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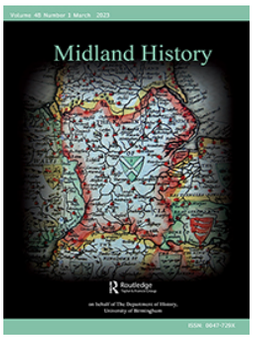

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Women, Late Chartism, and the Land Plan in Nottinghamshire

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the relationship between working-class women and Chartism, focusing chiefly on Nottingham. It argues that the opportunities for women to participate in the movement were much more varied and enduring than previous historians have often supposed. One of the reasons why women were so prominent by the time of Chartism in the 1840s was because of a tradition of political participation. Even by the period of late Chartism (post-1842), women were still participating in popular politics, and nowhere more so than in the Land Plan, a scheme to resettle urban workers on the land. Drawing on a database of some 2,300 Nottinghamshire members of the Land Plan, the evidence suggests that the region's women were more likely to join, and on their own volition, have their own jobs and possess a degree of independence that was not the case elsewhere.

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Introduction

The Nottingham region was a stronghold of Chartism, the mass movement for parliamentary reform, democracy and social rights, which swept across the manufacturing districts from the late 1830s to the early 1850s. Nottingham was the only constituency to elect a Chartist MP (in 1847), the fiery and hugely adored Irishman, Feargus O'Connor, the widely recognized national leader of the movement. Chartism was particularly attraction to the region's textile workers, the framework knitters who, alongside lace workers, artisans and other workers, saw in it a vehicle for redressing their poverty and exploitation. From the early days of the movement women had played a prominent part, forming their own body, the Nottingham Female Political Union (hereafter NFPU). But as the 1840s progressed, women, it has been argued, disappeared from Chartism, a trend not only evident in Nottingham but across the nation. According to this argument, the diminishing number of opportunities that existed increasingly boxed women into playing only an auxiliary role, supporting their menfolk, rather than advancing their own (feminist) agenda. Further, those historians who have argued for this masculinization of popular politics have invariably laid the blame for this at the hands of working-class men, in particular artisans who have been presented as either misogynistic or chivalric. Either way, the goal and effect were generally the same: to exclude women from

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politics, and often the workplace, and failing that, to firmly subordinate women to male patriarchy.[1]

As recent case studies based on other localities have shown, this argument has been exaggerated.[2] Part of the problem is that previous historians, including those who have looked at Nottingham, have tended to focus on the early-to-mid 1840s at the expense of the revival of Chartism later in the decade.[3] While Nottingham Chartism did not fully regain its former strength in 1847–8, there were still opportunities for female participation. As the first section suggests, one of the reasons why this participation was so enduring was because of the existence of a vibrant tradition of female political activism in the town and region. Further, the foundations laid during early Chartism (the focus of section two), when women were forming their own body and electing their own representatives, were, to some extent, transferred to the Chartist Land Plan in the later 1840s, the popular scheme established by O'Connor to resettle urban workers on the land. As Malcolm Chase has observed, 'There is a wealth of information, still yet to be fully fathomed', about the Land Plan, 'particularly in the newspaper's reports from branches, [and] in the shareholders' register', held by the National Archives.[4] Elsewhere, Chase has also suggested that these records 'may be of particular interest to the historian of the local community', because the register of shareholders 'can provide a snapshot of the condition of the local economy'.[5] Focusing on which types of workers took out shares, for example, can help to build up a picture of the local and regional economy and social structure. At its height, the Land Plan had some 70,000 weekly subscribers, around 42,000 of whom are recorded in the register of shareholders.[6]

A database has been compiled of the 243 identified Nottinghamshire women who subscribed to the Land Plan, and, to facilitate family record linkage, a second database has also been compiled of the 2,070 Nottinghamshire male subscribers.[7] At the outset, it

[1] A. Clark, *The Struggle for the Breeches: Gender and the Making of the British Working Class* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), pp. 177–8; J. Schwarzkopf, *Women in the Chartist Movement* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1991), pp. 59–62, 68, 90, 101.

[2] M. Roberts, 'Women and Late Chartism: Women's Rights in Mid-Victorian England', *English Historical Review*, 136 (2021), 918–949. In an earlier, suggestive article, David Jones cautioned historians from accepting too readily the argument that women disappeared from Chartism after 1842 and called for further research. D. J. V. Jones, 'Women and Chartism', *History*, 68 (1983), 1–21.

[3] Epstein focuses on the cultural and organizational aspects of Nottingham Chartism 'with particular reference to the early 1840s'. Richardson pivots around the year 1844, while Rogers is mainly concerned with the rise and fall of the NFPU: J. Epstein, 'Some Organizational and Cultural Aspects of the Chartist Movement in Nottingham', in *The Chartist Experience: Studies in Working-Class Radicalism and Culture, 1830–1860*, ed. by J. Epstein and D. Thompson (London: Macmillan, 1982), p. 223; H. Rogers, *Women and the People: Authority, Authorship and the Radical Tradition in Nineteenth-Century England* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), ch. 3; C. Richardson, *A City of Light: Socialism, Chartism and Co-operation – Nottingham 1844* (Nottingham: Loaf on a Stick Press, 2013), ch. 10.

[4] M. Chase, *The Chartists: Perspectives & Legacies* (London: Merlin, 2015), p. 49.

[5] M. Chase, 'The Chartist Land Plan and the Local Historian', *Local Historian*, 18 (1988), 76–7.

[6] There are three volumes in the Board of Trade papers, which comprise an incomplete list of names compiled as part of O'Connor's attempt to secure provisional registration under Joint Stock legislation: The National Archives (TNA), BT 41/474–6/2659. This is because only a proportion of the shareholders needed to be entered to secure registration, and perhaps also because one or two volumes of names have been lost. The first volume contains surnames A-G, the second G-J, and the third runs from A-Z. These registers also presumably exclude all of those subscribers paying weekly instalments who had not yet qualified as full shareholders. It has been estimated that only one quarter of the shareholders were entered in these registers. Chase, 'Chartist Land Plan', p. 77.

[7] The initial database was compiled using the transcriptions of all female members of the Land Plan, undertaken by U3A, now in the public domain and part of Mark Crail's Chartist Databank, housed on the website *Chartist Ancestors*. As part of the data-entry undertaken by the present author on the Nottinghamshire male subscribers, the U3A transcriptions were checked, a small number of transcription errors corrected, and an additional forty-six Nottinghamshire women identified. Chartist Ancestors, 'Chartist Ancestors Databank', <http://www.chartistancestors.co.uk/chartist-ancestors-databank/> [accessed 14 October 2022].

should be noted that the number of Nottinghamshire shareholders is much higher than previously assumed, even after duplications have been removed (the duplication rate was only 1%, though this is likely to be an underestimation).[8] The total number of shareholders was not c.2,500 but in excess of 4,000.[9] It proved possible to trace 142 of the 243 women on the census, the largest sample and record linkage to date of female members of the Land Plan.[10] While there are problems in using this data (discussed below), with some of the evidence suggestive rather than conclusive, Nottinghamshire women were more likely to join than women elsewhere, have their own jobs and possess a degree of independence that may have been unusual.[11] Thus, the article challenges the view put forward by previous historians of Chartism that the Land Plan confirmed women's status in the movement as 'limited and auxiliary'.[12] Chartism and the Land Plan in particular were notably attractive to Nottinghamshire's female textile workers, especially those employed in lace. As James Epstein has observed, 'An exceptionally high proportion of Nottingham's female population was employed', and this, in part, explains the strength of female Chartism.[13] Yet this factor on its own cannot fully explain this popularity; there were comparable levels of female employment elsewhere, including the east midlands, but low levels of female participation in Chartism and the Land Plan. Although the focus is on Nottinghamshire female shareholders, the article also provides some of the first, sustained comparative analysis of other regions. One final note of delimitation: this article focuses chiefly on Nottingham, including the surrounding villages which fall within the present-day city boundaries, but there will be occasional sideway glances to Mansfield, Newark, Retford, and Sutton-in-Ashfield. This is a geography largely dictated by the availability of source material, itself a reflection of where much Chartist activity took place, though as we shall see, the Land Plan had some capacity to reach beyond the movement's large urban strongholds.

[8]Only twenty-one duplicated names were found among the male shareholders from Nottinghamshire, and only one among the women. However, only where a name, occupation and address were identical, have entries been deemed duplications. It is, of course, possible, that some shareholders with identical names, but different addresses and different jobs, had moved houses and changed occupations.

[9]Richardson calculated that in the third volume, which runs from A-Z, names from A-J accounted for 43% of the total, and used this as a basis to calculate the missing names from volumes 1 and 2 (see note 6). Using this calculation, the total number of registered shareholders would be 4,163, of whom 437 would have been women. Assuming that the registers only included around one quarter of the total number of shareholders, then there would have been in excess of 1,600 female shareholders from Nottinghamshire. Richardson, *City*, p. 221.

[10]Thompson sampled 189 women from Lancashire and the West Riding, though no attempt was made to locate these women on the census. A larger analysis undertaken by Lowe identified 1,124 female subscribers, again without any accompanying work on the census. Schwarzkopf identified 389 women from Lancashire and did trace 58 of these women on the census. Bronstein's sample of southeast Lancashire included 191 women, but it is unclear how many of these she was able to locate on the census. In addition, Bronstein combined male and female subscribers for separate localities. Christopher Richardson also looked at Nottinghamshire members of the Land Plan, identifying 113 women, and provided some basic data and analysis, but, again, did not link these names with the census in his published study. D. Thompson, *The Chartists: Popular Politics in the Industrial Revolution* (New York: Pantheon, 1984), p. 127; J. E. B. Lowe, 'Women in the Chartist Movement (1838–52)' (MA diss., University of Birmingham, 1984), pp. 282ff; Schwarzkopf, 84. J. L. Bronstein, '"Under their own vine and fig tree": Land reform and working class experience in Britain and America, 1830–1860', (PhD diss., Stanford University, 1996), pp. 378–86; Richardson, *City*, Appendices 1–3.

[11]A. Little, 'Liverpool Chartists, Subscribers to the National Land Company, 1847–1848', in *Popular Politics, Riot and Labour: Essays in Liverpool History, 1790–1940*, ed. by J. Belchem (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1992), pp. 247–52.

[12]Bronstein, PhD, p. 379; Chase, *Chartists*, p. 54.

[13]Epstein, pp. 226–7.

Women, Protest and Politics: A Tradition in the Making

By the early nineteenth century, plebeian women were active participants in protest and politics in Nottingham and the broader region. Plebeian women played a central part in the periodic food riots which occurred between 1795 and 1812.[14] Food riots were a venerable form of popular protest, and plebeian women were often to the fore on account of their domestic responsibility for household provisions as well as their position as defenders of the community, though historians have debated the extent to which women dominated food riots across the nation.[15] While less common, women also protested in their capacity as producers.[16] At the same time as the Luddites were breaking machines, women close to the Nottinghamshire-Leicestershire border employed as lace runners formed a trade union and went on strike for higher wages, and not for the last time: in 1842, female lace runners in Nottingham came out on strike, but without success.[17] Far from being evidence of the growing independence of female factory lace hands, lace running was part of the finishing process which took place outside the factory and large machine shops, mainly in the homes of the women.[18] Thus, the gendered division of labour associated with family-based manufacture was not necessarily inimical to women organizing and protesting (hence the high levels of support for Chartism among Nottingham's women lace workers). Although less prominent, women were also involved in Luddism, though mainly in a supporting role. Depositions reveal that women supplied men with weapons, contributed financially to the campaign, were part of the larger crowds that broke frames, and were even part of the meetings which took place in pubs and inns where Luddism was planned.[19] Kinship was important in the formation of Luddite cells, with mothers, wives and daughters acting as the conduits through which the movement spread.[20] This is not the last time that we will encounter women in the orbit of physical force protest; it was a tradition, albeit a minority one, that would make itself felt in Nottinghamshire Chartism.

As the 1810s gave way to the 1820s, plebeian women, like most of the men, entered a period of relative political quiescence. Traditional forms of protest, such as machine breaking and food riots went into steep decline, though they still made occasional, often tantalizing appearances, such as support for the wronged Queen Caroline in 1820.[21] With the revival of radicalism and reform in the early 1830s – the heady days of the Reform Bill riots, political unions, and eventual enactment of the Reform Act – Nottingham's plebeian women were conspicuous by their absence, though it seems

[14]TNA, HO 42/51, f. 469, W.W. Watson to Home Office, TNA. HO 42/51, f. 363, 1 September 1800; 'Citizens arm yourselves', 20 September 1800; J.F. Sutton, *The Nottingham Date-Book* (2 vols, Nottingham: H. Field, 1884), II, p. 207; R.A.E. Wells, *Riot and Political Disaffection in Nottinghamshire in the Age of Revolutions, 1776–1803* (Nottingham: University of Nottingham, 1983), pp. 27–8.

[15]J. Bohstedt, 'Gender, Household and Community Politics: Women in English Riots, 1790–1810', *Past and Present*, 120 (1998), 88–122; E. P. Thompson, *Customs in Common* (London: Penguin, 1991), pp. 305–36.

[16]Nottingham Date-Book, pp. 207, 287.

[17]R. A. Church, Economic and Social Change in a Midland Town, Victorian Nottingham, 1815–1914 (London: Frank Cass, 1966), p. 151.

[18]TNA, HO 42/118, f. 115, Rev. R. Hardy to Home Office, 19 December 1811.

[19]TNA, HO 42/117, f. 618, Deposition of G. Jeffrey, Mansfield, 14 November 1811; HO 42/155, f. 10, testimony of a spy employed by H. Enfield, town clerk, 27 November 1816.

[20]Nottinghamshire Archives (NA), DD/1177/1, Anon. [Joseph Burdett], 'Recolections [sic] of a Journey Stockinger, 1816', typescript, p. 13.

[21]*Republican*, 7 July 1820; *Pioneer*, 15 February and 8 March 1834; *Nottingham Review*, 2 May 1828; Clark, *Struggle*, pp. 164–74.

unconceivable that they were not part of the crowds during this frenetic period of popular politics, not least because they made some of the banners on display at such meetings.[22] While none of the accounts of the Reform Bill riots in Nottingham mention women explicitly, the schedule of prisoners at the trial of the rioters included a woman, Elizabeth Hunt, who was indicted for receiving jewellery stolen from Colwick Hall, one of the targets of the rioters.[23] It is only in 1834 that plebeian women make their corporate appearance in the shape of the Nottingham Female Union, a body of trade unionists who protested against the harsh sentences handed down to the Tolpuddle Martyrs, again suggestive evidence that women were active as producers and not just consumers.[24] These women, who constituted themselves as 'the females of Nottingham and vicinity', sent a petition to the House of Commons protesting against the miscarriage of justice in the conviction of the Dorchester labourers, concluding with the injunction: 'N.B. All Females ought to sign'.[25] When the petition was presented in the Commons it contained 2,200 female signatures.[26] It is highly probable that many of these women went on to become Chartists, just as many frustrated male trade unionists did.

Plebeian women were also involved in the electoral process. There is no evidence of women actually voting at any elections, something that was technically possible before the 1832 Reform Act formally limited the franchise to 'male persons', but women occasionally voted elsewhere, though involvement was limited to parochial bodies and to women who were single.[27] Neither, it seems, were women the conduits for the enfranchisement of men as was the case in some other freemen boroughs, which Nottingham was, where one of the ways in which men could acquire the vote was by marrying a daughter or a widow of a freemen.[28] An electoral version of the French Salic law appears to have operated in relation to the freeman franchise in the borough. For all these barriers to the formal participation of women, there exists a considerable body of scholarship which has documented the many ways in which women were able to take part in Georgian and Victorian electoral culture: from canvassing to being canvassed and bribed, to influencing the votes of their menfolk, taking part in processions and demonstrations, forming committees to further the interests of their partisans, petitioning parliament and appearing as witnesses, to name but a few. All of these were pursued by the plebeian women of Nottingham.[29] An additional reason why Nottingham's plebeian women were so closely involved in the electoral process may have been because many of their menfolk already had the vote, which may have been viewed –

[22]J. Beckett, 'The Nottingham Reform Bill Riots of 1831', in *Partisan Politics, Principle and Reform in Parliament and the Constituencies, 1689–1880*, ed. by C. Jones, P. Salmon and R. W. Davis (Edinburgh: Parliamentary History Yearbook Trust, 2005), p. 120.
[23]University of Nottingham Manuscripts and Special Collections, Newcastle Papers, Ne C 5052, Schedule of prisoners, n.d.
[24]*Report of the Proceedings of the Public Meeting held on Nottingham Forest, 31st March, on the Six Members of the Trade Union at Dorchester* (Alfred Barber: Nottingham, 1834).
[25]*Pioneer*, 29 March 1834.
[26]*Public Ledger*, 15 May 1834.
[27]S. Richardson, *The Political World of Women: Gender and Politics in Nineteenth Century Britain* (New York: Routledge, 2013), ch. 4.
[28]P.gP 1867 [72], *Return relating to Freemen of Municipal Corporations*, p. 17; E. Chalus, 'Women, Electoral Privilege and Practice in the Eighteenth Century', in *Women in British Politics, 1760–1860: The Power of the Petticoat*, ed. by K. Gleadle and S. Richardson (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2000), pp. 19–38; K. Gleadle, *Borderline Citizens: Women, Gender and Political Culture in Britain, 1815–1867* (Oxford: British Academy, 2009), pp. 164–8.
[29]M. Cragoe, 'Jenny Rules the Roost': Women and Electoral Politics, 1832–68', in *Women and Politics*, 153–68.

as it was in some middle-class families – as belonging to the whole family.[30] By 1847, around a third of adult males in Nottingham were enfranchised, and this included some Chartists: for example, James Sweet had the vote, who was perhaps the most famous of Nottingham's Chartist leaders.[31]

No political movement could ignore women by the early nineteenth century, for example, women were actively canvassed in Nottinghamshire.[32] Canvassing was an important part of the electoral process which candidates ignored at their peril, and from the point of view of women, it was also one of the direct means through which politics was brought into the home as the candidates and their committees did the rounds.[33] By the 1840s, women were even more prominent during elections. In part, this was because of popular opposition to the implementation of the New Poor Law, a deeply resented innovation across the nation, but rendered even more acute in Nottingham because of zealous local promoters and officials, and the Tory-Chartist alliance that was forged in opposition to this Whig measure.[34] The political temperature was also raised by the quick succession of four parliamentary elections: three by-elections and a general election between April 1841 and May 1843. When the Liberal candidates, Sir John Cam Hobhouse and George Larpent, were victorious at the 1841 general election, ejecting the Tory John Walter Snr. who had so recently been elected in the by-election earlier that year, the crowd, and especially the women, made their disgust felt during the victory celebrations. This led to a riot in Sneinton: As parties were returning home from the Chairing … several women in Glasshouse street commenced hooting and abusing those wearing yellow ribbons [the Liberal colour], and … these women, from the late rain, began to scoop up effluent from the channels in the street and throw it at the Liberals.[35] The poor law was particularly unpopular with women, with many turning to protest and exercising their roles as community leaders and voicing their outrage as injured mothers and wives.[36] During the elections, the rallying cry of the plebeian women had been 'no skilly', a reference to the woefully inadequate diet metered out to paupers in the new workhouses: 'Wherever the Liberal candidate canvassed', complained the Liberal *Nottingham Review*, 'they were almost deafened by the women crying out "no skilly;" in short, during the whole of the past two elections that has been the word which has emanated from almost every female belonging to the lower classes'.[37]

[30]Gleadle, *Borderline Citizens*, ch. 7.
[31]F. O'Gorman, *Voters, Patrons and Parties: The Unreformed Electorate of Hanoverian England, 1734–1832* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), pp. 56, 206; C. Binder, 'The Nottingham Electorate and the Election of the Chartist, Feargus O'Connor, in 1847', *Transactions of the Thoroton Society*, 107 (2003), pp. 154, 159.
[32]NA, DD/H/51/16, A list of the canvass taken on 28, 29 and 30th October 1805 at Newark; A. Clark, 'Class, Gender and British Elections, 1794–1818', in *Unrespectable Radicals? Popular Politics in the Age of Reform*, ed. by M. T. Davis and P. A. Pickering (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), p. 115.
[33]Cragoe, p. 155.
[34]C. P. Griffin, 'Chartism and Opposition to the New Poor Law in Nottinghamshire: The Basford Union Workhouse Affair of 1844', *Midland History*, 2 (1974), 244–9; J. Beckett, 'Politics and the Implementation of the New Poor Law: The Nottingham Workhouse Controversy, 1834–43', *Midland History*, 41 (2016), 201–23.
[35]Nottingham Mercury, 2 July 1841.
[36]Clark, *Struggle*, pp. 187–95.
[37]*Nottingham Review*, 2 July 1841; *Evening Mail*, 4 June 1841.

Plebeian women sometimes played important parts in less visible aspects of electioneering. Previous historians have shown that women were sometimes the conduit through which bribes passed, as happened at the Nottingham election of 1843.[38] But women could also play a part in bringing the bribers and intimidators to justice.[39] It is also possible that women had played another decisive role behind the scenes during these elections in the form of exclusive dealing: the practice whereby electors and non-electors withheld their custom from shopkeepers who were known political opponents (and vice versa). While no innovation of the 1840s, it appears to have been more systematic and pervasive in this decade – largely at the behest of the Chartists.[40] Finding hard evidence of this sort of subtle intimidation is virtually impossible, and while exclusive dealing was far from being the only or even the most important factor in determining the outcome of elections, it may have played a part in Walter's victory in 1841, in Joseph Sturge's near victory in 1842, in Thomas Gisborne's in 1843, and, ultimately, in the election of Feargus O'Connor in 1847.[41]Women were undoubtedly involved, for the same reasons why they had played such a prominent part in food riots: they were responsible for much of the shopping, and the politics of consumption was part of their traditional role as guardians of the family and community. From the very beginning of its existence, the NFPU – the organizational expression of early female Chartism – had stressed the importance of exclusive dealing. It formed part of a public address which they published in the press: 'Let every shop and shopkeeper be noted in a book kept for the purpose, stating name, residence, trade and whether Whig or Tory; also another book containing the name of those friendly to the cause of the people'.[42] The Chartists also set up a co-operative society, and this too promoted exclusive dealing among women.[43] Firmer evidence is furnished by O'Connor's instruction to the Nottingham Chartists to instigate exclusive dealing during the 1847 election campaign, and, firmer still, his claim that local shopkeepers had complained about this instruction, presumably because some had lost trade or felt intimidated into acquiescence. This was always a possibility given the publication of poll books in the aftermath of elections, which detailed how every elector had cast their votes, a form of transparency that the Nottingham Chartists were willing to avail themselves of when it suited, despite the movement's demand for the secret ballot.[44]

Rethinking Women and Chartism

The previous section has shown how in the period preceding and paralleling Chartism, plebeian women played an important, albeit oftentimes, submerged role in popular

[38]For women as conduits and as recipients of bribes, see P.P. 1843 [130], *Select Committee on the Nottingham Town Election Petition*, 12 June 1843, pp. 143, 166.
[39]NA, Z17, Papers relating to the election of John Walter for Nottingham, O2/3.
[40]NA, Z17, Handbill, 4 August 1842, O2/6/1, *Morning Post*, 8 August 1842. See also P. Gurney, 'Exclusive Dealing in the Chartist Movement', *Labour History Review*, 74 (2009), 90–110.
[41]As Malcolm Chase and John Beckett have argued, O'Connor was largely gifted the seat in 1847. Yet divisions and disarray among opponents were not the only factors in the Chartist victory. Chase, *The Chartists*, p. 141; J. Beckett, 'Hobhouse, O'Connor and the Nottingham Election of 1847', *Parliamentary History*, 40 (2021), 502–20.
[42]*Northern Star*, 8 December 1838.
[43]*Address to the Working Classes on the System of Exclusive Dealing* (Nottingham: Ingram & Cooke, 1840), p. 7.
[44]*Nottingham Review*, 23 and 30 July 1847; TNA, TS 11/601, Thomas Cooper Letters, J. Sweet to T. Cooper, n.d. [August 1842].

politics and protest. The beginning of the Chartist movement in the late 1830s would see plebeian women in Nottingham and beyond build on this tradition to become an even more assertive and independent political presence. Chartism in Nottingham has received quite a lot of attention from historians. We know about the character and fortunes of Chartism in the region from the outbreak of arming and drilling in the heady summer of 1839 to the 'Battle of Mapperley Hill' in the equally turbulent summer of 1842. The reasons why the framework knitters flocked to the movement have also been explored, as has the organizational and cultural aspects of the Chartist experience, including the role of women and the gender politics of the NFPU.[45] Much less is known about late Chartism (the period after 1842) or the place of women within the movement. Previous research has established that women played a prominent part in Nottingham Chartism: they had their own organization, the NFPU, complete with their own leaders, lecturers, and teachers, and similar bodies existed at Sutton-in-Ashfield and possibly Arnold and Hucknall. Women were able to use the Democratic Chapel, a dedicated Chartist building in Barker Gate; women were part of the Chartist crowd, at outdoor meetings on the Forest, or formed part of the processions to welcome leaders such as O'Connor when they visited the town; and they collected money to support the wives and families of imprisoned male Chartists. Despite some important caveats, previous historians are largely in agreement that most women participating in the movement did so as wives, sisters or daughters of male Chartists and saw their role as auxiliaries to help their menfolk, and that they had largely ceased to be an active presence in late Chartism.[46]

There are some important clues in early Chartism which cast doubt on these arguments. The first is the speed with which the NFPU was established in the autumn of 1838, one of the earliest in the country. One of the reasons why Nottingham Chartist women were so quick off the mark was because of the aforementioned tradition of political participation and protest, most recently in mobilizing against the New Poor Law, hence the centrality of the latter to the early meetings of the NFPU and the broader movement.[47] The Chartists of Mansfield also singled out opposition to the New Poor Law, highlighting the way in which it broke up families even before entry into the segregated workhouse: to forestall the latter, families were dividing and lodging where they could.[48] Second, there is nothing in the published words of the NFPU that explicitly limited their demands to manhood suffrage. It is not just the case that some of the arguments that they made – no taxation without representation – might also apply to women[49]; more importantly, there is no explicit declaration in favour of manhood suffrage. The most that we can say is that the evidence is inconclusive whether the NFPU were advancing a proto-feminist agenda; certainly, they discussed the issue of women's rights in a later lecture, though unfortunately we do not know

[45]A. C. Wood, 'Nottingham, 1835–1865', *Transactions of the Thoroton Society*, 59 (1956), 1–83; P. Wyncoll, *Nottingham Chartism* (Nottingham: Nottingham Trades Council, 1966); Church, ch. 6; Epstein, pp. 221–68; Rogers, ch. 3; Richardson, *City*, ch. 10.
[46]Epstein, p, 245; Rogers, pp. 27, 107–8, 113; Richardson, *City*, p. 141.
[47]*Nottingham Review*, 16 November 1838.
[48]British Library (BL), Add MS 34245A, f. 90, Correspondence of the General Convention of the Industrial Classes 1839, H. Sharman to W. Lovett, 1 March 1839. The popularity of the northern anti-Poor leaders, Richard Oastler and Joseph Rayner Stephens, with Nottinghamshire Chartists is also evidence of this: BL, Add MS 34245A, f. 262 v, W. Hall to W. Lovett, 16 March 1839.
[49]Richardson, *City*, p. 140.

what was said.[50] Further, implicit in the appeal to women in the opening address of the NFPU was a recognition that they too were workers: 'our industry … the fruits and sweets of which are dashed from our lips'. This is an important recognition that had implications for women in later Chartism, especially the Land Plan. The address was also empowering: 'Sisters and women of England, much is yet in your power, to aid the great and holy cause'.[51] The address left open the possibility of women taking up arms.

This militant message was, it seems, taken to heart by at least one female Chartist from the region. Known female physical force Chartists are a historical rarity, and not just in Nottingham, but Elizabeth Cresswell of Mansfield enjoys that distinction. Cresswell was indicted along with a group of male Chartists from Mansfield who drilled and marched through the streets towards Nottingham in the summer of 1839, brandishing weapons. She was forty-three at the time of her indictment; hardly a youthful girl led astray by dubious company.[52] According to one hostile witness at her trial in Nottingham, Cresswell had been seen marching in the streets with the men which was 'calculate[d] to cause great terror to the inhabitants of Mansfield'.[53] After the crowd had been dispersed, she was then seen in the Black Swan pub, where she was subsequently apprehended. A loaded pistol was taken from her, which, she claimed, to be hiding for the landlord who had asked her to hide it, which she did in her dress. Another hostile witness at the trial alleged that Cresswell had actively recruited men to the marching party. Had she not been found with the pistol, Cresswell would have been released on her own recognizances.[54] She was convicted for unlawful and riotous assembly, imprisoned for one month in the House of Correction, though unlike her fellow male convicts her sentence was much shorter and she was not bound over to keep the peace upon her liberation.[55] According to the reporter for the *Nottingham Review*, Cresswell was known to the authorities as a 'bad character', and it may not be a coincidence that a Sarah Cresswell of Mansfield had two other brushes with the law, including court appearances, one for damage to property and another for riot, though it is possible that this is a different person.[56]

While it is unusual to find a female Chartist on trial, much less one who, at least potentially, had physical force inclinations, it is highly unlikely that she was the only woman in the Chartist crowd on this occasion. The support of women in the villages and towns around Nottingham was particularly important: in 1839 the Chartists of Mansfield informed the Convention – the national, co-ordinating body of the movement – that the number of females in their district was 'far above the number of males',

[50]*Northern Star*, 6 May 1843.
[51]*Northern Star*, 8 December 1838.
[52]TNA, HO 27/58, f. 344, Criminal Registers.
[53]*Nottingham Review*, 18 October 1839.
[54]TNA, HO 40/47, f. 518, Duke of Portland to Home Office, 18 August 1839. There may be a clue here about why legal records under-report the number of women protesters. Had Cresswell not been in possession of a firearm, she would have remained an anonymous part of the amorphous crowd. For the ways in which gender informed judicial discretion, see D. Palk, *Gender, Crime and Judicial Discretion* (Woodbridge: Royal Historical Society, 2006), ch. 8.
[55]NA, QDF 1, Return of all persons committed or bailed, 1830–1839, Michaelmas 1839, 14 October.
[56]*Nottingham Review*, 16 August 1839, 27 March 1835; *Nottingham Mercury*, 22 December 1832; NA, QSM/1/43, general quarter session held at Nottingham, 6 April 1835, and 14 October 1839.

many of whom were employed as winders and seamers in the stocking trade.[57] Similarly, because of the employment opportunities in knitting and lace, Nottingham itself 'had an unusually high proportion of females'.[58] This brings us to another problem with the argument that, as Chartism advanced, women disappeared. Absence of evidence is not necessarily evidence of absence. By the time that Chartism was a decade old in 1848, the presence of women was no longer that remarkable, and it is inconceivable that no women were present at meetings, especially outdoor ones such as the Methodist-style camp meetings that were held on the Forest and the large gatherings in the market place. In any case, a careful combing of the local and Chartist press shows that women continued to be a presence into the late 1840s and beyond. So far as is known, the NFPU does appear to have lapsed and no successor body was set up in its wake. Yet women were active. Historians have noted that a group of Nottingham women were nominated to represent the town on the body of the National Charter Association (the new co-ordinating body of the movement from 1840), but what has largely escaped attention is how unique this was: no women from any other locality nominated members of their own sex to represent them, and this occurred in spring 1843, that is, during the period when women were allegedly being excluded from the movement.[59] Neither was this a one-off, as a second, slightly different set of names were nominated later in 1843, which occurred at exactly the same time that members of the NFPU were debating the issue of women's rights.[60] Whether the national leaders upheld the nominations is unclear but arguably, is less significant than the fact that the women of Nottingham put themselves forward, and, perhaps more significantly, believed that it was necessary to represent their own sex. It is also suggestive that the Chartist newspaper, the *Northern Star*, published these slates of names.

Chartist women were still sufficiently organized as late as 1847 to form a society called 'The Nottingham Importation Society' for the purpose of importing flour and other provisions from the USA, another co-operative move that politicized consumption and the role of women as providers. Tellingly, the society met at the newsagent and coffee house of Mrs Smith (Mary Ann Smith, to be precise, and soon to be Mrs Rollett, following the death of her first husband and her marriage to Elmer Rollett, a fellow Chartist).[61] Similar co-operative ventures were also in existence at Arnold, Carrington and Radford.[62] Women were present at the festival held to celebrate O'Connor's election in November 1847, just as they were at a democratic soiree in July 1853. Outside the formal bounds of Chartism, women also formed their own friendly societies and played a part in the bitter strike organized by framework knitters in

[57]British Library (BL), Add MS 34245A, f. 89, General Convention papers, H. Sharman to W. Lovett, 1 March 1839. The 1841 Census shows that the Chartists were broadly correct about the male-female ratio, though perhaps not to the extent that they believed: there were 4,473 males to 4,915 females in Mansfield. P.P. 1843 [496], *Enumeration Abstract*, 1841, p. 226.

[58]R. Smith, 'Early Victorian Household Structure: A Case Study of Nottinghamshire', *International Review of Social History*, 15 (1970), p. 70.

[59]*Northern Star*, 6 May 1843. Those nominated were: Mrs Francis [sic.] Wright, Wood Street; Mrs Martha Sweet, Goose Gate; Mrs Caroline Blatherwick, Bellar Gate; Mrs Mary Ann Ellis, Independent Hill; Mrs Eliza Blatherwick, Bellar Gate; Mrs Jane Abbott (sub-treasurer), Mount East Street; Mrs Mary Ann Abbott (sub-secretary), Mount East Street.

[60]*Northern Star*, 8 July 1843. In the second list, the Blatherwicks, Francis Wright and Jane Abbott were not re-nominated, in their place were: Mrs Hannah Barnett, Waburn Street; Mrs Maria Ellis, Independent Hill; Mrs Susannah Wainwright, York Street; Mrs Eliza Wilkins, York Street.

[61]*Northern Star*, 15 May 1847; Richardson, *City*, p. 101.

[62]Richardson, *City*, pp. 182–3.

1849. Some Chartist male knitters had long recognized the important role played by women in the trade, and supported their admission into the knitters' unions.[63] When the Newport Chartist rebel John Frost, recently repatriated, visited Nottingham in 1856, Chartist women were present in the audience.[64] By this time Chartism was no longer a mass movement, and in steep decline, which is, perhaps, the real reason why it was no longer a viable vehicle for women's rights. Even the revival of 1848 was only a partial one, and the movement was nowhere near the former strength exhibited in 1839 or 1842.[65] Women in attendance at meetings was not the same as forming their own bodies and potentially advancing a feminist agenda, but they did not disappear from politics and protest from the later 1840s onwards. The fullest evidence of this is in the Chartist Land Plan.

'Wilt Thou Join the Land plan?'

The Land Plan was set up in May 1845 and was the brainchild of Feargus O'Connor, though it emerged from a longstanding radical preoccupation with the land and the people's dispossession of it.[66] It was a scheme designed to resettle urban workers on smallholdings. Workers subscribed, many by weekly instalments, eventually becoming a full shareholder: one share entitled the holder to enter a ballot for a two-acre holding (subsequently raised to two shares), one and a half shares for three acres (raised to three), and two shares for four acres (raised to four shares). These shares also entitled the holder to a cottage and a monetary advance (the amount dependent on the acreage of the smallholding). The allocation was by periodic ballot: once the company had amassed sufficient capital, an estate was purchased, plots laid out and cottages built, a lottery would be held, in which paid up subscribers were entered into the requisite ballot. Those who were successful could then take up residence – not, in the first instance, as owner-occupiers, but as lessees who were required to pay rent (to raise capital and borrow against for the purchase of future estates for other subscribers). Lessees then had the option to buy the allotment on favourable terms and become a freeholder, and thereby eligible for the franchise, which was another purpose of the scheme. A single share cost £1 6*s*, though it was possible to pay in instalments, initially of threepence, sixpence or a shilling, as one would expect of a movement with democratic goals and working-class membership.[67] In total, five estates were purchased: Herringsgate (or Heronsgate) in Hertfordshire (renamed O'Connorville), Minster Lovell in Oxfordshire (Charterville), Lowbands and Snigs End in Gloucestershire (originally in Worcestershire), and Great Dodford in Worcestershire.

Clearly, a lottery scheme that held out the possibility of winning a cottage and some land, must have appealed to some who were not Chartists, or at least had not been until the Land Plan came along. Yet it would be a mistake to assume that the Plan was not integral to Chartism. After 1845, Chartism proper and the Land Plan were intertwined

[63]*Midland Gazette*, 1 August 1848; *Nottingham Review*, 2 February 1844.
[64]*Northern Star*, 20 November 1847; *Nottinghamshire Guardian*, 3 Mary 1849, 28 July 1853, 22 January 1857.
[65]TNA, HO 45/2410C, f. 1044, John Bring to Home Office, 12 June 1848; TNA HO 45/2410C, f. 1014, Mayor to Home Office, 7 June 1848.
[66]M. Chase, *The People's Farm: English Radical Agrarianism, 1775–1840* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988).
[67]TNA, BT 41/474/2659, National Land Company rules, March 1847, n.p.

and local branches of the latter became the *de facto* organizational expression of Chartism in some places. Further, as Malcolm Chase has argued, the difficulties in securing legal recognition of the Plan, with the political connection to Chartism being cited as one of the reasons for its illegality, meant that taking out a subscription 'became a political act in itself, a gesture of defiance in the face of class legislation and government hostility, and a vote of confidence in O'Connor's leadership'.[68]

The Land Plan was hugely popular in the Nottingham region, not just because it was an O'Connorite stronghold, but also on account of a keen desire for land amongst the region's working classes, especially keen in Nottingham where the absence of any significant enclosure meant overcrowding, poor back-to-back housing and limited access to land, at least for the majority who were not burgesses (the latter had access to some common land).[69] Perhaps because a Nottingham architect won the commission for the design of the quatrefoil ventilator on the cottages, that one of the roads at Heronsgate was named 'Nottingham Road', and that some of the early ballot winners were from Nottinghamshire, helped to stoke local interest. It may not have escaped the attention of the region's women that one of the first winners for a plot at Heronsgate was a woman, Barbara Vaughan (though she was not from Nottinghamshire).[70]

For a town that was widely acknowledged to be one of the most over-crowded in the country the arcadian vision held out by the Land Plan must have seemed like an Elysium. Beyond the town, in the knitting villages enclosure *had* taken place, but the effect had been to deprive many knitters from access to land. In any case, the falling wages of the knitters necessitated working longer hours which left little time for cultivation, though some allotment societies and other schemes had tried to redress this in some of the villages but not always effectively.[71] Nearly two years before the Land Company was established, the Chartists of Lambley had promoted allotments, albeit 'upon a very small scale indeed'. They had 'found the good effects of the allotment system' on as little as a quarter of an acre. Chartists at Hucknall had also formed a similar association to promote allotments.[72] While the quality of housing tended to be better in the villages – much better in some cases – the attraction held out by the spacious and well-built cottages of the Land Plan was great.[73] Indeed, the houses on the first estate at O'Connorville were deemed to be so palatial that subsequent estates opted for the more enduringly iconic bungalow. Even so, these cottages were designed to ease domestic labour by integrating under one roof various conveniences, and in ways that promoted cleanliness as well as accessibility: a range in the kitchen, a dresser, tiled floors, drainage, running water, the means to heat water, the possibility of a kitchen garden, a fuel store, and a privy. Whether these were designed to entrench conventional

[68]M. Chase, *Chartism: A New History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), p. 259.
[69]Church, pp. 8–9; J. D. Chambers, *Modern Nottingham in the Making* (Nottingham: Nottingham Journal, 1945), p. 16.
[70]D. Poole, *The Last Chartist Land Settlement: Great Dodford* (Dodford: Dodford Society, 1999), pp. 22, 29; N. Mansfield, *Buildings of the Labour Movement* (Swindon: English Heritage, 2013), ch. 6; A. M. Hadfield, *The Chartist Land Company* (Newton Abbot: David & Charles, 1970), p. 224.
[71]M. Roberts, 'The Makeshift Economy of the Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire Framework Knitters, c.1780–1840', in *Industrialisation and Working People: Cromford and Beyond in the Era of the Industrial Revolution*, ed. C. Wrigley (Cromford: Arkwright Society, 2019), pp. 38–9; P.P. 1845 [641], *Royal Commission into the Condition of Framework Knitters*, Appendix to Report: Part II: Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire, pp. 17, 119; Church, pp. 109–111.
[72]*Northern Star*, 30 September 1843.
[73]S. D. Chapman, 'Working-Class Housing in Nottingham during the Industrial Revolution', *Transactions of the Thoroton Society of Nottinghamshire*, 67 (1963), p. 67.

gender roles or not, they were undoubtedly labour saving. Small wonder, as one contemporary observer noted, that 'the women, if possible, appeared still more over-joyed than the men' when they first laid eyes on their new homes.[74] One woman, Elizabeth Tawes, told O'Connor that she would not return to Nottingham for any money as she proudly showed him how happy and healthy her family were since moving to Heronsgate.[75] The Taweses had been rescued from Radford workhouse. Elizabeth's husband, Charles, was the only male subscriber from Nottinghamshire who listed the workhouse as his address.[76]

What made matters worse in the villages and suburbs – in places such as Radford, the original home of the Tawes family, and in Arnold and Basford – was that the people were more reliant on framework knitting than was the case in Nottingham where, at least in theory, other occupations could be pursued. Even in Sutton-in-Ashfield, with its population of 6,300, one local Chartist estimated that 4,500 people were directly dependent on the manufacture of cotton hose and 'perhaps about 1,000 dependent on the same branch of business in an indirect manner'.[77] The attraction of a scheme to impoverished workers that held out the possibility of feeding themselves is understandable. The Chartists from Sutton-in-Ashfield informed the General Convention, the co-ordinating national body in 1839, that many knitters were earning as little as 6–7*s* a week, many had no beds or coverings, and there were 'hundreds who have not a morsel to satisfy the cravings of hunger'.[78] Their neighbours in Mansfield fared little better as many knitters were forced to live off turnips, though some knitters did have access to an acre or two on the Forrest.[79] To make matters worse, payment in truck was common in the villages, and there was a steady stream of prosecutions for short weights and measures, two infractions that would have been particularly resented by women who took charge of the purchase and provision of food.[80]

The Land Plan ultimately failed to deliver what it had promised. Only 250 of the c.42,000 shareholders were settled on one of the estates before the company was wound up by an act of parliament in 1851. The overwhelming response was part of the problem, so popular was the scheme that the numbers taking out shares meant that it would take many years for all shareholders to win an allotment. The failure to secure legal status, internal problems relating to the finance and running of the Land

[74]Not all of these amenities were provided on every estate, at least not immediately and in some cases never. For a brilliant analysis of the social architecture of the Land Plan and Chartist cottages, see Helen Caffrey, 'Freedom to Farm: Housing Smallholders on the Chartist Land Colonies', *Housing Histories*, 22 April 2019, <https://housinghistories.home.blog/2019/04/22/freedom-to-farm-housing-smallholders-on-the-chartist-land-colonies/> [accessed 16 November 2022].

[75]*Northern Star*, 6 November 1847. While O'Connor undoubtedly exaggerated the happiness and prosperity of those settled on the estates, some first-hand testimony – by Charles Tawes, the husband of Elizabeth – admitted that while conditions were hard, which was to be expected, they were improving, and he told his friends in Nottingham not to believe the false reports against the Land Plan. Tawes's letters were sent to a friend in Nottingham, and published in the local press: *Nottingham Mercury*, 8 and 15 October 1847.

[76]TNA, BT 41/474/2659, n.p.

[77]BL, Add MS 34245A, f. 83, General Convention papers, J. Tomlinson to W. Lovett, 1 March 1839.

[78]*Ibid*, f, 85.

[79]BL, Add MS 34245A, f. 90, General Convention papers, H. Sharman to W. Lovett, 1 March 1839; *Northern Star*, 9 September 1843.

[80]Prosecutions under the Weights and Measures Act were a regular feature of quarter sessions in the region. For evidence of knitters being paid in truck, see the testimony of the Sutton-in-Ashfield Chartist, George Kendall (also secretary of his local Anti-Truck Association, and a Land plan subscriber): *Royal Commission into the Condition of Framework Knitters*, p. 184; Gurney, pp. 95–6.

Company, in particular the inability of the allottees to pay rent, and legal and practical problems encountered by the winning allottees who took up residence on one of the estates, each played a part.[81] However, a great deal of time was devoted by the Chartists and other reformers to self-help, including horticulture, which lived on and flowered in the mid-Victorian freehold land movement and the self-help associational culture, including in Nottingham.[82] A mutual assistance society was set up, with James Sweet as sub-treasurer, to help local Chartists who won allotments with initial expenses.[83] The overwhelming response to the Land Plan happened during a period when self-help was also growing in popularity,[84] and it undoubtedly played a part in reviving the fortunes of Chartism.[85] With some 600 branches across the nation, the Land Plan kept Chartism alive at a local level in the lean mid-1840s and beyond 1848. Nottingham was one of the most enthusiastic centres of support.[86] As late as 1849, the Chartists of Skegby, a semi-rural knitting village on the outskirts of Sutton-in-Ashfield, mustered 11*s* 6*d*. in the week ending 12 April towards shares in the Land Company, whereas the total for Nottingham was only a few shillings more that week.[87] The scheme also extended Chartism into new areas in which very little organization existed: only an individual subscription was required; members came from Newark and Retford (nine and five women, respectively).[88] It may also have lent itself to independent-minded women who were reluctant to participate in politics in more visibly assertive ways. There were a number of winners from Nottingham, including four women: Martha Sweet, wife of James Sweet, and one of the women who was nominated to serve on the NCA; Ellen Houghton (seamstress), Sarah Clark (pipe maker), Sarah Fletcher (straw bonnet maker), and Maria Merryman (a lace runner), though it would appear that none took up residence, perhaps because plots had been unavailable or, as seems more likely, because of the unfavourable reports which had begun to circulate about the harsh and unstable conditions on the new estates.[89] None of these names appear in the 1851 census as residents in the cottages on the sites of former Land Plan settlements, though we know

[81]The fullest account of these problems remains Hadfield, *Chartist Land Company*, chs 4–7.
[82]Chase, *Chartists*, p. 58.
[83]J. Rowley, 'Sweet, James (1804/5?–79)', *Dictionary of Labour Biography Volume 4* (London: Macmillan, 1977), p. 172.
[84]*Midland Gazette*, 1 April 1848. The Unitarian Rev. Linwood, a Chartist leader of some standing in this part of Nottinghamshire, did much to promote this culture through the Association of Self Help.
[85]Chase, *Chartism*, p. 237; Chase, *Chartists*, pp. 49, 63.
[86]Richardson, *City*, ch. 13. Even when the financial and legal problems became apparent, as late as March 1850, a group of Nottingham Chartists submitted a petition to the House of Commons protesting against the winding up of the Company. *Nottinghamshire Guardian*, 21 March 1850. For local divisions within the Chartist movement over the problems of the Land Company, see *Nottingham Mercury*, 21 December 1849; *Nottingham Journal*, 27 September 1850.
[87]*Northern Star*, 14 April 1849.
[88]Studies of other localities have also shown that the Land Plan penetrated into areas hitherto untouched by Chartism. See O.R. Ashton, 'Chartism in Gloucestershire: The Contribution of the Chartist Land Plan, 1843–50', *Transactions of the Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society*, 104 (1986), p. 204.
[89]It is possible that Maria Merryman may have taken up residence at Charterville as the Select Committee appointed to investigate the Land Company named her in the appendix on the list of those who had been transferred plots from previous occupiers. P.P. 1848 [557], *Select Committee on National Land Company, Fifth Report, Minutes of Evidence, Appendix*, p. 33.

that others had already cut their losses and left before the census date, the Taweses included.[90]

What do we learn about the women from the Nottingham region who took out shares, and how does this compare with elsewhere? The region's women were more likely to join, and on their own volition, have their own jobs and possess a degree of independence than was the case elsewhere. Six findings from the data support this conclusion. First, almost without exception, they were working class: even the small minority who were listed as 'no trade', 'widow', or independent on the census, lived in households that were working-class, broadly defined. Second, most women had jobs. Only 23 of the 243 women were listed as having no occupation (or 9.5%), a figure which includes seven minors and seven widows (Table 1), whereas in the West Riding and Lancashire the figure was 48%, and across the nation, 34%. If we subtract from these figures those who were non-wage earners (minors, paupers, aged widows), 204 women or 84% were in employment; compared with a national figure of 51%.[91] The record linkage between the shareholders index and the census confirms that the latter, especially the 1841 census, often fails to capture female employment, in particular of married women: forty-five women who declared an occupation on the shareholder's register are listed as having no employment on the census, though both the census and the shareholders register provide only a snapshot at a certain asynchronous point, and in the case of the census it has not always been possible to locate the women on either the 1841 or 1851 censuses.[92] Third, the proportion of female membership in Nottinghamshire was higher: nationally, women made up 4% of the Land Plan's subscribers, in Nottinghamshire, the figure was 11% - not dramatically higher, but nearly three times larger. Fourth, the vast majority of employed women were textile workers: 38% (or 45% of those in employment), higher than in the other two main textile and Chartist strongholds of Lancashire and the West Riding where only 21% were textile workers. The proportion involved in the production of clothing, as dressmakers and milliners, the second highest form of employment by some distance in Nottinghamshire, was also slightly higher: 19% (or 23% of those employed) compared with 15.5% elsewhere. The numbers of women who were in either domestic service (10%) or retail (4%) was comparable to other regions.

Few women were framework knitters compared to those in lace: 4% of women were knitters and 28% were lace workers, a ratio of 1:9, which reflected the gendered division of labour in knitting where women worked for husbands and fathers. Analysis of the Nottinghamshire male subscribers shows that 30% were knitters. The percentage of male lace hands was, however, much higher than the percentage of women in lace: 24% as against 30% who were knitters, a ratio of 4:5, which further calls into question the argument that male lace workers were a superior class apart, only a small minority of

[90]*Northern Star*, 13 November 1847, 29 January 20 May and 3 June 1848. When Martha Sweet won a ballot, her name was listed alongside two other Nottingham residents – Charles Edson and Mary Harvey – as a joint 'Family ticket'. For the names of residents in two former settlements, see P. Searby, 'Great Dodford the Later History of the Chartist Land Scheme', *Agricultural History Review*, 16 (1968), 37; K. Tiller, 'Charterville and the Chartist Land Company', *Oxoniensia*, 50 (1985), 261–3.

[91]Schwarzkopf, pp. 82–5.

[92]E. Higgs, 'Women, Occupations and Work in the Nineteenth Century Censuses', *History Workshop Journal*, 23 (1987), 63; S. Horrell and J. Humphries, 'Women's Labour Force Participation and the Transition to the Male Breadwinner Family, 1790–1865', *Economic History Review*, 48 (1995), 99.

Table 1. Occupational breakdown of Nottinghamshire female shareholders of the Chartist Land Plan, 1847–8.

Occupation	Number	%
Lace	68	28
Dressmaker/seamstress/milliner	47	19
Domestic service	20	8
Housekeeper	20	8
Other textile (cotton, silk, bobbin winder, bleacher)	14	6
Framework knitter	9	4
No occupation	9	4
Shopkeeper	8	3
Laundress/charwoman	8	3
Nurse/matron	8	3
Widow	7	3
Minors	7	3
Spinster	5	2
Schoolmistress	2	1
Pauper	2	1
Other	9	4
Total	243	100

Source: TNA, BT 41/474–6/2659; HO 107, 1841 and 1851 censuses, enumerator books.

whom (relative to framework knitters) were involved in Chartism. Charles Tawes was a laceworker and had been unemployed before winning an allotment at O'Connorville, as an inmate of Radford Workhouse.

Fifth, and perhaps most significantly, was the very high number of women who were, broadly defined, independent by earning their own wages and/or listed as heads of their households on the census. Thirty-three women were recorded as heads of their households, either because they were widowed or unmarried. These figures exclude minors (a classificatory category used on the list of subscribers) and those women of whatever age who were still living with both of their parents. If those women who lived with parents are added but were also contributing to the wages of the household, the figure rises to 90 (44% of women in employment), which is comparable to Lancashire.[93] However, female subscribers are excluded who it has not been possible to locate on the census, the figure is 70%, which is much higher than elsewhere. Sixth, of the women for whom record linkage proved possible (142 out of 243 names), 63 had children of their own (including in some cases, grandchildren living with them), or 44% of the sample, a much lower number than was the case in Lancashire where most female subscribers were mothers (Schwarzkopf only identified two female subscribers who had no children in her sample of 58). The Nottinghamshire women tended to live in slightly smaller households: 4.7 people compared to the national average of 5.5, ranging in size from 1 to 13, and the average number of children for those women who had families of their own was 2.9.[94] The average age of the women was 36, with an age range of 5–71, which was slightly older than the average age of a sample of Chartist men, and may also account for the relatively low number of resident children, as some would have grown up and established their own households.[95] Finally, of the 74 women who either lived

[93]Schwarzkopf, *Women*, p. 85.
[94]Smith, 'Early Victorian Household Structure', p. 72.
[95]C. Godfrey, *Chartist Lives: The Anatomy of a Working-Class Movement* (New York: Garland, 1987), pp. 59–60; M. Chase, 'Chartism 1838–1858 – Responses in Two Teesside Towns', *Northern History*, 24 (1988), 163.

with their father (37), or were married (37), 54 (or 73%) had artisans for spouses. Perhaps most significant and surprising of all is that only 16% of female subscribers had fathers or husbands who were also members of the Land Plan, which contradicts the assumption that most women who joined did so because the men in their households were also members and wished only to maximize their family's chance of winning in a ballot.[96]

Against the background of an assertive presence of women in Nottingham Chartism, the Land Plan can be seen as an expression of a degree of female independence by those women who were heads of households, principal wage earners, widows or unmarried, or even lodgers in other households (a further 14 women).[97] Many working-class households in Nottingham included lodgers, a significant proportion of whom were spinsters working in the lace industry.[98] These women were not necessarily financially independent, though some were, but more were direct wage contributors to their household economies. Many of these women were older, often heads of households, while those with families had relatively few, or grown-up, children, and thus had the resource to contribute to the Land Plan. Just as we should not assume financial independence, neither should we assume that a measure of independence precludes exploitation. The sizable presence of lace workers, which requires careful explanation, is testimony to this.

On the surface, female lace workers appear to be independent women, in the sense of taking on new employment opportunities, perhaps in some of the factories or large workshops that were beginning to appear where they were no longer beholden to fathers and husbands as they had been in framework knitting. There is some truth in this on two counts. First, only 9 of the 35 women who were listed as lace workers and identified on the census lived with a parent or husband who was also listed as a lace worker, and some women were certainly employed in factories. The Chartists of Mansfield told the Convention in 1839 that some 250 females were factory workers in their district earning on average 5*s* a week, though tellingly, this compared with some 600 domestic workers.[99] Second, there was a much lower rate of female membership in the satellite villages and towns – not those closest to Nottingham, such as Radford, which were, in effect, industrial suburbs of Nottingham, but places further afield, such as Arnold, Kirkby, Sutton-in-Ashfield, places where framework knitting was much more dominant than was the case in Nottingham, and where traditional gendered division of labour prevailed. But once again, we should not push this too far as there *were* female subscribers who lived in these places, and who were framework knitting families: 19% of female members from Nottinghamshire came from these satellite communities. These caveats aside, most female lace workers were employed in

[96]The figure of 16% almost certainly is an under-estimation because it has proved impossible to trace all the female subscribers on the census, and occasionally different addresses appear for husband and wife, perhaps because of a change of address after the husband had taken out shares but before the wife subscribed. This would appear to be the case with Ann Hoe, who won an allotment of four acres in December 1846. Ann is listed as 'Mrs John Hoe' in the *Northern Star*, and this can only have been the wife of John Hoe, a framework knitter and fellow subscriber who, on the 1851 census, is the only John Hoe listed as a framework knitter with a wife by the name of Ann, though both appear with different addresses in the shareholders register. *Northern Star*, 19 December 1847.

[97]In his sample of subscribers from Teesside, Chase concluded that those with shares tended to be younger and were more likely to be lodgers than Chartists generally (though his sample was almost exclusively male). Chase, 'Teesside'.

[98]Smith, 'Early Victorian Household Structure', p. 82.

[99]BL, Add MS 34245A, f. 89, General Convention papers, H. Sharman to W. Lovett, 1 March 1839.

the preparation and finishing stages of production and worked in their homes or the homes of others.[100] The persistence of domestic production does not disguise the existence of a different gendered division of labour. The stated occupation of the female lace workers on the share index confirms that the vast majority were employed in the preparation and finishing stages of production, as lace runners, drawers, menders, and so on. Thus, as with the hosiery trade elsewhere in the east midlands, Nottingham women employed in this sector remained domestic outworkers; but unlike in Leicester, growing numbers of women no longer seamed stockings made by their husbands; they were paid wages as individuals by other employers rather than as members of a household unit (as was the case before the growth of lace).[101] This may explain why comparatively few women from Leicester or Leicestershire took out shares in the Land Plan: 47 in Leicester (17 of whom had no trade), and only 4 in Loughborough and 8 in the Leicestershire villages. While it is possible that many of these names have been lost given the incomplete nature of the subscription lists, this seems unlikely given that records exist for some 1,400 Leicestershire men with shares.[102]

The Nottinghamshire women lace workers might have been relatively independent, but they were no less exploited than many other domestic outworkers: their situation was dire enough for the *Northern Star* to feature a full-length article on their plight.[103] For women in the lace trade, conditions were poor: long working hours (12–14 hours a day), in damp and humid rooms where they ruined their eye sight and fingers, for an average wage of 6 shillings in a trade that was prone to dramatic fluctuation, speculation and over-capitalization, in which its workers were not afforded the same degree of protection as cotton textile workers elsewhere, woeful though it often was.[104] On the other hand, 6*s* was much better than the 1*s* 6*d* earned by female domestic outworkers in the framework knitting trade.[105] Nonetheless, while domestic lace workers might have escaped the clutches of fathers and husbands, and were earning their own wages and making a significant contribution to their family's income, they were being exploited by other men, and other women who also acted as 'middlemen' in the lace trade.[106] To describe these women as independent would be stretching credulity, though their subscriptions to the Land Plan were an aspiration to realizing independence, just as it was for the many male framework knitters who needed rescuing from a trade from which they saw no prospects of escaping. Similar aspirations to independence were also pulls for other groups of women who were independent wage earners but in exploitative

[100]Fabrice Bensimon, 'Women and Children in the Machine-Made Lace Industry in Britain and France (1810–60)', *Textile: Cloth and Culture*, 18 (2019), 69–91.
[101]N. G. Osterud, 'Gender Divisions and the Organisations of Work in the Leicester Hosiery Industry', in *Unequal Opportunities: Women's Employment in England, 1800–1918*, ed. by A.V. John (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), pp. 47–50.
[102]A. Little, 'Chartism and Liberalism: Popular Politics in Leicestershire 1842 to 1874', (PhD diss., University of Manchester, 1991), pp. 379–82.
[103]*Northern Star*, 6 May 1843.
[104]Church, pp. 86–9. With many male framework knitters earning around 7*s* a week, wives and daughters employed in lace earning 6*s* would have made a significant contribution to their families, a much higher contribution, in fact, than was generally the case even among outworkers. Horrell and Humphries, p. 103.
[105]BL, Add MS 34245A, f. 89, General Convention papers, H. Sharman to W. Lovett, 1 March 1839.
[106]S. D. Chapman, 'Industry and Trade', in *A Centenary History of Nottingham*, ed. by J. Beckett (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), p. 341.

jobs, hence its popularity with minors and young girls in domestic service. The Land Plan offered women a route out of servitude, just as it held out the prospect of some security for those women who had been widowed and had families to support. One such shareholder was Fortune Fletcher, a widowed mother of fifty-four, living on Greyfriars Gate in Nottingham, who was a lace runner with two adult unmarried daughters, both of whom were lace carders. The collective wage of the household was probably around twelve shillings.

Two caveats should be noted in using these data. First, not all those who took out subscriptions were necessarily Chartist sympathizers (this was a lottery and some were, no doubt, attracted by the possibility of winning a cottage and/or some land), many subscribers across the nation *were* Chartists.[107] As Alan Little comments, 'Land Company subscription may actually give a better picture of occupational and geographical foundations of Chartism as a mass movement, than figures for a minority of committed activists on the National Charter Association council lists'.[108] Second, it is possible that the 16% figure of women who had fathers or husbands who were also subscribers underestimates the number of women who joined at the urging of male family members, including those who were not members of the same household. This analysis has been conducted at the level of household, though it is clear from some of the record linkage that brothers and sisters were also members, though at whose urging remains unknown, and indeed unknowable. It may be that occupation, class, and community were just as important as family in explaining female membership of the Land Plan: many women lived in the same neighbourhood or the same street: for example, Mary Johnson and Maria Severn, neither of whom had husbands or fathers who were subscribers, lived next door but one on Denman St, Radford.[109] Some families, though a small minority, joined up collectively as names of the individual members appear consecutively in the shareholder lists, while others may have joined up at different times, perhaps when family finances permitted a greater investment.[110] Anecdotal evidence, however, suggests that influence could also work the other way. During one of his visits to Nottingham, Feargus O'Connor remarked that 'women constitute the great force of the Chartist ranks in Nottingham.' This was a tacit recognition, perhaps, of the role they had played in securing his recent election for the borough; and still declared this in 1850. O'Connor relayed the following story:

> I will give you an instance of the effect of women taking up the Land Plan … A very short time ago, a man came to see me at Lowbands, and said he was anxious to enter the Land Society. I told him it was Sunday, and the secretary was not there. 'D—n it (said the man) I must and will join: for ever since last Sunday night, I have not had a wink of sleep, through my wife continually saying, "Wilt thou join the land plan? Wilt thou join the land plan?"' (Laughter and loud applause).[111]

Finally, a degree of caution is needed in concluding that male Chartist artisans were opposed to the participation of their wives in the movement; many of those who were

[107]Thompson, *Chartists*, pp. 127–8; Schwarzkopf, pp. 82, 85; Chase, *Chartists*, p. 59, ch. 12.
[108]Little, 'Chartist Land Company', p. 248.
[109]TNA, HO 107/2129, f. 235 v, Census enumerator's book.
[110]For example, the Plum family, of Green Lane, Lambley, appear in the shareholders register consecutively, including Dianah Plum, a dressmaker, daughter of Henry Plum, a framework knitter who appears first in the list. TNA, BT 41/474/2659, n.p. [page 2 of surnames beginning with 'p']. James and Martha Sweet, by contrast, appear in different sections of the ledger.
[111]*Nottingham Review*, 12 November 1847; *Northern Star*, 14 September 1850.

subscribers were related to framework knitters and other artisans – a group of men supposedly hostile to political women.[112] There might have been a degree of opposition among some of these men to the political involvement of their wives, daughters and sisters, but this does not suggest that all of these women defied their menfolk in taking out subscriptions or in participating in the movement.

Conclusion

The opportunities for plebeian women to participate in politics were more varied, more extensive, and possibly more enduring than historians have often suggested. Female political engagement, in terms of both numbers and depth of engagement, seems to have *increased* rather decreased over this period. From being largely supportive and subordinate in the early nineteenth century, by the late 1840s some plebeian women were independent political actors. There is little evidence that working-class women were either marginalized or subordinated in protest or radical politics. The NFPU seems to have folded, but new opportunities opened up and, while they may not have been ideal vehicles for the pursuit of a feminist agenda in the way that some female Chartist associations were, it is necessary to be cautious in assuming that the Nottinghamshire women who signed up to the Land Plan were doing so to re-establish or reaffirm separate spheres or uphold domesticity and patriarchy. Given the number of independent women who took out shares, we should also be wary of concluding that the gendered vision of the Land Plan propagated by O'Connor – that women should be confined to hearth and home – was necessarily the vision that women were signing up to.[113] The independent and assertive female politics that flowered in the Chartist movement represented the culmination of a tradition of female political activism which traced its origins to at least the early nineteenth century. If some of the Nottingham Chartist men traced their own radical careers back to the time of the Luddites, there is no reason to assume that some of the women were any different.[114] Local economic and social factors also played their part in explaining why plebeian women were so politically assertive. There were problems within the hosiery trade as male framework knitters became more impoverished due to growing competition, sometimes from women, and because of the expansion of the lace trade and new opportunities it presented women. This meant that Nottingham's plebeian women were increasingly forced to look to their own salvation, hence the attraction of the Land Plan. The Nottingham region may be atypical – the extremely limited response of Leicestershire women has already been noted – but further research on other localities is needed to establish typicality. Certainly,

[112]This is one of Clark's broader arguments, though in fairness to her careful handling of how the sexual division of labour differed according to occupational groups, she does note that weavers – the closest parallel to the Nottinghamshire framework knitters and lace workers – had a different gender culture from other artisans which reflected the more widespread participation of women in the family-based weaving workshop. While all-male artisan workshops tended to be much more exclusionary towards women – in both work and politics – some male domestic outworkers, in recognition of the role played by women in their trades, opted for sexual co-operation which gave women some economic, and by extension political, standing in their families and communities. The thrust of Clark's argument, however, is that working women in family-based workshops were increasingly subordinate and, by implication, denied the opportunity for independent political action once the traditional community forms of protest went into decline. Clark, *Struggle*, ch. 7.

[113]As Jamie Bronstein concedes, it certainly bore little relation to the practice of the 'unrelenting labour required of small-farming wives'. J.L. Bronstein, *Land Reform and Working-Class Experience in Britain and the United States, 1800–1862* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), p. 79.

[114]Epstein, p. 263, n.23; Chase, *Chartists*, p. 54.

Nottinghamshire women appear to have been more likely to join and more independent than their sister textile workers in Lancashire and the West Riding.

While there were some continuities in female political activism during this period, such as by the politics of consumption and the focus on electoral politics, there were also some important shifts. As with working-class men, plebeian women turned increasingly to politics and constitutional methods rather than direct action and violence, though, the shadowy role of women in Luddism, and the person of Elizabeth Cresswell, points to some continuity. In the early years of the period, women were much less visible, in part because of the paucity of the historical record, but while this was less of an issue by the 1840s, much plebeian female activism remained hidden because of the class and gender prejudices of the sources. In April 1840, the *Nottingham Mercury* contained a spoof article on female Chartism which clearly revealed these prejudices:

> A female political association assembled one day this week at a beer-house, to discuss the propriety of continuing in the Union. The LADY in the Chair … observed, on opening the meeting, that 'the times were dead again 'em … therefore, all she had to say was, that when opportunity offered, she hoped they would again equivolate for universal suffering and animal parliaments'.[115]

Such attitudes openly expressed by the male Chartists of Nottingham are less forthcoming, perhaps because many had wives who worked and were politically active.[116] While some framework knitters complained of competition from women, and sought a restoration of a breadwinner's wage, others advocated the admission of women into their trade unions. Politics was no exception. If women started to disappear from popular politics and protest in the 1850s and 1860s, though further research is needed, it seems that this had less to do with misogyny or emerging notions of separate spheres harboured by Chartist men, and more to do with the fact that Chartism went into steep decline and could no longer act as the vehicle for female political aspirations, just as it could not for working-class men.

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[115] *Nottingham Mercury*, 24 April 1840.

[116] For example, a sample of the leading male Chartists in the town and region revealed that the following had wives in employment: Jonathan Barber, James Sweet, John Blatherwick, John Wall, George Kendall, Henry Dorman, Joseph Souter, Charles Roberts, Jacob Bostock.