DOMESTIC SERVICE FOR WOMEN IN LONDON, 1660–1745

by

Paula M. Humfrey

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ABSTRACT

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by Paula Muriel Humfrey

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This thesis examines the working lives of female servants in early modern London. Domestic service was the dominant form of wage labour for women in the pre-industrial metropolis. While some historians of domestic service have maintained that a term in service was primarily a pre-marital phase of women's lives in this period, it is argued in this thesis that female servants in London could also rely on service as a means of getting income throughout their adult lives despite social strictures against their so doing. Individual servants' stories taken from ecclesiastical and criminal court depositions and parish settlement examinations reveal that despite broad disparity in the work they were hired to do, women in service experienced poverty and its attendant insecurities in common. As a result, domestics sought ongoing work in service despite the prescribed incompatibility of service with marriage and maternity. Women in London service tended to be highly mobile, and because the demand for their labour was market driven, they were able to leave places and take up new ones at their own discretion. At the same time, their mobility generated concern in a patriarchal and paternalistic society. Contemporary writers and legislators stressed that female servants should be better controlled, and manifest these concerns by challenging female servants' virtue and proposing that domestics were enmeshed in London's criminal subculture. Female servants undertook a range of strategies in order to get paid domestic work in an urban society in which that work was always available, but only to women who successfully protected and defended their reputations.

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Abbreviations

HCL  House of Commons Journals, 1693–97
JHL  House of Lords Journals, 1669
LPL  Lambeth Palace Library, Records of the Court of Arches, 1660–1735
OBSP  Old Bailey Sessions Papers, 1715–1745
SMW  Settlement Examinations, St. Margarets Westminster, 1718–1735
CHAPTER ONE: Defining domestic service

Introduction

This thesis is a study of the working lives of female servants in early modern London, most particularly the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. In this period, domestic service was becoming the dominant form of wage labour for women in the metropolis. Some women ended their work in service when they married, while others relied on domestic work as a means of getting income at later points in their adult lives; women in London service tended to be highly mobile; women who successfully protected their reputations for chastity and virtue were the ones most likely to get places; and, finally, despite broad disparity in the work they were hired to do, they experienced poverty and its attendant insecurities in common.

Because London was growing, the demand for domestics' labour was high, and women in service were often able to leave places and take up new ones at their own discretion. In the first decades of the eighteenth century, their mobility generated the concern of authorities, and it was proposed by writers and legislators that female servants should be better controlled. The contemporary understanding of the institution of domestic service as one of affective, quasi-
familial relations between master and servant was under scrutiny by both parties, and the contractual underpinnings of domestic service for women were correspondingly exposed. The role of urban female servants by the eighteenth century was a commercial one, and in London between the Restoration and this period there was some tension between this and an ideal of domestic service in which female servants were more clearly understood to belong to their employers' families. These themes are developed in the chapters that follow.

This thesis also endeavors to explore female servants' working lives in the metropolis through a qualitative assessment of narrative sources, a problematic undertaking in the sense that sources discussing urban labouring women's lives in this period are scarce. For example, Mary Broderick said of the household in which she had been employed for seven years, "I am a servant there,—my business is sometimes above, and sometimes below,—well, I am cook then."1 Broderick's ambivalence over how best to describe her work comes through in her phrasing. The records of these women's lives contain tiny details; yet small fragments of narrative such as Broderick's comment constitute one of the main records of female servants' working lives in London before the mid eighteenth century.

This chapter proposes a definition of servants after considering the contemporary distinction between servants and apprentices, and the early modern understanding of service as a pre-marital life phase for women. In a

1 OBSP January 1740 [Burgess and Hill].
discussion of the sources used for this thesis, this chapter takes up the problem of how to discuss domestic work in light of the amorphous character of the word 'servant', and in light of the paucity of systematic documentation available on this kind of paid work for women. Finally, this chapter considers the urban character of the metropolis in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries from the point of view of a domestic looking for work in the capital.

Several hundred years after the fact, how are we to understand domestic service for women in early modern London? This question is a thorny one because for contemporaries the term “servant” had a very broad and general usage. It does seem clear, however, that for women, domestic service was equivalent to “housewifery”, a descriptive term that was rather less broad than “service” in meaning. Training in housewifery prepared girls for their roles as wives and mothers. This notion is underscored by the fact that that even female apprenticeships to trades or crafts emphasized domestic duties.

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2 In his recent thesis on domestic servants of both sexes in London in this period, Tim Meldrum distinguishes “housewifery”, which he defines as housework proper, from two other categories of domestic work: “luxurious consumption”, having to do with “waiting, running errands, personal attendance and horse-related work,” and “production.” Timothy Meldrum, “Domestic Service in London, 1660-1750: Gender, Life Cycle, Work and Household Relations” (University of London Ph.D. thesis, 1996), 63-77. However, as a 1711 domestic manual asserted, even the lady’s maid, described as a mistress’s companion, should be ready to roll up her sleeves to wash fine linens. Anne Barker, The Complete Servant Maid or Young Woman’s Best Companion… (London, 1711), 40. It is unclear which of Meldrum’s categories this description of domestic work falls into. I have relied on a more general understanding of the term “housewifery” in this thesis: a female servant who performed housewifery acted as a housewife’s proxy in a range of tasks, even or perhaps especially if she worked for a master in a household without a mistress.
Domestic service was not often described precisely in the early eighteenth century. Defoe, writing in the 1720s, had Moll Flanders offer a kind of anti-definition of domestic work. Asked as a child what a gentlewoman was, Moll answered,

I explained myself negatively, that it was one that did not go to service, to do housework...and that I understood by it no more than to be able to get my bread by my own work...all I understood by being a gentlewoman, was to be able to work for myself, and get enough to keep me without that terrible bug-bear going to service...³

“By servants,” Defoe wrote elsewhere, “you are to understand me to mean, the several denominations hereafter mention’d,” including “[a]pprentices, as well as the apprentices to merchants, and more eminent tradesmen, as the apprentices to meaner people; such as shop-keepers, handicrafts artificers, manufacturers, etc.” One had also to include “[m]enial servants such as cooks, gardeners, butlers, coachmen, grooms, footmen, pages, maid-servants, [and] nurses.” He called the labouring poor “servants without doors.”⁴

Seventeenth-century writers made only a limited distinction between the labour of female domestics and the unpaid work that was the province of women within marriage. The author of *The English House-Wife* (first published in 1615, and later revised through many editions) wrote, “our English Housewife” is “the Mother and Mistress of the family, and hath her most general

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employs within the house." In the mid-eighteenth century, an anonymous author described "servant maids in private families...doing whatever act of housewifery is necessary in the family." Mother, mistress, and servant all had in common the house as the seat of their employment. In this respect the work of domestic service for women was similar to the range of class-dependent but always unpaid chores they assumed as wives.

Female servants' experience of service can therefore be said to have been gendered. It was unlike that of men, who differed in both their training and their life expectations. Domestic servants included women who performed a range of household tasks from cleaning and cooking all the way up through companion status. All of these were tasks associated in early modern society with unpaid domestic work done by wives and mothers.

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6 Anon., Low-Life, or One Half of the World Knows not how The Other Half Live (London, 1764), 66.

7 "Gender is a constitutive element of social relations based on a perceived difference between the sexes, and gender is a primary way of signifying relationships of power." For a discussion of gender as a concept, see Joan Wallach Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis", in Joan Wallach Scott, ed., Feminism and History (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 167. The term gender in this thesis is used to describe the culturally defined constructs governing expected behaviour of men and women (as opposed to sex, which describes biological differences). Also see Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780-1850 (London: Hutchinson, 1987), 13-33. It is "through the competing claims that women and men make on one another, in the contexts of particular sets of social and economic relations, that the cultural constructions of gender are constructed." Henrietta L. Moore, Feminism and Anthropology (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), 4.
Early-modern service for girls and women was defined prescriptively as a pre-marital phase. However, it is also suggested in this thesis that domestic service was a labour-market sector based on a commonly understood contract arrangement. In the chapters that follow, I have chosen to define a servant as a household worker hired on a year’s term because it preserves the most precise eighteenth-century description of the institution. As Burn wrote in 1755, “the law never looks upon any person as a servant, who is hired for less than one whole year.” Naming female servants as yearly-wage earners permits us to hew very closely to the perspective from which early-modern domestics understood the terms of their employment. Naming female servants as contract workers also lays bare how the practice of service in London, according to which women of differing ages and marital statuses were domestics, differed in some respects from the common understanding of service as a pre-marital phase of a woman’s life.

The notion that service for women was different from the training men received in school or as apprentices was an enduring one. In Elizabethan England, young men learned a trade or craft while young women learned housewifery. More than two centuries later, parish workhouse policy would be no different. In one nineteenth-century Westminster workhouse school, the number of female attendees aged seven to fifteen was markedly lower than the

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number of girls admitted to the workhouse.\textsuperscript{10} While no workhouse children were taught highly skilled, highly paid trades, girls received "decidedly less job training in general than boys." Workhouse officials, "like most contemporary social commentators, thought this kind of training appropriate for futures as either domestic servants or wives and mothers."\textsuperscript{11}

Female servants were rarely full apprentices to a trade or craft. Apprenticeships that provided "serious training for a well-paid job" were usually taken under the aegis one of the London Companies. However, out of a total of 1,590 persons admitted to the freedom of the City of London by apprenticeship in 1690, there were only twelve women.\textsuperscript{12} Pauper apprentices were often simply listed by parish overseers as being sent out to a master to perform housewifery, making it doubtful that a workhouse girl "apprenticed to a sawyer or a cooper for a pittance" would have been taught the trade in a comprehensive way.\textsuperscript{13}

The numbers of female apprentices in London varied through the early modern period. In the fifteenth century, when population pressures were low, women were apprenticed to some London trades, notably the needle trades. In contrast, no female apprentices appeared in the records of fifteen London


\textsuperscript{11} Ibid., 230-31.


\textsuperscript{13} Schwarz, \textit{London in the age of industrialisation}, 20-21.
companies between 1580 and 1640, when the population was growing fastest and migration of men was highest. When the numbers of male apprentices migrating to London dropped off in the second half of the seventeenth century, it was possible for women to get formal apprenticeships in the metropolis. However, it was also the case in the seventeenth century that even where women were apprenticed, either formally or informally, "household service became not simply an additional duty which, like their male counterparts, women might on occasion be required to perform, but a formal and major obligation of their apprenticeships." For female apprentices, domestic work was a central feature of their apprenticeships, making their work similar to domestics' work.

Female apprentices tended to be pauper apprentices, and girls apprenticed to a trade by the parish were often assigned only domestic chores. This is confirmed in female apprentices' settlement claims in St. Margarets parish, Westminster. Between 1718–1735, forty-two women attempted to get settlement in St. Margarets based on parish apprenticeships they had served there. One quarter of the women specified in their accounts the trades to which they were apprenticed. Two others explicitly stated that they were put into an

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15 Ibid., 140.

16 Eleven girls said they were made apprentices to the following: button maker; chandler; child’s coat maker; cook; glover; flourisher; haberdasher; innholder; joyner; mantua maker; plainworker; sempstress; serge maker; silversmith; stationer; staymaker; silversmith.
apprenticeship to do domestic work. Elizabeth Bridges said she was “bound apprentice from the Grey Coat Hospital Westminster about twelve years ago for the term of five years to one Mrs. Mary Thomson (to learn good housewifery).” Mary Minix stated that at the age of fourteen she was bound to a stationer for the term of five years “to learn the art of good housewifery.” Thus even apprenticeship had a particular reference to housewifery for women.

Notwithstanding the particular associations of both apprenticeship and service with housewifery for women, the definition of a servant was nonetheless very broad in the early modern period, including “men and women, boys and girls, working for their livings at every agricultural, commercial and industrial task, [including] personal domestics...Apprentices, journeymen (when living with their masters, as often they did), ‘hinds’, ‘maidens’ or ‘maids’ are some of the titles they were given, though the word servant was most often used, and was pretty well universal for the girls and the women.”

In contrast to the fact that female apprentices’ duties were often identical to those of domestic servants, young men called servants were often those apprenticed either formally or informally to a trade. In mid seventeenth-century Cambridge, for example, the difference between households with servants and

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17 Settlement examinations for the parish of St. Margarets, Westminster (hereinafter SMW) May 1733 [Bridges].

18 SMW June 1734 [Minix].

those with apprentices was centrally a socio-economic one. Lower occupational
groups kept servants, but there were few apprentices in labouring households. Yet confusion over the term 'servant' persisted. As D.V. Glass noted regarding
the demography of London in 1695, servants and apprentices were not regarded
as belonging to entirely separate categories, since servants might also be assistants
following an apprenticeship role.

In his study of seventeenth-century Southwark, Jeremy Boulton observed
that “it is impossible to distinguish between the domestic servant and the
resident working employee.” He argued that it is “certain that the term ‘servant’
embraces many individuals who were technically apprentices.” Boulton
followed Laslett, Goose and Glass in suggesting that “apprentices were simply
designated as servants because both were in a dependent position obliged to take
orders from the household head.”

As we have seen, females were usually not apprenticed; instead, they did
domestic work. As Deborah Simonton has argued with respect to apprenticeships
in housewifery, “the line between training and work was obscured by the nature

23 Boulton, Neighbourhood and society, 134.
of the task.”24 In Nigel Goose’s study of mid seventeenth-century Cambridge parishes, female servants were found to be 72-94% of the total number of people listed as servants, while the numbers of males designated apprentices ranged from 77-100% of the parish totals. Goose concluded that this “does suggest a domestic role” for women in service.25

For both sexes, a contract of service (as opposed to a multiple-year apprenticeship term) was modeled on the seasonality of agriculture: a year’s contract was traditionally dissolved with the harvest. In Elizabethan England, teenagers and young adults spent a period of years living with a series of family groups, “leaving their parental homes sometime in their teens and remaining in other households until they were financially able to set up their own homes and to marry, usually in their middle to later twenties.”26 The number of adolescent servants in England declined through the course of the eighteenth century.27 But where the tradition was intact, this pattern of service for young people served both an economic and a social function. It supported community stability by facilitating the creation of new households and permitting future householders to save money and acquire goods.

26 McIntosh, “Servants and the Household Unit”, 3-4, 13, 17.
Thus service in husbandry was “a site of preparation for independence, similar in some respects to school or apprenticeship, but with the difference that farm service allowed servants to save.” It allowed young people of all classes a work opportunity without stigma or prejudice, although with more advantage accruing to higher-born servants in wealthier households. Indeed, for farming families the institution of service “helped solve the problem of what to do with children between puberty and marriage.”

Just as leaving home, her first job, and marriage were the significant landmarks in the life-cycle of a woman, so marriage was itself the optimal end result of her years in service. As we have seen, domestic service was not traditionally understood as work in the masculine sense, as specialized training that shaped and defined an individual’s later paid craft or trade. Rather, service was a stage in their life cycle precisely because women “had only a single occupation open to them, to be wives.”

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29 Ibid., 3.
31 Laslett, Family Life, 61-62. As Sara Mendelson has written, “[c]ontemporary modes of thought divided female life into three distinct stages: virginity, marriage and widowhood. The conduct books employed this tripartite scheme in their description of feminine duties and privileges and women themselves appear to have been very self-conscious about passing through each condition in turn.” She has also written, “[n]or was the concept an artificial one. Women’s diaries and memoirs illustrate the notion of three modes of feminine existence, each with its appropriate deportment, duties and concerns.” Sara Heller Mendelson, The Mental World of Stuart Women (Amherst MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1987), 191, 199.
Women’s employment was limited by the contemporary understanding that their work did not share the status of men’s work. The identification of work with gender in early modern England was such that women were usually named and categorized according to their marital status, irrespective of the work they performed, the training they had invested in it or the skill set they had acquired:

the male was assumed to possess an occupational identity far stronger than anything experienced by women...record-keepers persisted in assuming that women merely ‘did’ various kinds of work, whereas their husbands were identified by them.

Eighteenth-century London experienced a labour-surplus economy “where large masses of underemployed labour would switch jobs frequently” and in which only a few kinds of paid labour were open to the majority of women. Most urban women “certainly worked for their living but were barred by custom, law or their own inclinations from sharing in ‘men’s work’ and so were forced to compete as individuals for the ‘women’s work’ that remained.” Indeed, the

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33 Michael Roberts, “‘Words they are women, and deeds they are men’: images of work and gender in early modern England”, in Lindsay Charles and Lorna Duffin, eds., *Women and Work in Pre-Industrial England* (London: Croom Helm, 1985), 136-139.


paid labour of a young man's teen years might easily have a money value equivalent to a woman's lifetime earnings.36

This situation was not new, nor was it to change in this period. Maxine Berg cited "a heritage going back to the sixteenth century" of female under-employment in London, according to which women only had available to them work in textile and clothing manufacturing or else "in a narrow range of badly-paid domestic work."37 Similarly, Peter Earle found that labouring women in early modern London tended not to venture very far into traditional men's trades, and that most women competed with other women for a narrow range of jobs among which domestic service predominated.38 In London, women's work still fell into the same categories in the mid nineteenth century.39

At the core of the gendering of domestic service was the fact that female servants, like all women, had to confront and navigate the issues surrounding maternity, whether potential or actual.40 In eighteenth-century London, the female labour pool was "subject to strong cultural constraints," sexual stereotyping first among them. It was not usual for women to work as paid

37 Ibid., 36.
38 Earle, "The female labour market", 339.
40 Sylvia Van Kirk, "What Has the Feminist Perspective Done for Canadian History?" in Franklin et al., Knowledge Reconsidered : a feminist overview (Ottawa: Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement ofWomen, 1984), 53.
servants while they were actively caring for their own small children, and when
women ceased to be servants, they were left with “a residual group of
occupations”\textsuperscript{41}:

\begin{quote}
[w]ith the exception of laundry, and to some extent of needlework, there was in London rather little demand for part-time female work, so
essential to a mother with young children.”\textsuperscript{42}
\end{quote}

Nor was this to change; among the inmates of the St. Martin in the Fields
workhouse in the early nineteenth century, women’s economic vulnerability
was an obvious and severe problem:

\begin{quote}
a disproportionately large number of female inmates aged sixteen to
forty-four can be accounted for by their greater economic vulnerability,
as well as by their care of dependent children, especially without the aid
of a male breadwinner. Indeed, of the 270 women aged fourteen to
forty-four, seventy-nine—nearly 30 percent—entered the house with
children or to give birth, without a male partner. In contrast, only five
men in the same age group entered the house with children and no
spouse.\textsuperscript{43}
\end{quote}

As Patricia Crawford has written, sexuality for women in the early modern
period was unavoidably linked with childbearing, since without a reliable means
of contraception, “women’s lives revolved around pregnancy, lactation and the
nurture of children.”\textsuperscript{44} Women’s opportunities to get places in service were thus
linked first to their marital status and life stage. This was the result of biological

\textsuperscript{41} Schwarz, \textit{London in the age of industrialisation}, 45.
\textsuperscript{42} Ibid., 18-19.
\textsuperscript{43} MacKay, “A Culture of Poverty?”, 221.
\textsuperscript{44} Patricia Crawford, \textit{Exploring women’s past: essays in social history} (Sydney: G. Allen & Unwin, 1983), 70.
exigency: women bore children and usually raised them, and this might be the central activity of many years of their working lives.\textsuperscript{45}

Some London women became servants as widows. Constance Knight disclosed that as a 68-year-old widow she became servant to a chairmaker in Piccadilly for several years.\textsuperscript{46} Margaret Douglas testified that she had had two husbands, “the first of them...by trade a butcher who dyed about sixteen years past.” She served a woman in Crown and Sceptre Court, St. James’s, for two years, remarried and was widowed a second time.\textsuperscript{47} Elizabeth Dickenson said that her husband, “dead upwards of twenty years” had been bound as a seven-year apprentice to a farrier. When her husband died before his apprenticeship ended, Dickenson became servant to a carpenter for three years.\textsuperscript{48} Other women remained unmarried: London service was attractive enough “for some women to choose it as a way of life rather than simply a stage in their life cycle.”\textsuperscript{49}

Early modern women’s connections to domestic work, and especially to paid domestic work, were complex, and were not well documented by

\textsuperscript{45} Thus it has been suggested, rightly, that “an important part of what women’s history has introduced into the profession [is] the knowledge that intimate questions of birth, copulation and death—having bodies, in short—are historically significant.” Elaine Leslau Silverman, “Revisions of the Past”, in Winnifred Tomm and Gordon Hamilton, eds., \textit{Gender Bias in Scholarship: The Pervasive Prejudice} (Waterloo ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1988), 120-23.

\textsuperscript{46} \textit{SMW} March 1727 [Knight].

\textsuperscript{47} \textit{SMW} March 1723 [Douglas].

\textsuperscript{48} \textit{SMW} September 1734 [Dickenson].

contemporaries. Occupational data were not collected on women in the eighteenth century. Berg has noted that where their occupations were recorded in parish and legal records, men's "unemployment and underemployment were masked behind occupational categories," but there are few sources documenting the specific work women performed.  

Once again, this would still be the case in the nineteenth century:  

a mixture of washing, cleaning, charring as well as various sorts of home- or slop-work in addition to domestic labour occupied most women throughout their working lives. The diversity and indeterminacy of this spasmodic, casual and irregular employment was not easily condensed and classified into a census occupation.  

This creates a problem: how do we to describe those parts of the labour force that "played a central role not reflected in official statistics"?  

It has been argued that female servants were essentially silent, and that they "did not generate documentary material which might support historical enquiry." However, it is well to keep in mind that it is easy to miss evidence about women's lives that has been "invisible" only because we have not taken it

50 Berg, *The age of manufactures*, 1-2. This has had the effect of cutting off women's labour-force participation from the discussion of England's economy in the early modern period, while male occupational structures "have formed the basic building block of all these macro-economic estimates." Berg, "What Difference did Women's Work Make?", 26.  

51 Alexander, "Women's work", 65.  


53 Kent, "Ubiquitous but Invisible", 111.
to be important or credible.\footnote{Elaine Hobby, \textit{Virtue of Necessity: English Women's Writing 1649–88} (London: Virago Press, 1988), 24.} As Miranda Chaytor phrases it, if we accept women's invisibility uncritically, and fail to recognize the subordination it implies, we will have obscured its historical significance.\footnote{Chaytor, "Household and Kinship", 50.} If we consider women's work in domestic service "exclusively in terms of its ability to provide savings for a woman's eventual marriage and to present opportunities for women to meet potential partners," we miss a chance to consider women's work strategies more carefully. As Patricia Seleski has written, "to argue that the pursuit of marriage alone dominated single women's work experience homogenizes that experience."\footnote{Patricia S. Seleski, "Women of the Labouring Poor: Love, Work and Poverty in London, 1750-1820" (Stanford University Ph.D. thesis, 1989), 114.} Thus it has been suggested that new conceptual frameworks are required to make women's economic activity in the past more comprehensible.\footnote{Alexander, "Women's work", 4.}

We know that because women's work as domestics was ascribed a lower status than men's work, it was correspondingly less well defined by contemporaries, who thought of it prescriptively as a stage in a woman's life cycle. Based on London evidence, however, the framework according to which we historically understand domestic service might be adapted to take on broader
proportions: female servants were simply women paid to do domestic work on the basis of a nominal per-annum wage.\textsuperscript{58}

Servants' expectations of an annual contract had a stronger hold in London than did their understanding of the institution as pre-marital phase. Defining domestic service for women as a life-stage occupation appropriate to girls and young women is consonant with eighteenth-century prescription. However, the ideology which demarcated the institution as a pre-marital phase places in the shadows women who neither young nor single but who were nevertheless domestics in the capital.

Just under a quarter of domestics were over the age of thirty. Meldrum has calculated that in London, in the period 1660-1750, 76.6\% of female servants were under the age of thirty.\textsuperscript{59} Female servants in the capital included not only singlewomen, many of whom were lifelong spinsters, but also married women and widows. In a sample of the years the years 1695-1714, Meldrum found at total of 286 spinsters (ages not specified), 32 widows and 24 wives in domestic service in London. Meldrum lists the marital status of an additional 24 women in his sample as "unknown".\textsuperscript{60} Thus it was only to mothers caring for babies and small children that places in domestic service were almost wholly unavailable. The

\textsuperscript{58} Meldrum noted that its "cultural resonance ensured that the practice of discussing domestic servants' wages in annual tranches continued long after" the Tudor period. Meldrum, "Domestic Service in London", 102.

\textsuperscript{59} Meldrum, "Domestic Service in London", 30, Table 2.3.

\textsuperscript{60} Ibid., 31, Table 2.4.
definition of female servants used in this thesis therefore includes a range of women in terms of class, education, age and marital status. This makes better sense of the great numbers of domestics reported to reside in the eighteenth-century metropolis than a definition of servants as unmarried young women.

Early modern London was about twenty times bigger than the largest provincial cities: by 1750, the metropolis held a full tenth of England’s populace, or roughly 675,000 people. A low estimate suggests that by the mid eighteenth century there may have been 52,000 servants in the capital, while a higher guess posits 90,000 servants. If, as has been suggested, eighty per cent of servants in London were female, this gives a range of between 41,000 and 72,000 female servants in the capital between 1700 and the mid eighteenth century. Migrant women constituted 70% of the female servant population in the metropolis, creating a large labour pool continually fed by incoming workers. Most labouring men in London, on the other hand, were not servants. One third of the London male labour force in this period was employed in manufacturing

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62 Kent, “Ubiquitous but invisible”, 112.


64 Ibid., 333. The number of female servants who migrated to London can only be inferred from local studies. The most nearly applicable for the period 1690–1730 is Schofield’s on the rural parish of Cardington, Bedfordshire, in 1782. Schofield found that while most girls moved only as far as a neighbouring parish in search of work, one female servant in seven migrated the 75-mile distance to
and another quarter of men worked in transport services. In 1695, only 9-11% of London men were servants, a percentage which included apprentices.65

It is difficult to know with any precision how many families employed domestics in early modern London, or the socio-economic cutoff point below which households could not afford them. Domestic service included places in a substantial range of households. This was not new to the early eighteenth century. In Elizabethan Essex, senior servants in prosperous households might have specialized jobs and good accommodations, as well as “the opportunity to accumulate significant amounts of cash and goods with which to launch themselves on an independent career or marriage at the end of their service.”66

At the other end of the spectrum of available positions, Elizabethan servants were more likely to be the solitary employee,

   to sleep in a storage loft or work room, and to have difficulty in extracting their wages from their hard-pressed employer at the end of the year. The least secure group of servants consisted of those illegitimate or orphaned children placed into service by the parish churchwardens.67

It has been suggested that by the mid eighteenth century, in London, domestic servants were “an integral part of all but the very poorest

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65 Berg, “What Difference did Women’s Work Make?”, 24, Table 2.


67 Ibid.
households. David Kent has written that "the great majority of female servants were employed not in leisured households as chambermaids and ladies' maids but as maids of all work, general servants and drudges" in the households of artisans and retailers. Earle has posited that between half and three quarters of metropolitan households employed one female servant: "[o]ne or two servants, usually female, was therefore the normal domestic staff, this being all that most households had space for or could afford."

Some grand London households employed substantial numbers of domestics. According to Mrs. Barker's *The Complete Servant Maid*, published in 1711, in such households domestic work was divided among an entire household staff. The housekeeper's role, for example, was firstly supervisory: "to be up in the morning before any of the servants, and let [the servants] never go to bed until they have seen the doors and windows properly fastened." The housekeeper was to keep her employer's belongings in good order and

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68 Kent, "Ubiquitous but Invisible", 111-12.

69 Ibid., 118-119.

70 Earle, *The making of the English middle class*, 218.

undamaged, since "all the goods in the house are committed to her care"; her job was to purchase and provision "every sort of necessaries for the family," in which duty she was charged with frugality. Under the direction of the housekeeper, the housemaid was to care for the rooms of the house and their furnishings by cleaning stoves, hearths, door locks, carpets, wainscot and stairs, by making beds and airing rooms. The chambermaid was to care for her mistress' clothes while the nursery maid cared for her children. Since the duty of a lady's woman was to keep her mistress company, Mrs. Barker exhorted,

it is necessary that none pretend to be properly qualified for it, unless their education has been something above the ordinary rank of other women; for she will not only be obliged to do some fine pieces of needlework, but also to read at proper times the best authors.

Finally, Mrs. Barker prescribed that once the kitchen-maid had finished her work, "let her be sure to make herself clean, but never attempt to dress above her station, nor refuse her assistance to any of the other servants."\(^2\)

This model of domestic service would certainly have applied to upper-class households such as Lady Clavering's in Red Lion Street, Holborn, described as a substantial dwelling with closets (bedrooms) on two floors. The family employed a large complement of servants. In addition to the cook, there was a

\[^2\] Barker, The Complete Servant Maid, 12-13, 15-18, 30, 33-35, 40, 44-45. Between the early- and mid-eighteenth century other similar works appeared only occasionally. These included John Shirley, The accomplished ladies rich closet of rarities; or, the ingenious gentlewoman and servant-maids delightful companion (London, 1715); Anon., The accomplish'd lady's delight. The compleat servant-maid: or, the cook's guide. Containing directions for dressing all sorts of flesh, fowl and fish...To which is added, recreation for the ladies (London, 1725); Eliza Fowler, A present for a servant-maid: or, the sure means of gaining love and esteem. under the following heads. Observance. Avoiding sloth. Sluttishness... (London, 1743).
housemaid, a chambermaid, butler, coachman and footman. A charwoman was added to the staff on an occasional basis. The Earl of Banbury had a still larger and presumably more specialized staff: when he came to lodge at his house in Pall Mall he brought “his retinue of servants which was about 17 or 18.”

The anonymous satirist who wrote the mid eighteenth-century Low-Life: Or, One Half of the World Knows not how The Other Half Live (a seventy-page depiction of a Sunday in the metropolis) similarly evoked a hierarchy of servants in grand London households. He described “servants of the nobility and gentry...thwarting and examining each other about the family affairs” as “some of the underlings, as house-maids, scullions, postillions, etc. threaten to give warning if things are not speedily rectified.” He wrote of “gentlemen’s housekeepers opening their pipes upon the under-servants ...that they may know for a certainty what authority she has.”

The employer class was broader, however, and employment situations more varied than Mrs. Barker allowed. For example, a seedman who had lodgings in Well Yard near his shop in Little Bartholomews employed one journeyman and one maid servant; a pawnbroker who kept lodgers in her house in Golden Square, St. James in the Fields, employed a single female servant; a

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74 LPL Banbury v Banbury 1694: Eee 8 f. 8.

75 Anon., Low-Life, 41, 42, 59, 47, 76.
couple with a house in Crowne Alley, Moorfields, “which was let for about five and twenty pounds per annum [and was] indifferent well furnished,” employed one woman to do their domestic work.\(^7\) We cannot say with certainty which category of urban households could not afford to employ domestics. We can only assert that servant-employing households were extremely varied.

The nature of domestic work was itself varied. Crowded living conditions were normal in London, and many people lived as weekly tenants in furnished rooms and ate their meals out at cookshops, thereby decreasing the need for housekeeping. On the other hand, another common arrangement was to subdivide a house into living quarters combined with a shop or business, so that rooms were often small, and many people filled them.\(^7\) This would have increased housekeeping needs in such a building over those of a single family dwelling of the same size, simply because more people lived in it. The character of urban domestic service therefore depended on the house as much as any other factor—on how large it was, and on how many rooms and windows it had.\(^7\)

As Bridget Hill has noted, housework in this period entailed heavy work dictated by the fabric and construction of early modern dwellings. Plaster or lime floors, like brick or paved stone, had to be swept or washed. Wooden flooring required greater maintenance through washing and scouring with sand; if the

\(^7\) \(LPL\) Browne v Docwray 1668: Eee 3 f. 182; City v City 1669: Eee 4 f. 202.


\(^7\) Ibid., 117.
ceilings on lower floors were not plastered, dirt and dust fell through from above. The process of heating water, heating houses, and cooking food. Lighting was limited to fires, candles, rush lights or oil lamps. The provision of water for drinking and household use, when there was not a pumped supply to a house, entailed getting it from a communal source. Working under these conditions, domestics were also responsible for houses, furniture and clothing that required constant mending and repair.

Housewifery entailed a number of other tasks and responsibilities. Female servants ran errands and were entrusted with money. They were assigned large organizational tasks, as when the Lady Spilsborough, planning to travel, relied on her maidservant to “get her things ready...and to prepare as many things as would serve her for four months.” The author of Low-Life described “tradesmen’s wives sending their servants to the adjacent publick-houses, to tell their masters a gentleman wants to speak with them at home”; “servants to ladies of quality...washing and combing [their] lap-dogs”; and “chambermaids


80 Ibid., 112-16.

81 LPL De Morais v Harrison 1706: Eee 9 f. 133; Brown v Docwray 1668: Eee 3 f. 184.

82 LPL Spilsborough v Spilsborough 1734: Eee 14 f. 109.
dressing their ladies.” Female servants worked long hours and might get shiftwork as well, one servant reporting that she waited on her mistress continuously “from mid afternoon til about 11 or 12 of the clock at nights and often times til one or two in the morning.”

Service also involved nursing duties and childcare. Dinah Allsop, for instance, was instructed to prepare for her mistress’s confinement by getting “all things ready for her labour” and fetching the midwife at the appropriate moment (she was subsequently given the charge of visiting the child at its wetnurse’s, and was sent for a lock of its hair when the baby died). Anna King was hired as a maidservant just before her new mistress gave birth, and handed the responsibility of finding a nurse for the child and setting the nurse’s wages, ordered to make shirts for the baby and to buy “several necessaries” for it. Sarah Redhead left the service of an upholsterer’s wife after a year “because there were too many children to wait on and look after.” Another mistress “had a maid servant of about forty years of age who carefully attended on and nursed her during her illness.”

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84 *LPL* Banbury v Banbury 1693: Eee 8 f. 31.

85 *LPL* Macclesfield v Macclesfield 1697; Eee 8 f. 415.

86 *LPL* Robinson v Robinson 1726: Eee 13 f. 57.

87 *LPL* Bound v Bound 1693: Eee 7 f. 691.

88 *LPL* Jessop v Jessop 1717: Ee 9 f. 12.
Domestic work could encompass multiple duties and roles for an individual servant. For example, when Mary Anderson was indicted for stealing a silver spoon her fellow servant testified that she "saw the spoon just before I went upstairs to the door, and when I came down again, it was gone." Anderson confessed that "she took it out of the kitchen, while the maid was gone up stairs to open the street door." Here we have only a description of two colleagues in a lodging at least large enough that it encompassed both a ground-level floor and a basement kitchen, and required a minimum of two domestics to staff it: a kitchen girl of unspecified rank and the maid to whom she deferred. In and of itself, the account of this theft cannot tell us very much, except perhaps about common practice, and about the hierarchy that obtained among servants in a London household where there was more than one servant.

In another trial in which details of household practices were revealed, Catherine Delaroy stood accused of stealing linen, children's clothing and pieces of fabric when she "went away and took her things with her." Shortly after leaving her place, she asked her mistress "to let her fetch her bundle down, for when she went away, she said, she had left one behind her." When the bundle in question was opened at her mistress's request, it was found to contain Delaroy's mistress's goods. In her own defense, Delaroy said that she wanted to ascertain that the bundle was indeed hers, but her mistress "hid herself behind the screen,

89 OBP October 1740 [Anderson].
and would not see me."

Again, it is not possible to draw very many conclusions from this small bit of detail. It is only suggestive of normal practices among London servants: that when domestics were itinerant, it was usual for them to bundle their belongings for easy carrying; and that relations between disaffected mistresses and maidservants could be strained to the point that an employer would refuse further contact with a domestic.

Female servants who came to trial for theft of their employer’s goods incidentally reported some details of their work. Rebecca Crywater, who was twelve or thirteen years of age, was “taken into the house to wait upon a child”; she was “entrusted in her mistress’s bedchamber, and the doors were left unlock’d.” Ann Westwood was taken in as a servant “out of charity.” Her responsibilities included dressing dinner (“finding the prisoner late in preparing the dinner, inquir’d if the lady dines abroad? That the prisoner pretending she did not think it so late, did hasten the dinner”), but she was free to leave to go to church in the afternoon, when she was finished."

In trial accounts we are offered an interesting if fragmented image of London domestics’ duties, as when in the course of her testimony, Elizabeth Sanderson, a domestic, offered a description of an evening’s events, and did not

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90 OBSP October 1740 [Delaroy].

91 OBSP Feb. 1730 [Crywater].

92 OBSP May 1730 [Westwood].
describe them as being unusual. Sanderson was the servant of a baker, and testified that her master's lodger,

having been abroad that day, came home about twelve o'clock at night, or near one, that she being in bed with her young mistress, and fast asleep, did not hear him knock, but he was let in by her old mistress, who lay below; that the captain came up to her chamber door for a candle, and she getting up, and slipping on her petticoats, carried a candle, set it in his room, that then he bid her shut the window shutters, and afterwards unbuckle his shoes, and pull off his stockings."

It was this servant's duty to share her mistress's bed when her mistress wanted her to, to handle late night interruptions in a shared house (her old mistress had lodgings on the floor below her current employer), and it was also part of her job to serve her master's lodger by fetching him a light and helping him undress.

This and other testimony suggests that female servants' work roles were not only multiple, but also wildly diverse. Alice Collins sat up all night with her master after he was fatally wounded by a blow to the head. Mary Thomas's master "trusted her with the key to his house in order for her to take care of it"; she was said to have run off and thrown the key away. Eleanor Sutton, staying at a tavern with her mistress and the latter's gentleman friend, said she "was called up several times to drink with them."
Female servants' work in the household of course provided considerable opportunity for theft, as when Margaret Owen stole a good deal of women's clothing from the household where she had a place. She committed the theft when her master and mistress were out of the house for the day, and she was home with only their son, who, "very lame of the palsy," could not stop her. As Owen's master testified,

[m]y son told me that the prisoner went up the stairs and made a great busling: that he called to her several times, and asked her what she was doing, and at last he heard her come down and go out. We searched, and soon found that she had rob'd us.97

This domestic was able to steal from her employers because she had the freedom to move throughout her master's house and was entrusted to watch over it when her employers were not at home.

Servants sometimes made incidental mention of outings and errands they made either on behalf of or in company with their employers, suggesting that a working domestic's range, contacts, and experiences were often broader than the house in which she had a place. In a relatively extensive description of such activities appearing in the Sessions Papers, Elizabeth Hogg was accused of stealing from her master, who ran a food shop. She had been a servant to the owner of the shop for three years, during which time her master "often found a greater decrease in his stock than he could account for." His wife testified that

97 OBSP January 1735 [Owen].
one morning as Hogg was opening the shop, she was overheard taking the lid off a canister, and observed placing something in the pocket of her petticoat. The week following, Hogg ran away. The report of this trial offers more detail concerning a domestic's activities than is usually available in the Sessions Papers. It emerged at trial that a neighbour of Hogg's had often seen Hogg give small parcels of these and other goods to Hogg's friend Susan Ashton, "with whom she used to go to the alehouse and gin shops." But Ashton herself denied it, suggesting instead that she often sent her own girl to Hogg's master's shop, but never received any goods she had not paid for. Ashton offered the observation that Hogg came to me one night with some fish in her hand, and something wrapt up in three papers. She seemed to be a little in drink, and said she had dropt one of her papers; and therefore desired me to look after the fish and other papers while she went back to see for it. I look'd into the papers when she was gone, and found there was little sugar'd kings in them. She came again and fetch'd them away; but whether she carried them to a customer, or did anything else with them, I cannot tell.\footnote{OBSP October 1725[Hogg].}

From Hogg's story, we ascertain that the petty theft of food from one's master was indeed something that could continue for quite a long period before a servant was caught. We also learn that a servant might have female friends whom she saw regularly, and that employers and neighbours were aware of the existence of such friendships (in this case, a relationship struck on the basis of one woman visiting the shop of the other's master). The intimacy of that friendship is
implied by the two women frequenting both alehouse and gin shop together, and by their casual exchange, of an evening, over the provenance of fish and “sugar’d kings.”

Other domestics described work that extended beyond the confines of the household, as well. Ann Kenring, for example, testified to having stood in a housewares shop with her mistress’s child in her arms while her mistress and two other gentlewomen sat in the same room.99 Elizabeth Cresswell testified that this was the same man she recognized when she encountered him on her errands the next day. She said, “I could not preserve (observe) him by day light, but there was a light at my master’s door— and I saw him next morning in the compter in the same dress.”100 One servant might go to the compter’s; another would incorporate shopping into her errands. Thus Elizabeth Russell was allowed to be out “fetching some scowering oil” while her mistress at market.101 Finally, Elizabeth Battersea testified that her mistress sent her out to invite a neighbour to her mistress’s lodgings for an afternoon visit; that she went out with her mistress on a morning visit to a tavern.102

As these stories show, domestic service for women in the metropolis was in practice largely synonymous with housewifery, and domestic service was not

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99 *OBSP* January 1735 [Williams].
100 *OBSP* May 1735 [Byrom].
101 *OBSP* August 1725 [Russell].
102 *OBSP* October 1730 [Hassel].
itself class-specific. Yet service for London women was gender-specific employment, housewifery being the largest component even of female apprenticeships. For women, all the tasks of service—from scrubbing, to marketing, to accompanying a mistress on social visits—were indistinguishable from the range of work women did as wives, with the obvious difference that domestic servants contracted for work according to a named annual wage.

**Historians of domestic service**

The argument which Alice Clark introduced in 1919 with respect to the seventeenth century and that Ivy Pinchbeck developed in her 1930 discussion of women in the industrial revolution was that the years 1690–1730 sat squarely in the middle of a two-century decline in women's work opportunities. More recent studies have challenged this notion both theoretically and empirically, and the extent of a decline in women's work roles has been much debated. But Clark's and Pinchbeck's writing, as well as the corpus of historical studies of women's work following them, uniformly describe a corresponding increase in opportunities for domestic service.  

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Notwithstanding, the historiography of domestic service is not a large one, reflecting the paucity of sources on labouring people generally, and more particularly the dearth of sources describing female servants. Early modern service in England received some attention in the first part of this century from Dorothy George, who described service within a broader analysis of English and particularly London society. George introduced servants as a colourful part of the mosaic of eighteenth-century London. She used descriptions of servants as a vehicle for portraying the unique qualities of the metropolis, its opportunities and dangers, recounting the adventures of young women who came from the provinces to establish themselves as domestics in Town as a kind of narrative *Harlot's Progress*. George alluded to Hogarth's series as illustrative of the perils awaiting country girls in the capital.\(^{105}\)

In the decades between the publication of George's *London Life in the Eighteenth Century* in 1925 and Hecht's *The Domestic Servant Class in Eighteenth Century England* in 1956 (generally regarded as the first scholarly monograph on domestic service in early modern England), Dorothy Stuart produced *The English Abigail*, a chronological survey of domestic service for Englishwomen from the Plantagenets to the Victorians. Not often cited by historians, this work captures details of domestic service that can be evoked only

by anecdotal material. Stuart was insightful in her selection of stories, for example offering a well-turned gloss on Samuel Pepys’ experience with one of his many maidservants:

The parting, when it did come, was anything but kind: for the tide of Elizabeth’s anger continued to rise, and finally she compelled her husband [Pepys] to dismiss Deb. with bitter words—not one of which came from his heart...he added, ‘I am apt to believe by what my wife hath of late told me [that she] is a cunning girl, if not a slut’—*i.e.* a wanton. In spite of these misgivings, he wrapped forty shillings in a twist of paper on the day of Deb.’s departure, trusting for an opportunity to slip it into her hand...None was vouchsafed to him...¹⁰⁶

Stuart relied on employers’ diaries and letters in recounting material like this “sad, sordid little story”, but gave the reader the sense of a domestic’s quotidian life nonetheless. In her chapter on Augustan servants, based on the correspondence of royal and noble households, she described better than later historians the idea of the domestic as “Betty”, the “pleasant generic” figure that was the emblem of the female servant in contemporary poetry and domestic comedies.¹⁰⁷

J. Jean Hecht’s study of domestic service in early modern England limited discussion of service in the metropolis to the formal places domestics assumed in upper-class families who came to London for the Season. Central to Hecht’s monograph was an extended comparison of household responsibilities and stations, with charts arranging the ranks of female servants in relation to their

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¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 91-94.
male counterparts, and a detailed description of the responsibilities specific to the
lady's maid, housekeeper, cook and chambermaid. Hecht defined smaller
London households as those in which space was cramped due to "a prodigious
train of servants." His assessment of the meaning of domestic service in the
eighteenth century was straightforward: as wealth "became a more potent
criterion of social status" evidence of that wealth had to be displayed; and so
servants took on "a new, more ornamental role for larger numbers of
employers." 108

Hecht, like Stuart, relied on qualitative analysis of historical sources
concerning servants. He eschewed quantitative assessment altogether,
concluding that "in the main, the material is unsuited to such treatment." Hecht,
too, depended on employers' views of service, drawn from sources as diverse as
prescriptive literature and estate rolls: "[s]ince relatively little of what servants
committed to paper has survived, the bulk of the material derives from the
employer class. Some of it naturally reflects the prejudices of that group." 109

Because his discussion focused on large, upper-class households that
employed many servants at the same time, Hecht's great insight into this
institution was his understanding of the way domestic service functioned as a
"cultural nexus" in early modern society. He viewed servants as "an important

109 Ibid., xii, xi.
agent in the process of cultural change.”110 This was a process facilitated in London especially by the convergence of classes in public spaces such as parks and theatres. At these venues, servants became familiar with the manners of the cultural elite and learned to mimic them. "Just as servants modeled themselves on their employers," Hecht wrote, "they were in turn taken as models by those beneath them in the social scale." This was especially true when servants traveled out of the capital to the country. Hecht saw this as evidence of England’s dynamic society.111

Hecht’s conclusions have recently been reprised in Bridget Hill’s Servants: English Domestics in the Eighteenth Century.112 More relevant to this thesis, however, is Hill’s earlier book, Women, Work and Sexual Politics in Eighteenth Century England. Here Hill follows Clark and Pinchbeck in situating domestic service within the larger picture of women’s work in eighteenth-century society. Chapters comparing female servants in husbandry to female apprentices and domestic servants offer an overview of the themes taken up by historians of service.113 Hill’s is a good assessment of the varied contemporary nomenclature that described service. She suggests that the “blurring of job descriptions of female servants in husbandry and domestic servants made it easy for the decline

110 Hecht, The Domestic Servant Class, 200.

111 Ibid., 219, 225-7, 205.


113 Hill, Women, Work and Sexual Politics , chs. 5-8.
of servants in husbandry to be obscured by the increase in domestic service" in the eighteenth century.\textsuperscript{114}

The decrease in numbers of servants in husbandry to which Hill referred had been charted a decade earlier, in Ann Kussmaul’s monograph. Kussmaul’s major study of farm servants in the eighteenth century showed that service in husbandry was an old and vital tradition in rural England. Through the perpetuation of this institution,

farmers, craftsmen and tradesmen could compose their household labour force independently of the numbers and skills of their children; their productive households could survive the death of any of its members; parents could send the children they could not support into the households of others.\textsuperscript{115}

As long as it survived, service in husbandry was a patterned phase of young men’s and women’s lives, a predictable life stage. For both sexes, labour on farms or estates was a transitional occupation specific to the period between childhood and adulthood, and the identifying characteristic of a servant in husbandry was that they lived in their employer’s house.\textsuperscript{116}

Peter Earle has also written on servants in the early modern period. As with Hill, it is this historian’s earliest work on servants that is most helpful with respect to understanding domestics in London. Earle followed the convention of

\textsuperscript{114} Hill, Women, Work and Sexual Politics, 82.

\textsuperscript{115} Kussmaul, Servants in Husbandry, 3.

\textsuperscript{116} Kussmaul suggests that “menial”, “domestic” and “servant” were terms which took on an exclusive reference to household labour “only when productive workers ceased, while butlers and housemaids continued, to live in the houses of their masters.” Ibid., 5-6.
describing service as a pre-marital phase during which adolescents lived in their employers' households, a custom described most fully by Kussmaul.

Extrapolating from a broad sample of London ecclesiastical court records, Earle found that female servants represented one quarter of the metropolitan population of labouring women at the end of the seventeenth century and the start of the eighteenth. He discovered that urban domestics were highly mobile; that they "varied their lives by taking a different kind of jobs between places"; and that "many also broke their employment with visits of varying length to parents."117

Another significant addition to the quantitative analysis of testimonial sources on female servants in London has been David Kent's article, "Ubiquitous but Invisible: Female Domestic Servants in Mid-Eighteenth Century London", which appeared in the same year as Earle's article, cited above. Using parish settlement examinations for the Westminster parish of St. Martins in the Fields for the decade 1750-1760, Kent found not only a concentration of servants under thirty years of age (59% of his sample), but also evidence of ongoing service for older women (40% over thirty years of age, and an additional 20% over forty). Kent found that the largest group of domestics in the capital were those


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employed by artisans and craftsmen (40%); a scant 3% had aristocratic or royal employers, even in Westminster, the seat of government.\textsuperscript{118}

Kent concentrated "on the terms of employment and economic rewards of domestic service in an attempt to explain the attractions of the occupation." He determined that since "very few women workers could rival the domestic servant in disposable income or security" in London, "many women chose domestic service instead of marriage." Kent accordingly concluded that "the women who flocked to London in their thousands did so because they understood basic economic realities and saw in domestic service the opportunity for personal advantage."\textsuperscript{119}

In the same year, in a thesis on women of the labouring poor, Patricia Seleski also posited the idea of female servants' independence in London. She wrote that "[a]lthough by the eighteenth century domestic service was primarily a waged occupation, in England it nevertheless retained much of its identification as, and many of the features of, a stage in an individual's life cycle." Thus, in her phrasing of it, "two models of service, paternal and contractual, existed in tension with one another."\textsuperscript{120}

\textsuperscript{116} Kent, "Ubiquitous but Invisible", 119.
\textsuperscript{119} Kent, "Ubiquitous but Invisible", 115, 123, 125.
\textsuperscript{120} Seleski, "Women of the Laboring Poor", 32, 45. This is a much-considered theme in the historiography of domestic service in ancien-regime France. Sara Maza writes that in the eighteenth century household service "allowed the social elites to define, both in theory and in practice, the meanings and ends of personal authority," but that this authority was unstable. Sara Maza, Servants and Masters in Eighteenth-Century France: The Uses of Loyalty (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983), 3. Cissy Fairchilds suggests that master/servant relationships "not only reflected broader social attitudes but helped to form them." Cissy Fairchilds, Domestic
David Kent has described female servants as "usually illiterate, highly mobile, propertyless individuals who existed in the shadow of another important person." Tim Meldrum’s recent thesis on servants in London in the period 1660-1750, however, illuminates exactly the women Kent found to be shadowed. The core of Meldrum’s primary research, like Earle’s, is depositional records from the London ecclesiastical courts. These records, some of which were also used for this thesis, support Meldrum’s wide discussion of the structures of household service for urban men and women.

Meldrum’s thesis adds to the historiography of service by focusing on “the gendered specificity of service as work.” He has found that, just as the growth of the metropolis at the end of the seventeenth and start of the eighteenth centuries was closely related to the expansion of the middle class and the growth of consumption, so “the increased demand for services was one concomitant of that consumption.” Meldrum has introduced the notion that a “moral

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121 Kent, “Ubiquitous but Invisible”, 111.
123 Ibid., 39.
124 Ibid., 39.
economy of service" obtained in London in this period, which he describes as "a patriarchal set of cultural norms that insured female earnings were, for the most part, much lower than those of male servants." 125 This moral economy was also one in which "the variety of components of domestic servants' earnings were subject to ceaseless informal negotiation between employer and employee." 126

Meldrum follows earlier scholarship in defining servants as adolescents and young adults who lived in. 127 Others, he suggests, fell to an ambiguous, undifferentiated margin. 128 It is important, to keep in mind (as Meldrum does) that a hard and fast definition of female servants is problematic. In London women of many different life stages called themselves servants, and these women did not always live with their employers; other arrangements were also possible. Elizabeth Colbeck, for instance, deposed in 1689 that she was employed as gentlewoman to the Countess of Peterborough, and that previously she had held the same position for the Countess of Inchequin. In her current place, Colbeck lived in; but while she was a servant to the Countess of Inchequin,

125 Meldrum, "Domestic Service in London", 125.

126 Ibid., 126.

127 Ibid., 102.

128 "The female life-cycle transition from servant to char, scourer and washerwomen meant that the women often changed their residence but not the nature of their labour." Ibid., 17-18.
Colbeck took lodgings "at the house of Mrs. Edwards at College Street, Westminster."\(^{129}\)

Meldrum shows how the definition of service as a life-phase occupation is problematic, and suggests that the contract relation of service is also central to an understanding of paid domestic work in early modern London. He defines service as

residence in a significant proportion of London households of young people unrelated to their masters and mistresses for periods of time that could be as short as a few days and as long as a working lifetime.\(^{130}\)

At the same time, however, "'real' service carried the contractual weight of mutual acknowledgment of employment, a necessary ingredient over and above service work and living in."\(^{131}\)

The duties comprising service in urban households did not change in any marked respect over the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. The range of jobs that constituted domestic service remained constant, and the tools for accomplishing these tasks, as well as the conditions of work, were far more fully immersed in tradition than in innovation. Female servants were called on, as they long had been, to clean, to cook, to shop, to organize and to attend.

However, domestic service for London women in this period, as a traditionally conceived and defined structure of employment, was caught up in

\(^{129}\) *LPL Inchequin v Escrick* 1689: Eee 8 ff. 592.

\(^{130}\) Meldrum, "Domestic Service in London", 21.

\(^{131}\) Ibid., 119.
an urban economic, demographic and social setting. Traditions that defined the institution for employers dictated terms according to which masters adopted a paternal role appropriate to the governance of young, unmarried women training to become wives. This thesis explores the idea that in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, service for London women was most essentially a contractual arrangement that depended less on a woman's life stage than contemporary prescription implied.

Themes and issues

London in the period 1690-1730 saw a proliferation of female servants in the city, and an increasing regulatory interest in them. They were perceived as numerous—and indeed were so—and as inadequately supervised. They were very often strangers to the neighbourhoods in which they sought work. They were highly mobile. They sought a contract of employment, demanded a wage and objected to perceived mistreatment through varieties of protest that made employers anxious. This thesis explores the nature of the master/servant contract in this place and time, and it considers in particular the strategies female servants used in order to get and keep work in the capital.

Female servants in London understood themselves to be part of a contractual system of yearly employment. This nomenclature, a carry-over from agricultural tradition, suggests a quasi-permanence to places in service that by no means always existed. We may speculate that both parties to the agreement, domestic and employer, played to the conceit of a year's term of hire because it
represented at least nominal security for both. This was a freighted variety of contract, after all, encompassing an agreement on the part of the servant to become intimate with her master’s possessions if not his person, in a context—the house—which though named as private was often very exposed to community scrutiny and vulnerable to theft.

Women’s work in service was intended to be circumscribed by the firm controls of patriarchal society, but high levels of female migration into the capital coupled with an increasing demand for domestics resulted in a disjunction between the ideology of service as an institution and the lived experience of it for women in London. Female servants in the metropolis in this period were part of a labour market which coexisted in some tension with the institution as employers, polemicists and legislators defined it. The chapters following explore the ways in which that tension was made manifest.

Chapter three connects female servants’ mobility in London to contemporary debates surrounding their wages. High and irregular mobility among London domestics made the formal term of a year’s contract the sole device common to all. However, female servants in the capital tended to utilize domestic work as a temporary resource, either because they found varieties of alternative employment, or because they left off working altogether and discovered other ways to get by, marriage among them. Anxiety over the wages servants received and how these were paid out was therefore a preoccupation masters and servants shared.
Chapter four explores the ways urban domestics fostered contractual relations in households. In the metropolis, female servants relied on the notion of "virtue", theirs and others', to gain agency. The extent of a female servant's agency was determined by her ability to get a place in service and then keep or voluntarily leave it. Domestics used the anonymity that their high mobility afforded them in order to secure work. Similarly, information they gathered about their employers' lives helped them enforce payment expectations by using gossip as a parallel currency of exchange.

Early modern opinion was remarkably cohesive concerning female servants' deviation from their prescribed role as compliant students of domesticity. As Hill has noted, The majority of comments on servant-maids in diaries, journals, memoirs and autobiographies give the impression that female domestic servants were a body of totally unscrupulous, inefficient, immoral, unreliable and dishonest women. They rarely satisfied their employers. They regularly stole from them, were for ever getting pregnant, being dismissed, and moving on.\textsuperscript{132}

With these themes in mind, chapter five, on female servants and the problem of servants' criminality, considers the issues of urban domestics as thieves and infanticides.

The concluding chapter, six, describes the particular case of a London servant named Phebe Harrison, who appeared before the consistory and Arches courts in the 1690s. The records which survive to document her suit are unusually detailed for material on a London domestic in this period, and the

\textsuperscript{132} Hill, "Women, Work and Sexual Politics", 131.
issues this woman confronted, like the strategies she can be seen to have followed, highlight the issues raised in the earlier chapters of the thesis.

Sources

This thesis employs three main primary sources. These are: settlement examinations for the parish of St. Margarets, Westminster from 1718 to 1735; 'Depositions' and 'Personal Answers' taken in suits before the Court of Arches, the Archbishop of Canterbury's appellate court as well as a court of first instance for the Diocese of London, between 1665 and 1735; and the Old Bailey Sessions Papers, a popular, regularly issued publication describing London criminal trials, for the years 1715 to 1745.133 A technical discussion of the nature and significance of the settlement examinations follows. I then show how the testimonies of female servants in Arches suits amplify the information I have drawn from the St. Margarets records. I have used the Sessions Papers as a way of focusing on servants' criminality and perceptions of it, and this source is discussed last.

None of these several bodies of records was created with the explicit purpose of recording information about women's work. David Kent noted that the London craftsmen, artisans and retailers who employed the majority of domestic servants have left almost no record of the part which servants played in their family economies. As a result, "the study of domestic service has been

restricted by the evidence, or lack of it, to leisured households.”\(^{134}\) With respect to the lives of early-modern women, the data are more limited still. Another problem is that in the adversarial contexts in which the settlement examinations and court records were created, the selective disclosure of witnesses must often have led to the emergence of what Lawrence Stone has called “opposite fictions” in their testimonies: partial truths constructed to further the respective parties’ ends.\(^{135}\) All texts, however, must make enough contact with the world of their time to be intelligible to their readers. Their language and content “will locate them in time and space; and they will make incidental allusions, if only in their similes and metaphors, to the manners and assumptions of the day.”\(^{136}\) It is with these ideas in mind that I have interpreted the sources used in this thesis.

Settlement examinations

In the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, the substantial influx of female migrants into London—many of whom came to the capital hoping to get a place in service—was regulated and restricted by the legalities of

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\(^{134}\) Kent, “Ubiquitous but Invisible”, 111. Kent used the settlement examinations of St. Martins in the Fields for the decade 1750-1760; for this thesis I have relied on the same records for the neighbouring parish of St. Margarets for the years 1718-1735. The level of narrative detail is the same in both series of records.


parish settlement. According to the terms of the 1662 Settlement Act—after its amendment in 1692 to include service as a qualification for settlement—there were five ways of obtaining settlement in a parish. These were by birth; by renting to the value of more than £10 per annum; by serving as a parish officer; by paying local rates; or by claiming on the basis of a year-long contract as an unmarried apprentice or servant in a parish household. After 1692, it was the first and last provisions that were most important to women of small means.\(^1\)

Women who worked as servants were all fundamentally poor, as were most women who worked for their livings. Since the instability and insecurity of paid work were large and ongoing problems for all female domestics in London, it was simply sensible for servants to seek settlement—and many unable to do it on the more straightforward terms of having secured sufficient income to make them viable in the parish’s view, sensibly sought settlement on the basis of the only kind of work that would allow them to do so.

As Peter Earle has argued, many female servants

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\(^1\) 13 and 14 Car II, c. 12 (1673-74). Expanded and revised 1 Jac II, c. 17 (1685); 3 Wm and Mary, c. 11 (1692); 12 Anne, c. 18 (1714); 9 Geo I, c. 7 (1723). For a good summary of the substance of this evolving legislation, see Paul Slack, “Appendix: Statutes Relating to the Poor” in Slack, The English Poor Law: 1531-1782 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 59-64.

\(^2\) Earle, The making of the English middle class, 129.
Getting a parish settlement under the head of service entailed an examination during which the claimant would be asked to give testimony before the parish clerk establishing that she had been employed as a “yearly hired servant” (the descriptive term used in the examinations) in that parish. Her response to a series of questions was set in the record as a third-person, narrative statement. The ruling on a case was added to the bottom of the examination. Three outcomes were possible: outright settlement; certification (the claimant had the right to remain in their parish of residence unless and until they required relief—see below); and removal. In London as elsewhere, the establishment of a settlement entitled the claimant to draw on parish resources, including the receipt of relief.¹³⁹

Settlement in the parish of her choice was a very desirable thing for a labouring woman to have—especially so for a migrant worker, given the insecurity of working life in the metropolis. But a woman seeking settlement was also aware that removal from the parish might mean wretchedness for her if, for instance, she had no remaining contacts in her distant birth parish. Labouring women accordingly had substantial incentive to make successful claims.¹⁴⁰ In the case of a removal order, the claimant could prevent immediate


¹⁴⁰ This would still be the case in the nineteenth century, when “paupers (especially single mothers with large, young families) could be removed to fairly distant parishes where they knew no one, and where they had trouble finding work. The motivation for removal on the part of authorities was economic; once the paupers had been removed they became the financial responsibility of the parish of settlement.” MacKay, “A Culture of Poverty?”, 222.
removal only by obtaining a certificate from her established parish of settlement to her parish of residence, thus preventing removal from the latter until such time as she requested poor relief.

The Act of Settlement and its amendments were embedded in the larger body of the still-developing Poor Laws. Technically, everyone had a settlement "to which he or she could be returned if they wandered." However, as that phrasing implies and as the law and its revisions made clear, settlement was a live and ongoing concern only for the labouring poor. The people who attracted the attention of the overseers were those who, having been in the parish for forty days, had not rented a dwelling at a minimum rate of £10 p.a. Thus settlement examinations were parish-instigated and unwelcome impositions on people who became chargeable, or were considered likely to become so. The significance of this is apparent for the women who claimed settlement on the basis of a year's term in service in St. Margarets, Westminster. A total of 147 women said they had been domestics in the parish

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142 Snell writes that "application for relief, followed by the examination to find where the applicant was eligible for it, provide the indication of unemployment." Snell, *Annals of the labouring poor*, 17; although she disagrees with Snell concerning the significance of most of the major issues surrounding settlement in this period, Landau too has found that, among male claimants, "those claiming by service attracted the attention of the overseers sooner after they married and set up a household than did the other claimants." Landau, "The regulation of immigration", 533.

143 Most settlement examination records which survive from the eighteenth century were taken in Westminster rather than City parishes. Examinations from several major Westminster parishes (St. Martins in the Fields, St. Anne Westminster, St. Clement Danes) are extant only from the 1750s. These have proved helpful to historians. As the basis of his article on domestic service for women, Kent used settlement examinations from St. Martins in the Fields for the decade 1750-1760, the first years for which records are available in that parish. Kent, "Ubiquitous but Invisible", 112. For an
between 1718–1735. Sixty-eight of this number were removed from St. Margarets and delivered to the overseer of the parish where they had legitimate settlement. Keeping the parish’s option of certification in mind, these sixty-eight removal orders suggest that the domestics in question were in need of immediate relief. The remaining seventy-nine women in the sample passed their examinations outright or were certified and allowed to remain in St. Margarets unless and until they needed help. Indeed, twenty-five women in the sample stated in their examinations that they had been servants in parishes other than St. Margarets and yet they were not removed. Slack has argued that “the chief effect of the settlement laws must have been to deter the migrant poor from claiming relief—for fear that they might then be removed out.”

In using settlement examinations as a main source for this thesis, I have counted women who achieved settlement alongside those who were granted certificates and others who received removal orders. However, in each case I have tried to be mindful of what the outcome reveals about the circumstances of the claimant. The examination texts are revealing first because of their internally consistent format, and secondly because they retain quirks of phrasing as well as individuality of detail, suggesting that the claimants’ statements were not entirely homogenized in the record. The signature of a single clerk, one Thomas

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investigation of bastardy in eighteenth-century Westminster, Nicholas Rogers used St. Clement Danes records dating from 1760, St. Martins records starting in 1780, and St. Margarets records from the same decades considered in this thesis; bastardy examinations were appended to settlement records. Nicholas Rogers, “Carnal knowledge: Illegitimacy in eighteenth-century Westminster”, *Journal of Social History* 23 (1989), 356-357.

Railton, appears on settlement examination records in St. Margarets continuously from 1718 to 1730. His procedure for examining claimants, with all of its attendant biases, suggests that the 147 records in this series may at least internally consistent for a twelve-year period.

The questions to which examinants responded do not appear in the record, but can be inferred from the kinds of statements they made. Women told their name and usually also their age, gave their marital status, named dependents if any, and finally, provided details of their work histories. This last is the most interesting part of the record, because most women not only gave a description of the required period in service and the wages that went with it, but told about other paid work they had done as well. Beyond saying where they had worked, they sometimes also said why, thus moving the story told in the settlement examination into the realm of personal connections with employers, friends and family. Women often described the references or personal connections that got them from one job to another, and named people who supported them between positions. Sometimes they mentioned their backgrounds and families of origin, or claimed reliance on extended family.

London Court of Arches records

This thesis relies on depositional testimony in the records of the London-based Court of Arches as a second primary source. Depositional testimony

145 In the early modern period, the Court was housed in the Doctors' Commons, London. See M.D. Slatter, "The Records of the Court of Arches", *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 4 (1953), 139-53 for a
from this corpus of records is intended to amplify the St. Margarets settlement examinations. While they provided the court with similar kinds of information to the parish examinants' statements, female servants who were witnesses in Arches suits were drawn from all over London and Westminster, creating a context for servants' testimonies that did not turn (as in the settlement examinations) on the employment status of the domestic. Instead, Arches deponents had widely varied reasons for testifying. After 1692, the term of hire was central to evidence given by settlement examinants, since they could only gain settlement by making a claim of one year's employment with one employer. In comparison, servant witnesses in Arches suits had no such incentive when they described the length of time they worked in various posts.

Procedurally, the legal documentation of Court of Arches suits emerged out of the accumulated testimony and decisions of the lower ecclesiastical courts, at least in appellate cases. Where the court heard first instance suits coming from within the Diocese of London, the parties were sworn in court, after which Personal Answers' and Depositions were taken privately. The resulting 'transcripts' were filed and bundled together, and became the evidentiary basis of

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146 The major pleas (libels, allegations or interrogatories) of the plaintiff or defendant in an Arches suit were collected in volumes called 'Personal Answers'. To supplement information offered in the depositions of particular cases, I have used 'personal answers' testimony where it can be matched to cases involving female servants. See Jane Houston, ed. *Index of Cases in the Records of the Court of Arches at Lambeth Palace Library 1660-1913* (London: British Record Society Index Library, vol 85, 1972).
the case. In most instances, only the documents were later produced in court.\footnote{147} These records were collected into folio volumes arranged chronologically by court session. Depositions and personal answers were usually at least a page long, and might run to five or six pages for a single entry. While depositions were usually presented sequentially, dated over several months, cases sometimes ended abruptly in the record only to reappear in a later folio.\footnote{148}

I worked through the complete series of volumes for the years 1665–1735, noting every instance in which a female servant in a London household was mentioned as long as the record met the criterion of providing some details beyond her name. Thirty-two separate suits, yielding one hundred and eight individual depositions, met this qualification. Sometimes this was only a sentence or two of biographical information, but often more was included. Because cases in this ecclesiastical court tended to turn on household axes and be defined by household parameters, the records show relationships between female servants and their colleagues, their friends, their employers and sometimes their families, forming a matrix of interpersonal connections. Every time I found such a web of connections, I followed the case as long as it included the servant or servants in question, until they disappeared from the record or the

\footnote{147} Slatter, "The Records of the Court of Arches", 143.

\footnote{148} As Lawrence Stone has rightly noted about this source, "the actors emerge from the fog of a past only dimly sketched in by the testimony of witnesses, and after the trial ends and sentence is pronounced they usually abruptly fade back into the darkness from which they sprang, leaving no trace in the historical record of what happened to them thereafter." Stone, Road to Divorce, 33.
suit ended. In the more heavily documented cases, as many as dozen entries were narratively held together by a single domestic or a series of domestics.

Arches records supply information about female servants in two ways. First, the records are a distillation of cases referred from the Consistory courts within the province of Canterbury. The précis of a case as it was presented in the higher court thus included detailed and salient descriptions of suits, as the depositions of new witnesses were added to the most important referred testimonies. In many cases, the statement of one female servant appears in the record, followed during the course of a suit by the statements of her colleagues and successors in a particular household. In this way, linked depositions were created in which domestics who knew one another testified concerning their mutual acquaintances in neighbourhoods in which they lived and worked. Because of the accumulation and sorting of evidence particular to lengthy appeal suits, there is also evidence in this source documenting domestics' relocations in and out of the capital over time. Deponents often explained their reasons for moving. These depositions can tell us something about where female servants' moved within the metropolis as well as outside, and why.

The court records reveal information about female servants in a second way, as well. The categories of suits that were within the province of the ecclesiastical courts brought many female servants as witnesses, since testimony in matrimonial cases and defamation suits tended to involve household events about which domestics had some knowledge. The depositions also offer intricate descriptions of relationships between female servants and their employers; these
sometimes formed the centerpieces of suits. Many domestics also made statements about London households and the living and working conditions that obtained in them.\textsuperscript{149}

The Arches records gave me a wider sample of statements from which to draw conclusions than the settlement examinations alone. In the two sources, there are a wide variety of descriptions concerning the particulars of jobs and job tenure, and sequences of positions. I have tried to use these two sources in a comparative way where it has been possible to do so—for instance, to compare domestics’ wages in St. Margarets to those gotten elsewhere in London. Where it has not been possible to compare meaningfully aspects of the two kinds of testimony, I have tried to use them together, as when counting the numbers of places sequentially held by individual women.

Although they come from a very different source, Court of Arches depositions resemble the St. Margaret’s settlement examinations in the sense that both were produced from spoken testimonies. I found it useful to set the Court of Arches records alongside the settlement examinations as a way of comparing information about female servants’ lives in one particular parish to the stories of domestics who worked in other parts of London. Like the parish records, the Court of Arches material includes servants’ ages, backgrounds, work histories, marital status, their husbands’ occupations, and information about children.

\textsuperscript{149} Earle has argued that most London cases were probably first instance and not appeal suits. Earle, “The female labour market”, 329-330.
Witnesses before the court were not constrained to respond in the same ways as the women who supplied the St. Margarets depositions, and did not share the same agenda. In most cases the stories of servants' lives and work histories were entirely incidental to the suit being prosecuted, and these domestics had nothing to prove with respect to the particulars that were conversely very important to settlement examinants. Arches deponents were simply asked to provide evidence of their identities, that they were who they said they were. Witnesses would therefore have had little reason to lie about much of the biographical information they offered to this court, although they must have tried to present themselves in a good light, with attendant embellishments of the truth in their own favour.

Lawrence Stone has argued that in the Court of Arches records, servants' depositions are not always very reliable descriptions of actual events. He suggests that even though details of servants' testimonies are sometimes supported by the testimony of other witnesses, bribery either to give false testimony or not to appear in court at all, was a shaping factor in servants' testimony; especially so "in a situation in which the reward could easily amount to a year's wages." Servants were unreliable witnesses because "they were poor and the protagonists for whom they testified were usually rich and powerful."150

Female servants who appeared before the court in the decades 1665–1735 described all kinds of places from grand to modest. It is thereby possible to

150 Stone, Road to Divorce, 29, 32.
determine some elements of household composition from this source: who populated the household, how many servants, in which combinations, for how long. Clerks taking depositions preserved something of the individuality of the deponent, as when Elizabeth Hawsot, a servant newly out of a place, said to the court of her mistress, "that old bitch wont give me a character but God damn her I’ll seek an opportunity at some time or other to be revenged of her for it."151 Whether or not servants' testimonies were strictly speaking 'true' in the sense of being accurate or objective representations of events, deponents surely had reason enough to make their testimonies sound plausible. Certainly they must often have reported what they thought the court wanted to hear, or what their employers encouraged them to say. But it is precisely in this way that female servants' statements reveal something about the ideology obtaining in early-modern households in the capital.

Old Bailey Sessions Papers

I have used this popular publication for the years the years 1715–1745 as the third primary source for this thesis, to explore the popular perception of female servants' involvement in two kinds of criminal cases, theft and infanticide. Contemporary fears of a criminal subculture revolving around thieving servants resulted in new criminal legislation in this period. Infanticide,

151 LPL Clavering v Clavering, 1734: Eee 14 f. 241.
in contrast, was prosecuted according to the century-old Infanticide Act.\textsuperscript{152} I examined both theft and infanticide trials in this record as a way of illuminating the pressures of service on women and exploring the local community as the arena in which these events took place.

Seventeenth- and eighteenth-century criminal trials for the City and Middlesex took place in the Old Bailey, as the Justice Hall adjoining Newgate Prison was popularly called, eight times per year. Female servants prosecuted at the Old Bailey were mostly urban women. The substance of the trials were reproduced in the form of printed pamphlets, the \textit{Sessions Papers}, which were sold to the public after each Session in this period. This publication was directed toward a popular readership as interested in sensational news as it was in the process of trials. Readers found out about recent cases and perused the last page of each folio, where advertisements for patent medicines and new books were printed. Defoe’s \textit{Robinson Crusoe}, for instance, was advertised in each edition of 1721-22. Since the \textit{Sessions Papers} catered to a popular audience, cases selected for lengthy description—that is, the ones that made good copy—offer some sense of the public interest in and perception of crimes perpetrated by female servants.

Only interesting prosecutions commanded long entries. They were designed to tell a good story to a popular readership and so sell papers. Consequently, the \textit{Sessions Papers} reflected popular concerns and in connection with this, offered a commentary on the criminal justice issues of the day. The

\textsuperscript{152} 21 Jas. I, c. 27 (1624).
published trial accounts detailed the most dramatic circumstances under which female servants stole from their employers and stressed the elements of crimes which would have interested readers most. Sensational trials were always reported and so offer a good means of studying how the editors described the worst and most worrisome of domestics' thefts. Accounts of female servants' trials often revealed the length of the pre-theft association between masters and servants, the nature and value of stolen objects, the means of their disposal, the involvement of domestics' accomplices in the theft and the court's discretionary inclinations at their trials. Between 1715 and 1725, for example, the Sessions Papers reported ninety-five trials in which female servants were prosecuted for the felony of stealing from their employers.

Within the narrative descriptions of trials, servants were reliably linked with employers and other members of domestics' neighbourhoods. A case might come to trial anywhere from a single day to a full six weeks from the date on which the incident was originally reported; upwards of fifty cases were then tried in the course of a single session, and the jury delivered its verdicts on groups of half a dozen or more cases at once.

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154 See chapter five, following.

155 Beattie, Crime and the Courts, 309-313.
By the 1720s, the Sessions Papers was issued as a folio volume, eight to ten pages long. The text, which ran in two columns, reproduced testimonies of plaintiffs and witnesses, although the procedural aspects of the trial were left out. The précis of a trial usually included the names of the central parties in the case, information about where they lived and their occupations, an account of the testimony of each witness, the trial verdict and finally a gloss on remarks made by the judge or jury. These narrative reports passed through the hands of at least one editor before they were printed. The editors in turn created a summary of the indictment and a description of the offence, and then made much of its human-interest aspects. Accordingly, a disproportionate amount of attention was given to testimonies presented in infanticide cases, while a trial for petty theft might merit only a few lines. Despite its limitations as a record of court procedure, the Sessions Papers records are rich with detail, substantially complete as a series, and essentially correct.\(^{156}\)

The court was much less procedurally formal that its modern equivalents. The accused spoke in her own defense and was unsworn. The accused might cross-examine prosecution witnesses herself, and produce and question witnesses of her own, so that "there was scarcely any possibility of distinguishing the accused's role as defender and as witness."\(^{157}\) Finally, Old Bailey juries often

\(^{156}\) Langbein, "The Criminal Trial", 271.

\(^{157}\) Ibid., 282-283.
offered rationales for their verdicts, and these were included in the Sessions Papers reports.\textsuperscript{158}

\textbf{London}

At any point at the end of the seventeenth and start of the eighteenth centuries, a female servant looking for work in the capital would have understood that London was full of the complexities of a big, cosmopolitan centre. In his speech at the opening of Parliament in November 1699, William III asserted that the increasing numbers of paupers were contributing to the growth of vice and debauchery in the City.\textsuperscript{159} A dozen years later, Addison wrote that on any day’s trip into Town he was certain to meet the familiar sturdy beggar “telling me he was extream poor, and should die in the streets for want of a drink,” only moments before rounding the corner to find “the centre of the City, and the centre of the world of trade”: “gay signs, well-disposed streets, magnificent publick structures, and wealthy shops.”\textsuperscript{160}

Mandeville opined in 1725 that there were few people in London that did not “wish the streets of it much cleaner than they generally are...but when once they come to consider that what offends them is the result of the plenty, great traffick and opulency of that mighty city, if they have any concern in its welfare,

\textsuperscript{158} Langbein, “The Criminal Trial”, 289-291.

\textsuperscript{159} House of Lords Journal, vol. 16 (16 Nov. 1699).

\textsuperscript{160} Addison, Spectator No. 454, 11 August 1712.
they will hardly ever wish to see the streets of it less dirty.\textsuperscript{161} As Mandeville said of the Grumbling Hive, “every part was full of vice, / Yet the whole mass a paradise.”\textsuperscript{162}

In terms of both population and geographical expansion, London underwent sustained growth through the course of the seventeenth century. The western suburbs in particular were becoming more extensive, “adding a tertiary sector of luxury items and services to the capital’s growing manufacturing capacity.” The capital was England’s largest single market.\textsuperscript{163} This market sustained London’s populace in most years through the first half of the eighteenth century. Harvests in England were generally good in this period, food prices were low, and real wages rarely dropped, so that “a customary standard of living was sustained by most people year after year.”\textsuperscript{164} Indeed, London labour is said to have experienced a golden age of high wages in the early eighteenth century.\textsuperscript{165}

The upper-class migration into London at this time was colloquially known as the ‘Season’. Parliament formally opened its session at the end of January, and this coincided with the Season’s largest single influx of arrivals into

\begin{enumerate}
\item[162] Ibid., ‘The Grumbling Hive’, p. 25.
\item[163] Finlay and Shearer, “Population growth and suburban expansion”, 53.
\item[165] Hay and Rogers, \textit{Eighteenth-Century English Society}, 90.
\end{enumerate}
the capital and most particularly into Westminster. The rate of arrivals tended to remain steady at a lower but still significant level through the end of April, and corresponding departures of households at this time of year were few. Those who arrived in the winter came for the first royal levee, and for the winter balls. At the end of April and through the first half of May, arrivals again peaked while departures remained at a low level. Departures in larger numbers commenced with the recess of parliament at the end of June, and remained at a high level throughout the summer and fall months. There was one further large influx of people into the metropolis in late August.166

Although he considered the demand and supply of eighteenth-century London servants in some detail, Hecht observed no correlation between rates of servants’ employment and the commencement or end of the winter and spring Season in the capital, mentioning only that servants accompanied their masters into the country at the end of the Season.168 The explanation Hecht offered for this conclusion was that servants in the metropolis were always in demand, irrespective of the time of year. He attributed this lack of seasonality to the simple fact of high demand in the metropolis, “where during the course of the century a broadening devotion to ‘the Season’, the requirements of the


167 The first chapter of Hecht’s monograph, entitled “The Demand and Supply of Servants” discusses the issue of employment in London as a central theme, and does so in terms of the demand/supply equation. Hecht, The Domestic Servant Class, 1-34.

168 Ibid., 13.
growing middle classes, and an extremely high death rate created an abundance of places."\textsuperscript{169}

Hecht's conclusions on this matter are applicable to the sources used in this thesis. While it is apparent that female servants relocated often in the metropolis, they did so throughout the year, and their employment does not appear to have increased in the winter nor decreased in the summer months. Although the size of the sample of female servants considered in this thesis is too small to admit of a definitive answer concerning domestics' seasonal migration, it seems reasonable to conclude provisionally, along with Hecht, that London employment was available to servants throughout the year because the aggregate requirements for them exceeded the supply. As Hecht suggested, throughout the eighteenth century much of the metropolitan demand for domestics went unheeded.\textsuperscript{170}

Notwithstanding, life for labouring people in the capital was never easy. A high level of mortality obtained in London in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries among people aged twenty to thirty-nine, many of them migrants lacking immunological protection in the crowded city."\textsuperscript{171} Especially in wartime economies—for example through the 1690s, when England was at war

\textsuperscript{169} Hecht, \textit{The Domestic Servant Class}, 10-11.

\textsuperscript{170} Ibid., 23, 26.

\textsuperscript{171} Ibid., 78. See also Finlay and Shearer, “Population growth and suburban expansion”, 50.
with France—high bread prices and shortages of both coal and the coin to buy it contributed significantly to unemployment among the poor.¹⁷²

At the same time, the aspirations of the middling sort ensured that London's servant population grew faster than the city as a whole, as more Londoners employed at least one servant and those who already had one began to think in terms of a staff rather than a single maid.¹⁷³ Both the number of servants and the demand for them increased in London as the middling sorts became the middle classes, acquiring both income and the inclination to spend it:¹⁷⁴

Demand for servants, especially female servants, increased considerably in the early eighteenth century, partly as a result of the increasing number of 'new gentry' taking up residence in the West End. These servants frequently switched jobs, and contemporaries found their independence and the lack of social supervision threatening.¹⁷⁵


More fluid consumption habits coupled with what Wrigley called "the spread of the practice of aping one's betters" was an important stimulant of economic change.  

Hogarth's prints during this period very often depict large mixed groups congregating in the streets, separately engaged in their productive or illicit activities. As is true of many of Hogarth's images, the scenes in the *Harlot's Progress* describe the interplay of divergent classes and interests in metropolitan society, female servants by no means least among them. In the first print of Hogarth's *Harlot's Progress*, "a sweet country girl with a rose in her bosom and her little purse and scissors hanging by her side," arrives off the York wagon at the Bell Inn in London. She is to be taken on as a servant, she thinks, but is bound instead to the bawd who will precipitate her fall from grace through whoring to crime to prison to death. Hogarth's caricature suggests that female servants had to navigate through a physically large and socially complex city.

Defoe, too, considered London a sprawling and sophisticated urban centre. In 1725, he wrote of "new squares, and new streets rising up every day to such a prodigy of buildings, that nothing in the world does, or ever did, equal it." By the 1720s, London had become densely developed along the entire curve of the

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Thames from Limehouse to Tothill Fields, and on the other axis, from Southwark on the south side of the river up to Shoreditch in the north. The City of London was overtaken by the surrounding metropolis, which was three times its size: fully three-quarters of London’s inhabitants lived outside the City proper, almost equally distributed between East London and Westminster. For all its great size, however, London in this period was well known to the inhabitants of its neighbourhoods, in the manner of a much smaller town:

it was not yet customary to give numbers to houses, so that a particular coffeehouse or bookseller’s shop would be located by physical description, even on the cover of a letter—“over against Catherine Street” or “two doors from the Exchange”.  

London was different from the rest of England. In London, a higher proportion of daily contacts were casual and associated with particular transactions rather than with community custom and tradition:

population turnover was higher and the environment impersonal; literacy was higher, kin less likely to live near at hand and, in central areas at least, households were larger, containing exceptional numbers of servants and lodgers...The salient demographic features of the metropolis—including high mortality of both children and adults, wet-nursing, and massive migration and mobility—suggest that personal relationships may have been very tenuous.”

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179 Pat Rogers, Grub Street: Studies in a Subculture (London: Methuen, 1972), 4-5.

180 Boulton, Neighbourhood and Society, 4-5.
This was a metropolis of interpersonal contacts among people who were often “herded together appallingly closely” in their living arrangements and who lived near their work.\(^{181}\)

St. Margarets was in this period an extraordinarily varied parish. Its patchwork layout incorporated the city homes of aristocracy as well as enclaves which housed (or barely sheltered) the poorest of the London poor, in its almshouses or in the decrepit housing on the north side of the Abbey and in Pye Street and Duck Lane. Because the settlement examinations used in this thesis came from the urban parish of St. Margarets, Westminster, and because many servants who were Arches deponents worked in this large parish, it is worth considering what a female servant in search of work would have seen had she headed toward the West End.

Despite the poor condition of its roads at the end of the seventeenth and beginning of the eighteenth centuries—as late as 1740, a passenger on Westminster’s roads was “everywhere surprised or endangered by unexpected chasms, [and] offended or obstructed with mountains of filth”—the West End was starting to flourish as the centre of polite society it would become later in the century.\(^{182}\) The presence of the Court made Westminster the nexus of the Season set in its clubs, salons and great houses. The locations of Parliament and the Court of course were not new, but gentry and aristocracy were increasingly drawn

\(^{181}\) Rogers, *Grub Street*, 4.

(or pushed, as they perceived it) westward as the metropolis grew. By the early eighteenth century, both older estates and new squares built for their proximity to the Court and Parliament extended around the curve of the Thames, south past Westminster Abbey. Estate developments were concentrated in the West End as aristocratic landowners made substantial properties available on long leases, while speculative builders laid out new streets and fashionable squares for those who could afford to live in them. The leisured classes relocated west- and northward, and the service personnel who catered to them, including domestic servants, followed: by the early eighteenth century the large contiguous parishes St. Martins in the Fields and St. Margarets, Westminster had acquired a varied population of servants, tradespeople, innkeepers and specialist craftsmen.

While the adjacent parish of St. Martins held a real concentration of the gentry's and aristocracy's town homes, St. Margarets was demographically more varied. St. Margarets was a large and ancient parish which had originally taken

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183 "As the newly-formed parishes of St. Anne and St. James in Westminster became the most fashionable places to live in the late seventeenth century, the social character of the inner West End parishes of St. Giles in the Fields and Covent Garden started to decline. As wealthier inhabitants moved west, poorer inhabitants moved in...older inhabitants attempted to protect the social respectability of their neighbourhoods from the threat posed by their new, poorer and often 'disorderly' neighbours...[This reflects] an attempt to preserve habits of social deference and subordination in London, which were thought to be under threat...they wished to reinstate a lost discipline and hierarchy to social relations in the city." Robert B. Shoemaker, "Reforming the City: The Reformation of Manners Campaign in London, 1690-1738", in Davison, ed. Stilling The Grumbling Hive: The response to social and economic problems in England, 1689-1750 (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992), 109.


185 Corfield, The Impact of English Towns, 78.
shape around Westminster Abbey and had extended to encompass part of the royal Court at Whitehall and St. James’s in the north, arranged along the river as far south as the line from Tothill Fields to the Bridewell.186 Parts of the parish were as beautiful and well situated as any in London. The streets which ran behind Dean’s Yard and the square itself (adjacent to the west side of the Abbey) were secluded and quiet, their houses sitting on lots with lawns and mature trees, isolated from the traffic on the main thoroughfares. A bit farther north and west, Petty France and the area around Queen Street and Queen Square were also considered to be respectable addresses. St. Margarets had direct access to Tothill Fields in the south, full of wild growth and sought out for recreation, and the highly manicured St. James’ Park in the north. The parish was famous for its excellent charity schools; even the almshouses in St. Margarets (almshouses, satellites of the Abbey and the medieval monastery, were plentiful in Westminster) were sufficiently attractive in their settings along the river to be rented by members of parliament as their lodgings in term-time.187 King Street was St. Margaret’s main north/south thoroughfare, and the tiny, overcrowded highway ran through this part of the parish. Smaller roads, on which shops were situated, were better maintained, but King Street was unpaved, muddy when wet and foul-smelling in dry weather, and always awash in refuse. Thus anyone

186 Thus the inscription over the Bridewell’s doorway: “Here are several sorts of work for the poor of St. Margaret’s parish...for such as will beg and live idle in the City and Liberty of Westminster.” Westlake, Westminster, 87.

"who rode into Westminster entered either by King Street or Tothill Street; but no one came afoot if they could come by boat.\textsuperscript{188}

In some contrast to the respectability of College and Cowley Streets was the oldest part of St. Margarets, and indeed of Westminster, land long since developed around the precincts of the Abbey; the most crowded part of Westminster in the seventeenth century was a small and tightly built area north of New Palace Yard, right at the northern edge of the parish.\textsuperscript{189} In the first quarter of the eighteenth century efforts were made to widen the streets, thus freeing both the Abbey from the closely packed houses which almost choked off its access to the rest of the parish and which were destroying the fabric of the cathedral with acid chimney smoke.\textsuperscript{190} The peculiarities of leasing houses in the old part of St. Margaret's facilitated the creation of open tenements accessed only by a passage through one of the front houses; over time these passages assumed the designation of lane, court, alley, place, building or yard. The tenements themselves were divided into separate rooms, often let to lodgers by the week.

\textsuperscript{188} King Street was reportedly also quite attractive, "with its gate at either end, its overhanging gables, and its signs" for the Swan, Dog, Bell and Blue Boar's Head taverns." Besant, Westminster, 265-266.

\textsuperscript{189} "Two factors attract[ed] to the neighbourhood an undesirable class of resident, the system of sanctuary and the indiscriminate charity of the monastery...the prebendaries of the Abbey...did not regard their prebends as involving any particular responsibilities towards Westminster or even to the Abbey itself...It was customary on the renewal of a lease for the lessee to pay a fine which was divided between them and consequently it was to their interest to grant only short leases...with the result that tenants spent as little as possible upon the houses they rented." Landlords "leased a tenement and sub-let it in rooms for the highest rent [they] could exact. The inevitable consequence was the degeneration alike of the houses and of the tenants who occupied them. By the middle of the eighteenth century, Westminster contained a slum area as squalid as any in England, its finer streets veiling a background of misery..." Westlake, Westminster, 81-82.

\textsuperscript{190} Westlake, Westminster, 82.
The buildings were often “old, and very slightly built [and] utterly destitute of every convenience”:

In the little space of a thousand feet by twelve hundred the courts were sometimes so narrow that the people could shake hands across; the tenements were sometimes built of boards nailed together; there were no sanitary arrangements at all; there was no drainage; typhus always...and actually under the very shadow of the Cathedral were gathered together the most dangerous and the most villainous wretches in the whole country. Old Pye Street, Orchard Street, Duck Lane, the Almonry and St. Anne’s Street were the homes of the professional street beggar and the professional thief. No respectable person could venture with safety into these streets.  

In the century between 1650 and 1750 there were increasing differences between London and elsewhere in England. Fewer relatives lived close together in the capital; households were bigger and were often populated by lodgers; interpersonal contacts were more casual than elsewhere. Wrigley emphasized the “tendency for contract to replace custom” in the metropolis. He described a “steady spread of environments in which the socialization process produces individuals ‘rationally’ rather than ‘traditionally’ oriented in their values and patterns of action.”  

The following chapters show how these conditions set the tenor of female servants’ lives as labouring women in the metropolis in this period.

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191 Westlake, Westminster, 295.

CHAPTER TWO: Views of domestics

Introduction

Before undertaking, in the following chapters, an analysis of the legal sources in which this thesis is largely based, I here introduce the subject of domestic service for women in early modern London by considering several narrative sources. There was a familial emphasis placed on urban service, an ideal clearly articulated by Samuel Pepys in the mid seventeenth century. Below I consider Pepys as a proponent of the view that female servants were members of their masters’ families. I also rely on the work of Daniel Defoe and others to introduce the contrasting perception that service in the early eighteenth century was in fact a commercial enterprise.

In his diary, Pepys catalogued his changing roster of household servants over the course of a decade. He ruminated on the nature of the relationships that obtained between himself and his servants, and on his wife’s role in hiring and managing the women. He concerned himself greatly with the issue of his domestics’ wages: whether he could afford to keep paying them, and whether his servants were meeting his expectations. He often expressed anxiety over his servants’ conduct and their predisposition toward gossip. Pepys’s ideas about
these issues are considered below, alongside his description of the time during which he and his wife hired one Mary Ashwell to become a companion to Elizabeth. She was the first lady’s maid to be hired into the household for a substantial period of time, and Pepys’s observations concerning the trials of hiring and maintaining an upper woman servant as he undertook this exercise are revealing of his concerns about female servants in his family.

Written a half a century later (and for publication), Defoe’s depiction of female servants suggests an understanding of service in which the notion of lost stability in master/servant relations is emphasized, with the problem of servants’ wages usually named as the cause. Pepys evinced nostalgia for a golden age of domestic service in which female servants were young women happily submitting to the wise governance of their employers, a feature of the institution that Pepys had begun to fear was slipping from his grasp.¹ This notion informed Pepys’s relations with his domestics, especially his wife’s upper servants. Defoe would later embrace an explicitly contractual understanding of service because it suggested strategies for managing domestics.

Views of domestics after the Restoration

In 1660, the first year of the diary, Pepys and his wife employed three servants in their Axe Yard household, only one of them female: “Jane, Wil

¹ A recent addition to the study of early modern men’s anxieties as the heads of households is Elizabeth A. Foyster, Manhood in Early Modern England: Honor, Sex and Marriage (New York: Longman, 1999).
Ewre, and Wayneman, my girl's brother.” ² At the end of 1661, Nell had been added to the original staff; at the end of 1662, Will and Jane remained, but Sarah had been replaced by a girl named Susan, and Pepys mentioned the departure of “the young Wayneman.” ³ A year later, the household was installed in new lodgings at the Navy Office in Seething Lane. The complement of servants then included Jane and Susan, and a new cookmaid named Besse, but Pepys wrote of “having neither man nor boy, nor like to have again a great while.” He found that with a staff composed of one woman and two girls he lived “in the most perfect content and quiet and very frugally also.” ⁴

At the end of the year following, 1664, Pepys was still happy with his household arrangements, notwithstanding the addition of a new woman, as he termed it, and a boy: “My family is my wife, in good health, and happy with her—her woman Mercer, a pretty modest quiet maid—her chambermaid Besse—her cook-maid Jane—the little girl Susan, and my boy which I have had about half a year, Tom Edwards.” He wrote, “a pretty and loving quiet family I have as any man in England.” ⁵ The combination of four maids and one clerk remained stable through the end of 1666, but the personnel changed: Besse and


⁴ Ibid., (31 Dec. 1663) IV, 430.

⁵ Ibid., (31 Dec. 1664), V, 359-60.
Jane were gone, replaced with "Alce", and a companion, Mary Ashwell, for his wife.  

Pepys was fond of writing end-of-year summaries of the state of his household and its roster of servants. Always in these assessments, as elsewhere in the diary, he was explicit in naming his servants as part of his family. Pepys's diary offers an affluent employer's view; it is not possible to know very much of the experience of working in his household from the perspective of his domestics. However, the diary is revealing of Pepys's own sense of his authority over his servants, and describes behaviour that Pepys thought should obtain in his household, and the ways in which the various women he employed as servants fell short of that standard. He was also aware that his wife's interaction with her servants had an impact on how well he was able to manage his spouse.

Pepys's concern with frugality with respect to his expenditures on servants in something of a refrain in the diary. This was emphasized in particular when, on hiring Ashwell, Pepys reached the limits not only of his purse but also of his paternal authority as head of the household. But Pepys's anxiety over the management of his servants was in place well before Ashwell was hired. As he wrote on New Year's Day, 1662:

My family is myself and wife—Wm., my clerk—Jane, my wife's upper-maid; but I think growing proud and negligent upon it, we must part; which troubles me—Susan our cook-maid, a pretty willing wench but

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6 Pepys, Diary, (30 June 1665), VI, 143; (31 Dec. 1666), VII, 426.

7 Ibid., (1 Jan 1660), II, 1; (31 Dec 1663), IV, 430; (31 Dec 1664), V, 359-360; (30 June 1665), VI, 143; (31 Dec 1666), VII, 426; (27 Mar 1667), VIII, 134.
no good cook—and Wayneman my boy, who I am now turning away for his naughty tricks.⁸

The changing household composition, and the shifting alliances this fostered, meant that the management of his servants' attitudes and their gossip was a central concern for Pepys. He wrote that their maid Sarah left them, having been "put away by us." When she got another place in the household of Sir William Penn, the Navy Commissioner and Pepys's colleague, Pepys noted that he was troubled: "we do make ourselves a little strange to him and his family for it, and resolve to do so."⁹ He noted his apprehension concerning what she might reveal about his own household, "though I love the wench." Indeed, on the night Ashwell arrived to work in the Pepys household, he recorded in the diary that Pepys approved of her discourse and carriage, and found that she was "not proud but will do what she is bid." But he struggled with finding a way to instill deference in her: "for want of being abroad, [she] knows not how to give that respect to her mistress as she will do when she is told it."¹⁰

The practice of requiring testimonials was beginning to flourish at this time.¹¹ In 1663, Pepys made something of an occasion out of attending a sitting of the Old Bailey Sessions, attending with London's Lord Mayor in his coach. Pepys's observation concerning the event, the notion he took away with him

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⁸ Pepys, Diary, (31 Dec 1662) III, 301-2.
¹⁰ Ibid., (12 Mar. 1663), IV, 72.
after hearing "two or three ordinary tryalls" wherein female servants were prosecuted for stealing from their employers ("which they say is very common these days"), was to assert that "therefore in my now taking of maids, I resolve to look to have somebody to answer for them."\textsuperscript{12} Pepys tended to accept recommendations from acquaintances, people he knew personally, for example his tailor; but he might also rely on hearsay, if a particular domestic was known to have "lived in great families."\textsuperscript{13} In Pepys's estimation, a good recommendation and the anticipation of a family relationship were important benchmarks of a developing master/servant relationship.\textsuperscript{14}

In certain respects relations between employers and servants in Pepys's household were very much determined by hierarchy, on whether the domestic in question was a lower, middle, or upper maid. In the daily order of things in the Pepys household only a companion servant shared her mistress's bed when her husband did not. The Pepys's had different kinds of interests in their upper and lower servants, principally because upper servants were more visible and were a social accessory, whereas what mattered most with the cookmaid was that she had a comely appearance, a docile temperament, and of course her kitchen skills. For example, Pepys referred to Susan as "a pretty willing wench but no

\textsuperscript{12} Pepys, \textit{Diary}, (2 Sept. 1663) IV, 294.

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., (27 May 1664), V, 158-59; (18 Mar. 1663), IV, 78.

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., (5 April 1669), XI, 152.
good cook.”¹⁵ Four months later his opinion had improved. He noted at that point that she “doth dress my meat very well and nicely.”¹⁶ Alice the cookmaid appeared in the pages of the diary without preamble in March, 1665: “and so home, where I find a new cook-mayd, her name is Alice, that promises very little.” At the end of her tenure, exactly a year later, Alice left with equally little fanfare.¹⁷ Cookmaids were not expected to entertain, and a middle-maid was not hired for her display of social skills. Indeed, when Pepys wanted to impress upon guests the finesse of his household, he hired a man cook for the occasion, and another man servant to lay a party table “with figures and napkins.”¹⁸ Pepys’s concern, as he saw it, was for their welfare as members of his “family” only so long as they lived with him.

Samuel and Elizabeth Pepys stretched their financial resources considerably to acquire a lady’s maid, or as Pepys called her, “a woman to my wife.” The woman they eventually hired in this capacity, Mary Ashwell, was treated similarly to the other servants in the household in those respects pertinent to maintaining the appearance of a well-managed family. For example, she and another female servant in the household were provided with mourning dress for Pepys’s mother’s funeral, while “under-maids” received new hoods.

¹⁵ Pepys, Diary, (31 Dec. 1662), III, 301-2
¹⁶ Ibid., (1 Apr. 1663), IV, 90
¹⁷ Ibid., (29 Mar. 1665), VI, 70.
¹⁸ Ibid., (13 Mar. 1668), IX, 115; see also (26 Mar. 1662) III, 53; (13 Jan. 1663) IV, 13; (28 Nov. 1666) VII, 388; (29 Nov. 1666), VII, 389; (13 Mar. 1668) IX, 115; (22 Jan. 1668) IX, 423.
scarves and gloves. In other respects, Ashwell shared a relationship with her employers that was different from that of the lower domestics, notably in the level of social exchange between mistress and servant. As Pepys often noted, keeping her was expensive, and while the status she conferred redounded to her employers’ cultural cachet, it did not enhance household productivity. Indeed, Pepys thought that Ashwell, as a social accoutrement, distracted his wife from her own activities of household management, on which Pepys relied: “her mind is so devilishly taken off her business and minding her occasions.”

In his year-end summary of his household affairs in 1662, Pepys wrote, “[w]e have lately had it in our thought, and I can hardly bring myself off of it since Mrs. Gosnell cannot be with us, to find out another to be in the quality of a woman to my wife, that can sing or dance.” Mrs. Gosnell was an employed for a month as a companion for Elizabeth. Pepys and his wife had acquired a taste for the kind of sociability such a servant conferred. This instigated their search for a lady’s maid.

As Clerk of the Navy Office, a preferment post to which he was still a newcomer in 1662, Pepys was an administrator of some substance, but a wage-earner nonetheless; his diary entries often estimated the wealth of his estate and

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19 Pepys, Diary, (27 Mar. 1667), VIII, 134.
20 Ibid., (14 June 1663), IV 183.
21 Ibid., (31 Dec. 1662) III, 301-2.
22 Ibid., X, Companion, 159.
his consideration of his financial prospects. As Pepys noted, reflecting on the prospect of hiring a companion for Elizabeth, “finding it hard to save anything at the year’s end as I now live, I think I shall not be such a fool—till I am more warm in my purse.”23 This was still a concern a year afterward, although Pepys thought he had made some gains toward stability, as he was then living with his staff of three women “in the most perfect content and quiet and very frugally also.”24

This sense of frugality was soon to be upended. Ashwell’s story suggests that as the relationship between her and her new master and mistress played out, all concerned tested the nature of the contract that was the source of their association—was she a member of the family or was she a contract worker? The story of Ashwell’s time in the household illuminates the tension that was perhaps inescapable in the arrangement, reveals Pepys’s discovery of the limits of his authority, and suggests his reverence for an ideal familial relationship, one that was difficult to make manifest in this case.

Pepys commented on the peace and order that obtained in his household before Ashwell was hired in 1663, and on the felicity with which he could manage his existing staff. On the day he committed to hiring Ashwell, following a round of interviews and visits while they considered her, he wrote, “I like her well and think she will please us. My wife and they agreed, and she is to come

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24 Ibid., (31 Dec. 1663), IV, 430.
the next week.” He noted the expense of the endeavour: “[n]ow I have taken a boy and am taking a woman, I pray God we may not be worse; but I will observe it.”

After she was hired, Pepys wrote of spending the evening pleasantly in the company of his wife and Ashwell, and of an afternoon the three of them spent “talking and laughing” in his chamber the following week. At another point Pepys rebuked Ashwell that it was not “fit for her to make herself equall with the ordinary servants of the house.” Pepys took it upon himself to tutor Ashwell in mathematics and reading. This was the initial cause of him and his wife “having a little falling out because I would not leave my discourse below with her and Ashwell to go up and talk with her alone upon something she hath to say.” Pepys was reproached with being uninterested in his wife, by which sentiment he came to understand that she was jealous of his attentions being directed toward Ashwell—“which I must avoid giving occasion of.”

Within the next several weeks, tensions escalated. Initially Pepys negotiated the terms of the developing relationship equitably enough with Elizabeth, discussing the matter in the only place in the house that they were

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26 Ibid., (20 Mar. and 29 Mar 1663), IV, 81.

27 Ibid., (10 June 1663), IV, 180.

28 Ibid., (3 May 1663), IV, 122.
(sometimes) afforded true privacy, their bed. ²⁹ Indeed, the only alternative was to send all the servants out of the house at once, a strategy they also used.³⁰ Pepys concluded that Elizabeth's increasing objections to Ashwell arose from the former's jealousy, and he resolved to "remedy all."³¹ The situation did not improve. Within the next two weeks, Elizabeth was "in a worse humour than she used to be, for I am taken up in my talk with Ashwell, who is a very witty girl."³² Pepys renewed his promise to himself to rectify the problem, but the damage was done: "I am troubled to see my wife take no more pleasure with Ashwell, but neglect her and leave her home."³³

It is quite possible that Ashwell did indeed steal from her mistress "a yard or two" of ribbon as their relations deteriorated, though Pepys thought his wife had made up the story. He concluded, "my wife doth take a displeasure against her, that they will hardly stay together—which I shall be sorry for, for I know not where to pick such another out anywhere."³⁴ This entry is revealing of Pepys's quandary: how to weigh the social status conferred by a lady's maid against the forced intimacy of a closely-packed London household and the stresses imposed

²⁹ Pepys, Diary, (31 May 1663), IV, 165.
³⁰ Ibid., (14 June 1663), IV, 183.
³¹ Ibid., (31 May 1663), IV, 165.
³² Ibid., (11 June 1663), IV, 180.
³³ Ibid., (5 June 1663), IV, 171.
³⁴ Pepys, Diary, (2 June 1663), IV, 175; see also (14 Aug 1663), IV, 276.
by limited finances. As Pepys depicted the situation, “before going to bed, Ashwell began to make her complaint and by her I do perceive that she hath received the most base usage from my wife”\(^{35}\) Or, as Pepys wrote of his wife and Ashwell fighting, “I said nothing to them, but let them talk—till she was gone and left us abed.”\(^{36}\) Pepys found himself in the unenviable position of mediating relations between his wife and his domestic, and discovered that it was difficult to control a servant after having declared himself and his wife to be very fond of her.

In the course of an extended visit to Pepys’s father, Elizabeth “could not forbear” telling Pepys “how she had been used” by Ashwell and by Pepys’s parents during her visit with the latter; Pepys wrote, “I find it will be best not to examine it, for I doubt she’s in fault too.”\(^{37}\) The ruined arrangements between servant and mistress crumbled still further when the two came to blows while visiting, thereby becoming the occasion of gossip amongst important friends and embarrassing Pepys greatly.\(^{38}\) With respect to Elizabeth, Pepys worried about how to “take some course to oblige her and yet preserve my authority.”\(^{39}\)

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\(^{35}\) Pepys, *Diary*, (13 Aug 1663), IV, 274.

\(^{36}\) Ibid., (13 Aug 1663), IV, 274.

\(^{37}\) Ibid., (12 Aug 1663), IV, 274.

\(^{38}\) Ibid., (4 Aug 1663), IV, 262.

\(^{39}\) Ibid., (30 June 1663), IV, 205.
Pepys was expressing a concern about a contractual issue—payment given for services rendered—but it was a concern he expressed in the language of paternal governance, which was the only language he understood to be appropriate to the relationship. He wrote,

I fear I shall find a trouble of my wife when she comes home, to get down her head again; but if Ashwell goes, I am resolved to have no more—but to live poorly and low again for a good while, and save money and keep my wife within bounds—if I can.40

In the end, Pepys and Elizabeth resolved to get “a couple of good maids and to part with Ashwell.” Pepys’s sentiments at the end of this affair were no less expressive of the tension he felt between his pecuniary and familial interests than they had been at the outset. Still, he identified most closely with his servant’s parent in framing what was fundamentally an economic concern. Letting Ashwell go, he wrote, “troubles me for her father’s sake, though I shall be glad to have that charge taken away of keeping a woman.”41

Pepys loved his female servants, and this is clear in his diary. His interest in them was assiduous, sometimes sexual, and unfailingly paternal in tone. As the preceding excerpts from his diary suggest, Pepys returned often to the theme of managing household relations in a crowded London house, and was interested in preventing discussion of his household outside the house. When servants failed him by gossiping, or by becoming the occasion for gossip

40 Pepys, Diary, (4 Aug. 1663), IV, 262.
41 Ibid., (12 Aug. 1663), IV, 274.
themselves, his considerable displeasure is recorded in his entries. Pepys was less interested in his servants' well-being as individuals when this was not commensurate with his own needs. He was prepared to turn out of doors a servant when illness threatened; he beat his servants; he focused on female servants as sexual conquests and turned the women away when he was discovered.42

As is true of all journal-keeping individuals, Pepys's motivations and actions as he described them were responses to his time and culture; in his case, to London life in the mid-seventeenth century. The diary entries suggest that the institution of domestic service for women in London fostered a particular kind of relations between masters and servants in the mid seventeenth century. Pepys saw an ideal domestic situation to be one in which a man lived together equitably with his wife and servants as a family, although he made it clear that it was only sometimes possible to achieve such an equilibrium.

Pepys's view of domestic relations as familial reflected a common understanding among London employers before the Restoration. This is confirmed in Laura Gowing's recent work. In a study of defamation and slander suits prosecuted in London's ecclesiastical courts in the century preceding the period covered in this thesis, Gowing endorses the view that girls and women in service in London before the Civil War conventionally relied on their masters and mistresses to stand in for their parents.

42 Pepys, Diary, (26 Mar. 1662), III, 53.
Gowing describes some of the qualities particular to urban domestic service, some of which would still be relevant to female servants in eighteenth-century London. In the period 1570-1640, female servants migrated to the capital at a greater variety of ages and under less predictable circumstances than their male counterparts.\textsuperscript{43} This was equally true at the end of the seventeenth and start of the eighteenth centuries in London.\textsuperscript{44} In the early sixteenth century, most people living in London were migrants and therefore lived in communities where they shared only a limited personal history and family past.\textsuperscript{45} As this thesis endeavors to demonstrate, this aspect of London society remained constant through the first part of the eighteenth century.\textsuperscript{46}

Gowing has discovered that in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries many households took in close relatives as servants.\textsuperscript{47} Pre-Civil War London's was a society in which masters and mistresses were expected to closely monitor their servants' moral conduct.\textsuperscript{48} The social and sexual behaviour of household servants was a particular preoccupation among mistresses of the


\textsuperscript{44} See chapter two, below.

\textsuperscript{45} Gowing, \textit{Domestic Dangers}, 20.

\textsuperscript{46} See chapter two, below.

\textsuperscript{47} Gowing, \textit{Domestic Dangers}, 27.

\textsuperscript{48} Ibid., 117.
middling sort. Such inquisitiveness was encouraged by the predominant London practice of servants living with their masters and away from their birthplaces and families:

London's households were full of women in the less protected [than married women] conditions of domestic service. Many had come to the city after the death of a parent; even if their parents were alive, they were generally at some distance. in the place of a close family, servants lived under the authority of their employers.

Gowing argues that when they came to the capital, servants acquired a new group of "kin" that included both their distant relatives and their employers, on whose advice and influence they depended. She notes that advice for women stipulated that part of the duties of running a house was the supervision of the moral relations of servants, and this expectation invested employers with a sense of authority over their servants' courtships. Domestics might receive close scrutiny from their mistresses who supervised their domestics' behaviour including their sex relationships. This meant that for female servants in London in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, employers were formally encouraged to stand in as substitute parents.

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49 Gowing, Domestic Dangers, 96.
50 Ibid., 142.
51 Ibid., 15.
52 Ibid., 21.
53 Ibid., 150.
54 Ibid., 191.
Gowings' work makes it easier to understand why Pepys would have been so frustrated by the difficulties and uncertainties entailed in managing his female servants in the 1660s. Pepys appreciated full well how the traditions of the institution were designed to keep female servants in hand, yet the ideal often failed him as he negotiated relations with his own domestics. It is unsurprising that Pepys took careful note in the diary of the practice, just then coming into vogue, of getting references from prospective domestics. By 1660, London was growing into a substantial metropolis, and the pool of available urban servants grew as well, creating anxiety about the increasing anonymity of these women from the employer's point of view.

Views of domestics in the early eighteenth century

A generation after Pepys, at the beginning of the eighteenth century, Daniel Defoe also wrote about domestics in London. His concerns about servants were varied and wide-ranging in his polemical work, and when he imagined labouring women in his novels, they were often domestic servants: Moll Flanders begins her life with expectations of going to service, fulfills them, and returns to domestic work in the interstices between her many marriages; Roxana's maidservant, Amy, is the supporting mainstay of her own and her mistress's shifting life circumstances. Defoe's novels appeared at the end of his writing career. He also demonstrated an interest in servants and a concern for

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female domestics' welfare in his earlier didactic work, and was one of the first English writers to do so. His most recent biographer writes that Defoe "worried about servants...Always alert to social change, he was among the first to write about this large population group at the time when it was being transformed into strangers whose work was a commodity for which they received wages."\(^56\) In Defoe's writing, there is the suggestion of arrangements between masters and servants that are perhaps more impersonal and more contractually stated than in Pepys's period.

In his prescriptive work, Defoe exhorted masters to be wary of domestics' bargaining tactics when hiring. His depiction of a spectacularly unsuccessful interview suggests that he was acutely aware of the possible points of contractual leverage held by female servants on the occasion that "a young wench came to hire herself":

My sister, understanding what she was, began to inquire what wages she expected? She modestly asked but eight pounds a year. The next question was, what work she could do to deserve such wages? to which she answered, she could clean a house, or dress a common family dinner. But cannot you wash, replied my sister, or get up linen? she answered in the negative, and said, she would undertake neither, nor would she go into any family that did not put out their linen to wash, and hire a charwoman to scour.

...And yet you ask eight pounds a year, replied my sister Yes, madam, said she, nor shall I bate a farthing. Then get you gone for a lazy impudent baggage, said I, you want to be a boarder not a servant; have you a fortune or an estate that you dress at that rate?

...Madam, replied she pertly; I know my business; and do not fear a service; there are more places than parish churches; if you wash at home, you should have a laundry maid; if you give entertainments, you must have a cook maid; if you have any needlework, you should have a chambermaid; and such a house as this is enough for a housemaid in all conscience. 57

In a steady urban market for domestics in a growing city ("there are more places than parish churches"), where the decision to hire a stranger necessarily depended on an employer's quick assessment of her in an interview ("have you a fortune or an estate that you dress at that rate?"), a contract depended on swift and surefooted negotiation ("my sister, understanding what she was, began to inquire what wages she expected").

When Pepys hired Ashwell in the 1660s, the process involved repeated interviews. Defoe's description of the negotiations involved in hiring a lady's maid suggests a more compressed and formulaic approach predicated on a servant's market value. Defoe thought maids ought always to be strictly distinguished as hired workers, particularly in matters of their comportment and dress. 58 The servant problem was not new in Defoe's period. By the eighteenth century, however, the management of female servants constituted an issue addressed with sustained urgency.

Defoe found that domestics difficult to pin down with respect to both references and dress, and complained that false references and elaborate costume


were devices women servants used as forms of disguise. Defoe was one of several to articulate the complaint that servants’ clothing was such that “it is a hard matter to know the mistress from the maid by their dress; nay, very often the maid shall be much the finer of the two.” Another, anonymous, author conceded in response to Defoe that servants “seem fond enough of appearing clean and handsome, without any other encouragement than our own foppishness and vanity.” A third writer proposed a solution to the sartorial problem: “some wise governments have found it necessary to make Laws for restraining this excess, by appointing a distinct dress for servants, whereby they might know themselves, and be known by others.”

In his 1725 essay on the management of servants, Defoe posited that there had been a decline in servants’ discipline on a lapse in morals and good practices, “spread by the example of the gentlemen to the tennants, to the common people in the corporations, to the servants, and in short, to the whole body of the people.” In *The Servant’s Calling*, an anonymous pamphlet written in the same year, the author proposed that servants “must obey two Masters, doing their duty to man upon a principle of serving God.” This “intitles ‘em to a

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reward and blessing from above, as much as to wages from an earthly Master."\textsuperscript{63}

Pepys worried about the money his domestics were costing him, but his attentions and tutelage were additional advantages he felt he conferred on his female servants. Defoe’s focus, in contrast, was on urban domestics’ anonymity—which he as an employer found to be problematic—and on their tendency to be both evasive and demanding. This last, he felt, was something female servants learned easily in London’s burgeoning market. Defoe developed his suspicions about the slippery nature of domestics in his fiction.

As a girl, Moll Flanders finds herself well situated in the family who adopts her into service. She views her new circumstances as step toward respectability since she has acquired a wealthy new mistress, who

\begin{quote}

exceeded the good woman I was with before in every thing, as well as in the matter of estate; I say in every thing except honesty; and for that, tho’ this was a Lady most exactly just, yet I must not forget to say on all occasions, that the first tho’ poor, was as uprightly honest as it was possible for any one to be.\textsuperscript{64}
\end{quote}

Her new mistress is affluent, and so commands Moll’s respect. Suggested in Moll’s phrasing is the necessity of sacrificing honesty in order to achieve such affluence. She takes notice of the fact that her “uprightly honest” nurse is also poor; with this observation, the importance of money to a female servant is linked to the perceived need to protect herself in undertaking arrangements with others.

\textsuperscript{63} Anon., \textit{The Servant’s Calling}, 7-8.

\textsuperscript{64} Defoe, \textit{Moll Flanders}, 15.
Moll's adventures suggest that high mobility was a feature of service for women by the 1720s. She comes to rely on domestic work as a vehicle for self-advancement, even as her circumstances are straitened precisely by her service in successive households. Moll takes on the role of domestic servant as her best means of self-protection, as well as to earn money, precisely because of the flexibility and anonymity the role of servant affords her, as when she reports "I had the curiosity to disguise my self like a servant maid in a round cap and straw hat," and "speaking with one of the maids, and I held a long gossip's tale with her."

Defoe's writing, a generation after Pepys's, might be said to reflect a tendency in London toward increasingly impersonal, contractual relations between masters and servants. We may at this point conjecture that this was thought to be the case in the early eighteenth century and explore this possibility further by considering the tenor of popular writing about servants in two major London periodicals. The Tatler and Spectator are here considered together, for several reasons: both were London papers, authored and edited by the same man, Richard Steele (along with Steele's friend, Joseph Addison, in the Spectator); the Spectator (1711-14) ran as a direct successor to the Tatler (1709-11); and both papers were directed at the beau monde who came to London for the Season, as members of the political classes and as governors and employers of the lesser

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65 Defoe, Moll Flanders, 16

66 Ibid., 95.
sorts of people. Accordingly, these two publications are excerpted in order to illustrate prescriptive and employers' views of domestics in the capital in the early eighteenth century, and to consider some of the ways in which female servants were conforming to or transgressing such expectations.

Both papers pursued double-faceted treatments of the subject of domestics. The first was discussion of the method for becoming a good master or mistress, cast as advice to readers from servants themselves. Secondly, the papers made periodic allusions to the assorted failings of the female sex, both mistresses and maids, and these commentaries were wittily presented as cases in which the management of domestics required special attention.

By way of exemplifying the effects of a good master upon his servants, Steele recounted his story of a visit to a gentleman friend, whose kindness toward his own servants resulted in a household in which "the servants act with affection to their master, and satisfaction in themselves." Yet in another issue written several months later, Steele suggested that he did not know of many arrangements that were felicitous in this way. He attributed this lack to the tendency among London's genteel classes to consider servants primarily as emblems of their employer's social status:

> there is hardly a man to be found, who would not rather be in pain to appear happy, than be really happy and thought miserable. These men attempt by sumptuous equipages,

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splendid houses, numerous servants, and all the cares and pursuits of an ambitious or fashionable life.68

In commenting on the precedence of status displays over private happiness among employers of London servants, Steele introduced a theme that he would later develop in the Spectator: only a fashionable master's unthinking behaviour could lead him to treat his servants like strangers—and yet this was the accepted practice in contemporary London.

In the Spectator, Steele presented the "humble petition" of four servants, one of them a woman, "in behalf of themselves and their relations, belonging to and dispersed in the several services of most of the great families in the cities of London and Westminster." The petitioners asserted the existence of "spies", tattling co-workers of suspicious mein who disrupt households: "whenever a spy is entertained, the peace of that house is from that moment banished." The servant-petitioners' claim was that such spies "never give an account of good services, but represent our mirth and freedom by the words wantonness and disorder." Spies were thereby understood to be the creators of household jealousy and misunderstanding, so that

the masters and mistresses of such houses live in continual suspicion of their ingenuous and true servants, and are given up to the management of those who are false and perfidious.69

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68 Steele, Tatler No. 63, 3 September 1709.

The Spectator's readers were reminded that a master's lack of a well-developed acquaintanceship with his servants could lead only to grief and discord in the household. Pepys, in comparison, had had intermittent difficulties with managing his domestics, but he was at least well acquainted with them during their respective stays in his household.

Steele considered that there was a remedy to the problems with servants he described. He noted that while it was "the common vice of children to run too much amongst the servants," those servants might themselves be improved, so that "the ill offices and defamatory whispers, which take their birth from domesticks, could be prevented." A religious education for servants was entailed, and Steele exhorted masters to have "a knowledge of the whole life of the persons he designs to take into his house for his own service, or that of his family or children, long before they [are] admitted." This, the Spectator asserted, would create endearing dependencies of servants upon their master, and inspire a paternal air in the master, "who would be relieved from much care and anxiety from the gratitude and diligence of an humble friend attending him as his servant."70

This recommendation was entirely consonant with a traditional understanding of how servants ought to be managed, as both Pepys's diary and Gowing's work on the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries suggest. As Defoe's work shows, however, "endearing dependencies of servants upon their master" and "a

70 Steele, Spectator, No. 294, 6 February 1712.
knowledge of the whole life” of prospective domestics were aims that could be difficult to achieve in the eighteenth-century metropolis.

For Steele, the servant problem was complicated by the fact that women, and in particular female servants, defied sound reasoning and were bereft of restraint. Just as he dedicated the Tatler “to the fair sex, in honour of whom I have taken the title of this paper,” so he offered opinions on the foibles and inscrutability he found unique to women in a domestic situation. Steele described London mistresses’ essential unreliability and tendency toward indisposition in his mention of the eighteenth-century custom of “How-d’ye Servants”, those sent to carry greetings and compliments between employers’ acquaintances:

if the how-d’ye servants of our women were to make a weekly bill of sickness, as the parish clerks do of mortality, you would not find in an account of seven days, one in thirty that was not downright sick or indisposed, or but a very little better than she was, and so forth.

Mistresses of domestics in London tended themselves to be of unreliable character, and female servants copied their mistresses. In so saying, Steele developed the theme he introduced elsewhere in his discussion of servants—that servants aped their masters and would more easily adopt employers’ faults than employers’ graces. Steele suggested that it was frequently the character of

71 Steele, Tatler, preface to Vol. I, ix.

72 Steele, Spectator No. 143, 14 August 1711.
domestics "to conform themselves in every thing to the humours and passions of their mistresses":

they sacrifice superiority of sense to superiority of condition, and are insensibly betrayed into the passions and prejudices of those whom they serve, without giving themselves leave to consider, that they are extravagant and ridiculous.\(^\text{73}\)

Steele's charge of domestics' extravagance anticipates Defoe's. In the *Tatler*, Steele expressed his opinions on this matter of servants' behaviour by describing a female acquaintance who complained of her domestics. He suggested that his acquaintance passed her time by eating, sleeping, dressing and praying, and so perhaps was well occupied for an hour in the morning. Thereafter, he wrote, "you come out to dress in so froward a humour, that the poor girl who attends you curses her very being in that she is your servant, for the peevish things you say to her." Steele also opined that during the period of the day "which your Ladyship sets aside for Heaven, you are to know, that your cook is sweating and fretting in preparation for your dinner."\(^\text{74}\) If a mistress set an example of snapping at her maid and idling away her time when her cook was at hard labour, it was no surprise that her servants were hard to manage.

Steele's theme was that servants could be no better than their employers, and mistresses must be especially diligent in monitoring their own behaviour

\(^{73}\) Steele, *Tatler* No. 121, 17 January 1710.

\(^{74}\) Ibid., No. 210, 12 August 12, 1710.
toward their domestics on account of their own irresponsible and chaotic natures. He supported this notion by providing servants’ points of view, including in the *Spectator* an under-maid’s suggestion concerning the nature of her mistress. This domestic, who described herself as the next thing to a lady’s woman, “under both my lady and her woman,” suggested that “My Lady her self is of no mind in the world, and for that reason her woman is of twenty minds in a moment.” This domestic asked of Steele that he let his readers know that all mistresses are as like as all servants.”

Only very limited inferences may be drawn from these anecdotal sources concerning London domestics’ adherence to or subversion of employers’ expectations. Prescriptively, servants were to be well treated by their masters after those masters had chosen and educated them carefully. Employers could only expect a bad outcome if they acquired servants for reasons of status, without a careful preliminary check into their histories. We may infer that servants fell into a range of behaviours, predicated on the quality of their relations with their masters. We may also infer that in the case of mistresses’ relations with their domestics, special allowance for poor management was recommended in consideration of women’s undependable natures.

We know that masters and mistresses held considerable paternal authority over their servants. Pepys looked backward to that earlier time when the metropolitan market for domestics was smaller and female servants were more easily managed if an employer knew their parents either personally or by

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7Steele, *Spectator* No. 137, 7 August 1711.
reputation. The virtues of an ideal servant changed very little, but as the seventeenth century became the eighteenth, the problems entailed in managing domestics were often described as those of managing contract workers rather than family members. An emphasis on female servants as wage labourers implies a contract relationship between masters and servants that was wholly exposed to the participants' views, and it also implies that female servants had some active role in shaping that relationship. Accordingly, this preface ends with a brief introduction to the concept of female servants' agency, an organizing principle that informs this thesis as a qualitative study of court and parish records.

People make their lives in society within several broad social contexts—economic, political, and ideological, for example—and each of these contexts creates occasions and opportunities for agency. Agency can be defined as a perception of possibilities for action created out of the circumstances of a person's life. It is a thing we perceive ourselves to have or to lack. As one develops an understanding of one's sources and levels of power, we understand oneself to be an agent.

We are agents as individuals, but also collectively, in groups. Agency, then, may refer to both individual and collective action, and to individual and

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collective power. Agency is especially important in contexts where an individual's or group's power is circumscribed, because an understanding of possibilities for action may represent the only available reservoir of strength in a particular social context, especially if that context sets the individual or group in question against a more materially powerful opponent. Because women have often been disadvantaged in social contexts in comparison to men, women's narratives about their lives have been described as "narratives of thwarted agency." 78 Indeed, the claim may be made that agency's defining characteristic is that it is always shaped in resistance to the dominant order, and that it is therefore "purely defensive." 79 In this view, agency represents possibilities for action that are not formally recognized as material, possibilities that are always covertly or at best informally held.

Joan Wallach Scott suggests that historical analysis benefits greatly from the study of women's agency, including the study of women's actions and experience and of ideas and policies which define their rights. 80 Female agency in history might take the form of consent to or transgression of formally sanctioned social order in particular contexts, since specific historical instances generate


different potentials for and limits to women's power. The general term "agency" will of course describe a range of experiences in different times and places. Women in the past and the contexts within which they made their lives are mutually constitutive—they shaped each other in shifting arrangements.

How are we to discover such possibilities for action within particular social contexts? Joan Cocks has suggested that historical investigation locates agency in women's force of language and meaning; in their expressed ideas and symbols; and in their desires and intentions as these are revealed in the light of their named goals. The particularity of women's experiences means that those experiences cannot be aggregated into a single, defining statement of the means by which agency is constituted. Agency, as Cora Kaplan has written, is never lived in the abstract, "but always, insistently, through a particular set of histories." It is possible to bring early-modern agency into the historical account. The historian may use agency as an organizing concept to locate and interpret evidence about women in the past that "has been invisible to those

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84 Cora Kaplan, Sea changes: essays on culture and feminism (London: Verso, 1986), 34.
whose eyes have encountered it before." This entails considering that women like men are "thinking social actors."

Perhaps the largest roadblock to assessing agency historically is that "local records are peculiarly silent—except indirectly—about large sectors of past thought." With this qualification, it is still possible to establish methods for assessing early modern women's agency. In studying Ralph Josselin's diary, for example, Alan Macfarlane considered the quality and importance of interpersonal relationships, which we may consider forms of agency similar to those available to London domestics: frequency of visits, messages and other communications, degree of interest shown in each other's affairs, and aid offered in finding work or in moments of crisis.

Evidence of agency for female servants in early modern London can similarly be found in Court of Arches records, a major source for this thesis, through the sequence of interpersonal exchanges described in depositions and through the patterns of relationships between participants in those exchanges. As Miranda Chaytor has noted, one way to consider the agency of women in the early modern period is by unravelling "the relations, hierarchies and obligations

86 Henrietta L. Moore, *Feminism and anthropology* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), 38.
88 Ibid., 105.
within households and between them, within kin groups and outside them." \(^{99}\) Such hierarchies and obligations are perceptible in the transcripts of trials and in depositions.

The notion of agency is an organizing device in this thesis, used to show the ways women attempted to take a limited degree of control of their lives in a patriarchal society. Agency is a useful concept because it helps to illustrate women's autonomy in an increasingly commercial society. Cultural valuations given to women and men do not always accurately reflect their respective access to and control over resources. \(^{90}\) A discussion of women's agency affords an understanding of power that was nowhere formally recognized. Indeed, it may be argued that when women's agency is factored into the historical account the two sexes' respective access to and control over resources were often better balanced than contemporary cultural valuations suggested. \(^{91}\) The following chapters of this thesis, an exploration of the commercial nature of London service, consider the access to and control over resources available to female servants in the metropolis in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.


\(^{90}\) Moore, \textit{Feminism and anthropology}, 37.

\(^{91}\) Ibid., 37.
CHAPTER THREE: Patterns of work and wages

Introduction

Sara Chappell was sixteen years old when she got her first London place in 1694. She was a native of the capital, “born and lived at Shadwell parish and lived there with her parents till the time she went to live with Jemima Bird,” an acquaintance of her grandmother’s who became her first mistress. Chappell reported she “hath known Jemima Bird so long as she can remember anything and was well acquainted with her before she went to live with her.” As Chappell’s Arches deposition told it,

when Sarah Chappell went from Bird’s service she went and lived in the family of William Edwards founder in Houndsditch about twelve months, then went home and lived with her father some time then went to and lived in the family of Captain Slee then living in Fox’s Lane afterwards at Shadwell Dock afterwards upon Wapping Wall afterwards at Stepney Causeway...she several times lived in Slee’s family by the space of three years an a half, and came from there a half a year since.
The domestic positions Chappell got were in households at the economic as well as the geographical periphery of London; Jemima Bird, her first mistress, "paid about 4 pounds a year rent." At the time Chappell left Slee's employ, her last recorded position as a servant, her master had just relocated within Shadwell, Chappell's birth parish. But Chappell herself moved on. In the six-month period between leaving Slee's and her deposition, she had found two sequential lodgings in Shadwell, and at the time of her deposition, she said she was "now out of service and has designs to go and live with her father a carpenter at Sherness." ¹

Her rotation through this series of jobs and lodgings in the east-end dockside, including her reliance on family and her intervals out of service, shaped the working self-identity Chappell described for herself in 1706: that of a woman who "gets her living by going to service but is now out of service." She deposed that she "hath lived by service and when out of service sews and knits." ² Chappell held at least five places as a domestic in London in the decade between her mid-teens and mid-twenties. It is clear that she benefited from family contacts in obtaining her first job, and her father continued to support her at

¹ Rudé's assessment of rents paid by the middling classes in the middle of the eighteenth century ranged between £8 and £10 p.a. at the lower end, and between £40 and £50 at the upper end. George Rudé, Hanoverian London, 1714-1808, (London: Secker and Warburg, 1971), 50-51.

² LPL De Morais v Harrison, 1706: Eee 9 f. 224.
Although she was resourceful at finding alternative varieties of work, she identified herself as a servant.

This chapter demonstrates that female servants experienced high mobility from position to position, notwithstanding that at each place a contract was struck to serve for an annual term. This represented a kind of security and a nominal guarantee for urban domestics who changed jobs at intervals shorter than a year. This chapter also discusses the intermittent nature of paid domestic work in the metropolis, and the variability in the social and economic status of even individual servants' places. Finally, this chapter suggests that steady wage rates for female servants across London gave them the agency to leave positions and get new ones at any time of the year.

Sarah Chappell's experience of urban service appears to have been a common one. For migrants and London natives alike, domestic service in the capital was normally work a girl began in her adolescent years, and through service young women received continuing training in domestic skills, a process begun earlier at home. In this, the London experience accommodated the traditions of service in a straightforward way.

With respect to female servants' irregular mobility between places and their intervals of doing other kinds of work, however, domestic service in the metropolis at the end of the seventeenth and start of the eighteenth centuries was an experience at some variance with the institution as its traditions had
developed among masters hiring farm servants. While servants in husbandry were recruited for a year's term primarily at autumn hiring fairs, no such natural constraints governed service in an urban setting, and the terms and conditions of domestic service developed differently. Thus in London, the term of a year's hire, as described in the formula used by Arches deponents, “I was a yearly hired servant,” was not consonant with the harvest cycle. Instead, the notion of an annual term was a device, a common standard used to negotiate positions at any time of the year. In this chapter it will be suggested that because female servants assigned a nominal yearly wage were also highly mobile in the metropolis, their opportunities to relocate at irregular intervals afforded them a limited but important source of agency and self-determination as workers.

Early training for domestic service

Whether London domestics were migrants or natives, they commonly got their first place in service as adolescents. In this, London servants followed traditions that were no different on the continent. Cissy Fairchilds notes that service in France in the same period was “an entry-level occupation, a first job” appropriate to “the young and inexperienced”; French girls started their careers as domestics in their mid to late teens.³ Laslett estimates that in England, “only a

³ Fairchilds, Domestic Enemies, 66.
minority of children were, at any one age, in service, though a majority of them may have been in this situation at some time in their lives.4

London domestics typically indicated that they had begun in service as a first job in their mid to late teens, often outside the capital. Drawing from a sample of six communities in this period, but not including London, Laslett found that 67% of all female servants in early modern England were between fifteen and twenty-four years old.5 This percentage suggests that service was commonly a first job throughout the country, and anecdotal evidence from Arches depositions confirms that this was the case in the metropolis as well.

Susan Wingood, a London-born Arches deponent, started service in London at fifteen. By the time she was twenty-three, she had gotten positions in St. Giles Cripplegate, Wapping and St. Mary Magdalene.6 Similarly, Frances Atkinson got her first London place when she was twenty, becoming housekeeper to a gentleman in Bloomsbury after leaving her mother’s home at Hull; Atkinson had begun to get work in service locally at age eighteen, and two years later she left for London.7 Hannah Brain, age twenty-one, said that she had lived with her father and been maintained by him throughout her childhood in

4 Laslett, Family Life, 34.

5 Laslett, Family Life, 34-35, 43.

6 LPL Winkle v Wood 1668: Eee 3 f. 452.

7 LPL Pindar v Pindar 1718: Eee 12 f. 65.
Oxfordshire, and that since leaving home at eighteen, she had been "maintained by going to service."8 Sarah Martin came to London in search of domestic work from Surrey, where she "was with her father from childhood."9 Ann Woods arrived in London with a Surrey-based household at age twenty-one. She had got the place out of her "childhood home with her mother in Chidingford."10

Elizabeth Henley came to London from Canterbury when she was twenty-four with her mistress, in whose parents' employ she had been since the age of eleven.11 Mary Jenkins came to the capital in her teens from her mother's house in Lincolnshire.12 When she turned eighteen, Mary Abis left Bedfordshire, where she was born and had lived "most of her time" to come to London and look for work in service.13 Christiana Lovegrove reported that she came to London "from the country"; at the age of nineteen she had already worked in three households for a total period of at least five years.14

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8 *LPL* Young v Young 1706: Eee 9 f. 156.

9 *LPL* Catchpoole v Catchpoole 1692: Eee 7 f. 456.

10 *LPL* Catchpoole v Catchpoole 1692: Eee 7 f. 450.

11 *LPL* Young v Young 1706: Eee 9 f. 185.

12 *LPL* Strudwick v Strudwick 1722: Eee 12 f. 139.

13 *LPL* Hubbard v Hubbard 1668: Eee 3 f. 283.

14 *LPL* Bound v Bound 1693: Eee 7 f. 691.
City-born women described the same early preparation for work in service that migrants did. In 1701 Mary Culcup testified before the court that she was “born at Westminster” and said that her father, who worked as a sugar boiler, also “blew the bellows of the organ at the parish church of St. Margarets Westminster and was one of the parish bearers.” Her birth family would have been one of the working poor, albeit several notches above the ranks of itinerant labourers or day-labourers. Culcup’s father had a trade, and served the church as a minor but salaried vestry official. Culcup’s mother “washed gentlemen’s linen.” Mary Culcup followed in her mother’s work role: she said she was “brought up to work at her needle and ironing” until she was nineteen years old. The work Culcup said she got from the age of nineteen “hath been in service”; she said she “thereby has been and is maintained ever since.” In the six years between her start in service and the death of her parents Culcup made her way through domestic positions in several households, working for a “chairman” and a gardener before her most recent master. At the time of her deposition, she lived “in Castle Street by the Seven Dials” at her employer’s lodgings.

Mary Culcup’s acquaintance, Margaret Anderson, lived near Culcup. Anderson was a lodger in a house in St. Andrews Street, at the junction where that road met Castle Street and Martin’s Lane. She was thirty years old, and said that “she was at that time out of service and taking in washing instead.” Anderson arrived in the metropolis from Newnham, Northumberland, “her
parents having died when she was an infant.” Anderson had come to the capital at age twenty-two, and had spent the eight years between her arrival and her Arches deposition working as a domestic in several London positions. She described her father as having been a labourer, and she said she was “brought up to spinning and washing...and to service.”15

Women who identified themselves as servants in London, migrants and natives alike, were trained for work that utilized their domestic skills. Just as Mary Culcup, a London native, was “brought up to work at her needle and ironing,” Margaret Anderson, a migrant, was “brought up to spinning and washing...and to service.” In telling their stories, these two London servants described their working lives similarly, despite their disparate geographic origins. This suggests that the general elements of girls’ training for service were the same for London-born women and migrants, although different skill sets would be required depending on the social and economic status of the households in which they were employed. All were trained to perform a range of household tasks appropriate to a domestic servant and also central to a woman’s responsibilities in marriage.

15 LPL Cross v Cross 1726: Eee 13 ff. 31, 45.
Female servants' mobility in London

In 1721 Mary Jenkins, age twenty-two, deposed,

she was a servant to General Charles as a waiting woman to his two daughters for about three quarters of a year ending in or about the latter end of July 1721...she hath for about 6 or 7 weeks lived [with a family named Strudwick] at Hyde Park and before that with Mrs. Margaret Boves in St. James’s Street 10 months and before that with General Charles about 9 months and before that she lodged with Mrs. LeFore in Prince’s Ct. in Prince Street St. James’s about 6 weeks or 2 months and before that she lodged with Mrs. Tulchet at Mrs. Williams in New North Street by Red Lyon Square for about 10 or 11 weeks and before that she lived with her mother Mrs. Worseby at Southwillingham and at Ragby in Lincolnshire and before that she waited on Consul Baker’s lady in Queen Street Westminster 8 or 9 months and before that she lived with her Aunt Lee in Dean Street Soho about 6 or 8 months and before that with Brigadier Duran’s Lady in the same street and in Spain.”

Jenkins reported nine moves in roughly four years, including two relocations with her mother out of the capital—after each of which Jenkins returned to London—and another period in which she either lodged with or waited on her aunt, as well as working for other employers. Jenkins’s story suggests the range and number of sequential places that were possible for an individual female servant in the metropolis, and her story highlights the intermittence of work as an urban domestic.

The sequential variability of a female servant’s places in London could be considerable. One Arches deponent had a place in “Lord Falconbury’s family”;

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16 LPL Strudwick v Strudwick 1721: Eee 12 f. 159.
she then became a servant to a pawnbroker in Golden Square, St. Giles, followed
by a place with a "widow gentlewoman" in Gerard Street. Another was the
servant of a goldbeater in Great Queen Street and to a carpenter near Lincolns
Inn Fields before being hired by the wife of a baronet. A third domestic reported
she had places with a doctor, a captain, the proprietor of a Haymarket public
house, and "Lord Abercorne in Bolton Street", for, respectively, terms of three
months, fifteen months, five months and three years. Hecht’s conclusions with
respect to this aspect of service—that while a servant was always hopeful of a
better place, the socio-economic status of her sequential employers could vary
considerably—are supported by servants’ Arches testimonies. In London a
domestic’s status might rise or fall with each new position she obtained, since a
change of places did not always bring social advancement.

The traditions of domestic service supported a certain expectation of
advancement, in two senses: women saw service as an avenue to a better life,
and domestic service also supported the hope of promotion within or between
places. The possibility of bettering one’s life by becoming a domestic servant
attracted migrants to the capital. As Hecht noted, migrants shared the

17 LPL Ceshall v Ceshall 1692/3: Eee 7 f. 536.

18 LPL Clavering v Clavering 1735: Eee 14 f. 237.

19 LPL Onslow — 1735: Eee 14 f. 207.

20 Hecht, The Domestic Servant Class, 34.
fundamental conviction "that a place in London provided the best chance of improving their condition." In this sense, domestic service was "both a refuge and a means whereby improved social status could be obtained."21 Kussmaul's assessment that, for servants in husbandry, "to move up was to move to a more responsible position, or to a larger and better-run farm," was also an aim shared by London domestics.22 The possibility of steady advancement was surest in upper-class households, where a large enough staff was required to create a context for promotion. The elevation a servant to a place among the upper staff then came after they "had risen by slow stages through the ranks of the lower household."23

Advancement between positions was of course possible for female servants in the capital, and this was most likely reflected a domestic's experience. One Arches deponent waited on two families before becoming housekeeper to several more by the time she was twenty-three years old, in 1718:

she has lived with Mr. Matthew Pindar and Mrs. Mary Pindar as their housekeeper...at their house in Brumby in the county of Lincoln...for

21 Hecht, The Domestic Servant Class, 23.

22 Kussmaul, Servants in husbandry, 55; in France in this period a servant's first job determined the level at which she would remain throughout her career; Fairchilds concludes that in the eighteenth century, "the career pattern of the typical servant showed a few relatively long stays at congenial households, interspersed with many short sojourns in less pleasing surroundings...Most domestics held many jobs in their lives: between five and ten was probably the average." Fairchilds, Domestic Enemies, 69.

23 Hecht, The Domestic Servant Class, 183.
about three months she has lived as a housekeeper to Esquire Batemen at Bloomsbury and before that she was a housekeeper to [the Pindars] about seven months and before that was a housekeeper to Conrad Baker in Queen Street Westminster for 5 or 6 months and before that she waited on Mrs. Thompson at Hull for 12 months and before that she waited on Mrs. Bastow at Beverly about 6 months and before that she waited on Mrs. Elizabeth Gee at York about three years and before that she lived at home with her father and mother at Hull all her time.24

This woman’s story suggests that she advanced in rank during the six-year period in which she held these places. At the same time, the term of each position was relatively short—five out of six for less than one year—circumscribing her advancement by ongoing re-hiring.

Hecht found that whether a London domestic advanced or not, instances of long service were exceptional.25 Defoe made the same point more sarcastically at the start of the eighteenth century:

I have heard of an ancient charity in the parish of St. Clement Danes, where a sum of money or estate is left, out...of which such maid-servants who have lived in that parish seven years in one service, receive a reward of ten pounds a piece, if they please to demand it...nor have I heard such reward has been paid to any servant of late years.26

24 LPL. Pindar v Pindar 1718: Eee 12 f. 65.

25 Hecht, The Domestic Servant Class, 82.

As Meldrum has noted, for most London domestic servants, "small households meant that career development was not an option within the household; where it was possible at all it usually necessitated moving jobs."\(^{27}\)

Ambition has often been cast as a salient feature of early modern English society, especially when compared to the closed and static social and economic hierarchies that obtained in France in the early modern period.\(^{28}\) The notion of advancement in service was a tradition fostered in upper-class households, where the requirement for multiple servants made such ambitions possible. But as Meldrum writes, only the large households of affluent London employers offered real scope for servants' internal promotion.\(^{29}\) Certainly it was possible for a woman to achieve a modicum of upward mobility in service, but, as domestics' Arches depositions show, a pattern of steady advancement did not always match the experience of female servants in London. Advancement within or between households was an uncertain thing for urban domestics, and they might also experience both considerable mobility and intermittence of work in service.

The mobility of early modern servants is difficult to quantify, because records detailing the movements between places of early modern servants are

\(^{27}\) Meldrum, "Domestic Service in London", 97.


\(^{29}\) Meldrum, "Domestic Service in London", 98.
rare. Ann Kussmaul, for example, has described how hard it is to assess the “spatial component” of rural servants’ mobility, finding that out of hundreds of surviving eighteenth-century Suffolk and Hertfordshire settlement examinations, only thirty-two provided details of individuals’ movements within farm service—that is, of the places they held and the sequence in which they got them.

Locating such records entails searching through narrative testimony for deponents who provided detailed descriptions of who had employed them, and who included enough fragments of information to fit the pieces of a servant’s work history together. In the Court of Arches records used for this thesis, thirty-eight London domestics described their work histories in detail in depositions between 1665 and 1735. Twenty-nine of the women (76.3%) reported having been servants to more than one London employer. Twenty-one (55.2%) named four or more masters.

Kussmaul has described the normal experience among rural servants in England in this period was one of narrowly circumscribed and regular mobility. When farm servants moved between positions, as Kussmaul has noted, “they most often traveled far enough to leave the parish in which they had last served, but not much further.” The relocations of servants in husbandry did not tend to be random, but were instead “directed and bounded” within the local
community; movement over long distances was rare. On the basis of the anecdotal evidence provided in Arches depositions, London domestics’ patterns of movement within the metropolis were consonant with distances covered by farm servants. That is, several female servants who described their sequence of places in detail described moves within a particular parish or to a neighbouring parish, unless they left the capital altogether to return to their families.

Dorothy Busby, at age twenty-three, lived in Bedford Court, near Red Lyon Street, and “lived by her service.” The social and economic statuses of her employers were varied, as were their locations within London. Busby had a place with a staymaker in the Strand for ten months and “came from thence sick”; during her illness she lodged with “an old Welsh woman” near Drury Lane for six weeks. She was subsequently employed as a servant for six months by a “fan stick maker” in Great Wild Street near Lincoln’s Inn Fields, and then for three-month periods by a cabinet maker in West Smithfield and a butcher in Westminster Market. At the time of her deposition, she had been a servant in the Bedford Court household for six weeks.

Other Arches depositions highlight not only the irregularity of female servants’ movements between places, but the varied employment circumstances between places as well. In 1735, Rebecca Hurley identified herself as a servant at

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30 Meldrum, “Domestic Service in London”, 98.

31 LPL Bave v Bave 1715: Eee 11 f. 84.
the age of forty-two. As she described her work history in the preceding five years, she had lodged at the Ship alehouse near Temple Bar for a year before becoming a domestic for six months to a woman who kept a milliner’s shop in the house of a dyer “over against Somerset House in the Strand.” Hurley left this position and was without work for several months, living in a house in Bell Yard; after this period she kept a chandler’s shop next door to the Black Swan Inn in Holborn for three-quarters of a year. She then returned to domestic service, first getting a place with a Mr. Locker at the Bell in Bullen Court in the Strand for three months, and then with a man who kept a brandy shop in Whishcomb Street near Leicester Fields. Hurley held this last position for a year. She was afterward hired as a servant to a cook in Eagle Street, where she remained for another full year. She said that she “used to take in washing...and now goes out to nurse women in their lying-in for her livelihood.” At the time of her deposition, she “lodged at the White Swan in Pauton Street, Haymarket” and had done so for the preceding six weeks.32

Female servants described positions that were intermittent even with the same employer, as when Frances Everard testified that at age twenty-four she took a place as a household servant in Milk Street, St. Lawrence Jewry; stayed for six months; “went from such service”; and six months after leaving “again went

32 LPL Onslow— 1735: Eée 14 f. 191b.
to and lived in [the same] service for four months." Similarly, Elizabeth Pryor, who was thirty-five, said that

she went to live as a servant to Francis and Elizabeth Jessup...and lived with them about 12 months...and then left the said service and about 18 months afterward she returned to them and lived with them as their servant for about 6 months.

Mary Abis also deposed that she worked on and off for the same master. Abis had come from Bedford "about half of a year since to live at London:"

and first lived at Mr. [illeg.] at the Hat and [illeg.] in the Strand for a month or two and then came to live with the said Mr. Hubbard and Mrs. Hubbard...and then went to live at the Nag's Head in Drum Alley in Drury Lane where she lived until her coming to live again with Mr. Hubbard, she getting her living by going to service.

Finally, Sara Chappell, whose deposition is included at the beginning of this chapter, said she "several times lived in Slee's family" as a servant.

Domestics who gave very detailed depositions, such as Busby, Jenkins, Hurley, and Chappell, each took jobs within particular areas of the metropolis, and so each can be said to have ranged within particular sections of the city, although did not always work in the same parish from job to job. Sara Chappell,

33 LPL Allen v Allen 1705: Eee 9 f. 85.
34 LPL Jessop v Jessop 1717: Eee 12 f. 46.
35 LPL Hubbard v Hubbard 1669: Eee 3 f. 283.
36 LPL De Morais v Harrison 1706: Eee 9 f. 224.
deposing in 1694, described movements generally circumscribed by work in dockside households. Two places she held in sequence—at Fox’s Lane and Shadwell Dock—were close enough together to be within the same neighbourhood, while her other positions were scattered within Shadwell and Wapping generally. The range and direction of Busby’s movements between places cast her north of Holborn for one job, and then directly south, almost to Thames-side, for the next. Her next moves took her north to Drury Lane, and then northeast to Lincoln’s Inn Fields, followed by a place gotten in a household situated at the far end of High Holborn and Holborn Hill. She then relocated to a job back around the curve of the river in the southern part of Westminster.

While these movements suggest that Busby remained in the westerly part of the metropolis, it is clear that she did not remain within the same neighbourhood.

In 1721, Mary Jenkins’ jobs described a route that took her from the furthest reaches of the West End, in Hyde Park, as far east as Red Lyon Square, north of Holborn, and Soho—and then south again into St. Margarets parish. Rebecca Hurley, deposing in 1735, got a series of three jobs at addresses on streets that intersected with the Strand, suggesting that she had made neighbourhood connections in order to find work. However, she also moved outside of that immediate range: her Whishcomb St. job took her much further toward the West End, and her Eagle St. place took her some distance north of the Strand, to Holborn. Of course these fragments of female servants’ stories are anecdotal, and
are merely suggestive at best. Arches depositions on the whole reveal only a little of the web of connections through employers, fellow servants, and others that took domestics from position to position.\textsuperscript{37}

In order to consider further the level of female servants' mobility in London, I have compared information taken from Arches depositions with St. Margarets settlement examinations. The range of servants' employers is comparable in Arches testimony and settlement examinations. However, these two kinds of records were created for very different purposes. In a settlement examination, the express purpose of giving testimony was for a woman to demonstrate that she had in fact been employed as a domestic servant in the parish for the term of one whole year. This was absolutely required in order for her to successfully claim parish settlement on the basis of service. The Court of Arches, on the other hand, neither privileged nor penalized servants for their work histories as these were presented in depositions, the details of which were in any case usually incidental to the testimony being sought and were included only to establish the witness's credibility.

Table 2.1 shows the lengths of time female servants who were settlement examinants in St. Margarets kept individual places in service compared to Arches deponents. This sample does not include positions domestics named as

\textsuperscript{37} Culcup and Anderson's acquaintanceship, cited above, was fostered by virtue of their living near to each other. The links between servants and others, and the attendant issue of "characters", or recommendations for jobs, is discussed in more detail in chapter five, following.
ongoing at the time they gave their statements. Keeping in mind that settlement
claimants had good reason to emphasize that they had worked a full year’s term,
85% of this group said that they had stayed in a single domestic position for
between one and three years. Among Arches deponents who had no incentive to
report fulfillment of a year’s contract, 52.4% of female servants stated that they
had remained in a place for less than one year, while the remaining 47.6% said
they had stayed in at least one place for a year or longer. Thus while many
servants took advantage of long-term work for one employer, suggesting a
mutually satisfactory employment situation, high mobility (where high mobility
is characterized as domestics’ movement between places lasting less than one
year) was not an unusual feature of service for women in the capital.
Table 3.1: Length of completed places listed in
St. Margarets settlement examinations compared to
Arches depositions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>St. Margarets</th>
<th>London</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>term</strong></td>
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<td>2 yrs. +</td>
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<td>4 yrs. +</td>
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<td>10 yrs. +</td>
<td>10 yrs. +</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>total</strong></td>
<td><strong>total</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source for St. Margarets: All female servants' settlement examinations for St. Margarets, Westminster, 1718-1735 in which length of place was listed; some deponents listed multiple places, and these have been counted separately. Source for London: All female servants' Court of Arches depositions, 1660-1730, in which length of place was listed; some deponents listed multiple places and these have been counted separately, as with the settlement examinations.
Reasons for the intermittence of places taken up female servants included temporary relocations out of the city, often coupled with periods during which these women lived with members of their extended families. This was described in the Arches deposition of Elizabeth Marson, age thirty-six, who worked for a distiller in Fryday St. for over a year. At the end of this period, Marson told her employer she had received a letter "by which she was acquainted her father was dying" and "declared she would go see her father." When Marson got her next place, as servant to a pewterer in Phillip Lane, she was still taking leave to "go to her father's in the country." In 1697 Sara Redhead deposed that she lived with her sister between places:

about May Day last was six months she went to live with Mrs. Lee in Fox Court...and she lived almost six months there after that was with her sister who was then sick and lived in the Tower, and her sister dying she lived a week at a country gentleman's at Clapham whose name she cannot remember...and from thence she went into the service of the Lady Charlotte Arby.

Other Arches deponents reported that they lived with their families in between places as well. In 1735, 30-year-old Elisabeth Baxter said that she had "lived as a servant" for the thirteen weeks preceding her deposition; before that, she was employed "at the Lady Torrington's as an assistant whilst the cook was lame"; before that she lived with her brother in Nottingham for three months;

39 LPL. Allen v Allen 1705: Eee 9 f. 74.

40 LPL. Macclesfield v Macclesfield 1697: Eee 8 f. 478.
before that she described two London addresses where she lodged, and third one in Hull. Sarah Wheeler, another servant, deposed that she had lived with her father in Surrey “and sometimes at service for above seven years last past.”

Women who in their depositions described receiving intermittent support from family nonetheless described themselves as servants. In a 1692 deposition, Elizabeth Hudson said she “usually gets her living by going to service” but “at present she lives with her sister, and maintains herself by making shirts and other linen.” When she was ill for two months, Hudson’s father paid her board at a tavern in Castle Street, Leicester Fields. After returning to work and taking on two successive London places of only a few weeks each, she became a servant in the household of a cousin “who keeps two hackney coaches in Piccadilly,” and later got a place with her sister, who with her husband kept a brandy shop “at her house at the end of Portuguese Row in Lincoln’s Inn Fields.” So too, Sarah Martin said she was a servant in a Southwark household “for about nine months.” Following this, she got another London place for “about” six weeks, after which she lived for half a year with her father, in Surrey. The clerk

[^41]: LPL Clavering v Clavering 1735: Eee 14 f. 257a.

[^42]: LPL Catchpoole v Catchpoole 1692: Eee 7 f. 472.

[^43]: LPL Ceshall v Ceshall 1692: Eee 7 f. 536.
append to Martin’s deposition: “she saith she is worth nothing and maintains herself by going to service.”

As the excerpts from female servants’ Arches testimony included in this chapter suggest, advancement within or between places was not a clear pattern for either London natives or migrants. Positions were often short and were held for erratic lengths. While work as a domestic servant could be sporadic, both Arches and settlement examinants identified themselves as servants, even when they were out of place.

Wages

Domestic service is recognized to have been waged work from the middle ages onward. In addition to being boarded and lodged, “the domestics in a large house or an opulent corporation were very well paid,” receiving up to 40s per year in the early 1200s. Similarly, servants in Elizabethan Essex “were often paid in a lump sum at the close of the period of service, allowing the master the effective use of the money along the way but giving the servant a nice nest egg at the end of the term.”

44 LPL Catchpoole v Catchpoole 1692: Eee 7 f. 466.


46 McIntosh, “Servants and the Household Unit”, 4.
Historians of wage labour have perforce developed notions of early-modern wage rates based on records of wages paid to labourers in the building trades, wherein wage records were closely kept. As Meldrum has noted, discussion of the wage in this period has “tended to concentrate on the wages of male workers in the southern building trades, both skilled and unskilled,” since these records yield long-run data series in a straightforward way; as he also notes, these records pointedly exclude female wage earners. Between 1660 and 1760 the proportion of the English population dependent on wages continued to increase. A large proportion of those so reliant were servants, whose wages it is hard to confirm. However, building-trade wages offer at least a rough basis of comparison against which to set female servants’ earnings.

Gilboy, in her still standard discussion of English wages in this period, found that labourers spent approximately 6d per day to buy wheat in the first half of the eighteenth century. The common or general labourer received 1s 8d per

47 Gilboy, Wages, 8-39.


49 Slack, The English Poor Law, 12.

50 Gilboy found that a common labourer’s wages “were, up to 1735, 1s.10d. per day, so that a little more than one-fourth of the daily wage was spent on bread....The craftsman was, of course, in a better condition. For the first ten years of the century he had to spend about one-fifth of his wages for wheat, [and] a little more than one-sixth during the next decade....Undoubtedly the purchasing power of London wages rose in terms of wheat during the first fifty years of the century...the course of London wages shows a rising trend of real wages in the first half of the century.” She also noted that the price of wheat alone “is not a satisfactory measure of the standard of living of a group,” but “the budget of the lower classes was then far simpler than a corresponding budget of modern
day almost continuously from 1700–1787 (inflation was almost negligible in this period at the level of the labouring wage). In contrast, Gilboy noted that the ‘weeder woman’ working in the garden at Westminster Abbey earned 6d per day in 1700 and 1701, and 8d from 1702–1718, while male labourers who worked in the Abbey orchard made 1s 6d per day until 1720.

Hecht suggested that the amount a female domestic stood to earn was variable, depending on the experience she brought to a particular position, and that a lady’s maid or a cook might earn £6 yearly in 1700, where a laundry maid would get only £2 5s; wages “varied considerably but, as might be expected, skilled servants received more than those who were young, inexperienced, or had nothing to sell other than their own strength.”

On the evidence of St. Margarets settlement examinations, female servants’ wages largely tended to fall within a range of £3 to £5 per annum in the period 1718-1735. Wages paid to servants working in the poorer areas of St. Margarets were not discernably lower than those paid by employers living in wealthier streets, and in instances where there were several female servants in a household, their earnings were consistent with what domestics in single-servant

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52 Of sixty women who recorded their wages for service outside London, 38 or 75% were paid less than £4 per year, and 43% were paid less than £3 p.a. Kent, “Ubiquitous but Invisible”, 119.
households were paid. Thus their range of wages does not seem to have depended on what Power called the “social topography” of the parish.\textsuperscript{53}

Table 3.2: Employers of female servants in St. Margaret’s parish, 1718-1735\textsuperscript{54}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>employer</th>
<th>#</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>artisans and craftsmen</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>27.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>publicans and victuallers</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>17.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dealers and shopkeepers</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>19.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>military and professional</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>15.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>aristocracy and court</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>20.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>total</strong></td>
<td><strong>84</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

On the basis of eighty-four domestics’ reports in settlement examinations between 1718-35, tabled above (2.2), the greatest number of female servants was


\textsuperscript{54} Source: All listed female servants’ settlement examinations in the parish of St. Margarets, Westminster, 1718-1735.
employed in St. Margarets parish by artisans and craftsmen. It appears that beyond the small majority of artisanal employers, a St. Margarets domestic was slightly more likely to work in the household of a courtier than that of a shopkeeper, but also slightly more likely to be employed by a victualler than by, for example, a doctor. The clearest conclusions to be drawn from this sample, however, concern the even-handed spread of numbers of servants among the listed categories of employers: close to the seat of government, St. Margarets was a parish that was not only varied in its housing, but also supported a wide range of employment circumstances for domestics.\^55

Only a few St. Margarets servants described the occupations of their masters or mistresses in conjunction with what they were paid to work in those households, so Table 2.3, below, is not at all comprehensive. However, this table refers to a broad range of employers and so indicates the parameters of domestics' wages in the metropolis. The last category of employer, 'court and government' is the most revealing of job titles for specific domestic positions, suggesting households big enough to sustain a group of servants with separate tasks:

\^55 Table 2.2 replicates Kent's categories for tabulating the employers of female servants in the neighbouring parish of St. Martins in the Fields in the mid-eighteenth century. In that parish also, domestics were most likely to be employed by artisans or craftsmen, but by a larger margin (40.34%) than in St. Margarets; on the other hand, very few female servants in St. Martins were employed in aristocratic households (3.67%) compared to St. Margarets (20.2%), perhaps reflective of the greater distance of St. Martins from court. The proportion of domestics in the remaining three categories of household was almost the same in the two parishes, except for a slight preponderance of publicans and victuallers in St. Martins. Kent, "Ubiquitous but invisible", 199, Table IV.
laundrymaids, chambermaids and cooks were paid between £4 and £6 in these aristocratic and government households.

The second category of employers, all in services, indicates that the wage rate for female servants was in the £3 to £4 range for households as diverse as those of a physician and a barber. Physicians, whose practices were concentrated in the affluent West End, and who were members of one of the highest-earning professions, offered medical services which were normally only affordable to wealthy clients. Barbers sat considerably lower in the economic hierarchy, producing an average income of under £25 a year in this period.\textsuperscript{56} A domestic in St. Margarets might earn roughly the same amount working for either master.

Of the four innkeepers' servants who reported their wages, again £3 to £4 seems to have been the norm. A St. Margarets victualler, coachmaker, chairmaker, clothdrawer and stonemason each paid their female servants £4 per annum. These tradesmen most likely employed one domestic at a time in their households: coachmakers, for instance, hired the skills of many different subsidiary tradesmen in their work, but only two City coachmakers reported having three or more menservants in 1693, and none documented women. Clothdrawers, by contrast, were often directly employed by substantial drapers or

\textsuperscript{56} Alexander cites an average of .75 men servants per household for barbers in 1700, and gives the example of one who reported 5 men and 2 women servants, and who paid £20l. p. a. in rent; another barber employed 3 men and 2 women in a shop worth £30l. He argues that because barbers offered a personal service, they employed more than the average number of servants, especially male servants, "for so mean a trade." Alexander, "Social and Economic Structure", 225-226, 235-236.
mercers, but did not themselves practice an especially wealthy trade, and so were unlikely to have employed female servants in greater numbers than the coachmakers. 57

The cook’s and a chandler’s domestics earned 50s a year, comparable to the wages paid to the female servants of low-end specialist tradesmen in the construction industry. Cooks and chandlers, usually operating tiny enterprises themselves, were likely to have been among the group of employers who truly could not afford to pay servants very much. Cooks “catered for a middle and lower range of customers who were too poor to frequent the more upmarket inns and taverns.” Their expenses were considerable. Cooks normally paid a rent in the City of over £20 for their premises, since they required space for customers to sit and eat in addition to a large cooking area. Chandlers were still smaller tradesmen, “probably similar to the old-fashioned corner shop, buying a few items of grocery off a larger retailer or wholesaler, and then selling them from inside their houses” to the poorer sort of customers. In London, chandlers were not well off— they were as poor as the lowest cadre of manufacturers or artisans. 58 Similarly, braziers, housepainters and glaziers stood to do well by their trades, but only on an occasional basis, when steady work was available. On a


58 Ibid., 129, 161, 193-194.
yearly basis, these tradesman could not have afforded to pay their domestics a high wage.\textsuperscript{59}

\textsuperscript{59} Alexander, "Social and Economic Structure", 208-209, 211-212
Table 3.3: Wages paid to female servants in St. Margarets, 1718-1735

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Employer</th>
<th>female servant's yearly wage</th>
<th>job description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Innkeeper</td>
<td>£3; £4; £4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victualler</td>
<td>£4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cook</td>
<td>50s</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chandler</td>
<td>50s</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coachmaker</td>
<td>£4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chairmaker</td>
<td>£4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clothdrawer</td>
<td>£4 10s</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stonemason</td>
<td>£4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brazier</td>
<td>50s</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plasterer</td>
<td>£3, with raise to £4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glazier</td>
<td>30s</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housepainter</td>
<td>40s</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Employer</th>
<th>female servant's yearly wage</th>
<th>job description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Physician</td>
<td>£4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clergyman</td>
<td>£4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apothecary</td>
<td>£3 10s</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barber</td>
<td>£4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laundress</td>
<td>£3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Employer</th>
<th>female servant's yearly wage</th>
<th>job description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Baronet</td>
<td>£5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Earl</td>
<td>£6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Countess</td>
<td>£4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Gentleman of the Excise Office’</td>
<td>£3 10s</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Archbishop of Canterbury</td>
<td>£5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: SMW July 1723 [Henley]; June 1721 [Barker]; March 1722 [Williams]; September 1721 [Booker]; February 1728 [Frankling]; May 1734 [Hughes]; May 1721 [Brightwell]; March 1721 [Grundy]; March 1722 [Willet]; November 1725 [Cousins]; November 1729 [Merritt]; November 1729 [Peirce]; April 1733 [Arundell]; December 1729 [Ayleworth]; February 1729 [Thomas]; March 1730 [Hand]; July 1727 [Kelly]; May 1722 [Birss]; March 1723 [Wardrup]; June 1724 [Stone]; October 1731 [Mitchell]; October 1733 [Phillips]; March 1727 [Knight]; February 1729 [Rice]; May 1720 [Glover]; February 1721 [Dore]; February 1721 [Williams]; June 1722 [Mason]; October 1722 [Hart].
Thus a range of wages was available to female servants in the metropolis, and in St. Margarets parish the range of wages paid to female servants tended to remain consistent irrespective of neighbourhood. The St. Margarets Churchwardens’ accounts for the years 1675-1681 list, by street, the number of houses subject to assessment for purposes of paying parish rates and taxes.61 These reflect the extent of residential housing development by street, but they also indicate the widely varying affluence of different areas in the parish. These variances notwithstanding, the consistent range of wages for London domestics in the years 1718–1735 is confirmed by the reported earnings of female servants working in St. Margarets, which fell largely within the £3 to £6 per annum range.

Women who said they had worked as domestic servants usually named street addresses and employers' occupations in their settlement examinations. Three women who were servants in King St. households (by far the most heavily developed street in the parish in this period) earned £3 a year, and one other domestic on this street was paid £4 for undescibed work; another woman was employed by a King Street barber at £4 per annum.62 On Orchard Street, also moderately well developed, two domestics earned £4 a year in separate

61 King St., 178; Tothill St., 96; Petty France, 67; St. Margaret’s Lane, 38; Orchard St., 34; Horseferry, 23; Cannon Row, 22; Great Sanctuary, 13; Duck Lane, 5. John Edward Smith, A Catalogue of Westminster Records (London: Wightman, 1900), 69.

62 SMW January 1728 [Steel]; June 1730 [Gordan]; November 1722 [Allen]; April 1724 [Smith]; October 1729 [Goodacre].
households. Petty France was considered a good address, and was a well populated area, with twice the number of assessed households as Orchard Street, though it had only a third the population density of King Street. One servant in a Petty France household earned 50s p.a., while another (employed by a man wealthy enough to move into temporary lodgings for two months while his house was being repaired) was paid the more nearly average wage of £3 10s. Another servant in the Petty France district was earning £3 p.a. working for a man who had lodgings at the Sun tavern. An innkeeper, whose establishment was along the much busier Tothill Street, similarly paid his domestic £3 a year.

At the southerly end of the parish, along a curving way known as the Horseferry, one domestic made £4 yearly, employed by the man who kept the 'Oxford Arms', as did the servant of the innkeeper at the 'Two Chairmen'. The servant to the woman who kept the 'Ship' in Buckingham Court got 30s. Cannon Row, a short and well-established residential street, housed a baronet who paid his female servant £4 p. a. Better wages were had by a woman working in a house in Great Sanctuary, a small but high-end rental district just south of the Abbey: she got £5 a year for her service. Another servant in the

63 SMW October 1724 [Marshall]; February 1723 [Medcalf].
64 SMW June 1729 [Love]; July 1720 [Smith]; March 1732 [Lewis].
65 SMW August 1727 [Meckloer]; July 1727 [Swain]; April 1724 [Smith].
66 SMW April 1721 [Cooper].
moderately populous area of St. Margarets Lane also earned £5 a year.67 A servant in the Longditch area of the parish made £4 per year before her master raised her wages to four and a half pounds.68 Finally, the fact of working in Kitters Yard, Duck Lane, which was entirely disreputable place, and notorious, did not prevent a servant from earning £3 a year working in a tenement house.69

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67 SMW April 1723 [Barnard]; December 1728 [Wright].
68 SMW June 1733 [Chansey].
69 SMW May 1728 [Powell].
Table 3.4: Range of wages paid to female servants in St. Margaret's, 1718-1735\textsuperscript{70}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yearly wage</th>
<th>#</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>below £1</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>8.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>£1 +</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>£2 +</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>£3 +</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>24.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>£4 +</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>38.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>£5 +</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>13.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>£6 +</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>£7 +</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>£8 +</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>£9 +</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>£10 +</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>140</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textsuperscript{70} Source: All female servants' settlement examinations in which wages were stated in St. Margarets, Westminster, 1690–1735.
The range of wages paid to female servants St. Margarets had no clear correlation with the economic status of particular rate-assessed streets in the parish.

Nor was a domestic’s literacy appear a decisive factor in determining what she was paid, presumably because literacy was not often a sought-after qualification for household workers. While the age and experience level of a particular domestic would likely have been a consideration in establishing her wage level, alongside the status of her employer and size of the household staff, literacy does not appear to have been a sure route to a higher wage. Out of a total of one hundred and thirty-nine domestics who signed or marked their settlement examinations in St. Margaret’s between 1718–1735, thirty-four (25%) appended signatures ranging in quality from poorly formed to very clear hands.

Table 3.5: Ability to sign among female servants in St. Margarets, 1718-1735\(^7\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>#</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>marked</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>signed</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>total</td>
<td>139</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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\(^7\) Source: All female servants’ settlement examinations signed or marked in St. Margarets, Westminster, 1690–1735.
Earle suggested that "migrants [to London] were the literate or near-literate 'cream' of provincial girls." There has been some assessment of labouring women's literacy levels in this period, evaluated according to their ability to sign their names to documents. On this basis it has been argued that the seventeenth century saw a great improvement in female literacy in the metropolis: 10% of London women were able to sign in the years up to 1640; by the 1720s, 56% of women signed. Earle has found that 48% of London female servants appended signatures to church court depositions, placing servants in the middle of the literacy spectrum for women, between the high literacy of schoolteachers, midwives and shopkeepers on the one end, and non-literate or barely literate silkwinders, charwomen and washerwomen on the other. However, Earle has elsewhere expressed doubt concerning the reliability of signatures as an indicator of literacy, since "the prevalence of very shaky, misspelt and virtually illegible signatures among female deponents...suggests that many of them had learned very little else."

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72 Earle, "Female labour market", 334-35.
74 Earle, A City Full of People, 119-120.
75 Earle, "The female labour market", 334-336. If 48% of London domestics were literate, this paints a very different picture than French totals for the same period. Fairchilds argues that in Toulouse in 1727-29, 38.6% of male servants were literate, compared to only 1.4% of female servants. Taking her sample from signatures on marriage contracts, Fairchilds maintains that "female servants were still mired in illiteracy at the end of the Old Regime" and that "servants
One quarter of the settlement claimants who had been servants in St. Margarets were able to sign their names. However, it is difficult to discover very much about the relative status of these labouring women based solely on that ability. There is no clear correlation in the group of St. Margarets settlement claimants between the ability to sign in a good hand (suggesting 'truer' literacy) and a particular type of employer or a higher wage: Elizabeth Carr, whose signature was poor, worked for a publican at £3 per annum; Honora Smith was paid the same amount by a coachmaker, but her signature was fair. Elizabeth Dickenson, who signed very well and clearly, was paid £5 a year by a coachman who employed her during her widowhood. Other domestics who signed their depositions worked for employers they described as gentlemen, but also for victualers, a joiner and a barber. The highly variable quality of the signatures (some of which are barely distinguishable from the marks or initials of the non-literate women), suggest that many signatures reflected coaching in that single accomplishment rather than true literacy. All of the thirty-four St. Margarets deponents who were able to sign their names received between £3 and £6 per annum in wages, consistent with the wage-range of St. Margarets domestics generally.

were much less likely to know how to read and write than other women in the towns in which they lived.” Fairchilds, Domestic Enemies, 112-113.
If neither the location of a London household nor servant’s literacy appear to have been determinant of what a domestic was paid, her gender was a factor fundamental to establishing her wage. Meldrum has found that in late seventeenth- and early-eighteenth century London, gender was “inevitably the principal delineating factor in nominal wage remuneration.” This was the factor that separated “the range of tasks, the remuneration for those tasks, and the chances for advancement within the household.” The reason for this gendered separation of wage rates was that while “[f]emale service was associated with housewifery,” service for men “could fall under more specialized rubrics or clearly-defined occupational labels that had a tendency to confer higher status, and therefore higher value, at least within the service labour market.”

Settlement examination responses and Arches testimony concerning the wage-range of female servants in London accords with the mean wage that Meldrum has calculated. Meldrum has found that on average, the level of metropolitan servants’ wages was “higher than that found in both surrounding and distant counties for domestic service as well as that in husbandry.” He has shown that the mean annual wage for London female servants rose from £3 12s

77 Ibid., 96-97.
78 Ibid., 122.
in 1690-9 to £3 15s in 1720-9, and rose again to £3 19s in the decade 1710-19; during the same decades, footmen’s wages ranged from £4 3s to £5.79

Meldrum suggests that such consistent wage levels indicate “the existence of a relatively efficient metropolitan wage market for servants that stretched from the east end to the market gardens of Chelsea.”80 The sources used for this thesis suggest this same conclusion. Of course, a servant’s age and experience was another important factor in determining what she was paid. As Meldrum notes, while “the intimacy of a small household could still leave space for negotiation over the level of a servant’s cash wage,” it was the size and wealth of the household that most influenced variation in wage levels.81 At the same time, the lack of effect of social geography on St. Margarets servants’ wages implies just such an efficient market as Meldrum has described, as does the fact that Westminster masters paid similar wages irrespective of their own social and economic status.

79 Meldrum, “Domestic Service in London”, Table 5.1, p. 92, from a sample of 36 female and 6 male London Consistory Court deponents.
80 Ibid., 94.
81 Ibid., 97-98.
The annual term of service as a source of agency

The intermittence and irregularity of the terms' of domestics' places in late seventeenth and early eighteenth-century London, set against the comparatively steady wage-range within which domestics were paid, shows the notional annual term of service to have been a commonly understood contractual device which obtained in place of a formal contract such as apprentices had. As Meldrum has noted of London during this period, "cultural resonance ensured that the practice of discussing domestic servants' wages in annual tranches continued long after" the Tudor period.82 In other words, the annual term of service continued to set the benchmark of wage negotiation for servants even in the growing metropolis, because the norm of working in one household from one year's hiring fair to the next still framed the institution in early eighteenth-century society.

It was the practice of hiring domestics on an annual term, set within London's efficient market for services, that gave domestics the wherewithal to determine and claim their pay on demand. Meldrum has suggested that there is little evidence of collective bargaining by female servants in the metropolis, simply because domestics had the labour market on their side: "the bargaining power granted by a surfeit of demand over supply obviated the need for more

82 Meldrum, "Domestic Service in London", 102.
overt forms of collective expression. As Meldrum has found, the wage was the central point of negotiation between master and servant. A female servant in London was hired for a year’s term, as was traditional, but she might begin that term at any time of the year, regardless of season. In the London market, the demand for domestics was high, and this gave her opportunities to change places before her year’s term was ended. When she left a place, a servant determined what portion of her year’s pay she was owed by calculating this as a percentage of her per-annum wages. In this fashion, female servants in the metropolis moved from position to position. Meldrum shows that before the mid eighteenth century, when women began to earn an annual wage as milliners, service was women’s sole avenue to nominal per annum earnings.

Female servants in London in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries contracted for places for an annual wage. However, a London domestic would also have understood that she might leave a job precipitously, and that the decision to do so could as easily be her idea as her master’s. Because she was hired for an explicitly named per-annum wage, however, she also knew what she was owed when leaving a particular position, whether she quit or was let go. This was the source of female servants’ limited agency as workers in the


84 Ibid., 106.

85 Ibid., 111, Table 5.4.
metropolis: a domestic was able to work according to the expectation of steady ongoing employment, and if she left that employment, she knew how to calculate exactly what she was owed based on the year's standard.

Kent has found evidence of increased short-term hiring of female servants—by which he means terms explicitly less than a year—in St. Martins in the Fields in the 1750s. He concludes that by mid-century the annual contract was starting to lose favour among Westminster employers, and cites Adam Smith's 1760 assessment of the initial cause:

Smith attributed the fashion for shorter hirings to the introduction of settlement by service: 'masters are not always willing to give their servants a settlement by hiring them in this manner, and servants are not always willing to be hired, because as every last settlement discharges all the foregoing, they might thereby lose their original settlement in the places of their nativity.'

As discussed in chapter one of this thesis, the innovation allowing single women to apply for parish settlement on the basis of a year's term in service became part of the Poor Law in 1692, as an appendage to the 1662 Settlement Act. It is this legislation that is the basis of Smith's (and Kent's) comments. The 1692 amendment followed tradition in establishing a yearly contract in service as

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87 3 Wm and Mary c. 11 (1692). See Slack, The English Poor Law, 62.
the requirement for women's independent settlement, but the starting date of
the annual term was flexible.

Eighteenth-century pay series were usually constituted from daily or
weekly wages, and most labouring people in early modern London expected to be
paid for an irregular number of days or weeks worked. Domestics' remuneration was framed instead by the nominal annual term, and domestics
deposing before Arches appear to have made a distinction between receiving a
per-annum wage for service and other varieties of income. For example, Susan Wingood testified that her employer “owes her 17s 6d for a quarter's wages” and
that “she getteth her living by going to service,” and Mary Abis deposed that she
had been hired as “Grace Hubbard's household servant, and is to have fifty
shillings per annum,” and that she “maintains herself by her wages.”

Hannah Saunders, servant to a coachpainter, said her own mother was both cook and
housekeeper to a woman with a house in St. James's Street, and that Saunders's
mother had an income of £10 per annum “besides her wages.”

Hanna Leavis, an Arches deponent who described herself as her master's
nurse, deposed that she “never had any settled wages” aside from what she had

88 Peter H. Lindert and Jeffrey G. Williamson, “English Workers’ Living Standards During the
Industrial Revolution: A New Look”, in Mokyr, ed. The Economics of the Industrial Revolution, 178.
89 LPL Alphery v Alphery 1669: Eee 3 f.707; Hubbard v Hubbard 1669: Eee 3 f. 283.
90 LPL Skelton v Greenly 1735: Eee 14 f. 191a.
gotten in an earlier period when she lived with the same employer and his wife “as their servant.” Leavis explained that as a servant, she “was not able to do the housework of the family without the assistance of a charwoman”—that is, a dayworker she distinguished as being different from herself, even though Leavis performed the same kinds of tasks as the char: “the making of the beds, cleaning the house and other household work.”91 We can ascertain from Leavis’s statement that her only experience of “settled wages” was what she got as a servant. In another deposition, Hannah Brain provided a striking contrast between the terms of her negotiation for an annual wage as a servant and the eventual length of her stay in a particular household. She understood they wanted a servant and that she was come to offer the service upon which John Young [Brain’s prospective master] asked her what wages she expected and she answered five pounds per annum upon which John Young says he thought it was too much but Hanna Leavis said she would not take less, and John Young then declared he would leave it to his wife and thereupon Mary Young agreed to give her five pounds per annum and Hanna Leavis by her order went and lived in their service on the day following and continued and lived in their service by the space of five weeks.92

It is apparent in Leavis’s and Brain’s depositions, like Wingood’s and Abis’s, above, that the annual-wage arrangement was transposed onto a highly mobile workforce of female servants in the metropolis. It also appears, at least in this

91 LPL Shippen v Shylling 1730: Eee 13 f. 227a.
92 LPL Young v Young 1706: Eee 9 f. 156.
anecdotal evidence, that domestics in the metropolis used the pound value assigned to the year's term as a benchmark for calculating the money owing to them when they left a position, however short the tenure of their employment.

A wage for women in service did not secure their economic self-sufficiency; it was not thought appropriate for women to be independent of their fathers and husbands in this way. Indeed, it has been suggested that eighteenth-century wage rates were generated "as a means of expressing and defending customary expectations." It is perhaps for this reason that historians have regarded the idea of a wage for early modern servants as problematic. Hill and Schwarz have posited that service in London (as elsewhere in England) should not in fact be described as wage labour, citing parish-sponsored servants who were not paid at all, and also citing servants' dependence on perquisites and vails and their reliance on their masters for room and board. Similarly, Kussmaul concluded that because early-modern farm servants "had no independent place"

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93 As Susan Staves has written, "the very rules that conferred ownership on women gave them a kind of ownership different from that imagined in a liberal property regime—entitlement to profit from capital, but not control over capital itself or the power to alienate capital." Susan Staves, _Married women's separate property in England, 1660-1833_ (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), 222.

94 Reddy, _The rise of market culture_, 8.

95 See Schwarz, _London in the age of industrialisation_, 161-168 and Hill, _Servants_, Ch. 4.
in the social order, those servants' wages were considered by all concerned to be "incidental to their dependency within employers' families."96

But for the majority of domestics who were migrants to the metropolis, where the community and family ties that were the source of farm servants' security were loosened or abandoned, the agency implied by the nominal annual term may have been especially significant. As Meldrum has found, relations between employers and domestics in London in the eighteenth century could no longer be seen "as those between surrogate child and master or mistress in loco parentis." Instead, the arrangement was recognized by both parties as fundamentally commercial one.97

A female servant in London either lived with her employers and received provision of bed and board in addition to her wages, or else was paid supplementarily so that she might get food and lodging independently of her employer's household. Notwithstanding that vails were scarce for female servants and perquisites more limited for women than for men, a domestic's

96 Kussmaul, Servants in husbandry, 8. Before the eighteenth century in France, "the majority of domestics seem to have been content to have their food and lodging provided and did not dream of anything more." However, practice changed in the course of the eighteenth century. Servants' labour "was no longer a duty owed to their masters; instead it was a commodity to be exchanged for cash, a resource of their own to be sold to the highest bidder." Fairchilds, Domestic Enemies, 60.

97 Meldrum, "Domestic Service in London", 169-70, writes: "While indentured servants had a legal document guaranteeing (at least on paper) their treatment and care when ill to something approaching standards they would receive from their own parents, domestic servants had no such guarantee, and were far more at the mercy of their employers' whims or affections." See also ibid., 171, 176.
per-annum contract must be understood to have incorporated both a nominal annual wage and provision of “diet and lodging.” If she was required to live out or provide food for herself, a stipend was added to the basic wage rate.98

Meldrum has estimated an “annual value” of weekly bed and board for servants in London at £9 15s for women in the late seventeenth century (£12 7s for men), and £14 6s for women in the early eighteenth century (£16 8s for men).99 He suggests that “traditional, customary payments in cash and kind were just as important to the London domestic as wages,” and that servant remuneration “displayed continuities in the payment of money wages and of non-wage reward as the eighteenth century progressed.”100 However, he has also found that for many servants, and in particular women, “perquisites in the form of cash earnings from byproducts of their work were small or intermittent”: “a conjunction of low status in the servant hierarchy with a middling-status employer left the servant reliant more on cash wage and bed and board than on perks and tips.”101

There is little remaining evidence to indicate the actual composition of the wage bundle for London domestics in this period. For example, one mistress

98 Hecht, The Domestic Servant Class, 153-156.
100 Ibid., 87, 125.
101 Ibid., 121.
who was "much troubled" at not being able to pay Sarah Redhead three pounds owing her ("she was hired for one year...and is to have six pounds for her years service") in compensation gave Redhead "a new stuff gown and a petticoat called Doyly's stuff of twelve pence a yard, and the lady Gerrard when she went out of town gave her five shillings." 102 Margaret Vassall, a servant to the Countess of Banbury, reported that because she was owed her yearly wage of £10, she negotiated her mistress into giving her "some goods to furnish her lodgings about the value of £5 or £6."103

It is clear from Arches testimony that while a female servant in London might well stay a full year in a place if she and her employers were happy or if she was endeavouring to get a settlement, she did not necessarily expect to work in one and only one household for that period. Even so, the yearly contract provided a nominal guarantee of steady employment for an annual term, starting on the day the domestic was hired and easily broken down, by servants, into its constituent months or weeks. By getting a place as a servant, a woman declared her intention to work in a household for one year. She might suspect that her place would only last a portion of that time, but she would also know the date she started and so would have the wherewithal to claim remuneration on the portion of the year's term served if she left the position.

102 LPL Macclesfield v Macclesfield 1695: Eee 8 f. 478.

103 LPL Banbury v Banbury 1693: Eee 8 f. 7.
Evidence that servants' demands for wages was becoming a concern among the employer class appears in the parliamentary record. Between 1692, the year domestic service was enacted as a settlement category, and 1708, nine separate private members' bills came before Parliament concerning the payment ('recovery") of servants' wages. Interestingly, neither the presenters of these bills or the MPs who sat on the wage-bill committees served as assistants of the London Corporation of the Poor. The Corporation of the Poor was an enterprise limited to the City of London, which by the end of the seventeenth century comprised a relatively small portion of the metropolis. There appears to have been no perceived need for City representation on theft-management and wage-regulation bill committees.

The first bill in the series concerning servants' wages was ordered in January, 1695, and made its way through parliament in February and March of

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104 Fifty-two assistants of the London Corporation for the Poor were appointed in 1698. Stephen M. Macfarlane, "Studies in poverty and poor relief in London at the end of the seventeenth century" (Oxford University D. Phil. thesis, 1982), Ch. 8, Appendix One, pp. 360-71.

105 There was one overlap between wage-bill committee members and the London Corporation of the Poor in the person of Sir William Ashurst (or Ashhurst), who sat on a London common council committee that investigated the Corporation of the Poor in 1708. Ashurst was never an assistant of the Corporation. Stephen Macfarlane considers him to have been a whig in political orientation, and the only one on an otherwise tory committee. Tories in City politics in the very early eighteenth century tended to oppose centralized social institutions (and the higher rates that went to support them) and favored local, parish-based institutions. The common council committees which investigated the Corporation of the Poor beginning in 1708 were concerned about the cost of the institution and complaints from parishes about having to pay assessments to support the London workhouse while simultaneously having to bear routine poor relief expenses. The report of the committee of 1708 may have begun the movement toward decoupling the Corporation from parish support, which ultimately proved to be the workhouse's undoing. I am indebted to Dr. Macfarlane for sharing his ideas on this subject with me in conversation.
that year. The bill was passed into legislation as a reassertion that no servant was to gain settlement in a parish where they were hired, unless they remained in that position for a period of one year or more, and was named an Act for the more easy Recovery of Servants' Wages, and for determining Differences between Masters and Servants. 106 This addition to the Poor Law was directed toward the better control of servants. The settlement issue was sandwiched between two other related points of legislation: an effort to insure that servants were paid, and another to manage disputes between parties to the agreement.

The possibility of a woman gaining a work-based settlement relied on her declaration of having served in a parish for a year's term, as discussed in chapter one, above. The 1695 bill proposed not only the terms of settlement; it also considered how the contractual obligations undertaken by both parties, master and servant, were to be met. While the phrasing of the bill is not explicit concerning the details of master/servant contractual obligations or the management of their disputes, the bill certainly implies that wage contract disputes between masters and servants were perceived as a problem in this period.107


107 I am grateful to Professor Beattie, who has alerted me to a plan included in a 1736 memorial for Robert Walpole, in which a gentleman named Robert Lilburne proposed a scheme for the registering of servants. The plan entailed registering servants in the parish in which they worked, and proposed that those who work for salaries, servants' wages or other annual or monthly payments or by the week or day, should not be hired until they produce a certificate signed by a JP or constable.
In this series of bills repeated emphasis was placed on the "punishing of idle and disorderly servants," a phrase repeated in four separate bills.\textsuperscript{108} Where the 1695 bill concerning settlement described as its agenda the resolution of differences between masters and servants, subsequent bills also expressed this idea using slightly different phrasing: "the better regulating of disorderly servants" and "suppressing vagabonds and regulating servants." These issues were raised alongside directives toward "the more speedy and effectual payment of their wages." Explicit direction toward "the more easy recovery of servants wages" was used in five different bills.\textsuperscript{109} The texts of these bills established an equivalency between servants and wage labourers by coupling the phrases "labourers and servants" and "servants and workmen."\textsuperscript{110} In the absence of effective regulatory mechanisms, the explicit linkage of servants not only with labourers but also with vagabonds suggests that there was some contemporary concern with the issue of the control and management of servants.

There was discernable anxiety within the employer class in this period surrounding both the management of servants' wage rates and the negotiation of

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Lilburne wrote that this was in aid of preventing and better discovering "murders, robberies, burglaries, street robberies, burning of houses, etc." Cholmondeley [Houghton] MSS, Correspondence, 17 August 1736.
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\textsuperscript{108} HC/ 13 (1699-1702), 390, 513, 711, 735, 737; 14 (1702-4), 3,11, 211, 390.

\textsuperscript{109} HC/ 13 (1699-1702), 711, 735, 737; 14 (1702-4), 3, 11, 14, 211, 390; 17 (1711-14), 430, 442-43, 452, 467.

\textsuperscript{110} HC/ 13 (1699-1702), 207; 16 (1708-11), 310, 321, 370, 377, 381, 395.
servants' remuneration. Defoe offered his perception that "the most fatal cause of all this mischief" among servants was "the advance of wages." When he suggested that, "this indeed is the support of all the insolence of servants," a concern with female agency was very much to the point. 111 Female servants could choose their work to some extent, and could choose to move from place to place. Defoe found this mobility to be a pressing social problem. Notwithstanding "the laws here for regulating of servants," he found that "the temper of the labouring poor" was such that servants "will be mutinous when they want employment, and idle and saucy when they have it." Above all, he was concerned that the traditions of service should not be dismantled in the provinces, as was happening in London. Metropolitan servants' mobility and their demand for higher wages was "one of the grievances which we want a law to restrain, and which if not taken in time, and restrain'd, will quickly make servants wages as dear in the country as they are now in the city." 112

"The greatest abuse of all," Defoe warned, "is, that these creatures are become their own lawgivers; nay, I think they are ours too, though nobody would imagine that such a set of slatterns should bamboozle a whole nation." 113

111 Defoe, The Great Law, 78.
112 Ibid., 83-84
113 Defoe, Everybodys Business, 11
Domestics' status as contract labourers in a substantial urban market meant agency for women, though of a precarious kind. As Defoe put it,

they hire themselves to you by their own rule. That is, a month's wages, or a month's warning; if they don't like you they will go away the next day, help yourself as you can; if you don't like them, you must give them a month's wages to get rid of them.\(^\text{114}\)

It has been suggested that attitudes had as great an importance as economic realities in the creation of early modern social policy.\(^\text{115}\) Contemporary attitudes were reflected in Defoe's complaints about female servants' economic freedom, and in the legislation directed toward the management of servants' contracts and the wages paid out to them. The contemporary economic reality, however, reflected an intermittently employed, highly mobile workforce of female servants in the metropolis. Domestics' high mobility was facilitated by a large and vital metropolitan market in which the regularized means of getting paid by strangers was the per-annum wage, offered as a nominal contractual term.

The ubiquity of the designation "servant" for women can be seen to represent the notion that most young women were servants by virtue of long-standing tradition. It also suggests that young labouring women perceived service as the most desirable work to have in the metropolis. If labouring women were to acquire any modicum of self-determination, their best avenue to

\(^{114}\) Defoe, *Everybody's Business*, 11.

it was through the annual-contract arrangement that was fundamental to determining their nominal wage.

It has been argued that legal and social regulation of the conditions of employment imposes cultural definitions on labour markets, and that "a similar dynamic governs the evolution of contractual forms."¹¹⁶ But the story an early-modern market culture told about itself could be widely at variance with the way that culture actually worked. As a traditional institution in a predominantly agricultural society, service was the arena in which a woman prepared for marriage, and the ideology of service was reflected in contemporary nomenclature and prescription. In early modern London, however, the realities of domestic service for women more closely resembled a market economy. In the capital, what has usually been understood as a pre-marital phase can also be described as a skill set with a defined labour market value.

CHAPTER FOUR: Sources of domestics' agency

Introduction

As discussed in chapter three of this thesis, at the end of the seventeenth and start of the eighteenth centuries in London, domestic service for women was in practice somewhat unlike the traditions of the institution. In London, labouring women who became servants marketed their domestic skills for a wage contract unattainable for them in other kinds of work. Domestic service was a labour-market sector in which women of all ages and marital statuses could participate, as long as they were without babies or dependent children.

Hecht noted the conflict inherent in the ideology of eighteenth-century relations between master and servant. The institution of service was acknowledged to be essentially contractual; however, it was also overlaid with a medieval inheritance in which “status was fixed and involved recognized rights and duties” and which “conceived of the relationship as essentially a family one.”¹ As Susan Amussen has written, however, servants, “despite the rhetoric

¹ Hecht, The Domestic Servant Class, 71.
exhorting them to devotion to their masters served on a contractual basis for a set period of time."2 The extent of a female servant’s agency was determined by her ability to get a place in service and then keep or voluntarily leave it.

This chapter moves from issues concerning domestics’ wages and contracts to introduce the nature of the interpersonal exchanges within the household that underpinned those wages and contracts. This chapter discusses the way the construction of London houses facilitated the transmission of gossip within the household; the ways that female servants could use gossip to good effect to advance their own interests and enforce their contracts; and the importance for domestics, particularly if they were unmarried, of cultivating a reputation for virtue. Information a domestic gathered about her employers’ lives while working in their household helped her to enforce contract expectations when she formulated that information as gossip. A domestic’s security in a place also depended very much on her employers’ perceptions of her virtue, and these perceptions were often mediated through gossip, as well. Early modern England was “a society in which gossip, sexuality and household tasks limited and defined women’s lives.” In this society, as Miranda Chaytor has written, gossip constituted “the politics of the officially powerless.”3

The first part of this chapter concerns the household as a work environment. A brief survey of the construction and uses of London houses in this period is helpful in explaining the occasions for and routes of the transmission of gossip in households. Saussure noted in 1727 that it was not possible "to have more comfortable houses" than those in England. Yet metropolitan households in this period, even when they were comfortable, were not especially private. People in London lived closely together, and in normally cramped urban housing even the lowliest female servant worked in proximity to her employers.

Depositions presented in the second part of the chapter suggest that domestics had some discretion in either choosing to report incidents they observed or overheard, or alternatively, withholding their opinions. In this way, domestics had some local influence over whether their employers' reputations were undermined or advanced. At the same time, however, female servants were themselves extremely vulnerable to the charge of being without virtue. This notion is discussed in the third part of this chapter. As Meldrum has

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4 Cesar de Saussure, A foreign view of England in the reigns of George I and George II, Van Muyden, ed. (London: J. Murray, 1902), 68-69. It has been suggested of at least moderately well-constructed early eighteenth-century townhouses that although "we would probably find them draughty, dark and smelly [they] probably worked fairly well as machines for living. There does not seem to have been much grumbling about living conditions from the occupants and...most foreign travellers agreed on the high level of domestic comfort." Cruickshank and Burton, The Georgian City, 96.
suggested, "in the metropolis sexual reputation and social 'credit', or standing were governed at the nexus of topography and gossip."  

Defamatory invective hinging on women's putative lack of sexual virtue was of course not an invention of early modern society, but it had pointed relevance for domestics in the London market in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, wherein a female servant’s ability to protect her own interests and get work was commensurate with community perception of her sexual virtue. With this notion in mind, the fourth part of this chapter presents the infanticide trials of three women who were servants in households St. Margarets Westminster, in (respectively) 1718, 1719 and 1735. Frances Dolan has suggested that the 1624 Infanticide Act “created and enforced” images and understandings of murderous women that were still in play a century later. The Old Bailey Sessions Papers accounts of these infanticide trials highlight the importance for female servants’ working lives of the demands of domestic labour; the instability of work for female servants; the critical importance for domestics of selectively disclosing information about themselves; and the importance for female servants of exchanges of favours within the community.


By way of concluding this introduction, Laura Gowing’s study of defamation and slander suits prosecuted in London’s ecclesiastical courts in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries sheds light on some of the elements of the urban experience of service for women that remained constant from the late sixteenth to the early eighteenth centuries. The character of church court records was the same in both periods. These consistently provided a comprehensive profile of witnesses, including their age, marital status, occupation, place of birth and length of residence in the parish.7

Consistent over this two-century span was the premise on which female servants’ involvement in the public sphere was predicated, that is, their sexual virtue. Gowing’s work suggests both the nuanced quality of this idea and its great durability. Slanderous exchanges were most likely to take place between women, but even between men, “sexual insult was almost inevitably about the sexuality of women,” and routinely concerned the sexual reputations of men’s wives or mothers.8 This phenomenon Gowing calls “the currency of verbal abuse.”9

Gowing offers a persuasive analysis of the historical origins of sexual slander prosecutions, describing the development of such prosecutions into a symbol from their roots in community practice:

7 Gowing, Domestic Dangers, 48.
8 Ibid., 62.
9 Ibid., 66.
Central to the language of insult was a project of naming whores and symbolically exiling them from the city, an enterprise whose corollary in actual practice—keeping prostitutes outside the city walls—was an established part of urban moral regulation.\(^\text{10}\)

In the late sixteenth century in London, as in the early eighteenth century, most people lived in communities where they shared only a limited personal history and family past. Gowing suggests that “to their neighbours [women] were, to some extent, an unknown quantity, and public discussions of their sexual honour provided one forum for anxieties about geographic, and perhaps also social, mobility.”\(^\text{11}\) It was certainly the case in both in the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries, however, that servants alerted by suspicious behaviour “looked through windows, stood in dark corners, or made holes in walls to watch.”\(^\text{12}\)

In the sixteenth century, as in the eighteenth, the assessment of women’s sexual reputations offered a means of controlling women, for even when women were discussing others’ sexual experiences they cast the shadow of their own reputations over the discussion, and the latter might always be brought into question. Thus, as Gowing writes, women “used the words of

\(^{10}\) Gowing, *Domestic Dangers*, 67.

\(^{11}\) Ibid., 20.

\(^{12}\) Ibid., 189.
slander to proclaim their own virtue by defining its opposite." In this way, the sexual insult of women became a very broad criterion for describing early modern female experience in the city:

The words of slander, ostensibly about sex, turn out to be about almost everything else. The sexual insult of women absorbed and refracted every kind of female transgression. Women’s sexual morality was gauged according to a number of factors, including neighbourly behaviour, hard work, and quiet living. However, for women sexuality remained a vulnerable point on the construction and destruction of reputation. Whatever made a good reputation, sexual discredit could threaten it.

As Gowing concludes, the power of words to damage reputation was extremely strong in “a largely oral world.” This remained true through the middle of the eighteenth century.

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13 Gowing, Domestic Dangers, 76.

14 Ibid., 118.

15 Ibid., 129.

16 Ibid., 133.
The fabric of London households

Defoe considered London a sprawling and sophisticated urban centre; in 1725, he wrote of "new squares, and new streets rising up every day to such a prodigy of buildings, that nothing in the world does, or ever did, equal it." At the same time, however, the entire metropolis, including Westminster, Southwark and the out-parishes, was inhabited by fewer than 700,000 people at the start of the eighteenth century. This was a society in which it was not yet common to number houses, "so that a particular coffeehouse or bookseller's shop would be located by physical description, even on the cover of a letter—'over against Catherine Street' or 'two doors from the Exchange'." As in ancien regime Paris, so it must have been in London: "[t]he whole system of addresses and descriptions was based on familiarity with the neighbourhood, designed for locals and not for strangers." As Garrioch has written, the neighbourhood was the hub of daily life. People "relied on neighbours for material and psychological support; among them they found human contact and companionship; and their vision, shaped by day-to-day sociability, was parochial."

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17 Defoe, A Tour Through the Whole Island of Great Britain, 268.

18 Rogers, Grub Street, 2-6.

London society fostered a high level of daily interpersonal contact both within and between its classes of inhabitants. Historians have long understood that parochial sensibilities obtained in the early modern metropolis. However, the experience of London life in this period was also “a powerful solvent of the customs, prejudices and modes of action of a traditional rural England.” Neighbourhoods were more mutable, with a higher turnover in population than elsewhere in England. In this sense, London “shared the anonymity of all great cities”; at the same time, however, there was “a village atmosphere about the parishes within the city.” Thus in the metropolis, a neighbour was “the person most likely to be asked for information on one’s character [and] competence either formally in a court of law or informally in the course of casual conversation.”

Domestics’ interactions within London neighbourhoods in turn rested on the still more circumscribed ambit of the household. The ways that people thought, acted and lived in the past can to a limited extent be ascertained by considering how contemporary domestic space was used to fulfill basic needs, since domestic furnishings, the way a house was fitted out, and its amenities all reveal something of the everyday acts—and exchanges—that took place within it. Even in solidly constructed London townhouses in this period there was very little true privacy.

20 Boulton, Neighbourhood and society, 4-5; see also Finlay and Shearer, “Population growth and suburban expansion”, 51.

21 Earle, The making of the English middle class, 240.
Take, as an example, the plans that survive for two housing developments in St. Margarets Westminster, the large and demographically varied parish that has received particular emphasis in this thesis. By the second half of the seventeenth century, extensive building was taking place on Maiden Lane, St. Margarets, which in 1679 became Queen Street and incorporated Queen Square. Nos. 9 to 15 Queen Street were built in 1698 or 1699; Nos. 11 and 19 Queen Square were built in 1706-1707. Each of these houses had tenants who would have employed servants. Nos. 11 and 19 Queen Square each housed a series of tenants, some of them aristocrats, through the end of the seventeenth and first quarter of the eighteenth centuries. The plans of the houses are revealing of the close confinement and consequent exposure of female servants and their employers to one another, something that was very likely inescapable even in these dwellings, which housed upper-class families.

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23 Descriptions of St. Margarets, here as elsewhere in the thesis, refer to parish sites as they existed before the construction of Westminster Bridge; by 1750, the topography of the parish was substantially changed as King Street, the main thoroughfare, was replaced by a new highway (Parliament Street) which entailed demolishing a substantial portion of the eastern part of the parish, alongside the Thames. See London County Council, *Survey of London, The Parish of St. Margaret's, Westminster*, Pts. I, II and III, Vols. XII, XIII and XIV (London: B.T. Batsford, 1926, 1930, 1931), Pt. I, 1.

24 The households occupying No. 11 were those of Lady Colchester (1706-1717), Lord Darby (1718-1721) and Ric. Worthington (1722-1737); the more frequently changing tenants of No. 19 were Mme. Barnes (1706-1707), the Duke of Beaufort (1718-1720), Isaac Woolaston (1721-1725), — Meard (1728) and Mme. Kenitall (1729-1737). London County Council, *St. Margaret's, Westminster*, Pt. I, 128.
Nos. 9 to 15 Queen Street formed "a terrace of three-storey houses over a basement, and an attic storey in a tiled roof," and including "small powder-closets in the back projections." No. 11 Queen Square was faced with brick both front and back, suggesting a consideration of appearances on the part of the builder. In St. Margarets short leases commonly resulted in the construction of thin-walled houses in which there was very little physical separation between any of the people who lived in the same building, whatever the degree of formal separation in their relationships or indeed households. As Saussure observed of London generally, "houses are often on the point of tumbling down a short time before or after the term [of the builder's land lease] has expired."

Records of its dimensions have survived for No. 19 Queen Square, "a parcel of ground with a brick messuage thereon...containing in front 23 feet 4 inches and in depth 35 feet 9 inches, three storeys in height" with a basement, "two rooms and a large closet on each floor, garrets in the roof, and a kitchen, washhouse and other conveniences below stairs, a small vault under the street, a yard behind 34 feet 1 inch deep, and an 'iron railing on each side of the doore'." Also included was a coach house on the north side of the stable yard.


26 Saussure, A Foreign View, 68-70.

Unmentioned in the description but easily discerned on the floor plans were front and back areas that were the occasion for the iron railings in front of the house, and which were common in new West-end developments. Saussure noted that

In all the newly-built quarters the houses have one floor made in the earth, containing the kitchens, offices and servants' rooms. This floor is well lighted, and has as much air as the others have. In order to accomplish this a sort of moat, five or six feet in width and eight or nine deep, is dug in front of all the houses, and is called the 'area'. This moat is edged on the side next the street with an iron railing. The cellars and vaults where coal is stored are very strongly built beneath the streets, and to reach them you cross the area.28

Each of these features—areas, garret, basement, kitchen, washhouse and vault—were important sites for domestics. The work that took place in them was laden with social significance, and although these spaces housed activities of an intimate nature they were often not particularly private.

The ground floor of these houses was designed to contain several rooms in addition to smaller closets, while the first storey in both floorplans shows two main rooms with passages between them. Stone has suggested that the internal construction of eighteenth-century houses "made privacy very difficult, if not impossible," since

28 Saussure, A Foreign View, 69.

...to enter one room, one therefore
had to pass through others...many of the internal partitions were far from soundproof being made of thin lath and plaster, or simply deal wainscotting.  

Indeed, servants "had no scruples about boring holes through the latter in order to get a view of the room."  

Certainly the floorplans of these St. Margarets houses, reproduced below, suggest living conditions which would have mitigated against privacy in favour of active interpersonal relationships, whether voluntarily entered into or not.

29 Stone, Road to Divorce, 213-214.

30 Ibid., 214.
Figure 4.1: Floorplans for No. 11 Queen Square, St. Margarets

Figure 4.2: Floorplans for No. 19 Queen Square, St. Margarets

Servants' living spaces were most often wedged into their employers' housing. Hecht remarked that in the eighteenth century, even opulent London townhouses were hard-pressed to accommodate "a prodigious train of servants." Domestics might be put up on the attic floor, the basement, or in small closets on the middle stories. Ware noted that if garrets were too small to accommodate a household's servants, "a bed for a man or two maid servants is contrived to be let down in the kitchen," although he cautioned that insulation was needed to keep out the damp and cold.

Domestics' rooms, when servants lived in, were not particularly private and were often without even basic fittings. The London Spy, who evinced a certain preoccupation with female servility, caricatured "poor servant maids plagued in their bed chambers with the pressing and wheedling persuasions of their lewd and infirm masters" who could scarcely be kept out, and "women-servants half naked in their bed chambers, looking into broken pieces of glass, and vainly attempting by the power of soap, and towel, to alter their sad-coloured complexions." Female servants, he suggested, might be seduced simply as a result of their easy proximity to others in the household: he depicted "drapers,

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33 Hecht, The Domestic Servant Class, 106-109.

34 Isaac Ware, A Complete Body of Architecture (London, 1767), 134.
mercers, lacemens and booksellers apprentices, creeping from the women-servants bedchambers to their own."\(^{35}\)

It seems reasonable to compare London to Paris in the same period, where female servants "were sometimes allowed a nook in a garret or corner, but very often they shared their mistress's room or slept in the kitchen"; such arrangements were dictated by the need to have domestics ready to hand, but also because of straightforward lack of household space. Indeed, eighteenth-century Paris has been described as

a world of promiscuity where space was organized spontaneously, making maximum use of every nook and cranny; a noisy world with no possibility of privacy, for not only were the occupants crammed together, but the partitions were thin and failed to keep out the bustle and noise; a private world which necessarily flowed onto the outer, shared space of passages, landings, stairs and streets.\(^{36}\)

The condition of closely shared urban space was at issue even in the grandest London households. Consider, as an example, the Grosvenor estate in Mayfair.

At Michaelmas 1726, Sir Thomas Hanmer, Baronet, moved his household into a new town house at No. 52 Grosvenor Street, for which he paid £4,250. He had a retinue of fourteen servants.\(^{37}\) The Grosvenor estates in Mayfair, which came in the course of the eighteenth century to be the most valuable part of

\(^{35}\) Anon., Low-Life, 8, 25, 69.

\(^{36}\) Roche, People of Paris, 116-117, 119.

Westminster, were acquired by the Grosvenor family in 1677 and continuously developed for building thereafter.38 The development of the estate entailed the leasing of property to tenants like Sir Thomas whose complements of servants were sometimes quite large. The numbers of servants in individual households were sometimes detailed in inventories.

For example, at No. 4 Grosvenor Square, in 1764, the garret bedrooms included a footmen's room with four beds, and a maids' room with three beds; the floor below housed the rooms of the upper servants. Female servants were not numbered, but the male servants in the house and stables were listed at twenty-three.39 At No. 10 Grosvenor Square, built in 1726-27, an inventory survives for the house as it stood in 1768 that offers a similar picture of the tight arrangements necessitated by constrained space in the metropolis. The ground floor of the house contained a "fore-parlour" and library, the first floor housed the dining room, a bedroom and a dressing room, and the third floor held five additional rooms, including a housekeeper's room, a laundry, and a lady's room. In the roof were a butler's garret, a maids' garret with two beds, and a "lumber room". There was one staircase in the house, a throughway which would have

39 Ibid., Part II, 120.
fostered considerable considerable mutual exposure between servants and employers.\(^{40}\)

Clearly, close quarters obtained even in the houses of upper-class tenants. An inventory of 1757 for No. 44, Grosvenor Square, built in 1727, includes a description of its ground-floor rooms containing a "dining parlour" at the front of the house, and a "bathing-room", dressing-room and library at the back; the first floor held a large drawing room, an additional dressing room, and a bedchamber. On the second floor were a bedchamber and nursery arrangement in addition to an upper servant's room; finally, contained in the garrets of the house were another upper servant's room with one bed, and two more rooms for the maids and the footmen with three and two beds respectively.\(^{41}\)

A third inventory describing the fabric of a large Mayfair house shows the flexible usages of its rooms, adjusted to accommodate shifting needs of its tenants. In 1751 Lord Guilford let the house at No. 50 Grosvenor Street for the sum of £300 per annum. On the ground floor the house contained an ante-room, parlour, dressing room and powdering room. The arrangement of the household space is described as follows:

The designated dining-room was the large front room on the first floor, but that had become in fact a drawing-room, and the actual eating-room, as was suggested by the plans already mentioned, was downstairs


\(^{41}\) Ibid., Part II, 155-56
in the so-called 'parlour'. The second floor probably accommodated both family and servants' bedchambers and the four garrets included two appropriated to named servants. Below stairs, the service quarters included a sick room. No water closets are mentioned in the house, nor are any indicated on the earlier plans, although the yard contained the 'necessary house' mentioned in the inventory.\textsuperscript{42}

This description, too, is suggestive of the close quarters kept in London even by affluent householders.

An inventory of one of the largest houses on the estate, built by the architect Thomas Ripley in 1720, housed a lady's maid in a second-floor bedroom, and the rest of the upper servants in bedrooms in the garrets, while the footmen's and maid's rooms had two and three beds respectively—although only the maids' room had a table. Other servants' rooms, including the cook's, were in a kitchen compound at the rear of the house. Even so, most of the two dozen servants in the household lived out.\textsuperscript{43} The "less salubrious" parts of the Grosvenor estate were tenanted in part by servants living out. This was true where land was parcellled out in large blocks at low rents, in areas where building leases had few restrictive covenants placed upon them. One such development, Grosvenor Mews, housed victuallers, chandlers, builders, servants, and a chimney-sweep at mid-century.\textsuperscript{44}


\textsuperscript{43} Ibid., Part II, 36.

\textsuperscript{44} Ibid., Part I, 84-85.
A brief description of London households as working environments follows. It is not a comprehensive discussion, but it focuses on household sites and usages common to most London households: the washhouse and privy—and the connection of these to the communal water supply—as well as the basement and ground-floor work sites and the outdoor area adjacent to them. In urban households, these were the places in which the bulk of servants' domestic work was undertaken. These sites accordingly were important in shaping the nature and extent of relations between servants and employers in the household, and between servants and others in the neighbourhood.

The great bulk of household labour depended directly on the availability of water. Its management was an important issue for the domestics employed in London households and, as suggested by Mrs. Barker's domestic manual, above, all female servants of necessity dealt with this problem, no matter what their status in the household. As Saussure similarly reported,

Not a week passes by but well-kept houses are washed twice in the seven days, and that from top to bottom; and even every morning most kitchens, staircase, and entrance are scrubbed.45

Piped water was a luxury in the early modern metropolis, since each household was responsible for the expense of bringing it in from the street (presuming that

45 Saussure, A Foreign View, 157.
one lived on a street equipped with the lead mains to which customers attached small elm pipes as the connections to their homes).46

Saussure noted that “[b]esides the distribution of water by the means of pipes, there are in many streets pumps and wells, where poor people who cannot afford to pay for water can obtain it for nothing.”47 Thus in the 1760s, the author of *Low-Life* depicted these communal sites, where “wives and servant girls of mechanicks and day labourers, who live in courts and alleys, where one cock supplies the whole neighbourhood with water...fill[ing] their tubs and pans, with a sufficiency to serve them the ensuing seven days.”48

By 1700 most town houses in the new Westminster developments were built over basements. Saussure noted that in “all the newly built quarters the houses have one floor made in the earth,” wherein were found “the kitchens, offices and servants’ rooms”; he asserted that “this floor is well lighted, and has as much air as the others have.”49 Thirty years later, Issac Ware was at some variance with this opinion, describing the lower storey of London houses as “sunk entirely underground for which reason it is damp, unwholesome and

46 London’s private water companies were “the Society of Hampstead Aqueducts, which supplied most of the Holborn district with water from ponds on Hampstead Heath, and the London Bridge and Chelsea companies, which drew their water from the Thames.” From the early 1720s, the Chelsea Company “supplied Pall Mall and Whitehall daily, but the rest of its [less wealthy] district less frequently.” Cruickshank and Burton, *The Georgian City*, 87-88.


uncomfortable." The author of "Low-Life" similarly described "common servants in a great bustle in their dark dirty kitchens." 51

Kitchens could also be situated on the first floor — especially when the house was divided so as to accommodate more than one household, or when a shop was housed at the basement level. Narrative descriptions of unremarkable London houses and the ways they were used are not common from this period. 52 However, a detailed description remains of two neighbouring houses in St. Peter Cornhill, evocatively described in 1696 as "sloping or slanting near to each other." The kitchen window of the first of the houses, which gave "one small light not quite half a yard wide," was almost opposite to the dining-room window of the second. Respectively, these rooms stood over a poulterer's shop and a taphouse. Measured from window to window, the two houses stood two and a half yards apart. There was "a trough or box used as a garden" attached to the outside of the dining-room window. With these dwellings so closely spaced, their inhabitants literally cultivated privacy: in summer, this window box was filled with "two pots of greens, one each side...mints and balm high grown...thick

49 Saussure, A Foreign View, 69.

50 Ware, A Complete Body of Architecture, 134.

51 Anon., Low-Life, 58.

52 Cruikshank and Burton cite only one, the inventory of a kitchen in Red Lion Square. Cruikshank and Burton, The Georgian City, 63-65.
grown and not fallen, but about three quarters of a yard high" with "tendrils extending as far as the kitchen window opposite" so that it was impossible to see the interior of the second house from the kitchen window of the first.53

Servants spent their working days centrally placed in small, multiple-use spaces. The varied activities in the poulterer’s street-level kitchen, described above, were managed by a sole female servant, who said that she put children to bed in this room "between six and seven of the clock at night [and set] the children’s basket of clothes on the dresser near the kitchen window." She deposed that the kitchen was "furnished with wooden chairs and the cradle always stands before the chairs with the head toward the kitchen window and the feet toward the fireplace, which fireplace is at the farther end of the kitchen about five yards distant from the window."54

The remote basement location of privies meant that these were the only places domestics might find temporary privacy within their working environment. Privvies were placed outside for direct ventilation. In larger London houses a second privy intended for servants was often created in the front basement area or in the coal vaults under the street in front of a house. The disposal of household effluents was often difficult, since brick sewers were constructed in an ad hoc fashion from houses depending on the whim of the

53 LPL Branch v Palmer 1696: Eee 8 f. 293.

54 LPL Branch v Palmer 1696: Eee 8 f. 293.
builder and available space under the street. Moreover, they were built as channels for liquid waste and themselves had no independent water supply. Seepage, blockage and consequent flooding were an inevitability.  

From a domestic’s point of view the washhouse was an important household worksite — along with the kitchen and pantry that were very often connected to it — and the central activity undertaken in it was heavy and time-consuming work. In 1709, “women servants who are to be up very early to washing” were said to retire early, after first “lighting fires under their coppers... that they may get some sleep before their labour begins.”  

Or, as remarked in Mrs. Barker’s domestic manual, “it is the practice... to rise very early, and most certainly on washing day it is best,” in order for maids to “have their work over before the evening.” As “the woman who does the most servile work in a family,” the scullery maid was to “keep the different rooms, such as kitchen, pantry [and] wash-house clean” and to “take great care that nothing be lost from them, nor any stranger admitted.” In return, she was “intitled to respect in proportion as her service is laborious.” However, even the lady’s maid should be ready to roll up her sleeves, since she was to perform “the

55 Cruickshank and Burton, The Georgian City, 91-94.
57 Barker, The Complete Servant Maid, 40.
58 Ibid., 45.
washing of laces, muslin, gauzes, cambricks; also to clean gold and silver lace [and] stuffs."^59

Washhouses were often situated between the kitchen and the more communal space of the garden or area, since access to the cistern was needed to fill the washing copper. These were communal sites where neighbours, and most particularly servants, met. When, for example, Elizabeth Harding’s maidservant reported “some water running out of her [neighbour’s basement] sink into [Harding’s] cellar,” the women shouted invectives at each other between “a yard adjoining to both their houses and being used by them both” and Harding’s “kitchen window up one pair of stairs.” The ensuing scrap between the women and their respective domestics resulted in a formal prosecution for defamation. Sara Whitlock’s Arches deposition concerned “some water running out of Cornelia Hodges’ sink” into her own mistress’s adjoining cellar:

The boy that Cornelia Hodges had employed to carry the water out of the cellar was unwilling to carry all of it out...[my mistress] told me that she would speak herself to Cornelia Hodges...and [I] went into the cellar again leaving Hodges then in a yard adjoining to both their houses and used by them both...immediately after [I] was got down into the cellar [I] heard Hodges and [my mistress] talk aloud whereupon [I] immediately went upstairs to hear and see what the matter was and being come up saw [Hodges] as she was standing in the yard say to [my mistress who] was looking out of her kitchen window up one pair of stairs...you are a whore and have been the undoing of many, and kept the husbands company when their wives and children have wanted bread...[my

mistress] was before of very good name and fame [but she is now] distained and disgraced.\(^6\)

A London washhouse was described in another Arches suit as “divided only by slit deals” from the washhouse of the neighbouring household. The mistress of this second household was described as being in the habit of “stooping and having one hand on the partition” in order to carry on arguments with her neighbour. This behaviour precipitated a dispute on a morning when two maids happened to be in the washhouse (which must therefore have been near the kitchen) feeding a child. The informal housedress of the aggressor (“a loose gown”) combined with the activities that were carried out within the washhouse suggest that this space was not regarded as entirely external to the lower storey of the dwelling but instead was used by two neighbouring households as a kind of adjunct living and workspace.\(^6\)

In early modern England, the gossip occasioned by daily interaction within such the environments of the household and its surrounding neighbourhood worked as an informal means of social control, an expression of the tension generated by strict adherence to community norms and traditions.\(^6\) In the

\(^6\) LPL Harding v Hodges 1668: Eee 3 f. 201.

\(^6\) LPL Tatham v Flewe 1675: Eee 5 f. 591.

\(^6\) Ingram, *Church Courts, Sex and Marriage*, 35-69.
London market, the cultivation of an appearance of virtue protected a domestic's reputation, and so determined the character and level of agency available to her.

Central to urban domestics' agency was the establishment and maintenance of social networks. A servant's reputation can be seen as a kind of currency in which information served as the coin of exchange. The most significant boundaries for a female servant, especially if she was highly itinerant, were not defined in physical terms, but rather in reputational ones: boundaries were established through "discourse" or "talk" circulating in the neighbourhood and on the job. Gossip, couched in terms of an ongoing commentary on reputation, was a significant source of power for female servants. It was a currency of exchange both between a servant and her colleagues and between a servant and her employers. In this context, a domestic's command of an appearance of virtue gave her currency that could be augmented by information she discovered about others; revealing information was currency spent in order to garner advantage for herself.

The court records demonstrate that relationships obtained between servants and their colleagues, their employers, and their friends. Gossip was the vehicle by which agency was obtained in the context of such relationships. Female servants in London described communities based on information exchanges. Overhearing discussion and happening upon events were common features of female domestics' experience in work situations which exposed them
to the private details of employers’ lives. Due to the nature of their work, female servants had opportunities to report on the private incidents to which they were routinely exposed. Social activities within the context of work were often based on an exchange of news and information with other participants in local fora.

Gossip and rumour are forms of discourse which share the critical functions of providing concealment or protection, serving as media of exchange, and generating agency. As Patricia Spacks has written, gossip and rumour both reflect and comment on existing social realities. Suits prosecuted by female servants or which involved them as witnesses make it clear in court records that questions of personal reputation were critical to female servants. Domestics manipulated virtue (or the appearance of it) as a means of protecting themselves and furthering their own plans, and that this was central to their agency.

Writing on consistory court deposition books for the village of Ryton in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, Miranda Chaytor suggests that court records reveal women’s roles and concerns, and that “from the situation in which the conflict occurred it is possible to reconstruct something of the material conditions of their lives.” Chaytor writes that insults “reflect women’s ‘otherness’; they reveal a society in which gossip, sexuality and household tasks limited and defined women’s lives; they represent women as inhabiting a separate culture, parallel to but concealed behind the better documented male

‘official’ one.” Indeed, “sexual divisions and inequalities are implicit in the insults themselves: ‘witch’, ‘whore’ and ‘scold’ are the commonest terms of abuse.” These terms spoke to “the spheres of female power and activity” and conveyed “the fear and hostility that these evoked.” 64

Looking to defamation cases wherein women “accused one another of violating norms and values,” Chaytor posits gossip as an index of early modern women’s agency. She concludes that although gossip was “certainly feared by men and generally assumed to be malicious,” the evidence of the court records suggests that most of the information gathered by women in this form was used to reaffirm rather than undermine male-dominated hierarchies. She describes gossip in Ryton as “the politics of the officially powerless.”65

If gossip was indeed a crucial source of agency for women who otherwise had very little social or economic power, it makes sense that gossip should often have focused on women’s sexual reputations, since this was regarded as the most salient index of a woman’s worth. Patricia Spacks notes that for women as well as men, “reputation is social currency.” However, men’s continued opportunities for action allow them ongoing opportunities to repair damage to their reputations. Women, in contrast, “have no way to wipe out stains to their good

64 Chaytor, “Household and Kinship”, 49.
65 Ibid., 50.
names." Reputation, for eighteenth-century women, was equivalent to sexual reputation.\textsuperscript{66}

It has been suggested that the idea of chaste femininity was a central feature of the dynamic of female repression in seventeenth-century England. Making a woman's "entire moral status and fate dependent on her observance of a single law severely restricted her possibilities for self-determination," so that "the major law for women [was] a negative one" ensuring that women thought first about avoidance of blame rather than achievement. As Katherine Rogers has argued, the ideal of modesty was thus perpetuated by its victims, since "a system of subordination was essential to produce peace and order and therefore happiness" in the nation as well as the family.\textsuperscript{67} As Sara Mendelson has noted of Stuart women, however, there was "a common urge to transcend feminine impotence and win control over a menacing environment."\textsuperscript{68} Mendelson suggests that in order to reconcile their interests and ambitions with the normative female role, women in early modern England encoded their masculine urges in a socially acceptable form: they arrogated to themselves the obverse of the masculine domain by using the power of speech to compensate for

\textsuperscript{66} Spacks, \textit{Gossip}, 31-32.


\textsuperscript{68} Sara Heller Mendelson, \textit{The mental world of Stuart women: three studies} (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press) 1987, 198.
their lack of physical prowess and worldly power—whence the importance of gossip for women, and especially gossip concerning their virtue.

An example of the importance of gossip to a servant’s reputation emerged in an Arches prosecution by a maidservant in a tradesman’s household in 1690. Her reputation, previously untarnished, had been compromised through gossip concerning her sexuality. Sarah Browne said she was employed by a seedman and his wife, who had their own shop beneath their lodgings in Well Yard, Little Bartholomews. Browne’s master also employed a journeyman named Docwray. Witnesses deposed that Docwray had abused Browne with “very bad language, calling her whore and jade...and threatened to beat her out of the shop.” Docwray then offended further by telling his master that “it was an easy matter to prove [Browne] a whore and that she had had a bastard.”

These charges had social consequences for Browne. According to several deponents in the suit, Sarah Browne had previously been regarded as a woman “of very good name and reputation and...of very civil and modest deportment.” However, “some of the neighbours by reason of [Docwray’s] speaking as aforesaid have jeered her.” Although both Docwray and Browne were in his employ, the seedman came to the aid of his maidservant: notwithstanding that Docwray told him some hours after the incident that if his master knew Browne’s true character “he would not keep her in the house,” it was Docwray who was sent away. Docwray reportedly returned the following week and “proffered [Bury] to
serve him again as his journeyman"; the seedman refused, on the grounds that Docwray "had abused his maid."69

For female servants, "virtue" was the non-material coin traded in work-related transactions. Her employer's perception of Browne as virtuous meant that she got to keep her job. This helped her to parry community rumour that she "had had a bastard." However, the report that "some of the neighbours...have jeered her" suggests that this rumour was likely to have remained in local memory. It was in this way that female servants' livelihoods pivoted on assessments of their sexual reputations.

References

Places must often have come to women through word-of-mouth, because advertisements for female domestic servants were only sporadically placed in any of the London newspapers before 1740, when the Public Advertiser began publication.70 Anna King, for example, deposed that her husband, "who then lived as a servant with [Mrs.] Drake," told her that Drake's maid was gone from her and that she wanted somebody to lie with her and desired [Anna King] to go to her and thereupon [King] went to her in

69 LPL Browne v Docwray 1668: Eee 3 f. 182.

70 Although the Daily-Courant, -Journal and -Post were all in regular London circulation before 1740, as were the Female Tatler, Flying Post and Post Boy, none of these newspapers carried regular advertisements for servants through the end of the 1730s.
her lodging in Tavistock St. [in St. Martins in the Fields] and when she had been with her about two days she hired [King] to live with her as her servant.\textsuperscript{71}

The only character King provided to her prospective mistress came from King's husband, who was already a servant in Mrs. Drake's household; the initial recommendation was then supplemented with a two-day trial, and on this basis King was then formally hired.

In the early eighteenth century, the author of The Complete Servant Maid asserted that if a housekeeper was to hire new servants, “let her be extremely cautious, and enquire strictly into their characters.”\textsuperscript{72} This suggestion was not always matched in practice in the metropolis. Peter Linebaugh has commented that “the labour market for servants was a matter of word-of-mouth in which employers had little control, at least in London.\textsuperscript{73} The networks of information about employment were located below stairs.” Defoe also took a strong position on the issue of references. He proposed that in an ideal republic, wherein the “great law of subordination” was respected,

no master or mistress shall take any menial servant into their house, without a full certificate for their behaviour in the last places they serv'd in; which certificate the said servant shall deliver to their new

\textsuperscript{71} LPL Robinson v Robinson 1726: Eee 13 f. 45.

\textsuperscript{72} Barker, The Complete Servant Maid, 17.

\textsuperscript{73} Peter Linebaugh, The London hanged: crime and civil society in the eighteenth century (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 252.
place, when hir'd; and if any master or mistress shou'd venture to hire a servant without such a certificate, they shou'd have no remedy by law against such said servant, whatever disorders they committed, murder excepted.\textsuperscript{74}

Defoe was frustrated by the absence of an established system of references for servants.\textsuperscript{75} His vehement tone in this passage matches his advocacy of extreme limitations on masters' powers in the event that masters did not comply with the certification system he imagined on paper.

Very little evidence of servants' references is presented in either the settlement or ecclesiastical court records examined for this thesis, and what evidence remains suggests that written or verbal characters were demanded and obtained in an ad hoc rather than in a regularized way. For example, Sarah Redhead said in 1697 that she had been servant to an upholsterer's wife in Cornhill "about 12 months" but left this position "because there was too many children to wait on and look after." Despite the fact that she had quit the position, Redhead deposed that "at any time afterwards Mrs. Cones was always calling to recommend her to places when she was out of place."

Redhead deposed that when she went "to live with a gentlewoman in Fox Court," she was sent to her new mistress "with a note sealed up from Mrs. Cones directed to Mrs. Lee in Fox Court near Brook Street." She concluded

\textsuperscript{74} Defoe, \textit{The Great Law}, 297.

\textsuperscript{75} The issue of servants' registration, including the Fieldings' effort to establish such a system in the 1760s, is discussed in chapter five, following.
her deposition by adding that she had since taken a place as "housemaid to
the Lady Charlotte Arby, and hath lived in her service ever since May Day
last, and Mr. [illeg.] who lives in the Old Bailey recommended her to the
place."76 By her own account, Redhead continued to be successful in getting
references from her employers.

Hecht wrote that a servant might be helped "by the paternalism of his
employer to transfer his services to an employer of higher social status," but in
the end, "the aid a servant received in making a change of that sort was confined
to the usual written or verbal character: he secured the place through his own
efforts." He also suggested that a London servant "could easily procure a
counterfeit testimonial," either written or verbal.77 The unreliability of such
testimonials emphasizes why employers' perceptions of female servants'
reputations, often founded on gossip, were so important to the latter in
furthering their own interests.

Female servants were often transients through the neighbourhoods in
which they worked. But as long as they remained in a particular place, they were
immersed in community. To extend the comparison with Paris, another closely-
packed metropolis, gossip "more than anything else defined the boundaries of
the community":

76 LPL Macclesfield v Macclesfield 1695: Eee 8 f. 478.

77 Hecht, The Domestic Servant Class, 183-186.
People gossiped primarily with and about people they knew. What they said could have little impact on outsiders, but for those who belonged to the community the way neighbours spoke about them and behaved towards them was a constant preoccupation. Because the neighbourhood, socially and materially, was central to people's existence, the place they occupied in it was vitally important to them.  

In early modern London, the business of exchanging news and information was at the hub of social life, and a domestic reported on the comings and goings of her employers as part of her own round of social activity. As Anne Orran recalled, for example, her mistress did go to bed between 6 and 7 of the clock on Thursday the nineteenth of August... after [my] mistress was in bed a neighbour's apprentice and a man and his horse were talking together [with me] and in discourse [I] told the company that night was a fortnight [since I] was merry with [my] fellow servants on Box Hill near Epsom.  

As in Paris in the same period, "servants could be very much part of the local community, for we find them participating in everyday neighbourhood sociability." Servants who worked for the much humbler people, most often as the sole employee, met neighbours on the stairs or in the courtyard—"either indirectly through paper-thin walls or directly in daily intercourse with them":  

Actually in the house, or right outside, were the most common locations of neighbourhood contact...for it was there that the overwhelming majority of [disputes] between neighbours occurred...[another] frequent meeting place was a common well or fountain...Neighbourhood sociability was essentially diffuse and

78 Garrioach, Neighbourhood and Community, 33.

79 LPL Branch v Palmer 1696: Eee 8 f. 293.
unorganized, based on shared space and shared habits, to a large degree fashioned by the constraints of the urban environment.\textsuperscript{60}

In this urban setting of close interpersonal contact, female servants could learn a great deal about the people who populated the households in which they worked.

Some evidence remains of the mechanics by which domestic service fostered neighbourhood connections for London servants, often through a linking employer. For example, a woman named Sarah Cross had at one time been Anna Gary's mistress; Mary Culcup, too, knew Cross by virtue of "living in the same neighbourhood as her"; Margaret Anderson also knew her "by living at the next door to the house where she then lodged and by washing for her." These women's acquaintances with Cross sprang from the fact of their "living in the same neighbourhood" or "next door" to her, or as a result of working in her household.\textsuperscript{81} At the same time, the connections between these women were transient; servants knew each other in household and neighbourhood contexts, and created other such contexts elsewhere in the metropolis every time they changed jobs.

Where an urban community pivoted on gossip, as in London and Paris, that community might also be described as a series of personal relationships

\textsuperscript{60} Garrioich, \textit{Neighbourhood and Community}, 131.

\textsuperscript{81} \textit{LPL Cross v Cross} 1726: Eee 13 ff. 31, 39, 45.
based on favour exchanges or the tensions of close association. As Arches depositions show, the construction and usage of London households fostered interaction between female servants and their employers. In this way, female servants' work gave them substantial access to household information. Domestics observed acts committed under the presumption of inviolate household privacy and were always capable of rendering them public; they could parlay this knowledge into gain if they knew how to protect themselves.

**Domestics' gossip**

The quality of detailed knowledge domestics acquired about their employers' lives is evident in the testimony of a waiting maid whose master and mistress lodged in part of a house in Old Southhampton Buildings, near Middle Row, Holborn. Called to account for her employers' wealth, the maid knew that her mistress had "several valuable household goods" and personal items, including "a pearl necklace five times round her neck," said to be worth fifty pounds, "ten very rich and good wearing clothes and linen," and "a handsome chest of drawers and a good trunk of damask and drapes linen, and a lined bed with other furniture, very rich and good of the kind." The maid also knew that her mistress had recently taken a gift from her father of "about two or three hundred pounds in goods," including "beds, pewter, diaper and damask table linen and other necessary and handsome furniture." The household
complement of domestics was comprised of the waiting maid, a servant maid, and a nineteen-year-old cook.

This waiting maid's duties, including giving her mistress's shifts and linen to the washerwoman, attending her mistress when she was ill, and escorting her mistress on excursions in her coach, entailed great intimacy with her employer; and yet when the household moved to Covent Garden, the waiting maid summarily left her place and was immediately replaced by another domestic.\textsuperscript{82} This female servant knew well the social and economic details of her employers' private lives, and those details left the household and traveled to the courtroom when she did.

This was also true of domestics employed in a surgeon's household, described in a second Arches suit. The surgeon lodged with his wife at the Thames-side house of a London apothecary. As part of their lodgings, the family and the two female servants they employed made use of a common room in which they sat by the fire; the physician's wife often went "upstairs to her chamber" to "lay in bed and read by candlelight." One maidservant, age twenty-eight, had gone to live with this family for a year in Bedford, and then for an additional six months when London lodgings were taken. The two domestics testified that their mistress never did without "anything that it was necessary or convenient for her to have"; however, they knew that their master allowed his

\textsuperscript{82} \textit{LPL} Bound v Bound 1693: Eee 7 f.679.
wife "only 10s a week to maintain herself and her family in meat, drink and other necessaries" and that their mistress "hath sometimes been forced to sell her own clothes to support herself, her husband not allowing her newspapers and refusing to give her half a penny to buy milk when she had occasion for it." ⁸³

In a third suit, another Arches deponent made the same point: that she had acquired considerable knowledge about her employers' livelihood and marriage in the course of working as their household servant. Of course, this servant may have been coached by an interested party before giving testimony, but in any case, the net result was that she knew a great deal about her employers' lives. She was employed by a barber and perriwig maker in Deere Street, St. Clement Danes. She knew that her master had enough income to buy a house in St. James's after borrowing £200 from his wife. This domestic knew that "ever since his marriage" this man "did keep a very good house...and did make sufficient provision of diet, lodging and apparel and indeed all things requisite for himself and his wife and family," living "handsomely and in good fashion for one of the quality." She also knew that the barber's wife "hath assisted him in the making of perriwigs and by her skill and endeavors in making [them] advanced his estate to the value of £1,000." The servant knew her mistress had married "without the consent and knowledge of her parents and they being

⁸³ LPL Jessop v Jessop 1718: Ee 9 f. 12.
much displeased thereat her father would not give her any portion”; however, her mother had since their marriage given her son-in-law “money and money’s worth to the value of £40.” The maid knew that when her mistress separated from her master, she took “21 periwigs worth £100, some pieces of plate to the value of £25, a watch worth £3 and a necklace of pearl worth £50.” In a statement redolent of contrasting circumstances, the maidservant said that while she lived in this household, she had her own bed in the heavily trafficked kitchen and was paid a wage of 50s per annum.84

Christiana Lovegrove, a cookmaid, deposed in 1693 that she “well knew Richard Hooton when he was a drawer at the Feather Tavern in Red Lion Square,” since he often came to her master’s house “to bring wine and the like.” Allsop knew Hooton as a regular visitor to the household in which she worked. She had “opportunity to hear his talk,” compared notes with other servants, and in this way shaped Hooton’s reputation as it was later presented to the court. Hooton’s was presented as “very lewd and debauched discourse commonly swearing and talking of his whoring.” Lovegrove was not the only domestic to hold this opinion. She deposed that her fellow servant, Mary, “called Richard Hooton a nasty pocky dog, to which [he] replied pox was the fashion and he did not care.” Hooton’s fellow servants, she said, “had seen his shirts” which “were

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84 LPL Hubbard v Hubbard 1668: Eee 3 f. 242.
stained as is usual in the distemper called the clap or pox,” and asserted that “he kept a whore.”

The notion of chaste femininity was a central feature of female life experience in this period, making a woman’s “entire moral status and fate dependent on her observance of a single law.” At the same time, careful observance of this law could also protect or advance the interests of a female servant who understood how to foster a reputation for personal virtue, and had an eye and an ear for others’ lapses. The character of servants’ gossip reaffirmed rather than undermined patriarchal authority. That is, the common perception of Hooton’s lack of character was fortified by gossip concerning his sexual boasting. In contrast, the community perception of Lovegrove’s own virtue and that of her fellow domestics, made manifest in their appalled reactions to this man, both protected these women’s reputations and made them more credible purveyors of information.

Similarly, in 1675, Sara Oakes, a London domestic, reported in an Arches deposition that on a day at the end of July, she was in her mistress’s washhouse “about her occasions.” Her mistress also happened to be there at the time. A neighbour, Thomasina Granger, was in the adjoining washhouse which was “divided only by slit deals” from that of Oakes’s mistress, “which partition had

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85 *LPL Bound v Bound* 1693: Eee 7 f. 691.

many large crevices or chinks or crannies therein through which any person in one of the...washhouses might easily be seen by anyone which would look thereinto from the other." There Oakes's mistress told Granger "of a certain scandal raised by Granger's maid...namely...that Granger's maid gave out that Oakes's mistress had St. Anthony's fire in her leg."

At this point, "the dispute between them grew very high they looking through the crevices or chinks of the partition one on the other." Alerted by her own maid, who had been drawn "to the street door" by the commotion, Granger's mother then came into the washhouse from her own house, which was "not far distant...and on the same side of the way":

she fell into a great rage and in her rage and anger looking through a large crevice or vacancy in the partition...in sight and hearing of Sara Oakes spoke in an angry and malicious manner...and said [to Oakes's mistress] you are a rotten pocky whore and you stink as you go along the street.

The dispute attracted an audience: "Oakes's fellow servants Johanna Scarlett and Mary Turner who saw and heard the same...The said words are since become a public talk and the credit and good name of [Oakes's mistress] was and is thereby much impaired and diminished amongst her neighbours and acquaintances."

The site of the incident determined its significance as much as what was said. Granger's mother asserted right to advance on Oakes's mistress's

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87 LPL Tatham v Flewe 1675: Eee 5 f. 591.
household; Granger herself laid physical claim to the partitioned washhouse. Consider the painstaking description Oakes gave to the partition that did such an inadequate job of dividing the space, but which all parties wanted to defend as a separating boundary. The partition was of slit boards having "many large chinks or crevices or crannies therein"; Granger's mother delivered her speech while "looking through a large crevice or vacancy in the partition in sight and hearing" of Oakes. The fiction of invisibility was reinforced even as the fact of it was actively undermined by masters and servants living and working in close proximity to one another.

Domestics of course had overt allegiances to their employers, and in this instance at least one was explicit in declaring her loyalties by fetching her mistress to the scene. However, a second order of things also obtained. While servants were officially only agents for their respective mistresses, and so were therefore formally invisible, it was a servant who first overheard the fighting "at the street door"; another servant began the scandal with the initial story; and it was a servant who later reported the end of her mistress's credit and good name to the court.

Female servants synopsized, aggregated and reported on the private incidents to which they were routinely exposed. This was at issue when in 1690 another domestic, Frances Lamb, was "dressing her head one Monday morning up one pair of stairs backwards in her master's house," a room "even and next to
the bed chamber of Mrs. Weston,” the neighbour in the adjoining household. Lamb deposed that “hearing Mrs. Weston’s voice saying Frank don’t play the fool, and hearing a man’s voice saying God I will” she recognized the voice of Mr. Weston’s apprentice:

the wall which divided the bedchamber of Mrs. Weston from the room which she was then in, being an old decayed wall of plaster and an old ragged hanging before it, with her fingers she very easily made a hole, and through the old hanging and shattered wall she then saw Mrs. Weston in naked bed and her apprentice Frank Alchin lying upon her naked body in his clothes.

Having made this discovery, Lamb “immediately went down into the shop where her master and...his apprentice were at work and there told her master...if he would please go up he might see Frank the apprentice upon his mistress. Thereupon the three went up and “made the hole in the wall bigger.” Lamb reported that she “did soon after...talk of what she had seen to several of the apprentices and servants in the neighbourhood, and they used to laugh at Frank Alchin about lying with his mistress.” Lamb and her fellows promised Alchin that they “would not tell his master that they saw him lie upon his mistress,” although she expressed her belief that “the apprentice boys and servants did talk of the same amongst themselves.”

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Female servants did well to maintain an appearance of rectitude and virtue, in concert with the traditional patriarchal ideals governing the

88 LPL Weston v Weston 1697: Eee 8 f. 479.
institution of service. Virtue was therefore often the overt concern which shaped the stories domestics told about others, too, as when in 1694, Margaret Vassall reported that she "was at first unwilling" to become a servant to the Countess of Banbury because she said she "had heard Lord Banbury had a great many mistresses," and because his woman "was not publicly owned as the Countess."89 In making this moral assertion, Vassall clearly had a bargaining point: she indicated her own virtue by protesting the legitimacy of her employers' union, thereby favourably contrasting her own reputation to the countess's.

An Arches deposition in 1697 described a servant's response to her mistress's second illegitimate pregnancy, she having seen her mistress through the first one. Dinah Allsop's main assertion was that her reputation stood to be damaged if she continued to be associated with her mistress, and therefore had a right to leave her service but also to be paid for her annual contract:

having perceived that the Countess was again with child, Dinah Allsop did tell the Countess that she was well assured [of it] and she desired leave to quit her service, for it would ruin her to live with her any longer, and she would not get another service, upon which the Countess was angry with her, and denied she was with child, but Dinah Allsop told her she was sure the Countess was with child, and she thought she ought in conscience to acquaint the Countess's mother of it, and then the Countess earnestly desired Dinah Allsop not to tell her mother or any of her family she was with child, and if she would go

89 LPL Banbury v Banbury 1693: Eee8 f.7.
away she would give her 20 guineas and five pounds a year to go and live with Dinah Allsop's sister in the country.90

Female servants in the metropolis used stories of on the subject of their virtue to their own advantage. In the above suit, the episode was understood by all as a moral one: the domestic challenged her mistress's virtue, and threatened to reveal the latter's indiscretions if her own payment, a year's wages, was not secured.

In April 1733, Lileas Cameron deposed that "about 1 of the clock of a Saturday night" as she was in her lodging room "which was very small and adjoining to" her mistress's bed chamber, she saw "the Lady Spilsborough sitting undressed upon a chair and without stays and Mr. Jeffreys then sat across her lap with his face towards her in a very indecent posture." Cameron thereupon put out her candle in order to see "what passed between them." The door stood "ajar very near them...she could not shut it without the lady's observing the same and Cameron was unwilling [her mistress] should know she had observed them." She heard her mistress say to Mr. Jeffreys "Lilly is asleep." Some days later, Cameron "met her Lordship coming down the stairs and he then speaking to her says 'what do you think Lilly I have caught your Lady and Mr. Jeffries in bed together' and when Cameron went into the bed chamber...the Lady Spilsborough

90 LPL Macclesfield v Macclesfield 1697: Eee 8 f. 419.
who was sitting and crying upon a chair between the bed and the door...said Oh Lilly I am undone.\textsuperscript{91}

Even fragmentary court depositions suggest that domestics knew the power of their reportage as a source of agency. Margaret Keene, a servant, deposed that for a period shortly after their master and mistress, named Bound, "parted and broke up housekeeping" Hannah Hardcastle, another servant, "was entertained" in Keene's own lodgings, and "for about a week or ten days Hannah lay with Keene in her own bed." Keene said that during "the first two or three days Hannah Hardcastle lodged with her," the two women were "talking of the difference betwixt" master and mistress, Hardcastle did then swear God damn her, her master was a cocky dog, and that her mistress was an honest woman, and she farther then swore that her mistress would pay her twelve pounds which she said was due to her she would swear for [her mistress] anything against [her master]; and Hannah Hardcastle then swore God damn her, if she would not have the money of [one] she would swear against her for [the other], or on any side that would give her the money.

Several days later, Hardcastle swore God damn her and sink her, she could not get any money of Mrs. Bound, but that she had been with her master Sampson Bound who had given her a pistol...and that Sampson had promised her the twelve pounds, with which money she said she would fetch her clothes out of pawn and then swore, by God she would swear for her master Bound that Elizabeth Bound was a whore to which this deponent replied that it was hard matter to swear her mistress to be a whore, to which Hannah replied why would she not give her the

\textsuperscript{91} LPL Spilsborough v Spilsborough 1734: Eee 14 f. 109.
money then, and if swearing would do it Hannah swore she would be revenged of Elizabeth.92

In a similar deposition, in 1735, Mary Stevens deposed that she “came to know the Lady Susannah Clavering by going to live as a servant to her and continued to live with her for about half a year.” During this period, a fellow servant, Elizabeth Hawso, “was turned away.” One month later, Stephens asked Hawso “if she had not got a place.” This deponent reported Hawso’s reply, “No, that old bitch wont give me a character but God damn her I’ll seek an opportunity at some time or other to be revenged of her for it.” A third servant, Mary Tilly, testified she lived with Clavering and her husband “as their cook for about six weeks...and hath ever since...lived in the same neighbourhood with them.” She deposed,

Elizabeth Hawso was the chambermaid [and] one Mary was the housemaid...Hawso was very poor and a great liar and frequented a house which was reputed to be a bawdy house...it was commonly reported that she had had one or two bastards and that she had been turned away two or three times for misbehaviour...Mary Tilly hath seen her set her foot upon or against the kitchen grates and show her legs in the presence of the men servants.94

Elizabeth Hawso’s grievances show how entangled were economic and moral considerations for female servants. Hawso’s demand of a good character from

92 LPL Bound v Bound 1693: Eee 7 f. 691.

93 LPL Clavering v Clavering 1735: Eee 14 f. 241.

94 LPL Clavering v Clavering 1735: Eee 14 f. 245.
her mistress was predicated on the former’s notion that a recommendation the salvageable part of her broken contract. At the same time, the lasting reputational damage Hawsot suffered concerned her compromised virtue, and therefore her ability to protect her reputation, and therefore also the degree of agency she was able to command.

It took a fourth servant to the Clavering household, a cook named Mary Nugent (who was hired after Mary Tilly left), to reveal to the court that other domestics employed by the family used the same invective-laden approach as Hawsot in negotiating with and discussing their mistress, though perhaps with more success. Mary Nugent deposed that she often heard her fellow servants “abuse Clavering...behind her back...by railing against her and hath heard them often curse her by saying damn her and she hath also several times seen them give her saucy language to her face.”

Elizabeth Hawsot’s case highlights an important challenge female servants faced in the metropolis: the threat that “discourse” about them might circulate in the community and threaten their jobs. Patricia Spacks has noted that the three aspects of gossip condemned by eighteenth-century moralists were its circulation

95 LPL Clavering v Clavering 1735: Eee 14 f. 247.

96 Favour exchanges and competitive claims between servants were part of this process, as when Anna Newman reported to her mistress that her fellow servant had delivered a letter to her mistress’s daughter which Newman “apprehended upon instruction from her mistress, who was very angry with the said maid and immediately gave her warning and turned her away for delivering the said letter.” LPL da Costa v da Costa Villa Real 1732; Eee 13, f. 343.
of slander, its betrayal of secrets, and its penetration of privacy. As Sarah Mendelson has written, women in Stuart England “arrogated to themselves the obverse of [the] masculine domain” by using speech-making to compensate for their lack of physical prowess and worldly power. For this reason, “a good character”, in the eighteenth-century phrasing, was a very useful thing to get from past employers when presenting oneself to prospective ones.

**Domestics’ pregnancies**

The obvious practical difficulties of keeping a place in service while at the same time providing care to one’s own children was, in Arches testimony, overlaid with a prescriptive concern for female servants’ virtue. Babies were an indication of moral lapse in single women, and so sanctions against pregnancy were especially severe for the 75% of London domestics who were unmarried. Perhaps more profoundly than any other factor, the possibility or actuality of pregnancy affected domestics’ prospects as wage earners.

Using as a source settlement examinations for the Westminster parish of St. Martin in the Fields in the 1750s, Kent has found that female servants in London were more autonomous economically than most other women and as a result “did not need to seek a secure subsistence within marriage.” Indeed, a

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female servant was "sexually more independent and less marriage oriented than other working women and more likely to pursue an illicit relationship rather than forfeit her position by marrying." However, in a study of illegitimacy in eighteenth-century Westminster, Nicholas Rogers has found that most illegitimate births were the result of women, domestics in particular, living and working closely alongside men—"the constraints of service and the still localized nature of the work environment [and] the proximity of lodgings" in London. As Rogers writes,

Many young women in Westminster would have found the conventional transition from service to marriage a hazardous business, especially if their savings were small and their skills commonplace. Their obstacles to nuptiality were many, and it only required an unwanted pregnancy to jeopardize a relationship or put it to the test. Pregnancy-inspired migration was a hazard for female servants, and tended to provoke the attention of parish authorities worried about the draw on local coffers. Pregnant women without legitimate settlement in a parish, as Defoe tells us, were routed out by local magistrates "to secure the parishes from the charge of their debaucheries":

As soon as they can drop their burthen, they fly, for fear of the House of Correction, and away they go to London to get services. London, like

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99 Kent, "Ubiquitous but invisible", 118.

100 Rogers, "Carnal Knowledge", 363, 365.

101 Ibid. 366.
the ocean, that receives the muddy and dirty brooks, as well as the clear and rapid rivers, swallows up all the scum and filth of the Country, and here they need not fear of getting places.

Making allowance for Defoe's polemics, one surmises from this passage that women, given the freedom to choose work and earn an income, will likely become pregnant; if unmarried, they will become charges on their parishes. After a time they will abandon their dependents and head for London, where any woman can get work as a servant as long as she has no children or babies for whom she must care. Defoe concluded, describing domestics' proclivities toward leaving children they had no means of supporting, "this helps to fill the Town with a generation of whores and thieves, and makes our maid servants recommend themselves as they do."  

In 1690, Sarah Hare was one of several maidservants to a family that had lodgings in London. Hare's fellow domestic said that on several occasions one winter, Nicholas Burrett, who "served her master's house with drink," invited Hare "to go abroad with him," which she did in the company of several other servants:

the rest of the servants then apprehending [Burrett] courted [Hare] in the way of marriage...hath often left [the pair] alone together at eleven of the clock at night and gone to bed...[and] hath heard it commonly reported that [Burrett] did get [Hare] with child.

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102 Defoe, The Great Law, 85-86.
Neighbourhood and household sociability formed the servants' nexus of information exchange in this suit. Servants in the household saw the pair "embrac[ing] when they thought nobody hath seen them," and one watched Burrett leave Hare's rooms "with his knee strings untied, and his coat unbraced."

Thus in the neighbourhood there came to be a common voice and fame...that Nicholas Burrett had lain with or debauched Sarah Hare and when [Burrett] was publicly accused of getting [Hare] with child, [he] hath generally replied, what if he did, [Hare] was a common whore and he would prove her so.

Burrett was eventually served with a warrant "for getting Sarah Hare with child." All parties concerned here were engaged in a discourse about Sarah Hare's sexual reputation. Hare's fellow maidservants "coming about [Burrett] and asking him why he did such an ill thing to her, [Burrett] having then his leg on the lap of [Hare] and [Hare] who was then with child leaning her head upon his breast" told her, "'my dear I will marry thee or do anything' and did thereupon order [her] to take some private lodging in London, and he would take care of her and pay for it." However, Burrett "seemed then very devious to put off the marriage to the Monday following," and Sarah Hare's brother "being then present, would not be satisfied therewith; and thereupon the next morning they went to [a] Justice at London" where Burrett "was obliged to give security to save the parish harmless from the child of Sarah Hare."

\footnote{LPL Hare v Burrett 1690: Eee 7 ff. 139, 141.}
Burrett's agenda was to prove that Hare was a woman without virtue, and so avoid being assigned paternity. He was unable to do so, but his master intervened on his behalf, and Sarah Hare's reputation was assessed and considered compromised. In the event, it was reported by the local milkseller (who said she had known Burrett "ever since his infancy"), that "about three weeks after her delivery [Hare] was carried away from thence by the churchwarden of the parish." The milkseller claimed that Sara Hare had had a liaison with another man, a fellow servant named John Baker "in her chamber, where [they] continued alone together two or three times for several hours with the door of their chamber shut."\(^{104}\) A female servant's virtue was at issue in this Arches suit, as in others, but at the same time the sexual reputation that followed her also had a considerable impact on a domestic's employment prospects.

Elizabeth Brooke's second mistress in St. James's parish, having known Brooke for seven months, testified before the Court of Arches in 1693. Her mistress stated that Brooke "went under the notion of a widow, and [said] that her husband whilst living was postmaster at Thetford in Norfolk, and her husband's mother kept her children which were...three or four [in number]." Her mistress said that "about the latter part" of Brooke's term in her household, she "hath observed Elizabeth Brooke to be sick and out of order and...hath told [her]

\(^{104}\) *LPL* Hare v Burrett 1690: Eee 7 f. 143.
that she wished she was not breeding or with child.” Brooke insisted that “she was big with fat and nothing else.” Yet her mistress later said she had heard that Elizabeth Brooke was brought to bed some few months after she left [her] service, [and] believes [Brooke] was with child when she lived with [her] but whether [Brooke] was delivered of a bastard child she knows not, nor knew [her] to be guilty of thieving, but did always look upon her to be a bold and confident servant.105

The traditions of service created the prescriptive notion that paid domestic work constituted an early life phase, after which women of all classes married and set up their own households. However, Rogers’s conclusion that in eighteenth-century Westminster the problems of getting and keeping work while avoiding pregnancy made saving a “hazardous business” for female servants concurs with evidence from Arches depositions, and also with the trial accounts of St. Margarets infanticides.106

Domestics’ infanticides

It has been proposed in this chapter that female servants in London made use of household gossip in order to gain agency. This was possible only so long as female servants themselves managed to remain within certain moral parameters; pregnancy was a dramatic abdication of an unmarried or widowed

105 LPL Catchpoole v Catchpoole 1692: Eee 7 f. 446.

106 Nicholas Rogers, “Carnal Knowledge”, 366.
domestic's virtuous state. Accounts of eighteenth-century prosecutions of Westminster domestics for the commission of infanticide display the limits of servants' agency very clearly.

As an example of the rhetoric of inquiry, domestics' infanticides, discussed below, highlight the sources and extent of female servants' agency in London. Infanticide involved the buildings in which domestic work was carried out; suggests the value for domestics of keeping information about themselves hidden or at least of selectively disclosing it; and the importance of the local community as the arena in which female servants undertook their working lives. Very little inquiry into paternity accompanied Old Bailey infanticide trials. However, there tended to be considerable involvement on the parts of fellow household and other community members regarding the mothers after community suspicions concerning infanticide were aroused. This stands in contrast to what we must presume to have been the tacit silence which prevailed as the mother's body shape changed during the course of her pregnancy. Rumour, or talk, began at the moment in which an infanticide was discovered, and thus when a private crime entered into public scrutiny.

The Infanticide Act of 1624 established that if an unmarried woman was proven to have concealed the birth of her child, and that child was found dead, the woman was presumed to have killed her baby.107 This was striking

107 21 Jas. I, c. 27 (1624).
legislation in two respects. First, the presumption of guilt was unusual in English criminal law. Moreover, if the woman was married, she was indicted under the charge of murder and was presumed innocent. Thus the two alternative means under which the killing of a newborn infant could be charged, and the degree of harshness with which the law treated the case at the outset, depended solely upon the mother’s marital status. The second striking feature of the law was that it dictated convictions should rest entirely on circumstantial evidence: the concealment of a baby’s corpse.

According to the statute, infanticide was regarded as a direct result of female sexual immorality. Thus in its legal definition, infanticide was a woman’s crime. This was also true of its prosecution in the courts. No men were charged with this crime in London between 1720-1725, either as the principal offenders or as accomplices. In determining the forensic aspects of these cases the court relied almost exclusively on the testimonies of women, primarily midwives. Female witnesses also prevailed in number. They made statements about the incident in question or testified to the defendant’s character during or even previous to her suspected pregnancy.  

In practice, the best means of avoiding the concealment charge was for the mother to show she had in fact anticipated and provided for the birth, and so

implicitly intended to be a good mother had the baby been born alive. By the early 1720s, the courts had adopted an essentially sympathetic attitude toward women accused of killing their babies, usually by ruling at trial that the woman charged had in fact demonstrated adequate preparation for the birth and care of her child, so that the death must have been accidental.\textsuperscript{109} However, because this rationale never directly addressed the question of concealment, and because the trial outcome often depended on character witnesses, the mother's reputation was centrally at issue despite the superficial clarity of the legal statute.

Malcolmson found that thirty-five of the sixty-one infanticide cases reported in the \textit{Old Bailey Sessions Papers} between 1730 and 1774 (approximately 70\%) involved servants.\textsuperscript{110} Beattie's similar estimation was that two-thirds of the women prosecuted under the Infanticide Act in Surrey were servants.\textsuperscript{111} Of twelve women whose infanticide trials were described in the \textit{Old Bailey Sessions Papers} the years 1720-1725, half were described as servants. All but one were acquitted; the woman found guilty and sentenced to death was described as a

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\textsuperscript{109} Beattie, \textit{Crime and the Courts}, 118-120.
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“low and simple servant.” Malcolmson speculated that servants’ motivation to infanticide was the result of their understanding that any employment subsequently available to a domestic who had had a child outside marriage “would be of the most menial and exploitative sort...or it would be socially deviant, such as robbery, begging or prostitution.” Following are the stories of three St. Margarets women which illustrate how the themes presented above—gossip, the nature of servants’ work within the household, domestics’ neighbourhood relationships, reputation and its connection to agency—emerged in particular trials.

A St. Margaret’s woman named Mary Row deposed that upon going to the necessary house about 10 o’clock at night with a candle, chanc’d to cast her eye into the vault, and esp’y’d a child, and going in to her husband in a surprize, told him what she had seen; who not having anybody in his house that he could suspect of such a matter, could not give credit to her, till he was convinc’d by seeing with his own eyes.

The writer of the Sessions Papers account took some pains to establish the strength and extent of the accused woman’s connection to both the household she worked in and the neighbourhood in which it was situated. Mary Row and her husband were acquainted with Sarah Lucas only as a “servant to a

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112 Old Bailey Sessions Papers [hereinafter OBSP] August 1721 [Roberts]; January 1723 [Leah]; January 1723 [Radford]; February 1723 [Prince]; February 1723 [Bateman]; February 1725 [Greening]. Radford’s was the conviction.
gentlemen and his lady in the neighbourhood." Joseph Row was not reluctant to become involved; "having seen what his wife had told him of," Row went to a justice of the peace, who in turn "sent his clerk, who with an officer saw the child taken up."

The account of Sarah Lucas’s trial emphasizes the importance of the basement vault to domestics, not only as a worksite, but also as the only place in the household where it was possible for them to obtain privacy. Row "recollected himself" that Sarah Lucas "had been there under pretense of bringing home a candle she had borrow’d, and laying it down has passed hastily through the house into the yard." Row then remembered that "upon her coming back he perceiving her to have a gown, ask’d her about it." Lucas had responded that "she had been to a sister in Covent Garden for it to do her work in." Row, "remembering this, began to conclude that Sarah Lucas was the person that had put the child in the vault." Thus was Sarah Lucas placed within a context neighbourhood of favour exchanges and gossip; and thus was she reminded of both the nature of authority in the local community and the limits of her agency as a female servant.

At trial, Sarah Lucas endeavored to save her reputation. For her to do so was crucial not only to avoiding a capital conviction, but also to keeping her job. At her trial, Lucas constructed a narrative of sexual virtue to explain her actions.

113 Malcolmson, "Infanticide", 192-93.
She “acknowledged the child to be hers, and that she put it in the vault,” and claimed that she “had been deluded” into the liaison which produced the pregnancy “by a fellow-servant at another place, who had promised her marriage, and had put her off from time to time.” Lucas asserted “that the child was born dead, she having received harm by two falls not long before”; that she “had given her mistress warning to go away in order to lie-in, but was taken before she expected [and] did cry out for help, but lying in the garret, and her master and his lady on the first floor, she was not heard; that after her delivery she lay two hours in the bed, but never perceived the child to stir or cry.”

Her neighbourhood acquaintances were willing to give this domestic a good character. Lucas brought a considerable number of witnesses to court who were willing to testify on her behalf, according to the various requirements for defeating an infanticide charge: “[s]he brought an evidence who depos’d that three days before this accident [Lucas] had spoken to her to procure her a lodging, telling her she was with child...[and] brought others to prove that while she was a prisoner she gave the key of her trunk to two women who went to her mistress’s and found childbed-linnen, in the presence of her mistress and others”; she produced three others, who deposed that “Sarah Lucas had asked them to help her to childbed linnen sometime before, and they had so done, and owned that to be the linnen which was produced in Court; she produc’d others who confirm’d the distance of her lodging from that of her master and mistress; and
that her mistress did remember some tokens of Sarah Lucas having had a fall." Two midwives confirmed that the child "was at its full time, and born alive...[but] it dy'd for want of help" and was not murdered. Sarah Lucas was acquitted.  

In practice, acquittals hinged on the claims of witnesses that the accused had made provisions for the baby. In a second trial, Mary Gough's fellow maidservant deposed that since Gough was ill, "she was sent for to do her work, and about six a clock in the morning was sent up to see how she did, and to carry her a dram, that Mary Gough told her she was bad with a pain in her stomach; that at nine a clock she went up again, and [Gough] told her she was better, and got up; and she going to make Mary Gough's bed, it lookt as if a child had been born, and the sheets were taken off, which she looking for found, and the child wrapt up in them." In an especially graphic depiction of the lack of privacy available to domestics living in their employers' London houses, Mary Gough slept—and laboured clandestinely—in the same bed as her master's daughter.

Household connections of an intimate nature were established not only between female servants, but also between servants and employers. The daughter of Mary Gough's master testified that "she lay with [Gough], and when she waked in the morning (before six)" Gough "complained that she was very ill of the chollick, and said she had endeavor'd to wake her young mistress several

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114 OBSP July 1718 [Lucas].
times in the night, but could not.” The daughter said that after hearing this she
“went downstairs to get [Gough] a dram, but did not go up herself any more to
her.” The daughter further testified on Gough’s behalf that “she reckoned Mary
Gough had six weeks longer to go; and that she had a fall from a chair some time
before, and never felt the child stir since.” Gough also called a fellow servant as
her witness,

who confirm’d the same, further deposing, that she help’d her up. There was a box of linnen brought into court, in which there were
children’s things, which her mistress deposed were in her house. The
nurse who nurst her in her illness deposed, that she heard her say
there was linnen in the box. Both surgeon and midwife agreed that the
child was at its full growth, although the surgeon thought it might be
born alive while the midwife believed it to be still-born, and that it
might be lost for want of help.115

In a Sessions Papers account of a third infanticide prosecution, a St.
Margarets domestic perhaps unrealistically denied her pregnancy to fellow
servants, one of whom reported the suspected pregnancy to her own aunt. Thus
after the birth, Elizabeth Smith “of St. Margaret’s Westminster, was indicted for
the murther of her female bastard infant, by throwing it into a vault, by which it
was suffocated and strangled.” A fellow servant in the household deposed that
“she had suspected Elizabeth Smith to be with child two or three months before,
and had taxed her with it, but she deny’d it.” The same servant then “spoke to
her aunt about it” and later “took notice that [Smith] was uneasy in the night, in

115 OBSP September 1719 [Gough].
bed, but lay till the usual time, and getting up, went to work.” However, “perceiving Elizabeth Smith to go to the vault more than once, she ask’d her, what ailed her?” Smith replied that “she had a violent looseness [and] went again to the vault, which was a pretty way backwards and under-ground.” This domestic conceded that Smith “might possibly cry out, and not be heard [and] she did not hear her.”

When Smith returned “seeming very ill” her fellow servant “ask’d, what was the matter with her? She said, nothing...thereupon [this woman] sent immediately for a midwife, who having examined [Smith], found she had had a child [and] ask’d, where it was?” To which Smith responded that “it was in the vault.” In the end, “the vault being search’d, the child was taken out.” The midwife brought to present medical evidence (who maintained that the death was accidental) testified that “she being sent for, ask’d Elizabeth Smith, if she had not had a child?” Smith “said nothing” but “afterwards said, she was taken with a pain in the vault, and the child dropp’d from her.” The midwife “found one child’s cap in [Smith’s] box, and...heard that there was more in another place,” while another woman said Elizabeth Smith “had brought to her Holland, and things to make fit for a child, which she produced in court.” Smith, like Gough, was acquitted.116

116 OBSP August 1730 [Smith].
Both gossip and lack of privacy were central characteristics of working life for female servants—especially for the majority of female servants who lived in. As Allyson May has concluded,

As a variety of witnesses—mistresses, landladies, lodgers and fellow-servants—tell their version of events to the court, the crowded, inquisitive world in which the defendants lived is revealed, a world of gossip and constant surveillance. These cases demonstrate a general lack of privacy in day-to-day living, and a particular interest in unwed mothers. In some instances, women seem to have taken on the role of moral police; certainly these trials highlight the importance attached to a woman's reputation.117

Frances Dolan has written that "[i]n early modern England, as now, home could function as a locus of conflict, an arena in which the most fundamental ideas about social order, identity, and intimacy were contested." Indeed, the structure and organization of the patriarchal household illuminated clearly both "the interdependency of superiors and subordinates and the precariousness of the master's authority."118 It has been suggested that post-Reformation private life was informed by a political construct, the idea that the household was primarily an organ of governance. The household was understood to be

a complex society with two basic communities, one the principal family and the other its subordinate servants, each of which had an internal hierarchy. The primary political function of the household society was

117 May, "Infanticide Trials", 24.

the maintenance of order; because of its complexity, structure was necessary to domestic order.\textsuperscript{119}

Political and domestic spheres were considered to be interdependent, “the integrity of each reliant on order in the other, with obedience the universal cement.” The household was the state in microcosm; the arena where the male head governed as paterfamilias. However, as Amussen has written,

In its timid attempts at concreteness in the gendered division of household responsibilities, prescription revealed the inability of its [patriarchal] theory of governance fully to admit the segmentation of authority as an economic necessity.\textsuperscript{120}

Female servants in London enforced their wage contracts by presenting the threat of destabilized household authority. It is difficult to consider the early modern period in terms of hard distinctions between “public and private, workplace and household, economy and family.”\textsuperscript{121} While patriarchy was a powerful construct in theory and in law, it was inevitably undermined by women who fell short of its prescriptions.\textsuperscript{122}

The standards of patriarchal and paternalistic governance were the benchmarks to which both parties to the yearly contract—masters and servants—

\textsuperscript{119} Dolan, \textit{Dangerous Familiars}, 15.

\textsuperscript{120} Amussen, \textit{An ordered society}, 1.

\textsuperscript{121} R. Rapp, E. Ross and R. Bridenthal, “Examining Family History”, \textit{Feminist Studies} 5, 1 (1979), 176.

\textsuperscript{122} This is the view marshalled in Anthony Fletcher, \textit{Gender, Sex and Subordination in England 1500-1800} (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996).
referred in order to regulate their relations. However, for female servants the nominally affective, quasi-familial norms governing the institution were challenged in the metropolis by female servants' mobility, itself the creation of a strong market for domestic labour. There was tension between the subordination traditional to service and the agency of female servants hired into contractual relationships in a fluid urban market. Both servants and masters laid claim to virtue to explain their actions; and this common understanding supported the economic contract between them.
CHAPTER FIVE: The problem of female servants' criminality

Introduction

As discussed in the preceding chapters of this thesis, there is evidence in disparate sources that by the early eighteenth century the ties between master and servant in London were susceptible to being more nearly contractual than affective. Domestics themselves acknowledged as a commonplace that long-term associations between masters and servants were rare in the metropolis. In 1716, for example, Elizabeth Knowles inquired of a maidservant in a Stepney household neighbouring the one she herself worked in,

> how long she had lived with her master, and she answering seven years, she reply'd so had she with hers; and that since two such instances of maid servants could hardly be found in London, she would needs drink with her to their better acquaintance.¹

As the demand for female servants increased sharply in the early eighteenth century, “servants frequently switched jobs, and contemporaries found their

¹ OBSP December 1716 [Knowles].
independence and the lack of social supervision threatening." Female servants in London were increasingly wage labourers, understood by the employer class to be strangers undermining affective familial traditions. When the vision of a properly ordered world of domestic servants came up against the reality of women moving freely in and out of positions, employers became suspicious of their domestics. Attempted regulation of them was a response to this, though ultimately a failed one.

This chapter considers domestics' thefts from their employers. Trial accounts often provide only small details, but from these fragments we can draw some conclusions about the nature of female servants' thefts from households in the metropolis, and the ways in which female servants sometimes considered theft to be important to their own agency as individual women. This idea is in turn connected to the notion, presented in this thesis, that domestic service was more nearly contractual than affective in the first part of the eighteenth century. This chapter will also address the question of whether London female servants stole independently or whether they were instead connected to larger networks of criminal gangs, as contemporaries alleged.

This thesis uses two samples from the *Sessions Papers*: The first is comprised of individual sample years taken at five-year intervals between 1715–

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2 Robert B. Shoemaker, "Reforming the City: The Reformation of Manners Campaign in London, 1690-1738", in *Stilling the Grumbling Hive: The Response to Social and Economic Problems in*
and the second is a more concentrated sample incorporating every year between 1715 and 1721. The first, long sample allows for breadth in covering trial stories through the first part of the eighteenth century. The second, denser sample covers each year from 1715–21, and so offers an opportunity to consider more closely the earlier run of Sessions Papers trials. This was also the half decade immediately following the imposition of the 1713 statute against theft from dwelling-houses, legislation which specifically targeted servants as thieves. In both samples, the criteria for the inclusion of female servants’ stories were trials in which female servants were named as defendants or testified as witnesses.

In 1724, Defoe offered the opinion that “[o]ur sessions’ papers of late are crowded with instances of servant-maids robbing their places, this can only be attributed to their devilish pride; for their whole inquiry nowadays, is how little they shall do, how much they shall have.”3 Certainly he based this notion on actual crimes, and in London in this period, many of these were reported in the Old Bailey Sessions Papers. In 1719, for example, Hannah Wyfield—a domestic servant—stole three gold cypher rings out of a small trunk belonging to her mistress “and sold one near the Hospital gate, the other two in Holbourn.”

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3 Defoe, Everybody's Business is Nobody's, 7.
Wyfield claimed that “she took the rings and sold them for want,” and insisted that she “had agreed with her mistress to pay her for them by one shilling per week till the whole money [38 shillings] should be out.” A prosecution for theft was occasioned by Wyfield’s failing in her payments. In the same year another domestic, Mary Tims, robbed her employer of silver and clothing two weeks after she was hired; “a pawnbroker stopp’d her” with one of the items, a silver spoon, and brought her home. Tims said she “did not take them with a felonious intent, but wanting a little money to buy her shoes, offer’d to pawn the spoon, and designed to redeem it again and put it in its proper place.” This servant was convicted and sentenced to be transported. In a second trial Winifred Haynes also claimed plans to redeem the clothing she had stolen from her mistress and then pawned. She too was transported.4

In the 1660s, Pepys had introduced the idea that servants in the metropolis were prone to vice and criminality. This became a refrain in the late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century London press. It was well known to the readers of popular broadsides and regular publications such as the Sessions Papers that female servants stole from their employers. As an anonymous tract phrased the contemporary complaint, London servants were unfit “to be entrusted with secrets [or] to be employ’d in any business of importance; not in

4 OBSP September 1719 [Wyfield]; May 1719 [Tims]; April 1719 [Haynes]. On the 1718 Transportation Act and its imposition as an alternative punishment to hanging, see Beattie, Crime
short, [able] to transact any thing which requires thought or conduct."

The potential for thieving by domestics in early eighteenth-century London was thought to be so great that they were widely assumed to require close regulation and management. This was a notion that suffused female servants' working lives in the capital.

It is now generally understood that explanations for women's crime should be socially contextualized rather than determined to reside in women's biological or psychological nature. In the metropolis the pool of potential victims and receiver contacts was larger than elsewhere and community watchfulness was diminished. Servants' thefts from London households may have constituted a rebellion against low wages or abusive employers, as well as a

__and the Courts, 502-13.__

5 Anon., Servitude — A Poem (London, 1726), 5. Between the early- and mid-eighteenth century, other similar works appeared only occasionally. These included John Shirley, The accomplished ladies rich closet of rarities; or, the ingenious gentlewoman and servant-maids delightful companion (London, 1715); Anon., The accomplish'd lady's delight. The compleat servant-maid: or, the cook's guide. Containing directions for dressing all sorts of flesh, fowl and fish...To which is added, recreation for the ladies (London, 1725); Eliza Fowler, A present for a servant-maid: or, the sure means of gaining love and esteem, under the following heads. Observance. Avoiding sloth. Sluttishness... (London, 1743).


response to the sharp contrast between the lives of servants and employers, and domestics' proximity to goods that might be stolen and sold.\textsuperscript{8}

It was not necessary for a servant to have "arcane contacts or to steal only valuable objects to make occasional and petty theft a useful supplement to a tiny income."\textsuperscript{9} From a master's or mistress's point of view, such petty theft opened the door to the intensely threatening prospect of servants "letting friends or lovers or gangs of men into their masters' houses at night to rifle them." London magistrates in this period were anxious to have accused domestics name the receivers who bought stolen goods, particularly in instances where it was suspected that the receiver had led the servant into the crime.\textsuperscript{10} Thus it has been suggested that "the few cases that came to light of servants in league with burglars were undoubtedly only the visible tip of a very large iceberg."\textsuperscript{11}

The eighteenth-century perception that female servants were enmeshed in an urban criminal subculture may have been rooted in their status as high-turnover wage labourers working in private households. The fear that domestics

\textsuperscript{8} Beattie, \textit{Crime and the Courts}, 252-53.
\textsuperscript{9} Beattie, "Criminality of Women", 93.
were criminal was also an expression of patriarchal anxiety about uncontrolled women. This chapter considers domestics' prosecutions for theft from employers as documented in the *Old Bailey Sessions Papers*. It emerges that female servants who stole had not known their employers for very long and that pawnbroking was probably a regular source of coin and occasional credit for them. When the popular perception of the deceit of female servants is compared with their criminality, it is possible to see that, in this period, the patriarchal controls that governed women's economic survival were being reshaped and the limits of those controls were exposed.

A notion central to understanding women's experience in early modern England was that girls had to be more carefully watched and controlled than their brothers. However, it was easier to monitor women's behaviour through neighbourly scrutiny in a small and tightly knit rural community that was deeply deferential to social and legal authorities. Because of its size and the higher turnover in its population, the impersonality of the metropolis offered a relative degree of freedom to women. There were considerably fewer female than male criminals in early modern England. At the same time, criminality among women was far more extensive in London than in the rural areas of its adjacent counties, and women were prosecuted for crimes against property far

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more frequently than for other kinds of offenses. The differences in levels of rural and urban prosecutions appear to have derived from the more frequent opportunities for theft in the metropolis. Higher urban prosecution rates may also have reflected the different character of women's working lives in London where they had a wider range of contacts but were also exposed to the economic difficulties that life in the city presented.

This thesis has proposed that at the end of the seventeenth and start of the eighteenth centuries, there were thousands of female servants in the capital, all seeking good jobs. And, as their irregular mobility indicates, they were either willing to move to get them or else they were fired by employers themselves ready to move or re-hire elsewhere. Moreover, there was no system in London comparable to the regular seasonal exchange of adolescent labour between farming families. Domestic in the capital might get places at any time of the year and so were not bound by the annual cycles of farm servants. While service for a London domestic therefore offered more varied work possibilities than existed for her rural counterpart. It could in theory take on aspects of a career, although this did not often happen in practice. As Defoe wrote,

14 This is excluding women’s prosecutions for prostitution, concerning which data is difficult to find.

I have heard of an ancient charity in the parish of St. Clement Danes, where a sum of money or estate is left, out of the income or interest of which such maid-servants who have lived in that parish seven years in one service, receive a reward of ten pounds a piece, if they please to demand it...nor have I heard such reward has been paid to any servant of late years.¹⁶

Indeed, as L.D. Schwarz has recently argued, the enormous service sector of the capital’s economy created a surplus reserve labour force by “attracting female servants to London and then leaving them without occupations when they chose to set up their own households.” This resulted in a “sink of underemployed labour.”¹⁷

This labour pool incorporated domestics moving in and out of places as changing circumstances demanded. Paradoxically, the gendered issues which made getting and keeping positions difficult—their potential maternity, the social and economic constraints placed on married women—set the conditions that made paid work a vital necessity. Domestic service in London was a readily available means of earning a wage rather than a career in the formal, masculine sense of the word. Female servants in the capital tended to utilize domestic work as a temporary resource, either because they found varieties of alternative employment, or because they left off working altogether and discovered other ways to get by. Female servants’ irregular mobility at times reflected their agency

¹⁶ Defoe, Everybody’s Business is Nobody’s Business, 13.

¹⁷ Schwarz, London in the age of industrialisation, 48.
and, at other times, their vulnerability to displacement. In either case, the nature of London service, often an irritant to masters, sometimes also encouraged these economically marginal women to steal.

Finally, domestic service in the metropolis was centrally defined for the servant by the expectation of an annual wage. As Beattie has argued, some servants "stole out of immediate and pressing need, impulsively and on their own," while others "pilfered not because they were out of work but because work provided the opportunity, some of which pilfering may have been at the disputed edge of customary payments and the wage." The wage necessarily put a contractual distance between master and servant.

Regulating female servants

The formal regulation of domestic servants had been periodically proposed since the time Pepys outlined his concerns about maidservants, although regulatory institutions came into actual existence only fleetingly before 1750. In projects which actually came to fruition, there is evidence of a struggle over the regulation of wage labour and its easy slide into crime. Regulatory offices, for example, tended to fall quickly into disrepute and were only short-

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The idea of servant registries originated in plans for "labour exchanges," offices designed to match workers with prospective employers. These unconnected schemes all aimed at facilitating contact between workers and prospective employers by printing sheets of miscellaneous advertisement. But by 1695, they had inevitably shrunk to "small advertising concerns or employment agencies of a not too reputable kind." Intelligence Offices survived only as a disreputable variety of employment agency, a snare by which the unwary or destitute were lured into indentured plantation servitude. As Ned Ward, the "London Spy", depicted it in 1709:

We now came to the back gate of the 'Change, on the east side of which sat a parcel of women, some looking like jilts that wanted cullies, and others like servants that wanted places... 'Now,' says my friend... within that entry is an office of intelligence, pretending to help servants to places, and masters to servants. They have a knack of bubbling silly wenches out of their money, who loiter hereabouts, upon this expectancy, till they are picked up by the Plantation kidnappers and spirited away into a state of misery and whoredom.

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A development of the mid-eighteenth century was the Statute Hall. Speculators advertised locations on the outskirts of London and "servants were drawn up in 'aisles' and masters or mistresses went to inspect and engage them, a few pence being paid for admission." As Dorothy George noted, such places were counted among the frauds of London. Not until 1750 would the Fieldings' concerns as magistrates and their campaign for a servants' registry result in the creation of their "Universal Register Office". Even more than the benign "bringing together of masters and servants, employers and employees," the aim of this institution—which, unlike earlier schemes, had the longevity of a full decade's existence—was specifically "to remedy servants' contributions to the crime and disorder of the capital."23

Clearly, monitoring servants' movements in the metropolis was too complex a problem to enforce on the presumption of their cooperation alone. Nevertheless, a strong regulatory impulse persisted in the capital. As discussed in chapter four, above, bills concerning the regulation and punishment of domestic servants as well as the payment of their wages received multiple readings in the Commons between 1702 and 1710. In one bill "for regulating them and paying their wages," it was stated as a clause that "any contract, bargain, certificate, or other writing, made in pursuance of this Act, need not be upon

23 George, London Life, 584-586.
paper stamped," suggesting an effort to facilitate contractual negotiations between servants and masters.24 A second bill, "to regulate servants and workmen, and for the more easy recovery of their wages" also implied a struggle to align the management servants with that of other wage labourers.25 A 1702 bill directed toward "the easier recovery of servants' wages and the punishing of idle and disorderly servants" was presented only weeks before another "for the effectual punishment of accessories to felonies and receivers of stolen goods."26 These attempts to pass legislation suggest that both servants and thieves were on legislators' minds, linked under the larger the problem of managing an urban labouring class in which the terms of contracts were often in dispute.

In the absence of an effective means of regulating servants, London employers compensated for domestics' mobility by stating a preference for country girls. Provincial women had a reputation for being untainted by the twin vices of disobedience and dishonesty which accrued to them alongside jobs in the urban market. Hogarth used this idea as the premise for the first image of his Harlot's Progress, in which a young woman is depicted as having just arrived in London. As she descends from the wagon that brought her she is scrutinized by


26 HC J 14 (1702-4):3, 11, 84, 124, 211, 390.
the procuress who will soon be the agent of her undoing. Female servants who came to know the metropolis were posited as emblems of virtue’s mutation into vice.

As the representative of a type—the thieving sometime maidservant—the figure of Moll Flanders had wide reference in this period. Her aliases were based on newspaper and pamphlet portraits in which she was called “Mal Cutpurse” and “Moll King”. A confessional account of her life circulated in London in the 1660s. In 1732 Hogarth borrowed her image to name and depict his “Harlot”. For his part, Defoe linked Moll with Jonathan Wild. In the 1710s and early 1720s Jonathan Wild was said to be, among other things, London’s arch-receiver of servants’ stolen booty. His widely reported exploits amplified fears of gangs in which female servants had membership. In his account of Wild’s trial for Applebee’s Journal, Defoe reconstructed a conversation concerning “Wild and a lady whose watch had been stolen in St. Anne’s Church, Soho.” The person who stole the watch and delivered it to Wild, “a dextrous Jade”, was “M—ll K—ng”,

27 Hogarth, _Engravings by Hogarth_, # 18.

28 Valerie Frith, “Never was any woman like her: Mary Frith, Commonly Called Mal Cutpurse” in V. Frith, ed. _Women and History: Voices of Early Modern England_ (Toronto: Coach House, 1995), 239.

who was "employed, under Wild's protection, as a thief." Alexander Smith posited that the Thief-Taker General's execution the year before had done nothing to curb petty property crime in London. There was still a "multitude of unhappy Wretches, that every Year are put to Death for Trifles in our Great Metropolis" he wrote, and "executions for Theft and Burglary are as Frequent as ever."

Later, Defoe used Moll's story to depict the way female servants became susceptible to lives of crime, or encountered criminality but narrowly avoided it. As soon as Moll is "carried to Newgate; that horrid Place" she has a friend search out "the two fiery Jades" that had caught her stealing. Both women are servants. Moll and her friend

tamper'd with them, persuad'd them offer'd them Money, and in a Word, try'd all imaginable ways to prevent a Prosecution; she offer'd one of the Wenches £100 to go away from her Mistress, and not to appear against me; but she was so resolute, that tho' she was but a Servant-Maid, at £3 a Year Wages or thereabouts, she refus'd it, as my Governess said she believ'd, if she had offer'd her £500.

Indeed, when she can herself afford to engage her midwife's maidservant, Moll's own experience leads to the expectation

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30 Gerald Howson, "Who was Moll Flanders?", The Times Literary Supplement (no. 3438, January 18, 1968), 63-64.

31 Alexander Smith, Memoirs of the life and times of the famous Jonathan Wild, Together with the history and lives of modern Rogues (London, 1726), iii.

32 Defoe, Moll Flanders, 213-16.
that the servant she sent me would have been some impudent brazen wench of Drury-Lane breeding...I was very uneasie at having her with me upon that account, so I would not let her lie in that house, the first night by any means, but had my eyes about me as narrowly as if she had been a publick thief. Moll's fears are assuaged only when her friend assures her that she took no servants into her own house "without very good security for their fidelity." 33

In The Great law of Subordination Consider'd; or, The Insolence and Unsufferable Behaviour of Servants in England Duly Enquir'd Into (1723) Defoe explicitly described the process by which servants fell into vice:

once servants are brought to contemn the persons and authority of their masters, or mistresses, or employers, they soon come to despise their interests; and at last to break into their property; and thus they become thieves. There have always been thieves and whores, who get into people's houses, under the characters of honest servants, even with design to rob the families...[but] there were never so many such as now. I have been told, our famous Thief-taker (as they call him) has a list of 7000 Newgate Birds, now in services in this city, and parts adjacent, all with intent to rob the houses they are in.

Because servants were perceived as insufficiency subordinated they subverted the rule of patriarchy—the "Great Law" which ordered society—in disturbing and invasive ways. It appeared but a small step from challenging a master's authority to stealing from him.

Defoe sought to protect the interest of patriarchal authority. When this interest was expressed with reference to specific issues, however, very little substance underpinned the polemic that painted domestics as criminals. The anonymous author of The Servant's Calling, for example, maintained that the

33 Defoe, Moll Flanders, 130-31.
petty theft of “the stores and provisions for a large family” was a crime morally equivalent to a capital felony. Servants who “eat and drink what they steal,” he wrote, “are no better than the receivers of stolen goods.”34 Defoe made the elision between minor offense and felony elsewhere, too, arguing that the worst “sort of thieving and robbery...practis’d by those we call honest servants” was “[l]oss of time”—wasting their paid hours.35

Indeed, in an anonymous 1724 tract entitled Servitude — A Poem, the author mounted an explicit defense against Defoe’s polemical writing on domestic service, seeking to rehabilitate the image of servants in light of the latter’s assertion that “these creatures are become their own lawgivers.”36 Certainly employers were right to “distinguish betwixt the deserving and the undeserving,” since rewards “are not given to good and faithful servants, but paid.” Yet the author, a self-described footman, maintained that there was great exaggeration in “the enormous crimes which [Defoe] lays to our charge.” The author conceded a high incidence of “pillering of tea, sugar, wine, etc. for junkets,” and wrote,

I shall not go about to extenuate these crimes, or to say we are not, some of us, guilty of them; but, I hope, [Defoe] will give me leave to think we are not all so; or that, if we were, we should yet be far from being upon a level with Jonathan Wild. I as much abhor the little

34 Defoe, Moll Flanders, 35-36.
35 Defoe, “Everybody’s Business”, 211
36 Ibid., 8, 11.
mean tricks of pilfering as anybody; but I cannot think that using a little sugar, or putting two or three grains of tea to that which our masters and mistresses have done with, is so mighty a crime, as to deserve the consideration of the Legislature. 37

Clearly here was a quick connection in contemporary minds between servants' acquisition of perquisites and serious forms of theft. But despite the various schemes to regulate them and control their movements, domestics in the capital remained largely unmonitored. One might never know with any certainty who female servants really were, or what agendas they may have harbored.

Unregulated women, coming into private houses and going at will, may indeed have been connected with gangs. As Peter Linebaugh has argued, Augustan writers flattered their patrons by writing about the insubordination, insolence and ambition of household servants. Yet the frequent executions of London servants at Tyburn "suggests that the relationship between employers and servants required virtually annual 'examples' to enforce discipline." 38 It would seem that the only way to control encroachment on employers' prerogatives was with the heavy hand of capital punishment.


38 Linebaugh, The London Hanged, 249.
Domestics' theft

The theft of goods worth forty shillings or more from a dwelling-house became a capital crime in 1713. This legislation, entitled "An act for the more effectual preventing and punishing robberies that shall be committed in houses," was created explicitly in order to punish "divers wicked and ill-disposed servants" who had been encouraged to steal from their masters. Magistrates were determined that accused servants should name both accomplices and receivers to whom they sold stolen goods. Thus the main targets of the new legislation were pawnbrokers.

Beattie suggested that the timing of the act was related to a high level of post-war prosecutions in the country and especially in London in these years. Returning soldiers facing unemployment would certainly have raised the incidence of crime and heightened anxieties about it. However, in the case of the 1713 statute, there may have been additional issues in play that help to explain why pawnbroking among domestics was perceived as a problem, especially at a time when the ground was already laid for fear-mongering. Indeed, the anonymous Footman’s comment—"I cannot think that using a little sugar, or

39 12 Anne c. 7 (1713) was one of the first among the proliferation of capital statutes after 1689 which marked the advent of England’s Bloody Code. As Beattie has argued, these related acts were the results of an intensified concern with order and morality implemented by a newly efficient system of government (see Beattie, “The ‘Bloody Code,’” 67-70).

40 This was the statute’s primary link to other related legislation in this period, acts against housebreaking (1691) and shoplifting (1699); see ibid., 63-64.

41 Ibid., 68.
putting two or three grains of tea to that which our masters and mistresses have
done with, is so mighty a crime, as to deserve the consideration of the
Legislature"—may have been intended as commentary on the 1713 Act and the
fear of gangs that fostered it. Certainly it was a protest against the link between
crime and the disputed terms of what constituted servants' pay. For this reason it
is worth comparing the polemical literature on female servants in the
metropolis and the criminal biographies of domestics to descriptions of their
trials for theft.

In the printed *Old Bailey Sessions Papers*, information was presented in a
highly condensed form and only interesting prosecutions commanded long
descriptive columns. They were designed to tell a good story to a popular
readership and so to sell papers. Consequently, the *Sessions Papers* reflected
popular concerns and in connection with this, offered a commentary on the
criminal justice issues of the day. Accordingly, the published trial accounts
detailed the most dramatic circumstances under which female servants stole
from their employers and stressed the elements of crimes which would
have interested readers most. Sensational trials were always reported and so
offer a good means of studying how the editors described the worst and most
worrisome of domestics' thefts. Accounts of female servants' trials often revealed
the length of the pre-theft association between masters and servants, the nature
and value of stolen objects, the means of their disposal, the involvement of
domestics' accomplices in the theft and the court's discretionary inclinations at
their trials.

Between 1715 and 1721, the years following the imposition of a 1713 Act
against theft from dwelling-houses, the Sessions Papers reported ninety-five trials
in which female servants were prosecuted for the felony of stealing from their
employers. These same years also saw Jonathan Wild's adventures, a symbol of
servants' connection to gangs, and included or immediately predated the
prescriptive writing of Defoe and others on servants discussed above. They also
closely followed the implementation of the 1713 statute. Like other statutes comprising the Bloody Code, the 1713 Act was
apparently intended to facilitate the discretionary imposition of non-capital
punishments. Indeed it is evident that in London, the court preferred not to see

42 M. Harris, "Trials and Criminal Biographies: A Case Study in Distribution," in Myers and

43 See Beattie, "The 'Bloody Code'", 70, 76.

44 For example, after Rebekah Bottomley was tried for the theft of silver spoons and wearing
apparel, she was found guilty to the value of 39 shillings and awarded benefit of clergy, and so was

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female servants hanged. Fully seventy-nine convictions were secured in these ninety-five trials, but only ten resulted in death sentences. All other sentences were commuted to transportation (thirty), burning in the thumb (thirteen) or whipping (eight). One female servant was fined and sentenced to stand in the pillory. In the remaining seventeen cases the sentence is unknown.\(^\text{45}\)

Despite the broadsides condemning servants' willful perfidy, jurors appear to have considered that the crimes of individual domestics merited lenience. When Elizabeth Rawson stood trial “for feloniously stealing a linnen gown and petticoat, a quilted petticoat, a riding hood, 2 lace caps, 2 cambrick handkerchiefs, an apron, a pair of clogs, etc.,” the jury “found her guilty to the value of 39s.” Similarly, when Ann Nichols took “a calicoe gown, a quilted petticoat, 2 holland shifts, a pair of shoes and a pair of clogs, all to the value of £4 10s. ...the jury, considering the matter, found her guilty to the value of 4s. 10d.”\(^\text{46}\) In one curious instance, a domestic who had stolen a quantity of plate from a chest of drawers and then disappeared, confessed where she had pawned the goods when she was saved from a capital conviction. \textit{OBSP} July 1715 [Bottomley]. The value of stolen goods could be lowered between indictment and conviction. Beattie, “The 'Bloody Code'”, 76.

\(^{45}\) The value of a servant’s theft, as that was established by the court at the time of conviction, was critical to the question of sentencing. The reasons for servants’ convictions often remain inscrutable, however. For example, when Mary Loyd stole clothing and a snuff box from her employers, notwithstanding that she was “taken with the goods upon her” and that it was determined at trial that “she had a very ill character,” the jury acquitted her. \textit{OBSP} July 1735 [Loyd]. In another instance, Ann Crew, the servant who was accused of stealing doe skins worth £10, was convicted of the felony to the value of 10d only. \textit{OBSP} Sept. 1745 [Crew].

\(^{46}\) \textit{OBSP} May 1721 [Rawson]; January 1721 [Nichols].
apprehended, but "seeming to suspect that her crime was not enough to hang
her, she fram'd she broke two locks to come at [the plate], which was positively
denied by the prosecutor." As the Sessions Papers described the judgment, the
jury "did not think fit to gratify her but brought her in guilty of 10d only."47

In contrast, the ten women in the sample who received death sentences
were convicted because they stole a very substantial amount of money or goods
(in two cases, over £150), because the jury reportedly found them unsympathetic
individuals, because they refused to confess when the circumstances of the theft
were obvious or were insolent in their responses to the court, because they
demonstrated premeditative cunning in planning a large theft or, in one sad and
laconically described case, because "the Prisoner came to be the Prosecutor's
servant on the Monday, and robb'd him of the Thursday, which she confess'd
before the Justice; she had nothing to say for her self, and none to call to her
reputation." She had stolen two silver spoons and £5.48

Even considering domestics' high mobility in London, female servants
prosecuted for stealing from their employers tended to be relative newcomers to
the places in question, arriving only a few days or weeks before the theft. They
"lay there two nights", or knew their employers "about a week" or "one

47 OBSP December 1718 [Hawley].
48 OBSP July 1719 [Wood].
fortnight," or "near a quarter of a year." For instance, it was said of Rebekah Bottomley, who was accused of stealing four silver spoons and "a considerable quantity of wearing apparel, belonging to several persons," that she "had been a servant in the house about a fortnight...early in the morning [she] was going off with the goods bundl'd up; but being stopt, fell upon her knees, and begged for mercy." Like Mary Dozril who, "having opportunity went away" with her mistress's silk gown and some muslin "and was afterwards taken at Southwark Fair," domestics often tried to disappear after the fact. They sometimes also came back to steal after leaving places, having first severed formal ties to their employers. For example, in 1716 a domestic working in the same household as Margaret Wells protested how Wells "had several times put her upon robbing her master when she lived with him, to which she did not consent; but after she was come away, [Wells] prevailed on her." In only three trials out of the ninety-five between 1715 and 1721 did servants work a year or longer in households

49 *OBSP* January 1719 [Delson]; September 1718 [Joy]; May 1719 [Tims]; December 1718 [Coates].
50 *OBSP* July 1715 [Bottomley].
51 *OBSP* October 1716 [Dozril].
52 *OBSP* January 1716/17 [Wells]. A similar modus operandi was reported in other trials. Ann Westwood's mistress overheard Westwood saying to her sweetheart, "come again a Sunday and she would give him something else" as she handed over ivory- and maple-handled cutlery. *OBSP* March 1720 [Westwood]. Ann Waters insisted that when she took five gold rings "out of a chest of draws...she was put upon the theft by another woman" *OBSP* June 1717 [Waters]. Another prosecutress complained that her maidservant had let two other women into her house to carry off clothing, some of which was pawned. She testified that the strangers "were the managers of the intrigue" and that her own servant was "only brought into the scrape." *OBSP* May 1717 [Dyer, Hudson, Knether].
before committing the thefts for which they were prosecuted. Between 1725 and 1745, female servants likewise tended toward a short pre-theft tenure: Mary Hilliard ran off with her master’s and another woman’s goods two days after first taking a new place. Mary Hill “staid about a week, took the watch from her master’s bed, and went off at the back-door.” Elizabeth Russell, alias Brown, was indicted for the theft of a quantity of silver: a tankard, two silver salts, two spoons; and some articles of women’s clothing. She took these things after she had been two weeks in her master’s employ. Mary Walford stole some clothing and household goods from her mistress, after she had been her servant for six weeks. Walford got up one morning and went away without warning.

Employers sometimes offered rewards for servants’ capture and the recovery of their goods. For instance, Mary Hilliard’s master offered a guinea reward for the recovery of the goods she stole from him. Hilliard was apprehended at her lodgings within a week, by a “man that lay with her the preceding night.” Mary Perrin, a chambermaid, stole a substantial amount of coin, a bank note for £40, and two gold rings with diamonds from her mistress, and left the house without notice. Her master sent a man to search for her “in

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3 OBSP December 1725 [Hilliard].
4 OBSP May 1725 [Hill].
5 OBSP August 1725 [Russell].
6 OBSP October 1740 [Walford].
the hundreds of Essex” where she was “well known.” Perrin’s father, when this man called at his house, “said he had not seen her for a twelvemonth,” but the man found her at Rochford. Margaret Owen stole a good deal of women’s clothing from the household where she had a place. Her employer advertised after the goods, and eventually had a letter from a friend in Gloucester “informing me she was there, and married to one Gardner, a chimney-sweeper.” Her master got a warrant, and made patterns of the stolen goods, and eventually Owen was taken.

Female servants whose exploits were described in the Sessions Papers were by definition the ones brought to trial. As Beattie argued, servants probably stole much more frequently than is suggested by the court records, “for it is likely that the harshness of the penalty as well as the trouble and expense of going to court discouraged prosecutions.” Why were thefts among servants who were no longer “strangers” by virtue of long association not prosecuted to nearly the same extent? Was patriarchal control more effective as relationships deepened, or were employers instead reluctant to prosecute women they knew well and with whom they could perhaps work out an alternative? It is difficult to know whether employers’ much sought-after affective relationships with their

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57 OBSP December 1725 [Hilliard].
56 OBSP January 1735 [Perrin].
59 OBSP January 1735 [Owen].
domestics held theft in check, or whether instead long-term, paternalistic relationships between masters and servants mitigated the effects of theft because those masters were either unwilling or were convinced not to prosecute. It does appear, however, that there was a connection between prosecutions for theft and the absence of affective ties that confirmed and ratified employers' and legislators' fears. Domestics' mobility was generally high and irregular in the capital. Female servants relied on the possibility of urban anonymity in order to steal. Yet if employers did not know thieves well, they were more likely to prosecute the thieves if apprehended. It was here, at the leading edge of an increasingly contractual work relationship with a highly mobile workforce, that the greatest number of prosecuted thefts were found.

When women in early modern England took to theft, their tendency was to steal multiple items at a time but from a smaller range of goods than was available to men.61 Like other female thieves in the metropolis, domestics stole household goods because they were both valuable and easily re-sold. The Sessions Papers' accounts of female servants' trials describe a preference among them for stealing silver in the form of plate, cutlery, candlesticks and boxes or vessels of various kinds. In twenty-three of the ninety-five trial reports in the 1715–21 sample, silver was listed as the item or one of the items stolen, and

60 Beattie, "The Criminality of Women", 92.
thefts of gold rings and china were also commonly reported. A second major
category of goods stolen was linen. Often this was in the form of costly as well as
bulky garments such as riding caps or lined gowns; sometimes it was large pieces
of fabric, often measurable in yards. One domestic was prosecuted for the theft of
“camblet, shagreen and other goods to the value of £29.”62 In thirty-nine cases
between 1715 and 1721, female servants stole articles of clothing; in nine further
instances they stole fabric. Finally, there were half a dozen cases in which
servants were accused of stealing “bodices” or “stays.” Between 1725 and 1745,
female servants’ thefts were also almost always of clothing, jewelry, coin or cash,
silver goods or other household items. The exceptions to this in the sample were
few. One domestic pilfered food stores from her master’s shop (tea, almonds,
candied peel); another stole a Bible; a third took twenty doe skins valued at £10.61

Because household goods and personal effects had value and were
accessible to domestics, it is understandable that these were the items stolen.
Taking them, however, would often have required a more complex scheme than
simply dropping a gold ring in a pocket. Plate and clothing were both unwieldy
and hard to conceal, and a certain amount of planning and subterfuge as well as
risk was therefore often entailed in both theft and disposal of goods. Ann Cook’s

62 OBSP March 1719 [Brunt].

61 OBSP October 1725 [Hogg]; Oct. 1725 [Pearson]; Sept. 1745 [Crew].
former master, for example, prosecuted her after "the woman he took in her place" reported "the lining of his curtains and other goods were torn away and gone." A constable searched Cook's lodgings, "where he found the goods, some under her bed, others in a chest of drawers." In another case in which half a dozen items of clothing were stolen, the culprit was found while "goods were upon her...next to her skin." Similarly, the thief of a gown and two petticoats was "taken that very morning" on which the theft was discovered "and had the two petticoats on." Another servant, long suspected of stealing "skains of linnen yarn" from her master, "was seen to take the yarn...it was found around her middle under her petticoat."\textsuperscript{64}

Domestics who became thieves were often discovered with stolen goods at an inn or tavern, implying that it was possible for the trial prosecutor or another interested party to ascertain a domestic's whereabouts if she took public lodgings in the metropolis.\textsuperscript{65} Mary Hawks and Mary Hilliard, for example, were both caught with stolen goods at alehouses where they had taken up residence.\textsuperscript{66} Hilliard was apprehended at her lodgings within a week of the theft, by a "man that lay with her the preceding night."\textsuperscript{67} Servants were not always caught so

\textsuperscript{64} \textit{OBSP} March 1719 [Cook]; May 1719 [Davis]; April 1719 [Rodgers].

\textsuperscript{65} \textit{OBSP} April 1725 [Barker]; Oct. 1725 [Hughes]; Apr. 1730 [Story].

\textsuperscript{66} \textit{OBSP} December 1725 [Hawks].

\textsuperscript{67} \textit{OBSP} December 1725 [Hilliard].
quickly, however. Elizabeth Russell was taken at the Angel in Hammersmith fully two months after stealing her master's silver."

Often thieves who were prosecuted had stolen items that would have been hard to conceal after the fact, sometimes because of their uniqueness and value but most often because of their size and heft. Escaping with and then concealing bulky or valuable things was of course difficult, and servants who were caught must often have been those who did not get help hiding stolen goods, or who failed to sell them in time to make quick gains and avoid detection. Yet even a successful theft required a means of turning identifiable goods into anonymous coin. Accomplices and receivers, as well as pawnbrokers, were therefore the agents on whom servants relied.

It is certainly possible to find examples of servants' larceny that suggest the polemicists were right concerning servants' predisposition to theft. Accomplices, often domestics with places in separate households, were jointly implicated in at least some planned thefts, and these trial accounts were of a kind to support and foster the contemporary fear that they were connected to a criminal subculture in the metropolis. The most dramatic example of this in the 1715–21 sample was occasioned when Mary Abbott's master was burnt out of his home, giving Abbott's friend, another maidservant, "several opportunities to importune her

\footnote{OBSP August 1725 [Russell].}
to rob her master, and to corrupt her in every way.” At her trial, Abbott claimed to have “resisted a long while til at last, when her master was reestablished she lived with him again, at which time she was prevailed on to discover the nature of his business, and the value of his effects.” The two domestics “having fixed upon the project”, her friend went to Abott’s masters’ house on a Saturday night and “desir’d liberty to lodge there, pretending to come from on board a hoy [sloop], and to be unprovided with such a conveniency.” First persuading Abbott’s mistress “to let her lie with her daughter, [since] she look[ed] like a clean honest woman,” Abbott’s servant-accomplice stole £200 in gold and silver in a deal box during the night, and “the next morning sent away her box in a coach which she took after pretending to pay honourably for what she had had.” In the end, her fellow servant and accomplice testified against Abbott, who was convicted of the capital felony and sentenced to death. But this case was an exception among the more prosaic and often clumsy nature of most such thefts.

Taking the prosecutions of a single year, half a dozen cases of female servants pawning stolen goods came before the Old Bailey in 1719. After they were caught, Hannah Wyfield, Mary Tims and Winifred Haynes (whose trials are described above) unsurprisingly insisted on their intentions to redeem and return the things they had stolen and pawned. A fourth servant stole a watch from her master’s bedstead and tried unsuccessfully to pawn it at an

“OBSP May 1716 [Abbot].
alehouse for 22 shillings. A fifth, charged with the theft of callicoe fabric and a
gown of the same material, said she “stole the gown in the evening and the
callicoe in the morning, and pawned the gown; she sold the callicoe to another
woman, telling her it was her mother’s.” The last domestic prosecuted in that
year said she had been hired to “do the business” at her master’s house and go
home at nights. She was dismissed after ten days, when the man hired another
maidservant to live in and said he therefore had “no further occasion for her.”
Shortly afterward, a pawnbroker told this woman’s master he had some of his
goods: “armed with a warrant he found still more yards of holland, muslin and
printed callicoe in the cellar of her lodgings [and] some between [the servant’s]
bed and bedclothes.”70 While most servants must certainly have been aware that
this type of larceny was a capital felony, the Sessions Papers’ accounts of
domestics working with female accomplices or pawning stolen goods depict an
amateurish enterprise at some remove from membership in gangs. Jonathan
Wild’s army of “7000 Newgate Birds, now in services in this city,” and all
reporting to him, was more spectre than fact.

Certainly domestics were capable of purely opportunistic theft. This is
suggested in the trials of female servants prosecuted for stealing from
individuals who shared their employers’ dwellings. Mary Hawks, for example,

70 OBSP January 1719 [Delson]; October 1719 [Tadlock]; May 1719 [Sunderland].
was convicted for the theft of goods and money from three people, one of them her master, all of whom were tenanted at an alehouse. At the same Sessions, another servant, Mary Hilliard, was similarly indicted for stealing both from her master and from another woman as well. So too, at the previous Sessions Mary Longason had confessed to the theft of "three handkerchiefs, two pair of ruffles, a suit of headcloaths, and five yards of lace" from her master and also from others in the house where they lodged. This was also true of several other female servants in the sample who stood trial for theft. These trials are suggestive of the close quarters that comprised shared accommodations in London, and of the limited ability of lodgers to safeguard goods from their fellow tenants' domestics.

Testimony concerning a servant's social life sometimes reveals a domestic's connection to others outside the household where she had a place. This was true at the trial of Mary Randall for her theft of a silver tankard from an inn, a trial account which preserves a description of an inn where Randall spent an afternoon and an evening with acquaintances. Randall had left her place as a servant to the owner of the inn where the incident occurred two years and three months before the theft. As the incident was recounted by witnesses, a servant to the brewhouse and five or six of his friends had been drinking from two in the

71 _OBSP_ December 1725 [Hawks].

72 _OBSP_ December 1725 [Hilliard].

73 _OBSP_ October 1725 [Longason].
afternoon until eight that night. Mary Randall joined them, and was told “you are a fine servant to stay here all this afternoon.” She responded that “she waited for the Bow coach.” When the same comment was later repeated, she said that “all the family were in the country.”

At this point in the evening, Randall “called for a tankard of beer, and would have it in a silver tankard.” A witness described the theft in context:

the maid of the house went to draw it in a pewter tankard, the prisoner made reply, Why do you draw it in a pewter tankard? I and my fellow servants can drink out of a silver tankard as well as those men: the maid of the house said, a pewter tankard was as good as a silver one; the prisoner said, she would have a silver tankard, and I saw the maid bring the silver tankard up full, and set it down upon a little table in the room, and the prisoner took the tankard off the table, and said, she would go into the little room by the bar; and the maid of the house followed her into the room, and came back to us. I said, Mary, there is a tankard of beer that she has had, which we shall have to pay for, if you do not take care of it; she went into the room the prisoner went into, and said, Lord, Mr. Fell, there is no body there, and the candle is blown out.

Once it was determined the tankard was stolen, the maid who sold Randall the beer was urged to go after the thief: “Mrs. Cross [the owner] came down, and she said to me, for God’s sake go and look after the tankard; said I, what can I do? I cannot do anything in it, but she desired I would.” Thus a maid who knew Randall only casually was nonetheless aware of where Randall might be found. This maid testified, “I know the prisoner used to go sometimes to a place where

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74 *OBSP* May 1730 [Westwood]; July 1735 [Loyd]; Mar. 1735 [Butler].

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she had an acquaintance, and I intended to go there; but I thought as I went along, I would call at two or three pawnbroker's in Houndsditch." At the first pawnbroker's shop she checked, the innkeeper's maid found and claimed the tankard by asserting herself against the broker's hesitancy:

when the tankard was described, "the man seemed in surprise; said I, you need not be in a surprise, for I have got the prisoner, though I had not, but I said so, because I saw him in surprise: said I, let me see the tankard, there's nothing at all in that; so he took the tankard out of a drawer from under the counter, and he shewed it me: I said it was Mr. Cross's tankard: he said, the person that brought it to him was an honest girl, for he had known her a great while, and told me that I must look after the prisoner.

The pawnbroker continued, she "brought this tankard to my house; I had known her about seven or eight months, and she used to be a customer to us, and had a good character. She said she brought it from her sister, who keeps a public house in Skinner's street, and wanted to borrow 8l. upon it, to pay the brewer the next morning." He told her, "I could not lend her so much upon it" and in the end
gave her six guineas, which she returned to the pawnbroker when she was caught.75

Exchanges like this one give a limited sense of the potential range of an urban domestic’s social relations. Such accounts offer only a very general impression of female servants’ involvement with their peers, but they do suggest that urban domestics were enmeshed in a web of social contacts. In another description of a domestic’s social relationships, Mary Loyd stole jewellery and clothing from a lodger in her master’s house after she had been employed there scarcely a week. A witness, Joseph Farley, said, “[a]s I was sweeping my master’s door, she came by and asked me to drink. I saw she had got a fine ring, and so Molly, says I, the times are well mended. Aye, says she, last night I met the French — and he took me to the bagnio, and offered me a guinea to lye with me; and so I took my opportunity, and stript the rascal naked.” Her master of less than a week was a tailor; Loyd was caught with “some of his goods upon her,” and witnesses testified that she had attempted to pawn them.76 Here, then, is commentary on a female servant’s assertion of her plans, including her efforts to meet her own needs illegally, or at least extra-contractually. Loyd knew her fellow female servants in the neighbourhood well enough to tell a fabricated

75 OBSP September 1745 [Randall].

76 OBSP October 1735 [Loyd].
story of theft and sexual conquest, and she sought to convince at least one other person of its veracity.

In another such instance, Mary Banister stole two cotton gowns worth 10s.; she was seen by a fellow domestic carrying these downstairs under her cloak. When the servant gave chase, she dropped the two gowns out of her cloak, and "went to strike me in order to get away." Banister told another witness of the reason for the theft. When Banister was apprehended by her fellow domestic as she was stealing the gowns, she first stated that "she was weary of her life, and wanted to be transported; she "thought she could live better abroad than here, and gave me a slap on the face." This remark suggests agency of a kind, in that Bannister sought to change her life circumstances radically, and discovered a means of doing this, and then sought to physically protect herself as a last resort.

Similarly, Rebecca Demain stole a watch and seal from a fellow domestic in the household where she was employed, and then gave these items to a friend, a quilter, to sell without revealing that they were stolen. Agency inerred in the secretive handing off of the goods to a trusted friend. But the scheme did not play out as planned, and Demain's agency was countered by that of her quilter friend at trial, who was able to call on a character witness where Demain had none to call to her own account.78

77 OBSP September 1745 [Banister]
78 OBSP September 1745 [Demain and Atkinson].
As in Rebecca Demain’s case, liaisons between servants could suggest conspiracies to steal. In another trial, Mary Parsons and Honour Davis were indicted for sealing the goods of Parsons’s master: Parsons “stole the goods,” and Davis “deluded her to the fact to give her money to tell her fortune, promising her great things.” In similar fashion, Mary Perrin, a chambermaid, confessed to taking money and goods from her master, but said “she had no thought of doing so till she was put upon it by another person.”

For employers, a domestic’s character was of considerable importance, and this is evident in Sessions Papers accounts. For example, It was said of Ann Owen in court that “her mother and other friends will not appear for her, she is of such a character.” In a rather differing assessment of another servant in court, six persons testified to Catherine Delaroy’s good character, several of whom had known her a long time: “a dozen years,” or “since she was a child.” In a third, more detailed, case, a domestic who represented herself to her master as Rachel Jacobs was indicted along with her husband for the theft of 20£ worth of silver netting and a gold tissue waistcoat, among other clothing, jewelry and household valuables. Her master prosecuted her before the court. He said,

79 OBSP December 1730 [Parsons and Davis].
80 OBSP January 1735 [Perrin].
81 OBSP September 1745 [Owen].
82 OBSP October 1740 [Delaroy].
I charged the prisoner Rachel (who had been my servant 4 years) with the fact: she deny’d it, but after a long examination, she delivered me my jewels back again, and upon my asking her for the rest of the things, she told me, they were all very safe, and I should have them again, in an hour, provided I would let her go for them, and send no body with her. I was willing to have my goods again, and desirous to know who was concerned with her, therefore I let her go; but I sent a man to follow her, to watch where she went.

Rachel Jacobs’s master trusted her, at least provisionally, to recover the stolen goods after the fact of the theft. This servant’s reputation was centrally important at her trial, judging by the extent to which her reputation was documented both by the prosecution and by defense witnesses. Jacobs’s master recounted a conversation he had had with her in which the character of their relationship, and the extent of her trust in him, was highlighted: “when I taxed her with taking them, she deny’d it with earnestness for 2 hours; but upon my promising to be a friend to her, and that I would not hurt it, she confessed.”

Gossip, and the issues of local reputation that were centrally important to female servants, were a factor both in Rachel Jacobs’s capture and at her trial. She was discovered by the man her master sent in search of her, bearing a search warrant. Her pursuer, in turn, was informed of the servant’s whereabouts “by a Jew woman, who sells anchovies about the streets.” He said, “we went with the anchovy woman in search of the prisoner Rachel; she carried us to Tower Street, and there she called her out of a house to us, and I took her, and told her she was my prisoner.” Jacobs’s reputation as a married servant was also considered important at trial, both by her master and the man who gave her lodging after
the theft. Rachel’s master knew that her husband “is married to Rachel, and he used to come to her till about 6 months ago; but he frequently beat her so miserably, that I forbid him in my house, and I have not seen him for 6 months.” From this it would seem that Jacobs’s master took an interest in his female servant’s welfare, although his self-interest is also evident, particularly since he was involved in prosecuting her husband, as well. The story of this servant being beaten was corroborated by the man who lodged her at his inn: “a Jew woman, who serves me with anchovies and pickles, brought the prisoner Rachel to my house, and told me she was distressed for a lodging, and desired my wife to let her lie a night or two at our house.”

Character witnesses, of which Jacobs had several, proved important during her trial: one claimed to have known her for over twenty years, and said “he never had had any dealings with her, but took her to be an honest woman.” Another witness said he knew her to have lived “very honestly” for three years in another of her places as a servant. Two additional women said they “had known her some time, and had never heard any harm of her.” A final witness “deposed that she had lived with him, at twice, near six years, and that nothing was missing, during that time.”83 This defendant, like other accused, relied on character testimony.

83 OBSP July 1740 [Isaacs]
Another case involving the purported theft of a substantial amount of goods addresses the question of how much agency was available to London domestics by illustrating the connection between a servant’s theft and what she thought was owed her. Elizabeth Barker’s guilt turned on her disposal of a household’s contents among several families after her titled mistress’s death; the prosecutor was the deceased’s sister. Even the prosecutor in the case declared, “my sister and all of us had a very good opinion of the prisoner till the goods were mist”; and the issue was raised in court that Elizabeth Barker, the defendant, was owed five years’ wages at the time her mistress died—this was considered a possible motive for Barker to have stolen the goods. She had not been secretive concerning her plans for the goods’ disposal; and indeed, had asked several of the recipients before the fact whether her proposed course of action was the proper one. Half a dozen witnesses testified to her good character.84

The presentation of domestics’ character references at trial are occasionally revealing, both for what they say about character content, and for what they suggest about domestics’ extensive reliance on ‘a good word’ as a source of agency. For example, as it was said of Elizabeth Chace at her trial for theft,

*John Miller.* The prisoner was my servant between 4 and 5 years; I keep the Temple Eating-House in Sheer-Lane: She has been entrusted by me with hundreds of pounds, and in abundance of gentlemen’s

84 *OBSP* December 1735 [Barker].
chambers. I never desire to have a better, nor an honester servant while I live.

Mr. Wilson. I knew her when she was Mr. Miller’s servant; I am a dealer in hair, and have trusted her in my apartment, and she never wronged me of any thing.

Nicholas Humphries. I have known her three years or more; I have trusted her in my house with things of value, and always thought her an honest, industrious servant.

Mrs. Woodward. I know her to be a very honest young woman, and never stained her character.

Ann Miller. I never knew her wrong anybody in my life; she always bore a good character."\(^{85}\)

Character references were important to female servants as the currency in which they traded for agency either at trial or beforehand. One servant sought to obtain a character to present to a pawnbroker before doing business with him; another was said to have recomended herself to employers “by a forged letter in the name of a gentlewoman of credit”; as was said of a third domestic at trial, “I have found her to be so honest, industrious and faithful, and in all respects such a good servant, that if she was now at liberty, I would immediately take her into my house again.”\(^{86}\)

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\(^{85}\) OBSP October 1740 [Chace].

\(^{86}\) OBSP Feb. 1730 [Crywater]; Jan. 1735 [Owen]; July 1735 [Loyd].
In nineteen of the ninety-five Sessions Papers trial accounts involving domestics in 1715–21, female servants were indicted as working with accomplices or dealing with receivers. In an additional twenty-one cases—giving a combined total of forty out of ninety-five, or almost half—domestics handed their stolen goods to pawnbrokers. Pawnbroking effectively operated as the hub of a credit system for a substantial part of London’s female population in this period. For labouring women, access to a quasi-banking system that traded in goods as well as currency was a centrally important vehicle in surviving on a marginal income.\(^87\) Moreover, as Beattie noted, London’s was a thriving market in which “almost anything could find a buyer...[and] everything could be turned to account.”\(^88\) Pawnbroking, or dealing with receivers of other kinds, might in many instances have been as legitimate an economic arrangement as any in which labouring people participated, but it was also unregulated. Female servants’ inclinations to use pawnbrokers as receivers of booty must have followed logically enough from their use of them as a regular part of an urban credit network.

Female servants in this period participated in a wage economy, but did so from within the context of the household. Just as perquisites—“putting two or three grains of tea to that which our masters and mistresses have done with”—

\(^88\) Beattie, “The Criminality of Women”, 93.
were seen by servants as having an equivalency with wages, so thieves often claimed to have conflated the payment of their wages with the appropriation of their masters’ goods. Hannah Wyfield’s notion that pawning her mistress’s rings was compensation for an inadequate income, for example, was coloured by her idea of the theft as a loan to be paid out in instalments. When servants explained why they converted stolen goods to cash, they unsurprisingly tended to say that they were owed the goods or equivalent by their employers. Sometimes domestics’ expectations were very colourfully expressed, as when Mary Hill was apprehended having stolen her master’s watch and “the next day offering it to sale.” She claimed that “her master pox’d her; and because his wife kept him bare of money, he gave it to her to sell to pay the surgeon.” Another servant at her trial confessed “that she sold the two silver spoons at Gloucester, and the callicoe gown to a servant maid”; she “alleged she had her mistress’s goods, but said that her mistress had given them to her.” A third claimed, more cleverly, that on account of his being “very fond of her,”

her master ordered her to pack up the plate and go over with it to France; that accordingly she carried off the goods, but her mind altering, and she not being willing to go to France, pawned the goods, that he might have the trouble of redeeming them for his pains; and

99 OBSP May 1725 [Hill].

100 OBSP January 1735 [Owen].
that she intended to have sent her mistress word where the goods were pledged."

According to Sessions Papers accounts, the employers of London servants sought to control theft among their servants by outwitting them, just as domestics sought to outwit their masters. In an effort to discover which of his maids had stolen some gold pieces from him, for example, one master resorted to what the trial report called "some odd methods to discover the thief":

I did cover a table with soot, and made all the maids come in, and lay their hands on it, and told them, that the guilty person would be black'd; but all their hands were sooted. I imagined the person that was guilty should pass by without touching the table, for fear of being blacked.  

This master's effort to manipulate his domestics' credulity was unsuccessful, but other techniques used by masters to discover thefts from their servants were more sophisticated, as when Sarah Mumford's master marked the bills he suspected her of stealing from his till. Employers' approaches to controlling their servants are evinced in other ways in the record, as well, particularly where the domestics in question were young. After Ann Owen ran away with thirty shillings of her London master's money, he found her in Islington, "and she had a great bundle of things with her." Owen's master reported that he asked her,

\[91\] OBSP July 1740 [Davis].  
\[92\] OBSP Oct. 1740 [Chace].  
\[93\] OBSP July 1745 [Mumford].
“my dear, how could you serve me so?” He further emphasized both her youth and the affective nature of his relationship with her when he testified before the court that she “is seventeen years of age, and her mother and other friends will not appear for her.”

Similarly, the court acquitted Rebecca Crywater, who was twelve or thirteen years of age, of the theft of a valuable gold watch and chain after she presented several terrified versions of both a confession and a denial in court and beforehand. Among the details of the trial was the report that Crywater came to her master’s house the night the watch went missing, and her master and mistress “bid her not be out of the way; that thereupon she came again on Sunday night, and that they charged her.” Her employers’ authority over her was sufficient to prompt Crywater’s return to the household after the theft was discovered. Her master demanded her return outright, and she complied.

There is evidence in the Sessions Papers accounts to suggest that domestics knew important details of their master’s lives, and made use of that knowledge. As Ann Wilson testified at the murder trial of her mistress’s son: “I never knew him to be out after ten at night. I always let him in, and he could not go out afterwards without my knowledge, for I lay in the next room to him, and there

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94 OBSP September 1745 [Owen].

95 OBSP February 1730 [Crywater].
was only a wainscot partition between us.” Eleanor Sutton similarly testified to having knowledge of her mistress’s private affairs when the latter was indicted for assault at a tavern. Sutton knew when the prosecutor of the case (her mistress’s lover) arrived, who went up to his room with him, and what they drank (“I was called up several times to drink with them”). Sutton said, “I went to bed before they parted. My bed is in the next room to that they were in, so that I could hear what was doing.”

Domestics sometimes used the knowledge they had of their employers to defend their own actions. Mary Thomas, for example, was accused of stealing a gown and some money. Her master said he trusted her with the key to his house in order for her to take care of it. Speaking of her mistress, Thomas asserted, “it was none of her gown: pray let it be tried on, it will not fit her, it was a young woman’s who lodged with her, and she tore it off the young woman’s back, because she had been in company with a young man that she had half a guinea of, and owed her money, and did not pay it.” Thomas then said that her mistress ran a bawdy house, and that she “had her own sister debauched for 10 guineas.”

Jane Silletay, a servant, also made good use of her knowledge of her master at trial after she was indicted. In her own defense, she claimed that

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*OBSP* October 1735 [Sutton and Goodman].

*7* OBSP January 1735 [Kendenell, Cox, and Mason].

*8* OBSP October 1745 [Thomas].
her master had given her the cloaths and money too, for favours that he often desired of her, when he came to her bed-side in the morning to call her up: but for the greater secrecy, he bade her to take a lodging in some place where he might conveniently visit her. But she going, and not sending him word where she was, and he finding her out by chance, prosecuted her in spight. She own’d that she did not make this defence when she was first apprehended; but that (she said) was only because she was then unwilling to disgrace her master.\footnote{OBSP January 1725 [Silletay].}

This servant used her knowledge of her master to make the claim that her confessed theft was justified. She claimed, plausibly enough, that he had given her the items in question in exchange for sexual favours, and that the prosecution was obtained when those favours were withheld. She also drew her purported affection and respect for her master into her own defense.

Another servant, Elizabeth Sanderson, was still more explicit concerning her relations with her master’s lodger, a man whom she prosecuted for raping her. Sanderson testified that after the assault, this man “sent his surgeon to cure her eye with bleeding and plastering after he wounded her in the assault, that if she had a child he would claim it as his own, and tried to buy her off with half a guinea to say nothing of the incident, which she refused.”\footnote{OBSP December 1730 [Reptown].} Similarly, Ann Stephens was indicted for stealing her master’s silver spoon. In her own defense, Stephens testified that her master “had attempted to lie with her, and had abused
her, and that was the reason she had left her service, and that he had stopp'd, her wages for the spoon."101

Conflicting expectations of female servants' conduct and their remuneration were bound to create tension, providing both the occasion for theft and the justification of it:

The experience of the metropolis alone may not have created this panic about servants and the crime it was thought they were responsible for. But it does seem likely that there was a particular anxiety about servants' loyalty in the metropolis where domestic servants changed posts regularly.

This sense of anxiety, Beattie suggested, explains the capital provisions of the statute. Setting the non-clergyable offense at forty shillings or above “makes it clear that the statute was aimed not at the petty pilfering of servants, but at more sizeable and more threatening offenses in which servants were allied with outside forces.”102 Yet it appears that there were not many such instances.

Beattie found that almost 90% of the women prosecuted under the 1713 statute in Surrey in the eighteenth century were charged in Southwark or neighbouring urban parishes. Conversely, in the rural county of Sussex only six women were charged between 1713 and the end of the eighteenth century.103 If servants' theft was an overwhelmingly urban crime, the metropolis also saw the

101 OBSP May 1730 [Stephens].
103 Ibid.,” 76.
greatest erosion of patriarchal control. Accordingly, the character of actual thefts suggests an alternative interpretation of the polemical material. Writers who argued that female servants in London were susceptible to criminality took into account the fact that servants were wage labourers coming into private households. This was an arrangement which, in a substantial urban market where jobs were more steadily available than elsewhere and wages were market-driven, meant that they could come and go relatively easily. But it also meant that places in service were often temporary and insecure.

It may have been the case that servants' theft simply reflected what has been called a problem in London of labour discipline and labour supply—that is, of labouring people who needed work and turned to property crime when they could not get or were not inclined to it. The insecurities of service for women in the capital and their need to support dependents must have been among the reasons female servants stole from their employers and often delivered those stolen goods to pawnbrokers. However, this does not quite support the popular sensationalism surrounding domestics said to be enmeshed in criminal gangs. It seems equally possible that the concern about female servants' theft was, in part, an expression of patriarchal anxiety regarding women whose movements could not be easily monitored or controlled. Eighteenth-century writers, reformers and

legislators tried to control service for London women with patriarchal and paternalistic notions about domestics' proper place. In London, a place in service for a subsistence wage was undertaken as a sustained contractual relationship within the household in which patriarchal controls ought to have been operative, but were not working to prevent mobility. Beattie found that in 1711 and 1712 approximately a quarter of all property crimes prosecuted in the City of London involved thefts by servants. This suggests that a very high proportion of female criminals were domestics.\textsuperscript{105}

If one in four women in London was a servant, and if domestics had places in households offering easy access to saleable property at times when their own security was marginal or the terms of their wages in dispute, this proportion is easier to understand. Female servants often could not keep jobs long in the city, or were not inclined to do so. While the work itself was highly unstable, the fact of a yearly wage contract meant that domestics’ relations with their employers were sometimes predicated on differing expectations about what servants were due. Female servants sought wages or equivalent security in a difficult world. Employers, though, were nostalgic for a past time in which servants were innocent country girls. Indeed, writers and legislators saw the metropolis itself as the locus of corruption, and this generated the myth about

\textsuperscript{105} Beattie, “The ‘Bloody Code’,” 68, note 60.
domestics' participation in gangs that obscured the more banal facts of their criminality.

This chapter has considered two different aspects of female servants as thieves: perceptions of their connections to criminal gangs compared to descriptions of their much less well-organized commissions of larceny. Of course male servants could be thieves as well, and the call for servants' regulation was directed toward the management of both sexes. But, as Beattie noted, this was a paternalistic culture in which women required far stricter management than men, and so anxiety about them ran high and jury sympathy often ran deep. Despite their frequent prosecutions for theft, female servants in London do not often appear to have been gang members. But they were always wage labourers. Disputed wages was the occasion of many prosecutions, especially when domestics were not well known to their masters.

The lawmakers and polemicists of the early eighteenth century had only limited tools to articulate their concerns. The incorporation of new capital statutes into the criminal law, which we regard in retrospect as an often blunt and clumsy instrument, was one of these. Beattie suggested that the 1713 Act was intended by the bill's presenters—themselves middling to substantial employers of servants—to encourage the imposition of serious and deterrent punishment
which nonetheless fell short of hanging. In female servants’ trials, juries most often used the statute in this way. Similarly, the best way for employers to confront domestics who claimed a yearly wage was to condemn them for transgressing acceptable social bounds and argue for their regulation.

Female servants in this period came into private households as they had always done—this was the essential nature of their job. In London, domestics were thought to be “slippery in the tail”: they dressed to disguise their station, came into places and left them at will and demanded wages, the terms of which were often in dispute. For these reasons, the bond between employers and domestics can be seen to have been more nearly contractual than affective. The erosion of the old traditions of service must indeed have been worrisome for employers and especially so for employers of women. If this was so, then the 1713 Act against theft from a dwelling-house, set against the hyperbole of broadsides on servants’ transgressions and the repeatedly presented bills to ensure that servants were paid but also punished, suggest a contractual system of wage labour struggling to be born.

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CHAPTER SIX: Conclusion

Female servants in late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century London were women in a broad range of circumstances, but all were hired on a nominal annual basis to do the work of maintaining the house and waiting on the household. Female servants often lived in, but not always. Their work was often similar in character to the jobs of women in the charring and laundry trades, but differed in the essential respect that servants contracted for an annual—rather than daily or weekly—wage. A considerable range of women worked as servants, from the labouring poor to women who were penurious but educated and must indeed have been hard to distinguish from their mistresses.

London domestics worked in the dominant form of paid employment in a society where not many varieties of paid work were available to women, and where no other varieties of it were available on an annual contract. There was a high level of mobility among urban female servants, and facility in navigating the course from employer to employer was a skill critical to a domestic’s
survival. Female servants were all susceptible to the insecurity and instability of working life, whether they were employed in middling or upper-class households.

Lack of privacy was a defining characteristic of the culture of urban domestic service. The household, employers maintained, was intended to be a bulwark against the larger, public world, and domestics, by virtue of their work, undermined that privacy. From female servants' perspective, though, the acquisition of knowledge about others' (especially employers') lives was a crucial source of agency. The stories of domestics anecdotally presented in Arches and parish settlement records suggest that for female servants adaptability was a crucial skill. Broadly, these are the themes this thesis has explored.

Given that we have only evidentiary fragments to work with when we want to investigate the lives of domestics, who left neither diaries nor letters, it is difficult to discover very much about female servants in the early-modern metropolis. We know that female servants in London came to the capital from nearby rural communities and distant counties both. Some were reared in similar circumstances to Mary Culcup, introduced in chapter two, whose father "blew the bellows of the organ at the parish church of St. Margaret Westminster and was one of the parish bearers," and whose mother "washed gentlemen's
linen. Others, like Phebe Harrison—whose story follows in the form of a small microhistory intended to illuminate the themes addressed in this thesis—travelled to London “in a wagon.”

The records of the Court of Arches introduce a woman named Phebe Harrison in a suit brought in 1706, but her story as it is told in Arches depositions begins ten years beforehand: in 1696, “between Michaelmas and Christmas,” a woman was discovered “in Exchange Alley between Jonathan’s and Garraway’s coffee house...between five and six of the clock in the morning.” This woman was said to be “not well and in labour”; she “clasped her hands about her belly [and] seemed to be in pain.” She was carried in a hired coach, by a man unknown to her, to “the house of Mr. Hunt in Downing’s Alley Without Bishopsgate...and a midwife being sent for, [she] was soon afterward delivered of a son.” It soon becomes clear in the depositions pertaining to the case that this person, initially described by one witness as a “gentlewoman”, had at least two possible identities.

1 LPL Cross v Cross, 1726. Eee 13 f. 45.

2 Gattrell describes the microhistory as a method of investigation “rooted in neighbourhood and community, playing to a sense of place, and of incident—to the imagination, in short.” V.A.C. Gattrell, The Hanging Tree: Execution and the English People 1770-1868 (London: Oxford University Press, 1994), 447. I have followed Gattrell’s convention of grouping together all references to the case (see below) so that they can be read as a group by other researchers.

3 See LPL De Morais v Harrison, 1706. Eee 9 ff. 108, 109, 111, 113, 114, 118, for all excerpts cited from this suit. I am grateful to Dr. Sara Mendelson for her kindness in sharing with me her own notes on this suit.
Rosamund Emery, the nurse who looked after this woman during the period of her lying-in, said that the latter “was delivered of a son...[who] was christened by the name of James as the son of Lewis Anthony Morais and Phebe Morais.” However, Emery guessed that “the child was the son of [Morais]” but she did not think Harrison was his wife, “she having nothing provided for her lying-in and she saying that [Morais] was her husband.”

Who was Phebe Harrison, alias Morais, thought by witnesses to be a “gentlewoman” and yet rescued by strangers from a very public place just in time to have her baby? Through Arches depositions, it is possible to trace something of Harrison’s path over the space of roughly a decade. The first depositions in the case suggest that Harrison the “gentlewoman” was the victim of ill treatment, even though the circumstances surrounding the birth of her child and her relationship with the child’s father remain a mystery. Harrison lost more than one place as a “yearly hired servant” as a result of getting tangled up in sexual alliances. The court record describes Harrison’s declining fortunes, culminating in her arrival in London “on a wagon,” penniless and poorly dressed for the cold. Some years later, she brought a suit against the man she declared was the father of her child.

While we cannot rely on Harrison to speak for all of her contemporaries, nor even necessarily consider her experience to be representative in any
meaningful way, her case points up some broader themes addressed in this thesis. What was the distance covered in Harrison’s various moves, and how long did she stay in one place? What duties did Harrison’s various jobs entail? What can we discern about her life as a servant from evidence about the social and economic status of the households in which she worked? Her story is a reminder of how little privacy was available in London households, and also a reminder of the importance of reliable contacts for domestics. Harrison’s story also underscores the significance of reputation for female servants working in London’s service economy.

Migration into the capital was the cause of its growth in this period. As described in chapters one and two, above, servants in provincial centres were susceptible to London’s influence. As M.J. Kitsch has phrased it, in this period, “rural expectations could be met locally, but ambitious town youths had to look to London.” In the early spring of 1692, a woman who called herself Phebe Harrison came to the house of John Patrickson, tobacconist, in Church lane, Covent Garden. She claimed that “she had been a servant at [Patrickson’s] father’s house in Cumberland, and was come from there, and [his] father had recommended her to [Patrickson] to assist her and get her a place or service.”

Phebe "declared she was come to live at London." If Phebe Harrison can be characterized as an ambitious town youth, unsatisfied with her experience of service in the north of England and feeling the pull of the city, what might she have expected, coming into the London labour pool outfitted by her old employer with directions and possibly a written character?

Harrison "declared she was come to live at London." This is the assertion of a woman just starting out on her career as a servant in the city. We do not know Harrison’s age at this juncture, but it appears that she had some qualifications to apply for a position, and the tenor of her statement, if we may infer as much, is youthful and confident. Patrickson’s wife was persuaded to hire a lodging for Harrison “at the house of Elizabeth Tilly, then living opposite against [Patrickson’s] house in Church Lane.” It was said of Elizabeth Tilly that she “followed no employment...[but] was maintained by her husband who went to sea.” Patrickson and his wife agreed to sponsor Harrison at Tilly’s house, which was said to have “a lower room two chambers and a garret” at the rate of 6p per week for Harrison’s lodgings (in comparison, Patrickson’s husband paid eight pounds per annum for his house, which was similar to Tilly’s but for the addition of a “cellar shop” out of which he managed his trade as a tobacconist).

A more clearly defined image of Harrison’s lodgings in Church Lane can be inferred from the location of Tilly’s house and Patrickson’s, which sat opposite
it. As discussed in the first chapters of this thesis, about a third London’s inhabitants lived along such lanes, which commonly supported shops and the work areas of craftspeople, but were not so grand as the wide, paved thoroughfares which constituted the London streets. Lower down the social and economic scale, a similar proportion of Londoners could be found at the considerably more run-down addresses designated by the name “alley” or “court”. Indeed, the “scale and character of houses and homes must have dramatically altered the moment one turned off a street into a side yard or alley.” In the tightly packed warren of dwellings that shaped even the better London neighbourhoods, within the space of a few yards “space and light gave way to confinement and gloom.” For tradesmen such as Patrickson, who worked in a service industry, “[c]hoice of residence was probably dictated by considerations of commercial advantage and rent.”

Harrison was an urban domestic who lived as a weekly tenant in furnished rooms. Patrickson and his wife continued to sponsor Harrison at Tilly’s, but after “about a quarter of a year,” she mysteriously disappeared. Elizabeth Patrickson claimed “that she doth not know [but] that Phebe Harrison secretly conveyed her things from Tilly’s or where she went to live after she went from Tilly’s.” In the summer of 1692, after leaving not only Tilly’s house

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5 M.J. Power, “The social topography of Restoration London”, in A. L. Beier, and R.A.P. Finlay,
but, as it happened, London as well, Harrison turned up some twenty miles away in the town of Ebisham (now Epsom), in Surrey. She found employment with the family of a man named Wrench, a yeoman or small farmer. It was later said that during this period, she "carrie[d] his milk into the town to sell."

Harrison was dismissed from Wrench's service after the appearance of "a public report and talk in Ebisham of [her] lying with [a cellarman named] John Wells." A witness testified that after "she was turned out from Wrench's service," Harrison "lay and lodged in and about the almshouses in Elisham for about two months...and then went to live as a servant in the family of John Page where she lived some time." In the period between Michaelmas 1692 and Christmas 1693, then, Harrison was to be found at Page's house in Ebisham, charged with the duties of a maid of all work. After her exposure to London, it is possible that Harrison carried not only her belongings but also some urban attitudes with her when she headed south into Surrey (indeed, her prejudices would soon be betrayed by the fact that she did not stay out of the city for very long).

It is not clear from the record what the house Jane Page and her husband kept at Ebisham was like, although we know that the family subsequently moved to Maiden Lane, St. Pauls Covent Garden, and some months after that relocated

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to Salisbury Street, St. Martins in the fields. Both of these were wealthy London parishes. At Maiden Lane, the family lodged at "the house of Mr. Maning a baker"; at the Salisbury Street address, they occupied part of "the dwelling house of one Mr. Thomas a joyner." All of Page's family seems to have been employed in various service industries; Jane Page deposed that "she and her daughters work at plain work to her acquaintances and to the Exchange and she employs workmen sometimes and her husband works at his trade [as a barber]." We also know that at least in Ebisham the family took in lodgers. Although Jane Page offered the common disclaimer to the court that "she cannot tell what she is worth," the family must have been a reasonably prosperous one.

Harrison's sojourn out of London was not a long one, lasting only a little more than a year. At the end of that time, Harrison was dismissed from Page's service after she was accused of sexual involvement with one of her employer's lodgers. At Christmas 1693, Harrison "upon going from Page's service did go to London in a wagon...[she] was then in a mean habit and very poor in clothes...[Jane Page] lent her an old gown to keep her warm in the wagon." Having once disappeared from Tilly's house, Harrison quite as suddenly came back: "Elizabeth Tilly came to [Elizabeth Patrickson's] house and said Phebe Harrison had lived at Ebisham and there been a milk maid...Phebe Harrison was in a linsey woolsey gown and petticoat and very mean in habit." Harrison then
appealed to Patrickson's husband; she “desired him to lodge her once again.”
Here there is a break in the record for the space of several years, and the story is
rejoined at the moment at which Harrison is discovered in active labour in
Exchange Alley.

Harrison's worst crisis followed the decline charted by her circuitous trip
out of London. Whatever the circumstances that got her into the dangerous
position of having an apparently illegitimate child, at this juncture Harrison's
reliance on her contacts greatly intensified. This makes sense: where Sylvia Van
Kirk has described "an underlying structural unity to the female historical
experience [determined by] women's unique reproductive function, whether
actualized or not,"6 Phyllis Mack has found that for women at all levels of
society, sexuality, which of course for women incorporated both pregnancy and
childbirth, was very realistically linked to bodily danger and bondage."7

In his revealing discussion of illegitimacy in eighteenth-century
Westminster, Nicholas Rogers has emphasized what he calls the continuing and
often precarious quest for stable conjugal relationships in the metropolis.8 He has
found that while London society did work in certain terms as a kind of "solvent

6 Van Kirk, “What has the Feminist Perspective Done”, 56.


8 Rogers, "Carnal Knowledge", 355.
of traditional mores” which allowed for a wider range of sexual pairings than were socially sanctioned in the provinces, women generally wound up with a losing bargain when an illegitimate child entered the picture. Even so, Rogers notes that most women “entered into sexual relationships after, and sometimes well after, their entrance into the service economy. These were not country girls taken in by city slickers, but women who had spent several years working in London before becoming pregnant.”9 The difficulty for parish officials revolved around the fact that and the mothers of illegitimate children, without means of income, often became chargeable to the public account. Unsurprisingly, this was a situation which the local authorities assiduously sought to avoid.

The fulfilled annual contract in service that was required for a woman to obtain independent settlement, described in chapter three, was a consideration that impinged directly on Phebe Harrison. Rosamund Emery, the nurse hired to look after Harrison and her newborn, articulated an apparently widely held supposition in the community that the child “was not born in wedlock”; the report of Harrison’s condition reached the authorities, and Emery stood by Harrison when “the overseers of the poor of St. Buttolph Bishopsgate on the day Phebe Harrison’s month was up did carry [her] before the Lord Mayor...Rosamund Emery to keep herself out of trouble...informed the Lord

9 Rogers, “Carnal Knowledge”, 358.
Mayor that Phebe Harrison's husband was gone to sea and thereupon Phebe Harrison was discharged.” On the same day, Emery moved Harrison from Hunt's house and the disreputable neighbourhood in which Half Moon Alley was situated, to her own lodgings in Abchurch Lane, in the shadow of Westminster Abbey. Harrison “continued to live there about a week until she had other lodgings provided for her,” and in the interim period “no inquiry was made as to [her] character or reputation by the parish officers.” In the end, Harrison left because Emery had “but one bed and not conveniences for her.” For her trouble, Emery did not entirely escape reprimand:

Mrs. Hunt chided and was angry at Rosamund Emery for not giving her timely notice of Harrison’s coming and for bringing Harrison to her house when she was in labour and said she wondered Rosamund Emery would do so and said she did not know but that she should have been brought into trouble if she had not engaged her [own landlord] for passing word to the parish.

Emery had already extended her protection to Harrison in other ways as well. She arranged to have Harrison’s baby christened and offered herself and her friend as godparents. Unimpressed by Morais’ lack of interest in Harrison and the child, she cautioned Harrison that she “would have her get what she could of [Morais]...saying that gentleman would be weary in time and the reason she said so was because she did not think Phebe Harrison was married to [him].”
Emery may have known, as did others, that Lewis Anthony Morais was Portuguese, and had lived in London "for upwards of thirty years"; that he was a well-to-do jeweller who was said to keep company "with the best quality in England"; and that he had been a lodger at Page's in Ebisham when Harrison worked there. But even if she was not aware of these circumstances, throughout the period of her acquaintance with Morais and Harrison, Emery evinced a primary concern with her own credibility not only with respect to her employer (from whom she requested leave in order to nurse Harrison), but also with her reputation in the community. This preoccupation was also echoed in Mrs. Hunt's expressed fear that but for a narrow miss, she would herself have had to answer to the parish warders.

Despite the awkward situation in which she was placed (or perhaps because of it), Emery was willing to perjure herself on Harrison's behalf before the Lord Mayor's court when she declared that the latter had a husband, and that he "was gone to sea." The self-protection involved in these women's concerns over their reputations and their desire to retain enough autonomy to take action without interference were probably connected. The issue of female servants' characters, and the notion of reputation as a currency which paralleled the receipt of cash wages is a theme taken up in chapters four and five.
We know that Harrison was dismissed from both of her Ebisham jobs over questions about her reputation. Unsurprisingly, since she was a woman, the allegations which got her fired had a primary reference to her sexuality. In the first instance, it was reported in the neighbourhood that "Phebe Harrison and John Wells [the cellarman] were together in [a] house of office and some boys were gathered...together about the door...John Wells soon afterward declared he had lain with Phebe Harrison...and put up his privy member as far as he could into her body." With respect to the second incident at Ebisham, Jane Page testified that "on an evening about ten of the clock" during the period when Harrison was a maid in her household, the latter carried up a candle into a chamber of one of the male lodgers. Harrison "staying in [this] chamber some time, [Page] went and knocked at the door." When Harrison came to the door, Page "called her impudent slut and asked her how she durst stay in a gentleman's room." Harrison replied that the man "had thrown her down on the bed and proffered her a diamond ring and said she could not get away from him." Page, "not liking such passages and fearing somewhat worse might happen," fired Harrison.

For the domestics involved Harrison's story, reputation was a currency that augmented cash wages. Harrison used the image of her respectability to apply for help when she most needed it—she was, after all, mistaken for a
“gentlewoman” when she was in labour. Ten years afterward, in 1706, she used this same currency when she undertook to provide for her child by claiming she had been married to Morais at the time of the baby’s birth. She then drew on the amassed resources of her own credibility as she tried to obtain witnesses to support her cause in court.

A decade after leaving Rosamund Emery’s care, Harrison sought her out again; Harrison had in her company “a ten year old boy which [she] declared was her son.” Harrison came to Emery’s house to tell her that “[Morais] denied her to be his wife, and said that she would try that, whether he was her husband or no, and said that if she could not prove it, she might prove him an old rogue or herself a young whore.” Harrison had already remarked to another acquaintance “that she should have stayed until [Morais] was dead and then nobody could disprove what she said, and then whatever he had would be hers and her child’s.”

Harrison also sought out Elizabeth Patrickson, her old patron. However, all was not well between them. Patrickson asked Harrison “how she could do such a wicked thing as to say she had lain at [Patrickson’s] house and was married from thence...Phebe Harrison thereto answered that she knew it was false, and that she did not know where to lay it else but on [her] because she thought [Patrickson] would not be found out...[Harrison] then fell on her knees
and desired [Patrickson] for God's sake not to betray her and said [she] was the only woman that could receive her." The surviving Arches records do not reveal the outcome of the suit, but the evidence suggests that Harrison's chances of winning a judgment in her favour were not good.

Rogers has concluded that most illegitimate births were not the product of hit-and-run encounters; instead, many were the consequence of propinquity, which "illustrates the constraints of service and the still localized nature of the work environment [and] the proximity of lodgings" in London.\textsuperscript{10} He writes that while Westminster's economy provided young women with the prospect of continuing employment opportunities in domestic service, it also rendered marriage an elusive goal due to the continuing influx of female recruits from the countryside. He suggests that

\[\text{[m]any young women in Westminster would have found the conventional transition from service to marriage a hazardous business, especially if their savings were small and their skills commonplace. Their obstacles to nuptiality were many, and it only required an unwanted pregnancy to jeopardize a courtship or put it to the test.}\textsuperscript{11}\]

In this light, it is worth considering Phebe Harrison's fundamental independence in the face of hard odds, and her adaptability in trying to secure the all-important coin of a good reputation so that she could continue to work as a servant.

\textsuperscript{10} Rogers, "Carnal Knowledge", 363-64.

\textsuperscript{11} Ibid., 366.
Historians are now well aware of gender as an important component of "the historian's analytical tool box." Gender analysis, in Joan Wallach Scott's definition, must include "women's actions and experience, ideas and policies which define their rights, and metaphoric and symbolic representations of feminine and masculine"; the problem for empirical historical investigation, she argues, is to "select moments when all of these are at issue." Domestic service for women in late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century London, this thesis has argued, was set in one such moment.

As Garthine Walker has argued, "by exploring the dynamics of female behaviour, we dramatically expand our perception...of the gendered attitudes of early modern England." And, as Pamela Sharpe recently suggested, "[t]he domestic service of young women urgently needs further research" since it can be seen as "the touchstone from which women's involvement in other areas of the economy would be judged." This thesis is offered as a beginning contribution to that discussion.

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13 Ibid., 46-47

14 Walker, "Introduction", Women, Crime and the Courts, 8

15 Pamela Sharpe, Adapting to Capitalism. Working Women in the English Economy, 1700-1850 (New York: St. Martin’s, 1996), 127, 128
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