Conclusion

In July of 1637 Jane Whittell of Bedford in Leigh, Lancashire, was asked by her neighbour to look after two ducks and a drake to stop them straying into the ripening corn before harvest. Unfortunately, the ducks did stray, not into the corn but onto a neighbour's property. Jane accused the neighbour's servant, Anne, of tempting the ducks away by feeding them before shutting them inside. In her defence, Anne said that she had been told by her mistress to shut up any stray ducks and pointed out that she had returned the ducks when Jane challenged her. Jane wanted to know what had happened to the drake, but Anne claimed she had never seen it. The dispute went to the Lancashire quarter sessions held at Wigan in Michaelmas that year, with depositions from Jane and Anne taken by John Atherton, the local JP.[1] This is just one of a multitude of entirely unremarkable disputes that provided evidence for this book. When Jane agreed to care for the ducks, it is very unlikely she anticipated it would lead to a dispute in court. We can be certain, however, that she had no inkling that almost 400 years later, a historian who shared her name would be using the evidence of that legal dispute to write a history of work in early modern England.

Thousands of disputes, crimes, misadventures, and enquiries provide evidence for this study. Individually such cases are often trivial, but EN MASSE they provide a new way of looking at the early modern economy. The findings enable areas of the economy that were previously shrouded in obscurity to be illuminated with new clarity. They allow us to recover the crucial role women played in all areas of the economy. They cause us to think again about the relationship between work and the market in early modern England. They suggest that focusing on the experience of work offers a corrective to many existing approaches to preindustrial economic development. This conclusion explores all these implications, beginning with the types of work that the work-task approach reveals and

[1] LaA, QSB/1/190, 54.

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conceals, before moving on to look at the relationship between work and the market, and what it was like to work in early modern England: the experience of work.

9.1 Hidden Work

The work-task approach reveals many aspects of work that historians had either failed to find adequate evidence of before, most prominently women's work, or have overlooked altogether. But there were also types of work that we did not collect or find evidence about, and types of work that remained underrepresented in the work-task data. The work-task approach is very effective at documenting women's work. Whereas previous studies provided examples of women working in a wide variety of activities, the work-task approach allows this to be quantified. We show that women worked in all the major areas of the economy. Of the 62 subcategories of work shown in Appendix B, women made up the majority of those carrying out work tasks in 27, and less than 10 per cent in only 12. Areas which women were largely excluded from were most common in crafts and construction, followed by agriculture and land, and transport. Yet even within these categories, we find women outnumbering men in textile and clothing production, in milking and gathering food, and in carrying goods and messages.

Our evidence suggests a flexible division of labour but one that varied in different parts of the economy.[2] Men and women participated roughly equally in commerce, although close analysis shows that men dominated higher-value transactions. Women did just over a third of agricultural work. They were most prominent in the core farming activities of livestock husbandry and arable agriculture but less involved in or absent from wood husbandry, hedging, and hunting and fishing. They dominated milking and dairying, almost to the exclusion of men. In contrast, the gender division of labour in crafts and construction was sharply defined. Women were almost or completely absent from apprenticed crafts. Sheilagh Ogilvie has credited guilds with excluding women from craft occupations in south-west Germany and more widely across early modern Europe.[3] Our evidence suggests something slightly different: that apprenticeship presented a barrier to women's entry into many specialist occupations whether or not guilds were present. England's labour laws required certain crafts to be entered only via apprenticeship, although they did not specify that apprentices should be male.

[2] Whittle and Hailwood, 'Gender division of labour'; Hailwood et al., 'Comparing the gender division'.
[3] Ogilvie, *Bitter Living*, pp. 329–31 and *European Guilds*, pp. 232–305.

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Women dominated all categories of housework and all but one of carework. Yet the assumption that these types of work were predominantly unpaid work by married women done within the family is incorrect: housework made up a larger proportion of unmarried women's work than that of married women and much of it was work 'for another'. Using the proportion of 'for another' housework and carework, we can re-estimate women's labour force participation, the measurement of work that excludes unpaid housework and carework. Broadberry et al. based their calculations of GDP on an estimate that 43 per cent of women's work was labour force participation compared to 97 per cent of men's work.[4] Our evidence suggests that 76 per cent of women's work was labour force participation as a minimum estimate.[5]

Jan de Vries bemoaned the inability of historians to look within the 'black box' of the household economy.[6] While the work-task approach does not allow forensic analysis of the working patterns of particular households, it does enable us to look at the average work patterns or repertoires of particular types of workers, such as married women, or men and women of particular age groups.[7] This shows that it was young unmarried women who did most housework. Carework was mostly skilled healthcare and midwifery, and involvement in this increased throughout women's lifecycle. The largest work category in our data for both married and widowed women was commerce, rather than housework.[8] We can also compare the work patterns of wives of men with particular occupations. This shows that the wives of husbandmen, artisans, and labourers had more in common with each other than with their husbands' work patterns. All these wives were significantly involved in commerce. The wives of artisans and labourers did equal amounts of crafts and construction work, mostly in textile and clothing production. The wives of husbandmen did slightly more agriculture than the other wives, but the difference was not great.[9] Thus, it should not be assumed that married women's work was defined by their husband's occupation: women had their own patterns of productive and manufacturing work, as well as their distinct involvement in housework and carework.

[4] Broadberry et al., *British Economic Growth*, p. 348.
[5] The other 24 per cent of women's work was housework and carework that was either not paid, carried out for members of their own household, or for which there was no information. For a more detailed discussion, see Whittle, 'Putting women back in'.
[6] de Vries, *Industrious Revolution*, p. 8.
[7] On the working patterns of households, using nineteenth-century data, see Burnette, 'How not to measure'.
[8] See Table 2.8. [9] See Table 2.18.

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Rather than guessing the work of labourers and servants according to where they lived or their gender, the work-task data allows the types of work these women and men did to be explored. This shows that labourers had high involvement in agriculture and transport, both of which were likely to be related to their paid work, but they also engaged in commerce, which was more likely connected to their own household economy. Servants' engagement in commerce was significantly lower because they lived in the households of others. Male servants, like labourers, had work repertoires dominated by agriculture and transport.[10] For female servants, housework was their biggest category of work, but agriculture still accounted for more than 20 per cent of their work tasks.[11] It has been suggested that husbandmen were interchangeable with labourers.[12] Our data indicates this was not the case: while there were similarities in work patterns, husbandmen did more agriculture and commerce, while labourers did more food processing (mostly threshing), and transport.[13] This suggests the balance between wage labour and independent farming was different for these two groups, with labourers doing more of the former and husbandmen more of the latter.

Some types of work were more prominent than expected in the dataset: transport was one of these. As Section 3.3 made clear, the transport category only includes tasks that had moving something as their main purpose, and that involved movement between properties. In addition to this, nearly every subcategory of work involved some transport activities. These demonstrate the difficulties faced when working in the early modern economy: the distances that had to be covered, typically on foot, to engage in commerce, sell or return the yarn you had spun, arrange building work, or pay a debt, for instance. Every communication required someone to be sent in person carrying a message. Goods had to be loaded and unloaded, often transported in small quantities because of limited capacity to carry more. It is here that the inefficiencies of the early modern economy lay.

Other types of work were either under-recorded, or less prominent than expected. Regional specialisms were often barely visible: this is a consequence of the methodology but also reflects the reality of early modern work. Both specialist occupations and regionally specific activities such as sea-fishing or lacemaking were drowned out by the multitude of more generic tasks that nearly everyone carried out in every place: activities such as commerce, agriculture, housework, carework, and

[10] See Table 2.15. [11] See Table 2.20.
[12] Shaw-Taylor, 'Rise of agrarian capitalism', p. 54. [13] See Table 2.15.

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transport.[14] For mariners, miners, and larger towns, more information about work could have been collected from the specialist courts that regulated their work, but this would have overrepresented them within the sample as a whole.

For two, or possibly three, types of work, the issue was the opposite: we know they were ubiquitous but are recorded less than expected. These were spinning, childcare, and cookery in the sense of meal preparation. The reasons are slightly different in each case. Independent estimates of the spinning needed to support the cloth industry demonstrate it is under-recorded in our dataset.[15] This is largely because people felt no need to mention something so common and when they did mention it, spinning was often referred to as 'working' without the details needed to record it as a specific work task, as when women were described 'working in the doorway' of their houses. For childcare the issue is twofold: childcare seems to have been combined with other work activities in most cases, and children themselves started working at a young age. This meant dedicated time spent caring for children was largely limited to very young infants and sick children. Childcare took up less time than might be expected in early modern England. The issue with cooking is similar. Early modern cookery books and historical reconstructions of dishes prepared for feasts have perhaps encouraged an overestimation of the time people spent cooking. If we separate out food processing and the collection of water and fuel, the actual preparation of meals seems to have taken relatively little time: a large pot often simmered on the hearth without a great deal of supervision. Ingredients were presumably quite quickly cleaned, chopped, and added to it. Bread was typically purchased.

There were types of work that we deliberately did not record. This includes the work of administering justice and the probate process, as well as the drawing up and witnessing of documents including wills and contracts, and also office-holding duties including those undertaken by the clergy. These were all important forms of work, not only undertaken by men with occupational titles such as lawyer, clerk, and clergyman but by others such as the widows who typically administered their husband's probate, or the neighbours who were called in to witness documents. However, if they had been included in the dataset, they would have been grossly overrepresented, and would have swamped the other forms of work we were keen to collect. We also excluded crime for the same reason, despite the fact it was an important way of making a living for

[14] On regional similarities and differences, see Section 3.1.
[15] Muldrew, '"Th'ancient distaff"'.

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many English people. Poaching, for instance, was undoubtedly common but is either not mentioned because it was criminal or forms the central focus of cases taken to the quarter sessions and therefore was not recorded.

A final important form of work is absent from the dataset. We did not record sex or pregnancy as work unless it was explicitly paid – and we found no examples of explicit payment. Using Margaret Reid's third-party criterion to define work, it is unclear whether, in an early modern context, sex or pregnancy meets the definition of work unless it was paid.[16] The church courts were full of accusations that women were 'whores', and to a lesser extent, that establishments were 'bawdy houses' or brothels, but this is evidence of the insults commonly hurled around early modern communities rather than precise evidence of work tasks. Very occasionally paid sex work formed the central focus of a case, but for that reason we did not record it, in the same way that other crimes and disorders central to cases were not included in the database. We found no cases where paid sex was mentioned incidentally. Paid sex work was undoubtedly present but was not commonly documented in the courts we consulted: urban court records might contain more evidence.[17]

The work-task approach cannot claim to recover the entire range of work in early modern England; however, it is more effective than any other existing approach at providing a holistic view of the most common types of everyday work undertaken by women and men. Its particular strengths are providing evidence about women's work, unpaid work, and the details of what people actually did in their working lives, including the tasks undertaken by people with particular occupations.

9.2 Work and the Market

Economic change in early modern England was rooted in market relations. Structural change that involved a shift from agriculture to work in manufacturing and services was premised on households' increased dependence on the market to buy their daily necessities, and the increased marketing of agricultural goods to provide those necessities. Urbanisation relied on the same dynamics. Proletarianisation indicates that even within agriculture, workers became more likely to work for wages than to use their own land and resources. Evidence of economic change is therefore located in the relationship between work and the

[16] Reid, *Economics of Household Production*, p. 11.
[17] See Ingram, *Carnal Knowledge*, pp. 404–5.

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market. This had two main dimensions: an increase in paid work, and an increase in work that connected to selling and buying goods. In the work-task approach such work is indicated by work 'for another' and work in the commerce and management categories.

The 'for another' category is not equivalent to paid work. To recap, work 'for another' fell into three main subcategories: work that was explicitly paid, work undertaken by servants, and work that was done for people outside the household but for which no further details were available.[18] While the first two subcategories were paid, the third subcategory most likely included a mixture of paid work, work done in exchange, and work carried out by kindness or charity. Work for which no details at all were available about the context was counted as 'not for another', meaning that work 'for another' must be an underestimate of work undertaken for pay or for others outside the household. Nonetheless, rates were high.

Women did slightly more 'for another' work than men, at 36 per cent compared to 35 per cent. Similarly, women did almost as much work in the commerce and management categories as men, 48 per cent and 49 per cent respectively. This indicates that we should not assume women were less engaged in market work than men. In part, this was because housework and carework were much more likely to be done 'for another' than many historians have anticipated. The proportion was particularly high for carework at 78 per cent, the highest of any of our work categories. Rather than capturing large quantities of childcare, the carework category is dominated by healthcare and midwifery. This was predominantly carried out by women 'for another', showing that women dominated the grassroots of healthcare provision – not by caring for their own families but by providing skilled medical advice and care *outside* the household. The proportion of housework 'for another' was also relatively high at 44 per cent, only two percentage points lower than agriculture at 46 per cent. Both carework and housework were frequently commercialised as sources of income, rather than being subsistence services provided within the family.[19] The commerce and management categories captured the petty commerce of everyday market exchanges, as well as the tasks of credit and the pawning of goods. Men were more likely to undertake high-value transactions, but women were prominent in the marketplace and in money management. Marjorie McIntosh emphasised the 'limited set of choices' available to women in the market economy.[20] We are more inclined to emphasise the ubiquity of women's market work

[18] See Section 2.2. [19] Whittle, 'Critique of approaches'.
[20] McIntosh, *Working Women*, p. 251.

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and the prominent role played by married women. Women did face restrictions, imposed by their lack of property rights within marriage (coverture), and by exclusion from most apprenticeships and professions, but they were nonetheless active within the market economy.

As explained in Section 1.4, the work-task data is not effective at tracking change within the study period from 1500 to 1700, as it is influenced by the changing composition of courts and types of cases. It is most reliable when using incidental evidence only. If the incidental evidence is divided into two periods, 1500 to 1630 and 1631 to 1700, this shows no significant change over time. Counterintuitively, there was a slight increase in agricultural work and decrease in work in crafts and construction. The gender division of labour also changed little, with a slight decline in the proportion of agricultural work done by women, and a slight increase in women's commerce and management work.[21] However, the work-task data can be used to interrogate other theories and datasets that explore change in the early modern economy, particularly the growth of non-agricultural occupations and the lengthening of the working year.

Work-task data can be used to dissect the composition of occupations, that is, to explore the types of work people with particular occupational descriptors actually did.[22] This shows that artisans with craft occupations spent a relatively small amount of time engaged directly in their primary occupation, and the proportion was lower for less wealthy artisans such as weavers and shoemakers. As expected, yeomen, husbandmen, labourers, and male servants did the largest proportions of agricultural work, but men with other types of occupations such as artisans, professionals, and gentlemen, also did significant amounts of agricultural work. Combined with the evidence that incidental work tasks changed little over time, this suggests that the occupational data which underlies discussions of structural economic change in early modern England overstates the extent of change.[23] Occupational profiles undoubtedly did change over time, with more men being identified by secondary sector, craft occupations. But it seems that the work at the level of work tasks changed little: work tasks were reshuffled into a slightly different occupational profile rather than the nature of the economy being transformed.[24]

[21] See Section 1.4. [22] See Section 2.5.

[23] For example, Broadberry et al., 'When did Britain industrialise?'; Keibek, 'Male occupational structure'; Wallis et al., 'Structural change'.

[24] See Aucoin et al., 'Structural change', for further comparison between occupations and work tasks.

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Another important strand of recent theories of early modern economic change has been the argument of increased 'industriousness' or work intensity, to explain how a smaller proportion of workers in agriculture could provide food for the increasing proportion of people with non-agricultural occupations. Here discussion focuses primarily on an increase in the number of days worked each year.[25] The need to explain this change is largely removed if we accept that the proportion of agricultural work, at the level of work tasks, did not change significantly. However, the work-task approach also provides more direct evidence about time-use. This shows long working days in the early modern period, a steady working year, and significant quantities of work undertaken even on Sundays.[26] There is no evidence of the observance of St Monday. This undermines Hans-Joachim Voth's much-quoted conclusion that the working year lengthened because the observation of St Monday declined after 1750.[27] In so far as St Monday was ever observed, it was restricted to male craftsmen in London, a very small proportion of England's overall workforce. The work pattern we observe makes sense, given the demands of a rural, agricultural economy: the care of livestock, in particular, was a constant requirement, not something that could be skipped on Sunday or Monday or avoided in the evening.

Evidence of a lengthening working year is also provided by Jane Humphries and Jacob Weisdorf. They show that unskilled day labourers had to work an increasing number of days per year to equal the wages of annual servants, rising from c.150 days a year to 250 days during the seventeenth century.[28] Leaving aside issues of how many days servants worked annually, and whether day labourer and service were interchangeable in the way their model suggests, a more fundamental question can be asked. Does this indicate labourers were doing more work in total or just more paid work? It is possible that the whole debate, from Jan de Vries' 'industrious revolution' to Broadberry et al.'s increased work intensity, has been focused on the wrong issue.[29] Rather than preindustrial workers replacing leisure with work under stimulus from a more commercialised economy, what took place was the replacement of independent work in small farms and workshops with paid work, or proletarianisation. Agriculture was increasingly dominated by wage

[25] Broadberry et al., *British Economic Growth*, p. 405; Humphries and Weisdorf, 'Unreal wages', p. 2880.
[26] Hailwood, 'Time and work', and Chapter 4. [27] Voth, *Time and Work*, pp. 268–9.
[28] Humphries and Weisdorf, 'Unreal wages', esp. pp. 2880–1.
[29] de Vries, *Industrious Revolution*; Broadberry et al., *British Economic Growth*, pp. 340–70.

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labour rather than independent farmers.[30] It may also be the case that paid work was more productive, because it took control of work away from the worker and forced other forms of work to be squeezed in around the paid working day and week. It remains unclear how far this applied to women as well as men. There are some indications that women's paid work in agriculture declined when men's increased: our evidence suggests this was replaced with work in commerce. Craig Muldrew indicates that women's paid work in spinning also increased.[31]

The polemical literature generated by those supporting Parliamentary enclosures in the late eighteenth century offers an interesting perspective on this issue. Rural dwellers who made at least a partially independent living from small farms and common land were characterised as 'subsisting in idleness', being 'less inclined to work', and as involved in 'lazy industry' and 'beggarly independence'. They were an 'idle, useless and disorderly set of people'. Small farmers were mocked because they 'wasted their time at market, full of their own importance'.[32] These were the remnants of the early modern economy, seen through the eyes of wealthy employers and their supporters, who wished to use these people as cheap and subservient labour. Economic historians should be wary of echoing these prejudices.

9.3 The Experience of Work

Adam Smith began *The Wealth of Nations* by describing the efficiencies of production that could be achieved by the increased division of labour into more specialised occupations. The pin-maker or nail-maker could work faster at producing pins or nails than a smith who did a wider range of metalworking. Indeed, pin-making could be separated into 18 different processes, each undertaken by a specialist worker.[33] But if given a choice, would you rather be the worker who sharpens the point on 48,000 pins each day, or a blacksmith working a forge, shoeing horses, mending tools, chatting to customers, and perhaps making a few nails? E. P. Thompson records the persistent complaint of skilled workmen in the 1830s that '"they wish to make us tools" or "implements" or "machines"'.[34] But workers are not tools; they are people. Smith noted three ways in which labour could become more productive: first, through the dexterity and skill achieved by focusing on specialist processes; second, by avoiding 'the time which is commonly lost in passing from one species of

[30] Shaw-Taylor, 'Rise of agrarian capitalism'. [31] Muldrew, '"Th'ancient distaff"'.
[32] Neeson, *Commoners*, pp. 28–33. [33] Smith, *Wealth of Nations*, pp. 18–25.
[34] Thompson, *Making of the English Working Class*, p. 898.

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work to another'; and, third, by using machines which 'facilitate and abridge labour'.[35] By all these measures, work in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was inefficient. People worked long hours, weeks, and years, but their work was relatively unspecialised and involved a great deal of movement from one task to another. Very little was mechanised. The work-task data highlights both the multiple processes involved in particular occupations, and the varied work patterns that combined multiple occupations, much like Smith's country weaver 'who cultivates a small farm, must lose a good deal of time passing from his loom to the field, and from his field to the loom'.[36]

Yet, although the early modern economy was not as efficient as those of later centuries in its use of labour, it was self-sufficient at a national level, sustainable, and efficient in its use of resources: qualities which are absent from modern industrial economies. It relied on human and animal power, with a small amount of wind and waterpower used in mills. Fuel for heating and industry was largely obtained from wood, although London was already dependent on mineral coal by 1700.[37] The use of land and natural resources was maximised. Trees and hedges were carefully managed for renewable timber; women picked shreds of wool dropped from sheep on common land to spin at home; rough pastures were periodically cleared and ploughed; birds, fish, and rabbits were caught and eaten.[38] Households were not self-sufficient, but householders strove for independence, achieved by engaging in multiple forms of work and monetising almost every product and service in the market. Independence did not mean isolation. Most work took place outside and even inside spaces were open to the sight and hearing of servants and neighbours. The prevalence of work 'for another' suggests cooperation and neighbourliness as well as the pervasiveness of paid work. The gender division of labour suggests a 'two-supporter model' in which wife and husband both worked to support the household, assisted by children and servants. The gender division of labour was flexible and adaptable, and wives often had their own occupations as well as sometimes assisting with their husband's work.

Early modern work should not be romanticised. The work-task database contains evidence not only of families running their own farms and independent workshops but also of artisans and the homeless begging for food and drink, people who stole to feed their families, children who were neglected or died while carrying out dangerous work, and family members and servants who suffered violent assault from relatives or

[35] Smith, *Wealth of Nations*, pp. 21–2. [36] Ibid., p. 23. [37] Wrigley, 'Urban growth'.
[38] See also Warde, *Invention of Sustainability*.

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employers. But we should consider what has been lost as well as gained over the centuries. Most importantly, we should remember that although work tasks were the constituent elements that created the economy, the workers of early modern England were not tools or instruments – they were people, and their experiences matter in their own right. This book has aimed to make the experiences of all types of workers in England more visible. It provides a more complete view of how people experienced and contributed to the economy, women as well as men, and illuminates the central place of work in early modern lives.

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