

The Black Death, Girl Power and the Emergence of the European Marriage Pattern in England

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The first outbreak of the Black Death between 1347 and 1353 probably halved the population of Europe and thereafter recurrent outbreaks contributed to a long period of demographic stagnation. The response and adaptation of land and labour markets to the supply-side shock waves following this succession of epidemics, and the resultant chronic shortages of labour between the mid-fourteenth and early sixteenth centuries, is attracting renewed attention from historians.¹ As Alfani and Murphy observe, broadly similar demographic experiences triggered very different regional responses in labour markets, which were a major factor in determining whether plague had a positive or negative long-term impact on levels of income per head and income inequality in a particular society.² For example, demographic decline was associated with the dissolution of serfdom in some areas of the continent, thereby freeing up markets for land and waged labour and reducing income inequality, but resulted in its maintenance or reimposition in others, reinforcing pre-existing inequalities and inhibiting the emergence of factor markets.³

The demographic collapse resulted in a well-documented increase in nominal and real wages, and the greater ease of obtaining employment probably bolstered annual earnings for the mass of the populace. Shortage of tenants and declining land values reduced the proportion of landless and increased the average size of landholding, sucking more labour from the wage earning sector. For these reasons, the Black Death ushered in a 'golden age' for the peasantry. The central questions in debates about the long-term impact of plague are the extent of these gains, how sustained were they, and the extent to which a greater proportion of women were drawn into land and labour markets? Participation in factor markets would not only increase women's earning capacity, but also strengthen their position in society through greater independence and higher levels of social capital.⁴ Furthermore, it carried potentially significant implications for marital choices, because working and landed women were more likely to dictate whether, when and whom they married, which in turn

carried potentially significant implications for overall demographic behaviour and levels of human capital formation.⁵ In this respect, the later Middle Ages can be seen as a golden age of women or, put another way, an enhancement of ‘girl power’.

One important line of argument is that variations in the extent of girl power across Europe carried profound implications for long-term levels of economic performance. Women in the North Sea region, it is argued, were drawn into land and labour markets after the Black Death to a far greater extent than in other parts of Europe, which in turn raised the average age of women at first marriage (from perhaps 20 years to around 25), increased the proportion of non-marrying women, and led to the formation of conjugal households based on the nuclear family: the characteristics of Hajnal’s famous ‘European Marriage Pattern’ (EMP), also known as the (Northwest European Marriage Pattern). As de Pleijt and van Zanden state, ‘labour market engagement by women plays a role in the explanation of the EMP...the degree to which women participate in labour markets and how they are remunerated are important determinants of female autonomy that may also affect their demographic behaviour’.⁶ In turn, the EMP is associated with fertility restriction, greater emphasis within the household on the literacy and numeracy of children (‘quality’ not ‘quantity’), higher levels of household income in the long run, and therefore superior levels of economic performance.⁷ In these ways, girl power drove the Little Divergence, whereby the North Sea region pulled ahead of the rest of Europe between the fifteenth to eighteenth centuries on the roadway to liberal modernity.⁸

In this scenario, after 1350 the structure of land and labour markets in the North Sea region of Europe facilitated greater female engagement than in other parts of Europe.⁹ In particular, it is argued that women in their teens and early twenties increasingly opted for work as live-in, and therefore unmarried, servants on annual contracts either on large rural livestock farms or in urban workshops and households, although they could also obtain better paid and more regular work as day and casual labourers. Furthermore, women could legally inherit and exchange land as individual agents, which provided opportunities to construct a land bank in preparation for marriage. Greater female agency and material rewards presented opportunities to build a marriage fund. In southern Europe, by contrast, it is argued servanthood was dominated mainly by children and young teenagers, and there were far fewer unmarried servants in the workforce. Women were discouraged from entering labour

markets more generally and legally constrained from acquiring land as individual agents.

Consequently, they tended to marry earlier and to live in large extended family households.¹⁰

Hence a broadly similar experience across Europe—severe then sustained demographic decline—was filtered through different institutional frameworks to generate very different levels of girl power. If these arguments are correct, then the Black Death ushered in a ‘golden age’ for women in the North Sea region. Those who adopt this view do not claim that this period saw the end of gender inequalities, but nonetheless see women as enjoying higher wages, increased earnings, more opportunities to acquire land, improved standards of living, and greater agency over who or whether to marry. A critical mass of young women chose to marry later in life, or not at all, with the result that the EMP must have emerged sometime between the 1370s and the 1450s. One recent simulation of changing English marriage patterns has estimated that the shift occurred around the middle of the fifteenth century, with the average age of females at first marriage rising from 18 to 24 years.¹¹ As Steve Rigby has observed, ‘the great attraction of this perspective is that...it provides a coherent model in which women’s changing social position and agency come to have a key role in explaining change within the economy as a whole.’¹²

Although this model has found support in various quarters, both of its central components—the existence of a golden age for women and its direct causal linkage with the emergence of the EMP in the century after the Black Death—have attracted considerable scepticism.¹³ The sceptics doubt the extent of women’s economic gains after the Black Death, thereby challenging the link between economic prosperity and the emergence of the EMP: even the link between the EMP and the march to modernity has been disputed.¹⁴ The result has been a vigorous and wide-ranging debate, in which England occupies an important position: first, because from the mid-fourteenth century it was laying the foundations which allowed its economic performance to become one of the strongest in Europe and, second, because from 1550 it is argued that the EMP was firmly established there.

Yet the case of England also epitomises the serious challenges to resolving the wider debate. Although its documentary base is better than anywhere else in Europe, it is still inadequate for determining definitively before 1600 how often women worked and in what types of work, and how changes in women’s employment were connected to changes in their age at first marriage or to remain

single. Thus we are forced to rely on patchy and indirect evidence, sewn together with *a priori* arguments and econometric modelling, a combination liable to generate heat as well as light. As a result, there is little consensus among medievalists over the extent to which women delayed marriage in response to the changed post-Black Death environment.¹⁵ As Horrell, Humphries and Weisdorf state elsewhere in this issue, women might well be moving ‘to centre stage as the economic actors responsible for kick-starting growth, but empirical evidence...on women’s incentives in, and responsiveness to, the changed environment is missing.’¹⁶ Their article exemplifies how meticulous research does indeed continue to improve our understanding, but the absence of the requisite hard demographic data and of reliable information about the type and rewards of women’s work before 1600 remains an insurmountable obstacle to arriving at secure conclusions about what changes might have occurred in the late Middle Ages.

The lack of reliable evidence also extends to the demography of the sixteenth century, although this is often overlooked in the debate over the EMP. It is widely held that English women were already postponing marriage in the sixteenth century, confirming the existence of the EMP at that date. For example, Voigtlander and Voth state that ‘in England the average age at first marriage between 1500 and 1650 was similar to that in the USA in 1990, that is 26.5 versus 26.9’.¹⁷ But this confident statement obscures the vital point that the English figure is an estimate, constructed from raw information about baptisms, marriage and deaths in parish registers which has then been converted into estimates of fertility rates, mortality rates and marriage patterns through the careful yet speculative reconstitution of family groups.¹⁸ While parish registers are unequivocally the best source of raw demographic data available for sixteenth-century Europe, and while they generate the best available estimates of demographic trends, both remain problematic. First, the principal architects of family reconstitution from parish registers—Wrigley and Schofield—issued strong warnings about the problems presented by both the sources and their own methods. They cautioned that parish registers are ‘far too imperfect’ as a source for definitive demographic data and have to be subjected to ‘a long and circuitous’ method of family reconstitution in order to ‘circumvent’ their inherent ‘pitfalls’: consequently, both the original sources and the historical methodology are ‘defective guides’ and subject to ‘a margin of error’ when reconstructing demographic data.¹⁹ Second, these

reservations are especially relevant to the sixteenth-century data. Parish registers did not exist before 1538, the number and quality of surviving registers for the rest of that century are lower than for the seventeenth century, and consequently they yield demographic data which are highly—suspiciously—variable from year to year.²⁰ Thus we cannot be entirely sure that by 1550 a strong version of the EMP really was established in England.

The purpose of this essay is to sketch out the principal arguments about changes in female access to labour and land markets in the two centuries after the first outbreak of the Black Death in England; to discuss the reliability of the evidence for such changes; and to consider their implications for the emergence of the EMP. It also offers some preliminary insights from original research into legal disputes over labour contracts after 1350 and into women's access to the land market in the wake of the first epidemic in 1348-9, when opportunities available to females are thought to have been expanding most rapidly. It concludes that women were drawn into the labour market after 1350 and, for those on day wages, remuneration and earnings were greatest between 1350 and the early fifteenth century. Servanthood, by contrast, was poorly remunerated. Furthermore, societal prejudices against female autonomy and their presence in the workforce remained strong. Despite the wider availability of land, single women were less engaged in the land market after 1350 than before. Hence girl power increased, but there were distinct limits to the gains. There exists no reliable evidence before 1600 for either the presence of significant numbers of unmarried young female servants in their early twenties or the existence of the EMP in England, and the nature of the extant source material means we will never have conclusive evidence for either. However, what strands of evidence do exist do not provide strong support for a major swing to female servanthood in the century after the Black Death.

This essay begins by setting out each of the main arguments supporting the view that in the century after 1350 the involvement of women in labour markets increased sufficiently for the EMP to become established as England's demographic system, and subjects them to critical review. It then offers a similar summary and critical survey of debates about women's role in the land market. It concludes first by assessing three different chronologies of the transition to the EMP, and then by setting out some possible new lines of enquiry about structural changes in women's work during the sixteenth century.

‘Girl Power’, labour markets and marriage

The case for increased female agency after 1350 in the English labour market is founded on four principal lines of argument: a major swing to pastoral farming which greatly increased the work opportunities for females in servanthood; improved employment for women in urban servanthood; better pay for females; and labour legislation forcing women away from casual work and into annual contracts as live-in servants. The common theme here is that most female employment in this supposed ‘golden age’ lay in annual servanthood rather than in day or piece work for wages. Since servants on annual contracts were usually required to be single, then this caused young women opting for employment to delay marriage, thus reducing their child-bearing capacity. Hence servanthood is regarded as the crucial link between increased female employment and the emergence of the EMP, and it too is assumed to have been widely established by the sixteenth century.²¹ The major scholarly work on servanthood in early modern England suggests that 60 per cent of the population aged fifteen to twenty four years of age were servants.²²

For this linked argument to be persuasive, historians have to prove that during the later Middle Ages the gains in women’s wages were sufficient to generate considerable girl power, that they remained single while they worked and/or that servanthood increased among a large enough proportion of young women to shift the entire demographic system of England. Herein lies a major problem, which is at the centre of much of the debate. Medieval sources for women’s work are varied, discontinuous, scattered over time and place, and problematic. The best available data relate to wage rates, as Horrell, Humphries and Weisdorf show in this issue (and see below), but there is scarcely any indication of annual earnings. Information about servanthood is indirect and partial, which means we can never know whether, when or by how much the proportion of servants rose after 1350.²³ The evidence from late medieval England does not and cannot enable us either the extent of female gains or to establish when the decisive swing towards single female servants occurred in rural areas. Instead, all we can do is identify from partial and inadequate sources the presence or absence of tendencies encouraging the spread of live-in servanthood and debate their relative strength and significance.

We can be certain on two points: first, servanthood was not uncommon before the Black Death, which means that it was not novel thereafter.²⁴ Second, it was as much a male as a female institution. In the poll tax returns of 1379 and 1381 68 per cent of taxpayers described as servants in the Essex returns were male, as were 57 per cent of those in South Erpingham hundred in Norfolk.²⁵ In the early sixteenth century women tended to outnumbered male servants in towns, but in some rural areas male servants comfortably outnumbered female.²⁶ Thus arguments in favour of increased servanthood after 1350 must be sensitive to the prevalence of male servants, whose presence did not necessarily carry the same implications for the demographic system as young female servants.

Pastoral farming and women's work

According to a powerful argument articulated by Voigtlander and Voth, a sharp swing to commercial pastoral production after the Black Death was a major factor in raising 'female employment opportunities outside the peasant household'. The swing to pasture was due to a rising consumption per head of animal produce through the higher living standards of survivors of plague, and it was mainly a feature of the North Sea region where climatic conditions were best suited to stock rearing. Within this region, according to this argument, pastoral production was concentrated mainly on the large farms of landlords who were highly dependent on resident, and therefore unmarried, women to work their enterprises, which resulted in postponed marriages and curtailed childbearing.²⁷

Voigtlander and Voth estimate that these processes raised the age of females at first marriage by perhaps four years during the course of the later Middle Ages, and explain how servanthood had come to be such a major institution in early modern England.²⁸

Edwards and Ogilvie have challenged Voigtlander and Voth's assumption that women could only work in in pastoral agriculture as unmarried servants for landlords, which forms the crucial link between the swing to pastoral production after the Black Death and the supposed presence of the EMP and widespread servanthood in the sixteenth century. As they point out, before c.1600 we have no reliable evidence for the proportion of young women in rural servanthood in England and we know that medieval landlords hired women to work on their demesnes on day and piece rates, not just on annual contracts. Finally, they marshal the abundant historical evidence for peasant, not landlord,

domination of late-medieval livestock farming, which decouples the link between large-scale pastoralism and the rise of rural single servanthood. Peasant agriculturalists were capable of undertaking most of the necessary work involved in rearing livestock and poultry through their family labour, perhaps occasionally hiring additional casual labour, without any significant need for live-in servants.²⁹ In other words, rural women could marry early and still access the labour market or engage in pastoral activities. Indeed, Mate's detailed study of the pastoral economy of the Sussex Weald after 1350 reveals married women on smallholdings, keeping poultry and livestock, and supplementing their income with intermittent brewing, spinning and harvesting. Women could be married and work in pastoral pursuits: indeed, 'the ability of a wife to supplement the family's income...may have encouraged some couples to marry fairly young'.³⁰

The response of Voigtlander and Voth to this wide-ranging critique of their argument is uncompromising, accusing Edwards and Ogilvie of 'a flawed reading of the historical evidence' and an over-reliance on 'individual cases and isolated examples'.³¹ They reassert that 'since pastoral production increased significantly after the Black Death, so did life cycle servanthood...in an increasingly pastoral economy, there was more service husbandry,' and cite the leading historical scholar on servanthood on early modern England, Kussmaul, to re-affirm the association between large pastoral farms and a high proportion of young single female servants.³² Voigtlander and Voth also dispute the notion that peasant production dominated the pastoral sector in medieval England and clarify that in their model a 'peasant' is defined as all 'people who farm at best small plots, without hiring outside labor. Everyone else—anyone who hires laborers—is referred to as 'landlords'...this of course includes farmers on leased land who often cultivate large plots by hiring servants and day laborers, and not just noble lords.'³³

In turn, Edwards and Ogilvie are equally unyielding, restating the 'serious flaws' in Voigtlander and Voth's original analysis, dissecting Voigtlander and Voth's rejoinders point by point, and dismissing the attempted rebuttal as a complete failure.³⁴ They argue that Voigtlander and Voth's re-definitions of 'peasant' and 'landlord' bear little resemblance to those recognised in an extensive academic literature, and they rehearse again the widespread evidence for peasant (conventionally defined) dominance of pastoral pursuits in the later Middle Ages, and the association between peasant

enterprises and a married/family—rather than single female—workforce.³⁵ In particular, they emphasise Voigtlander and Voth’s unwillingness to acknowledge that the only hard evidence for the ubiquity of young female servanthood dates from after 1600.³⁶

What are we to make of this robust exchange? Edwards and Ogilvie are correct to emphasise the lack of quantifiable data about the extent of female servanthood before the seventeenth century. Voigtlander and Voth rely on Kussmaul’s work for evidence of servanthood, but her figures are derived from a data-set of 100 parish listings, of which just five date from before 1650, and so her sample cannot serve as a reliable guide to the proportion of married young females, or the prevalence of female servants, before that date.³⁷ Pre-1650 English sources are not straightforward to interpret, even for the groups of the population they include, and cannot yield a reliable estimate of the proportion nationally of young females working as servants.³⁸ Voigtlander and Voth are insufficiently sensitive to this point, instead placing considerable reliance on their re-working of the poll tax data of 1377 to 1381 to establish the significance of servants within the population at this early date.³⁹ Unfortunately, the meaning and recording of ‘servant’ here is too variable and uncertain, and unmarried females are too liable to be under-recorded, for these sources to sustain reliable aggregate analysis of this type.⁴⁰ The most reliable and cautious research into servants in the period 1450 to 1650 reveals that servanthood was widespread, that female servants marginally outnumbered males, and that female servants were most prominent in smaller households and regions where spinning and dairying were common pursuits.⁴¹ Beyond such generalisations, we cannot know precise proportions of young females in servanthood or be certain about changes over time.

There is no disputing Voigtlander and Voth’s basic point that pastoral production increased after 1350, because the swing is reliably evidenced in various ways.⁴² Similarly, landlords (conventionally defined) manifestly had to hire local people to run their pastoral operations, unlike peasant producers who could draw primarily on family labour. It does not follow, however, that livestock raising in the later Middle Ages was organised predominantly in large seigniorial production units requiring live-in, female, servants or that the proportion of unmarried female servants quickly reached the threshold sufficient to transform England’s demographic system. First, Voigtlander and Voth’s definition of a landlord as ‘anyone hiring labour’ provides a tidy solution for the purposes of their theoretical model,

but creates havoc for those grappling with historical reality: adopting such a definition would require historians to recategorize any serf holding in excess of twenty acres of land as the holding of a landlord. Second, landlords could and did hire workers on day rates, on annual contracts but not as live-in servants, and on annual contracts as live-in servants, but we can never know the relative balance of each at a given time or how it changed over time. Likewise, although we cannot know the exact contributions of the peasant and seigniorial sectors to overall pastoral output, Edwards and Ogilvie offer a salutary corrective to Voigtlander and Voth's excessive focus on the latter by demonstrating the importance of the former in both the pre- and post-plague eras.⁴³ As Dyer has recently observed of the west Midlands after the Black Death, 'peasant livestock, taken together, greatly outnumbered those kept by their lords.'⁴⁴ For all these reasons, Edwards and Ogilvie are convincing in challenging Voigtlander and Voth's claim 'that the historical facts...do not contradict our arguments'.⁴⁵

Edwards and Ogilvie's emphasis on the dominance of the peasant sector within overall pastoral production can be strengthened further, because the withdrawal of major landlords from direct involvement in pastoral pursuits after 1350 is very well documented. From the mid-fourteenth century higher-status landlords increasingly leased out the various components of their demesnes piecemeal and by the early fifteenth century were leasing out manors in their entirety, effectively ceasing direct involvement in agriculture and becoming rentier farmers instead.⁴⁶ As a result, few of the elite landlords engaged in pastoral production to any great extent. These trends were especially true of dairy production. Many landlords did keep milk herds, some of which were expanded in the late fourteenth century, but in most cases the cows were leased to local people for an annual fee of between 3s. and 7s. per cow.⁴⁷ In the early fourteenth century the bishopric of Winchester was unusual in directly exploiting around 75 per cent of cows on fifty manors across southern England, but by the end of the century this estate had reduced the proportion to only 25 per cent.⁴⁸ Under such rental arrangements the cows grazed on demesne pastures, but the calving, milking, cheese and butter making was undertaken by the lessee.⁴⁹ Even this leasing arrangement was not sustained beyond the early fifteenth century on most estates, when many demesne herds contracted in size and some were sold off.⁵⁰ Dairying was overwhelmingly a peasant activity, where family labour was deployed.

Some landlords did retain a direct interest in sheep and rabbit rearing while leasing out the rest of their demesnes, and some of these enterprises were thriving in the second half of the fourteenth century in certain places.⁵¹ Indeed, the proportion of sheep in seigniorial hands might have risen in parts of East Anglia, because lords possessed the right to control sheep ownership through foldcourses.⁵² For most of England, however, peasant ownership dominated, accelerated from the early fifteenth century by the contraction in demesne flock sizes and the decision by some major lords to sell or lease out their flocks and warrens.⁵³ Others consolidated their sheep rearing onto a smaller number of manors: Norwich Cathedral Priory maintained around 7,000 sheep on a cluster of ten Norfolk manors, and the abbey of Bury St Edmunds consolidated around 6,000 sheep on the heathland pastures of five rural manors to the north of the abbey.⁵⁴ One exceptionally well-documented gentry lord—John Hopton, with estates in Yorkshire and Suffolk producing an annual revenue of around £300—maintained large sheep flocks and bought young bullocks for beef fattening in the mid-fifteenth century, but notably avoided any direct involvement in dairying.⁵⁵ Crucially, sheep and rabbit rearing, and beef fattening, did not require live-in, and therefore unmarried, servants. Where landlords did maintain a direct involvement in livestock operations, their shepherds and herders were invariably males employed on annual contracts.⁵⁶ Demesnes also employed males as dairymaids, although the role was more strongly associated with women.⁵⁷ These *famuli* were paid in a combination of cash and kind, but seldom provided with lodgings.⁵⁸ From the early fifteenth century some lords even abandoned annual contracts for these farm workers and instead hired workers by the week or day for specific tasks.⁵⁹

Thus the weight of evidence is overwhelming: after 1350 most landlords moved away from direct involvement in agriculture and towards rentier farming, a trend which accelerated in the fifteenth century.⁶⁰ Those landlords who retained some interest in livestock concentrated mainly on sheep, and perhaps rabbit rearing or beef fattening, run mainly by male employees who were not live-in servants and with casual workers hired by the day. Lords largely steered clear of dairying, other than to lease their herds and pastures to unnamed local operators. The main lessees of the manors on such estates, certainly in the late fourteenth century, were local peasants, including serfs, many of whom had previously run the manor on the lord's behalf as reeves or bailiffs.⁶¹

These developments accelerated the swing towards peasant production in the pastoral sector, and consequently livestock and poultry were reared predominantly in smaller-scale units which drew primarily on the labour of married women and children.⁶² This enterprising peasant elite were increasingly styled either ‘husbandmen’ or ‘yeomen’, and the key issue is the extent to which they could run their agricultural units with family labour and to what extent they needed to supplement this with live-in servants. We know that the household of a late fifteenth-century husbandman typically had one female servant, who undertook a range of different tasks.⁶³ We also know that the processes of farm engrossment accelerated during the course of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, creating larger units in excess of 50 acres run by yeomen and lesser gentlemen. We do not know what threshold of farm size had to be reached for yeomen to take on more servants, particularly in dairy production (see below), nor do we know when a critical mass of such farms was reached sufficient to cause a major shift in the demographic system. Voigtlander and Voth are correct that the size of production unit, irrespective of whether it was seigniorial or not, is key.

Urban employment and women’s work

The second line of argument to support the surge in girl power and the emergence of the EMP in the later Middle Ages is that higher living standards for the mass of the populace after the Black Death generated higher demand per capita for better quality processed foodstuffs (notably ale) and household goods, which were increasingly manufactured by specialists in towns (as opposed to generalists in the countryside). These developments drew young rural women into urban centres where, again, they were primarily employed as live-in, unmarried, servants on annual contracts. Barron suggested that London women enjoyed a golden age of employment opportunities after the Black Death.⁶⁴ Goldberg’s pioneering study of late medieval York and its environs indicates that in the 1370s servanthood was already well established in towns and less well developed, but nevertheless still known, in rural areas: 32 per cent of York’s taxable adult population were servants compared with 20 to 30 percent in other towns, and less than ten per cent in rural areas.⁶⁵ Women, he suggests, had been drawn into towns in the third quarter of the fourteenth century in response to labour shortages and the growth of the textile industry, which in turn raised their mean age at first

marriage to around 25 years in towns and 20 years in the countryside.⁶⁶

Stevens tested Barron's arguments for London by measuring the proportion of women involved in litigation in two of its main courts, and found 'tepid' support for increased economic opportunities for women and evidence of a 'modest' golden age.⁶⁷ Goldberg's case study of York is very impressive, although it has been subject to critical scrutiny.⁶⁸ Mate, in particular, has questioned the typicality of York, which as England's second largest city experiencing exceptional sectoral growth was likely to offer far greater employment opportunities for women than in the vast majority of late-medieval towns. Employment opportunities for women were much narrower in the market towns of late-medieval Sussex, which were insufficiently affluent or large to generate much regular or well-paid work.⁶⁹ Considerable regional variations in the rates of rural female migration to towns are evident, indicating significant regional differences in the availability of urban employment: for example, rates were much higher in the Midlands than in East Anglia.⁷⁰ Mate points to the relative poverty of most single urban women, who therefore must have considered marriage an attractive proposition for improving their standards of living and their social standing: they 'would have had to find the suitor very unattractive before rejecting him'.⁷¹ Furthermore, women did not enjoy open access to the urban labour market but were concentrated in some trades—such as victualling and in mercantile households as domestic servants—and largely excluded from others, such as textile manufacture.⁷² Some fifteenth-century towns prohibited women from weaving.⁷³ Even brewing, a traditional female occupation, became increasingly large-scale, specialised and male-dominated after 1350, and those women who did remain in the industry tended to be married and from the middle ranks of society.⁷⁴ Female employment was especially vulnerable to downturns in urban trade cycles.⁷⁵

Thus broad generalisations and unqualified optimism about the extent of women's work in English towns after 1350 should be treated with caution. By way of illustration, Colchester (Essex) was one of the few English towns to expand in size during the fourteenth century, despite repeated outbreaks of plague: its population grew from around 3,500 people in 1300 to 8,000 in 1400, because of the towns' involvement in the booming textile manufacturing industry.⁷⁶ As such, we would expect it to have presented exceptional employment opportunities for women in servanthood. One way of testing this assumption is by analysing the gender balance of servants involved in contract disputes—private

plaints between individuals—over labour recorded in its borough courts. A sample of all courts held in twelve years between 1350 and 1379 yielded 67 cases of labour disputes involving servants, of whom 27 per cent of all litigants were women.⁷⁷ This is a relatively low proportion for such a buoyant industrial town, although it is consistent with the low and declining levels of sole female litigants in post-Black Death London.⁷⁸ It might be that Colchester's focus on textiles also worked against female servants, who tended to be found in other trades such as victualling.⁷⁹ These caveats aside, the sample reinforces the important point that males could feature prominently even in urban servanthood.

The Colchester example illustrates the potential for utilising legal disputes over labour to cast fresh light on the composition and mechanics of the post-plague labour market. An under-utilised source in this respect is the Court of Common Pleas, which in the years after 1350 dealt with an increasing number of private complaints relating to alleged breaches of employment contracts under the Statute of Labourers. A sample of 983 private complaints between 1355 and 1375 reveals that only 3 per cent of employers and 13 per cent of defendants were women.⁸⁰ Similarly, the Justices of the Peace sessions in Norfolk and Suffolk in the 1360s and early 1370s, which targeted offences under the Statute of Labourers, reveal that just 3 per cent and 7 per cent respectively of those prosecuted were women.⁸¹ Thus three different types of court—borough, Common Pleas and JP sessions—are consistent in recording low proportions of women involved in labour offences, which is both striking and surprising in a period when women's employment opportunities were supposedly expanding rapidly.

Remuneration for women's work

The third line of argument to support the surge in girl power and the emergence of the EMP in the later Middle Ages is that women's pay rose sharply and remained high in late medieval England, and, furthermore, female casual and day rates of pay for women were higher here than in much of Europe, both of which would act as a powerful incentive for women to enter paid work.

Although women were generally paid less than men for performing similar tasks, the gender wage ratio (GWR) was noticeably higher in the North Sea region at around 0.8 across the late medieval and early modern periods compared with something closer to 0.5 elsewhere in Europe.⁸² The superior

GWR should have incentivised women to enter the labour market, and is indicative of wages being determined more by market scarcity and productivity than custom.⁸³ This is consistent with recent assessments of the large size and diversified structure of the English hired labour market in the fourteenth century.⁸⁴ In contrast, the lower GWR in southern Europe reflects a lack of opportunity and incentive for women in the labour market, with wages being determined more by custom than relative scarcity.⁸⁵ The evidence for the differential is convincing.

Wage data from medieval England are reliable and relatively abundant, and they reveal that after 1350 there was an enduring rise in both nominal and real wage rates. For example, the day rate for an unskilled rural labourer doubled between the 1340s and 1390s. Women's casual and day wages received an immediate boost in the 1350s, but remained around 20 per cent lower than those for men: the GWR did not close.⁸⁶ Rising nominal wages, coupled with falling commodity prices from the 1370s, contributed to an improvement in women's welfare, with the number of days' work required each year for a woman to obtain bare-bones subsistence being estimated to have halved from 77 days in 1301-1350 to 38 days in the fifteenth century.⁸⁷

The earnings and welfare of women dependent on casual and day work undoubtedly rose after 1350 and probably peaked in the early fifteenth century.⁸⁸ Unfortunately, we can never know definitively how many days per annum an average woman actually worked, because female economic activities are hard to capture and the data is more fragmentary than for males.⁸⁹ An optimistic view would suggest that a woman was capable of earning sufficient annual income from casual labour to sustain herself as a single woman, whether to construct a marriage fund or remain unmarried: alternatively, young women could opt for employment as a live-in servant for a number of years to build a fund.⁹⁰ Either way, she was exercising greater agency over whether and where to work, and whether and when to marry. A pessimistic interpretation would point to the unpredictable and intermittent nature of women's casual work, which was readily available in the harvest period, for example, when labour was especially scarce, but which was otherwise 'ignored when supplies of male labour were adequate'.⁹¹ Even if work was available, the range of goods available for purchase and consumption was limited—unlike in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, when a more appetising variety of goods spurred an industrious revolution among workers—which might have encouraged an increased

preference for leisure time over maximising annual earnings.⁹² For those who hold such views, women's gains from casual employment were not particularly marked.⁹³ Mate, for example, concluded that although women in Sussex now earned more than before the Black Death, 'there was no significant transformation in women's role as workers. Occupational segregation was merely dented, not broken'.⁹⁴ Whittle has estimated that a servant couple saving all their wages for five years were still unable to afford more than a modest cottager's holding at the end of their endeavours.⁹⁵ If these pessimistic interpretations are correct, then changes to women's work were unlikely to have had a discernible impact on marriage patterns and demography.

The boost to women's casual wages after 1350 was not matched by the pay of servants, even when their board and lodging is taken into account. Remuneration for women on annual contracts remained largely flat throughout the late fourteenth century, peaked at the beginning of the fifteenth century, then sagged again.⁹⁶ Incidental information from other sources reinforces this picture of poorly-remunerated servanthood for both males and females.⁹⁷ Male and female servants were invariably assessed at the lowest rate of tax in the 1379 poll tax, assessed at 4d. and 6d. rather than the 8d. and 10d. paid by female spinsters and labourers.⁹⁸ Fragmentary evidence from County Durham also indicates that servants were poorly paid.⁹⁹ Mate doubts whether low-paid domestic service would allow a young women to save enough to buy even bedding and basic utensils for an independent conjugal household.¹⁰⁰ The low pay of servants indicates a relatively unskilled and unattractive form of employment, one occupied by a shifting and transient sector of the workforce. This impression is reinforced by the frequency with which servants moved before the end of their contracts. The most common category of recorded offence in the Colchester borough courts, comprising nearly one half of all cases, was leaving servanthood before the term of the agreed contract had expired. Our sample of disputes over labour contracts taken from the Court of Common Pleas reveals that half of all absconding workers had served less than one month of their contracts of employment: complaints about unpaid wages and violent conduct by employers are not uncommon.¹⁰¹

Thus various strands of evidence point consistently to the relative unattractiveness of servanthood as a form of employment. Such limited gains for women on annual contracts presents a serious challenge to the claim that servanthood became a significant and attractive option for females in the

later Middle Ages. As Horrell, Humphries and Weisdorf observe in this issue, married women enjoyed greater leverage and potential rewards than their spinster sisters. Husband and wife teams in casual labour are occasionally recorded in the sources, and such well rewarded work might even have encouraged the formation of nuclear households.¹⁰² Women on day wages were better remunerated, but they still earned less than men for equivalent work and social prejudices about what types of work they could perform remained strong (see below). As Humphries observes, the golden age ‘glittered far less brightly for women’.¹⁰³

Discriminatory labour legislation

The fourth argument to support the girl power surge and the emergence of the EMP is that the English labour market in the medieval and early modern periods was subject to discriminatory legislation, effectively funnelling single young women into life-cycle servanthood and deterred them from casual labour.¹⁰⁴ Late medieval labour markets did not operate freely in accordance with frictionless market forces, but rather were distorted to varying degrees by non-market forces and compulsion imposed by legal restrictions, gender power relations, and other cultural factors. The response of the English government to the first outbreak of the Black Death in 1348-9 was to introduce wide-ranging and novel labour legislation, which was regularly re-issued and updated over the next three centuries.¹⁰⁵ De Pleijt and van Zanden claim that this legislation distorted the operation of the labour market to the disadvantage of young single women, who were discouraged from working as day labourers. They believe that ‘in medieval England there were legal constraints on young single women working casually and it remained strongly discouraged into the sixteenth century.’¹⁰⁶ By directing young women into annually contracted servanthood, legislators were reinforcing other tendencies leading females to postpone marriage while leaving married women and older spinsters to dominate the market in female casual labour.¹⁰⁷

De Pleijt and van Zanden’s only support for this claim is a single citation to the work of Humphries and Weisdorf. In fact, Humphries and Weisdorf make a subtly different point, noting the strong association between, on the one hand, casual/day labour and married women and, on the other hand, between annual contracts and young unmarried women. Humphries and Weisdorf do offer the

suggestion, based on studies of the implementation of the labour legislation in sixteenth-century England, that the ruling elite discouraged unmarried women from day work and ‘considered annual service more appropriate’ for them.¹⁰⁸

In fact, the wording of the post-Black Death labour legislation was gender neutral.¹⁰⁹ Certainly, the Statute of Labourers in 1351 and subsequent iterations promoted hiring by the year as standard for all workers, since employers preferred annual contracts to day hires because these guaranteed labour for an extended period at a lower rate per day.¹¹⁰ The only possible evidence for gender bias in the late medieval legislation is in the implementation of the compulsory service clause, which sought to force the idle able-bodied to work ‘in service’, i.e. for annual contracts not day or piece rates. While this applied equally to men and women in the strict letter of the law, Judith Bennett has argued from a small sample of existing cases that in practice the authorities targeted women disproportionately.¹¹¹ Hence de Pleijt and van Zanden’s assertion that ‘in medieval England there were legal constraints on young single women working casually’ is not supported by the actual evidence. It is likely, however, that gender discrimination through the labour legislation was increased in the sixteenth century (see below).

There is widespread agreement among historians that the labour market was characterised by cultural and attitudinal, as opposed to explicit legal, discrimination against women.¹¹² Women’s work was concentrated in certain activities, reflecting the prejudices that prevented them from accessing others. Men dominated most sectors of work exclusively or primarily: this applied to highly skilled and paid trades, such as mason, carpenter and smith, as well as supervisory roles and even lower paid tasks, such as ploughing, scythe mowing, and building work.¹¹³ Women were largely consigned to ‘low-skilled, poorly paid, periodic employment’.¹¹⁴ They occupied a position at the back of the queue for day work, filling the gaps in the market, rather than occupying a central or equal position with males.¹¹⁵ Such cultural barriers restricted the extent of opportunities for single women to make a comfortable living or to build a marriage fund.

Women’s access to the land market

Having explored the arguments and evidence for female agency in the labour market, we now turn to

consider the issue of women's increased access to the land market: did the shortage of tenants and declining land values after 1350 present opportunities for single females in particular to accumulate land as part of the surge in girl power and perhaps in preparation for establishing a separate household, as part of a shift to the EMP?

De Moor and van Zanden have speculated that the ability of women to inherit and buy property offered another means of building their own marriage fund as a prelude to forming a separate, conjugal, household ('neo-locality'), which in turn led to nuclear families and fertility restriction. In particular, these scholars draw broad contrasts between the more extensive legal rights of women in northwest Europe, where females could inherit and exchange land as individual agents and enjoyed certain property rights within marriage, with the more restricted regime in southern Europe, where women's access to property was mainly linked to marriage and patriarchal gift through the dowry system. According to this argument, women in northwest Europe possessed greater agency in both the land and labour markets, which they exercised in their late teens and early twenties to construct a marriage fund.¹¹⁶ This argument, which de Moor and van Zanden admit is tentative, inverts the Malthusian principle that the ready availability of land would stimulate earlier, not later, age at marriage. Research on this important subject is still in its infancy in England, but the proliferation of manorial court rolls, which document closely the transfer of servile land among the peasantry, provides excellent opportunities for detailed case studies.

Research to date is highly consistent in regarding as very limited the involvement of women in the English land market after the Black Death.¹¹⁷ The most comprehensive study of fourteenth-century rentals and court rolls reveals that women comprised 13.9% of tenants in the first half of the fourteenth century, and 12.5% in the second, on 26 manors in 16 different counties of England. Furthermore, these female tenants usually held smaller plots of land than males and 'they were also less likely to take on new tenancies abandoned after the plague'.¹¹⁸ Even when women were the legal direct heirs to land, in practice they were often overlooked in preference to distant male relatives, a persistent prejudice which resulted in little change in gendered patterns of landholding. Bardsley concluded that 'entrenched and interwoven ideas about gender and land...changed very little', a view which is broadly supported by other studies.¹¹⁹ In late fifteenth-century Norfolk women comprised

less than 20% of rural land holders and unmarried female tenants were overwhelmingly widows.¹²⁰

The proportion of female tenants was similarly low in late medieval and early modern County Durham, while in Sussex the custom of ultimogeniture and the ability of women to inherit land at 15 years of age encouraged them to marry early rather than building up a marriage fund and marrying later.¹²¹

These findings relate to the servile land market based on information contained in manorial court rolls, which contain hardly any information about the market in free land. An insight into the latter is, however, provided through feet of fines, which were payments made to the Court of Common Pleas to register the transfer of freeholds from one tenant to another. A large database of 92,692 freehold land transfers between 1300 and 1500 from nineteen widely-distributed English counties reveals that women were involved in 28 per cent of all transactions. At first sight this seems to indicate higher levels of engagement than for unfree property, but on closer analysis a similar pattern emerges. First, women feature in 45 per cent of all sales of land, but in only 10 per cent of purchases. Second, rather than increasing, their participation actually falls after 1350, from 34 per cent of all transfers (1300-49), to 30 per cent (1350-99), 14 per cent (1400-49) and 21 per cent (1450-1509). Third, unmarried women do not feature prominently and are usually widows.¹²² The findings, therefore, are consistent with those from the unfree land market: women sold far more property rather they bought, their participation in the land market declined after 1350, and few single women entered the market, whether to construct a marriage fund or for any other purpose.

Thus, despite the legal ability of English women to inherit, buy and sell land, and despite the general shortage of tenants in the later Middle Ages, women do not appear to have become more active, let alone prominent, in the land market in this period. It seems very odd that the first two outbreaks of plague in 1348-9 and 1361-2, which killed first around 50 per cent then around 15 per cent of the population and triggered two of the greatest episodes of land transfer in documented history, did not enable some women to construct a portfolio of property.¹²³ Indeed, it is difficult to reconcile with Ada Levett's observation that the female inheritance of land had made a significant contribution to the relatively full and rapid reoccupation of unfree holdings during the course of 1349 on the manors of St Albans abbey.¹²⁴ For example, women (including wives, widows and girls)

comprised 22% of incoming tenants on reoccupied holdings on the abbey's Hertfordshire manors of Langley, 32% at Barnet, 35% at Cashio, 43% at Norton and 37% at Codicote.¹²⁵

How can these clear short-term gains for women in the land market in the immediate aftermath of the Black Death of 1348-9 can be reconciled with the long-term downward trend in female land holding? The only rational explanation is that even when women did acquire land, they chose to dispose of it or use the windfall to marry. Indeed, Bardsley identified a similar 'bump' in female inheritances during the first epidemic on her sample of 26 manors, as did Mullan after the second plague epidemic of 1361-2 on the bishopric of Winchester's estate, but both discovered that women soon offloaded their newly-acquired inheritances, so the initial gains were not sustained.¹²⁶ Likewise, at Thornbury (Gloucestershire) the acquisition of land by widows and female heiresses in 1348-9 was followed by a surge of marriages, so very few remained single.¹²⁷

Is the same pattern of behaviour observable on the St Albans manors identified by Levett? Table 1 presents a detailed breakdown of the immediate responses of adult female heirs of servile land on two of those manors. At Codicote there were 67 tenant deaths between October 1348 and spring 1349, an estimated mortality of 50 per cent: in 46 cases the landholding was immediately re-occupied. Women accounted for 17 ex 46 or 37 per cent of the re-occupancies: of these, eight were women old enough to inherit, six as single women and two as widows (the remaining nine were all under age). Of the two widows, one disappears from the record after inheriting 2 roods of land and the other allowed her cottage to become ruinous until in 1356 when it passed to her son after her death. What became of the six adult single women? Three of them disappear from the record, whilst the other three all granted their land to third parties within a year of inheriting. For example, Alice atte Pirye entered a messuage and half a virgate of land as an 18 year old in May 1349, then immediately transferred the holding to Simon atte Priye and his heirs, in return for a room in the main house plus one quarter of wheat and half a quarter of barley per annum.

Table 1: Adult women inheriting land in the Black Death of 1348-9 at Codicote and Norton

Manor	No. of inheriting women	Single women retain	Widow retain	Granted to third party	Woman married/ soon marries	No further record
Codicote	8	0	2	3	0	3
Norton	9	1	0	3	5	0

Sources: Foden, *Records of the Manor of Norton*, 137-46; British Library, Stowe Ms 849.

At Norton 21 servile holdings were reoccupied in 1349 following the death of the previous tenant, nine of which (43 per cent) were taken by adult women. In four of these cases, the inheriting women paid entry fines that were also coupled with licences to marry, and in a fifth the inheriting woman was already married. For example, Sara Crowe inherited a house and a cotland from her dead brother, and paid a 12d. fine which was also a licence to marry: in April 1350 Sara transferred another house and a quarter virgate of land to shared ownership with her husband, John Love, and the grant confirmed that they were currently childless.¹²⁸ In a sixth case, the inheriting female transferred the land immediately to an apparently unrelated male third party.¹²⁹ In two further cases, the female heir died soon afterwards. For example, Alice Ward inherited a half virgate from her deceased father, but was deemed incapable of working the holding because of her ‘foolish nature’. John Loveleg agreed to take on the holding and care for Alice, providing her with food and clothing for her lifetime, but Alice died soon afterwards and the land remained with John.¹³⁰ Alice Swetekyn, a single mother, died in the Black Death leaving a house and a croft to Alice, her two year old daughter, about whom nothing more is recorded: in 1351 the croft was granted to a third party, so little Alice must have succumbed soon after her mother.¹³¹ Thus, in just one of the nine cases did the female heir retain the landed inheritance and, at least in the immediate future, remain single.¹³² Here, at least, the female acquisition of land in the epidemic of 1348-9 led primarily to immediate marriage, not its deferment.

The proportion of women inheriting the land of deceased tenants in the plague year of 1348-9 was high on these two manors, around 40%, which helps to explain the relatively complete uptake of land in the aftermath of the catastrophe. Yet in the 17 cases where women were old enough to inherit in their own right, eleven (65%) either offloaded the land or married immediately and in only one—possibly four—cases did the women retain their land for any significant length of time. Perhaps

women felt unable to manage an agricultural holding alone, and unable to recruit the workforce to help them do so, or perhaps they felt strong societal pressure to offload? Whatever the reason, these case studies support the emerging view that English women did not exploit the post-plague shortages of tenants and the ready availability of land to become active and independent acquirers of land. If women did enjoy a golden age, the acquisition of land was not part of it.

Transitioning from one demographic regime to another

The survival of larger numbers of parish registers from the end of the sixteenth century provides a reliable basis for reconstructing the key demographic characteristics of the English population. By 1600 we can be reasonably secure that the average age of women at first marriage was around 25 years, perhaps 15 per cent of adult women remained unmarried, and around one half of young women were single servants. These traits may already have been in place in 1550, but the evidence is much less secure.

Before 1550 there is no reliable, aggregated data about crude fertility and mortality rates, the mean age of women at first marriage and the proportion of the population remaining unmarried. Instead, all we have are pockets of information compiled for other purposes which can be subjected to some basic demographic analysis. Most of this information relates to death rates of adult males, which reveal high levels of mortality into the early sixteenth century, including a sharp deterioration in life expectancy in the late fifteenth century.¹³³ These mortality rates are highly reliable for the small samples they represent, but if they are typical of the wider population then fifteenth-century England was locked into a high mortality regime which required a high level of fertility just for the population to maintain level. The problem with this scenario is that if the EMP was already established by 1450, with its characteristic lower rates of female nuptiality, then the combination of low fertility and high mortality would have caused the overall population level to plummet after 1450, whereas general indicators suggest that it remained broadly constant.¹³⁴

Another challenge to the view that later marriage among females was driven by their superior economic opportunities after 1350 is contained within Judith Bennett's detailed reconstruction of the marriage patterns among a well-documented sample of poor and landless serfs in 1268-9 on the

densely populated manor of Weston (Lincolnshire). This reveals that poverty condemned a high proportion to late or no marriage: in other words, traits of the EMP were already present well before the Black Death among certain social groups in some localities, and were the consequence of extreme poverty not increased opportunity.¹³⁵ Bennett's evidence supports the traditional Malthusian argument that shortages of land, widespread underemployment and low real wages would lead many ordinary people to defer marriage, and that, in general, abundant land and work would encourage early marriage.

Thus there are serious challenges in reconciling what narrow demographic data do exist for the Middle Ages with the argument that by 1450 the EMP had already emerged as the dominant demographic system in England, whether through increased female agency or by any other mechanism. It would help if henceforth the debate maintained a clear and consistent distinction between the presence of certain traits of the EMP in some sections of the population and the establishment of the EMP as the dominant demographic *system* among the population as a whole. Resolution would be further aided by recognising the varied experiences—urban, rural, regional—of both epidemic disease and the availability of certain types of work, and the complex ways in which these interacted to produce subtly different outcomes locally for gender ratios and female nuptiality.¹³⁶

There currently exist three different scenarios for the emergence of the EMP in England. The first is a single transition to the EMP from the pre-existing 'medieval' demographic regime sometime between the 1350s and the 1450s. As we have seen, the evidence and arguments for this are hotly disputed. The second scenario is a single transition sometime between 1450 and 1550, which has been suggested by a number of historians, but is under-explored and needs closer consideration.¹³⁷ For example, Belich speculates that high mortality might have kept families small in the fifteenth century, but the EMP emerged following the post-1500 demographic upturn, when conventional Malthusian logic would dictate that land shortages and declining real wages would result in deferred marriages.¹³⁸ In the third scenario there was no single transition from an identifiable 'medieval' demographic system to the EMP. Rather, a weak variant of the EMP already existed in the pre-Black Death period, but thereafter was gradually strengthened. Hence there might have been fluctuations between various versions of the EMP between 1250 and 1550.¹³⁹ If this was the case,

then the differences between the demographic systems before and after 1350 have been overdrawn and, in reality, such differences were subtle and complex.

How do changes in women's work, particularly in the form of single servanthood, and the average age of marriage relate to these three different chronologies of the emergence of the EMP? As stated above, the pre-1600 evidence simply does not enable us to establish when the decisive swing towards single female servants occurred in rural areas, so all we can do is identify the presence or absence of tendencies encouraging the spread of live-in servanthood and debate their relative significance. The weight of available evidence does not provide strong support for a single transition to the EMP in the century after the first plague outbreak: indeed, a range of types of evidence suggest the limited gains in female welfare in this period, especially in terms of women's access to the land market and their role in single servanthood. Of course, those who doubt the prevalence or importance of rural servanthood before 1450 are then faced with the major challenge of explaining when and why female servanthood became so commonplace by the seventeenth century.¹⁴⁰ These scholars are forced into supporting either the second or third scenarios of demographic transition, both of which involve the challenge of explaining how the EMP came about.

In focusing on changes after 1450, one possible avenue of research might be the evolution of labour legislation during the course of the sixteenth century, when its provisions and implementation were reinvigorated by a series of parliamentary acts culminating in the Statute of Artificers in 1563.¹⁴¹ These successive restatements and revisions of the labour laws were more explicit and specific about how to discipline the labour force, with a particular focus on vagrancy and compulsory service. Indeed, in 1549 the requirement for servants to be unmarried and to serve on annual contracts was stated explicitly for the very first time.¹⁴² A new energy in enforcement is apparent from the mid sixteenth century, especially in legally compelling the idle poor into annual servanthood, which was seen as a remedy for contemporary social and moral concerns.¹⁴³ Perhaps it was the sixteenth-century labour laws that exerted most influence in discouraging young single women from casual work and forcing them into annual service rather than, as de Pleijt and van Zanden argued, the later Middle Ages? Furthermore, rising population and land values, coupled with falling real wages and opportunities for day labour, might have made the security of annual contracts in servanthood more

attractive as the sixteenth century progressed, which would be consistent with traditional Malthusian logic.

Another possibility is that changes to the structure and productivity of the dairying industry between the mid-fifteenth and mid-sixteenth centuries drew a higher proportion of young women into servanthood. Dairying was more demanding of labour than other pastoral pursuits, with daily attention to milking and to butter and cheese making, and was therefore most strongly associated with live-in female servants of all pastoral pursuits.¹⁴⁴ Demand for cheese from the London market rose sharply during the sixteenth century, increasing output and specialisation in those dairying districts supplying the capital in south east England.¹⁴⁵ Between the 1350s and 1450s milk had contributed a steady 25% of the share of estimated livestock outputs in England, but by the 1550s this had risen to 44%.¹⁴⁶ There was also a sharp rise in milk yields, from an estimated 125 gallons per cow in the first decade of the fifteenth century, to 139 gallons in the 1450s, to 201 gallons in the first decade of the seventeenth century.¹⁴⁷ The rise in both total output and productivity per cow owed something to the diffusion of bigger and improved stock, but it must also have been associated with an increase in labour inputs in response to growing demand.¹⁴⁸ Given the traditional role of women in dairying, the proportion of female servants in this expanding labour force would have increased if the expansion of dairy output was also associated with a shift to larger production units. The role of yeomen and gentlemen farmers with larger herds and farms was especially important in this respect, since these social groups were heavily dependent on servants.¹⁴⁹ There is some evidence to support such a shift: from the late fifteenth century some small monastic landlords with estates in dairying districts began to build up herd sizes, dependent on female servants, and herd size and dairy specialisation increased in the fifteenth and early sixteenth century in the west Midlands.¹⁵⁰ Few peasants owned more than a couple of cows in early fourteenth century Suffolk, whereas in the early sixteenth century the average herd size on dairy farms in north Suffolk had reached around sixteen cows.¹⁵¹ A herd of sixteen cows was probably the limit for one live-in servant to handle.¹⁵²

Conclusion

Female opportunities in the land and labour markets undoubtedly expanded most rapidly in the second half of the fourteenth century, when the population of Europe had probably halved. The most secure evidence from England indicates that women and children on day rates benefited from the shortage of labour, but not as much as adult males, and that women on annual contracts did not share those gains. The GWR remained at around 0.8, higher than in southern Europe. The number of days a woman in casual labour had to work each year in order to obtain bare-bones subsistence halved between the early fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries. The sources do not allow us to reconstruct how often women worked, but they do reveal how women were confined to certain types of work and how they remained behind males in the queue for employment. This helps to explain why women comprised a very low proportion of defendants in labour disputes recorded in three different types of court in the second half of the fourteenth century, which was the very period when their employment opportunities were expanding most rapidly. Research on the land market is consistent in showing that single women engaged less after 1350 than before. Social prejudices against female autonomy in the land and labour markets did not break down in the wake of the plague, limiting their opportunities in both urban and rural settings. There was no formal discrimination in the medieval labour laws, although this appears to have changed in the sixteenth century. Servanthood was poorly remunerated, and attracted as many men as women. Disputes over work contracts suggest that servant abscondments were frequent.

Thus, after 1350 women unquestionably enjoyed some improvements in welfare and more choices over work and marriage, but there were distinct limits to their gains. There is no conclusive evidence before 1600 for either the presence of significant numbers of single female servants in their early twenties or the existence of the EMP in England, and the nature of the extant source material means that such evidence will always remain elusive.¹⁵³ This stark reality not only fuels the debate, but also enhances its dependency on *a priori* reasoning supported by indirect and piecemeal local evidence squeezed from various sources. Given the current state of research, it is difficult to argue convincingly either that the period immediately after the Black Death constituted a golden age for female agency or that girl power and servanthood drove the emergence of the EMP before 1450. The most secure evidence indicates the coexistence of the EMP and high proportions of young female

servants in the seventeenth century.

The debate on girl power and the emergence of the EMP is attractive and important, because it potentially combines the history of women with the rise of the modern world. Furthermore, in the post-Covid world it also offers some comforting optimism about the possible silver linings within the black clouds of a global pandemic. Yet the debate also exposes the disjuncture that often exists between the grand questions we pose about our past and the capacity of the extant sources to answer them, resulting in a tendency for econometricians and historians to talk past one another rather than to engage and to collaborate more closely. The theory of a major transition after 1350 is appealing, but overdrawn: grand theories possess a compelling cogency and a dangerous allure, but by their nature they tend to over-simplify the complexities of historical reality.¹⁵⁴ The focus on the influence of market signals and female employment in explaining the EMP has sparked an important and invigorating debate, but a proper understanding of when and how the EMP first emerged must also give close consideration to the legal and cultural contexts of women's lives, and to the complex framework of the other institutions necessary to support it.¹⁵⁵

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¹ Originally captured in the Brenner Debate, Trevor H. Aston and Charles H. E. Philpin, eds. *The Brenner Debate: Agrarian Class Structure and Economic Development in Pre-industrial Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); for summaries of the debate, see Steven H. Rigby, *English society in the later Middle Ages. Class, Status and Gender* (London: Bloomsbury, 1995): 127-43, and John Hatcher and Mark Bailey, *Modelling the Middle Ages. The Theory and Practice of England's Economic Development* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000). More recently, for example, Sevket Pamuk, 'The Black Death and the Origins of the Great Divergence across Europe, 1300-1600', *European Review of Economic History* 11:3 (2007): 289-317; Nico Voigtlander and Hans-Joachim Voth, 'The Three Horsemen of Riches: Plague, War, and Urbanization in Early Modern Europe', *The Review of Economic Studies* 80:2 (2013): 774-811; Guido Alfani and Tommy E. Murphy, 'Plague and Lethal Epidemics in the Pre-Industrial World', *Journal of Economic History* 77:1 (2017): 314-43; Remi Jedwab, Noel D. Johnson, and Mark Koyama, 'The Economic Impact of the Black Death', *Journal of Economic Literature*, 60:1 (2022): 132-178.

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⁴ Tina de Moor and Jan Luiten van Zanden, 'Girl Power: the European Marriage Pattern and Labour Markets in the North Sea Region in the Late Medieval and Early Modern Period', *Economic History Review*, 63:1 (2010):

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⁵ Alexandra de Pleijt and Jan Luiten van Zanden, 'Two Worlds of Female Labour: Gender Wage Inequality in Western Europe, 1300-1800', *Economic History Review*, 74:3 (2021): 611-13, 631-5; de Moor et al., *Capital women*: 4-9, 126, 242.

⁶ De Pleijt and van Zanden, 'Two worlds': 612.

⁷ See, for example, P. Jeremy P. Goldberg, *Women, Work and Life Cycle in a Medieval Economy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992): 333-45; de Moor and van Zanden, 'Girl Power': 1-33; Nico Voigtlander and Hans-Joachim Voth, 'How the West "Invented" Fertility Restriction', *American Economic Review*, 103:6 (2013): 2227-64; Stephen Broadberry, Bruce M.S. Campbell, Alexander Klein, Mark Overton and Bas van Leeuwen, *British Economic Growth, 1270-1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015): 389-90; Alexandra M. de Pleijt and Jan Luiten van Zanden, 'Accounting for the "Little Divergence": What Drove Economic Growth in Pre-Industrial Europe, 1300-1800?', *European Review of Economic History*, 20:4 (2016): 387-409; James Foreman-Peck and Peng Zhou, 'Late Marriage as a Contributor to the Industrial Revolution in England', *Economic History Review*, 71:4 (2018): 1073-99.

⁸ Jane Humphries, 'Plague, patriarchy and girl power', in Damian Grimshaw, Colette Fagan and Gail Hebson, and Isabel Tavora, eds., *Making work more equal. A new labour market segmentation approach* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017): 215-18.

⁹ De Moor and van Zanden, 'Girl power': 13, 15-16.

¹⁰ Goldberg, *Women, Work*: 330-1, 340-4, 357-61; de Moor and van Zanden, 'Girl power': 11-12.

¹¹ Foreman Peck and Zhou, 'Late marriage': 1090-3.

¹² S. H. Rigby, 'Gendering the Black Death: Women in Later Medieval England', *Gender and History*, 12:3 (2000): 748.

¹³ Mavis E. Mate, *Daughters, Wives and Widows after the Black Death: Women in Sussex, 1350-1535* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1998); Rigby, 'Gendering': 745-754; Humphries, 'Plague, patriarchy', 208-26; Judith M. Bennett, 'Wretched girls, Wretched Boys and the European Marriage Pattern in England (c.1250 - 1350)', *Continuity and Change*, 34:2 (2019): 315-47; Jeremy Edwards and Sheilagh Ogilvie, 'What Can We Learn from a Race with One Runner? A Comment on Foreman-Peck and Zhou, 'Late Marriage as a Contributor to the Industrial Revolution in England'', *Economic History Review*, 72:4 ((2019): 1439-46; Jeremy Edwards and Sheilagh Ogilvie, 'Did the Black Death Cause Economic Development by "Inventing" Fertility Restriction?', *Oxford Economic Papers*, 73 (2022): 1228-46.

¹⁴ Tracy K. Dennison and Sheilagh Ogilvie, 'Does the European Marriage Pattern Explain Economic Growth?', *Journal of Economic History*, 74:3 (2014): 651-93.

¹⁵ Summarised in Bennett, 'Wretched Girls': 315-20, 335-8. See also Mark Bailey, 'Demographic Decline in Late Medieval England: Some Thoughts on Recent Research', *Economic History Review* 49:1 (1996): 1-19; Mavis E. Mate, *Women in Medieval English Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

¹⁶ S. Horrell, J. Humphries and J. Weisdorf, 'Forgotten family: the influence of women and children in the economic-demographic nexus', JMEMS.

¹⁷ Nico Voigtlander and Hans-Joachim Voth, 'Reply to Edwards and Ogilvie: "Did the Black Death cause economic development by "inventing" fertility restriction'', *Oxford Economic Papers*, 73 (2022): 1247.

¹⁸ E. Anthony Wrigley and Roger S. Schofield, *The Population History of England 1541-1871: A Reconstruction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

¹⁹ Wrigley and Schofield, *Population History*: 16, 454.

²⁰ Wrigley and Schofield, *Population History*: 24-5; J. Hatcher, 'Understanding the Population History of England 1450-1750', *Past and Present*, 180 (2003): 100-4.

²¹ Voigtlander and Voth, 'Reply', 1248.

²² Ann Kussmaul, *Servants in husbandry in early modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press): 3, 57; Larry R. Poos, *A Rural Society after the Black Death. Essex 1350-1525* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 1991): 187-8; Foreman Peck and Zhou, 'Late Marriage': 1081.

²³ Mate, *Women in Medieval Society*: 27-31; Jane Whittle, *The Development of Agrarian Capitalism. Land and Labour in Norfolk 1440-1580* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000): 252-3.

²⁴ Mate, *Daughters, Wives*, 49; Mate, *Women in Medieval Society*, 59-61; Peter A. Franklin, 'Thornbury Manor in the Age of the Black Death: Peasant Society, Landholding and Agriculture in Gloucestershire, 1328-1352' (University of Birmingham, PhD thesis, 1982): 362.

²⁵ Poos, *Rural society*: 187, although servants may have been badly under-recorded; Whittle, *Agrarian Capitalism*: 259. See also similar evidence from the poll-tax returns from the Pevensey marshes, Mate, *Daughters, Wives*: 29.

- ²⁶ Whittle, *Agrarian Capitalism*: 259-60, table 5.5; Jane Whittle, 'Housewives and Servants in Rural England 1440-1650: Evidence of Women's Work from Probate Documents', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 15 (2005): 54.
- ²⁷ Voigtlander and Voth, 'How the West': 2255-6, 2259-60; Voigtlander and Voth, 'Reply': 1249.
- ²⁸ Voigtlander and Voth, 'How the West': 2229; Voigtlander and Voth, 'Reply': 1248.
- ²⁹ Edwards and Ogilvie, 'Did the Black Death': 1228-46.
- ³⁰ Mate, *Daughters, Wives*: 24, 28.
- ³¹ Voigtlander and Voth, 'Reply': 1247-8.
- ³² Voigtlander and Voth, 'Reply': 1250-1.
- ³³ Voigtlander and Voth, 'Reply': 1251.
- ³⁴ Jeremy Edwards and Sheilagh Ogilvie, 'The Black Death and the Origin of the European Marriage Pattern', *Oxford Economic and Social History Working Papers*, 204 (2022): 1-2.
- ³⁵ Edwards and Ogilvie, 'The Black Death': 16-19.
- ³⁶ Edwards and Ogilvie, 'The Black Death': 16-25.
- ³⁷ Whittle, 'Housewives and Servants': 53-4.
- ³⁸ Whittle, 'Housewives and servants': 73.
- ³⁹ Voigtlander and Voth, 'How the west': table 3; Voigtlander and Voth, 'Reply': fig. 2.
- ⁴⁰ Mate, *Daughters, Wives*: 29-30 and Whittle, *Agrarian Capitalism*: 257, warned independently of the difficulties in using the Poll Taxes for this purpose. Goldberg, *Women, Work*: 368-75; Poos, *Rural Society*: 185-6; Cordelia Beattie, 'Women's Work Identities in Post Black Death England', in James Bothwell, P. Jeremy P. Goldberg and W. Mark Ormrod, eds., *The Problem of Labour in Fourteenth-Century England* (York: Borthwick Institute, 2000): 4-10 explores differences in the recording of women in various poll tax returns. Morgan Kelly and Cormac O Grada, 'The Preventive Check in Medieval and Preindustrial England', *Journal of Economic History*, 72:4 (2012), 1023; Edwards and Ogilvie, 'Did the Black Death', 1237 and Section A6, online Appendix; Edwards and Ogilvie, 'The Black Death', 23-5; Jane Whittle, 'Attitudes to Wage Labour in English Legislation, 1349-1601', in Jane Whittle and Thijs Lambrecht, eds., *Labour laws in Preindustrial Europe. The Coercion and Regulation of Wage Labour, c.1350-1850* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2023): 41-3.
- ⁴¹ Whittle, 'Housewives and Servants', 54-61.
- ⁴² Most obviously in Broadberry et al., *British Economic Growth*, 104-29. See also, for example, Bruce M.S. Campbell and Mark Overton, 'A New Perspective on Medieval and Early Modern Agriculture: Six Centuries of Norfolk farming 1250-1850', *Past and Present*, 141 (1993): 77, table 6; Bruce M.S. Campbell, *Field Systems and Farming Systems in Late Medieval England* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2008): XII, 176-9; Bruce M.S. Campbell, 'Grain Yields on English Demesnes after the Black Death', in Mark Bailey and Stephen H. Rigby, eds., *Town and Countryside in the Age of the Black Death. Essay in Honour of John Hatcher* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2012): 124-5;
- ⁴³ Edwards and Ogilvie, 'Did the Black Death', 1232-3.
- ⁴⁴ Christopher Dyer, *Peasants Making History. Living in an English region 1200-1540* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022): 188, also 197-8, 204-5, 207. A point reiterated for eastern England by Philip Slavin, 'Livestock Husbandry in Late Thirteenth Century Suffolk' in Maryanne Kowaleski, John Langdon and Phillip R. Schofield, eds. *Peasants and Lords in the Medieval English Economy: Essays in Honour of Bruce M.S. Campbell* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2015): 13, 22-3.
- ⁴⁵ Voigtlander and Voth, 'Reply': 1262.
- ⁴⁶ Barbara A. Harvey, *Westminster abbey and its Estates in the Later Middle Ages* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977): 148-51; Christopher Dyer, *Lords and Peasants in a Changing Society. The Estates of the Bishoric of Worcester 680-1540* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981): 146-9, 167; J. Ambrose Raftis, *Ramsey abbey and its estates* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press): 241, 266, 284, 289-91; Edmund B. Fryde, *Peasants and Landlords in Late Medieval England* (Stroud: Alan Sutton, 1996): 71-86, 113, 121-2, 135, 137-8, 149; Campbell, *Field Systems*: XII, 132; John Hare, *A Prospering Society. Wiltshire in the Later Middle Ages* (Hatfield: University of Hertfordshire Press): 80-98.
- ⁴⁷ Mark Bailey, *A Marginal Economy? East Anglian Breckland in the Later Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989): 257-8; Bruce M.S. Campbell, *Seigniorial Agriculture in Medieval England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press): 146, 431-3; Mark Bailey, *Medieval Suffolk. An Economic and Social history 1200 to 1500* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2007): 81-3, 219-20; Campbell, *Field Systems*: IX, 292-5.
- ⁴⁸ Jordan Claridge, 'Managing Milk, Making a Living', seminar paper and personal communication.
- ⁴⁹ Campbell, *Seigniorial Agriculture*, 146, 151. The lessees are never named, but they were undoubtedly local peasants.
- ⁵⁰ Bailey, *Marginal Economy*, 294-5; Campbell, *Field Systems*: IX, 296-8; Bailey, *Medieval Suffolk*, 220-2. For two exceptions, see Herbert P.R. Finberg, *Tavistock Abbey. A Study in the Social and Economic History of Devon* (Newton Abbot: David and Charles, 1969): 134-8, where the dairy operation was exploited directly; and

Whittle, 'Housewives and Servants': 70, 74, who cites the example of Katherine Dowe running Sibton abbey's 70-strong herd directly in 1503.

⁵¹ Bailey, *Marginal Economy*, 249-56, 289-92; Fryde, *Peasants and Landlords*, 91-4, 105-8; Hare, *Prospering Society*: 63-68, 74; Bailey, *Medieval Suffolk*: 220-2.

⁵² Campbell and Overton, 'New Perspective': 77-8, although see also 86 and compare Bailey, *Marginal Economy*, tables 4.4 and 5.7 for the relative importance of lord/peasant sheep ownership on the well documented manor of Lakenheath.

⁵³ For example, the bishopric of Worcester was virtually a rentier landlord from the later fourteenth century, when the only resources to be exploited directly were a few sheep and timber/fuel stocks Dyer, *Lords and peasants*, pp. 140, 175-6, 210. See also Raftis, *Ramsey Abbey*: 148-9; Finberg, *Tavistock Abbey*: 145; Bailey, *Marginal Economy*: 289-92, 296-303; Fryde, *Peasants and Landlords*: 101-3, 110, 149; Campbell, *Seigniorial Agriculture*, 164; R.H. Britnell, *Britain and Ireland 1050-1530: Economy and Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004): 414-15; Hare, *Prospering Society*: 97-8; Mark Bailey, 'The Rabbit and the Medieval East Anglian Economy', *Agricultural History Review*, 36:1 (1988): 1-20.

⁵⁴ Mark Bailey, 'The Sheep Accounts of Norwich Cathedral Priory', in Mark Bailey, Maureen Jurkowski and Carole Rawcliffe, eds., *Poverty and Wealth: Sheep, Taxation and Charity in late Medieval Norfolk*, Norfolk Records Society, 71 (2007): 13-18; Mark Bailey, 'The Breckland Estates of Bury St Edmunds Abbey, 1100 to 1500', *The Journal of Breckland Studies*, 4 (2020): 38.

⁵⁵ C. Richmond, *John Hopton. A Fifteenth-Century Suffolk Gentleman* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980): 37, 39, 65-6, 72-3, 79, 81, 95.

⁵⁶ For male shepherds and pigherds, and even some male dairy workers, see Richmond, *John Hopton*: 85; Mate, *Daughters, Wives*: 58; Mate, *Women in Medieval Society*: 32; Bailey, 'Sheep Accounts': 64-86.

⁵⁷ Jordan Claridge and John Langdon, 'The Composition of Famuli Labour on English Demesnes c.1300', *Agricultural History Review*, 63:2 (2015), 198-201.

⁵⁸ P. Jeremy P. Goldberg, 'What is a Servant', in Curry and Matthew, eds., *Concepts and Patterns*: 3-4. For example, in the two cases where monastic lords exploited their herds directly, cited above in XX, there is no reference in the detailed accounts to the expenses associated with the provision of board or lodging to the servants. Katherine Dowe and three servants were simply paid 'stipend and wages', with no record in the account of the inclusion of any board or lodging: they were certainly on annual contracts, but it is uncertain whether they were also live-in (and therefore celibate) servants, A.H. Denney, *The Sibton Abbey Estates 1325-1509*, Suffolk Records Society, 2 (1959): 141-2.

⁵⁹ Mate, *Daughters, Wives*, 144-5.

⁶⁰ Christopher Dyer, *Peasants Making History. Living In an English Region 1200-1540* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022): 188.

⁶¹ Harvey, *Westminster Abbey*, 151; Dyer, *Lords and Peasants*: 211-17; Fryde, *Peasants and Landlords*: 111-12; Hare, *Prospering Society*: 99-116; Dyer, *Peasants Making History*: 94-5.

⁶² Dyer, *Peasants Making History*: 214.

⁶³ Whittle, 'Housewives and Servants': 74.

⁶⁴ Caroline Barron, 'The "Golden Age" of Women in Medieval London', *Reading Medieval Studies*, XV (1989): 35-58

⁶⁵ Goldberg, *Women, Work*: 159, 327.

⁶⁶ Goldberg, *Women, Work*: 328, 336-7.

⁶⁷ Matthew Frank Stevens, 'London Women, the Courts and the "Golden Age": a Quantitative Analysis of Female Litigants in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries', *The London Journal*, 37:2 (2012): 67-88.

⁶⁸ Judith M. Bennett, 'Medieval women, modern women: across the great divide', in David Aers ed., *Culture and history, 1350-1600: essays on English communities, identities, and writing* (New York, 1992), 147-75; Bailey, 'Demographic decline': 1-19; Judith M. Bennett, 'Compulsory Service in Late Medieval England', *Past and Present*, 209 (2010): 44-7; Mate, *Daughters, Wives*: 38-41; Mate, *Women in Medieval Society*: 56-60.

⁶⁹ Mate, *Daughters, Wives*: 41-4, although see also Rigby, 'Gendering': 751.

⁷⁰ Mark Bailey, 'Servile and Gender Migration in Late Medieval England: the Evidence of Manor Court Rolls', *Past and Present*, (2023), 00-0.

⁷¹ Mate, *Women in Medieval Society*: 57.

⁷² Goldberg, *Women, Work*: 192-3, table 4.6.

⁷³ Horrell, Humphries and Weisdorf, 'Family Standards of Living': 125.

⁷⁴ Mate, *Daughters, Wives*, 63, 75; Mate, *Women in Medieval Society*: 40-5.

⁷⁵ Goldberg, *Women, work*: 347, 354.

⁷⁶ Richard H. Britnell, *Growth and decline in Colchester 1300-1525* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986): 49, 159-60.

⁷⁷ Mark Bailey, 'The Implementation of National Labour Legislation in England after the Black Death, 1349 to 1400' (forthcoming).

- ⁷⁸ Stevens, 'London Women': 84.
- ⁷⁹ Goldberg, *Women, Work*: 189-93.
- ⁸⁰ The sample is taken from the Hilary term in each of 1355, 1360, 1365, 1370, 1375, The National Archives CP40/380, 401, 419, 437, 459, part of an on-going project by the author and N. Amor. There was no legal restriction on women acting as plaintiffs or defendants, although there appears to have been a social shift against women appearing as sole litigants in many late medieval courts, Stevens, 'London women', appendix.
- ⁸¹ Madonna J. Hettinger, 'The Role of the Statute of Labourers in the Social and Economic Background of the Great Revolt in East Anglia' (PhD thesis, Indiana University, 1986): 128.
- ⁸² Mate, *Women in Medieval Society*, 29-30.
- ⁸³ De Pleijt and van Zanden, 'Two Worlds': 625-9.
- ⁸⁴ Bailey, *After the Black Death*: 32-8.
- ⁸⁵ De Pleijt and van Zanden, 'Two Worlds': 630-1.
- ⁸⁶ Jane Humphries and Jacob Weisdorf, 'The Wages of Women in England 1260-1850', *Journal of Economic History*, 75:2 (2015): figure 3, 417-18; Humphries, 'Plague, Patriarchy', 213-14, 218-19.
- ⁸⁷ De Pleijt and van Zanden, 'Two Worlds': 633.
- ⁸⁸ Horrell, Humphries and Weisdorf, 'Family Standards of Living': fig. 1, 97-8.
- ⁸⁹ Humphries, 'Plague, Patriarchy', 218.
- ⁹⁰ De Pleijt and van Zanden, 'Two Worlds': 615.
- ⁹¹ Mate, *Women in Medieval Society*: 28; Horrell, Humphries and Weisdorf, 'Family Standards of Living': 120-2.
- ⁹² S. Horrell, J. Humphries and J. Weisdorf, 'Forgotten Family: the Influence of Women and Children in the Economic-Demographic Nexus', this issue.
- ⁹³ Horrell, Humphries and Weisdorf, 'Family Standards of Living': 107.
- ⁹⁴ Mate, *Daughters, Wives*: 49, 75, 193; Mate, *Women in Medieval society*: 33.
- ⁹⁵ Jane Whittle, 'Servants in Rural England c. 1450-1650: Hired Work as a Means of Accumulating Wealth and Skills Before Marriage', in Maria Ågren and Amy Erickson (eds), *The Marital Economy in Scandinavia and Britain, 1400-1900* (Aldershot, 2005) 104.
- ⁹⁶ Humphries and Weisdorf, 'The Wages of Women': figure 3, 417-18; Humphries, 'Plague, Patriarchy', 218-19; Horrell, Humphries and Weisdorf, 'Family Standards of Living', fig. 1, 97-8, 133.
- ⁹⁷ Humphries and Weisdorf, 'Wages of Women': figure 2.
- ⁹⁸ Mate, *Daughters, Wives*: 45.
- ⁹⁹ Peter L. Larson, *Rethinking the Great Transition. Community and Economic Growth in County Durham, 1349-1660* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022): 151.
- ¹⁰⁰ Mate, *Daughters, Wives*: 27.
- ¹⁰¹ See also Whittle, 'Attitudes to Wage Labour', table 1.3. A sample of cases from local courts between the 1350s and 1430s found that, in disputes where the length of service is explicitly stated, nearly half of servants left within a month of starting their contract in a sample of four towns, Elaine Clark, 'Medieval Labor Law and English Local Courts', *The American Journal of Legal History* 27:4 (1983): 345 fn 6.
- ¹⁰² Humphries, 'Plague, Patriarchy', 220-4 offers a nuanced and thoughtful discussion of the relative attractions of servanthood and casual labour under these circumstances.
- ¹⁰³ Humphries, 'Plague, Patriarchy', 224.
- ¹⁰⁴ De Pleijt and van Zanden, 'Two Worlds': 615
- ¹⁰⁵ For an overview, Chris Given-Wilson, 'The Problem of Labour in the Context of English Government, 1350-1450', in Bothwell et al. eds., *Problem of labour*: 85-100; Whittle, 'Attitudes to Wage Labour': 33-54.
- ¹⁰⁶ De Pleijt and van Zanden, 'Two Worlds': 615.
- ¹⁰⁷ De Pleijt and van Zanden, 'Two Worlds': 631-2.
- ¹⁰⁸ Citing Humphries and Weisdorf, 'Wages of Women', no page number, but the obvious passage is on pp. 411-2; see also Humphries, 'Plague Patriarchy', 221.
- ¹⁰⁹ Given-Wilson, 'The Problem of Labour', 85-100; C. Given-Wilson, 'Service, serfdom and English labour legislation 1350-1500', in A. Curry and E. Matthews, eds., *Concepts and patterns of service in the later Middle Ages* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press: 2000): 21-37; Whittle, 'Attitudes to Wage Labour', 40.
- ¹¹⁰ Madonna J. Hettinger, 'Defining the Servant: Legal and Extra-Legal Terms of Employment in Fifteenth-Century England', in Allen J. Frantzen and Douglas Moffat, eds., *The Work of work. Servitude, Slavery and Labour in Medieval England* (Glasgow: Cruithne Press, 1994): 215-25.
- ¹¹¹ Bennett, 'Compulsory Service': 13-19, 28-41, although see Whittle, *Agrarian Capitalism*: 260-1, who found that in sixteenth century Norfolk men were prosecuted more frequently under this clause.
- ¹¹² Humphries, 'Plague, Patriarchy', 218-24.
- ¹¹³ Mate, *Daughters, Wives*: 57-8.

- ¹¹⁴ Beattie, 'Women's Work', 19-20; Bennett, 'Compulsory Service', 29; Sandy Bardsley, 'Women's Work Reconsidered: Gender and Wage Differentiation in Late Medieval England', *Past and Present*, 165 (1999): 29; de Pleijt and van Zanden, 'Two worlds': 615, 631.
- ¹¹⁵ Mate, *Women in Medieval Society*, 28-9; Horrell, Humphries and Weisdorf, 'Family Standards of Living': 97-8, 107.
- ¹¹⁶ De Moor and van Zanden, 'Girl Power': 7-11.
- ¹¹⁷ Mate, *Women in Medieval Society*: 90-1.
- ¹¹⁸ Sandy Bardsley, 'Peasant women and inheritance of land in fourteenth-century England', *Continuity and Change*, 29:3 (2014): 302, 304-5, 307.
- ¹¹⁹ Bardsley, 'Peasant Women': 319-20; Bennett, 'Compulsory Service': 35.
- ¹²⁰ Jane Whittle, 'Inheritance, Marriage, Widowhood and Remarriage: a Comparative Perspective on Women and Landholding in North-East Norfolk, 1440-1580', *Continuity and Change*, 13:1 (1998): 66.
- ¹²¹ Larson, *Rethinking Transition*, 151; Mate, *Daughters, Wives*: 49, 81, 196-7.
- ¹²² Adrian R. Bell, Chris Brooks, and Helen Killick, 'Medieval Property Investors, 1300-1500', *Enterprise and Society*, 20:3 (2019): 582-4, tables 2 and 3.
- ¹²³ Bailey, *After the Black Death*, 4, 70-7, 136-7.
- ¹²⁴ Ada Levett, *Studies in Manorial History* (London: Merlin press, 1963): 253.
- ¹²⁵ Levett, *Studies in manorial history*, appendix.
- ¹²⁶ Bardsley, 'Peasant Women;', 302-3, 307.
- ¹²⁷ Franklin, 'Thornbury Manor': 336-40.
- ¹²⁸ Peter Foden, trans., *Records of the Manor of Norton in the Liberty of St Albans 1244-1539*, Hertfordshire Records Society, XXIX (2013): 144, 146.
- ¹²⁹ Alice Carter inherited a messuage and one eighth of a virgate from her dead brother John, and transferred it to Richard Bate, *Norton*: 143-4.
- ¹³⁰ *Norton*: 142-3, 157.
- ¹³¹ *Norton*: 139, 149.
- ¹³² Helen Shepherd had died holding a house and a half virgate, which was inherited by her aunt Matilda: but the extant court records reveal nothing more about Matilda, *Norton*: 139.
- ¹³³ For two excellent recent surveys, see Richard M. Smith, 'Measuring Adult Mortality in an Age of Plague, 1349-1540', in Bailey and Rigby, eds., *Town and Countryside*: 57-66; Richard M. Smith, 'Some Emerging Issues in the Demography of Medieval England and Prospects for their Future Investigation', *Local Population Studies*, 100 (2018), 13-24.
- ¹³⁴ Bailey, 'Demographic Secline': 16-17; Hatcher, 'Understanding the Population History': 89-99; Smith, 'Measuring Adult Mortality', 41-57; Smith, 'Some Emerging Issues': 15-16. Foreman-Peck and Zhou's argument that the EMP became established around the middle of the fifteenth century is based explicitly on the assumption that at this date the high mortality regime was over, but the syntheses above are clear that it was not, 'Late marriage': 1093.
- ¹³⁵ Bennett, 'Wretched Girls'; Kelly and O Grada, 'Preventive check': 1021-4.
- ¹³⁶ Hatcher, 'Understanding the Population History': 99-120, 128-30.
- ¹³⁷ Bailey, 'Demographic Decline': 15-17; Mate, *Daughters, Wives*: 49; O. Benedictow, 'New Perspectives in Medieval Demography', in Bailey and Rigby, eds., *Town and countryside*, 32-6.
- ¹³⁸ James Belich, *The World the Plague Made: The Black Death and the Rise of Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020): 414-15.
- ¹³⁹ Smith, 'Measuring Adult Mortality', 73-82.
- ¹⁴⁰ Kussmaul, *Servants in Husbandry*, 3, 57; Poos, *Rural society*, 187-8; Foreman Peck and Zhou, 'Late Marriage': 1081.
- ¹⁴¹ Whittle, *Agrarian Capitalism*: 275-301; Whittle, 'Attitudes to Wage Labour': 35, 38-40, 43-7.
- ¹⁴² Whittle, 'Attitudes to Wage Labour': 43-4, 49-53; Charmian Mansell, 'Objecting to Youth: Popular Attitudes to Service as a Form of Social and Economic Control in England 1564-1641', in Lambrecht and Whittle, eds., *Labour Laws in Preindustrial Europe*: 185-8.
- ¹⁴³ Whittle, *Agrarian Capitalism*: 275-301; Humphries, 'Plague, Patriarchy', 221-2; Whittle, 'Attitudes to Wage Labour', 48; Mansell, 'Objecting to Youth': 187-8.
- ¹⁴⁴ Whittle, *Agrarian Capitalism*, 256-8; Whittle, 'Housewives and Servants': 61, 69-70.
- ¹⁴⁵ F. Jack Fisher 'The Development of the London Food Market 1540-1640', *Economic History Review*, 5 (1935), 46-64; John Chartres, 'Food Consumption and Internal Trade' in A. L. Beier and Roger Finlay, eds., *The making of the metropolis, London 1500-1700* (London: Longman, 1986): 168-196, 180-2.
- ¹⁴⁶ Broadberry et al., *British Economic Growth*: table 3.17.
- ¹⁴⁷ Broadberry et al., *British Economic Growth*: table 3.13.
- ¹⁴⁸ Idiou Grau-Sologestoa and Umberto Albarella, 'The 'Long' Sixteenth Century: a Key Period of Animal Husbandry Change in England', *Archaeological and Anthropological Sciences*, 11 (2019), 2781-2803.

¹⁴⁹ Mark Overton, *The Agricultural Revolution in England: The Transformation of the Agrarian Economy 1500–1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010): 40-1, 172-5; Whittle, *Agrarian Capitalism*, 264; Whittle, ‘Housewives and Servants’: 68, 73; Larson, *Rethinking*: 60, 140, 144.

¹⁵⁰ Hare, *Prospering Society*: 80; Dyer, *Peasants Making History*: 95-6, 196-7.

¹⁵¹ Slavin, ‘Peasant Husbandry’, 13, 22-3; Bailey, *Medieval Suffolk*: 222-3.

¹⁵² The Sibton abbey herd of 63 cows were tended by four women, who also tended to 66 calves born throughout the year, made butter and cheese, and kept 50 pigs. This equates to 16 cows each. A herd of sixteen cows would have taken one person between six and seven hours to milk, based on one milking per day and twenty-five minutes per milking.

¹⁵³ Mate, *Daughters, Wives*: 21; Kelly and O Grada, ‘Preventive Check’: 1022.

¹⁵⁴ Hatcher and Bailey, *Modelling the Middle Ages*: 208-40.

¹⁵⁵ Dennison and Ogilvie, ‘Does the European Marriage Pattern’: 687.