responsible for family upkeep, women were not considered derelict if they sought help from poor relief or charity. The greater intolerance of faltering fathers evident in the women's memoirs returns to an important theme: the gendered alignment in working-class households and specifically the frustration that daughters and mothers shared when men failed to deliver on their side of the marital bargain. Mary Gawthorpe (b. 1881), growing up in a warring household headed by a man whose earnings were decreasingly sufficient to support his family, reported simply that she came to see her father through her mother's eyes.⁶⁵

Feckless fathers were, however, preferable to those who flatly reneged on their responsibilities either before or after marriage. The many desperate women in these stories who sought to retain links to unstable or unwilling men underline the urgent need for a male breadwinner. Edith Evans (b. 1903) could not comprehend why her mother remained with her drunken and eventually suicidal father. Her father Jonathan was, however, a regular worker despite his problems and Kate had eight closely spaced children.⁶⁶ Similarly, Gawthorpe only managed to extricate her mother from her abusive marriage when she herself earned enough for their support.⁶⁷ These cases illustrate the bald reality: as Richard Wall argued many years ago, it was less risky to cling to an inadequate man than to go it alone.

An unaided struggle was, however, the lot of many mothers. Death was not alone in denuding families of their breadwinners. Among the male autobiographers, not only did significant numbers of fathers desert their families, but reported paternal death rates were well above the mortality suggested by demographic sources, an excess that I interpret as masking additional abandonment. Other fathers were away working or in the army or navy, while some co-resident fathers were incapable of providing because of ill-health, incapacity or alcoholism. Altogether 8–18 per cent of working-class boys appear to have been rendered *de facto* fatherless in childhood. If a reasonable estimate of paternal mortality is added to this toll, about a

third of boys grew up in families without fathers or without breadwinners, even frail breadwinners.⁶⁸

The life accounts by women fall in line. In cases which include information on the family of origin, 15.5 per cent of authors reported fathers as dying before or during their childhood, a figure consistent with the population mortality. But while women appear less likely to hide desertion behind purported bereavement, they openly acknowledged 2.8 per cent of fathers as having deserted, 1.7 per cent as hopeless alcoholics, while a further 2.8 per cent were chronically ill or disabled, 4.4 per cent were in the army or navy and 2.2 per cent were working away from home. Moreover, it is highly likely that many of the 20 per cent of fathers about whom we know little or nothing included many who were dead or had absconded. So, around a third of women too grew up in families without effective male breadwinners. Did mothers fill this gap?

In the men's memoirs, as noted above (p. 6), fathers were almost always given a job title. Mothers were seldom so defined.⁶⁹ Was this simply because men identified the world of work with other men especially their fathers and failed to notice the productive activities of their mothers? Do the accounts by women correct this bias and uncover an overlooked hive of female activity?

While fathers could be versatile at work, mothers carried this to extremes, patching together seasonally and cyclically available jobs to augment family incomes. Isabella Smith's (b. 1890) grandmother made pegged rugs, did sewing or 'would go out to work in the fields or do some decorating or anything for a few shillings'.⁷⁰ Women like this hustle and bustle through both men and women's narratives, clearly if episodically contributing to family survival, but without specific occupations. Thus, measuring economic activity by the possession of an occupational title is likely to underestimate women's work.⁷¹ A broader perspective counts mothers as active if their children's recollections include any reference to productive activity, excluding childcare and domestic work. But even with this definition, only around one quarter to a third of women with husbands present were reported as economically active in their sons' memoirs.⁷² Was this low rate an artefact of the condescending male gaze?

Daughters were more inclined than sons to assign occupational titles to mothers though these were not accorded the central importance of fathers' jobs. Limiting attention to women born before 1879 to compare with the findings from the men's accounts, and focussing first on families with husbands present, 26–32 per cent of mothers were designated specific occupations.⁷³ Moreover, daughters were also more predisposed to recognise mothers' piecemeal efforts to contribute to family incomes, noting how they went out charring, took in washing, picked potatoes, peas and hops, spun, knit, nursed and even less specifically '... done what she could'.⁷⁴ Daughters, as children often worked alongside mothers and as adults pursued the same makeshifts, so not surprisingly were more likely to notice and value such casual employment. Recognition of part-time and occasional work raises participation to over 50 per cent, well above the 29–36 per cent of mothers with husbands present reported as economically active using the same broad definition in the men's autobiographies.⁷⁵

Women's greater awareness of mothers' makeshifts recurs in the reporting of self-provisioning activities, such as gleaning, gathering and spinning for own use.

Ten female autobiographers remembered mothers gleaning, and the value it generated, the same number as in the much larger male sample.⁷⁶ Although such memories might be elevated by the greater frequency of agricultural families in the dataset (see appendix), self-provisioning was not exclusively rural. Mary Howitt's (b. 1888) mother, in a pit village, had 50 hens and 2 pigs 'so we always had plenty of bacon and eggs', while Mrs Layton (b. 1855) reported from a London suburb that everyone kept either pigs or chickens or ducks.⁷⁷ Men, whether in the Registrar General's Office or their own homes, were oblivious to these activities and disdainful of their value. Women's reminiscences are more respectful.

Although the samples are small, and the definitions both of economic activity and marital status fuzzy, women were also more aware of or more willing to report the efforts of lone mothers. Perhaps men were embarrassed to recall their widowed or deserted mothers' employment, thinking that this reflected ill on their replacement breadwinning. Daughters, called upon to provide substitute childcare and domestic labour, felt no such qualms. Indeed, the life-changing moments when mothers needed to substitute for their husbands provide watersheds that are missing in the men's writings. For Elizabeth Allen (b. 1800), this crisis came when her father took to drink, leaving her mother 'for days together, seeming quite indifferent as to the manner in which his wife and infant were to subsist'. Fortunately, her mother had savings and contacts who helped her to secure employment.⁷⁸ Other women were pushed into the labour force when husbands died or were incapacitated.⁷⁹ When Rebecca Siviter's (b. 1869) husband died, the Poor Law's stance constituted a crossroads. The *Guardians* said that Rebecca was healthy, and though her baby was not yet weaned, could work; tragedy ensued as we will see.⁸⁰

Women's work took such marginal forms partly because they were constrained by their responsibilities for domestic labour and childcare, tasks that were described in some detail by men and women looking back upon their childhoods. Sons readily acknowledged the enormity and importance of these tasks.⁸¹ Daughters were just as grateful. Dora Tack's (1887) mother was never active economically,⁸² but her only child assigned great importance to her mothering, describing her as 'a quiet loving and patient lady who nursed me through the dreadful hooping cough and subsequent bronchitis attacks, as well as looking after Dad during the many different changes of time in police duties'.⁸³ Where there were more children, the work multiplied, and became difficult if not impossible to combine with employment outside the home.

Women deployed age-old strategies to fit earning around childcare and domestic labour. School and office cleaning or 'charring' took three or four hours at a stretch while 'finishing' could be done in their own homes. Nellie Raisbeck's (b. 1912) mother was unusual in holding down a full-time factory job. Her daughter explained how her mother organised her domestic work and self-provisioning around the hours but was forced to conclude: 'I don't know how my mother managed to get everything into one day ...'.⁸⁴ For less superhuman mothers, work outside the home left little time to mother and could endanger children.⁸⁵ The Norfolk Labourer's Wife (b. 1824) was forced by her large family and husband's low wages to work as hard as a man 'not such heavy work, but as much'.⁸⁶ She managed this because her own mother, who had also worked in the fields, 'stayed at home' and looked after her grandchildren. Exhausted, the Norfolk Labourer's wife confessed

impatience with her brood, 'not bad 'uns, but mortal tricky', and at times 'when angry like' she resorted to slapping them. Fortunately, her mother stepped in to protect the children, smoothing over the rough edges of a stressful life so that the children bore no grudges but became 'rare and kind to their old mother'.⁸⁷ Outcomes were not always so auspicious. When traveller Mary Saxby (b. 1738) left her infant while she peddled goods around a local town, the huts burned down and the child so badly injured she later died.⁸⁸ Rebecca Siviter (b. 1869), as noted (p. 11), was pressurised when widowed, to return to work as a chain-maker despite having three young children. The baby, John, died from burns after falling into a fire. This might have been a domestic fire but Rebecca's granddaughter situated the accident at the open forge when the child had been taken to work with his mother.⁸⁹

Most mothers could not compensate for an incompetent breadwinner without repercussions for their children. Benjamin Shaw's wife (b. 1775) responded to her husband's ill health and inability to work by hawking gingerbread even though they lived in a textile district and she had factory experience. Perhaps she pursued this (in Benjamin's view) petty employment to leave time for domestic labour (though Benjamin condemned her as a hopeless housewife). But the end result was that 3 of Betty's girls started factory work aged between 9 and 11, though one a 'small and puny child' went to the winding frames at around 14.⁹⁰ Did families like the Shaw's with frail breadwinner fathers and mothers who could not fill the gap supply daughters as well as sons to the industrialising economy? Did girls join their brothers as child workers of the industrial revolution?

4. Girls and the labour market

While it is not possible to tease out child participation rates from the autobiographical evidence, age at starting work was a commonly recorded milestone, which I used to trace a boom in children's work associated with early industrialisation. I found that boys born in the second and third cohorts of the industrial revolution started work younger than those born earlier or later. [Table 1](#) shows the age at which the women writers reported that they began work by cohort alongside the ages recorded by men for the same periods.

The sample of women that specify age at starting work is much smaller than the men's sample but the means by cohort are close and there is the same distinctive 'U' shape. Both boys and girls started work younger in the crucible of industrialisation, 1791–1850. After mid-century, and consistent with the secondary literature on child labour, age at starting work began to rise. The inclusion of a fifth cohort in the female sample shows a clear structural break in working age with another jump of nearly two years by the last quarter of the nineteenth century. The second column shows the means for girls excluding the cases drawn from the Parliamentary Papers to reassure readers that the pattern is not an artefact of including this material.

As well as documenting the decline in age at starting work during the industrial revolution, I explored its determinants using regression analysis.⁹¹ The restricted sample of women's autobiographies and the collinearity of several potential determinants (involvement of poor law, absent or dead fathers, mothers' economic

Table 1. Age at starting work, girls from the life accounts data set compared with boys from working-class autobiographies

Cohort	Girls: mean age (sample size)	Girls: mean age excluding evidence from Parliamentary Papers (sample size)	Boys: mean age (sample size)
1627–1790	11.60 (19)	11.73 (15)	11.50 (91)
1791–1820	10.33 (39)	10.81 (13)	10.28 (123)
1821–1850	9.65 (36)	9.46 (20)	9.98 (144)
1851–1878	11.43 (34)	11.37 (31)	11.39 (160)
1879–1892	13.09 (32)	13.09 (32)	n.a.

Source: See text and Humphries, 2010, p. 176.

Note: gender differences are not statistically significant.

activity) make it impossible to replicate the analysis. However, [Table 2](#) presents the results of an attenuated regression where several variables have been combined and recoded. The most important variable is the combination of the record on dead or absent fathers with a father's occupational status as given by the CAMSIS scale.⁹² These variables have been collapsed into a new variable that reflects the robustness of a father's ability to support his family. The variable takes a value of zero if a father is absent, dead or his breadwinning otherwise compromised, and the CAMSIS score of his occupation otherwise. The model includes a time trend, mother's economic status, using the broader definition, and the number of children in the family. Women born after 1878 are excluded to ensure comparability with the sample of male autobiographers. It also provides the results when combining both men's and women's evidence and including gender as an explanatory variable.

The U-shaped trend seen in the simple cohort means is again apparent in the sizes and significance of the coefficients on date of birth and date of birth squared in both samples. The new variable measuring the competence of the male breadwinner is positive and significant in both samples: for boys and girls a robust breadwinner delayed entry into work, and conversely, a frail or reluctant breadwinner brought it forward.

This effect is clearly recorded in women's life accounts. We have already heard the Norfolk labourer's wife lamenting her father's inadequacy (see section Family structure and functioning). The daughters of other infirm men suffered similarly, as did those whose fathers baulked at their breadwinner role. Mrs Burrows (b. 1850) was just 8 when she became part of an agricultural 'gang' as her father, 'a great sufferer with tumour in the head' had not earned one day's wages in 16 years.⁹³ Ellen Johnston (b. 1832) entered the factory aged barely 11 when her abusive stepfather 'could not bear to see me longer basking in the sunshine of freedom'.⁹⁴

Similarly, for both girls and boys, a mother's economic activity was associated with starting work earlier, not surprising given that both women and children of poorer households were more likely to work. The inconsistency in reporting mothers' work along with the different sample sizes makes interpreting the differences in the size of the coefficient on mothers' economic activity difficult. However, it is interesting that the number of children in the family pushed boys precociously

Table 2. Proximate determinants of age at starting work

	Girls	Boys	All children
Constant (SE)	1124.302* (646.912)	686.879** (151.307)	691.145** (146.612)
Date of birth (SE)	-1.222* (0.712)	-0.751** (0.168)	-0.754** (0.162)
Date of birth ² (SE)	0.0003* (0.0002)	0.0002** (0.00005)	0.0002** (0.00005)
Bread winner (SE)	0.032** (0.015)	0.029** (0.006)	0.029** (0.000)
Mother's economic status (SE)	-1.144* (0.621)	-0.449* (0.256)	-0.552* (0.236)
Total children (SE)	-0.089 (0.090)	-0.115** (0.039)	-0.117** (0.035)
Gender (SE)	n/a	n/a	-0.530* (0.319)
Sample size	76	380	456
R ² adjusted	0.095	0.101	0.106
SSE	2.734	2.473	2.504
F stat (sig.)	2.583 (0.033)	9.534 (0.000)	9.996 (0.000)

*Sig. \leq 0.10.**Sig. \leq 0.05.

into work, but does not appear to have had the same effect on girls. The sign on the coefficient is negative, but is small and not significant. Perhaps girls were kept at home within big families to help with childcare or allowed to go to school accompanying their younger siblings. Women not surprisingly often described their first 'job' as looking after younger siblings. Boys were not spared from domestic tasks and childcare but they rarely regarded this as work displacing schooling or earning. This is the first indication that the interface of family and economy had different implications for girls.

The results from the combined sample must be treated with caution given the much larger number of male cases and the inclusion of female cases from sources other than working class life writing (see above p. 5), but they could be read as suggesting that gender was of second-order importance in determining a child's experience of industrialisation: boys and girls worked at younger ages in families headed by frail breadwinners, where poverty prompted mothers to work and in the crucible of industrialisation when demand for child labour was at its peak. The gender variable itself suggests that overall boys might have started work six months earlier than their sisters, but the coefficient is only significant at the 10 per cent level and the effect may well be explained by the concentration of the female cases in the later cohorts.

The quantitative evidence also shows a large difference in the range of jobs offered to boys and girls by the industrialising economy. Boys were employed in agriculture, mining, factories, workshops, commerce, services, and at sea, and many jobs offered opportunities to move up albeit attenuated career ladders. More important still, apprenticeships gave lucky boys access to jobs as artisans, while the army and navy, while dangerous, also offered avenues for upward mobility.⁹⁵ Girls' first and subsequent jobs were much more constricted. In the early

cohorts and in rural areas, farm service was practically the only job on offer once hand-spinning had disappeared. In the factory districts, millwork offered new opportunities but these displaced those in domestic manufacturing. In regions where heavy industry dominated, things were even worse, as Elizabeth Andrews emphasised.⁹⁶ Elizabeth was saved from the heavy work locally available by her parents paying ten shillings a quarter for her to learn dressmaking. But only the fortunate few, whose parents had the wherewithal, might be apprenticed, some 12 per cent in the life accounts data set, and even then, in limited trades.⁹⁷ Over the whole period under study, much the most common first (and subsequent) occupation was domestic service, which accounted for 28 per cent of first jobs where these are known. Service trained girls for a future as a wife and mother while providing some income or at least board and lodging in the meantime. The dominance of this single job is unparalleled in the labour market for boys. In the narrow range of jobs available and girls' concentration in domestic service, workshops and textile factories, the evidence from the life accounts is consistent with the occupations of children aged 10–14 in the 1851 census.⁹⁸

The qualitative evidence casts light on the forces underpinning limited occupational options by identifying a neglected but major factor limiting girls' capabilities: the threat of sexual predation. Historians are well aware of the prevalence of sexual harassment in the past, but its implications for women's choice of jobs and feelings of security at work as well as for their wellbeing more generally have rarely been investigated. While the men's writings were replete with an account of violence on the streets, in schools, workplaces and even homes, there were only a handful of cases where sexual molestation was suggested. Women suggested greater danger, and given their reluctance to engage with sexual themes or acknowledge impropriety (even as a victim), reported instances must be the tip of the iceberg.

Mary Saxby's (b. 1738) peripatetic life was punctuated by a series of encounters ranging from harassment to rape.⁹⁹ As a self-acknowledged 'vagrant', Saxby was particularly vulnerable but women were at risk even when about their legitimate business. Christian Watt (b. 1833) reported that '[F]ishwives were often attacked both for money and carnal knowledge' and armed herself with a gutting knife for self-defence.¹⁰⁰ Travel to work was fraught with danger. When their father obtained a job as a head gardener, the girls in the Hodgson family (b. 1890s) faced a long walk to the mill where they worked. 'It was dark when we went and dark going home . . . we three girls didn't like it, and Mother didn't like us having to do it either'.¹⁰¹ Men known to girls were often just as much a threat as those who may have been lurking in the dark.

Domestic servants were not immune, as described by Christian Watt, who was combative in return:

One morning while giving a hand to make the beds . . . a Captain Leslie Melville put his arms around me and embraced me. I dug my claws into his face and with all the force I could I tore for all I was worth; his journey into flirtation land cost him the skin of his nose.¹⁰²

For less forceful characters, it was better not to encounter such dangerous situations, so when teenager Louise Jermy (b. 1877) went into domestic service, her

stepmother's advice was never to let a man enter if alone in the house. Lucy Luck (b. 1848) had no choice when a strange man forced entry but was saved by the intervention of the large farm dog!¹⁰³ Others were not so lucky. As today, girls without parental protection were particularly vulnerable. Ellen Johnston (b. 1832) hints at abuse by her stepfather.¹⁰⁴ Sally Marcroft (b. 1801) was impregnated by the son of a weaver with whom she was boarded as an orphaned pauper.¹⁰⁵ Lucy Luck (b. 1848), on graduation from the workhouse, was found a job where she was constantly preyed upon:

... the place of service [the poor law officer] had found for me was a public house. ... The mistress was very good to me but the master was one of the worst who walked God's earth. Always fighting with his wife ... he would beat that woman shamefully ... But that was not the worst of him. That man who had a wife and was a father to three little children, did all he could, time after time, to try and ruin me, a poor orphan only fifteen years old. He would boast to me, and even tell me the names of other girls he had carried on with. God alone kept me from falling a victim to that wretched man, for I could not have been my own keeper¹⁰⁶

Even more appalling, Emma Smith, a Cornish waif (b. 1886), was abandoned by her mother to a hurdy-gurdy man, for whom she gathered the coins tossed by sympathetic onlookers. She provides a chilling account of his abuse:

... This beast – old enough to be my grandfather – grabbed hold of me, a child of about six years of age, if I was that. He undid some of my clothing and behaved in a disgusting way. Presently he said, 'Don't tell Ma or Charlie what I've done, or something awful will happen'. As he said this his face was so evil and threatening that I was overwhelmed with fear.¹⁰⁷

Few suffered such horrendous abuse, but fear of assault was common and had significant effects on what girls were able to do and to be.

Girls sought to avoid situations that placed them in danger and to guard against behaviour that threatened their reputations. Workplaces where the sexes mixed were widely regarded as promoting immorality and prudent girls shunned such exposure.¹⁰⁸ The abhorrence of underground work in coalmines and the bad reputation of factory work stemmed from women and girls' employment alongside men to whom they were not related. Elizabeth Andrews' (b. 1882) revulsion for the brickyards or screens was not only prompted by the hard and dirty work involved but also by the rough clientele. Similarly, agricultural fieldwork was judged damaging once girls reached puberty. Thus, Jane Bowden (b. 1811) explained that when she was bound out as a farm servant as a child she was 'employed in out-door work' but when she reached puberty '... I was kept entirely to the house'.¹⁰⁹ Another observer described girls working in the fields as 'poor things ... they look so mauled'.¹¹⁰ Service in public houses could also bring girls into bad company and threaten reputations. Hannah Cullwick (b. 1833) obtained a place at the Lion Hotel but her father 'thought it was not good for me at a public house and I was to give warning'. When Hannah tried to return to her previous mistress

she was informed that it was 'not respectable to have a girl out of a public house' and 'felt frightened rather at that'.¹¹¹ Lucy Luck (b. 1848), a workhouse child, was destined for such disreputable work: 'What did it matter? I was only a drunkard's child. But if they had found me a good place for a start, things might have been better for me'.¹¹²

As these cases make clear, the need for circumspection in the face of potential predation and threats to reputation made negotiating the world of work especially difficult. Isabella Smith (b. 1890) went to her first hiring fair aged 16 and was frightened when 'a horrible scruffy-looking man' accosted her asking if she was for hire.¹¹³ Families could protect daughters in their search for employment and supervise arrangements once made, but not all fathers were as scrupulous as Mr Cullwick above. While Mrs Hodgson was as anxious as her daughters about their long walk back and forth to work in the dark, Anita wondered why her father sacrificed their safety for the rent-free house.¹¹⁴ Perhaps mothers were sensitive to the dangers of such exposure because they too had been pestered and threatened: it was a gendered experience. In contrast, while Captain Cowper seemingly regarded his oldest daughter Agnes (b. 1874) as 'a nursemaid to help her mother in looking after his progeny' and vetoed her apprenticeship in an upmarket retail establishment, he did not demur at employing her in what her younger sister considered unsavoury circumstances dockside. Agnes, 'instinctively ladylike', was humiliated even endangered by being sent to serve paraffin in a dockside chandler's store and to sell straw beds to sailors on Cowper's ship.¹¹⁵

Intimidation pushed girls into the ghetto of jobs judged respectable. Coerced by propriety, girls crowded into certain jobs with adverse effects on their economic prospects. Crowding made it easier for employers to discriminate, and harder for girls to earn a living wage; all too frequently they remained partially dependent on fathers or the state. They then graduated to a second kind of dependence, when as married women they were responsible for unpaid work in the home. Without independence, women and girls lost self-esteem and lacked voice even within the household. A vicious circle eroding female capabilities was set in motion.

5. Girls and schooling

Child labour was associated with a dip in educational standards. The ability to sign on marriage certificates declined in the early nineteenth century, particularly in the factory districts where there was extensive employment for younger children.¹¹⁶ But data on school attendance before the spread of National and British Schools in the late nineteenth century is fragmentary. The autobiographies provide fresh evidence to generate estimates of school attendance in years by cohort and gender.

Table 3 reports girls' years of schooling by cohort in comparison with the means for the larger male sample. Boys' and girls' years of schooling both declined in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries only to recover after 1850, reflecting the results on age at starting work and the independent findings on literacy. Moreover, consistent with the gender gap in literacy, girls had less education until the mid-nineteenth century by which time subsidised schooling was increasingly available and girls' right to share in its growth increasingly recognised. The evidence from the cohort of girls born 1879–1892, not available from the men's autobiographies,

Table 3. Years of schooling, girls from the life accounts data set compared with boys from working-class autobiographies

	Girls: mean duration of schooling (sample size)	Girls: mean duration of schooling excluding evidence from Parliamentary Papers (sample size)	Boys: mean duration of schooling (sample size)
1627–1790	1.97 (19)	2.08 (18)	3.74 (102)
1791–1820	1.11 (33)	1.34 (16)	3.09 (130)
1821–1850	1.77 (38)	2.01 (21)	2.80 (159)
1851–1878	4.39 (36)	4.47 (34)	4.41 (157)
1879–1892	7.37 (35)	7.37 (35)	n/a

Source: See text and Humphries, 2010, p. 314.

shows a second jump in years of schooling, suggesting a clear change in ideas about childhood and education, coinciding with compulsory education and consistent with the distinct break with early working. Again, the second column replicates the analysis for the sample without cases from the Parliamentary Papers. While the samples are smaller in the middle cohorts the same trend is evident.

Regression analysis was also used on the sample of men's autobiographies, to explore the correlates in this case with years of schooling. The results were consistent with historians' expectations, other fragmentary evidence, and the findings about starting work. The time variables traced out a U-shaped curve which mirrored age at starting work. Schooling declined for the cohorts at the centre of industrialisation but then recovered as the nineteenth century wore on. Fathers' willingness and ability to play the role of breadwinner was also significant with the sons of fathers with a higher status and probably better paid jobs attending school for longer. Indicators of poverty such as a working mother cut schooling short just as they prompted early entry into the labour market. The availability of free or subsidised schooling not surprisingly extended duration. The smaller sample of women's writings and the more limited information they contain mean that only an attenuated analysis is possible as reported in Table 4. This relates years of schooling for both girls and boys born before 1879 separately and then in a combined sample to some of the most obvious correlates.

Most of the explanatory variables have similar effects for both girls and boys, though there are subtle differences. The time trend is again quadratic reflecting the dip in mean years of schooling in the middle birth cohorts. The breadwinner variable is positive and significant; daughters, as well as sons benefitted educationally from a father who was willing and able to support his family. A working mother appears associated with reduced schooling but the effect is not significant. The local availability of a free school, although positive for both girls and boys, has a larger coefficient and is only significant for girls, suggesting that 'school pence' were a serious deterrent to girls' attendance whereas the opportunity cost of forgone wages was more important in the case of boys. The gender dummy in the combined sample is positive and significant reflecting the more extensive schooling acquisition by boys shown in the cohort averages. These results are all intuitively understandable:

Table 4. Proximate determinants of years of schooling

	Girls	Boys	All children
Constant (SE)	1964.670** (480.611)	512.286** (118.532)	630.113** (114.579)
Date of birth (SE)	-2.191** (0.531)	-0.573** (0.132)	-0.704** (0.127)
Date of birth ² (SE)	0.001** (0.0002)	0.0002** (0.00004)	0.0002** (0.00004)
Bread winner (SE)	0.032** (0.012)	0.028** (0.005)	0.030** (0.005)
Mother's economic status (SE)	-0.378 (0.526)	-0.341 (0.221)	-0.380 (0.204)
Total Children (SE)	-0.161** (0.073)	-0.098** (0.033)	-0.099** (0.030)
Free School (SE)	2.513** (0.871)	0.852 (0.545)	1.300** (0.460)
Gender (SE)	n/a	n/a	0.675** (0.278)
Sample size	78	397	475
R ² adjusted	0.381	0.120	0.175
SSE	2.200	2.190	2.210
F stat (sig.)	9.013 (0.000)	10.001 (0.000)	15.391 (0.000)

*Sig. \leq 0.10.**Sig. \leq 0.05.

girls' education was considered much less important since boys were the breadwinners of the future. Hence, boys received more schooling and it was less limited by cost. Free education, and *a fortiori* the Board schools of the late nineteenth century, enabled girls to catch up with their brothers.

The most telling difference by gender relates to the effect of the size of the sibling group. Total children in the family impact negatively on schooling for both genders but have a bigger bite for girls whereas its effect on age at starting work was small and insignificant (p. 15). A new baby pulled girls out of school not necessarily to work but to help mothers and provide childcare: more evidence of gendered predetermination.

The qualitative evidence expands on these findings. Like most men, women enjoyed school: '... we were all happy there' reported Bessie Harvey (b. 1875), 'I loved school from an early age' said Elizabeth Andrews (b. 1882), and Anita Hughes (b. 1892) was not alone in weeping upon graduation.¹¹⁷ Like men too, women were proud of their intellectual attainments. Barbara Farquahar (b. 1800) boasted that she was an early and fluent reader though with only two years of schooling, while Marianne Farningham (b. 1834) reported that she was considered 'rather a prodigy!'¹¹⁸ Women's memories of school were not clouded by the violence men remembered as wreaked upon them by both other pupils and their teachers. True, Minnie Frisby (b. 1877) relived her shame that her underdrawers showed below her dress and the boys said they were falling down, and Bessie Harvey (b. 1875) reported being caned on her hand for talking, but these were mild treatments in comparison with the baiting and punishments meted out to boys.¹¹⁹ Gender stereotypes dictated the nature of chastisement: boys were beaten, whereas in Bessie's school, naughty girls had to go to the headmistress's house to polish her stair rods, wash up and dust!

The strategies used to secure a modicum of education for sons were also deployed in the interests of daughters. Attendance when very young, compressed schooling into the brief interlude before beginning work and provided childcare freeing mothers for other work. Maria Payne's (b. 1881) elder sister and brother attended a Dame School in Pool Village in 1879 run by a local woman in her own house. She had six pupils whose average age was three and who paid 2d each per week. They were taught the alphabet and figures but spent most of the morning playing games and were spared afternoon school, a schedule surprisingly like a modern kindergarten. Maria looked forward to this school but the old Dame died so despite being only two years and nine months old, she went with her siblings to the National School.¹²⁰ Starting young and leaving young was standard.¹²¹

Marianne Farningham (b. 1834) also attended a local Dame School and longed to continue to a day school but 'the charges were too high for my father's means' while the local National School was off-limits to non-conformist children.¹²² Thus, Marianne's early lessons 'came from our parents, chiefly of course, our mother'.¹²³ Other relatives, in Marianne's case her co-resident paternal grandmother, also provided instruction.¹²⁴ For some girls, home-schooling, most often delivered by their mothers and integrated into the day's domestic schedule, was their only source of learning.

...if it be considered that the whole labour of the house devolved upon our mother, it will be believed that this could be no light task; nothing however was allowed to interrupt our lessons: and it was no uncommon thing to see her busy at the washing tub while we by turns took our place beside her; one child would be found attending to the baby, another gathering sticks and keeping the fire alive, a third engaged in reading, and a fourth bringing water from a pure soft spring, at some distance from the house; while our eldest brother assisted father in the gardens.¹²⁵

Others benefitted from Sunday schools which were free and with part time and winter attendance could be combined with working.¹²⁶ Christian Watt (b. 1833), for example, had to start work aged eight but continued at school in winter 'when fishing was slack'.¹²⁷

Even in the same families, girls lost out on education. Old Sally (b. 1800), the female half of an elderly couple described by Flora Thompson, never went to school. There was no dame school sufficiently close but her brother attended a night school run by the vicar of an adjoining parish and he shared his smidgeon of scholarship, teaching Sally to spell. Thereafter, 'she had been left to tread the path of learning alone'.¹²⁸ Her husband was 'a little more advanced' as he too had enjoyed the benefit of the night school first hand. Similarly, Janet Bathgate's (b. 1810) schooling was fragmented by episodes in service, her earnings, partially at least, used to fund her brother's apprenticeship.¹²⁹

The content and quality of schooling sometimes differed. Agnes Cowper (b. 1874), one of few writers not to enjoy her schooldays, attended a church school while her brothers were sent to a 'Higher Grade School'. Lacking any foundation, she was at sea with arithmetic, and her capabilities in other subjects did not compensate because an ability to add and subtract was viewed as essential as girls in her social milieu were destined to 'become either dressmakers or milliners, as the day of

the girl clerks and the stenographer had not yet dawned'.¹³⁰ Agnes identified the nub of differential treatment: the limited job opportunities available to girls (see above pp. 13). Apprenticeships, which remained the gateway to skilled jobs, were rare and costly for girls and limited to a narrow range of trades. Agnes hoped to go into a retail business which meant serving a two-year apprenticeship, but on broaching this with her parents was told that her place was in the home, in contrast to the opportunities afforded the boys of the family. Captain Cowpers refused to allow Agnes to follow her modest dreams and insisted instead that she help her mother in the endless domestic round of his large and underfunded household. Her resignation in the face of this ruling provides an apposite bridge into a discussion of girls' negotiation of family relationships in their attempts to live life as they wanted.

There was much to overcome. First and foremost, it is clear that girls' schooling was often interrupted by childcare responsibilities as families grew in size and new babies arrived. Despite her desire to become a teacher, Elizabeth Andrews (b. 1882) reported that she 'had to leave school at 12 owing to our large family and the coming ninth baby'. Andrews saw this little sister's death as a reprieve: '... I had a chance to return to school for another year'.¹³¹ Isabella Smith (b. 1890) similarly reported that after the arrival of a baby brother, the ninth child in the family, 'I didn't go to school any more ... I had to stay at home and help'.¹³² Responsibilities were deepened and darkened if mothers died. When Catherine Maclaughlin (b. 1885) was ten her mother died in childbirth. Thereafter, her schooling was patchy, with odd days off to do the baking, and soon tapering away as she went part and then full time at a local mill. These times she remembered as 'very hard ... looking after the boys and trying to look after the house'.¹³³ Shouldering such premature duties left their scars, as discussed below.

6. Fathers, mothers and daughters

As we have seen, a father's role as the economic provider while giving him status and authority was not easily combined with family life and attention to children and became less so by the end of the eighteenth century with the separation of home and work and the lengthening of working time. Bonds of affection, holding men in place as breadwinners, were eroded by their work-related detachment from their families. Reciprocally, as fathers became detached and unfamiliar, children were less able to overlook authoritarian or harsh behaviour. If mothers became breadwinners, then they too could be pulled away from their families.¹³⁴ But the economic structure of households meant that it was almost always men who became alienated, a tendency reinforced by the gendering and adulting of men's leisure activities. Fathers, even if they put in long hours, or perhaps because of such industriousness, after work often decamped to the pub or working men's club or sought amusement in sports or local politics. The former pursuits were most common and resented not only for robbing families of their fathers' company but also for their waste of scarce resources particularly if intoxication left men sullen rather than jovial. On Saturdays, Catherine Maclaughlin's (b. 1885) father, who worked long shifts, finished early but rather than head home, he would linger in 'Jack Riley's' where a good part of his wages went to pay off his weekly slate.¹³⁵

Mary Gawthorpe's (1881) father was secretary of the local Conservative Party, a respectable role, but as it involved much drinking and spreading of bonhomie, it threatened the family's stability.¹³⁶ To the extent that fathers were able to involve sons in activities defined as 'masculine', including work, they were able to bridge this chasm and build relationships.¹³⁷ This was more difficult with daughters.

There were exceptions. Minnie Frisby (1877) was close to her father who 'used to idolise and spoil me'.¹³⁸ Significantly, Mr Frisby worked at home combining occasional nail-making with harvesting and selling watercress, his familiarity with his children reinforced by their involvement in his activities. Adored as she was, Minnie had to leave school aged 12 as 'school was'nt (sic) work', and she was needed in the market-garden.¹³⁹ Some men managed to retain loving relationships with children even when spending time away. Ruth Mynachlog's (b. 1856) father went harvesting in Herefordshire in the summers of her childhood, but his return was joyously celebrated with the treats and welcome cash that he brought home.¹⁴⁰ More typical were Margaret Bondfield (b. 1873) or Edith Evan's (b. 1903) fathers or Captain Cowper. The first was a decent provider but so distracted by his responsibilities at work, that he became 'a stranger who punished with quotations and a slipper'.¹⁴¹ The second was a hard-living coal miner completely disinterested in domesticity.

My father at that time worked in the pit, and we didn't see much of him. He came home very dirty and always had a bath in a zinc bath in front of a big coal fire. I used to wash his back and then dry him down with a large rough towel. Mother would be making his meal after which he would go to the working men's club. When he came home we would be in bed, so we didn't see him much.¹⁴²

Captain Cowper's job of necessity took him away for long periods, and Daisy the younger sister who was only five when he died could only remember him in isolated incidents, but the memories were grim. 'He was stern – harsh, I should judge – to both his crews and his children, a characteristic that was not lessened as he grew older'.¹⁴³ The authoritarian harshness that laced Bondfield and Cowper's fathering, in other cases and especially if fuelled by alcohol, could explode into abuse. Annie Auty's (b. 1830) dedication to Temperance was founded on her father's drunken violence. 'My father worked hard, but yet he drank harder ... and when in drink, he was like a fiend let loose'.¹⁴⁴

In contrast to distant and disinterested fathers, mothers were ever present and always involved. They dominated memories of infancy. Bondfield (b. 1873) says that for five years her 'world consisted of Mother, [and brothers] Ernest and Frank'.¹⁴⁵ Men and women remembered their mothers' concern for their health and welfare. Care provided in illness constituted a *motif*. When Mrs Whyman (b. 1878) suffered rheumatic and then typhoid fever her mother was the only one to enter her sick room.¹⁴⁶ Similarly, when Bessie Harvey (b. 1875) and her siblings all had scarlet fever together in one bed; 'no one would come near except the Doctor and poor old mother ...'. Five-year old Alice died.¹⁴⁷

Mothers toiled against dirt, fighting off lice, bedbugs and other threats to well-being. They struggled to see their children warmly and well dressed and often

against all odds they provided food. It was usually of a plain kind and barely enough, but occasionally meals to remember, like the ‘... best of all’ suet balls that triumphed over ‘pig’s liver with potatoes and onions and sage and butter poured on top’ or ‘stews with lots of onions and carrots and turnips’ in Daisy Cowper’s (b. 1890) memories.¹⁴⁸ Probably because they came later to wage similar battles, women were more sensitive to these everyday contributions, and although both men and women recognised the hard work and sacrifices that went into mothering, they weighed the contributions differently. Mary King (b. 1905), reflected on the relative contributions of her parents coming down firmly in her mother’s favour. The bad housing and primitive sanitation, ‘... wis lot o’ work for ma mother. She wis a hard workin’ woman’. She provided a telling example: cleaning out the dry toilet. ‘[O]h, it would be ma mother likely that cleaned oot the toilet ... ma mother was the worker ... ma father widnae dae it’.¹⁴⁹

Love for mothers was founded in the care and attention they showed towards their children, and the dexterity they exhibited in managing the household finances and ensuring order, but women’s assessment reflected or anticipated their shouldering of responsibility for these same duties.¹⁵⁰ Only the women’s remembrances provide intimate detail on the physical effort that went into raising healthy children. Margaret Whyman (b. 1878) reported with pride that her mother bore 17 children, all lived, and were large bonny babies able to walk when only a year old! She went on to ascribe this health to their mother’s breast feeding ‘with no recourse to dum-mies or teats’.¹⁵¹

Nor was the relationship entirely material. Autobiographers remembered mothers for the pleasure they brought into their lives through play, reading, conversation and shared ideas and aspirations. Cowper’s (b. 1890) eulogy to her mother emphasised her liveliness and engagement ‘for it added so much colour to the lives of us children, and life might have been dull, all things considered’.¹⁵² Marianne Farningham’s (1834) vividly remembered when her mother gave the children skipping ropes and the fun they had playing together, fun which heralded a terrible fear:

We did not know how to use them, [the skipping ropes] so she showed us on a never-to-be-forgotten evening. We stood around, merrily laughing at the sight of our mother skipping like a girl, while we counted the times she kept it up. Suddenly she dropped the rope and leaned against the wall, holding her handkerchief to her lips, and I noticed that it was stained with blood¹⁵³

She records her sudden terror spontaneously comparing the value of mother and father in her childish life: ‘That was the beginning of the end... she was so much more to us than our father...’. Consumed with foreboding, Marianne prayed ‘Lord, if you must have one, please take our father to heaven, and leave us our dear mother’.¹⁵⁴ Marianne’s mother died on Christmas day and thereafter she could not bear the sound of Christmas bells and carol singers. As in other cases, her mother’s passing represented a sea change in her life as she ‘grew at once from a child to a woman’ pressed by the responsibilities that then devolved upon her.¹⁵⁵

Of course, some women, like some men, could not abide their mothers. The early chapters of Hannah Mitchell’s (b. 1871) autobiography detail her battles

with her domineering and short-tempered mother, an antagonism fed by Mitchell's own rebelliousness.¹⁵⁶ However, Daisy Cowper's (b. 1890) testimonial is more representative: 'I cannot express how I loved her, deeply and unwaveringly, from my earliest recollection – (and still do, bless her dear memory)'.¹⁵⁷ Love was manifest too in the desolation expressed when mothers died: mournful accounts of a mother's death providing a way of preserving her spirit in the stories.¹⁵⁸ 'Whilst my mother was alive I had someone to go to for a kind word and to tell my troubles, but now I had no one, for she was gone' wrote Lucy Luck (b. 1848). Hannah Cullwick (b. 1833) was bereft at not having said goodbye:

... nobody told me of Mother's being so ill else nothing'd o'kept me away. I sh'd o'run across them fields & all the three mile in ½ an hour. I *know*. But when Philip Blud come on the Saturday evening & said she was dead I thought it was no use, tho' I ax'd to go, & all my strength seem'd gone.¹⁵⁹

If the deaths of mothers were traumatic events for both men and women, death in childbirth was a tragedy in a different key. While it robbed men of mothers, scarring their childhoods, or of wives, leaving them burdened with motherless children, for women it had an additional frightening implication: it threatened a fate that they might share. Men, rarely present during childbirth focussed on the outcomes of maternal mortality, while the women's stories provide the mundane contexts, the painful labours, the stillbirths, and the crude medical interventions. Few men were as callous as Granny Keens' (b. 1852) husband. When she was having 'a very difficult time' at the birth of her third child, he walked his pony and trap up and down outside in the cold, so later told his wife that 'he had the worse job'.¹⁶⁰ Most men were simply absent, distance ensured by work, gendered boundaries and medical norms. They came on the scene only at the end, bit parts in the happiness or sadness that ensued, as is made clear in Catherine Maclaughlin's (b. 1885) moving account of her mother's death.

I remember the day very clearly carrying my baby brother who was not 2 years old to the priest's house a mile away, at the request of a neighbour who had come to see her, but it was too late when we got back home her face was covered up. Then I had to run to the foundry to give my father the bad news. As in other times the bed had been brought downstairs so she remained there until her funeral two days afterwards, and we lived in the scullery.¹⁶¹

The story which shows most clearly how childbirth bound women and girls together in shared trepidation is provided by Alice Maud Chase (b. 1880) in her history of the rambling Moody family. Alice's mother had married a much older man who had many children by his first wife. These included a stepdaughter Lily, who Mrs Moody loved 'more than her own daughter' and another, Amy, who had grown up as a sister to Alice and her siblings. Lily had married and was having her third child at the same time as her stepmother was pregnant with her ninth while Amy was about to give birth to her first. So, three women in the family faced the strain of pregnancy, the travail of labour and the dangers of childbirth together. Lily was unwell during the pregnancy, gave birth to a

stillborn child and then died in less than 24 hours. Shocked and distressed, Mrs Moody's 'moans and wails ... nearly broke our hearts', and 'life seemed to stand still suddenly' for the Moody women and girls who sooner or later had to face the same test that had torn Lily away.¹⁶²

Nor was it only birth that drew women and girls together. Pregnancy was probably invisible to sons for in the prudish nineteenth century women were secretive. Daughters were more aware. Even as a child, Edith Evans (b. 1903) recognised the toll on her mother's health: 'Mother was getting less able to cope with a baby coming every second year'.¹⁶³ Compassion deepened with adult reflection. While remembering their living conditions, Edith appreciated afresh the hardships her mother faced when pregnant. The toilet was at the back of the Evans' house, at the end of a wall topping. The fastest access was through a small window in their cellar, the only other route being out of the front door, down the street and through a ginnel and then only to less private shared accommodation. 'How my mother got out of the window, especially during her pregnancies, I don't know'.¹⁶⁴

Empathy with pregnancy and childbirth was compounded by recognition of the strain caused by additional children to already stretched family resources of time and money. Women acknowledged their outright hostility as girls to additional babies, a hostility that was deepened if the birth involved withdrawal from school. When a seventh baby was born into the Hodgson family it was three days before Ermytrude, the eldest daughter would look at him: 'Being the eldest she had lots to do and said there were enough to look after without another one'.¹⁶⁵ Girls contemplated the burdens of maternity and dreamed of a different fate. Christian Watt (b. 1833) rejected one suitor: 'it is stupid to marry young and have bairns strung around your neck like tinkies' pails and be bogged down for the rest of your life'. She resolved to be 'an old maid' for '[T]here were several in Broadsea, sitting in blissful solitude and the polished brightness of their hoosies' which seemed infinitely more attractive than her own crowded home with seven noisy brothers.¹⁶⁶

Not only did additional children draw mothers and daughters together, it drove fathers and daughters apart. The strains imposed from constant additions to overcrowded underfunded homes were laid at their door. Ermy Hughes exchanged words with her father over the arrival of a new baby whom she declared was surplus to requirements.¹⁶⁷ As a rather knowing teenager, Edith Evans (b. 1903) became 'thoroughly ashamed of my big family and really disgusted with my father'. She could hardly bring herself to 'talk right to him'.¹⁶⁸ Daisy Cowper (b. 1890) was even harsher. When told that her father's ship had sunk and he would not be coming home she felt 'sympathy for mother's tears, not grief for a lost parent'. She despised her father for his inadequate breadwinning and resort to alcohol and disliked him for his authoritarian behaviour, but, more importantly, she resented his impositions on her mother whom he left pregnant whenever he returned to sea. Reflecting on her mother's bereavement, she concluded: 'Mother must surely have been relieved to know that child-bearing was over ...'.¹⁶⁹

Although rarely discussed directly in either men or women's life writings, the tensions around sexual activity, its consequences, in terms of additional children, and the associated gender gap in pain and pleasure are suggested in these excerpts.¹⁷⁰ Both men and women recognised that another child, 'the prospect of another little mouth to feed', was as Granny Keens (b. 1852) suggested 'quite a

tragedy'. Most men did not dwell on the links between such misfortunes and their marital intimacy and looked stoically forward. Women, who paid the higher price, were less tolerant. Granny remembered how a married brother would come home with a swollen face and their mother would greet him with 'toothache again; John you won't get any sympathy from me, what do you want this time, a boy or a girl'.¹⁷¹ It was a rare man who like Elizabeth Rignall's (b. 1894) father shouldered responsibility for family size. The father's co-workers were ribbing a mate whose wife had just delivered her tenth child. One man remarked that she always seemed 'ailing or carrying'. In what Elizabeth calls the 'uninhibited way of a group of young men' they then teased her father about his solitary child.

This proved too much for Father's volatile temper, and he retorted, 'sooner than subject my wife to such misery, I'd ----' and a really drastic solution followed; one that was actually handed out to Peter Abelard all those centuries ago ... Yes I mean castration, although Father as uninhibited by this time as his companions, expressed it in terms more crude and forceful.¹⁷²

Fathers' identifying with their daughters' wellbeing could break the male mould. Elizabeth Bryson (b. 1880) came to see the defects in her charming but feckless father, her grandfather's verdict a factor in removing the scales from her eyes. Her mother, he would say, was good and clever but she had made one mistake: her choice of husband. What had she had since then Elizabeth's grandfather asked but trouble. '[S]air trauchled with too many bairns. Seven bairns, and now no money to feed them'.¹⁷³ Of her mother's courage and love in the face of such difficulties Elizabeth reported she could 'hardly speak'.¹⁷⁴

7. Conclusions

Children's experience during this century of economic change as seen through working-class life stories has revealed similarities in the experience of girls and boys. Both grew up in mainly nuclear families but with ties to wider kin and to neighbours; both participated in the boom in child labour that marked the classic era of the industrial revolution, indeed the narrower job options open to girls probably crowded them into domestic manufacturing and the early factories, leaving Maynes and her co-editors hypothesis that girls played a distinctive role in Europe's economic development (p. 2) open to further investigation; and, both benefitted from the spread of education in the mid-nineteenth century followed by the establishment of compulsory schooling post-1870. But there were also important differences. Girls had less schooling at least until the mid-nineteenth century, fewer training possibilities and reduced job options. Moreover, although both boys and girls were close to mothers whom they saw as the lynchpins of home and family these ties had different roots and implications. Boys were protective as well as admiring while girls saw in their mothers' struggles their own tales foretold. Thus, while boys anticipated their manhood by contributing to household resources seeing themselves and being seen as second-order breadwinners, girls anticipated their womanhood by sharing in domestic labour, household management, childcare, and opportunistic and casual employment. These differences can all be traced back to the ways in which the households of the era interfaced with

the economy, trapping men and women in spheres of activity which, while never entirely separate, often failed to dovetail.

From the eighteenth century as reflected in some of the earliest life accounts, families were heavily reliant on their male heads for economic support, and this nascent male breadwinner family system entrenched as places of work became increasingly separated from homes, and more formalised and regulated, while hours lengthened. Historians have emphasised the ways in which these structural changes made it more difficult for wives and especially mothers to engage in economic activity rendering them increasingly dependent, a tendency reflected in the narratives. But husbands and fathers struggled to wrench a *family* income from the labour market. Women and children's expectations of support from husbands and fathers ran ahead of reality. Men died, deserted, fell ill and took to drink. In this paper, I have emphasised how fathers tried to fulfil the role of breadwinner through industriousness, by working harder and longer hours and by tramping in search of higher pay, but how ironically, these stratagems detached them from their families and undermined their commitments. Growing up in these frail male breadwinner families, with their tensions and contradictions, gendered the identities of several generations of men and women. As future breadwinners, boys' education and training were privileged; as future wives and mothers, girls learned by helping at home or as servants in other people's households or worked temporarily in gender-segregated workplaces. Both boys and girls had to work at young ages if fathers stumbled in their task of breadwinning or if families were large, though in the latter case girls' baby-minding could substitute for earning. Both too loved and admired mothers though these feelings were grounded in different familial experience. Girls' affection was nurtured in domestic intimacy where they observed mothers negotiate support from often frail and sometimes begrudging breadwinners, stretch resources to cover needs, seize opportunities to augment resources and bear and raise babies who were seemingly imposed upon them.

The male autobiographers who in later life took their childhood experiences into politics, campaigned to reform economy and society through trade unionism, protective labour legislation, enfranchisement, compulsory education and cooperative societies. Their female counterparts, reflecting women's life chances, are fewer, less celebrated, usually operated on a local stage, and while sharing the men's objectives extended to include women's suffrage, often focussed on 'domestic' issues: the need for pithead baths, family allowances paid to mothers, nursery schools, maternity care and midwifery services. Such issues look unglamorous even unimportant, like the 'poor boring' lives of the women whose experience brought them to wider attention, but their legacy is a permanently widened progressive agenda and social policies that have improved the lives for countless men, women and children.

Acknowledgements. I thank the three anonymous referees for their constructively critical and very detailed reports: some of the most helpful I have ever received in almost 50 years' experience of peer review. I thank Ginger Frost and Julie-Marie Strange for their comments on an earlier draft, Deborah Oxley for many long discussions of related topics and the Trustees of the Ellen McArthur Fund for inviting me to give the McArthur Lectures in Cambridge in 2016 in which these ideas were first developed. Most of all, I thank the cohorts of students who have taken my course on 'History from Below' in the Oxford Graduate Economic and Social History Programme. Their interest, ability and enthusiasm never cease to warm my heart.

Notes

- 1 E. Andrews, *A woman's work is never done* (Cymric Democrat Publishing Society – South Glamorgan, 1957), 15; M.-A. Ashford, *Life of a licensed victualler's daughter, written by herself* (Saunders and Otley, 1844), 20.
- 2 The formative contribution remains I. Pinchbeck, *Women workers and the industrial revolution 1750–1850* (London, Virago, 1981). See also K. Honeyman, *Women, gender and industrialisation in England, 1700–1870* (St Martin's – New York, 2000); J. Burnette, *Gender work and wages in industrial revolution Britain* (Cambridge University Press – Cambridge, 2008); P. Sharpe, *Adapting to capitalism: working women in the English economy, 1700–1850* (Macmillan – London, 1996); S. Horrell and J. Humphries, 'Women's labour force participation and the transition to the male-breadwinner family', *Economic History Review* 48 (1995), 89–117. More focussed studies include R. Wall, 'Some implications of the earnings, income and expenditure patterns of married women in populations in the past', in J. Henderson and R. Wall eds., *Poor women and children in the European past* (Routledge – London, 1994); A. M. Froide, 'Marital status as a category of difference: single women and widows in early modern England', in J. M. Bennett and A. M. Froide eds., *Singlewomen in the European past 1250–1800* (University of Pennsylvania Press – Philadelphia, 1999); B. Moring and R. Wall, *Widows in European economy and society 1600–1920* (Boydell – Woodbridge and Suffolk, 2017); and, N. Goose ed., *Women's work in industrial England: regional and local perspectives* (Local Population Studies – Hatfield, 2007).
- 3 For a discussion of the gender bias in general studies of youth, see the introduction M. J. Maynes, B. Soland and C. Benninghaus eds., *Secret gardens, satanic mills. Placing girls in European history* (Indiana University Press – Bloomington and Indianapolis, 2005). Honourable exceptions to this bias include Maynes, Soland and Benninghaus, *Secret gardens* as above; and, M. Gomersall, *Working-class girls in nineteenth-century England: life, work and schooling* (St Martin's Press – New York, 1997). Recent studies of child labour in the British industrial revolution include J. Humphries, *Childhood and child labour in the British industrial revolution* (Cambridge University Press – Cambridge, 2010); S. Horrell and J. Humphries, 'Child work and wages', *Explorations in Economic History* 73 (2019), 101272.
- 4 D. Simonton, 'Bringing up girls: work in preindustrial Europe' in Maynes, Soland and Benninghaus, *Secret gardens*, 23–38; D. Simonton, *A history of European women's work, 1700 to the present* (Routledge – London, 1998); D. Simonton, 'Women and education', in E. Chalus and H. Barker eds., *Women's history, 1700–1850* (Routledge – London, 2005), 33–56; P. Kirby, *Child labour in Britain, 1750–1870* (Palgrave – Basingstoke and Hampshire, 2003); Horrell and Humphries, 'Child work'.
- 5 S. Horrell and D. Oxley, 'Bargaining for basics? Inferring decision making in nineteenth-century British households from expenditure, diet, stature and death', *European Economic History Review* 17 (2013), 147–70.
- 6 Maynes, Soland and Benninghaus, *Secret gardens*, 5.
- 7 D. Simonton, 'Bringing up girls: Work in preindustrial Europe' in Maynes, Soland and Benninghaus, *Secret gardens*, 23–38.
- 8 Humphries, *Childhood and child labour*.
- 9 G. Frost, Review of J. Humphries, *Childhood*, *Journal of British Studies* XX (2011), 517. More generally, Simonton argues that 'the economic nexus of labouring life meant that the image of the child-oriented mother remained alien among the lower classes' in 'Bringing up girls': 26.
- 10 J.-M. Strange, *Fatherhood and the British working class, 1865–1914* (Cambridge University Press – Cambridge, 2015); E. Griffin, 'The emotions of motherhood: love, culture, and poverty in Victorian Britain', *American Historical Review* 123, 1 (2018), 60–85. Ginger Frost also provides legal case materials that demonstrate the particular tensions and stress in the relationship when children were illegitimate, see G. S. Frost, *Illegitimacy in English law and society, 1860–1930* (Manchester University Press – Manchester, 2016).
- 11 Such constraints are best understood within Amartya Sen's 'capabilities approach' which focuses on what people are able to do and to be which he sees as providing barriers to gender equality, see A. Sen, *Inequality re-examined* (Clarendon – Oxford, 1992).
- 12 M. J. Maynes, *Taking the hard road: life course in French and German workers autobiographies in the era of industrialization* (University of North Carolina Press – Chapel Hill, NC, 1995).
- 13 <https://archiveshub.jisc.ac.uk>
- 14 John Burnett introduced teachers and students to proletarian life-writing through excerpts clustered thematically and contextualised using standard sources, see J. Burnett ed., *Destiny obscure: autobiographies of childhood, education, and family from the 1820s to the 1920s* (Allen Lane – London, 1982); J. Burnett ed.,

Useful toil: autobiographies of working people from the 1820s to the 1920s (Allen Lane – London, 1994). David Vincent edited some important writings by nineteenth-century radicals, rescued and saw published one key working-class autobiography and used the sources to explore how working men conceptualised their circumstances, see D. Vincent, *Testaments of radicalism: Memoirs of working-class politicians 1790–1885* (Europa – London, 1977); D. Vincent ed., *The autobiography of a beggar boy* (Europa – London, 1978). D. Vincent, *Bread, knowledge and freedom: a study of nineteenth-century working class autobiography* (Europa – London, 1981). Ellen Ross produced path-breaking work, describing motherhood in deprived families at the turn of the nineteenth century in *Love and toil: motherhood in outcast London, 1870–1918* (Oxford University Press – Oxford, 1993). Carolyn Steedman has used individual memoirs as lenses on working-class life particularly emotional life, see *The radical soldier's tale. John Pearman, 1819–1908* (Routledge – London, 1988); and, *Master and servant. Love and labour in the English industrial age* (Cambridge University Press – Cambridge, 2007). Jane Humphries, as noted, combined qualitative and quantitative methodologies in her analysis of the effects of economic change on working-class boyhood, see Humphries, *Childhood*. Emma Griffin used a similar set of autobiographies, including some by women, to argue for greater optimism. *Liberty's dawn* (Yale – New Haven, 2013) painted the industrial revolution as an era of opportunity and release from social constraints. Jonathan Rose's *The intellectual life of the British working classes* (Yale – New Haven, 2001) used autobiography (and other sources) to find out what and how working people read. Julie-Marie Strange's *Fatherhood* used memoir to challenge dominant assumptions about absent or 'feckless' fathers and sympathetically reintegrate the paternal figure within the emotional life of families. Other work drawing on autobiography is discussed in Humphries, *Childhood*, 14–23.

15 For more detail on methodology, see, J. Humphries, 'Childhood and child labour in the British industrial revolution', *Economic History Review* 66 (2013), 395–418.

16 '[N]o truths either in general or in particular, can be deduced by adding up their contents and dividing by the total number', Vincent, *Bread*, 10, cited in Humphries, *Childhood*, 20. More ambiguously, Helen Rogers and Emily Cumings have argued that 'quantitative approaches to the authors and their writings cannot reveal the complexity of individual lives and are no substitute for close reading and textual analysis', a criticism which leaves room for a combined methodology, see 'Revealing fragments: close and distant reading of working-class autobiography', *Family and Community History* 21 (2018), 180–201.

17 Rogers and Cumings, 'Revealing fragments', 189, 191.

18 In 1700, 25 per cent of women could read and write according to signatures on marriage certificates compared with 40 per cent of men and this gap narrowed over the next 150 years. By 1860, 63 per cent of women were literate and 70 per cent of men. D. Cressey, *Literacy and the social order: reading and writing in Tudor and Stuart England* (Cambridge University Press – Cambridge, 1980); D. Vincent, *Literacy and popular culture in England 1750–1914* (Cambridge University Press – Cambridge, 1989).

19 Hence the autobiographies by politically involved women like Andrews, Bondfield, Bryson, Gawthorpe and Mitchell, by nurses and camp-followers in war zones like Cadwaladr and Exley, and by adventurers like Lacey.

20 E. Oakley, 'The autobiography of Elizabeth Oakley, 1831–1900', *Norfolk Record Society* 56, (1993), 148.

21 R. Pascal, *Design and truth in autobiography* (Garland – New York, 1985).

22 W. J. Jones, 'Editor's note', preceding M. Evans, *Memories of New Quay*, translated from Welsh by Mary Jane Stephenson (Ceredigion Book Society – Aberystwyth, 1961).

23 <http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O70506/sampler-parker-elizabeth/> I thank Kate Heard for drawing my attention to the item.

24 Sources include Reports from Commissioners, On the Employment of Women and Children in Agriculture, Parliamentary Papers, 1843; Reports from Commissioners, Children's Employment (Mines), Parliamentary Papers, 1842; Reports from Commissioners, Children's Employment (Trades and Manufactures), Parliamentary Papers 1843; Children's Employment Commission (1862), Parliamentary Papers, 1867.

25 For example, Elizabeth Rignall provides an extensive account of her mother's childhood and early life in 'All so long ago', TS, Brunel University.

26 H. Mayhew, *London labour and the London poor* (London, Charles Griffin, 1851), Vol. 1; A. Munby, *Diaries* (Trinity College Library – Cambridge); *Working days. Being the personal records of sixteen working men and women written by themselves and edited by Margaret Pollock* (Jonathan Cape – London, 1926).

27 W. Marcroft, *The Marcroft family* (John Heywood – London, 1886); B. Shaw, The family records of Benjamin Shaw of Dent, Dolphinholme and Preston, 1772–1841, in A. G. Crosby ed., *Record Society of Lancashire and Cheshire* (1991).

- 28 The earliest female writer was born in 1667 whereas the earliest male writer was born in 1627, hence the different starting points.
- 29 M. Anderson, *Family structure in nineteenth-century Lancashire* (Cambridge University Press – Cambridge, 1971).
- 30 The Lady Cranworth, 'A Norfolk labourer's wife', *Eastern Counties Magazine and Suffolk Notebook II* (1901), 125.
- 31 M. Cox, Employment of women and children in agriculture, Parliamentary Papers (1843), 89–90; L. Jermy, *The memories of a working woman* (Goose and Sons – Norwich, 1934).
- 32 M. Saxby, *Memoirs of a female vagrant written by herself* (J. Burditt – London, 1806), 4.
- 33 Oakley, 'Autobiography', 126, 131. Interestingly, the uncle does appear to have adopted one of his sister's girls and raised her as his own, 126.
- 34 The almost universal assignment of fathers to occupational groups enables a check on the representativeness of the data. Fathers are allocated by cohort to primary, secondary and tertiary sectors of employment, following the occupational divisions established by the Cambridge Group for the History of Population and Social Structure. Comparisons can then be made with the CAMPOP estimation of the occupational structure of England and Wales and with the distribution of the fathers of the male writers, as shown in Table A1 in the appendix. Although fathers involved in primary production are overestimated in cohorts 2 and 4 while those in the tertiary sector underestimated in cohort 2, relative to the CAMPOP distribution and the fathers of the male writers, the distributions are roughly but reassuringly in line. See L. Shaw-Taylor and E. A. Wrigley, 'Occupational structure and population change', in R. Floud, J. Humphries and P. Johnson eds., *The Cambridge economic history of modern Britain, Volume I, 1700–1870* (Cambridge University Press – Cambridge, 2014), 59.
- 35 A. Candler, *Poetical attempts by Ann Candler, a Suffolk cottager with a short narrative of her life* (John Raw – Ipswich, 1803); C. Exley, 'Catherine Exley's diary' in R. Probert ed., *Catherine Exley's diary. The life and times of an army wife in the peninsular war* (Brandram – Kenilworth, 2014); C. Watt, *The Christian Watt papers*, D. Fraser, ed. (Birlinn – Edinburgh, 2004); D. Smith, *My revelation: an autobiography* (Houghton Publishing – London, 1933).
- 36 Father's occupational group was unrecorded more frequently in cohort 2 but this reflects the clustering of interview evidence from the Parliamentary Papers. For cohorts 1, 3 and 4, fathers' occupational group is missing in 12.5, 13.3 and 11.4 per cent of cases, respectively.
- 37 L. Luck, 'A little of my life', *The London Mercury* 76 (1926), 354–373.
- 38 Mrs W. Shorely, Mrs Emma Thompson, and Mrs Daniels, *The Bedfordshire times and independent*, 8 April 1910 and 29 April 2010.
- 39 Mrs John Sharp, *The Bedfordshire times and independent*, 8 April 2010.
- 40 B. Harvey, 'Youthful memories of a horsekeeper's daughter', in E. A. Goodwyn and J. C. Baxter, eds., *East Anglian reminiscences* (Boydell – Ipswich, 1976); C. Maclaughlin, untitled manuscript, Brunel.
- 41 Sharp, *The Bedfordshire Times and Independent*.
- 42 Humphries, *Childhood*, 95. For standard sources, see, R. Allen, <https://www.nuffield.ox.ac.uk/people/sites/allen-research-pages/>; G. Clark, 'The long march of history: Farm wages, population and economic growth, England 1209–1869', *Economic History Review* 60 (2007), 97–136; I. Gazeley, 'Income and living standards, 1870–2010', in R. Floud, J. Humphries and P. Johnson, *The Cambridge Economic History of Modern Britain, Volume I, 1700–1870* (Cambridge University Press – Cambridge, 2014). Strange, *Fatherhood*.
- 43 The origin and evolution of the male breadwinner family, as ideological and economic construct, has long been debated, see C. Creighton, 'The rise of the male breadwinner family: a reappraisal', *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 38 (1996), 310–37.
- 44 M. Clarke, untitled, Brunel.
- 45 Strange, *Fatherhood*.
- 46 The Lady Cranworth, 'A Norfolk labourer's wife', 124.
- 47 S. Horrell and J. Humphries, 'The origins and expansion of the male breadwinner family. The case of nineteenth century Britain', *International Review of Social History* 42 (1997), 25–64.
- 48 On breadwinner frailty, see Humphries, *Childhood*, 120.
- 49 D. C. Jones, *Social Surveys* (Hutchinson – London, n.d.), 63.
- 50 R. Allen, 'Engels' pause: technical change, capital accumulation, and inequality in the British industrial revolution', *Explorations in Economic History* 46 (2009), 418–35.

- 51 Mrs M. A. Deacon, 'Memories of Desborough 70 years ago', Village Memories Collection, Northamptonshire Record Office.
- 52 Mrs Layton, 'Memories of seventy years', in M. L. Davies ed., *Life as we have known it by Cooperative women* (Virago – London, 1977).
- 53 M. Coe, 'Mary Coe' in M. Chamberlain ed., *Fenwomen. A portrait of women in an English village* (Virago – London, 1975), 28.
- 54 D. Tack, *My Brixton childhood* (Brixton Society – Brixton, 1992), 3.
- 55 Mrs Sargeant, 'Memories of a villager', 2.
- 56 H. Fowler, untitled, Brunel.
- 57 Autobiographical letter, Reports from Commissioners, Local Government Board, Parliamentary Papers, **XXV** (1874), 248.
- 58 E. Johnson, 'The factory girl', in J. R. Simmons Jr ed., *Four nineteenth-century working-class autobiographies* (Broadview Press – Toronto, 2007).
- 59 M. Barber, *Five score and ten. A true narrative of the long life and many hardships of M. Barber* (Penny and Makeig – Crewkerne, 1840), 4–6.
- 60 M. L. Triggles, 'Autobiographical letters', Brunel.
- 61 D. Cowper, 'De Nobis', Brunel.
- 62 Strange, *Fatherhood*.
- 63 Tack, *Brixton childhood*, 1.
- 64 M. Bondfield, *A life's work* (London – Hutchinson and co., 1950), 23.
- 65 M. Gawthorpe, *Up hill to Holloway* (Traversity Press – Penobscot Maine, 1962).
- 66 E. Evans, 'Growing up'.
- 67 Gawthorpe, *Up hill*.
- 68 Humphries, *Childhood*, 63–8.
- 69 Humphries, *Childhood*, 102–3.
- 70 I. Smith, 'A hired lass in Westmorland' (Local History Reserve, Cumbria County Library – Carlisle, n.d.).
- 71 See J. Humphries and C. Sarasúa, 'Off the record: female labour participation in the European past', *Feminist Economics* **18** (2012), 39–67.
- 72 Although this rose to over 40 per cent if the wives of men in occupations which the Registrar General's office counted as active by dint of husbands' work were included as participating.
- 73 The range of estimates depends on whether cases are included where information on parents is missing.
- 74 The Lady Cranworth, 'A Norfolk labourer's wife', 124.
- 75 Humphries, *Childhood*, 105. The range of estimates depends on whether cases are included where information on parents is missing.
- 76 Oakley, Burrows, Spriggs, Smart, Coe, Mrs Palmer, Gittings, Jarvis, Walker, Groom.
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Appendix

Table A1. Comparison of fathers' broad occupational groups, and primary, secondary and tertiary breakdown (percentages)

Occupational group	1710 PST	Cohort 1 1700-1790	1817 PST	Cohort 2 1791-1820	Cohort 3 1821-1850	1851 PST	Cohort 4 1851-78	1871 PST
Primary	51	45 (42)	39	55 (32)	36 (37)	32	46 (29)	26
Secondary	37	32 (34)	42	42 (44)	46 (51)	45	36 (45)	46
Tertiary	12	23 (24)	18	3 (24)	18 (13)	23	18 (27)	28

Notes: The data from the autobiographies are recoded into the PST groups as follows: agriculture and mining are combined into 'primary'; factory, domestic manufacturing, trades and casual are combined into 'secondary'; clerical, soldiering, sea and services are combined into 'tertiary'.

Sources: PST benchmarks from L. Shaw-Taylor and E.A. Wrigley, 'Occupational structure and population change', in R. Floud, J. Humphries and P. Johnson, *The Cambridge Economic History of Modern Britain, Volume I, 1700-1870* (Cambridge, CUP, 2014) p. 59.

French abstract

L'expérience des filles à l'ère du changement économique

Les filles et leur famille à l'ère du changement économique

L'article s'appuie sur 227 autobiographies de femmes actives et un échantillon plus large d'histoires de vie masculine, afin de comparer les expériences vécues par les filles d'un côté et les garçons de l'autre en ce qui concerne leurs premiers emplois, leur scolarité et leur vie de famille, à la fin du XVIIIe et au début du XIXe siècle. La question est de savoir si les filles ont été désavantagées face aux opportunités qui se présentèrent et si elles purent échapper aux menaces pesant sur leur bien-être avec le changement économique. Les filles étaient plus susceptibles que les garçons d'être victimes de harcèlement sexuel, ce qui limitait les moyens de subvenir à leurs propres besoins et de vivre leur vie. Le père, en tant que soutien de famille, méritait respect et souvent affection, mais c'était à leur mère que les filles s'identifiaient.

German abstract

Erfahrungen von Mädchen in einem Zeitalter des ökonomischen Wandels

Dieser Beitrag stützt sich auf autobiographische Berichte von 227 arbeitenden Frauen und einer größeren Stichprobe von Lebensgeschichten von Männern, um Mädchen und Jungen im späten 18. und 19. Jahrhundert im Hinblick auf ihre Erfahrungen auf ihrer ersten Arbeitsstelle, in der Schule und im Familienleben miteinander zu vergleichen. Er geht der Frage nach, ob Mädchen benachteiligt waren, wenn sie die Chancen ergriffen oder die Gefahren für ihr Wohlergehen abwendeten, die durch den ökonomischen Wandel verursacht wurden. Mädchen erfuhren häufiger als Jungen sexuelle Belästigung, wodurch sie in ihren Verdienstmöglichkeiten und ihrer Lebensweise eingeschränkt wurden. Väter ernteten als Brotverdiener Respekt und oft auch Zuneigung, aber es waren die Mütter, mit denen sich die Mädchen identifizierten.