

Women's Work: Home / Work



Schoolgirls being taught domestic skills c1900

From 1862 onwards, the official syllabus allocated half of girls' school hours to teaching domestic skills such as cooking, sewing and laundry. Educationalists like Ruth Homan encouraged this development in London County Council schools; the skills taught were those needed by servants in middle-class households rather than by working-class wives.

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Class of Work	Age Period	London	Proportion of total employed	Number
Between 1861 - 1870	15-20	1871	17.1	—
1871-1880	15-20	1881	16.0	—
1881-1890	15-20	1891	15.1	1510
1891-1900	15-20	1901	14.0	1410
1901-1910	15-20	1911	13.1	1310
1911-1920	15-20	1921	12.1	1210
1921-1930	15-20	1931	11.1	1110
1931-1940	15-20	1941	10.1	1010
1941-1950	15-20	1951	9.1	910
1951-1960	15-20	1961	8.1	810
1961-1970	15-20	1971	7.1	710
1971-1980	15-20	1981	6.1	610
1981-1990	15-20	1991	5.1	510
1991-2000	15-20	2001	4.1	410
2001-2010	15-20	2011	3.1	310
2011-2020	15-20	2021	2.1	210

Report on the Money Wages of Indoor Domestic Servants 1899

In 1899, almost 50% of women workers were employed in domestic services. Their hours were very long and their wages low, and they were excluded from protective legislation. This table is from a report by the educationalist Clara Collet, who was lobbying the Board of Trade for regulation of servants.

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What's Wrong with Domestic Service? c1930

In 1930 the Labour Party set up an investigation into the problems of domestic service. These included the lack of recognised qualifications, low cash wages and exclusion from unemployment insurance schemes. It identified the recent scheme to force unemployed women into domestic service as unjust to both workers and employers.

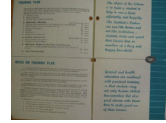
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Young women training to be house workers 1951

This image is captioned 'efficient training and recognition gives prestige to domestic workers'. The commentary on the image states that the trainee, Bridget Ruane, has selected the recipes she is preparing. This highlights the lack of initiative generally associated with such jobs.

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A Training Scheme for House Workers c1950

The National Institute of Houseworkers was set up in 1946 to raise the status of domestic employment by providing training and qualifications, and lobbying for agreed pay rates and working conditions. But only large institutions could afford these professional house-keepers, with private households relying on low-paid cleaners or 'dailies'.

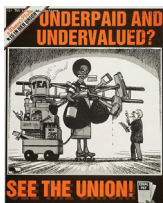
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Oxford University Cleaners' Strike 1972

In 1972 the women cleaners or 'scouts' at St Anne's College, Oxford University, went on strike in protest against compulsory redundancies and low wages that were only paid during term time.

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Underpaid and Undervalued c1990

This leaflet was issued to encourage low-paid women to join a union. The tools dragged along by the woman represent a range of trades including carpentry and painting, but most of them refer to domestic work such as cooking and cleaning.

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Julie Hayward 1988

Cleaning and cooking are typically done by women, making it hard for them to claim equal pay. An important test case was brought in 1988 by Julie Hayward, a qualified cook employed by Cammell Laird shipyard. Supported by the GMB union and the Equal Opportunities Commission, she successfully claimed equal pay with male craft workers.

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Photograph by PA Photos



Helping with Children is a real War Job 1942

This recruitment leaflet for nursery workers promotes the Child Care Reserve Scheme. This provided short training courses to qualify as nursery assistants with a salary of £120 a year.

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Woman Power 1942

By September 1944 there were 2400 nurseries or nursery classes receiving over 106,000 children, but this was not enough to fulfill the demand for nursery places. After 1945 many nurseries were closed down, making it very difficult for mothers of young children to work.

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National Child Care Campaign c1980

By 1980 campaigners had identified lack of childcare as a problem affecting the employment prospects of all women. The National Child Care Campaign was set up to lobby for a nationwide network of state-supported nurseries.

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March for Oxford City Nursery 1982

A demonstration on behalf of Oxford City Nursery. University towns often have a high proportion of residents with no local links who are dependent on paid childcare.

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Photograph by Judy Harrison



Married Women's Association c1950

The Married Women's Association was founded in 1938 to argue for married women's rights to financial support, and to a stake in the family home, especially in the case of divorce. Its supporters seem to have been mainly middle-class professionals.

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What? Ideas for Action Summer 1969

The Working Association of Mothers was established by Diana Priestley as a co-operative in May 1969. There was a great deal of initial publicity and several local projects were set up. However there was no funding for national co-ordination, and the organisation closed in 1980. The cover image is based on the 'pop art' of Roy Lichtenstein.

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Handbook of the Daily News Sweated Industries Exhibition 1906

The 1906 Sweated Industries Exhibition set out to expose all forms of sweatshops: workshops operating in difficult and dangerous conditions overseen by a middleman known as a 'sweater'. Many of the trades displayed were done in the home, like cardboard box making. The exhibition attracted over 30,000 visitors and sold 20,000 catalogues. The Trade Boards Act of 1909 was a direct result.

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Black Women for Wages for Housework at Greenham Common 1984

In the 1980s some radical feminists argued that women caring for families should be paid by the state, not by their partners, as this would remove the economic disparity within relationships. They claimed that women were intrinsically peacemakers, saying: 'Pay Women, not the Military'.

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Photograph by Gisela Norman

Sweated Labour: Homeworking in Britain Today 1983

This pamphlet, published by the Low Pay Unit, reports the findings of a survey of homeworkers in both new and traditional occupations in the early 1980s. The results confirm the disadvantage and isolation generally faced by homeworkers in all occupations.

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OPPOSITE WALL

**Pregnancy need
only be a pause
1980s**

From 1975 onwards, the right of women to paid time off for childbirth or adoption and to return to work afterwards has been increasingly protected by law. However there have been attempts by some employers to circumvent the law, or to penalise women returning after maternity leave.

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OPPOSITE WALL

**Housework
1970s**

This poster highlights the economic significance of women's domestic labour in feeding and clothing families. The visual source is drawn from Soviet agit-prop.

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OPPOSITE WALL

**A Woman's Work
is Never Done
c1975**

This poster makes a parallel between women's domestic labour and paid work on an assembly line, and refers to the way that women's attention is divided. The attractive woman on the television acts as an ironic contrast.

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