

Women Business Owners in the Nineteenth Century

There were thousands of women business owners in the nineteenth century. They owned service, retail, manufacturing and agricultural businesses. In some cases they were sole traders, often working from home. In a great many cases they employed one or two hands, or an apprentice or two. Some employed 20, 50 and more. Here are some businesses owned by women, gleaned from the 1881 census:

- Hotels, inns, taverns, public houses
- Farms
- Breweries
- Retail shops including confectioners, drapers, tobacconists, booksellers
- Private libraries
- Merchants of coal, corn, potatoes
- Theatres (as lessee or proprietor)
- Manufacturers

Women were manufacturers of clothing, carpets, headwear, footwear, stays, slate, sausages, agricultural machinery, accessories, bricks, pills, harnesses, saddles, trimmings, mineral water, hammers, bridle bits, brushes, paper, lace, cork, cattle feed, tiles, lace, padlocks, embrocating, cigars, baby linen, parasols, silk, lint, tambours, tarpaulin, sweets, cakes, chairs, augurs, soda water, dials, tobacco, gimp, clogs, regalia, scales, oilcloth, pipes, sauce, biscuits, ginger beer, lozenges, cotton wool, rope, hair, iron goods (including fire-irons, nails and files), toys, twine, woolens, spoons and forks, electro-plate items, awl blades, axle trees, hatbands, musical instruments, gold watch cases, glass, spectacles, cotton, tobacco, music stools, herb beer, candles, machinery (including beer engines), watches, silver ware, jewelry, and thimbles

Self-Employed Artisans

- Dressmaker, milliner, staymaker, bird stuffer (i.e. taxidermists)

Self-Employed in the Arts and Literature

- Editor, journalist, photographer, colourist, artist, artists' model, sculptress, street musician, singer, dancer, minstrel

Self-Employed in Education

- 'Professor' of dancing, music, languages. Owners of creches, private mixed sex elementary schools, young ladies' seminaries, ladies' college

Self-Employed in Health Services

- Physician, monthly nurse, wet nurse, sick nurse, 'doctress' or 'doctress' (i.e. herbalist, ointment maker), rubber (i.e. masseur)
- Annie Kingsford, married, 33, "Physician M.D. Paris" 11 Chapel Street, Mayfair.
- Jane Stanley, married, 47, "horse and cattle doctress" Silver Street, Thorne, Yorks.

19. Miss Julia Allen, 30, was a vest maker employing 84 hands. 96 Wrentham Street, Birmingham.
20. Elizabeth Abbott, 41, was a box maker employing six girls and one boy at 25 Norfolk Road Finsbury.
21. Widow Susan Ackerman of 31 King's Road, Reading, was a 'wireworker master employing three men and one boy'.
22. Sarah Adams, 42, a widow with six children, was described as a 'fancy stationer mistress employing four men, six boys, one girl' at 22 St Owen Street, Hereford.
23. May Ade, 69, of 3 Couldrey's Cottages, Plumpton, Sussex, was a cowkeeper employing one man.
24. Mary A. Aland, 44, 18 Sutton Street, Holborn, London, a widow with ten children (ages 21 to 3) was a metal gilder employing three men and one woman.
25. Margaret Allen, 56, of Barrons Yard, Keswick, was a widow with one daughter. She was a 'coach maker employing nine men and three boys'.
26. Sarah Anderson, 58, a widow, was a coach builder employing seven men and five boys at 37 St Peter's Hill, Grantham.
27. Eliza Andrew, 51, was an engineer and machine maker employing 57 men and two boys at Belmont Terrace, Stockport.
28. Mrs Annie Allen, 41, of 104 High Street, Barnstaple, was a dressmaker employing seven women and six apprentices.
29. Emily Allen, a widow of 57, was a belt maker employing one girl, at 4 Jewin Crescent, Cripplegate, London.
30. Susanna Allen, 70, owned a blacksmith's business in which she employed two men at Dorchester.
31. Lettitia Allwright, 57, was a poulterer employing five men and two boys at 54 Rathbone Place, Marylebone.
32. Mary Amos was a draper employing three assistants at 4 Cannon St, Dover.
33. Jane Archer of Bondend, Gloucester, was a 70-year-old widow who was a miller, farmer and baker employing four men and two boys.
34. Emily Archer, 67, of 106 Dorset Road Lambeth was a brewer employing 13 men and one boy.
35. Eliza Ashby, 49, a widow, was a fire iron manufacturer employing three men and one boy, at 77 Malinder Street, Sheffield.
36. Elizabeth Ashby, 47, widow, brewer and maltster employing twelve men, Eling Brewery House, Rumbridge Street, Eling, Hampshire.
37. Ann Ashworth, 54, a widow, was a tailor employing seven men and two women, at 39 & 41 Market Street, Haslingden.
38. Mary Aslin was a jewel case manufacturer employing three boys and four girls, at 35 Clerkenwell Close, Holborn.
39. Nancy Astin, 41, was a hairdresser and perfumier employing three men and one boy at 3 & 5 Fleet Street, Burnley.
40. Ann Astley, 67, was a 'saddler and harness maker mistress' employing two men at The Green Saddler's Shop, Hungerford.

64. Mary Benham, 54, was a newspaper proprietor, publisher, printer and bookbinder. Crouch St, Colchester.
65. Mary Bentley, 60, laundress employing 20 women at 9 Howell Street, Paddington.
66. Mary Berry, 61, was a manufacturer and farmer of 1,319 acres employing 279 persons plus 40 half-timers. Holme House, Colne.
67. Martha Baron, 50, was a clogmaker mistress employing nine men, at 165 Manchester Road, Wigan.
68. Elizabeth Biggin, 52, was a ferrule manufacturer employing ten men, two boys and one girl. 7 Glen Road, Ecclesall
69. Naomi Bird, 32, was a straw dyer employing three men and one boy, at Leighton Buzzard.
70. Sarah Brook, 58, was a woollen manufacturer employing 37 men, and farmer of 23 acres, Butterworth Hill, Huddersfield,
71. Mary Ann Brown, 49, was a dairywoman employing ten men at 1 Kentish Town Road, London.
72. Jane Brownet, 63, was a silversmith employing six men, lived at 1 Richmond Bldgs, Westminster.
73. Betsy Browning, 60, was a cooper employing six men, living at 5 St James's Sq, Wolverhampton.
74. Miss Harriet Burch, 36, packing case manufacturer employing five men and one boy; living 24 Glovers Road, Aston.
75. Lois Simpson, 55, was a publisher employing four men, 54 Penton Place, Southwark.
76. Mary Ann Day, 20, was a brothel keeper employing two prostitutes at 4 St Thomas Street, Doncaster.
77. Maria Boosey, 75, owner a nursery and market garden employing eight men and two boys at Rochford Rd Nurseries, Rayleigh, Essex.
78. Elizabeth Bracewell, 53, was a 'cotton manufacturer employing 330 workpeople'. She lived at 8 Keighley Road, Colne.
79. Amelia Brennan, 53, was a lucifer match manufacturer 11 Delauney's Yard, Crumpsall.
80. Mary A. Bligh, 47, was a publisher employing five men and two boys at 5 Hardres Street, Ramsgate.
81. Miss Harriett J. Boulds, 64, was a draper employing 28 assistants, eight milliners, five dressmakers, six apprentices and three porters at 1 to 4 Market Street, Stoke Damerall, Devonport.
82. Harriet James Boulds was the daughter of a shipwright in the Royal Dockyard. In 1838, at the age of 22, she opened a small haberdashery shop in Pond Lane, in what had become the Town of Devonport. She 'is reputed to have had boundless energy and regarded with unconcern the tedious coach journeys to London when buying had to be done. She was one of the first to get the coach to Exeter and change on to the railway for the remainder of the journey to London. In 1860 she took on her brother, Edwin as a junior partner. He had previously served his apprenticeship with her and worked for other firms. The business became H. J. & E. A. Boulds. They opened other