



Respectable standards of living: The alternative lens of maintenance costs, Britain 1270–1860

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Abstract

This paper argues that in all societies there is considerable agreement about what goods and services are needed to provide a decent living, and that this standard can be measured by the expense involved in maintaining people of good standing. Maintenance costs include two components of living costs that are neglected in conventional approaches. First, in contrast to the usual focus on a fixed basket of commodities, maintenance costs capture changes in the composition and quality of the goods required for a respectable lifestyle. Second, unlike conventional accounting, they include the costs of the household services required to turn the basket commodities into livings. Ignored in the conventional methodology, the inclusion of these costs represents a core innovation. More than 4600 observations, drawn mainly from primary sources, trace levels and trends in maintenance costs for Britain from 1270 to 1860. These can be compared with established cost of living indicators to offer a complementary perspective on real consumption that accommodates aspirational goods and the input of household labour. The struggle to support families at respectable standards emerges as driving industriousness and motivating prudence among a class that played a major role in economic development.

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JEL CLASSIFICATION

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Is it reasonable to believe that a middling-sort artisan living through the British Industrial Revolution would have felt content and esteemed when consuming an identical bundle of goods and services to that enjoyed by a medieval counterpart? Or that he would have felt several times more satisfied if in receipt of several times the same bundle? Clearly not, yet this supposition is implicit in most historical cost of living indexes, which hold the bundle of goods in total expenditure constant even over extended periods.¹ This remains the case in recent studies of living costs, which use Robert Allen's stylized patterns of expenditure or *Allen baskets*.² The 'barebones' basket represents a physiological minimum of consumption with just enough necessities to survive, while the 'respectability' basket, reflecting the consumption of the non-poor, is more generous, providing for a richer diet and greater comfort, and has been preferred by most historians of Western Europe.³ Its costs have been widely used to deflate wage series and compute welfare ratios, that is, the numbers or fractions of the basket that could be purchased, constituting a methodology that now dominates the comparative study of historical wellbeing. However, Allen baskets are also Laspeyres indexes: their composition remains fixed, costs changing only because of changes in prices. Recently [Sara Horrell](#) has constructed a price index on the basis of a chained Laspeyres methodology, but the scarcity of historical evidence limits revision of the expenditure weights to eight points through the years 1260–1869 and entails reliance on standard price series.⁴

While limited information on budget shares and the difficulties of splicing in the prices of new commodities has obliged economic historians to apply unchanging expenditure weights, the idea that consumption patterns remained even roughly constant conflicts with several grand narratives of economic history. These rest on the impact of novel or hitherto prohibitively expensive commodities to explain trends in international trade, structural change, and even the motivation to work. Thus, [Jan de Vries](#)' influential 'industrious revolution' relies on the appearance and cheapening of attractive commodities to persuade working people to reallocate time from leisure and household production to market work, a reallocation that presaged the Industrial Revolution.⁵ Social historians also reject notions of consumption inertia, citing improvements in diets, cleanliness, comfort, and dress as markers of the respectable 'middling sort' and thus targets of aspirant working people.⁶

¹ [Phelps-Brown](#) and [Hopkins](#), 'Seven centuries of the prices of consumables'. These authors emphasized that the resulting series represented the changing cost of a composite unit of consumption, and only in a general sense could be considered a cost-of-living index.

² [Clark](#), 'Long march'; idem, 'Condition'; [Allen](#), 'Great divergence'; idem, *British Industrial Revolution*.

³ For criticism of the barebones basket, see [Humphries](#), 'Lure'.

⁴ [Horrell](#), 'Household consumption'.

⁵ [de Vries](#), *Industrious revolution*.

⁶ From an extensive literature see: [Brewer and Porter](#), eds., *Consumption and the world of goods*; [Dyer](#), 'Changes in diet'; [Dyer](#), *Standards*; [Lloyd](#), *Food and identity*; [Trentmann](#), *Empire*; [Magagna](#), 'Food and politics'; [Larson](#), *Rethinking the Great Transition*; [Styles](#), *Dress of the people*; [Dyer](#), 'Georgian washerwomen'; [Rawcliffe](#), 'Marginal occupation'; [Styles](#), 'Custom or



Perhaps even more problematic, the basket methodology focuses exclusively on the prices of commodities, failing to recognize the labour required to transform these into livings, for example, to turn foodstuffs into meals, wield soap to ensure cleanliness, and assemble fuel to provide warmth and light. If paid for, this domestic labour is captured in costs, though seldom recognized as an economic activity.⁷ If, as is common, this labour is unpaid, it is ignored.⁸ Even when recognized as important, the absence of evidence on the time taken in domestic labour and the value of that time deter inclusion.⁹

The neglect of domestic labour is one aspect of an ahistorical definition of work which gender historians such as [Maria Ågren](#), [Carmen Sarasúa](#), [Alexandra Shepard](#), and [Jane Whittle](#) argue have misled accounts of economic progress and structural change.¹⁰ Here, the focus is on how its omission from calculations of living costs might similarly mislead accounts of living standards. Indeed, difficulties are exacerbated as imputed contributions are unlikely to be stable. A more varied diet, more domestic comfort, and a higher standard of cleanliness entail a greater input of labour, especially if housework technology lags, while the shadow price of household services also changes. The need to account for changing consumption and for domestic labour are intertwined problems and demand an integrated approach.

I propose a radical response. Economists, from [Smith](#) to [Sen](#), have recognized that acceptable living standards are socially and culturally determined.¹¹ Poverty has long been understood as contingent, conceptualized in terms of relativities or the influential ‘consensual’ approach whereby necessities are distinguished by public opinion and their absence used to identify hardship.¹² *Respectability*, since it means ‘regarded by society to be good, proper or correct’ is just as

consumption’; [Weatherill](#), *Consumer behaviour*; [Muldrew](#), *Food*; [Crowley](#), *Invention of comfort*; [French](#), *Household goods*; [Smith](#), *Consumption*; [Horrell et al.](#), ‘Consumption conundrums’; [Horrell](#), ‘Household consumption’.

⁷ Witness its almost complete neglect in [Broadberry et al.](#), *British economic growth*.

⁸ This disregard is paralleled at the macro level by the omission of the value of unpaid domestic labour in National Income accounts long contested by feminist economists and some economic statisticians, see [Mitchell et al.](#), *Income in the United States*, for an early discussion; [Benería](#), ‘Enduring debate’; [Antonopoulos](#) and [Hirway](#), eds., *Unpaid work*; [Jefferson](#) and [King](#), ‘Domestic labour’; and [Moos](#), ‘Care work’ for the feminist economist position; [Hawrylyshyn](#), ‘Value of household services’, for imputation strategies; and, [Clark](#), ‘Economics of housework’; and, [Wagman](#) and [Folbre](#), ‘Household services and economic growth’ for historical illustrations. Estimates of the value of unpaid household services confirm its macro importance at between 19% and 60% of GDP depending on country and valuation strategy, while historical evidence suggests an even larger contribution in the past, see [Clark](#), ‘Economics of housework’. For recent reviews of the background and politics of the exclusion of unpaid household services from GDP measurement see, [Messac](#), ‘Outside the economy’; and [Derock](#), ‘Hidden in plain sight’.

⁹ In constructing her chained Laspeyres CPI, [Horrell](#) acknowledges that ‘... a chicken, potatoes, and carrots will require additional labour to be turned into a meal’ but without evidence on the time taken and its value, leaves it out of consideration, ‘Household consumption’, p. 1028.

¹⁰ [Ågren](#), ed., *Making a living*; [Sarasúa](#), ‘Women’s work’; [Shepard](#), *Accounting*; [Whittle](#), ‘Critique’. See also [Macleod et al.](#), eds., *The whole economy*.

¹¹ ‘By necessities I understand, not only the commodities which are indispensably necessary for the support of life, but whatever the custom of the country renders it indecent for creditable people even of the lowest order to be without’, [Smith](#), *Wealth of nations*, pp. 869–70; ‘For the person studying and measuring [the standard of living] the conventions of society are matters of fact And not issues of subjective search’; see also the discussion of ‘contemporary standards’ compared with ‘self-evaluation’, and the possibility of rankings based on ‘commonly accepted values’ ([Sen](#), *Standard*, pp. 30–33).

¹² [Townsend](#), *Poverty*, emphasizes the importance of ‘the endeavour to define the style of living which is generally shared or approved in each society’ (p. 60); [Mack](#) and [Lansley](#) argue that there is ‘substantial social consensus about what constitutes an unacceptable living standard’, see *Poor Britain*.



socially grounded and so can be identified from local habits, customs, and expectations.¹³ Adam Smith famously noted that a linen shirt and leather shoes were essential to an eighteenth-century English artisan's self-respect, while the Lowell mill girls objected to the frequency with which lobster appeared on boarding-house menus, considering it a demeaning foodstuff. Standards deemed satisfactory are rarely stationary, as Smith emphasized.¹⁴ Changes often coincide with the appearance or accessibility of new goods, for example, pocket watches and excursions to the seaside in the nineteenth century, but also reflect broader shifts in social values. Children's toys were deemed a luxury in the past but today their absence would be widely considered deprivation. The challenge is to identify what people took respectability to involve and then cost this standard. This paper's claim is that both the standard and its cost are reflected in the expenses incurred in maintaining people of good standing, maintenance that was provided for different reasons and varied in composition, but was described, costed, and recorded, thus enabling qualitative and quantitative analysis.

Section I describes the evidence and defends its use to chart changing living standards and their costs. I recovered more than 4600 observations of maintenance costs ranging across seven centuries from British sources. These measure total expenditure on maintenance and so capture changes in the quantities and prices of the goods and services needed to support respectable living. Many, but not all, observations monetize the in-kind components of pay sometimes afforded to workers, particularly to those on annual contracts, and thus contribute to recent research estimating total remuneration for such workers.¹⁵

Decade averages show that maintenance costs always exceeded those of the basket, demonstrating the extent to which more and better commodities and necessary household services were included. The gap varies over time, widening when new goods and services were adopted or when their prices increased, and narrowing when maintenance fell back towards the basket level or when the prices of commodities included in respectable maintenance but missing from the basket declined relatively.

Section II explores the qualitative evidence from the sources to identify developments in how respectable people lived. Section III follows standard practice applying regression analysis to control for the heterogeneity of the data, then using the estimated coefficients to reconstruct, in this case, the costs of maintenance in different contexts.¹⁶ Since these are monetary costs they are then deflated using first the Horrell chained Laspeyres and then the respectability basket index to separate changes in prices from changes in standards and approximate the evolution of real consumption. Focus is on the differences between the costs of maintenance and those of the basket. Unfortunately, these conflate the drift of actual consumption away from the narrow confines depicted in the basket with changes in the quantities and prices of the household services required to transform commodities into livings, picked up in the charges for maintenance but not in the

¹³ <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/respectability>.

¹⁴ 'A linen shirt is, strictly speaking, not a necessity of life. The Greeks and the Romans lived, I suppose very comfortably though they had no linen. But in the present times, a creditable day labourer would be ashamed to appear in public without a linen shirt', Smith, *Wealth of nations*, p. 870.

¹⁵ Humphries and Weisdorf ('Unreal wages') originally approximated the value of perquisites when workers were maintained as well as paid a wage by the cost of an Allen basket, 'Wages'. Whilst acknowledged as second best to direct estimates from historical sources, the strategy was followed in subsequent studies. Claridge et al., 'Wages and the middle ages', seeks empirically grounded estimates though limited to medieval liveryes.

¹⁶ For the use of regression analysis to control for heterogeneity see Margo, *Wages*; Clark, 'Long march'; Humphries and Weisdorf, 'Unreal wages'; Horrell and Humphries, 'Children's work'.



contents or cost of the basket. I investigate the sources of divergence by relating trends to the qualitative evidence on changing consumption and to women's wages to reflect the costs of domestic labour. Section IV explores the implications of the quest for respectability. Maintenance ratios are constructed to illustrate whether male wages could maintain a single man at standards deemed respectable given the goods and services this required, let alone achieve a decent livelihood for a whole family. These illustrate the pressures that consumption aspirations and the need for domestic services imposed on male earnings capacity, exposing them as drivers of industriousness and motivators of 'moral restraint'. Indeed, Malthus himself directed attention to these same forces as vital to long-run growth in his argument that 'a decided taste for the conveniences and comforts of life, [and] a strong desire for bettering their condition' prompted 'a laudable spirit of industry and foresight' among the English working class.

I | SOURCES AND METHODS

More than 200 mainly archival and printed primary sources yielded evidence on what it cost to maintain respectable working people from 1270 to 1860. To reiterate, these capture changes in the quantities as well as the prices of the goods consumed simultaneously with the household services needed to transform them into livings. Table 1 lists the kind of sources searched with illustrative examples.

Reliable observations occur when employers fed and/or housed employees and recorded the costs in their accounts. Underdeveloped transport systems meant that workers often lived on site to save having to return home for meals or sleep.¹⁷ Such observations are common earlier, but even in the Industrial Revolution, if workplaces were isolated, employers often boarded employees, while the need to have some agricultural workers continuously available meant that farm servants routinely lived in until the late nineteenth century.¹⁸ Related observations compare workers' wages when they were fed and sometimes housed (recorded as 'ad mensa', 'at the Lord's Table', 'with meat & drink', etc.) with wages for the same or similar workers without such benefits (recorded as 'finding himself', 'on his own table', 'without meat', etc.). The differences indicate the values attached to the perquisites.¹⁹ Payments for maintenance were also made to a third person, often a named woman, who may have upgraded livings or extracted superior recompense.²⁰

Leaving accounts, estimates by social commentators provide a fourth source. These are second-hand but based on local knowledge. Grain liveries given to servants on medieval demesnes constitutes a fifth source, while the billeting costs of military personnel, living-out apprentices, or parishioners who were unable to cope independently, represent a sixth, though the latter may have drifted towards barebones standards and the former been only supplemental.

Maintenance contracts, corrodies, or pensions provide a seventh source. Maintenance contracts, agreed upon when people surrendered property in return for promises of support usually in old age, not only specified the resources due the respectable elderly, but often, the

¹⁷ Salzman, *Building*; Airs, 'Social and economic aspects'; Woodward, *Men at work*; Dils, *Reading St Laurence churchwardens' accounts*.

¹⁸ For example, pauper apprentices were regularly housed on the sites of early factories, see Honeyman, *Child workers*; For farm workers see Devine, *Farm servants*; Short, 'Decline'; Howkins, 'Peasants'; Whittle, ed. *Servants*.

¹⁹ Prudent employers were vigilant in ensuring that when workers were either fed or accommodated the cost was recouped in lower wages. See, Gardiner and Whittick, eds., *Accounts*, p. 33.

²⁰ See, Davis, *Wandsworth*, p. 13; Penney, ed., *Household account book*.

**TABLE 1** Types of sources with examples of observations.

Type of source (number of observations)	Example
1. Accounts: costs of workers' board and lodging (769)	In 1548, the Boxford Churchwardens employed Thomas Armysbye for 'dawbynge of the town shoppes'. He was paid 12d for 3 days of work, his 'meate & dryke' was costed separately at 9d, and his bed at 1d (Northeast, ed., 1982)
2. Accounts: differences in wages between with and without board and lodging (606)	In 1578 at Stanford in the Vale, a thatcher's servant was paid 8d for 2 days of work 'with meat' in addition, while in 1580 he was paid 5d per day but had to 'boorde himselffe' (Stanford-in-the-Vale churchwardens' accounts, 1552–1725)
3. Accounts: direct payments to providers of board and lodging (522)	Admiralty records record payments c.1562 to 'Joan Kinge, Alice Bary, Elizabeth Ffrances, Joan Rocke and 18 other persons of Deptford, Greenwich, Lewisham and thereabouts for the lodging of 170 shipwrights, caulkers, sawyers, smiths....' (Hattendorf et al, 1993).
4. Estimates by social commentators (143)	Arthur Young estimated harvest board in the 1770s as high as 10d per day (Young, 1772)
5. Grain liveries (110)	In 1303–5, on various Durham Priory manors, ploughmen received 4.33 quarters of wheat, which Richard Britnell (2014) valued at 21s per year
6. Billeting (271)	Billeting in Hertfordshire of five men for 3 days was costed at 7s 6d in 1643 (Thomson, 2007)
7. Maintenance contracts, corrodies, and pensions (748)	Agnes att Wode, 'the lord's beadswoman' on the Manor of Mote was boarded with a servant for 3 months in 1479 at a cost of 2s 6d (Gardiner and Whittick, 2008)
8. Wage assessments: differences in wages with and without food and drink (1135)	A 1724 Kent wage assessment determined that the 'second sort' of artificers were to get 14d per day in summer or 7d and food (Waterman, 1928)
9. Board wages (323)	In February 1756, Duke Duck received 15s for 5 weeks 'board wages' alongside his regular remuneration for the same time (Wiltshire Record Office, 2664/2/1B/10).

Source: See text.

compensation owed in the event of disagreement.²¹ Thus, in 1632, Shropshire widow Anne Donne agreed to a reduction in the rental on her land in exchange for maintenance with her yeoman son. However, the canny widow included a get-out clause: if she were not satisfied with her living, she could resume exclusive possession of her property. Henrie would then be liable for the market rent on any land and Anne would have to maintain herself, the rental consideration afforded Henrie capturing the cost and value of the widow's subsistence.²² Corrodies were livings provided in religious houses. Royal pensioners were often foisted on reluctant establishments, but humble people also purchased corrodies to provide support in old age, and the superannuated servants of the institutions themselves also benefitted.²³ The contents of corrodies were often

²¹ Homans, *English villagers*; Clark, 'Aspects of social security'; Dyer, *Standards*; Smith, 'The manorial court'.

²² Shropshire Record Office, XMO/445/14/25.

²³ British History Online, Angold et al., *History of the county of Shropshire*, pp. 70–80; Page, ed., *History of the County of Somerset*, pp. 69–81.



defined, illustrating changing consumption patterns, and as with maintenance contracts, default valuations provide guidance on costings. Pensions, screened to exclude elite allowances, also benchmark decent livings.

Observations also derive from labour market regulations introduced following the Black Death.²⁴ Wage assessments list maximum wages for workers of various kinds, according to whether ‘meat and drink’ was provided. The differences, as with type 2 observations, shadow the cost of a respectable diet.²⁵ The final source type concerns payments, usually to domestic servants, to compensate for the suspension of maintenance when employers were absent and houses closed. Such ‘board wages’ covered living costs, and since servants remained on furlough, removed the stress of new hiring when employers resumed residence. Care was taken to ensure that board wages did not include rewards for service, as skeleton staff were often tasked with cleaning and repairs, and to exclude cases when servants continued to be housed and fed.

Source types clustered in certain eras, such as grain liversies in the medieval period and board wages in the 1700s, though even in the earliest sparsely documented decades, reliance is never on less than three kinds of source, and from 1350, usually five or six.

Data collection followed certain protocols reflecting an abstemious use of the available evidence and to ensure comparability; for example, observations were reduced to a day rate assuming that a week’s board covered 7 days, a month’s 28–31, and so on.²⁶ In the occasional instances when the individual components of maintenance (e.g. food, drink, heating, lighting, bed space) were costed separately, as in the case of the ‘dauber’ in table 1, these were combined to provide an estimate of complete maintenance.²⁷

Sceptical readers might worry about circularity in the argument: if increasing money wages lead to better maintenance, it becomes difficult to identify exogenously improving standards. Here, source type 7 proves useful. Older people were not in receipt of wages but stating their needs against generally perceived standards; it is important then to check whether maintenance contracts, corrodies, and pensions have significantly different costs.

Were people in the past watchful of the value of maintenance? Did they bargain for standards deemed respectable? First, consider maintenance associated with employment. Maintenance did not come for free and offsets in terms of wage reductions were scrupulously sought. When George Culley was advising on the hiring of a servant, he urged that ‘If he has his meat that must be deducted’.²⁸ However, employers who were mean risked both reputational damage and

²⁴ Putnam, *Enforcement*.

²⁵ The differences for annual workers, which often explicitly included ‘livery’, were assumed to cover basic housing, as these employees likely ‘lived-in’.

²⁶ Cases were defined by an entry in an account book or reference in a document and recorded once only even if payment was for several days or weeks or even years. Costs which were recorded say weekly over time generated a series of cases, while if the bills were paid less frequently the number of cases fell. No account was taken of payments specified as ongoing but not appearing in subsequent accounts. Where payments were for groups of boarder/lodgers and to several providers they were recorded as specific cases only when specified individuals were involved. For example, I treated the payments for victualling and lodging the 170 shipwrights, caulkers, sawyers, and smiths described in tab. 2 at 7d per day for victuals and 2d per week for a feather bed per man as 22 observations, as 4 named women and 18 additional providers appear in the Admiralty record.

²⁷ The costs of individual components subsequently provided spot checks on the valuations implied in the regression analysis.

²⁸ Cited in Orde, ed., *Matthew and George Culley*, p. 106. Similarly, the value of victuals provided by employers were understood to augment the incomes of labouring families, see, Davis, *The case of labourers*, accounts 4 and 5.

shirking employees. Thus, William Ellis, in a well-known advice book, reported that a local farmer had ‘disgraced himself’ by feeding his servants ‘apple pasties ... with the stalks and cores of the apples included’ and crusts of water and suet. As a result, ‘he could hardly get a good servant to live with him, and those that did, grumbled much and worked the worse for it’.²⁹ Workers did not long tolerate demeaning conditions. [Mary Ann Ashford](#) remembered a Scots employer adopting a devious cost-cutting stratagem, encouraging her to eat less by suggesting that dieting would enhance her sexual appeal: ‘Mary, child, you would be very handsome were it not that your cheeks are too large; if you would eat less, they would be thinner’.³⁰ Mary moved on.

Where employment was available with or without upkeep, arbitrage ensured that the wage gap reflected its value. If workers thought they could do better fending for themselves they sought to ‘live out’, while employers constantly compared the costs of boarding their employees against paying higher wages. [John Bennett](#), for example, described how c. 1805, his master pressured him to ‘live in’ on a lower wage. [Bennett](#) experimented but ‘the living did not suit me...’ so negotiated an ‘outdoor’ apprenticeship on a higher wage.³¹ Across the bargaining table, farmer Robert Loder regularly calculated how much it cost to board his servants, and pondered whether having them at his beck and call justified the expense.³²

The same sensitivity to value and status was manifest in maintenance contracts. Even humble retirees insisted that support reflect propriety. Livings were to be ‘... as befit such a woman’, ‘... fitting his degree and quality’; ‘... convenient for a Cristian’; and, ‘... fit for her station’.³³ Corrodies and pensions remained benchmarked to tacitly agreed standards of decency. During the Reformation, former monks, nuns, friars, and chantry priests were ‘not generally popular’ but their pensions were fixed at levels thought appropriate to their ecclesiastical status.³⁴ Wage assessments were patchily enforced and drifted over time from imposing a ceiling to underpinning a floor,³⁵ but the valuations implicit in rates with and without perquisites reflected local knowledge about both prices and acceptable standards.³⁶ Board wages were received by servants selected for retention and paid by employers seeking to be thought fair-minded, so unlikely to be cheeseparing.³⁷

Figure 1 shows the average cost of maintenance by decade in comparison with the cost of the respectable Allen basket.

Although not without interruption, the overall picture suggests betterment in what was considered a decent living and a steady rise in its monetary cost albeit fuelled in certain time periods by rising prices. Not surprisingly, nominal maintenance costs follow changes in the price level indicated by changes in the cost of the respectability basket, registering short run blips as

²⁹ Cited in [Muldrew](#), *Food*, p. 41.

³⁰ [Ashford](#), *Life*, p.30.

³¹ [Bennett](#), Autobiographical manuscript, p. 5.

³² Cited in [Fussell](#), ed., *Robert Loder's farm accounts*, p. 9.

³³ [Homans](#), *English villagers*, p. 145; [Warwickshire Record Office](#), CR/908/200/7-8; [Hertfordshire Record Office](#), DE/W/156; [Lancashire Archives](#), DDX 243/2/35.

³⁴ [Hodgett](#), *The state*, p. xii.

³⁵ [Rogers](#), *History*.

³⁶ Since Assessments list a number of occupations and grades (workpeople of the first, second, and third class), they enable classification by skill.

³⁷ Since they were paid at different rates by seniority and grade, they can be sorted by status.

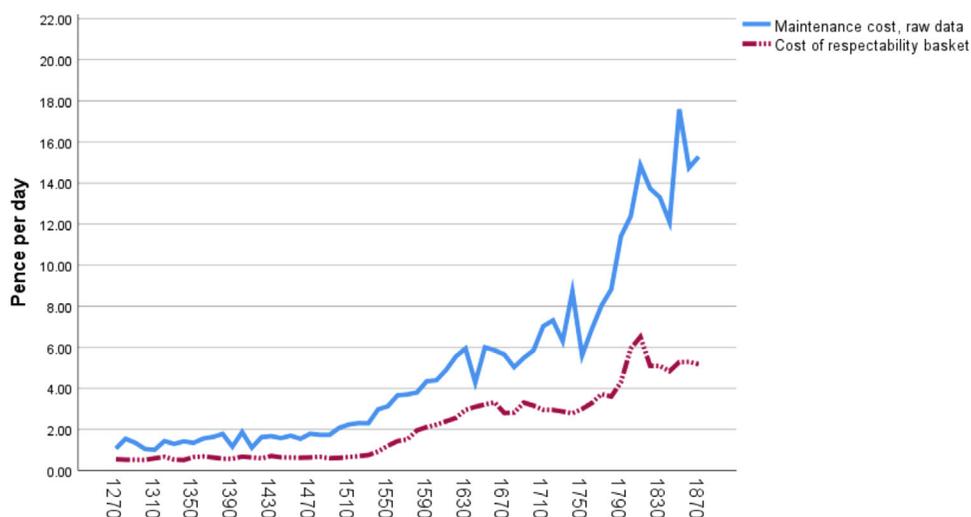


FIGURE 1 Maintenance costs and the costs of the respectability basket, 1270–1870. *Sources:* Maintenance costs: see text; Allen respectability basket: <https://www.nuffield.ox.ac.uk/people/sites/allen-research-pages/>. [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

well as long run trends. However, maintenance costs are always greater, and the disparity evolved over time.³⁸ The task is to decompose this gap and understand its drivers.

Maintenance costs were compiled from diverse sources and cover various circumstances, so there is a danger that shifts in sample composition could confound real changes, a problem addressed by regression analysis in section III. One issue is sufficiently important to merit prior discussion. Maintenance varied in composition and thus in cost. I identified five packages. Being fed provided a baseline (package 1). Board went further involving daily meals in a domestic setting and some rudimentary housing (package 2).³⁹ Lodging improved on board by including access to a specific and usually private space implying greater comfort (package 3).⁴⁰ Washing added the laundering of clothing and bedding and other household services (package 4). Package 5 involved eclectic components.⁴¹ Although packages of each type are observed in almost all centuries, food alone packages decline from more than 70 per cent of the total in the 1200s and 1300s, to 17 per

³⁸ Increasing, though not without interruption, from about 200% of the cost of the basket in 1270 to 300% in 1870.

³⁹ Board was the most ambiguous category. Language helped as ‘board’, and similarly ‘tabling’, signified a series of meals rather than just food. Duration of provision was also a signal. If given for days or weeks together it was likely that shelter was included, though of a rudimentary kind to distinguish it from ‘lodging’. Construction workers, for example, were often boarded on site in workshops or buildings that had already been roofed, while agricultural workers were routinely housed in outbuildings, see *Airs*, ‘Social and economic aspects’, p. 25; *Denby*, ‘Gardeners’ lives’.

⁴⁰ A rare price assessment for Woodstock, Oxford, in 1604 lists a ‘fetherbedd for j ma j night & so to departe’ at a maximum price of 1d, but goes on to suggest economies of scale in the reduced cost if the bed was inhabited for longer, and the premia attached to privacy and comfort by the much lower costs if two men were to share or if a ‘fflockbedd’ was substituted for the feathers. *McArthur*, ‘Prices at Woodstock’, p. 715.

⁴¹ It was not possible to identify maintenance packages according to whether they contained clothing. Though apparel featured in maintenance contracts, its supply to workers was extemporized, of variable quality, and often unspecified. Where valued separately, clothing was excluded from costings, but it is likely that in some cases its provision went unrecognized. Since clothing, or at least clothing’s raw materials, is included in the respectability basket, its costs should exceed those of maintenance.

cent and 3 per cent in the 1700s and 1800s, respectively, whereas packages that include food, board, lodging, and washing, non-existent in 1200s and 1300s, increased to 27 per cent and 42 per cent of all packages in the final two centuries, respectively. While regression can control for these changes, they are independently meaningful since they reflect the increasing sophistication of consumption described by historians and supported by detail from the maintenance accounts surveyed below.

II | CHANGES IN RESPECTABLE CONSUMPTION AND THE EVIDENCE FROM MAINTENANCE STANDARDS

The many authors interested in the foods, goods, and houses of the past, consistent with the broader debate on ‘medieval’ to ‘modern’, have pushed the origins of consumer society further back. They see the Black Death as a major divide and argue that although the consumer revolution of 1600–1750 was distinctive in terms of the desire for tempting newly available commodities, the previous centuries were not marked by timeless frugality. Changes in eating are particularly important for studies of respectability because food, as [Paul Lloyd](#) has shown, was not only a priority, but conveyed identity and social distance.⁴² Thus, when the demographic catastrophe of 1348 gave medieval workers greater bargaining power, with few alternative options, diet was the first beneficiary. According to the poet William Langland, post-Black Death labourers ‘...deign no longer to dine on the stale vegetables of yesterday; penny ale will not suit them, nor bacon, but they must have fresh meat or fish, fried or baked, and that hot-and hotter for the chill of their maw’.⁴³ From a slower start, other components of living standards such as accommodation, cleanliness, and comfort also evolved, though not without setbacks.⁴⁴ Thus, changes in expenditure patterns slowed if not halted in the Elizabethan era and while the consumer revolution represented another break, access to the new goods, associated with the expansion of trade and development of manufacturing, was not uniform.⁴⁵

Historians have also noticed the labour needed to transform goods into livings. According to [John Crowley](#), late medieval man’s physical requirements for comfort were ‘clean clothes, a well-appointed bed, a fire, and someone to serve him these amenities’.⁴⁶ The need for service was not fixed but evolved along with consumption baskets. The improved diets of the period following the Black Death needed more time to prepare, cook, and serve. As Langland noted, self-assertive peasants demanded hot meals. As changes in other aspects of living followed, they too required more complementary domestic labour. French’s recent claim that widened material lives necessitated new forms of housekeeping to manage enlarged dwellings and their expanded contents can be generalized from her late medieval London households to early modern respectable equivalents. These needs then intensified with the accumulation of durables in the consumer revolution.⁴⁷ While the transition from simple to more extensive maintenance packages, noted earlier, echoes these findings, this section dives more deeply into the qualitative evidence.

⁴² [Lloyd](#), *Food and identity*.

⁴³ Cited in [Landsberger](#) and [Landsberger](#), ‘English Peasants’ Revolt’, p. 114.

⁴⁴ [Alcock](#), *People at home*; [French](#), *Household goods*.

⁴⁵ [Horrell](#), ‘Household consumption’.

⁴⁶ [Crowley](#), *Invention of comfort*, p. 18, my emphasis.

⁴⁷ [French](#), *Household goods*; [Briggs](#), ‘Manorial court roll inventories’.



Beginning with food: medieval maintenance standards and their gradations before the Black Death are illustrated by the perquisites assured the Bishop of Chichester's chamberlain at Battle Abbey. He was to have a furred robe and a decent room along with a daily allowance of 2 loaves of 'Simnel bread', 1.5 gallons of convent ale, and 1.5 cooked dishes from the kitchen. The accompanying servant's living is more representative of the classes studied here. He was to have two loaves of black bread, a gallon of ale, and from the kitchen the same as the Abbey's servants, while he presumably dossed down in some communal dormitory or on his master's floor: a telling comparison with the chamberlain's situation.⁴⁸ How did these standards evolve?

The dietary step-change associated with the plague is difficult to detect in grain liveries and early maintenance contracts which rarely itemized support in detail.⁴⁹ However, medieval agreements described respectable diets as needing to be 'reasonable' or 'as is proper' while by the early modern period they were to be 'good', 'wholesome', 'competent', and 'sufficient'.⁵⁰ Corrodies were sometimes more specific. On the eve of the Black Death, John de Trentam, the elderly servant of Vale Royal Abbey, was promised in 'retirement' one loaf of convent bread and one loaf of black bread along with a flagon of ale and a dish from the kitchen. By 1365, the corrody of John Machon and his wife Edith specified 'a white loaf' daily along with a gallon of ale and 'a pittance' of food and drink.⁵¹ The diets of almshouse residents also appear upgraded.⁵²

When workers' food was itemized, it too suggests increasing variety, and more meat. Thus, in 1482, the churchwardens of St Mary at Hill fed their carpenters and plumbers by (a carefully costed) 'sholdere and a brist of moton' for their 'none mete' and a rib of beef 'on the morwe' as well as bread and ale.⁵³ A few years later, the Guild of the Holy Cross provided its carpenters with bread, beer, herrings, fish, onions and garlic, mustard, salt, 'otemde', fruit, white peas, and 'symnel', and later meat, butter, cheese, and eggs, all costed in the accounts.⁵⁴

The century that followed the Golden Age represented consolidation rather than continued improvement. Though wheaten bread and more meat and ale became established in respectable working people's diets, poor harvests and high prices saw retrenchment towards cheaper foodstuffs.⁵⁵ A new phase of improvement began c. 1600 with even 'fillers of dung', low down on the respectability scale, on the Manor of Lord Bergaveny, expecting 'breade and cheese & drinke good and sufficient in quantity for a labouringe man all the day, and at the end of the day his dyner at the costs and charges of the Lord or his farmer', while reapers had '... two drinkings in the forenoone of breade and cheese, and a dyner at no one econsistinge of rost meat & other good victuals meete for men & women in harvest time; and two drynkings in the afternoone, one in the middle of their afternoones worke; & the other at the end of the days worke, And drinke always during their worke as neede shall require'.⁵⁶ At Hayton reapers were also promised '... at

⁴⁸ Searle and Ross, *Accounts*, p. 16.

⁴⁹ Smith, 'Manorial court', p. 49.

⁵⁰ Homans, *English villagers*, pp. 144–6; West Sussex Record Office, SAS-BA/97; East Sussex Record Office, SAS/G28/15; Sheffield City Archives, CM/393.

⁵¹ British History Online, *Brownbill, Ledger Book*; British History Online, *Doubleday and Page*, eds., *History of the County of Hampshire*, although these differences might reflect status.

⁵² Nicholls, 'Comfortable lodging'; Nicholls, *Almshouses*.

⁵³ Cited in Salzman, *Building*, p. 80.

⁵⁴ Shakespeare's Birthplace Trust, BRT/1/3/40.

⁵⁵ Larson, *Rethinking the Great Transition*.

⁵⁶ Godfrey, *Book of John Rowe*, p. 28.



the end of the daye ... apple pyes or such like repast'.⁵⁷ In 1666, John Aldrich spent 2s 6d on beer for his sheepshearers and 5d on 'milk and eggs for their puddings'.⁵⁸ By the eighteenth century, the social commentators Ellis, Batchelor, and Young agree that the food provided to agricultural workers included more meat and dairy and was less reliant on the older standbys of bread and herrings. Ellis claimed that his servants enjoyed pickled pork and apple dumplings and at harvest 'Puddings, Pyes, Pasties, Cheese, Milk, with other Culinary Preparations, and with well brew'd and strong and small Beer and Ale ...'.⁵⁹

Harvest was the gastronomic highpoint for agricultural workers, but other meals also indicate rising standards. In 1746, Susan Browning, apprenticed aged 15 to a local yeoman, ran away after a beating only to return, a homecoming made memorable according to her settlement examination, because she was in time for the Christmas dinner of 'a shoulder of mutton, a plum pudding and some white cabbage and turnips'.⁶⁰ Such indulgences were not daily experiences, but occasional exposure generated ambition. In the 1770s, John Harrower, journeying from Lerwick to London, was short of money and usually ate economically, but splurged on 'good suppers', punch, porter, and roast beef, and on one memorable occasion, eight oysters, with bread and two pints of ale.⁶¹ By 1872, lodger Bill William regularly enjoyed bloaters, beef, pig meat, apple pies, and sago puddings, cooked and served by his redoubtable landlady.⁶² Respectable diets had moved beyond the Allen basket.

Food was also eaten differently. Maintenance records show how 'board' went beyond the delivery of 'meat and drink' to the provision of meals in a domestic setting. Women were paid not just for providing food but 'tabling' their boarders, while corrodial dishes were sent from the kitchen, or seats provided at collective counters. Additional services were incorporated, as when John de Trentam's serving was to be 'reasonably cut up'.⁶³ In these ways, boarding increased household labour and put pressure on costs, though for most of the aspirant respectable, such refinements were marginal in comparison to the value of the food itself.

Change was slow but by the seventeenth century, meals involved greater refinement, and by the nineteenth, boarders claiming respectability, such as Bill William, expected cooked meals served regularly in a tidy setting.⁶⁴ John Birch Thomas remembered two 'gentlemen' lodging in his London household as '... always in a hurry for their breakfast'.⁶⁵ A rare valuation of the requisite labour occurs in the diary of grocer George Heywood, who initially shared accommodation with his business partner above their shop and employed a woman to serve meals and clean, but on George's marriage in 1815, his partner expected to 'save this'. He was willing to pay 'for the meat' but nothing else now Mrs. Heywood was in residence! George cited the market equivalent of his wife's time and pressed his case for reimbursement.⁶⁶

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 222.

⁵⁸ Hickey, *John Aldrich*.

⁵⁹ Cited in Muldrew, *Food*, pp. 41, 43.

⁶⁰ Pilbeam and Nelson, *Poor law records*, p. 226.

⁶¹ Harrower, 'Diary'. I am grateful to Amy Erickson for this reference.

⁶² Anstis and Anstis, eds., *Diary*.

⁶³ British History Online, *Brownbill*, *Ledger book*.

⁶⁴ Anstis and Anstis, eds., *Diary*.

⁶⁵ Thomas, *Shop boy*, p.1.

⁶⁶ Barker and Hughes, *Business and family*, pp. 252–3.



What then about lodging? Thirteenth-century maintenance contracts suggest that even the respectable had limited expectations about space, privacy, and warmth: a mere room at the end of the house was a standard stipulation.⁶⁷ Remember, while the Bishop of Chichester's Chamberlain enjoyed a decent room, no provision was made for his servant.⁶⁸ Nor did the Black Death appear to inaugurate dramatic change. For example, while the late medieval covenant between John and Jenet Thornton and shoe-maker John Clay carefully specified that their meat and drink was to be 'sufficiently competently and onestly holsum for monis body', lodging involved only 'howse rowme and rent, fre fire and flet'.⁶⁹ Expectations rose slowly, limited to those at the top of the respectability tree early on but eventually trickling down. William Leygh, a 'gentleman', specified two chambers, one to contain a chimney, in his 1560 retirement contract, but 72 years later, Anne Donne, the widow of a mere yeoman, stipulated a 'convenient' and chimneyed chamber. Others, too, sought control of their own heating and some separate space.⁷⁰ Although, non-conformist minister and farmer [Peter Walkden](#) in early 1700s Lancashire was content to share a bed when travelling with a fellow preacher and routinely 'lay down' with a child when his wife was absent, he retreated to his 'lodging room' (sic) to read and write.⁷¹ By the nineteenth century, private domestic space had become a hallmark of respectability, creating contentious boundaries when employees lived in.⁷²

While the late medieval Thornton-Clay agreement was modest in its housing provision, it introduced a new obligation: the old couple were to enjoy 'weshing & wringing clenly and wele'.⁷³ Laundry had entered the respectability lexicon, and, consistent with historians' emphasis on the moral as well as hygienic and aesthetic connotations of clean clothing, became increasingly necessary for a decent lifestyle. By the early 1700s, [Peter Walkden](#), surely not exceptional, recorded changing his linen with great regularity, and only decades later, indentures show that even humble apprentices were thought to warrant 'washing'.⁷⁴ Given the labour involved, this was often grudging. George Heywood resisted washing for a prospective junior assistant, and Mary Hardy said firmly that her lodgers, the Ansell family, had 'to find their own linen & washing...'.⁷⁵

Modern eyes might overlook other emerging components of decent living. Chimneys, bedding, access to a privy, and use of a horse or gelding were all stipulated as inputs into respectability as it extended to include the utility of a fixed fireplace, comfort while sleeping, a modicum of privacy in personal hygiene, and a means of transport, the latter essential for attendance at church and thus a key attribute of the upright. Therefore, William Leygh, in the vanguard given his status, specified access to 'a house of office' and 'free keeping' of two geldings in his 1560 retirement contract.⁷⁶

⁶⁷ Homans, *English villagers*, pp. 144–5.

⁶⁸ See above, p. 17.

⁶⁹ [Lincolnshire Archive](#), HOTCHKIN 2/1/18.

⁷⁰ [Derbyshire Record Office](#), D779B/T 140; [Shropshire Record Office](#), XMO/445/14/252; and 1045/164; see also [Sheffield City Archives](#), CM/393; [Cornwall Record Office](#), RP/2/3; [Shropshire Record Office](#), 1045/164.

⁷¹ [Walkden, Diary](#).

⁷² [Barker and Hamlett](#), 'Living above the shop'; [Barker, Family](#); [Barker and Hughes](#), *Business and family*.

⁷³ See fn. 70 above. [Lincolnshire Archive](#), HOTCHKIN 2/1/18.

⁷⁴ [Walkden, Diary](#); [Lane, Apprenticeship](#); [Marshall](#), 'Apprenticeship'.

⁷⁵ [Barker and Hughes](#), *Business and family*; [Bird, Diary of Mary Hardy](#), p. 162.

⁷⁶ [Derbyshire Record Office](#), D779B/T 140.



Additional attributes of respectability all required additional household services. Clothing and bedding had to be washed, wrung and sometimes starched, fireplaces cleared, fires reset, and domestic spaces swept and cleaned. Medieval maintenance often relied on local women seizing an opportunity to earn money,⁷⁷ but provision became increasingly professionalized. Packages at the apex of respectability specified access to an individual servant, while those lower down the social scale stipulated particular services. Thus, Jane Ormandy, who worked for many years for Clement Taylor of Finishwaite, agreed to a remuneration package that included ‘her Dame to mend her’.⁷⁸

By the eighteenth century, the novel commodities of the Industrious Revolution appear. In his will of 1723, yeoman Robert Pake instructed his son to maintain his mother ‘in cloathes, meate, drink, washeing and lodging wit tobaccke fit for a person of her degree’.⁷⁹ Walkden recorded regular enjoyment of his pipe and purchases of tobacco progressed down the social scale witness its 1757 inclusion in Kendal Poor Law’s provision for ‘lunatick’ John Bland.⁸⁰ Medical services and contemporary pharmaceuticals also come into view, so by 1780 widow Elizabeth Smerdon added ‘physick and attendance on her’ to the maintenance package agreed with her son.⁸¹ Responsibilities could even extend beyond life, as when Ann Whibby Price required her umbrella-maker brother to provide, in due course, a ‘Christianlike’ burial.⁸²

So, as predicted by the cultural historians, respectable maintenance involved increases in the quantity and quality of food and the pursuit of greater comfort, as well as decreasing tolerance for dirt, giving substance to the shift from less to more extensive support packages. Moreover, and again consistent with broader findings, these changes appear to have taken place in two phases separated by a downturn, with one flourishing coinciding with the Golden Age, and second beginning in the early 1600s. Different changes occurred at different times. All had implications for complementary inputs of domestic labour. Medieval man prioritized improvements in food consumption, content as was John Kebbe in his 1399 property surrender, with a ‘small space for a bed ...’, but John Harrower, in the 1770s, consumed more domestic service when he enjoyed his memorable oyster dinner, and then paid 3d for a bed warmed with a warming pan ‘... being the first time I ever seed it done’.⁸³ Some 50 years later, George Heywood fled inadequately serviced lodgings when mice ran over his food. Co-resident vermin were not part of his early nineteenth-century aspirant identity: ‘It was not riches I wanted it was to live comfortable and respeccable (sic)’.⁸⁴ Is this quest for respectability evident in the quantitative evidence of the contents and costs of maintenance, and if so, what are its implications?

⁷⁷ Knoop and Jones, *Medieval mason*.

⁷⁸ Martin, *Account book*, p. 79; see also the stipulation of ‘mending’ as a component of maintenance in eighteenth-century apprenticeship contracts, Marshall, ‘Apprenticeship’, chart 4.1.

⁷⁹ Cornwall Record Office, CA/B47/55.

⁸⁰ Walkden, *Diary*; Cumbria Archive Centre, WQ/SR/264/19-20.

⁸¹ Devon Archives, 4930B/L/22.

⁸² Hereford Record Office, CM20/25-27.

⁸³ Alcock and Miles, *Medieval peasant house*, p.; Harrower, *Diary*.

⁸⁴ Barker and Hughes, *Business*, p. 242.



III | MODELLING MAINTENANCE

I compiled maintenance costs from various sources covering diverse circumstances, thus non-random clustering of certain kinds of observations could confound real changes and descriptive sample statistics be misleading.⁸⁵ To mitigate this danger, I estimated maintenance costs by regression to control for skill, source type, duration, region, package, and whether the maintenance might cover the upkeep of women and children as well as men, to isolate changes over time⁸⁶, as in equation (1).

$$\ln COM_{it} = \alpha + \mathbf{X}\rho + \beta_1 \ln COL_t + \beta_2 \ln WW_T + \beta_3 D_i + \beta_4 Year_t + \varepsilon_i \quad (1)$$

I selected women and children for separate analysis.⁸⁷ I constructed skill categories to capture within sample variation in socio-economic status: skilled, indicated by a managerial position, or designation as a master craftsman (e.g. master mason); semiskilled, indicated by a trade or craft (e.g. mason) or secondary managerial position (e.g. foreman); and unskilled, indicated by designation as an apprentice, servant, or labourer. While not randomly distributed, the relative proportions of each skill group probably reflect the constitution of the working population, with the semiskilled group representing around half of all observations across all time periods, the unskilled about 30 per cent, and the skilled 20 per cent. I included source type as a control in case shifts in the evidence base distort trends. As economies of scale made longer-term upkeep cheaper, as indicated by the Woodstock price assessment (fn. 40), I included duration as a control.⁸⁸ Daily support dominated until the 1800s when weekly support, hitherto second in importance, became most common. Annual maintenance faded in importance over time while irregular periods of maintenance represented 10–20 per cent of observations in all centuries. These sample proportions likely reflect developments within the population. I included regional and package dummies as standards and prices varied geographically, and costs varied with the coverage of maintenance. The regression results are presented in column 1 of table 2.

Reassuringly, the coefficients on the controls for source type are small and often insignificant,⁸⁹ indicating that changes in the source base are unlikely to be confused with real change, and in the case of maintenance contracts, corrodies, and pensions, fending off charges of circularity (see above). Other variables have signs that make sense. For example, the variation by skill suggests

⁸⁵ In essence, regression identifies the effect of changes in one variable as if other variables are held constant, thus enabling the analysis of heterogeneous historical data, see fn. 16.

⁸⁶ $\ln COM_{it}$ is the natural logarithm of the cost of boarding/lodging individual i in year t ; $\mathbf{X}\rho$ is vector of dummy variables for each of the three categories of skill, each of the nine geographical regions, each of the nine source types, each of the four duration periods, and each of the five different packages. $\ln COL_t$ is the natural logarithm of the cost of the respectability basket in year t ; and $\ln WW_T$ is the natural logarithm of women's wages in the decade T , which includes year t ; D_i is a dummy variable for whether the observation relates to a group of workers that might include women and children; and $Year_t$ is the year of the observation. In some estimations, the region dummy is interacted with time to capture changes in regional standards and prices, and the package dummy is interacted with women's wages to capture their different domestic labour intensities.

⁸⁷ Men dominate the sample, providing 3755 cases and a further 119 involving the maintenance of a group which included men out of the total number of 4627 (overall 83.7 per cent). The substantially lower maintenance costs of women and children are a topic for future analysis.

⁸⁸ For a discussion of economies of scale in household consumption, see Folbre et al., 'Equivalence scales'.

⁸⁹ The exceptions are direct payments to providers, grain liveries, and board wages, which are significantly correlated with costs, as anticipated above.



TABLE 2 OLS regression analysis of maintenance costs.

	1.	2.	3.	4.
Constant	-5.985*** (0.173)	-0.880*** (0.255)	0.848*** (0.038)	-2.015*** (0.286)
Skill (REF skilled)				
Semiskilled	-0.181*** (0.017)	-0.187*** (0.015)	-0.198*** (0.015)	-0.221*** (0.016)
Unskilled	-0.417*** (0.021)	-0.399*** (0.019)	-0.393*** (0.020)	-0.427*** (0.020)
Type of source (REF accounts: direct estimates)				
Accounts: differences between with and without board and lodging	0.009 (0.025)	-0.088*** (0.023)	-0.0117*** (0.023)	-0.047* (0.020)
Accounts: direct payments to providers	0.068** (0.024)	0.088*** (0.023)	0.106*** (0.023)	0.104*** (0.023)
Estimates by social commentators	0.080 (0.054)	-0.045 (0.047)	-0.020 (0.047)	0.042 (0.051)
Grain liveries	-0.306*** (0.070)	-0.406*** (0.065)	-0.542*** (0.065)	-0.537*** (0.069)
Billeting	-0.031 (0.045)	-0.168*** (0.042)	-0.215*** (0.042)	-0.173*** (0.044)
Maintenance contracts, corrodies, and pensions	-0.005 (0.040)	-0.006 (0.035)	0.019 (0.037)	0.030 (0.038)
Wage assessments	0.073** (0.028)	-0.088*** (0.027)	-0.065* (0.028)	0.030 (0.028)
Board wages	0.119** (0.038)	0.053 (0.033)	0.031 (0.034)	0.019 (0.037)
Duration (REF daily)				
Weekly	0.114*** (0.026)	0.022 (0.023)	-0.009 (0.023)	0.032 (0.024)
Annual	-0.208*** (0.037)	-0.235*** (0.034)	-0.239*** (0.035)	-0.205*** (0.036)
Other	-0.021 (0.024)	-0.072*** (0.021)	-0.087*** (0.021)	-0.065** (0.022)
Region (REF London and Southeast)				
Scotland	3.652*** (0.941)	-0.146*** (0.037)	-0.195*** (0.038)	2.209* (1.029)
Wales	3.540*** (0.974)	-0.113 (0.130)	-0.205 (0.124)	2.769*** (0.881)
East Anglia	-0.543* (0.277)	-0.035* (0.018)	-0.040* (0.018)	-0.845*** (0.257)
Midlands	1.534*** (0.348)	-0.136*** (0.021)	-0.135*** (0.022)	1.579*** (0.341)
North-east	0.994** (0.371)	-0.138*** (0.023)	-0.114*** (0.024)	1.056** (0.371)

(Continues)

**TABLE 2** (Continued)

	1.	2.	3.	4.
North-west	-0.100 (0.492)	-0.231*** (0.029)	-0.268*** (0.029)	-0.120 (0.467)
Other	0.310 (0.472)	0.084 (0.047)	-0.124** (0.047)	0.656 (0.436)
South-west	0.776*** (0.243)	-0.080*** (0.019)	-0.097*** (0.019)	0.309 (0.231)
Scotland × year	-0.002*** (0.001)			-0.001* (0.001)
Wales × year	-0.002*** (0.001)			-0.002** (0.001)
East Anglia × year	0.001* (0.000)			0.001*** (0.000)
Midlands × year	-0.001*** (0.000)			-0.001*** (0.000)
North-east × year	-0.001** (0.000)			-0.001** (0.000)
North-west × year	0.000 (0.000)			0.000 (0.000)
Other × year	0.000 (0.000)			0.000 (0.000)
Southwest × year	-0.001*** (0.000)			0.000 (0.000)
Package (REF Package 1: food only)				
Package 2: food and board	-0.141*** (0.031)	-0.032 (0.028)	-0.024 (0.087)	-0.034 (0.085)
Package 3: food, board, and lodging	0.050* (0.025)	0.147*** (0.022)	0.125*** (0.025)	0.036 (0.027)
Package 4: food, board, lodging, and washing	0.130*** (0.034)	0.225*** (0.030)	0.154*** (0.048)	0.006 (0.052)
Package 5: sundry components	-0.118** (0.053)	-0.111* (0.053)	-0.291 (0.156)	-0.352* (0.153)
Mixed group	-0.005 (0.047)	-0.099* (0.043)	-0.140*** (0.043)	-0.110* (0.044)
Year	0.005*** (.000)	0.001*** (0.000)		0.002*** (0.000)
Ln cost of respectability basket		0.392*** (0.032)	0.407*** (0.033)	
Ln women's daily wage [mean of casual and annual (day basis)]		0.264*** (0.045)	0.394*** (0.035)	0.465*** (0.041)
Ln women's casual wage × package 2			0.040 (0.054)	-0.019 (0.055)
Ln women's annual (day basis) wage × package 3			0.083*** (0.019)	0.113*** (0.020)

(Continues)

TABLE 2 (Continued)

	1.	2.	3.	4.
Ln women's annual wage (day basis) × package 4			0.107*** (0.026)	0.170*** (0.027)
Ln women's casual wage × package 5			0.179 (0.111)	0.225* (0.110)
R^2 (adj)	0.751	0.777	0.776	0.776
S.E.E	0.3858	0.3652	0.3662	0.3657
F	335.244***	466.743***	420.108***	337.368***
N	3874	3874	3874	3874

Notes: Dependent variable is $\ln COM_{it}$. Region is interacted with time to capture changes in regional standards and prices and package is interacted with women's wages to capture their different domestic labour intensities. Robust standard errors in parentheses. *** $p \leq 0.001$, ** $p \leq 0.01$, * $p \leq 0.05$.

Sources: See text.

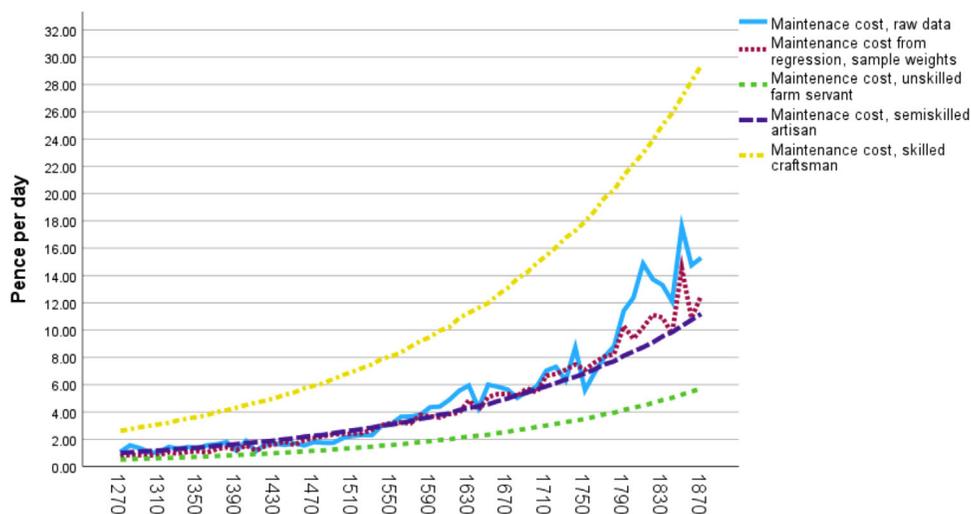


FIGURE 2 Maintenance costs, raw data, constructed from regression 1, and for stylized individuals. Sources: Maintenance costs: see text. [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

a plausible status hierarchy and by duration evidence for economies of scale. Region too is significant. It cost more to board and lodge in the south-east than elsewhere, and most regions fell further behind over time.⁹⁰ While packages of support that included accommodation and washing cost more than food alone, board cost less, reflecting the meanness of any housing provided with board, and the association of meals in the field with physically demanding work, universally thought to merit dietary generosity.⁹¹ Loosely defined packages also cost less than food alone.

Figure 2 shows the values predicted from equation (1) (reconverted from logarithms) alongside the raw data. The prediction is based on the sample weights, but as these appeared to approximate trends in the population, it provides a guide to average experience. I used the coefficients to

⁹⁰ Wales is insufficiently documented in the sample.

⁹¹ Dils, *Reading St Laurence churchwardens' accounts*.

**TABLE 3** Maintenance for stylized individuals.

	Constant	Skill	Source type	Duration	Region	Package	Year
Unskilled farm servant	-5.985	Unskilled -0.417	Accounts	Annual -0.208	South-west + 0.776 - 0.001 × year	Food, board, and lodging +0.050	0.005 × year
Semiskilled artisan	-5.985	Semiskilled -0.181	Wage assessments +0.073	Daily	North-east + 0.994 - 0.001 × year	Food, board, and lodging +0.050	0.005 × year
Skilled master craftsman	-5.985	Skilled	Paid direct to provider +0.068	Weekly +0.114	Midlands + 1.534 - 0.001 × year	Food, board, lodging, and washing +0.130	0.005 × year

generate maintenance profiles for stylized individuals as defined in table 3 and shown in figure 2. These profiles represent the range of historical experience, with the semiskilled artisan standing roughly in the middle.

As the costs are in nominal values, the first task is to allow for changes in the price level. The maintenance profiles were deflated using Horrell's chained Laspeyres index (see above), which uses periodic changes in the basket of goods consumed by historical families to compute the cost-of-living. In principle, deflation by this measure will incorporate price change due to shifts in consumption standards and be the appropriate companion to the nominal price of maintenance, although it will not account for changes in the prices of commodities included in maintenance but not in family expenditure, and the focus on final goods in Horrell's consumption baskets will not capture changes in the cost of the domestic labour required to transform commodities into livings. Real maintenance can then best be thought of as an amalgam of the quantity, quality, and novelty of the goods comprising respectability, along with the requisite labour requirements for their use. The trends shown in figure 3 clearly show the two-phase sequence suggested by the qualitative evidence.

However, in Horrell's analysis, maintenance cost and cost-of-living are both indexed to base year 1750 (= 100), so the quantities are comparable to that received in 1750 (= 1). Interest here is in a comparison with the respectability basket, also a Laspeyres price index, so in what follows it is used to deflate monetary maintenance.⁹²

The monetary costs of maintenance as predicted from the regression and for the stylized individuals divided by the same-year cost of the respectability basket are shown in figure 4. The overall pattern is practically indistinguishable from that shown in figure 3, but this procedure identifies the levels of consumption involved in decent maintenance relative to those implied in the respectability basket.

Respectable maintenance for most middling-sort people usually cost between 1.5 and 3 times the respectability basket, though it reached 4 times that level in the late medieval period, and was always much higher for skilled men, and lower for unskilled apprentices and servants.⁹³ Since

⁹² Horrell argues that using the refined deflator offers little difference to deflation using the Allen respectability basket, at least until the mid-eighteenth century because of the pervasive effect of agricultural conditions on the prices of the goods consumed, Horrell, 'Household consumption'.

⁹³ Maintenance costs also varied systematically by region.

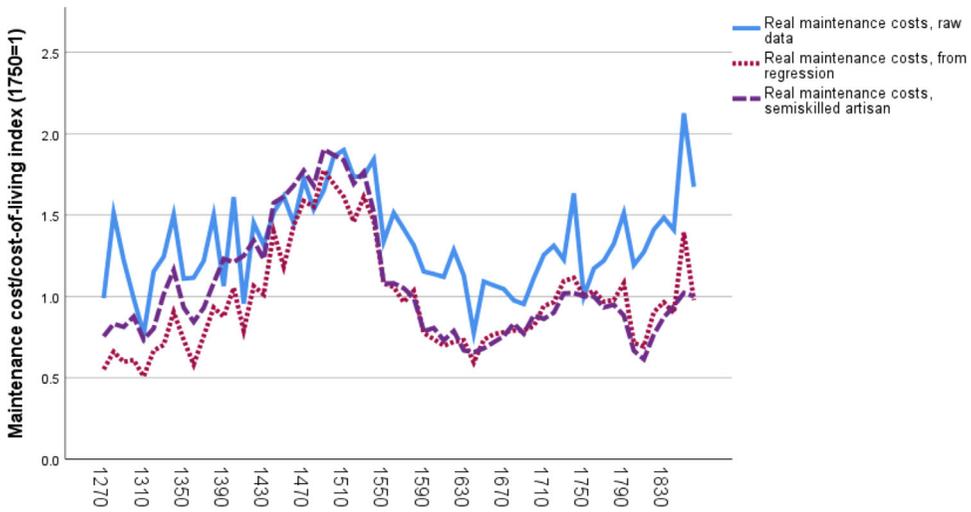


FIGURE 3 Real maintenances, 1270–1860. *Sources:* Maintenance costs: see text; cost-of-living index, Horrell, ‘Household consumption’. [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

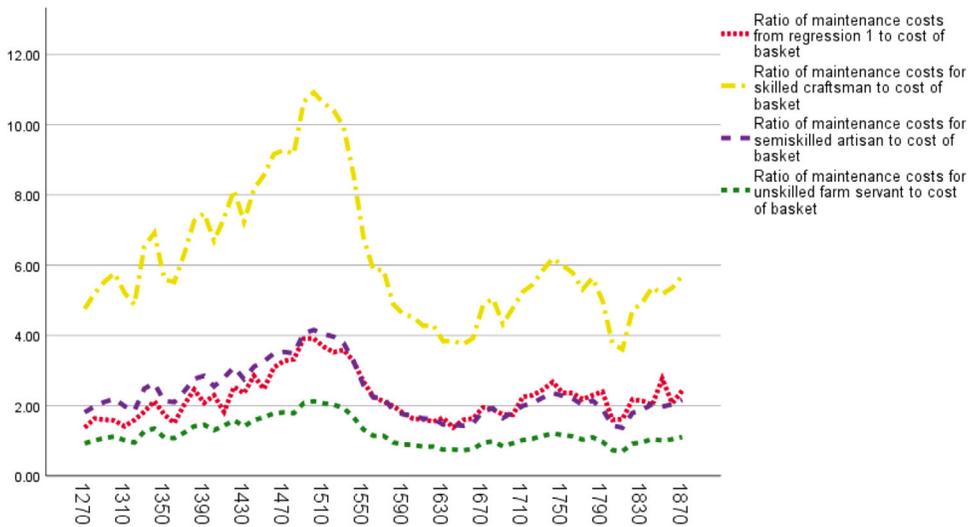


FIGURE 4 Consumption in select maintenance provisions relative to Allen respectability basket, 1270–1860. *Sources:* Maintenance costs: see text; Allen respectability basket: <https://www.nuffield.ox.ac.uk/people/sites/allen-research-pages/>. [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

the basket costs capture changes in the quantities and prices of the goods included, divergence indicates that more or better quality goods and services featured in maintenance. The Black Death clearly marked a break with earlier standards. Levels fell back in the 1500s as the Tudor inflation eroded real values. Note that this nuances the apparent steady betterment in livings implied by the monetary costs of maintenance (figure 1). By allowing for price changes, the evolution of maintenance costs is reconciled with mainstream accounts of a profound decline in real consumption from the middle of the Tudor period. However, decent maintenance even at its trough cost half



again as much as the basket, implying a substantial difference in real consumption. Moreover, this cutback did not last until the nineteenth century as some commentators suggest. Instead, the reopening of the gap *c.* 1630 confirms the standard timing of the consumer revolution and the increasing pursuit of comfort. The difficult decades at the end of the eighteenth century saw standards trimmed back towards those implied in the basket, but there was a resurgence in real consumption thereafter.

These changes reflect the consumption patterns described by historians and found in the qualitative evidence on maintenance, as well as observed in Horrell's reconstruction of family budgets.⁹⁴ In her data, 1299–1475 showed a shift away from the dominance of basics such as bread and beans, with consumers able to enrich their diets with meat, dairy, and beer and increase expenditure on clothing. But the post-Black Death Golden Age was tarnished in the following century, with the Elizabethan era providing little respite, although the increased share of fuel and soap in expenditures might mark the beginning of greater cleanliness and comfort. This becomes increasingly evident into the eighteenth century, when Horrell's representative household increased purchases of protein, but also paid higher rents, possibly reflecting better quality housing, and spent a larger proportion of their money on household goods. The later eighteenth century again saw a tightening of household belts. Industrialization did not alleviate the pressures around food consumption, although new goods such as tea, sugar, tobacco, and potatoes entered, but it did witness noticeable increases in expenditure on domestic comfort, particularly on household goods, furniture, and some services. The wedge that Horrell sees these changes driving between actual consumption and the contents of the respectability basket is detectable in the nineteenth-century drift of maintenance away from the cost of the Allen basket in figure 4.

However, the trends in maintenance charges also reflect the changing consumption of domestic service, missing from the Allen basket and Horrell's account of expenditure and thus from the cost-of-living indexes based on these baskets. While medieval lifestyles involved limited quantities of domestic labour, its price was increasing because of the growth in women's wages, augmenting maintenance costs, and inflating the estimates of real consumption. Retrenchment *c.* 1450–1600 reflects stagnation in both the quantities and prices of the domestic labour needed to deliver contemporary lifestyles, while renewed divergence post-1600 relates to the greater labour-intensity of more sophisticated livings made even more costly by the growth of women's wages.⁹⁵ To investigate further, the costs of the basket and of household services (in natural logarithms) were included in the model, with the results reported in columns 2–4 of table 2.⁹⁶ In regression 3, year is excluded because of collinearity with the basket costs, but regressions 2 and 4 report models that include time trends and women's wages.

The costs of maintenance are positively and significantly affected by the price of the unchanging basket but do not track this closely.⁹⁷ Women's wages were also relevant, confirming the need to consider the costs of domestic service in any accounting. Moreover, women's wages did not

⁹⁴ Horrell, 'Household consumption', fig. 1, tab. 1.

⁹⁵ See, Humphries and Weisdorf, 'Wages', pp. 424–5.

⁹⁶ The inclusion of these time-varying variables reduces the time trend though it remains positive and significant. The collinearity of the basket costs and women's wages with time required that the regional interactions be excluded.

⁹⁷ The coefficient suggests that increases in the cost of the basket increase the overall cost of maintenance less than proportionately, and vice versa, so if the basket is thought of as representing basic expenditure then inflation in its costs leaves it constituting a larger share of the total, thus echoing the standard finding on the effects of inflation on share of food in total expenditure, see Horrell, 'Household consumption', p. 1044.



impact uniformly across the packages which varied in their domestic labour intensity. More time was required to furnish board than just food, and more again to service lodgers and to provide laundry services, thus the costs of the packages likely varied according to the wages of the female providers. This hypothesis is confirmed in columns 3 and 4 of table 2, where the package dummies are interacted with women's wages. A rise in women's wages had a greater proportional effect on maintenance costs if lodging and then washing were included compared with less extensive packages.⁹⁸ As material consumption expanded and became more diverse, it required the simultaneous consumption of more domestic labour, rendering cost-of-living indexes that omit its consideration less accurate over time.

The last step in establishing historical trends requires modelling transitions from one package of support to another, particularly from the simple provision of food and board to the inclusion of lodging, washing and other household services. Such changes were shown to punctuate the chronology of respectable living in section II and need to be explicitly included in a stylized costing.

I used the coefficients of the regression in column 4 to construct the costs of the representative semiskilled artisan as he progressed from one package to another. First, a baseline was predicted for his maintenance analogous to that in table 3. Then, holding constant skill and region, a historically informed profile involving varying packages of support was constructed. Before 1350 respectable status was supported by a grain livery, from 1350 to 1499 required the inclusion of board provided on an annual basis and recorded in accounts, from 1500 to 1549 remained consistent with package 2 but now provided on a daily basis, from 1550 to 1619 involved lodging, from 1620 to 1719 was paid directly, and finally, after 1720 included washing. The equations used to predict the costs of maintenance through these transitions are presented in table 4 and the ratio of the estimates relative to the cost of the respectability basket alongside those of the artisan on a fixed package (column 1 of table 4) and as predicted from equation (1) are shown in figure 5.

The time path of the consumption implied by the maintenance costs of the northern artisan constructed from regression 4 relative to the costs of the basket shows the same two phase evolution as did that constructed from regression 1, shown in figure 3 and above, though the boom following the Black Death never reaches the same heights as estimated earlier. Allowing for transition from one package of support to another lends further support. The gap between the costs of respectable maintenance and the respectability basket is initially narrower, as before 1350 the food package is provided by a grain livery, similar in real terms to the respectability basket. However, consumption then grew to more than twice that assumed in the basket during the Golden Age, illustrating the artisan's enjoyment of more and better food even though restricted to annual board. The late medieval era and Tudor years saw real consumption decline though still valued at half as much again as that of the basket. After the civil war, there was a new era of betterment, with real consumption climbing to more than 2.5 times that given in the basket by the mid-eighteenth century because of the progressive adoption of the new goods of the Industrious Revolution and the services needed to turn them into lifestyles. While interrupted by turmoil associated with the French wars, progress resumed thereafter.

Of course, this trajectory depends on the dating of the transitions from limited maintenance packages to those that included lodging and then washing. However, the chronology is supported by the distribution of the different packages over time within the sample, the qualitative findings

⁹⁸ Increases in women's wages did not impact differently on the costs of board compared with the provision of food alone, testifying to their similar domestic labour intensities.

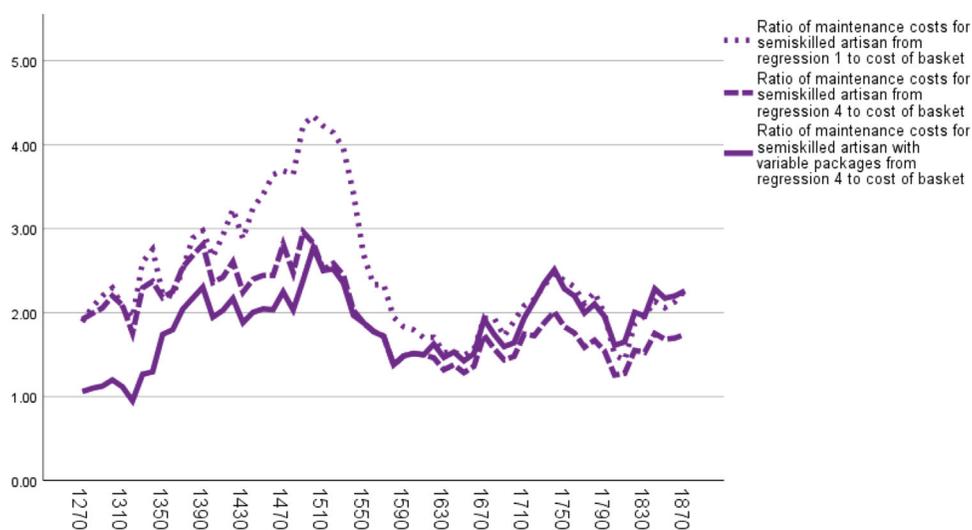


FIGURE 5 Consumption in maintenance provisions for a semiskilled northern artisan relative to Allen Respectability basket, 1270–1860. *Sources:* Maintenance costs: see text; Allen respectability basket: <https://www.nuffield.ox.ac.uk/people/sites/allen-research-pages/>. [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

TABLE 5 Maintenance for a stylized unskilled farm servant.

Constant	Skill	Source type	Duration	Region	Women's wages	Package	Year
-2.015	Unskilled:	Accounts:	Annual:	North-east:	$0.465 \times \text{Ln}$	Food, board, and	$\text{Year} \times 0.002$
-0.427	REF	REF	-0.205	1.056-	women's	lodging:	
				$0.001 \times$	wage	$0.113 \times \text{Ln}$ women's	
				year		annual wage	

from the sources, and the multi-sourced accounts of consumption historians. Importantly, the increasing gap post-1820 resembles the late appearing 'wedge' that Horrell identified between her chained Laspeyres index and the Allen basket and which she ascribed to the growing sophistication of consumption.⁹⁹ The consumption level of a worker such as the semiskilled artisan evolved along something like these lines, identifying periods when respectable standards approximated those of the basket and periods when they increasingly diverged.

To capture the range of experience, I reconstructed respectable maintenance for the least promising figure, the unskilled farm servant or apprentice, from the regression coefficients in table 2 column 4, as in table 5, alongside the construction from regression 1, both relative to the cost of the basket and as shown in figure 6.

The maintenance of the unskilled farm servant represents a lower bound, following the same two-phase chronology but lagging that of the artisan while still costing more than the basket in almost all time periods. This difference is narrowed if the servant was limited to food and board, explicitly withholding the additional commodities and services contained in more elaborate and realistic packages of support. In this case, post-1550, the real consumption approached

⁹⁹ Horrell, 'Household consumption', p. 1045.

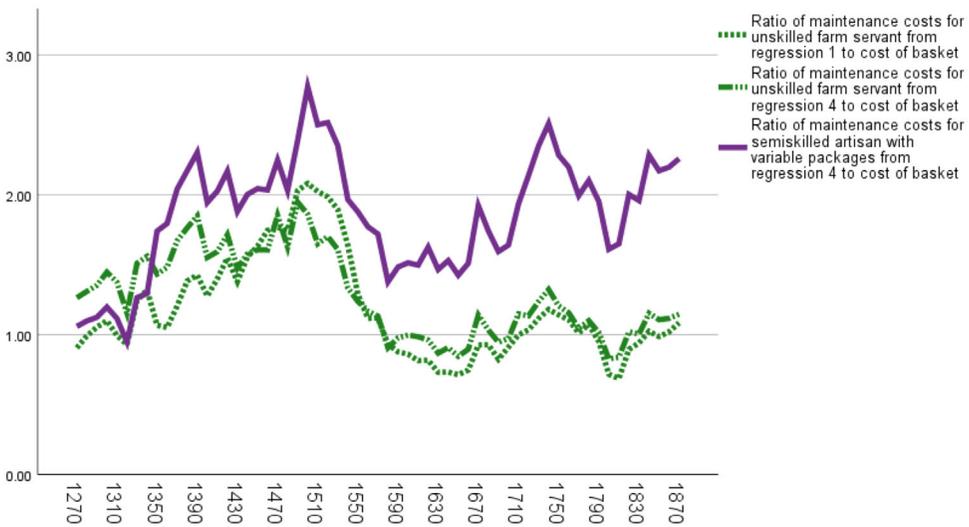


FIGURE 6 Consumption in maintenance provisions for an unskilled farm servant and semiskilled artisan relative to Allen Respectability basket, 1270–1860. *Sources:* Maintenance costs: see text; Allen respectability basket: <https://www.nuffield.ox.ac.uk/people/sites/allen-research-pages/>. [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

that of the basket. However, as emphasized in the qualitative evidence, such a narrow living was no longer considered appropriate for those with claims to respectability by c. 1650, when even apprentices and farm servants enjoyed better standards of food and accommodation. By the eighteenth century, the farm servant limited to package 2 was clutching at the margin of respectability.

Workers who were not supported by employers, the state, or kin but had to fend for themselves, also had to obtain a respectable maintenance if they sought to be regarded as ‘good, proper or correct’. They had to purchase the status goods and services in the market, or in the case of domestic labour, support other family members while they provided the work unpaid. Living up to the standards of respectability when providing for themselves put pressure on men’s wages, as measured by maintenance ratios, that is, male wages divided by maintenance costs. Exploring the extent, chronology, and implications of this pressure is the final topic.

IV | MAINTENANCE RATIOS AND WELFARE RATIOS

When providing for themselves, respectable workers also sought to enjoy the range of goods and services they bargained for when supported by others. Thus, the costs of respectable maintenance shadow the general costs of respectable living. These also evolved to include different goods as diets, fashions, and aspirations changed, and had to cover the labour required to transform these collections of commodities into lifestyles. Domestic labour might be purchased from commercial providers or supplied unpaid by family members, in which case they needed familial support. A respectable domestic standard involved hours of work in the home only possible if husbands and fathers earned enough to support wageless (but not workless) women and girls: respectability involved ‘breadwinning’. Since a respectable lifestyle consistently cost more than the fixed basket,

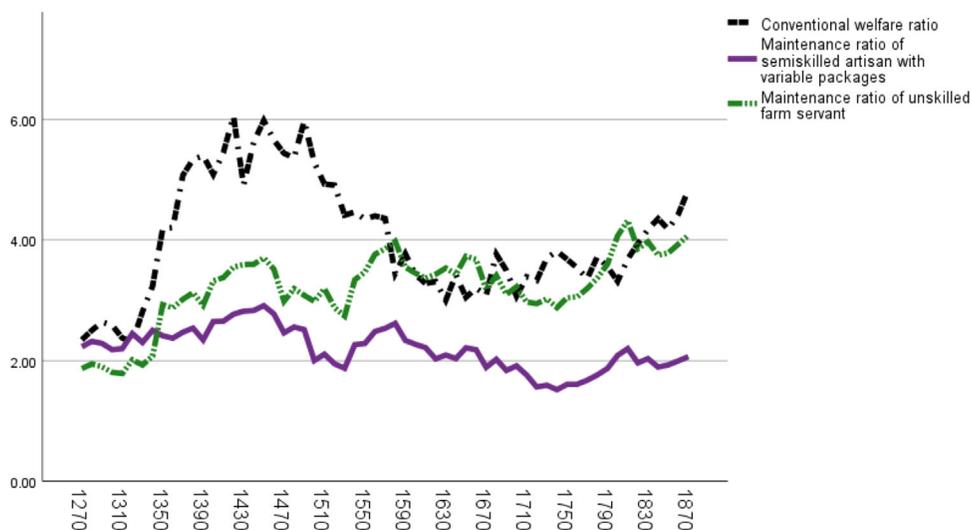


FIGURE 7 Welfare ratios and maintenance ratios for stylized individuals, 1270–1870. *Sources:* Maintenance costs from regression 4: see text; Allen respectability basket: <https://www.nuffield.ox.ac.uk/people/sites/allen-research-pages/>; Men's wages: Clark, 'Long march'. [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

it represented a greater proportion of men's wages, evident in comparisons of conventional welfare ratios with maintenance ratios, the number or fractions of respectable maintenance packages that the same wages could purchase, as in figure 7.

Consider first the artisan: while the Black Death raised the standard of respectability, its costs were less elastic than male wages, creating an (albeit muted) Golden Age. This situation did not last and the extent to which unskilled male wages could support two respectability packages, with their expanded contents and supporting household services, became uncertain by the late 1400s. Nor was there any sustained recovery thereafter as aspirations did more than keep pace with wages. Of course, the wages of unskilled rural workers commonly used to index welfare were lower than those of a semiskilled artisan. Therefore, turning to the unskilled farm servant, their respectability package was sufficiently cheap, at least after the Golden Age, such that unskilled rural wages could purchase 2–3 such livings, and even 4 by the nineteenth century. However, maintenance of this kind was associated with adolescents working as life-cycle servants or apprentices. Older men subsisting at such levels fell short of being considered 'good, proper or correct' especially if needing to support families. Thus, they either accepted a reduced status, living as one of Gregory King's miserable 'cottagers and paupers', or they struggled to work harder and longer to buy a living more akin to adult respectability.

Post-1650, even men on better wages had to follow suit as evidenced by the artisan's situation. Wages were barely able to buy two of the livings required to ensure their status as a respectable semiskilled worker, let alone the three that historians estimate were needed for family support, including the upkeep of members providing household services. The pursuit of respectability and the burden of breadwinning both disciplined and motivated workers, particularly the skilled artisans and the middling sort, people who in aspiring to a better life and seeking community regard had the potential to drive growth. Moreover, as Malthus noted, the quest to better their condition provided English men and women with a motive to delay marriage and limit fertility within marriage, thus contributing to reduced demographic pressures and enabling the transition



from Malthusian stagnation to modern economic growth. These links from aspiration to industriousness and prudence mean that the study goes beyond offering an alternative lens on living standards to provide fresh insight into the wellsprings of long-run development.

V | CONCLUSION

The paper makes contributions in different areas of economic history. First, it provides pioneer estimates of the long-run costs of supplying appropriate food, board, lodging, and washing to persons of good standing, showing how these varied by socio-economic status, region, and other factors. These charges are taken to indicate the changing costs of a socially and culturally defined respectable lifestyle. Second, by taking a deep dive into the evidence on how people actually lived, the approach raises healthy questions about what should be included in baskets of commodities whose prices are intended to measure the cost of living and prompts useful debate about how evolving requirements might be integrated into perspectives on living standards. The approach is also unique in both emphasizing and attempting to impute value to the domestic labour needed to transform commodities into the consumables and comforts that constitute livings.

Since many of the maintenance estimates value the in-kind components of employment remuneration, a third contribution is to efforts to monetize annual and other longer term labour earnings in which the contribution of perquisites loomed large. These empirically grounded estimates are preferable to the costs of stylized commodity baskets used hitherto to proxy for the value of in-kinds.

A fourth contribution is that by recognizing that consumption was dynamic, the approach circumvents the reliance on a fixed basket of commodities and enables the separation of rising prices and rising standards. Deflating maintenance costs by the costs of the respectability basket shows real consumption as evolving over two phases, the first following the Black Death and the second coinciding with the consumer revolution. In between there was retrenchment, even decline, but the approach nuances the conventional account as Golden Age gains were muted and betterment in the second phase, although interrupted by the French wars, never fell back to the standard implied in the basket, and post-1820 moved ever further away.

A fifth contribution acknowledges that since respectable maintenance always cost more than the basket, the pressures on men to finance such decent livings for themselves, let alone for their families, could be severe. The chronology of real consumption identifies eras when new or improved goods and services edged into respectable livings and became reflected in costs, pressing on men's wages and shading achievements implied in conventional welfare ratios, as analogous maintenance ratios confirm.

The sixth contribution is that this alternative metric helps explain long-run economic change. The quest for respectability, as Malthus claimed, created a motive for matrimonial prudence. White-collar worker Bill William happily engaged in sexual frolics with several girls and some heavy petting with his longtime girlfriend, but he constantly postponed marriage, unsure that he could finance a family and continue to enjoy the same 'conveniences and comforts' of his situation in lodgings.¹⁰⁰ The stress on wages contributed to industriousness as well, though this took a different turn to that anticipated by de Vries. It was not consumerist women but upwardly mobile, able, and ambitious men, such as George Heywood and John Harrower, who were motivated by the pursuit of respectable standards to work harder, as well as the inhabitants of Mokyř's

¹⁰⁰ Anstis and Anstis, eds., *Diary*.

upper tail of human capital, who were spurred to enterprise and innovation.¹⁰¹ On the contrary, for women respectability involved increasing demands of a traditional kind, as more domestic labour, whether waged or unwaged, was required to turn enlarged and more sophisticated bundles of commodities into decent upkeep. For women to be considered ‘good, proper and correct’ they had to provide meals in a neat domestic setting, keep their homes and families clean, and launder clothes and bedding. Legions of unpaid household workers then became a charge on those family members who earned a wage, as the standards associated with respectability cemented separate spheres and required ‘breadwinners’, coercing women and men into stereotypes and policing performances within these gender roles, which raises a final more speculative point, for by not merely noticing the important role of domestic labour in delivering living standards but also through the regression analysis measuring its time and opportunity cost, the paper lays the foundations for the imputation of the value of unpaid domestic labour from market equivalents. This would provide new insight into women’s contribution to economic growth and wellbeing, a vital task for the future.

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DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data underlying this research can be accessed at: <https://zenodo.org/records/11126812>

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¹⁰¹ Mokyr, ‘Holy land’.



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