

workshop 6: women and collective action

Separate spheres – how realistic?:

Presumed characteristics and roles:

men	women

*** Warning no1* -**

- Women did not
- Female writers.....

Food riots again:

John Bohstedt found that women were involved in 32% of the 240 food riots he sampled 1790-1818 and dominant in 15% of them.

Roger Wells in a more extensive survey concluded that women were the principal actors in only 9% of 391 riots.¹

Difficulties of the evidence.....

Source: *The Times*, 13 October 1800

Your examples from Old Bailey trials:

¹ Nicholas Rogers, *Crowds, Culture and Politics in Georgian Britain* (Oxford, 1998), p. 230.

Women's involvement in politics:

Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire and Lady Duncannon – 1784 election support for Charles James Fox

Mary Wollstonecraft, *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792)

See Anna Clark, *The Struggle for the Breeches* (1993) – retort to E. P. Thompson's *Making of the English Working Class* (1963)

Female reformers from 1819

Source of the week: George Cruikshank, 'The Belle Alliance, or the Female Reformers of Blackburn', 12 August 1819, British Museum.

By the end of 1819, at least 25 female reform societies had been formed, predominantly in the manufacturing districts of the North and Scotland. According to Henry Hunt, 20,000 of the 150,000 at St. Peter's Fields, Manchester, 16 August 1819, were women and children (one eighth of the whole). Of the 654 persons recorded as injured at Peterloo, at least 168 were women, 4 of whom died of their wounds.²

- Why only from 1819?.....

Samuel Bamford, *Passages in the Life of a Radical* (1849), chapter XXIV.

http://gerald-massey.org.uk/bamford/c_radical_%288%29.htm

[1819] WITH the restoration of the Habeas Corpus Act, the agitation for reform was renewed. A public meeting on the subject was held at Westminster, on the 28th of March and in June; Sir Francis Burdett's motion for reform was negatived in the House of Commons.

² Michael Bush, 'Women at Peterloo', 224.

Numerous meetings followed in various parts of the country; and Lancashire, and the Stockport borders of Cheshire, were not the last to be concerned in public demonstrations for reform. At one of these meetings, which took place at Lydgate, in Saddleworth, ... I, in the course of an address, insisted on the right, and the propriety also, of females who were present at such assemblages voting by a show of hand for or against the resolutions. This was a new idea; and the women, who attended numerous on that bleak ridge, were mightily pleased with it. The men being nothing dissentient, when the resolution was put the women held up their hands amid much laughter; and ever from that time females voted with the men at the Radical meetings. ... our females voted at every subsequent meeting; it became the practice, female political unions were formed, with their chairwoman, committees, and other officials; and from us the practice was soon borrowed, very judiciously no doubt, and applied in a greater or less degree to the promotion of religious and charitable institutions.

- Queen Caroline affair 1820

.....

27 female addresses were presented to Caroline, with over 70,000 signatures from all over the country.³

- Female Chartism.....

Spring 1838 – Birmingham female political union formed – 3000 members.
1838-9 – well over 100 women’s Chartist groups formed. There were at least 430 non-gender specific (i.e. male) Chartist organisations.

Stockport female Chartists declared in 1839: ‘we regret we should be driven by dire necessity to depart from the limits usually prescribed for female duties; but when...we find it impossible to discharge those duties in our relative capacities – when even with the most rigid economy we are unable to provide for the actual necessities of subsistence ... we feel justified in declaring our conviction that nothing less than the adoption of the principles [of the Charter] remove the existing distress, or secure the safety of the working classes’.⁴

Still separate spheres?

Nicholas Rogers argues that historians have over-stressed the novelty of women’s entry into mass politics after 1815; he suggests that women’s participation stemmed from their position at the centre of neighbourhood life as workers and consumers.⁵

³ Rogers, *Crowds*, p. 251.

⁴ Thomas and Grimmit, *Women in Protest*, p. 111.

⁵ Rogers, *Crowds*, p. 216.

Further reading:

- Amelia Rauser, 'The Butcher-Kissing Duchess of Devonshire: Between Caricature and Allegory in 1784', *Eighteenth Century Studies*, 36: 1 (Fall, 2002), 23-46
- Office for National Statistics data on the pay gap - <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/cci/nugget.asp?id=167>
- John Bohstedt, 'Gender, Household and Community Politics: Women in English Riots, 1790-1810', *Past and Present*, 120 (1988)
- Roger Wells, *Wretched Faces, Famine in Wartime England, 1763-1803* (Stroud, 1988)
- David Jones, 'Women and Chartism', *History*, 68:222 (1983)