

Gender and the *British Workman*



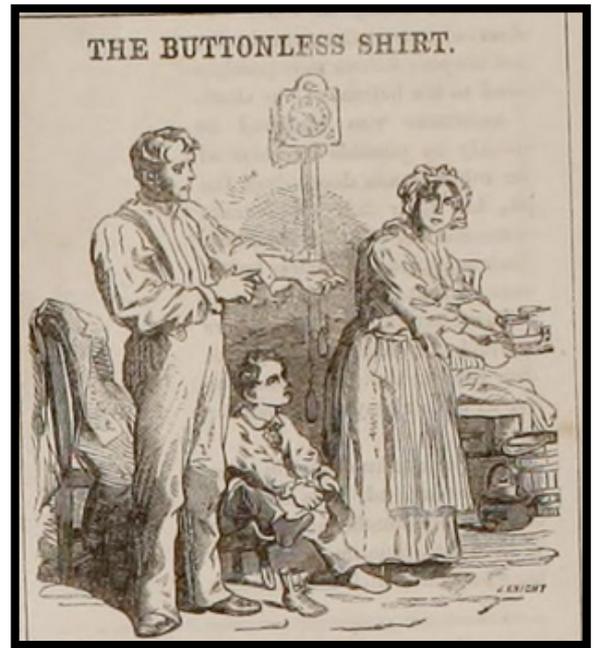
Despite its title the *British Workman's* target audience also included women, in particular British Workman's wives. In fact the magazine included a 'Column for Wives'. In the first issue, printed in 1855, the column includes a poem and a small etching of a young woman opening a window to enjoy the 'pure air'. By the third issue the name of the column had changed to 'Wives and Mothers'.

**'MY WIFE IS THE CAUSE OF IT.'**

A 'good' wife was considered essential in the working class home to provide an ideal domestic environment for the working man. Disorganised wives were criticised and blamed for driving men to the public-house and beer shop. At this time in British society women were considered morally and emotionally superior to men. Women, it was believed, could curb men's bad behaviour.

Were there more wives like my blessed mother, there would be fewer confirmed drunkards.

A tidy, industrious, early rising wife, is like the main spring of a watch. She keeps every thing in "good time," and "looketh well to her household."  
 Many a working man is driven from his home to the public-house and beer shop, through the lack of domestic management on the part of his wife.



READ THIS IF YOU WANT A GOOD WIFE.



"A temper like that is enough to drive any man to ruin!!" (BW Issue 4 pg.15)



Wives in the *British Workman* Magazine are presented as full time domestic workers at home, looking after children and husbands, constantly cleaning, cooking, and sewing. There are very few references to women in paid employment outside the home. Yet we know from historical records that very many women did. However finding accurate details of how and where women worked during the mid nineteenth century is difficult. This is partly because of the way information about employment was gathered at the time. The [Census](#), (a national survey still carried out every 10 years in Britain), takes a snapshot of the population, who they are, where they live, what they do for a living. In the mid nineteenth century women's work was not considered as important as men's, so sometimes women in the household surveyed were not included in the Census. Also some women did not want their husbands to know they were working; sometimes women's work was illegal, such as prostitution; or they worked in unregulated sweatshops, which they did not want to declare as they thought they might lose their jobs. Although we do not have full records we do know that women were employed in large numbers across most areas of industry.

Carry out your own research to see if you can find out what types of jobs women carried out in mid nineteenth century Britain. Some of the following websites might be useful:

[BBC – History women's work](#)

[Economic History Society](#)

[Victoria Web](#)

(add any recommended school sites)

Write down some of the jobs you found that women did at this time. Are there any jobs that you were surprised by?

Please carefully read the article from the *British Workman* called '**A Few Words to the Wives of Working Men**' on page 6 as well as the **Housework and Childcare** advice article on page 7.

a) Compare the two articles. What are the most striking differences between the **style** and **content** of the writing (e.g. the language used, the feelings shown, the attitudes towards housework and childcare.)

What are the key messages that the article '**A Few Words to the Wives of Working Men**' on page 6 is trying to get across?

In paragraph 3 of the article '**A Few Words to the Wives of Working Men**' on page 6, apart from her husband who else is it suggested that a wife should obey?

In the same paragraph (3) what problems does the writer note that wives experience?

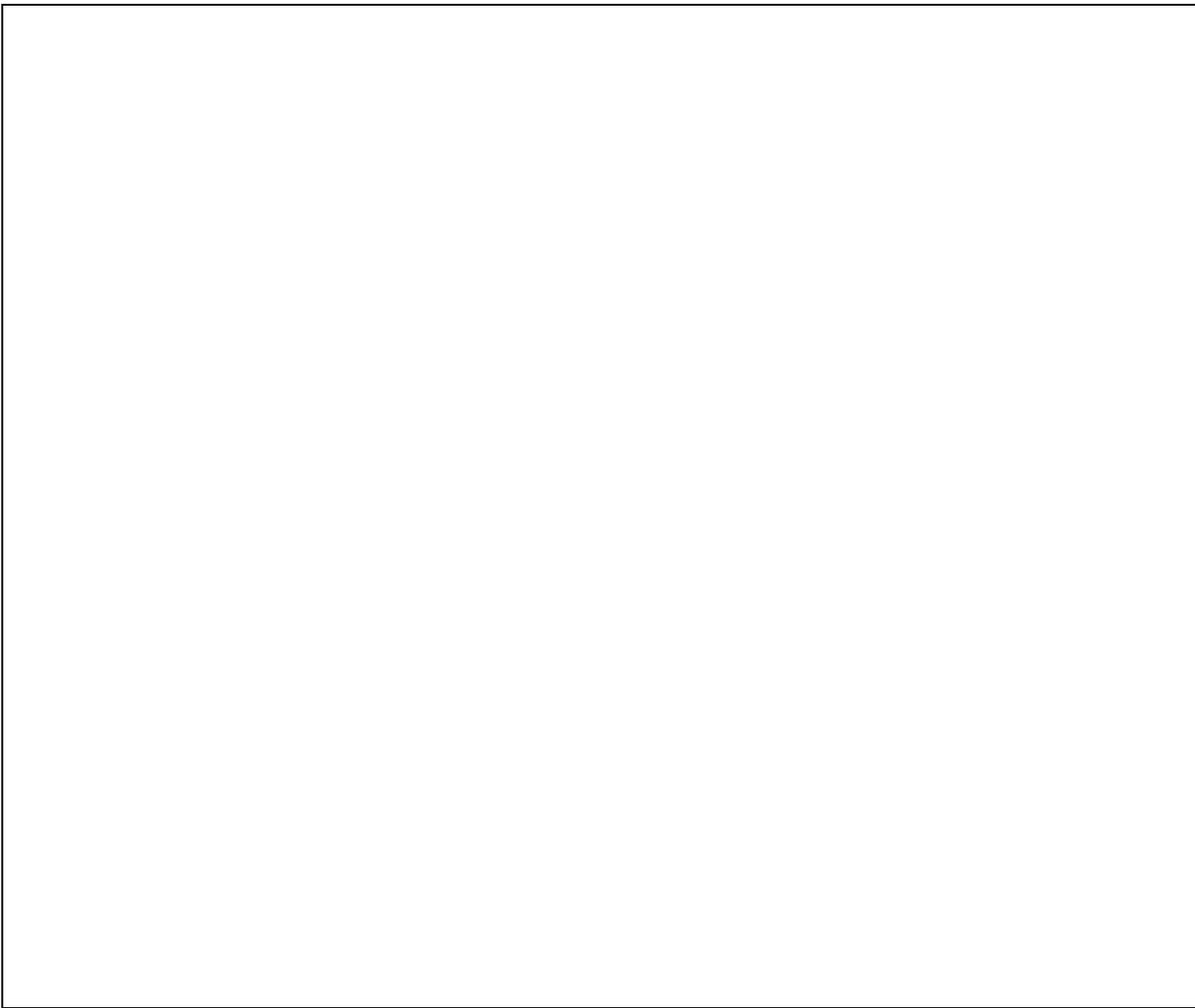
Please carefully read line 13-16 of the advice article **Housework and Childcare** on page 7. How does the writer use personal pronouns (he or she) to remind the reader that working inside or outside the home can be either a man or woman's role?

Please carefully read lines 1-3 of the article **Housework and Childcare** on page 8. What impact does the arrival of children have on a couple does the writer suggest?

What are the key messages in the advice given to parents in the second advice article **Housework and Childcare** on page 7?

Write your own short newspaper piece (around 200 words), about how you think that a wife's role has **either** changed a lot or has not changed much in Britain since 1855. Don't forget to give the piece an eye-catching title! (Need some help? Get some tips [here](#))

<- Title



# A FEW WORDS TO THE WIVES OF WORKING MEN.

BY THE WIFE OF A WORKING MAN.

WHEN your husband leaves you in the morning to go to his work, let him feel that he is leaving the happiest place in the world; and when he comes home in the evening let him feel that he is coming back to the happiest place in the world.

Para 1

Make it your business to please your husband. Study his wishes in little things. As soon as he is gone away, think what you can do for him; whether he has told you to do any thing, or even expressed a desire to see a thing done. Believe me, a wife's love, and a wife's care, and a wife's attention do much to make her husband a happy man; and what a solemn thought it is to have the happiness of a fellow creature in our keeping. "A prudent wife is from the Lord." "Whoso findeth a wife findeth a good thing;"—the wisest of men says this, and an inspired apostle writes, in one of his two letters, six verses all about wives; verses which a wife can never read and pray over too often. Let us look in our Bibles for 1 Peter iii. 1—6.

Para 2

Prudent = careful

When a man leaves his home to go to his work, his wife little knows the trials of various kinds to which he is exposed; trials from his fellow labourers; trials from his employers, perhaps; trials of fatigue and weariness. True, the wife has her troubles too, her children's little and great illnesses, continual worries with her domestic duties, often discomfort and pain of body; but yet God has given great strength to woman—the power of endurance, and the ability to bear much suffering. When a woman's heart is full of love, she can do any and bear any thing. But this love must be anchored on One beyond her husband, on One Friend who is nearer to her than any earthly friend. Therefore, I will conclude these few words to my fellow sisters, the wives of the working men, with this important piece of advice.

Para 3

Fatigue = tiredness

ing letter from  
of Shaftesbury.  
th your new undertaking,  
y calculated to produce the  
trust that every MASTER,  
give you the support and  
very faithfully,  
*Shaftesbury*

"God bless my husband. God keep my husband. God prosper my husband. God preserve my husband."

Para 4

When your husband comes home, will he not then find a smile of welcome, a happy fire-side? Yes; and when the children are gone to sleep and the evening has passed away, as together you read God's Holy Word and join in prayer to Him, you will know what St. Peter meant when he says in the verses you have already been reading, "Heirs together of the grace of life."

CAROLINE.

Pray much for your husband. God will be sure to answer your prayer. It will be sure to bring down a blessing on your husband, and a blessing on yourself too. While you are at home tending your little ones, cleaning your house, cooking your dinner, or sitting at your needle-work, lift up your heart often to God on behalf of your dear husband. Say,

## Housework and Childcare

Juggling domestic chores and childcare responsibilities can be difficult. It's even harder if one parent works out of the home and the other stays at home to look after the children. 1

The person going out to paid work can morph into Fifties Dad! And the person staying at home ends up feeling resentful and put upon. 3

So here are some basic principles for dividing up the domestic jobs when one person is doing more paid work than the other: 4

- Ensure there is respect for both roles. The going-out-to-work person needs to realise that a person doing full-time/more childcare has a hard job, too. So communicate. And maybe get the going-out-to-work person to try a couple of days of lone wrangling. 6
- Make sure there is an equitable distribution of 'free time'. Going-out-to-work person is not entitled to come home to a pitcher of martinis in a reclining chair.
- Similarly, there needs to be an equitable distribution of the cash. 11

"Childcare is work even when it's unwaged."

- Getting up at night with a baby/whiny toddler is not one parent's sole responsibility. Obviously, a cardiac surgeon shouldn't be sleep-deprived the night before she operates, but just because one person has a stressful job doesn't mean that s/he cannot take on some of the burden, for example at weekends. What is right for your particular family will depend on the jobs you do, how demented a particular parent is becoming and whether you have spawned some non-sleeping Margaret Thatcher-style offspring. The burden of sleep-deprivation should never fall entirely on one parent. 19
- You need to ensure that childcare, housework and life admin are fairly divided. And if you want to avert divorce, you need to accept that there is likely to be a period of adjustment after having children, when both of you make mistakes. 20

### Dividing childcare fairly

Start as you mean to go on. You need to allow the person who hasn't given birth and provided the initial childcare (let's call him 'Dad') to become competent in his own way. 24

Unless he is flagrantly clumsy and afflicted by poor judgment (which hopefully you might have noticed before you reproduced with him) you need to let him learn. Don't micro-manage. 27

You may think your baby looks ridiculous in the assortment of clothes 'Dad' has selected but he is not going to self-destruct. Find things 'Dad' can do to bond with the baby, eg sharing feeding, bathing, taking baby out in a sling. 28

When you're both at home, make sure it's understood that childcare is a mutual responsibility: 31

- There should be equal distribution of lie-ins/nights out/whatever kind of time off you value 33
- It is reasonable for both parents to curtail their social life at times
- Expensive and/or time-consuming hobbies may need to be back-burnered for a while

## Dividing housework fairly

The arrival of children can highlight what was previously a manageable disparity of hygiene standards. One person may have to raise his game and stop growing mould in old coffee cups. One person may have to relax a bit. 1

The balance will probably be different in every relationship; neither person should feel taken advantage of. 4

The rule of thumb is that you should both be working a fairly equal amount of hours if you add up job and household. And it's part of a good relationship that you don't allow the other to struggle on while you sit on the couch with a beer. 5  
7

It grates to be the person who has to manage a slob. But if he/she is an otherwise decent partner/parent, it may be worth the effort. 8

Tips for ensuring a fair(ish) distribution of housework 10

- Partners who do not 'see' dirt may need a schedule. If he doesn't notice the mess or understand the constant small maintenance tasks required by a household with children in it, assign him some big jobs to do. 11
- Communicate. "Sit down, agree the list of jobs that need to be done each day and then decide who they belong to. Then you don't have to nag about it. If he doesn't do his agreed jobs, it's clear and you can just ask when he is going to do them". 14
- Another nagging-reduction tip: have a niggles list or whiteboard in the kitchen where you write down things that need doing and which are the other person's job.
- Play to your partner's strengths, if any. He may be poor at tidying but an enthusiast of the Dyson. 19

"You have to remain firm and remind yourself that if he is able to work in a high powered job, then basic shopping, cleaning and food preparation are well within his abilities."

- Do weekend blitzes where one person manages the children and the other person makes free with the duster and the Cillit Bang. 20
- Declutter your residence and address storage issues. If you are constantly piling toys and baby goods on top of each other in corners, you will both fall into the trough of housework despair. 22
- With someone who does housework ineptly try a (not too passive-aggressive) praise sandwich: "It's great all that laundry got done. Bit of a shame about the shrunken cashmere, always good to look at the labels really. But I am so pleased it's all nice and clean..." 26

## Glossary

Afflicted – suffers with
Back-burnered – Put on hold
Blitzes – attacks
Cardiac - Heart
Chores – tasks
Cillit Bang – A cleaning fluid
Demented – frantic
Disparity – difference
Dyson – vacuum cleaner
Equitable – fair
Fifties dad – during the 1950s (esp. in America and UK) the media used stereotyped images of women as

housewives who stayed at home cooking and doing housework whilst dad went out to work. Dad would return home to expect the house to be clean, dinner cooked and the family waiting for him.
Flagrantly – deliberately
Ineptly - uselessly
Life admin – paying bills, banking,
Margaret Thatcher – 1980s UK Prime Minister who said she only needed a few hours sleep each night
Micro manage – controlling small tasks being carried out by someone else
Morph – transform
Niggle – annoyance
Passive-aggressive – being hostile or angry with someone but not showing it directly
Praise sandwich – say something nice to someone, then criticise them, then say something nice again.
Rule of thumb – a rough guide
Spawned – give birth to
Wrangling – quarrelling, arguing

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<sup>i</sup> <https://sites.google.com/site/group1linkages/women-and-work/19th-century>