

The Contribution by Women to the Social and Economic Development of the Victorian Town in Hertfordshire

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Abstract

This study focuses on the role and contribution of women in the context of the social and economic development of two towns in Hertfordshire during the nineteenth century. Although the age saw an increase in urbanisation, Hertfordshire remained an agricultural county with long established land owners, a middle class with influence in the towns and its closeness to London attracting the newly wealthy in search of a country estate. The towns selected for this study, Hertford and Hitchin, changed little in their character and, compared with others which experienced industrial expansion, saw a modest population growth. This, however, brought the consequential pressures on housing and poverty.

This research is unique in combining the study of the activities of women and the challenges faced by two market towns over a period of time of change and thus making a contribution to the debate on the concept of “separate spheres” by demonstrating that women had a place in the public arena. The daily life of a country town was reliant on a thriving economic environment. As this research demonstrates, many women had trades and businesses, contributed to good causes and were central to the education of children and adults. Their philanthropic efforts supported the building and maintenance of churches, schools, and hospitals. It charts the role of ordinary women, operating in a small town environment, before extension of the suffrage and Equal Opportunities legislation established their position as legitimate influencers of policy and practice.

Little work has been done on how the English small town coped with its growth in population and the summons from central government on compliance with an increasing body of legislation on how the town should be run. It was men who undertook the necessary offices associated with this seed of local government but a micro-history of the people who inhabited these two towns demonstrates that women made a significant contribution to social and economic life of these towns.

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The Contribution by Women to the Social and Economic Development of the Victorian Town in Hertfordshire

1.1 Introduction: Objectives and context

The nineteenth century saw a growth in urban development and an increasing interest by central government in local administration. The Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834 in particular has been credited as the start of a new era in local government in Britain which became more complicated as the century progressed.¹ We can identify the mayors, aldermen and the men who undertook the offices associated with the poor law and school boards, but what contemporaries and historians have neglected is the unrecorded, but significant, contribution made by women in terms of economic activity, philanthropy and education. This study is unique in its focus on the role and contribution of the women living in two market towns in England which had to contend with concomitant challenges associated with a growth in population and an increasing interest by central government in local matters.

Writing in 1973, Davidoff recorded that accounts of the nineteenth century recognised Queen Victoria and a few notable women who were writers, the path-breakers and, in the later years of the century, those in the suffrage movement but noted a neglect of accounts of the lives of the majority of women in the context of their commitments and activities.² Twenty five years later Cannadine could acknowledge that there had been studies on women but made a plea that women's history be integrated into the mainstream of research.³ Even more recently it was stated that women's history and local history had developed in parallel.⁴ In practice there have been many surveys of women's work in the nineteenth century, sometimes general or concentrated on a specific class, work area or location.⁵ In particular, the publication, in 2007, of a collection of studies on women and their working lives in nineteenth century

¹ G. Best, *Mid-Victorian Britain 1851 – 75* (London, 1982), p. 55.

² L. Davidoff, *The Best Circles, Etiquette and the Season* (London, 1973), p. 14. In a later paper, first published in 1990, she noted that issues of family and kinship had been neglected. Family history has become the territory of the amateur. See L. Davidoff, "Regarding Some 'Old Husbands' Tales': Public and Private in Feminist History" in L. Davidoff, *Worlds Between: Historical Perspectives on Gender and Class* (Oxford, 1995), p. 229.

³ D. Cannadine, *History in our time* (New Haven; London, 1998), pp. 107 – 8.

⁴ J. Howells, "By her labour: Working wives in a Victorian provincial city" in C. Dyer, A. Hopper, E. Lord and N. Tringham, eds., *New Directions in Local History since Hoskins* (Hatfield, 2011), p. 158.

⁵ W. Neff, *Victorian Working Women* (London, 1966); N. Goose, ed., *Women's Work in Industrial England* (Hatfield, 2007); E. Gordon and G. Nair, *Family and Society in Victorian Britain* (New Haven and London, 2003); C. Chinn, *They worked all their lives; Women of the urban poor in England 1880 – 1939* (Manchester, 1988); D. W. Adams, *The rise and fall of Apothecaries' Assistants, 1815 – 1923*, unpublished PhD thesis, University of Hertfordshire, 2011.

covered a wider canvas and recognised the value of regional studies to add detail to generalisations based on national statistics in the context of industrial England.⁶ This research takes the study of location to a more detailed dimension by concentrating on women and their activities in two country towns in the same county which were unaffected by industrialisation in terms of employment opportunity. The contribution of women, who represented over half the population, has not been confined to occupations but reveals wider evidence of their input to the society in which they lived.

1.2 Victorian women

Historians and literary scholars have frequently noted a Victorian middle-class ideal that approached the world of work and the home as separate spheres. The proper employment for women was to be the angel of the home and thus have no role outside the house. The origins of the concept can be traced to the research done by Alice Clark and more specifically by Ivy Pinchbeck's study which roots the idea in the nineteenth century.⁷ The rise in industrial employment was seen as creating a separation of men and women's lives with a movement from the home as a workplace to a dedicated work unit thus creating an economy based on the (male) head of the family producing the family wage. There is some support for this perspective with the caveat that further analysis is needed at regional level.⁸ However, the concept of separate spheres has been used, notably by Davidoff and Hall, as a means of describing the importance of middle-class values, creating divisions between work undertaken by men in the public sphere and the domestic, fulfilled by women, in the private sphere.⁹ It is, therefore, an essentially Victorian middle-class ideology with the consequence that much of the historiography has concentrated on the middle class. The separate spheres concept has been challenged but continues to be a subject of interest to historians. Writing 20 years ago, Vickery noted that the contribution of Davidoff and Hall had added to the debate but their conclusions were not 'Holy Writ'.¹⁰ In similar vein, Cannadine described the view

⁶ N. Goose, ed., *Women's Work in Industrial England* (Hatfield, 2007).

⁷ A. Clark, *Working Life of Women in the Seventeenth Century* (London, 1968) (First published 1919); I. Pinchbeck, *Women Workers in the Industrial Revolution* (New York, 1969) (First published 1930).

⁸ S. Horrell and J. Humphries, 'Women's labour force participation and the transition to the male-breadwinner family, 1790 – 1865', *Economic History Review*, XLVIII, I (1995), p. 105.

⁹ L. Davidoff and C. Hall, *Family Fortunes – Men and Women of the English Middle Class 1780 – 1850* (London, 1987).

¹⁰ A. Vickery, "Golden Age to Separate Spheres? A Review of the Categories and Chronology of English Women's History", *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 36, No. 2 (June 1993), pp. 401 – 2.

that women were confined to the home as “so often repeated in feminist historiography that it has attained the status of a self-evident, unchallengeable truth”.¹¹ If this were true, there would be no scope for seeing women in the public sphere but it had no reality for many and particularly those needing remunerated employment.¹² As Higgs noted, Victorian ideology may have espoused the concept of work and home being separate but not all shared those beliefs.¹³ For those who could not afford a life of leisure, employment options were those “proper” to women, caring and domestic work, and those servicing the needs of women and children such as teaching, dress-making and later, garment manufacture.¹⁴ The concept of separate spheres overlooks the working class imperative of women, and men, who undertook whatever work was available in order to maintain a subsistence life style. It ignores the fact that many had multiple occupations according to season and opportunity.¹⁵ Men and women continued to observe the demarcations of labour existing before the Victorian era and the need to support a family unit such as a farm, small-holding, shop or trade did not disappear during the nineteenth century.¹⁶

In defence of the concept of separate spheres, Davidoff contended that its use has been oversimplified.¹⁷ However, as a tool to describe the experience of life for women in the nineteenth century, it is now regarded as inadequate; it was an ideal rather than a reality.¹⁸ As this research will demonstrate, for many families dependence on a male wage was unrealistic. It also challenges the assumption that the “never married” woman and widow were dependent on a family wage.¹⁹ They are the subject of particular study in this research which has shed another dimension on the ability of both to keep an enterprise viable without a male head of household. Many wives were familiar with a trade conducted from home and

¹¹ D. Cannadine, *History in our time*, pp. 99 – 100.

¹² S. Nenadic, “Gender and the rhetoric of business success: the impact on women entrepreneurs and the ‘new woman’ in later nineteenth-century Edinburgh” in N. Goose, ed., *Women’s Work in Industrial England* (Hatfield, 2007), p. 272.

¹³ E. Higgs, “Occupations in the 19th century census” in N. Goose, ed., *Women’s Work in Industrial England* (Hatfield, 2007), pp. 258 -9.

¹⁴ S. Nenadic, “Gender and the rhetoric of business success”, pp. 272 -3.

¹⁵ E. Higgs, *A Clearer Senses of the Census* (London, 1996), pp. 96 -7.

¹⁶ R. B. Shoemaker, *Gender in English Society 1650 - 1850* (Harlow, 1998), pp. 307 – 308.

¹⁷ L. Davidoff, “Regarding some ‘Old Husbands’ Tales’: Public and Private in Feminist History” in L. Davidoff, *Worlds Between: Historical Perspectives on Gender and Class* (Oxford, 1995), pp. 227 – 230.

¹⁸ A. Vickery, “Golden Age to Separate Spheres?”, p. 413; A. C Kay, “Retailing, Respectability and the Independent Woman in Nineteenth-century London” in R. Beachy, B. Craig and A. Owens eds., *Women, Business and Finance in Nineteenth-century Europe* (Oxford; New York, 2006), p.153.

¹⁹ L. Davidoff and C. Hall, *Family Fortunes*, p. 313.

were able to manage it in the husband's absence.²⁰ Undoubtedly, many were able or forced to sell up on his demise but, again, this is a generalisation and as will be shown, even in the nineteenth century, some did continue with what has been described as an uncongenial trade.²¹

A particular focus of this research is the input of women in the area of philanthropy. The separate spheres ideology has been used to underline the acceptability of women undertaking philanthropic work as this was an extension to their caring role within the home.²² By the end of the century there was some recognition that, through their philanthropic work, women understood the social make-up of their neighbourhood to the extent that Lord Salisbury endorsed their effectiveness in being better able than men to guide on matters concerning the life of the working class.²³ Engagement with the poor of the community would enable some women to be well versed on their needs but philanthropic work covered a range of activities. On the one hand the bazaar, for example, allowed for the exposure of the gentry to a wider population but visiting and educating the poor was not a general experience amongst women of the middle class. The association of women and charitable activity has been reinforced, notably through Prochaska's study of women and philanthropy in the nineteenth century.²⁴ However, this research will demonstrate (chapter 3, pp. 90 - 150) that philanthropy, whilst engaging the energy of many women, was not an exclusively female occupation and involved men and women. The "missionary philanthropy", espoused by the middle class, has been described as creating a new public sphere where women and men came together.²⁵ In practice, this philanthropic "common" sphere was not restricted to mission work at home and overseas.

The concept of the "angel of the home" did have a more lasting legacy and consequences for women's education and employment into the twentieth century.²⁶ In her study of an

²⁰ A. Clark, *Working Life of Women in the Seventeenth Century*.

²¹ A. Vickery, "Golden Age to Separate Spheres?", p. 409.

²² J. Hannam, "Women and Politics" in J. Purvis, ed., *Women's History: Britain 1850 – 1945* (London, 1995), p. 221).

²³ P. Hollis, *Ladies Elect – Women in English Local Government, 1865 – 1914* (Oxford, 1987), p. 20, p. 47 and p. 137.

²⁴ F. K. Prochaska, *Women and Philanthropy in Nineteenth-Century England* (Oxford, 1980).

²⁵ A. Twells, *The Civilising Mission and the English Middle Class, 1793 – 1850* (Basingstoke, 2009), pp. 26- 7 and p. 81.

²⁶ J. McDermid, "Women and Education" in J. Purvis, ed., *Women's History: Britain, 1850 – 1945* (London, 1995), pp. 107 – 128.

industrial environment, Lown used the separate spheres ideology to explain a paternalistic approach by some employers to excuse the necessity of female labour in industry, not just on factory work but, as an extension of women's caring role in the home, to justify the employment of the genteel, those who needed remunerated employment, as welfare officers, replicating the philanthropic work done by the ladies of leisure.²⁷ As this research will demonstrate, in spite of the recognition of the usefulness of women's philanthropic experience, there was no significant breakthrough into new areas of work or even into the voluntary roles of public office during the nineteenth century.²⁸

What was more lasting was the imposition of nineteenth-century middle-class values for girls of all social classes in the field of education. Domestic science remained on the school curriculum for girls well into the twentieth century continuing the assumption that girls were to be "trained" to be domestic servants, wives and mothers. Additionally, a "marriage bar" precluding married women continuing employment in, for example, the civil service helped reinforce attitudes that required legislation to allow full opportunity of employment and equal pay for equal work.²⁹ Its influence can be seen in the detail of the recording of women's occupations in the nineteenth-century censuses. The Victorian age has been described as coloured by "rhetoric about women's waged work as illegitimate and immoral ... [which] became ever louder and more insistent".³⁰ As a consequence many women, and especially married women, were recorded without occupation leading to an apparent conclusion that women's contribution to the economic life of the country declined over the Victorian era. The evidence for this will be examined in more detail in Chapter 2 (pp. 29 - 89) with particular attention given to the widow in order to shed some light on her economic activity when married.

An investigation into the lives of ordinary women needs to be set in a context which gives shape and parameters for study. The following sections go into some detail on the

²⁷ J. Lown, *Women and Industrialisation: Gender at Work in Nineteenth-Century England* (Oxford, 1990); J. Hannan, "Women and Politics", p. 221.

²⁸ The Welfare Workers Association (now the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development) was created in 1913.

²⁹ Sex Discrimination Act 1975 and Equal Pay Act 1970. (Even in 1966, a co-educational grammar school magazine could include advertisements suggesting that Barclays Bank was the place of opportunity for ambitious young men but there was scope for girls in secretarial work with the bonus of a gratuity on marriage. That for the National Provincial Bank was directed exclusively to the capable and efficient young man. *The East Barnet Grammar School Magazine*, Vol. 3 No. 6, 1966).

³⁰ S. Steinbach, *Women in England 1760 – 1914* (London, 2004), p.11.

demographic and occupational structure of the two towns which are the focus of this study. Whilst not untouched by change neither Hertford nor Hitchin experienced any distortion in make-up of population through new work opportunities. Although women represented just over half the population of both towns, any contribution to governance was unrecorded but some detail has been included to expose the reality of living in a nineteenth-century town.

1.3 Small towns

Study of the small town has been neglected. Thirty years ago Cannadine recorded that the future for urban history was uncertain as most of the work done in this field was being undertaken by research students with the consequence that some studies would not be finished and most would not be published.³¹ This may have been a reflection of an anti-urban tradition in English historiography or a view that it was a subject more suited to the antiquarian.³² His comments were echoed by Hoskins who noted that many towns and cities did not have a good history and that this was especially true of smaller towns “which do not attract the academic historian and are also more within the compass of the trained local historian.”³³ The establishment of the Centre for Urban History at Leicester in 1985 and publications and conferences organised by the Local Population Studies Society have done much to counteract these pessimistic forecasts, but whilst most towns, cities and, even, villages have had their history chronicled, providing a useful time-line and information on their buildings and famous sons (and sometimes daughters), the commercial and social life of the country town has been overlooked.³⁴

There are hints that the academic historian did not view the small town as a proper subject for study. It was considered a sleepy backwater, only important in the context of the country as a

³¹ D. Cannadine, “The Dyos phenomenon and after” in D. Cannadine and D. Reeder eds., *Exploring the Urban Past: Essays in Urban History by H. J. Dyos* (Cambridge, 1982), p. 220.

³² P. J. Waller, *Town, City and Nation 1850 – 1914* (Oxford, 1983), p. 318.

³³ W. G. Hoskins, *Local History in England* (London, 1984), p. 96.

³⁴ C. Smith, “Population growth and economic change in some Nottinghamshire market towns, 1680 – 1840”, *Local Population Studies*, No. 65, Autumn 2000, p. 31; J. Brown, “Market Towns and Downland in Hampshire 1780 – 1914”, *Southern History* Vol. 28 (2006), p. 74; N. Goose, “Introduction” in D. Short ed., *An Historical Atlas of Hertfordshire* (Hatfield, 2011), pp. xvi - xvii.

whole and it would be foolish to “squat in solitary places”.³⁵ Some towns were, and are, small. One definition suggests that a defined area with 2,500 inhabitants would have a shared sense of community and government, another puts the figure at 5,000 with the caveat that, in Victorian terms, a proper town would have a population of more than 10,000 inhabitants.³⁶ However, a significant proportion of the population in England in the nineteenth century were dependent on a market town. The 1851 census identified 580 towns of varying size in England accounting for 10,556,288 of the population. Working on the definition of “country” comprising detached houses, villages and towns without markets, the urban/country ratio was balanced with a rural population of 10,403,189. A relationship existed between the two, not just in terms of trade. The census report noted that a large proportion of town dwellers had been born in the country and that, in England, “town and country are bound together, not only by the intercourse of commerce and the interchange of intelligence, but by a thousand ties of blood and affection.”³⁷ A more recent, and less poetic, assessment is that between one third and a half of the English population lived in or was dependent upon the market town in the nineteenth century and, at its end, one in every nine urbanites lived in a small town.³⁸ The core business of the country town was to provide for its inhabitants and those in the surrounding hinterland. The Victorian age saw towns expand from the provision of a market for produce, shops and trades and, although the local breweries and corn markets were replaced by larger enterprises with more goods becoming available, the market town, even today, continues to serve the local community.³⁹ The individual customs and history of each country town have shaped the minds and attitudes of many millions of people.⁴⁰

³⁵ P. J. Waller, *Town, City and Nation*, p. 6.

³⁶ A. Dyer, “Small Towns in England” in P. Borsay and L. Proudfoot, eds., *Provincial Towns in Early Modern England and Ireland* (Oxford, 2002), p. 53; P. J. Waller, *Town, City and Nation*, p. 6.

³⁷ BPP 1852 - 1853 LXXXV (1631), *Census of Great Britain, 1851, Population Tables*, p. lxxxiv.

³⁸ A. Everitt, “Victorian Leicestershire: The Village Carrier” in A. Everitt, ed., *Perspectives in English Urban History* (London, 1973) p. 235; P. J. Waller, *Town, City and Nation*, p. 6.

³⁹ N. Raven, “Occupational structures in three N. E. Essex Towns” in M. Daunton, ed., *The Cambridge Urban History of Britain*, Vol. III (Cambridge, 2000), p. 173; P. J. Waller, *Town, City and Nation*, p. 229; A. Everitt, “Introduction” in *Perspectives in English Urban History* (London, 1973), p. 5.

⁴⁰ A. Everitt, “Victorian Leicestershire: The Village Carrier”, p. 235. (Alan Everitt was credited with demonstrating that provincial history represented more than a pale reflection of “assumed” national trends, see Obituary, *Times*, January 2009.)

1.4 Hertford and Hitchin

Hertfordshire has been described as a county of small towns.⁴¹ It was recorded a century ago that Hertfordshire's major industry was malting and that the life and economy of its market towns had continued at much the same pace in the nineteenth century as during the eighteenth.⁴² In other words, there is no obvious narrative and yet Hertfordshire is a county with a remarkable diversity in terms of geology and industry and, as a home county, serviced the needs of the capital and provided the country estate for established gentry and the nouveaux riches.⁴³ Although its urban population grew, mirroring that of other towns in England, no town became a significant regional centre.⁴⁴ Detailed work on the development of some towns in the county has been published.⁴⁵ Hertford and Hitchin have yet to come under the same scrutiny. They were selected for study as they started the nineteenth century as small market towns and by its end, in spite of a growth in population, were essentially unchanged in nature. Geographically close in a small county, relatively untouched by the industrial revolution and by the growth of the metropolitan suburbs in the southern part of the county, they possessed many similarities, but what this research demonstrates is how the influence of land ownership, beliefs and outlook on life prompted differences in approach within a very small geographic area. The following sections look in more detail at demography, occupations and governance and whilst women have been neglected in the historiography of the development of the town, it is necessary to paint the background of the environment in which they made an undoubted contribution.

1.5 Demography

Hertford and Hitchin were, and are, typical of a county of small towns. Both grew in population size during the course of the nineteenth century but at its end could still be

⁴¹ T. Slater and N. Goose eds., *A County of Small Towns* (Hatfield, 2008); N. Goose, "Introduction" in D. Short, ed., *An Historical Atlas of Hertfordshire* (Hatfield, 2011), p. xix.

⁴² C. H. Vellacott, "Industries" in W. Page, ed., *The Victoria History of the County of Hertford* (London, 1914), p. 234.

⁴³ N. Goose, "Introduction" in D. Short, ed., *An Historical Atlas of Hertfordshire*, pp. xviii – xix. (Detailed study on the influence of established and new landowners on the rural community in Hertfordshire is in J. P. Moore, *The Impact of Agricultural Depression and Land Ownership Change on the County of Hertfordshire, c. 1870 – 1914*, Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Hertfordshire, 2011.)

⁴⁴ T. Slater and N. Goose, "Panoramas and Microcosms: Hertfordshire's towns through both ends of the telescope" in T. Slater and N. Goose, eds., *A County of Small Towns*, p. 11.

⁴⁵ M. Freeman, *St Albans. A History* (Lancaster, 2008); N. Goose, *Population, economy and family structure in Hertfordshire in 1851, Vols. I and II* (Hatfield, 1996 and 2000).

considered as small. By 1851 Hertford had 5,703 inhabitants and Hitchin was only slightly larger with 6,595 making them both small by nineteenth-century standards but both had seen their populations double over the previous 50 years, which brought concomitant problems. Both had areas of sub-standard housing; in Hertford this was primarily the Butcherly Green area and in Hitchin the area around Back Street and Dead Street (later renamed Queen Street). Contemporary maps are at Appendices 1 and 2 (pp. 203 and 204). They had many features in common but a key distinction between the two towns, important in the context of a study of women, is that Hitchin was a centre for the straw plait trade; Hertford was not.

In 1851 the population breakdown for England and Wales was for every 20 males there were 21 females, reflecting the pattern of the previous half-century.⁴⁶ Although both towns had an overall gender bias towards women, the figure for Hertford in 1851 is lower than might be expected of the county town.⁴⁷ As can be seen from Table 1 (p. 17), there is some variation within the parishes of Hertford. The figures for St John's parish, which included the working-class district of Butcherley Green, exclude the workhouse, the county gaol and Christ's Hospital with its 406 male and 65 female scholars, but even with this adjustment, the area did not fit the generalisation that towns attracted more women than men.⁴⁸ By contrast, the working-class streets in Hitchin (Dead Street, Back Street and Hollow Lane) housed 1,253 people in 1851, 610 (49 per cent) of whom were male and 643 female, with the straw plait trade accounting for the employment of 212 women and girls and 24 men and boys in the area. Although the straw plait trade offered a significant employment opportunity for women throughout the century it had no impact on the male/female ratio in Hitchin. (By contrast, Luton's straw hat trade resulted in a population of 6,724 males to 9,332 females in 1861.⁴⁹) There was little change in the pattern of population 40 years later but the increase in the proportion of females in the St John and All Saints parishes enhanced the ratio of females in the population of Hertford (see Table 2, p. 17).

⁴⁶ BPP 1852 – 1853, LXXXVIII Pt [1691.I]. *Census of Great Britain, 1851, Population Tables II, Vol. I*, p. xxv.

⁴⁷ Figures for the same year for the St. Albans region are 54.4% female in the urban parishes and 51% in the rural parishes, see N. Goose, *Population, economy and family structure in Hertfordshire in 1851, Volume 2, St Albans and its region* (Hatfield, 2000), p. 34.

⁴⁸ BPP 1852 - 1853, LXXXVIII Pt [1691.I], p. xlii.

⁴⁹ S.Bunker, *Strawopolis, Luton Transformed 1840 – 1876* (Bedford, 1999), p. 21. (A population skewed towards males in areas of heavy industry and a preponderance of females in areas of textile working has also been noted. See D. Graham, "The Use of Published Population Census Burgh Ward Data for Local Population Studies: Dundee, 1901 – 1971", *Local Population Studies*, No. 58 (Spring 1997), p. 34).

Table 1: Population: Hertford and Hitchin 1851

	Total	Male	Female
All Saints	1,273	637 (50%)	636 (50%)
St Andrew	2,149	1,015 (47%)	1,134 (53%)
St John	1,514	769 (51%)	745 (49%)
Hertford total	4,936	2,421 (49%)	2,520 (51%)
Hitchin	6,575	3,118 (47%)	3,457 (53%)

Source: Digitalized Census Enumerators' Books.

Table 2: Population: Hertford and Hitchin 1891

	Total	Male	Female
All Saints	963	437 (45%)	526 (55%)
St Andrew	2,121	1,015 (48%)	1,106 (52%)
St John*	2,976	1,475 (49.6%)	1501 (50.4%)
Hertford total	6,060	2,927 (48%)	3,133 (52%)
Hitchin	9,510	4,431 (46.6%)	5,079 (53.4%)

Source: BPP 1893 – 4 CV [C.6948 –I], *Counties of England and Wales, 1891, Area, houses and population Vol. II*, p. 189. (*Figures exclude the 300 male and 79 female scholars at Christ's Hospital).

Table 3: Population – Hertford and Hitchin 1881, 1891 and 1901

	1881	1891	1901
All Saints	1,127	963	846
St Andrew	2,481	2,121	2,094
St John	2,987	3,357	3,506
Hertford total	6,595	6,441	6,446
Hitchin*	9,070	9,510	10,788

*includes Langley. Source: W. Page, ed., *The Victoria History of the County of Hertford* (London, 1914), p. 238.

On the face of it, Hertford had the status to become a major town. A recollection of Hertford in the second half of the nineteenth century recalled the excitement of Quarter Sessions when “we saw one of the great invasions of our County town by the stately equipages of an age that had almost passed. Every squire had his turnout, usually a well appointed landau with a pair

of high bred horses. Hatfield House still sported postillions for the Marquess of Salisbury's barouche."⁵⁰ Assize week was the provincial equivalent to the London season.⁵¹ Hertford became the seat of county government. By the end of the nineteenth century it had 25.5 servants for every 100 families. The proportion of female domestic servants was used, at the time, as a "rough measure of the standard of comfort in which a community is living" and, with the caveat that "custom varies widely in different parts of the country", the average for England and Wales was 18 domestic servants for every 100 households.⁵² Whilst the proportion in Hertford was above the national average there is no hard evidence that it had capitalised on its status. The 1891 census recorded 12 men as "clerk" in Hertford which throws some doubt on the theory that the growth of the middle class in Hertford might be due to the higher numbers of local government employees after the establishment of county councils in 1888.⁵³ Hitchin had eleven men recorded as "clerk" in 1891 and with 24 servants for every 100 families was demonstrating a similar "standard of comfort" to Hertford.⁵⁴

Hertford, with two rail links to London, was also was close enough to make commuting feasible, and five of the clerks on the 1891 census were specifically recorded as attached to a Civil Service department, but this does not appear to be a significant factor. The population of Watford, through closeness to the capital and its paper trades, increased from 7,461 in 1871 to 29,327 in 1901.⁵⁵ This was exceptional as the population of England and Wales grew by 11.7 per cent from 1881 to 1891, with Hertfordshire increasing by 6.29 per cent.⁵⁶ By comparison with Watford, growth in Hertford and Hitchin was slight and, in Hertford, it can be seen that this was not due to a burgeoning middle-class population, but an increase in the predominately working-class district of St John's (see Table 3, p. 17).

⁵⁰ H.A.L.S. D/EX26 Z3, *Looking back seventy years*. (An undated and anonymous account).

⁵¹ H. Cunningham, "Leisure and Culture" in F. M. L. Thompson, ed., *The Cambridge Social History of Britain 1750 – 1950, Vol. 2* (Cambridge, 1990), p. 292.

⁵² BPP 1904 CVIII [Cd. 2174], *Census of England and Wales, 1901. General Report with Appendices*, p. 95.

⁵³ M. Freeman, *St Albans. A History*, p. 231.

⁵⁴ By contrast, the commuting district of Barnet had a ratio of 29.6 servants to 100 families and East Barnet valley with 40 female servants per 100 families was the highest in Hertfordshire, see BPP 1902 CXIX [Cd.1377], *Census of England and Wales 1901, County of Hertford*, p. 54.

⁵⁵ M. Freeman, *St Albans. A History*, p. 231. Such growth did bring problems. By 1901 plans were afoot to employ a Rescue Worker in Watford to "save poor women in the district from a life of shame, degradation and sin" and the following year saw the Bishop set up a commission to consider the spiritual needs of this increased population – H.A.L.S. St Albans Diocesan Record Office, RD4/7 – *Diary of Rev. Kenneth Gibbs*.

⁵⁶ BPP 1893 - 2 CVI [Cd. 7222], *Census of England and Wales 1891, Vol. IV, General Report*, pp. 4 and 7.

1.6 Commerce and occupations

Hertford and Hitchin were connected to London by rail by 1851 which supplemented their carrier services to the capital and surrounding villages. Hertford also had two regular barge services to London.⁵⁷ There were some differences in the occupational composition of Hertford and Hitchin (see Table 4, p. 20 and Table 5, p. 20). The obvious one, for the male population, is that Hitchin had a sizeable agricultural community but Hertford, as to be expected of the county town, had a higher proportion in the public service and professional areas. More detail on the number of men employed in the manufacturing category is shown at Appendix 3 (p. 205). Both towns appeared to cater for the needs of their residents, including the gentry, the professional classes and those in the surrounding countryside.⁵⁸ They both had a market and shops providing clothing and food and, although there were more employed in the making of luxury goods in Hertford, both catered for those who needed coaches, furniture, watches and clock making, fitting the definition of a country town.⁵⁹ To support the quarter sessions in Hertford, there was the printing works with William Hordle of Port Hill providing law stationery and another significant employer was Stephen Austin of Fore Street, employing 30 persons, publisher of the *Hertford Mercury* and printer to Haileybury.⁶⁰ On the face of it, Hitchin was better supplied with hatters but this may be the influence of the straw plait trade. Some males were recorded as specifically engaged on straw plait work but 59 of these were under the age of 15 which, with a more significant agricultural community, contributed to the higher incidence of juvenile employment in Hitchin which will be considered in the context of education in Section 4 (pp. 151 – 202).

The occupational breakdown in both towns changed little in the next forty years except in two areas. As to be expected, there was a reduction in the numbers employed on the land and markedly so in Hitchin. By 1891, 96 men in Hitchin were enumerated as “agricultural labourer”, representing 0.1 per cent of the total population of the town; Hertford had 48 men

⁵⁷ Kelly, *Post Office Directory of Hertfordshire 1851*, pp. 201 and 204.

⁵⁸ J. Brown, “Market Towns”, p. 28.

⁵⁹ J. Brown, “Market Towns”, p. 82.

⁶⁰ Haileybury, originally based in Hertford and later at Hertford Heath, was the college for civil servants of the East India Company.

Table 4: Occupational structure – 1851 - Hertford

Sector	Male	Percentage	Female	Percentage
Agriculture/animals/gardener	195	9.8	15	1.7
Building/plumber/rail labr.	133	6.6	1	0.1
Manufacture	395	19.6	159	16.8
Transport	155	7.7	0	0
Dealing/shop/innkeeping	202	10	88	9.3
Public service/professional	129	21.6	59	6.3
Domestic service	89	4.4	457	48.4
Miscellaneous	259	12.8	6	0.6
Property owning	6	0.3	6	0.6
Independent/annuitant	7	0.3	57	6
Vagrants/prisoners/paupers	119	5.9	65	6.9
Retired	13	0.7	8	0.8
Unknown	5	0.3	23	2.5
Total	1,707	100.0	944	100.0

Table 5: Occupational Structure – 1851 - Hitchin

Sector	Male	Percentage	Female	Percentage
Agriculture/animals/gardener	501	24.90	18	1.38
Building/plumber/rail labr.	276	13.72	2	0.15
Manufacture	482	23.95	781	59.93
Transport	115	5.72	1	0.08
Dealing/shop/innkeeping	184	9.15	47	3.61
Public service/professional	84	4.17	41	3.15
Domestic service	41	2.04	194	14.89
Miscellaneous	122	6.06	5	0.38
Property owning	10	0.50	13	1.00
Independent/annuitant	5	0.25	62	4.76
Vagrants/prisoners/paupers	157	7.80	116	8.90
Retired	29	1.44	4	0.31
Unknown	6	0.3	19	1.46
Total	2012	100.0	1303	100.0

recorded as “agricultural labourer”, that is 0.8 per cent of the total population. The other difference, affecting Hitchin, was the decline of the straw plait industry. In 1851 it was

providing employment for 700 people, just over 10 per cent of the population of the town; by 1891 the number so enumerated was 214 (2.2 per cent).

By 1890 the trade of Hertford was described as the sale and grinding of corn, the making of malt and oilcake, brewing and the conveyance of coals and other commodities for the supply of the district to the north of the town.⁶¹ Similarly, Hitchin was recorded as having trade in corn, flour, malt and brewing. It was noted for the distillation of lavender, and, even at this late date, straw plait was described as “extensively manufactured”.⁶² Although new jobs had appeared during the course of the century, no industry dominated the labour market in either town. In 1881 Stephen Austin, the printer in Hertford, continued to be a significant employer with 37 men, 16 boys and one woman. Malting and brewing were important in the county and this is reflected in both towns. The 1881 census for Hertford described Alexander McMullen as a “brewer and farmer, employing 51 men” and, by 1891, 37 males in Hertford were described as having an occupation in the industry. Similarly, in Hitchin, William Lucas was enumerated in 1881 as “J.P. for Hertfordshire, brewer employing 30 men”. By 1891, 21 males in Hitchin were recorded as being in the brewing trade. Both men had important businesses but in the context of the total population could not be described as commanding the economy of either town.

1.7 Governance

The petty sessions were held in Hitchin but, administratively, Hertford, as a royal borough and county town, was more important. It had the right to elect bailiffs and licence to manage the town.⁶³ Hitchin was more typical of the local government of the time which was vested in the hands of magistrates and other prominent local citizens.⁶⁴ Amongst these was a strong representation from the Society of Friends, in particular the Lucas, Ransom, Tuke, Seebohm

⁶¹ Kelly, *Kelly's Directory of Hertfordshire 1890*, p. 765.

⁶² Kelly, *Kelly's Directory of Hertfordshire 1890*, p.775.

⁶³ M. Bailey, “The economy of towns and markets, 100 to 1500” in T. Slater and N. Goose, eds., *A County of Small Towns*, p. 49.

⁶⁴ J. Garrard, *Leadership and Power in Victorian industrial towns* (Manchester, 1983), pp. 19 – 23; J. L. Hammond and B. Hammond, *The Town Labourer 1760 – 1832* (London, 1995), p. 38.

and Thompson families.⁶⁵ Their interest in the areas of philanthropy and education will be explored in Chapters 3 and 4 (pp. 90 - 150 and pp. 151 - 196). Hine credits the Quakers for their civilising influence in Hitchin, and undoubtedly their ethos had its influence but a recurring theme in this study is the willingness of all denominations to work together.⁶⁶

Regret has been expressed that there is little information on what it was like to live in a nineteenth-century town.⁶⁷ Mid-century reports expose the problems of over-crowding, dirt and disease indicating that it was not a pleasant experience. Whilst a government report can provide some facts, one has to look elsewhere for the reality of the life of the women who visited the poor and taught their children. Mrs Gaskell, a minister's wife, knew the condition of his flock. She described the reality of sub-standard housing and a cellar, which was home to a family, where two working men were almost knocked down by the foetid smell.⁶⁸ This was in a work of fiction but she was, in fact, softening the impact of a real scene.⁶⁹ As Mrs Gaskell noted, the paths to reach this dwelling were not for the "dainty". It was a novel based in the north of England but such squalor was not confined to the industrial town. Similar scenes would have been familiar to those women who visited some of the working-class areas in Hertford and Hitchin.

Pressure on housing was such that an increase of just 12 in Hertford between 1831 and 1841 to 853 houses was inadequate. The average number of persons per house rose from 6.23 to 6.39 over the same period.⁷⁰ The report to the Board of Health in 1850 noted that whilst the over-crowded area of Butcherley Green was included in the list of haunts of epidemic, endemic and contagious diseases, the Medical Officer "found fever in the best districts" and there was not a street where there was not a case of typhus. In addition to health problems, over-crowding raised the question of morality with many families having inadequate space,

⁶⁵ There was a Quaker presence in Hertford with 53 recorded as attending the meeting on 31 March 1851 as compared with the 208 recorded for Hitchin, see BPP 1852- 3 LXXXIX, *Census of Great Britain, Religious Worship, England and Wales, Report and Tables*, p. 27.

⁶⁶ R. L. Hine, *The History of Hitchin, Vol. II* (Hitchin, 1972), p. 438.

⁶⁷ R. Sweet, *The English Town 1680 – 1840* (Harlow, 1999), p. 1.

⁶⁸ E. C. Gaskell, *Mary Barton*, published 1848, (Penguin edition, 1976), pp. 97 – 98.

⁶⁹ S. Gill, *Mary Barton* (Penguin edition 1976), pp. 477 – 478.

⁷⁰ H.A.L.S. Health 3, Public Health 614.094: *Report to the General Board of Health on a Parliamentary Inquiry into the Sewerage, Drainage and Supply of Water, the Sanitary Condition of the Inhabitants of Hertford by William Ranger, 1850.*

such as a man and wife, sons aged 15 and 18 and two daughters living and sleeping in one room, about 13 foot square and just over seven foot high.⁷¹

The picture in Hitchin was very similar. The population had increased by nearly a sixth in the ten years to 1841 to 6,125. The stock of houses was 1,057 which meant that the number of persons per house (5.79) was better than in Hertford. The areas where fever prevailed were principally around the Back Street area but, as with Hertford, the Clerk to the Union reported that typhus fever had been epidemic in almost every street in the town.⁷² Chapman's Yard (off Back Street) came under particular attention with the inhabitants noted as exceedingly dirty and of the 17 houses, six had seven to ten people and in three there were eight to eleven resulting in, as with areas in Hertford, the whole family, including adult sons and daughters, sleeping in one room.

Hertford and Hitchin reacted to these problems in different ways which reflected the style of local government in each. The Inspector of the General Board of Health noted that the Marquess of Salisbury had a large extent of property in Hertford but had opposed the application of the Public Health Acts to the Borough. It was also rejected by the Clerk to the Union and 42 others as improvements had been made "by the efforts of the inhabitants themselves, without the influence of the Board of Health".⁷³ By contrast, the report to the Board of Health on Hitchin noted that "It is, however, an act of justice to some of the owners who have recently come into possession of a portion of the property [in Chapman's Yard] it has been my duty to describe, to state, that a spontaneous desire was shown on their part to remedy existing evils, by rendering the houses fit habitations for human beings."⁷⁴

⁷¹ H.A.L.S. Health 3 *Report to the General Board of Health, Hertford.*

⁷² H.A.L.S. Health 3, *Public Health 614.094, Report to the General Board of Health on a Preliminary Inquiry into Sewerage, Drainage and Supply of Water, and the Sanitary condition of the Inhabitants of the Town of Hitchin by William Ranger, 1849.*

⁷³ H.A.L.S. Health 3 Public Health 614.094; H.A.L.S. Charities Hertford, *Letter from William Ranger.*

⁷⁴ H.A.L.S. Health 3 Public Health 614.094, *Report to the General Board of Health – Hitchin.*

It has been recorded that only three towns in Hertfordshire (Ware, Cheshunt and Watford) set up a local board of health under the provisions of the 1848 Public Health Act.⁷⁵ In fact there was a fourth, albeit short-lived.⁷⁶ The General Board of Health reported, in 1854, that 13 towns in the country, including Hitchin, had completed work on water supply and drainage and praised local gentry for their support. “In Hitchin, for example, F. P. Delmé Radcliffe, Esq., has given the Local Board a fine spring of water sufficient to supply the town, and has allowed the aqueduct main to be laid through his park, past his house, and on to the pumping machine.”⁷⁷

The picture emerging is of two towns, in the same county, about 13 miles apart with some similarities and differences. Both were market towns catering for a community but other factors created individuality and demonstrate the diversity of a small county.⁷⁸ Throughout most of the century Hitchin had a closer relationship with the rural community with more men employed as agricultural labourers and many men, women and children involved in the straw plait trade. By the end of the century these two areas of work were in decline but Hitchin had grown in population whilst Hertford’s was decreasing. Hertford had a solid base as the “capital” of Hertfordshire but its credentials masked an underlying problem of the working-class district of Butcherley Green. Those with influence in Hitchin tried to ameliorate the lot of their less fortunate townfolk, and the inhabitants of the town generally, by embracing the provisions of the 1848 Public Health Act; thanks to the influence of the Marquess of Salisbury, Hertford did not.

1.8 Sources

This research has been underpinned by the availability of the digitalized census enumerators’ books for 1851 and 1891 for the county through the Centre for Local and Regional History at

⁷⁵ K. Thompson, “Local Government” in D. Short, ed., *An Historical Atlas of Hertfordshire*, p.18.

⁷⁶ The enterprise failed through the incompetence of the government appointed surveyor and engineer. Details can be found in R. M. Gutchen, “The Government and Misgovernment of Hitchin – The Local Board of Health, 1848 – 1873”, *Hertfordshire Past and Present*, Number 15, 1975/6, pp. 32 - 65.

⁷⁷ BPP 1854, *Report of the General Board of Health on the Administration of the Public Health Act and the Nuisances Removal and Diseases Prevention Acts 1848 – 1854*, p. 26.

⁷⁸ A. Everitt, “Victorian Leicestershire”, p. 235; N. Goose, “Introduction” in D. Short, ed., *An Historical Atlas of Hertfordshire*, pp. xvii – xix.

the University of Hertfordshire and, for additional prosopography, the 1881 census transcribed by the Church of the Latter-Day Saints. This, together with the information available from the government reports on aspects of society of the time means that the focus is, in consequence, on the Victorian era (1837 – 1901). However, as with any period of time, a label may bind an age but in practice events before and after are pertinent to the development of attitudes, behaviour and legislation and, as this study will demonstrate, allows for exposure of continuity and change in women’s lives.

The accuracy of what was recorded in the census, specifically in enumerating married women’s occupations, has been the subject of separate studies and this will be explored in chapter 2 (pp. 29 - 89).⁷⁹ In addition, contemporary comment was made on inaccuracy in recording age, marital status and occupation.⁸⁰ There is also simple human error. The local accent can be heard in the recording of William Brown, Jas Lane, Jas Creasey and Henry Creasey as “arrant boy” in Hitchin in 1851 and the eight women in the St Andrew parish of Hertford enumerated as “chairwoman” in the same year.⁸¹ There is the elision, or ignorance, of a new occupation, in the recording of John Tully in Hitchin in 1891 as “assorting clerk and telegraphist”.⁸²

The nineteenth century left a legacy of government reports, although the largest employment category for women, domestic service, received no such attention.⁸³ There are local records which identify the men who undertook public office in both towns, although their motivations for such activity are generally unrecorded. For both towns very few personal papers and diaries remain and even fewer written by women. They come with the caveat that what was recorded may have been selective.⁸⁴ Local newspapers have been accused of seeing events through “journalistic spectacles tinted wishfully by Victorian ideology” but have provided

⁷⁹ Notably L. Shaw Taylor, “Diverse Experiences; the geography of adult female employment in England and the 1851 census” and M. Anderson, “What can the mid-Victorian censuses tell us about variations in married women’s employment?” in N. Goose, ed., *Women’s Work in Industrial England*, pp. 29 – 50 and pp. 182 – 208.

⁸⁰ BPP 1893 – 1894 CVI [C7222], *Census of England and Wales 1891, General Report*, pp. 28 and 35. More recent studies suggest that age was generally accurately recorded, see A. Perkyms, “Age Checkability in the censuses of six Kentish parishes 1851- 81”, *Local Population Studies*, No. 50, Spring 1993, p. 38.

⁸¹ Digitalized census enumerators’ books for Hertford and Hitchin, 1851.

⁸² Digitized census enumerators’ books for Hitchin, 1891.

⁸³ J. Burnett, ed., *Annals of Labour* (Bloomington; London, 1974), p. 135.

⁸⁴ J. Burnett, ed., *Destiny Obscure* (Harmondsworth, 1984), pp. 11- 12.

more information of the activities of women in these two towns.⁸⁵ The *Hertford Mercury* (*Hertfordshire Mercury* from 1872) in particular has been used and the availability of some local nineteenth-century newspapers in the British Library collection on-line has allowed for comparison with other areas, specifically in the growth of the bazaar (see Chapter 3, pp. 120 - 129).

The inadequacy of census and other statistical data for the social historian, and particularly in the study of women, results in a need to be imaginative in order to elicit information on the customs and social mores of the time.⁸⁶ Autobiographies are a valuable resource when used with the caveat that memory can be clouded and selective. The other limitation is that whilst autobiographies, diaries and personal papers exist, they are few and far between at working-class level. To understand the life of a straw plaiter in Hertfordshire the notes made by Lucy Luck, who spent much of her working life in London, are the only resource.⁸⁷ The fictional autobiography of Flora Thompson, collected as *Lark Rise to Candleford*, has provided a rich source of material on life in an English village at the end of the nineteenth century. It is, however, a selective record. Her father, for example, was an alcoholic which, needless to say, was not mentioned in the book.⁸⁸ The diary of Hannah Cullwick, a general servant, is a popular source for information on life “below stairs”.⁸⁹ She has been noted, perhaps coyly, as an exceptional servant.⁹⁰ However, the diary was written for the man who was to marry her, Arthur J. Munby, a man with an interest in working women of the roughest kind.⁹¹ As Cullwick herself noted, “I’d sent no diary to M but I was so delighted that I was going to see him in the evening ... he was cross with me about the diary and we were very dull all evening ... I must write more, for it is not life to me if M isn’t nice with me”.⁹²

⁸⁵ J. Garrard, *Leadership and Power*, pp. 21 and 29.

⁸⁶ A. C. Kay, “Retailing and the Independent Woman”, p. 153.

⁸⁷ J. Burnett, ed., *Annals of Labour*, p. 77.

⁸⁸ P. Razzell, “Flora Thompson: Health, Mortality and Fertility in Juniper Hill”, *LPSS Newsletter* 46, February 2010, pp. 5 – 10.

⁸⁹ Notably P. Horn, *The Rise and Fall of the Victorian Servant* (Gloucester, 1986).

⁹⁰ S. D’Cruze, “Women and the family” in J. Purvis, ed., *Women’s History: Britain 1850 – 1945*, p. 67.

⁹¹ D. Hudson, *Munby, Man of Two Worlds* (London, 1972), p. 3.

⁹² L. Stanley, ed., *The Diaries of Hannah Cullwick, Victorian Maidservant* (London, 1984), pp. 159 – 160. An analysis of the relationship between Munby and Cullwick, first published in 1979, can be found in L. Davidoff, “Class and Gender in Victorian England: The Case of Hannah Cullwick and A. J. Munby” in L. Davidoff, *Worlds Between: Historical Perspectives on Gender and Class*, pp. 114 – 142.

In view of this inadequacy of material the nineteenth-century novel has been used for background information. Novels, as with autobiographies, newspaper reports and manuals, may not reflect accurately the life of the ordinary people. Authors were, in the main, from a certain class and, by definition, literate. However, the nineteenth-century novel, and particularly works by Mrs Gaskell, Charles Kingsley and Charles Dickens, has been cited as providing “a veritable quarry of evidence for historians of Victorian Britain.”⁹³ The credentials of the author as providing a valid historical resource through the genre of fiction are nicely demonstrated by an example demonstrating the difficulty a widow might encounter in continuing her husband’s business.⁹⁴

Contemporary and modern critics have complained that authors such as Mrs Gaskell and Anthony Trollope lost sight of the debate on the “great question”, the uplifting of the human spirit, with the accusation that Mrs Gaskell inhabited a “mundane world” and that Trollope was rooted “in the necessities of day-to-day reality”.⁹⁵ This, however, is what provides a source of information on what it was to live in the nineteenth century and the hopes and concerns of a wider group of characters. Mrs Gaskell, as a minister’s wife in Manchester, had the credentials to know what life was like for the slum dwellers in a manufacturing town and having seen her own young son die and could understand the despair of the parent watching a child starve to death.⁹⁶ Her stories include the working class, to the extent that they are often integral to the plot. The attitude of the servant woman, Sally, demonstrates her loyalty to her master and mistress and the horror of an unmarried mother being part of the household; the death of the young factory girl, Bessie Higgins, exposes the unhealthy lifestyle of an industrial town, with its “endless noise and sickening heat”, and in *Mary Barton* there is an insight into the realities of the seamstress’s trade with Margaret’s loss of eyesight.⁹⁷ In the absence of relevant working-class testimonies, such accounts provide a

⁹³ B. Southgate, *History meets Fiction* (Harlow, 2009), p. 59.

⁹⁴ Davidoff and Hall use as an example an incident from George Eliot’s *Mr Gilfil’s Love Story*, published in 1858, in the collection *Scenes from Clerical Life*. Firstly, they acknowledge that in describing the problems faced by a widow in trying to fulfil the dying wish of her husband that she continue to run the farm, Eliot, as an estate steward’s daughter would understand the realities and the opposition she would face. However, the fictional element in the tale is provided by the benevolent landlord allowing the widow a cottage at low rent with a plot for a cow and some pigs. L. Davidoff and C. Hall, *Family Fortunes*, p. 289.

⁹⁵ P. Davis, *The Oxford English Literary History, Volume 8 – The Victorians*, (Oxford, 2002), p. 373.

⁹⁶ D. Epstein Nord, *Walking the Victorian Streets* (Ithaca N.Y.; London, 1995), p. 146.

⁹⁷ E. G. Gaskell, *Ruth*, published 1853 (O.U.P. edition, 1985), p. 145; *North and South*, published 1854 – 5, (O.U.P. edition, 1983), pp. 182 and 280; *Mary Barton*, published 1848, (Penguin edition, 1984), p. 84.

context for the realities of life in the nineteenth century and reveal patterns of thinking, values and attitudes.

1.9 Conclusion

The over-arching structure of this research is the story of two towns during the nineteenth century. As noted above (pp. 13 – 14) the small town has been neglected as a subject for study by the academic historian. This research demonstrates the similarities and differences of two market towns, in the same county, in their responses to the challenges they faced. In so doing, the focus is on another neglected area, the women of the town who made an undoubted contribution to the health of their community and thus integrating women's history into the mainstream. As can be seen in tables 4 and 5 (p. 20) above, a significant number of women were recorded with an occupation in 1851. The number so recorded diminished as the century progressed but whether this is an accurate reflection of the middle-class ideal of a retreat into domesticity will be examined in the following chapters.

The health of a town depended on a thriving economy. Chapter 2 expands on the demographics and occupational structure of both towns (pp. 15 – 21 above) with the focus on women. It looks at the economic contribution of women by examining the employment available to them and their participation in the trades and shop-keeping areas. Specific attention has been paid to the widowed and never married in order to add to the debate on the accuracy of recording female occupations in the census returns. An increasing interest in the welfare and literacy of the nation meant that both towns had to contend with the interest of national government in matters of charity, poverty and the education of the working class. This research examines their responses and specifically the input of the women. Chapter 3 reviews the established charities in both towns and women's role in supporting these and their wider interests in fundraising for local causes and missionary endeavours at home and overseas and, in so doing, re-visits and challenges some established historiography. Chapter 4 considers the availability of education and the under-valued role of women in their active support of schooling and development of literacy, particularly for the working class.

Women, occupations, trades and commerce

2.1 Introduction

The following sections identify the female population in Hertford and Hitchin and examine the opportunities for remunerated employment open to women in the Victorian age. The census provides a picture of the resources available to the single and widowed. The deficiencies in the recording of the work undertaken by wives and mothers will be considered and additional sources used in building a picture of their working lives. As part of this examination of the employment of married women, particular attention has been paid to the occupations of widows in order to try to shed some light on their remunerated activities during their marriage.

2.2 The female community

The make-up of the population of both towns in 1851 was similar. Hitchin had a slightly higher percentage of unmarried men and women and Hertford had more widows and widowers than other towns in the county (see Appendix 4, p. 206). Of the female population over the age of 20, there was little difference between Hitchin and Hertford in the proportion of widows and unmarried women (see Table 6, p. 30). Having the cachet of the county town may be why Hertford attracted more widows, possibly looking for civilised society;¹ by 1891, the positions had been reversed, with Hertford retaining the same number of widows as 40 years before. Most widows were recorded as heading a household. The proportion thus described changed from 1851 to 1891, with a higher percentage of widows in this category in Hitchin (72 per cent in 1891; 64 per cent in 1851) as compared with Hertford (66 per cent in 1891; 55 per cent in 1851). The figure that is consistent is the number of widows heading a household as a percentage of the total heads of household which remains constant for Hertford and just a slight increase for Hitchin, (see Table 7, p. 30).²

¹ N.Goose, *Population, economy and family structure in Hertfordshire in 1851, Vol. 2, St. Albans and its region*, p. 35.

² The accuracy of census information might be challenged by some examples in later sections which indicate that the most senior member of a household was designated its head although, in reality, they were probably dependent on younger members of the family.

Of the remaining widows in Hertford in 1891 most, 58 per cent, were living with a family member, with domestic service, including nurse, washerwoman, charwoman and laundress, accounting for the employment of a quarter of widows in this category. A further 20 per cent were described as living on their own means. Living with a family member did not, however,

Table 6: Unmarried women over the age of twenty and widows - number and percentage of total female population over the age of twenty - Hertford and Hitchin

	Hertford	Hitchin
1851		
Widows	238 (15.7%)	236 (12.5%)
Unmarried	459 (30%)	569 (30%)
1891		
Widows	238 (13.8%)	387 (14%)
Unmarried	534 (31%)	855 (32.4%)

Table 7: Widows as a proportion of the total heads of household³

	1851	1891	1851	1891
Heads of household	Hertford	Hertford	Hitchin	Hitchin
Number of widows heading household	129	157	172	278
Total heads of household	968	1186	1332	1953
Percentage of heads of household who were widows	13.3%	13.2%	12.9%	14.2%

render all such widows as dependent. Maria Passingham at Bull Plain, a law copier, lived with her unmarried daughter, a dairy manageress who was enumerated as head of the household, which included an unmarried son, an insurance agent. Catherine Taylor in Villiers Street was described as a teacher of music with her unmarried brother, an accountant and one servant. A more equal relationship is that of Hannah Davis, a widow originating

³ If the 22 widows in almshouse accommodation in Biggen Lane, Hitchin, are excluded, the percentage of widows heading a household is reduced to 13.1%, thus resulting in a consistent picture for both towns.

from Devon, whose relationship with the head of household, Hannah Ewens, unmarried and from Kent, is recorded as partner. Both were enumerated as licensed victuallers. In Hitchin at the same date, 108 widows were not described as “head of household”. The majority, 64 per cent, were living with another family member.

2.3 Occupations

Women were predominately occupied in the domestic service and manufacturing work areas and more detail on this is shown in Table 8 (p. 32). Although both towns had the same quota of dressmakers in 1851 (one for 37.5 of the total female population of the town), it was the straw plait trade that contributed to a higher incidence of recording of female occupations in the manufacture category in Hitchin. Apart from Lucy Drummond in St John’s parish, Hertford, a lime burner and Sarah Perks of Hitchin, a manufacturer of gun wadding, those in the “other” category were primarily in more familiar occupations such as upholstery, shoe binding and, in Hertford, book binding.

By 1891, the trades of Hertford and Hitchin continued to be centred around the malting and brewing industry with Hitchin distinguished by the distillation of lavender and straw plait was described as “extensively manufactured”.⁴ The straw plait trade was, as a domestic trade, in decline by this date. Cheaper imports had reduced the number employed in the trade in Bedfordshire from 23,058 in 1871 to 12,076 in 1891 and in Hertfordshire from 12,804 to 3,416.⁵ Ten years before it had been recorded that straw plaiting was “starving work, and the price per score was getting worse ... they only did straw plaiting at odd times because they could get nothing else to do.”⁶ The numbers involved in straw plait work in Hitchin had reduced from the 664 recorded in the 1851 census to 218 in 1891. Memories of the time suggest, however, that whilst straw plaiting might have been in decline, it was still important.

⁴ Kelly, *Kelly’s Directory of Hertfordshire 1890*, p.765 and p. 775.

⁵ N.Goose, “The straw plait and hat trades in 19th century Hertfordshire” in N. Goose, ed., *Women’s Work in Industrial England* (Hatfield, 2007), p.100 .

⁶ B. Hill, *Women Alone, Spinsters in England 1660 – 1850* (Yale, 2001), p. 34.

Table 8: Women employed in the manufacture and domestic service categories – Hertford and Hitchin – 1851

	Hertford	Hitchin
<u>Manufacturing</u>		
Dressmaker	72	92
Milliner	23	16
Straw plait/bonnet maker*	10	609
Needlewoman/sempstress	21	15
Baker/pastrycook	2	2
Confectioner	3	1
Staymaker	12	9
Other	16	37
Total	154	781
<u>Domestic Service</u>		
Servant/Cook	339	176
Nurse/Nursemaid	17	17
Laundress/Washerwoman	53	43
Charwoman	17	30
Other	1	1
Total	427	267

*includes 4 enumerated as “bonnet sewer” in Hertford.

A reminiscence of Bedmond, written in the 1920s, of the village 50 years before recalled the heyday of the domestic straw plait industry, noting that all the women worked on straw plaiting, with the men helping in the evening but another, recalling Leverstock Green in

1925, stated that the women of the village did straw plaiting and someone used to walk to Luton to deliver it.⁷

Table 9: Percentage employed in manufacture – female population – Hertford and Hitchin

	1851		1891	
	Hertford	Hitchin	Hertford	Hitchin
Dressmaker	46	12	62	39
Milliner	13	2	7	3
Needlework/semstress	13	3	7	3
Bonnet Manufacture/Sewer	4	5	-	1
Straw Plaiter*	3	73	1	49
Other	21	5	33	5

*There were four straw plaiters in Hertford in 1851 and one in 1891

The straw plait trade might have declined, but even in the early years of the twentieth century, it had not disappeared (see Table 9, p. 33). Straw hat making continued into the twentieth century.⁸ A reminiscence of the Hitchin Plait Market in 1897 described the women (and a few men) bartering with the dealers on prices from 9d to 11d a score.⁹ What may have changed is that, with the absence of significant money to be made on straw plait, it had ceased to be the all consuming activity described by Edwin Grey but had joined the range of jobs in the economy of makeshifts.¹⁰ Rose Craig of Hitchin, born in 1896, recalled that her mother did straw plaiting ... “took it to plait mart early in morning and bought food with the

⁷ Hertfordshire Federation of Women’s Institutes, *Hertfordshire within Living Memory* (Newbury, 1992), pp.17 and 21.

⁸ N.Goose, “How saucy did it make the poor? The straw plait and hat trades, Illegitimate Fertility and the Family in Nineteenth-Century Hertfordshire”, *History*, Vol. 91, Issue 304, October 2006, pp. 99 – 101.

⁹ Roy Pinnock, *In a Green Valley* (Lilley: (privately published), 1971), p. 14.

¹⁰ E. Grey, *Cottage Life in a Hertfordshire Village* (St Albans, [1935]), Chapter 2.

money.”¹¹ Straw plait work was still an expedient in the working-class home in Hitchin at the beginning of the twentieth century. The census does not, however, record this ad hoc work. As the following sections demonstrate, an income stream was generally recorded for the single and widowed; the working-class wife’s activities, often seasonal or casual, were neglected.¹²

2.4 Married women

A case has been made for more married women having paid employment than recorded by the census as their work was usually domestic or agricultural and seasonal which allowed them to give some attention to home and children.¹³ The 1851 Census enumerated 3,462,000 wives in Great Britain. Of these, 2,630,000 (76 per cent) were recorded as having no occupation; the rest were deemed to be occupied either through support of their husbands’ trades or some other extraneous occupation.¹⁴ This might include running a small provision shop or a beerhouse on their own account.¹⁵ These were often not major enterprises. In many cases, such shops were no more than a space in the front room, stocking the minimum of goods, with the few customers as poor as the shop-keeper who was unable to afford to buy in bulk at cheaper prices.¹⁶

Support of the husband was recorded through the assumption that the wives of butchers, innkeepers and farmers were actively involved in the family business.¹⁷ This assumption resonates with the picture of Mrs Poyser whose management of the diary was deemed to be an example to all farmers’ wives.¹⁸ In reality, there was some inconsistency. Elizabeth

¹¹ Hitchin Museum HITHM 10825, *Rose Craig Remembers*, Transcript of Tape Recording made in 1988.

¹² C. Day, “Geographical mobility in Wiltshire, 1754 – 1914”, *Local Population Studies*, No. 88, Spring 2012, p. 70; N. Goose, “Working women in industrial England” in N. Goose, ed., *Women’s Work in Industrial England* (Hatfield, 2007), pp. 23 - 4.

¹³ M. Anderson, *Family Structure in Nineteenth Century Lancashire* (Cambridge, 1971), p. 71.

¹⁴ BPP 1852 - 3 LXXXVIII Pt[1691.1], *Census of Great Britain, 1851, Population tables II*, Vol. I, pp. lxxxviii – lxxxix; J. McKay, “Married Women and work in nineteenth-century Lancashire”, in N. Goose, ed., *Women’s Work in Industrial England*, p. 165. By contrast, the same proportion of widows (605,000 out of 795,000) were assigned an occupation in the 1851 census.

¹⁵ M. Anderson, *Family Structure in nineteenth-century Lancashire*, p.71; J. Benson, *The Penny Capitalists* (Dublin, 1983), p. 118.

¹⁶ J. Flanders, *Consuming Passions* (London, 2007), p. 46.

¹⁷ BPP 1852 – 3, *Census of Great Britain*, pp. ccxxvi – ccxxv.

¹⁸ G. Eliot, *Adam Bede* (Collins edition, 1969), p. 197.

Bennett was described as “farmer’s wife” on the 1851 census (and her daughter, Maria, as “farmer’s daughter”). Joseph Bennett was a farmer of 470 acres, employing 41 men. They lived in the town of Hitchin (Bancroft) which meant that the home was not located with the farm. On the other hand, William Harwood, a farmer of 45 acres employing three labourers, was based on the outskirts of the town at Charlton. His wife was not enumerated as any more than “wife” and yet, on the face of the facts, she would appear to have a closer interest in the farm than Mrs Bennett. To add weight to this hypothesis, the Bennetts employed a cook and a housemaid suggesting that Elizabeth was a lady of leisure; the Harwoods had no domestic servants.

The working-class family depended on the wife and mother to manage the household budget and supplement it when possible.¹⁹ Their work was central, not just to the family, but has been described as key to the wealth of the nation.²⁰ The difficulty in defining and quantifying the contribution of women is constrained by the lack of records apart from the decennial census. Even if the enumerator had been disposed to record work done by married women, he could not have encapsulated, in a recording of one moment in time, the diversity of the casual or intermittent activities of many women and men.²¹ The instructions for the 1851 census stated that wives should be recorded with an occupation where they were “regularly employed from home, or at home, in any but domestic duties....”. The problem is not whether such employment was accurately noted but how the term “regularly” was defined by householders and enumerators.²² In consequence, irregular and ad hoc work was not always recorded.²³ Studies on the agricultural community have been dismissed as a basis for extrapolation that women’s work was under-recorded; such work is seasonal and thus not

¹⁹ J. Humphries, “Because they are too menny”: Children, mothers and fertility decline, the evidence from working class autobiographies of the eighteenth and nineteenth-centuries”, University of Oxford, *Discussion papers in Economic and Social History*, Number 64, September 2006, p. 30.

²⁰ K. Honeyman, *Women, Gender and Industrialisation in England 1700 – 1870* (Basingstoke, 2000), p. 34.

²¹ K. Honeyman, *Women, Gender and Industrialisation*, p. 74; J. Humphries, “Women and Paid Work” in J. Purvis, ed., *Women’s History: Britain 1850 – 1945* (London, 1995), p.85; E. Higgs, *A Clearer Sense of the Census*, pp 97 -9.

²² L. Shaw Taylor, “Diverse Experiences”, p. 34.

²³ O. Saito, “Who worked when?” in D. Mills and K. Schurer, eds., *Local Communities in the Victorian Census Enumerators Books* (Oxford, 1996), p. 189.

fitting the definition of it being regular.²⁴

Whilst studies of textile workers, lace makers and straw plaiters have shown high levels of recording, there is a small inconsistency from place to place and census to census.²⁵ This pattern is mirrored in Hertfordshire. Female employment in the straw plait trade was generally well recorded but there are discrepancies between 1851 and later censuses.²⁶ These are exceptions but demonstrate the value of looking at more than one census return. A case in point is to be found in the records of Pirton.²⁷ The availability of work for women and low wages for men would suggest additional earnings were a necessity.²⁸ The average wage for the agricultural labourer in Hertfordshire was assessed as 10 to 12 shillings a week in 1869.²⁹

Apart from the interpretation of instructions given to the enumerators, the Victorian age has been coloured by the concept of separate spheres. The concealment of employment of married women equated to wish fulfilment.³⁰ If it was not recorded; then it did not happen. This change in attitude is clear from some differences in recording women's work, notably that of the wife, as can be seen below in a comparison between the 1851 and 1891 census returns. Where a woman was recorded as the head of the household, a means of support,

²⁴ L. Shaw-Taylor, "Diverse Experiences", p. 41. (The same argument could be applied to the men who were recorded as agricultural labourers, particularly in the arable farming areas, who were without work in the winter, see BPP 1868 – 9, XIII, *Report on the Employment of Children, Young Persons and Women in Agriculture*, pp. 112 – 3).

²⁵ L. Shaw-Taylor, "Diverse experiences", p. 39.

²⁶ N. Goose, "How saucy did it make the poor?", p.103; C A Crompton, "Changes in Rural Service Occupations during the Nineteenth Century: An Evaluation of Two Sources for Hertfordshire, England", *Rural History*, 6,2, (1995) p. 202.

²⁷ The 1851 census recorded 107 households headed by an agricultural labourer. An occupation was recorded against the wife of just two, one a straw plaiter and the other, born outside the village (Saffron Walden), a dressmaker. By the time of the 1881 census there were 132 households headed by a married agricultural labourer and 118 of these wives were recorded as being a straw plaiter. From age and husband's name, it is possible to identify three women from the earlier census. Ann Odell, Sarah Walker and Sarah Goldsmith were without occupation in 1851, but straw plaiters in 1881. It would seem reasonable to assume that most of the women in the village had always been straw plaiters.

²⁸ J. McKay, "Married Women and Work in Nineteenth Century Lancashire", p. 34.

²⁹ This was in contrast to a pastoral area, Derbyshire, where the average wage was assessed as 15 shillings a week; BPP 1868 -9, XIII, *Report on the Employment of Children, Young Persons and Women in Agriculture*, pp. 183 - 4.

³⁰ C. Miller, "The Hidden Workforce: female field workers in Gloucestershire 1870 – 1901", *Southern History*, Vol. 6, 1984, p.151.

whether it be through independent means, a trade or receiving alms, was more likely to be recorded. This accords with the premise that most women worked.³¹

The 1851 census recorded 69 per cent of wives in Hitchin under the occupation column as either “wife” or no entry; for Hertford, 63 per cent were similarly recorded, thus putting both towns below the national average of 76 per cent.³² Of the wives in Hitchin and Hertford in 1851 with an entry in the occupation column, the term “wife of” was the favourite description which, at the least, must be described as an obscure definition. “George Dear and Co.” was a family firm with Mary described as a “Linen and wool drapers wife” on the census. The participation of all the family is suggested by the four adult children enumerated as sons and daughters of a linen and wool draper, together with a nephew employed as an apprentice. However, such involvement would seem unlikely for the wife of the engine driver, flyman or railway labourer. It might have been useful to assign Rebecca Howard and Sarah Taylor, in Hertford in 1851, as “bricklayer’s wife” as in both cases the husband was absent on census night, but it adds little to our understanding of the households of Lucy Nightingale in West’s Yard and Mary Crouch in Back Street where both bricklayer husbands were present. It is also unlikely that Elizabeth Maynard enumerated as “Platelayers (sic) wife” or Mary Butterfield, a “Master Bricklayers (sic) wife” in Hitchin were involved in the trade.

A few wives appeared with a trade in their own right. Elizabeth Hill, of Bull Plain, wife of a plumber and glazier was a milliner and Sarah Ellis, of Butcherley Green, wife of a farm labourer was described as a nurse. Susan Cock, wife of a sawyer in Back Street was a dressmaker, thus of a higher status than her husband, and the upward mobility continued with her son, enumerated as a tutor. Martha Webster of Honey Lane appeared to have more financial stability than most apparently dependent wives. As a staymaker, employing three hands and a business important enough for an entry in the trade directory, she outclassed her plumber and glazier husband. Similarly, Jonathon Cowley was enumerated as a “shopman” in Bridge Street, Hitchin in 1851. However, it was his wife who was named in the trade

³¹ P. Earle, “The Female Labour Market in London in the late Seventeenth and early Eighteenth centuries”, *Economic History Review*, Vol. 42, No. 3, August 1989 p. 346.

³² J. Burnett, *Annals of Labour*, pp. 48 – 9.

directory for the year as a “Milliner and Dressmaker”.³³ As the household also included four female apprentices, it is to be assumed that Mrs Cowley ran the business (and might, therefore, be better described as the head of the household). As with Hertford, there are other wives with distinct occupations. Laundress, charwoman and dressmaker are the most frequently occurring in Hertford and also appear in Hitchin but they are by far outweighed by the 144 wives who were straw plaiters. The marital status of those recorded with an occupation in 1851 shows that the straw plait trade provided employment for many unmarried women in Hitchin, and, to a lesser extent widows, but also contributed to a higher recording of an occupation for the married woman, (Table 10, p. 39). Although a few single and widowed women were designated as “daughter” or “sister”, the majority were recorded with an income source in the 1851 census.

Irrespective of the Victorian reluctance to acknowledge the working wife, for some it was accepted. The Parson, for example, needed a wife, or another female family member, to take on tasks associated with the girls at school and working with the women in the parish.³⁴ The vicar of Hitchin, Lewis Hensley, was enumerated in 1891 with his wife and four unmarried daughters. The oldest, Lucy, the surviving child from his first marriage, was specifically recorded as “deaconess”.³⁵ Similarly, the Workhouse Master needed someone to fulfil the office of Matron. In 1851, James Wakenall was the Master of the Hitchin Union Workhouse; Susanna, his wife, was the Matron. By 1881, he was a widower and his daughter had taken on the role. In Hertford, the February 1869 meeting of the Board of Guardians recorded the appointment of Sarah Kitchener, sister in law of Mr Wheeler, as Matron of the Workhouse. This was critical for Mr Wheeler as this enabled him to be reappointed as Master as the appointment of himself and his late wife had been a joint one.³⁶ Conversely, in Hitchin, the board accepted the resignation of the Workhouse Master’s sister from the post of Matron in order to consider appointing “a young lady Mr Fowler intends to marry”.³⁷ The concept of a

³³ Kelly, *Post Office Directory Hertfordshire 1851*, p. 202.

³⁴ Joseph Arch, *The Story of his Life, Told by Himself* (London, 1898), pp.51- 2; F. Thompson, *Lark Rise to Candleford* (Penguin edition, 1973), p. 133.

³⁵ Lucy Hensley was a pioneer as the role was not formally recognised until 1891, (see M. Ward, *Female Occupations* (Newbury, 2008), p. 84).

³⁶ *Hertford Mercury*, 20 February 1869.

³⁷ *Hertfordshire Mercury*, 31 August 1889. (The census taken eighteen months later showed Alfred Fowler, aged 39, Master of the workhouse, Fanny, age 31, as his wife and Matron together with a daughter aged eight months).

joint appointment extended into new areas such as evidenced by the advertisement for a man and his wife to act as attendants for the Hertford Swimming Bath Company's 1898 season.³⁸ The mould was not broken until the twentieth century. Joseph Stratford and his wife had been Master and Matron of the Hertford Workhouse. Their daughter took on the role of Matron but by 1907 the role of Master was held by Mr J. H. Hill.³⁹

Table 10: Female employment by marital status – 1851 – Hertford and Hitchin

		Unmarried	Percentage of total unmarried	Married	Percentage of total married	Widowed	Percentage of total widowed
Hertford	Domestic service	309	44.59%	36	4.46%	43	17.27%
Hitchin	Domestic service	179	20.46%	41	4.02%	30	12.77%
Hertford	Manufacture	96	13.85%	29	3.59%	26	10.40%
Hitchin	Manufacture	339	38.74%	*201	19.73%	32	13.62%

*156 were involved in straw plait work.

The instructions for recording the work done by women varied little in the censuses from 1851 to 1881.⁴⁰ A change was made to the instructions for the census of 1891 which asked that “married women assisting their husbands in their trade or industry were to be returned as “Employed”, although there was no instruction to return an occupation in the “profession or occupation” column.⁴¹ This, again, as indeed the Registrar General noted, was subject to a broad interpretation which might include keeping the husband's petty accounts, taking orders or receiving payments.⁴² Just 59 married women in Hertford, at the date of the 1891 census, were recorded as having an occupation. Apart from a few women in the familiar jobs of

³⁸ *Hertfordshire Mercury*, 23 April 1898.

³⁹ *Hertfordshire Almanack*, 1907, p. 122.

⁴⁰ E. Higgs, *A Clearer Sense of Census*, p. 98.

⁴¹ E. Garrett, “The dawning of a new era? Women's work in England and Wales at the turn of the century”, in N. Goose, ed., *Women's work in Industrial England*, p. 328.

⁴² BPP 1893 – 4 CVI [C.7222], *General Report, England and Wales, Vol. IV, 1891*. pp. 57- 8.

laundress, washerwoman and dressmaker, the occupations recorded tended to be held by women who were sharing the office of their husband. Elizabeth Stratford was Matron of the work house, but in addition, Ann Little, wife of the Postmaster, was enumerated as his Assistant.⁴³ Martha Nicholson, wife of the Club Steward, was the Club Stewardess of the Old Vicarage Conservative Club, Sarah Trundell and Elizabeth Parr, as publicans, supported husbands with the same occupation and Emma Rose and Ellen Squires were actively involved in their husband's businesses of bookselling and drapery. Just two appear to have independent businesses. Mary Finch, with her daughter, was a draper; her husband was a coal merchant; Sindia Clark was enumerated as a coal merchant; her husband was living off his own means. Even at this late date, and unusually for Hertford, one wife was listed as a straw plaiter; 70 year old Charlotte Westwood who was born in a straw plait area, Shillington.

In Hitchin, in 1891, 145 wives were recorded as having an occupation. This is higher than in Hertford but a marked change from the 1851 census. As with Hertford, many of those with an occupation were linked to a family business. Jane Garrett was recorded as a "sweet shop keeper"; her husband was a sugar boiler and confectioner, Harriet Patrick was a butcher's clerk; her husband was the butcher, Emma Williams shared the same occupation as her husband, both were shown as fishdealers. There are some deviations. Sarah Hill was a shopkeeper, but her husband was more specifically a grocer and Maria Thake was a fruiterer and confectioner whilst her husband was a glazier and painter. Although the industry was, by this date, in decline 62, half the married women with an occupation were enumerated as straw plaiters. The description "wife of" had disappeared. Just one woman, Sarah Rudd of Hitchin Hill, was enumerated by husband's occupation, "Baker's wife".⁴⁴

⁴³ This is another example which questions who might rightfully be described as head of household. The confidence of the Civil Service Commissioners was such that they appointed Annie Wenham as postmistress of Hertford in 1877, in succession to her father. (*Hertfordshire Mercury*, 7 April 1877). She was married to Fred Little in September 1879 (information from www.familysearch.org) who became Postmaster, see Kelly, *Kelly's Directory of Hertfordshire 1882*, p. 616.

⁴⁴ As William Rudd, Baker, was significant enough to have an entry in the Trade Directory, doubtless Sarah was involved, see Kelly, *Kelly's Trade Directory for Hertfordshire, 1890*, p. 781.

What was not enumerated was the part time and ad hoc employment, such as child minding, nursing, midwifery and laying out, as possibly enumerators, and women themselves, did not view it important enough to be noted.⁴⁵ Studies indicating that women's work was under-recorded have been linked to the seasonal work associated with agriculture but the domestic and caring occupations are also intermittent and regularly occurring.⁴⁶ Some full-time roles existed, such as the nurses at Christ's Hospital, but for most women such work would have been in response to a demand. In the household of Dorcas Lane, a washerwoman appeared for two days every six weeks to take charge of the big wash.⁴⁷ This was regular employment for the woman, outside the home. Flora Thompson described her as a "professional washerwoman" as doubtless she had other customers and consequently may have been recorded as a washerwoman on the census. The 1891 census recorded 2.2 per cent of women over the age of 20 in Hertford and 3.5 per cent in Hitchin engaged in laundry work and these may have had similar, regular, commitments; others, however, may have responded to a demand. The appearance of recruits to the Hertfordshire Militia in Hertford was a cause for low attendance at school as several of the children were required by their parents who were probably occupied in washing, sewing and victualling.⁴⁸

Flora Thompson also recalled Mrs Beer who was stated to be "much in request as a midwife" which raises the question as to what extent occupations such as this were captured by the census.⁴⁹ Although there were over 200 children under a year old in Hitchin in 1851 and over 100 in Hertford, only Hitchin apparently had a midwife. Elizabeth Patemen, a 68 year old widow, was enumerated as "Midwife (Pauper)". There were no monthly nurses in Hitchin and just two in Hertford; one of these at the Hertford Infirmary.

Although Hertford and Hitchin were defined as towns, both were rooted in the rural community. The 1851 census recorded five farmers and 151 agricultural/farm labourers in

⁴⁵ E. Roberts, *A Woman's Place. An Oral History of Working-Class Women 1890 – 1940* (Oxford 1983), p. 136; C. Day "Geographical mobility in Wiltshire, 1754 – 1914", *Local Population Studies*, No. 88, Spring 2012, p. 70.

⁴⁶ L. Shaw-Taylor, "Diverse Experiences", p. 41.

⁴⁷ F. Thompson, *Lark Rise to Candleford*, p. 494.

⁴⁸ H.A.L.S. H/Ed 1/88/1, *Log Book All Saints United Schools, entry for 8 April 1864*.

⁴⁹ F. Thompson, *Lark Rise to Candleford*, p. 441.

Hertford and nine farmers and 418 agricultural/farm labourers in Hitchin. Gleaning may have been seasonal but vegetable production could keep women in work throughout the year.⁵⁰ Low attendances were noted at the British Girls' School in Hitchin, not just because of harvest and gleaning, but additionally 50 girls were noted as absent on 21 July 1885 because it was market day.⁵¹ No doubt their mothers were involved in the gathering of vegetables for market and other seasonal jobs, such as the harvesting of wheat, barley, hay, and, in Hitchin, it was women and children who were recorded as supplying Ransom's distillery with lavender and herbs.⁵²

Further examples of ad hoc work undertaken by women include breaking orange and bacon boxes into firewood, rag sorting, waste paper sorting, weeding and stone-picking.⁵³ All these jobs were irregular and part of the economy of makeshifts and impossible to quantify. Other lists of part time work for married women include dress making, mending and altering clothes.⁵⁴ Producing food, such as, pies, cooked hams, cakes, brewing herb beer and keeping fowls for egg production were other possibilities.⁵⁵ Recalling the life of her grandmother, M. K. Ashby wrote that "she helped in later harvests, but mostly she worked as her father did – using her skill and intelligence in others' emergencies. She wrote letters for her neighbours, helped them cut out shirts, to whitewash their ceilings. Sometimes she would sit up at night with the sick. Little money was passed, but her services were meticulously paid for. Her garden was dug, vegetables and rabbits brought, faggots of wood were stacked against her wall."⁵⁶ It was an example of the reciprocal network among relatives and neighbours.⁵⁷ The mother was revered as it was her efforts that staved off starvation and is a theme common to many autobiographies; "the belief that the mother of a poor household was the only safe

⁵⁰ P. Sharpe, *Adapting to Capitalism, Working Women in the English Economy, 1700 – 1850* (London, 1996), p. 98; N. E. Agar, *Employment and Community in Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire in the Nineteenth Century* (Unpublished PhD thesis, University of East Anglia, 1977), pp. 199 - 200.

⁵¹ Jill Gray Collection, Hitchin British Schools, *Hitchin British (Girls) Schools Log Book*.

⁵² R. L. Hine, *Hitchin Worthies* (Hitchin, 1972), p. 317.

⁵³ Carl Chinn, *They worked all their lives*, p. 104; R. Blythe, *Akenfield* (London, 2002), pp. 15 - 17.

⁵⁴ Not all women were useful with a needle and thread. Laura employed Mrs Macey to turn and lengthen a garment (F. Thompson, *Lark Rise to Candleford*, p. 454) and a more affluent Mrs Paul recorded that she went to have her dresses altered; three months later her daughter was born, H. A. L. S. D/EAm F11, *Elinor Ritchie Diaries*, entries for 30 April 1890 and 28 July 1890.

⁵⁵ E. Roberts, *Women's Work, 1840 – 1940* (Cambridge, 1988), p. 40; P. Sharpe, *Adapting to Capitalism*, p. 128; F. Thompson, *Lark Rise to Candleford*, p 172.

⁵⁶ M. K. Ashby, *J. Ashby of Tysoe 1859 – 1919* (Cambridge, 1961), p. 5 and p. 89.

⁵⁷ L. Davidoff, "The Family in Britain" in F. M. L. Thompson, ed., *The Cambridge Social History of Britain 1750 – 1950, Vol. 2* (Cambridge, 1990), p. 114.

harbour in the midst of the uncaring and often cruel sea which was society.”⁵⁸ Joseph Arch, for example, commented that “We should have been in a very bad way if my mother, by her laundry earnings, had not subsidised my father’s wages”.⁵⁹

It would be reasonable to assume that Hertford and Hitchin were peopled with wives and mothers who worked all their lives. It has to be an assumption based on the marked difference in recording the occupation of wives and widows on the census. In Hertford, in 1891, 81 per cent of widowed heads of household were shown with some indication of how their income was derived. For the wives in the same year, just 6.6 per cent had an occupation recorded. For Hitchin the figures are 76.6 percent for the widowed heads of household and a slightly higher figure for the wives at 9.6 per cent, reflecting the 63 wives who were recorded as a straw plaiter. A widow had to have an income. It is by looking at widows that some light might be shed on whether or not they were economically active when married and what resources were available to them when widowed.

2.5 The plight of the widow

The natural state for a woman, at the time, was to cease to be the dependant in one household but to marry and, as she was usually enumerated without occupation, become a dependant in another. However, the death of her husband created a problem. The widow, left destitute and forced into dependency, is the stuff of the novel throughout the nineteenth century. From Mrs Henry Dashwood, Amelia Osborne to Susan Henchard, the need for male protection is a common theme.⁶⁰ This mirrors the concern of government. A mid-century report, commenting on paupers, recorded that the highest ratio of indoor paupers was to be found in the counties around London, with Hertfordshire also noted to be above average. The report also noted that “For the number of widows who were yearly left destitute, and the comparative helplessness of women, when in distress, a large excess of females in workhouses might have been expected. For every 10,000 males and 10,000 females in

⁵⁸ C. Chinn, *They worked all their lives*, p. 45; J. Burnett, *Destiny Obscure*, pp. 228 - 230.

⁵⁹ Joseph Arch, *The Story of his Life*, p. 31.

⁶⁰ Jane Austen, *Sense and Sensibility*, published 1811; William Makepeace Thackeray, *Vanity Fair*, published 1848; Thomas Hardy, *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, published 1886.

England and Wales, there were 64 males and 62 females in workhouses at the time of the census.”⁶¹

This ratio does not hold true for Hertford or Hitchin in 1851. The Hertford Union Workhouse was recorded on the census as having 114 inmates. Excluding the 34 children (inmates aged 15 and under), there were 47 males to 33 females, of whom 13 were widows. The picture is more marked in Hitchin, where, again excluding the 52 children, there were 83 males to 43 females, including 11 who were widowed. By 1881, the gender balance has moved to around 2 males to each female (excluding children), with just 6 of the 165 inmates of the Hertford Union being widows and 18 of the 212 at the Hitchin Union Workhouse. The sex ratio at this date (males to 100 females in the adult population in the Workhouse) is similar for both towns at 242 for Hertford and 243 in Hitchin.

It has been estimated that twice as many women to men were recipients of help from the poor rate in 1850 and this might suggest recognition of a woman’s ability to cope in the longer term, to provide support for other relatives and the irregular and seasonal nature of the work available to them.⁶² In Hertford, in 1851, 16 widows heading a household were shown as in receipt of alms or parish relief. All were elderly, (average age of 71), with the exception of Sarah Saunders, age 43 and Lydia Lear, age 36 who was described as “Day school and in receipt of parish relief”, an example of childminding for a few pence which would supplement alms.⁶³ Hitchin, at the same date, had more almshouse provision and the occupants were described as head of the household. To what extent the census accurately captures other recipients of poor relief is a matter of conjecture. Several widows in Hertford and Hitchin were identified with more than one income stream in the 1851 census. In addition to Lydia Lear, Sarah Glasco, also in Dimsdale’s Buildings, was described as “allowed by Parish and launderess” and Ann Sear and Elizabeth Driver in St Andrew Street were both enumerated as “chairwoman (sic) (living in Almshouse)”. There are similar examples in Hitchin in 1851 such as Elizabeth Warren in Silver Street, a “charwoman

⁶¹ BPP 1863 CIII (3221), *General Report England and Wales, 1861*, p. 66.

⁶² N. Goose, “Workhouse Populations in the mid-nineteenth century: the case of Hertfordshire”, *Local Population Studies* No. 62, Spring 1999, p. 62; K. Honeyman, *Women, Gender and Industrialisation*, p. 30.

⁶³ P. Horn, *Education in Rural England*, (Dublin, 1978), pp. 15- 6.

(pauper)” and Sarah Russell in Bancroft, “laundress receiving alms”. This suggests that, if they had the physical strength, work was possible when available.

Another factor influencing treatment of widows (as opposed to widowers) is the strong bond between a mother and her children, particularly the daughters who would have been more closely involved in running the household.⁶⁴ The usefulness of the widow to the family in childminding and household chores is suggested by widow/widower workhouse populations.⁶⁵ In Hertford, in 1851, there were 22 widowers and 13 widows; just one widow was born in Hertford and seven were born outside the county as opposed to the widowers with only one born out of the county. A similar picture is revealed for Hitchin where six of the 35 widowers were born out of the county but three of the eight widows. This does suggest that, for women, knowing the neighbourhood, having a family network and establishing contacts were important factors bearing upon whether or not the widow was consigned to the workhouse. The local family network was broad; a migrant nuclear family may not have that support.⁶⁶

Ties of kinship are difficult to establish as women change their name on marriage but the dynasties of chimney sweeps dominating the trade in Hertfordshire do demonstrate their closeness in occupation and location.⁶⁷ The 1851 census for Hertford recorded the Bland family, Edward, aged 64, at 161 Butcherley Green and Edward, age 42, heading a separate household at 155 Butcherley Green. Similarly, three members of the Howard family had their own households in Hollow Lane, Hitchin. In addition, Sarah Williams, a widow, described as “sweep (pauper)” headed a household in Hollow Lane comprising of her son and his family, plus her grandson, Charles Howard, a 13 year old sweep. The senior member of the family was designated as its head although it might be more accurate to see 63 year old Sarah as (financially) dependent on her chimney sweep son, but with five grandchildren in the household, with ages ranging from three months to 13, one can only speculate that her childminding contribution was useful. To establish other family connections would be a

⁶⁴ E. Roberts, *A Woman's Place*, p. 25; C. Chinn, *They worked all their lives*, p. 23 and p.45.

⁶⁵ N. Goose, “Workhouse populations”, p.60.

⁶⁶ E. Roberts, *A Woman's Place*, p. 169.

⁶⁷ E. Wallace, *Children of the Labouring Poor* (Hatfield, 2010), p. 129.

daunting task but doubtless there were others in medium sized towns such as Hertford and Hitchin. At the date of the 1851 census most inhabitants were born within the county and 2,276 (41.5%) of those in Hertford were born in the town and 3,939 (60%) of those in Hitchin.⁶⁸

A further examination of the workhouse population in Hertford and Hitchin in 1851 shows a balance between the sexes in what might be expected to be the able-bodied working population, that is inmates aged between sixteen and fifty nine, but a higher incidence in the male population over the age of sixty, thus confirming the skew identified in other Hertfordshire Workhouses (see Table 11, p. 46).⁶⁹ There were six widows in the sixteen to fifty nine age group in the Hertford Workhouse at this date, just one had children; for Hitchin, there were just three in this group, two of whom had children.

Table 11: Workhouse population - Hertford and Hitchin - 1851

		Male No. %	Female No. %	Total
Hertford	Age 16 and over	45 (58%)	33 (42%)	78
Hitchin		78 (66%)	40 (34%)	118
Hertford	Age 60 and over	24 (73%)	9 (27%)	33
Hitchin		50 (74%)	18 (26%)	68
Hertford	Age 16 – 59	21 (47%)	24 (53%)	45
Hitchin		28 (56%)	22 (44%)	50

It is difficult to assess the contribution of the widow in a family household. The figures would suggest that the minority were dependants as the majority of widows were described as heading a household although, again, the enumerator may have assumed that the most senior member of the household was its head, (see Table 12, p. 47). Most widows in both towns

⁶⁸ By 1891 Hitchin was demonstrating a more open approach with 39 percent of its population born in the town (and 57 per cent within the county); by contrast 48 per cent of Hertford's population had been born in the town and 71 per cent in the county.

⁶⁹ N. Goose, "Workhouse populations", p. 60; A. Hinde and F. Turnbull, "The populations of two Hampshire workhouses, 1851 – 1861", *Local Population Studies*, No. 61, Autumn 1998, p.50. (The term "able-bodied" includes the five inmates of the Hitchin Union Workhouse in this age category who were confined there through mental health problems, see H. A. L. S. QS Misc B4C 1 of 2, *Pauper Lunacy Return for Hitchin, 1851*).

Table 12: Widows - Hertford and Hitchin - 1851

	Head	Family member	Lodger/visitor	Servant	Other ⁷⁰	Total
Hertford	131	37	31	19	19	237
Hitchin	173	33	14	7	1	228

were enumerated with an income source ranging from receipt of alms through the conducting of trades to the independent women with an annuity or other source of funds. This picture supports the conclusions of a study of St Albans at the same date. Not only did a town provide amenities for the more affluent, but it also offered support to those at the lowest end of the social scale.⁷¹ The following sections look at the occupations of widows in more detail.

2.6 Widows and occupations

More detail on the income source for the widow is in Table 13, p. 48. On the face of it, there is little difference in proportion of widows involved in manufacture in both towns. However, again the influence of the straw plait trade can be seen. For Hertford, the 25 widows classified as employed in manufacture were in the traditional female occupations of the dressmaking and needlework trades. In Hitchin 28 of the 32 were employed in straw plait work. This may account for the imbalance in the domestic service category with 43 widows in Hertford and 31 in Hitchin employed in this category, with washerwoman, laundress and charwoman dominating the list. In this respect Hertford fits the pattern of St Albans which was, at this date, the largest town in the county. Of the 72 women with occupations of washerwoman, laundress and charwoman in Hertford in 1851, 29 (40 per cent) were widows thus mirroring the 41 per cent in St. Albans in 1851.⁷² The equivalent figure for Hitchin was

⁷⁰ This includes Martha Chalkley, who may or may not have been a permanent resident, with her daughter and 9 day old grandson in Hitchin. The Hertford residents in this category were living independently either with an occupation or on parish relief.

⁷¹ N. Goose, *Population, economy and family structure*, Vol. 2, p. 36.

⁷² N. Goose, *Population, economy and family structure* Vol. 2, p. 68.

Table 13: Income source – Widows in Hertford and Hitchin - 1851

Occupation/income stream	Hertford		Hitchin	
	No.	%	No.	%
Manufacture	25	(10%)	32	(13%)
Dealing	18	(7%)	12	(5%)
Public service/professional	17	(7%)	9	(3%)
Domestic service	43	18%)	31	(13%)
Other	5	(2%)	5	(2%)
Property/annuitant/independent	35	(14%)	41	(17%)
Unemployed/vagrant/pauper	42	(17%)	47	(19%)
Retired	12	(5%)	30	(12%)
Unknown	41	(17%)	29	(12%)
Total	238		236	

30 per cent. For those in the “dealing” category there is some similarity between the two towns in that this work area was dominated by the inn-keeping and associated trades, with a few running grocery, butcher and ironmongery shops and, in Hitchin, one plait dealer.

Some occupations were recognised as being “women’s work” with the provision of shelter and the supply of food and drink being such examples.⁷³ Widows are to be found inn-keeping throughout the nineteenth century. At the turn of the eighteenth century four widows ran inns in and around Bramfield.⁷⁴ Mrs Ramsey was recorded at the Falcon Inn and Mrs Thomas at the Bull Inn in Hertford.⁷⁵ Taking in a lodger may have provided additional income for some unmarried women.⁷⁶ This was not the exclusive preserve of the widow nor the norm in Hertford and Hitchin. In Hitchin there were three Lodging Houses listed in the

⁷³ C. Jones, “From Hartland to Hartley: marital status and occupation in the late nineteenth century”, in N. Goose, ed., *Women’s Work in Industrial England* (Hatfield, 2007), p. 300.

⁷⁴ W. Branch Johnson, *The Carrington Diary 1797 – 1810* (London, 1956), p. 153.

⁷⁵ *Haldens Directory 1811* (Facsimile text edition, 1996), (no page numbers).

⁷⁶ N. Goose, “How saucy did it make the poor?”, pp 121 –2.

1851 census. Two (“The Shoulder of Mutton” and “Bushell and Strike”) were Public Houses, headed by men; the third (“The Couriers Arms”) was run by the unmarried 24 year old Elizabeth Cotton, who was supporting five younger brothers and sisters, employing one servant and managing 18 lodgers. In addition, there were over 100 households, not described as lodging houses, which included lodgers who do not appear to be family members or servants. Some were headed by a widow, such Hannah Saunders of Walsworth Road with two lodgers, Sara Day of Tilehouse Street, also with two and Sarah Day of Dead Street with one. There are others in households headed by a man, sometimes as an adjunct to a related business such as inn keeping, but in most cases it would appear that taking in lodgers provided for an additional source of income for a married couple. For one family the money so accrued amounted to about 60 per cent of the earnings of the male breadwinner.⁷⁷

Family history provides the opportunity to add some flesh on the census snap-shot. Phoebe Stapleton was shown in the 1861 census for Pirton, near Hitchin, as a widowed head of household, maintaining herself and two daughters by straw plaiting and housing a lodger, George Titmus, a 21 year old agricultural labourer, thus supporting the view that taking in a lodger was a source of income for widows.⁷⁸ Information from the 1851 census reveals, however, that the lodger was Phoebe’s younger brother. By 1871, Phoebe with her daughters, now aged 16 and 13, was living with her father and the enumerator assumed that he was, by age and gender, the head of the household. Given that the widower, William Titmuss, aged 73, was described as “Ag Lab infirm” one cannot help but be drawn to the conclusion that, contrary to being the dependent widow as suggested by the census return, Phoebe had kept a family together for twenty years. This again questions the accuracy of the designation of the head of household. The example of the milliner, Mrs Cowley, has already been noted (pp. 37 - 8 above) and oral testimony suggests that the contribution of many wives and widows was critical to the survival of the family but another, male, member of the household was recorded as the head.⁷⁹ The example of Phoebe Stapleton also challenges the

⁷⁷ S. Horrell and D. Oxley, “Work and Prudence: Household responses to income variation in nineteenth-century Britain”, *European Review of Economic History*, 4, 2000, p. 34.

⁷⁸ M. Anderson, *Family Structure in Nineteenth-Century Lancashire*, p. 46.

⁷⁹ E. Roberts, *A Woman’s Place*, pp. 110 and 117. Another case in point was recalled by Edwin Grey who was told by one cottager that his wife should be enumerated as head as she was boss. E. Grey, *Cottage Life in a Hertfordshire Village*, p. 160.

assertion that taking on a lodger was a resource useful to widows as she was actually looking after a family member.

Whilst adherence to the values associated with the Victorian sense of propriety may not have been a priority in the hand to mouth existence lived by many, especially in the working-class areas of Butcherley Green in Hertford and Queen Street in Hitchin, this may have been a factor. A young widow may have been more cautious about taking on a young, male, lodger; the older widow could be viewed as being in loco parentis. For Hertford in 1851, with five exceptions, all widows heading a household with a lodger, could be viewed as in that older category, that is, over 60 years old. Of the exceptions, Lydia Lear, at Dimsdale Buildings, not only had her Day School and parish relief to help her support her four children under the age of ten, but also a lodger, William, a 23 year old labourer. As he also went by the name of Lear, one might assume a family relationship.

A similar picture is revealed by the 1851 census of Hitchin. Sixteen households were shown as headed by a widow with a lodger or two, but the majority of lodgers were to be found in households containing husband, wife and a family. Again, there may be some confusion between a lodger and a family member who may or may not be paying rent. George Worboys, for example, was lodging with Isaac Worboys and his wife; Elizabeth Tapp, the widowed dressmaker, had a lodger by name of Thomas Tapp. In other cases, the lodger may have been part of the family firm. Just as Louisa Ambrose, a widowed grocer in Bancroft, Hitchin, had a household comprising three children and George Halsey, a shop assistant, Ann Parr, another widow in St Andrews Street, Hertford carried on a business as a greengrocer, with a lodger, William Gaylor, also a greengrocer. By contrast, the widower, William Hill with his two sons in Hertford was shown as having a widow as a lodger.⁸⁰

⁸⁰ It is possible that she was the housekeeper. It was the custom in Oxfordshire for a widower to apply to the Board of Guardians for domestic help, see F. Thompson, *Lark Rise to Candleford*, p. 283. A similar example has been recorded from Kent, see A. Perkyns, "Admission of children to the Milton Union workhouse, Kent, 1835 – 1885", *Local Population Studies No. 80, Spring 2008*, p. 68.

The evidence from the 1851 census for Hertford and Hitchin suggests that it was the married woman who was more likely to have a lodger or two. Income derived was regular and did not take the wife away from the home and child rearing.⁸¹ Some obvious potential family relationships have been identified above, but given the lack of space in many homes, family was better than an outsider as a lodger.⁸² A contemporary description of the single basement room and the contrivances which had to be made to entertain two girls for tea demonstrates the difficulty of having a full-time resident.⁸³ Hitchin and Hertford had their areas of sub-standard housing and with families sleeping together in one small room where there would have been little scope for any additional members of the household unless there was a tie of kinship.⁸⁴

It has been noted that taking in lodgers resulted in a loss of genteel status.⁸⁵ Whilst gentility was unaffordable for many, it does raise a further dimension to the term “visitor”, as in the sense of “paying guest”, a term arising from the nineteenth century.⁸⁶ There were ten widows in Hertford and eleven in Hitchin shown with a “visitor” on the night of the 1851 census. Again, the term appears to cover a variety of situations. Ann Collins at the Cross Keys in Hertford had, as to be expected of an innkeeper, ten lodgers, but a distinction is made between them and another member of the household, Ann Atherton, an 18 year old from Norfolk, who was distinctly labelled as a visitor. On the other hand, Jane Wilkinson, a victualler in Hertford had two visitors, a thatcher and a labourer, which might indicate the distinction between a permanent and transient lodger in the hospitality business. The “genteel” arrangement might be demonstrated by such Hitchin households as headed by Elizabeth Thorpe, who was described as a house proprietor, with the two visitors, the Misses Cobb, both milliners, or Hannah Creasey, the housekeeper, with three children and three visitors, a farmer’s daughter, a yeoman and an annuitant. However, just to add further

⁸¹ One estimate suggests that if looking after a lodger was viewed as a full-time occupation, then an additional five to ten per cent of wives should have been classed as having paid employment. See E. Garrett, “The dawning of a new era?”, p. 345.

⁸² E. Roberts, *A Woman’s Place*, p. 141.

⁸³ E. C. Gaskell, *Mary Barton*, published 1848, (Penguin edition, 1970), pp. 52 - 3 and p. 66.

⁸⁴ H.A.L.S. Health 3 Public Health 614.094: *Report to the General Board of Health on a Preliminary Inquiry into Sewerage, Drainage, and Supply of Water, and the Sanitary Condition of the Inhabitants of the Towns of Hitchin and Hertford by William Ranger 1849.*

⁸⁵ B. Hill, *Women Alone*, pp.47 – 8.

⁸⁶ Credited by the O.E.D to George Gissing in 1895.

ambivalence, an apparently unrelated member of this household, a (male) private teacher was described as an “occupier”.

By 1891 there were three changes in the income source of widows (see Table 14, p. 52). By the end the century, an estimate on poor relief calculated that women represented three-fifths of those in receipt of all forms of poor relief.⁸⁷ In fact fewer widows were labelled as “pauper” in 1891. The higher number for Hertford for 1891 is distorted by inclusion of 7 widows described as “almshouse dwellers”, whereas the description was not used in Hitchin. There is an increase in both towns in the numbers described as living on their own means. To what extent that might have been the result of an annuity or help from other family members is rarely recorded by the census data. The widowed Ann Jenkins was, however, recorded at Cottage Walsworth as “living on her children”. As the household comprised her son, daughter in law and three children under the age of four, perhaps she repaid them by child-minding and other household chores.

Table 14: Widows – Income source by percentage

	1851	1891	1851	1891
	Hertford	Hertford	Hitchin	Hitchin
Manufacturing	12	6	13	18
Dealing	7	7	5	6
Public/professional service inc. nurse	7	5	4	4
Domestic service inc. laundry/charwoman	18	20	13	14
Other	2	5	2	3
Property owning, own means, annuitant	15	23	18	29
Pauper, unemployed, vagrant	18	6	20	2
Dependent, retired, no occupation recorded	21	23	25	24

The other change in occupational structure is in the “manufacturing” category. Even in 1891, the proportion of widows in this category is high in Hitchin including as it does 45 widows involved in the straw plait trade. The decrease is as a result of a reduction in the number of widows involved in dressmaking. The 1851 trade directory listed no dressmakers in Hertford

⁸⁷ A Digby, “Poverty, health and the politics of gender”, in A. Digby and J. Stewart, *Gender, Health and Welfare*, (London, 1996), p. 69.

in 1851 and just two in Hitchin, Mrs Mary Cowley in Bridge Street and Miss Martha Creasy in Bucklersbury.⁸⁸ By 1882 the trade directory recorded nine dressmakers in Hertford and seventeen in Hitchin which might suggest the existence of some “penny capitalism”.⁸⁹ The domestic sewing machine was being advertised in Hertford in 1868 and by 1882 there was the Singer sewing machine factory in Ware Road, Hertford.⁹⁰ By 1890, eight dressmakers were listed in the directory for Hertford with the Singer sewing machine still making its presence felt through Walter Prentice, their agent in Fore Street.⁹¹ More significantly, there is evidence of availability of “ready to wear” clothing through Mrs Sarah Doyle of Maidenhead Street, a “ladies and children’s outfitter” and Harry Sherriff in Maidenhead Street, described as a “general and family dealer, hosiery, millinery, family mourning”.⁹² A similar picture is revealed for Hitchin in 1890 with fifteen dressmakers in the directory and Joseph Everall listed as the Singer sewing machine agent in Nightingale Road. In addition Gerald Drake in the Market Place, George Hawkins, Ernest Leete and Pluck and Cheeseman in Bucklersbury were all listed as “clothiers”.⁹³

2.7 Women and commerce

A close look at trades undertaken by widows gives an opportunity to examine some contradictions in the historiography on the subject. Commenting on women in the seventeenth century, Alice Clark noted that “though examples of the separate trading of women occur frequently in the seventeenth century, no doubt the usual course was for her to assist her husband in his business. When this was transacted at home her knowledge of it was so intimate that she could successfully carry on the management during her husband’s absence.”⁹⁴ This has been endorsed as reflecting behaviour today.⁹⁵ A contrary view, however, concluded that although widows occasionally continued the trade of their husbands

⁸⁸ *Post Office Directory for Hertfordshire 1851*, pp. 202 - 3.

⁸⁹ J. Benson, *The Penny Capitalists*, p. 48.

⁹⁰ *Hertford Mercury*, 29 February 1868 (advertisement by C. W. Nunn and C. C. Nunn); Kelly, *Kelly’s Directory of Hertfordshire 1882*, p 617.

⁹¹ Kelly, *Kelly’s Directory of Hertfordshire 1890*, p. 771.

⁹² Kelly, *Kelly’s Directory of Hertfordshire 1890*, pp 769 and 771.

⁹³ Kelly, *Kelly’s Directory of Hertfordshire 1890*, pp 779 – 80.

⁹⁴ A. Clark, *Working Life of Women in the Seventeenth Century*, pp.153 - 54.

⁹⁵ How many shopkeepers’ wives declared their contribution on the 2001 census return? M. Anderson, “What can the mid-Victorian censuses tell us about variations in married women’s employment?” in N. Goose, ed., *Women’s Work in Industrial England* (Hatfield, 2007), p. 204. One could ask the same question of the wives and partners of electricians, plumbers and others running a small business from home.

only a small number succeeded for more than a short period.⁹⁶ This is a different scenario to temporary management in the husband's absence but although Earle's sample is restricted to London, those women who appeared in court records and over a century before the Victorian era, his view is that the working lives of women in 1700 were remarkably similar to those in the nineteenth century.⁹⁷ In his review of the jobs wives stated they did, he concluded that they provide little support for Clark's claim that the majority of wives found "scope for productive activity in their husband's business."⁹⁸ However, Clark was referring to businesses conducted from home as was the report to the Registrar General on the 1851 census which noted the importance of the services rendered, not only by wives of farmers, but also in businesses carried on from the home, such as the wives of shopkeepers and innkeepers.⁹⁹ The reality for most women was a responsibility for managing the household income, thus challenging a view that they had no facility with numbers.¹⁰⁰

Evidence of active involvement of the wife in the family business is limited. One surviving record is by Ann Wickham, married to a brewer in Hertford, who kept a day book, recording events from time to time over the period 1852 to 1857. Her interest in the business is shown by her note on 31 January 1854 that it was a bad time for maltsters and brewers when malt and hops were so dear and again, in May of that year, when a ten shilling duty was put on malt to meet the expenses of the war. More significantly, she was empowered to act for her husband. She recorded that on 28 February 1856 that she went to London, to the Court of Chancery "about the railway money being transferred to my husband. The Hon Sir R Kindersley, Vice Chancellor, on the chair. (A Very Nice Gentleman)."¹⁰¹ Another wife who could have had a close interest in her husband's business was Charlotte Gatward, the wife of an ironmonger in Hitchin. There was no panic when she and her husband were woken by news of a fire next door. It was recorded that they dressed with no great urgency and "Mrs Gatward took up a box containing some important documents and gave them to her

⁹⁶ K. Honeyman, *Women, Gender and Industrialisation*, p. 20.

⁹⁷ P. Earle, "The Female Labour Market", p.346.

⁹⁸ P. Earle, "The Female Labour Market", p. 338.

⁹⁹ BPP 1852 -3 LXXXVIII Pt [1691.1], *Census of Great Britain, 1851, Population Tables II*, Vol. I, pp. lxxxviii - lxxxix.

¹⁰⁰ L. Davidoff, *Thicker than Water: Siblings and their Relations 1780 – 1920* (Oxford, 2012), p. 73.

¹⁰¹ H.A.L.S. D/EX/126/F1, *Day Book of Ann Wickham*.

husband.” That she also had in mind other valuables is suggested by her being found dead in the front room.¹⁰²

The directory for Hertford for 1860 lists 41 businesses under the management of women using the title “Mrs”.¹⁰³ Six of these can be identified in the 1851 census as widowed and pursuing the same trade, Mary Carter, a hair dresser employing one hand, Lucy Drummond, a lime burner, Elizabeth Harris, a butcher, Ann Collins, an inn keeper, Elizabeth Stocks, a coal merchant and Ann Winters, staymaker and fancy repository. The latter, hair dressing and inn keeping were recognised trades for women but the unusual nature of the businesses run by the other three would suggest an ability to continue with their husbands’ businesses over a

Table 15: Women running a business in the 1860 trade directory for Hertford who were married in 1851

Name	Occupation in 1860	How described 1851
Elizabeth Barrand	Dress and staymaker	Wife of Tailor
Ann Camp	Shopkeeper	Greengrocer’s wife
Sarah Dowton	Shopkeeper	Brewer’s wife
Mary Hills	Beer retailer and butcher	Wife (husband – butcher)
Sarah Ann Newman	Butcher	Wife (husband – Master butcher employing 3 men)
Eliza Redman	Blacksmith	Wife (husband – blacksmith)
Lydia Reeve	Surgical bandage maker	Wife (husband – surgical bandage maker)
Ruth Thake	Baker	Baker’s wife
Sarah Wyman	Corn Chandler	Wife (husband – Mealman)
Eliza Wenham	Register Office for Servants	Leather seller’s wife

period of time. A further ten women can be identified as married at the time of the 1851 census and without occupation (see Table 15, p. 55). This is a small sample but the consanguinity of most with their occupation in 1860 and their husbands’ trades might suggest an involvement and a subsequent continuation of the business after his demise. Not all managed to make this a long term concern. Nathaniel Cheek was a butcher in Maidenhead

¹⁰² *Hertford Mercury*, 6 March 1853.

¹⁰³ Kelly, *Post Office Directory for Hertfordshire 1860*, pp. 353 - 6.

Street and listed as such in the 1851 directory for Hertford.¹⁰⁴ Three years later his widow felt the need to insert a notice in the newspaper to record that she “thinks it right to contradict a report that she has disposed of her business”.¹⁰⁵ There is no record of the business in the 1860 trade directory. A similar notice was placed by Mrs King in 1887, thanking the public for their liberal patronage of her late husband and soliciting their continuance.¹⁰⁶ Whether or not Mrs King was successful or not is the subject of guesswork. Four years later she was enumerated as “living on her own means”, with her two daughters.¹⁰⁷ The same edition of the paper carried a notice from Mrs Farrow advertising fancy goods and Christmas cakes. The 1881 census shows her as a widow living in the household headed by her widower father, a confectioner, with her son, brother and sister. Although Sarah Farrow was enumerated as a dressmaker, she continued her father’s business for in 1891 she was recorded as head of the household, a confectioner, with her younger sister as her assistant. The business continued, appearing in the trade directory for the rest of the century. Two wives were enumerated with an occupation in 1851. Martha Prior, listed as a straw bonnet maker in 1860 was enumerated as a bonnet maker in 1851; Frances Ward, the marine store dealer was recorded as a shopkeeper in 1851.

A slightly different picture emerges from Hitchin. Eighteen women using the title “Mrs” were listed in the trade directory for 1860.¹⁰⁸ One, Martha White, was a widow in 1851 and recorded as a publican, matching her description in the 1860 directory as running “The King’s Head”. Of the remainder who can be identified, and married in 1851, there is more evidence of the wife having her own occupation (Table 16, p. 57). As for Hertford, there is an indication that widows were able to keep a business running on the death of their husband in spite of attitudes that, even at the end of the century, could be viewed as condescending. The death of Miss Hart, the tobacconist, in 1901 was occasion to note that since her father’s

¹⁰⁴ Kelly, *Post Office Directory for Hertfordshire 1851*, p. 198.

¹⁰⁵ *Hertford Mercury*, 2 and 11 February 1854. (Nathaniel Cheek died in the April to June quarter of 1853. (Information from FreeBMD.org.uk)).

¹⁰⁶ *Hertfordshire Mercury*, 3 December 1887.

¹⁰⁷ The 1881 census recorded William King, a draper in Maidenhead Street. The household comprised his 28 year old wife, two year old daughter, two assistants and a general servant. The 1890 Directory recorded Harry Sherriff running a drapery business at a similar address. (Information from Kelly, *Kelly’s Directory of Hertfordshire*, 1890, p. 771 and www.familysearch.org).

¹⁰⁸ Kelly, *Post Office Directory for Hertfordshire 1860*, pp. 359 – 361.

death, she had a large share of the business and “in which it must be the exception to find a woman conspicuously successful”.¹⁰⁹

Table 16: Women running a business in the 1860 trade directory for Hitchin who were married in 1851

Name	Occupation in 1860	How described in 1851
Selina Bailey	Hat Manufacturer	Wife (husband – Hatter)
Marie Cotton	Beer retailer	Wife (husband – publican)
Ann Plumb	Gun maker	Wife (husband – gun maker)
Elizabeth Foster	Wheelwright	Dressmaker (husband – Master wheelwright)
Sarah Harding	Shopkeeper	Dressmaker (husband – confectioner)
Elizabeth Paternoster	Servants’ register office	Upholsterer (same as husband)
Caroline Rudd	Milliner and dressmaker	Bonnetsewer (husband – carpenter)
Mary Cowley	Milliner and dressmaker	Dressmaker (husband – shopman)

A comparison of the 1881 and 1891 censuses also confirms success in continuing to run a family business. Some widowed heads of household in Hitchin and Hertford in 1891 have been identified as married ten years earlier using date of birth and place of birth as identifiers and, where possible, by confirmation of other family members, usually children. The sample used comprises a widow, with family living with her in 1891, who was enumerated without occupation in 1881. For Hertford there are 18 women who can be positively identified as widowed in 1891 and married in 1881 (see Appendix 5, p. 207). All except two were recorded as having no occupation in 1881, but were recorded as having one in 1891. Once again, there is a relationship between the husband’s trade and that of the widow. Ellen Randall is a case in point. She was recorded as a dairy proprietor in 1891, with her daughters and grandson shown as assistants and two male farm servants enumerated as part of the household. This was clearly a family concern. In 1881, Ellen, a “cowkeeper”, was married to Henry, also enumerated as “cowkeeper”, as was his older daughter, with the younger daughter and son described as “assistant cowkeepers”. Of the remaining widows some may have had to find an occupation on bereavement, such as Emily Ramsey and Phillis Chandler,

¹⁰⁹ Hitchin Museum, *Lawson Thompson Scrapbook*, Vol. 2b.

but five were enumerated in 1891 in the traditional domestic occupations of washerwoman, laundress and charwoman which may mean that they took up work on widowhood or had always been in the trade. A few appear not to have needed remunerated employment. The 1891 census for Hertford does not allow for identification of those with inherited or invested income as against those who may have been supported by a family member and consequently does not help explain why the percentage of widows in the independent category increased in both towns between 1851 and 1891 (see p. 52 above). Jane Woollatt, for example, was the widow of a farmer, described in 1881 as having 510 acres, employing 13 men and five boys and Mary Wilds, widow of William, an architect and surveyor, may have had the necessary reserves to allow for living off their own means and Eliza Acres, of St Andrews Street, widow of David, a superannuated police constable, may have been the recipient of a pension.¹¹⁰

For Hitchin it has been possible to identify 21 women who were widows in 1891, with an occupation, but apparently unemployed when married in 1881 (see Appendix 6, p. 208). As with Hertford, there is a relationship in many instances with their husbands' trades. Like Ellen Randall in Hertford, this continuity is demonstrated by Agnes Smoothy in Ickleford Road running a dairy business whilst her son was a butcher. In 1881, married to Albert, a farmer, Agnes was recorded as a "farmer's wife", and it would appear that she was an active participant in the work of the farm. Another example is that of Elizabeth Burton, innkeeper, at the Railway Inn in Walsworth Road. Married to Joseph in 1881, she was enumerated as innkeeper's wife, but also in the household is her mother, recorded as "former innkeeper's wife" which suggests a family tradition. Eliza Deamer, also an innkeeper, had no occupation in 1881. Her husband was a coal and yeast dealer but with a visitor, a traveller in brewery corn, in the household on census night in 1881 might suggest a connection with the trade. Two other cases indicate separate trading by the wife. Adelaide Tomlin, a greengrocer, who, in 1881, was married to Henry, a bricklayer and greengrocer but shown as having no occupation and Mary Hunt, a general shopkeeper in 1891, similarly without occupation in 1881. Her husband was described as a gardener, but their address was recorded as Back Street grocer shop.

¹¹⁰ The Police Pensions Act of 1890 did establish the hitherto discretionary pension as a right after 25 years service.

For some others widowhood brought the need to find an income. In 1881 Susan Bird was married to Frank, a Baptist minister, and enumerated as having no occupation although churchmen's wives and daughters inevitably took on duties associated with the church. The household also included two young children and a servant which would suggest a reasonably modest income. Widowed by 1891, she had three children living with her and her mother in law, but no servant, and, more tellingly a job, post mistress and running a fancy shop. Like Phillis Chandler in Hertford, the widow of a maltster and clerk, she was not in trade and not of a class where cleaning or laundry work was suitable. Like many other middle-class women, her education had not fitted her for work and the options were limited.¹¹¹

It was not possible to identify any wives with occupations in Hertford in 1881, but widowed in 1891, but for Hitchin there are 13 further widows who were enumerated with an occupation in 1881. Of these, ten were described as straw plaiters, one a machinist, possibly engaged in the making of straw hats, and the other two were enumerated as a laundress. By 1891 all were widowed and six continued with the straw plait trade. Of the rest, Caroline Knight in Corries Yard became a charwoman, the remainder took up laundry work, which may be an indication of the decline of the straw plait trade. However, the evidence from this small sample does lend weight to the argument that where a trade was part of the culture of the community, such as straw plait work in Hitchin, it was recorded in earlier censuses.¹¹²

2.8 Widows and dynasties

In 1851, 39 women were listed in the trade directory for Hertford.¹¹³ Ten were schoolmistresses (including three at Christ's Hospital) and one was Matron at the Infirmary and another at Christ's Hospital. The hospitality trade was represented by three widows running an inn, Jane Johnson at the "Ship", Jane Wilkinson at the "Vine" and Susan Wyman at the uninviting sounding "Cold Bath". In Hitchin four women, all widows, were listed as running an inn, Matilda Bloom at the "Half Moon", Dinah Crawley at the "White Lion",

¹¹¹ D. W. Adams, *The rise and fall of the Apothecaries Assistants, 1815 – 1923*, unpublished PhD thesis, University of Hertfordshire, 2010, pp. 362 – 63. A similar, fictional, illustration of the limited options for the middle-class woman is that of Miss Matty where selling tea is considered suitably genteel, (E. C. Gaskell, *Cranford* (Penguin edition, 1984), pp. 197 - 8).

¹¹² N. Goose, "Working Women in industrial England", in N. Goose, ed., *Women's Work in Industrial England*, p. 24.

¹¹³ This represents 12 per cent of the entries. Kelly, *Post Office Directory for Hertfordshire*, pp. 198 – 200.

Harriet Lewin at the “Red Lion” and Sarah Parker at the “Bee Hive”. The directory listed 31 inns in both Hitchin and Hertford, with a further 14 beer shops in Hertford. This accords with St Albans at the same date; women publicans were not unusual but very much in the minority.¹¹⁴

The widows at the time of the 1851 census were often supporting families and those involved in trade might be expected to be keeping the business going so that it could be handed over to the next generation as a going concern. It has been possible, using names, dates of birth and place of birth, to positively identify several families, where the head of the household was a widow in 1851, and track them through to the end of the century. The ability of the widow to keep a family together, to lay the foundations for the next generations and to contribute to the economy of a town is demonstrated by some examples from Hitchin and Hertford.

Amy Seymour, a 50 year old widow, was a carpenter in Hitchin employing four men.¹¹⁵ Her son, William, aged 24, was also a carpenter and by 1881 he was enumerated as a “builder”, employing 18 men and three boys. By 1891, a widower and still a builder, he headed a household consisting of his son, Frank, also a builder, his widowed sister as housekeeper and a general servant. Sophia Littlechild, a widow, was living in Fore Street Hertford in 1851 and described as an “upholsteress”. Living with her was her nephew William Morris, aged 19, a cabinet maker. By 1881, although still described as a cabinet maker in the trade directory he was enumerated as an “upholsterer, employing three men and one boy”.¹¹⁶ His older daughter, Elizabeth was described as an “upholsteress” and the household included Louisa Tonks, a “boarder and upholsteress”. This seems to add weight to the argument that family members were not recognised as “employed”. One has to assume that Louisa was also employed by William, even though the census only records that he had male employees, and that Elizabeth was also a productive member of the concern. The business continued with William enumerated as an “upholsterer” in 1891, assisted by his younger son. His older son, now married, had a separate establishment as an upholsterer.

¹¹⁴ N. Goose, “Pubs, Inns and Beer Shops: the retail liquor trade in St Albans”, *Hertfordshire's Past*, Issue 43/4, Summer 1998, pp. 55 – 60.

¹¹⁵ Amy may have been employing other members of the family. She was running her business from 65 Back Street, Hitchin; Thomas and John Seymour were at 113 and 80 Back Street respectively. Both were enumerated as “carpenter”.

¹¹⁶ Kelly, *Kelly's Directory of Hertfordshire 1882*, p. 616.

Hertford and Hitchin were the most important centres for chimney sweeps in the county with families who were in business throughout the century.¹¹⁷ What was key to the continuance of these businesses was often the widow.¹¹⁸ Ann Howard of Back Street, Hitchin, a widow, was enumerated as “chimney sweep” in 1851. Her older son, Richard, aged ten, was also described as “chimney sweep”. By 1881, Richard, unmarried and still a sweep, was heading a household in Butcherley Green, Hertford, with two lodgers, a housekeeper and a chimney sweeper. His younger brother, James, another sweep, was also on the 1881 census for Butcherley Green. He was married with three daughters and three step children. Having passed the business on to the men of the next generation, it then reverted to another woman, Johanna, widow of James. She was recorded as a “chimney sweep and publican” in the 1891 census and as a “chimney sweeper and beer retailer” in the trade directory for the previous year.¹¹⁹ The directory for 1882 shows James as a “chimney sweeper and beer retailer” although the latter occupation is not evident on the census return for the previous year, further evidence to support the supposition that this was his wife’s business.¹²⁰

The most unusual example of the involvement of the widow in trade is demonstrated by the Drummond family in Hertford. Lucy Drummond was widowed in 1846. Her husband’s estate included a house with four bedrooms, plus horses and carriages in the yard giving assets amounting to £218.12.0d.¹²¹ Robert Drummond had confidence in his wife’s abilities as although the local solicitor was executor of the estate it was a joint appointment with Lucy designated executrix. She was able to keep the business going as she was enumerated on the census five years later as a “lime burner”. Given that this was an unpleasant job, and certainly an unusual one for a woman, it might be expected that Lucy’s objective would have been that her sons might follow her into the business. However, her son, Charles, aged 25 was enumerated as a “solicitors (sic) clerk”, which might suggest an alternative theory, that the lime burning business was funding an education and a consequent improvement of the

¹¹⁷ E. Wallace, *Children of the Labouring Poor*, pp. 129 and 145.

¹¹⁸ In St Albans, the widow, Sarah Perrin, not only had lodgers but eight sweeps working for her, including her 16 year old son and 7 year old nephew both of whom, like her, had been born in Hitchin. E. Wallace, *Children of the Labouring Poor*, p. 147.

¹¹⁹ Kelly, *Kelly’s Directory for Hertfordshire 1890*, p. 770.

¹²⁰ Kelly, *Kelly’s Directory for Hertfordshire 1882*, p. 616; J. Benson, *The Penny Capitalists*, p. 118.

¹²¹ H.A.L.S. D/EL B176, *Robert Horatio Drummond – Will*.

family circumstances by ensuring that her family aspired to what we might describe now as “white collar” jobs. Her younger son, Frederick, aged seventeen had no occupation nor had the two daughters, Ann, aged 22, and Fanny, aged ten. By 1881, Charles was a “house and estate agent”, married with six children; Frederick was a “collector to the Lee Conservancy”, married with three daughters, with his son as an assistant. By 1891, Charles had died leaving a widow, one son, an assistant overseer for the parish, the other a banker’s clerk and daughters involved with a governess school. Neither son, nor their sons, appeared to have any connection with the lime burning business but it remained in the family. By 1881, Lucy, now aged 85, continued to be described on the census as a “lime burner”, with her unmarried daughter, Fanny living with her with no occupation enumerated. By 1891, Fanny, still unmarried but now heading the household was described as a “lime burner” and apparently supporting her widowed sister and a niece with an occupation described as “governess school”.

There is here a possible analogy with Dorcas Lane, an educated woman with the ability to undertake the paperwork associated with a business and run a post office. On the death of her father she retained Matthew, the excellent foreman, and continued the blacksmith business under her name.¹²² The report to the Registrar General did note that about 500 women were recorded as blacksmiths and whitesmiths on the 1891 census. Whilst it was surmised that this might be a result of women continuing the business of “her defunct husband or father”, this could not be a complete explanation as 94 per cent of such women fell into the “employed” rather than the “employer” category.¹²³ Dorcas Lane clearly fell into the latter category. Some of the women above may have had a “hands on” approach; others were, to use Flora Thompson’s description, the “brains of the business”.¹²⁴

Some widows had an independent source of income. Whether this be through support from family members or investment is not clear in the census. The second group, also enumerated without occupation, were those in receipt of alms or parish relief. The third group comprised those widows who continued with their established trade or occupation on widowhood, and

¹²² F. Thompson, *Lark Rise to Candleford*, p. 365.

¹²³ BPP 1893 – 4 CVI [C.7222], *Census of England and Wales, 1891, Vol. IV, General Report*, p. 57.

¹²⁴ There is some anecdotal evidence of women taking this “hands on” approach, see *Local Population Studies*, No. 23, Autumn 1979, p. 48 and *Local Population Studies*, No. 25, Autumn 1980, p. 58.

finally there were the widows who had to find some means of support on the death of the male breadwinner. The small sample above suggests that the widow of a tradesman, dealer, innkeeper, beer-house keeper or shopman was often able to continue the business on his demise because she had always had an active interest in it or it was, in fact, her business. It is in these areas that the concept of separate spheres for home and work do not apply. That the involvement of the wife was not recorded may have been for several reasons. It may not have been full time, the wife's income from such employment would have been irrelevant to the census enumerator and the wife may not have seen herself as in employment but viewed her input as simply fulfilling her obligations to the family unit.¹²⁵ However, whether she be wife or widow, there is evidence of her important, albeit unquantifiable, economic contribution to the family and to the town.

What these few families also demonstrate is that there were many reasons for widows to continue in trade. Whilst it is understandable that Ann Howard, with a ten year old son, needed a trade that was providing him with employment and her with a living it does not explain why William Seymour, aged 24, had not taken over the carpentry business. It was his mother who was enumerated in 1851 as head of the household, a "carpenter and employing four men". It was not as if running a business was not within William's competence; that the business expanded when he took over is evidence of that. This leads to the question as to who was dependent on whom.

It is the Drummond family who illustrate this difficulty in using census data in identification of dependency and activity. As the senior member of the household, Lucy Drummond was enumerated as head of household in 1881 and a "lime burner". The occupation of the oldest person in the household was often sufficient for the purposes of the census.¹²⁶ Her daughter, with no occupation, consequently appeared to be dependent on her. It is, however, difficult to believe that an 85 year old was capable of more than a minor role in the business. The unmarried daughters, living with parents, fall into the same limbo as married women. To what extent were they involved in the running of a business and might, in some cases, they have been the sole or major breadwinner?

¹²⁵ E. Garrett, "The dawning of a new era?", p. 357.

¹²⁶ E. Garrett, "The dawning of a new era?", pp. 358 - 9.

2.9 Unmarried/never married women

Whilst the contribution of married women to the welfare of a family has been acknowledged, the unmarried woman has been neglected. The mature spinster, an “old maid”, was cause for concern.¹²⁷ This can be challenged by evidence that, although a minority were heading a household, many were essential to the support of others and useful members of society.

The 1851 census report noted that the proportion of the population who were in the never married category was significant. For every 100 women in England at that date, aged twenty and above, there were twenty eight spinsters; for every 100 men in the same age group there were twenty nine bachelors. This shows a reasonable balance (albeit with some regional variations), but, using the premise that those above the age of forty are called “old”, the report noted that “it will be found that there are in the kingdom about 1,407,225 “young” and 359,969 “old” maids; 1,413,912 “young” and 275,204 “old” bachelors.”¹²⁸ That the term “old maid” carried a pejorative sense at the time might be substantiated by contemporary comment.¹²⁹ Such attitudes persisted throughout the nineteenth century and beyond.¹³⁰ The regrettable circumstances of the single woman is nicely described by two generations in one fictional household; Miss Bates, left to care for her elderly mother, was viewed as loquacious and boring and her niece, Jane Fairfax, an object of pity as she had to earn a living, resolving to “retire from all pleasures of life, of rational intercourse, equal society, peace and hope, to penance and mortification for ever” by becoming a governess.¹³¹ In a novel published in 1875, Georgiana Longstaffe can ask what will become of her if she does not marry, and, a century after Jane Austen, the potential of a legacy providing independence for her daughter caused Mrs Fane to declare that she must marry at once.¹³²

¹²⁷ BPP 1852 – 3, LXXXVII Pt [1691.1], *Census of Great Britain, 1851*, p. xlii.

¹²⁸ BPP 1852- 3 LXXXVIII Pt [1691.I], *Census of Great Britain, 1851*, p. xlii.

¹²⁹ An anonymous comment (attributed to Harriett Martineau) referred to spinsters as objects of contempt. “Results of the census of 1851”, *Westminster Review* 5 (1854), p. 325 – 57, quoted in C. Jones, *Those who God hath not joined: a study of never married people in England and Wales in the nineteenth century* (Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Essex, 2003), p. 26.

¹³⁰ A more recent comment comes from Anita Brookner, (*Altered States*, (London; Penguin, 1997), p. 167): “Men can bury their past. An unmarried woman *is* her past. Whereas a wife has a social position, a spinster has none.”

¹³¹ J. Austen, *Emma* (Everyman edition, 1965), p. 326 and p. 143.

¹³² A. Trollope, *The Way We Live Now* (Penguin edition, 1994), p. 595; C. Mackenzie, *Sinister Street*, published 1913, (Penguin edition, 1983), p. 595.

Whilst occupation of father, the survival of parents and the timing of their deaths and possibly the birthplace of the father appeared to affect the incidence of marriage or non marriage, the causes of marriage or non marriage in the nineteenth century have not been identified.¹³³ One factor was that there was an excess of females in the population throughout the nineteenth century. In the towns, the incidence and availability of domestic service resulted in 107 females in the 15 to 20 age group to 100 males as compared to the country districts where for every 100 males there were 87 females. The sex ratio balanced out to the age of forty five, but then increased again, as, speculated the 1891 census report, the towns offered to women, even in advanced age, “many comparatively light occupations that are closed to the other sex”.¹³⁴

The Victorian novel typically ends with a legacy, a marriage, emigration or death.¹³⁵ The legacy would also, inevitably, lead to marriage, which was the standard happy ending, but a dangerous one for women and one which may have caused some women to take the decision to remain single. Writing at the beginning of the nineteenth century, marriage was a dominant theme for Jane Austen, it was the only way that the Bennet daughters could be assured of some future security, but she did allude to the pitfalls, not the least the resultant burden of children. As she well knew, from the experience of her own family, marriage, and the consequent business of childbirth, was perilous. Her advice was to adopt a regimen of separate rooms.¹³⁶ However, her sister-in-law, Elizabeth Knight, died. “She was thirty-five: a well-to-do, well-born, well-looked after woman who had married for love at eighteen, and been pregnant almost permanently ever since.”¹³⁷ Death through childbirth was no respecter of class or status, claiming the life of the heir to the throne, Princess Charlotte. Another example from later in the nineteenth century is provided by Mary Glynne, (1813 – 1857), who married the fourth Baron Lytton. In the course of her marriage she produced eight sons and four daughters, more than adequate to satisfy the need for an heir and a spare or two.

¹³³ C. Jones, *Those whom God hath not joined*, p. 307.

¹³⁴ BPP 1893 – 94 CVI [C.7222], p.32.

¹³⁵ D. Lodge, *Nice Work* (Penguin, 1989), p. 83.

¹³⁶ B. Brookes, “Women and Reproduction, 1860 – 1939”, in J. Lewis, ed., *Labour and Love: Women’s Experience of Home and Family 1850 – 1940* (Oxford, 1986), p. 156.

¹³⁷ C. Tomalin, *Jane Austen, A Life* (London, 1997), p. 206.

Although the doctor warned that a twelfth child would endanger her life, it is a matter of pride that Lyttleton's mother recorded that the warning was not passed on to him.¹³⁸

Hertford and Hitchin had similar stories. Emma, wife of Admiral Thomas Gosselin of Bengoe Hall, married in 1809. She died six years later, the day her youngest daughter was born. In Hitchin, Margaret married Lewis Hensley in 1857. She died three years later, surviving her youngest child by five days; her daughter lived for just one day.¹³⁹ As wife to the vicar of Hitchin she would have had a more modest household but both, compared to the majority, would be described as comfortable, with access to servants, medical supervision and nursing care. Similarly, Samuel Lucas of Tyler Street, Hitchin, was shown in the 1851 census with a daughter aged two years old. As his wife had died two years before, after 12 years marriage and producing four other children, it is reasonable to assume that childbirth was a contributory cause. Again, this was a household which had a comfortable income. Aside from exhibiting at the Royal Academy, Samuel was a farmer and brewer, employing 18 hands and three house servants.

In 1870, 3,875 women in England and Wales died through childbirth and the number increased to 4,400 by the end of the nineteenth century.¹⁴⁰ Official records of that date indicated that mortality through child birth was 5.31 per 1,000 births which may have been an under-estimate.¹⁴¹ The publication, by the Women's Cooperative Guild in 1915, of letters from working-class women on their experiences of childbirth made for "harrowing, often stomach churning reading".¹⁴² Furthermore, the survivors of childbirth did not necessarily enjoy robust health.¹⁴³ Aside from the sex ratio being skewed, and although many women, and society generally, viewed marriage as their aim, it is evident from the study of contemporary autobiographies, that in spite of the pity shown to the "old maid", some men

¹³⁸ Mary herself had hoped that a stomach attack might have resulted in an abortion. S. Fletcher, *Victorian Girls, Lord Lyttleton's Daughters* (London, 2001), pp.35- 6.

¹³⁹ Information from www.familysearch.org

¹⁴⁰ B. Harrison, "Women and Health" in J. Purvis, ed., *Women's History: Britain, 1850 – 1940*, pp. 171- 2.

¹⁴¹ BPP 1904 XIV [Cd 2197], *Sixty Sixth Annual Report of the Registrar General (1903)*, p. lxxiii.

¹⁴² C. Rowan, "The State, the Labour movement and Working-Class Mothers", in R. Brunt and C. Rowan, eds., *Feminism, Culture and Politics* (London, 1982), p.71.

¹⁴³ A doctor recalling the introduction of the N.H.S. in 1948 noted that he had been consulted by some 20 to 30 women with unbelievable gynaecological conditions, see D. Kynaston, *Austerity Britain* (London, 2007), p.327.

and women were unable to take up an offer of marriage or had no desire to be married.¹⁴⁴ Daughters in particular would be aware of the hazards of childbirth and drudgery associated with a houseful of children.

A few single women were able to head a household with two events identified as signalling acceptability. The first was to reach an age beyond child bearing and the other was the death

Table 17: Percentage of households headed by a single woman

	Hertford	Hitchin
1851	3.20	4.65
1891	4.38	4.89

of a surviving parent.¹⁴⁵ For some the local employment opportunities did allow for a single woman to establish a household without support from a husband or other (male) protector (see Table 17, p. 67). The pattern of employment in Hertford and Hitchin is in Table 18, p. 68. The towns are balanced in terms of those involved in shop-keeping, domestic work and school teaching in the professional class, but the striking difference between the two towns is in the manufacturing area. Both had six unmarried women employed in the needle trades of dressmaker, milliner or needlewoman, but the numbers in Hitchin are again skewed by the impact of the straw plait trade.

Most households headed by a single woman consisted of other family members, a lodger or two and/or servants. In Hertford, it was usually a sister who was a member of the household, although three had a responsibility for a parent. Catherine Roach, a Washerwoman had her

¹⁴⁴ C. Jones, *Those whom God hath not joined*, p. 338; L. Davidoff, *Thicker than Water*, p. 63 .

¹⁴⁵ A. M. Froide, "Marital Status as a Category of Difference" in J. M. Bennett and A. M. Froide eds., *Singlewomen in the European Past 1250 – 1800* (Philadelphia, Penn., 1999), p. 239.

widowed mother (aged 79) plus two nephews; Rebecca Wadsworth, a school proprietress, also had her widowed mother (aged 71) and a brother and sister, whilst Sarah Sherman supported her 80 year old father and a nephew. Likewise, in Hitchin, Nancy Newman, a schoolmistress in Tyler Street had her sister and 73 year old mother dependent on her. Although sisters feature as part of these households, a notable difference in the towns is the number of families without resident menfolk. Apart from Mary Bynoth in Butcherly Green, living with her elderly parents and her two daughters, aged eight and two, there is no further evidence of an unmarried woman with children heading a household in Hertford at this date.¹⁴⁶

Table 18: Income source - unmarried heads of household - Hertford and Hitchin - 1851

Sector	Hertford	Hitchin
Manufacture	7	29
Dealing	3	3
Professional	7	5
Domestic	4	4
Property owning	2	3
Independent/Annuitant	4	10
Other	2	
Dependent/pauper/retired	3	7

In 1851, 33 (53 per cent) of the single women heading a household in Hitchin were within child bearing age and 15 (65 per cent) in Hertford.¹⁴⁷ This suggests that the impetus for their heading the household was loss of parents, or in the case of Rebecca Wadsworth above and Catherine Roach, a washerwoman in Salisbury Court, the mother was viewed as the dependant. In Hertford, some were heading a household and running a business. Like Rebecca Wadsworth, Sarah Jane Evans in North Crescent ran a school, with her sister, and

¹⁴⁶ This could be an example of inaccurate recording. The 1881 census records a Mary Bynoth, with the same year of birth, living with her husband, Thomas, a shepherd at Little Berkhamstead.

¹⁴⁷ Below the age of 45 is used by demographers, see A. M Froide, "Married Status", p. 242.

Sarah Robins in Fore Street and Fanny Gutteridge in Brickendon were both milliners, employing staff as did Caroline Guy, a draper in St Andrews Street.

The pattern of households in Hitchin does reveal some households headed by independent straw plaiters, including some unmarried mothers. (Three others were headed by a charwoman and two by needlewomen).¹⁴⁸ Those headed by a straw plaiter demonstrate a range of circumstances. Eliza Westwood in Hollow Lane's household comprised her (straw plaiter) sisters and agricultural labourer brother and the Valentine sisters, in their fifties, in Helen's Yard lived together, but of the 20 households headed by an unmarried straw plaiter, six have young children with them and in eight the young straw plaiter lived by herself. In other households there is evidence of care of younger siblings, but apart from Ann Cook in Back Street who, with her two children, may have had support from her fish dealer brother and Jane Hubbard, with one daughter and a lodger, the implication is that by straw plait work, many of these women were able to maintain themselves and, in some cases, their children without a husband's wage.

Whether the availability of straw plait work encouraged single women to establish a separate household has been viewed as unlikely.¹⁴⁹ The remuneration varied according to season, the state of trade in the century and the competence of the plaiter.¹⁵⁰ A record of the 1860s noted that the prices commanded ranged from 10d. to 2s. 6d. "according to the intricacy of the pattern".¹⁵¹ Another, from the same date, reported that a score of plait could be sold at anything from 2d. to 3 shillings, and that the earnings of "a good plaiter, after straws are deducted, will be from 5s. to 7s. 6d. per week, in a good state of trade".¹⁵² The trade was seasonal with one plaiter noting that straw work was very bad from July up to Christmas and an analysis of the records of a straw plait dealer in Dunstable indicated that lower

¹⁴⁸ One of these may be another inaccuracy in recording. Ann Steeley was recorded with children by the name of Gray and Steeley. 30 years later she was enumerated as a widow, living with one of her children. There is a record of a marriage between James Steeley and Ann in 1850, information from www.freebmd.org.uk

¹⁴⁹ N. Goose, "How saucy did it make the poor?", p. 550.

¹⁵⁰ N. Goose, "The straw plait and hat trades in Nineteenth-Century Hertfordshire" in N. Goose, ed., *Women's Work in Industrial England*, pp. 110 – 7.

¹⁵¹ E. Grey, *Cottage Life in a Hertfordshire Village* p. 69.

¹⁵² A. J. Tansley, "On the Straw Plait Trade", *Journal of the Society of Arts*, No. 422, Vol. IX, 15 December 1860, p. 72.

prices were paid for plait during the winter.¹⁵³ Average earnings throughout a year have been assessed to be around 4 shillings a week; enough to enhance a household budget, but not sufficient to support a separate household. Even in St. Albans, where there was potential for higher earnings by hat making, there is little evidence that girls left their parental home and established independent households.¹⁵⁴

Looking at the younger (under the age of 40) straw plaiters heading a household in Hitchin in 1851, it is difficult to assess whether this was their choice or it was forced upon them by the break-up of the family home. That four of these women had younger siblings living with them would suggest the latter in these cases. Eliza Westwood's household supports the thesis that straw plaiting provided for a family, rather than an independent life style. However, it also supported Emma Mayer, a singleton, born in London, Mary Ann Dear, born in Caxton, Cambridgeshire, and her two young sons and Ann Hunt with her three young daughters. This does suggest that if the rewards of straw plaiting were insufficient to maintain a household it was not their only activity and not their only means of support. The marked contrast between Hertford and Hitchin is, however, in the number of households with unmarried daughters and grandchildren. There are many examples of grandchildren boarding with grandparents and it would be iniquitous to presume that in all cases where an unmarried daughter was present the grandchild was illegitimate, but there are more instances in Hitchin where age of daughter and grandchild render this a possibility and three cases of children recorded as illegitimate (see Appendices 7 and 8, pp. 209 - 211).

That single women were less likely than widows to head a household is borne out by the comparatively few households headed by unmarried women in Hertford and Hitchin in 1851.¹⁵⁵ However, this assumes that all remaining spinsters were therefore to be classified as dependent. Taking the Registrar General's definition of an "old maid", that is an unmarried woman age 40 and above, it is clear that in both towns, his assertion that there was potential

¹⁵³ J. Burnett, *Useful Toil*, (Allen Lane, 1974), p. 77; P. Horn, *The Victorian Countrywoman* (Oxford, 1991), p. 177.

¹⁵⁴ N. Goose, "Cottage industry, migration, and marriage in nineteenth-century England", *Economic History Review*, Vol. 61, No. 40, 2008, pp. 798 – 819.

¹⁵⁵ R. Wall, "Women alone in English society" (*Annales de Démographique Historique*, 1981), p. 303, quoted in B. Hill, *Women Alone*, p. 2.

employment, even for the mature, unmarried woman, in a town was true. Taking the population of single women as a whole in Hertford in 1851, all except thirteen in the age forty and above category were assigned an occupation or source of income. Of the exceptions, three were in the workhouse, a further three were supported by friends or parish relief and Matilda Chandler, described as “infirm”, living with her widowed mother in Butcherley Green, who is also described as infirm. Of the rest, the part they played in the household is a matter of conjecture although it must be felt that Alicia Thorne in Chequer Yard and Ann Peet in Hertingfordbury Road, living with an octogenarian father, might have a support and housekeeping role, as might Mary Barrett in Port Hill, living with her single brother. The remaining three, living with the family of a sibling, may well have shared household duties. Louisa Pallett, living in her bother-in-law’s six children household in St Andrews Street was specifically described as a companion to the wife of the head of household.

For Hitchin in 1851, the picture is similar with most unmarried women in the age 40 and over group being assigned an income or occupation. Apart from the nine women in the workhouse, one visitor and a lodger, there were eight in households where elderly parents were shown as the head, or, in the case of Caroline Stuart in Bancroft, she was designated as the Curate’s sister; the household comprising just her and her unmarried brother. Of the remaining three, Charlotte Barton in Tyler Street shared a household with her son, her straw plaiter sister with her daughter; Susannah Wharf was at Hitchin Hill with her brother in law, a retired watchmaker and sister, an annuitant, and Dinah Abbots at Lewesford was in a larger establishment, headed by her schoolmaster brother in law, which included his wife, four children, two assistants, her widowed mother and twenty six pupils. Even with four servants, it would be difficult to believe that she was living a life of idleness.

Recognising some regional variations and potential confusion in some enumerators who recorded a family member as employed on domestic duties, domestic service was the main occupation for working class women in the nineteenth century.¹⁵⁶ At least one servant was

¹⁵⁶ E. Higgs, “The tabulation of occupations in the nineteenth-century census, with special reference to domestic service”, in N. Goose, ed., *Women’s Work in Industrial England*, p. 263 - 4.

the necessary status symbol and the demand for female servants grew, particularly between the 1851 and 1871 censuses.¹⁵⁷ As to be expected, domestic service accounted for the main occupation of single women over the age of 20 in Hertford and Hitchin in 1851 with 43 per cent so employed in Hertford and a high, but lower, number of 32 per cent in Hitchin. In Hertford, 14 per cent of the unmarried women over the age of 20 were engaged in some kind of manufacturing trade, that is dressmaking, millinery and other needlework trades, but the percentage for the same group in Hitchin was 33 per cent; 19 per cent of whom were engaged in straw plait work.

The range of opportunities for remunerated employment was limited.¹⁵⁸ Essentially, at the lower end of the social scale, there were the domestic occupations, a few were in the shop-keeping and inn keeping trades and for the more genteel, there was dressmaking, millinery and school teaching. The distinguishing features are for Hertford, the employment of twelve widows/unmarried women as nurses at Christ's Hospital, and more significantly, for Hitchin, the straw plait trade which provided employment for the married, widowed and single woman. At the top end of the scale, there were those with an independent income, annuitants and fund holders who, whether widowed or unmarried may have had some standing in the town.

2.10 Unmarried women 1891

The "spinster problem" continued into the nineteenth-century and by its end had got worse.¹⁵⁹ The ratio of males to female was reasonably stable during the first part of the century but, partly as a result of emigration by more men than by women, in 1891 the number of females to 1,000 males was 1,064.¹⁶⁰ In spite of this continuing imbalance between the sexes, marriage continued to be seen as the norm and any training or preparation for the world of work was viewed as unnecessary.¹⁶¹ An often repeated quote from Charlotte Brontë's *Shirley*, indeed used by Anderson in this context, is that of Caroline Helstone's unfulfilled wish to prepare for an independent life by becoming a governess. This is dismissed as totally

¹⁵⁷ P. Horn, *The Rise and fall of the Victorian Servant*, p 26 – 9.

¹⁵⁸ M. Ward, *Female Occupations*, p. 4.

¹⁵⁹ M. Anderson, "The Social Position of Spinsters in Mid-Victorian Britain", *Journal of Family History*, Winter 1984, p. 378.

¹⁶⁰ BPP 1892 – 4 CVI [C. 7222], *Census of England and Wales, 1891, Volume IV, General Report*, p. 25.

¹⁶¹ M. Anderson, "The Social Position of Spinsters", p. 392.

unrealistic. *Shirley* was published in 1849 and little changed during the course of the century.¹⁶² There were a few such as Sophia Baines owning the Pension Frensham, Beatrice French with her South London Dress Supply Association and some independence shown by several of Thomas Hardy's heroines, notably Bathsheba Everdene, but even with Bathsheba the pattern continued with the novel charting the love interest of the heroine, culminating in the "happy ending" with her marriage to Gabriel Oak.¹⁶³ Work, in the novel, continued to be an interlude before marriage.¹⁶⁴

The opportunities for gainful employment open to women were, at the time of the 1891 census, about to change. Certainly there was an indication of increased literacy amongst the population as a whole in the completion of the 1891 census return as evidenced by the Registrar General's complaint that it was impossible to establish a proper analysis of industry as the schedule had been done by somebody "who, too commonly neither cares for accuracy nor is capable of it".¹⁶⁵ Higgs takes a more charitable view on the mind-set of those completing census returns,¹⁶⁶ but the point here is that the complaint is not against the census enumerator, but the householder who has taken control of the form filling.

Although the 1870 Education Act introduced the concept of compulsory elementary schooling this did not have an immediate impact on the quality of education provided, primarily because there was not a supply of qualified teachers. Such training that existed was narrow in its curriculum. Whilst there had been a more professional approach to the qualifications of male teachers, by the end of the century the Board of Education was reporting that 28 per cent of male teachers were not college trained; for female teachers this was 51 per cent.¹⁶⁷ Even by 1914, 41 per cent of women teaching in elementary schools were neither trained nor certificated.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶² W. F. Neff, *Victorian Working Women*, p. 253.

¹⁶³ A. Bennett, *The Old Wives Tale*, published 1908; G. Gissing, *In the Year of Jubilee*, published 1894; T. Hardy, *Far from the Madding Crowd*, published 1874.

¹⁶⁴ W. Neff, *Victorian Working Women*, pp. 253 – 54.

¹⁶⁵ BPP 1893 – 4 CVI [C.7222], p. 28 and p. 35.

¹⁶⁶ E. Higgs, *A Clearer Sense of the Census*, pp 96-7.

¹⁶⁷ P. Horn, *Education in Rural England*, pp. 110 – 1.

¹⁶⁸ P. Horn, *The Victorian and Edwardian Schoolchild* (Gloucester, 1989), p. 165.

Although there are indications of some change in occupations open to women in Hertford and Hitchin in 1891, they are very small. It was not until the twentieth century that this became a reality following the provision of free education and the opening of secondary education to a wider population with the impact only beginning to show on the 1921 census.¹⁶⁹ The difference in the occupations undertaken by women in 1891 as compared to 1851 was minimal in these two towns and it is only with the benefit of hindsight that the seeds of alternative job patterns in the clerical and shop keeping areas can be detected. In Hitchin, in 1891, just four unmarried women were enumerated as in clerical work. Alice Foster and Edith Passingham, both in Bancroft, were described as clerks and Emma Jeeves in Bridge Street and Fanny Williams, boarding with Smith and Ann Woodfield in Tilehurst Street, were employed by the pioneer in the opening of clerical work to women and designated as Post Office clerks.¹⁷⁰ The common factor between these four women is their age. The two Post Office clerks were 19 and 20; the other two were 17 and 21.¹⁷¹

The picture in Hertford at this date is similar with just five unmarried women classified as in the clerical work. Eleanor Briden, aged 15, in Port Vale was described as “grocers book keeper” and Bertha Ilott, aged 16, in St Andrews Street was a “grocer’s clerk”. Eleanor may have grown up with the trade as her father was described as a “baker”, but Bertha’s father was the Relieving Officer, and thus better fitted the model of the opening of white collar work to middle-class women.¹⁷² Alice Barber, aged 22, of Castle Street was a member of a household comprising her sister as head and housekeeper, supporting a younger sister, a milliner’s apprentice, and two schoolboy brothers. Sarah Stallabrass of Maidenhead Street was enumerated as “clerk”. At 40, she is conspicuously older than the others but as the household consisted of her widower father and her two brothers, all butchers, the assumption is that she was part of the family firm. The men sorted the meat and she did the books. The final member of the groups is Emily Cato, part of the household of William Grummitt, a

¹⁶⁹ E. Garrett, “The dawning of a new era?”, pp. 347 – 9.

¹⁷⁰ L. Holcombe, *Victorian Ladies at Work* (Newton Abbot, 1973), pp. 163 – 8.

¹⁷¹ There is a parallel here with Flora Thompson who, at the same age, boarded at Grayshott where she was the Post Office Assistant, see M. Lane, “Introduction” to F. Thompson, *A Country Calendar* (Oxford, 1979), pp. 16 – 7.

¹⁷² E. Garrett, “The dawning of a new era?”, pp. 314 - 5.

“baker and corn merchant”. At 27 she appears to have a position of some responsibility, described as “shopwoman” in her relationship to the head of the household and “book-keeper” under “occupation”.

Apart from the small minority in jobs which were new to women, the traditional work areas predominated (see Table 19, p. 76). Straw plait work was still important to the older age group but for those in the 15 to 39 age group the decline, in Hitchin, in the numbers employed in the straw plait trade is clearly demonstrated. The impact of this can be seen by the increase in participation in dressmaking and millinery and domestic service in Hitchin for this group, whereas Hertford shows a modest decrease in the percentage so involved in 1891 as compared with 1851. For both towns there was a small increase in those classed as “professional” (mainly in the teaching area) and also an increase in those in trade. Like Eliza Doolittle, shop-keeping became an aspiration for the working-class girl.¹⁷³ It was also a route to independence and upward mobility. A case in point is that of Gertrude Pearce, first born child of John Pearce, an agricultural labourer, and Ann Stapleton, a straw plaiter. Born in 1877, she worked as a shop assistant, eventually owning her own wool shop in Hitchin, important to have a mention in a recollection the people of the town in the early years of the twentieth century.¹⁷⁴ There were also the attractions of regulated hours of shop work and a means to influence terms of employment. Certainly there was a Young Ladies Committee of the Early Closing Association in Hitchin as it was they who raised money for the Soldiers’ and Sailors’ Families Association (S.S.F.A.) and *Daily Mail* Fund with a patriotic concert at the end of the century.¹⁷⁵

Although it was unusual for a single woman to be heading a household in the first half of the nineteenth century, as already noted, a number did in Hertford and Hitchin in 1851.¹⁷⁶ In Hertford, about 20 per cent of households headed by women had as their head an unmarried

¹⁷³ E. Garrett, “The dawning of a new era?”, pp. 350 – 1. [*Pygmalion* was premiered in 1913].

¹⁷⁴ E. A. Latchmore, *People, Places and Past Times of Hitchin* (Hitchin, 1974), p.26. (Gertrude Pearce was my great aunt).

¹⁷⁵ *Hertfordshire Mercury*, 7 April 1900.

¹⁷⁶ B. Hill, *Women Alone, Spinsters in England*, p.2.

Table 19: Occupation break-down by percentage - unmarried women with an occupation enumerated in the 1891 census (1851 figures in parentheses)

	Hertford		Hitchin	
	Age 15 – 39	Age 40 – 59	Age 15 – 39	Age 40 - 59
Laundry/Washer/Charwoman	3 (3)	3 (2)	3 (2)	16 (-)
Domestic service including bar maid	59 (64)	43 (50)	51 (38)	37 (51)
Dressmaker/Milliner/Seamstress	14 (18)	14 (9)	18 (13)	14 (8)
Other manufacturing	2 (3)	4 (2)	2 (1)	- (4)
Straw Plait work	- (0.7)	- (-)	9 (9)	11 (12)
Trade	10 (5)	16 (2)	5 (3)	6 (6)
Professional including nurse (non domestic)	10 (6)	13 (33*)	10 (3)	14 (18)
Other	2 (0.3)	7 (2)	3 (1)	2 (1)
Total number	482 (435)	69 (45)	755 (603)	106 (49)

*includes 9 nurses at Christ's Hospital

woman; for Hitchin the figure was higher at 26.5 per cent. This might be attributed to the rewards of the straw plait trade. Some support for this theory is indicated by a later census. By 1891 the straw plait trade was in decline and this might be reflected in the fact that the ratio of households headed by unmarried women in these two towns had narrowed to the extent that in Hertford, 26 per cent of the households headed by women were unmarried and 27 per cent in Hitchin. Whilst the percentage of the unmarried female population over the age of 20 heading a household in 1851 was 6.5 per cent for Hertford and 11 per cent in Hitchin in 1851, the differential had narrowed to 10 per cent for Hertford in 1891 and 12 per cent for Hitchin. The figure for Hitchin remained fairly stable in spite of the decline in the straw plait trade. The evidence supports the thesis that this was a trade that could support a family unit rather than a single women living alone.¹⁷⁷ A case in point is that of Mary Bevan in Tilehurst Street who was a straw hat maker, as was her sister. She headed a household that included their mother and two lodgers. The tradition of straw hat making was a family one.

¹⁷⁷ N. Goose, "The straw plait and hat trades", p. 124.

The 1881 census has the mother, Sarah Butterfield as head of household and a straw hat sewer, as were her two daughters, enumerated under the name of Brown in that year.

What did continue to characterise Hitchin was its, small, ability to continue to support single mothers as heads of household. Whilst, in 1851, 12 of the 15 households headed by a single mother were involved with the straw plait trade, by 1891 there had been two changes, (see Table 20, p. 78). The number of such households had been reduced to nine, and just two were dependent on straw plait work. Ann Barker, aged 78, at 7 Sunnyside, headed a household of two daughters (also straw plaiters) and two grandsons, and, Mary Barker, aged 55, at 6 Sunnyside was also a straw plaiter, with a daughter, (again a straw plaiter), two sons and a lodger. The remaining seven consisted of three charwomen, two laundresses, one seamstress and one retired washerwoman. Although these numbers are small, Hertford, by contrast, had just one woman enumerated as a single head of household with offspring. Emma Mansfield of Ash Street, a laundress, headed a household comprising two daughters, two sons, plus a widower lodger with his three children.¹⁷⁸ Nine single heads of household were enumerated as a laundress. That this was their established trade is demonstrated by the 1881 census which indicates that seven of these were enumerated as a “laundress”, often in business with a family member, such as Catherine Burr in Union Road and Ellen Lawton in Nightingale Road, both operating with a niece and Rhoda Cole in Bedford Road, Sarah Day in Ickleford Road and Emily Waters in Mill Yard, each working with a sister. A laundry business could start small and suited those with family responsibilities.¹⁷⁹ The difference between the inconvenience of the visiting washerwoman, with the house full of steam and wet washing drying indoors in bad weather, and the convenience of outsourcing the family laundry, was described by Flora Thompson.¹⁸⁰

Examination of the households in Hertford and Hitchin in 1891 which included an unmarried woman over the age of 40 demonstrates that the inference from census data that those without

¹⁷⁸ Given that she was shown as a widow on the 1881 census, this may be a more realistic interpretation of her marital status.

¹⁷⁹ J. Benson, *The Penny Capitalists*, p. 69.

¹⁸⁰ F. Thompson, *Lark Rise to Candleford*, pp 346 and 494 - 5.

Table 20: Sources of income – Unmarried women heading a household - 1891

	Hertford	Hitchin
Laundry/washing/charwoman	6	15
Domestic service	2	3
Dressmaker/milliner/seamstress	7	16
Other manufacturing	1	1
Straw plait	-	9
Trade	5	5
Professional	6	10
Living on own means	19	26
Other	6	9
Total	52	94

occupation were thus a dependant is fallacious. In Hertford in 1891, excluding Susanne Hanson, a visitor in North Road and the two lodgers and two boarders, all were part of a family, (see Appendix 9, p. 212). Some would appear to be fulfilling the role of housekeeper for an unmarried brother or widowed brother in law in others, although the father was enumerated as head of household, given the age of the parents it might be argued that the important role in the household was the daughter's care of the elderly. Maria Westrope's father, for example, was aged 84 and enumerated as a "grocer" in the Market Place. As the household also included her unmarried brother, also a grocer, plus two grocer's assistants, and a domestic servant, it would be reasonable to assume that the operation of the family business and the home must have involved Maria. A further four households were enumerated with the mother shown as head but Ann and Isabel Silverside in Villiers Street must have been responsible for the work associated with the lodger rather than their 79 year old mother. An even busier household was headed by Boadica Lawrence's 79 year old mother. As it also included a lodger and two young nieces, it is difficult to understand the notion that Boadica, according to official returns, was without occupation.¹⁸¹ Whether or not Mary Taylor was a permanent resident is thrown into doubt by the fact that there were five children under the age of eight in the household, the youngest less than a month old. The

¹⁸¹ Boudica continued to support her mother; Sarah was a "deserving guest" at the Coronation dinner in Hertford in 1902, see P. Sheail, "Hertford's Coronation Dinner, 1902, *Herts Past and Present*, Issue 19, Spring 2012.

presence of a nurse girl, and a general servant would suggest that she was fulfilling a useful function and that she had plenty of work to do in support of the household.

A similar picture emerges for Hitchin, (see Appendix 10, p. 213). Excluding the four visitors, three boarders and two lodgers, the spinsters shown without occupation in the 1891 census appear to be fulfilling similar support and care functions in the household. There are cases of the companionship of siblings, two with a brother in law and the importance of family evidenced by Louisa Deane, aged 56 and Louisa Ponnell, aged 67, sister and cousin to Rosa Thompson, a 48 year old widow, with five children and four servants. These examples demonstrate the importance of kinship, but particularly for the older spinster.¹⁸² Fifteen of this group were in households headed by an elderly relative and whilst apparently without occupation were caring for the elderly, managing a household, often with ancillary responsibilities such as providing for a lodger and looking after children.

The importance of family support and dependency is illustrated by the Upchurch family in Hitchin. In 1881 William, aged 58, a general labourer, was enumerated as head of a household which included his wife, with no recorded occupation, his son, a boot and shoemaker, his unmarried daughter, a laundress, and her son and a lodger. Ten years later William was not employed and his daughter was categorised as head of the household. What the census also suggests is that this was a family fitting the working class model of an economic unit in terms of production and service.¹⁸³ Although the wife is shown without occupation in 1881, somebody would have been looking after the needs of Charles Wright, a police constable, the boarder. An important contribution the brother may have made the supply of footwear. Boots were a major expenditure, even into the twentieth century, and so had to last.¹⁸⁴ A brother in the trade could prove to be a valuable contributor to the family budget. As a schoolmistress noted, in 1888, reasons for prolonged absence being “no boots, no school money, no coat”.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸² M. Anderson, “The Social Position of Spinsters”, pp 390 – 3.

¹⁸³ J. Benson, *The Penny Capitalists*, p. 135.

¹⁸⁴ A. Davin, *Growing Up Poor, Home, School and Street in London, 1870 – 1914* (London, 1996), p. 136; E. Roberts, *A Woman’s Place*, p. 162.

¹⁸⁵ F. Dodwell, *Hitchin British Schools, 1810 – 1900* (Hitchin, 1993), p. 112.

In addition to those earning an income, there were those of independent means. The 1891 census return, unlike that for 1851, does not identify annuitants, fund holders and those owning property. In 1851 the number of households headed by single women in the independent category was 19 in Hertford, representing 15 per cent of the total and 13 in Hitchin (21 per cent). By 1891 these figures had changed, with the proportion in Hitchin growing to 26 per cent (26 of the 99 households headed by a single woman) but the proportion grew more dramatically in Hertford to 36 per cent with 19 of the 53 households headed by a single woman of independent means.

If the Registrar General was concerned about the helplessness of widows and the high number of single women, especially “old maids”, the evidence from Hertford and Hitchin is that they were making a positive contribution to family life, the economy of the town and also of the nation.

2.11 The domestic servant

A survey of women’s employment in nineteenth-century England would not be complete without further mention of domestic service, (see above pp. 71 - 2). The Victorian age saw the rise in employment of the domestic servant. It accounted for the employment of 9.8 per cent of the total female population in the country in 1851.¹⁸⁶ Hertford reflected the opportunities in the town with 16.2 per cent of its total female population so employed in 1851 and, even with the attractions of the straw plait trade, 7.9 per cent of women in Hitchin were in domestic service occupations in the same year. By 1881, over a million women were employed as live in servants.¹⁸⁷ The Cowpers at Panshanger had 34 indoor servants in 1891; in Hitchin the Delmé Radcliffes had 12. More modest households relied on the maid of all work, but the professionals would aim to employ a cook, housemaid, parlour maid, and when necessary, a nursemaid.¹⁸⁸ In practice this varied. The physician in Hertford in 1891, Arthur Boucher, employed a cook and the new born child meant a nurse was also present but the

¹⁸⁶ E. Roberts, *Women’s Work 1840 – 1940*, p. 19.

¹⁸⁷ P. Horn, *The Rise and Fall of the Victorian Servant*, p. 25.

¹⁸⁸ P. Horn, *The Rise and Fall of the Victorian Servant*, p.18.

bankers, Francis Lucas in Tilehurst Street in Hitchin, had four servants and William Lucas at Foxholes eight. The domestic servant may have freed wives and daughters of some domestic chores but their employment also created problems.

Supervision was a challenge to those unused to the role. Jane, wife of Thomas Carlyle, tended to quarrel with servants but also quasi-mother them until they presumed on her good nature which resulted in the hiring and firing of 30 servants in as many years.¹⁸⁹ The competence of the servant was another difficulty. Winnie Seebohm on returning home found no curtains in her room. “Durling (simpering and twiddling her huge thumbs) said that she did not know how it was Miss, the man only came to measure the window the other day – I said “Which other day?” but she “Couldn’t say Miss, it was the other day.”¹⁹⁰ In addition there was the problem of drink. The daughter of a Watford doctor recorded events for 2 April 1847 as “Went to church, at dinner Cook got dead drunk and Mary and I carried her up to bed.” The following day’s note was “Packed Cook off as soon as we could out of the house.”¹⁹¹ In similar vein, William Lucas noted that “This week I am compelled to dismiss our old gardener, Abbis, for his inveterate tendency to muddle himself with drink.”¹⁹² Sometimes servants took the initiative. A Baldock brewer noted that “three of our female servants have given notice to leave the reason assigned was that they find the situation dull and wish for livelier where they see more company....”¹⁹³

By comparison, Susanna Crow in Bancroft, Hitchin, was enumerated as “useful maid, domestic servant” and others were recognised for their loyalty. Ann Lucas, a Hitchin Quaker, was recalled as “a good mistress and her servants generally stayed with her many years and were attached to her in an unusual degree.”¹⁹⁴ In 1851, Ann’s servant was Sarah Piggott. Ten years later, her son recorded her leaving his household with the words that “the recollection of her many services to my aged parents, and, since their decease, her great

¹⁸⁹ R. Ashton, *Thomas and Jane Carlyle, Portrait of a Marriage* (Pimlico, 2003), p. 402.

¹⁹⁰ H.A.L.S. D/ESe/C1, *Letters of Winnie Seebohm*.

¹⁹¹ H.A.L.S. PC 657, *Ann Pidcock’s diary*.

¹⁹² G. E. Bryant and G.P. Baker, eds., *A Quaker Journal, Vol. II* (London, 1934), p. 489.

¹⁹³ G. Curtis, *A Chronicle of Small Beer*, (London, 1970), p. 197 - 8.

¹⁹⁴ G. E. Bryant and G. P. Baker, eds., *A Quaker Journal*, p. 476, note for 8 August 1855.

kindness to me, filled my mind with thankfulness.”¹⁹⁵ A similar testimonial comes from Hertford with Ann Wickham noting that Hannah Watson had left them as she was to be married. “She had lived with me rather more than eight years and was a very faithfull (sic) servant.”¹⁹⁶

The amount of time freed by the employment of a servant varied. The schedule of the working day for the maid of all work has been fixed by the diaries of Hannah Cullwick.¹⁹⁷ Doubtless life for many was hard but this was a record written to satisfy the interest of Arthur Munby in strong working women.¹⁹⁸ The reality for those with one servant girl may have resulted in some help in the house but its management and many of the household chores remained with its mistress. A charity school girl would not have been strong enough to attempt some of the jobs undertaken by Hannah Cullwick.¹⁹⁹ The employment of a servant helped with some chores but was, for many, primarily a status symbol.²⁰⁰

2.12 Women and investment

Women without an occupation but with independent means were often also important investors. An invitation to invest in her brother’s business had the result of putting Miss Mackenzie “into a twitter. Like all other single ladies, she was very nervous about her money.”²⁰¹ This is a sweeping generalisation but Miss Mackenzie was right to have reservations. Investment in a brother’s enterprise was not always successful.²⁰² Fiction, however, also features a spectrum of husbandless women ranging from those in genteel poverty, managing respectability on a small income, to rich maiden aunts and widows who were courted for their money.²⁰³ On the one hand, literature tells us that women without

¹⁹⁵ R. L. Hine, *Hitchin Worthies*, p. 236.

¹⁹⁶ H.A.L.S. D/EX/126/F1, *Day Book of Ann Wickham*, entry for 12 June 1854.

¹⁹⁷ P. Horn, *The Rise and Fall of the Victorian Servant*, pp. 57 – 8.

¹⁹⁸ L. Stanley, ed., *The Diaries of Hannah Cullwick*, pp. 139 and pp. 152 – 3; D. Hudson, *Munby – Man of Two Worlds*, p. 148.

¹⁹⁹ E. C. Gaskell, *Cranford* (Penguin edition, 1984), pp. 41 and 110 – 11.

²⁰⁰ P. Horn, *The Rise and Fall of the Victorian Servant*, p. 17. “Everybody who was anything” kept a maid, even if it was just a girl to clean the knives and boots on a Saturday. See F. Thompson, *Lark Rise to Candleford*, p. 165.

²⁰¹ A. Trollope, *Miss Mackenzie*, published 1865, (O.U.P. edition, 1988, first published 1865), p. 36. Inevitably, having been deprived of a portion of her income, she is left to look after her brother’s widow and children. Similar plots occur in Trollope’s *The Belton Estate*, published 1865 and *The Way We Live Now*, published 1874.

²⁰² L. Davidoff, *Thicker than Water*, p. 139.

²⁰³ D. R. Green and A. Owens, “Gentlewomanly Capitalism? Spinsters, widows, and wealth holding in England and Wales c. 1800 – 1860”, *Economic History Review*, LVI, 3 (2003), pp. 514 – 5.

husbands could not cope with financial matters; on the other hand some clearly could. Widows and spinsters have been shown to have been active and self reliant in investment and the disposal of their assets.²⁰⁴ The Married Women's Property Act of 1882 allowed married women some control over their own money, however, that the single and widowed showed an ability to take an active interest in investment would suggest that many women may have had more understanding of money matters than they were allowed to demonstrate.²⁰⁵

Whilst most women were balancing the household budget and some were running commercial operations, for many women their money was controlled by others. The Hertfordshire Savings Bank was established in 1836. Rule 17 did allow for a married woman, or a woman who subsequently married, to make deposits and for the Trustees to pay her any sum of money but there was the caveat of "unless the husband of such woman shall give to such Trustees or Managers notice in writing of such marriage, and shall require payment to be made to him."²⁰⁶ Two account books belonging to women remain. One was initially held by William Smithins, a shoemaker in Brickendon, who deposited and withdrew small amounts leaving £37.11s.9d on his death in 1855. It was then taken over by his widow, Sarah. With interest and the odd withdrawal, the account was closed in 1869 leaving £19.18s.7d. The other account belonged to Susanna Malin of Ware, variously described as a schoolmistress or governess. She opened the account in 1836 at the age of 46 and made regular deposits, usually of £12, amassing £201.9s.4d. by 1854 when after several withdrawals the account was closed. Both examples appear to fit the objectives of the bank, enabling an "industrious and frugal person" to save and thus provide for "an old age of honourable independence."²⁰⁷

The funds of this bank were invested in Government Securities. A more risky savings opportunity was the Samuel Adams bank which went bankrupt in July 1856.²⁰⁸ The creditors

²⁰⁴ D.R.Green and A. Owens, "Gentlewomanly Capitalism?," pp. 513- 19 and pp. 531 – 2.

²⁰⁵ H.Doe, "Waiting for her ship to come in? The female investor in nineteenth-century sailing vessels", *Economic History Review*, 63, 1 (2010), p. 104.

²⁰⁶ H.A.L.S. D/EHx/B27, *Hertfordshire Savings Bank Depositors Account Books*.

²⁰⁷ H.A.L.S. D/EHx/B27.

²⁰⁸ H.A.L.S. D/EL/B339, *Samuel Adams and Co., Hertford and Ware, Bankruptcy papers*. (It was recorded the following month that no depositors would suffer. *Hertford Mercury*, 2 August 1856).

included 21 women holding amounts ranging from £10 to the £640 held by Miss Mary Willoughby of Hertford. Ten women had savings amounting to under £50 but the average sum held was £130. Whilst some of the creditors may have had a concern about their total savings, others had a wider range of investments. Jane Squire had about £100 at the bank and can be positively identified as she was listed amongst the creditors as “at Dr Evans”.²⁰⁹ The 1851 census for Hertford recorded her, age 48, no occupation, sister-in-law to the surgeon, Dr John Tasker Evans, living in Fore Street, who was also a trustee of her will. Her estate comprised £400 Consols, £275 Great Eastern Guaranteed Preference Stock, Midlands Counties Railway Debenture bonds to the value of £1,000, a General Railway Bond of £200, Eastern Counties Railway Consol Stock of £235 and New 3 per cents of £360.

Other wills confirm research that women invested not only in government securities but also had shares in other ventures.²¹⁰ The widow, Mary Chalkley of Townsend Road, Hertford, died in 1873 leaving a more modest amount of £294 invested in East India stock 4 per cents to be divided amongst her family.²¹¹ Mary Davies of Hertford made some small bequests of jewellery to friends, but the majority of her estate comprised houses in North Crescent, Hertford, and a share in a property in Tottenham.²¹² Another with investments in property was Sarah Haggar who had 12 cottages around Hertford and a house, valued at £1,632. All were left to her sister.²¹³ A more significant holding was that of the spinster, Mary Hudson of Hertford. Most of her capital was invested in East India stock with about £600 at the bank. On probate it was valued as £18,736.8s.7d in December 1891.²¹⁴ Francis Ellis, a spinster living in North Crescent Hertford, left an estate which included about £1,610 in Consolidated Stock, just over £5,000 in 3 per cents, some smaller investments and the contents of a substantial (five bedroom) house. Her interest in investment is shown by the instructions in her will. A niece and nephew received one third of her estate each and the remaining third was vested in trustees, with instructions to invest “in public stocks or securities in the United Kingdom or real securities in England and Wales (and not Ireland or elsewhere) varying the

²⁰⁹ H.A.L.S. D/EL/B339.

²¹⁰ D. R. Green and A. Owens, “Gentlewomanly Capitalism?”, p. 531.

²¹¹ H.A.L.S. D/EL/B153, *Probate Mary Chalkley*.

²¹² H.A.L.S. D/EL B167, *Will of Mary Davies, Villiers Road, 1876*.

²¹³ H.A.L.S. D/EL B208, *Sarah Louisa Haggar, 1898*.

²¹⁴ H.A.L.S. D/EL B227, *Mary Hudson, Probate*.

investment from time to time as often as might be thought proper and to pay the annual income of this third part to her great niece Eliza Parbury during her lifetime.”²¹⁵

It is clear from a sample of wills made by women in Hertford that there were women with significant money; that their investments were primarily in government stock, and they were thus conforming to the pattern in London and other home counties at the time in making a significant contribution to the finances of the nation.²¹⁶

2.13 Conclusions

Making do with an inadequate and irregular income stream was the lot of many women. Whilst the influence of experience of domestic service may have influenced cottage life and some men may have become more home-centred, these were a reflection of the influence of middle-class values.²¹⁷ Other comments from the late nineteenth century noted that many husbands effectively disregarded their responsibilities for the family leaving wives in ignorance of their pay but having to accept what was handed to them.²¹⁸ This mirrors the experience of Flora Thompson’s family. Recalling her father’s behaviour she wrote, “one week he would bring home the whole of his wages, the next week nothing I do not think that he meant to be unfair; he never seemed to grasp the fact that he was responsible for our upbringing; he simply wanted the money for this, that, or the other, and had it.”²¹⁹ In the persona of Laura, however, she asserted that men handed over their wage to the wife thus mirroring the oral testimony of a sample from the north of England.²²⁰ Doubtless both scenarios were to be found in Hertford and Hitchin.

²¹⁵ H.A.L.S. D/EL/B181, *Probate, Frances Ellis, spinster, 1872*.

²¹⁶ D. R. Green and A. Owens, “Gentlewomanly capitalism?”, p. 531.

²¹⁷ F. Thompson, *Lark Rise to Candleford* (London, 1957), p. 172; D. Cannadine, *History in our Time*, p. 107.

²¹⁸ H. Bosanquet, *Rich and Poor*, p. 107, quoted in M. Young and P. Willmott, *Family and Kinship in East London* (London, 1957), p. 18; E. Ross, *Slum Travelers* (sic), *Ladies and London Poverty, 1860 – 1920* (Berkeley, California; London, 2007), p. 156.

²¹⁹ M. Lane, ed., F. Thompson, *A Country Calendar* (Oxford, 1984), p. 6.

²²⁰ F. Thompson, *Lark Rise to Candleford*, p. 62; E. Roberts, *A Woman’s Place*, pp. 110 – 111.

The resourcefulness of some wives has been noted in their ability to supplement the family income with ad hoc work, and also, in a few cases, to set up their own business.²²¹ There is no evidence of such entrepreneurship amongst the straw plait workers in Hitchin. James Bennett of Bancroft in Hitchin was enumerated in 1851 without occupation, apparently supported by his straw plaiter wife but for the rest it appeared to be supplementary income in a household where the head plied a lowly trade such as bricklayer, chimney sweep and, most commonly, agricultural labourer. Exceptionally, John and Louisa Brown of Tyler Street and Abraham and Emma Currell of the Folly were straw plaiters and for a few households straw plait work sustained mothers, daughters and their children.

It is in the laundry work, later in the century, that there are indications of a business. Moses Fisher of Elm Tree Cottage in Hitchin had no occupation but his wife, sister and two daughters were laundresses as was Rebecca Valentine, with her two daughters at Frythe Cottages although in this case the husband was employed as a tailor. In Hertford, Mary Dray of Bull Plain appeared to be supporting her unemployed husband through laundry work and Harriet Raw, in the St John parish of Hertford, was the wife of a labourer and although enumerated as without occupation her son, aged 16, was shown as “laundry work” and her daughter, age 13, as a “laundress” which might suggest that Harriet did have a laundry business which was one which could be started with minimal outlay.²²² A more impressive establishment was the Ware Road Steam Laundry in Hertford, managed by Susanna Drury.²²³ That fewer households maintained their own laundry can be seen by the census returns on the Delmé Radcliffe family with two laundry maids in 1851 but none in 1891. The Panshanger estate was larger but although it retained three laundry maids in 1851 and 1891, the two washerwomen were not members of the household in 1891.²²⁴

The rewards of the straw plait trade provided many working-class women in Hitchin with regular employment but, by the close of the century, for both towns there was recourse to the

²²¹ In the east end of London some women who were successful French polishers did set up their own business and supported husband and family, see S. Wise, *The Blackest Streets* (London, 2009), p. 64.

²²² J. Benson, *The Penny Capitalists*, p. 73.

²²³ Digitalized Census Enumerators Books for Hertford and Hitchin.

²²⁴ P. Horn, *The Rise and Fall of the Victorian Servant*, p. 83.

ad hoc economy of make shifts which, for Hitchin, still included straw plait work. Without the direct testimony of these women any evaluation of income derived is impossible but there is some indirect evidence that mothers did have remunerated employment. “Wanted at home” was a frequent cause for absence, particularly for girls.²²⁵ This may have been to cope with the mother’s illness or confinement but there are specific notes such as “mother out at work”.²²⁶ Gleaning was so part of the culture of the Hitchin community that the School Attendance Committee recognised that there could be no expectation of children at school until it was over.²²⁷ In Hertford, the appearance of the Hertfordshire Militia created work and the concept of a wife leaving a child in charge of a younger child while she worked in the fields was an event which caused no comment in a report on an accident to the child.²²⁸

The assertion that most information recorded by census enumerators is reasonably accurate does raise questions about the definitions of the words “most” and “reasonably”.²²⁹ Contemporary records noted a concern on accuracy in recording occupation.²³⁰ Where there was a culture of women working such employment was more likely to be recorded but the evidence suggests that married women’s involvement in straw plait work could vary from census to census.²³¹ The recording of the occupations of widows and single women is more comprehensive. Some women had small businesses employing others. These were primarily in the laundry, dressmaking and millinery trades often involving members of the family, such as the Bentley sisters in the Churchyard in Hitchin enumerated as dressmakers in 1851 and their neighbour, Elizabeth Whittamore, a widow, also a dressmaker, assisted by her daughter and son, a tailor. A larger enterprise was that of unmarried Ann Palmer in Sun Street who was a draper and milliner, supported by a niece and nephew and six assistants, plus two domestic servants. Similarly in Hertford at the same date, the three Adeane sisters were supporting their widower father by dressmaking and the Gutteridge sisters in Fore Street, milliners and dressmakers, were employing an apprentice and a domestic servant.

²²⁵ F. Dodwell, *Hitchin British Schools – Schooldays 1810 – 1900*, p. 114.

²²⁶ Jill Grey Collection, British Schools Hitchin, *Hitchin Girls British Schools Log Book*, entry for February 1889.

²²⁷ H.A.L.S. BG/HIT, *Hitchin Schools Attendance Committee*, minute for 14 October 1890.

²²⁸ H.A.L.S. H/Ed1/88/1, *Log Book – All Saints Hertford United Schools*, entry for 8 April 1862; *Hertford Mercury*, 14 April 1860.

²²⁹ L. Shaw-Taylor, “Diverse Experiences”, p. 35.

²³⁰ BPP 1893 – 4 CVI [C7222], p. 35.

²³¹ N. Goose, “Introduction”, in N. Goose, ed., *Women’s Work in Industrial England*, p. 24.

The ability of some widows to keep a business running would suggest that there was a degree of under-recording of wives' employment, or contribution, particularly in the shop-keeping and artisan trades. If work was not remunerated then the individual was not seen as productive with the consequent inference that she, and probably a he or two as well, was dependent on others. Obviously this overlooks the reproductive value to the family of the wife, but also ignores the value of the labour expended in running a household.²³² In addition, whilst the census does provide invaluable information on paid work done by women outside the home, the economy of makeshifts, the part time and ad hoc work, done by women, and by men, is impossible to quantify.

The century saw the rise in the employment of a domestic servant. The opportunity presented by having at least one servant was the freeing of some time, not for leisure, but for other activities. Work was the foundation of morality and happiness and it evident from contemporary diaries that holidays were opportunities to be exploited to learn and visits to other locations were used to this end.²³³ An excursion to Devon was not an opportunity for sitting idly in the sunshine and a visit to London was exploited to the full.²³⁴ A similar picture is revealed by the Hitchin brewer, William Lucas. A day's visit to London took in the zoological gardens, patronage of a bazaar and a meeting of Friends.²³⁵ For the woman at home, wasting time was viewed as a sin. Reading was an excuse to put off the useful work of mending as "unless ladies are well off, they cannot afford to waste time any more than gentlemen."²³⁶

Charitable work at the local level usually fell to women, particularly where their status in community meant that it behoved them to do so. The titled and gentry espoused the concept of noblesse oblige; the aspirational middle class, with a servant or two, had some time to emulate this. Philanthropy allowed for consort with the upper classes and a social forum with

²³² E. Garrett, 'The dawning of a new era?', p. 315 and pp. 358 - 359.

²³³ B. Wilson, *The Making of Victorian Values* (New York, 2007), p. 101.

²³⁴ C. Miller, ed., *Rain and Ruin* (Gloucester, 1983), pp. 164 - 5 and 45 - 6.

²³⁵ G. E. Bryant and G. P. Baker, eds., *A Quaker Journal*, Vol. II, p. 392.

²³⁶ A. Trollope, *Ayala's Angel*, (O.U.P edition, 1986), p. 16.

other like-minded women. The following chapter examines women's contribution in Hertford and Hitchin.

3 Philanthropy

3.1 Motives for Philanthropy

A manual of the time recorded that “this world was never made for idleness; everything around and about us tells of action and of progress,” with further instructions that “if time be heavy on your hands, are there no household duties to look after, no servants to instruct, no flower-beds to arrange, no school-children to teach, no sick-room to visit, no aged people to comfort, no widow nor orphan to relieve?” The advice continued with the rather questionable conclusion that an active life is “the principal reason, why the wives of the poor have such quick and easy labours, and such good recoveries; why their babies are so rosy, healthy and strong; notwithstanding the privations and hardships and poverty of the parents.”¹ On the list of suitable activities, it was apparent that doing “good works” such as visiting the sick and old and bereaved was important, not so much for the recipient of the charitable act, but for the donor.

If a motive for women to become involved in charitable activity was to stave off boredom, it is not surprising that some of the beneficiaries felt that there was no genuine interest in the lot of the poor. Philanthropy bestowed on the giver a sense of satisfaction and consequently it was difficult to determine who derived the greater benefit, the visitor or the visited.² A former east of London slum dweller viewed the activities of the good works done by ladies as “it was a pastime, Queen Victoria encouraged it...”³ Why so many upper and middle-class Victorians devoted so much time to charitable work raises many questions.⁴ This section looks at the charitable activities of the women of Hertford and Hitchin and the objects of their endeavours.

Charitable activity was valued before the Victorian era and involved women. The presence of the Society of Friends was a key factor in some towns. In Bristol, they had their own

¹ P. H. Chavasse, *Advice to a Wife on the Management of her own health* (London, 8th edition, 1912), pp. 13, 67 and 105.

² B. Wilson, *The Making of Victorian Values*, pp. 368 – 370; F. K. Prochaska, *Women and Philanthropy in Nineteenth-Century England* (Oxford, 1980), p. 135.

³ S. Wise, *The Blackest Streets* (London, 2009), p. 65.

⁴ D. Owen, *English Philanthropy 1660 – 1960* (Cambridge, Mass., 1965), p. 165.

independent welfare arrangements, which took account of the possibilities of rehabilitation, which became the blueprint for wider philanthropy, such their school for blind boys becoming a civic institution.⁵ The Society of Friends was well established in several locations in Hertfordshire. They were in Hertford from 1665, which has the oldest meeting house in the country.⁶ The nineteenth century saw many Quakers becoming more prosperous and this is particularly marked in Hitchin.⁷ Whilst the principal landowners in Hertford were the Marquess of Salisbury, Earl Cowper and the Dimsdale family; in Hitchin the lord of the manor William Wilshere (based in Welwyn) and Francis Delmé Radcliffe were joined by a strong representation from the Quaker Lucas, Seebohm and Ransom families.⁸

Hitchin women were important to the organisation of the Society of Friends providing the clerk to the national Women's Yearly Meeting in the shape of Phoebe Allen, née Lucas and Ann Lucas for many years at the beginning of the century.⁹ Furthermore, not only were women allowed an active part in the running of the Society of Friends, they also had licence to operate independently outside the home. In the eighteenth century, Mercy Ransom of Hitchin travelled throughout Great Britain and Ireland before and after her marriage and was often away for several months only ceasing this active ministry, because of a fall, in 1802.¹⁰ A similar freedom was a feature of some Nonconformist churches with women taking an active part in the governance of the church and allowed to preach.¹¹ The Congregationalists in Hitchin established a Female Friendly Society in 1803 and women were given a vote.¹²

There is some evidence of some differences of opinion. One comment, recorded by a Hitchin Quaker, accused the Evangelicals of excess "in narrow bigotry, meanness, evil dispositions and high professions."¹³ For some the divide between the Established church and the others was a constraint on relationships. Whilst Charlotte Brontë and her father were prepared to

⁵ M. Gorsky, *Patterns of Philanthropy* (London, 1999), pp. 116 – 7, pp. 146- 7.

⁶ C. Heath, *The Book of Hertford* (Chesham, 1975), pp. 56 –7.

⁷ C. D. Field, "Zion's People: Who were the English non-conformists?", *The Local Historian*, August 2010, Vol. 40, No. 3, pp. 209 – 210.

⁸ Kelly, *Kelly's Directory of Hertfordshire 1890*, pp. 765 and 776.

⁹ R. L. Hine, *The History of Hitchin*, Vol. II, p. 211.

¹⁰ R. L. Hine, *The History of Hitchin*, Vol. II, p. 200.

¹¹ An example being Dinah Morris, see G. Eliot, *Adam Bede* (Collins edition, 1969), p. 475.

¹² R. L. Hine, *The History of Hitchin*, Vol. II, p. 124.

¹³ G. E. Bryant and G. P. Baker, eds., *A Quaker Journal*, Vol. I, p. 134.

welcome Mrs Gaskell to their home, the curate, husband to Charlotte, did not approve of his wife's intimacy with the Gaskells as they were dissenters (Unitarians).¹⁴ Quakers were often themselves unwelcome. When told that burning a gentleman's house was a hanging offence, the rioters' response was a shout of derision as nobody would get hanged for burning out a Quaker.¹⁵

In spite of some differences, the nineteenth century saw a growing recognition by the Christian churches of a shared agenda. Credit for this has been attributed to Darwinian evolutionary biology and German biblical criticism which questioned a literal belief in the Creation with the consequence that the teachings of the New Testament became central elements of Christian belief.¹⁶ This is a neat theory, but apart from exceptions, such as Mary Ann Evans (George Eliot), who was a serious student and translator of German theology, many of the population would have been untouched by this scholarship.¹⁷ In practice, established beliefs would take longer to be uprooted.

What was acknowledged was that love of one's fellow man was a Christian duty and, by assisting the poor in order to escape everlasting fire, followers were espousing a religion of service rather than doctrine.¹⁸ Female role models from the Bible confirmed that women had a role in the area of charity.¹⁹ Undoubtedly there was some hypocrisy and some suspect motives, but there were also people with a genuine intent to improve the lot of their fellow men and women. The motives of the individual varied as much as people differ from one another.²⁰ They varied from a humanitarian view underpinned by religious beliefs, a sense that it was the right thing to do and to providing a purpose to life.²¹ This doctrine of service was accepted by the Church of England and supported by a concern about how to regulate the working class. Enlightenment on the teachings of, at the best, the Church of England or at

¹⁴ J. A. V. Chapple and A. Pollard, eds., *The Letters of Mrs Gaskell* (Manchester, 1966), p. 347.

¹⁵ Mrs Craik, *John Halifax, Gentleman* (London, [1908]), p. 99.

¹⁶ E. Ross, *Slum Travelers* (sic), p. 20.

¹⁷ In her fiction, both the Nonconformist Mr Lyon and the Church of England Mr Casaubon dedicate time to studies of the Old Testament which, in her view, was irrelevant. G. Eliot, *Felix Holt* (Harmondsworth; New York: Penguin, 1972), p. 503 and *Middlemarch* (Penguin edition, 1985), p. 240.

¹⁸ F. K. Prochaska, *Women and Philanthropy*, p. 8.

¹⁹ F. K. Prochaska, *Women and Philanthropy*, pp. 14 – 17.

²⁰ G. Finlayson, *Citizen, State and Social Welfare in Britain 1830 – 1990* (Oxford, 1994), pp. 54 – 5.

²¹ G. Finlayson, *Citizen, State, and Social Welfare*, pp. 48 – 50.

least another Christian denomination, was a method of enforcing rules and accepted behaviour on the uneducated mass of the population. The difficulty was in reaching those in need of such guidance.

Accuracy of census information continues to be subject of some debate, but a contemporary comment throws doubt on the recording of Christian worship. William Lucas of Hitchin, noted on 31 March 1851 that the “census is taken and the government is attempting to obtain much more than the usual information, but the obstructiveness of people, more particularly the clergy, will baffle them. An attempt was made yesterday to ascertain the numbers attending places of worship. Our number (that is Friends) in the morning 105, Independents (afternoon) 439, Baptists (evening) 704, but the latter number was swelled by accidental circumstances; their general number is, I believe, under 600.”²² These figures tally with the records of the Ecclesiastical Census but William Upton’s survey a few years earlier recorded higher attendances with 300 at the Friends Meeting House, 600 at the Independent chapel and 800 at the Baptist chapel.²³ In spite of this, alleged, swelling of numbers there was a concern that church and chapel were not reaching out to the artisan and working classes.

That over five million of the population did not attend some form of religious worship on a Sunday meant that “a sadly formidable portion of the English population are habitual neglecters of the public ordinances of religion”. The aspirational middle class were acknowledged as having added to the number of attendances; for the upper classes, it was accepted as amongst the “recognised proprieties of life”.²⁴ On an optimistic note, the report concluded that the clergy everywhere were now “foremost in all schemes for raising the condition of the poor, and the ministers and members of the other churches are not backward in the same good labour.”²⁵ In other words, religion, particularly the established church, and philanthropy had a symbiotic relationship.

²² G. E. Bryant and G. P. Baker, eds., *A Quaker Journal*, Vol. II, p. 447.

²³ J. Burg, *Religion in Hertfordshire 1847 – 1851* ([Ware] Hertfordshire Record Society, 1995), pp. 142 – 3 and pp. 40 - 1

²⁴ BPP 1852 – 3, LXXXIX (1690), *Census of Great Britain, 1851. Religious Worship, England and Wales. Report and Tables*, p. clviii.

²⁵ BPP 1852- 53 LXXXIX (1690), pp. clix – clx.

A difference of religious belief did not appear to be an impediment in Hertford or Hitchin as members of all churches came together in the aid of a good cause, irrespective of denomination. An early example of this can be seen in the establishment of the Back Street School in Hitchin in 1810. The ethos of the school was to provide an education “without interfering in the religious tenets of parents’ wishes”, and founded under the aegis of the British and Foreign School Society with eight trustees representing the established church and nine representing the dissenters.²⁶ In similar vein, the Quaker Phebe Lucas recalled that her aunt “took an active part in conducting the various charities in the town”, working with the vicar’s wife, Sarah Wiles.²⁷ She and S. Wiles can be found, amongst others, in a one sheet record of the 1825 meeting of the subscribers to the Hitchin Lying in Charity.²⁸ In Hertford, the builder, George Hancock was a regular worshipper at the established church, but would also go to the Friends’ house.²⁹ The Fancy Fair, held in 1851, in aid of the Cowbridge Chapel Sunday school made an appeal to all those with an interest in religious education for articles, which was “nobly responded to”.³⁰ At the end of the century, the mayor of Hertford could report, with pleasure, on the £140 made through a bazaar and free entertainments for the Catholic schools, as it was for the “school of religion he professed and loved”.³¹

The century saw a diminution in the number of Friends based at the Hitchin meeting, decreasing from 200 in 1750 to 100 in 1850.³² Some of this movement was a result of marriage to a non-Quaker as it was not until 1860 that marriage where only one party was a Friend was allowed.³³ However, for many it was a conscious move into the Church of England, supporting Prochaska’s view on the coming together of the Dissenters and Church

²⁶ BPP 1834, Vol. XXII, *Further report of the commissioners appointed in pursuance of an act of Parliament, intituled “an act for appointing commissioners to continue the inquiries concerning charities in England and Wales”*, pp. 310 - 2.

²⁷ J. Lucas, *Phebe’s Hitchin Book* (Hitchin, 2009), p. 55.

²⁸ H.A.L.S. 67563, *Hitchin Lying in Charity*.

²⁹ H.A.L.S., D/EHx/F23, *George Hancock, Hertford*, entry for 9 March 1851.

³⁰ *Hertford Mercury*, 12 April 1851.

³¹ *Hertfordshire Mercury*, 23 April 1898.

³² R. Hine, *The History of Hitchin*, Vol. II, p. 212.

³³ G. E. Bryant and G. P. Baker, *A Quaker Journal*, Vol. I, p. 24 and Vol. II, p. 537

of England on some doctrinal issues.³⁴ In Hitchin, Mary Thompson resigned from the Society of Friends in 1876 followed by her sister, Catherine, in 1877.³⁵ Both women were active in service to their community but by the 1870s they both appeared to espouse the view that this was not a unique attribute of the Quaker movement and they could continue their way of life under the Church of England.³⁶ Although Hine attributes this to a desire for the sacraments, a common bond between them and the members of the Church of England may have been a shared interest in the society where they lived. Anyone who was concerned with social stability would have an interest in integrating those who had moved into the towns.³⁷ Mary Thompson in particular was active in the slum area of Hitchin, earning herself the title of “Angel of Queen Street”.³⁸ Another factor in the sisters’ decision to leave the Society of Friends may have been that there were some advantages to attending a religious service with a recognised pattern of ritual although Mary Thompson’s responses to the Psalms were recalled as being idiosyncratic.³⁹ They also did not have the freedom and licence available to their brother.⁴⁰

Religion and philanthropy were linked but by the later years of the century the clergy were being accused as being the main instigators of and supporters of the old system of relief of the poor.⁴¹ This exposes a problem with Victorian philanthropy, a problem encapsulated by the title of a paper by Octavia Hill, “The Importance of aiding the Poor without Almsgiving”.⁴² On the one hand the New Poor Law had been put in place to ensure that the work-shy and indolent were not rewarded, but did the existence of charitable giving undermine these principles and weaken the Victorian maxim of “self help”?⁴³ To the

³⁴ F. K. Prochaska, *Women and Philanthropy*, p. 8.

³⁵ R. L. Hine, *The History of Hitchin* Vol. II, p. 212.

³⁶ R. L. Hine, *Hitchin Worthies*, pp. 322 -336.

³⁷ D. Owen, *English Philanthropy*, p. 135.

³⁸ R. L. Hine, *Hitchin Worthies*, pp. 344 – 355.

³⁹ Hitchin Museum, *Letter to Reginald Hine from Grace Hall, dated 12 May 1929 in R. L. Hine’s notes for Hitchin Worthies*.

⁴⁰ Lawson Thompson ensured he had a seat near the door at the Hitchin meeting so that at any hint of a long drawn out prayer, he could slip out into the garden for a cigarette. See R. L. Hine, *Hitchin Worthies*, footnote to p. 342.

⁴¹ C. E. Maurice, ed., *Life of Octavia Hill* (London, 1913), p. 257.

⁴² N. Goose and L. Moden, *A History of Doughty’s Hospital, 1687 – 2009* (Hatfield, 2010), pp. 51 – 3; G. Finlayson, *Citizen, State and Social Welfare*, pp. 72 – 80.

⁴³ G. Finlayson, *Citizen, State, and Social Welfare*, pp. 77 – 80; G. E. Mingay, *Rural Life in Victorian England* (Stroud, 1976), pp. 99 - 100.

Victorians, the rich man was in his castle and the poor man at his gate; it behoved the rich to help the poor be self reliant, not dependent.⁴⁴

In addition to religion and awareness of local issues being motivators, charitable work provided the opportunity to consort with the rich and famous, inspiring the comment that the English managed to combine the pleasure of doing good while getting drunk with the rich.⁴⁵ At local level, the wife of the artisan could be found selling items at the fancy fair with the lady of the manor.⁴⁶ The opportunity to see the great and the good was also an attraction for the customer of the bazaar. William Lucas, noted in his diary for May 1847 that, “Eliza, Martha and I called at a bazaar for the benefit of the Irish, where we had the honour of buying bags, purses etc., of Marchionesses, Countesses, and other great ladies who were displaying their charms and selling their wares at 2/6 admission. We saw some most complete specimens of aristocratic beauty, and could form some idea of the fascinating manner of the highest bred people; ease without familiarity, grace and beauty without any appearance of consciousness are characteristics of this class.”⁴⁷ That there is no trace of irony elsewhere in the diary would suggest that the “honour” of spending money is a statement of fact.

A bazaar was a means of raising significant sums of money for various charities. Those advertised in *The Times* have been estimated as making amounts ranging from £1,000 to £25,000.⁴⁸ The one attended by the Lucas family took place at the Regent’s Park barracks, patronised by the Queen and Prince Albert on the Thursday, and opened to the public, at the charge of 2/6d, on the Friday and Saturday, on which days “it may be recommended to all benevolent and sightseeing persons to attend.”⁴⁹ It was noted that articles at the bazaar, which might be fairly charged at sixpence or a shilling were priced at five shillings, “and in some instances double that amount, without the slightest compunction,” with receipts at the

⁴⁴ D. Owen, *English Philanthropy*, p. 245.

⁴⁵ D. Owen, *English Philanthropy*, p. 166.

⁴⁶ F. K. Prochaska, *Women and Philanthropy*, p. 65.

⁴⁷ G. E. Bryant and G. F. Baker, *A Quaker Journal*, Vol. II, p. 392.

⁴⁸ F. K. Prochaska, *Women and Philanthropy*, p. 54.

⁴⁹ *The Times*, 27 May 1847, Times Digital Archive, infotrac.galegroup.com, consulted 9 December 2009.

door on the first day realising over £1,000.⁵⁰ In the provinces a four day Grand Fancy Bazaar in aid of the infant school for the deaf and dumb had taken £4,400 by the second day, thanks to “female eloquence”.⁵¹ By comparison, a two day bazaar in aid of the Cowbridge Chapel Sunday School in Hertford raised a smaller, but significant, sum of £176.⁵² This fits the estimate that smaller, local, bazaars raised between £100 and £1,000.⁵³

3.2 Motives for women

For many women, philanthropy was part of their remit. It was the expected way of life for many a woman living at the rectory or manse, but generally unrecorded except for an occasional glimpse through an obituary. The death of the wife of Reverend F. G. Marchant, minister of Tilehouse Baptist church in Hitchin, for example, was the time to recall the high esteem in which she was held for her “valuable help and counsel to the poor”.⁵⁴ Although Charlotte Brontë was a successful author, as the surviving daughter of a parson, it behoved her to continue her work in his parish. Her neighbours had become rich through woollen manufacture, but in spite of her standing, she was not on their visiting list. “She goes to see the poor – teaches at the Schools most gently & constantly, - but the richer sort of people despise her for her poverty, - & they would have nothing in common if they did meet.”⁵⁵ Mrs Gaskell herself, as a minister’s wife, was frequently soliciting goods or money to help with poor relief, or thanking the donors. Her (unmarried) daughters were also closely involved. It was they who were begging for “scraps of cloth” to manage a cape or cloak for ten old women and a benefactor was informed that the recipients of the extra 6d. a week were old women “my daughters know well”.⁵⁶

William Lucas paid tribute to his mother for many qualities, none the least to her ministry to the Society of Religious Friends and her devotion to the poor, commenting that “As a minister she was highly esteemed. She did not preach long sermons, but I never heard anyone who condensed so much into a few words. Much of her time was spent in visiting

⁵⁰ *Freeman’s Journal and Daily Commercial*, May 29 1847, infotrac.galegroup.com, consulted 9 December 2009.

⁵¹ *Manchester Times*, Saturday 7 May 1859, Issue 73.

⁵² *Hertfordshire Mercury*, 12 April 1851.

⁵³ F. K. Prochaska, *Women and Philanthropy*, p. 54.

⁵⁴ *Hertfordshire Mercury*, 9 April 1887.

⁵⁵ J. Chapple and A. Shelston, eds., *Further letters of Mrs Gaskell*, (Manchester, 2003), p. 101.

⁵⁶ J. Chapple and A. Shelston, eds., *Further Letters of Mrs Gaskell*, pp. 205 and 235.

the poor, especially in cases of sickness, and she was well qualified to minister to their temporal and spiritual wants.” On her death in February 1852, he recorded that “when her strength permitted she was indefatigable in visiting the poor, more particularly those who were suffering from illness, and a considerable portion of the morning was generally devoted to this duty.”⁵⁷ His mother’s ministry was as important to William Lucas as her role as wife and mother.

The Salvation Army, established in 1865, also recognised that women could be active participants, thanks to the initiative of Catherine Booth, wife of the founder, who began to preach in 1860.⁵⁸ By this date, it was principally the Salvation Army which espoused a tradition of female leadership and preachers. The Methodists, apart from a few breakaway groups, stopped the practice in 1803 although Miss Adeline Waddy was to be found at the end of the century conducting evangelical services at the chapel in Hitchin.⁵⁹ Whilst the number of women preachers in the Quaker community may have declined, women still played an important part in the governance of the Society of Friends.⁶⁰ By 1900, the total membership of the London Yearly Meeting comprised 9,064 women and 8,089 men. Elders and Overseers were in the same proportion with 825 women and 813 men.⁶¹

Whilst the dissenting churches did allow some equality in the participation of women, the nineteenth century saw a growth in the opportunities in the voluntary sector for all women. Although the leadership of the Bristol Auxiliary Bible Society was entirely male, even in the early years of the century, the input of women was significant, yielding some 20 per cent of the income of the society in 1823.⁶² Other societies where women were significant subscribers were the 1900 list for the Church Missionary Society (49%), the 1885 list for the Trinitarian Bible Society (53%), the 1820 list for London Society for the Encouragement of Faithful Female Servants (56%), the 1859 list for the Society for Supplying Home Teachers

⁵⁷ G. E. Bryant and G. F. Baker, *A Quaker Journal*, Vol. I, p. 24; Volume II, p.475.

⁵⁸ www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk, consulted 4 September 2009.

⁵⁹ *Hertfordshire Mercury*, 18 March 1893. (Adeline was the youngest daughter of the Reverend Samuel Waddy, founder of Wesley College).

⁶⁰ L. Davidoff and C. Hall, *Family Fortunes*, p. 137.

⁶¹ Library of the Religious Society of Friends, J. North, compiler, *Women in the Society of Friends*, February 1976.

⁶² M. Gorsky, *Patterns of Philanthropy*, p. 168.

and Books in Moon's Type, [embossed letters for the blind], (58%), the 1900 list for the Society for Promoting Christianity amongst the Jews (59%) and the 1900 list for the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (69%).⁶³ The Institution for the Employment of Needlewomen had the most significant proportion of women subscribers, accounting for 75 per cent of total number and 72 per cent of its income. In the same year, the Society for the Abolition of Capital Punishment could only muster seven per cent of its income from women subscribers, thus confirming a theory that women supported causes familiar to them. This sample, however, contains an eclectic mix of causes dating from 1801 to 1893, with most of the group of twenty clustered around mid-century. The sums generated by women subscribers ranged from £15 to £200, but a sense of the importance of mission can be seen in the 39 per cent contribution from women to the Irish Evangelical Society in 1853 which, in financial terms, was the biggest beneficiary of female support with £1,868 contributed out of a total of £4,830.⁶⁴

Whilst support of needlewomen may have been a cause close to many a woman's heart, there were other causes which might also attract a more secular frame of mind such as sanitary reform with Lord Shaftesbury's exhortation that "there isn't a woman in this room who couldn't save the lives of four or five children within the next six months; and this without giving up one of your daily duties, one of your pleasures, one even of your frivolities, if you choose."⁶⁵ However, by the end of the century, it was the church and missionary societies who were most reliant on the support of women. For the Church Missionary Society, the London City Mission and the British and Foreign Bible Society women formed around half the number of total subscribers.⁶⁶

Philanthropy provided an outlet for intellect and energy. Florence Nightingale described life as living from meal to meal with a little worsted work and Beatrice Webb, neé Potter, wrote in 1879 of her "perfectly lonely life and want of employment which makes life almost torture." Her older sister broke free of her role of the dutiful daughter, designated to look after ageing parents, and "eventually received a small allowance from her father" and

⁶³ F. K. Prochaska, *Women and Philanthropy*, Appendix 1.

⁶⁴ F. K. Prochaska, *Women and Philanthropy*, Appendix V.

⁶⁵ C. E. Maurice, ed., *Life of Octavia Hill*, p. 149.

⁶⁶ F. K. Prochaska, *Women and Philanthropy*, Appendix 1.

established herself in London working as Octavia Hill's full-time assistant from 1876 until her marriage in 1883.⁶⁷ The ability to indulge in pursuits outside the home was constrained by what was seen as proper amongst certain sectors of the population. Involvement in some good work did provide a valid reason for escape. Doubtless there were also real life examples mirroring Marian Maudsley's use of visits to Nannie Robson as an alibi for an illicit tryst.⁶⁸

It is difficult to measure the contribution to society made by the female philanthropists. The census returns do not provide useful information, even on those employed on work for charities. Louisa Twining was the Superintendent of two homes, one for epileptic and incurable women and another for workhouse girls and was an active campaigner for the Workhouse Visiting Society. Her contribution was such that she was, in 1861, invited to give evidence to the Select Committee on the Administration and Relief of the Poor.⁶⁹ The 1881 census, however, merely noted that she was a "gentlewoman". Octavia Hill was running housing schemes from the 1860s and a founder member of the Charity Organisation Society. She was acknowledged as an expert on housing and in 1884 was called as one of the chief witnesses to the Royal Commission on the Housing of the Working Classes.⁷⁰ The 1881 census recorded that she was a teacher of Latin and Drawing at the school headed by her sister. Also included in the household was Harriet Yorke, Octavia's life-long companion. Although Harriet became treasurer of the National Trust, the census recorded that she was a visitor with no occupation.

This lack of recognition persists. Octavia Hill's achievements have been acknowledged. She was regarded as an expert on working class housing but she has been accused of seeking solutions to immediate problems rather than understand the social process.⁷¹ Similarly, Angela Burdett-Coutts has been viewed as a failure as her building projects did not become a

⁶⁷ E. Ross, *Slum Travelers* (sic), pp. 21 – 2. (The reference to her small allowance might suggest a subsistence existence in a small household. The 1881 census recorded that the head of household at 26 Grosvenor Road was Catherine Potter, a "Manager of Artisan Dwellings". The household comprised Ann Townhend, age 38, Secretary Clerk, plus a parlour maid, butler, cook and servant).

⁶⁸ L. P. Hartley, *The Go-Between* (London; Penguin, 1997), pp. 240 – 4.

⁶⁹ T. Deane, "Late nineteenth-century philanthropy", in A. Digby and J. Stewart, eds., *Gender, Health and Welfare*, pp. 122 – 4.

⁷⁰ C. Morrell, "Octavia Hill and Women's networks in housing" in A. Digby and J. Stewart, *Gender, Health and Welfare*, p. 96.

⁷¹ F. K. Prochaska, *Women and Philanthropy*, pp. 133 and 233.

role model as they depended solely on the willingness of a wealthy woman to give away her money.⁷² Although their achievements are now being questioned, Hill and Burdett-Coutts were achieving improvements when little else was being done. Twenty-first-century attitudes distort the priorities of the day.⁷³

Undoubtedly there was a social element to involvement in charitable work with a network of women linked by friendship, education, and marriage.⁷⁴ Philanthropy enabled people “to dine well and discuss the local poor”.⁷⁵ A bazaar for whatever the cause was the opportunity for ladies to meet, to be seen, and an event for a little light flirtation in a society where women were not given many opportunities of being in the public gaze.⁷⁶ This was recorded by Trollope. Although his fictional bazaar raised more than eight hundred pounds, whether the beneficiaries, the orphans of negro soldiers fighting in the American Civil War, “were ever the better for the money I am not able to say.”⁷⁷ The fun to be had in participating in the bazaar and the act of giving were enough; what happened to the money was irrelevant.⁷⁸

If motivation for philanthropy was a mixture of religious belief, what was accepted behaviour, an opportunity for some amusement, a genuine desire to improve the lot of the disadvantaged and to educate and thus control the poor there was, for women, another compelling reason. On marriage, Dorothea Casaubon became subservient to her husband and his wishes, but some freedom of movement could be obtained through the normal behaviour of someone of her class and situation. She would, “occasionally drive into Middlemarch alone, on little errands of shopping or charity such as occur to every lady of any wealth when she lives within three miles of a town.”⁷⁹ What did occur during the nineteenth century was a swelling of the number of women involved. Meriel, born in 1840, the oldest child of the

⁷² D. Owen, *English Philanthropy*, p. 378. Owen does, however, note that she recognised the needs of those she housed, providing, for example, the costermongers with accommodation for their donkeys.

⁷³ Who would now record the death of the baby of a family existing on charity that even if it had survived, “it is difficult to see what benefit would have accrued to itself, its relations or the community”? Article by Anna Martin, 1858 – 1937, an associate of the Bermondsey Settlement quoted in E. Ross, ed. *Slum Travelers* (sic), p. 156.

⁷⁴ C. Morrell, “Octavia Hill and Women’s networks in housing”, pp. 100 – 2.

⁷⁵ L. Colley, *Britons, Forging the Nation* (New Haven, 1992), p. 95.

⁷⁶ F. K. Prochaska, *Women and Philanthropy*, pp. 67 – 8.

⁷⁷ A. Trollope, *Miss Mackenzie*, (OUP edition, 1988), p. 369.

⁷⁸ B. Wilson, *The Making of Victorian Values*, p. 96.

⁷⁹ G. Eliot, *Middlemarch* (Penguin edition, 1965), p. 269.

fourth Baron Lyttelton, took over the responsibility of senior female in the household on the death of her mother. She visited the village school, sometimes taught there and visited the poor “as she had always done since she was old enough”.⁸⁰ This was her recognised role. The rise in servant keeping enabled the middle-class woman to devolve household chores and thus had the opportunity to emulate the behaviour of the upper class. This requirement for reliable servants has been attributed as giving women an incentive to make causes such as orphanages and industrial schools where woman and children could be taught the “habits of honest labour” a priority.⁸¹ However, whilst recognising the constraints of identifying women as subscribers to charitable societies, it would appear from Prochaska’s own evidence, that the prime beneficiaries of their efforts were churches, chapels and missionary endeavours at home and abroad.⁸² This pattern is mirrored by the beneficiaries of fundraising events, particularly in Hertford, and Hitchin in the nineteenth century.

Philanthropy provided an opportunity for women to operate outside the home, for perfectly respectable reasons, and build on friendships and create new connections. Not only were there the links through marriage, friendship and schooling, but the setting up of a society, with a good cause, enabled women to meet.⁸³ Networks were not circumscribed by geography. The *Ipswich Journal* recorded many local bazaars but the ladies of Ipswich found opportunity to be present at the Manchester Exchange supporting the Temperance Alliance and were worthy of special mention on the variety of slippers on their stall: “the most appropriate articles which a temperate bazaar can obtain; for in proportion as slippers are worn, fireside enjoyments are appreciated and the public house so deserted.”⁸⁴ Even the support of a small, local, bazaar in aid of Cowbridge Chapel Sunday School in 1851 extended beyond Hertford. Naturally, Mrs Bowbay, the Minister’s wife was a stall holder, but also officiating at stalls were Mrs Heathcote, wife of the Minister in Hitchin, Mrs and Miss Besley of Buntingford, Miss Trigg and Mrs Pryor of Buntingford and Miss Rackshaw of London. Lady Mahon, wife of the non-resident M.P. dutifully donated £2.⁸⁵ This indicates a strong network of women, and also some young women. Mrs Heathcote was aged 23, with three

⁸⁰ S. Fletcher, *Victorian Girls*, p. 48.

⁸¹ F. K. Prochaska, *Women and Philanthropy*, p. 149.

⁸² F. K. Prochaska, *Women and Philanthropy*, Appendix V.

⁸³ A. Digby and J. Stewart, *Gender, Health and Welfare*, p. 93.

⁸⁴ *Manchester Times*, 26 April 1856, Issue 736.

⁸⁵ *Hertfordshire Mercury*, 12 April 1851.

children under the age of four; similarly, Mrs Benjamin Young, wife of the Alderman and Brewer in Hertford was 25 with, again, three children, under the age of three. The Quaker community provided another network. Winnie Seebom's sister helped with a bazaar at Darlington in aid of the hospital.⁸⁶ Stalls included one run by the Richardsons, a prominent Newcastle Quaker family, and items for sale included a watercolour sketch of Hitchin and a silk hand screen by Miss A. M. Lucas.⁸⁷

3.3 Charitable activity in Hertford and Hitchin

Hertford and Hitchin had a number of long-established charities, some dating back to the seventeenth century. An interest in these by central government began with the inquiries into the existence and conduct of endowed charities in England and Wales by the 1833 Royal Commission. There were thirty six listed in the 1834 report on Hitchin.⁸⁸ Broadly these covered education, some provision of apprenticeships for boys, the establishment and maintenance of housing for the poor through almshouses, and sums to provide money or bread to the deserving poor. Three schools in Hitchin were the beneficiaries of endowments yielding a regular income, the Free School (for boys), the Girls' Charity School and the Charity School in Back Street (the British Schools). Revenue for the Free school in 1832/3 was £137.16s.0d; for the Girls' School £62.6s.1d and the Back Street school received £83.10s.0d with additional revenue of £27 through the pupils' weekly contribution.

The other major beneficiaries were the almshouses. John Skynner's, established at the end of the seventeenth century, had investments generating £72.2s.1d in 1833, and those for Ralph Skynner's almshouse, £88.10s.0d.⁸⁹ For the rest, the revenues were small and parcelled together to provide "Bread Charity" and "Money Fund". The "Bread Money" funds yielded £12.4s.0d. in 1833 but the "Money Fund" totalled £73.3s.0d for the same year and was customarily was used by the churchwardens to make a twice yearly distribution of sums from 1 shilling to 2s.6d. to the poor of the parish. Whilst this may have been seen by the

⁸⁶ H.A.L.S. D/ESc C1, *Winnie Seebom's letters*.

⁸⁷ *Northern Echo*, Wednesday 22 October 1884. (Alice Mary Lucas was daughter of William Lucas).

⁸⁸ BPP 1834, Vol. XXI.I, *Further report of the commissioners appointed in pursuance of an act of Parliament and passed in the 1st and 2nd years of His Present Majesty, c. 34, intituled, "an act for appointing commissioners to continue the inquiries concerning charities in England and Wales for two years, and from thence to the end of the next session of Parliament."*

⁸⁹ BPP 1834, Vol. XXI.I, *Charity Commissioners' Reports, Hertfordshire*.

churchwardens as a pragmatic way of dealing with small sums, the Commission was beginning to flex its muscles and tartly noted that “This being a useless mode of application of so large a sum, we recommend that it should be employed in relieving necessitous and deserving poor persons of the parish not receiving parochial relief, or in some other efficient manner.”⁹⁰

The commissioners also had advice for the trustees of Jacob Marsom’s Charity. The rent from the “Rose and Crown” was to provide apprenticeships for poor, fatherless, boys to freemen of the city of London. Since 1804 only two such apprenticeships had been made. The trustees explained that relatives were unwilling to send children to the metropolis and it had been difficult to find suitable masters. They did concede that there had been insufficient publicity and would do more in the future. They were also advised that repairs that had been done to the “Rose and Crown” had amounted to £300 in the past thirty years and that such work in future should only be done after an estimate for the work had been approved by the trustees. These were the only criticisms of charities in Hitchin, apart from a regular note throughout the report that the trustees of a number of charities, (the Free School, the Girls’ Charity school, John and Ralph Skynners’ almshouses, Daniel Warner’s almshouse, Edward Draper’s Charity and Ralph Skynner’s Charity) were the same, which may be a hint that the commissioners found this a little worrying, but could not find fault.

A feature of the endowed charities is that women were represented as donors and recipients. Elizabeth Simpson, for example, left money for the establishment of an almshouse for protestant dissenters and support of the Back Street Meeting House. The Girls’ Charity school was established by Dame Mary Radcliffe’s gift in 1719, and although it expired in 1807, there were further benefactions.⁹¹ The William Chambers Charity had cleared its debts incurred by repairs to property and in Easter 1833 was able to donate £20 for additional clothing for the 36 poor girls at the charity school and a further £20 to the ladies association for the relief of the sick and infirm poor. Where records do exist, however, the evidence suggests that the management of charities was firmly in the hands of men well into the

⁹⁰ BPP 1834, Vol. XXI.I, p. 330.

⁹¹ H.A.L.S. D/P53 25/17, *Charities Hitchin*.

twentieth century. The “Barley money” dispensed to poor widows in Hitchin, who filled the essential criteria of piety in that they were “constant frequenters” of the church, existed through money bequeathed by Mrs Ewesden, Mrs Godfrey and Mrs Harris, (or Arris), early in the nineteenth century.⁹² This was a charity enabled by women for the benefit of women.⁹³ When it came to making up the number of trustees to the requisite eight in 1883, it was, even at this late date, gentlemen who were invited to join the board.⁹⁴

At the same date (1833), Hertford had fewer charities. Five were vested in the Corporation of Hertford and the remaining 14 fell under the jurisdiction of the separate parishes of All Saints, St Andrew and St John. The contrast between Hitchin and Hertford is in the more modest provision of almshouse accommodation and less investment in education. The only charity listed in the parish of St John is also the only record of almshouses in Hertford, the four almshouses in Butcherley Green endowed by Lady Mary Harrison in 1705.⁹⁵ The charities vested in the corporation included the Richard Hale Grammar School for Boys, established in 1664 and the Green Coat School, which in addition to tuition in reading, writing and arithmetic provided pupils with a complete set of clothing each year. In theory, the George Butteris Charity and the Benjamin Cherry Charity both made provision for support of a boy from the town at Christ’s Hospital. The commissioners noted that nothing had come of the latter and it needed review.⁹⁶

By this date, there were two schools for poor girls in Hitchin, the Girls’ Charity school and the British Schools in Back Street. There is a note to the effect that Benjamin Cherry’s will of 1817 gave £300 to the Green Coat School in Hertford, with £21 to the girls’ school.⁹⁷ There is no record of a girls’ school in the commissioner’s 1834 report and a reminiscence later in the century refers to boys only, recalling that some 50 years ago, when the

⁹² BPP 1834, Vol. XXII, p. 330.

⁹³ H.A.L.S. D/P53/25/4 and D/P53/25/25, *Charities Hitchin*.

⁹⁴ H.A.L.S. D/P53/25/11.

⁹⁵ H.A.L.S. D/EHx/Q4, *Benefactions to the town and borough of Hertford*.

⁹⁶ BPP 1835, Vol. XXI pt1.1, XXI, pt II.1, *Further report of the commissioners appointed in pursuance of an act of Parliament, made and passed in the 1st and 2nd years of His Present Majesty, c.34, intituled, “an act for appointing commissioners to continue the inquiries concerning charities in England and Wales for two years, and from thence to the end of the then next session of Parliament*, p. 379.

⁹⁷ H.A.L.S. D/EHx/Q3, *Report of Inspection into the former municipal charities of Hertford*.

Corporation was trustee of the school, there were more boys, (40 as opposed to the 20 in 1893), and they were cleaner and tidier than now.⁹⁸ This is confirmed by William Upton's 1847/8 survey which recorded that it was a school for 60 boys.⁹⁹ That a girls' school must have existed is substantiated by the trade directories for the 1850s. It was a separate establishment with Mrs Sarah Skerman as mistress in 1851 and 1855 and Miss Jane Lewis in 1859.¹⁰⁰ Whilst it may have been viewed as less important than the boys' school, it was a recognised feature of the town. In a report dated 1851, one of the attractions of the bazaar in aid of Cowbridge Sunday School was a set of six dolls representing the charity schools in the town. These were a boy and girl from the Blue-coat school (Christ's Hospital), a workhouse schoolboy, a Green coat boy and girl and a Brown School girl.¹⁰¹ The latter was a school of industry for girls and had been established in Hertford in 1793 by three Quaker women. Unlike the boys' schools it was supported by voluntary subscription and the occasional sermon.¹⁰² The accounts for a year at some point in the middle of the nineteenth century show about 150 subscribers, half of whom were women.¹⁰³

As with Hitchin, however, most money accruing through endowed charities was directed to the local poor. The Hertford charities had their income enhanced by Miss Dimsdale's bequest which had substantially increased the largesse available. In 1714, the total distributed was about £60 (apportioned between the three parishes of St Andrew's, St John's and All Saints), rising to about £81 in 1782.¹⁰⁴ The charities administered by the borough of Hertford's trustees had receipts of £286. 17s. 3d in 1833 and although Miss Ann Dimsdale had stipulated that her bequest of £500 be invested and the income be distributed to the poor who were "most worthy and proper objects" of her bequest and "who should not have received parochial relief within the space of three calendar months", the commissioners noted that the distribution of sums ranging from six to 12 shillings, that had taken place in January 1833, made no distinction as to whether or not the recipient was on parochial relief.¹⁰⁵ In 1833, the allocation by parish was St Andrew £106.2s.0d, All Saints £46.13s.0d and St John

⁹⁸ *Hertfordshire Mercury*, 6 January 1894.

⁹⁹ J. Burg, *Religion in Hertfordshire*, p. 38.

¹⁰⁰ Kelly, *Kelly's Directory of Hertfordshire 1851*, p. 201, 1855, p. 212 and 1859, p. 340.

¹⁰¹ *Hertford Mercury*, 12 April 1851.

¹⁰² *Hertford Mercury*, 30 August 1856.

¹⁰³ H.A.L.S. D/EL/Q33, *Hertford School of Industry for Girls*.

¹⁰⁴ H.A.L.S. *Hertford Corporation Records Vol. 76, Charities Hertford*.

¹⁰⁵ BPP 1835, Vol. XXI, p. 394.

£73.10s.0d.¹⁰⁶ The pattern of allocation changed during the course of the century to reflect a growing population in the Butcherley Green area in the St John's parish, and a corresponding decrease in the share of the pot for the poor of All Saints (see Table 21, p. 107). However, the poor parishioners of All Saints had access to another charity which funded a weekly soup kitchen from January to March.¹⁰⁷ Whilst the sums generated were of the same order of some charities in Hitchin, in Hertford most of the money was distributed to the poor, whereas in Hitchin, similar sums were being used for education and maintenance of almshouses. Whilst the £73 in the "Money Fund" distributed to the poor in Hitchin was deemed to be an unsatisfactory way of using such a large sum, apart from a comment that the trustees may not have been adhering to the letter of Miss Dimsdale's bequest, larger sums were being distributed to the poor of Hertford.

The 1833 report on charities in Hertford contained some tentative criticism. There had been, for example, five separate arrears in rents due to the St John's parish charity, extending from 34 to 102 years. Although the trustees had tried for payment and been successful in just one case, the report noted that "they could, however, very probably have done more, but did not

Table 21: Allocation of Miss Dimsdale and Grass Money - Hertford

	1834	1850	1860	1870	1880	1890	1900	1910
St John	£78.9s.6d	£66.11s.0d	£73.5s.6d	£86.11s.11d	£85.17s.0d	£67.19s.6d	£73.12s.0d	£77.12s.6d
All Saints	£42.1s.0d	£40.18s.0d	£62.1s.0d	£60.6s.6d	£54.17s.0d	£25.3s.0d	£21.17s.0d	£21.6s.6d
Brickendon	£32.6s.6d	£19.11s.6d	£41.0s.0d	£42.15s.6d	£32.2s.6d	£24.1s.0d	£19.8s.6d	£18.15s.6d
St Andrews	£91.11s.0d	£86.11s.6d	£97.1s.6d	£87.13s.0d	£96.2s.6d	£49.3s.6d	£49.3s.6d	£59.2s.6d
Totals	£245.8s.0d	£213.12s.0d	£273.8s.0d	£277.6s.6d	£268.19.0d	£171.3s.6d	£164.1s.0d	£176.17s.0d

Source: H.A.L.S. D/EHx/Q5, *Account book of the trustees of the poor of Hertford*.

¹⁰⁶ BPP 1835, Vol. XXI Pt 1.1, XXI Pt 11.1, 1835, p.394, *Charity Commissioners' Reports, Hertfordshire*.

¹⁰⁷ *Hertfordshire Mercury*, 7 January 1893.

feel themselves authorised to go to much expense.”¹⁰⁸ Whether or not the trustees felt, by these comments, that it behoved them to make further efforts is unknown. By 1867 the commission was recording no income for these almshouses.¹⁰⁹ In fact they did not exist. The dowager Marchioness Townshend had decided that they needed to be replaced. A new almshouse was opened in 1855 for six widows in the more salubrious All Saints parish. This had the advantage of being a healthier location and the inhabitants would also be able to attend church without fatigue or trouble.¹¹⁰

By 1867, there was again a similarity between the two towns with both having gross charitable income of around £900.¹¹¹ There was another town in Hertfordshire, of similar size, receiving a similar income. Watford had endowed charities generating £943 but distribution of the total varied town by town, see Table 22, p. 108. Again, in 1867, it is the almshouses in Hitchin which accounted for the highest endowment, with education and relief

Table 22: Distribution of income from endowed charities - Hertfordshire - 1867

	Total gross income	Almshouses	Education	The poor	Clergy and church	Other
Hitchin	£992.12s.0d	£401.14s.5d	£345.15s.5d	£123.7s.6d	£24.4s.2d	£99.10s.6d
Hertford	£903.7s.1d	-	£235.15s.11d	£373.9s.1d	£135.10s.0d	£157.12s.11d
Watford	£943.0s.0d	£265.12s.7d	£215.0s.3d	£18.16s.5d	£295.10s.0d	£108.1s.9d
St Albans	£1976.9s.9d	£1114.18s.6d	£166.3s.9d	£357.7s.9d	£299.16s.0d	£88.3s.9d
Hemel Hempstead	£122.4s.7d	£60.0s.0d	£30.0s.0d	£7.12s.0d	-	£24.12s.7d
Hatfield	£107.14s.0d	£14.3s.6d	£40.2s.0d	£16.16s.7d	£22.14s.3d	£13.17s.8d

Source: BPP 1867 – 68, Vol. LII (part I), *General Digest of the charities mentioned in the 14th report of the Charity Commissioners, Hertfordshire.*

of the poor accounting for the rest. As with the 1833 report, Hertford spent similar sums on educational charities and relief of the poor. Watford’s support of its almshouses was recorded as £265.12s.7d., however, unlike Hertford and Hitchin, about £295 was directed to the support of churches and clergy, making it as large a spender in this area as the cathedral

¹⁰⁸ BPP 1835, Vol. XXI, pt1.1, Vol. XXI, Pt 11.1.

¹⁰⁹ BPP 1867- 68, Vol. LII Pt 1.3, LII Pt II.1, *General Digest of Endowed Charities for Counties and Cities mentioned in the Fourteenth Report of Charity Commissioners.*

¹¹⁰ *Hertford Mercury*, 15 April 1854 and 27 October 1855.

¹¹¹ BPP 1867 – 68, *General digest of the charities mentioned in the 14th report of the Charity Commissioner, Summary of Hertfordshire.*

city of St Albans. Support of the clergy did not feature in the accounts of Hertford and Hitchin. St Albans was another town with almshouses, accounting for most of its annual spend in 1867 with maintenance of church and clergy the second largest recipient. In the absence of almshouses, education or churches were the prime beneficiaries of endowed charities in Hertfordshire. Bishop's Hatfield had six endowed charities generating around £107 a year, with about £7.0s.0d distributed to the poor and £40 to education. Similarly, Hemel Hempstead was recorded as having income of about £122 a year, with around £16 a year being distributed to the poor but the main recipients were, with £30 each, education and dissenting chapels.

As the century progressed, the commissioners would appear to have become more confident of their status and power and tensions between the inspectors and inspected start to become apparent. From the perspective of the trustees, there was the understandable reaction to an outsider having better ideas on how long standing arrangements could be improved.¹¹² Quantification of charitable giving in the nineteenth century is a challenge.¹¹³ There are few formal records of charities and full runs of annual reports of nineteenth century charities are rare.¹¹⁴ A listing of the endowed charities in Hertford and Hitchin made in 1867 noted several where a report had not been made.¹¹⁵ There were others which were defunct.¹¹⁶

If the evidence given mid-century to the Inspector of Charities in Hertford was representative of a general view, such records may not have been made at all. The trustees of the Green Coat School, for example, had not seen anything in the Charitable Trusts Act that required them to present annual accounts to the vestry and whilst they had, at some previous time, been printed and circulated, this cost money and the practice had been discontinued.¹¹⁷ An awareness of the cost of record-keeping can also be seen in the accounts on the distribution of

¹¹² D. Owen, *English Philanthropy*, p. 299.

¹¹³ D. Owen, *English Philanthropy*, p. 169; N. Goose and L. Moden, *A History of Doughty's Hospital*, p. 109.

¹¹⁴ F. K. Prochaska, *Women and Philanthropy*, p. 28.

¹¹⁵ BPP 1867 – 68, Vol. LII, *General Digest of Endowed Charities for Counties and Cities mentioned in the Fourteenth Report of the Charity Commissioners*.

¹¹⁶ The legacy of Thomas and Margaret Hall was such an example. It was recorded as having no income. BPP, (1867 – 8), Vol. LII Pt I.3, LII Pt. II.1, *General Digest of Endowed Charities for Counties and Cities mentioned in the Fourteenth Report of the Charity Commissioners*.

¹¹⁷ *Hertford Mercury*, 9 May 1857.

the “Barley Money” (around £20 a year) to poor widows in Hitchin where a careful note is made of the price of conforming to the law with special mention of Paternoster’s bill (the local stationers) for charity forms costing 8/6d, making out two charity lists 3/- and two sets of returns to the Charity Commission at a cost of £2.2s.0d.¹¹⁸ The Reverend G. Gainsford spoke against the formation of a school board for Hitchin, not because he was against education and the welfare of young people. It was he who initiated, funded and organised events for money to establish St Saviour’s orphanage.¹¹⁹ His objection was purely on the grounds of cost. By his reckoning, it would cost the parish £1,200 to do something that was currently done for £300.¹²⁰ However, as there would be no means of compelling children to attend school without a board, one was established.

By the 1860s the Charity Commission was understaffed and complaints were being made about their tardiness in dealing with even routine matters.¹²¹ This was a view endorsed by Alderman Armstrong of Hertford who commented that the Charity Commissioners and the Poor Law Board were two of the greatest incubi in the country and particularly “those busy-bodies, the Charity Commissioners, who wanted something to do, and to do it as slowly as possible,” further stating that he had had contact with them on one or two former occasions, “and a more slow, stupid public body did not exist.”¹²² This is a more robust view than Owen’s more benevolent assessment that without a necessary increase in power, the Commission was content to operate on the lines of a government department, dealing with routine matters in a routine way.¹²³

On the other hand, the Commissioners themselves doubtless saw it as their function to ensure that charities were operating efficiently and in line with their stated terms of reference. The report, dated 1857, on the Richard Hale School in Hertford reveals an inspector who was, by turn, concerned at what appeared to be a failing school and baffled as to how this had been

¹¹⁸ H.A.L.S. D/P53 25/5, *Charities Hitchin*.

¹¹⁹ *Hertfordshire Mercury*, 2 January 1886 and 15 July 1886.

¹²⁰ *Hertfordshire Mercury*, 18 April 1871.

¹²¹ D. Owen, *English Philanthropy*, pp. 302 – 303.

¹²² *Hertfordshire Mercury*, 10 February 1883.

¹²³ D. Owen, *English Philanthropy*, p. 299.

allowed to happen.”¹²⁴ The master was unable to offer any information on the bequests associated with the school which was not surprising given that in their 1835 report the Commissioners noted that there nothing was known of these.¹²⁵ It was noted, furthermore, that the school was not in good repair and although the master was held in some affection by pupils and parents (some of whom were former pupils) the main criticism was of the standard of education at the school. There was a two-fold problem. Firstly, in the eyes of the Commissioner the master was elderly and old fashioned. He declined to give his age, but apparently looked about 70.¹²⁶ Secondly, the trustees had no plan for improvement. In fact, it was a matter of some mystery to the inspector, William Brase, what they did. The £40 annuity, due through the will of Richard Hale, for maintenance of the school was paid annually to Mr Longmore, the Town Clerk, Trustee and Treasurer. He had dutifully recorded this as can be seen in his return for the 1850s.¹²⁷ The Commissioner noted that “This receiving and paying the annuity appears to be all that the Governors or Trustees have done in relation to the school”.¹²⁸ Whether or not Mr Longmore took a greater interest in the standard of education at the school is unknown but by the 1880s he was the recipient of letters complaining about the fabric of the school from its new master.¹²⁹ By the 1890s it was the Green Coat School which was causing concern. It was a school which was attractive only to the poorest of the poor because of the gift of clothing associated with it and had attracted an unsatisfactory report from the Education Department.¹³⁰

The sums involved in these long-established charities in Hertford and Hitchin ranged from modest sums to just a few pounds a year and were insufficient. By 1800, charitable trusts had been overtaken, in number and value to the charity, by other forms of giving.¹³¹ A typical case of such funding is that of the Girls’ School of Industry in Hertford whose maintenance was through subscription and the occasional sermon. A personal and household account book for a Hertford woman during the years 1808 to 1810 shows note of regular a penny or even

¹²⁴ H.A.L.S. D/Ehx/Q3, *Report of Inspection into the former municipal charities of Hertford*.

¹²⁵ BPP 1835, Vol. XXI Pt 1.1, XXI Pt 11.1.

¹²⁶ If the 1851 census was accurate the master, Mr Cruttwell, was 62.

¹²⁷ Return from the Charity Trustees in England and Wales of the gross Annual Amount of Receipts and Expenditure, 1853 – 57, 1859 Session I, House of Commons Papers, Accounts and Papers (II) XX, p. 493.

¹²⁸ H.A.L.S. D/Ehx/Q3, *Report of Inspection into the former municipal charities of Hertford*.

¹²⁹ H.A.L.S. D/EL Q13, *Hertford Grammar School*.

¹³⁰ *Hertfordshire Mercury*, 6 January 1894 and 4 March 1893.

¹³¹ G. Finlayson, *Citizen, State, and Social Welfare*, p.59.

sixpence given to a poor person and the more significant contribution recording that she gave 2 shillings to the charity sermon.¹³² A few years later the Baptist Sunday School in Hitchin recorded that the Reverend Hilyard's sermon had raised £21.8s.0 ½ d. in June 1815 and that Mr Middleton had preached a very good sermon on 21 May 1820, with £22.2s.0d. collected at the door. These were popular events. Note was made that the Charity Sermon in 1814 attracted a good attendance. "There was thought to be as many people this evening as ever was known upon any former occasion".¹³³ The sermon was a recognised means of raising money for local charities including those long established, such as the Green Coat School. The Reverend H. Melville preached on their behalf in 1845, thus collecting £27.12s.0d.¹³⁴ It was also the opportunity to focus on societies and respond to immediate needs. One record, covering the years 1845 to 1851, noted sermons for the District Visiting Society, collecting £15.12s.9d., the Church Missionary Society, raising £15.9s.0d., the Propagation of the Gospel, attracting over £12 and the sermon for relief of famine in Ireland and Scotland amassing £31.19s.51/4d.¹³⁵ This latter was clearly a particularly successful one but Reverend Hewitt did not fare so well when he preached for the Infants' school and "gave offence".¹³⁶

The sermon, subscriptions and donations were augmented through the nineteenth century by other fundraising activities such as bazaars and concerts but this did not result in the charitable trusts becoming redundant. The "Grass money" was still being distributed to the poor in Hertford in the twentieth century and similarly, in Hitchin, the charities known as the "Barley Money", to the value of £20, were distributed annually at the Corn Exchange by the churchwardens, giving 5 shillings each to poor widows who were constant frequenters of the church.¹³⁷ Records end in 1908, which may or may not be related to the introduction of old age pensions that year. Large sums may have been generated by other forms of fundraising, to augment existing charitable activity, but it was the state in the shape of local and national government that needed to intervene.¹³⁸

¹³² H.A.L.S. D/EHx/F23, *Personal and household account book of Mrs Sarah Neild*.

¹³³ Hitchin Museum, *Reginald Hine's notes for Hitchin Worthies*.

¹³⁴ H.A.L.S., D/EHx/F87, *George Hancock, Hertford*, entry for 14 August 1845.

¹³⁵ H.A.L.S., D/EHx/F87, *George Hancock*, entries for 20 November 1851, 31 August 1845, 23 March 1851, 21 January 1857.

¹³⁶ H.A.L.S., D/EHx/F87, *George Hancock*, entry for 12 October 1850.

¹³⁷ H.A.L.S. D/P 53 25/5, D/P 53 25/18, 19, *Charities Hitchin*.

¹³⁸ N. Goose and L. Moden, *A History of Doughty's Hospital*, p. 53.

3.4 Women and charity in Hertford and Hitchin

A constraint in quantification of women's contribution is the paucity of surviving evidence.¹³⁹ The Charity Commission was limited to reporting on endowed charities. Where records have been retained, it would appear that the managing committee or trustees of local charities were men. Exceptionally, the undated accounts for the Hertford School of Industry for girls suggest that women played a more important part in this organisation.¹⁴⁰ It would appear from the one set of accounts available that the treasurer was Eliza Ludlow. The list of subscribers also suggests that this was an organisation with a benefit for women and run by women. An incentive for those subscribing a guinea or more annually was the ability to nominate potential pupils and have the girl work for them for two weeks a month. Twenty eight women availed themselves of this facility, mainly the landed proprietors and wives of the professional class with a household comprising more than just one maid of all work. Mrs Ellice of Brickendonbury, for example, was one such subscriber, the wife of a merchant trading to the West Indies, presiding over an establishment of eleven servants. There were altogether some 150 subscribers of whom 71 were women.¹⁴¹ In addition to subscriptions, the accounts note that a sum of £156.8s.5d had been raised by a fancy sale in October.

The pattern of fund raising in Hertford and Hitchin suggests that local efforts were generally directed towards local causes and missionary endeavours. Events supporting other charities outside the neighbourhood were rare and a response to a one-off need. Such an event was the fancy fair held at the Hertford Corn Exchange on 3 January 1856 for the benefit of the wives and families of those serving in the Crimea, although opportunity was taken to use the event to benefit local people. The newspaper reported that total receipts were about £150, including the £18 which was taken at the stall for the Hertford Ragged School.¹⁴² Apart from a report of a garden party, organised by Mrs W. Baker, held in Hertford in 1877, in aid of Lady Burdett Coutts's "Turkish compassionate fund", raising £43, there is no evidence of much interest of causes outside the Hertfordshire borders until the end of the century.

¹³⁹ F. K. Prochaska, *Women and Philanthropy*, p. 28; N. Goose and L. Moden, *A History of Doughty's Hospital*, p. 58; D. Owen, *English Philanthropy*, p. 169.

¹⁴⁰ A manuscript note associated with these accounts refers to a new schoolroom in 1851.

¹⁴¹ HALS, D/EL/Q33, *Hertford School of Industry for Girls*.

¹⁴² *Hertford Mercury*, 5 January 1856.

The Boer War was a catalyst for fundraising for a national cause. The local newspaper printed notices of subscriptions for the Lord Mayor's fund for refugees from Transvaal and the Orange Free State and the fund for assistance of widows and orphans of soldiers and sailors.¹⁴³ The following week saw a more local focus with a notice on the Lord Lieutenant's fund for wives and reservists now serving with the colours.¹⁴⁴ The following June saw a garden fete and gymkhana in aid of the Officers Families fund. The organising committee comprised of women; the gymkhana committee, men. All events, decorated cycles, egg and spoon and musical chairs were segregated, apart from the needle threading competition, which was mixed.¹⁴⁵

The Hertfordshire branch of the Soldiers and Sailors Families Association (S.S.F.A.) was established in January 1895.¹⁴⁶ Mrs Clinton Baker, as president of the Hertford division, initiated an appeal for relief of men serving with the colours in January 1900.¹⁴⁷ The following month a collection for a Hertfordshire bed in the Imperial Yeomanry Hospital was supported by the Countess Cowper who led the way with a donation of £20, with 29 other women contributing towards the total of £115.5s.0d.¹⁴⁸ On a more modest scale, a patriotic concert, organised by the Young Ladies Committee of the Early Closing Association in Hitchin, raised £9.11s.6d. for the S.S.F.A. and £3.7s.6d for the *Daily Mail* Fund.¹⁴⁹

Whilst the families such as the Cowpers at Panshanger supported other causes through, for example, a concert in aid of the Finsbury and Shoreditch Polytechnic and Recreation Ground for Working Lads, reports in the local newspaper of efforts directed to charities outside the county are a rarity.¹⁵⁰ Miss Guttridge was commended at the annual meeting of the Hertford Town Mission in 1882 for her donation of a guinea, raised through the sale of pin cushions and kettle holders made by her. It was noted that other beneficiaries of her sale of

¹⁴³ *Hertfordshire Mercury*, 11 November 1899. (The *Hertford Mercury* became the *Hertfordshire Mercury* in 1872).

¹⁴⁴ *Hertfordshire Mercury*, 18 November 1899.

¹⁴⁵ *Hertfordshire Mercury*, 30 June 1900. The receipts were not published.

¹⁴⁶ *Hertfordshire Mercury*, 5 January 1895.

¹⁴⁷ *Hertfordshire Mercury*, 6 January 1900.

¹⁴⁸ *Hertfordshire Mercury*, 6 January 1900 and 10 February 1900.

¹⁴⁹ *Hertfordshire Mercury*, 7 April 1900.

¹⁵⁰ *Hertfordshire Mercury*, 7 April 1887.

needlework were a ragged school in London and the City of London mission and it was hoped “her excellent example would be followed by other ladies”.¹⁵¹ Whilst her example may have been followed, reports of such small-scale fundraising by individual women rarely merited a report in the local paper. Doubtless there were others, such as Margaret Thompson in Hitchin who undertook to support a native teacher at the mission at Travancore through the sale of her sketches and paintings, but unless such efforts were recorded at annual meetings or, like she, there was a need to advertise to solicit commissions for the cause, records are rare.¹⁵² Those few that did attract reportage, such as Miss Bouchier of Sele Cottage, Hertford, funding a full communion service for St Andrew’s church through the sale of her embroidery, or Mrs Fryer’s donation of £4.0s.0d raised through a sale of her work to the St Saviour’s Church, Hitchin, Stained Glass Window Fund were directing their efforts to local causes.¹⁵³ As with many of the female activists in the area of fundraising, the church and spreading the word of God were of paramount importance.

3.5 Bible and missionary societies

In his review of female philanthropy, Prochaska cites the Bible Society as being one of the first where women were involved and also recognised as being successful.¹⁵⁴ Newspapers have some records of fundraising events and reports of annual meetings, but even these can be frustrating when it comes to the identification of the involvement of women. In 1844, for example, the Ladies’ sections of the Hertford Auxiliary of the British and Foreign Bible Society contributed around £84, about 20 per cent of the annual income of the society in Hertfordshire.¹⁵⁵ The *Hertford Mercury* made regular reports on the annual meetings of the Hertfordshire branch of this society, but the report for 1852 is typical in noting that “there was a numerous attendance, chiefly of ladies” but then proceeded to list the 15 men who attended.¹⁵⁶ That ladies were in the majority on attendance is supplemented by reports on their individual contribution. The total receipts for the year were about £314 of which the Hertford Ladies Association contributed £21.14s.1d. With the sums from the associations at

¹⁵¹ *Hertfordshire Mercury*, 18 November 1882.

¹⁵² Hitchin Museum, *Lawson Thompson Scrapbook*, Vol. 2b, letter to *St Mary’s* magazine dated 21 July 1892.

¹⁵³ *Hertford Mercury*, 11 April 1863; Hitchin Museum, *Lawson Thompson Scrapbook*, Vol. 1A.

¹⁵⁴ F. K. Prochaska, *Women and Philanthropy*, p. 27.

¹⁵⁵ *Hertford Mercury*, and *Hertford and Bedford Recorder*, 3 August 1844.

¹⁵⁶ *Hertford Mercury*, 18 September 1852.

Ware and Tring, the Ladies' groups accounted for over 13 per cent of the total donations for the year. The 1850s saw a reduction in the amount collected by the Hertford Ladies section of this Auxiliary from around £21 in 1854, £17 in 1855 down to a low point of £14 in 1856.¹⁵⁷ By 1861, there must have been some regeneration of efforts with Hertford Ladies raising £28 in that year and £23 in 1862 but the amount had fallen to £15.15s.0d in 1863, although this was a reasonable contribution in the context of a total for Hertfordshire of £229.¹⁵⁸ This revival, however, was temporary. By 1865 the Hertfordshire Auxiliary of the British and Foreign Bible Society was reporting that attempts had been made to revive and reorganise the Ladies' Association. The Reverend Warleigh had invited ladies of several districts to a friendly cup of tea, but it was the view of the women that their job had been done. The newspaper recorded that "it was the opinion of all visitors that the poor were well supplied with copies of the Word of God but that some further agency was required to induce them to carefully read it".¹⁵⁹

There was no further mention of the Ladies section of the Hertfordshire Auxiliary in the *Hertford Mercury* for some years. This may have been the result of a lack of interest as ten years later a hope that there might be a larger attendance at future meetings was recorded.¹⁶⁰ This may have been fulfilled as a "good attendance" was reported three years later.¹⁶¹ The next report of the Society was for 1888 and noted a contribution of £16.4s.3d from the Hertford Ladies. This was, apparently no advance on the previous year, but taking the sums year by year, it was deemed to be an improvement on the previous decade.¹⁶² A similar contribution is noted for Hitchin with the Ladies Association raising £17.0s.0d.¹⁶³ It would appear that there was competition in this area as attendance of the meeting of the Hertfordshire Association of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel was recorded as being "far from numerous".¹⁶⁴ There were several other organisations, such as the Society for the Promotion of Christianity amongst the Jews, the Hitchin Ladies Bible Association and

¹⁵⁷ *Hertford Mercury*, 30 September 1854, 22 September 1855 and 22 September 1856.

¹⁵⁸ *Hertford Mercury*, 28 September 1861, 4 October 1862 and 3 October 1863.

¹⁵⁹ *Hertford Mercury*, 7 October 1865.

¹⁶⁰ *Hertfordshire Mercury*, 9 December 1876.

¹⁶¹ *Hertfordshire Mercury*, 6 December 1879.

¹⁶² *Hertfordshire Mercury*, 10 November 1888.

¹⁶³ *Hertfordshire Mercury*, 8 November 1890.

¹⁶⁴ *Hertfordshire Mercury*, 22 November 1879.

the Church of England temperance mission for example, all with missionary endeavours at their heart, whose annual meetings were recorded in the local newspaper from time to time.¹⁶⁵

In spite of the competition, the Hertfordshire Auxiliary of the British and Foreign Bible Society continued. A report for 1892 named the 15 men on the platform and noted that “the audience which contained a number of ladies was far from being a numerous one.”¹⁶⁶ The annual meetings of the Auxiliary were recorded into the 1890s with the amount collected rising from £158 in 1891 to £252 in 1895. The unique contribution by Hertford Ladies had, however, dropped to around five per cent of the total at £12.5s.3d. in 1895.¹⁶⁷ They improved on matters the following year with a total of £49.9s.9d.¹⁶⁸ By the end of the decade, the Auxiliary was recording an income of £242.13s.3d., which was a decrease on the previous year.¹⁶⁹ This appears to be the trend. By 1910, the total raised was £149.14s.10d., with the comment that this was £14.6s.1d. less than the previous year.¹⁷⁰ Continuous runs of accounts may be rare, but the *Hertford Mercury* recorded the input of the Hertford Ladies of the British and Foreign Bible society each year from 1852 to 1862. The total raised by them was £154. 1s. 10d, over £9,000 in today’s terms.¹⁷¹ Reports of meetings and amounts collected were intermittent and sums ranged from £12 to £49 over the fifty year period from 1850 to 1900. Taking a conservative average of £15 a year and a more generous one of £20, the Hertford Ladies raised from £750 to £1,000 for this cause, around £45,000 to £55,000 in today’s spending power.¹⁷²

Other missionary societies, which were regularly reported in the *Hertfordshire Mercury*, were the Church Missionary Society, the Hertford Town Mission and the Church of England Zenana Missionary Society. The Hertfordshire Auxiliary of the Church Missionary Society had a Ladies’ section, contributing £15.10s.4d to the annual total receipts of some £330 for

¹⁶⁵ *Hertford Mercury*, 20 February 1869, 14 November 1857, 12 November 1859, *Hertfordshire Mercury*, 31 March 1883.

¹⁶⁶ *Hertfordshire Mercury*, 23 April 1892.

¹⁶⁷ *Hertfordshire Mercury*, 2 May 1896.

¹⁶⁸ *Hertfordshire Mercury*, 10 April 1897.

¹⁶⁹ *Hertfordshire Mercury*, 5 May 1899.

¹⁷⁰ *Hertfordshire Mercury*, 15 October 1910.

¹⁷¹ www.nationalarchives.gov.uk, consulted 29 September 2010.

¹⁷² www.nationalarchives.gov.uk, consulted 18 December 2010.

1856.¹⁷³ Five years later the Society could note a doubling of income from Hertford and its vicinity, much due to the reorganisation of the Ladies' Section who had divided the town into districts for collection of subscriptions and distribution of publications.¹⁷⁴ The income of the Society grew by around £200 a year during the first part of the 1860s and then dropped in 1866 to £1,813. By 1873, attendance at its annual meeting had also dropped, it was suggested that this was possibly through competition from local church missionary societies, and the July meeting of the following year recorded that there had been no extension of its work in Hertfordshire or Essex.¹⁷⁵ Women continued to have an interest as the meeting for 1876 attracted a "fair attendance" and "consisted principally of ladies". Typically, the newspaper then noted the names of the men attending.¹⁷⁶ By 1893, the East Hertfordshire Missionary Society recorded that the total of £1,615 collected was less than the previous year, but thanks were due to those who managed the juvenile section and the women's union, the latter having been responsible for £200 raised through sales of work.¹⁷⁷ Six years later another report is to be found, with a similar sum, £1,705.10s.8d., raised by East Hertfordshire.¹⁷⁸ No mention was made of any specific effort by women, but one cannot but assume that they were still active in organising sales of work and the juvenile section.

The Hertford Town Missionary Society also had a Ladies' Committee with the promise that its members would be calling on those who had yet to subscribe to the mission.¹⁷⁹ A Bible-woman was thought to have been present in almost every town in England by 1862.¹⁸⁰ There was general endorsement that it would be beneficial to have one in Hertford as one would "do more good amongst her own sex than an ordinary missionary".¹⁸¹ There is no record of an appointment in Hertford or Hitchin but the trade directory for 1878 listed Mrs Sarah Collett as Bible Reader at the Mission House in Hertford.¹⁸² She was recorded as holding the same position in the 1890 edition.¹⁸³ In 1877, the mission reported that, although the Ragged

¹⁷³ *Hertford Mercury*, 12 July 1856.

¹⁷⁴ *Hertford Mercury*, 15 June 1861.

¹⁷⁵ *Hertfordshire Mercury*, 20 December 1873 and 4 July 1874.

¹⁷⁶ *Hertfordshire Mercury*, 20 July 1876.

¹⁷⁷ *Hertfordshire Mercury*, 1 July 1893.

¹⁷⁸ *Hertfordshire Mercury*, 22 July 1899.

¹⁷⁹ *Hertford Mercury* 26 May 1855.

¹⁸⁰ F. K. Prochaska, *Women and Philanthropy*, p. 127.

¹⁸¹ *Hertford Mercury*, 30 October 1869.

¹⁸² Kelly, *Kelly's Directory of Hertfordshire, 1878*, p. 615.

¹⁸³ Kelly, *Kelly's Directory of Hertfordshire, 1890*, p. 769.

School had now been given up, it was still short of funds. The picture did not improve. Seven years later, its membership had declined, through death and movement out of the district, and in 1887 it recorded a deficit of £17.8s.7d.¹⁸⁴ In spite of this, it continued. In 1890, the ladies who acted as collectors were thanked, and although, once again, it was noted that a fair number attended the annual meeting of the Hertford Town mission, the newspaper listed the 21 men who formed the platform party.¹⁸⁵ Money continued to be a problem, with a rummage sale organised in 1896 to pay off its debt.¹⁸⁶ Another was held in 1899, raising £5.15s.0d., but that, plus subscriptions of £76.19s.2d., was not enough to meet expenditure of £100 and a debt of £20. “The committee could not help but feeling that several in the town did not subscribe and those that did not as much as they could.”¹⁸⁷ Contrary to expectations, the Town Mission was still in existence, and over-spending, into the twentieth century. In 1905, it recorded expenditure of £155 and an income of £122.16s.1d. It is to be hoped that more subscribers were found as the rummage sale organised on its behalf five years later, in 1910, raised just £5.¹⁸⁸

For women, there may have been some attraction in a charity devoted to the welfare of women, and the Church of England Zenana Missionary Society, established in 1880, was such a body. Originally devoted to the spiritual and physical health and education of women in India, its work was later extended to China.¹⁸⁹ A meeting in Hertford in 1886 attracted a fair attendance of ladies “given the weather”. A further interest may have been that the speaker was a woman, Miss Hamilton, a lady missionary from India.¹⁹⁰ A lantern lecture in 1894 was also presented by a woman, Miss Alice Boileau.¹⁹¹ The 1890s saw an annual sale of work on behalf of this mission, although recording receipts is spasmodic and imprecise. In 1892, £26 was taken on the first day of the two day sale and two years later a total of £38 was raised. The £28 achieved in 1897 was deemed to be not as much as last year, although the

¹⁸⁴ *Hertfordshire Mercury*, 24 November 1877, 22 November 1884 and 3 December 1887.

¹⁸⁵ *Hertfordshire Mercury*, 29 November 1890.

¹⁸⁶ *Hertfordshire Mercury*, 26 September 1896.

¹⁸⁷ *Hertfordshire Mercury*, 28 November 1899 and 2 December 1899.

¹⁸⁸ *Hertfordshire Mercury*, 15 October 1910, 8 November 1910 and 25 November 1905.

¹⁸⁹ Acceptance of the benefits of women missionaries was embraced by this Society, firstly as helpmate to the (missionary) husband and then through the appointment of unmarried women. By 1890 there were 2,481 women serving as missionaries with this Society in China, D. Davin, “British Women Missionaries in Nineteenth-Century China”, *Women’s History Review*, 1:2, 1992, pp. 257 – 271.

¹⁹⁰ *Hertfordshire Mercury*, 15 May 1886.

¹⁹¹ *Hertfordshire Mercury*, 1 December 1894. Miss Boileau is referred to in *The light of the Morning, the story of CEZMS work in China*, by Mary E. Darley, 1903, www.ocotilloroad.com consulted 25 October 2010.

unspecified sum from the 1899 sale was reported as “more than last year”.¹⁹² From the few figures published, receipts would appear to have been about £30 - £40.

Some impetus may have been given to the Society by a talk given by Mrs Honischer in that year. This was a public meeting in Hertford with men and women present which endorsed the role of women in the Society. As the speaker noted, women had been sent abroad, as “in those heathen lands it was the women the Society wished to catch and it was only by women that this could be done”. These sentiments were supported by the Reverend Canon McCormick. He saw women as absolutely necessary in the Zenanas.¹⁹³

The women, unidentified by the reportage of the times, who were active supporters of the missionary societies relied on subscription, sales of work and rummage sales to generate further funds. For the needs of the major projects, primarily church and chapel building, more sophisticated means were needed. The bazaar was one such means.

3.6 The bazaar

The fancy sale, sale of work or bazaar became closely associated with female philanthropy, providing as it did, an opportunity for some entertainment outside the home.¹⁹⁴ Coverage of these in the press, through advertisements and reportage, allows for some assessment of their frequency, the causes supported and the money raised. The bazaar attended by the Lucas family was one patronised by royalty and where there was such support, some significant sums were achieved, particularly in London but also in some provincial locations.¹⁹⁵ The support of Princess Louise and the Marquis of Lorne at the bazaar held in Glasgow, in 1871, in support of the West of Scotland Seaside Homes at Dunoon doubtless helped ensure that the stalls raised a sum calculated at £10,000.¹⁹⁶ Nor was support limited to the British royal house and nobility. A fancy fair held in 1861, for the support and education of orphans and destitute Catholic children, drew in support from not only various countesses, ladies,

¹⁹² *Hertfordshire Mercury*, 3 December 1892, 8 December 1894, 20 November 1897 and 9 December 1899.

¹⁹³ *Hertfordshire Mercury*, 29 April 1899.

¹⁹⁴ F. K. Prochaska, *Women and Philanthropy*, pp. 57 – 9.

¹⁹⁵ G. E. Bryant and G. F. Baker, eds., *A Quaker Journal*, Vol. II, p. 392.

¹⁹⁶ *The Times*, 2 November 1871.

marchionesses and Catholic gentlewomen, but the Empress of France donated a silk cloth and some Sevres china.¹⁹⁷

In the provinces, the patronage of royalty was rare. In areas of rapid growth the balance of population was different and the middle-class could assume more importance through the lack of competition from the aristocracy.¹⁹⁸ Even without the support of the titled, some large sums were raised through bazaars. That held in support of the Infant school for the deaf and dumb Manchester in May 1859 raised £4,400 over two days.¹⁹⁹ The annual meeting of the Manchester Athenaeum recorded that £1,268.10s.6d. had been raised by a bazaar.²⁰⁰ Hertfordshire had the benefit of being close to London and housing some important families. The one advertised to address the debt on St. Andrew's church to be held at Cassiobury was expected to be "one of the most brilliant fetes of the season". Not only had it the support of the Countesses of Essex, Clarendon and Eglington, but the ladies had laid on extra carriages on trains from Euston Square.²⁰¹ A later bazaar in 1881 at the Grove, Watford (home of the Clarendon family) for the benefit of the Hertfordshire Convalescent Home attracted the support of Princess Christian (Queen Victoria's daughter, Princess Helena) and raised £1,324.²⁰² It was a memorable achievement for Hertfordshire and still recalled with admiration and gratitude some ten years later.²⁰³ That, together with the proceeds of around £550 from a concert at Hatfield, accounted for more than half the income of the home for that year.

In the absence of royalty, local gentry were supportive. A similar sum was raised in Hitchin in 1844 for the building of North Herts and South Beds Infirmary. Lady Dacre and Mrs F. Delmé Radcliffe headed the list of stallholders and with a mixture of "articles most elegant", such as worsted work from the Dowager Queen, and "most homely", the 50 linsey-woolsey and 50 flannel petticoats donated by Sir John Sebright, thereby raising around £1,200. The

¹⁹⁷ *The Times*, 15 May 1861.

¹⁹⁸ D. Epstein Nord, *Walking the Victorian Streets*, p. 138.

¹⁹⁹ *Manchester Times*, Saturday May 7 1859, Issue 73.

²⁰⁰ *Manchester Times*, Saturday January 31 1857, Issue 776.

²⁰¹ *Hertford Mercury*, 4 June 1859.

²⁰² *Hertfordshire Mercury*, 4 June 1881, 6 August 1881, 11 March 1882.

²⁰³ *Hertfordshire Mercury*, 21 June 1890.

Quaker influence in the town can be seen by the press comment that “the Friends, were as usual amongst the most extensive of the purchasers”, doubtless buying the “cottage clothing” to dispense to the poor.²⁰⁴

To be open to calls upon one’s purse was to be expected for many but it was the Marchioness of Salisbury, Lady Cowper and the Baroness Dimsdale for Hertford who headed the list of patrons of bazaars for the Hertford Infirmary, St Andrew’s church building and St Andrew’s schools.²⁰⁵ The Countess Lytton, Lady Dacre and Mrs Delmé Radcliffe were the sought after patrons for fundraising events for the National schools, Holywell church and the Hitchin Training school.²⁰⁶ It was also important to be seen either attending the bazaar or as a stallholder. The *Hertford Mercury* was taken to task for failing to publish a full list of stallholders at the bazaar held in aid of the British Schools in Hertford. Their apology noted that their reporter had made an application for a list, but on failure to obtain one, he put down the names of those he recognised. A full list was then published.²⁰⁷

A constraint on the measurement of the impact of bazaars is that not all were reported and, where they were, the receipts were not always published. A sample from the advertisements in the *Times* indicated that six bazaars were advertised in 1830, growth was steady over the next decades, reaching a peak of 21 in 1875. The number dropped to 16 in 1895 which was ascribed to the availability of local newspapers.²⁰⁸ The difference between the causes supported by the national events advertised in the *Times* and those covered by local newspapers would appear to be the dominance of church, chapel and missions as beneficiaries of local bazaars, although Prochaska acknowledged that his sample was small and overlooked events that went unrecorded.²⁰⁹ The ability to access some newspapers online allows for an opportunity to widen his sample and compare bazaar activity in East Anglia which supports the dominance of religious causes at local level, see Appendix 11, p. 214.

²⁰⁴ *Hertford Mercury, and Hertford and Bedford Reformer*, 7 September 1844.

²⁰⁵ *Hertford Mercury*, 23 January 1858, *Hertfordshire Mercury*, 27 February 1875, 11 June 1881 and 14 February 1885.

²⁰⁶ *Hertford Mercury*, 11 November 1865, *Hertfordshire Mercury*, 14 July 1877 and 10 October 1885.

²⁰⁷ *Hertford Mercury*, 3 May 1862.

²⁰⁸ F. K. Prochaska, *Women and Philanthropy*, p. 51.

²⁰⁹ F. K. Prochaska, *Women and Philanthropy*, pp. 52 – 3.

Although there may have been a demand for something more sophisticated than “plain tables containing nothing beyond an incongruous mess of what the reporters briefly describe as ‘collections of fancy and useful articles’...” the bazaar continued to thrive into the 1890s.²¹⁰ The quality of the goods on sale was not attractive but there was a requirement to buy in support of a good cause.²¹¹ The Mayor of Hertford was content to invest in two pairs of knickerbocker stockings made by “that excellent old lady, Mrs Wodehouse” at the sale of work in aid of ladies in reduced circumstances in 1898. The bazaar for the Hertford Catholic schools in the same year had articles he described as “better than the usual run of affairs. The Miss Danhams had been working for months and had a splendid show. I bought one of their fire screens – Mrs Brunlees had also done excellent work and made a good show at her stall.”²¹² However, at the bazaar in the Castle grounds the following year he found himself “surrounded by ladies anxious to sell their rubbish and left the grounds a poorer and wiser man.”²¹³ Although Mrs Abel Smith expressed a view, in 1899, that “it was a mistaken idea that bazaars and sales of work were worn out, and should be allowed to die a natural death”, in practice the bazaar had ceased to be a stand-alone event. The bazaar she declared open included stalls managed by women, but both men and women were involved in an entertainment. A further “novel feature of this bazaar was a ‘Sunlight soap washing competition’ which proved to be a decided attraction”.²¹⁴ The bazaar, like the garden fete, continued into the latter years of the century, but increasingly both included other entertainments, whereas the “sales of work” were, like the “rummage sale” and the modern “car boot sale”, far more humdrum affairs.²¹⁵ There is evidence of far fewer bazaars, fetes

²¹⁰ *Ipswich Journal*, Wednesday 14 April 1888, Issue 9047.

²¹¹ F. Thompson, *Lark Rise to Candleford*, pp. 342 – 3.

²¹² H.A.L.S. D/Ex 256 21 Z1, *Journals of Hellier Gosselin, his first Mayoralty of Hertford, 1897 – 1898, entry for 27 April 1898.*

²¹³ H.A.L.S. D/EX256 Z3, *Mayoralty of Hellier Gosselin 1897-1899.*

²¹⁴ *Hertfordshire Mercury*, 4 February 1899.

²¹⁵ Another reservation on the usefulness of bazaars came from Benjamin Waugh, founder of the N.S.P.C.C. He wrote to several newspapers to inform that publicity on receipts from bazaars had reduced their income by 25 per cent. Such sums went into reserves and they still needed regular donations. See *Morning Post*, Monday 9 March 1896, Issue 38611. Similar letters can be found in the *Ipswich Journal*, Saturday 14 March 1896, Issue 9540, *The Huddersfield Daily Chronicle*, Monday 9 March 1896, Issue 8926, *Berrow's Worcester Journal*, Saturday 14 March 1896, Issue 10560 and *The Star* (St Peter Port), Tuesday 10 March 1896, Issue 50. That money raised by events was put aside for exceptional expenditure is supported by the use of the “Bazaar fund” for extensions and alterations to Hertford Infirmary, see *Hertfordshire Mercury*, 19 September 1878. The asset, and problem, for the N.S.P.C.C. was that the Queen was its patron and a fancy fair would attract support from the nobility. One held for its benefit in 1895 drew titled ladies for all the stalls, with those for Hertfordshire under the direction of the Marchioness of Salisbury, see *Hertfordshire Mercury*, 25 May 1895.

and fancy sales in Hitchin. This may be due to the *Hertfordshire Mercury* being based in Hertford, a different ethos of giving amongst the Quaker community in Hitchin, or simply that it was not faced, as was Hertford, with two major church rebuilding programmes. Just two bazaars were recorded for Hitchin in the 1850s, benefiting the ragged school and the church. The national school was the beneficiary of the only bazaar reported in the 1860s. The 1870s saw an increase to three, one for the Wesleyan chapel, another for church re-building and the third to establish an orphanage at St Saviour's. The orphanage and the chapel were also the subject of a bazaar each in the 1880s, with the servants' training school and the congregational church making the total four. By the 1890s, just two were reported; one for the local volunteer company and the other for St Saviour's Working Man's Club. For most, no receipts were published. Those that were produced sums ranging from the £10 from the sale of women's work on behalf on the enlargement of the Wesleyan chapel to the £480 raised for the Hitchin Training School for Servants.²¹⁶

By contrast, events of this kind appear to have been more frequent in Hertford, where, as in East Anglia, they increased from a slow start, with just five reported in the 1850s and 1860s seven in 1870s and nine in the 1880s. The high spot was, however, the 1890s, with 29 recorded. Most of these (21) were directed towards religious causes, with church and chapel building the prime cause, followed by annual sales for the Church of England Zenana Mission. Once again, it is difficult to assess the impact of these events. Not all receipts were published or, if they were, they were recorded in less than precise terms, such as that for the Fancy fair in aid of St Nicholas Hall, where the "result was very satisfactory".²¹⁷ Where sums were reported they ranged from around £10 to £150. The nature of the event, rather than the cause seemed to influence this. The bazaar, with free entertainment, at the Corn Exchange in Hertford in aid of the Catholic schools made £140 over two days; a rummage sale for the same cause the following year raised £16.²¹⁸ Occasionally a bazaar did produce a significant sum of money. That in aid of the Hertford Infirmary held in 1858 raised £891.9s.10d., followed by £360 in 1892 on behalf of All Saints church rebuilding fund and

²¹⁶ *Hertfordshire Mercury*, 25 June 1870, 31 October 1885 and 7 November 1885.

²¹⁷ *Hertfordshire Mercury*, 5 November 1898.

²¹⁸ *Hertfordshire Mercury*, 23 April 1898 and 1 April 1899.

the £250 in 1885 for the Abel Smith Memorial and St Andrew's infant schools, but these were not the norm.²¹⁹

Whilst Prochaska asserted that there was no evidence that men ever took the management and operation of the nineteenth-century bazaar into their own hands, there are many exceptions to this generalisation.²²⁰ The report on the Manchester Athenaeum bazaar notes that Mr Charles Taylor was Chairman of the Bazaar Committee. The men were also active in the running of this bazaar. The stalls, as expected, were attended by women, but the men acted as stewards, supported by two detectives and other policemen "to guard against annoyance or loss from the presence of improper parties."²²¹ An even more significant, male, self sacrifice was noted in the *Ipswich Journal* when the inquest into the death of Colonel Graham recorded that he had hardly taken any food for two days while engaged in the bazaar and fete in aid of the Waifs and Strays Society and that, and the general exhaustion occasioned by sleepless nights, had caused him to reach for a sedative. He was found dying with a tumbler with the remains of a solution of cyanide of potassium.²²²

Some bazaars, such as that in support of the re-building of All Saints, attracted the titled with the Countess Cowper heading the list of patrons and that for St Andrew's school opened by the Marchioness of Salisbury, but this does not mean that they were the organisers. The fancy fair in Hertford in aid of the Infirmary in 1858 was recorded as receiving 1,000 visitors netting £891.9s.0d, with again, ladies running the stalls, but special note was made of the "zeal and untiring energy with which Dr Towers [Honorary Secretary to the Infirmary] assisted in arrangements for this fancy fair."²²³ The advertisement for this fair makes a clear distinction between the committee appointed to superintend the arrangements (men) and the

²¹⁹ *Hertford Mercury*, 14 August 1858, *Hertfordshire Mercury*, 16 April 1892, 30 July 1892, 10 September 1892 and *Hertfordshire Mercury*, 11 April 1885 and 2 May 1885.

²²⁰ F. K. Prochaska, *Women and Philanthropy*, p. 57. This assertion has been repeated, see S. Steinbach, *Women in England 1760 – 1914* (London, 2004), pp. 54 - 5

²²¹ *Manchester Times*, Wednesday October 23 1850, Issue 206.

²²² *Ipswich Journal*, Saturday 27 June 1896.

²²³ *Hertford Mercury*, 17 July 1858 and 14 August 1858.

patrons, all ladies, including the Marchioness of Salisbury, Countess Cowper, Viscountess Palmerston and Marchioness Townshend.²²⁴

In similar vein, the stalls at the sale of fancy work in aid of the new infants' school building in Hertford were managed by women assisted by Messrs Burnaby and Mr Henry Rayment.²²⁵ The bazaar held in 1875 to raise funds for of the building of St Andrew's church, Hertford, included the expected "triumphs of skill and taste in needlework, woolwork and embroidery" but contributions were augmented by handicraft from men and Mr Wagner also exhibited some mechanical curiosities in the adjoining room for those prepared to spend an additional sixpence.²²⁶ Even more innovative was the bazaar in aid of the Wesleyan chapel, Hertford, where the stalls were supplemented by musical selections, a concert, conjuring by Mr Young and electricity dispensed by Master Brett "at a penny a shock".²²⁷

The report on the bazaar in aid of the Hertfordshire Convalescent Home at Hertingfordbury rectory noted that Mr Burnside accomplished the feat of being in several parts of the ground at the same time in "keeping the business alive".²²⁸ The report on the re-building fund for St Andrew's church in Hertford noted that thanks were given to the Rector for his trouble in getting up the bazaar and also to Mrs Robertson and others who had assisted in carrying it out.²²⁹ The Reverend T. Lingley, in greeting the Marchioness of Salisbury who was to open the bazaar in aid of St Andrew's infants' school some ten years later, asserted that "we have organised a bazaar."²³⁰ The school committee comprised men; the stallholders were women. In his eyes there was clearly no misunderstanding as to who had organised the event. Nor was there any ambivalence in giving credit to Mr Daltry and his committee (all men) for their organisation of the bazaar in aid of the All Saints church building fund.²³¹ The Marchioness

²²⁴ *Hertford Mercury*, 23 January 1858.

²²⁵ *Hertfordshire Mercury*, 14 August 1875.

²²⁶ *Hertfordshire Mercury*, 3 April 1875.

²²⁷ *Hertfordshire Mercury*, 20 February 1886.

²²⁸ *Hertfordshire Mercury*, 12 July 1879.

²²⁹ *Hertfordshire Mercury*, 17 April 1875.

²³⁰ *Hertfordshire Mercury*, 11 April 1885.

²³¹ It was not until 1901, when the Building Committee was re-constituted, that some ladies were invited to join. See S. White, "All Saints' Church – The disastrous fire of 1891", *Hertford and Ware Local History Society Journal*, 2010, p. 18.

of Salisbury, the Countess Cowper, the Baroness Dimsdale and other titled or well-known ladies lent their patronage to the event.²³²

Organisation of charity balls has been deemed as giving ladies the experience needed in order to set up bazaars, with Lady Salisbury credited with championing both.²³³ It is hard to imagine that she would have been closely involved with the minutiae of hall hiring, advertising and setting up the stalls. Furthermore, acquaintance of running charity balls was an unlikely piece of background information for the “indefatigable” Miss Guttridge and Miss Nunn in their organisation of the fancy fair in aid of the Cowbridge Sunday school.²³⁴ In practice, there were many types of bazaar, but the difference between those patronised by the titled and important and the smaller local bazaars was encapsulated by Anthony Trollope, who noted that Miss Mackenzie was prepared to collect and make things for the charity bazaar, but was told that such items would not be sold. “There are tradesmen who furnish the stalls, and mark their own prices, and take back what is not sold. You charge double the tradesman’s price, that’s all.”²³⁵

This type of bazaar ceased to be fashionable by the end of the nineteenth century. By this time its entertainment value had been diminished by the growth in shops selling a wider variety of items. By the 1890s, the local newspaper was regularly holding advertisements for “fancy goods” (S. Neale, Hertford) and “novelties of the season” (Cocks and Co., Hertford). The trade directory for 1851 does not indicate the presence of any outlets for such goods but by 1882 there were three “fancy repositories” in Hertford (one run by a man) and five, all run by women, in Hitchin.²³⁶ There continued to be two dealing in “fancy goods” in the 1890 directory for Hertford and six in Hitchin.²³⁷

²³² *Hertfordshire Mercury*, 30 July 1892.

²³³ F. K. Prochaska, *Women and Philanthropy*, p. 58.

²³⁴ *Hertford Mercury*, 12 April 1851.

²³⁵ A. Trollope, *Miss Mackenzie*, (Oxford edition, 1988), p. 357.

²³⁶ Kelly, *Kelly’s Directory of Hertfordshire, 1882*, pp. 614–7, pp. 623–5.

²³⁷ Kelly, *Kelly’s Directory of Hertfordshire, 1890*, pp. 769–772, pp. 779–781.

The appearance of outlets for ornaments and novelties may have been a factor in the demise of the bazaar, but there was also a view that it was becoming frivolous and participants, if not the object of ridicule, were the butt of satire, notably from the pages of *Punch*.²³⁸ The *Hertfordshire Mercury* reported on *Punch*'s 1879 skit on the fancy fair, noting that the gatherings at Hertingfordbury Rectory "were far more honestly conducted".²³⁹ The opportunity to meet friends and indulge in the little light flirtation may have been replaced.²⁴⁰ Beatrice Webb wanted more from life than to sit at home with a lack of meaningful employment.²⁴¹ For Winnie Seebohm, the work put into preparing for a bazaar was a time-consuming distraction from her studies and ambition to go to Newnham College. As she recorded, "We are still busy with Bazaar work – I only hope all the things we have made will sell! I hate fancy work – and bazaars too".²⁴² This bazaar was no doubt that opened by Countess Lytton in aid of the Hitchin Training School for servants. Mrs Seebohm was listed as one of the stall holders.²⁴³

Winnie Seebohm achieved her ambition to go to Cambridge, as did her friend and neighbour, Margaret Tuke;²⁴⁴ for others there were alternative outlets. Mrs Clinton Baker became President of the Hertford Division of the Soldiers' and Sailors' Families Association; Miss Burgess its Vice-President.²⁴⁵ The British Red Cross Society's Vice Presidents for Hertfordshire were all, except Mr Norman McMullen, women, including the local altruists, notably Lady Faudell-Phillips of Hertford and Mrs E. R. Ransom of Hitchin. It was another Quaker, Mrs Tindall Lucas who became organiser for Hitchin, with several other ladies expressing their willingness to assist her.²⁴⁶ The N.S.P.C.C. also provided a structure for secular, charitable work, with a branch established in Hitchin in 1892.²⁴⁷ Whether Prochaska's view that experience in running bazaars gave women the confidence to take on roles in social administration is a moot point.²⁴⁸ There is little evidence that bazaars and

²³⁸ F. K. Prochaska, *Women and Philanthropy*, pp. 67 – 9.

²³⁹ *Hertfordshire Mercury*, 12 July 1879.

²⁴⁰ F. K. Prochaska, *Women and Philanthropy*, p. 67.

²⁴¹ E. Ross, *Slum Travelers* (sic), pp. 21 – 2.

²⁴² HALS, D/ESc/C2, *Winnie Seebohm's letters, Letter dated 7 September 1885 to Mrs Edward Morris*.

²⁴³ *Hertfordshire Mercury*, 10 October 1885 and 30 October 1885.

²⁴⁴ Margaret Tuke became a Fellow of Newnham College and Principal of Bedford College.

²⁴⁵ *Hertfordshire Mercury*, 6 January 1900.

²⁴⁶ *Hertfordshire Mercury*, 5 November 1910 and 15 October 1910.

²⁴⁷ *Hertfordshire Mercury*, 5 November 1892.

²⁴⁸ F. K. Prochaska, *Women and Philanthropy*, p. 71.

fancy sales were an important feature of life in Hitchin and although a regular event in Hertford, they served a purpose in raising funds for one off causes. The view of those like Winnie Seebohm may be nearer the truth. It was frivolous and there were other opportunities for useful and rewarding work outside the home.

3.7 Fundraising

Sums raised by local bazaars were not great. Exceptionally that held for the re-building of All Saints Church, Hertford, in 1892 raised about £350 but, to put this into context, it was a small contribution to the re-building costs.²⁴⁹ The major source of funding was through subscriptions which had, by July 1892 reached over £6,000, followed by the insurance money amounting to £4,200.²⁵⁰ St Andrew's Church in Hertford had also been rebuilt (in 1869) and although bazaars and concerts were organised, the exercise was essentially funded through subscription.²⁵¹ The descendants of the bazaar have continued in the guise of garden fetes, craft fairs and Christmas markets. More tenacious appear to be the smaller scale endeavours, usually on behalf of local charities and schools, that continued through to the twentieth-century with, in the 1890s, the first mention of a "rummage sale", the precursor to the jumble or car boot sale.²⁵²

For entertainment and an opportunity for men and women to meet, there were other forms of fundraising. The "Spelling Bee" made a brief appearance in 1876. Two were recorded as being held at Hitchin, the first in aid of the Mechanics' Institute. The vicar presided over the second, with Mrs Hensley, his wife, and Mr Woodhead acting as referees. The four finalists were Mr E Ransom, Miss Dawson, Miss Wiles and Mrs Henshaw. The prize was donated to the South Herts and North Beds infirmary.²⁵³ In Hertford the Hertfordshire Mercury recorded its first "Spelling Bee" with the popularity of "this latest Transatlantic importation" shown by the number of competitors for prizes and the "overflowing attenders of spectators for this

²⁴⁹ Other fundraising events such as recitals, cricket matches and amateur dramatics were organised, see S. White, "All Saints' Church – The disastrous fire of 1891", pp. 9 – 10.

²⁵⁰ *Hertfordshire Mercury*, 30 July 1892.

²⁵¹ *Hertford Mercury*, 13 November 1869 and 27 November 1869, Kelly, *Kelly's Directory of Hertfordshire*, 1882, p.610.

²⁵² *Hertfordshire Mercury*, 11 March 1893 and 22 April 1893.

²⁵³ *Hertfordshire Mercury*, 11 March 1876.

contest”. First prize was won by Mr Chuck of Ware, but Miss Crawley, Mrs Butler and Miss Green were recipients of the second, third and fourth prizes. The profit of eight guineas was split between the Hertfordshire Convalescent Home and the Hertford Infirmary.²⁵⁴ Although not a major fundraising event, the interest shown was such that a promise was made that another was to be held the following month.²⁵⁵ April 1876 also saw notice of another “Spelling Bee”, this time for funds for Christ Church School, Port Vale. The report notes that of the competitors “a fair proportion were ladies”, however, although they were conspicuous for their good spelling, “only one of them [Miss Crawley] was fortunate to win a prize.” Whether or not this was an area where men and women could compete, and the women did rather well, was a reason for its sudden demise is a matter for conjecture. There is no further mention of a “Spelling Bee” in the *Hertfordshire Mercury*.²⁵⁶

The event, involving men and women, that had more enduring appeal was the concert. It made an early appearance in Hertford in 1865 in aid of the re-building of St. Andrew’s church. The associated fancy fair, described as “not large but tasteful”, was a minor part of proceedings although its takings at £120 were larger than the ticket sales which amounted to £38.18s.0d.²⁵⁷ Although the concert made regular appearances raising funds for various good causes, records of the receipts are rare. Where these have been published, they would appear to be modest. That for All Saints Infants’ School in 1883 made £108 as the necessary expenses were defrayed by the benefactor and organiser, Mrs Faudell Phillips.²⁵⁸ The patronage of the Marchioness of Salisbury and Baroness Dimsdale for the concert in aid of the Hertfordshire General Infirmary may have helped to raise £85, but this was exceptional. Once expenses such as hire of hall, piano and advertising had been deducted, two others

²⁵⁴ *Hertfordshire Mercury*, 1 April 1876.

²⁵⁵ *Hertfordshire Mercury*, 25 March 1876 and 11 April 1876.

²⁵⁶ The swift rise and fall of the Spelling Bee can also be seen in East Anglia. First prizes in 1876 went to “the fair sex”, but names were not recorded. The few events recorded subsequently were men only affairs with the prize winners named. See *Ipswich Journal* for 5 February 1876, 28 June 1884, 29 February 1888, 24 April 1888 and 24 February 1900.

²⁵⁷ *Hertford Mercury*, 9 December 1865.

²⁵⁸ *Hertfordshire Mercury*, 6 October 1883.

made about £50.²⁵⁹ Twenty years later, the concert held in 1910 in aid of the County hospital raised £52.12s.0d.²⁶⁰

Even less lucrative were other entertainments. The Fancy Dress Ball at the Sun Hotel, Hitchin, “got up by” Mr and Mrs Hughes made £7 for the N.S.P.C.C. Receipts for another fancy dress ball for the Children’s League of Pity held in Hertford were not reported, but even the Grand Patriotic ball held at the height of the Boer war could only muster £10.²⁶¹ Expenses also took a toll on the profits of the whist drive and dance held at Hertford town hall for the Hertford and Bengoe district Nursing Association. The receipts were £31.11s.6d., but only £18 was given to Mrs Reginald Smith as treasurer of the association.²⁶²

Fundraising events continued to be a factor in the financing of many voluntary institutions. Even well into the twentieth century voluntary hospitals, for example, were reliant on patients’ fees, but also bequests, concerts, fetes and flag days.²⁶³ However, the prime means of funding were not the special events, but regular subscriptions, donations, collecting cards and sermons preached on behalf of a good cause. All of these areas saw a positive response from the women of Hertford and Hitchin.

The Brown Coat School of Industry for girls in Hertford was typical in its funding arrangements. A fancy sale was held mid century, raising £156.8s.5d., but its core funding was achieved through its 150 subscribers, supplemented by collecting cards held by twenty women and one man.²⁶⁴ In addition, the occasional sermon would be preached on its behalf.²⁶⁵ For others, such as the Salem chapel Sunday schools in Hertford, maintenance was through an annual sermon, with £17.5s.0d. collected in 1871.²⁶⁶ Similarly, annual sermons

²⁵⁹ *Hertfordshire Mercury*, 19 February 1887 and 5 March 1892, (Concerts in aid of the Hertfordshire Convalescent home and All Saints re-building).

²⁶⁰ *Hertfordshire Mercury*, 16 April 1910.

²⁶¹ *Hertfordshire Mercury*, 25 April 1896, 16 February 1899 and 17 March 1900.

²⁶² *Hertfordshire Mercury*, 26 February 1905.

²⁶³ J. Gardiner, *The Thirties, An Intimate History*, (London, 2010), p. 201.

²⁶⁴ H.A.L.S. D/EL/Q33, *Hertford School of Industry for girls*.

²⁶⁵ *Hertford Mercury*, 30 August 1856.

²⁶⁶ *Hertford Mercury*, 17 June 1871.

were preached in support of the Baptist Missionary Society in Hitchin, followed by a public tea meeting. The usual vote of thanks were passed to the ladies (unnamed) for making the arrangements, but the total collected in 1872, at £21.16s.0d., was less than that achieved the previous year.²⁶⁷

Donations, such as that from Lady Bloomfield, were also an important source of funding. These ranged from the modest contributions of 2s.6d to a guinea from 20 ladies for the All Saints Church hangings fund to the £500 from Mr Robert Smith to satisfy his wife's wish that a room for Divine worship be provided at the Hertford Infirmary.²⁶⁸ The Hertford Infirmary relied on subscriptions, from men and women, which individually were small (around two to three guineas a year) but regular.²⁶⁹ The loss of subscribers, such as the two benevolent ladies (not named) who formerly resided at Bengoe, who were also regular visitors, was cause for concern.²⁷⁰ Collecting cards were primarily used by women such as those held in connection with the re-building of All Saints Church in Hertford.²⁷¹ The shilling subscription lists for the Hertford Infirmary were held by men and women with Mr Wray managing to produce 10 shillings from his list, plus a donation of £100 from Lady Bloomfield, but it was Mrs Pawle who appeared to be most tireless in her support of a good cause, making 30 shillings from her fourth list in July 1895 and a further 21 shillings from her fifth a month later.²⁷²

Subscription lists were a recognised method of fund raising for many causes. Sometimes there was an incentive such having a girl from the School of Industry for Girls in Hertford work for you; for the Hertfordshire Convalescent Home it was being able to nominate a patient.²⁷³ For women supporting the North Herts and South Beds Infirmary at Hitchin, through subscriptions of two guineas or more, there was the ability to vote at the election of officers, albeit only by proxy.²⁷⁴ In other cases, it was simply an acknowledgement of

²⁶⁷ *Hertford Mercury*, 27 April 1872.

²⁶⁸ *Hertfordshire Mercury*, 2 February 1895 and 26 April 1877; Kelly, *Kelly's Directory of Hertfordshire, 1882*, p. 611.

²⁶⁹ *Hertford Mercury*, 13 January 1862, *Hertfordshire Mercury*, 22 January 1881 and 11 January 1883.

²⁷⁰ *Hertfordshire Mercury*, 28 January 1893.

²⁷¹ *Hertfordshire Mercury*, 17 November 1894.

²⁷² *Hertfordshire Mercury*, 7 July 1895 and 17 August 1895.

²⁷³ H.A.L.S. D/EL/Q33, Hertford School of Industry for Girls; *Hertfordshire Mercury*, 21 February 1880.

²⁷⁴ H.A.L.S. HV4 1A/3, *Minute Book 1890 – 1914, North Herts and South Beds Infirmary, Rule 7.*

generosity through publication. The subscription list for the re-building of All Saints church in Hertford was printed in the local paper. The contributions of ten women to the fund amounted to about six per cent of the £2,000 raised in early February 1892 with amounts ranging from £5 to £25. Following publication of the list further donations, £25 from Mrs Henry Gilbertson and £100 from Miss Green were recorded.²⁷⁵ On the laying of the foundation stone, a further fundraising effort, attracting women, was the presentation of purses (containing not less than £2) to Countess Cowper.²⁷⁶

3.8 Wills

Wills are not be a comprehensive record of what was left to charity as some made their principal benefactions whilst living.²⁷⁷ In a review of the wills published in the *Daily Telegraph* during the last ten years of the nineteenth century it was noted that women were more inclined to remember a charity, possibly because this sample included women who were unmarried or widowed and had no relatives.²⁷⁸ A small sample from Hertford suggests otherwise; family, however distant, were the prime beneficiaries.²⁷⁹ Francis Ellis, a spinster living in North Crescent Hertford, was an exception, leaving £100 to the Treasurer of Hertford Infirmary and £19 guineas for the poor at Port Vale chapel.²⁸⁰ This was not a great amount in the context of her whole estate.²⁸¹ A more significant holding was that of the spinster, Mary Hudson of Hertford. Most of her capital was invested in East India stock with about £600 at the bank. On probate it was valued as £18,736.8s.7d in December 1891. Charitable causes were not forgotten but this was limited to £20 to her “esteemed” pastor William Benson, £10 to the treasurer of the Funds for the Poor assembling at Port Vale chapel and a further £10 to the Port Vale Sunday School. The value of the friendly word from the vicar, minister or doctor, or in the case of Mary Hudson, “her esteemed pastor”, may have been valued. Francis Ellis’s directions were very specific. The legacy was not simply

²⁷⁵ *Hertfordshire Mercury*, 6 and 13 February 1892.

²⁷⁶ *Hertfordshire Mercury*, 18 and 25 March 1893.

²⁷⁷ D. Owen, *English Philanthropy*, p. 391 and pp. 470 -1.

²⁷⁸ F. K. Prochaska, *Women and Philanthropy*, p. 35.

²⁷⁹ H.A.L.S. D/EL/B153, *Probate Mary Chalkley*; D/EL/B167, *Will of Mary Davies, Villiers Road, 1876*; D/EL/B181, *Probate, Francis Ellis, spinster, 1872*; D/EL/B208, *Sarah Louisa Haggar, 1898*; D/EL/227, *Mary Hudson, Probate*; D/EL/281, *Charlotte Sophia Skinner – death 3 January 1869*.

²⁸⁰ H.A.L.S. D/EL/B181, *Probate, Frances Ellis, spinster, 1872*.

²⁸¹ £1,610 in Consolidated Stock, just over £5,000 in 3 per cents, some smaller investments and the contents of a substantial (five bedroom) house.

directed to the Infirmary but to its treasurer. Safe investments may have been a substitute for a male provider for the single and widowed woman.²⁸² They provided a regular, and safe, source of income, but without any human contact.

Evidence from other sources, however, points to legacies by women being an important source of funding for two hospitals. The North Herts and South Beds Infirmary at Hitchin and the Hertford Infirmary were reliant on voluntary contributions. Both institutions had as their financial base the proceeds of a bazaar organised with the active involvement of women. That, at Hitchin, in 1844 raised £1,200.²⁸³ The Fancy Fair in aid of the Hertford Infirmary contributed £610 and by 1858 its “Bazaar Fund” stood at £869. 15s. 2d., which was invested in Consols stock, and sold in 1878 to fund building work.²⁸⁴ The day-to-day running costs of both institutions, however, were dependent on subscribers. The majority of these were men although some subscriptions may have been a joint one by husband and wife. Those made by women represented just 9 per cent of the North Herts Infirmary’s income of £317 for the year of 1860. Most of the amounts subscribed by women were a few guineas and outweighed by Lord Dacre’s contribution of £25.²⁸⁵ Income for the Hertford Infirmary for the same year was higher with £593 raised through subscription. The discrete contribution of women at £99 was also higher than in Hitchin, representing 17 per cent of the subscription income for the year.²⁸⁶

The North Herts and South Beds Infirmary at Hitchin was the beneficiary of regular legacies. Women were not unique in remembering the hospital in their wills but, as can be seen from Table 23, p. 135, they were in the majority. The trustees were disappointed that an important bequest was negated as Mrs Smallwood’s “kindly intentions” of leaving them £1,000 in Consols was frustrated by her will being declared invalid. They were particularly distressed as they had sanctioned some improvements in anticipation of this largesse.²⁸⁷ Surviving records for the Hertford Infirmary are less comprehensive, but their legacy account from

²⁸² D. R. Green and A. Owens, “Gentlewomanly Capitalism”, p. 530.

²⁸³ Kelly, *Post Office Directory of Hertfordshire 1860*, p. 202.

²⁸⁴ H.A.L.S. HV3/A3/1, *Ledger, Hertford Hospital 1832 – 1873; Hertfordshire Mercury*, 19 September 1878.

²⁸⁵ H.A.L.S. HV4 1A, *Hitchin Infirmary (North Herts Hospital) Minute Book, January 1856 – September 1873*.

²⁸⁶ H.A.L.S. HV3/A3/1.

²⁸⁷ H.A.L.S. HV4 1A/3, *Annual Meeting, 6 October 1863*.

1832 to 1873 noted £54 from Miss Baker in 1836, £100 from Mrs Hanberry in 1847, £45 from Miss Baker, £50 from Miss Joslin and £30 from Miss Kemble in 1867, representing 76 per cent of the total received in the period through legacies.²⁸⁸ That it, like the Hitchin infirmary, enjoyed a regular income stream through the wills of women is suggested by intermittent reports in the local paper. The annual meeting in 1881 recorded £50 from the late Miss Green, £10 from the late Mrs Russell Ellice and a legacy of £500 from Mrs Bunting.²⁸⁹ Miss Luppino's legacy of £100 was noted in 1886 and that of £50 from Miss Hudson in

Table 23: Legacies recorded in the minute book for the North Herts and South Beds Infirmary

Date	Legator	Amount
1859	Miss Sarah Miller	£5.5.0
1859	Miss Elizabeth Ann Lucas	£100
1862	Mary Wilshire	£10
1864	Elizabeth Hailey	£350
1867	Mrs Whitting	£200
1872	Madame Linouski	£50
1873	Mr Pendred	£100
1873	Mrs Kempson	£5
1878	Mrs Pryor	£50
1880	James Smyth	£1,000
1880	Miss Hurst	£479
1882	Mr Drake	£100
1889	James Trustrum	£45
1889	Mrs Catherine Law French	£100
1891	Miss Deborah Young	£450
1896	Miss Wahy	£500
1902	Miss Isabella Campbell	£100
1903	Mrs Sarah Ellen Pyne	£2,500
1905	Mrs Ilott	£300

Source: H.A.L.S. HV4 1A/1, HV4 1A/2 and 1A/3, Hitchin Infirmary (North Herts Hospital) Minute Books, January 1856 – September 1873, 1873 -1890 and 1890 - 1914.

²⁸⁸ H.A.L.S. HV4/A3/1, *Ledger, Hertford Hospital, 1832 – 1873*.

²⁸⁹ *Hertfordshire Mercury*, 27 January 1883.

1893.²⁹⁰ In addition, there was Miss Ellis's bequest of £100 in 1872 and possibly others in records which have not survived. Women were also responsible for material gifts. Elizabeth Hailey's bequest to the Hitchin Infirmary was supplemented by the donation of her bath chair for use of the patients; 20 years later, thanks were recorded for the invalid couch donated by Mrs Drake Garrard.²⁹¹ In similar vein, the Hertford Infirmary was the recipient of old linen from Countess Cowper, a small bed from Mrs du Maurier and flannel jackets for women and children from Mrs Fenwick.²⁹² The importance of a bazaar in funding the establishment of both infirmaries, the continuing support of women through subscriptions and donations and some significant bequests suggests that the contribution of women was important to the survival of both.

Recognition was given to an institution's reliance on a competent day-to-day manager. The annual meetings of the Hitchin infirmary make regular mention of the board's entire satisfaction "with the efficient management of the matron" (1859), "and for the zeal she has shown for the welfare of the house and the economy of the expenditure of the funds of the infirmary" (1862) and a recognition of the "arduous nature of her duties from additional inmates" as a result of the railway accident at Arseley (1877).²⁹³ A further instance of the importance of the matron was recorded by the board of the Hertfordshire Convalescent Home which noted that they had a good committee "but would have been poorly off without a good manageress [Mrs Philpot, the matron] at the head".²⁹⁴ However, the management boards remained in the hands of men throughout the century. Whilst Miss Lucas was noted as being present at the 1906 annual meeting of the North Herts and South Beds Infirmary and Miss Beck in 1911, no women appeared as trustees.

Women were in the minority when it came to subscriptions and donations to local charities and other good causes, notably church and chapel building and improvements. However, it is clear from a sample of wills made by women in Hertford that there were women with

²⁹⁰ *Hertfordshire Mercury*, 23 January 1886 and 28 January 1893.

²⁹¹ H.A.L.S. HV 4 1A/1.

²⁹² *Hertfordshire Mercury*, 30 October 1886.

²⁹³ H.A.L.S. HV4 1A/1.

²⁹⁴ *Hertfordshire Mercury*, 27 July 1889.

significant money; that their investments were primarily in government stock, and they were thus conforming to the pattern in London and other home counties at the time in making a significant contribution to the finances of the nation.²⁹⁵ In addition they were supporters of local causes. During their lifetimes doubtless many were involved in fund raising, supported the bazaars, sales of work, concerts and made regular donations but it was on the death of a few of these women that the objects of these endeavours saw a real benefit.

Tens of millions of pounds may have been raised by women in the nineteenth century for various good causes.²⁹⁶ Similar wild guesses could also be made for Hertford and Hitchin, but quantification is impossible.²⁹⁷ Certainly the influence of women on various charities is evident although some doubt might have been cast on the worthiness of the cause. The bazaar in aid of St Andrew's Church in 1886 did inspire the newspaper to comment that some might question the need for a new pulpit but everyone would surely agree that the church badly needed a new organ and provision of a residence for a caretaker at the cemetery.²⁹⁸ Hertford was the beneficiary of two new church buildings during the century and these, plus nonconformist chapels, missionary societies, infirmaries and the Hertfordshire Convalescent Home comprise the main objects of charitable endeavour in both towns. The New Poor Law of 1834 intended to take beggars off the streets and, apart from the obviously frail and elderly, out-relief was not to be available to those able to work. However, by the end of the century it was evident that beggars and vagrants were still part of society. It took some years to appreciate the truth of the Book of St Matthew: the poor are always with us.

3.9 The Poor

By 1882, the endowed charities in Hertford were generating some £350 a year and the almshouses and other charities in Hitchin at the same date had income of about £1,000.²⁹⁹ The pattern changed little over the next 30 years with Hertford recorded as distributing about

²⁹⁵ D. R. Green and A. Owens, "Gentlewomanly capitalism", p. 531.

²⁹⁶ F. K. Prochaska, *Women and Philanthropy*, p. 55.

²⁹⁷ G. Finlayson, *Citizen, State and Social Welfare*, p. 67.

²⁹⁸ *Hertfordshire Mercury*, 19 June 1886.

²⁹⁹ Kelly, *Kelly's Directory of Hertfordshire*, 1882, pp. 611 and 620.

£260 a year to the poor and Hitchin's charities generating £1,000.³⁰⁰ The sums of money dispensed by these, long-standing, charities were inadequate to deal with the problems associated with urbanisation and compliance with nineteenth-century legislation on public health, sanitation and education. They were also not designed to meet Victorian aspirations for impressive churches, libraries and schools. Fundraising, whether it be by subscription, donation or a special event, such as the bazaar or concert, was directed primarily to meet these aspirations. From time to time there was a response to a need, such as the move to raise £10,000 to recompense farmers and gardeners whose crops were destroyed by a hail storm in the north west of the county, but these were unusual, and directed to the "deserving", who had suffered through an act of God.³⁰¹

Mrs Sarah Neild of Hertford made note of her expenditure during the years 1808 to 1810 including a regular record of a penny or even sixpence given to a poor person, such as the entry for 12 January 1809, "I gave a little girl 1d".³⁰² At around the same time, Phebe Allen could recall visits made by her aunt to poor cottages in the neighbourhood of Pirton and Ickleford, never going "empty handed".³⁰³ Later in the century, William Lucas noted that Phebe herself and her husband were infested with beggars, "but the entire absence of censoriousness and the indulgence shown to the frailties of their poor neighbours were noble and Christian values".³⁰⁴ This was a charitable view. For many, the giving of small alms appeared incompatible with the Victorian ethos of "Self Help", and Mrs Neild's penny given to a child would be criticised as resulting in a "child ruined".³⁰⁵ As regards vagrants and beggars, Hitchin took the step of instituting a Society for the Relief of Distressed Travellers and the Discouragement of Vagrancy and Begging in 1827, with instructions that inhabitants should refrain from giving any pecuniary relief to beggars, but to refer applicants to the agent of the Society, Mr James Craft, employed on a salary of £10 a year. The costs of relieving 1,302 beggars and their families for the first year were £24.0s.1d. rising to £33.18s.8d. in

³⁰⁰ Kelly, *Kelly's Directory of Hertfordshire*, 1910, pp. 128 and 143.

³⁰¹ *Hertfordshire Mercury*, 17 July 1897 and 14 August 1897.

³⁰² H.A.L.S. D/EHx/F23, *Personal and household account book of Mrs Sarah Neild*.

³⁰³ J. Lucas, *Phebe's Hitchin Book*, p. 45.

³⁰⁴ J. Lucas, *Phebe's Hitchin Book*, p. 71.

³⁰⁵ G. Finlayson, *Citizen, State and Social Welfare*, p. 77.

1831.³⁰⁶ There is no evidence of further meetings, which may suggest that the rationale for the Society had been superseded by the New Poor Law Act of 1834.

The evidence of self help amongst the poor is limited to what records have been retained. In the case of philanthropy among the poor, this was often informal and undocumented.³⁰⁷ It was usually women who were the recipients and givers of this local, informal, help. The importance of the mother is a common theme in working class memories.³⁰⁸ The father was often immune to the hardship and deprivation associated with the upbringing of a large family, his portion of the wage remained unchanged; it was the wife, and older children who managed the scarce means available to them.³⁰⁹ Records written by women from the working class are few.³¹⁰ Mrs Lawrenson, for example, recalled her illness following childbirth and wrote that “I think if it had not been for a good neighbour I should have gone under.”³¹¹ Rather like Flora Thompson’s mother, whose kindness to the lonely widower was rewarded by small gifts to her children, there was a symbiotic relationship between those whose lives, by locality and lack of space, were intertwined.³¹² Such lives were uncontrolled by officialdom and consequently unrecorded.³¹³ A remembrance of Queen Street, the poor area of Hitchin, describes the people there as having “hearts of gold” with a loyalty to each other and to their families.³¹⁴ This is supported by evidence from other locations throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. “Charitable assistance among the poor in London is not uncommon ... they assist each other to an extent which is little understood, for which they receive little credit.”³¹⁵ For many in the east end of London “kin and companions could mean

³⁰⁶ Hitchin Museum, *Lawson Thompson Scrapbook*, Vol. 1A.

³⁰⁷ F. K. Prochaska, *Women and Philanthropy*, p. viii.

³⁰⁸ J. Burnett, D. Vincent and D. Mayall, *The Autobiographies of the Working Class*, Vol. I, (Brighton, 1984), p. xxiv.

³⁰⁹ J. Humphries, “Because they are too menny”, p. 30.

³¹⁰ J. Burnett, D. Vincent and D. Mayall, *The Autobiographies of the Working Class*, p. xxviii.

³¹¹ M. Lewelyn Davies, ed., *Life as we have known it by Co-operative Working Women*, (London and New York, 1975, [first published, 1931]), p. 37.

³¹² F. Thompson, *Lark Rise to Candleford*, pp. 88 –9.

³¹³ F. K. Prochaska, *Women and Philanthropy*, p. 45.

³¹⁴ A. E. Latchmore, *People, Places and Past times of Hitchin*, p. 39. This view is supported by a report on the eviction of a family from Barnard’s Yard in 1904, not through fault of their own but because the landlord wished to improve the property. The response to a question as to whether the council should help was rejected on the basis that the family would find lodging as the neighbours were very kind, Hitchin Museum, *Loftus Barham Scrapbook*, Vol. 6.

³¹⁵ *Local Government Board, Report 1873 - 1874*, quoted in A. Davin, *Growing up Poor*, p. 59.

the difference between life and death”.³¹⁶ These connections were not recognised until the 1950’s.³¹⁷

The poor, as recipients of charity, were dependent on the view of the donor on what might be good for them. Under the headline of “Festivity in the [Hitchin] Union house”, it was reported that the children were given tea and cake and a chapter from the Bible. They were then examined by Reverend G. Gainsford. Mrs Whittington and Miss Hine, “with their usual generosity” supplied aged men and women with plum cake, tobacco and snuff.³¹⁸ In other words, the children were to be set on the path of religious virtue, and the deserving poor, and that was the elderly, were given some reward. All other adults were excluded from the “festivity”. Churchgoing was often a requisite for the recipient of largesse such as the “Barley Money” paid to widows in Hitchin who attended church.³¹⁹ For the Hertford workhouse inmates, it was enshrined in Rule 11 that “Paupers who are able shall always be required to attend Divine Worship every Sunday.....”³²⁰

For the Quaker community in Hitchin, visiting the sick and poor was a duty and a way of life although there was an odd voice of dissent. Like other Quaker families, the Seebohms in Hitchin were active philanthropists. Even in her last month of life, Wilhelmena Seebohm wrote that “I am very busy making Christmas presents for children and some orphans that I know something about.”³²¹ Her oldest sister, Juliet, took on district visiting in 1883 when she was 24. That she was doing what was expected of her is gleaned from a letter from her friend, Lucy Johnson, who wrote, “I feel like you that it is difficult to interest oneself in poor people just because they are poor. And I don’t really believe that anyone can really help anyone else, rich or poor, without personal affection and sympathy.”³²² This does appear to

³¹⁶ S. Wise, *The Blackest Streets*, p. 266.

³¹⁷ M. Young and P. Willmott, *Family and Kinship in East London*, (London, 1957).

³¹⁸ *Hertford Mercury*, 4 June 1853.

³¹⁹ H.A.L.S. D/P53 25/18,19, *Charities, Hitchin.*

³²⁰ H.A.L.S. D/P48/8/10, *Vestry Minutes, All Saints, Hertford.*

³²¹ H.A.L.S. D/ESe – C4, *Winnie Seebohm’s letters.*

³²² V. Glendinning, *A Suppressed Cry*, (London, 1969), p. 38.

be an exception but does accord with Beatrice Webb's concern on the intrusiveness of visiting the poor.³²³

Many women saw philanthropic work as a way of life. The obituary notice on Mrs Joseph Sharples praised her indefatigable work as Honorary Treasurer of the Society for the Betterment of the Poor in Hitchin, an organisation that she founded and kept going.³²⁴ These efforts were recorded on her death, yet there is no record of her achievements. There was an active Ladies' Committee. In 1854 they spent £50 relieving 422 families, although such activity had to be suspended during August and September through lack of funds.³²⁵ Two years later, the Ladies recorded their disquiet to the chairman, Joshua Ransom, as they were finding it impossible "to meet their increasing expenses and carry out the objects of this branch of the society, by relieving the sick and infirm, unless subscriptions are increased, and this fact is urgently impressed on subscribers and non-subscribers."³²⁶ How many were involved and any information on their day to day activities has not been retained although reports from the Ladies on their Visiting Districts were printed as they were deemed to be the best way of informing subscribers on their activities.³²⁷ The Society continued into the twentieth century with women taking on governance roles. The 1908 meeting records the re-appointment of Miss Pepper as Honorary Treasurer and Miss Hilda Seebohm as Honorary Secretary. The work of the Society had expanded with the appointment of Miss Evans, a qualified sanitary inspector (with diploma and silver medal from the National Health Society) to advise on child health and welfare.³²⁸

It was, again, a death, that of the wife of the Reverend F. G. Marchant of the Tilehouse Street Baptist Church, that provoked the recollection that she had been held in high esteem for her "valuable help and counsel to the poor".³²⁹ William Lucas of Hitchin recalled, on the death

³²³ G. Finlayson, *Citizen, State and Social Welfare*, pp. 158-9.

³²⁴ *Hertford Mercury*, 5 June 1869.

³²⁵ Hitchin Museum, *Lawson Thompson Scrapbook*, Vol. 1A.

³²⁶ *Hertford Mercury*, 21 November 1857.

³²⁷ Hitchin Museum, *Lawson Thompson Scrapbook*, Vol. 1A.

³²⁸ Hitchin Museum, *Lawson Thompson Scrapbook*, Vol. 3A.

³²⁹ *Hertfordshire Mercury*, 9 April 1887.

of his mother in 1852, that she spent most mornings visiting the poor and sick.³³⁰ His kinswoman, Elizabeth Lucas, second wife of the artist Samuel Lucas, was recorded as being full of “practical sympathy for the sick and suffering”.³³¹ It was again an obituary notice that recognised Mrs John Thompson’s kindness, “as a Lady whose great knowledge of the poor of Hitchin, and her ever ready benevolence in assisting them will be long remembered among us.”³³² The benevolence of her daughters was recorded by Reginald Hine, paying tribute, in particular, to Mary Thompson and her work amongst the women in the Queen Street area of Hitchin, which included the practical, such as making clothing for the poor, encouraging them to save through the Penny Bank and the building of a plait market nearby, but this is an exception.³³³ Whilst her intentions were noble, it was unfortunate that the building of a more conveniently placed plait market was achieved at the start of the decline in the straw plait trade.³³⁴ As with Octavia Hill’s efforts to build for the poor, it is easy to be wise after the event, but like Hill, she recognised the imperatives of the time and, like Frederic Seebohm (see p. 164) appreciated the value of the straw plait trade to the working class in Hitchin.³³⁵

Records of practical help are few, Rebecca Whiting, a minister of the Society of Friends, gave the (Hitchin) Town Missionary a beehive that had swarmed.³³⁶ In Hertford, a newspaper editorial announced a sale of articles of clothing suitable for the poor with the proceeds to be spent on the purchase of materials to employ poor women during the winter months.³³⁷ There is no report on this sale but it may have been a regular event as another was advertised six years later.³³⁸ The chimney sweeps in Hertford and Ware, the Bland, Dye, Baker and Street families were the recipients of clothing and a tea following a collection made by Mrs Barrand, Miss Horn and Mrs Metevier.³³⁹ Sometimes, however, the practical help would appear strange to the contemporary eye. At Mr Ransom’s harvest home in Hitchin in 1878, his wife said a few words in appreciation of the work that fell upon the

³³⁰ G. E. Bryant and G. P Baker, eds., *A Quaker Journal*, p. 475.

³³¹ Library of the Religious Society of Friends, *Typed extracts, Annual Monitor, 1900*, p. 112.

³³² J. Lucas, *Phebe’s Hitchin Book*, p. 89.

³³³ R. L. Hine, *Hitchin Worthies*, pp. 344 - 5.

³³⁴ N. Goose, “The straw plait and hat trades”, pp. 99 – 100.

³³⁵ D. Owen, *English Philanthropy*, p. 387.

³³⁶ S. Graham, Compiler, *The Diary of Joshua Whiting, (1820 – 1909)*, (York, 2006), p. 12.

³³⁷ *Hertfordshire Mercury*, 15 November 1873.

³³⁸ *Hertfordshire Mercury*, 29 November 1879.

³³⁹ *Hertfordshire Mercury*, 17 August 1879.

wives of their labourers. Her reward for their labours was to give each wife a tin vessel in which to carry the husband's dinner.³⁴⁰

Small scale alms giving continued throughout the century, there is, for example, regular reference in the *Hertford Mercury* to the winter soup kitchen in Hertford. Even by 1886, a carol concert took place in aid of the soup kitchen and penny dinners.³⁴¹ Such minor benevolence was insufficient in face of changing social conditions.³⁴² Whilst there is evidence of some concern for the poor in Hertford, it does appear that the women of Hertford were more concerned with buildings, particularly churches, and missions than the lot of other townspeople. It was an outsider, Mrs Faudell Phillips, Jewish by religion, who grasped the realities of the situation on the ground.

It was she who, on coming to Balls Park, took an interest in the (Church of England) All Saints Infants' School. On discovering that many children, coming from a distance, had to bring their own dinner and that dinner was inadequate, she called for a meeting of the trustees to see what could be done. On finding that there was no kitchen, she organised a concert at the Corn Exchange. This made £108 and expenses were met by Mrs Faudell-Phillips.³⁴³ Her interest in the school continued. Some years later, she was recorded, with her daughters, dispensing bread, butter, cake and oranges at the annual treat.³⁴⁴ Her altruism extended beyond the Infants' School.³⁴⁵ In December 1887, for example, she organised a dramatic and musical entertainment for the benefit of the Hertford Infirmary, raising £85, and sent a donation to the Baptist School tea in 1899.³⁴⁶

³⁴⁰ *Hertfordshire Mercury*, 19 September 1878.

³⁴¹ *Hertfordshire Mercury*, 11 December 1886.

³⁴² F. K. Prochaska, *Women and Philanthropy*, p. 22.

³⁴³ *Hertfordshire Mercury*, 6 October 1883 and 3 November 1883.

³⁴⁴ *Hertfordshire Mercury*, 29 January 1898.

³⁴⁵ J. P. Moore, *The Impact of Agricultural Depression and Land Ownership Change on the County of Hertfordshire, c. 1870 – 1914*, University of Hertfordshire Theses Collection, pp. 150 – 1 lists Helen Faudell-Phillips' charitable activity over a typical month.

³⁴⁶ *Hertfordshire Mercury*, 24 December 1887, 7 January 1888 and 14 January 1899.

It was apparent to many that poverty was a problem and, specifically as far as Hertford was concerned, it was affecting the “deserving” poor. Attitudes to the workhouse had changed with a change in its population. The breakdown of the composition of the Hertford and Hitchin workhouses is shown at Table 24, p. 144. The change over the half century reflects the reality that the workhouse was evolving into an old people’s home, with the only children present in 1901 being those related to other inmates.³⁴⁷ As the Hitchin Workhouse Master noted, in one of his fortnightly reports to trustees in 1900, the 12 admitted to the workhouse

Table 24: Workhouse population – Hertford and Hitchin

	1851	1851	1881	1881	1891	1891	1901	1901
Workhouse inmates	Hertford	Hitchin	Hertford	Hitchin	Hertford	Hitchin	Hertford	Hitchin
Female – total adult	33	40	32	46	37	38	30	57
Female – age 60+	9	18	8	27	18	17	13	32
Male – total adult	45	76	72	104	65	72	50	94
Male – 60 +	24	50	37	78	40	55	29	62
Children	35	55	45	52	37	28	10	17
Total	146	239	194	307	197	210	132	263
Vagrants	n/k	n/k	19	5	5	n/k	24	21

Source: 1851, 1881, 1891 and 1901 C.E.Bs. (Adult defined as aged 16 and over; children as aged 15 and under).

had a combined age of 940, averaging 78.5.³⁴⁸ The recognition that this was the home of last resort for many engendered some different attitudes. Entertainment at the Hertford workhouse at Christmas 1892 was for all, with oranges, cakes, sweets and bonbons freely distributed and the adults supplied with beer.³⁴⁹ A few years later it was recorded that entertainment, tea and buns were provided by Alderman Phillips and his family whilst at

³⁴⁷ N. Goose, “Workhouse populations in the mid-nineteenth century”, pp. 60, 66-7.

³⁴⁸ *Hertfordshire Mercury*, 17 February 1900.

³⁴⁹ *Hertfordshire Mercury*, 7 January 1893.

Hitchin, additions were made to the ordinary fare at Christmas in order to break the monotony.³⁵⁰

The rules were also relaxed at Hitchin to enable aged and infirm inmates of good character to visit family and friends on Sunday instead of being obliged to go to church.³⁵¹ Even more practical was the decision to allow a man out of the workhouse as he could earn 2 shillings and sixpence a week. Of concern was the possibility that everyone would want to do this but it was agreed that he could leave his children behind as they were all of weak intellect and not fit to be moved.³⁵² In Hertford, the ladies of the neighbourhood were asked to arrange for a few pictures to be put in the workhouse infirmary as “it behoved them to make the last days of the old as comfortable as possible without being extravagant.”³⁵³

Surveys by Booth (on life and labour in London) and Rowntree (covering poverty in York) suggested that deprivation was a factor affecting England’s major towns but, on the other hand, improvements had been effected in public health, sanitation and general living conditions.³⁵⁴ The later years of the nineteenth century suffered no great economic collapse but there were years of depression such as the later 1870s, the mid-1880s and the mid-1890s. These trends can be seen in the figures for out-relief in Hitchin and Hertford. The early 1870s saw improvements. Hitchin was one of the seven unions commended for its 28.75 per cent decrease in out-relief between the years 1872 and 1876. This was attributed to the strict adherence to the rules on outdoor relief and had not been accompanied by an increase in inmates of the workhouse.³⁵⁵ The ten years from 1882 also saw a decrease in the maintenance of paupers in Hertford from £754 spent on in maintenance and £1,546 on out relief for the half year to £688 and £1,500 in 1893.³⁵⁶ These figures support the thesis that there were years of depression and years of improvement.

³⁵⁰ *Hertfordshire Mercury*, 4 January 1896 and 14 January 1905.

³⁵¹ *Hertfordshire Mercury*, 13 June 1896.

³⁵² *Hertfordshire Mercury*, 4 March 1899.

³⁵³ *Hertfordshire Mercury*, 17 April 1897.

³⁵⁴ G. Finlayson, *Citizen, State, and Social Welfare*, pp. 108 – 112.

³⁵⁵ BPP 1909, Appendix volume 1A, *Royal Commission on the Poor Laws and Relief of Distress*, p. 807.

³⁵⁶ *Hertfordshire Mercury*, 31 March 1894.

Whilst standards of living were improving, these periods of depression, such as in the mid-1890s, were reflected at local level in both Hitchin and Hertford.³⁵⁷ Both towns had a problem with casuals and vagrants. The comment, at a meeting of the Hertford workhouse, by Colonel Preston, the Local Government Inspector that “as for able bodied vagrants, he did not care tuppence” may have been typical.³⁵⁸ However, both Hitchin and Hertford were reporting an increase in casuals during the last years of the century. In Hertford, a lack of room at the workhouse meant that they had to be boarded in the town of Hertford.³⁵⁹ At the same time, the increase in the number of tramps, the casual paupers, was a constant refrain in the Hitchin Workhouse Master’s reports. In January 1898, the Hitchin Workhouse Master recorded 211 casual paupers as compared with 123 for the same period in the previous year.³⁶⁰ Even when the weather improved in May of that year, he was still reporting an increase with 39 men coming into the workhouse in one night.³⁶¹

Although casual paupers were an issue for both towns, it was Hertford that had a problem at its core. There was the annual soup kitchen for the poor of the parish of St Andrews, running from January for 12 weeks.³⁶² The Christ Church soup kitchen was also a regular feature. By 1895, it had been running for nine years, with 18 distributions made to 66 families in 1894.³⁶³ This was inadequate and in February 1895, the Mayor called for a meeting of employers and prominent individuals to consider the distress in the town as a result of so many men being out of work. It was Mrs Faudell-Phillips who set up the Hertford Benevolent Fund and its subscribers enabled distributions of coal, groceries and soup to be made to 393 men, 463 women and 869 children. Mrs Faudell-Phillips was also thanked for giving away dinners.³⁶⁴

The situation did not improve and in the following year, the Mayor of Hertford was seized with the fact that there was “a great deal of poverty and suffering in Hertford which called for

³⁵⁷ G. Finlayson, *Citizen, State and Social Welfare*, pp. 113 - 114

³⁵⁸ *Hertfordshire Mercury*, 17 April 1897.

³⁵⁹ *Hertfordshire Mercury*, 17 April 1897.

³⁶⁰ *Hertfordshire Mercury*, 22 January 1898.

³⁶¹ *Hertfordshire Mercury*, 14 May 1898.

³⁶² *Hertfordshire Mercury*, 7 January 1893 and 6 January 1894.

³⁶³ *Hertfordshire Mercury*, 26 January 1895.

³⁶⁴ *Hertfordshire Mercury*, 16 February 1895.

help”.³⁶⁵ He convened a meeting to set up a society for organising charitable relief so as to identify deserving causes. Naturally, the committee initially comprised men, but Mr G. R. Darrant “thought however that the list of the committee although satisfactory as far as it went was imperfect. He urged the inclusion of a few ladies names and those of bona fide working men.” This suggestion was taken up. The report on the first meeting indicates a committee consisting of 16 men and 12 women.³⁶⁶ The bad weather that winter “brought the usual numbers of men being out of work and standing idle in the street”, and whilst forty of them were set to work, by the Mayor, in obtaining gravel, the newspaper still recorded that there was a “good deal of want in the town” and that the soup kitchen had distributed soup to 50 and dinners to 25, and that this would continue three times a week for the following fortnight.³⁶⁷ The problem continued into the twentieth century. The Hertford Organised Aid Society spent over £100 in making 430 grants of weekly relief in 1904, consisting of coal, groceries, milk, bread and 699 tickets for food at the Hertford Coffee House. In addition, a number of cases were reported to the N.S.P.C.C.³⁶⁸ The report on its fifteenth annual meeting in 1910 showed an increase in expenditure, (£150) with 100 additional grants of grocery and 22 cases of neglect were reported to the N.S.P.C.C. Particular note was made of the fact that “whoever came [to the Society] for relief was never asked questions about religious beliefs.”³⁶⁹

Fundraising efforts, by men and women, in the Victorian period had allowed for the building of churches, chapels, infirmaries and the Hertfordshire Convalescent Home. Missions at home and abroad had also benefitted, but poverty was still a problem. The Hertford Organised Aid Society was a response to a need. Hitchin, by contrast, already possessed several benefit societies, notably the Hitchin Friendly Society, established before the New Poor Law in 1827, and surviving beyond with 254 members in 1906.³⁷⁰ In addition, Hitchin had a Lying-in charity, founded in 1796, a Provident Institution from 1815, a Female Saving

³⁶⁵ *Hertfordshire Mercury*, 31 October 1896.

³⁶⁶ *Hertfordshire Mercury*, 31 October 1896 and 14 November 1896.

³⁶⁷ *Hertfordshire Mercury*, 30 January 1897 and 6 February 1897.

³⁶⁸ *Hertfordshire Mercury*, 14 January 1905.

³⁶⁹ *Hertfordshire Mercury*, 29 January 1910.

³⁷⁰ Kelly, *Kelly's Directory of Hertfordshire, 1906*, p. 137.

Society, (1823), a Society for Bettering the Condition of the Poor, (1831) and a Society for the Provision of Invalid Kitchens in Back Street inaugurated in 1868.³⁷¹

In spite of different approaches, neither town was able to ignore the economic realities. Figures show that both towns were faced with similar problems. The proportion of pauperism against the 1901 population in Hertford was 1 in 33; for Hitchin it was only slightly better at 1 in 37.³⁷² There was a national debate on the inadequacy of the New Poor Law and the piecemeal attempts by voluntary organisations. Whatever had been achieved by the hard-working men and women engaged in good causes in Hitchin and Hertford, it was inadequate and there was recognition that poverty was a national, state, challenge.³⁷³

3.10 Women and government

The charitable activities of women have been credited with opening new work areas to them and a voice in politics.³⁷⁴ In practice, many women were already involved in the caring occupations such as nursing and education. The process of professionalism of these roles was more complicated than placing the sole catalyst as involvement in philanthropic work.³⁷⁵ Women's involvement in philanthropy may have brought them into the world of local government but even when appointed to local councils, in the twentieth century, their influence was limited to matters of education, health, safety and hygiene.³⁷⁶ By 1898 Mrs Eliza Ransom and Mrs Ann Wright had joined the Hitchin Board of Guardians and in 1901 Mrs Kate Dunn appeared to have replaced Mrs Wright. Mrs Ransom was also a member of the school attendance committee and was recorded as a member of the Rural District

³⁷¹ R. Hine, *The History of Hitchin*, Vol. II, p. 230.

³⁷² BPP 1909, *Royal Commission on the Poor Laws and the Relief of Distress*, Appendix volume 1A, Appendix No. XIII (B).

³⁷³ G. Finlayson, *Citizen, State and Social Welfare*, pp. 160 - 3

³⁷⁴ F. K. Prochaska, *Women and Philanthropy*, pp. 226 -7.

³⁷⁵ F. K. Prochaska, *Women and Philanthropy*, p. 227.

³⁷⁶ P. Hollis, *Ladies Elect – Women in English Local Government*, pp. 10, 47 and 468.

Council.³⁷⁷ By 1908 the Hertford Board of Guardians included Miss Ginn and Mrs Durrant; they were joined by Mrs Dunn the following year.³⁷⁸

Women ratepayers were given the borough vote in 1867, restricted to unmarried women in 1872. Typically, they represented 17 per cent of a local electoral register, although this was higher in the spa and spire towns.³⁷⁹ In a sample year, 1896, there were 163 women and 773 men entitled to vote in parochial and county elections in Hitchin and 170 women and 825 men in Hertford.³⁸⁰ By the end of the century, nationally, there were about 200 female parish councillors.³⁸¹ Although women were able to serve on district councils, even by 1914 there were never more than two or three doing so at any one time and this is true of Hertford and Hitchin.³⁸² 1907 saw the first town and county elections.³⁸³ It was not until 1920 that Emeline Edith Rose Bradford appeared as the first female county councillor for Hertfordshire, representing Watford.³⁸⁴

1883 introduced restrictions on expenditure on parliamentary campaigns.³⁸⁵ This increased the importance of volunteers, including women, resulting in the formation of the Women's Liberal Association and the Women's Cooperative Guild.³⁸⁶ Further interest in politics is evidenced by the attendance at the Unionist meeting in Hertford in 1888 where a "number of ladies occupied the front seats in the body of the hall and the gallery."³⁸⁷ A more direct involvement by women was under the auspices of the Primrose League.³⁸⁸ With a membership that included Lady Gwendoline Cecil, Hertfordshire was an important county

³⁷⁷ H.A.L.S. BG/HIT 38, *Hitchin Union Minute Book*, meetings held on 23 September 1898, 23 April 1901.

The *Hertfordshire Mercury*, 19 August 1899, recorded that Mrs Ransom seconded a resolution before Hitchin Rural District Council to consider an isolation hospital.

³⁷⁸ *Hertfordshire Almanack*, 1908, p. 131 and *Hertfordshire Almanack*, 1909, p. 133.

³⁷⁹ P. Hollis, *Ladies Elect*, p. 7. A return made in 1890 determined that 685,202 women were entitled to vote in England and Wales with the total for Hertfordshire being 4,546, *Hertfordshire Mercury*, 15 March 1890.

³⁸⁰ H.A.L.S. SH6/1/45, *Register of Persons entitled to vote – Northern or Hitchin Division 1896*; H.A.L.S. SH6/1/44, *Register of Persons entitled to vote – Hertford – 1896*. (The proportion of women entitled to vote in the same year was 18% for St Albans and 20% for Chipping Barnet, H.A.L.S. SH6/1/46).

³⁸¹ F. K. Prochaska, *Women and Philanthropy*, p. 226.

³⁸² P. Hollis, *Ladies Elect*, p. 373. The *Hertfordshire Almanack* has no record of women councillors in the 1902, 1906, 1912, 1917, 1918 and 1919 editions.

³⁸³ P. Hollis, *Ladies Elect*, p. 396.

³⁸⁴ *Hertfordshire Almanack*, 1920, p. 64.

³⁸⁵ *The Corrupt and Illegal Practices Prevention Act 1883*.

³⁸⁶ There was a branch of the former in Hertford, (notice of meeting – *Hertfordshire Mercury*, 10 March 1900) and a Cooperative Society was established in Hitchin, (*Hertfordshire Mercury*, 5 November 1892).

³⁸⁷ *Hertfordshire Mercury*, 27 October 1888. The names of the men attending were reported; the ladies remain anonymous.

³⁸⁸ An organisation formed in 1883, by admirers of Benjamin Disraeli, to promote Conservative principles.

with St Albans, for example, boasting 12 habitations and around 4,500 members.³⁸⁹ By 1901 about 25 per cent of the officers of the Primrose League were women with Hertford fitting that pattern with seven of the 23 Council members being women, including the Dame President, Miss Erica Robertson.³⁹⁰ By 1908, another office was taken by a woman with Mrs G. R. Durrant undertaking the role of Treasurer.³⁹¹ Whether this indicates an interest by women in politics is debateable. The League has been described as a social organisation.³⁹² The indications suggest that in Hertfordshire it attracted women and particularly younger women. The audience at one meeting was described as largely composed of “dames”; another, a concert, attracted a large audience, “ladies predominating and infantile cries were indicative of the presence of babies”. A similar attendance pattern was reported for a meeting four years later with “a small attendance, ladies preponderating”. As usual, the newspaper reported the names of the men present.³⁹³

There were suffrage associations in both towns. A public meeting was held in Hertford in 1884 and by 1910 Hitchin, as the base for the North Hertfordshire branch of the Women’s Suffrage Society, was reporting a growth of membership to 184, not a high number and, naturally, the chairman was a man, Earl Lytton.³⁹⁴ Many of the well-known women of the Victorian era distanced themselves from the suffrage movement; some were openly hostile to it.³⁹⁵ A higher priority, for some women, was a demand for higher education so, like Winnie Seebohm, they were better qualified to be useful in life.³⁹⁶

³⁸⁹ M. Pugh, *The Tories and the People, 1880 – 1935* (Oxford, 1985), pp. 25 and 108.

³⁹⁰ P. Sheail, “The Hertford Primrose League in 1901”, *Herts Past and Present*, Issue 15, Spring 2010, p.5 and p. 7. (This article included photographs of the officers and some committee members, but not of Miss Robertson as there is not one on record. Four of the women served with their husbands).

³⁹¹ *Hertfordshire Almanack*, 1908, p. 131. (This does demonstrate a difficulty in identifying women. The Miss Emily Beddall on the Council in 1901 became Mrs G. R Durrant the following year, see P. Sheail, “The Hertford Primrose League”, p. 13).

³⁹² P. Hollis, *Ladies Elect*, p. 54. The attractions in one area were the summer fete, excursions, winter entertainments and the pretty enamelled badge, (F. Thompson, *Lark Rise to Candleford*, pp. 465 – 6).

³⁹³ *Hertfordshire Mercury*, 28 January 1888, 26 May 1888 and 9 January 1892.

³⁹⁴ *Hertfordshire Mercury*, 19 March 1910.

³⁹⁵ G.Himmelfarb, “Introduction”, in G. Himmelfarb, *The Spirit of the Age, Victorian Essays* (New Haven; London, 2007), pp. 11 – 2.

³⁹⁶ The Quaker magazine cited Elizabeth Fry, Florence Nightingale and Catherine Booth as part of a movement giving women a place in public service which resulted in a demand for further education. (*The Friend*, Vol. XLVII, 4 October 1907); Notice of the death of Miss Wilhelmenia Seebohm, *Hertfordshire Mercury*, 2 January 1886.

4 Education

4.1 Introduction

Provision of schooling was haphazard at the beginning of the nineteenth century.¹ For the children of the upper and middle classes there were the fee-paying schools and private tuition with a governess or tutor. For the sons of artisans and trades-people there were long-established grammar schools. For the working-class child in the rural community the options consisted of a few charity schools and the “dame” schools run by elderly men and women, often when they were unfit for manual labour.² The quality of instruction was mixed and although often dismissed as no better than child-minding establishments, many provided children with the basics of reading and writing.³ The incidence of child labour in some areas affected both school attendance and the type of school attended which, in Hertfordshire, included the plait school.⁴ This pattern of provision is evident in Hertford and Hitchin. There were the charity schools, such as the Brown School of Industry in Hertford, doubtless an unknown number of “dame schools” in both towns and, in Hitchin, the 1851 census identified two women running “Plaiting Schools”.

Teaching was a calling that was associated with women as providing paid employment for the lower and middle classes as child minders, teachers and governesses. The 1851 census for Hertford shows that women formed the majority in teaching roles with 13 men and 23 women so enumerated. For Hitchin, the distribution was more skewed with 11 men and 32 women in education. Teaching continued to be primarily associated with women at the end of the century. By the time of the 1891 census there were 11 men in Hertford and 45 women in teaching jobs; in Hitchin the numbers were 9 men and 61 women. This is underlined by the change in types of schools over the 40 years. In 1851, both towns had private boys’

¹ P. Horn, *Education in Rural England*, p. 30.

² P. Horn, *Education in Rural England*, p. 15; J. Humphries, *Childhood and Child Labour in the British industrial revolution* (Cambridge, 2010), p. 332.

³ P. Horn, *Education in Rural England*, pp. 18 -19; J. Humphries, *Childhood and child labour*, p. 364.

⁴ W. B. Stephens, *Education Literacy and Society 1830 – 1870* (Manchester, 1987), pp.172 – 3; P. Horn, *Education in Rural England*, pp. 23 –6.

schools with Mrs and the Misses Bayes Preparatory school for Young Gentlemen and William Poulton's Boys' Academy in Hertford and Samuel Goodwin's Classical and Commercial Academy and Benjamin Abbott's Classical Boarding School in Hitchin.⁵ By 1890, the boys' schools had disappeared although Ladies' Schools, such as those run by Miss Thomasine P. Kingston in Hertford and the Misses Piersons in Hitchin, were still being advertised.⁶ There was still a market for the establishments for the genteel young lady run by the genteel.

In spite of this formal association between women and education, identifying evidence for their influence in the growth of literacy, which also encompasses their other roles as mothers, school visitors and Sunday-school teachers, is elusive. Hertfordshire was no different to any other county in being affected by the changes to education during the century, primarily that for the working class. The experiences of the children of this class were probably similar to those from other parts of the country who produced their autobiographies.⁷ The following sections will explore evidence for the input of women in education in Hertford and Hitchin in the context of the national scene.

4.2 The growth of literacy

The nineteenth century saw an increased interest in the education of the working class, culminating in the 1870 Education Act. As with other relationships with the poor, there was ambivalence and controversy on what changes should be made and how they should be implemented. The problem with charity was that help given to those in need should encourage self reliance, not dependency, and maintain the established order of society. Similar strains can be detected in the debate on education for the working classes. On the one hand, the testimony of Samuel Smiles suggested that the working class, through mutual help in the area of education, would find the means for social elevation.⁸ The alternative view can be seen in an early report of the trustees of the British Schools in Hitchin which stated that their aim was to give children such plain and useful knowledge "as may prove beneficial to

⁵ Kelly, *Kelly's Post Office Directory of Hertfordshire 1851*, pp. 198, 200, 202 - 3.

⁶ Kelly, *Kelly's Directory of Hertfordshire 1851*, pp. 770 and 780.

⁷ J. Burnett, *Destiny Obscure*, Chapter 2; J. Humphries, *Childhood and child labour*, Chapter 10.

⁸ G. Finlayson, *Citizen, State and Social Welfare*, pp. 22 - 3.

themselves in their humble walk of life and render them more generally useful to their employers".⁹

Parental attitudes towards education also had ambiguities. For the upper class, an education was a *sine qua non*; for the tradespeople, some basic skills of numeracy and literacy were essential to the continuance of the family business; for the working-class family, there may have been an incentive to see children improve their lot in life but the reality was that all its members were part of an economic unit. The wage earning potential of the wife and the children were often crucial to survival.¹⁰ The pence expended in schooling had to be balanced between the benefit of having the children looked after while the wife worked; the possibility of the children themselves finding remuneration through employment was counterpoised with the benefits of, for example, provision of clothing from membership of a school. By the later years of the nineteenth century the charity school in Hertford, the Green Coat School, was still attracting pupils. The Education Inspectors had some doubts about its usefulness in providing an education, noting defects in spelling, grammar and arithmetic and particularly in grammar, as "few of the boys manifested any intelligent knowledge of the subject, and all came far short of the Government Standard requirement."¹¹ However, it was a school still attractive to the very poor because of its gift of clothing. Even in the 1880s, the Mayor of Hertford could report, with the agreement of the borough council, that the school was adhering to the original intentions of the founders and doing good work in the town.¹²

The village school and "dame school" have been regarded as little more than child-minding establishments staffed by teachers who were barely literate.¹³ This endorses the official, mid-century view that they were "generally very inefficient" although the testimony of those who experienced such schooling indicates that some fulfilled a useful function.¹⁴ A more recent assessment concluded that the "Dames" were, in return for a few pence, providing a basic

⁹ H.A.L.S. 67527, *Seventh Report of the Dead Street School, 24 December 1825*.

¹⁰ J. Humphries, "Household Economy" in R. Floud and P. Johnson, eds., *The Cambridge Economic History of Modern Britain, Volume I, Industrialisation, 1700 – 1860* (Cambridge, 1994), p. 261; J. Burnett, *Destiny Obscure*, p. 136.

¹¹ H.A.L.S. D/EL Q 25, *Examination of Boys, July 1881*.

¹² *Hertfordshire Mercury*, 10 February 1883.

¹³ G. E. Mingay, *Rural Life in Victorian England*, p. 161.

¹⁴ J. Burnett, *Destiny Obscure*, pp. 145 – 6.

grounding and affording working-class children an opportunity to learn letters and numbers.¹⁵ Child-minding was essential when the wife had the capacity to earn. The alternative was to vest responsibility in older children of the family. A description of one family unit recalled that “Boys fed poultry and pigs and soon were milking and cutting firewood. By eight years they could do much more than all that. Girls had to bath little brother and sister just a size smaller than themselves and stagger with pails of water from the tap fifty yards away when scarcely taller than the pails they carried between them.”¹⁶ Not all children were imbued with this sense of responsibility. That leaving the very young in charge of a baby was commonplace may be inferred from the report in the *Hertford Mercury*. The mother was out working in the fields leaving a child in charge of the baby who was attacked by a ferret while the young child-minder had gone out to play. The paper censured neither mother nor child for their neglect, but recorded that “the case ought to be a warning to labourers not to keep in their dwellings such dangerous vermin as ferrets.”¹⁷

Whilst the provision of free elementary education undoubtedly was a factor at the end of the century, there were other forces which were supporting the rise in literacy amongst the population throughout the Victorian era. It has been recognised that Sunday schools were an important contributor to this growth.¹⁸ As with the rationale for other philanthropic endeavours in the nineteenth century, a fundamental need was to regulate society and religion was seen as the key. Snell took as his text, on his discussion on Sunday schools, Proverbs, Chapter 22, verse 6.¹⁹ This is a theme espoused by the Cowbridge Sunday School in Hertford. Of special note, in the report on the bazaar held in aid of a new school-room, was the appositeness of the doll representing a Sunday school girl bearing a flag with the inscription “Train up a child in the way he should go,” [and when he is old, he will not depart from it].²⁰ Whilst Mingay asserts that it was the established church in the form of the local clergyman who established a school to combat poverty and ignorance, this was unrealistic in

¹⁵ J. Humphries, *Childhood and child labour*, pp. 355 – 8 and p. 364.

¹⁶ M. K. Ashby, *The Changing English Village 1066 – 1914* (Kineton, 1974), p. 168.

¹⁷ *Hertford Mercury*, 14 April 1860.

¹⁸ J. Humphries, *Childhood and child labour*, p. 322.

¹⁹ K. D. M. Snell, “The Sunday-School Movement in England and Wales: Child Labour, Denominational Control and working-class culture”, *Past and Present*, 164, p. 122.

²⁰ *Hertford Mercury*, 12 April 1851.

the populous industrialised towns.²¹ The local clergyman in a parish might have the influence to impose Christian values on his flock, particularly if there were other benefits such as outings, treats, access to the Lying-in “Box” and other alms. The clergyman’s daughter, for example, was the person consulted in Lark Rise on finding places for girls going into domestic service.²²

Hertfordshire had one of the first Sunday schools. The credit for publicising this initiative has been given to Robert Raikes who started his first Sunday school in Gloucester in the 1780s and, in Hertfordshire, to the Earl of Clarendon who established the first such school in the county at Kings Langley in 1785.²³ The school’s aims were to establish principles of virtue, piety and respect for the Sabbath. This might fit the model of those in power buying peace and political tranquillity.²⁴ However, there were two incentives for potential customers of this Sunday school. Firstly, the child had to be proposed by one of the sponsors of the Sunday school, thus it was a privilege to attend; secondly, and a real motive for parents to encourage attendance, was that the recipients of this instruction were also candidates for a distribution of clothing if their attendance merited it.²⁵ The ethos of “self-help” and need to bring a sense of responsible God-fearing behaviour to the poor thus produced reasons to turn attention to the education of the working class; for the working class, there were tangible rewards. The child-minding aspect might also have a bearing. Whilst Lacqueur dismisses the theory that parents could, on Sunday afternoon, enjoy the benefits of a quiet house without the distraction of children, it must have been a welcome bonus.²⁶ Whether Hertford and Hitchin met the rural or urban model of Sunday-school provision will be covered in another section.

Week-day schooling for many a working-class child may have been in the hands of semi-literate child-minders but the establishment of two bodies, the dissenters’ Royal Lancastrian Association, which became the British and Foreign School Society in 1814 and the Church of

²¹ G.E. Mingay, *Rural Life in Victorian England*, p. 158.

²² F. Thompson, *Lark Rise to Candleford*, p. 162.

²³ J. S. Hurt, *Bringing Literacy to Rural England, The Hertfordshire Example* (London, 1972), pp. 2 – 3.

²⁴ T. W. Lacqueur, *Religion and Respectability: Sunday Schools and the Working-Class Culture 1780 - 1850* (New Haven, 1976), p. 85.

²⁵ J. S. Burt, *Bringing Literacy to Rural England*, p. 3.

²⁶ T. W. Lacqueur, *Religion and Respectability*, p. 147.

England's National Society for Promoting the Education of the Poor in the Principles of the Established Church in 1811 provided a basis for a more uniform education system for the working class with "National" and "British" schools. These movements were purely voluntary in nature as interest by the government in education for the working class was not a factor in early nineteenth-century politics. The watershed year for an official interest was in 1833 as a consequence of the Royal Commission on the Existence and Conduct of Endowed Charities which exposed some schools to government scrutiny. Falling under the purview of the Charity Commissioners were Hertford and Hitchin schools such as the Free Grammar School in Hitchin and the Richard Hale School in Hertford. The same year saw an initiative to extend education with a state grant of £20,000 to be shared between the British and National schools for the building of new schools, with the initial caveat that the respective Society raised an equivalent sum of money and later, from 1839, that such schools submitted to an inspection. From these modest beginnings, the area of education became one with resources devoted to it. The Education Committee of the Privy Council was established to dispense these grants in 1839 and within ten years was employing 50 civil servants, one of the largest branches of government.²⁷

The rise in interest in schooling meant a consequent need for an increase in the provision of schools. Hertfordshire was home to many of the established gentry such as the Salisburys and Cowpers whose seats were close to Hertford.²⁸ Furthermore, Hertfordshire attracted successful businessmen who wanted a country estate which was close to the capital. A reminiscence of Hertford in the nineteenth century noted that "The stately mansions and parks that surrounded the town of Hertford when I was a boy were the evidence of this. Woodhall, Goldings and High Leigh were all the country residences of wealthy bankers."²⁹ Whether these families, and the establishment, were supportive in bringing education to the masses in Hertfordshire will be explored in Section 4.4 (pp. 166 - 175).

The debate on the level of literacy amongst the population in the nineteenth century continues and, specifically, as to whether the evidence from marriage registers tells us anything more

²⁷ A. Digby and P. Searby, *Children, School and Society in Nineteenth-Century England* (London, 1981), p. 5.

²⁸ J. S. Burt, *Bringing Literacy to Rural England*, p. 15.

²⁹ H.A.L.S. D/EX26 Z3, *Looking back seventy years*.

than the competency of a small sample of the population at a given point of time.³⁰ Although educational standards were low, a sample of working-class biographies would appear to demonstrate that a total lack of schooling was rare.³¹ If there was no expectation that the working class could write, why disabuse officialdom when it came to a marriage register? The caveats to an extrapolation that this was true of the population as whole is that someone writing an autobiography would be literate and this particular sample is restricted to boys. However, whilst education for girls may not have been viewed as a priority by working-class families, many sons recall that it was their mother who helped them on the path to literacy.³² Many may have learned enough to read the Bible, but the “use it or lose it” philosophy may well have applied to most. M. K. Ashby recalled her grandmother who “never read and had almost forgotten how to.”³³ It is a small sample, but the 1841 meeting of the Hitchin Society for Bettering the Condition of the Poor noted that £9.3s.11d. had been spent on a school in Langley. 21 had left, 6 boys and 15 girls; all could read, 10 write and “12 girls use their needle to advantage”.³⁴ This may suggest different priorities for girls’ education, but whether or not they could write, all could read.

The signing, or not, of the marriage register was the measure used by the government to assess the literacy of the population. That this was of interest to the government has been attributed to the ethos that education would have a civilising effect on the masses and a view that the state needed to adopt a paternalistic approach to protect the weak and encourage “self-help”.³⁵ Government interest began with support of the voluntary approach by the British and National schools but by mid-century, there were comments that England was under-investing in education and efficient instruction in literacy skills did assume increasing priority.³⁶

³⁰ A. Digby and P. Searby, *Children, School and Society*, p. 3; R. Crone, “Reappraising Victorian literacy through prison records”, *Journal of Victorian Culture*, 27, 2010.

³¹ J. Humphries, *Childhood and child labour*, p. 314.

³² J. Humphries, *Childhood and child labour*, p. 320.

³³ M. K. Ashby, *Joseph Ashby of Tysoe*, p. 171.

³⁴ H.A.L.S. 67564, *Society for the Bettering the Condition of the Poor, Annual Meeting, November 1841*.

³⁵ A. Digby and P. Searby, *Children, School and Society*, p. 6; G. Finlayson, *Citizen, State and Social Welfare*, pp. 87 – 9.

³⁶ G. Finlayson, *Citizen, State and Social Welfare*, p. 97; D. Mitch, “Education and Skill of the British labour force” in R. Floud and P. Johnson, eds., *The Cambridge Economic History of Modern Britain, Volume I, Industrialisation, 1700 – 1860* (Cambridge, 1994), p. 350.

If the central tenet of many of those involved in the education of the working class was to instil the habits consistent with a Christian upbringing, then the central role in the syllabus was knowledge of the Bible, and being able to refresh one's memory by reading it.³⁷ The core subject was thus religious instruction and even when the 1870 Education Act was enforced to provide facilities for every child to be educated, there were those, such as Lord Shaftesbury, who declared a preference for "Ragged Schools" as they taught religion, whilst state schools taught little or none.³⁸ The advance in thinking was that education was more than being able to make out the letters in a well-known text but this needed to be reinforced by practice in writing those letters. The increased involvement of the government in a country whose population was growing required a people that could read instructions, a case in point being the responsibilities of parents under the 1870 Education Act. An early meeting of the School Attendance Board for Hitchin empowered the clerk to "publish a large and smaller handbill with provisions of the Act to promulgate it within the Union."³⁹ Similar bills were published in Hertford.⁴⁰

The third Annual Report of the Registrar General for 1841 acknowledged that the signing, or not, of the marriage register was, as an indicator of literacy, open to question. However, it was noted that although this sample might not be representative of the population as a whole, as the same pattern of literacy was revealed in the second Annual Report, it was concluded that this was a safe measure of the comparative state of education. For the south Midland counties, the highest level of illiteracy was in Bedfordshire at 61 per cent, followed by Hertfordshire with 52 per cent of men and 56 per cent of women signing the marriage register with a mark.⁴¹ An unusual feature of the figures for Hertfordshire was the gender balance. In other counties a higher proportion of men to women signed their name. London, for example, had the highest level of literacy in England and Wales with 18 per cent signing with a mark, but this was made up of 12 per cent men and 25 per cent women.⁴² By 1854, 31 per cent of men and 46 per cent of women signed with a mark, which was recorded as a "striking example of the neglect of elementary education in England" leading to the conclusion that

³⁷ P. Horn, *Education in Rural England 1800 – 1914*, p. 31.

³⁸ G. E. Mingay, *Rural Life in Victorian England*, p. 158; G. Finlayson, *Citizen, State and Social Welfare*, p. 97.

³⁹ H.A.L.S. BG/HIT, *Hitchin School Attendance Committee 1877 – 1899*.

⁴⁰ H.A.L.S. D/EL Q27, *Green Coat School 1836 – 1839*.

⁴¹ BPP, 1841 Session 2 VI (345), *Third Annual Report of the Registrar-General*, p. 8.

⁴² BPP 1841 Session 2 VI (345), p. 8.

“46 in every 100 of the future mothers of the English population cannot write, or write so imperfectly that they made their marks instead of writing their names in the marriage register. How long is the population to remain in this state of ignorance?”⁴³

The 1872 Report to the Local Government Board noted a progressive improvement but even in 1870, 24 per cent of men and 27 per cent of women did not write their names on marriage registers.⁴⁴ By 1880, the “constantly decreasing number of men and women failing to sign their names in the marriage register” was a cause for congratulation as children increasingly attended Board and other schools. The national figure had decreased to 15 per cent of men and 20 per cent of women.⁴⁵ Although the value of girls’ education had been endorsed at national level in order to educate the future mothers of the population, education for many girls ranged from none or what could be gleaned from a “dame” school and it was the daughters of the family whose schooling was disrupted through a need to take on domestic responsibilities.⁴⁶

Hertfordshire was unusual in its gender balance in the numbers signing the marriage register. By 1878 women were more literate than men in the county with 24.7 per cent of men and 20.3 per cent of women signing with a mark. This was the pattern for other counties in south east England, but a marked contrast to neighbouring Bedfordshire where 24.8 per cent of men and 30.6 per cent of women signed with a mark.⁴⁷ By the end of the century, 97 per cent of men and 96 per cent of women were able to sign the marriage register.⁴⁸ Hertfordshire was a county with a high level of illiteracy in 1841. By 1901 it was a county which was not singled out for adverse comment.⁴⁹

⁴³ BPP 1854, *Thirteenth Annual Report of the Registrar General*, p. viii.

⁴⁴ BPP 1872 XVII [C667], *Thirty-third Annual Report of the Registrar General, Summary of Marriages, Births and Deaths registered 1861 – 1870*, p. v.

⁴⁵ BPP 1880 XVI [C2568], *Forty-first Annual Report of the Registrar General (1878)*, p. xix.

⁴⁶ F. K. Prochaska, *Women and Philanthropy*, pp. 3 - 4; J. Burnett, *Destiny Obscure*, p. 140.

⁴⁷ BPP 1880 XVI [C2568], *Forty-first Annual Report of the Registrar General (1878)*, p. xviii.

⁴⁸ P. Horn, *Education in Rural England 1800 – 1914*, p. 150.

⁴⁹ BPP 1904 XIV [Cd 2003], *Sixty-fifth Annual Report of the Registrar General (1902)*, p. xvi.

4.3 Schools and Schooling in Hertfordshire

Hertfordshire started the Victorian era as a neglected county in terms of literacy but the statistics mask some variations within the county. The availability of work for children of the lower classes would, inevitably, affect their ability to pursue a course of education. Although selective evidence would suggest that it was rare for working-class boys to have no formal schooling, the pressures of inadequate funds to pay, lack of suitable clothing and illness all resulted in irregular attendance patterns throughout the century.⁵⁰ Extracts from the Log Book of St Mary's school in Hitchin for the 1860s demonstrate the many reasons why children were unable to attend school.⁵¹ Similar records can be found in the Log Books of the British schools in Hitchin and Hertford and that of All Saints in Hertford.⁵² The weather and local distractions were a regular feature such as the entries for the British Girls' School at Hitchin.⁵³ Wet and cold weather was an impediment, particularly for children who had to travel a distance to school and those with inadequate clothing. The Log Book noted for 15 March 1871 that there was a smaller attendance because it was a cold morning. The following day the attendance was even smaller "owing to a sunny morning" and as with other Hertford and Hitchin schools, holidays were given such as for the Royal marriage (21 March 1871) and a circus in town (3 April 1873).⁵⁴ The regular factor in all of these log books reflected the child's ability to contribute to the family budget through haymaking, harvest, gleaning and working in the fields on market day.

Using a definition of child labour as those being aged 10 to 14 years of age, in 1851 Bedfordshire had the highest proportion of children in work of any English county with 50 per cent, but Hertfordshire was also high at 34 per cent. As to be expected in agricultural counties, the boys were, in the main, agricultural labourers. As the census was taken at a time when demand for child labour was low there were no doubt others who would have worked when needed.⁵⁵ The usual outlet for girls, domestic service, was augmented by

⁵⁰ J. Humphries, *Childhood and child labour*, p. 314.

⁵¹ E. Wallace, *Children of the Labouring Poor*, pp. 25 – 31.

⁵² Jill Grey Collection, Hitchin British Schools, *Hitchin Girls' British Schools Log Book*; H.A.L.S. H/Ed1/196/1, *Hertford British School Log Book*; H.A.L.S. H/Ed/88/1, *Log Book All Saints Hertford United Schools*.

⁵³ F. Dodwell, *Hitchin British Schools, Schooldays 1810 – 1900*, pp. 110 – 123.

⁵⁴ J. G. C. British Schools Hitchin, *Hitchin Girls' British Schools Log Book*.

⁵⁵ J. S. Hurt, *Elementary Schooling and the Working Classes 1860 – 1918* (London, 1979), p. 27.

opportunities in the straw plait trades. By 1871, when the national average for work in this age group was 27 per cent, Hertfordshire was still high at 31 per cent although the figure was again exceeded by Bedfordshire at 45 per cent.⁵⁶ The real distinction in the south midlands counties was the number of children aged five to nine who were enumerated as working in the 1851 census (see Appendix 12, p. 215). With a national average of 1.9 per cent, Bedfordshire was again the county which had the highest proportion with 17 per cent of this age group employed. Whilst Buckinghamshire (8 per cent), Hertfordshire (7 per cent) and Northamptonshire (6 per cent) were markedly lower, these were proportions that were higher than any other English county.⁵⁷

The incidence of child labour was not general throughout the county. The 1851 census demonstrates a difference between Hertford and Hitchin. Just six boys and one girl under ten years of age were recorded as employed in Hertford in 1851, but 37 boys and 54 girls were enumerated as such in Hitchin. This is just 5 per cent of the total of children under the age of ten years in Hitchin, but a marked difference between the two towns. It is, however, an unreliable indication of the true picture. It was noted in 1864 that children started plaiting at a very young age, sometimes when three and certainly four years of age, and although some doubt was cast upon the value of the results of their endeavours, the reality was that there were children under the age of five employed on straw plait work and “probably many others not returned in the census as so engaged.”⁵⁸ The consequent difference between the availability of work for children may be reflected in the percentage of those signing by a mark on the marriage registers in 1856. Hitchin had the highest percentage in the county at 58 per cent and Hatfield the lowest at 34 per cent. Hertford was only marginally better at 36 per cent and just above the national level of 35 per cent.⁵⁹

The ability of girls, and also boys, to earn money through straw plaiting undoubtedly influenced parents. There was little criticism of boys working in agriculture. The potential of their being able to contribute to the family’s income is recorded without comment in the

⁵⁶ W. B. Stephens, *Education, Literacy and Society*, pp. 168–69.

⁵⁷ W. B. Stephens, *Education, Literacy and Society*, p. 169.

⁵⁸ BPP 1864, Vol. XXII.L., *Children’s Employment Commission (1862) Second Report of the Commissioners*.

⁵⁹ W. B. Stephens, *Education, Literacy and Society*, pp. 186–87.

1869 Report on Children, Young People and Women in Agriculture. By contrast, the evils of the straw plait trade were viewed as having not only having an ill effect on the morals and domestic habits of those involved in it but also having a detrimental impact on education. The Report quoted the Board of Guardians for the Hitchin Union as saying that “in consequence of the employment of children in plaiting, and also the indifference of their parents to the value of education, there is much neglect in sending children to school. There are plaiting schools in most of our parishes, to which children are sent from 3 years old. In many of these neither reading nor writing is taught, the object being to extract a large amount of work from the children. These greatly interfere with the attendance at the educational schools.”⁶⁰

Girls were also often called upon to take on domestic responsibilities. The log book for the British Girls’ School at Hitchin has frequent references to the absence of girls as they were needed at home. However, agricultural work, specifically gleaning, was also a feature of absences for girls as well as boys. The School Attendance Committee in Hitchin recognised the economic necessity of the harvest for many families and instructed their Clerk in 1890 to respond to a criticism from the Education Department to the effect that Managers of Schools contribute to the poor attendance of children “by closing the schools for the Harvest holidays too early as children cannot be expected to return to school until after gleaning is over.”⁶¹ The farmers needed the labour and the parents needed all the support available to keep the family from the workhouse.⁶² Although by 1900 all children aged between five and 14 years of age were required to attend school with provision for those achieving the fifth standard to leave after the age of 12, the Bye-laws for Hertford Union School did allow for a child aged 11 to leave on the proviso that the fourth standard had been achieved and the child was to be employed in agriculture.⁶³

⁶⁰ BPP 1868 – 1869, XIII, *Report on the Employment of Children, Young People and Women in Agriculture*, p. 111.

⁶¹ H.A.L.S. BG/HIT, *Hitchin School Attendance Committee 1877 – 1899*.

⁶² E. Wallace, *Children of the Labouring Poor*, pp. 43 –7.

⁶³ H.A.L.S. D/EL 4083, *Bye-laws for Hertford Union School from the Board of Education made on 29 September 1890*.

There was more (local) ambivalence to the opportunities afforded to children to earn through straw plaiting. It was recognised that there was a “great want of education among female children and young women of the poor” and consequently a girls’ school was established in Hitchin in January 1819.⁶⁴ From its inception, the Girls’ British School in Hitchin was beset with problems of attendance through competition with the need to produce straw plait. The first report in September 1819 noted that the school had been open for eight months and had started with 91 scholars but this had gradually decreased to 72, with around 50 actually attending. Reasons for leaving were varied and sometimes unspecified, but the report noted that a significant reason was through “parents wishing and perhaps needing them to plat (sic)”.⁶⁵ There are regular reports each year of girls leaving the school for various reasons such as, in 1827, “needed at home”, “gone to the silk mill”, “left the town”, “refused to pay the penny a week”, “dismissed as dirty” and five going to a plait school. The same report noted that “It must be a subject of regret the Girls quit the school at so early an age for the purpose of Platting (sic), instead of remaining longer in the School and then going to service where they might by prudent conduct, gain an honest livelihood and a fair character, rendering them useful and respectable in the eyes of their superiors and an example for imitation to their associates.”⁶⁶

Education in the plaiting schools was limited. The standard picture is of an elderly dame in charge who in exchange for 2d. to 3d. a week would teach the elements of straw plait work.⁶⁷ The 1851 census of Hitchin identified two straw plait school mistresses. One might fit the stereotype. Catherine Clayton of Tyler Street was a 73 year old widow; however, Catherine Taff at the Highlander was married and aged 31. The working conditions in such schools were not pleasant. One plaiting school was reported as being a small cottage room, some ten and a half feet square and six to seven feet high where there were 41 children on the day of the visit, although there could have been 60. This was worse than the “lace schools” as room had to be allowed in those for the pillow.⁶⁸ Leaving age could be as young as eight or nine years of age when the child could earn two to three shillings a week. Any education, aside

⁶⁴ H.A.L.S. 67554A, *Rules of Dead Street School 1818*.

⁶⁵ H.A.L.S. 67521, *First Report of the Dead Street School*.

⁶⁶ H.A.L.S. 67529, *Ninth Report of the Dead Street School*.

⁶⁷ P. Horn, *Education in Rural England*, pp. 23–5.

⁶⁸ BPP 1864, Vol. XXII.I., *Children’s Employment Commission (1862), Second Report of the Commissioners*.

from learning the skills of the trade, was dependent on interest by others in the area, notably the minister of the parish, who could influence a wider curriculum. However such schools were in the minority. A report of 1860 noted that “It may be safely affirmed of the greater number of these [plaiting] schools, that the children taught within them are altogether lost sight of by the wealthy and other classes around them.”⁶⁹ In Hitchin, there is evidence that the realities of the economic situation for many families and some compromises were made. Recognising that parents were dependent on earnings secured by children straw plaiting, the Ladies Committee of the British School for girls allowed time for straw plaiting.⁷⁰

A report on the incidence of straw plaiting in schools in the Hitchin parish in 1869 recorded that schools where no plaiting was allowed accounted for 577 boys and 264 girls; schools with elementary education and plaiting allowed accounted for 72 boys and 153 girls, but there were still the “dame” plaiting schools with 48 boys and 112 girls. The conclusion of the report was that plaiting should be allowed as it gave girls, and also boys, “another string to their bow when out of work or disabled.”⁷¹ The same statistics and conclusions were used by Frederic Seebom in his letter on education in the straw plaiting districts.⁷² Agricultural work did result in injury and “piece-work in agriculture often implies physical injury to men ignorant of the best means of maintaining their working power.”⁷³

Attitudes to the imperative of the rewards of the straw plait trade moved towards acceptance during the century. By 1870, it was a factor in the curriculum of schools in the straw plait trade area and so engrained in the culture of the community that pleas were being made for it to continue to be accommodated after the enforcement of the 1870 Education Act. The Children’s Employment Commission had already noted that it was impossible to believe that the employment of very young children in the trade could be of any real value.⁷⁴ This was a

⁶⁹ A. J. Tansley, “On the Straw Plait Trade”, *Journal of the Society of Arts*, 21 December 1860, p. 71.

⁷⁰ F. Dodwell, *Hitchin British Schools, Schooldays 1810 – 1900*, p. 23.

⁷¹ Hitchin Museum, *Lawson Thompson Scrapbook*, Vol 2A.

⁷² *Hertfordshire Mercury*, 2 April 1870.

⁷³ BPP 1868- 1869, XIII, *Report on the Employment of Children, Young Persons and Women in Agriculture*, p. 111. This was an issue in Hertfordshire with the Medical Officer to the North Herts Infirmary recording his concern, in 1857, of the increasing number of accidents through the use by farmers of steam machinery, H.A.L.S. HV4 1A/1, *Hitchin Infirmary (North Herts Hospital) Minute Book January 1856 – September 1873*. Mechanisation also provided another incentive for literacy amongst the working class. If men could not read instructions or indicators on machinery, it was likely to get broken, see W. B. Stephens, *Education, Literacy and Society*, p. 180.

⁷⁴ BPP 1864, Vol. XXII.I, *Children’s Employment Commission (1862), Second Report of the Commissioners*.

theme developed by Frederic Seebohm who noted that whilst it was necessary for children to learn how to plait, in practice few plait dealers would buy that made by children under the age of eight years old. This suggested a compromise whereby plaiting should be taught together with ordinary branches of education to the infants and then, from eight years, the provisions of the Workshops' Act should apply, allowing half time schooling.⁷⁵ His motivation was his recognition of the necessity for children to learn to plait. This was not a matter of exploitation by parents, but "indicative of a parental responsibility in securing for their children the practical education of the apprentice in crafts where skills had necessarily to be mastered at an early age."⁷⁶ These realities were felt by Frederic Seebohm but not, he feared, by the managers of some schools. "A system cannot gain the heart and interest of the people which is managed for them over their heads by one man, or two or three men of a different class..."⁷⁷ The alternative perspective was understood by the women running the Hitchin British Girls' School who, in the early days of the school, recognised the need for straw plaiting to be on the curriculum.

The shift in attitude on the need for basic education for the working class was driven by a number of factors. One such consideration was one of national pride and another was the economics of international trade. There were, by mid-century, higher levels of literacy in the USA and Prussia.⁷⁸ Whilst work, primarily domestic service, was the inevitable lot of many girls, they were also the mothers of the next generation. That 46 per cent of brides could not sign their name on the marriage register was viewed as consigning the nation to a continued state of ignorance.⁷⁹ At the local level, the influence of imports was being felt and the sea change from the attitudes of the early part of the century towards the straw plait trade can be seen. Foreign plaiters were beginning to compete although England was viewed as producing the best straw. The answer to this rested in skilled labour and an ability to adapt to the changing needs of the market. The evil of the straw plait trade was that girls were being taught nothing but plaiting, and that sometimes imperfectly. "With increased care and

⁷⁵ *Education and the Plaiting Districts*, letter to the Editor of the *Hertfordshire Mercury* from F. Seebohm, 2 April 1870.

⁷⁶ W. B. Stephens, *Education, Literacy and Society*, p. 175.

⁷⁷ *Education and the Straw Plaiting Districts*, F. Seebohm, 2 April 1870.

⁷⁸ D. Mitch, "Education and skill of the British labour force" in R. Floud and P. Johnson, eds., *The Cambridge Economic History of Modern Britain Vol. I, Industrialisation 1700 – 1860* (Cambridge, 1994), p. 350.

⁷⁹ BPP 1854, *Thirteenth Report of the Registrar General*, p. viii.

cleanliness and intelligence, the earnings of plaiters would increase.”⁸⁰ This was another argument for increased education for the girls in the straw plait areas.

4.4 Schools in Hertford and Hitchin

On the face of it, Hitchin and Hertford were well supplied with schools. In 1839, 14 schools were listed for Hertford and 13 for Hitchin.⁸¹ Although the list included the schools endowed by charities such as the Free Grammar School (Richard Hale) in Hertford and the Free Grammar School in Tilehouse Street Hitchin, it also included some which would appear to be small, private enterprise institutions such as Susannah Mowbray’s school in Back Street Hertford and Ann Clark’s establishment in Bridge Street Hitchin. The listing itself was selective, the boarding establishments needed to advertise to a wider audience than the residents of the town, but the child-minding establishments, the “Dame” schools and the plaiting schools do not appear in the directory. Further doubt on the accuracy of the information may cast by the classification of the Dead Street School in Hitchin as a National School and not as a British School. Christ’s Hospital was a significant establishment but not one that was totally relevant to the schooling of children in Hertford. There was an endowment which allowed for three presentations a year for boys of Freemen and Inhabitants of Hertford.⁸² This was a valuable and sought after privilege. Eliza Cheek was recorded as pleading for her son to have one such place. As a widow, with three small children, her circumstances were slender, “so small that I am obliged to have recourse to my friends to enable me to support them....”⁸³ However, with just three placements a year, Christ’s Hospital was not going to have much impact on the education of the population of Hertford.

Apart from Christ’s Hospital, the Boarding Schools were small institutions. The 1851 census recorded Letitia Dunnage of Bancroft, Hitchin, with 15 boarders, one of whom was local to Hitchin and apart from one from Kent, the rest were from Hertfordshire or the adjoining counties of Bedfordshire and Essex. Even smaller was the school run by Ann Tower who, in 1851, was the described as a widow, aged 81, running a school in Bull Plain, Hertford, with

⁸⁰ *Education and the Plaiting Districts*, F. Seebohm, 2 April 1870.

⁸¹ *Royal and Commercial Directory of Essex and Hertfordshire* (Pigot and Co., 1839), pp. 113 and 117.

⁸² H.A.L.S. D/EL Q17, *Will of Benjamin Cherry*.

⁸³ H.A.L.S. D/EL Q 17.

an Assistant. There were six boarders, one from Hertford and the rest from elsewhere in Hertfordshire. The incentive for setting up a school would appear to be economic necessity for women; of the rest, charitable foundations formed the majority. Although Sarah Sloper, listed with a school in Bridge Street, Hitchin, in 1839 could afford to retire, she was enumerated on the 1851 census as aged 74 and an annuitant, Ann Tower was apparently still needing to run a school at the age of 81.

Apart from the unrecorded “Dame” and plaiting schools, the availability of schools in Hitchin and Hertford mid-century was essentially limited to charitable foundations and small institutions aimed at the moneyed classes. In Hitchin these included Mrs Mary Dunnage’s Ladies’ school and Samuel Goodwin’s Classical and Commercial Academy, both in Bancroft.⁸⁴ Similarly, in Hertford Mrs Bayes and her two daughters ran a Preparatory school for young gentlemen at Bayley Hall, Miss Sarah Jane Evans a Ladies’ school in North Crescent and William Poulton had a Boys’ Academy in St Andrew’s Street.⁸⁵ The titles of these establishments demonstrate that their aim was to attract a select group of pupils.

The availability of places in the charity schools was also often restricted by cost and dependent on the good behaviour of the pupils. The Richard Hale Grammar School in Hertford was endowed by a rent of £40 per annum, plus a capitation fee, which was calculated to attract the Middle Classes.⁸⁶ On the other hand, the Green Coat School was open to boys who were legitimate, with a baptism certificate and of poor deserving parents not in receipt of parish relief.⁸⁷ The Green Coat School’s attraction, to parents, was that its endowment allowed for not just the provision of an education but also clothing. There are regular accounts of expenditure in the 1850s of around £30 for coats, waistcoats, breeches and shoes for 40 boys, plus 5 shillings a quarter for haircutting.⁸⁸ In addition to investment income, there were the regular sermons. The Green Coat School benefited from an annual sermon at All Saints. The amount collected in 1832 was £31.5s.4d. Some of this money was

⁸⁴ Kelly, *Kelly’s Post Office Directory of Hertfordshire 1851*, p. 203.

⁸⁵ Kelly, *Kelly’s Post Office Directory of Hertfordshire 1851*, pp. 198 – 200.

⁸⁶ H.A.L.S. D/EL Q13, *Hale Grammar School Subscription list*.

⁸⁷ H.A.L.S. D/EL Q23, *Answers to questions asked of Alderman Newton’s Charity by the Education Department, 1870*.

⁸⁸ H.A.L.S. D/EL/Q14, *Green Coat School Cash Book*.

passed on to the Girls' School. The £10.9s.6d. allocated to them in 1847 was described as half the sermon money which would suggest that the amount collected diminished as the century progressed, but £24.15s.6d. was collected in 1857.⁸⁹

Another, less regular, source of income was an appeal for donations through a subscription list. The state of the building housing the Richard Hale School was the subject of some criticism by the Government Inspector in 1857.⁹⁰ As the endowment and capitation fee did not allow for dilapidations, an appeal was made in 1861, noting that the last time such an exercise had been undertaken, in 1807, £800 had been raised.⁹¹ It was hoped to raise £400 for their current needs. Whilst the subscription list comprised mainly men, the Viscountess Palmerston contributed £100 and Mrs Gilbertson and Mrs Newman two and one guinea respectively.⁹² The prime financial contribution from women, however, was through the sales of work, bazaars and concerts. The amounts raised were often not recorded. That to enable the establishment of a Ragged School in Hollow Lane in Hitchin involved several ladies of the neighbourhood, helped by the Reverend Gainsford, and although the rain apparently fell in torrents, it was tolerably well attended and considering the weather "a very satisfactory amount was taken."⁹³ As so often, the names of the ladies involved were not recorded. The Ragged School in Hertford also had to search for funds when it found that its expenditure of £64.4s.1d. was exceeding its income in 1856 because a trained teacher had been appointed on a salary of £40 a year. In this case it is clear that women had an active role in running the school and some names have been recorded. An appeal was made for further subscriptions and donations and these might be made to Mrs George Jackson, the Misses Elizabeth and Emily Manser and S. M. Jenkins.⁹⁴ Some years later, it was recorded that Mrs Armatage had taken on the role of the Treasurer, in addition to being Superintendant.⁹⁵

⁸⁹ H.A.L.S. D/EL/Q14.

⁹⁰ H.A.L.S. D/Ehx/Q3, *Report on Inspection into the former municipal charities of Hertford.*

⁹¹ H.A.L.S. D/EL Q10, *Hale Grammar School subscription list, 25 April 1861.*

⁹² H.A.L.S. D/EL Q10, *Hertford Grammar School.*

⁹³ *Hertford Mercury*, 9 October 1852.

⁹⁴ *Hertford Mercury*, 29 November 1856.

⁹⁵ *Hertfordshire Mercury*, 28 September 1872.

As far as the Girls' Schools were concerned, subscriptions and donations made up most of the income and pupils made a direct contribution through the fee of one penny a week. However, the British Schools (Girls) at Hitchin recorded an income of £62.9s.6 ¼ d. in 1822 which included £1.18s.4 ½ d. through the sale of needlework.⁹⁶ Their 1824 report noted that there were some deficiencies amongst the scholars, but "your committee hope that in the most useful part of Female Education, namely Needle Work, there has been an unusual degree of industry exerted as we find the money received for the payment of work amounts to £5.15s. 6¾ d., a larger sum than ever before."⁹⁷ The accounts of the Green Coat School in Hertford have notes of donations for 1832 and 1834 to the Girls' School for making shirts.⁹⁸ Later in the century, the British Schools in Hertford were supported by a committee of ladies who assisted the teacher of the sewing class on each afternoon the class was held.⁹⁹ For the School of Industry in Hertford, needlework was an important part of the curriculum. A report of about 1850 noted that a girl was allowed to work half a month for the lady who presented her, that is to "employ her at needlework, two weeks in a month; but not to infringe on the time of working in the school."¹⁰⁰

Needlework did not figure on the timetable for boys' schools although some did compete in the East Hertfordshire Association for Plain Needlework exhibition later in the century. Unfortunately the assessment was that "The socks sent in by the boys were no good for size. The width of the foot and the leg is so great I fear they will be quite useless."¹⁰¹ The course of instruction at the Richard Hale (boys') School in 1871 included Religious Instruction, English, Latin, Greek and French languages and literature, Writing, Arithmetic, Mathematics, the elements of Natural Science and generally all such branches of Study as may be requisite to a Classical and Commercial Education."¹⁰² By contrast, the curriculum for the Green Coat School was more basic with the introduction of cookery lessons for girls towards the end of the century.¹⁰³ A Cookery Centre was also established in Hitchin in 1896 which girls in

⁹⁶ H.A.L.S. 67561, *Hitchin British Schools (Girls) Minute Books*.

⁹⁷ H.A.L.S. 67561.

⁹⁸ H.A.L.S. D/EL Q14, *Green Coat School Cash Book*.

⁹⁹ *Hertfordshire Mercury*, 28 March 1885.

¹⁰⁰ H.A.L.S. D/EL/Q33, *School of Industry, Hertford*.

¹⁰¹ *Hertfordshire Mercury*, 24 July 1886.

¹⁰² H.A.L.S. D/EL Q/10, *Hertford Grammar School*.

¹⁰³ HEd1/89/1-3, *Hertford Green Coat Log Book and Admission Registers*.

Standards V to VI at the British Schools attended.¹⁰⁴ Such initiatives were endorsed by the Board of Education's 1899 edict that schooling for girls should set a high value on the housewife's position.¹⁰⁵ This was a message repeated throughout the century. Mr Cowper reflected on the need for practical training, particularly for girls. As they would be "exercising the duties of servants, or mothers in humble abodes" their education should reflect that by attention to needle work and other household duties.¹⁰⁶

The managers of schools were usually men. The report on the Privy Council's approval for school boards noted that a Miss Jennette O. Temple had put herself forward to be a member of the Exeter board as "she thinks a woman ought to be on the board to assist in judging what is good for girls."¹⁰⁷ That it was recorded suggests that Miss Temple's views were a novelty.¹⁰⁸ The board of the Cowper Testimonial School (boys), the Abel Smith School (girls) and the associated Infants' School comprised men until the turn of the century when ten women were recorded as having become managers in 1901.¹⁰⁹ The two notable exceptions were two schools for girls, the School of Industry in Hertford and the British Schools in Hitchin.

Although the School of Industry in Hertford was established in 1793 by three Quaker women, by 1850 it would appear to have been in the hands of the Church of England as "it is hereby declared that no person shall be appointed or continue to be Mistress of the School who shall not be a Member of the Church of England."¹¹⁰ The Committee for the management of the school comprised ten women, and the clergyman of the parish but the Treasurer was Eliza Ludlow and Elizabeth Green was the Secretary. The Mistress was to instruct the girls in the principles of the Christian religion and take "special care of the manners and behaviour of the children; and to teach them reading, writing and arithmetic, knitting and sewing; for which

¹⁰⁴ F. Dodwell, *Hitchin British Schools, Schooldays 1810 – 1900*, p. 82.

¹⁰⁵ P. Horn, *The Victorian and Edwardian Schoolchild*, p. 50.

¹⁰⁶ *Hertford Mercury*, Report on the Hertfordshire Diocesan Board of Education Annual Meeting, 27 May 1858.

¹⁰⁷ *Hertford Mercury*, 28 January 1871.

¹⁰⁸ Miss Temple was one of the first nine women elected to a school board, probably as she had support from her brother, the bishop of Exeter. See P. Hollis, *Ladies Elect*, pp. 71 -2.

¹⁰⁹ H.A.L.S. H/Ed 1/88/1, *Log Book, All Saints Hertford United Schools*.

¹¹⁰ H.A.L.S. D/EL Q33, *School of Industry Hertford*.

she is to receive 10 shillings a week.”¹¹¹ School-teaching was not a valued profession in the nineteenth century. Even in 1870, it was viewed as on a par with trade, although slightly more respectable as the teacher had to dress creditably.¹¹² Mr Grove, Master of the Green Coat School, was paid £15 a quarter in 1856.¹¹³ However, any generalisations about the relative salaries of men and women are difficult. On the establishment of the British Schools (Girls) in Hitchin in 1818, Miss Marcia Topham was appointed mistress at a salary of £40 per annum.¹¹⁴ Two years later, Clement Henry Cruttwell was appointed Master of the Richard Hale School in Hertford at a salary of £20 per annum, although a house was provided. He was also allowed £10 for an Usher and £10 for repairs to the school and dwelling house.¹¹⁵ By 1858, he appeared to be receiving about £40 a year, but as his widow and executrix was paid £9.11s.8d. in 1860 in order to pay Mr Sippett, the Usher, it would appear that this continued to be funded from his salary.¹¹⁶ On the other hand, the Master at Christ’s Hospital, Nathaniel Keymer, was qualified with a M.A. On the collapse of the Samuel Adams Bank in 1856, he could state that he could bear the loss of the £70 he had invested with the bank.¹¹⁷

The British Schools for Girls in Hitchin was established on the same pattern as the Boys’ School with a trustee board representing the Church of England and Dissenters. There were 13 women listed on the committee in its first report and the commitment was taken seriously. The first minute of their first meeting in September 1819 recorded a requirement that each would spend half a day a week at the school and a fine of sixpence was to be levied on every lady of the committee “who neglects to attend herself, or provide a substitute, on her respective day at the schools”.¹¹⁸ This obligation became a strain and their fourth report in 1822 included a plea to their friends to help with the visiting rota and bestow “a small portion of their time in imparting instruction to the indigent and ignorant two or three hours in a fortnight is all that is required to be taken from business or pleasure.”¹¹⁹

¹¹¹ H.A.L.S. D/EL Q33, *School of Industry Hertford*.

¹¹² G. E. Mingay, *Rural Life in Victorian England*, p. 161.

¹¹³ H.A.L.S. D/EL/Q14, *Hale’s Grammar School and Green Coat School Cash Book*.

¹¹⁴ H.A.L.S.67561, *Hitchin British Schools (Girls) Minute Books*.

¹¹⁵ H.A.L.S. D/EL Q10, *Hertford Grammar School*.

¹¹⁶ H.A.L.S. D/EL Q14, *Hale’s Grammar School Cash Book*.

¹¹⁷ H.A.L.S. D/EL/B339, *Letter dated 24 July 1856, Samuel Adams and Co. Ware, bankruptcy papers*.

¹¹⁸ H.A.L.S.67561, *Hitchin British Schools (Girls) Minute Books*.

¹¹⁹ H.A.L.S. 67561.

One of the problems was that the school relied on the monitorial system with older children teaching the younger ones, under general guidance of the teacher. Whilst the second report noted some satisfactory progress had been made, the imperatives of being needed at home or having to earn meant that many girls were leaving early which resulted in a difficulty in identifying and training monitors. As the fourth report recorded, ladies were needed for the visiting rota as “Monitors however desirous to perform their duty, are but Children, and require the advice and guidance of their elders.....”¹²⁰ The committee appeared to have increased as by 1827 it was recorded that it comprised 20 ladies, ten from the established Church and ten from other bodies of Christians who committed to attend the school regularly, one per morning and one per afternoon.¹²¹ Monitors in other schools also required supervision. The log-book for a Hertford school recorded in February that Miss Lilley Starkiss was reprovved several times for coming in so late in the morning and, later that year, it was noted that she and June Hendry, the infant Monitress, were away most of Friday afternoon. However she was called upon to take charge of the infants’ class when the teacher was away ill in 1901 and when she left the school in 1904, the Head Teacher noted that she had been a faithful teacher for eight years as a Monitress.¹²²

The commitment shown by the founders, men and women, of the British Schools at Hitchin was rewarded. By 1848, William Upton recorded that it “is one of the finest which can be found. The property on which it stands was granted by Lord Dacre, with a recommendation that Schools should be erected, based on principles in which Churchmen and Dissenters could equally unite. This is the case. The Clergyman cordially joins, and consequently there is no ‘National’ School. The ‘Friends’, who are numerous here, take much interest in Education.”¹²³ This does reflect two differences in the attitudes towards schooling in Hertford and Hitchin. Firstly, it is the strong Quaker presence which is credited with the development of education in Hitchin. Many were important people in the community and took initiatives to improve the lot of others. Secondly, it was the local gentry, Lord Dacre, and the Lord of the Manor, William Wilshere, who provided land and support. Elsewhere in Hertfordshire, with some exceptions such as Earl Cowper, aristocracy have been described as

¹²⁰ H.A.L.S. 67561.

¹²¹ H.A.L.S. 67540, *Rules of Dead Street School*.

¹²² H.A.L.S. HEd1/89/1-3, *Hertford Green Coat Log Book and Admission Registers*.

¹²³ J. Burg, *Religion in Hertfordshire*, p. 42.

“sadly deficient in providing local leadership for the spread of popular education,” whereas the “parvenus and nouveaux riches were more sympathetic and generous”.¹²⁴ The Abel Smiths, for example, built and maintained the school in Hertford and five other village schools.¹²⁵ Whilst Earl Cowper was concerned with the Cowper Memorial School in Hertford, and others in neighbouring villages, by contrast the Salisburys confined what little interest they had to schools local to Hatfield. Such interest was often negative. The third Marquess has been described as the Hertfordshire landowner who was the most virulent opponent to the school board system and compulsory education.¹²⁶

The Salisburys restricted their interest to Hatfield schools but they were major landowners in the county which affected Hertford. By 1862, the Committee of Council of Education recorded that attainments at the Green Coat School in Hertford were sound, but “discipline is greatly interfered with by the inconvenience of the room. I hope the Trustees will be able to fix at once on a healthy site for the new School, with good arrangements for offices and playground.” A year later, the Education Department was informing the Trustees that “My Lords will be unable to pay the Capitation Grant unless they learn within a reasonable time that a site has been secured for the new School premises.”¹²⁷ Unfortunately the Trustees were not getting much help. Identification of a site and drawing up plans resulted in a note to the Clerk informing him that “I have submitted the plan and Mr Medcalfe’s valuation of the Ground in Hertingfordbury pond to the Marquis of Salisbury who desires me to say that he cannot agree to the terms proposed.”¹²⁸ The next thought was to take up an offer of a room from the Cowper Testimonial School but the Council of Education could not agree to that as the trustees did not have any authority to sub-let part of their premises to another charity. Efforts continued until 1866 when the Bishop of Rochester was encouraged, by the Council of Education, to make some glebe land available in the All Saints parish.¹²⁹ The first Marquess of Salisbury had been more enlightened, giving land in Hertford for a National

¹²⁴ W. B. Stephens, *Education, Literacy and Society*, p.183.

¹²⁵ J. S. Hurt, *Bringing Literacy to Rural England*, p. 16.

¹²⁶ J. S. Hurt, *Bringing Literacy to Rural England*, pp. 25 - 7.

¹²⁷ H.A.L.S. D/EL Q20, *Hertford Grammar School and Green Coat School*.

¹²⁸ H.A.L.S. D/EL Q20.

¹²⁹ H.A.L.S. D/EL Q 20.

School. However, the second Marquess reclaimed the land in 1841 and the pupils moved to the Cowper School.¹³⁰

Hertford and Hitchin both benefited from having members of the community with a different outlook to the Salisbury family. The Quaker ethos of work and service, plus the input of the nouveaux riches and the Victorian philosophy of “self help”, encouraged a culture of interest in education, not just as a civilising force, but a means to improve one’s lot in life. On coming to Balls Park, Mrs Faudell-Phillips, although Jewish by religion, took an immediate interest in All Saints School, raising money through concerts, bazaars and subscriptions to make improvements.¹³¹ The attitude of many members of the successful Jewish community was that integrating their poor into a prosperous middle class supported their endeavours to be part of British society. They had no desire to maintain the status quo.¹³² This may have influenced Mrs Faudell-Phillips actions and, it was also said of her that, “her first instinct was to be kind”.¹³³

It would be difficult to quantify the contribution of women to the establishment of schools for the working-class child as their input was so often not recorded. Fundraising for the benefit of schools involved many women such as the bazaar in aid of improvements to the All Saints and Abel Smith Schools in Hertford in 1885.¹³⁴ This became more of an imperative with compulsory education and a growing population. There is evidence of direct management at the British Schools (Girls and Infants) at Hitchin and the Ragged School and School of Industry in Hertford, plus some records of visiting and support, particularly in needlework lessons. Whilst women did become governors of other schools, this was not until the early twentieth century in Hertford and Hitchin. On the setting up of School Attendance Committees in 1877 a few, Lady Dacre at Kimpton and Mrs Pryor at Weston, did become members of these local Committees. By 1898, Mrs Eliza Ransom and Ann Wright had become members of the Committee for the Hitchin Union. In Hitchin, agreement was reached

¹³⁰ www.hertford.net/history/histschool consulted 16 May 2011.

¹³¹ *Hertfordshire Mercury*, 6 October 1883, 11 April 1885 ; H.A.L.S. D/EL Q27, *Abel Smith Memorial Hall*.

¹³² D. Englander, “Anglicised Not Anglican: Jews and Judaism in Victorian Britain” in G. Parsons, ed., *Religion in Victorian Britain, Volume I, Traditions* (Manchester, 1988), p. 244.

¹³³ *Hertfordshire Mercury*, 12 August 1916.

¹³⁴ H.A.L.S. D/EL Q 27, *Abel Smith School*.

to allow the two Relieving Officers for the Union to be appointed as Attendance Officers, but it was hoped that “district visitors” and other agencies would also be used.¹³⁵ Whilst “visitors” included the local clergyman and other trustees of the school, this must have included some women supporting girls’ education.¹³⁶

A further contribution by women to schooling, which is not recorded, is that it was doubtless the mother who was responsible for finding the penny a week and ensuring that her children were “clean, washed and combed”. The Log Book for a school in Hertford noted in 1872 that the Master was obliged to send a boy home “on account of the filthy state of his head. The lad is motherless and fearfully neglected.”¹³⁷

4.5 Sunday schools

The rationale for the Sunday school was that the working-class child should have an education in the Christian religion. The teachings of the Bible were thus fundamental and everyone should be able to read it. It has been asserted that without Sunday schools, literacy would have been at a lower level.¹³⁸ For the pupils, with few exceptions, those who recorded their time at Sunday school recalled their experiences with pleasure.¹³⁹ What was more problematical was whether or not the working class should also be taught how to write and, by extension, whether or not all 3 “Rs” could be taught on the Sabbath.¹⁴⁰ The rules of the Sunday School Society expressly stated that neither writing nor arithmetic were to be taught on Sundays.¹⁴¹ On the other hand, reading (the Bible) and also having some knowledge of arithmetic (to add up one’s wages) were important, but what was the point of writing?¹⁴²

¹³⁵ H.A.L.S. BG/HIT, *Hitchin School Attendance Committee 1877 - 1899*.

¹³⁶ F. K. Prochaska, *Women and Philanthropy*, p. 133.

¹³⁷ H.A.L.S. H/ED 1/88/1, *Log Book All Saints Hertford United Schools*.

¹³⁸ J. Humphries, *Childhood and child labour*, p. 322.

¹³⁹ J. Humphries, *Childhood and child labour*, p. 322; J. Burnett, *Destiny Obscure*, pp. 142–4.

¹⁴⁰ T. W. Lacquer, *Religion and Respectability*, p. 138.

¹⁴¹ J. Burnett, *Destiny Obscure*, p. 141.

¹⁴² J. Humphries, *Childhood and child labour*, p. 329.

Writing in 1976, Lacquer could note that modern historians were in agreement that, like the Kings Langley example, Sunday schools were the agency for the upper and middle classes to impose their ethos on the working-class.¹⁴³ He, however, contended that it was difficult to justify that thesis as many of the founders of Sunday schools were from the working class and after 1810 some 60 per cent of Sunday-school teachers had once been pupils. This is a theme endorsed by Snell who supports the Laqueur perspective that the Sunday school was an integral part of the working-class community and not an imposition from outside.¹⁴⁴ Again, for the working class, there were the benefits, not just of clothing, but of mutual aid societies and a social network providing recreation which could also be used by scholars and their parents to find employment.¹⁴⁵ In other words, they were fulfilling a similar role to the parson's daughter in *Lark Rise*. For those involved in running the schools, this was an opportunity to find further recruits. The Wesleyans, for example, referred to their Sunday schools as "the nursery of the church."¹⁴⁶ The alternative view is that as recruitment agencies for a particular branch of the Church, Sunday schools were a failure. However, they did encourage a Christian culture evidenced by the presence of a Bible and Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* in most working-class homes.¹⁴⁷ Both were popular choices for Sunday-school prizes in Hitchin and Hertford.¹⁴⁸

The correlation that Snell finds with the prevalence of child labour and enrolment at a Sunday school is indicative of more than one stream of influence.¹⁴⁹ On the one hand, the Earl of Clarendon established a school in a rural parish which may have fitted the model, dismissed as a minority by Lacquer, of the vicar in charge, supported by a few "lady bountifuls".¹⁵⁰ As important were the efforts of all branches of the Christian church in larger centres of the population. A picture appears of the rural parish with a Sunday school administered by the local clergyman, and his wife and family, under the guidance of the local gentry and the needs of the populous town served by both the Church of England and dissenters establishing

¹⁴³ T. W. Lacquer, *Religion and Respectability*, p. 187.

¹⁴⁴ K. D. M. Snell, "The Sunday-School Movement", p. 132.

¹⁴⁵ T. W. Lacquer, *Religion and Respectability*, p. 172.

¹⁴⁶ K. D. M. Snell, "The Sunday-School Movement", p. 166.

¹⁴⁷ T. W. Laqueur, *Religion and Respectability*, p. 160.

¹⁴⁸ H.A.L.S. NR14/8/3, *Hertford Congregational Sunday-School*; Hitchin Museum, *Reginald Hine's papers*, *Baptist Sunday-School Day Book extracts*.

¹⁴⁹ K. D. M. Snell, "The Sunday-School Movement", p. 139.

¹⁵⁰ T. W. Lacquer, *Religion and Respectability*, p. 91.

their own Sunday schools. Given that Hertfordshire was an agricultural, rather than industrial, county the expectation might be that the Sunday-school model would be that matching the rural parish.

A correlation has been shown between levels of Sunday-school enrolment and the prevalence child labour.¹⁵¹ Sunday schools did not interfere with the working week and, in industrial areas, attendance at a Sunday school outstripped day school attendance.¹⁵² The conclusion, therefore, would be that Sunday schools were more generally found in the industrial towns. However, counties, classed as agricultural rather than industrial, such as Buckinghamshire and Bedfordshire, also had high levels of enrolment thanks to the working week being occupied with the lace-making and straw-plaiting trades.¹⁵³ With a localised straw-plait industry, the probability would be that Hitchin would have a higher incidence of Sunday-school enrolments than Hertford.

By the middle of the century most children attended a Sunday school and the growth in attendance was particularly marked in Hertfordshire. A comment in the middle of the eighteenth century was that parishioners in Hertfordshire were backward in sending their children to church during Lent.¹⁵⁴ The next century saw an increase from 3.9 per cent of the population of Hertfordshire enrolled in a Sunday school in 1818 to 13.1 per cent in 1851, thus putting it in the second quartile in density per capita in England. By 1851, the adjoining county of Bedfordshire was first in rank order on this measurement.¹⁵⁵ The percentage of the population at Sunday school in Luton in 1851 was 18 per cent. This was one of the highest proportions in the country, exceeded only by Woburn in Bedfordshire and Burnley, Clitheroe and Haslingden in Lancashire. By contrast, neighbouring Hitchin stood at 10 per cent and Hertford at 8 per cent.¹⁵⁶ This appears to support the thesis that Sunday schools did not impinge on a working week which was disciplined by factory attendance, in this case the

¹⁵¹ K. D. M. Snell, "The Sunday-School Movement", p. 139; J. Humphries, *Childhood and child labour*, p. 321.

¹⁵² P. Horn, *Education in Rural England*, p. 32.

¹⁵³ K. D. M. Snell, "The Sunday-School Movement", p. 140.

¹⁵⁴ W. Page, ed., *The Victoria History of the Counties of England, Hertfordshire*, Vol. IV, p. 349.

¹⁵⁵ T. W. Lacqueur, *Religion and Respectability*, p. xi and pp. 49 – 52.

¹⁵⁶ W. B. Stephens, *Education, Literacy and Society*, pp. 325 – 338.

straw hat making in Luton.¹⁵⁷ In Hitchin, however, although child labour was used in the straw plait industry, it was, to a greater or lesser extent, accommodated in the education system.

The nonconformist congregations in the country districts and small towns may have consisted of fragmented groups who found it difficult to establish schools.¹⁵⁸ However, it was just these groups who were prime movers in the setting up of Sunday schools in Hitchin. The Ecclesiastical Census of 1851 made no report on a Sunday school at the parish church of St Mary's, but the Wesleyan Methodist Chapel claimed an average attendance of 95 morning and afternoon, the Congregational Chapel 151 in the morning and 166 in the afternoon and the Baptist Chapel an average of 150 in the morning and 170 in the afternoon.¹⁵⁹ It should, however, be noted that the children of the Church of England were not neglected. The 1820 report on the Hitchin British Schools (Girls) noted that most of the pupils attended the appropriate Sunday school and those of the Established Church went to Divine Service on Wednesdays and Fridays.¹⁶⁰

The picture in Hertford was similar. There were few Sunday-school scholars recorded in the Ecclesiastical Census at the Primitive Methodist Chapel, but the 150 attending the Cowbridge Independent School outweighed the 60 recorded at the Church of England St Andrew's Church. The converse was true of the All Saints parish where the Church of England had an average attendance of 650 Sunday-school scholars as compared with the Wesleyan Methodists (26) and the Roman Catholics (70 – 80). However, the popularity of All Saints was distorted by the compulsory attendance of the children of Christ's Hospital.¹⁶¹ There were 471 scholars recorded on the 1851 census. Once again, attendance at Sunday school did not measure the involvement of children in organised religion. The hours for the School of Industry in Hertford were from 9.15 on Sunday morning for instruction and from 2.30 in the afternoon in order to "walk in an orderly manner, to and from church, under the care of their

¹⁵⁷ K. D. M. Snell, "The Sunday- School Movement", p. 139.

¹⁵⁸ W. B. Stephens, *Education, Literacy and Society*, p. 182.

¹⁵⁹ J. Burg, *Religion in Hertfordshire*, pp. 142–4.

¹⁶⁰ H.A.L.S. 67522, *Hitchin British Schools (Girls) Minute Books*.

¹⁶¹ J. Burg, *Religion in Hertfordshire*, pp. 156–9.

mistress.”¹⁶² Whilst the nonconformist schools appeared to be attracting more pupils by 1880 the Congregational Sunday school in Hertford was bemoaning the fact that their numbers had been diminished by the zeal of Churchmen organising clubs and other attractions. There was seen to be no harm in copying the practice and so a committee was formed to set about organising a club.¹⁶³

4.6 Women and Sunday Schools

Identification of the influence and actions of women in the field of education is difficult and their role in the Sunday-school movement is equally elusive. It behoved the Christian mother to make religion the foundation of family life.¹⁶⁴ Outside the home there was scope for her and her unmarried daughters and sisters to influence the attitudes and behaviour of the young through Sunday schools and other mission work.¹⁶⁵ Naturally it would have been expected that Mrs Forsaith, wife of the Minister, and her two daughters were teachers at the Congregational Sunday School in Hertford.¹⁶⁶ Endorsement of this being a role for all women came from Marianne Farningham who brought her lecture *The Women of Today* to Hertford in 1880. A woman who was a Sunday-school teacher would be “engaged in a proper work in bringing young hearts to Christ”.¹⁶⁷ Although nationally known as a writer and lecturer, Farningham was better known in her home town of Northampton as the Girls’ Sunday-school teacher.¹⁶⁸ Apart from occasional reports on Sunday-school treats or fundraising efforts on behalf of these schools, the names and numbers of the women involved in this movement, which was so important in the nineteenth century, are generally unrecorded. Whilst the Sunday school may have been an important focus for public activities for lower and middle-class women, Snell’s view that “probably a majority of Sunday-school teachers were women” can be no more than an intelligent supposition.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶² H.A.L.S. D/EL Q33, *School of Industry, Hertford*.

¹⁶³ H.A.L.S. NR/14/8/1-3, *Minutes of the Cowbridge Congregational Sunday School, entry for 6 January 1880*.

¹⁶⁴ F. K. Prochaska, *Women and Philanthropy*, pp. 73 – 4.

¹⁶⁵ F. K. Prochaska, *Women and Philanthropy*, p. 93.

¹⁶⁶ H.A.L.S. NR/14/8/1-3, *Minutes of the Cowbridge Congregational Sunday-School, meeting of the committee, 25 January 1881*.

¹⁶⁷ *Hertfordshire Mercury*, 6 April 1880.

¹⁶⁸ Marianne Farningham, *The Victoria Web*, www.victorianresearch.org consulted 23 May 2011.

¹⁶⁹ K. D. M. Snell, “The Sunday-School Movement”, p. 131.

If the records of the Congregational Sunday school in Hertford are typical, then it appears that women did play an important role and generally outnumbered the male teachers. In 1863, there were 14 male teachers and 16 female teachers of whom all, bar one, were unmarried.¹⁷⁰ As the century progressed, a regular comment in the minutes of the Committee meetings was of the want of male teachers to the extent that an offer by Miss Francis to take a boys' class was gladly accepted.¹⁷¹ To some extent this did reflect the breakdown of scholars at the school with girls outnumbering boys. The school's return to the Sunday School Union in 1906 recorded eight male teachers and 15 female teachers and 209 scholars on the books. In practice, the average attendance was 37 for the boys and 128 for the girls.¹⁷² The committee included women who dedicated their lives to this Sunday school such as the "indefatigable" Miss Nunn and Miss Gutteridge who organised the Fancy Fair in 1851 in aid of the new schoolroom.¹⁷³ Miss Gutteridge was remembered on her death in 1878 as for many years an active, useful and successful teacher. Miss Nunn's record as Superintendant for a quarter of a century was marked by a presentation of a silver tea service and a time piece in 1864. She continued to hold this office, and that of Treasurer until her death in 1879.¹⁷⁴

Although information on the role of women in Sunday schools is scant Ann Bradly, who was one of the trustees of the British Schools, was deemed to be a "Hitchin Worthy" because of her role as co-founder of the Baptist Sunday School in Hitchin.¹⁷⁵ She, with Thomas Field, established the school in 1812, taking the roles of Secretary and Treasurer respectively, with 18 girls and four boys but by 1814 there were 76 girls and 54 boys. Funding was through the sermon. This was clearly a popular event as in 1814 it "was thought to be as many people this evening as ever known upon any former occasion" and the following year, with 91 girls and 51 boys as pupils, the Reverend Halyard preached the charity sermon, with £21.8s.0 ½ d. collected at the door.¹⁷⁶ Like the Sunday school established by the Earl of Clarendon, the attraction for parents may have been through the issue of clothing. In 1822, 111 girls

¹⁷⁰ H.A.L.S. NR14/8/1-3, *Minutes of the Cowbridge Congregational Sunday School, June 1863 meeting.*

¹⁷¹ H.A.L.S. NR/14/8/1-3, 21 January 1889 meeting.

¹⁷² H.A.L.S. NR/14/8/1-3.

¹⁷³ *Hertford Mercury*, 12 April 1851.

¹⁷⁴ H.A.L.S. NR/14/8/1-3, 7 April 1864, 4 February 1878 and 6 January 1880 meetings.

¹⁷⁵ R. L. Hine, *Hitchin Worthies*, pp. 190–3.

¹⁷⁶ Hitchin Museum, *Reginald Hine's notes for Hitchin Worthies.*

received stockings as some did not have them. Expulsions from Sunday schools may have been rare.¹⁷⁷ This does mean that they did not occur. In 1823, the Baptist Sunday school Day Book noted that Amy Perkins, Ann Pierce and Mary Creasey's names were crossed off the list for non-attendance and indifferent behaviour when present.¹⁷⁸ The behaviour of the boys at the Congregational Sunday school in Hertford was also cause for comment. The minutes for the January 1863 meeting noted that several boys had been expelled for repeated misconduct, three were suspended for a month in 1885 and the bad behaviour of the boys was still a matter of concern to the committee in 1889 and 1890.¹⁷⁹

Another explanation for the popularity of Sunday schools and the inculcation of the Christian faith was that this did provide a way of dealing with death.¹⁸⁰ At the Hitchin Baptist school not only were the children subjected to a "suitable discourse" on the death of one of their contemporaries but the annual treat consisted of a walk around the Burying ground until a local Quaker, William Lucas, took pity on them and offered use of his barn.¹⁸¹ The Sunday-school treat was an attraction throughout the century. In the summer of 1896, the Hitchin Girls' British School Log Book noted the poor attendance on 17 June because of the Wesleyan Sunday-school treat. This was a regular, annual, event and throughout the 1890s there are references to the building of swings and, in 1893, a payment of 12 shillings and sixpence for a specific item, 200 buns.¹⁸² A month later on 16 July a poor attendance was noted because of the Congregational Sunday-school treat. The Tilehouse Street (Baptist) event on 22 July must have been particularly popular, certainly consisting of something more than a walk around the cemetery, as a half-holiday was given.¹⁸³

Similarly, the annual treat was an important event in Hertford and no doubt it was women who were responsible for organising the fun and food, although it is rare to see mention of a

¹⁷⁷ T. W. Lacqueur, *Religion and Respectability*, p. 200.

¹⁷⁸ Hitchin Museum, *Reginald Hine's notes for Hitchin Worthies – extracts from the Baptist Sunday School Day book for 27 July 1833 and 15 February 1823*.

¹⁷⁹ H.A.L.S. NR/14/8/1-3, minutes for 29 October 1889 and 21 January 1890.

¹⁸⁰ T. W. Lacqueur, *Religion and Respectability*, p. 164.

¹⁸¹ R. L. Hine, *Hitchin Worthies*, p. 191.

¹⁸² H.A.L.S. NM4A/25, *Brand Street Methodist Church (Wesleyan) Hitchin Sunday-School Treasurer's Accounts*.

¹⁸³ Jill Grey Collection, British Schools, Hitchin, *Hitchin Girls' British Schools Log Book*.

name. It fell to Miss Cooper at the Congregational Sunday school to solicit subscriptions for the children's treat in 1893, and again with Miss Head in the following two years. Collecting enough money was a problem the following year as some two pounds more was spent than collected. The teachers agreed to collect the difference or make a personal donation.¹⁸⁴ Sometimes other women, and not necessarily members of the congregation, came to the rescue. Mrs Ord of Bengoe, with friends, provided the prizes for the treat held by Hertford Town Mission in 1885; the Hertford Baptist Sunday-school tea in 1899 included a distribution of presents by the wife of the Superintendent, Mrs Piper, with the arrangements organised by Miss Salmon and Mr Piper. Thanks were recorded to Lady Faudell Phillips, Mrs Lockhart and others who sent donations.¹⁸⁵

Although the dissenters may have been small groups in the rural community and small towns, it was a consistent feature of Hitchin and Hertford that all sects cooperated in the aid of a good cause. The appeal by the Independent Chapel in Hertford in 1851 for articles to sell at a bazaar to raise funds for a new schoolroom was to all denominations resulting in a "cordial union of all classes and denominations".¹⁸⁶ The report on the bazaar does make particular mention of the general superintendents of the bazaar, Miss Gutteridge and Miss Nunn, but such mentions are rare. The Sunday-school anniversary services held at the Wesleyan Chapel in Hitchin in 1887 included a service of song with Miss Winters, Miss E. Winters and Miss Wilshere, plus Mr Hopper and Mr Giddings, who, again, may have had a role in running the school.¹⁸⁷ It also fell to the women of this chapel to collect for the event. There are references to Miss Woolley and Miss Day collecting in 1879, Miss Woollatt and Miss Dixon in 1880 and Mrs Rivett and Mrs Paddon in 1885.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁴ H.A.L.S. NR/14/8/1-3, minutes for 15 September 1886.

¹⁸⁵ *Hertfordshire Mercury*, 3 January 1885 and 14 January 1899.

¹⁸⁶ *Hertford Mercury*, 12 April 1851.

¹⁸⁷ *Hertfordshire Mercury*, 30 April 1887.

¹⁸⁸ H.A.L.S. NM4A/25, *Brand Street Methodist Church (Wesleyan), Hitchin Sunday School Treasurer's Accounts*.

4.7 Adult schools

There were no Sunday-school scholars recorded at the Hitchin Meeting House of the Society of Friends in 1851 which endorses the view that the Quakers attached little importance to these.¹⁸⁹ However, the Quakers did initiate their First-Day School Association, initially in the Quaker towns in the north of England and Bristol and Gloucester. Their fourth annual meeting in 1851 noted that there had not been enough vigilance on the part of the enumerators in the recognising education, for adults and children, in the census.¹⁹⁰ This exposes the difference in approach. Apart from the obvious, the movement was called the First-Day Association (not Sunday school), the schooling offered was not directed at children, but was for young people and adults. Although it has been asserted that inter-denominational rivalry was a spur to school provision in Hitchin, in fact the reality was somewhat different.¹⁹¹ The philosophy behind the founding of the British Schools in Hitchin had been that education should be provided without interfering in the beliefs of the parents.¹⁹² The Quakers were not seeking recruits from the young; the choice of religious education was a matter for parents.

Although Scripture lessons were on the curriculum for the First-Day schools, reading and writing were also included. The school for men and boys aged 15 years and over was started in Hitchin in 1861 and that for women in 1863. By 1871 there were 395 male scholars and 187 female scholars and women outnumbered men on the teaching staff with 13 men and 22 women.¹⁹³ An indication of who was involved can be seen from the representatives of Hitchin at the conference of teachers in 1870. Hitchin was represented by Alfred Ransom, James H. Tuke, Samuel Tuke and also Margaret Sims May, Juliet Ransom, Lucy Sewell and Alice Mary Tuke.¹⁹⁴ Although numbers decreased, possibly due to the extension of elementary education, the need was still there. In 1881, Hitchin reported that there were 288 male scholars and 105 female scholars, with 13 male and 22 female teachers, and even in

¹⁸⁹ J. Burg, *Religion in Hertfordshire*, p.144; K.D.M. Snell, "The Sunday- School Movement", p. 149.

¹⁹⁰ Library of the Religious Society of Friends, *Friends' First-Day School Association Reports, 4th Annual Meeting 1851*, p. 6.

¹⁹¹ W.B. Stephens, *Education, Literacy and Society*, p.194.

¹⁹² F. Dodwell, *Hitchin British Schools*, p. 11.

¹⁹³ Library of the Religious Society of Friends, *Friends' First-Day School Association Report for 1871*.

¹⁹⁴ Library of the Religious Society of Friends, *Report of the Proceedings of a Conference of Teachers in Friends' First-Day Schools held in Dublin, 1 – 3 August 1870*, pp. xii.

1891, they still had 248 male and 92 female scholars, with 9 male and 10 female teachers. Women and girls were given scripture lessons and writing instruction in the morning; men and boys the same in the afternoon.¹⁹⁵

Women were not restricted to teaching the female scholars. The photographs (which have been dated as taken in 1867) of Ann Lucas, Catherine and Mary Thompson with their classes show these to be all men.¹⁹⁶ Juliet Seebohm also took a class of working men at the Adult school and her sister, Winnie, covered for her one week, commenting that the men were good and orderly and that one was becoming quite gallant and “with a little washing he might pass for a gentleman”.¹⁹⁷ It was, for her, also an opportunity to learn. Some of her students had relatives in the army and whilst Winnie herself was no worshipper of the man, she was surprised to learn that “Gordon was not liked by the soldiers under him - they say he was so careless of bloodshed.... His work amongst the poor and his endurance of hardship were very grand: but many are doing more at the first, and for the latter, it is no more than one expects of every Englishman.”¹⁹⁸ These comments and the photographs suggest that many of the scholars were mature. This does reveal another aspect of the validity of the marriage mark as a test of literacy. Many of these students may have already married. This reflects a sample of 40 working-class auto-biographers; 21 of these learned to write in adolescence or manhood like Will Thorne, founder of the Gasworkers’ Union, who signed with a mark but was taught to read as an adult.¹⁹⁹ The needs of bureaucracy did not necessarily recognise the needs of the working class. Chris Wrigley’s forebear was not illiterate. He could not afford to take time off work to register the birth of his son. A friend did it and signed with a mark.²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁵ Library of the Religious Society of Friends, *Friends’ First-Day School Association Reports, Annual Meeting 1881 and Annual Meeting 1891*.

¹⁹⁶ R. L. Hine, *A Mirror for the Society of Friends* (London, 1929), p. 137; Hitchin Museum, *Lawson Thompson Scrapbook*, Vol. 2A.

¹⁹⁷ V. Glendinning, *A Suppressed Cry*, p. 38.

¹⁹⁸ V. Glendinning, *A Suppressed Cry*, p. 39.

¹⁹⁹ J. Humphries, *Childhood and child labour*, p. 309; J. S. Hurt, *Elementary Schooling and the Working Classes*, p. 63. (Will Thorne was taught to read by Eleanor Marx Aveling, Karl Marx’s daughter).

²⁰⁰ *History Today*, August 2011, Vol. 61, Issue 8, p. 56.

A further initiative, led by the Quakers in Hitchin, was the institution of the Evening school. A Boys' Evening School was set up in 1810 to be held in the winter months.²⁰¹ This must have had mixed success as the annual meeting of the Society for the Bettering of the Condition of the Poor held in 1841 noted that the "Society have resolved to make another effort this winter to maintain an Evening School".²⁰² How successful they were in this endeavour is unrecorded. Mid-century, William Ransom and William Lucas were agreed that the "poorer classes *must* receive a better education", and particularly the women who should be better educated than the men.²⁰³ Advertisements appeared in 1865 for an Evening School for female adults to be held at the British Schools premises every day except Wednesday. The curriculum comprised writing, reading, ciphering and needlework and this was to be conducted by Miss Cornock. How this enterprise was financed and how successful (or not) is not recorded.²⁰⁴ As Miss Cornock had been succeeded by a Miss Rebecca Welman as Mistress of the Girls' School by 1870, it might be assumed that this was a short lived experiment.²⁰⁵

An Adult School was instituted by another Quaker, James Hack Tuke in 1860. This was a long term success as, presiding over the annual meeting in 1887, Tuke recorded that there had been an increase of five in the numbers attending the female school and 234 attended the men's school.²⁰⁶ The original volunteers at the school were Alfred and William Ransom, Frederic Seebohm and four women, Lucy Sewell, Ann Lucas and the Thompson sisters. The younger sister, Mary, taught there for over 50 years.²⁰⁷ Other women became teachers there. Alfred Latchmore, a local chemist, was noted for his activity in the Adult-school movement. He became President of the Hertfordshire Adult School Union in 1928 and was President and Secretary of Hitchin Adult school several times. An additional note records that "In this work he was greatly helped by his wife and daughter".²⁰⁸

²⁰¹ R. L. Hine, *A Mirror for the Society of Friends*, p. 119.

²⁰² H.A.L.S. 675 64, *Society for the Bettering of the Condition of the Poor, Tenth Annual Meeting*.

²⁰³ R. L. Hine, *Hitchin Worthies*, p. 310.

²⁰⁴ Hitchin Museum, *Lawson Thompson Scrapbook*, Vol. 1A ; F. Dodwell, *Hitchin British Schools, Schooldays*, pp.16 -17.

²⁰⁵ J.G.C., British Schools Hitchin, *British Girls' School Hitchin Log Book*.

²⁰⁶ *Hertfordshire Mercury*, 22 October 1887.

²⁰⁷ R. L. Hine, *A Mirror for the Society of Friends*, p. 120.

²⁰⁸ Library of the Religious Society of Friends, *Typed Register Extracts*.

Apart from the contribution made to the Adult school by Quaker women in Hitchin, the names of those women who contributed to the work of the Sunday schools, First-Day schools and Adult schools are rarely found except on their death. Miss Thompson's life was recalled as one devoted to the Friends' Adult Schools.²⁰⁹ The funeral of Mrs John Powell in January 1904 was occasion to note that, like Miss Gutteridge of Hertford, "She was for some years a teacher at the Congregational Sunday School where she was held in high esteem by both teachers and scholars."²¹⁰ The death of Miss Ellen Paternoster five years before had been occasion to note her efforts in collecting for the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel and that she was a Sunday-School teacher of long-standing. Her obituary might have applied to so many women. She was recorded as having "lived an unobtrusive but useful life."²¹¹

4.8 Schooling at the end of the century

Provision of schools in Hertfordshire improved during the Victorian era to such an extent that by the 1860s most children lived within reach of a day school.²¹² The 1840s saw the building of the Cowper Testimonial and the All Saints Infants Schools in Hertford and in 1859 the opening of a Ragged School to add to the existing charity schools.²¹³ In Hitchin, the National Schools of St Mary's and St. Andrew's were erected in 1854 and the St. Saviour's School in 1868. Women played an important part in raising money to fund building and improvements through bazaars, rummage sales and concerts. The funds for improvements to the All Saints and Abel Smith Memorial schools in Hertford were augmented in 1885 by a profit of £250 from a bazaar and musical entertainment by eight young ladies, plus separate donations of £5 each from Mrs Abel Smith and Mrs Carlile.²¹⁴ Women were key to the history of Walworth School. It was built by Mrs Exton in 1852 and endowed with £1,000 by Mrs Hailey in 1852.²¹⁵

²⁰⁹ Hitchin Museum, *Lawson Thompson Scrapbook*, Vol. 2B.

²¹⁰ Hitchin Museum, *Loftus Barham Scrapbook*, Vol. 7, newspaper cutting dated 15 August 1904.

²¹¹ Hitchin Museum, *Loftus Barham Scrapbook*, Vol. 7, newspaper cutting dated 15 August 1899.

²¹² W. B. Stephens, *Education, Literacy and Society*, p.195.

²¹³ www.hertford.net/history/timeline consulted 26 May 2011.

²¹⁴ *Hertfordshire Mercury*, 11 April 1885.

²¹⁵ R. L. Hine, *The History of Hitchin*, Vol. II, p. 430.

Although provision was apparently ample, both towns faced an increase in population during the second half of the nineteenth century. In 1851, the census recorded 2,565 children aged 15 and under in Hitchin and 1,774 in Hertford. By 1891 the figures were 3,179 and 2,020 respectively. The bazaar held in 1885 in Hertford was the result of a necessity. £327 was required to erect another school room for 50 children at the Abel Smith School and most of this was raised by the efforts of women. It was deemed that this would meet current needs and the return for the year ending 31 August 1889 indicated that all schools in Hitchin and Hertford had accommodation in excess of their average attendance.²¹⁶ However, it was noted that “the population at the east end of the town [Hertford] is increasing very considerably.”²¹⁷ In 1891, 48 per cent of the children aged 15 and under in Hertford were in the St John’s parish.²¹⁸

Whilst literacy levels rose in Hertfordshire during the century there were still problems with the quality of the education provided, attendance and attitudes of employers and parents towards schooling for the working-class child. A note on average attendance figures for schools in Hertford in 1876 highlighted the Ragged School, the Roman Catholic School, the Green Coat School and Mrs Wray’s Infants School with a footnote to the effect that the writer did not think that these would be deemed “efficient schools” under the Act.²¹⁹ On this basis, using the average attendance figures, about 180 children (a quarter of the school population of Hertford) were deemed as not being given an effective education.

As to the quality of teaching staff, it was primarily the women who attracted criticism. The report by Mr Wix, the Inspector for Schools in Hertfordshire, at the end of the century noted that 88 of the 200 pupil-teachers examined that year were described as below “fair”. Of the subjects, “history and geography (especially of the female teachers who seldom have to teach these subjects) are poor, and show insufficient reading and a want of guidance in study. The female teachers are very weak in arithmetic (very many could not work even a simple

²¹⁶ BPP 1890 (403), *Elementary Education (schools examined). Return to the House of Commons dated 12 August 1890*, p. 203.

²¹⁷ H.A.L.S. D/EL Q28, *Abel Smith School*.

²¹⁸ Figures exclude Christ’s Hospital.

²¹⁹ H.A.L.S. D/EL Q 39, *Green Coat series*.

addition and subtraction of vulgar fractions correctly) and the answers on the method are, as a rule, meagre and vague”.²²⁰ This is not surprising as a prime function of girls’ education was to provide the servants and mothers of the future with the essentials of domestic work. While the girls were engaged in needlework the boys were taught geography and mathematics. Needlework became a class subject in 1875 followed by cookery in 1892 and laundry work from 1890.²²¹ In addition, reliance on the mistress and the pupil teacher meant that girls were being taught by the untaught.

In some schools improvements were made. The Inspector’s report on the Hitchin Girls’ British School in 1863 recorded that the “state of instruction in the three elementary branches does not appear to me by any means satisfactory. The writing and arithmetic are much below the average and the reading is moderate. I regret to say that I do not think the mistress can work with the necessary energy and vigour.”²²² The trustees took a close interest in the school and made regular visits from the inception of the school.²²³ Visits by Committee Ladies were regularly recorded in the school log book in the 1860s. Usually they are unnamed, but Miss Thompson, Mrs Ransom, Miss Lucas and Mrs and the Misses Foster appear to have been regular visitors. Visitors were also a feature of the British Schools in Hertford. A report on the Hertford British Schools noted that “the teacher of the sewing class is assisted by a ladies’ committee, one of whom attends regularly on each afternoon when the class is held.”²²⁴ The Gosselin sisters were regular visitors to the National boys’ and girls’ schools, taking lessons in scripture and reading.²²⁵

In Hitchin, however, members of the committee took an interest in other subjects. The Log Book noted in 1865, for example, a Committee Lady looked at sewing on the afternoon of 10 April; another took dictation on 5 May and on 15 May she took a reading class and heard

²²⁰ BPP 1893 – 94 [C. 7068], Vol. XXVI. 1081, *General Report for the year 1892, by the Rev. F. Synge, one of Her Majesty’s chief inspectors of schools, on the schools in the Eastern Division*, p. 10.

²²¹ A. Digby and P. Searby, *Children, School and Society*, pp. 46 - 7.

²²² Jill Grey Collection, British Schools Hitchin, *Hitchin Girls’ British Schools Log Book*.

²²³ H.A.L.S. 67524, *Fourth Report on Dead Street School*.

²²⁴ *Hertfordshire Mercury*, 28 March 1885.

²²⁵ G. Cordingley, *The Gosselins of Bengeo Hall* (Hertford, published by author, 2002), pp. 11 - 2.

multiplication tables.²²⁶ By 1872, the Inspector could report that elementary subjects were good although by 1880 there had been some regression (or use of higher standards) as whilst reading was reported as good, arithmetic and spelling were rather backward. The Mistress was praised by the Inspector in 1891 for the continued progress in the general efficiency of the school and, after 22 years, was replaced by Elizabeth Hurlston in 1897 who won the Inspector's accolade the following year with the comment that "there is much to commend in the work of this school which seems likely to do well under the present mistress."²²⁷ A consistent factor throughout its history was the support and interest of women in its management from its beginning to end. In 1912, Miss Thompson, who appears to have been the Correspondent for the school since 1871, was still on the committee, together with representatives of the Seebohm and Ransom families.²²⁸

Hertford also attracted good and indifferent reports from the Inspector of Schools and boys' schools were not immune to criticism. In 1862, the Green Coat School was assessed as sound and the attainments sufficient.²²⁹ Twenty years later the position had changed. The Reverend Wigram committed some comments to print on how matters might be improved but, as he recorded, a problem was "the increasing deafness of our Master. A misfortune indeed – but one which is obviously most prejudicial to our school".²³⁰ A further problem was of money with the charity's income being insufficient to employ a certificated master. Whilst the Charity Commissioners wanted the school to become an elementary school, the view of the trustees was that they wished to continue with the existing regime.²³¹ The trustees had already had a difference of opinion with the Inspectorate in 1872. The Inspector had found remarks by the curate of the parish in the School Log Book and the trustees were reminded that, apart from the annual report, entries in the Log Book were restricted to the principal

²²⁶ J.G.C. British Schools Hitchin, *Hitchin Girls' British Schools Log Book*.

²²⁷ J.G.C. British Schools Hitchin, *Hitchin Girls' British Schools Log Book*. (Miss Hurlston stayed for 27 years, resigning in 1924; the school was taken over by the County Council the following year).

²²⁸ H.A.L.S. 67561, *Hitchin British Schools (Girls) Minute Books*.

²²⁹ H.A.L.S. D/EL Q20, *Green Coat School*.

²³⁰ H.A.L.S. D/EL Q25, *Examination of boys, 1881*. (It was a misfortune that was not quickly resolved. Mr Flack was still in position ten years later, see Kelly, *Kelly's Directory of Hertfordshire 1890*, p. 768).

²³¹ H.A.L.S. D/EL Q20 and *Hertfordshire Mercury* 10 February 1883.

Teacher. As the Managers had not complied with the 7th section of the Elementary Education Act (on religious tolerance), no grant could be made that year.²³²

The Cowper Testimonial School also attracted mixed reports but, like the British Girls' School in Hitchin, the story was one of progress. The Inspector's report for 1869 noted that "The state of this school is improving but I hope there will be a steady advance. A school in my district similarly situated in another country town is much more forward in all respects."²³³ By 1890 the report for the year recorded that "the boys here are vigorously and well taught and their discipline is commendable."²³⁴ The British Schools in Hertford were also commended for an improvement in 1894 as against the previous year with elementary attainments described as "very fair", although "the use of fingers for calculation should not be permitted".²³⁵ An indication of a different expectation from boys may be seen on the note that the pupil teacher, Herbert Copping, passed "fairly" in 1895, but "should attend to spelling and Euclid".²³⁶ This was an unlikely attainment for the female teachers and yet they were more likely to stay within the teaching profession. Six months later, the Log Book noted that Bertie Copping had two days' leave to sit the Civil Service Exam. He left to join the Civil Service in January 1896. By contrast, it was not Euclid that presented a problem for the Master when the mistress, Elsie Frost, was absent in November 1898. The Log Book noted that "sewing and drawing cannot be done in consequence".²³⁷

Attendance continued to be a problem with staff and pupils unable to attend school.²³⁸ Illness was a common problem. It was recognised by the Inspectorate that "hardly a parish escapes an annual visit of measles or whooping cough."²³⁹ Hertford and Hitchin were no exception as school Log Books testify.²⁴⁰ Scarlet fever was also prevalent causing absences at the British

²³² H.A.L.S. D/EL Q39.

²³³ H.A.L.S. H/Ed 1/88/1, *Log Book, All Saints Hertford United Schools*.

²³⁴ H.A.L.S. H/Ed 1/88/1.

²³⁵ H.A.L.S. H/Ed 1/196/1, *Hertford British School Log Book*.

²³⁶ H.A.L.S. H/Ed1/196/1.

²³⁷ H.A.L.S. H/Ed1/196/1.

²³⁸ P. Horn, *Education in Rural England*, pp. 136 – 138; G. E. Mingay, *Rural Life in Victorian England*, p. 164.

²³⁹ BPP 1899 [C9361], Vol. XXI.91, *General Report for the year 1898 by W. E. Curry, Esq. on the schools in the Eastern Division*, p. 8.

²⁴⁰ An outbreak of measles in October 1897 caused the Medical Officer to close the school for a fortnight. H.A.L.S. H/Ed/196/1, *Hertford British Schools Log Book*.

Schools (Girls) at Hitchin in July 1892.²⁴¹ Members of staff were also susceptible to illness. This was doubly inconvenient for the Hertford Schools as when Mr Hancock was taken seriously ill in October 1897, his wife, also a teacher at the school, was “obliged to be with him”.²⁴² Weather continued to be another factor affecting attendance together with other distractions. In Hertford these ranged from the Ware Fair, the Harvest Home and a holiday being given in 1892 as the circus was in town. Another holiday was given on 6 April 1891 as two of the staff were engaged on the census.²⁴³ Similar patterns are evident in the records for the British Girls’ School at Hitchin with illness, mother out at work and without shoes plus holidays, such as the one for the Baptist School treat (22 July 1896) cited as reasons for non-attendance.²⁴⁴

The other factor influencing school attendance was the attitude to schooling by the children themselves, their parents and the employers. The Inspector of schools for Hertfordshire, Mr Wix, reported that he did not find school boards an efficient means of policing attendance in small country parishes as the management of the schools was in the “hands of men whose apparent interests are entirely opposed to education”. West Hertfordshire (the Berkhamsted and Hemel Hempstead Unions) were commended for creditable attendance; the problem was in east Hertfordshire.²⁴⁵ In Hertford, it appears that the schools and their managers took responsibility for attendance. The Log Book for the British Schools noted in October 1874 that the Master had asked Mrs Sagers about her son’s absence. “Her reply is that she had sent him to Cowbridge because I made such a bother about his being away.” The following day he was told by Mr Ludlow, a trustee of the school that he had no power to reject any boy applying for admission. His reaction is recorded. “Walter White discharged himself from this school in September 1873 giving no reason for doing so. Went to Cowbridge and stayed there till September 1874, then discharged himself giving no reason. When he was here he

²⁴¹ J.G.C., British Schools Hitchin, *Hitchin Girls British Schools Log Book*.

²⁴² H.A.L.S. H/Ed 1/88/1.

²⁴³ H.A.L.S. H/Ed 1/88/1.

²⁴⁴ J.G.C. British Schools Hitchin, *Hitchin Girls British Schools Log Book*.

²⁴⁵ BPP 1887 [5123.11], Vol. XXIII. 783, *General report for the year 1886, by Rev. F. Synge, on the schools in the eastern division*, p. 7.

was very irregular in his attendance and frequently played truant. I am ordered to readmit them (sic).²⁴⁶

Hitchin did have a School Attendance Committee which initially met fortnightly and then monthly from 1881. Interest in the business of these meetings may have waned as there are frequent references to insufficient members attending to form a quorum and, on 13 September 1898, it was recorded that “As no Members attended a quorum was not formed.”²⁴⁷ In practice, the Committee appeared to have set up a system which required little input from them. The two Relieving Officers for the union were appointed as Attendance Officers with the hope that local visitors to schools would be supportive. In 1880, the Committee noted an increase in school attendance of 235 children in the first three months of the year as compared with the previous year.²⁴⁸ Cases brought to the attention of the Committee appear to be few and mostly a matter of authorising the Attendance Officer to take legal proceedings or review of an exceptional case, such as the child to be examined by the doctor who confirmed that the boy was “defective in intelligence and memory and that he is therefore an unsuitable case for education in an ordinary school.”²⁴⁹ Proceedings were taken against some parents, but employers were also castigated. The Clerk was directed to write to Walter Hine, the gamekeeper at Putteridge Park, and send him a list of boys who he had employed to beat game. The Clerk was also empowered “to state that he has rendered himself liable to a penalty in each case.”²⁵⁰

In spite of the difficulties, standards did improve and with them opportunities for girls to demonstrate academic ability. The “greatest achievement” at the Hertford Examination Board in 1888 was Mary Wilds’ Arithmetic paper which was awarded 98/100. Alice Fountain was, again, first in English Language but could not have the prize as she had won it in the previous year, but she did receive Mr Abel Smith’s special prize for the most deserving person. In the senior section the best papers were produced by Miss Cornwell (Grammar and

²⁴⁶ H.A.L.S. H/Ed 1/88/1, *Log Book All Saints United Schools*.

²⁴⁷ H.A.L.S. BG/HIT, *Hitchin School Attendance Committee 1877 – 1899, Meetings 10 January 1882, 4 April 1882, 23 July 1889, 20 August 1889, 27 May 1890, 11 November 1890, 9 December 1890, 31 March 1891*.

²⁴⁸ H.A.L.S. BG/HIT, *Hitchin School Attendance Committee, Minutes of 10 April 1879 meeting*.

²⁴⁹ H.A.L.S. BG/HIT, *Hitchin School Attendance Committee, Minutes of 12 July meeting*.

²⁵⁰ H.A.L.S. BG/HIT, *Hitchin School Attendance Committee, Minutes of 7 December 1897 meeting*.

History) and Charles Vernon (Arithmetic).²⁵¹ Discussion in Hitchin on the future of the old Free School centred around the establishment of a new high school with the Charity Commissioner being told that “a high school for girls was as much needed in the town and district as for boys.”²⁵² Whether or not there was a culture of encouraging aspiration amongst girls in Hitchin is impossible to assess. Winnie Seebohm went to Newnham College in 1885 as did her neighbour and friend, Margaret Tuke, who graduated and became Principal of Bedford College in 1906. Both women were members of families who were active in the British Schools and the Adult Schools in Hitchin. The Inspector’s report on the British Schools (Girls) in 1883 commented that most girls were old for their respective standard. By 1895, the School’s Log Book recorded that two girls had left as they had won scholarships at the Grammar School.²⁵³

4.9 Conclusion

Quantification of the influence of women on education in Hertford and Hitchin is impossible. Occasionally, there are references to family members or friends taking on the schooling of children. Phebe Lucas was taught, for a time, by two sisters who let her join their two nieces and Winnie Seebohm also tutored her younger sister and Dora Ransom.²⁵⁴ These are, however, not the records of the working class but accounts of a more privileged community of Quakers with money and servants. The importance of the mother in teaching her children how to read and write is a recurring theme in working-class autobiographies.²⁵⁵ The official record, the census, designated most women as “housewife”.²⁵⁶ However, the importance of her role was endorsed by other official reports.²⁵⁷ If the mother was not literate, it still fell to her to ensure that the child had the requisite pence, was clean and tidy and she bore the responsibility for ensuring that her children attended school. The first case for the School Attendance Committee in Hitchin sanctioning legal action occurred in 1878. The children of Edith Armitage, now the wife of Edward Kingsley, had been given warning and so the

²⁵¹ *Hertfordshire Mercury*, 27 October 1888.

²⁵² Hitchin Museum, *Lawson Thompson Scrapbook, Volume 2a*.

²⁵³ J.G.C., British Schools Hitchin, *Hitchin Girls British School Log Book*.

²⁵⁴ J. Lucas, *Phebe’s Hitchin Book*, p.40; H.A.L.S. D/ESe C1, *Letters from Winnie Seebohm*.

²⁵⁵ C. Chinn, *They worked all their lives*, p. 45; J. Humphries, *Childhood and Child labour*, p. 320.

²⁵⁶ E. Garrett, “The dawning of a new era?”, p. 358 - 9.

²⁵⁷ BPP 1854, *Thirteenth Report of the Registrar General*, p. viii.

Attendance Officer took proceedings under the Act.²⁵⁸ Similarly, it was the mother who produced the certificate from the doctor to record that her son was so defective in intelligence that he was unsuitable for normal schooling.²⁵⁹

There is some evidence of the sums raised by fund raising events run by women to build schools and enhance their facilities but their prime input was through teaching, visiting and, in a few cases, management. Teaching was a job where women were in the majority and on the evidence available, the surmise that the majority of Sunday-school teachers were women was true of Hertford and Hitchin.²⁶⁰ It was certainly true of the First Day and Adult schools in Hitchin. It would also appear that girls were more regular pupils at Sunday schools, in Hertford, but not at the Adult schools run in Hitchin. Girls might be more pious than boys but an alternative explanation is that the Sunday school did not impinge on the working week. Girls were frequently absent from school as they were wanted at home. Sunday was the day parents would be at home thus allowing girls freedom to learn.

Marianne Farningham's education was interrupted when she was aged 12 because of the death of her mother but her mentor became the Baptist Minister.²⁶¹ This may have been true for many girls in Hertford and Hitchin. The inculcation of habits of discipline and religious observance by the Sunday-school teacher resulted in, what has been described as, "that peculiar English confusion between cleanliness and godliness."²⁶² In 1852, a government report bemoaned the lack of religious observance amongst the working class.²⁶³ By 1866 it would appear, to Mrs Gaskell, a Minister's wife, that Sunday had become a special day to the working class.

²⁵⁸ H.A.L.S. BG/HIT, *Hitchin School Attendance Committee 1877 – 1899, minutes of 26 February 1978 meeting*.

²⁵⁹ H.A.L.S. BG/HIT, *Hitchin School Attendance Committee, minutes of the 12 July 1885 meeting*.

²⁶⁰ K. D. M. Snell, "The Sunday-School Movement", p. 131.

²⁶¹ T. W. Lacqueur, *Religion and Respectability*, p. 153.

²⁶² T. W. Lacqueur, *Religion and Respectability*, p. 223. (The introduction of the expression "Sunday best" is, according to the O.E.D., credited to Mrs Gaskell as being the first to put it into print. "At eleven o'clock Mrs Gibson was off, all in her Sunday best (to use the servant's expression ...), well dressed in order to impose on the servants of the Towers"), E. C. Gaskell, *Wives and Daughters* (first published in 1866) (Penguin edition, 1984), p. 542.

²⁶³ BPP 1852 – 53, LXXXIX (1690), *Census of Great Britain 1851, Religious Worship, England and Wales, Report and Tables*, p. clviii.

Assessment of women's contribution to the improvement in literacy during the nineteenth century is extremely difficult. Their ability to teach was restricted by their own education and hence the caveats in official reports on the quality of female teachers.²⁶⁴ With a few exceptions, management of schools was in the hands of men and yet the exception does indicate a success story. The British Girls' School in Hitchin was situated in Dead Street. Its re-naming to Queen Street in the 1850s did not alter the fact that it was in the centre of the slum area which was not cleared until the 1920s. Like the Green Coat School in Hertford, its pupils were the poorest of the poor. Unlike the Green Coat School, where educational standards declined, the British Schools was one of steady progress. In spite of early problems on attendance and the quality of teaching staff, by the end of the century it was receiving good reports from the school inspectorate. A feature of the school was that its managing committee comprised women who took a direct and proactive interest in the curriculum, supporting the mistress and monitresses by regular attendance to teach pupils and guide the staff. For both towns there were women Sunday-school teachers who brought "young hearts to Christ".²⁶⁵ Undoubtedly these women, in the main unrecognised and un-recorded, but often better educated did much to improve literacy and, if attendance patterns are an indicator, with probably girls being the main beneficiary.

Many women were involved in the rise of literacy. The teachers and monitresses were often supported by visitors who supplemented deficiencies in the abilities of the paid staff by providing instruction and role models. However, even at the end of the century, they were all still fighting poverty. Attendance patterns were still adversely affected by sickness through regular epidemics and the want of boots and adequate clothing for inclement weather. In addition, economic pressures and the continuing need for the working-class child to enhance the meagre family income were still the realities that compulsory elementary schooling could not eradicate.²⁶⁶

²⁶⁴ BPP 1893 - 1894 [C.7068], Vol. XXVI. 1081, p. 10.

²⁶⁵ *Hertfordshire Mercury*, 6 April 1880.

²⁶⁶ P.Horn, *Education in Rural England 1800 - 1914*, pp. 267 - 270.

In spite of the achievements of women in the drive towards literacy just nine women nationwide were elected in the 1870s to the first school boards.²⁶⁷ The re-opening of the Free School as a grammar school for boys and girls in Hitchin in 1888 did see the inclusion of three women on the board, but described as “Coöptative (sic) Governors”.²⁶⁸ It was not until 1917 that Lady Evans from Great Berkhamsted and Miss M. E. Robertson, headmistress of Christ’s Hospital Hertford, became members of the County Education Committee.²⁶⁹

²⁶⁷ P. Hollis, *Ladies Elect*, p. 71 and p. 132.

²⁶⁸ R. L. Hine, *History of Hitchin Grammar School* (Hitchin, 1931), pp. 48 – 9.

²⁶⁹ *Hertfordshire Almanack*, 1917, p. 79.

5 Conclusions

In the absence of local government, as understood today, it fell to the prominent members of the community to take leadership in matters relating to regulation of the town. A case has been made for the established aristocracy taking the lead in such matters with the newly rich having neither the time nor inclination.¹ Such generalisations do not apply to Hertford and Hitchin. The influence of the Quakers in Hitchin has been credited with the improvements in the structure and sanitation of the town.² In Hertford, the negative approach to public health and education by Lord Salisbury was counterbalanced by constructive input, particularly in school building, by the Abel Smith family and, later in the century, in a positive interest in the welfare of the poor by the Faudell Phillips family, thus giving further support to the thesis that a supposed disinterest by the parvenus in a locality needs to be challenged.³ Whilst the names of the men who undertook the necessary public offices are recorded, the contribution of women has been overlooked. Surveys of the activities of women in the nineteenth century have been broad or limited to a specific group or location.⁴ This research is unique in looking in more detail at women of all classes in two market towns over a period of time and challenges some tenets on economic activity by, in particular, married women and widows. This research supports the view that married women's employment was under-recorded in the census returns and questions the contention that "regular" work outside the home was faithfully recorded.⁵ The economy of make- shifts was a feature of working class life.⁶ As this study shows, there is evidence of women's involvement in agricultural work, not just at harvest time, but in the production of vegetables which is less seasonal. The confusion appears to be with viewing "regular" as equating to "full-time" and many frequently occurring commitments were not recorded.

¹ S. Bunker, *Strawopolis*, p. 130; D. Cannadine, *Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy* (Harmondsworth, 2005), p. 360.

² R. L. Hine, *A History of Hitchin, Vol. II*, p. 438.

³ J. P. Moore, *The impact of Agricultural Depression and Land Ownership Change on the County of Hertfordshire, c. 1870 – 1914* (Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Hertfordshire, 2011), p. 145.

⁴ W. Neff, *Victorian Working Women*; N. Goose, ed., *Women's Work in Industrial England*; E. Gordon and G. Nair, *Family and Society in Victorian Britain*; C. Chinn, *They worked all their lives*; D. W. Adams, *The rise and fall of Apothecaries' Assistants, 1815 – 1823* (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Hertfordshire, 2011).

⁵ M. Anderson, *Family Structure in Nineteenth Century Lancashire*, p. 71; L. Shaw Taylor, "Diverse Experiences", p. 34.

⁶ E. Higgs, *A Clearer Sense of the Census*, pp. 96 – 8.

An influence in the choice of Hertford and Hitchin as subjects for this study on women was that Hitchin was a centre for the straw plait trade; Hertford was not. The nineteenth century saw the rise and fall of this trade and the occupational breakdown for Hitchin mid-century demonstrates its importance, not only for women but contributing to a higher incidence of child labour in Hitchin. Although significant, there is no evidence of the entrepreneurial spirit which coloured the growth of Luton.⁷ Its role in Hitchin was restricted to an expedient in the working-class home, displacing the domestic service occupations as the preferred employment. By the end of the century, it continued to be a feature of working class life but no more noteworthy than other employment options for the working class woman. Whether it encouraged immorality has been viewed as doubtful.⁸ The industry did, however, support families without menfolk and some single mothers. This supports evidence from the lace-making area of Devon. Illegitimacy was tolerated where the mother could contribute to the family budget.⁹

Whilst the census may be viewed as the best source of information about the employment activity of women it is by no means a perfect record.¹⁰ The evidence from this research, which has used more than one census return and other sources, notably trade directories, suggests that any fears, expressed in contemporary reports, that a widow was helpless and the mature, unmarried, woman was dependent on others were unfounded and adds weight to the contention that women were able to run their own business and also continue, successfully, one which had been in their husband's or father's name.¹¹ Many widows not only continued the enterprise but were successful enough to pass it on to succeeding generations.

In conducting a trade or managing a shop many women were able to give some attention to the running of the home. At the working-class level an ideal scenario was the wife, with her

⁷ The population of Luton in 1901 was 51,174; in 1801 it was 3,095. Comparative figures for Hertford are 3,360 in 1801 and 9,322 in 1901; Hitchin, 3,161 in 1801 and 10,072 in 1901. (Sources: S. Bunker, *Strawopolis*, p. 19 and pp. 26 – 7; BPP 1903 LXXXIV [Cd 1406], *Census of Great Britain, County of Bedford*, p. 14; BPP 1831 XVIII (348), *Census of Great Britain, 1831, Comparative account of the population of Great Britain in the years 1801, 1811, 1811, 1831*, p. 22.

⁸ N. Goose, "How saucy did it make the poor?", p. 547.

⁹ J. Robin, *The Way We Lived Then* (Aldershot, 2000), pp. 30 – 1 and p. 79.

¹⁰ L. Shaw Taylor, "Diverse Experiences", p. 41.

¹¹ A. Clark, *Working Life of Women in the Seventeenth Century*, pp. 153 – 4.

cow(s), allowing her to be at home and concentrating on clothing and feeding the family.¹² For the middle class, the manuals of the time prescribed the home as being the centre of a woman's life. "One of the greatest requisites, then, for a happy home is a cheerful, contented, bright and merry wife; her face is perpetual sunshine, her presence is that of an angel; she is happy in herself, and she imparts happiness to all around her."¹³ In practice, like Mary Thompson, the "Angel of Queen Street", many angels did not confine their activities to the home and it could be said that some were rarely in.¹⁴ This research supports the questioning of the "separate spheres" ideology.¹⁵ Records of the activities of, particularly, the Quaker women in Hitchin show that there had been scope for activity outside the home throughout the century, and before. Whilst such records for Hertford are unavailable, the indications are that charitable work through fundraising and teaching at Sunday schools provided opportunities outside the home. Women outnumbered men in teaching at Adult Schools and Sunday Schools in both towns. The biographies of a few famous women may be distorting the reality. Florence Nightingale's torture of living from meal to meal with a little worsted work was not necessarily the norm.¹⁶

This research extends current historiography in the area of philanthropy. The definitive work on women and charitable work in nineteenth-century England was published in 1980.¹⁷ It is, perhaps, timely to review some of its conclusions. Significant sums of money were raised by women in Hertford in support of church building and missionary endeavours, confirming the national pattern.¹⁸ However, this is not reflected in Hitchin where the culture reflected what Gorsky has described as the Quaker philosophy of rehabilitation.¹⁹ The Quakers, men and women, joined with others in founding schools for children and adults and there is more evidence of direct engagement with the poor of the town than can be detected in Hertford. Many Quakers were prominent townsfolk and had a significant involvement in public office but, in so doing, they worked with all faiths in establishing schools, administering the poor

¹² BPP 1868 – 9, XIII, *Report on the Employment of Children, Young Persons and Women in Agriculture*, p. 116.

¹³ H. P. Chavasse, *Advice to a Wife on the Management of her own Health*, p. 66.

¹⁴ Mary Thompson was a regular visitor to the poor, a trustee of the British Schools in Hitchin, a teacher at the Adult School, secretary of the Ladies' Saving Society and doubtless had many other, unrecorded, activities.

¹⁵ S. Steinbach, *Women in England 1760 – 1914*, pp. 42 – 3.

¹⁶ E. Ross, *Slum Travelers* (sic), p. 21.

¹⁷ F. K. Prochaska, *Women and Philanthropy*.

¹⁸ F. K. Prochaska, *Women and Philanthropy*, pp. 51 - 2.

¹⁹ M. Gorsky, *Patterns of Philanthropy*, pp. 116 – 7, pp. 146 - 7.

law and improving the physical and social conditions of the town. Hitchin had a number of local societies dedicated to alleviating hardship with women having an integral part in their organisation and operation. Whilst there is evidence that the people of all denominations worked together in the aid of a good cause in Hertford, there is less evidence of interest in the needs of the working class of the town. Visiting the poor was a way of life for the women in Hitchin; in Hertford, the ladies distributed Bibles but it fell to a Bible reader to encourage the poor to read them. It was not until the end of the century that Hertford recognised that the ethos of the New Poor Law was inadequate and something needed to be done about their unemployed and poverty in the town. Part of this impetus was down to the arrival of Helen Faudell Phillips.

It would, however, be easy to dismiss the fund raising activities of the women of Hertford as just a pastime. As with Hitchin, many were stalwarts of the Sunday school, supporters of the local schools and the local hospitals were the beneficiaries of some significant legacies from women. The bazaar, the fancy sale and concert allowed women to meet outside the home and develop links which were not circumscribed by geography. Where this research might challenge Prochaska is that the bazaar was not a women only event. Men and women worked together in its organisation and execution and on other fundraising events.

This study also raises a question mark against his thesis that philanthropy in the nineteenth century provided an escape from the boredom of home life and thus empowered women to aspire to public office and new work areas.²⁰ This assumes a simple story that the woman, in the Victorian age, became isolated by the creation of separate spheres for home and work. Involvement of the angel of the house in philanthropy allowed her licence to step outside and become successful and thus ensure her place in “feminine” occupations of nursing, schooling and social work. The rise of the “white collar” worker, with aspirations, may have left wives at home, some content with domesticity; others seeking an escape and an opportunity to consort with the great and the good. In practice many working-class women worked outside the home, the shopkeepers were in the public arena and the gentry and nobility continued to socialise, travel and fulfil a commitment to “noblesse oblige”. There was no breakthrough

²⁰ F. K. Prochaska, *Women and Philanthropy*, p. 11 and p. 222.

into public office at the end of the century. Acceptance of women as local and county councillors and magistrates took longer.

An important legacy of the engagement of the women in the life of Hertford and Hitchin was in the field of education. They outnumbered men as Sunday school teachers and took a more proactive approach to their responsibilities for education. The record of the women who served as visitors to schools suggests a regular interest and, for the British Schools in Hitchin, this was not limited to supervision of needlework. Their interest in improving literacy is also evidenced by the number of women involved in the Adult schools in Hitchin. The establishment of a girls' grammar school in Hitchin reflected the aspirations of the Tuke and Seebohm families whose daughters attended university.²¹ The indications are that the contribution of women in the field of education was more constructive than from the men who were school trustees. As noted, (p. 111 above) the trustees of the grammar school in Hertford played no part in the running of the school and an interest by a trustee of the Green Coat School resulted in a rebuke from the inspectorate.²²

This survey of women reveals the input made by many to the development of Hertford and Hitchin. Some can be identified but the working-class woman who makes an occasional appearance in the minutes of school attendance committee meetings and school log-books is elusive. There is little recorded on the lives of working class families by the families themselves.²³ The use of census information has enabled an exposure of some examples of the mutual support within the family and the occupations undertaken by working-class

²¹ The Grammar School for girls in Hitchin opened in 1889 (R. L. Hine, *History of Hitchin Grammar School*, p. 50). The Grammar School for girls in Hertford was in Ware and opened in 1906.

²² H.A.L.S. D/EL Q39, *Hertford Green Coat Log Book*, entry for 27 July 1872: "The attention of the Trustees and the Master is necessary to articles 36 – 39 of the Code, by which entries in the Log Book are restricted to the principal Teacher, except on receipt of the annual report, and are confined to subjects immediately belonging to the school." Even in Hitchin, the trustees of the British Boys' School limited their attendance to dispensing prizes, supervising examinations and checking the registers. The inspectorate commented that this was not being done with the frequency required. See J. G. C., Hitchin British Schools, *Hitchin Boys' Schools Log Book, 1863 – 1899*.

²³ A. Davin, *Growing Up Poor*, p.7.

women but evidence of the support of family, friends and neighbours which was a feature of working-class life is elusive.²⁴

What this research has demonstrated is that in spite of a paucity of records on the economic and social activities of women it is possible by use of archive material, trade directories and newspapers to add information to the census data. A detailed and local study can examine life behind the census statistics and in so doing a better understanding can be achieved of the range and depth women's contribution. It has also demonstrated that national, regional and even county generalisations on a society and its people can mask significant local differences in approach, culture and, ultimately, the destiny of the town and its people.

²⁴ G. Best, *Mid-Victorian Britain*, p. 153.

Appendix 1: Hertford – Ordnance Survey 1880 © Crown copyright



Appendix 2: Hitchin – Local Board of Health – Ordnance map - 1852



Appendix 3: Manufacture – Male population – Hitchin and Hertford 1851

	Hertford	Hitchin
Baker/Confectioner	39	36
Maltster/Brewing	34	25
Milling	27	16
Shoe/Boot Maker/Cordwainer	62	64
Tailor/Hatter	37	65
Saddler/Harness Maker	13	7
Coach Builder/Painter	17	5
Iron Founder/Smith	46	33
Printing	23	3
Watch/Clock/Furniture Maker	17	21
Straw Plait		75

Appendix 4: Hertford and Hitchin – Marital status – 1851

	Unmarried	Married	Widow/er	Not known
Hertford	64.2	29.4	6.1	0.3
Hertford – excluding Christ’s Hospital scholars	60.9	32.2	6.6	0.3
Hitchin	62.1	32.4	5.5	
St Albans	61.4	33.1	5.4	
Berkhamsted	61.4	32.9	5.7	
Mills rural norm	59.8	35.0	5.2	

Source: Digitalized Census Enumerators’ Books

The table also includes comparison with the Berkhamsted region and St Albans and the “English Rural Norm”*

* N. Goose, *Population, economy and family structure in Hertfordshire in 1851, Volume 2, St Albans and its region* (Hertfordshire, 2000), p. 34.

Appendix 5: Hertford – women who were married in 1881 and enumerated without occupation and widowed by 1891

Name	Address	Husband's occupation	Widow's occupation 1891
Mary Harry	Castle Street	Watch and clock maker	Silversmith
Maria Maffia	Fore Street	Silversmith and jeweller	Watchmaker and jeweller
Elizabeth Hartwell	Maidenhead Street	Master Butcher	Butcher
Betsy Peck ¹	Fore Street	Stonemason	Stonemason
Elizabeth Hale	London Road	Market gardener	Market gardener
Johanna Howard	Bircheley Street	Sweep	Sweep and Publican
Elizabeth Hart	Old Cross	Publican	Publican
Emily Ramsey	Thornton Street	²	Grocer
Mary Robins	Fore Street	Clerk and Traveller	Carpenter ³
Martha Day	Port Vale	Wagon Driver, Ag. Lab	Laundress
Anna Clarke	The Folly	General labourer	Washerwoman
Elizabeth Foster	Riverside	Painter and glazer	Washerwoman
Emily Grice	Thornton Street	Ships steward	Charwoman
Caroline Donohoo	Railway Street	Fishmonger	Charwoman
Phillis Chandler	Cowbridge	Maltster and Clerk	Registry Office Keeper
Jane Woollatt	Queens Road	Farmer	-
Mary Wilds	Fore Street	Architect and Surveyor	-
Eliza Acres	St Andrews Street	Superannuated Police constable	-

¹ It is unlikely that Betsy Peck undertook the work of a stonemason as she was a needlewoman before her marriage. (Information from Ian Fisher, her great-grandson). Her husband died in 1884 when the two oldest sons were 15 and 14. The firm continued to trade under the name of their father even when they were old enough to take over. (See Kelly, *Kelly's Directory of Hertfordshire, 1895*, p. 106 and 1898, p. 120.)

² Husband's occupation not recorded as absent on census night. The address was Aldershot Barracks.

³ The turn to carpentry is unexpected but the trade directory recorded her husband, Henry, as a carpenter. (See Kelly, *Kelly's Directory of Hertfordshire, 1882*, p.616.)

Appendix 6: Hitchin – women who were married in 1881 and enumerated without occupation and widowed by 1891

Name	Address	Husband's occupation	Widow's occupation 1891
Hannah Worsley*	Tilehurst Street	Grocer	Grocer
Mary Cannon*	Chalkdell Terrace	Market gardener	Market Gardener
Sarah Taylor*	Tilehurst Street	Baker	Baker
Agnes Smoothy*	Ickleford Road	Farmer	Dairy manageress
Eliza Burton*	Railway Inn	Innkeeper	Innkeeper
Eliza Deamer	The Anchor	Coal and yeast dealer	Innkeeper
Jemima Overton	Walsworth Road	Shopkeeper – beer	Pub licensed victualler
Sarah Fordham ¹	Falcon inn	Blacksmith	Licensed victualler
Adelaide Tomlin	Golden Square	Bricklayer and greengrocer	Greengrocer
Mary Hunt ²	Queen Street	Gardener	General shopkeeper
Ellen Rainsford ³	Walsworth Road	Rail (Clerk G. N. R)	Lodging house keeper
Isabella Muirhead ⁴	Bancroft	Baker	Lodging house keeper
Susan Bird	Walsworth Road	Baptist Minister	Fancy shop and post mistress
Martha Lofts*	Nightingale Road	Grocers assistant	Newsagent and schoolmistress
Harriet Cherry*	Florence Street	Coal dealer	Laundress
Sarah Parker	Radcliffe Road	Labourer	Laundress
Ann Worsley	Penns Yard	Labourer	Rag and bone dealer
Ellen Hill	Crispin Terrace	Bricklayer	Charwoman
Sarah Impey	Crispin Terrace	Engine fitter	Charwoman
Emma Cousins	Halls Yard	Coachman	Charwoman

* Enumerated as “wife of” in 1881.

¹ Address in 1881 was The Falcon.

² Address in 1881 was Back Street Grocer shop.

³ The household included a lodger in 1881, another clerk with the G. N. R.

⁴ The household included a lodger in 1881, Robert Hardy, the Singer sewing machine agent.

Appendix 7: Hertford 1851 - Families with unmarried daughters and grandchildren

Address	Head	Status	Unmarried daughters	Age	Occupation	Grandchildren	Age
31 Church Lane	John Harwood	W				Emma Arnold	20
						Eliza Arnold	7 mths
						(Great G'dau)	
16 Maidenhead	Peter Young*	M	Ann	38	Confectioner	Mary	18
136 Butcherley Green	Sarah Lee	W	Emily	20	House Servant	William	4
196 St Andrews St	Joseph Faiers**	M	Caroline	18	Printer's daughter	Theresa	4 mths
1 St Andrews St	Mary Turner	W	Emma	26	Dressmaker	Anne	6
			Eleanor	24	Dressmaker	George F	4
113 Water Lane	Joseph Winters	W	Mary A	31	Managing the household	Blanche	6
						Julia	4
						Florence	1
154 Dimsdale Buildings	Sarah Glascoe	W	Jane	28	Laundress	Frederick L	2
175 Hertingfordbury Road	Mary Pannell	W	Elizabeth	23	Needlewoman	Lydia	3
83 Butcherley Green	John Chapman	M	Emma	21	Labourer's daughter	William	1

*Confectioner, aged 90. Ann and Mary also enumerated as "Confectioner"

**Printer - Theresa enumerated as "Printer's granddaughter"

Appendix 8: Hitchin – 1851 – Families with unmarried daughters and grandchildren

Address	Head	Status	Unmarried daughters	Age	Occupation	Grandchildren	Age
67 Bancroft	Richard Amor	Married	Mary	32	Dressmaker	Elizabeth	15
115 Bancroft	John Smith	Married	Marian	27	Straw plaiter	John	4 mths
			Sarah	23	Straw plaiter	Charles	4 mths
42 Golden Square	Robert Chipperfield	Married	Mary Ann	25	Bonnet sewer	Daucus Negus	1 mth
100 Churchyard	Jane Norris	Widow	Ann	23	Shoebinder	Alfred C	2
34 Bucklersbury	John Savory	Married	Sarah	19	Straw plaiter	Emma Savory	3
			Hannah	18	Straw plaiter	John Savory	2
			Elizabeth	15	Scholar	Richard Savory	1
						Frederick Gray	2
174 Old Park Road	James Palmer	Married	Mary Ann	24	Straw plaiter	James	1
			Ellen	20	Straw plaiter		
			Eliza	11	Scholar	Grandchildren	
9 Tyler Street	John French	Married	Martha	18	No occupation	Charles	5
78 Tyler Street	Sarah Faulkner	Widow	Mary	26	Straw plaiter	Mary Ann	3
			Sarah	20	Straw plaiter	Sarah Joyce	3 mths
			Ann	18	Straw plaiter		
115 Highlander	Charles Muncey	Married	Emma	19	No occupation	James	9 mths
15 Sun Street	George Wright	Married	Mary Ann	21	No occupation	George F	8
58 Bridge Street	Samuel Arnold	Married	Rebecca	22	Straw plaiter	[forename blank]	under 1 month
			Sarah	17	Straw plaiter		
33 Back Street	Thomas Latchford	Married	Frances	20	Straw plaiter	Lizzy*	1
			Eliza	22	Straw plaiter	Fanny Ann*	1
38 Back Street	Lydia Poulter	Widow	Lydia	34	Straw plaiter	Richard	5
51 Back Street	John Clark	Married	Martha	19	Straw plaiter	Mary Ann	8 days
			Elizabeth	16	Straw plaiter		
			Priscilla	14	Straw plaiter		
65 Back Street	Amy Seymour	Widow	Rebecca	28	Bonnet manufacturer	Arthur Thomas	3
77 Back Street	William Wilshere	Married	Louisa	23	Straw plaiter	James*	5
			Sarah	21	Straw plaiter	Mary Ann*	1
			Maria	19	Straw plaiter	Sarah Ann*	1
97 Hollow Lane	Thomas Foster	Widower	Agnes	28	Straw plaiter	Ellen	4
			Mary	26	Straw plaiter	Thomas	2
115 Hollow Lane	Ann Ambrose	Widow	Ann	32	Straw plaiter	Betsy	8
8 Biggen Lane	Elizabeth Silsby	Widow	Hannah	30	Straw plaiter	William	1

15 Biggen Lane	Elisabeth Ansell	Widow	Ann	43	No occupation	William	11
43 Biggen Lane	Elizabeth Buckle	Widow	Martha	34	Servant	James	7
114 Back Street	Sarah Butterfield	Widow	Elizabeth Stevens	26	Straw plaiter	Frederick Stevens	3
			Sarrah Stevens	24	Straw plaiter		
121 Back Street	James Beach	Married	Caroline	17	Straw plaiter	Sellina**	7 mths
			Jane	11	Straw plaiter		
136 Wimbush	William Goldthorpe	Married	Mary Ann	33	Dressmaker	Henry James	1
2 The Park	Joseph Pedder	Married	Mary Ann	27	Dressmaker	Alfred	6
			Ellen	20	Dressmaker		
			Eliza	10			
55 Folly	George Pearse	Married	Ellen	20	Straw plaiter	Ann	6 mths
			Maria	14	Straw plaiter		
			Amy	6			
60 Folly	Sarah Barker	Widow	Ann	35	Straw plaiter	Elizabeth	17
			Martha	29	Straw plaiter	Mary	14
			Hariot (sic)	21	Straw plaiter	Emma	11
						William	8
167 Hitchin Hill	Daniel Rance	Widower	Ann	32	Laundress	Mary Ann	12

* Enumerated with child assigned to daughter

** Enumerated as illegitimate

Appendix 9: Unmarried women aged 40 and over; enumerated without occupation – Hertford - 1891

Name	Address	Other household members
Mary Harrison	Fore Street	Unmarried brother
Sophia Field	Jenningsbury Farm	2 unmarried brothers
Ann McMullen	New Road	Unmarried brother and 82 year old mother
Fanny Slade	St John's Road	76 year old mother, brother and his son
Florence Foster	Castle Street	84 year old father and mother
Maria Westrope	Market Place	84 year old father, unmarried brother and 2 grocer's assistants
Julia Roberts	Fore Street	Mother and father aged 72
Elizabeth Vines	Port Mill	Father aged 75, mother aged 78 and their 11 year old grand-daughter
Susan Dorsey	Hertingfordbury Road	Mother, aged 81
Ann and Isabel Siverside	Villiers Street	Mother, aged 72 and a lodger
Boadica Lawrence	Currie Street	Mother, aged 79, lodger and 2 nieces
Harriet Denny	Maidenhead Street	Brother in law and his 2 sons
Mary Taylor	Fore Street	Brother, sister in law and 5 children under the age of eight

Appendix 10: Unmarried women aged 40 and over; enumerated without occupation – Hitchin -1891

Name	Address	Household
Frances Cain	Churchyard	Unmarried brother
Sarah White	King's Head	Unmarried brother
Maria Lewin	High Street	Unmarried brother, servant and nurse
Emma Cousins	Tilehurst Street	Aunt aged 75
Alice Harding	Bunyan Road	Aunt, servant and nurse
Sarah Preston	Bedford Road	Nephew and his family
Amelia Almond	Russell Slip	Nephew and his family
Mary Geard	Bedford Road	Unmarried sister
Hannah Cissaman	Biggen almshouses	Unmarried sister
Elizabeth Upchurch	Charlton	Sister and brother in law
Mary Lewin	Storehouse Lane	Widower brother in law and his daughter
Eliza Gray*	Russell Slip	Rebecca Davis
Louisa Deane and Louisa Ponnell	Walsworth House	Sister and cousin to the widowed Rosa Thompson, household also included 5 children and 5 servants
Elizabeth and Ann Fells	Market Place	Father and mother aged 75
Adelaide and Chistiana Foster	Bancroft	Father, aged 82 and mother
Clara Barham	Fishponds	Father, mother and unmarried brother and sister
Margaret Throssell	Walsworth Road	Father, aged 80, mother, their grandson, unmarried brother and 2 servants
Ambie Taylor	Sunnyside	Father aged 70, mother, brother and nephew
Priscilla Ransom	Benslow	Father aged 69, mother, 2 unmarried brothers, sister and 3 servants
Marianne Lucas	Tilehurst Street	Father aged 75 and 4 servants
Lydia Merritt	Whinbush	Father aged 69
Hannah Lines	Walsworth Road	Father aged 83
Rachel Widdows	Fishponds	Mother
Ellen Millist	Bancroft	Mother
Susanna Groom	The Oaks	Mother aged 78, unmarried brother and 2 servants
Lucy Hutson	Radcliffe Road	Mother and a lodger
Eliza Worboy	Walsworth Road	Mother and 2 young nieces

*Eliza Gray was enumerated as “Companion” which may imply paid support.

Appendix 11: Bazaars advertised or reported in the *Ipswich Journal*

Cause	1860 – 1869	1870 – 1879	1888 – 1889	1890 - 1899
Church/chapel/mission ¹	13	25	100	110
Schools	5	2	13	5
Hospitals/asylum	1	1	2	
Convalescent homes			5	
Orphanages ²		2	6	4
Army volunteers		2	2	1
Conservative club/Primrose League			1	1
Liberal club			1	
New almshouse			1	
Youth groups ³			1	5
Other			1	7
Totals	19	32	133	133

Source: 19th century British Library Newspapers, <http://infotrac.galegroup.com>

¹ This includes a new chapel plus church improvements such as heating or a new organ.

² The Sibton Orphanage was a regular beneficiary. It was established for children of the middle class to provide training so they could be placed “in the station of life in which they were born”. The girls were trained to become governesses and teachers; the boys were set on a trade. (*Ipswich Journal*, Saturday 29 August 1874, Issue 7247). This contrasts with St Saviour’s Orphanage in Hitchin, the object of one of the few bazaars there. It was for local, orphan, girls and from frequent references to girls leaving school to go to St Saviour’s was fulfilling a local, social, need. (See H.A.L.S. H/ED 2/6/1, *St Andrew’s National School Admission Register, 1888 – 1913*).

³ Working Girls Club, Girls Friendly Society, Mechanics Institute and Y.M.C.A.

Appendix 12: Employment of children as recorded on the census – 1851 - Hertford and Hitchin

	Hertford	Hertford	Hitchin	Hitchin
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Total aged 11 – 15	250	245	341	346
Number employed	52	49	125	163
Percentage employed	21	20	40	47
Total aged 1 -10	652	592	925	895
Number employed	6	1	37	54
Percentage employed	1	-	4	6

Of the boys aged 11 to 15 in Hertford, 38 were errand boys and 14 were engaged in agriculture. In Hitchin, 49 boys in the same age group were in agriculture, 40 were errand boys and 32 engaged in straw plait work. For the girls in Hertford, the only employment was that of servant, with just Fanny Stewart of Railway Street, engaged in straw plait manufacture. Why this should be, given that she and her parents were not born in a recognised straw plait working area, and her father a gardener and mother a dressmaker, is a mystery. The only connection appears to be through a neighbour, Rebecca Klusman, a visitor at 18 Railway Street, who was described as a plaiter. Hitchin, however, was a centre for this trade and thus offered an alternative to domestic service. Of the 163 employed girls in the age 11 – 15 category 31 were servants; the rest were straw plaiters.

Five of the boys under the age of ten in Hertford were employed as chimney sweeps, one as a farming boy and the one girl in the group was a servant. Children in the same age group in Hitchin at the same date (excluding those in the workhouse) were primarily employed in the straw plait trade, with all the girls described as either straw plaiter or at straw plait school. Straw plait work also accounted for employment of 28 boys under the age of ten, with three errand boys, five in agriculture and one described as a musician.¹

¹ The musician, William Ludvig, aged seven, was lodging at the Couriers Arms with his brothers, all born in Germany, and can be assumed to be a transient resident.

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