

Spinsters and sisters: the transformation of a female sphere in Leicestershire, 1851-1903

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Preface

This book could not have been produced without the stability of Linux and the document processing capability of L^AT_EX. Some of the figures were produced using QGIS and resized using GIMP. The databases depended on LibreOfficec Base. Statistics have been calculated with gretl. Nor would it have been possible to deploy these large datasets without the online accessibility of the census enumerators' books, the National Probate Register, and the probate and parish register material in the Record Office for Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland.

Since the publication is aimed at two audiences, it will present difficulties for different readers. There is much quantitative and some statistical manipulation which the general reader may find a problem. In the case of the Gini coefficient, it is a measure of the distribution of wealth where 0 represents comprehensive equality and 1 complete inequality. With the standard deviation, it is necessary to cite this measure in connection with the mean value to illustrate the dispersion around the mean - that is, the mean may be skewed by some values. Academic readers will mostly be aware of these complications of measurement. They may find frustrating the repetition of illustrative cases of spinsters. The rationale for that iteration is that the general reader and especially the reader with local interest may appreciate this 'colour'.

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1 Introduction

At dinner Harry found only Septimus Jones, Augustus Scarborough, and his aunt. Miss Scarborough said a good deal about her brother, and declared him to be much better ‘What can it matter?’ said the generous spinster.¹

The dean leaning on a gaunt spinster, his only child now living with him, a lady very learned in stones, ferns, plants, and vermin, and who had written a book about petals.²

Perhaps predictably, the novelist, Trollope, associated spinsterhood closely with the upper echelon of society with which he was acquainted. His was a familiar stereotype of the upper-class maiden aunt. The cultural change in the attitude to spinsters in the late nineteenth century has been addressed by Freeman and Klaus, largely associated with women of the middle class.³ The important aspects of workforce participation and subsistence of unmarried women were explored from the 1851 census by Michael Anderson, differentiating age cohorts, emphasising the significance of servant-hood in earlier years and relief in later life.⁴ According to Anderson, the collection of the census information brought into focus the condition of spinsterhood and precipitated a ‘crisis’ of concern about unmarried women.

There is some scope to consider how these changes progressed through the later nineteenth century, examining not only the subsequent census returns but also the National Probate Register (NPR) which commenced in 1858, and not only separately, but in connection by nominal records linkage from the probate data to the census information. Moreover, the census returns of 1851 confirmed a suspicion about the ‘surplus woman’ problem. While the 1841 census simply required the age and occupation of persons, that of 1851 introduced a question about marital status. Analysis of the returns of 1851 revealed a ‘surplus’ population of 500,000 unmarried women. Concern was focused on the issue of household and family formation in an industrialising environment and what it meant for national development. Factory production, although automated, still required a large labour force. No doubt also the issue

¹Anthony Trollope, *Mr Scarborough’s Family* (Hamburg, 1883), p. 48. Emma Higgins, *Odd Women? Spinsters, Lesbians and Widows in British Women’s Fiction, 1850s-1930s* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014).

²Trollope, *Chichester Towers* (London, 1857). pp. 74-5.

³‘Blessed or not? The new spinster in England and the United States in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries’, *Journal of Family History* 9 (1984), pp. 394-414.

⁴‘The social position of spinsters in mid-Victorian Britain’, *JIFF* 9 (1984), pp. 377-93.

of the control of women by men in a patriarchal society.⁵

The commencement of the NPR in 1858 and the more detailed census questions of 1851 are thus serendipitous for assessing the impact of spinsterhood on the social and economic developments of the time as well as female household formations as many spinsters co-habited (see below). Their female households elicited questions: of how they were perceived and how they regarded themselves as objects and as subjects, especially if they were propertied.⁶

Who were spinsters?

The question seems superfluous, but defining spinsters is not simple. Without longitudinal or life-course studies it is impossible to establish that an unmarried woman of thirty will become a never-married female in later life. For that reason, an historical approach has customarily assumed an age of fifty and above for spinsters from static sources.⁷ The late Richard Wall, for example, opined that: ‘Under the age of 45 two roles dominate, that of daughter and servant . . .’⁸ Kowaleski differentiated between ‘life-cycle’ single-women and ‘lifelong’ single-women, the former young women who have attained the age of puberty and the latter those who never married.⁹ For such reasons, some historians have adopted the more felicitous term of ‘never-married’.¹⁰ Below, that guideline of already at age fifty is accepted with the added criterion of no co-resident children. This conventional criterion of minimum age of fifty does, of course, raise issues, considering that average life expectancy at birth (e0) in 1851 has been estimated as 39.54 years. Although this metric increased

⁵Katharine Levitan, ‘Redundancy, the “surplus woman” problem, and the British census, 1851-1861’, *Women’s History Review* 7 (2008), pp. 359-76 (at pp. 359-60).

⁶Donna Dickinson, *Property, Women & Politics* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1997), pp. 6, 9, 74, 76, 79-91, 119 (‘impaired subjectivity as agents and property-holders’).

⁷Patrice Bourdelais, ‘Le poids démographique des femmes seules en France (Deuxième moitié du XIXe siècle)’ (The weight on singleton women in France (Second half of the nineteenth century) *Annales de Démographie Historique: Démographie historique et condition féminine*. (1981), pp. 215-27 at p. 217. Bridget Hill, *Women Alone: Spinsters in England 1660-1850* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001). p. 5. Anderson, ‘The social position’, followed a different line on age.

⁸‘Women alone in English society’ *Annales de Démographie Historique* (1981), pp. 303-17 at p. 310. Wall basically considered some sources up to 1796 and then a comparison with the returns to the 1971 census. His earlier evidence did not allow a distinction between widows and spinsters (p. 306).

⁹Maryanne Kowaleski, ‘Singlewomen in medieval and early modern Europe: the demographic perspective’, in Judith M. Bennett and Amy M. Froide, eds, *Singlewomen in the European Past 1250-1800* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), pp. 38-81 at pp. 39-40.

¹⁰Earlier by Wall. ‘Women alone’, p. 307.

by 1871 to 41.31, numerous single-women will have died before age fifty.¹¹ It might be expected that the two daughters of John and Mary Moore, of Russell Square in Leicester, Elizabeth (aged 45) and Maria (aged 42), both shoe machine hands, and both residing with their parents in 1881, might have attained the age of fifty unmarried.¹² For purposes of comparison, however, there must be consistency and so this criterion is retained. In the late nineteenth century in France, never-married females over fifty comprised 12 percent of the population in 1851 and simultaneously widows over fifty 34 percent.¹³

There was, nevertheless, manifest local and regional variation.¹⁴ Local and regional conditions may well have affected the economic and social environment conducive to the residence of singleton females, which explains the attempt below to segregate local and regional data. Underlying conditions of singleton women were, of course, structural.¹⁵ Quite obviously, one of the parameters for the extent of spinsterhood was demography. Running Spearman's rank correlation of the 1881 population of fifty sample places in Leicestershire with the number of spinsters in each produces a coefficient of 0.846657. Excluding the borough of Leicester, the coefficient still reaches 0.837046. Inevitably, the local number of unmarried women depended on and was a function of the size of the population. Equally, the sex-ratio in 1881 was another variable. In 1881, females exceeded males in all age cohorts in Urban District Councils and in all except those aged 25-35 in Rural District Councils.¹⁶ Structural factors thus influenced the extent of (involuntary) spinsterhood. Such conditions were not deterministic, however, and voluntary spinsterhood played a significant influence, as discussed below.

Transformation in the notion of spinsterhood

The conditions of spinsterhood before 1850 have been cogently delineated by Bridget Hill.¹⁷ By the 1890s, a process of transformation of the status of women had developed to a significant extent.¹⁸ The following discussion

¹¹E. A. Wrigley and R. S. Schofield, *The Population History of England 1541-1871: A Reconstruction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, revised edn, 1989), p. 529 (Table A3.1).

¹²The National Archives (TNA) RG11/3166.

¹³Bourdelais, 'Le poids', p. 217.

¹⁴Bourdelais, 'Le poids', pp. 226-7.

¹⁵Bourdelais, 'Le poids', pp. 216-17.

¹⁶*1881 Census of England and Wales General Report and Tables* (1883 lxxx (C.3797) 583), pp. 17-22.

¹⁷*Women Alone*.

¹⁸David Rubinstein, *Before the Suffragettes: Women's Emancipation in the 1890s* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1986); for what follows, pp. 69-93 ('Salaried ladies') and 165-82 ('The experience of local government').

attempts to elucidate the intermediate position after 1851 as the contexts changed. What opportunities were afforded by increasing urbanisation and industrialisation in the late nineteenth century?¹⁹ It has been suggested that a consensus (between male-dominated associations and employers) evolved in the late nineteenth century about the importance of ‘the breadwinner’s wage’ so that there is some necessity to consider single-women’s employment locally in the textile and other industries as they became increasingly factory-based (hosiery, boot and shoe, and elastic web).²⁰ Did factory-based production allow women to to earn a separate living? This variable is important in assessing the intersectional character of gender and class. Did the legal changes to married women’s ownership of property have implications for unmarried women by eroding more generally the force of patriarchy?²¹ The Married Women’s Property Acts of 1870 and 1882 did not directly concern unmarried women, but was there a tangential effect?²² For example, were any residual influences by fathers and brothers over ‘independent’ means granted to spinsters attenuated? It is significant, moreover, that property reform preceded (by some time) franchisal changes for women.²³

There were, furthermore, incremental opportunities for women of the middle class during the later nineteenth century. While a section of these women engaged in philanthropic ventures, some new opportunities were opening through the transformation of local government. Some rate-paying women acquired the franchise in elections to some local government institutions. In the case of the School Boards established after the 1870 Education Act, women were gradually elected to the boards. Towards the end of the century, women eventually established representation on the Boards of Guardians for administration of the poor law. The reforms of the 1894 Local Government Act enabled women

¹⁹Martha Vicinus, *Independent Women*. Succinctly, Martin Daunt, *Wealth and Welfare: An Economic and Social History of Britain 1851-1951* (Oxford: Oxford University Press [OUP], 2007), pp. 1, 20-22.

²⁰Anna Clark, *The Struggle for the Breeches: Gender and the Making of the British Working Class* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1995). For the advance of urbanisation, Richard Dennis, *English Industrial Cities of the Nineteenth Century: A Social Geography* (Cambridge: CUP, 1984), pp. 41-5; For the industries, R. McKinley, ed., *VCH Leicestershire Volume IV The City of Leicester* (Oxford: OUP, 1958), pp. 303-27; Vicinus, *Independent Women*.

²¹*Married Women’s Property Act 1882* (45 & 46 Vict. c. 75). Mary Lyndon Shanley, *Feminism, Marriage and the Law in Victorian England, 1850-1895* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989) considers the earlier, more limited act of 1870 and the subsequent extension of rights in 1882.

²²Lee Holcombe, *Wives and Property: Reform of the Married Women’s Property Acts in Nineteenth-century England* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1983).

²³Dickenson, *Property, Women & Politics*, p. 6.

to obtain a foothold in local government on parish and district councils.²⁴ For the ideological implications of these changes specifically in Leicester, see further below (under ‘Ideology’). Initially one woman was elected to the Leicester School Board and she was married, but she was subsequently followed by Misses Clephan and Gimson (for whom, see further below under ‘Ideology’).²⁵ The Loughborough School Board latterly included Miss Chester.²⁶ Towards the end of the nineteenth century, four unmarried ladies were elected to the Leicester Board of Guardians for the administration of the poor law, including the redoubtable Miss Fanny Fullagar (for whom, see further below under ‘Ideology’).²⁷ Under the 1850 Act, local authorities were permitted to establish a library service. Two branch libraries were supervised by two unmarried women, Miss Horton and Miss Stagg, at Westcotes and Knighton, although the chief librarian was male.²⁸ Throughout the county in 1881, a dozen unmarried postmistresses managed the local distribution of mail.²⁹ By 1899, 24 unmarried postmistresses served their villages.³⁰ Miss Annie Cockburn administered a branch post office in Biddulph Street in Leicester, supplying money orders as well as her stationery business.³¹ In Burbage, Castle Donington and Eastwell, Misses Martha Archer, Sarah Smith and Charlotte Wignell acted as registrars of births and deaths.³² (All places are, unless otherwise noted, in Leicestershire).

The expansion of the bureaucratic state thus opened some opportunities for women, if at the margins and only in government through the local ad hoc boards such as the School Board and the Board of Guardians (for the latter, see further below under ‘Ideology’). The schools in the county afforded positions for a substantial number of mistress teachers in 1881: 83 in denominational (‘voluntary’) schools (mostly National); 35 in endowed (charity) schools; 31 in private schools; and six in Board schools (the latter had made little progress in rural parishes where National schools allegedly furnished sufficient places). In the borough of Leicester in 1881 18 unmarried female teachers had positions in

²⁴Patricia Hollis, *Ladies Elect: Women in English Local Government 1865-1914* (Oxford: OUP, 1987), esp. pp. 39, 58, 91, 95, 205, 241,

²⁵*Kelly's Directory of the Counties of Leicestershire and Rutland* (London, 1881), p. 558; *Wright's Directory of Leicestershire and Rutland* (London, 1899), p. 290.

²⁶*Wright's Directory* 1899, p. 121.

²⁷*Wright's Directory* 1899, p. 283.

²⁸*Wright's Directory* 1899, p. 281.

²⁹*Kelly's Directory* 1881, pp. 476, 494, 499, 504-5, 511, 520, 539, 676, 699, 707.

³⁰*Wright's Directory* 1899, county section, pp. 2, 16, 20, 37, 54, 57, 63, 64, 65, 67, 78, 97, 100, 106, 198, 207, 214, 216, 220, 227, 233, 242, 250, 254.

³¹*Wright's Directory* 1899, p. 14.

³²*Wright's Directory* 1899, county section, pp. 39, 44, 66.

the Board schools.³³ These numbers were still exceeded by the 45 unmarried female teachers in private schools in the borough and 31 in denominational schools.³⁴ The environment thus altered radically after 1850. In 1870, the management of the new Philharmonic Society was entrusted to Miss Deacon as well as Mr Henry Nicholson.³⁵ At that time, the librarian of the library at the Town Hall was Miss Berrington who was succeeded by Miss Underwood and Miss Daniells.³⁶ In contemporary Loughborough, three women composed the governors of the girls' upper school of the long-established Loughborough Grammar School, two of whom were married. The other, Miss Fearon, was the sister of Archdeacon Fearon, the rector of All Saints.³⁷ Some opportunities for promotion were afforded in some of the newer retail enterprises. The Whetstone Co-operative Society store was managed by Miss Isabella Johnson.³⁸ The manageress of the company's store in Coalville was Miss Hemmesley.³⁹ Miss Halford similarly supervised the Coop's store in Glenfield.⁴⁰ All these places were rapidly expanding in population in the late nineteenth century.

The decision of women to engage in charitable and social organization was characteristic of the late nineteenth century reflecting the expansion of the middle class, especially the urban middle class. For instance, the celebrated Miss Fanny Fullagar was appointed Honorary Secretary of the Leicester Society for Indigent Old Age and affluent Miss Nedham occupied the same post for the St Mary Magdalen Refuge for Fallen Women.⁴¹

In what follows below, however, the discussion concerns the entirety of the spinsterhood of all status and economic position. After describing the source material analysed, the next section discusses the demographic and economic conditions of spinsterhood throughout the county of Leicestershire with reference to different localities: rural villages; industrialising villages; small towns; and the county borough. Thereafter are addressed the social conditions of unmarried older women, that is, their support networks.

³³ *Kelly's Directory* 1881, p. 558.

³⁴ Zena Crook & Brian Simon, 'Private schools in Leicester and the county 1780-1840' and Angela Gill, 'The Leicester School Board 1871-1901' both in Brian Simon, ed., *Education in Leicestershire 1540-1940: A Regional Study* (Aylesbury: Leicester University Press, 1968), pp. 103-29, 156-77.

³⁵ *Trades Protection Society Directory of Leicester* (Leicester, 1870), pp. 10-11.

³⁶ *Trades Protection Society Directory*, p. 7; *Kelly's Directory* 1881, p. 554; *Wright's Directory* 1899, p. 281.

³⁷ *Kelly's Directory* 1881, p. 664.

³⁸ *Kelly's Directory* 1881, p. 726.

³⁹ *Wright's Directory* 1899, county section, p. 50.

⁴⁰ *Wright's Directory* 1899, county section, p. 76.

⁴¹ *Wright's Directory* 1899, p. 286. Lucia Zedner, *Women, Crime and Custody in Victorian England* (Oxford: OUP, 1991).

2 Contexts

The source material

For this examination, two principal sources have been exploited: the National Probate Register (NPR) of the civil registration of wills from 1858 (when it commences) to 1903 and the census enumerators' returns of 1881 (a midpoint for the chronological extent of the probate material). There is a considerable degree of nominal records linkage between the two datasets as well as their independent analysis. Additionally, where possible, these data are connected to the local registration (copies) of wills and parish registers.⁴²

Probate registration of wills by spinsters accounted for 9.4 percent (N= 2198 spinsters) of all enrolments in the National Probate Register for Leicestershire. By comparison, the registration of wills of widows comprehended 16.8 percent. The spinsters as testators were distributed through 250 villages and hamlets. The concentration is, of course, associated with the county borough, Leicester (746 spinster wills), and the small towns, Loughborough (107), Melton Mowbray (67), Ashby de la Zouch (66), Lutterworth (40) Hinckley (39), and Market Harborough (31).⁴³ Syston approached this level with twenty-five, whilst 22, 20, 19 and 17 were recorded respectively for Kegworth, Castle Donington, Shepshed, and Belgrave, expanding villages with an industrial component and a decayed town.

Some explanation is necessary about the further examination of the data. For the purposes of comparative analysis below the higher echelon of society has been omitted. All spinsters with honorifics have been excluded (such as the honourable lady). Easily spinsters of the landed gentry have also been omitted, for example Maria Cave of Stanford Hall whose estate was valued at up to £60,000 in 1879 and Jemima Ord of West Langton Hall with a valuation of up to £16,000 in 1876. While acknowledging that gender and class were intersectional, the emphasis is on the transect of class and gender in the middle and lower classes.

The method of the valuations in the NPR changed over time. Between their inception in 1858 and for most of 1881, an estimate was produced in the form of 'under £x pounds'. From partway through 1881 to 1897, a precise figure was established. From 1858 to 1898, the valuation consisted entirely of personal estate (money, goods and chattels). From 1898, unsettled real estate was included. For those reasons, the numbers and statistics below are divided

⁴²Record Office for Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland DE 462 series (registered wills).

⁴³For Lutterworth, Pamela J. Fisher & Andrew Watkin, *Lutterworth: The Victoria County History of Leicestershire* (London: University of London, 2022).

into appropriate cohorts.⁴⁴ The entries in the NPR have been connected to the registration of some of the wills at the local probate registry. The NPR comprehends the abstracted details of the local registration: the status, the executors/executrices, and the valuation of the estate. The local registration of the wills comprises full copies of the wills. In many cases the wills are quite perfunctory, reflecting the small estate of the spinster. In the majority of instances, the wills simply recite legacies to kinship. In a few wills, however, of the higher-net-worth spinsters, valuable information is provided about bequests to local (and national) organizations promoting welfare and, in a few cases, to cultural and educational institutions.⁴⁵ Figure 1 represents the locations for which there exist spinster valuations in the NPR.

The NPR referred to ‘spinster’ while the census enumerators in 1881 almost consistently observed the term ‘unmarried’, except for the occasional employment of ‘spinster’ as in the exceptional instance of Elizabeth Hough (aged 68) in 1881 living with her sister, Rachel Hough (aged 60), at The Rawdon Arms in Ashby de la Zouch, Elizabeth designated ‘spinster’ although Rachel was inscribed as ‘unmarried’.⁴⁶ Lydia Tyres, head of a household, aged 63, was also designated ‘spinster’.⁴⁷ In what seems an aberration, the enumerator in (Enumeration) District 22 in the immense parish of St Margaret substituted ‘not’ for ‘unm’.⁴⁸ In District 33 of the same parish the enumerator adopted ‘single’, which became the authorised description in the later census.⁴⁹ In another aberration perhaps, Susannah Brown, lodging with her sister and her brother-in-law in Craven Street, aged 65 and a shoe fitter, was designated ‘single’.⁵⁰ When the enumerator visited Providence Street in 1881, in the same household he recorded Emma Willey, one of two lodgers, who was unmarried, aged only twenty-four, but whom he described as ‘Spinster’. The other lodger, Susan Horspool, born in Jersey, also unmarried, but aged 67, he referenced as ‘Maiden’, perhaps out of deference.⁵¹ The ambiguity is illustrated by the recording of Hannah Dakin, head of a household in Sileby, unmarried and aged 60. Under occupation, the enumerator inserted ‘Spinster’, but this entry was

⁴⁴Explained by W. D. Rubinstein, *Men of Property: The Very Wealthy in Britain Since the Industrial Revolution* (London: Social Affairs Unit, 2006, revised edn; originally London: Croom Helm, 1981), pp. 21-22.

⁴⁵ROLLR DE462 series.

⁴⁶TNA RG11/3141, fo. 88. Another ‘spinster’ occurs at RG11/3173, fo. 99.

⁴⁷TNA RG11/3159, fo. 111.

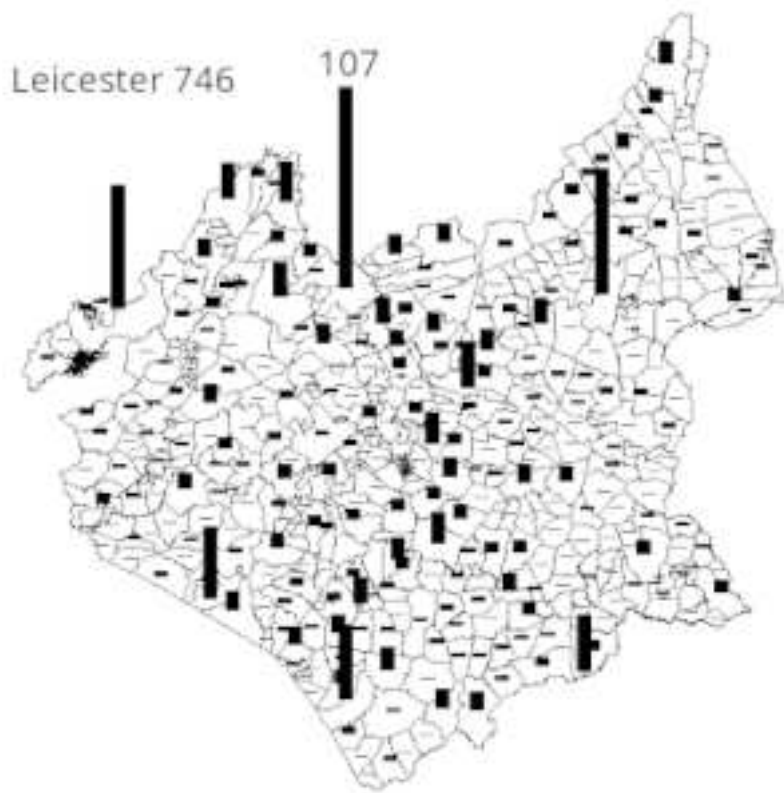
⁴⁸TNA RG11/3159, fos 43-63.

⁴⁹TNA RG11/3161, fos 15-28.

⁵⁰TNA RG11/3172, fo. 85v.

⁵¹TNA RG11/3165, fo. 103.

Figure 1: Locations with the Number of Probate Valuations for Spinsters, 1858-1903



cancelled by striking through and annotated ‘NO’ (no occupation).⁵² Such descriptions were unusual by comparison with the almost universal ‘unmarried’.⁵³

The 1881 census has been explored for the whole of the county borough, all the predominant small towns (Ashby de la Zouch, Hinckley, Loughborough, Lutterworth, Market Harborough, and Melton Mowbray) and for a sample of other places to comprehend different types of parish and village.⁵⁴ The sample is thus purposive but amounts to about 15 percent of the ‘ancient’ parishes by number.⁵⁵ Figure 2 illustrates the distribution of the locations selected and the number of spinsters in each of these settlements.

Selecting the 1881 census allows consideration of the building expansion through the enormous parish of St Margaret, which encompassed 116 registration districts, reflecting the construction of new housing and streets.⁵⁶ The process was not entirely complete, but substantially so. The enumerator remarked that the houses numbered 1-10 on St Saviour’s Hill were uninhabited because ‘Recently Built’ and furthermore ‘6 Houses Building’.⁵⁷ Predominantly this new housing development was occupied by married couples from a younger age cohort, but the returns have been comprehensively examined

⁵²TNA RG9/2279, fo. 108v.

⁵³For other instances of ‘Spinster’ in the 1881 census: RG11/3150, fo. 119v; 3151, fos. 23v, 113.

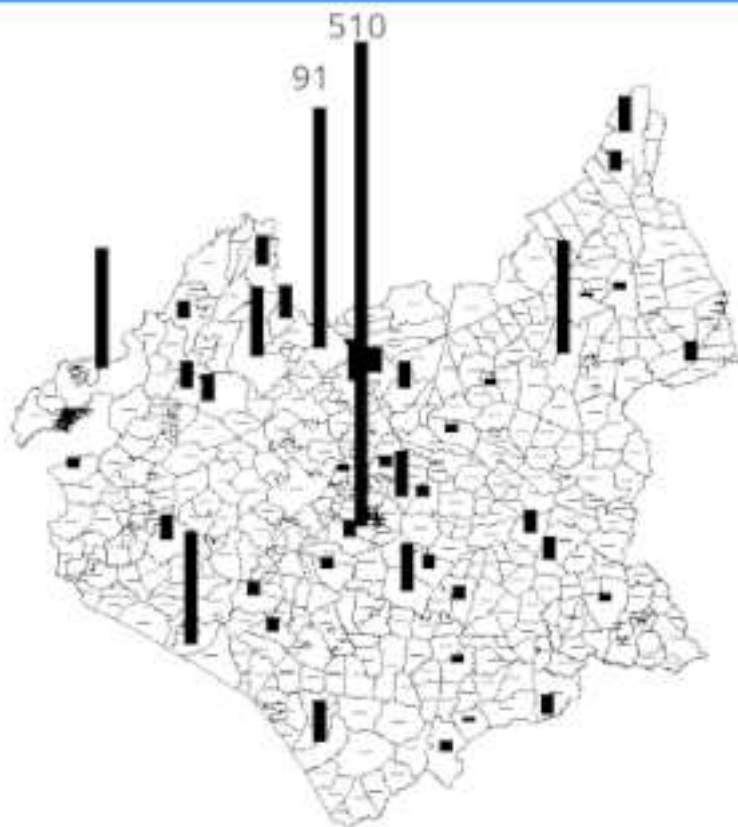
⁵⁴Ashby De La Zouch (TNA RG11/3140, fo. 1-RG11/3141, fo. 106), Hinckley (RG11/3131, fo. 1-RG11/3132, fo. 76), Loughborough (RG11/3144-3146), Lutterworth (RG11/3117, fos 66-120), Market Harborough (RG11/3119, fos 250-261), and Melton Mowbray (RG11/3182, fo. 1-RG11/3183, fo. 31. Leicester: RG11/3153-3180

⁵⁵Anstey; Appleby (including the extent in Derbyshire), Barkby; Barrow upon Soar; Belgrave; Billesdon; Birstall; Bottesford; Breedon on the Hill cum Worthington; Buckminster; Diseworth; Dunton Basset; Earl Shilton; Enderby; Frolesworth; Glenfield; Great Glen; Hallaton; Hathern; Higham on the Hill; Horninghold; Humberstone; Husbands Bosworth; Kegworth; Laughton; Lockington; Market Bosworth; Mountsorrel; Oadby; Peatling Magna; Queniborough; Quorndon; Redmile; Rotherby cum Brooksby; Saddington; Scalford; Shepshed; Sileby; Skeffington; Stoney Stanton; Theddingworth; Waltham on the Wolds; Whitwick; Wigston Magna; Wymondham. TNA RG11/3123, fos 15-35; RG11/3126, fos 76-101; RG11/3185, fos 61-69; RG11/3116, fos 124-135; RG11/3129, fo. 101-RG11/3128, fo. 25; RG11/3116, fos 136-143; RG11/3124, fos 37-88; RG11/3124, fos 74-87; RG11/3385, fos 10-70; RG11/3134, fos 2-26; RG11/3118, fos 52-58; RG11/3155, fos 75-80; RG11/3181; RG11/3230; RG11/3120, fos 87-99; RG11/3184, fos 126-143; RG11/3123, fos 115-124; RG11/3120, fos 22-30; RG11/3185, fos 16-31; RG11/3143, fos 37-101; RG11/3189, fos 46-64; RG11/3128, fos 34-50; RG11/3134, fos 77-82; RG11/3189, fos 72-86; RG11/3120, fos 32-43; RG11/3120, fos 57-63; RG11/3385, fos 81-88; RG11/3151, fos 73-114; RG11/3127, fos 2-107; RG11/3185, fos 106-20; RG11/3152, fos 24-50; RG11/3153, fo. 26-RG11/3154, fo. 108; RG11/3133, fos 83-101; RG11/3147, fos 105-39; RG11/3150, fos 1-49; RG11/3151, fos 1-54; RG11/3384, fo. 87-RG11/3385, fo. 26; RG11/3153, fos 8-20; RG11/3150, fos 79-129.

⁵⁶TNA RG11/3156-3172.

⁵⁷TNA RG11/3162, fo. 103v.

Figure 2: The Number of Spinsters in Selected Locations in the 1881 Census



for completeness. This census also antedates the boundary extension of 1892 which subsumed older villages with a different demographic composition.⁵⁸ The impending boundary changes render the 1891 return less suitable. The 1881 census is also the most proximate to Pritchard's analysis of the late nineteenth-century housing development in Leicester, his specific points of comparison being 1870 and 1884. Spatially, his sample areas 7 and 8 coincide with part of the expansion in St Margaret's parish noted above.⁵⁹ The difficulties of the census enumerators' books are well known, with excisions and cancellations. The greatest impediment is the occasional faint inscription which affects entire Districts. The problem recurs particularly in some Districts in the parishes of St Mary and St Margaret in the county borough, but only in a small number, and it is possible to make sense of the information.⁶⁰

Examples of issues

Above, the questions about spinsterhood in the late nineteenth century have been cursorily presented. Some examples from the census might elucidate more concretely the issues. If the urban influence is considered first, Sophia Peberdy was recorded in 1881 as unmarried, head of the household, aged 50, and a shopkeeper in Bartholomew Street in Leicester.⁶¹ In Northampton Square, Ellen Jones was the sole occupant and head, unmarried, aged 61, a haberdasher.⁶² Similarly, Emma Bamford inhabited Calton Street, head of household, aged 58, with one servant, and earning a livelihood as a grocer.⁶³ Tobacconist was the trade of Rebecca Knapp in St George Street, unmarried and aged 59, her income supplemented by two lodgers.⁶⁴ Receiving revenue from four lodgers, Mary A. Orton pursued her activity as a shopkeeper and grocer in Samuel Street, aged 57 and unmarried.⁶⁵ Did the expansion of the county borough provide more retail opportunities for sole female traders? Formerly a hosiery mender, but retired in 1881, Hannah Webster, unmarried and aged 50, occupied a house with her spinster sister of the same age, Lucy.⁶⁶ Eliza Smith as head of household in William Street, unmarried and aged 52,

⁵⁸For these villages, *VCH Leics. IV*, pp. 415-46.

⁵⁹R. M. Pritchard, *Housing and the Spatial Structure of the City: Residential Mobility and the Housing Market in an English City Since the Industrial Revolution* (Cambridge: CUP, 1976), pp. 83-4 (incl. Fig. 4.6), 92, 94.

⁶⁰For example, RG11/3175 in parts.

⁶¹TNA RG11/3159, fo. XX.

⁶²TNA RG11/3160, fo. 96.

⁶³TNA RG11/3161, fo. 7v.

⁶⁴TNA RG11/3161, fo. 19v.

⁶⁵TNA RG11/3161, fo. 89v.

⁶⁶TNA RG11/3160, fo. 96v.

was engaged in fancy hosiery and afforded shelter to her two nieces.⁶⁷ Living alone in Bedford Street, Charlotte Robinson, unmarried and aged 66, continued as a factory hand.⁶⁸ In the neighbourhood, in a yard off Victoria Street, resided Elizabeth Orringe, head of household, aged 34, a factory hand, reflecting that some younger women could establish their lone household from industrial wages.⁶⁹ The sisters Mary and Jane Underwood co-habited in Gower Street, unmarried and aged 68 and 62, shoe fitters.⁷⁰ Even the aged washerwoman, Sarah Tester, could manage to live alone in Tichborne Cottages from her income as a washer woman, presumably because of the plentiful urban clientele.⁷¹ Did these opportunities arise from urban and industrial expansion and were they typical?

The cohabiting sisters and nieces then address the question of how these singletons established support networks and how they might differ across the class spectrum. In the bourgeois enclave of Hotel Street, Mary Deacon established her position as a professor of music, unmarried and aged 59, but sharing her household with her sisters Elizabeth (aged 57), Lucy (50) and Adelaide (47), all single and engaged in selling music scores, the household serviced by unmarried female housekeeper and servant—consequently a substantial female household.⁷² Another sisterly household existed in Dane Hill Road, headed by Mary Ellis, unmarried and aged 54, with her cadet sisters Hannah and Sophia, aged 47 and 43 respectively and all unmarried—occupations not specified, so presumably of independent means.⁷³ Such was certainly the case of the Coleman sisters, all unmarried and all accruing ‘interest on money’, in their shared household in London Road, Christian aged 69, Elizabeth 66 and Ann 56.⁷⁴ ‘No profession’ inscribed the enumerator for all the Froane sisters in their household in Saxe Coburg Street, in which the unmarried Anne, aged 74, headed a household consisting of her unmarried sisters Dorothy (72), Hepzibah 59, and Eliza 57.⁷⁵

These supportive households were not confined to the middle class. Often, however, the relationship had a different complexion. As frequently still happens, unmarried daughters remained in their natal household to support elderly mothers. Thus Mary Sharp aged 58 remained with her mother, the

⁶⁷TNA RG11/3161, fo. 94.

⁶⁸TNA RG11/3168.

⁶⁹TNA RG11/3168.

⁷⁰TNA RG11/3169.

⁷¹TNA RG11/3168, fo. 39.

⁷²TNA RG11/3177, fo. 131.

⁷³TNA RG11/3176, fo. 50.

⁷⁴TNA RG11/3157, fo. 46.

⁷⁵TNA RG11/3160, fo. 56.

widow Hannah Sharp (aged 75), with two female lodgers, in New Lane in Leicester.⁷⁶ In Melton Street in the borough, Mary Ann Mayne resided with her mother Dorothy Mayne, a widow aged 83. Mary Ann had earlier left the household ('Formerly Ladies Maid'), but had returned unmarried and aged 61 in 1881. They were accompanied by a female lodger, aged 20, a hosiery mender.⁷⁷ Christian Stevens was reported as head of her household in Stoney Stanton, with the occupation of shopkeeper for small items, unmarried and The values of estates of allaged 50, with her mother, the widow Ann Bray (who presumably had a second marriage), a widow and seamstress, aged 67.⁷⁸ Early widowhood bound the unmarried daughter.

More complex are the households consisting of brother and sister. In some cases, the relationship is obscured further by the enumerator initially defining the sister as 'housekeeper' but cancelling that designation. In such cases, mutual support might be inferred. In Dryden Street, a household consisted of Samuel Coleman (aged 58 and unmarried), a hosiery trimmer and dyer, and his unmarried sister, Harriet Coleman (aged 51), an elastic web hand.⁷⁹ The designation of Samuel as head does not preclude an economic partnership, but perhaps a deference to a patriarchal ideology of the bureaucracy. John Townsend, also as head nominally, co-habited with his two sisters, Mary and Susannah Townsend, all unmarried, two aged 52 and the eldest sister Mary aged 58. John and sister Susannah were employed in a worsted factory in the borough.⁸⁰ Aged 56 and 54 respectively and both unmarried, John and Mary Wild lived together in Palmerston Street, she occupied as a silk winder.⁸¹ Perhaps unusually, Ann Barwick was denominated head of her household in Eaton Street which contained her brother, Samuel Barwick, married and aged 64, a general mechanic. To all intents, he appears to have been a lodger, although not specified, in her house, which she occupied as an unmarried cotton winder, aged 62.⁸² That relationship thus introduces the numerous cases of female lodgers, especially in urban places, such as Emma Neale lodging in Christow Street in Leicester, a hosiery mender, unmarried and aged 49.⁸³

The recitation of all these tedious examples indicates that unmarried women had their support networks and that they did not always reside alone in a household. Their resources in the industrial economy also allowed them to

⁷⁶TNA RG11/3171, fo. 101.

⁷⁷TNA RG11/3168, fo. 50.

⁷⁸TNA RG11/3130, fo. 124.

⁷⁹TNA RG11/3168, fo. 39v.

⁸⁰TNA RG11/3172, fo. 95.

⁸¹TNA RG11/3155, fo. 79.

⁸²TNA RG11/3165, fo. 101.

⁸³TNA RG11/3166, fo. 53.

earn an income to support themselves. Henceforth, the analysis will mainly consist of aggregates and statistics, but the issues of the last paragraph subsist not only in the combination of sisters in households, but how other female relatives, especially unmarried aunts, were supported. Quite evidently also questions arise about independent means and spinsterhood and the concentration of spinsters in localities and locations, again associated with class.

Spinsters' estates in the National Probate Register (NPR)

The reminder is necessary that these estates in the probate valuations are highly selective. The detailed statistics for the probate valuation of estates of *all* spinsters (not just those aged fifty and over) excepting those of aristocratic and gentry status is provided in Tables 1 and 2. In Table 1, the NPR before 1881 represents values as under a certain amount. The values were arbitrary and incremental which explains the categories (<£100, <£200, <£300, <£450, <£600, <£800 etc.). Above <£4,000, the categories are combined to reduce the number of rows in the table. The purpose of the table is to illustrate the wide discrepancy in the values.

Table 1: The values of the estates of *all* spinsters in the NPR before 1881

Value (£s)	Number of spinsters	Value (£s)	Number of spinsters
<100	228	<1,500	67
<200	140	<2,000	41
<300	99	<3,000	54
<450	81	<4,000	27
<600	75	<5,000-<10,000	57
<800	58	<12,000-<30,000	16
<1,000	50	<40,000-<70,000	7

Note to Table 1 <£100 includes numerous spinsters with less than £20 and less than £50 values.

Table 2: Statistics of all spinsters' estates in Leicestershire (excluding aristocracy/gentry) 1881-1903 (N=2198)

Date	Percent of all spinsters	Mean (£s)	Std	Median (£s)
1881-987	36	1640	5790.384	343
1898-1903	17	2419	6857.461	469

Std here and hereafter Standard Deviation (dispersion around the mean)

In Table 2, it has to be remembered that the valuations after 1897 include unsettled real estate, not just personal estate.

In Table 2, the standard deviation indicates the enormous disparity in spinsters' wealth. If the spinsters constituted a discrete population the Gini coefficient defining the inequality of wealth would attain 0.788098 and 0.790871 respectively between 1881-97 and 1898-1903 (where 1.0 represents absolute concentration of wealth). The aggregate data may conceal variance by locality. The further question pertains to the distribution of the spinsters' wealth geographically, by type of place. For this purpose, the data have been segmented into: county borough; small towns; industrial villages; and rural villages.

Table 3: Descriptive statistics of spinster's (all ages) wealth in urban locations

Place/date	N of spinsters	Mean (£s)	Std	Median
Leicester 18812-1897	385	2135	8293.845	343
Leicester 1898-1903	169	3203	8515.214	472
Small towns 1881-18987	123	1443	3531.003	370
Small towns 1898-1903	52	1618	3867.388	470

Table 4: Main occupations and status of spinsters (aged fifty and older) in the 1881 census in selected locations

Occupation/status	Borough	Small towns	All other parishes
Independent	105	44	49
Head (only)	503	1	11
Relative	49	20	54
Housekeeper	29	15	28
Retail	28	9	6
Dressmaker	34	12	19
Industry/crafts	79	36	50
Domestic work	32	15	7
Servant	26	28	14

Spinsters in the census of 1881

The geographical dispersal of spinsters is represented in Figure 2 from the evidence of the 1881 census. As explained above, a purposive sample has been extracted for rural parishes and villages, comprising about 15 percent of the ancient parishes in the county. By far the greatest concentration existed in the county borough and the expanding town of Loughborough. Although the density of urban population helps to explain this concentration, there are social and economic implications.

In Table 4, independent comprehends annuitants, income from dividends or houses, and simply 'independent'. Head applies when the unmarried female is not allocated to any occupational status, but entered only as head of household. Relatives include sisters, daughters, aunts and nieces, but in the table only when no other occupation is provided. When a relative is also assigned an occupation, the female is included under that employment status. Accordingly, the number for relatives is an under-representation. The rationale is that the relative was less likely a dependant and probably a contributor to the

household finances. Dressmaker is included as a separate category since it constituted a significant category of employment for unmarried (and married) females. Domestic work actually here comprises out-work such as laundresses, charwomen, washerwomen and mangle owners. 'Housekeeper' is ambiguous to the extent that it is inserted and cancelled for relatives (such as sisters) and also because the possibility of a common-law wife cannot be excluded. In the latter instance, for example, Thomas Bonser, a coal miner, widower aged 57 and head of household in Whitwick, co-resided with an unmarried 'boarder',⁸⁴ Jane Preston, unmarried and aged 60, described by occupation as a housekeeper. In Sileby, Thomas Condon, an unmarried head aged 64, a sack weaver, was accompanied in his house only by Elizabeth Pollard, his housekeeper, unmarried, aged 52.⁸⁵ Industry and craft consists mainly of textile production, including sempstresses and seamers, who in some cases were outworkers for the local factory-based textile industry. Two points require emphasis: these women have attained the age of fifty; the number for relatives is for those without a defined occupational status.

For the section for 'all other parishes', some further examination is necessary for industrialising villages which are subsumed in the numbers in the table. These locations consisted of Anstey (shoes), Belgrave (textiles), Birstall (textiles), Earl Shilton (textiles), Kegworth (textiles), Mountsorrel (textiles), Shepshed (textiles), Sileby (textiles and shoes), Whitwick (coal), and Wigston Magna (textiles).⁸⁶ The differentiation is not absolute, for some places, like Bottesford, had an ingress of railway workers for local maintenance of the track.⁸⁷ There unmarried women over the age of fifty earned their living as principal of the school and postmistress. Overall, however, these industrial villages allowed independent living for fewer than thirty unmarried women over the age of fifty, nineteen framework knitters and eight seamers.

Female unmarried women in the small town of Loughborough (incorporated as a borough in 1888—seven years after the census) reflected the engagement of occupations in the borough of Leicester. In particular, fifteen of the 91 unmarried women were employed in the local textile factories. As the borough expanded rapidly in the nineteenth century, opportunities opened for spinsters as retailers: eight of the 91, including a (former) clothier in Mill street, a ladies' draper in Market Place, a milliner in Church Gate, a haberdasher on Sparrow

⁸⁴TNA RG11/3143, fo.

⁸⁵TNA RG11/3150, fo. 124v.

⁸⁶TNA RG11/3127, fos 2-107; RG11/3133, fos 83-101; RG11/3143, fos 37-end; RG11/3146, fo. 102-RG11/3147, fo. 60; RG11/3150, fos 79-129; RG11/3151, fos 1-54; RG11/3152, fos 24-50; RG11/3153, fo. 26-RG11/3154, fo. 108; RG11/3385, fos 10-70.

⁸⁷TNA RG11/3230, fos 16-50.

Hill, and a milliner on High Street, all central locations. The facilities of the town also attracted (fifteen) independent unmarried women, clustered in the salubrious areas with prestigious housing (villas) in Burton Street, Ashby Road, Derby Road, and Leicester Road. The existence of unmarried women remained, nonetheless, difficult. Many of those engaged in domestic outwork (washing, mangling) survived in a rudimentary fashion, with the consequence that 62 younger unmarried women became patients of the county asylum.⁸⁸

Nominal records linkage

It is necessary to be explicit about the methodology employed here. The first recourse is the NPR, but this source records only the status only as spinster, the place of abode at death, the amount of the estate and details of the administrators or executors. With that information, it is possible to consult the census of the nearest date to the grant of probate which furnishes the place of birth and age, which are critical to identify the spinster precisely. From there can be obtained additionally the status and occupation. With the details of the place of birth and age, it is possible to work back through other census returns (1841-1911) to examine the life-course occupations of the woman. Additionally, the baptism of the female child can be established from the parish or nonconformist registers, crucially after 1812 with the occupation of the father. In most instances, the spinster can then be connected from the NPR to the local probate registers which have certified copies of the wills of the spinsters.⁸⁹ The certified copies of the wills contain the details of legacies and trusts. They too, however, simply specify the status of the testator as spinster, so the census is thus still necessary for the occupation or social status. The association of information in the NPR with the censuses allows further analysis, but also reveals some inconsistencies.

From that linkage, a little dissonance emerges across the two records. In some cases, there is a divergence between the two, usually that those recorded as spinsters in the NPR are recorded as widows in the census. For example, the registration of Mary Chanler in the NPR in 1900 recorded her as a spinster of Hinckley. In the census of 1891, however, she occurs as a widow aged 62 and lodging house keeper in that small town.⁹⁰ Similarly, Maria Compton's estate was enrolled in the NPR describing her as a spinster of Catthorpe in 1863, but the census return of 1861 accorded her the status of widow and landed proprietor there, aged 74.⁹¹

⁸⁸TNA RG11/3180, fos 111-122.

⁸⁹ROLLR DE462 series.

⁹⁰TNA RG12/2503, fo. 5v; NPR 1900 Cabell-Dyson, p. 53.

⁹¹TNA RG9/2244, fo. 85v; NPR 1863 Cadaby-Cuxon, p. 474.

Table 5: Main categories of spinsters aged fifty and over in the NPR, 1858-1903

Occupation/status	N	Occupation/status	N
Independent	381	Education	33
Head (only)	60	Dressmaker	45
Relative	151	Industry/craft	45
Retail	44	Domestic work	10
Housekeeper	25	Servant	52

A second complication is the elusive nature of some of the deceased in the census. This issue mainly occurs with very common names and especially in the borough of Leicester. The number of unambiguous connections between the two records is severely limited by this problem, but the unambiguous data is still useful. Almost 46 percent of unmarried women in the NPR cannot be categorically identified in the census enumerators' returns between 1841 and 1901. The remaining 54 percent (N=1188) are unambiguous connections, furnishing status and age at death (the latter by comparing the age in the census with the date of probate).. It is then necessary, however, to distinguish those aged fifty and over. This exercise reduces the aggregate number to 912 spinsters, which is still a reasonable sample for analysis. The methodology is then to connect the spinsters in the NPR to their appearance in the census enumerators' returns to identify their status (as relatives), their means of support (in the categories employed above) and their age at death.

In Table 5, 'education' included governesses, teachers in private schools, teachers in denominational schools, and (a few) teachers in Board Schools. In addition to those above, the numbers include a dozen lodgers, five in almshouses, and five companions.

3 The wealth of spinsters

Information about the estate of spinsters over the age of fifty is derived from the NPR between 1858 and 1903. To recapitulate, the data must be segmented into three sections: 1858-1881 (part year); 1881 (part year)-1897; and 1898-1903. In the first segment (1858-1881), the estate is expressed as under so much (for example, under £100); in the second, a specific amount is provided; in the third, the content of the estate includes not only personal estate of the first two segments but also some real estate. To reiterate also, inclusion in the NPR was highly selective. Omission varied greatly by status and wealth. The estates of women of independent means is likely to be more comprehensively represented than other social and economic categories.

Table 6 abstracts the value of estates of unmarried women with independent means between 1858 and 1881 during which time the estates were estimated at under a certain amount (e.g. estate valued at under £100 or estate valued at under £200). The table is restricted to independent women because of the paucity of numbers for other categories of spinster aged over fifty. Between 1858 and 1881, the estates of a dozen dressmakers were evaluated, all below £1000; one amounted to under £20, six to less than £100, and two more to less than £200. Only seven estates of unmarried women engaged in domestic outwork were assessed: three under £100; three under £200; and one under £450. 'Education' comprises here not only teachers but governesses, so there is a higher upper level: at the lower estimate, estates were valued at under £100 (two), under £200 (three), under £300 to under £800 (five), under £1000 and under £1500 (two combined) and under £3000 (one). For housekeepers, another dozen estates were determined: two under £100; three under £300; three under £450; and four between under £800 and under £3000. Industrial workers had estates considered to be under £100 (eight), under £200 (two) and from under £450 to under £800 (three). Fifteen retailers who died before 1881 had rather paltry estates valued at under £100 (six), under £200 (four), under £300 (three), under £450 and under £600 (one each). A higher number of servants' estates is perhaps surprising, with seven estimated at under £100, nine under £300, six under £450, five under £600 and under £800 combined.

Table 7 comprises mean and median valuations where a sufficient number of estates were captured by the NPR. That condition explains the omissions of estates in some categories in 1898-1903, since insufficient data exist.

The high-net worth spinsters of independent means are discussed in the section below. It should be emphasised, however, that there was relative poverty and indigence in the spinsterhood. Between 1858 and 1881, 72 estates of spinsters aged over fifty in the NPR were reckoned as under £100. After 1881,

Table 6: The Estates of Two Categories of Spinster Aged Over Fifty in the NPR, 1858-81

Estate (£s)	Independent (N)	Head (only) (N)
Under 100	14	3
Under 200	12	2
Under 300	13	0
Under 450	12	5
Under 600	13	0
Under 800	11	1
Under 1,000	8	2
Under 1,500	20	4
Under 2,000	13	1
Under 3,000	15	4
Under 4,000	12	1
Under 5,000-under 12,000	16	3
Under 16,000-under 40,000	7	1
Under 60,000	0	1

Table 7: The Estate of Spinsters Aged Over Fifty in the NPR, 1881-1903

Category	Mean Estate (£s)	Std	Median Estate (£s)
Independent, 1881-97	3,742	11545.0	791
Independent, 1898-1903	5,570	13168.0	1,139
Heads, 1881-97	5,760	12617.0	1,632
Retail, 1881-97	783	1849.0	305
'Education', 1881-97	983.5	1382.6	270
Housekeepers, 1881-97	376	507.13	265
Dressmakers, 1881-97	268	219.33	206
Dressmakers, 1898-1903	240	312.98	97
Industrial/craft, 1881-97	243	269.86	184
Servants, 1881-97	324	288.76	218

when precise valuations commenced, another 84 estates were assessed as below £100. In total, 156 estates of spinsters over fifty fell below £100 (about 17 percent). Predominantly these spinsters over fifty were assigned no occupation in the census enumerators' returns but marked as dependants, as sister or aunt. In the small number of cases when an occupation was assigned, five were graziers or farmers (some sisters in combined husbandry), five living on their own means, four dressmakers, three in retail, a framework knitter, a housekeeper, and a victualler. Illustrative examples may be useful. Elizabeth Hayes of Swepstone lived alone as a provisioner of bread and flour. Her estate was valued at £9 19s 5d.⁹² Combining together as dressmakers, Elizabeth Woofenden and her sister had their premises in the upmarket Regent Street. When Elizabeth died, aged under sixty, her estate was assessed at merely £4 5s 0d, probate assigned to Julia Woofenden, spinster.⁹³ There was a wide disparity in the wealth of spinsters aged over fifty, extending from just over £4 to in excess of £124, 000 (see below, Emma Brookhouse). While the elite possessed estates at death valued in the tens of thousands, an equal number existed on estates assessed in the tens of pounds.

⁹²TNA RG11/3137, fo. 39; NPR 1883 Haas-Hyslop, p. 231.

⁹³TNA RG11/3173, fo. 76; NPR 1892 Ubsdell-Zwart, p. 214.

Table 8: Size Distribution and Value of Land Held by Spinsters in the NPR Correlated with the *Return of Owners of Land*

Acreage	No. of Spinsters	Annual Value (£s)	No. of Spinsters
5 and <	14	50 and <	11
6-10	3	51-100	5
11-20	4	101-200	5
21-50	4	201-300	2
51-100	1	600-700	1
101-200	2	2,903+	1
201-300	1		
>1,000	1		

4 Categories of spinsters

Spinsters with independent means

At the apex of the spinsters with their own means were the landowners. In 1881, at least six of the ‘principal seats’ in the county were held by unmarried women: Evington House; Aylestone Hall; Claybrooke Hall; Newton Harcourt Manor; Woodthorpe Grange; and Wymeswold Hall.⁹⁴ Most of these lady landowners had not attained the age of fifty in 1881. The exception was the Misses Simpson (Mary, Emma and Louisa) who together lived at Claybrooke Hall, two aged sixty and the youngest 57.⁹⁵ The concern is henceforth with independent spinsters noted in the NPR. By comparing the probate details with the 1873 return of landowners for the county, it can be established that at least 30 of the spinsters were owners of more than an acre of land.⁹⁶ That figure is a minimum. It is probable that, for example, Priscilla and Mary Scotton received land from William Scotton who possessed 130a 3r 34p in Claybrooke Magna, with an annual valuation of £286 10s. 0d.⁹⁷ For similar reasons, Catherine and Sarah Thirlby of Ibstock probably had income from land.⁹⁸

The valuations, nevertheless, did not equate directly with the acreage, since

⁹⁴ *Kelly’s Directory* 1881, pp. vii-viii.

⁹⁵ TNA RG11/3116, fo. 94v.

⁹⁶ *Return of Owners of Land 1873 Volume I Leicestershire* (C1097: London, 1875)

⁹⁷ *Return of Owners of Land: Leicestershire*, p. 26.

⁹⁸ *Return of Owners of Land: Leicestershire*, p. 29. Also Marian Woodburn, p. 32. For Ibstock, Pamela Fisher, *Ibstock: The Victoria County History of Leicestershire* (London: University of London Press, 2020).

some urban land was at a premium for the expansion of building to meet demographic increase. Thus just over an acre in the possession of Miss Ellis in Belgrave was evaluated at £133 10s 0d per annum. In Loughborough, almost three and a half acres owned by Mary Frisby extended to £63.⁹⁹ Rural land produced a return of £2-£5 for the landed spinsters. The income of the majority of independent spinsters thus probably derived from rents from houses, dividends and annuities. Four dozen spinsters with valuations in the NPR died possessed of estates worth more than £9,000. This figure is selected to include those before 1881 whose estate was considered to be under £10,000. Thirteen of the estates were assessed in or after 1898, with the potential inclusion of real estate. Twenty-one of these spinsters inhabited the borough of Leicester, almost a half. Additionally, two other unmarried women with high net worth lived in Loughborough, one before incorporation in 1888 and the other deceased in 1899. Urban-based wealth thus became quite dominant.

Indeed, by far the wealthiest spinster at her death was Emma Hannah Brookhouse in 1886, her total estate valued at £124,843 1s 8d. Her valuation represents the evolution of industrial wealth in the borough. Joseph Brookhouse developed the hosiery concern in Leicester in the late eighteenth century. In partnership with Daniel Smith, Benjamin Brookhouse continued the business in Granby Street as Brookhouse & Smith, hosiers, then as Smith Brookhouse & Co.¹⁰⁰ When Benjamin married first Sarah Musson of Leicester, he contracted a marriage bond in 1802 with Daniel Smith and the witnesses to the marriage in 1803 were Thomas Fielding and Smith again, both principal entrepreneurs in the hosiery business.¹⁰¹ Emma Hannah Brookhouse was the daughter of Benjamin and Sarah, baptised in the first months of 1810.¹⁰² By 1851, Benjamin was a widower aged 80, but the household still contained his son, Joseph, aged 45, Mary Ann, 43, and Emma Hannah, 41, all unmarried. Now Benjamin was described as a fundholder, as was Joseph.¹⁰³ Two years later Benjamin departed the world and was interred at St Mary's in Leicester on 15 September 1853.¹⁰⁴ The household continued in Granby Street, now headed by Joseph who in the 1855 *Post Office Directory* was entered in the 'gentry' section as 'esq.'¹⁰⁵ When Joseph died in 1861, the household was

⁹⁹ *Return of Owners of Land: Leicestershire*, p. 29. Also Marian Woodburn, p. 32.

¹⁰⁰ *The Leicester Directory* (Leicester: T. Combe & Son, 1827), p. 6; *Pigot's Directory of Leicestershire 1822, 1828, 1835*, pp. 216 (1835).

¹⁰¹ ROLLR Marriage bond 1802; 7D41/20, no. 452 (not paginated).

¹⁰² ROLLR 24D65 (not foliated or paginated).

¹⁰³ TNA HO107/2088, fo. 7.

¹⁰⁴ ROLLR DE1683/30, p. 127 (no. 1016).

¹⁰⁵ *Post Office Directory of Derbyshire, Leicestershire, Nottinghamshire and Rutlandshire* (London: Kelly & Co., 1855), p. 61.

disrupted. His estate, valued at under £60,000, was entrusted to the management of the surviving executrix, Mary Ann. At the same time, the probate of the estate of Benjamin, who had died in 1853, was re-evaluated at under £60, 000, and probate granted to two executors, including George Toller, solicitor.¹⁰⁶ Subsequently, the two sisters established a separate household on London Road, Mary Ann as ‘head’.¹⁰⁷ Mary Ann died in 1881, her estate assessed at under £70,000, and probate was granted to Emma with George Toller, senior and junior, gentlemen of 104, New Walk.¹⁰⁸ The origin of the wealth of the high-net-worth spinster, Emma Hannah, thus lay in industrial enterprise in hosiery manufacture a hundred years before the valuation of her estate at her death. In the meantime, the family had relinquished the business to depend on investment income and adopted a gentle status. The figures at the valuations suggest that the two spinsters, and especially Emma, managed their resources with some acumen, perhaps with the assistance of the Toller males.

In this context, it is worth considering in more detail these independent spinsters located in the county borough as the analysis reveals the significance of new sources of wealth from which unmarried women also benefited. The daughter of John Mitchell, a woolcomber, Rebecca was born in Kibworth Beauchamp in 1818. By 1851, John had migrated into Leicester, where he expanded his business as a hosier. At that time, he was widowed, aged 67, and lived in Market Street with his daughters, including Rebecca, aged 33, already an annuitant. At the time of the census, Rebecca was visited by Maria Berridge, another young annuitant destined for spinsterhood. When she died in 1894 at 1, Museum Square, Rebecca’s estate was assessed at £12, 786 6s 6d.¹⁰⁹ Another daughter of a hosiery manufacturer, Georgiana Ireland, the issue of Alderman George Ireland, died in Prebend Terrace in 1881. (Her father had been buried in St Martin’s graveyard in 1826 (aged 53)). At her death, her estate was considered to be worth under £14,000.¹¹⁰ The inheritance of Ann Stretton derived from the leather-working and boot and shoe business of her father, William Stretton. (Her father was also buried at St Martin’s, in 1840). At Granby Street in 1882, her estate amounted to £27,907 18s 7d.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁶NPR 1861 Bache-Bywater, p. 13.

¹⁰⁷TNA RG9/2284, fo. 43.

¹⁰⁸NPR 1881 Bianchi-Bywater, p. 218.

¹⁰⁹ROLLR DE5417/6, p. 26 (nos 201-202); HO107/2088, fo. 6; NPR 1894 Kahane-Mytton, p. 267. She was interred at Kibworth: DE5417/27, p. 53 (no. 417).

¹¹⁰*Pigot’s Directory*, p. 216; ROLLR DE1564/16, p. 130 (no. 1034); NPR 1881 Iago-Pilcher, p. 14.

¹¹¹*Pigot’s Directory*, pp. 120, 127, 214; ROLLR DE462/25, pp. 286-299; ROLLR DE1564/17, p. 56 (no. 448); NPR 1882 Smale-Tytler, p. 225.

The proceeds from legal practice were a traditional source of wealth, but the income was probably increased through the expansion of business in an industrialising and commercial borough. Maria Berridge was the child of Jesse and Maria Berridge, the father a solicitor and attorney in Millstone Lane in partnership as Greaves and Berridge. Jesse died in 1840. By 1898, Maria had accumulated an estate valued at more than £14,417.¹¹² Outside the borough, Sarah Walker was born in Coleorton to Benjamin Walker in 1815, her father described as a collier at the registration of the baptism, but, as his probate registration confirmed, a coal master and farmer, a concern continued by his son, William. Benjamin's estate in 1861 was evaluated at under £6,000. When she died aged 83 at Halcyon House in Coleorton in 1896, her estate exceeded £9,264.¹¹³ An estate of under £60,000 was possessed by Martha Lawton on her demise in 1872. She was the daughter of John and Eliza, born in 1793. When John (died 1845) married Elizabeth Bankart in 1790, he had already established himself as an attorney at law.¹¹⁴

Spinsters living with relatives

Above, several examples have been adduced of spinsters living with sisters. Such co-residence was certainly a feature. Concentrating only on spinsters in the NPR, however, a slightly different picture emerges. In total, 278 unmarried women living with relatives were included in the NPR, but 127 died before the age of fifty. Of the remaining 151, 52 resided with a brother (married or unmarried, but most usually the latter). Another 32 remained with their parents at the time of death. Fifteen were accommodated by a niece or nephew (that is, were aunts) and another fifteen by in-laws (usually a brother-in-law with wife as sister of the unmarried woman). Only 27 were sisters co-habiting with sisters. There is an obvious reason for this division. Those co-habiting with a brother almost exclusively resided in rural parishes where the brother was engaged in agriculture. The geographical distribution of these spinsters with relatives reflects this arrangement. Only thirty of these spinsters inhabited the borough of Leicester and merely fourteen in the six small towns in the county. The rest were dispersed through seventy or so other localities. Figure 3 illustrates the distribution.

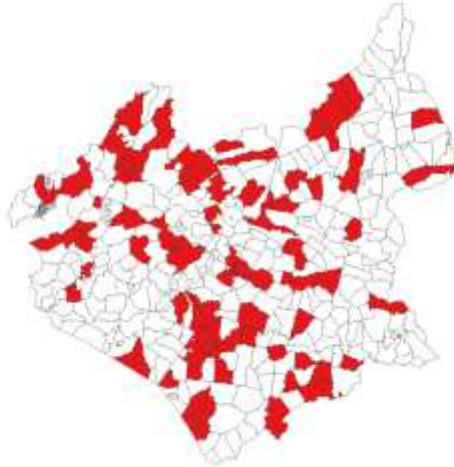
An example of the dominant arrangement was the Bevan household in

¹¹²ROLLR DE1564/3, p. 24 (no. 187); DE1564/17, p. 55 (no. 435); DE462/41, pp. 134-141 (will, 1896); *Combe Directory*, p. 19;

¹¹³ROLLR DE1913/8, p. 5; TNA RG12/2512, fo. 23; ROLLR DE1913/19, p. 131 (no. 1046); NPR 1861 Udale-Whetton, pp. 68-9; NPR 1896 Udale-Zurhorst, p. 38.

¹¹⁴ROLLR DE1913/8, p. 5; TNA RG12/2512, fo. 23; ROLLR DE1913/19, p. 131 (no. 1046); NPR 1861 Udale-Whetton, pp. 68-9; NPR 1896 Udale-Zurhorst, p. 38.

Figure 3: The Distribution of Spinsters Co-habiting with Relatives



Syston, although in this case not occupied in agriculture but retail. Head of the household was Samuel, unmarried, a coal merchant, aged 50. Residing with him were his three older sisters, Mary, Elizabeth and Alice, all spinsters, aged respectively 63, 60 and 59¹¹⁵ (Elizabeth died in 1898, her estate just exceeding £554).¹¹⁶ In the small number of instances where sisters did reside together in the countryside, it was usually because they were all engaged in a farming enterprise. At Thurlaston Lodge, the widow Mary Fox, even at the age of 83, was not only head of household, but also actively occupied in farming 170 acres. Her three daughters remained at home, aged 57, 55 and 52. One, Hannah, died in 1859 with an estate estimated at less than £450, her will proven by her executrices, her sisters and spinsters, Mary and Dorothy. After the demise of their mother, Mary senior, Mary junior and Dorothy, sisters and spinsters, managed the agricultural concern. (Dorothy died in 1890 with a small estate).¹¹⁷ Similarly, the Church household at Ratcliffe on the Wreake was countervailing against the rural trend. The unmarried Ann Church (aged 66) was referenced by the enumerator as ‘Head of Household’, perhaps demonstrably, and the farmer of 132 acres. Her two sisters, both

¹¹⁵TNA RG11/3155, fo. 23.

¹¹⁶NPR 1898 Aaron-Bywater, p. 194.

¹¹⁷TNA HO107/2081, fo. 475v; RG11/3128, fo. 89; NPR1860 Eade-Fyson, p. 273 and 1890 Fabian-Gyton, p. 184.

unmarried and aged 64 and 62, were described by the enumerator as 'farmer's daughters'. The youngest of the sisters, Mary, passed away in 1877 with an estate which did not exceed £1,000.¹¹⁸ The urban condition is perhaps well illustrated by the Froane sisters, all four co-residing in Saxe Coburg Street in Leicester, the sisters all unmarried and aged 74, 72, 59 and 57, and reputed by the enumerator to be of 'No profession'. The second eldest, Dorothy, died in 1892 leaving an estate of a pinch over £1,009.¹¹⁹

Spinsters in retailing

In the 1881 directory, spinsters provided shopping outlets in 26 villages and four of the small towns, a total of 38 unmarried women retailers, including eleven grocers, twelve 'shopkeepers' and five drapers. It seems likely then that the predominant activity was the provisioning of food. By contrast, the same directory contains a strong element of haberdashery and drapery provided by unmarried women in the county borough of Leicester. Forty-seven unmarried women owned shops, 17 of whom were haberdashers and 11 'shopkeepers'. A distinct difference divided the activities of unmarried female retailers in country and major urban place.

The focus now turns to spinsters in retailing referenced in the NPR. When Harriet Heap, of Lutterworth, spinster, died in 1890, probate was granted in the Principal Probate Registry to her sister, Emma Heap, spinster of 42, Tavistock Square, London, the sole surviving executrix of her will. Harriet's estate was assessed at £8,714 4s 3d. The family's wealth had been established in grocery on the High Street in the small town in the south-west of the county. Harriet had probably been closely involved in the maintenance of the business from the death of her mother in 1882 to her own demise in 1890.¹²⁰ By the time that he married Susannah Smith, also of Lutterworth, by licence in 1828, William Heap had already established the grocer's shop on the High Street in Lutterworth. She was his senior. In 1841, the household comprised William (aged 36), his wife, Susan(nah) (44), and their five children, Emma (12), Harriet (10), Elizabeth (8), Ann (6), and William the younger (4). Although the census of 1851 returned William as a house proprietor in Wood Market, the grocery was his main business. William senior died in 1868, but by his will of 1867 had appointed his son, William, and his daughter, Harriet, as his trustees for the benefit of his wife and other daughters. The will reveals that he also possessed the White Hart and three cottages all in Ely Lane. Accordingly,

¹¹⁸TNA RG9/2279, fo. 65; NPR 1877 Caballon-Cuzner, p. 150.

¹¹⁹TNA RG11/3160, fos 50. 56; NPR 1892 Eachus-Gyte, p. 149.

¹²⁰NPR 1890 Haarback-Hixson, p. 290; TNA RG11/3117, fo. 78; ROLLR DE2094/12, p. 194 (no. 1551).

the will was proved by William junior and Harriet at the Leicester registry.¹²¹ William the younger became responsible for the business, but died prematurely in 1881. By his will of 1873, he appointed Harriet as his sole executrix, responsible for the legacies for all four sisters equally. In the 1881 census Susan(nah) was entered as head of household, aged 83, at the grocery business in High Street, with Emma (aged 52), Harriet (50), and Ann (46) as assistants. The concern was considerable, for the family employed three male assistants and a female servant. The following year Susannah died too.¹²² Harriet's elder and youngest sisters, Emma and Ann, had not been continuously engaged in the grocery business. In 1851 Emma was employed as a drapery assistant to her cousin, William Paddy, in his large linen drapery business in Southampton Row in the Bloomsbury area of London. Twenty years later, both Emma and Ann had the same employment. By 1901, the two sisters resided together at 42, Tavistock Square, aged 72 and 67, with two female servants, where Emma died in 1909 and Ann in 1915.¹²³ When the two sisters died in 1909 and 1915, their estates in London were valued at respectively £17,254 5s 1d and £19,062 14s 5d. Although generated by their father's grocery business, their fortune had increased through their London property. Harriet's estate in 1890 was assessed only on personal estate, not real estate. Similarly, in 1868 William senior's personal estate in Lutterworth had been valued at under £3,000 and his son's in 1881 at under £4,000.¹²⁴ All their fortune, however, had originated in a substantial grocery business in a small town in the county before the advent of the larger departmental and chain stores. The Heap's business was, however, anomalous in the generation of wealth for spinsters through retailing.

Another spinster was involved in a grocery business in Lutterworth, but with less consequential wealth. Mary and Martha Killpack continued the business established by their father, James, in the Wood Market. James died in 1868, from which date the two sisters managed the shop. In 1871, they employed their younger sister, Ann, as grocer's assistant, but by 1891 she had been relegated to domestic duties and a female grocer's assistant employed in a totally female household and business, all unmarried.¹²⁵ James Killpack was the son, born in 1813, of a wheelwright, but by 1861 had advanced in Lut-

¹²¹ROLLR DE2094/9, p. 74 (no. 220); TNA HO107/598/14, fo. 8; TNA HO107/2078, fo. 331; ROLLR DE462/11, pp. 324-328; DE2094/12, p. 126 (no. 1006).

¹²²ROLLR DE 462/24, p. 184; (William Heap of High Street, Lutterworth, grocer); TNA RG11/3117, fo. 78; ROLLR DE2094/12, p. 194 (no. 1551).

¹²³TNA HO107/1507, fo. 331; RG10/340, fo. 5; RG12/2490, fo. 19; RG13/136, fo. 72; NPR 1910 Haas-Kyte, p. 78; ROLLR DE4336/19, p. 100 (no. 797) (Emma buried in Lutterworth); NPR 1915 Haag-Kyte, p. 96.

¹²⁴NPR 1868 Habbyam-Hixon, p. 179; 1881 Haas-Hyslop, p. 203.

¹²⁵TNA RG9/2246, fo. 73; RG10/3222, fo. 97; RG12/2490, fo. 24.

terworth to be parish clerk as well as grocer in Wood Market. At that time, Mary had a career, aged 22, as a National School mistress, and Martha (19) was occupied as a dressmaker.¹²⁶ Their brother, the youngest child, Charles was than aged seven. The census enumerator in 1881 was explicit that the two sisters were partners.¹²⁷ By her will of 1896, Mary appointed Martha and Charles as her executors. Charles had migrated to Leicester where he established a considerable wholesale grocery business at North Avenue. His son, indeed, was the company's traveller in the grocery trade. Their house consisted of twelve rooms.¹²⁸ In 1896, Mary's estate was considered to have a value of just £89. When her father's will was proved in 1868, his estate had been appraised at under £450. In 1919, when Martha died, a spinster, she had an estate of £1,181 1s 5d. By 1922, Charles was designated a company director with an estate assessed at well over £27,000.¹²⁹

In the directory of Leicester in 1881 The Misses Deacon were included as owners of a pianoforte and music warehouse in Hotel Street. In the advertisement section, the firm is described as S. Deacon. The company was indeed established by Samuel Deacon, first in Gallowtree Gate, then in Market Street and finally in Hotel Street. Samuel and his wife Ann had issue four daughters (and also two nieces residing with them in 1861).¹³⁰ When Samuel died in 1867, aged 80, his estate was assessed at under £1,000 and probate granted to his widow, Ann. In his will, Samuel had committed all his estate to his wife.¹³¹ Ann followed her late husband in 1869. The household of the sisters continued at Hotel Street with Mary Ann as head, professor of music, and the other sisters as music sellers (with two female servants). By 1891, however, the sisters, except Lucy, had migrated to Cotswold House, De Montfort Square, all as retired music sellers, with a female companion and two female servants.¹³² At Mary Ann's demise in 1903, probate was granted to her unmarried sisters, Elizabeth and Adelaide, who had co-resided with her in De Montfort Square. Mary Ann's estate was evaluated at £4,502 1s 8d. By her will of 1893, she had appointed those two sisters joint executrices.¹³³

¹²⁶ROLLR DE2094/4, p. 5 (no. 34); TNA RG9/2246, fo. 73.

¹²⁷TNA RG11/3117, fo. 88v.

¹²⁸TNA RG11/3164, fo. 55; RG12/2522, fo. 66; 1911 schedule.

¹²⁹NPR 1896 Kyberry-Mytton, p. 26; 1868 Ibbetson-Kynaston, p. 314; 1919 Haakman-Kyte, p. 505; 1922 Haag-Kyte, p. 470.

¹³⁰*Kelly's Directory* 1881, p. 583; TNA HO107/604/18, fo. 28 (1841); HO107/2088, fo. 10 (1851); RG9/2296, fo. 63v (1861).

¹³¹NPR 1867 DaCosta-Palmer, p. 92; ROLLR DE462/10, p. 686.

¹³²TNA RG10/3288, fo. 43 (1871); RG11/3177, fo. 131 (1881); RG12/2536, fo. 77; RG13/3004, fo. 121v.

¹³³NPR 1903 Caball-Dyton, p. 264; ROLLR DE462/46, p. 511.

What these biographies demonstrate is the capability of unmarried women to maintain and continue commercial enterprises, even if they had been initially developed by their parents. Mostly, the retail outlets belonging to unmarried women were modest concerns, but that applied too to the majority of all retail proprietors.

The spinsters themselves lived to a decent age. The most longevous were also the poorest of this cohort at death. In 1864 Dorothy Chettle of Ab Kettleby had estate appraised at under £100. She had been born to John and Mary Chettle in the same parish in 1774 and was interred there aged 90 in 1864. She had unusually composed her will in 1834. In 1841, the enumerator recorded her as a grocer; in 1851 as a shopkeeper with a female servant; and in 1861 as a shopkeeper and grocer living alone.¹³⁴ Perhaps significantly, her will was proved by another spinster of the parish, Mary Burroughs. Anne Button of Kimcote was a year younger than Dorothy at her demise. The daughter of Benjamin and Sarah Button of Kimcote, she was born there in 1796 and there buried in 1884, aged 89. Her will of 1879 was proved in 1885 by her nephew, Benjamin Button, of Navigation Street, Leicester, a carpenter, but the estate was assessed at merely £17 16s 0d. When she was aged 60 in 1861, she cohabited with her spinster sister, Fanny, aged 70, and was described as 'Sells Grocery'. After Fanny's death, Anne was inserted in the census of 1871 as a 'Grocer', living alone.¹³⁵ Both these unmarried women lived to a late age, 89 and 90. Both were occupied in retail of groceries. Both engaged in this trade in rural villages, Ab Kettleby in the north-east of the county near to the market centre of Melton Mowbray and in Kimcote in the south close to the market town of Lutterworth. Neither accumulated more than a very modest amount of personal estate by the time of their death. They both died alone with slender means. One other who lived alone at death was Mary Hackett, also inhabiting a rural village, Stoney Stanton, in the west of the county. She too had limited personal estate at her demise, valued at £110 4s 0d. and her sole executor too was another spinster, Mary Howe, of the same parish. She expired alone in 1901, having previously been inscribed in the census return of 1891 as a grocer, aged 67, living alone.¹³⁶ In fact, for at least 34 years, Mary had been living with her younger brother (by two years), Joseph, who was entered in the census schedules from 1851 to 1881 as head of household and 'Grocer'. After his death in 1885, Mary assumed the sole

¹³⁴NPR 1864 Cable-Searby, pp. 111-12; ROLLR DE1747/1; DE1747/5, p. 47 (no. 371); DE462/7, p. 138; TNA HO107/587/18, fo. 6; HO107/2091, fo. 578; RG9/2302, fo. 7v.

¹³⁵ROLLR DE1241/4, p. 12; DE5759/3, p. 9 (no. 67); DE462/28, pp. 39-42; NPR 1885 Bear-Bywell, p. 415; TNA RG9/2246, fo. 18; RG10/3222, fo. 43.

¹³⁶ROLLR DE1169/1/16 no. 205a; TNA RG12/2502, fo. 104.

running of the business, thus in 1891 recorded as 'Grocer', living alone.¹³⁷ Like Anne Button, Mary had a partner in business and household for much of her life, until her younger brother, Joseph, died at the early age of sixty. Mary continued the business alone until her death in her late-70s. As the other two spinster retailers who died alone, Mary lived her entire life in the same parish.

Few of the spinsters in retail trade, however, did die in solitary existence. Most had some sort of companion at some stage and often at the end of life, brother, sister or servant. At least a third of the businesses were joint enterprises by sisters. Perhaps half a dozen involved brother and sister. Two or three were cooperative between mother and daughter. At the very least, unmarried women retailers at the end of life had a single female servant. Five years before her death in 1896, the retired grocer Elizabeth Doughty had the company of her niece.¹³⁸ Some of the businesses were thus continuations of family affairs, as the Heap and Killpack stores in Lutterworth. About half the businesses were existing family businesses and the other half new businesses commenced by spinsters. Mary Wooding continued the news agency established by her father in Churchgate in Loughborough. She assisted him for several decades in his affairs. When he (Cornelius) retired, he remained with Mary as a dependant while she managed the business with three employees. Her siblings had not involved themselves in the business, although by her will she appointed her brother as executor.¹³⁹

One of the features of these spinsters who succeeded to established businesses was, indeed, how they were entrusted to manage the concern, sometimes to the exclusion of male siblings. Their capability was recognised. Most of the unmarried women who were involved in retail were in fact endogenous in their places of business. Fewer than a third were born in another parish. The movement was usually tightly circumscribed. Annie Wright became postmistress and retailer in the Market Place in Melton Mowbray with a female assistant and servant, having been born just outside the town in Burton Lazars.¹⁴⁰ (Her success was reflected in the valuation of her personal estate at under £600 in 1864). Only a very small number travelled over distances from their birthplace to new places of business, usually from one urban centre to another. Susannah Wallen, born in Coventry, migrated with her mother to Leicester, where they,

¹³⁷TNA HO107/2082, fo. 21; RG9/2259, fo. 131; RG11/3130, fo. 130; RG12/2502, fo. 104; ROLLR DE4476/101/, p. 31 (no. 242); DE1169/1/16 no. 205a; NPR 1901 Haarhoff-Jutsum, p. 2.

¹³⁸TNA RG12/2719, fo. 7; NPR 1896 Cable-Dyson, p. 273.

¹³⁹TNA HO107/2085, fo. 225; RG10/3256, fo. 11v; RG11/3145, fo. 52; ROLLR DE462/39, pp. 418-419.

¹⁴⁰TNA HO107/2091, fo. 294v; RG9/2301, fo. 24; ROLLR DE462/7, p. 80; NPR 1864 Udall-Wythe, p. 462.

with Susannah's two other sisters, Emma and Mary, established retailing first as bread and flour dealers and then as grocers and confectioners in Applegate Street. After their mother's death, the three sisters managed the business together until Susannah's death in 1893. In her will of 1893, Susannah entrusted her sister, Emma, as executor.¹⁴¹ For some, entry into retail was hesitant and gradual, sometimes combined with another occupation, so that multiple occupations, especially in rural locations, persisted, sometimes indeed as by-employment. Sarah Hunt was the daughter of a framework knitter of Hathern. He, Thomas Hunt, operated as a grocer and knitter at times. Sarah worked with him in the textile trade, but towards the end of her life, according to the census, as a grocer, with but modest personal estate of about £55 at her death.¹⁴² During her childhood, Elizabeth Doughty's father in Castle Donington plied his trade as a carpenter, but then ventured into a sideline of grocer as well as joiner. Subsequently she assisted her brother, Richard, as a baker. Later still, she operated as a grocer and at the age of 66 was recorded as a retired grocer.¹⁴³

'Education'

For the purposes here, 'education' comprises all those involved in the care and custody of children, including governesses, private schools for children and ladies, denominational ('voluntary') schools and latterly Board Schools. Two of the characteristics of the 'profession', particularly for denominational schools (inspected by the Newcastle Commission between 1859 and 1861) and (after 1870) Board Schools, was the representation of women and the imperative for their single status.¹⁴⁴ In the 1841 census for the whole country, just over 25,000 male teachers compared with well over 31,000 female instructors.¹⁴⁵ Teaching comprised both the self-employed and the employed. From 1846, the government developed certification for teachers, although it was a voluntary, permissive scheme.¹⁴⁶

Again the focus of the following discussion is spinsters in education included in the NPR. One question about the teaching 'profession' was how far

¹⁴¹TNA RG10/3290, fo. 38v; RG11/3179, fo. 10; RG12/2542, fo. 80v; ROLLR DE462/36, p. 201.

¹⁴²TNA HO107/594/27, fo. 17; RG9/2276, fo. 105v; RG10/3258, fo. 88; RG12/2517, fo. 107; NPR 1896 Hagg-Jutson, p. 214.

¹⁴³TNA RG5/107 no. 674; HO107/594/24, fo. 49; HO107/2140, fo. 110; RG9/2487, fo. 11v; RG11/3384, fo. 5.

¹⁴⁴*Accounts and Papers of the House of Commons Volume 41 The Revised Code of 1862.*

¹⁴⁵Joyce Burnette, *Gender, Work and Wages in Industrial Britain* (Cambridge: CUP, 2008), p. 222 (Table 5.1).

¹⁴⁶Burnette, *Gender, Work and Wages*, pp. 300-304.

it enabled social mobility.¹⁴⁷ Two inter-related aspects are important: the social origins of the teachers and their estate at death. The analysis here is confined to unmarried women teachers over fifty who appeared in the NPR. Of these spinster teachers, only four derived from the lower class. Six had family origins in retail, four followed a father into education, three emanated from each of industrial and professional backgrounds. Two had clerical fathers and another two had farming origins. The problem, not unexpected, with the exploration of economic success of spinster 'teachers' is that most of the material relates to private schools.

Evidence for spinsters employed in 'public' schools, such as denominational schools, is limited. Isabella and Eleanor Hogg were entered in the enumerator's return for Cossington in 1881, aged 71 and 54, as unmarried sisters, both formerly 'National School' mistresses; the only school in the parish at this time was the National School. The same details occurred in 1851-71. The school was adjacent to Ratcliffe College, the Catholic seminary. When Eleanor died in 1881, her personal estate was evaluated at £2,444 16s 7d, probate awarded to Isabella. Two years later, on Isabella's demise, Isabella's estate was valued at over £5,036. In fact, they were daughters of a nonconformist clothier of Holbeck, Yorkshire, which elucidates their affluence. These origins also explain their entry into teaching together.¹⁴⁸ Ending her life in employment as an infant school mistress, Mary Lavender was employed in Hugglescote Baptist School. In 1881, she lived alone, as also in 1871, in Hugglescote. She had migrated from her place of birth (in 1826) in London, to live with her cousin at The Crescent in Spalding and then as a boarder in Thomazin Lane there, engaged as a British School mistress. Her paltry estate in 1890 was worth no more than £77 8s 10d. She too, as a nonconformist, had been inspired into teaching in elementary schools.¹⁴⁹

These nonconformist spinsters had migrated to follow their profession in education. That reason obtained with other observant women. Born in Barkestone, Frances Wilford died and was buried there in 1893. At the time of her birth in 1825, her father was a publican in the parish. In 1851, she was already the schoolmistress there, living with her widowed mother. There they

¹⁴⁷Vicinus, *Independent Women*, pp. 163-210.

¹⁴⁸TNA RG9/2279, fo. 56v; RG10/3261, fo. 63; RG11/3150, fo. 54v; RG4/3354, p. 33 (baptism); ROLLR DE4825, p. 46 (no. 366) (burial in Cossington); DE642/24, pp. 658-661 (will); NPR 1881 Haas-Hyslop; *Wright's Directory* 1881, p. 509 (the National School); NPR 1883 Haas-Hyslop, p. 401; ROLLR DE462/26, pp. 181-184; DE4825, p. 48 (no. 377); TNA RG4/3177, fo. 44.

¹⁴⁹TNA HO107/2096, fo. 530V; RG10/3250, fo. 82v; RG11/3142, fo. 92; RG4/4354 p. 28 (no. 179) (baptism); NPR 1890 Kahrs-Lyus p. 205; *Wright's Directory* 1881 p. 534 her position at the school).

co-resided in 1871. In 1881, Frances resided at the Girls' School House with a female servant, where she was employed as mistress at the Free School. At age twelve, she had been one of the recipients of a bible from Chester's Charity, a more expensive one than those distributed to other pupils. At her demise at the age of 67, her personal estate amounted to £269 10s 0d.¹⁵⁰

The apparent commonality of these spinsters who entered into education of children in 'public' schools was their religious vocation. Their socio-economic origins were divergent. Frances Wilford's father eventually became a butcher. Eleanor Hogg's father belonged to the industrialists who had made a considerable success. Most of the spinster teachers who figure in the NPR were involved in proprietary schools, privately owned and run, often for the benefit of young ladies of middle-class status. Not all successfully accumulated wealth. A substantial proportion had estate at death between £100-200. Maria Winship had less. For at least twenty years she managed a proprietary school in London. Migrating to Leicester, she and her female lodgers were described as 'governess' in the census of 1861, with a female servant. Her estate in 1868 was sworn as under £100.¹⁵¹ Although Elizabeth Fowler, a schoolmistress in Melton Mowbray, provided accommodation for another female teacher and retained a female servant, her estate too was evaluated at below £100 at her death in 1866.¹⁵² Although Alicia Cooper had a position at the private school for young ladies first in Princess Street and then in Knighton (Stoneygate School), her estate in 1893 only just exceeded £120.¹⁵³

There was probably some correlation between social origins and personal estate at the end of life. Susannah Wignell was the daughter of a cottager in Drayton. She became a schoolmistress at an early age with four pupils in her household in 1851. The number had increased to seven young ladies in 1881, born in Ireland, Australia, Northamptonshire and London and aged nine to eighteen. Her niece accompanied her as an assistant governess. Her estate, however, extended only to £150 9s 0d.¹⁵⁴ Another schoolmistress of 'low' birth

¹⁵⁰TNA HO107/2139, fo. 261; RG10/3546, fo. 9v; RG11/3380, fo. 17; ROLLR DE1006/4, p. 17 (no. 135) (baptism); DE6170, p. 69 (no. 549) (burial); *Wright's Directory* 1881, p. 485 (her position); NPR 1893 Udal-Zuccani, p. 141.

¹⁵¹TNA HO107/590/10, fo. 52; HO107/2090, fo. 473v; RG9/2293, fo. 39v; ROLLR DE462/11, p. 110 (will, 1863).

¹⁵²TNA HO107/2088, fo. 342v; RG9/2300, fo. 71v; ROLLR DE745/13, p. 178 (no. 1423) (burial); NPR 1866 Cade-Fulvoye, pp. 412-413.

¹⁵³TNA RG11/3173, fo. 104; *Wright's Directory* 1881, p. 627; NPR 1894 Cabban-Dytech, p. 123.

¹⁵⁴TNA HO107/589/9, fo. 2; HO107/2093, fo. 256v; RG10/3303, fo. 27; RG11/3189, fo. 78; ROLLR DE462/30, p. 198 (will benefiting her niece); NPR 1887 Weaire-Zulueta, p. 148; *Wright's Directory* 1881, p. 514 (day school).

was Emma Jacques of Leicester who died in 1895 with an estimated estate of just under £197. Emma's father had been a hosier at her birth, but in 1851 was employed as a gardener, in Shepshed. With Ada Ogden, she established a school ('Partner in a school') in Melbourne Road, in Leicester.¹⁵⁵

Those spinsters from middle-class backgrounds were more likely, in this small sample, to succeed economically, perhaps because of financial, social and cultural capital available to them. Caroline Gimson's father, at the time of her birth, was a grazier. After his death, her mother ran a business as a maltster. Operating out of her family household in Church Langton and then Smeeton Westerby, with her younger sister, Eliza, as an assistant teacher, Caroline accommodated young female scholars: four in 1851; seven in 1861; and three in 1871. She retired with her annuitant mother to Kibworth Beauchamp. At her death, her remaining estate was evaluated at just under £1,408.¹⁵⁶ Adah Biddle, the daughter of a glove manufacturer of Humberstone Road, Leicester, pursued a career as a governess/teacher in Leicester. On her death in Erskine Street, she left an estate worth just more than £834.¹⁵⁷ On her demise in 1878, Ellen Charnock left an estate considered to be in the region of £1,500. Born in Allexton in the county, she was the daughter of the curate there, Edmund George Charnock. Charnock's widow, Bridget, lived in Rectory Place, Loughborough, with her daughter who became principal and head mistress of the endowed school. She retired in her fifties to the salubrious new housing in Burton Street, 'Late Schoolmistress'.¹⁵⁸ Also in Loughborough, first also in Burton Street and then in the equally polite Park Road, resided Marianne and Catherine Chapman, retired teacher and 'retired governess'. They enjoyed at least twenty years of retirement. In 1892, Marianne's estate extended to more than £872, including 45 shares in the Nottingham Manufacturing Company Ltd and £200 in gilts. When Catherine died three years afterwards, her estate amounted to £3,241 16s 6d. Possibly, of course, they benefited from inheri-

¹⁵⁵ROLLR DE610/15 p. 177 (no. 1415) (baptism); TNA HO107/2085, fo. 495v; RG10/3720, fo. 47v; RG11/3160, fo. 41v; RG12/2526, fo. 69; ROLLR DE462/39, p. 16 (will, benefiting Ada Ogden, spinster); NPR 1896 Haag-Jutson, p. 248.

¹⁵⁶ROLLR DE1699/7 p. 8 (no. 57) (baptism in 1819); TNA HO107/589/15, fo. 4; HO107/2079, fo. 524; RG9/2250, fo. 88; RG10/3226, fo. 35; RG11/3121, fo. 26v; ROLLR DE462/24, p. 669 (will, 1881); NPR 1881 Defabr-Gynn, p. 269.

¹⁵⁷ROLLR DE609/11 p. 156 (no. 1245) (Baptism in 1869 at Enderby, but born in 1840); TNA HO107/2088, fo. 390v; RG9/2286, fo. 8v; RG10/3273, fo. 18v; NPR 1899 Aaron-Bywater, p. 201.

¹⁵⁸ROLLR DE6994/1, p. 1 (no. 1) (baptism, 1818, register signed by her father); DE1619/4, p. 49 (no. 391) (burial in Loughborough); DE462/21, p. 408 (will, 1877); NPR 1878 Cabanyes-Cutts, p. 129; TNA HO107/2085, fo. 287; RG9/2274, fo. 94v; RG10/3254, fo. 24.

tance too.¹⁵⁹ In fact, about ten of these spinsters in education were able to retire. The number must, however, be placed within the context of the age at death of the women.

The Potter sisters of Hoton near Loughborough illustrate this capacity. In 1871 Elizabeth, Anne and Letitia Potter were annuitants co-resident in Weeping Ash Cottage in that parish. Elizabeth had been born in West Hallam (Derbyshire) and Letitia in Wymeswold, close to Hoton. The young sisters established a school for ladies in Hoton which accommodated nine scholars in 1841. The complement had increased to ten scholars by 1851. Miss Potters' Boarding School was adjacent to Miss Cooper's school with its six scholars. When Elizabeth died in 1876, her estate amounted to under £600, the figure revised to £501 15s 5d in 1885 as the estate had been left un-administered by Letitia; Anne's in 1884 extended to about £1,046.¹⁶⁰ In their case again is encountered the joint enterprise of sisters and spinsters.

Their undertaking also illustrates the migration of unmarried women in education, in this case short-distance movement. Indeed, twice as many spinster teachers had exogamous origins than endogenous educationalists. Most moved over short distances, but long-distance migration also featured. Several had origins in adjacent Lincolnshire. Alice Love, who ended her life as an infant schoolteacher in Scalford, had been born in Boston.¹⁶¹ Born in Brigg, Elizabeth Fowler found employment as a school mistress in Little London in Melton Mowbray.¹⁶² Lucy and Catherine Tallant, unmarried sisters, established a school first in Pocklington's Walk in Leicester with eight scholars and then on London Road. Their birthplace was Rauceby.¹⁶³ Lucy died in Arundel Street in Leicester, but Catherine, her executor, had moved again to Sussex.¹⁶⁴ As mentioned above, the Hogg sisters, whose school was established in Cossington, had been born in Holbeck in Yorkshire. Also noted above, Mary Lavender and Maria Winship had origins in London and Mary had travelled via Spalding to Hugglescote. Laurence Caroline Huché had been born in Paris,

¹⁵⁹TNA RG4/27, fos 49 and 53 (baptisms); ROLLR DE462/37, p. 318 and DE462/39, pp. 488-490; NPR 1896 Cable-Dyson, p. 45; TNA RG10/3254, fo. 24; RG11/3144, fo. 20; RG12/2516, fo. 64v.

¹⁶⁰TNA HO107/593/4, fo. 9; HO107/2086, fo. 240v; RG9/2277, fo. 37v; RG10/3260, fo. 62v; NPR 1877 Oades-Quirk, p. 311; NPR 1885 Oades-Quirk, p. 388; NPR 1884 Oak-Quitow, p. 348; ROLLR DE462/20, p. 201 (will); DE3363/1, p. 51 (no. 408) (burial).

¹⁶¹TNA RG10/3296, fo. 134v; NPR 1880 Ingo-Lywood, p. 339 (under £200).

¹⁶²TNA HO107/2088, fo. 342v; RG9/2300, fo. 71v; ROLLR DE745/13, p. 178 (no. 142) (burial); NPR 1866 Eade-Fulvoeye, pp. 412-413 (under £100).

¹⁶³TNA RG9/2283, fo. 8v.

¹⁶⁴TNA RG9/2283, fo. 8v; RG10/3267, fo. 52; NPR 1876 Smalden-Tytler, p. 292 (Lucy, under £800); Lincolnshire Archives Fiche/23/20 Rauceby baptism register, p. 28 (no. 223) (Lucy's baptism, daughter of a farmer).

made a living as a teacher of French in Brighton (Sussex) and finally in Great Glen in Leicestershire.¹⁶⁵ Although Mary Caillard had been born in London, her father was from Paris. By 1851, he was resident in 'New Town Street' in Leicester, when Mary was thirteen. She followed his profession to become a teacher of French from the house which she shared with her brother, Ernest, a chief clerk, in Welford Road, near his place of employment.¹⁶⁶ It is worth reiterating here that a number of these schools were managed by sisters in concert. The Potter sisters in Hoton have been described above. Three sisters were involved in this establishment for young ladies. The two Hogg sisters from Yorkshire together undertook teaching in Cossington. The Chapman sisters who retired in Loughborough had both engaged in teaching. In Market Harborough, the Chater sisters joined together as schoolmistresses. In the early years of her career, Caroline Gimson was assisted by her sister, Eliza.¹⁶⁷ Susannah Wignell in Drayton employed her niece as a teacher in her school.¹⁶⁸

Dressmakers (and milliners)

The first section here discusses the general features of dressmaking from the trades directories and the census return of 1881. The second section is concerned more narrowly with spinsters as dressmakers who appeared in the NPR. 'If the woman of fashion was a victim of oppression [patriarchy and consumerism], the woman who made fashion [dressmaker] appeared to enjoy an enviable independence'.¹⁶⁹ Dressmaking by women was at once an interim state in the longer term, subversive, gendered and anomalous. Prior to the eighteenth century, male tailors predominantly constructed female dress. From the middle of the twentieth century, female skills were supplanted by factory production. Dressmaking had a subversive aspect because it was skilled and practised outside the household, in workshops. It was not traditional domestic production. It subverted the association of craft with masculinity. It guaranteed some independence for women of different classes.¹⁷⁰ Yet it was a gendered occupation. More than that, it was closely aligned with spinsterhood,

¹⁶⁵TNA RG10/1082, fo. 90v; RG11/3124, fo. 53v; NPR 1887 Hoad-Juvet, p. 174 (£115 8s 3d).

¹⁶⁶TNA HO107/2090, fo. 530v; RG9/2293, fo. 106; RG10/3283, fo. 55v; RG11/3173, fo. 60v; RG12/2536, fo. 87v; ROLLR DE462/38, p. 428 (will); NPR 1895 Cable-Dyton, p. 2 (£903 12s 3d).

¹⁶⁷TNA HO107/2079, fo. 524.

¹⁶⁸TNA RG10/3303, fo. 27; RG11/3189, fo. 78.

¹⁶⁹Wendy Gamber, *The Female Economy: The Millinery and Dressmaking Trades, 1860-1930* (Urbana and Chicago, IL: University of Illinois, Press, 1997), p. 2.

¹⁷⁰Gamber, *Female Economy*, pp. 2, 5, 6.

although some married women were involved. The added complexity is that dressmaking and millinery were attractive occupations for both unmarried and married women.

Indeed, after the Married Women's Property Acts, the inducement to married women may have increased. The 1870 Act allowed women to control assets which they acquired after marriage and the 1882 Act empowered them in respect of all their estate. Consideration of the dressmaking and millinery crafts must then be conducted in relation to both married and unmarried women. Additionally, for unmarried women, dressmaking allowed some independence by comparison, say, with domestic service. Employment in the workshop, although involving some responsibility to an employer, did not involve the subservience of service at the demands of the household.

The occupation did, nonetheless, require considerable training, as an apprentice or boarder. The initial sacrifice was real. Mrs Howell designated dressmaking as an 'honourable existence' as well as 'situations of great responsibility'.¹⁷¹ Acquiring the skill required a long period of training, although Mrs Howell professed to teach the craft in thirteen lessons in her book of 82 pages. The issue was that only practical sewing had been taught in schools until some rudimentary craftwork was introduced by the Revised Code of 1871.¹⁷² What is clear is that both inter-related crafts and retail outlets were concentrated in the county borough.

Trades directories were, of course and especially in the nineteenth century, selective and sometimes required subscription for inclusion. They do, nonetheless, illustrate the distribution of the craft. In Kelly's directory of the county in 1881, about 160 female enterprises were concentrated in Leicester with 45 in aggregate in the six small towns (Loughborough with 17 at the apex). A single dressmaker occurred in 25 rural villages; three villages contained two dressmakers and two had three. Thus 66 percent of female dressmakers/milliners inhabited the county borough and 85 percent occupied an urban base in the borough combined with the six small towns.¹⁷³ At 3A Union Street in the borough, Miss Edith Townend had a business as teacher of dress cutting, listed in Kelly's directory of 1895, although it seems to have been fugitive as she does not appear in the censuses of 1891 and 1901.¹⁷⁴ By 1899, the numbers had expanded. There was an explosion in the number of dressmakers in the bor-

¹⁷¹Mrs M. J. Howell, *The Hand-Book of Dress-making* (London: Simpkin, Marshall & Co., 1845), p. v.

¹⁷²Vivienne Richmond, *Clothing the Poor in Nineteenth-century England* (Cambridge: CUP, 2013), pp. 110-114.

¹⁷³*Kelly's Directory* 1881, pp. 850-1.

¹⁷⁴*Kelly's Directory* 1895, p. 178.

ough who were listed in the directory of that year: more than 700.¹⁷⁵ The six small towns (Loughborough in fact now a borough) contained 116 dressmakers who advertised in the directory. Additionally, more than 20 had developed in Coalville, second only to Loughborough (44) in the number of resident dressmakers. In the rural places more than 450 dressmakers plied their trade.¹⁷⁶ Dressmakers were located in about 150 rural places; some rapidly expanding localities had a larger complement, such as Enderby with 16, Blaby and Wigston Magna 14 each, Shepshed 13, Hugglescote and Ibstock each 11 and Sileby 10. Industrial development in these villages increased the population.

Of those female establishments of milliners/dressmakers listed in the commercial section of the 1881 directory, 51 per cent comprised women who were or had been married (Mrs). Singleton spinsters accounted for 41 percent. The other 8 percent consisted of partnerships, seventeen of which involved spinster and spinster and one Mrs with Miss. Similarly in 1899, 49 percent of the dressmakers in Leicester and the same percentage outside Leicester (rural dwellers and inhabitants of the small towns) comprised women who were or had been married. Women who were or had been married in 1881 and 1899 perhaps maintained their businesses with the assistance of some capital input from their union.

Spinsters might have had some recourse to family capital but the formation of spinster partnerships reflects not only female social arrangements but also shared enterprise. There were accordingly 42 dressmaking partnerships of unmarried women, often sisters, in the borough in 1899, although few outside Leicester. These issues are expanded below in relation to specific dressmaking concerns about which more information is available.

The concentration in the county borough was already evident in the Trades Protection Society's directory for Leicester in 1870.¹⁷⁷ The same characteristics existed, even though the survey antedated the 1870 Married Women's Property Act. Of the females listed as milliners/dressmakers in the commercial section, 49 percent consisted of women who were or had been married (Mrs) compared with 43 percent singleton women. Additionally, however, 11 listings related to partnerships between spinsters and four between married and unmarried women. The problem, of course, is that the directories listed singleton women of every age, but to qualify as 'demographic' spinsters requires age at and above fifty. The majority of the misses listed in the directories belonged to the younger generation (see further the section on spinsters' wealth).

Reference to the census returns reveals the details of some of the older

¹⁷⁵ *Wright's Directory* 1899, borough section.

¹⁷⁶ *Wright's Directory* 1899, county section, passim.

¹⁷⁷ *Trades Protection Society Directory*, pp. 161-2.

singleton dressmakers, a number of whom were resident with an older parent. Mary Ann Hollis, aged 46 in 1871, lived with her mother.¹⁷⁸ Similarly Elizabeth Bower lived with her elderly mother, at that same time Elizabeth aged 58 and her mother 77.¹⁷⁹ When her father in 1871 was aged 75, Harriet Bishop, residing with him, had reached the age of 50. Although listed as a dressmaker in the directory of 1870, the census described her as a warp hand. She may have made the transition from home work to factory.¹⁸⁰ In 1871, Harriet Mansell, aged 42, had a business as a milliner with two female assistants, but the concern was not included in the directory of 1881.¹⁸¹ Another Harriet (Thornton) was entered in the census as head of her household in 1871, when she was aged 48. She shared a dressmaking business there with her elder sister, Eliza Glover, a widow, aged 55.¹⁸² Accommodating a female apprentice, Ann Wallis, maintained a millinery concern, aged 44 in 1871.¹⁸³ Although these older dressmakers and milliners usually lived within a household with company, Susannah Teed unusually pursued her dressmaking alone when she was aged 62 in 1881.¹⁸⁴ Comparing the commercial sections of the directories of 1870 and 1881, only a score recurred in 1881 from 1870, which suggests that employment in dressmaking was fugitive and transient and that many of the younger unmarried women did not persist in the craft.¹⁸⁵

Despite this transience, it is possible to follow through some of the spinsters who were engaged over a long time in dressmaking. In the following paragraphs, the fortunes of eight dressmaking concerns run by unmarried women are considered (in alphabetical order of surname), all of which lasted for some years, all in the county borough, Leicester. After the relation of their enterprises, some conclusions are drawn about the diverse nature of dressmaking by unmarried women. The focus returns to those spinsters included in the NPR.

Informal partnerships between kin allowed some unmarried women to persist in dressmaking. One such involved Caroline Bacon and her niece, Selena Orton, although the concern was listed in the trades directories under the name of Caroline only. Caroline was born and baptised in Cosby in December 1821, the daughter of Thomas and Mary Bacon, her father a publican. By 1851, Caroline had migrated into Leicester a few miles to the north, to live

¹⁷⁸TNA RG10/3282, fo. 73.

¹⁷⁹TNA RG10/3282, fo. 5.

¹⁸⁰TNA RG10/3268, fo. 53.

¹⁸¹TNA RG10/3269, fo. 51v.

¹⁸²TNA RG10/3282, fo. 38v.

¹⁸³TNA RG10/3288, fo. 47.

¹⁸⁴TNA RG11/3174, fo. 123.

¹⁸⁵My intention is to explore the millinery and dressmaking trades in Leicestershire in general in more detail elsewhere.

with her sister, Ann Orton, in St George Street. Ann too had been born in Cosby and was in 1851 a plain sewer. At this time, Ann's daughter, Selena, was still a scholar. At this address, Caroline had already engaged as a dressmaker, now aged 30. The three continued to inhabit St George Street in 1861, although Selena too had now become involved as a dressmaker. Shortly afterwards, Ann died and Caroline became head of household, with her niece, Selena, as a dependant, both dressmakers, now aged respectively 49 and 31. This situation pertained in 1881. In 1882, Selena decided at age 42 to marry Thomas Hubbard, both parties literate in signing the register. Caroline seems to have died in 1889 and in 1891 Selena and Thomas occupied the house in St George Street with the two children of Thomas's first marriage. Thomas was described as a porter and plumber and Selena assigned no occupation. Selena died five years later. The partnership of Caroline and Selena had endured at least twenty years.¹⁸⁶

Among the informal partnerships was that of Elizabeth Benford and her niece Ann(ie). Elizabeth was the only child of Nathaniel and Elizabeth Benford, her father a native of Leicester and her mother of Withy Brook in Warwickshire. Elizabeth was born in 1837 when the couple were living in Duke Street in St Mary's parish in Leicester. Nathaniel's occupation was carpentry and joinery. When he died, aged 66, at the end of 1863, his estate was evaluated at under £100. By then, the couple had migrated to 31 New Bridge Street, where in 1871 the widow Elizabeth inhabited the house with the younger Elizabeth and Annie. Elizabeth senior had private means, but both Elizabeth junior and Annie were engaged in dressmaking. The elder Elizabeth died in October 1872 at the age of 77, when her estate was also assessed at under £100. In the subsequent censuses of 1881, 1891, 1901 and 1911, Elizabeth junior and Annie cohabited at 31, New Bridge Street, through to 1901 both as dressmakers. In 1911 Elizabeth, now aged 73, had retired and existed on her own means. Her niece Ann, now 56, continued as a dressmaker in the house. Both remained unmarried. Elizabeth passed away in the City Mental Hospital in 1925, probate granted to Ann who still lived at 31, New Bridge Street. Elizabeth's effects were assessed at £610. Ann died unmarried six years later in 1931 at the same house, with a reduced estate of £85 15s 8d. These two had remained unmarried into their old age, Elizabeth to age 87 and Ann to 75. Together they lived throughout at 31, New Bridge Street existing as dressmakers. Elizabeth's origins were either in the upper working class or

¹⁸⁶ROLLR DE9030/3, p. 29 (no. 225); TNA HO107/2088, fo. 273; TNA RG9/2284, fo. 107; TNA RG10/3271, fo. 39; TNA RG11/3161, fo. 25; St Margaret's marriage register, p. 97 (no. 194) (1882); Civil Registration Death Index 1889 Q2, p. 10; TNA RG12/2528, fo. 115v; Civil Registration Death Index 1896, p. 152

lower middle class, depending on the precise status of Nathaniel's trade. They managed to subsist together through dressmaking without attaining the elite level of modistes. All of Nathaniel, Elizabeth senior and junior, and Ann were interred in the same grave in Welford Road Cemetery.¹⁸⁷

Moving from modest to 'modiste', the Cookson sisters established a business as 'costumiers' from their upmarket base in Princess Street in Leicester. The sisters had been born in Hound Court in Holborn to Richard Cookson, a solicitor's clerk, and his wife, Jane. The sisters, Elizabeth and Hannah, were aged nine and six months in 1851, two of five siblings. Elizabeth by age 19 had become one of the four assistants in the establishment of Elizabeth Scrivener, milliner and dressmaker, in Brook Street, Hanover Square. By 1871, the widowed Jane had migrated with Elizabeth and Hannah to Princess Street, by which time the two daughters (aged 29 and 20) had already developed their dressmaking concern. In 1871, Elizabeth was designated mistress dressmaker and Hannah dressmaker's assistant. Additionally, they recruited another dressmaker's assistant, Elizabeth Gains, aged 22 from Atherstone, who boarded with them. In 1881, a new dressmaker's assistant was at board with Elizabeth and Hannah who were both 'in business as couturier'. In 1891, the partnership occupied Tenbury House on London Road. On the census day, Elizabeth was absent, Hannah in residence denoted as 'Sister' not head, and as costumier. (Elizabeth was then staying in the Temperance Hotel in Bloomsbury). Their mother, Jane, now 78, resided with them. As before, they engaged one female dressmaker's assistant, but also a female servant. By 1901, however, both were described as 'retired costumier' and now resident in St Alban's Road, still providing for their mother, now aged 88. The two sisters had retired at the ages of 59 and 50.¹⁸⁸

Sarah Goodwin, in contrast, conducted her dressmaking alone, although she lived with her mother. Born in Uppingham (Rutland) in 1831 to George, a bookkeeper, and Elizabeth Mary Goodwin, by 1851 Sarah co-resided with her younger brother George in Nelson Street; she, aged 19 and the head of household, remained unmarried and a dressmaker, while he, aged nine, was still a 'scholar'. By 1861, the two had been joined by their widowed mother in Ashwell Street. Elizabeth, now 52, was engaged as a monthly nurse; Sarah,

¹⁸⁷ROLLR DE1683/3, p. 292 (no. 2330); TNA HO107/2090, fo. 592; NPR 1863 Babb-Britton p. 184; NPR 1873 Abbatt-Beyts p. 340; TNA RG10/3284, fo. 4v; TNA RG11/3174, fo. 59; TNA RG13/3006, fo. 6V; TNA 1911 original certificate; NPR 1925 Aaron-Czogalla, p. 31; NPR 1931 Aaron-Cyzer, p. 258; Civil Registration Death Index 1925 Q2 B, p. 50. The monumental inscription recites all four.

¹⁸⁸TNA HO107/1513, fo. 493; TNA RG9/40, fo. 42; TNA RG10/3282, fo. 30; TNA RG11/3173, fo. 29; TNA RG12/209, fo. 66; TNA RG12/2524, fo. 103; TNA RG13/2995, fo. 76.

now 29, continued as a dressmaker; and George, 19, had become a schoolmaster. By 1881, Elizabeth and Sarah occupied a house in Nelson Street, from where Sarah managed her business, as listed in the directories. Although still at Nelson Street in 1891, their roles had been reversed: Sarah now head and her mother a dependant as a retired nurse. Sarah died on 24 October 1895, a spinster, her address still Nelson Street, but expiring in Frisby on the Wreake. Her effects amounted to £91 18s 1d and probate was granted to Edward Whait, grazier. Whait by this time was aged about 46. He resided at the Black Horse Inn in Frisby where his mother was head of household and innkeeper in 1881. Sarah had probably died at the hostelry.¹⁸⁹

Another migrant into Leicester was Sarah Ann Deacon who had been born in Smeeton Westerby in 1844. She still resided in that village with her family in 1861. Both her father, a servant, and mother, had been born in the same village. In 1861 father and mother were aged respectively 44 and 49. Sarah Ann, then aged 17, had already embarked on her occupation as a dressmaker. By 1870, she was operating out of Wellington Street in Leicester. Then, by 1881, she had established a larger concern in Upper Fox Street in the county borough. As head of the household and dressmaker, she employed one assistant dressmaker, but had also been joined by her two cousins, Naomi and Elizabeth Deacon, who were additional dressmakers, and a female servant. Her establishment in Upper Fox Street was inscribed in the directory of 1899.¹⁹⁰

In that same directory, a dressmaking business was listed in Stoughton Street under the ownership of Mary Hull. Mary, born in the first month of 1827, was the eldest daughter of John, a framework knitter, and Mary Hull of Anstey. By 1841, when Mary junior was 16, the family had migrated to Dover Street in the borough of Leicester. When the census enumerator visited the household in Dover Street in 1861, John, aged 61, was employed as an overlocker in a shirt factory. The couple now had four daughters at home, all born in Leicester: Mary junior, aged 34, dressmaker; Eliza, aged 28, a milliner; Ann(ie), aged 25, also a dressmaker; and Emma, aged 22, another milliner. Twenty years later, the constituents of the household, now in Guthlaxton Street, remained the same, although Annie had become a hosiery worker and John, the father, was described as of 'No occupation', not unexpectedly since he was aged 83. Mary was then aged 54, at home, dressmaking. By 1891, she had established her dressmaking business in Stoughton Street, alone in

¹⁸⁹ROLLR DE1784/9, p. 94 (no. 748); TNA HO107/2090, fo. 581; TNA RG9/2283, fo. 50v; TNA RG11/3157, fo. 11v; TNA RG12/2524, fo. 93v; NPR 1895 Eachus-Gysser, p. 210; TNA RG11/3181, fo. 73.

¹⁹⁰TNA RG9/2250, fo. 93v; *Trade Protection Society Directory*, p. 161; TNA RG11/3158, fo. 4v; *Wright's Directory* 1899, p. 333.

her household, then aged 64. The census enumerator for the street in 1901 recorded her as living alone, single, aged 78, and still occupied as a dressmaker, working from home on her own account. On 1 October 1909, she died, a spinster at 46 Stoughton Street, her effects valued at £445 15s 10d. Probate was granted to John Hull, warehouseman.¹⁹¹

Ultimately also a singleton dressmaker was Susannah Teed, although she lived with her widowed mother-in-law for some time. Aged 32 in 1851, Sarah, living with her mother, was employed as a cotton winder. Established at Jarram Street in 1861, she had changed to dressmaking, still in the same abode as her widowed mother-in-law, Sarah Newton. Sarah was employed as a charwoman, aged 69, and Susannah, unmarried, had her business as a dressmaker, aged 42. The two still co-habited in 1871. After Sarah's death, Susannah continued in Jarram Street, living sole, aged 62, and a dressmaker. By 1891, however, she had been admitted as a hospital inmate at the Confrater's House on Fosse Road in Leicester. There she died in 1897.¹⁹²

Exercising her trade of dressmaking and living completely alone in her business, Mary Ann Vye established herself as a dressmaker ultimately in Muriel Street in Leicester. She was born to Edward Vye, a framework knitter, in 1836, in Goodacre Street in Leicester. She probably embarked first on employment as a domestic servant, initially to a grocer in Great Easton and then to a master grocer who resided in the salubrious location of Forest Fields in Loughborough. By 1891 she had changed direction, returned to Leicester, and inhabited a house in Wellington Street alone as a dressmaker. By 1901, aged 62, still unmarried and a dressmaker, she lived alone in Muriel Street, her habitation also in 1911. Aged 81, she died in 1917.¹⁹³

All the above unmarried dressmakers were listed in one or more of the trades directories of 1870, 1881 and 1899. Their details represent the variety of origins and levels of success of dressmaking in the urban context. Two sisters from a middle-class background, originating in London, managed to pursue a successful partnership and rise to the level of 'modiste'. This status of 'modiste' might have also been attained by Madame Spiers of De Montfort Square, listed in the directory of 1899 as an independent dressmaker, but the

¹⁹¹ *Wright's Directory* 1899, p. 334; ROLLR DE247/7, p. 39 (no. 308); TNA HO107/604/4, fo. 28; TNA RG9/2283, fo. 77v; TNA RG11/3158, fo. 61v; TNA RG12/2526, fo. 27; TNA RG13/2995, fo. 151v; NPR 1909 Haarblecher-Kyle, p. 192.

¹⁹² TNA HO107/2090, fo. 135; TNA RG9/2294, fo. 60v; TNA RG10/3284, fo. 57; TNA RG11/3174, fo. 123; TNA RG12/2538, fo. 92v; Civil Registration of Deaths 1897 Q4, p. 309.

¹⁹³ TNA HO107/604/9, fo. 40; TNA HO107/2093, fo. 264; TNA RG9/2233, fo. 44v; TNA RG12/2524, fo. 17; TNA RG13/3009, fo. 155v; TNA 1911 South Leicester 22 Schedule 56; Civil Registration Death Index 1917, p. 213.

wife of Frederick, a tailor's cutter at the same address.¹⁹⁴ Most of the other dressmakers had more modest businesses and had origins in the working class. In most cases, they formed informal partnerships or lived with close family, sometimes recruiting nieces. Few worked entirely alone.

Housekeepers

As indicated above, the category of housekeepers is anomalous. Their status is ambiguous, sometimes represented as the head of household, often not, and frequently kin to a male head. These 'housekeepers' within a nuclear household (that is, of close kin like brothers and fathers) are omitted here. These kin housekeepers are examined in the category of spinsters co-habiting with relatives. Formally, housekeepers existed at the apex of servanthood, the pinnacle of the career in service. The concern here is restricted to those who appeared in the NPR. Sarah Brown of Shearsby was still described as a female servant in her late fifties in 1841. By 1861, she had retired, her last occupation as housekeeper. She died in 1864 aged 80.¹⁹⁵

There is a complication, however, in that 'female servant' might in 1841 have included housekeeper. More secure is the progression of Ann Lomas: in 1851 cook, aged 32, to a landholder in Somerby; in 1861, nurse for an aged female landholder and annuitant in Melton Mowbray; in 1871 housekeeper in Newtown Linford to a farmer of three hundred acres; and in 1881 housekeeper to a retired park keeper in the same location (but dying that very year).¹⁹⁶ So also Ann Rudkin's earlier employment was as a servant, but she progressed formally to housekeeper. She migrated from her birthplace, Mountsorrel, to become a servant to an ironmonger in Melton Mowbray. Subsequently, she returned to her home village to serve William Wale. At age 55, she was in the household of a clothier in Mountsorrel, George Fowkes, as his housekeeper.¹⁹⁷

Housekeepers' position was, nevertheless, different in their potential closeness to their employer, especially bachelors or widowers. In 1891, Eliza Flude was included in the census enumeration as head of her household in New Street in Leicester, aged 74, supported by her own means, and accommodating her niece. Ten years later, she provided support not only for her niece (now aged 48), but also her sister (aged 69), all single. Additionally, five female servants

¹⁹⁴ *Wright's Directory* 1899, p. 335. TNA RG13/3003, fo. 170.

¹⁹⁵ ROLLR DE3132/1, p. 41 (no. 325) (interment, aged 80); TNA HO107/598/11, fo. 5; RG9/2248, fo. 6v.

¹⁹⁶ TNA HO107/2091, fo. 122; RG9/2300, fo. 7v; RG10/3265, fo. 15; RG11/3152, fo. 32v; ROLLR DE 247/10, p. 39 (no. 307) (burial at Anstey).

¹⁹⁷ TNA HO107/588/1, fo. 40; HO107/2087, fo. 191v; RG9/2280, fo. 37; ROLLR DE966/5 (born 1794); DE462/14. pp. 268-70 (will, 1869); NPR 1871 Qainton-Ryrie p. 310 (under £300).

composed a large female household of singletons.¹⁹⁸ New Street consisted of large Georgian houses in the vicinity of the large parish church of St Martin's (the future cathedral). Her situation, however, is deceptive. Eliza was the progeny of William, a farmer, and Catherine Flude, born in Kirby Muxloe in 1816.¹⁹⁹ She migrated into the borough and by the age of 34 had become employed as his housekeeper by George Shaw, then aged 49 and a widower, a Fellow of the College of Physicians (and future JP). In that position, she continued in his household in New Street through to the 1881 census.²⁰⁰ George was interred in St Martin's in 1888 by permission of the Home Secretary (after the Burial Acts restricted burials in urban parishes).²⁰¹ In his will of 1882, George had appointed Eliza as joint-executrix, specifying some legacies to her, but also nominating her as residuary legatee. At probate in 1889, his estate was valued at £28,063 16s 6d.²⁰² By Eliza's death in 1901, the estate had increased to £30,737 16s 10d, at the house at 16 New Street. Probate was granted to Catherine Flude, spinster. Catherine was the niece who co-resided with Eliza in 1891, but she had been a visitor in to Eliza in New Street when Eliza was housekeeper in 1861 and 1871. George subsequently employed her too as a servant. At her death in Bournemouth in 1940, Catherine's estate was assessed at more than £35,000.²⁰³ Probably in memory of George, Eliza had bequeathed £100 to the Royal Medical Benevolent College at Epsom (Surrey).

Another beneficiary was Catharine Sutton of Leire, but her advancement was complicated by kinship. In later age she became housekeeper to her unmarried uncle, John Freeman, who was already advanced in years. John's smallholding of 16 acres was a legacy to Catharine, although her personal estate in 1869 amounted to less than £100.²⁰⁴ When she received the bequest, she accordingly made her will (1857) in which she appointed 'my friends' Richard Palmer of Leire, parish clerk, and James Booth of the same, farmer, her executors, but when Booth refused to act, her codicil replaced him by John Wright of Leire, threshing machine keeper (1860).²⁰⁵

Not many benefited like Eliza Flude. Of the housekeepers over the age of fifty occurring in the NPR, five possessed personal estate at death reckoned

¹⁹⁸TNA RG12/2540, fo. 26; RG13/3006, fo. 173v.

¹⁹⁹ROLLR DE123/11, p. 4 (no. 29).

²⁰⁰TNA HO107/2090, fo. 276; RG9/2296, fo. 43v; RG10/3288, fo. 24; RG11/3177, fo. 103v.

²⁰¹ROLLR DE1564/17, p. 165 (no. 1320).

²⁰²ROLLR DE462/32, pp. 1-4; NPR 1889 Shackleton -Syson, p. 24.

²⁰³NPR 1940 Eaborn-Gyselynck, p. 219.

²⁰⁴NPR 1869 Sabiin-Szyrma, p. 112; TNA HO107/2078, fo. 144v (at age 59; John aged 79); RG9/2246, fo. 45 (Catharine head with sixteen acres).

²⁰⁵ROLLR DE462/12, pp. 376-378.

below £100. At the lowest level, Mary Ann Vann had estate valued at £5 exactly on her demise in 1882 (although not decided until two years later). Elizabeth West retired from housekeeping to live with her niece and niece's husband in Fleckney. Her meagre estate in 1884 amounted to £30 10s 6d.²⁰⁶ When Mary Warner's life ended in Cosby in 1865, she had possessions worth less than £20. She had risen from servant at Cosby Lodge to housekeeper to a farmer of forty acres in Cosby. She retired from housekeeping and lived alone in that village.²⁰⁷ At least ten of the women had retired from housekeeping before their death and lived independently. For the most part, they were the most secure; seven had estate at death valued at more than £300.

Ann Rudkin (above) had migrated from her home village to Melton Mowbray, but returned. Movement was important for some unmarried women to attain the position of housekeeper. Most moved only once and then worked their way up. Illustrative is Martha Watkin who had been born in Wellingborough (Northants.) in 1814. By the age of thirty, she was already housekeeper to Charles Marshall, a purveyor of proprietary medicines, in Market Harborough. She continued in this position until Marshall's death in 1880. Marshall's estate was estimated at less than £200 and probate awarded to his spinster sister in Leicester. Martha died in 1887, her own estate assessed to be £75 10s 9d.²⁰⁸

Industrial workers

That industrial workers had estate valued in the NPR might seem unusual, even more so for unmarried women so engaged. (A revised age of 45 is adopted here because of the high mortality rate and the lower life expectancy). The following discussion concentrates on those spinsters included in the NPR. Indeed, eight of these women died before the age of 45 and are not considered further below. For example, Charlotte Gregory of Leicester, died about the age of 30; in 1851, she was co-resident with her married sister and was employed as a worsted spinner, aged 18. When she died in 1863, her estate was considered to amount to less than £50 and probate granted to her brother, Charles Gregory, a woolcomber.²⁰⁹ When Harriet Newton succumbed in 1890, her estate was directed to her father, Isaac Newton, of Grange Lane, Leicester, a plumber.

²⁰⁶NPR 1884 Udall-Zuhr, p. 243; ROLLR DE462/27 (will, 1877); TNA RG11/31210, fo. 83v.

²⁰⁷NPR 1865 Waddams-Zwinger, p. 31; ROLLR DE9030/11, p. 111 (no. 583) (burial in Cosby 1865); TNA HO107/597/20, fo. 26; HO107/2081; RG9/2257, fo. 47v.

²⁰⁸TNA HO107/2079, fo. 142; RG9/2251, fo. 73v; RG10/3224, fo. 13v; RG11/3119, fo. 103; NPR 1880 Mabbett-Nye, p. 72; NPR 1890 Taaff-Wayte, p. 552.

²⁰⁹TNA HO107/2090, fo. 128v; NPR 1863 Gabriel-Gyllett, p. 283.

The family had origins in Queniborough, but had migrated together to Leicester, to Southampton Street. In 1871, Isaac and Harriet remained together in Duke Street when her occupation was specified as employed in an 'Elastic Warehouse'. A decade later, she lived as a lodger in Jarram Street, still working in elastic web. Her estate in 1891 amounted to £32 4s 5d. At the age of 35, she pre-deceased her father. Her experience also illustrates external migration into the borough for textile work in the new elastic web industry and further internal urban movement.²¹⁰ Ruth Marsland's estate exceeded both the above, extending to £87 19s 7d. The beneficiary was her father, with whom she resided. Although she survived into her mid fifties, she predeceased one of her parents.²¹¹

The following now considers those unmarried women aged over 45 who worked in industry and whose estate was enumerated in the NPR. Well over a half were employed in textile production in the factory units. Only two were engaged in the shoe industry.

Ambiguity surrounds sempstresses, of which there were six. In industrial localities it is likely that sempstresses were employed as outworkers in the textile industry. Occasionally, this situation is made evident. Mary Jones, whose estate was reckoned at under £100 in 1858, was described by the enumerator in 1851 as a cotton hose seamstress, even at the advanced age of 75. (She had, incidentally, made a will just prior to her demise).²¹² A daughter of a stockinger, Sarah Sandys became a hosiery sempstress, having acquired an estate not exceeding £100 at her death in 1870 at age 51 or so.²¹³

Not surprisingly, however, Belton was singular in this respect. Well over half the unmarried female industrial workers in the NPR inhabited Leicester. Four and two others resided in the industrial towns respectively of Loughborough (incorporated in 1888) and Hinckley. Two more belonged to Shepshed and one to Sileby, heavily industrialised villages. Only one of these spinsters owned a small business, the remainder were employees. In Loughborough in 1841, Sarah Wallis was described as a needle maker (for the hosiery knitting machines). Her premises then were and remained in Woodgate in the town. In 1851, she was employing seven men and five boys. By 1861, although she was enumerated as a framework knitter and needle maker, her concern engaged only three men and one boy. It is possible that she directed the business

²¹⁰ROLLR DE971/6, p. 71 (no. 562) (baptism in Queniborough, 1854); TNA RG9/2285, fo. 26v; RG10/3282, fo. 57v; RG11/3174, fo. 120v; NPR 1891 Mabbott-Nye, p. 613.

²¹¹TNA RG11/3156, fo. 78v; NPR 1888 Maber-Nye, p. 98.

²¹²TNA HO107/2085, fo. 526; NPR 1859 l'Anson-Jupp, p. 141; ROLLR DE462/2, pp. 107-8.

²¹³TNA HO107/604/8, fo. 32; RG9/2296, fo. 32; NPR 1870 Sabine-Szklarska, p. 160.

because her brother was considered ‘insane’. She made her will in 1867 just ahead of her death at the age of 68. Despite her position as a small employer, her estate was considered to amount to less than £100.²¹⁴

The career of Ann Scarborough of Leicester perhaps illustrates how an unmarried woman might escape the restrictions of servanthood for more liberty in factory work. Ann, born in 1839, was one of six children of a labourer who abandoned his wife and family. She lived with her mother and siblings, described as a ‘House Servant sleeps at home’, so she had some respite from the demands of servanthood. She abandoned that employment to become first a ‘Tailoress’ and then a ‘Machine Woman (Sewing)’, elaborated in 1881 as shoe machinist. Ultimately she and her mother resided with their married sister. At her death in 1881, her personal estate was valued at £62 1s 0d.²¹⁵

The experience of Ann Scarborough and her mother reflects the intra-urban migration of industrial workers in the borough. From their original base in Elbow Lane, to temporary accommodation in Friar Lane, to her sister in Ashwell Street, and at her death in Upper Charles Street.

Most of these unmarried women in industry were endogenous to their place of work. Immigrants were few. The father of Ruth Marsland brought his family from Batley (Yorkshire) to Leicester. Her father, Paul, was employed as a lambswool spinner. All his four daughters entered into factory-based textile production. Ruth persisted for over 30 years as a mender in a warehouse. For all this time, she resided with her father, first in Orton Street and then at Albion Hill.²¹⁶ Frances and Mary Ann Ford (below) had been born in Nottingham.²¹⁷ Mary Hallam, a lace runner in Markfield, had been born in Sutton Bonington (south Nottinghamshire).²¹⁸ Susan Buckler, who became employed as a machinist in Leicester, belonged to a family which had migrated from Nuneaton (Warwickshire), where her father obtained his living as a ribbon weaver. When the family arrived in Great Holme Street in Leicester, Thomas, the father, started afresh as a silk weaver. Indeed, the entire household was engaged in the work. After moving inside the borough as a lodger whilst employed as a machinist, Susan finally settled in Little Holme Street, still a

²¹⁴TNA HO107/595/6, fo. 23; HO107/2085, fo. 83; RG9/2273, fo. 74v; ROLLR DE462/11, pp. 1316; NPR 1868 Udale-Weymouth, p. 99.

²¹⁵ROLLR 3D71/17, p. 94 (no. 746); TNA HO107/604/13, fo. 36; HO107/2090, fo. 97 (note that family deserted by father); RG9/2297, fo. 21; RG10/3288, fo. 21; RG11/3156, fo. 105; NPR 1888 Raban-Seymour, p. 424.

²¹⁶TNA HO107/2090, fo. 341; RG9/2298, fo. 25v; RG11/3156, fo. 78v; NPR 1888 Maber-Nye, p. 98.

²¹⁷TNA RG11/3178, fo. 75.

²¹⁸TNA HO107/2083, fo. 395; ROLLR DE1729/13, p. 35 (no. 273) (buried in Markfield, 1863); DE462/6, p. 462 (will, 1863); NPR Habberley-Hyne, p. 36 (under £200).

machinist, but earning additional income from two male lodgers.²¹⁹ Only these four spinsters had origins outside their place of abode at work and death. The remainder were indigenuous.

As with other spinsters, joint tenancy was both an affective and economic arrangement. In the years before her death, Frances Ford, lived with her sister, Mary Ann, in Friars Causeway in Leicester. By this stage, both were living on their own means, Both had, however, been employed in a worsted warehouse and as worsted spinners. In 1851, Frances and Mary Ann, aged 34 and 25 respectively, resided with their mother, Rachel, in Great Holme Street, all worsted spinners. With her three daughters, Rachel moved to Friars Causeway, the daughters involved in worsted spinning. The two sisters, Frances and Mary Ann, continued to occupy this accommodation until their death. By their joint residency and their work in the textile industry, they together accumulated enough income to retire. The estate of Frances amounted to almost £125 when she died in 1899 in her early eighties. Accordingly, she made her sister, Mary Ann, sole beneficiary.²²⁰ Similarly, the Carter sisters, Mary and Elizabeth remained in the natal household until the death of their widowed mother and then took on together the accommodation in Devonshire Square in Loughborough. Both had entered into the hosiery industry from an early age and continued as menders until advancing to overlockers. In 1881, they also recruited their niece as housekeeper in this female household. In fact, Elizabeth's estate in 1884 amounted to more than £294, which she bequeathed to her unmarried sister, Mary, and her widowed sister, Anne.²²¹ Spinsters thus predominantly lived in joint households. In nine cases, unmarried women in the NPR co-resided with a sister, five with female lodgers, four with a mother, and two with a niece. Three others resided with a brother, the same number with a nephew, and one each with her father, widowed brother-in-law, and male lodgers.

A small number lived alone towards the end of life. The solitary household did not necessarily mean lack of sociability. Eliza McCracken passed some of her earlier life in company. In 1861 she lived as a boarder in a female household of spinsters in St George Street, at that time a dress maker. By 1891, however, she lived alone, aged 62, in East Street, now a hatter's warehouse woman. Ten

²¹⁹TNA RG9/2295, fo. 107v; RG10/3286, fo. 81; RG11/3176, fo. 73; RG12/2539, fo. 56v; ROLLR DE462/43, pp. 418-419 (will, 1900); NPR 1900 Aaron-Bywater, p. 386 (£97 19s 1d).

²²⁰TNA RG9/2297, fo. 56v; RG11/3178, fo. 75; RG12/2541, fo. 15; NPR 1899 Eabry-Gzowski, p. 118.

²²¹TNA HO107/2085, fo. 13; RG9/2293, fo. 17; RG10/3254, fo. 57v; RG11/3144, fo. 62; NPR 1884 Cable-Cuzner, p. 53.

years later, still in East Street, she continued alone, now a silk cutter. When she died in 1903, her estate, then in Livingstone Street, was evaluated at over £129. In her will of 1896, nonetheless, she prescribed: 'I appoint my friend Thomas Lenton of Number 18 Saint George Street Leicester aforesaid Boot and Shoe Maker to be the Executor . . .' She had not waited until her deathbed to pronounce her intentions. At the time, she lived alone, but not without neighbourly friendship.²²²

Not only were the estates of these spinsters evaluated in the NPR; a number of them made wills which were registered locally and fully transcribed in the register books. Two dozen can be traced in the registers. Half of these related to spinsters living in Leicester; another four concerned unmarried women working in Loughborough. The rest were dispersed through villages, except for one associated with Ashby de la Zouch.²²³ Elizabeth Walker of Arnesby who made a will copied into the local register had personal estate valued at just £13 7s 0d.²²⁴ The estate of Catherine Pettefer of Leicester only just exceeded £56, but her will was copied into the local register.²²⁵ Her belongings incidentally included portraits of her mother and Mr and Mrs Redman. An estate evaluated at £79 13s 9d remained on the death of Jane Lindley of Leicester whose will was also entered in the local register.²²⁶ Six other locally registered wills concerned estate of unmarried female workers with estate below £100 (extending from 1858 to 1901).

All these unmarried women working in local industry had their origins in the working class. Their decision to make wills is thus significant, especially as some antedated the full impact of the Married Women's Property Acts of 1870 and 1882. These unmarried industrial workers exercised a (limited) agency in the disposition of their estate, stimulated by their unmarried condition. Despite the low valuations of some estates what is also significant is the capability of some, sometimes through joint tenancy in the household, to accumulate not inconsiderable amounts of personal estate from their working lives. Perhaps

²²²TNA RG9/2284, fo. 106v; RG12/2524, fo. 63v; RG13/3004, fo. 18v; ROLLR DE462/46, pp. 561-562 (quotation at p. 561); NPR 1903 Kaberry-Mylton, p. 258 (£129 8s 2d).

²²³ROLLR DE462/2, pp. 107-8; 462/3, pp. 150-151, 472-473; DE462/5, pp. 408-409; DE462/6, p. 462; DE462/11, pp. 13-16; DE462/12, pp. 583-584; DE462/22, p. 589; DE462/25, pp. 128-129; DE462/27, p. 114; DE462/28, pp. 12-14; DE462/28, p. 295; DE462/34, p. 526; DE462/37, pp. 455-457; DE462/39, pp. 623-626; DE462/41, p. 334; DE462/42, p. 127; DE462/43, pp. 336-337, 418-419; DE462/44, pp. 63, 66-68; DE462/45, pp. 575-576; DE462/46, pp. 561-562; DE462 1903 schedule 287.

²²⁴ROLLR DE462/28, pp. 12-14 (1885).

²²⁵ROLLR DE462/34, p. 526 (1891).

²²⁶ROLLR DE462/37, pp. 455-457 (1893).

some capital was inherited, although their parents in most cases had limited means. The aged Ann Needham who resided in Jewry Wall Street in Leicester with her niece was occupied in the mending of hosiery. Her estate in 1860 (died 1859) amounted to under £800.²²⁷ Also co-resident with her niece, and both employed in fancy trimming for hosiery, Lucy Kilbourn of Welford Road, Leicester, had an estate of £825 16s 0d in 1882.²²⁸ In this case, it might be significant that probate was granted to Benjamin Russell of Knighton, hosiery manufacturer. Six other estates were evaluated at over £294 to over £670, including hosiery overlockers with estates of £294 12s 0d (Loughborough, 1884) and £499 exactly (Leicester, 1898).²²⁹

The downside to their experience was the relatively early age at death, if still above the mean age. Six died in their late forties and ten in their fifties. Another fifteen expired in their sixties. Most of these spinsters lived in Leicester. Two who continued into old age resided outside the borough. Mary Jones of Belton lived to the age of 83. She lived there continuously with her widowed sister, both born in the village. Her work, probably outwork, was as a cotton hose seamstress.²³⁰ In the small town of Ashby de la Zouch, Frances Orme co-resided with her sister, Dorothy, both occupied as glove knitters. Frances lived until 84.²³¹ Their longevity probably resulted from the more salubrious environment and the lighter work. Significantly too, these unmarried women continued in the workplace into middle age or later until death. Conventionally, most married women quit the labour market on marriage. Work in industrial occupations was a life-course event, truncated when they were expected to remain in and manage the household.²³² In advance of the fertility decline, their lives reflected an alternative to the reproductive model of the family.²³³

²²⁷TNA HO107/2090, fo. 369; ROLLR DE462/3, pp. 150-151; NPR 1860 Mabb-Nyren, pp. 150-151.

²²⁸TNA RG11/3173, fo. 58; ROLLR DE462/35, pp. 128-129 (1882); NPR 1882 l'anson-Lyveden, p. 279.

²²⁹Elizabeth Carter (daughter of fwk): TNA RG11/3144, fo. 62; NPR 1884 Cable-Cuzner, p. 53; Sarah Windram (daughter of a tailor): TNA RG11/3171, fo. 97; NPR 1898 Udale-Zwicky, p. 198.

²³⁰TNA HO107/2085, fo. 526; ROLLR DE462/2, pp. 107-108; NPR l'anson-Jupp, p. 141.

²³¹TNA RG11/3140, fo. 117v; DE462/39, pp. 623-626.

²³²Succinctly, Simon Szreter, *Fertility, Class and Gender in Britain 1860-1940* (Cambridge: CUP, 1996), pp. 350-9, 481-8, 503-12 and Jane Humphries, *Childhood and Child Labour in the British Industrial Revolution* (Cambridge: CUP, 2010), pp. 102-118 (mothers' economic activity).

²³³For the fertility decline, Szreter, *Fertility, Class and Gender*; Stephanie Coontz, *The Social Origins of Private Life: A History of American Families 1600-1900* (London: Verso, 1988), pp. 301-305.

Servants

The first section here elucidates the general context of servanthood. The second part then focuses on unmarried female servants whose estate was evaluated in the NPR. In 1876, Herbert Miller lamented the decline of 'respectable' women of the working class entering domestic service. His deduction of the 'present scarcity of respectable domestic servants' was predicated on a few advertisements which struggled to elicit applications. He had, of course, an agenda. Throughout his tract, the emphasis is on the availability of 'respectable' women from the working class; he proposed 'such reforms as will induce a greater number of the more respectable of the working classes to embrace the solid advantages of domestic service'. The problem was the restrictions on personal freedom imposed by employers and the shunting of 'fallen' women into domestic service. He estimated that one in seven women were engaged in domestic service. His suggestions comprised mainly the allowance of greater freedom and a salary of at least £14 per annum for under-servants with increments for higher status.²³⁴

In fact, the 'scarcity' of entrants to service was probably caused by the increasing demand from middle-class households for servants, with consequent competition. Especially was this the case in the borough and the small towns. In Lutterworth in 1881, for example, 66 households retained at least one female servant. Accordingly, since most households employed only one female servant, 97 single women were engaged in service there. Only the professional households, like solicitors, employed more than one female servant. Most retailers (bakers, ironmongers, drapers, grocers, chemists) had a female servant.²³⁵

Simultaneously in Melton Mowbray 284 female servants assisted 185 households, the complement here expanded by the number of hunting lodges. Thus the Egerton Lodge required 16 female servants. The retail sector, however, employed most of the local female servants, usually one per household. By contrast, the female servants in the lodges consisted of a high proportion of migrant females. One of the features of Melton was the complement of male servants (grooms) who lived in their own households compared with female servants who lived in. Sixteen female servants were also admitted to the union workhouse. Another contrast in Melton was the difference in age cohorts: in the Egerton Lodge, for example, the female servants were of mature age (cook

²³⁴Herbert P. Miller, *The Scarcity of Domestic Servants: The Cause and the Remedy* (London: W. Lake & Son, 1876), pp. iv-v (long quotation), 9 ('scarcity', estimate of numbers), 14-15 ('The Difficulty in Getting Servants'), 16-20 (the popular, condescending view of service), 20-1 (solutions).

²³⁵TNA RG11/3117, fos 66r-120v.

52, housekeeper 64, laundry maids in their thirties, housemaids in their thirties also but one 59, and lady's maids aged 24 to 54) by comparison with the younger females in middle-class households.²³⁶

In rapidly expanding villages, demand for female servants also increased in middle-class households. In Enderby, 20 households employed 32 female servants. Three daughters in households were unemployed servants and two had been consigned to the workhouse.²³⁷ Even in a predominantly agricultural parish female servants were in demand. In Queniborough in 1881 21 servants were in occupation in 11 households: at Queniborough Hall, a J.P.'s house, the Oak House, Bottom Hall, The Coppice, Fair View Villas, Rodgers Lodge and The Beeches.²³⁸

Now the discussion returns to the experience of unmarried female servants whose estate was assessed in the NPR. Most of these female servants were young and most of them eventually died unmarried and probably with limited means. We know of the final estate of only a small proportion who made wills. Obviously, it was unusual for servants to make wills so the complement of servants examined here is a tiny fraction of the female servant population. What the data demonstrate is the potential for some fortunate servants to establish in later life a comfortable existence. Conversely, and paradoxically, the information also illustrates those whose estate was minimal at death, even though they made a will. For the purposes of separation of the two, the amount of £200 has been adopted as the dividing line, although many estates were much higher and some much lower. Twenty-seven females who had been employed as servants died with estate valued at more than £200. Such an amount was a considerable estate relative to most working-class people. This first section concerns the higher-endowed spinsters aged over fifty who had acted as servants.

When Dorothy Baker died in 1858, aged 67, her estate was placed in the category of under £450. In the census of 1851, she was recorded as the head of household and as a retired servant, aged 58. Her unmarried sister resided with her, aged 60, also a former servant. The two sisters lived together in Chapel Lane in Syston with one female servant. Both had been born in Syston and were buried there. Dorothy survived her sister and administration of her estate was granted to her brother, George Baker, also of Syston, a victualler.²³⁹ Some of the more affluent female servants thus had the opportunity to retire from

²³⁶TNA RG11/3182, fo. 1-RG11/3183, fo. 31v.

²³⁷TNA RG11/3128, fos 2-25; RG11/3129, fos 101-118.

²³⁸TNA RG11/3155, fo. 75-.

²³⁹NPR 1858 Babbage-Bywater, p. 6; TNA HO107/2087, fo. 555; ROLLR DE2811/13, p. 168 (no. 1341).

service. In 1891, Ann Tuckey resided as a lodger in Ely Lane living on her own means. Her estate extended to £628 0s 9d. She had been a servant to a number of different retailers in Lutterworth.²⁴⁰ Similarly, Frances Sharpless, a retired domestic cook, had accumulated an estate of £769 9s 7d by her demise.²⁴¹ An even higher amount, just over £842, had been acquired by Elizabeth Pratt when she died, living on her own means in Long Whatton after a life of service.²⁴² ‘Formerly servant’ was the description of Mary Harvey in the census return for Sewstern in 1881 which had been preceded by ‘Retired Servant’ and ‘Blind’ in 1871.²⁴³ Her estate, nevertheless, was appraised at £574 17s 6d.²⁴⁴ In Laughton in 1871, Mary Bailey was enumerated as the head of household and an annuitant, but she had been engaged as a servant in Laughton by the farming Cutter family. In 1872, her estate amounted to under £300.²⁴⁵

The number of retired is small, of course, and most female servants died in service. The following numbers relate to all unmarried female servants over the age of fifty regardless of the amount of their estate at death, that is, both above and under £200, where it is possible to determine their employment. The figures concern the status of their employers. The category of middle-class/commercial mainly comprises retailers. ‘Gentle’ contains aristocracy and gentry, but also employers of independent means. Professional comprises medical practitioners, solicitors and bankers. Those with estate over £200 were employed by eight middle-class/commercial employers, six of ‘gentle’ condition, four farmers, three professionals, three clergy, and two industrialists. When estate under £200 is concerned, the employers included seven of ‘gentle’ status, five farmers, two professionals, and one industrial. Mary Isaacs, a spinster servant who died in Hose, with an estate valued in the NPR, was one of six children of a rural labourer.²⁴⁶

The social origins of these female servants over fifty who featured in the NPR can only be elicited for 16 women. The possibility depends on whether they appear in their natal households in the census in their early years or if they can be traced back to registers of their baptism. Four were the daughter of an agricultural labourer and another three children of labourers. Two were the issue of framework knitters. One each belonged to the families of a coach

²⁴⁰TNA RG12/2490, fo. 43v; NPR 1893 Sabel-Tyssen, p. 317.

²⁴¹TNA RG13/2998, fo. 69; NPR 1903 Sabberton-Tyack, p. 61.

²⁴²TNA RG12/2517, fo. 88v.

²⁴³For Sewstern, Pamela Fisher, *Buckminster and Sewstern: The Victoria County History of Leicestershire* (London: University of London Press, 2017).

²⁴⁴TNA RG10/3298, fo. 16v; NPR 1891 Haas-Hives, p. 237.

²⁴⁵TNA RG10/3225, fo. 151v; NPR 1872 Aaron-Bezelly, p. 175.

²⁴⁶TNA HO107/2103, fo. 61v (1851).

smith, a tailor, a cow keeper, a dyer, a joiner, a farmer and a small holder.²⁴⁷

Most of the servants over fifty in the NPR had migrated from their place of birth. The distance was usually short, over a few miles. Some, however, had moved over considerable distance. Ten had moved more than twenty miles from their place of birth. Fourteen moved from a rural place of birth to an urban place, to the borough (six) or small towns (including for this purpose, Loughborough, although it received incorporation in 1888). Only eight entered service in the place where they were born and remained there, three of whom resided in Lutterworth and Loughborough.²⁴⁸

One of the longest-distance migrants was Hannah Mills, who died in Leicester in 1902 with an estate of £1,577 18s 9d. Initially, she remained in her family household into her thirties, but by 1881 she acted as housekeeper for a leather merchant on London Road in Leicester, then aged 51. Twenty years later the census enumerator found her, now 71, at 29, Evington Road, a servant of the retired hosier, Frank Rowlett, where she died in service.²⁴⁹

The movement of others was dictated by the itinerant household which they joined. Born in Alderley (Cheshire), Robina Swindell became attached to the household of Catharine, Lady Brooke, recorded in 1841 at Oriental Place in Brighton (Sussex) and in 1861 at The Elms, High Street, Market Harborough. Accordingly, she was buried in Market Harborough, shortly after Lady Catharine's household settled there, when Robina was aged 58.²⁵⁰ Mary Dunnings began life in Nursling (Hampshire). She accompanied the Reverend John Bridges Ottley (alias Hooker) (1797-1879) to his living in Thorpe Acre near Loughborough to which he was instituted in 1845. There she served him and was laid to rest there in precisely the same year as Ottley. Ottley had been born in Rottingdean (Sussex) and was ordained a priest by the bishop of Chichester.²⁵¹ Frances Sharpless represented both the short- and long-distance movement. Born in Barkby (Leicestershire), the youngest daughter

²⁴⁷TNA HO107/587/10, fo. 6; HO107/593/16, fo. 16; HO107/593/19, fo. 10; HO107/596/17, fo. 20; HO107/806/3, fo. 6; HO107/1816, fo. 287; HO107/2079, fo. 51; HO107/2091, fo. 64; RG4/1269, fo. 41v; RG9/2253, fo. 81; RG9/2256, fo. 74; RG9/2280, fo. 64; ROLLR DE2040/4, p. 5 (no. 442); DE6676, p. 142 (no. 1133).

²⁴⁸For patterns of migration of some servants, Colin Pooley and Jean Turnbull, *Migration and Mobility in Britain Since the 18th Century* (London: Routledge, 1998), pp. 157-8 (Tables 5.1a-b; final column).

²⁴⁹TNA HO107/1816, fo. 287 (1851); RG9/1214, fo. 75 (1861); RG11/3157, fo. 46 (1881); RG12/2525, fo. 105 (1891); RG13/2997, fo. 6; TNA RG4/1965, fo. 53 (nonconformist register, Norwich, 1829); NPR 1902 Kaal-Mytton, p. 306.

²⁵⁰TNA RG9/2249, fo. 23; ROLLR DE1587/31, p. 51 (no. 4010).

²⁵¹TNA HO107/2085, fo. 377v; RG9/2275, fo. 70; RG10/3257, fo. 34v; *Crockford's Clerical Directory for the Year 1868* (London: Horace Cox, 1868), p. 495; ROLLR DE3542/9, p. 24 (nos 190, 192).

of a blacksmith, she first found employment as a cook to Elizabeth Pochin at Barkby Hall. She then moved to live as a housekeeper with her sister and brother-in-law as a housekeeper in Wymondham. Within a short time, however, she was retained by Edward Balston, the archdeacon of Derby (1873-1891), as a cook at his vicarage in Bakewell (Derbyshire), where she served for a considerable time, probably until Balston's death in 1891. Before her death, she had retired and resided with her niece in Beaumont Road, Leicester, where she died in 1902 aged 68. In 1891, Balston's estate was appraised at £53, 95s 15s 7d. Through the service, Frances had acquired an estate valued in 1903 at £769 9s 7d.²⁵² Probate was granted to her sister, Sarah Bryan, of Charnwood Street, Leicester, a widow, who had migrated to the borough from Wymondham. Frances's estate was entirely composed of personal (no real) estate.

Remaining in the place of birth did not preclude movement, especially if residence was in the borough or one of the small towns. Ann Tuckey, born in Lutterworth, participated in internal migration in the town, serving different employers. By 1841, she was retained by Peter Smith, who had independent means. Within the next decade, she changed into the service of George Wardley, a linen draper. Then by 1861, a retired grocer, Thomas Simons, had the benefit of her service. Finally, she was employed by the cooper, Thomas Gilbert. In 1891, two years before her demise, she had become a lodger in Ely Lane in the town, living on her own means. When she died in 1893, with an estate of more than £628, probate was granted to Ann Heap, another spinster of the town. Miss Tuckey was interred in Lutterworth at the age of 85.²⁵³

Many of these unmarried female servants, nonetheless, remained in the service of one employer for more than ten years, often considerably longer, and some for their adult life, as might be expected, perhaps. Twenty with a valued estate in the NPR remained with one employer for more than ten years. A number had a single employer. Amongst those was Mary Dunning above, who died at the same time as her clerical employer whom she had served for 34 years. Dinah Cox, became a servant to Major Joseph Knight J.P. by the age of 17 and continued in his employment first in Friar Lane in Leicester and then at the Manor House, Glen Parva, where she died in service after serving

²⁵²TNA HO107/592/5, fo. 11 (1841); HO107/2087, fo. 640 (1851); RG9/2282, fo. 58 (1861); RG10/3298, fo. 64v (1871); RG11/3446, fo. 59v (1881); RG12/2773, fo. 54 (1891); RG13/2998, fo. 69 (1901); NPR 1892 Aanenson-Byworth, p. 111 (Balston); NPR 1903 Sabberton-Tyzack, p. 61; *London Gazette* Issue 27536 p. 1886 (1903).

²⁵³TNA HO107/598/14, fo. 8; HO107/2078, fo. 8; RG9/2255, fo. 88 (1861); RG10/3222, fo. 73v (1871); RG12/2490, fo. 43v (1891); NPR 1893 Sabel-Tyssen, p. 317; ROLLR DE4336/19, p. 42 (no. 330).

him for 37 years.²⁵⁴ So also Ann Carpendale died in service after employment for more than twenty years in the Blagden household in Long Clawson.²⁵⁵

This long service was sometimes well rewarded. Born in Stonesby in 1809, Elizabeth Cobley entered into the service of Joseph Bishop in nearby Melton Mowbray by 1851. There she served him until his death in 1881, when Bishop's estate was valued in excess of £15,402. In his will and codicils of 1880-81, Bishop bequeathed a cash legacy of £300 to Elizabeth, an annuity for life of £100 per annum, allowance to live in his house in Nottingham Road for six months to arrange her own house, and for her to select from his furnishing and effects 'as she may require to furnish a small house.'²⁵⁶ Evidently, Elizabeth selected Bishop family portraits, for by her own will (1882) and codicil (1888) she bequeathed two oil paintings, a portrait of the late Joseph Bishop on horseback and one of the late James Thomas Bishop, brother of Joseph, which had previously belonged to Joseph Bishop. Her estate was appraised at over £560.²⁵⁷ The farmer and J.P. Henry Woodcock of Rearsby House in the eponymous parish was the second employer of Elizabeth Whittle, born in Queniborough in 1809. She had entered his service by 1851 and continued to her demise in 1874. Henry survived to 1896. At her death, Elizabeth's estate extended to under £800 and she placed it in trust to to Woodcock's son, Christopher Cleever Woodcock of Runcorn, gentleman (also one of the executors and trustees of his father's will in 1896).²⁵⁸

Occasionally, the wills of these spinster servants reveal something of their household furnishings. Rebecca West was born in Lutterworth in 1797 and found employment there in a female household in Woodmarket in the town. In that service, she died in 1860, aged 63, and was buried in Lutterworth. By her will, she bequeathed a chest of drawers, silver spoons, a chiffonier, and all her books except her bible and Baxter's Saints, elaborating 'my Bible with Marginal references which I commonly use...' Her legacies included £5 to each of the British and Foreign Bible Society, the Church Missionary Society, and the Religious Tract Society, reflecting her belonging to the 'respectable'

²⁵⁴TNA HO107/604/3, fo. 14; HO107/2081, fo. 166; RG9/2296, fo. 41v; RG10/3230, fo. 17; ROLLR DE462/21, pp. 810-811.

²⁵⁵TNA HO107/587/12, fo. 20; HO107/2091, fo. 435v; RG9/2302, fo. 52v; ROLLR DE462/6, pp. 260-261.

²⁵⁶ROLLR DE1540/3 (her baptism); TNA HO107/2091, fo. 238v; RG9/2300, fo. 49; RG10/3294, fo. 82v; NPR 1881 Bianchi-Bywater, p. 34; ROLLR DE462/24, pp. 742-748 (esp. p. 742).

²⁵⁷NPR 1889 Calabé-Cutts, p. 238; ROLLR DE462/32, pp. 427-429.

²⁵⁸TNA HO107/599/2, fo. 5; HO107/2087, fo. 581v; RG9/2282, fo. 45; RG10/3267, fo. 52v; NPR 1874 Udale-Zulueta, p. 280; ROLLR DE462/17, pp. 669-670; NPR 1896 Udale-Zulueta, p. 204.

working class adumbrated by Herbert Miller. She also had investments in the Lutterworth Bank.²⁵⁹

Many of those unmarried servants who made wills, however, did not accumulate significant estate at their death. Just £4 was the appraised estate of Mary Barsby in 1883. A daughter of a labourer born in 1816 in Snarestone, by 1881 she had retired and lived as a boarder in Shackerstone. Her service had involved her as a lady's maid.²⁶⁰ Emily Bates was one of the children of a small farmer in Quorndon. All the children were brought into the parish church together in 1837 for collective baptism, a familiar means of economising on the christening feasts. Although she found employment as the servant of a gentleman in Quorndon, her final estate was valued at less than £38.²⁶¹ (Probate was granted to her sister, also a spinster). A slightly higher amount, just under £52, constituted the estate of Rebekah Burrows in 1890. The daughter of an agricultural labourer in Tur Langton, she migrated to Leicester to serve in the household of an independent lady in De Montfort Place.²⁶²

The amount of estate bequeathed by these unmarried female servants over the age of fifty who made wills thus varied considerably, from a few pounds to several hundred pounds. To some extent their final fortunes depended on the generosity and wealth of their employers. It also resulted from the rapport between employer and servant, such as the legacy of personal effects, including paintings. To another extent, that relationship also depended on the length of service and whether the woman died in service. Why did these women, including the poorest, thus make wills? One influence must have been the experience of the household: emulating or taking notice of the testators at the head of the household. They may too have regarded themselves as an integral part of respectable society. In many instances, with their more considerable estates, they wished to provide particularly for sisters and nieces and nephews. They nevertheless constituted a very small part of the complement of female household servants who had little to leave and no incentive to make testamentary provision.

²⁵⁹ROLLR DE2094/3, p. 25 (baptism); DE2094/12, p. 82 (no. 654) (burial); HO107/59/14, fo. 33; HO107/2078, fo. 333v; NPR 1860 Ubank-Whettall, p. 209; ROLLR DE462/3, pp. 234-237.

²⁶⁰ROLLR DE2040/4, p. 5 (no. 36) (baptism); DE1103/9, p. 53 (no. 36) (burial); TNA RG11/3134, fo. 120v; NPR 883 Aaron-Bezant, p. 318.

²⁶¹ROLLR DE725/7, pp. 2-3 (nos 22-27) (baptisms); TNA HO107/594/8, fo. 30; HO107/2087, fo. 245; RG11/3151, fo. 84v; NPR Aaron-Bhadoory, p. 438.

²⁶²TNA HO107/589/19, fo. 8v; HO107/2079, fo. 51; RG11/3157, fo. 16v; NPR 1890 Babb-Byworth, p. 447; ROLLR DE462/33, p. 376.

5 ‘Women alone’?

How far alone?

In 1881, Hannah Royce lived alone in Dysart Street in Leicester, unmarried, aged 57, making her way as a ‘mangle woman’, and deaf. She had been born in Oakham (Rutland) and her migration to Leicester might have isolated her, although she managed to become a householder and obtain some income.²⁶³ At the other end of the spinster spectrum, the high-net-worth Sarah Barlow inhabited Carlton Terrace with no kinship companions, but with one servant.²⁶⁴ Were they, however, typical of unmarried women of their age cohort? Numerous examples exist of female households with co-resident spinsters, as noted above. These households were not restricted to urban centres. In Gilmorton, Ann, Elizabeth and Martha Bloxam, all unmarried, and aged 75, 67 and 66, lived together, all annuitants.²⁶⁵ Nearby in Aston Flamville, Mary Ann, Sarah, and Harriet Gilbert, all unmarried annuitants, aged 70, 58 and 55, inhabited a household with their niece, aged 22, a governess, and a single servant, Ada Robinson, aged 15.²⁶⁶ Two elderly unmarried aunts, Ann and Mary, were co-resident with John and Mary Beal in 1861 and still in 1871 in Ashby Magna.²⁶⁷

The domestic status of unmarried women of means is reflected in the cohort living in Loughborough. Their position is determined by connecting them from the NPR to the census enumerators’ returns. This identification can be established for 68 unmarried women of all ages, 46 of whom were aged fifty or above at age of death. Almost half of those aged fifty and above (N=20) lived with one or more sisters, three with a brother, one with a daughter, and two with a niece. Four had lodgers. Two lived with only a servant. Five were live-in housekeepers. Others had lodgers or were themselves lodgers. Only four lived alone. Elizabeth Briggs, for example, lived with her brother, a druggist in the Market Place.²⁶⁸ Also in the Market Place, Louisa Armstrong accommodated two lodgers.²⁶⁹ In the centre of the town too, Elizabeth Watson shared a house with her two sisters, Ann and Mary.²⁷⁰ In Meadow Lane, Jane Hall had

²⁶³TNA RG11/3165, fo. 75v.

²⁶⁴TNA RG11/3173, fo. 6; she also held over 45a of land in Earl Shilton as well as her property in Leicester: *Return of Owners of Land*, p. 2.

²⁶⁵TNA HO/2078, fo. 255v (1851).

²⁶⁶TNA RG11/3130, fo. 30v (1881).

²⁶⁷TNA RG9/2244, fo. 20 and RG10/3220, fo. 107v (designated Priscilla in 1861 and Mary in 1871!).

²⁶⁸TNA HO/107/2085, fo. 1.

²⁶⁹TNA RG10/3256, p. 6.

²⁷⁰TNA RG10/3256, p. 8.

the company of her sister, another female fundholder, and a servant.²⁷¹ Mary Mundy inhabited one of the new villas on Derby Road with three other annuitants, the unmarried sisters Elizabeth, Anne and Emma Lander.²⁷² In the polite district of Forest Road, the retired school teacher, Marianne Chapman, lived with her two sisters, but also provided hospitality for her niece Florie.²⁷³ Still in business as a milliner, aged 53, Ann Moss lived with her unmarried sister, Mary, a dressmaker aged 45, with two young female assistants and an even younger female apprentice.²⁷⁴

In rural places, there was more complexity. In two expanding and industrialising parishes, Enderby and Shepshed, two dozen women over fifty remained unmarried. Eight remained alone and the same number lived with sisters. Two lived with their mother and one with a niece. Two had lodgers and one was a boarder. Another was a housekeeper and one a servant. A third therefore were solitary. For agrarian rural locations, a sample of a dozen parishes has been examined (Barkby, Billesdon, Bottesford, Frolesworth, Hallaton, Peatling Magna, Queniborough, Redmile, Saddington, Scalford, Theddingworth and Wymondham). These parishes were inhabited by 51 spinsters over fifty. Almost a third again (N=18) lived on their own. Again, the same number lived with a sister. Eleven resided with a relative (mother, aunt, cousin, or niece). Five and two were employed respectively as housekeeper and servant. Exemplifying this prevalent condition were the sisters Eliza and Jane Birch, both aged 58, living together as needlewomen in Billesdon.²⁷⁵ The unmarried innkeeper, Elizabeth Rose of Stonesby had attained the age of 51 by 1881. As head of household she accommodated her sister, Mary, also unmarried and aged 40, and her niece, aged 12, Emma Alderman.²⁷⁶ When Elizabeth died seven years later, probate of her estate (valued at £801 13s 0d) was granted to Mary, who died two years later, her estate extending to slightly more at £931 19s 2d.²⁷⁷ Two unmarried sisters lived together in Oadby in 1871, both laundresses. The eldest Maria Page, aged 60 in 1871, died in 1873. Probate of her estate of under £200 was granted to Mary, her co-resident sister, younger than Maria by six years. Mary died two years later, her estate also estimated at under £200.²⁷⁸

The companionship of spinsters can be illustrated by the nexus of unmar-

²⁷¹TNA RG9/2274, fo. 77.

²⁷²TNA RG11/3144, fo. 143.

²⁷³TNA RG12/2516, p. 31.

²⁷⁴TNA RG12/2516, fo. 32.

²⁷⁵TNA RG11/3123, fo. 25.

²⁷⁶TNA RG11/3185, fo.37.

²⁷⁷NPR 1888/1890 Raban-Seymour, pp. 290, 298.

²⁷⁸TNA RG10/3232, p. 15; NPR 1873 Oakden- Quirk, p. 68; 1875 Oade-Quinlan, p. 80.

ried women of high-net-worth who resided in the locality around the salubrious area of New Walk and London Road in Leicester. Maria Berridge and her sister, Ann, lived together on New Walk in 1891.²⁷⁹ Previously Maria and two sisters had co-resided (their parents deceased) at Millstone Lane, where their father had had his legal practice.²⁸⁰ In De Montfort Street, Harriet and Ellen Stone co-resided, as sisters and spinsters, with two female servants. They were accustomed to living in a large female household as the four Stone daughters had been companions to their widowed mother in Rutland Street (with additionally two female servants). When the census was taken in 1851, they all resided there when the daughters were aged 57, 54, 51 and 45.²⁸¹ After the decease of their father, Ann and Elizabeth Stretton lived with their mother on Granby Street, their parents' house. When their mother died, they continued to inhabit the house in tandem.²⁸² Elizabeth had married, but in her widowhood returned to the house in Granby Street. This female household also accommodated two female servants. Catherine Ross also received her widowed sister into her house on London Road.²⁸³ In 1851, Mary Ann and Isabella Peet remained in their mother's house on New Walk as she (Ann) was a widow aged 67. All of Ann, Mary Ann and Isabella were fundholders. By 1871, the sisters owned the house together. Subsequently Mary Ann moved to Sparkenhoe Street with her niece, Alice Mary. In her will of 1857, Mary Ann had appointed Isabella as sole executrix, but in 1901 administration was granted to their niece (above), Alice Mary Peet. (Latterly, Mary Ann had adopted her mother's maiden name as Mary Ann Bosworth Peet).²⁸⁴ Emily Nedham had shared a house with her aunt, but later with a 48-year-old lady's companion.²⁸⁵ The same recourse was made by Susannah Nedham who lived with a 46-year-old lady's companion.²⁸⁶ Anne Bakewell adopted this solution too.²⁸⁷ In Regent Street, Martha Lawton had resided with two female servants in her sixties, but in her seventies her household consisted of the two female servants, a nurse, and a 48-year-old lady's companion.²⁸⁸ High-net-worth spinsters would always, of course, have the company of servants if no

²⁷⁹TNA RG12/2524, fo. 39.

²⁸⁰TNA RG9/2296, fo. 40v (1861).

²⁸¹TNA HO107/2088, fo. 3656v; RG9/2285, fo. 65v; RG10/3269, fo. 18.

²⁸²TNA HO107/2088, fo. 189; RG10/3269, fo. 50v.

²⁸³TNA RG12/2534, fo. 95.

²⁸⁴TNA HO107/2088, fo. 40v; RG9/2283, fo. 33; RG13/2995, fo. 123; ROLLR DE462/44, p. 310 (1901).

²⁸⁵TNA RG10/3282, fo. 10v (1871); RG12/2536, fo. 76 (1891).

²⁸⁶TNA RG10/3288, fo. 31v.

²⁸⁷TNA RG11/3384, fo. 17.

²⁸⁸TNA RG9/2293, fo. 69v; RG10/3269, fo. 57.

other co-resident, as did Rebecca Mitchell with her two female servants in New Walk.²⁸⁹

In one way or another, many spinsters managed to avoid solitariness in their old age. When they co-resided with kinship, they had familiar society and close support. Coincidentally, by combining their expenses, sisters conserved their resources. At the lower levels of wealth, single unmarried women also avoided solitariness. Referring again to just more than unmarried women aged fifty and over with estates valued at under £100 after 1881 (who can be identified in the censuses), only ten lived alone without any companion. The majority thus formed a household with companionship. Those who, however, lived with their brothers were still subject to at least a nominal patriarchal influence, not least because the brother was normally the head of household and sometimes married. For example, Ann Cart remained in her natal household in Syston. Her elder brother was head of the household, a castrator, and the younger brother a pig dealer. Ann received income as a dressmaker, as did her youngest sibling, Ruth, but the other younger sister, Harriet, was designated 'housekeeper'. Also living with them was their niece.²⁹⁰ Predominantly, but not exclusively, single women over fifty managed to co-reside with a relative, most usually a sister, outside the borough and small towns. The significant persistence of some older unmarried women living alone in the countryside may, however, have perpetuated the trope of the 'old maid'.²⁹¹

Survival of the spinsters

By defining the criterion of spinsterhood as over age fifty, some parameters about female mortality rates have already been delimited. In this section, what is considered is the life expectancy of unmarried women at age fifty (e50). Although many women died unmarried before that defining age, the analysis here can only pertain to the later age. Table 9 delineates the age at death of unmarried women above the age of fifty in general and by sector. Relatives are omitted because of the uncertainty about their presumed financial resources (as opposed to their kinship support). Clarity is necessary about the method. To reiterate, the age at death is established by comparing the date of probate with occurrence in the censuses between 1841 and 1901, which accounts for the limited number of women. The number is further circumscribed by retaining only those aged over fifty at the time of probate. Heads of households

²⁸⁹TNA RG12/2536, fo. 11.

²⁹⁰TNA HO107/2087, fo. 546.

²⁹¹Susan S. Lanser, 'Singular politics: the rise of the British nation and the production of the old maid' in *Singlewomen in the European Past 1250-1800*, ed. Bennett and Froide, pp. 297-323.

Table 9: Age at Death of Women in the NPR Unmarried at Age Fifty, 1858-1903

Category	Number	Mean Age	Std	Median Age
All	912	70	10.394	71
Independent	378	73	9.8964	74
Heads	60	74	10.820	74
'Education'	33	63.5	8.9796	62
Housekeepers	25	70.4	10.483	73
Retail	44	69.5	11.055	70
Dressmakers	45	64	8.1219	63
Industrial	38	65	11.117	63.5
Servants	52	67	8.8885	66.5

appear as such because the census provided no occupation. They might have possessed other income, but the census enumerator simply inscribed them as head of household. Independence comprised all of ownership of land, houses, dividends and annuities. Educators defines governors and teachers. Industrial workers were mainly engaged in textile production with a small number of shoe operatives. In addition to those sectors in the table, ten domestic outworkers (laundresses and washer women) demised between the ages of 51 and 78, but five in their fifties.

In the late nineteenth century, life expectancy at birth (e_0) remained about the age of 41 (just under).²⁹² Attaining the age of fifty probably enhanced chances of survival. Unsurprisingly, the chances of further life-course were associated with economic and social cohorts or sectors. At the apex of life expectancy at age fifty, as might be expected, were the unmarried women of independent means. They might expect to exist for ten years longer than dressmakers and industrial women and seven years longer than their servants. Probably they survived the women who performed menial, but necessary, work (the domestic outwork) by at least twenty years. Indeed, 27.5 percent of the spinsters of independent means (N=104) survived beyond eighty (some of whom into their nineties). The life expectancy at age fifty thus further reflected the intersection between gender and class.

²⁹²Wrigley and Schofield, *The Population History of England*, p. 712.

6 Conclusion: Ideological implications

In 1881 in Belgrave in Birstall, the five Ellis sisters lived together, all unmarried, aged 53, 49, 47, 44 and 41.²⁹³ Co-resident at The Gravel, they were the surviving daughters of John Ellis, JP and railway director.²⁹⁴ However the sisters co-existed, the bureaucratic state insisted that the eldest (Jane) should be inscribed as the head of the household. The state interpellated them into an ideological status.²⁹⁵ Spinsters, like widows, were inducted into the patriarchal society and its bureaucratic representation as honorary men, under the influence of 'hegemonic masculinity'.²⁹⁶ How this compulsory alignment was received by the women is an open question here because of the nature of the data employed here. Were women more likely to have cohabited in a more collegial or sisterly manner than in a household dominated by male heads? Did women of different classes live together differently? As mentioned above, where sisters and aunts lived in households as 'dependants', they were frequently inscribed as 'housekeepers', even if that epithet appears to have been cancelled (struck through). Spinsters in the census occupied differentiated and ambiguous positions according to different circumstances in the census enumerators' returns. Their divergence seems to accord with Laclau's 'constitutive incompleteness': 'A particular identity becomes an identity by virtue of its relative location in an open system of differential social relations'.²⁹⁷

These positions extend beyond simple intersectionalism. The ideological implications of the public engagement of spinsters in the later nineteenth century are usually associated with middle-class women and philanthropy. These women gradually entered into the public arena of local government through the ad hoc boards.²⁹⁸

None made more of an impact than Miss Fanny Fullagar. Fullagar represents the middle-class spinsters concerned about the 'condition of England'

²⁹³TNA RG11/3153, fo. 29v.

²⁹⁴TNA RG9/2281, fo. 120v. (1861). One daughter, Eliza, died in 1879, with a probate valuation of her estate of up to £7000, in her early 50s. John Ellis of Belgrave, esq, had an estate valued at under £40,000 in 1862 (that is, personal estate excluding real estate): NPR 1862 Eaches-Fyson, p. 61.

²⁹⁵For an expansive interpretation of concepts of ideology and also Althusser's interpellation, Terry Eagleton, *Ideology: An Introduction* (new and updated edition, London: Verso, 2007), esp. pp. 141-56.

²⁹⁶R. W. Connell, *Masculinities* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995).

²⁹⁷Judith Butler, 'Restaging the universal: hegemony and the limits of formalism' in Butler, Ernesto Laclau and Slavoj Žižek, *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality: Contemporary Dialogues on the Left* (London: Verso, 2000), pp. 30-1

²⁹⁸See, in general, S. Aucott, *Women of Courage, Vision and Talent: Lives in Leicester 1870-1925* (Leicester, 2008).

in its local manifestations and the connection between the urban middle class and liberal and Liberal conscience. Fanny (1847-1918) was the third child of Frank Fullagar M.B.C.S., eye surgeon, who resided in Belvoir Street.²⁹⁹ As well as sitting on the Board of Guardians from 1889 to 1904, she was closely associated with the Leicester Liberal Association for Women. Excluded from full participation in the Liberal Party, the women established their own pressure and promotional association. Frank Fullagar died, a widower for over twenty years, on 31 March 1876, leaving personal estate valued at under £14,000.³⁰⁰ In his will of 10 February 1873, he appointed trustees to liquidate his assets and invest with two-thirds of the income directed to his two surviving daughters, Catherine (Katharine) and Fanny, for their life, taking advantage of the 1870 Married Women's Property Act.³⁰¹ In 1881, Katharine (nominal head) and Fanny were living together in Tower Street, both unmarried, receiving income from dividends.³⁰² Fanny subsequently moved to St Peter's Road where she lived with a single female servant, the enumerator recording her as 'Poor Law Guardian'.³⁰³ Katharine, still single, later rejoined her sister at St Peter's Road and again was designated nominal head of household as the elder sister. Their eight-roomed house accommodated a cook and a housemaid.³⁰⁴ Fanny Elizabeth Fullagar died on 13 January 1918 at 20 Mecklenburg Street. Probate was granted to Charles Sale Bigg, solicitor, and John Alfred Hopps, chartered accountant, to administer her effects valued at £1,450 14s 0d.³⁰⁵

'In my judgment, the irresistible forces behind all human affairs are bringing womanhood into the main stream of the world's active life'; so opined the Reverend J. Page Hopps in a letter published in the *Leicester Daily Post* on 2 January 1891 when the local Liberal Association refused the nomination of Miss Charlotte Ellis to the School Board.³⁰⁶ Miss Ellis had prior experience on the Belgrave School Board.³⁰⁷ When she stood for re-nomination as the Liberal candidate for the West Humberstone Ward to the Leicester Board of Guardians in 1896, she addressed the meeting on the contribution which women could make to the alleviation of the poor.³⁰⁸ Her interest in the

²⁹⁹TNA HO107/2088, fo. 127v.

³⁰⁰NPR 1876 Faber-Gyte, p. 185. Probate was granted to the surviving trustees in his will.

³⁰¹ROLLR DE462/19, pp. 423-8.

³⁰²TNA RG11/3173, fo. 48.

³⁰³TNA RG12/2525, fo. 46v.

³⁰⁴TNA 1911 census St Peter's Road schedule 12.

³⁰⁵NPR 1918 Dabbs-Gyle, p. 313. There is, of course, a blue plaque to her.

³⁰⁶*Leicester Daily Post* 2 December 1891, p. 5.

³⁰⁷*Leicester Chronicle* 17 August 1889, p. 7; *Leicester Daily Mercury* 15 March 1890, p. 3

³⁰⁸*Leicester Chronicle* 21 March 1896, p. 5.

predicament of the poor was manifest when in 1884 she despatched a parcel of periodicals for the inmates of the workhouse.³⁰⁹ During her service on the Leicester Board of Guardians from 1892, Miss Ellis was constantly an active member. She initiated a discussion, for example, in 1897 on the relationship between the labour test and the labour bureau.³¹⁰ By this time, the Board of Guardians had four unmarried women members: Miss Coy, two Misses Ellis, and Miss Fullagar.

Despite some setbacks with the Liberal Association, Miss Ellis was a stalwart on the Leicester Women's Liberal Association in collaboration with Misses Gittins, Logan, Fullagar, (Kate) Ellis and Bolus.³¹¹ These women, with Miss Annie Clephan, organized a suffrage meeting in 1890.³¹² An earlier women's suffrage committee had appointed Miss Ellis, Miss Gill and Miss Bolus as secretaries.³¹³ Indeed, at the age of 29, Charlotte Ellis had subscribed to the women's suffrage petition of 1866. Misses Ellis and Fullagar were also active in the local branch of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children.³¹⁴

As mentioned above, the Misses Ellis co-resided at The Gravel in Belgrave in 1881, all five unmarried, aged from the eldest, Jane (53), to the youngest, Ellen (41), with three female servants. The surviving sisters (Margaret, Isabella and Charlotte) continued in joint residence at The Hall in Belgrave until Charlotte's death in 1917. At her death, Charlotte's estate amounted to £11,551 8s 9d. The spinsters and sisters had decided to remain single and co-resident. Charlotte, concomitant with her Quaker heritage, entered actively into public service through the ad hoc boards in local government to which women were admitted.³¹⁵

The activism of these middle-class interventionists punctured, with other changes, the 'doctrine' of 'separate spheres' which had perhaps developed in middle-class households.³¹⁶ Some women 'insinuated' themselves into the pub-

³⁰⁹ *Leicester Journal* 8 February 1884, p. 7. Also 28 June 1878, p. 3.

³¹⁰ *Leicester Chronicle* 15 October 1892, p. 3; 17 August 1895, p. 10; 2 January 1897, p. 10.

³¹¹ *Leicester Chronicle* 4 February 1893, p. 11

³¹² *Leicester Daily Mercury* 15 April 1890.

³¹³ *Leicester Chronicle* 15 May 1880, p. 11.

³¹⁴ *Leicester Daily Post* 26 July 1889, p. 8.

³¹⁵ TNA RG11/3153, fo. 9v; ROLLR DE462/61, pp. 20-26 (will 1899, codicils 1908 and 1911); NPR 1918 Dabbs-Gyte, p. 180.

³¹⁶ Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780-1850* (London: Routledge, 1987) – and its critics; Robert Shoemaker, *Gender in English Society 1650-1850: The Emergence of Separate Spheres?* (Harlow: Pearson, 1998); Angela Hattery, *Women, Work, and Family: Balancing and Weaving* (London: Sage, 2001), pp. 87-8; Janet Wolf, *Feminine Sentences: Essays on Women and Culture* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995 repr.), pp. 12-33.

lic sphere with the expansion of the bureaucratic state in its local institutions, the ad hoc boards such as the Boards of Guardians and the School Boards. Women became eligible for election to the former from 1875. Their role extended beyond lower office and visitation to representation. Obstructions still remained, of course, for spinsters' participation in local governance, not least prejudice and the persistence of patriarchal attitudes.

Although these unmarried women might still be excluded from full engagement, they could be involved in the 'associational' society through their wealth, by significant legacies in their wills.³¹⁷ All the high-net-worth spinsters in the borough of Leicester made wills. Most of them included bequests to local organisations, to those which provided for the indigent and disadvantaged, but in some cases also to cultural organisations. The most beneficent was Elizabeth Dalton in her will and codicils of 1889 and 1893.³¹⁸ Her legacies were substantial, including to national organisations, but the focus here is on the local beneficiaries. All her paintings were bequeathed to the corporation of Leicester for the Art Gallery with an endowment of £1,000. (In addition, her etchings and drawings were presented to the Department of Science and Art). The same amount of money was directed to each of the Infirmary, the local Institution for Trained Nurses, the local society for support in Old Age, and the Provident Dispensary. Even more substantial benefactions were made to the Chaplaincy at the Infirmary (consistent with her bequests to national religious societies) (£2,000), the local association for the Welfare of the Blind and the Fever House (each £4,000) and the Blanket Lending Society (£5,000). Smaller, but still considerable, amounts were to be received by the Home for Penitential Females (£200), the local Society for the Relief of the Sick Poor, the Infant Orphan Asylum, and the Female Asylum (each £500). Elizabeth appointed her spinster sister, Emily, as her executor, and in her own will, Emily repeated the bequests (with Elizabeth as her executor).³¹⁹

Other spinsters in the borough could not match the amount of these benefactions, but patronised the same associations. For example, Martha Lawton included in her will bequests of £50 to each of the Female Asylum, the Blanket Society, and St John's Church School; £100 to each of the society for the Relief of Indigent Old Age, the same for the Relief of Sick Poor, the same for the Relief of the Blind, and to the Dispensary; the highest amount (£500) was left

³¹⁷For the associational society, Peter Clark, *British Clubs and Societies 1580-1800: The Origins of an Associational World* (Oxford: OUP, 2001) (i.e. Robert Putman's 'social capital').

³¹⁸ROLLR DE462/41, pp. 624-628. (The will also provides a very interesting insight into the furnishings of the urban upper-middle class).

³¹⁹ROLLR DE462/43, pp. 397-402 (will 1889; codicil 1893).

for the Infirmary.³²⁰ Sophia Heggs left commensurate amounts: £50 to each of the Dispensary, Blind Institution, Infant Orphanage, and St Mary's Church Schools; and £100 to the Infirmary.³²¹ Similarly, Eliza Flude bequeathed £100 to each of the Infirmary, and the societies for the Welfare of the Blind and the Infant Orphan Asylum (as well as national organisations for similar purposes).³²² Harriet Huskisson of De Montfort Street bequeathed £150 to each of the local societies for the Relief of Indigent Old Age, Relief of the Sick Poor and the Blind Institution.³²³ A smaller legacy of £50 was included in the will of Catherine Burnaby for each of the Infirmary, Lunatic Asylum, and Institution for the Blind in addition to legacies to national societies for religious observance. Referring back to her origins, she also made bequests for the National School in Asfordby and for a Christmas dole for the poor inhabitants in that village.³²⁴ Smaller amounts were included in the will of Georgiana Ireland, the daughter of Alderman George Ireland, consisting of £19 19s 0d to each of the society for the Relief of Indigent Old Age, the Relief of the Sick Poor, the Blanket Lending Society, and the Infirmary (for Georgiana, see below).³²⁵ Benefactions were made in the wills of Elizabeth Walker and Susannah Nedham to the Infirmary, the Fever House, the society of Indigent Old Age, and additionally by Elizabeth to the Infant Orphan Asylum and the local Association for the Blind, and by Susannah to the Leicestershire and Rutland Lunatic Asylum and the society for the Relief of Sick Poor.³²⁶

Practical exclusion from involvement in the associational life of the borough did not prevent these older, unmarried women from consideration of the local conditions of the less fortunate. Their conscience required them to make a contribution to the alleviation of the indigent and less fortunate. Some spinsters managed to enter into public life; others committed private support to the under-privileged. These women took advantage of their private social capital at the end of life, fostering some cultural activity for the wider public, but as importantly remembering the issues of the 'condition of England' in its local manifestations, as part of the liberal bourgeois ideology.³²⁷

³²⁰ROLLR DE462/15, pp. 391-406 (will 1863; codicils 1864-72).

³²¹ROLLR DE462/16, pp. 745-749 (will 1870).

³²²ROLLR DE462/44, pp. 417-422 (will 1893).

³²³ROLLR DE462/26, pp. 514-518.

³²⁴ROLLR DE462/12, pp. 151-155.

³²⁵ROLLR DE462/24, pp. 202-212 (will 1879) (this will also includes interesting descriptions of household furnishings of an upper-middle-class home).

³²⁶ROLLR DE462/32, pp. 8-9 (will 1889); DE 462/6, pp. 450-457 (will 1873).

³²⁷For middle-class cultural capital, Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (London: Routledge, 1987); R. J. (Bob) Morris, *Class, Sect, and Party: The Making of the British Middle Class; Leeds, 1820-1850* (Manchester: Manchester Uni-

Some different aspects of the potential role of spinsters are illustrated in the life and will of Georgiana Ireland. The last of the four daughters of George Ireland, she received a commemorative name from her father. He may have favoured her as the last daughter, although George and his wife, Priscilla had a later son, Edward. Having established a successful hosiery firm in Belgrave Gate, George became Mayor in 1821 and an Alderman. He died, however, at a relatively young age, in 1826. By his will of 1813, George made equal provision for all his five children.³²⁸ For a time, the two youngest daughters, Elizabeth Harriet and Georgiana, remained spinsters and co-resided at Prebend Terrace 81, London Road, a terrace of villas between Nelson Street and De Montfort Street. There, Georgiana died in 1881.³²⁹ Two years before her demise, Georgiana composed her will.³³⁰ Her dispositions of her household furnishings reveals the cultural attributes of the urban upper middle class and the social networks which she had accumulated, cemented towards the end of her life through the circulation of material goods (see The Appendix for more details).

How do changes in gender relations occur? How central or significant is gender in shaping women's and men's lives and experiences? What are the intersections of gender with other hierarchies of power and privilege?³³¹

One of the significant features of the different lifestyle of spinsters is the subversion of patriarchal authority in diverse ways. By co-residence sisters and spinsters evaded patriarchal dominance over the household. The affective relationship in these all-female households probably varied from the married household. Sisters had complete control without any male pressure over their personal estate and significantly appointed sisters and spinsters their executrices. Secondly, sisters and spinsters ventured into joint enterprise, particularly in educational provision and dressmaking. These enterprises remained, nevertheless, 'segregated' economies. In the former, education, women often played a subservient role as primary teachers in public ('voluntary' and Board) schools. Dressmaking was associated with female employment. Unmarried women thus established some independence in these businesses, but in a segregated sphere.

Some spinsters did, however, become managers of family concerns. In the

versity Press, 1990). Simon Gunn, *The Public Culture of the Victorian Middle Class: Ritual and Authority and the English Industrial City 1840-1914* (Manchester: MUP, 2000).

³²⁸ *Pigot's Directory* 1822, 1828, p. 216; TNA PROB11/1743, fos 163-4 (Prerogative Court of Canterbury will register, 1826-1828); ROLLR DE1564/16, p. 130 (no. 1034).

³²⁹ *Leicester Trade Protection Directory* 1870, p. 41.

³³⁰ ROLLR DE462/24, pp. 202-213.

³³¹ Lynn Segal, *Why Feminism? Gender, Psychology, Politics* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999), p. 41.

provisioning trade in particular some unmarried daughters, often the younger children, were entrusted to maintain the family business. Their capabilities were recognized. That position again punctured patriarchal dominance.

With some exceptions, those experiences, however, pertained to the bourgeoisie, upper and lower middle class. Spinsterhood was segmented by intersectional variation: class and identity overlapped. The subjective experience of unmarried women of the working class was quite different. In particular, servants continued to be subject to patriarchal dominance except when female servants lived in all-female households. The smaller proportion of unmarried women who worked in industrial production in factory units, although remaining independent, still succumbed to 'occupational' sorting in the workplace.³³²

³³²Burnette, *Gender, Work and Wages*, pp. 136-85.

APPENDIX

ROLLR DE462/24, pp. 202-213 (will 1879; probate 1881)

Legacies in the will of Georgiana Ireland:

To her sister, Harriet Marius A small mahogany bedstead with hangings and bedding, wines and spirits and provisions 'for housekeeping', a small dress cupboard, bedroom chairs, the smallest set of mahogany drawers, a looking glass, the floor carpet in testator's bedroom, four mahogany chairs with hair seats, a mahogany chiffonier

To her nephew, Henry A mahogany card table, the middle-sized mahogany bedstead with hangings and bedding, a looking glass, painted dressing and wash tables

To her nephew, William A walnut Chappell pianoforte

To her nephew, James Three marble ornaments on the dining room sideboard

To her nephew, George The portrait of the testator's father [George Ireland, Mayor of Leicester, 1821, deceased 1826 ROLLR DE1564/16, p. 130, no. 1034], the small dinner table, a mahogany card table, a set of oak drawers

To her niece, Mary Ann A glazed and framed needlework picture

To her great niece, Elizabeth The miniature of the testator's mother painted on ivory, a silver creamer engraved with the crest of a wolf's head, a rose diamond ring, a gold watch engraved 'PEJ', a rosewood pianoforte by Nutting & Addison, a rosewood desk, a workbox, a dressing case, a music stool, all the testator's printed and music books, jewellery, personal ornaments, trinkets and needlework

To her cousin, Eliza The portrait of the testator's late uncle Thomas Miller, all the testator's old lace, old China ornaments, a gold ring with amethyst centre late the testator's uncle's, a brooch with testator's uncle's likeness on the obverse and the letter 'M' in pearls on the reverse

To her friend, James King A walnut whatnot with Canterbury

To her friend, William Salusbury A pair of silver ladles engraved 'G. Ireland Mayor', and oil paintings (The Money Changers, a portrait of Kay the Naturalist by Sir Peter Lely, a portrait of Tycho Brake the Astronomer with Celestial Globe, a portrait of a Gentleman in a Red Coat by Hogarth, a small picture with two figures one wearing spectacles, oil painting on copper of The Adoration of the Magi)

To her friend, Mrs Salusbury, wife of William above An oil painting of a lady with her right arm visible by Sir Godfrey Kneller, two oil paintings of a boy and a girl by Greuze, six paintings of Scottish views by Mac Inhpe senior, a mahogany sideboard, a rosewood card table, a rosewood couch in the spare room, a walnut dressing table with glass, a wash table with marble top, a

mahogany towel horse, a pair of incense burners, a set of four spelt cases, two taller old China spelt cases and a vase, two blue and white China bowls, an electric-plated fish knife and fork in their case

To Margaret Salusbury, daughter of the above A gold chain with a ruby heart, a rosewood work table

To Dora Salusbury, daughter of the above A small painting of Skating on the Ice

To Beryl Salusbury, daughter of the above A small alabaster vase with its stand and snake handles

To her friend, Charles Crossley, surgeon Oil paintings (portrait of a gentleman and portrait of a lady by Sir Godfrey Kneller, Gypsies by Morland, Lady in a Pink Dress by Sir Peter Lely, Presentation of Jesus in the Temple by Ferdinand Bol, Bird's Nest by Melville, Seapiece with Boats on the Beach by Vickers senior, Flowers by Baptiste, a portrait of Sir Nicholas Bacon by Holbein, Fruit Girl painted on copper by Vandyke, a figure painted on a round panel by Ostade), a lady's wardrobe with glass centre, a bedstead with hangings and bedding, curtains, a mahogany secretaire in the front top bedroom, marbles on the staircase with their stands, a pair of black marble ornaments, an ironstone dinner service, the dinner table in the dining room with eight mahogany chairs, a chimney glass and curtains in the dining room, a rosewood sofa, a table, a rosewood couch in green damask, six rosewood chairs in the drawing room, and the carpet there, a pair of figures on each side of the drawing room door, a hat stand and hall chairs, six silver tea spoons engrave 'G. Ireland Mayor', four silver salt cellars with purple glasses, four silver salt spoons, a plated spirit stand with bottles, a garden roller and a grass mower

To Mary Jane Crossley, wife of Charles Testator's best pearl ring, a horse-hair couch and a painted rosewood easy chair, three vases in green and gold with painted landscapes

To Alice Mary Crossley, daughter of the above A pair of China ornaments, a pair of large blue vases in the drawing room

To Charles Crossley, son of the above An oil painting of the Earl of Clarendon in an oval framework.

To Arthur Crossley, son of the above A small oil painting of a sea piece with boats, a landing place and figures

To George Crossley, son of the above An illustrated bible, a pair of small oil paintings of figures on panels by Deniers

To her niece, Elizabeth Georgiana, and her servant, Elizabeth Brown All her wearing apparel

To her servant, Elizabeth Brown Furniture from the servant's room and an annuity of £30 Also many cash legacies to all the above.