

Female agricultural labour on the Dixon Estate, Lincolnshire, 1801–17

by Donna J. Ulyatt

Abstract

This article continues the examination of women's work in the early nineteenth century drawing on two detailed logbooks kept on the estate of the Dixon family of Holton Hall, Lincolnshire, 1801–17. Some of the women working can be identified as the wives of labourers working on the estate. Others were girls, including the daughters of the same labourers. Female labour seems to have been drawn on most heavily in the first years of the century and diminished thereafter although later evidence is offered to show the practice continuing even in mid-century. Women were used most heavily in weeding, hay making and harvest work: there were occasions when they were employed in heavy work such as dung-spreading.

In a recent article, Pam Sharpe commented that we 'have little idea of where and when women worked on farms'. Despite the work of Sharpe herself, and other historians such as Burnette, Gielgud, Speechley and Verdon who have addressed the work of women in agriculture in general and in particular regions or counties, much remains to be done to elucidate how often women were employed in agriculture and what those who were employed did in the fields.¹ They and other authors have particularly drawn on farm accounts which, as Verdon argues, offer a more reliable account of the employment and wages of agricultural workers than some contemporary published sources which are tainted by the preoccupations of largely male writers.² Or, as Gielgud has suggested, 'it is from farm records that women's value as workers is most practically and authentically revealed'.³ This paper aims to contribute to our knowledge of women's work by offering an analysis of their work on a single Lincolnshire estate which possesses records of unusual quality from the first two decades of the nineteenth century. The source is two logbooks from the estate of William Dixon of Holton-le-Moor which cover (with gaps) the years 1798–1817 and record the work undertaken by seventy women and girls.

¹ P. Sharpe, 'The female labour market in English agriculture during the industrial revolution: expansion or contraction?', *AgHR* 47 (1999); N. Verdon, *Rural Women Workers in nineteenth-century England, gender, work and wages* (2002); J. Gielgud, 'Nineteenth-century farm women in Northumberland and Cumbria: the neglected workforce' (unpublished D.Phil thesis, University of Sussex, 1992); H. Speechley, 'Female and child

agricultural day labourers in Somerset, c.1685–1870' (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Exeter, 1999) and J. Burnette, 'The wages and employment of female day-labourers in English agriculture, 1740–1850', *EcHR* 57 (2004).

² Verdon, *Rural Women Workers*, p. 36; also Speechley, 'Female and child agricultural day labourers', p. 77.

³ Gielgud, 'Nineteenth-century farm women', p. 79.

They detail the number of days worked, pay received and in many cases the type of work undertaken by the women. The records of women employed as domestic servants were kept separately from those employed on the land and there was very little or no interchange between the two roles.

I

The three villages mentioned in the text, Holton-le-Moor, Nettleton, and Thornton-le-Moor lie south-west of Caistor on the north-western edge of the chalk wolds and sit partially on limestone heath and partially on clay. The Dixon family acquired Hall Farm at Holton-le-Moor and Gravel Hill Farm at Thornton-le-Moor in 1740 from the Bedstoe family.⁴ They also held land at Normanby, Searby, North Kelsey, Hibaldstow, and marsh pasture at Theddlethorpe, Great Carlton, and Skidbrooke.⁵ William Dixon built Holton Hall in 1783. By the nineteenth century, he was a relatively large landowner, owning well over 3,000 acres, having gained a further 131 acres in 1791 following the enclosure of the adjoining parish of Nettleton.⁶ The enclosure of Holton-le-Moor appears to have come about in two stages, the first in the early seventeenth century led to the disappearance of the open fields and the ending of common grazing rights on meadow and pasture land, leaving some 600 acres of rough pasture and warren unenclosed.⁷ The enclosure of this land at Holton-le-Moor was delayed in the early nineteenth century by the question of tithes and by William Dixon's own fondness for the large warren on the moor.⁸ Dixon regularly employed warreners, such as William Markham in 1816, which implies that it was a profitable enterprise.⁹

In his notebooks Dixon registered his concern that the side effects of rapid enclosure were bad for public welfare and would cause considerable hardship to those without land.¹⁰ Dixon believed that 'landlords benefited at the expense of farming tenants' upon the enclosure of Caistor Moor in 1814.¹¹ The experiences of Viscount Cholmondeley and his family, with whom Dixon had worked in setting up and running the Caistor Society for Industry in 1800, had led Dixon to believe that enclosure raised poor rates.¹² Late enclosure was common on less fertile or disputed land and the enclosure of Holton-le-Moor was not completed until 1838, some fourteen years after Dixon's death.¹³

⁴ *Holton le Moor* (unbound pamphlet 12628, Lincoln Central Library).

⁵ H. Fuller, 'Landownership in Lindsey c. 1800–1860 with particular reference to the role of the large landowner as an agent of agricultural improvement and landscape change' (unpublished MA thesis, University of Nottingham, 1974), p. 79.

⁶ E. and R. Russell, *Parliamentary enclosure and new Lincolnshire landscapes* (1987), p. 113.

⁷ R. Olney, 'The Enclosure of Holton-le-Moor', in Dinah Tyszka, Keith Miller and Geoffrey Bryant (eds), *Land, people and landscape. Essays on the history of the Lincolnshire region* (1991), p. 122.

⁸ J. Yates and H. Thorold, *Lincolnshire. A Shell Guide* (1965), p. 122.

⁹ Lincolnshire Archive Office, Dixon 4/3/141. All documents cited are held by the LAO.

¹⁰ Olney, 'Enclosure of Holton-le-Moor', p. 123.

¹¹ *ibid.*

¹² D. Hey, 'The north-west Midlands', in J. Thirsk (ed.), *The Agrarian History of England and Wales*, V, 1640–1750 (2 vols, 1984), i, p. 150. The Caistor House of Industry is referred to once in the women's work logbooks where it is noted that during July 1811, six unnamed inmates worked for Dixon. However, this is the only reference to House of Industry inmates in the women's work logbooks, suggesting that they were not employed on the estate on a regular basis.

¹³ Olney, 'Enclosure of Holton-le-Moor', p. 124.

Alongside their farming interests, the Dixon family were benefactors of the community, particularly in Holton-le-Moor. Over the 150 years that they owned the land, they built a school, almshouses, a village hall and funded the restoration of the parish church.¹⁴ Despite their philanthropy, the Dixon family did not enjoy the status and standing of their near neighbours, the Yarboroughs. In a letter to Lord Brownlow in 1837, Reverend William Cooper considered Thomas John Dixon, William's son, a 'Highly respectable and very opulent yeoman' but not suitably educated for magisterial duties.¹⁵ *The Stamford Mercury* nevertheless reported on the death of William Dixon in 1824, that 'he was universally respected by all who knew him, and a great part of his life was spent in bettering the conditions of the labouring classes'.¹⁶

Although the estate remained under William Dixon's control during his life, a comparison of the handwriting in the logbooks with other Dixon notebooks appears to show that Thomas John Dixon, William's eldest son, kept them.¹⁷ From 1805, Thomas John was farming at Nettleton and Thornton le Moor with other family members and later in his own right. When his father died in 1824, Thomas John Dixon took over the running of the estate. He married Mary Anne Roadly in 1827 and they had four children. In 1821 the total estate acreage was 2,037, which increased to 3,352 acres when 1,315 acres at Searby, Hibaldstow and North Kelsey were annexed to the Dixon estate on the marriage of Thomas John to Mary Ann. Thomas John Dixon enclosed the moor in 1838 and carried out much of the expansion of the arable acreage on the estate.¹⁸ Additional purchases and further reclamation increased the acreage of the estate to 4,124 acres in 1860 and to 5,043 acres in 1870.¹⁹ Thomas John's son and heir Richard died just twenty-one days after his father in 1871.²⁰ The Estate then passed to Mary Anne and following her death to their three daughters, Ann, Amelia, and Charlotte in succession.²¹ The family maintained their position as landowners until 1890s. Although the house remained in the family's possession, the estate itself was broken up following a dramatic fall in land prices.²²

By the end of the eighteenth century, some changes in farming practice had been undertaken at Holton-le-Moor, although much of it remained either moor or warren suitable only as sheepwalks and rabbits.²³ The women's work logbooks indicate that the crop rotation used on Dixon land was one of which Arthur Young would have approved.²⁴ It consisted of turnips and other fodder crops, beans, barley and clover with some wheat and potatoes. There is evidence for the limited use of fallow.²⁵ The Dixon family were clearly engaged in a form of mixed farming by the end of the eighteenth century, using both old and new farming techniques to grow cash and fodder crops and also breed and fatten livestock for market. Dixon farm accounts from the year 1835 listed the livestock kept which included 78 pigs, 165 cows and 1968 sheep.²⁶

In a later set of farm accounts, dated 1852, Thomas Dixon detailed the crops grown and techniques used, many of which were similar to those used during the period of the logbooks.

¹⁴ *ibid.*

¹⁵ LAO, 4BNL Box 1.

¹⁶ *The Stamford Mercury*, 17 Dec. 1824.

¹⁷ Dixon 5/4/1 and 5/4/2.

¹⁸ Olney, 'Enclosure of Holton-le-Moor', p. 122.

¹⁹ Dixon 1/C/12/3 and 1/C/14/65.

²⁰ Dixon 10/12/1.

²¹ M. Levy, 'Domestic service in rural England during

the nineteenth century', (unpublished MA thesis, University of Nottingham, 1992), p. 8.

²² Olney, 'Enclosure of Holton-le-Moor', p. 180.

²³ A. Young, *General View of the Agriculture of the County of Lincolnshire* (1813, repr. 1970), p. 123.

²⁴ *ibid.*, p. 129.

²⁵ Dixon 5/4/1.

²⁶ Dixon 5/1/9.

He listed the main crops as beans, carrots and turnips, the cultivation of which was labour intensive and often required hoeing and weeding on a two-weekly basis for the first two months. The use of fallow was still common when it was not profitable to transport manure to a field or when manure was in short supply.²⁷ Dixon detailed the land preparation required for planting clover, cabbage and 'mangol wuzels'. These fodder crops were hand sown in soil that had been double ploughed, which had had stones removed and was then hand hoed up to three times. The fields also required hand weeding, women, and children, Dixon explained, usually did the weeding and the hoeing.²⁸

II

The records are by no means complete and although the cover of the first logbook is dated 1798 the entries inside the book do not start until 1801. There is also no record of work undertaken in the three years 1806–8 or in 1816 in either book.²⁹ Evidence from the 1802 Dixon farm account book indicates that the male labourers continued to work in the same manner during 1806, 1807 and 1808, adding weight to the supposition that the records are incomplete.³⁰

The women's work logbooks provided an important record of the type of work women did, the number of days they worked and the pay they received. Whilst many of the women appear to have been day labourers, a number of the women in the logbooks were the wives or daughters of the 'confined' labourers employed by Dixon. 'Confined' labourers were usually married labourers employed by the farmer or landowner on a permanent or yearly basis and who lived in cottage accommodation on the farm.³¹ Many of the labourers employed by Dixon appear in the estate labour accounts for a number of consecutive years. One such example is William Westfield who was first engaged as a shepherd by William Dixon in 1796 and was still recorded as working for Dixon in 1817.³² Elizabeth Westfield, William's wife appears sporadically over much of the length of the Dixon women's work logbooks in 1801, 1812 and 1817. Mary Robinson and her husband William appeared in the first logbook and William appeared in a male labourers' account book dating from 1804.³³

Transcripts of the parish records for churches in Holton, Thornton and Nettleton show that thirteen of the women were linked to men working for Dixon. The birth of Olive Dawber is recorded at Holton in 1792. Her parents Sarah and William Dawber were both mentioned in the logbooks and Olive herself is listed in the second logbook as weeding for 4½ days in 1801 for which she received the child rate of 6d. per day.³⁴ Parish records from Thornton-le-Moor show John and Elizabeth Hand as the parents of a son and daughter buried in 1810. Both John and Elizabeth worked on the Dixon estate from the 1790s, Elizabeth also appears in the logbooks and

²⁷ Dixon 10/5/1.

²⁸ Dixon 10/5/3.

²⁹ Dixon 5/4/1 and 5/4/2. The first book is entitled 'Women's Logbook' and is dated 1798, however the second book which deals largely with pay, has the titles 'Common Day Book' and also 'Waste Book' scrubbed out and 'Women's Work Ledger 1801–1813' added. The greater part of this paper is based on an analysis of

these volumes: specific references will not normally be offered.

³⁰ Dixon 4/6.

³¹ BPP, 1867, XVI, *Sixth Report of the Children's Employment Commission*, p. 15.

³² Dixon 4/3/135.

³³ Dixon 4/6/68 and 5/4/1.

³⁴ Dixon 5/4/2.

in a farm account book in 1824. The baptism registers at Thornton confirm the marriages of Bridget and William Proctor and Thomas and Mary Sharlack, all of whom appear in the Dixon estate records. By cross-referencing of the names in the logbooks with those in other Dixon estate records, it is possible to show that 19 of the 70 women listed are the wives of confined labourers.³⁵ A further 16 of those listed appear to be daughters of confined labourers.

The estate records show that at least two of the women were hired alongside their husbands in a package deal not dissimilar to the 'bondager' system practised in the north-east. Pinchbeck believed that many farmers and landowners preferred to employ the wives of their labourers as day labourers, as this helped to keep down their wages bill.³⁶ In 1792, Hugh Sparrow was hired with his wife Lucy. He received sixteen guineas a year, a cottage, turf, a shoe and boot allowance and various amounts of grain. Lucy was recorded as working for around 70 days that year, undertaking work that included weeding, haymaking, harvest, and shearing.³⁷ Lucy Sparrow also appears in the Dixon logbooks in 1809, 1810 and 1811.

The women with unknown or unproven links to Dixon labourers may possibly have been other relatives, or women and girls from the surrounding villages. It is possible that some of the women were single women employed as farm servants. However, there is no mention of female farm servants in the logbooks or in the other Dixon account books. Of the women named in the logbooks, some were adult women and others girls. There are two factors which can be used to distinguish them. The first and most obvious is the amount they were paid. The second logbook shows that girls were paid around 6*d.* a day, approximately half of that the women received. On this criteria 16 of the 70 women employed could be classed as girls. The logbook shows Ann Linderson earning £1 9*s* 1*d* in 1813 for 47 days work at an average of 6*d.* per day. She appears again in the 1824 accounts for the full female rate.³⁸ Without knowing the ages of the individual women and girls, there is no way to discern the age at which a girl was considered an adult and given adult pay.

The second factor distinguishing women from girls relates to the frequency and duration of employment. The same 16 girls were found to be employed less often and for shorter periods than the adults. They were also employed, alongside their mothers, in more general tasks such as weeding and haymaking. Sarah Dewry worked with her mother, Mary in 1802. They are both recorded as weeding for 4 days in May and 20 days in June. Mary was consistently employed and appears in the logbooks for nine of the thirteen years and was paid the full rate whilst Sarah was only listed in 1802 at the child rate.³⁹

The question will inevitably asked as to whether data drawn from the years of the Napoleonic wars can be typical. Whilst it may have been the case that 'the Napoleonic Wars led to an increase in the number of women employed in agriculture' in some parts of the country, it is far from clear that military service led to a significant absence of male agricultural labourers in Lincolnshire.⁴⁰ A number of confined labourers are known to have been working on the Dixon estate during these years and their names appear on a loose note in the second women's work

³⁵ Dixon 4/6/68, 4/11, 4/3 and 5/4/2.

³⁶ O. Pinchbeck, *Women Workers and the Industrial Revolution, 1750–1850* (1931, repr. 1981), p. 91 and B. Hill, *Women Alone, Spinsters in England, 1660–1850* (2001), p. 178.

³⁷ Dixon 4/3, fo. 140.

³⁸ Dixon 5/1/1.

³⁹ Dixon 5/4/1 and 5/4/2.

⁴⁰ Pinchbeck, *Women Workers*, p. 62.

logbook. They include William Robinson, Thomas Cash, and William Dawber. Unfortunately there are no comparable records of male day labourers on the Dixon estate for this period making it difficult to assess the total number of days worked and the percentage of the total represented by the women's work recorded in the logbooks. There is however, one book of accounts, covering the period from 1802 to 1809 that shows that men were employed in number of both skilled and semi-skilled roles on the estate.⁴¹ Whilst some of the men's work is listed in this account book, it also includes payments made to traders, and suppliers such as millers and blacksmiths and payments made by tenants. The logbooks do show that total number of days the women worked fell from 648 in 1801 to 111 in 1817 with the highest number of days worked in any one year being 667 in 1802. In addition, there was a decline in the number of individual women employed during this period. The logbooks show that 16 women were employed in 1801, falling to 14 in 1817 and a low of one woman in 1814. Figures from 1817, which represent the employment of fourteen girls for one week in July of that year, distort the overall trend (Table 1). There is therefore some evidence that women were offered less work after the end of the war but their employment did not end then. The 1824 farm account book is very detailed and lists the names of labourers and the pay they received.⁴² However, it does not link individual women to individual tasks and therefore gives no indication of the work in which they were engaged or its duration. It shows that there were nineteen women employed throughout the year although the largest numbers of women were working in July and August. The type of work they were undertaking is mentioned only four times. On 31 July 1824, Maria Wilson was paid 5s. 6d. for threshing and loading and Maria Duffield was paid 7s. 8d. for haymaking and manure. In August 1824, Mary Jackling was paid 5s. for taking a wagon of bones to Brigg and in September Elizabeth Brown was paid 1s. 8d. for two days haymaking. Only three of the names match those of women from the earlier logbooks. Ann Linderson (as already mentioned), Elizabeth Hand and Elizabeth Brown. Elizabeth Hand's son Matthew and Elizabeth Brown's husband William are also recorded as working on the estate in 1824.

The next surviving farm account book is dated 1835 and is similar in form to the 1824 account book.⁴³ It lists 18 women as working in much the same way over the whole year from January through to December. There is again, however, no indication of the nature of the work these women were engaged in. The year round employment of the women plus the lack of references to harvest work suggest a shift away from harvest employment towards spring weeding and summer haymaking.⁴⁴ Much later James Green Dixon, Thomas Dixon's brother, gave evidence to the commissioners of the Commission into the Employment of Children, Young Persons and Women in Agriculture which reported in 1868 in which he confirmed that it remained the practice on his land to hire the wives and children of his labourers.⁴⁵

The women in the logbooks were paid by the day. Burnette's study of the pay and work of female day-labourers in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries indicates that nationally, women were paid between 4d. and 15d. per day.⁴⁶ However, the women in the logbooks were

⁴¹ Dixon 4/6.

⁴² Dixon 5/1/1.

⁴³ Dixon 5/1/9.

⁴⁴ K. D. M. Snell, *Annals of the Labouring Poor, Social*

Change and Agrarian England, 1660–1900 (1985), p. 45.

⁴⁵ Olney, 'Enclosure of Holton le Moor', p. 283.

⁴⁶ Burnette, 'Wages and employment of female day-labourers', p. 668.

paid at the higher rate and received between 12*d.* and 18*d.* per day.⁴⁷ Whilst the record of the pay the women received is incomplete and the women's earnings from other sources are not known, the logbooks do show that the average annual earnings were £3 6*s.* Elizabeth Hand earned the highest sum in any one year, £6 7*s.* 2*d.* in 1811 whilst the lowest total was 6*s.* paid to Mary Cessy in 1813. However, the average earnings are better illustrated by Mary Clark who earned £3 14*s.* 11*d.* in 1809 and by Elizabeth Taylor who earned £3 5*s.* in 1810. By comparison, male labourers listed in farm account book such as William Robinson and Thomas Smith were employed on a yearly basis and received an annual wage of between £18 and £22 per annum plus cottage accommodation and other payments in kind.⁴⁸

III

Gielgud's work on women agricultural workers in the North, Miller's work on farm workers in Gloucestershire and Speechley's on women agricultural workers in Somerset indicate that women were engaged in a range of agricultural tasks, similar to those carried out on the Dixon estate, during this period. Whilst Speechley concludes that rural working women in Somerset undertook labour intensive tasks such as hoeing, weeding and stone picking but that heavy tasks such as ground clearing and spreading manure were undertaken by male workers.⁴⁹ Miller suggests that in Gloucestershire women did 'most of the unskilled, back breaking types of work.'⁵⁰ On the Dixon estate many of the tasks the women undertook were dirty and heavy such as muck breaking and dung spreading.⁵¹ Mary Dickinson and Mary Dewry provided examples of such work. Mary Dickinson was recorded as 'dung spreading' in July 1803 and Mary Dewry was recorded as 'muck breaking' in May and June 1813. Manure was used as a fertiliser to improve areas of thin soil and Dixon describes how wet manure was thrown by hand on the land in winter by labourers, both male and female.⁵²

The work the women undertook also differed over time (Table 2). Haymaking was the biggest single task undertaken by the women, occurring throughout the season in most of the years between 1801 and 1814. The women were engaged, mainly in haymaking with some weeding and hoeing, for 248 days during August 1811, the highest number of days worked in any one month. Between 1801 and 1809, the women appear to be engaged in a wider range of tasks. In September 1801 the women are recorded as working in eight different tasks. Between 1801 and 1809 harvest and haymaking represent the core of their employment in the autumn months. However they were also engaged in threshing, barley sheafing and potato and turnip picking. Between 1810 and 1814 there is an apparent reduction in their autumn employment, which appears to be confined to haymaking, some weeding in 1810 and turnip picking in 1811.

The seasonality of women's employment is shown in Table 1: the tasks undertaken by the women may be found in Table 2. Some 45 per cent of the entries in the logbooks included the type of work undertaken. Whilst acknowledging that the sample is small, the evidence is detailed and provides sufficient evidence for a case study. A number of the tasks carried out by

⁴⁷ Dixon 5/4/1 and 5/4/2.

⁴⁸ Dixon 4/6.

⁴⁹ Speechley, 'Female and child agricultural day labourers', p. 100.

⁵⁰ Miller, 'Farming, farm work and farm workers', p. 83.

⁵¹ Dixon 5/4/1.

⁵² Dixon 10/5/3.

TABLE 1. Women's seasonal employment patterns on the Dixon estate

	<i>Number of Days Worked by Month</i>						<i>Total number of days worked</i>	<i>Number of women</i>	<i>Average number of days worked per woman</i>
	<i>May</i>	<i>June</i>	<i>July</i>	<i>August</i>	<i>September</i>	<i>October</i>			
1801	14	82	91	237	201	23	648	16	40.5
1802	42	182	150	135	128	30	667	13	51.3
1803	3	110	65	113	98	0	389	12	32.4
1804	20	70	48	71	47	21	277	4	69.25
1805	0	0	7	25	8	2	42	2	21
1809	0	0	14	3	0	0	17	4	4.25
1810	0	8	132	77	57	0	274	15	18.26
1811	0	0	199	248	0	0	447	19	23.52
1812	4	27	36.5	15	25	0	107.5	8	13.4
1813	4	20	11	17	19	0	71	7	10.14
1814	22	21	26.5	0	0	0	69.5	1	69.5
1815	0	11	30	0	0	0	41	4	10.25
1817	0	0	111	0	0	0	111	14	7.9

Note: 1806–8 and 1816, no data.

Source: LAO, Dixon 5/4/1 and 5/4/2.

the women, such as weeding, hoeing, and potato setting, were undertaken during the spring months (Table 1). The logbooks show that between 1801 and 1814 the women were engaged in weeding during 25 of the 50 months for which there are records. Weeding was most often, but not exclusively, undertaken in May, June and July.

The women maintained their involvement in the harvest and were also engaged in additional autumn and winter tasks such as threshing, turnip pulling and potato picking and sorting. Spring work including weeding and hoeing was undertaken by women and children for a fraction of the cost of using male labourers.⁵³ Many of the women were recorded as weeding individually or in small groups throughout the logbooks. However, in June 1802 eight of the women, including Ann Cash, Sarah Brown and Elizabeth Smith, were recorded as weeding on the same days from the fifth to ninth of June. There is no indication as to whether they were working together at a single site or in smaller groups at separate sites. Four entries in the first logbook refer to weeding undertaken for a W. Rayner during the month of June 1803 and 1804. Two of those engaged in this weeding were girls who worked together and the other two were women. They were all paid by Dixon, which could suggest they were on loan to a neighbour.⁵⁴

A number of the women were recorded as weeding and hoeing in May, June and occasionally other months. Unfortunately, there is no distinction made in the logbooks between the different sorts of weeding and hoeing undertaken. However, crops known to require regular hoeing and weeding include turnips, potatoes and other root crops. The 1801 crop returns

⁵³ Snell, *Annals of the Labouring Poor*, p. 59.

⁵⁴ Dixon 4/6.

show that in addition to wheat and barley, turnip production accounted for some 22 percent of total arable acreage on the wolds.⁵⁵ The lighter soils on the wolds were highly suited for turnip cultivation. Farming in this area relied heavily on sheep production and the turnip made an excellent fodder and forage crop. Snell suggests that the involvement of women in turnip cultivation was 'slight, but was nevertheless an additional aspect of their spring work'.⁵⁶ However he does make a distinction between the south and east and those areas such as Norfolk and Lincolnshire where in the nineteenth-century agricultural gangs were used to cultivate and harvest such crops.⁵⁷

Turnips are mentioned on two occasions, first in July 1803 when Mary Dewry is recorded as working at weeding, twitching (the removal of couch grass), potatoes, and turnips for eight days and in October 1811 when Sarah Croft worked for sixteen days at turnips.⁵⁸ Mary Dewry was clearly engaged in a number of other tasks over the eight days for which she is shown to be 'at turnips', and the fact it was July suggests she was not pulling the turnips but was perhaps undertaking tasks such as additional weeding or hoeing of the turnips. Sarah Croft appears to have been working only at turnips for sixteen days in October; this may have been the case as turnip pulling was one of the few tasks undertaken by women during October. None of the other women were recorded as working with turnips on these days, which could indicate that Sarah alone worked at turnips however, it seems more likely that she worked either with women whose work on those days was not recorded or perhaps with male members of her family. Turnip pulling, like potato digging, was not the light task so often associated with rural working women, it was hard dirty back-breaking work, which blistered the hands, and was often undertaken in very cold weather.⁵⁹

The second logbook shows eight women engaged in equally strenuous woad pulling during June and July of 1812 and 1813.⁶⁰ The cultivation of woad, a plant with a taproot approximately 20 cms long, would have been difficult on the thin soil of wolds. According to Young, writing in the early nineteenth century, woad was best cultivated on fresh grassland. It therefore seems likely that it was grown, as recommended by Young, for a few years, on newly converted land. After thorough preparation of the land, the first seeds would have been broadcast in March. Woad required careful weeding and successive crops were weeded and cropped at the same time. This was a task 'executed with much attention by men, women and children, on their knees, using short spuds with one hand, and drawing the weeds with the other'.⁶¹

Potato setting, weeding, and picking, which feature regularly in the Dixon logbooks, were equally arduous tasks.⁶² The 1801 crop returns indicated that potatoes were not a significant crop in Lincolnshire. However, the women in the Dixon logbooks appear to have been employed in potato production through much of the year over the life of the logbooks.⁶³ The recorded incidence of potato setting undertaken by the women was second

⁵⁵ C. Rawding, 'Agricultural land use in 1801', in S. Bennett and N. Bennett (eds), *An Historical Atlas of Lincolnshire* (2001), p. 92.

⁵⁹ Pinchbeck, *Women Workers*, p. 61.

⁶⁰ Dixon 5/4/2.

⁶¹ Young, *General view ... Lincolnshire*, pp. 174, 176.

⁶² Dixon 5/4/1 and 5/4/2.

⁶³ Rawding, 'Agricultural Land Use', p. 92.

⁵⁶ Snell, *Annals of the Labouring Poor*, p. 55.

⁵⁷ *ibid.*, pp. 55–6.

⁵⁸ Dixon 5/4/1.

TABLE 2. Work Undertaken by women on the Dixon estate

	<i>May</i>	<i>June</i>	<i>July</i>	<i>August</i>	<i>September</i>	<i>October</i>
1801	Haymaking Potatoes	Haymaking	Weeding Hoeing	Haymaking Harvest Shearing Threshing	Harvest Haymaking Threshing Turnips Beans Corn Potatoes Sheafing Barley	Harvest
1802	Weeding Potatoes	Weeding Haymaking Potatoes Threshing	Haymaking Weeding Turnips Washing Locks	Harvest	Harvest Haymaking Threshing Weeding Shearing	Harvest Beans
1803	Weeding	Weeding Haymaking Potatoes Twitching Threshing Dung Spreading	Haymaking Weeding Dung Spreading	Weeding Haymaking Threshing Shearing Pig Tending	Harvest Haymaking Threshing Beans	
1804	Weeding Potato setting	Weeding	Weeding Haymaking Hoeing Twitching Threshing Potatoes	Haymaking Shearing	Haymaking Shearing Weeding Sheafing Barley	Haymaking Potatoes Beans
1805	Carting and setting potatoes Burning off stubble	Weeding			Sheafing Barley	
1809	Weeding	Weeding	Haymaking	Haymaking Shearing	Harvest Sheafing Barley	
1810		Haymaking	Weeding		Weeding Haymaking	
1811	Weeding Muck breaking	Weeding Muck breaking	Haymaking Hoeing beans Weeding	Haymaking		Turnips
1812	Weeding	Weeding	Haymaking Weeding Dung Spreading Woad pulling			

	<i>May</i>	<i>June</i>	<i>July</i>	<i>August</i>	<i>September</i>	<i>October</i>
1813	Weeding Potato setting Muck breaking	Weeding Twitching Muck breaking	Haymaking Weeding Woad pulling	Haymaking Weeding corn Clover Muck breaking Setting potatoes	Haymaking	
1814	Weeding Muck breaking	Muck breaking	Haymaking			

Note: Multiple entries are listed in descending order of frequency.

Source: LAO, Dixon 5/4/1 and 5/4/2.

only to weeding during May for many of the years between 1801 and 1814.⁶⁴ Potato picking was one of the few tasks undertaken in the month of October; Ann Cash was recorded as at potatoes for five days during October 1804 for which she was paid 5s.⁶⁵

IV

The logbooks show that next to weeding and hoeing, haymaking and the harvest were the biggest employers of the women. Both were a vital part of rural life and indeed of the rural economy. The work itself was often strenuous and dirty and women's involvement varied from area to area with some women engaged in reaping or shearing and others raking, gathering and gleaning.⁶⁶ Excluding those women listed as sheafing, the peak of the women's involvement in haymaking and harvest was in September 1801 when the logbooks show that twelve women were recorded as having worked a total of 136 days. A further 74 women are recorded as working a total of 1160 days during the harvest and haymaking months of July, August, September and October over the thirteen years. Unfortunately there is no indication of the individual tasks that they were engaged in. However it is reasonable to speculate that a significant portion of the women were engaged in haymaking and harvest tasks.⁶⁷

Haymaking took place from July to September. Young writing in 1813, stated that in some parts of the county the start of haymaking was delayed until September due to the 'want of labourers'.⁶⁸ Nevertheless, in many of the years covered by the logbooks, haymaking on the Dixon estate took place from May through to October suggesting that the availability of women's labour offset any labour shortage and may also signify the use of new crops or successive cropping of older crops. Thirsk suggests that grasses such as clover and ribgrass were good for haymaking and grazing and could be mown as early as June and in some cases May.⁶⁹ The bulk of haymaking on the Dixon estate appears to have taken place during the summer months of July and August. However, Rebecca Smith was recorded as haymaking for

⁶⁴ Dixon 5/4/1.

⁶⁵ Dixon 5/4/2.

⁶⁶ Pinchbeck, *Women Workers*, p. 56.

⁶⁷ Dixon 5/4/1 and 5/4/2.

⁶⁸ Young, *General view ... Lincolnshire*, p. 223.

⁶⁹ J. Thirsk, 'Farming techniques, 1500-1640', in Thirsk (ed.), *Agrarian History of England and Wales*, IV, 1500-1640 (1967), p. 180.

four days in May 1801. Clover was mentioned once in August 1813 when Sarah Croft is recorded as working at clover.

The logbooks show that alongside the laborious, heavy and dirty work and dirty work of weeding, dung spreading and the harvest and haymaking period, the women were sometimes engaged in skilled or semi-skilled work such as sheafing and threshing. Ten of the women were involved in 'shearing' or 'sheafing' (the spelling changes from one entry and the next), during the months of August and September, particularly between 1801 and 1804. Sheafing involved the collection and binding of newly mown crops such as wheat, barley, rye and sometimes grass. An entry in the second logbook relating to Ann Thompson lists her as 'wheat shearing' in August and September 1810. There are several entries concerning barley sheafing in the logbooks, including the collecting, binding, and stacking. At the turn of the nineteenth century, the crop returns placed barley as the most important crop at county level. Barley was a 'triple purpose' crop suitable for bread, malt, and stock feed.⁷⁰ It was successfully grown on the thin and less fertile soils and was therefore important to heath and moor areas where up to 34.4 per cent of available arable acreage was cultivated with barley.⁷¹

A paper loosely inserted in the second logbook shows Mrs Sparrow, Mrs Dent, and Mrs Richards were each employed for fifteen days twining, stacking, and taking away barley. The women were recorded as 'at barley' for a further nine days. Unfortunately there is no year or month listed on the insert. There are another five entries in the logbooks for 'sheafing' barley, all immediately post-harvest in the September of 1801, 1804, 1805 and 1809. The fact that the women were paid 1s. 6d. per day, 50 per cent more than the average daily rate for the women on the estate at that time, suggests that there was either an increased demand for labour at harvest time or that the women's sheafing skills were worth paying for. There is however no evidence to suggest that the women on the Dixon estate were engaged in reaping or mowing during the period of the logbooks. The 1802 Dixon farm account book does however show that male labourers on the estate, William Robinson and Thomas Smith, were mowing barley at the same time, during September of 1803, 1804 and 1805, as the women were sheafing and binding it.⁷²

Both men and women on the estate were recorded as threshing during months of September and October.⁷³ Threshing was largely undertaken by hand in the early nineteenth century, before machines powered by horses and later steam gradually took over.⁷⁴ White wheat, when mown by the scythe, was cut earlier in the season often when not fully ripe and was handled more easily with the use of the threshing machine as opposed to hand flailing.⁷⁵ The Dixon logbooks indicate that the women were engaged in threshing during August, September and in October of 1801 to 1804.⁷⁶ However there is only one reference to a threshing machine in the logbooks, which says simply that in 1815, '5 days at threshing machine'. Without additional evidence concerning the use of threshing machine on the Dixon estate at that time, the role of the women in wheat and barley shearing is difficult to discern.

⁷⁰ Thirsk, 'Farming techniques', p. 170.

⁷¹ Rawding, 'Agricultural Land Use', p. 92 and *Lincolnshire Echo*, 13 June 2002, p. 5.

⁷² Dixon 4/6.

⁷³ Dixon 4/6 and 5/4/1.

⁷⁴ T. W. Beastall, *Agricultural Revolution in*

Lincolnshire (1978), p. 195.

⁷⁵ J. A. Perkins, 'Harvest technology and labour supply in Lincolnshire and the East Riding of Yorkshire, 1751-1850', *Tools and Tillage* 3 (1977), p. 127.

⁷⁶ Snell, *Annals of the Labouring Poor*, p. 222.

V

Haymaking and harvest 'traditionally' employed all available local labour including indoor servants and villagers. In some cases people came from nearby towns.⁷⁷ It is reasonable to suppose that women made up a sizeable proportion of those engaged in haymaking and harvest related tasks. The communal nature of haymaking and harvest imbued a certain respectability in the work and in many cases, this respectability was reinforced by the fact that the women often worked in family groups under the supervision of male members of the family.⁷⁸

A number of the women are recorded as working the same locations over a period of time, which could support such notions of respectability. The female members of the Smith family, Rebecca, Elizabeth, and Mary were consistently recorded as working at Ewefield. They were engaged in a number of tasks including twitching, weeding, haymaking, harvest, threshing, and potato setting. A number of the other women were recorded as working at Holton, Thornton, or Nettleton. However, during 1801, Elizabeth Carline, worked from May through to November at Mount Pleasant where she was engaged in similar tasks to those women working at Ewefield, Holton, Thornton or Nettleton including setting potatoes, haymaking, harvest and also threshing. The apparent loyalty of the women to a particular area could have been due to a number of reasons. They could have simply been told where to work. They may have worked in the same areas as their husbands or other relatives, or they worked in areas not far from their cottage accommodation, making it easier to care for any young children and also their own cottage gardens and livestock.

The number of days each woman worked each year varied and was probably linked to their ages, marital status, and other demands on their time. Elizabeth Hand, who was married to one of Dixon's confined labourers, worked on average 72.6 days per year whilst Ann Leonard, who had no proven link, worked only two days. The wives of confined labourers had an opportunity to earn a wage and tend a cottage garden. They were in a better position to survive changes in employment opportunities than other women who took work as day labourers. The wives of confined labourers appear to have worked more often and for longer periods than those women not identified as married to confined labourers. Two further examples are those of Mary Dickenson who worked for a total of 121 days in 1804 and Rebecca Smith who worked for 104 days in 1802. Mary worked consistently for the first four years then disappeared from the books whereas Rebecca reappears in 1810 and 1811 but is found to have worked only seven days and eleven days respectively.⁷⁹ It could be argued that between 1805 and 1817, these women were occupied elsewhere or that life cycle demands such as child care or nursing prevented them from working. On the other hand, despite their relatively privileged position, these women could have been unable to find suitable work due to an overall decline in agricultural employment.

Whilst there is no direct evidence, it seems likely that when labourers' wives and daughters were not working for wages they were maintaining the cottage garden and making what they could at local markets from the sale of any excess produce, butter and milk. Such skills and

⁷⁷ K. Sayer, *Women of the Fields, Representations of rural women in the nineteenth century* (1995), p. 56.

⁷⁸ *ibid.*, p. 30.

⁷⁹ Dixon 5/4/1 and 5/4/2.

abilities were considered vital to the family economy. 'The wife's management of the livestock, together with the earnings of herself and her children in hay time and harvest etc, produce nearly as much money in the course of the year as her husband by all his labour during the same time.'⁸⁰

VI

The decline in overall numbers of both men and women regularly employed in agriculture was already significant by the end of the eighteenth century with seasonal under- and unemployment being commonplace.⁸¹ However, Gielgud suggests that labour intensive farming methods 'increased the regularity and diversity' of women's work in the first half of the nineteenth century'.⁸² Any increase in the amount or type of work rural women undertook was subject to regional variations and could have been a result of the decline in farm service, the growing demand for food or perhaps – more significantly – an increase in the demand for cheap labour as a result of the use of labour-intensive farming methods.⁸³ Farmers and landowners in Lincolnshire were not competing for labour with the large scale industry found in other regions, yet the women in the logbooks were paid above average wages, at between 1s. and 1s. 6d., which suggests that there was demand for their labour.⁸⁴ Whilst domestic service may have drawn some younger women and girls away from agriculture, it was not an option for married women or women living in more remote areas of the county. The women in the logbooks, who supplied the flexible and cheap labour that enabled Dixon to grow a variety of labour intensive crops, were able to make a substantial contribution to their family's income.

Laying aside any reservations about the limitations of the Dixon logbooks, it is apparent that a significant number of rural working women were engaged in a range of agricultural tasks on the Dixon estate at the beginning of the nineteenth century. The failure to acknowledge the agricultural work rural women undertook creates a partial and misleading picture of the size and nature of the agricultural work force in Lincolnshire and more generally during the nineteenth century.

⁸⁰ Anon, *A Political Enquiry into the Consequences of Enclosing* (1785), p. 43, quoted by Snell, *Annals of the Labouring Poor*, p. 212.

⁸¹ J. Burnette, 'Labourers at the Oakes. Changes in the demand for female day-labourers at a farm near Sheffield during the Agricultural Revolution', *JEcH* 59 (1999), pp. 41–67.

⁸² Gielgud, 'Nineteenth century farm women', p. 101.

⁸³ *ibid.*, p. 53; Speechley, 'Female and child agricultural day labourers', p. 76 and Miller, 'Farming, farm work and farm workers', p. 220.

⁸⁴ Burnette, 'Wages and employment of female day-labourers', p. 668.