

Women's work has often been written out of history, producing misconceptions that women did not work or that their work was unimportant either to their households or to the British economy.

In fact, women workers were central to all commercial enterprises in the past, from the most traditional - like agriculture and small shops - to new areas like telecommunications. Often their contribution went unrecognised because it was part of a family business, or because they worked informally, part-time or on piecework.

In many industries women were used to introduce new processes or techniques as - unlike unionised male workers - women's work wasn't classified by skill level and paid accordingly. These included electronics, ceramics and shoemaking, where women were used for manufacturing and assembly tasks that demanded dexterity and close attention, but were repetitive and poorly paid. The establishment of new professions like nursing, teaching and social work, and the development of office administration, also depended on the work of women. In 1962 the Trades Union Congress organised an exhibition in London, 'With Women's Hands', to show the surprising variety of women's employments.