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## SHEPSTERS, HUCKSTERS AND OTHER BUSINESSWOMEN: FEMALE INVOLVEMENT IN CANTERBURY'S FIFTEENTH- CENTURY ECONOMY

SHEILA SWEETINBURGH

The role of women in the workplace and thus their contribution to the national economy has remained a topical issue into the twenty-first century. It continues to fuel debates amongst economists and politicians especially regarding what are seen as inequalities in career progression, maternity leave, flexible working and the 'hidden economy' of households, child rearing, care of others and related activities. Historians, too, have explored many aspects of these topics, the growth in such scholarship in part a response to the rise and greater awareness of feminists from the 1970s onwards, who investigated what they viewed as an increasing marginalisation of women as workers from early modern times and into the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.<sup>1</sup> Although challenged by some, among the ideas put forward to explain such a phenomenon was the concept of separate spheres; put simply men (husbands) laboured in the workplace or workshop, women (wives) in the domestic household.<sup>2</sup> The logical extension of this was the idea that historians should explore an earlier past to see if previous societies had functioned through more integrated households where domestic and commercial environments were under a single roof or space.<sup>3</sup> One consequence of this exploration was the hunt for a 'golden age' (or even in the plural), where female 'commercial' workers were more plentiful, were seen as having wider opportunities regarding the range of occupations practised, which in turn might have had the potential to raise their status within the workplace, and in the economy and society more generally.<sup>4</sup>

These investigations into the working lives of women brought to the fore associated aspects of female experience over time such as the implications of the patriarchal nature of many societies, and in particular those of Western Europe; the significance of life-cycle stage and the effect this had on a woman's legal status, including her ability to function as an independent trader; and the role of marriage and household formation more broadly.<sup>5</sup> In turn, such studies have addressed, at least to a degree, demographic matters including sex ratios and patterns of mortality and fertility, both geographically and chronologically, and how these affected and were affected by economic and cultural factors, themselves responding to and responsible for political, religious and social norms. This complex interweaving is important to appreciate even if it is exceedingly difficult to untangle because it demonstrates the problems of trying to identify trends over time regarding women and work.<sup>6</sup> Consequently it may partly explain the frequency with which

studies either offer *longue durée* surveys covering several centuries or use a snapshot approach, focusing on a particular year or short period. Another explanation for these alternative methods is the type, format and relative paucity of primary sources because it has long been appreciated that much of the work undertaken by women in the past remains hidden from view, being subsumed under that recorded for the male household head, most frequently the husband.

Yet, even where it is possible to locate women as workers in the workplace, there remains the matter of whether this commercial activity would necessarily have been construed by the women themselves as desirable, or even a matter of choice. Today, in what is seen as a more enlightened society, there are women who for a variety of reasons do not wish to engage directly in the world of work as it is still generally characterised. Such choices are as important to recognise now as they should be for women in earlier centuries, which means a greater percentage of women as workers does not necessarily equate either to a 'golden age' or to a time when working commercially was seen as an 'opportunity'. Instead, for large numbers of women work of this kind may have represented necessity not choice, a case of survival not betterment, and one that some would have preferred not to have undertaken if their circumstances had allowed.

The issues and problems outlined thus far cannot be addressed in a short article, but do need remembering when assessing women as commercial workers.<sup>7</sup> However, one area where this article will try to break new ground, albeit only for the city of Canterbury, is a more systematic study over time. By concentrating on the fifteenth century and using a particular set of sources that provide annual data (see details below), as well as supplementary material from other records, it is possible to move beyond the snapshot and the use of examples drawn from a long time period and wide geographical range. Nonetheless, it is worth noting at this point that all the primary sources used here present major problems regarding analysis. It is frequently believed, for example, that surnames had become fixed by this period but there is still some flexibility here. In addition, forenames are not always given because in some cases women are only designated in terms of a male relative, almost always their husband. In other instances there is nothing to indicate the woman's life-cycle status. Consequently, even though considerable care has been taken regarding the identification of the women in the records, especially where this involves record linkage, it is possible there remains an element of misidentification. Yet, notwithstanding such issues, this article offers some new insights regarding women and work in late medieval society.

For a number of social historians, the early fifteenth century, like the previous half century, is broadly seen as a time when the balance between wage levels and labour supply witnessed a reversal compared to the pre-Black Death period, as did the relationship between the demand for and supply of land. Among the consequences were far higher levels of mobility for men and women, both within the countryside and from rural to urban society, as both sexes sought to take advantage of these increased opportunities. Even though the national authorities sought to halt, indeed even reverse these relations to pre-plague levels, this appears to have had relatively little effect beyond certain localities.<sup>8</sup> Towns thus drew in migrants, especially from predominantly arable-farming areas, the profile of these migrants being

artisans and labourers, ranging from the unskilled though to the skilled, who were from a broad age range, the semi-skilled and unskilled most frequently in their late teens or early twenties. Women, as well as men, were part of this exodus from the countryside and Jeremy Goldberg has suggested that social developments such as life-cycle servanthood had an impact on the sex ratio, especially in towns. The higher proportion of women to men in these urban communities had a consequent effect on age at marriage, which meant women married later than previously, often leaving service to marry in their mid-twenties, while a significant number of women never married at all.<sup>9</sup>

The early fifteenth century also seemingly led to a growth in the variety of occupations undertaken by women due to the reduction in male workers resulting from continuing outbreaks of plague, albeit women remained predominantly in the areas of victualling, textiles and services. Access to capital, nevertheless, remained a serious and limiting factor for many businesswomen. However, some civic authorities, notably in London but probably also elsewhere, did seek to encourage widows to maintain their late husbands' businesses as they sought continuity within the urban economy. This latter factor may have grown in importance as a result of the long mid-century depression that can be seen to have extended from the 1440s to the 1470s. In addition, and even though the experiences of particular towns differed between the late fourteenth and the late fifteenth century, the continuing nationally-significant outbreaks of plague (about one per decade), agrarian, trade and other difficulties, seem to have adversely affected a considerable number of English towns which meant that local economies remained sluggish into the last decades of the fifteenth century, as seen, for example, in depressed rental incomes and empty and sometimes dilapidated properties.<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, the apparent increase or revival of craft guilds during the same period, some of which included protectionist strategies among their regulations, suggests a time of economic difficulty or at best readjustment.

Canterbury was not immune from such national factors. Moreover, as elsewhere local and regional concerns were also significant, including apparent difficulties in the city's textile manufacturing sector and that the 1470 Jubilee coincided with deep-seated political difficulties. In addition, Canterbury's relations with the Yorkist kings were sometimes strained, which was also true for Kent more broadly.<sup>11</sup> Thus against this context of often challenging circumstances this article will explore the incidence and activities of independent businesswomen, their longevity as workers and to a degree how they were viewed by the civic authorities at different times across the fifteenth century.

Studies of the role of women as workers in the medieval economy have normally employed sources such as ecclesiastical court records, institutional rentals, wills, poll tax records or lay subsidies, inquests and other court documents, including the assize of bread and ale. However, this study draws primarily on local licencing records which list the annual fees (fines) paid by applicants allowing them to reside and trade independently within Canterbury's liberty, and were recorded annually by the city chamberlains for about two hundred years beginning in 1392/3.<sup>12</sup> The 'intranses', as they were called, who were below the status of freemen, are listed on a ward basis.<sup>13</sup> Against the name of each intrans the level of fine imposed is almost

always specified, also frequently the person's occupation and occasionally place of origin. Furthermore, intrants had to re-apply annually, even though occasionally certain individuals seem to have been in arrears for several years. Whether the majority of these intrants were recent immigrants rather than non-free natives is difficult to access but remains a possibility, however as a group they were sufficiently prosperous to have craft tools, and had enough financial and personal credit to allow them to set up in business.

In terms of an investigation covering the fifteenth century, the nature of this source has considerable merits because it offers a means to examine the incidence of independent female workers over time, the occupations they followed and how this may relate to the broader trends of intrants' involvement in the economic life of fifteenth-century Canterbury. Moreover, as well as this quantitative approach to the sources, it is feasible to trace the commercial activities of particular individuals over a number of years, to follow the activities of married couples, and to track how certain wives coped with the death of their husband.

The various data on individuals in the licensing records are usefully augmented by the deployment of other types of civic record, in particular debt cases from the city's petty sessions because such cases are viewed by historians as offering evidence of commercial transactions.<sup>14</sup> Even though the level of detail on a case basis is often severely limited, the court records do offer a further pool of about 350 named women of whom some can be connected through record linkage to freemen either by birth or marriage.<sup>15</sup> Testamentary records provide an additional source, not only those from the ecclesiastical courts but also details recorded by the city's common clerk relating to inheritance issues involving daughters, wives and widows of freemen in the transference of property within Canterbury's liberty.<sup>16</sup>

#### *Male Intrants in Canterbury's fifteenth-century economy*

The average number of male intrants licensed each year during the fifteenth century was about 70, while that of females was fewer than five. To provide a context for the far smaller involvement by female intrants in the city's economy, this short section considers the place of their male counterparts during this period.<sup>17</sup> By the very nature of their often precarious existence, the number of men listed annually varied considerably, albeit a fortunate few were able to make the transition to freeman status. Looking at the 5-year rolling average of the numbers of male intrants (**Fig. 1**) during the fifteenth century, in broad terms, the early decades saw a rise in numbers but this growth was over by 1420. Even though there were short-lived increases in the 1440s and 1490s, the century witnessed a broad downward trend. As already noted, this long decline was not uniform because it was due to a variety of factors, and, although national issues were important, these figures also indicate the significance of local and regional issues. The 1440s witnessed a partial recovery at a time when national factors, such as high taxation and depressed cloth exports, were becoming increasingly challenging as the country slipped into a long and extremely deep depression that prevailed for several decades. Notwithstanding these national problems, the slight rise in the figures for much of the 1460s, and to a lesser extent the 1470s, is perhaps more understandable because political conditions

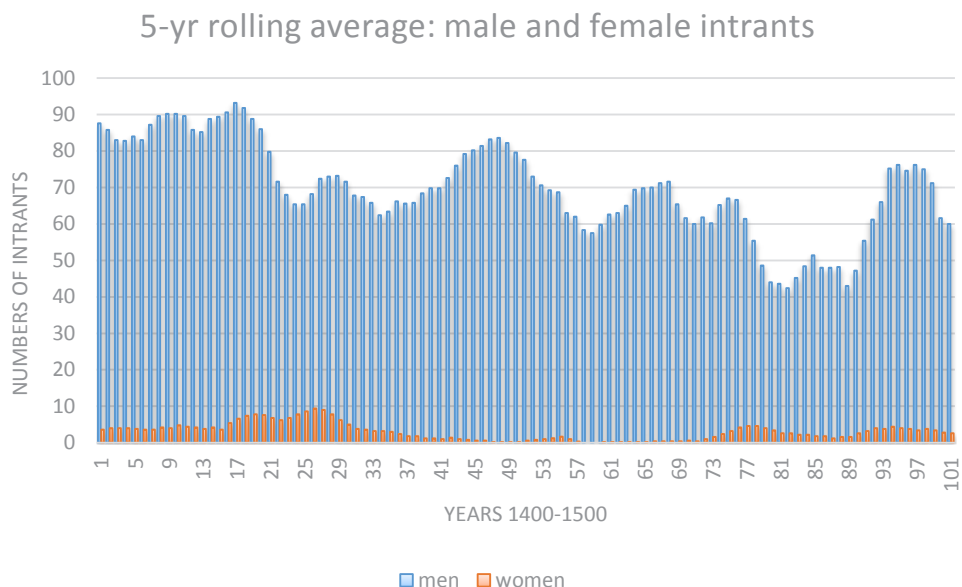


Fig. 1 Five-year rolling average of male and female intrants 1400-1500.

did become more stable during the two reigns of Edward IV. Yet the presumably anticipated improvement as a consequence of the 1470 Jubilee would have been muted by the political problems of the Readeption and subsequent Fauconberg Rising, as well as a serious outbreak of plague.<sup>18</sup> The civic authorities were able to petition the king successfully to recover Canterbury's privileged status by the end of 1471 but that in itself was apparently not sufficient to draw in large numbers of intrants. The figures suggest that the 1480s presented considerable difficulties, yet the subsequent decade saw a marked, but short-lived, recovery (the downward trend returned in the subsequent decade). However other sources for the 1490s: the figures for stallholders in the fish and flesh markets, witnessed a decline that suggests that the economy was not buoyant generally.<sup>19</sup> This widespread situation is substantiated by Andrew Butcher's findings because Christ Church Priory, the premier landlord in the city, was experiencing problems finding sufficient tenants for its property during the later fifteenth century, as well as having to spend an ever greater percentage of its urban rental income on building maintenance.<sup>20</sup>

Looking more specifically at the occupational profiles of the male intrants (see **Figs 2-3**; occupational information for 1400-9 is too limited to be useful) and comparing the early and late fifteenth-century decades, apart from clothing, metalworking and the provision of hospitality, the other figures indicate a reduction in the numbers involved, especially the workshop industries. Another feature is the considerable variation among the different sectors of the economy over the century, and, where the figures are sufficient to indicate a trend, it may be possible to explore briefly this complex picture.

Firstly, examining those trades involving the supply of goods and services; as

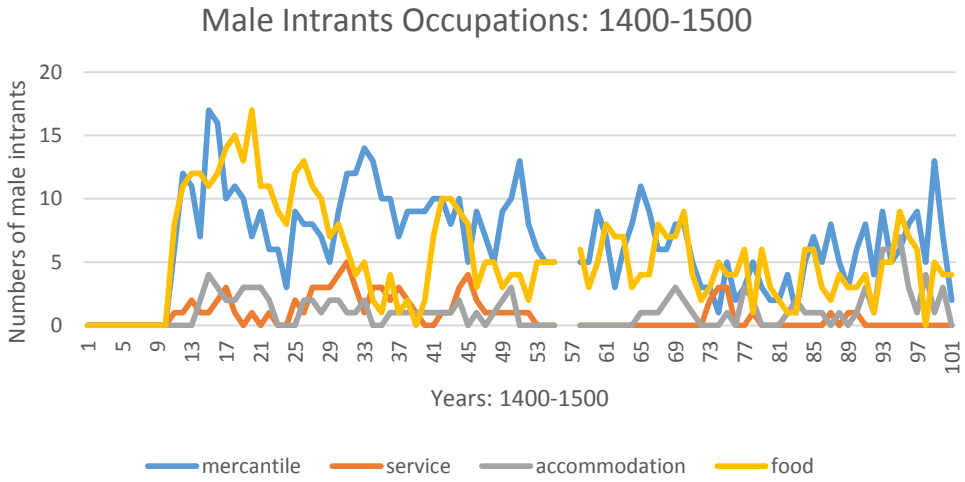


Fig. 2 Male Intrans Occupations in the Service, Hospitality and Trade sectors; numbers 1400-1500.

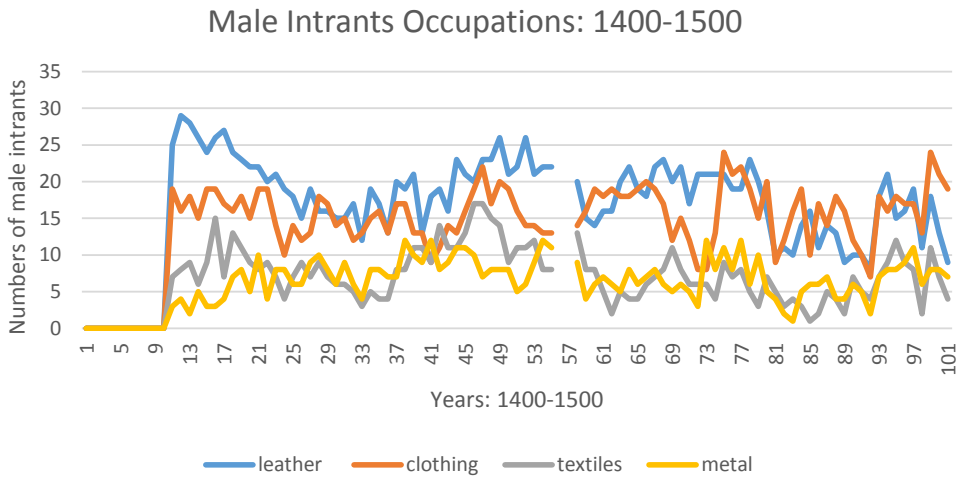


Fig. 3 Male Intrans Industrial-type Occupations; numbers 1400-1500.

a distribution centre for the rich mixed farming region of east Kent, Canterbury also needed to supply a transient as well as a resident population. Consequently the decline in the number of male intrants involved in victualling, most marked in the 1430s and thereafter remaining low albeit punctuated by increases in the early 1440s, late 1460s and mid-1490s, is perhaps indicative of economic difficulties, as well as stagnant or falling population levels.<sup>21</sup> In addition the contrasting levels of success of the two Jubilees of 1420 and 1470, only the former apparently resulted in a sizeable increase in the numbers trading in food and drink, may partly reflect



this general trend, as well as the far more favourable political circumstances of 1420.<sup>22</sup> Unfortunately the numbers involved in the provision of hospitality are too small for any useful analysis, but there were more intrants in the mercantile trades. As a sector it seems to have been more volatile than most, a reflection of the flexible nature of the occupations involved, but the steep decline in the 1420s is worth noting, as is the nadir during the later 1470s and early 1480s. The latter seems to be part of a wider trend and may represent a lack of confidence in the city's economy and thus an unwillingness by individuals to engage in such commerce.<sup>23</sup>

Turning to manufacturing, whether attributable to the regional dominance of cattle in comparison to sheep as the primary livestock species, it is noteworthy that the leather industry, especially shoe making and repairing, comprised the most popular trades among this group of male intrants. Nevertheless, across the industry the broad trend over the century was downwards, and this, too, may relate to a fall in population because Canterbury residents presumably comprised the primary market.<sup>24</sup> Yet whether the seeming recovery in the 1490s represents a reversal of the demographic trend or greater per capita spending on such items as shoes is not clear. The declining numbers involved in the manufacture of textiles, especially weavers (linen and wool), from the late 1440s onwards, may owe less to the city's demography and more to growing competition from Wealden cloth producers.<sup>25</sup> This seems to have become even more challenging in the early sixteenth century, the civic authorities using a range of policies to try to halt the decline.<sup>26</sup> In contrast the clothing industry, notably the tailors and specialist cap and hat makers, apparently found opportunities throughout most of the century. Thus even though there was some variation year on year it is not clear what may have fuelled this, and, as with all the occupations, it may reflect the personal circumstances of those working in clothing rather than more general economic and social factors.

Another industry, like clothing, that appears to buck the general trend involves the metal workers. Even though the numbers are small, it is interesting that in the 1490s the figures are higher than for the 1410s. Moreover, the greatest and longest sustained peaks were either side of 1440 and during the 1470s. However the rise was not due to growing numbers of producers involved in the luxury market such as goldsmiths, instead it marks the presence of more smiths and locksmiths. Why this happened is not known, but it is worth noting that soon after in 1506 the city's senior smiths and armourers drew up guild regulations that included a number of protectionist measures.<sup>27</sup>

Consequently, even though the picture is complex, the fifteenth century witnessed a decline in the numbers of men trading as intrants and the marked downturn in the 1430s was particularly noticeable regarding the victuallers. Other sectors of the economy that might be viewed as similarly significant concerning their implications for female businesswomen are clothing and textiles. For whereas the number of male intrants involved in textiles did fall from its late 1440s peak, the figures for clothing in general indicate a relatively buoyant market across the whole period.

#### *Businesswomen in Canterbury society*

Among the city's intrants during the fifteenth century, just over 160 were women. This is a small figure and in any one year women never comprised more than 14%



of the total.<sup>28</sup> In addition only in eight years did women constitute 10% or over, but the figures still offer valuable insights regarding the place of women as independent traders. Moreover, as a means of exploring the significance of the female intrants, it is useful to compare the poll tax returns for 1381, where occupations are often listed, and 1392, the first year the intrants were recorded.<sup>29</sup> Although the 1381 poll tax returns are slightly damaged it is possible, discounting servants, as well as those designated solely as ‘the wife of’, to identify 84 women by occupation, who presumably were single women, although what proportion were widows is unclear. Of these, 70% were involved in textiles and almost all were listed as spinsters (i.e. spinners).<sup>30</sup> The remainder were divided among seven sectors and of these the largest was victualling at 12% (10 women). Thus discounting the textile workers there were 25 women for whom their occupations are known, including three gentlewomen, and interestingly this figure is similar to the 18 female intrants listed in 1392. Furthermore, none of the women recorded as intrants between 1392 and 1500 are designated as spinsters, yet such workers must have been present in the city to supply the weavers, both intrants and freemen.<sup>31</sup> Even though it must remain conjecture, it is possible that the spinsters were not viewed by the civic authorities as independent traders and instead the successors of those listed in 1381 may have operated under a putting-out system controlled by the weavers.<sup>32</sup>

Looking at the comparable 5-year rolling average for female intrants (Fig. 1), like their male counterparts the early decades of the fifteenth century were the most advantageous, and this was especially noticeable in the late 1410s and mid-1420s (the peak came in 1425 when 12 women were recorded). Thereafter there was a sharp decline and by the mid 1430s there were never more than one or two, and in the following decade women had all but disappeared: between 1441 and 1450 they were not listed in seven of these years and in the 1460s only three women are noted (Fig. 4). The mid-1470s brought a partial recovery, as did the 1490s, but the intervening period had witnessed a return to the low levels of the later 1430s.

Even though two out of every three of these 160+ businesswomen are only recorded for a single year, at the other end of the spectrum Alice Sergaunt traded as a huckster (victualler) for 13 years between 1415 and 1427. Her activities coincided with the decades when women were most likely to trade for longer periods: in the 1410s out of a total of 29 female intrants, 12 were licence-fee payers for two years or more, and in the 1420s there were 14 who traded for over a year compared to 12 who were listed for only a year. Like the total figures, it seems feasible that this longevity was due to the relative buoyancy of Canterbury’s economy, which amongst other factors had benefited from royal military campaigns in France, including Henry V’s triumph in the Agincourt campaign, the king’s subsequent pilgrimage to Canterbury and his meeting there with the Holy Roman Emperor, as well as the success of the 1420 Jubilee.

The fall in the total number of businesswomen during the second and third quarters of the century is also reflected in their very limited longevity. Between 1425 and 1475 only Juliana Bous (1433-39) traded for more than five years, and in the 1440s, 1450s and 1460s, the sole exceptions who were present for more than one year were Johanna Ratford and Johanna Wylliam. In contrast, during the final quarter, greater longevity matched the recovery in the number of total female licence payers, and this is most marked in the 1470s and 1490s when 45% of these

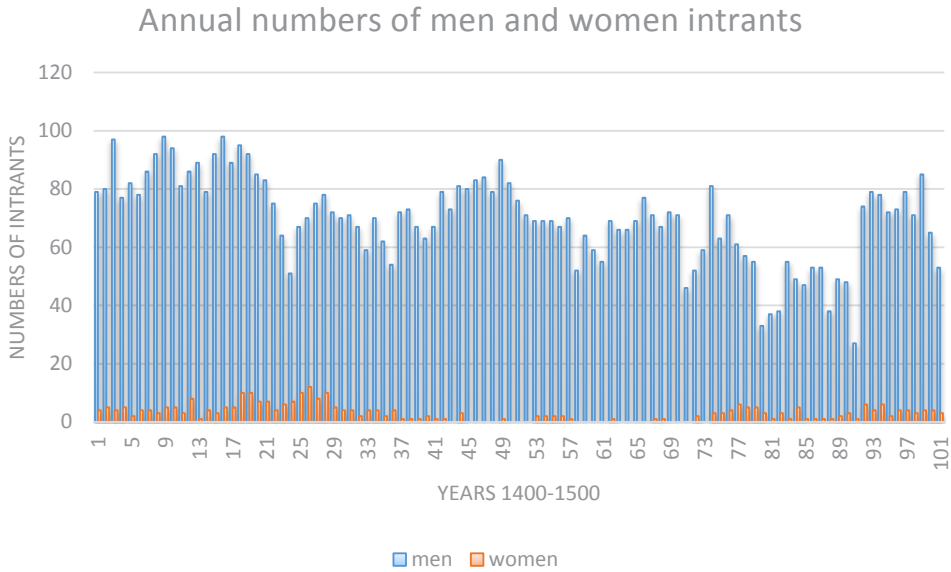


Fig. 4 Annual numbers of male and female intrants 1400-1500.

women are listed for more than a single year. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that of those who traded for more than five years during these decades, all three women were working widows, albeit they seem to have traded previously as wives, in one case for almost a decade.

Unlike their male counterparts, throughout the fifteenth century these business-women apparently had almost no opportunity to progress from intrant to freeman. The only women known to have achieved this status during the fifteenth century are Constance as the wife of Robert Bertyn, in 1455, and in 1482/3 Margaret Gryme, sole merchant, and Margaret Chyrche, the widow of William a Canterbury goldsmith.<sup>33</sup> Nonetheless, assize and court records indicate that women were commercially active in far larger numbers. For example, the very fragmentary assize records, covering only a few years and often not all of Canterbury's wards, do illustrate female involvement in brewing, the regrating of ale, and as inn-holders and butchers, as well as several brothel keepers.<sup>34</sup> Amongst the latter were Katherine Borach in 1437, and fifty years later Mabil Shynglton, Johanna Belle and the wife of Thomas Style.<sup>35</sup>

In contrast, the more extensive petty session sources list the involvement in debt cases of 352 women. The almost complete absence of women intrants from these cases may indicate that many of these plaintiffs and defendants were the daughters, wives or widows of freemen.<sup>36</sup> As a different cohort among Canterbury's businesswomen, it is unfortunate that the survival rate of these fifteenth-century court records is patchy, and there are none at all for the 1430s and 1440s. Even though they are not complete, there are only four extant rolls for the first three decades, the far more comprehensive coverage for the last three decades is valuable.

Yet taking into consideration these obvious differences, it seems that there was a marked increase in the number of women using the courts in the 1480s and 1490s, as well as their involvement in more than one action. Indeed, Margery Amet was involved in six cases over a four-year period in the 1480s and Eleanor Pemberton engaged in a similar number of cases but over a far longer period, the first in 1479 and the last in 1491.

However, even if this apparent rise in the numbers is a product of differing record survival over time, the recognition of the legal status of *femme sole* (a married woman who traded independently of her husband and who was responsible legally for the debts she incurred) is not seen in the surviving Canterbury court records before the 1460s.<sup>37</sup> Between 1460 and 1499 the proportion of women so designated compared to those known to have been wives seems to have stayed at about a third, which means that in total 36 different women were noted as a *femme sole*, almost half (15) in the 1480s. A few women were listed accordingly more than once, but on other occasions the clerk for some reason did not mention their legal status, which may indicate that although seemingly important it was not viewed as essential in terms of recording practices. For the majority of the married women who were not seen as a *femme sole* and thus in law under the jurisdiction of their husbands respecting their commercial activities, the presence of their husbands with them in the courts was viewed as mandatory.<sup>38</sup> Nonetheless, the court officials on occasion apparently saw the wife as the sole culprit regarding the outstanding debt, in that it was she alone who was detained.<sup>39</sup>

So what was the range of businesses run by women in Canterbury during the fifteenth century and did this change over the period? Even though the number of female intrants is less than half that recorded in the courts, the licensing records offer more details regarding occupation and for almost two-thirds of these women such details are known. Among the 36 occupations noted, 21 are only listed once, for example, fletcher, spurrier (maker of spurs), butcher, laundrywoman and vintner. Similarly one brewer is listed, Cecily Feyset who traded for a year after her husband John's death.<sup>40</sup> He had been a barber and her apparently short-lived experience as a widow in 1414 can be viewed as typical of that sector of the ale industry that involved small-scale, intermittent female production. This is in contrast to certain male brewers who by this period were operating relatively, large-scale, commercial brew houses. Among these, albeit slightly later in the century, was John Bigge who had both an ale and a beer brew house at his principal messuage. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that following his death his feoffees settled certain property, including his 'le Bierbruhous' and 'le Alebruhous' on his widow Constance and John Martin gentleman, with the instruction that Bigge's mother should reside in part of her daughter-in-law's messuage.<sup>41</sup>

More commonly these businesswomen were potters (3), barbers (5), shopkeepers (5), hucksters (7), shepsters (15), upholders (12), and victuallers (18).<sup>42</sup> The preponderance of the food, clothing and mercantile trades is typical of female involvement in the later medieval urban economy (**Fig. 5**). It also mirrors to a degree the occupations of their male counterparts (see above) and the far more limited information provided in the debt cases where the items most commonly listed are barrels of ale (and beer in 1487, 1489 and 1496), and various forms



A



B



C

Fig. 5 Some examples of female employments illustrated on misericords (nationwide):

A: Spinster with distaff, Minster in Thanet Church. (Photo. S. Sweetinburgh.)

B: A dishonest alewife, Ludlow Church. (Photo I. Corrigan.)

C: Carding, Norton Church, Suffolk. (Photo I. Corrigan.)

of bread and cloth.<sup>43</sup> Far less numerous were those female intrants in the textile industry because apart from the absent spinsters, there were only two weavers, one kempster (a wool-carder), one dyer and one fuller. Indeed if these represent workers involved in the production of woollen cloth, the staple fabric in medieval

England, it is worth noting that there were three flaxwives and a lacemaker among the Canterbury businesswomen. Such diversity may reflect a need to look for other economic opportunities, as may the presence of at least one knitter in the city.<sup>44</sup> In addition, a few women were engaged in the leather industry, including two corverses (shoe makers), a skinner and a pelterer, which is especially unusual because of these women only Felicia Hogyn seems to have been continuing her late husband's business, and in her case she maintained it for a further three years.<sup>45</sup> The absence of women in either the construction or metal-working industries is not unusual, and there were relatively few male intrants in these same sectors, especially construction.

Examined over time, during the later 1410s the occupational profile is dominated by the victuallers, a response, perhaps, to the likely enhanced opportunities presented by Henry V's overseas military campaigns and the 1420 Jubilee. The following decade continued to offer such work, but others chose to act as shepsters (3), or as cloth or clothing sellers (3 upholders and 1 haberdasher), with further diversity in the form of two potters, two barbers and a dyer. Even though the number of women working independently fell in the 1430s and 1440s, the variety of occupations remained, albeit none were listed specifically as victuallers but there was a butcher and a fruiterer. Businesswomen continued to act as barbers, apparently following their husband's craft, as did the wife of Richard Alcotcs who was designated the fletcher for a year during their marriage.

Even though the numbers involved are small, diversity remained the hallmark of the last 30 years of the century, both within and comparatively between the decades. For even though the clothing and mercantile trades were well represented in each, including shepsters and shopkeepers in all three decades, and one woman from the leather trades (a hosier in the 1470s, a corveser in the 1480s and a skinner in the 1490s), those involved in the food industry were only listed in the final two decades (a cook and a fruiterer in each). One of the very few women from the metal-working trades was active in the 1470s as a spurrier, and there was also a barber and a potter, while in the 1480s the wife of William George was an ashburner and in the following decade there were three flaxwives and a mercer from the textile industry.<sup>46</sup> Such findings are interesting because greater diversity might have been expected during the first quarter when the city's economy was buoyant, followed by a concentration on a narrow range of traditional occupations in the final decades of the century.<sup>47</sup> Nevertheless, the particularity of Canterbury's heavy dependence on pilgrimage may explain the dominance of victualling during the early period. Yet it is less clear why this sector was barely present in the final quarter of the century, its place taken by clothing, mercantile and other trades, but the small numbers involved may be a key factor here.

A further topic that is especially important with respect to the place of women within the economy is life-cycle stage. However there are considerable identification issues regarding the marital status of many of the female intrants. Nonetheless, by examining the records of men with the same surname, ward of residence, year of licensing and occupation, as well as deploying other sources through record linkage, it is possible to categorise in terms of life-cycle stage these businesswomen fairly confidently, albeit there are some where this is less secure.<sup>48</sup>



Thus taking account of these caveats, it appears there were over 40 women who were listed either as ‘the wife of’ or who were apparently operating their own business as married women, including six women recorded first as wives and then as widows; and a further 31 are ‘known’ to have been widows using the same criteria. The remainder (88), who were apparently ‘single’, presumably comprised the unmarried and widows but the relative proportions are impossible to ascertain from the available information.

Taking the largest group – the single women, as a proportion of the total number of women, the figure for the first quarter of the century was far greater (constituting the majority) than for the last quarter. Even though this may partly be a consequence of the less detailed records for the earlier period, it may, together with the higher total numbers of female intrants, reflect relatively high levels of immigration. Probably most would have travelled relatively short distances, the city’s primary catchment area being east Kent, but a few seemingly had journeyed further, such as Katherine Orpington, and from outside the county: Alice Northampton and Celia Newport.<sup>49</sup> Furthermore, if the model Goldberg witnessed in late medieval York of life-cycle servanthood is appropriate for fifteenth-century Canterbury, it is feasible that some/many of these single female intrants had spent time in service, whether they were natives of the city (but outside the freedom) or new arrivals, before having sufficient resources to trade as businesswomen.<sup>50</sup>

In terms of longevity, as intrants over 70% of these single women were only recorded once. For some this may indicate that it was very difficult for them to gain a sustainable place within the city’s economy and a proportion of these women may have become or returned to being servants, or left Canterbury, either to return whence they came or to try their fortune elsewhere. Those less fortunate may have joined the city’s poor, eking out a living on the margins, and those even less fortunate may have died, the city experiencing, for example, at least one major plague outbreak per decade. Although this may be an especially extreme example, it would suggest the perils of being a single businesswoman even in buoyant economic times. Whether Isolde Tappestere, who was before the courts in 1417, is the same person as Isolde Stafford, an intrant in the same year as a victualler is unknown, but is feasible because she is not listed again. Initially Isolde responded through her attorney to John Fydhole’s demands for the 9s. owed for various breads he had supplied, but then she went in person to the court and acknowledged the debt. As a consequence she was taken into custody and died in jail.<sup>51</sup> Yet thinking more positively, some may have married local craftsmen, their business subsumed within their new household and thus disappeared from the lists as independent traders.

Notwithstanding that the occupations of many from this group are not listed, it is probably not surprising that victuallers, shepsters and upholders were the most common businesswomen. Presumably such work offered these women considerable potential because it required few capital assets, a factor that may have influenced Celia Goldbeter’s decision to take in washing in 1415 and Johanna Moldson’s to become a fruit seller (1491).<sup>52</sup> Yet a few were seemingly able or more willing to invest far greater capital because the weaving and dyeing businesses of Johanna Broid (1423) and Emma Essele (1427), respectively, would have necessitated far greater investment for tools and even premises.<sup>53</sup>

Of the minority of single businesswomen who may be characterised as being successful in the city's commercial world, for a small number it is possible to examine some aspects of their 'career' in Canterbury. For example, Isabel Bertelot, perhaps from Romney Marsh because the surname was present there in the fifteenth century, is recorded as an intrant for three consecutive years (1411-1413). She is listed as a pelterer, indicating that she was an artisan and seemingly a woman of some skill because after the first year her licence fee increased to 2*s.* for each of the next two years.<sup>54</sup> Thereafter she disappears from the list, maybe following marriage, although whether to John Clare, who appears that year as a pelterer in the same ward, remains a matter of conjecture.<sup>55</sup> The only two women, either through choice or necessity, who managed to operate as independent traders for over ten consecutive years were the hucksters Alice Sergeant and Alice Clerys. The former lived in Northgate ward for at least 13 years, her business thriving sufficiently that her annual fee increased from 6*d.* to 8*d.* The latter had previously traded from Newingate ward for at least as long, and perhaps similarly successfully because only in her first year did she pay less than 6*d.*

The problems of identifying widows from amongst these single women is exemplified by the case of Margaret Halke. Between 1423 and 1430 she was annually listed as a chandler in Northgate ward, the annual fee rising from 6*d.* to 8*d.* for her final three years. Thereafter a Sampson Halke is recorded for two years under the same ward and occupation, paying a higher fee of 10*d.* in each year, and in 1433 he became a freeman by redemption. Even though there is nothing else to link these two people nor what relationship this should be, it is feasible that Sampson was Margaret's son and that he took control of the family business from his widowed mother when he came of age. Again, although this involves a degree of conjecture, it seems the family remained in Canterbury because a Margaret Halke found herself before the city's petty sessions in 1463 for debt.<sup>56</sup>

In other cases the identification of widows appears more secure, and of these 31 female intrants over half (58%) are only listed for a single year. The occupations are known for almost all of these short-term businesswomen and just over half continued their husband's craft, such as Laurence and Clemencia Gerard who are both recorded as corvesers, although whereas Laurence's licence fee had risen from 8*d.* in 1428 to 3*s.* 4*d.* in 1431, the following year his widow only paid 10*d.* and then disappeared from the list. Similarly John and Constance Algood seem to have followed the same trade. In 1415 John is listed as an ostclothmaker, paying initially 4*d.* per annum. Thereafter his fee rose in increments so that by 1426 he was paying 16*d.* as his licence fee, the couple residing in Newingate ward. He was able to maintain this level of activity for a further three years, and when his widow paid the licence fee in 1432 she, too, was a cloth maker.<sup>57</sup> Others were presumably unable to maintain such continuity: William Croser also worked as a corveser between 1432 and 1434 but the year after Isabel, his widow, was fined as an upholder.

Whether the disappearance of these widows so soon after the death of their late husbands was a result of their own death, rather than remarriage, entering service or migration is unclear. However a minority wished or had no option but to continue working independently in widowhood, and for most this meant maintaining the family business for at least two and often three years. For example, Johanna



Hobard traded for three years as a vintner from 1496 after Robert's death, and in her final year she was before the courts in a dispute over two barrels of wine, one of which contained Malmsey.<sup>58</sup> Even though examples from the intrants' lists are rare because of the nature of the sources, it is feasible that certain widows continued the family business until their sons were able to take control. Whether this was exactly the scenario regarding the Queyk family is not clear, but Johanna did maintain her husband Simon's successful fulling business (his licence fee rose from *8d.* to *20d.*) in Worthgate ward for two years after his death. Nevertheless, she paid the smaller sum of *8d.* each year, and it is possible John Queyk, who began trading on his own in 1425, which was seemingly a few months before Simon's death, may have taken on part of the family business because he was also operating in Worthgate as a fuller. Like Johanna (his mother?), he was initially paying an *8d.* fee but in 1427, his final year before he too disappeared from the intrants' lists, he was charged *10d.* (half the amount previously levied on his deceased father?).

Such examples suggest that the city authorities had no objection to the presence of widows as independent traders in fifteenth-century Canterbury, and may even have encouraged their involvement to provide continuity and thus strengthen the city's commerce. For even if they were unable to continue the same type of business, their ability to trade independently was presumably advantageous to all concerned in a society where personal reputation was viewed as vital social capital.<sup>59</sup> Thus Emma Clerk was able to trade as a victualler in Northgate ward from 1416 to 1418 after her husband Leonard's death, the same length of time he had run his cook shop and acted as a huckster. Consequently, if this does reflect the position of the mayor and his brethren, it is not clear why these widowed businesswomen were far scarcer during the middle decades of the century.

Turning finally to the 'known' wives, including those who were in business first as wives and then as widows, during the period of marriage the majority (57%) are listed for one year only as independent workers. Agnes Robert appears to fit this arrangement because she ran her shop in 1477 as the 'wife of John Robert', but the year after in her own name having also moved wards from Newingate to Burgate.<sup>60</sup> Whether this scenario was due to John's incapacity in 1477 is not certain, but may explain the pattern seen with respect to Richard Alcotes and his wife in the 1440s. He is first listed as a fletcher in 1441 paying *12d.* He paid the same sum the following year and then again in 1444, but in the intervening year it is his wife who is listed at the lower fee of *8d.* Thereafter, except for 1448 when he disappears again, Richard continued to work as a fletcher until 1451.

However this chronological pattern of one year under the 'wife's' name during her husband's career is far less evident in the intrants' lists for the last quarter of the century. Instead where the working lives of couples are recorded the year in which the wife is seen as the intrans are almost equally either the year prior to her husband or the year after.<sup>61</sup> For example, John a Lee's wife was the named intrans as a cook in 1495, and thereafter for the next two years their cook shop is recorded under his name. A decade earlier the pattern is reversed. Edward Clynk, also a cook, is listed under Westgate ward in 1482 paying *16d.*, but it is his wife who was seen as the cook by the common clerk the following year, and again the licence fee is *16d.* Moreover, these later decades witnessed a large percentage of the total of 'known' couples, although why is not clear. It seems unlikely husbands were

more incapacitated than early in the century but whether this represents changing recording practices by the various clerks, or a shift in the respective responsibilities within families is unclear.

Nevertheless, there are couples, especially during the first two decades of the century, whose joint careers were apparently more complex and where the involvement of family members may extend into the next generation. For example, Henry and Lora Rounceby, with perhaps one or even two of their sons, are recorded as intrants for almost two decades. Looking at the level of fine paid by either spouse, their family business seems to have prospered because Henry paid a licence fee of 6*d.* in 1411, and three years later Lora was charged 8*d.* Indeed it is Lora rather than Henry who is recorded each year between 1413 and 1418, always at 8*d.* per annum. Interestingly neither is listed in 1419 but Henry's name returns the year after. Yet in 1421 and 1422, and again in 1424 it is Lora who is noted as the intrant. Thereafter her name disappears and over the next seven years it is mostly a Henry Rounceby, although in 1426 the forename changes to Laurence, and during the same period the fine had risen to 10*d.* per annum. Even though it is difficult to be sure of the precise chronology of responsibility held by individual family members as understood by the common clerk, these records do suggest that the civic authorities had few reservations regarding wives, as well as widows, in terms of their place in Canterbury's economy during the early decades of the fifteenth century. Whether such a view continued to be held in the later decades is somewhat less certain, nevertheless wives did very occasionally trade independently for several years, such as the unnamed wife of Henry Russelyn who, having traded for eight years as his wife (1491-5, 1498-1500), was thereafter noted as an intrant for four years as his widow. As a shepster living in Worthgate ward, she seems to have been modestly successful, but what exactly Henry was doing in the years prior to his death is not clear.<sup>62</sup> Nonetheless, as noted above, such examples may hint at the problems married couples faced as a result of chronic disability or illness, and that town authorities were, therefore, prepared to recognise the necessary place of women in society.

This apparent willingness to provide the space whereby women could trade independently during marriage, rather than only in widowhood, is also evident from the petty sessions. In 1472, Petronella Haddon defended herself in court as a sole merchant against Thomas Ramsey over a debt of 34*s.* 6*d.* for 11½ barrels of ale.<sup>63</sup> As a huckster, Beatrice Atkyn was involved in several cases in the early 1480s. She was designated a *femme sole* by the court and found herself in custody as a result of the debt owed to Ramsey, her husband, who was also present in court, not held to account.<sup>64</sup>

Yet even where the courts sought to hold such businesswomen accountable in law in their own right, it is probably not appropriate to envisage this with modern eyes solely as a 'victory' for the female sex. Rather for these Canterbury women pragmatism may have been far more important.<sup>65</sup> The ability to gain a favourable judgement in the local courts might be achieved as a *femme sole* working independently, but if being represented by an attorney or working together with a spouse was more likely to result in the desired outcome, then presumably that is what these women did. Although the sources do not provide sufficient information to verify this hypothesis, this scenario does appear to fit the following examples. As a recent widow in 1491, Petronella Morbere was apparently involved in three debt

cases that year, and in the second she was represented by her attorney regarding the labour costs incurred on various hides and skins.<sup>66</sup> Alternatively, and this is not to imply that widows remarried just to receive such support, but on occasion the presence of her new husband beside her in court must have been viewed as advantageous. Among the occasions where this occurred in the Canterbury petty sessions were debt cases involving widows as executors of their late husbands. These included Agnes, one of the executors of Will Faunt, who was not only joined by her late husband's other executor, a cleric called Thomas Halewell, but by her new husband Edward Bolney in their action against John Potman in 1496.<sup>67</sup> In addition, Margaret Stephen challenged the court's designation of her as a *femme sole*. She and her husband were accused by Richard Melseby regarding her failure to pay 4s. 11d. for the white bread he had supplied, but when she came in person to the court she stated that she was not a sole merchant.<sup>68</sup>

### Conclusion

The Canterbury records, especially the intrants' lists, offer a useful window on the commercial activities undertaken by women in the late medieval city. Even though there remain analytical problems concerning the deployment of such records, not least the numbers recorded and the ability to identify women in terms of their life-cycle stage, they do provide valuable comparable material, especially in terms of the early and later fifteenth century. To a degree the earlier period, in particular, can be envisaged as a time of opportunity, but life was still exceedingly precarious whether due to external factors such as market forces or internal issues like sickness or industrial accidents. The high level of female involvement in the food, mercantile and clothing industries has also been seen elsewhere, but it is worth noting that this pattern resembled that found for their male counterparts, a reflection, perhaps, of the particular nature of the city's economy. Thus this study, as well as examining the significance of regional and local conditions, has been able to place Canterbury within the wider scholarship on late medieval urban women and their place in economic society.

### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Such as: M. Prior, ed., *Women in English Society 1500-1800* (London, 1985); M. Whyte, *The Status of Women in Preindustrial Societies* (Princeton, 1986); J. Bennett, *Ale, Beer, and Brewsters in England: Women's Work in a Changing World, 1300-1600* (New York, 1996). See also articles in *Gender and History*; *Women's History Network*; and *Feminist Studies*.

<sup>2</sup> Although not specifically addressing this issue, Barbara Hanawalt nevertheless would seem implicitly to have envisaged such a distinction in her analysis of inquest records; B. Hanawalt, *The Ties That Bound: Peasant Families in Medieval England* (New York, 1986). Among those who see this model as too simplistic; F. Babb, 'Producers and reproducers: Andean marketwomen in the economy', *Women and Change in Latin America*, ed. J. Nash and H. Safa (New York, 1986), pp. 53-64. See also; J. Bennett, 'History that stands still: women's work in the European past', *Feminist Studies*, 14 (1988), 269-83; S. Stuard, 'The chase after theory: considering medieval women', *Gender and History*, 4 (1992), 135-46; B. Capp, *When Gossips Meet: Women, Family, and Neighbourhood in Early Modern England* (Oxford, 2003).

<sup>3</sup> R. Morewedge, ed., *The Role of Women in the Middle Ages* (Albany, 1975); M. Labarge, *Women in Medieval Life* (London, 1986).

<sup>4</sup> For example, C. Barron, 'The 'Golden Age' of women in medieval London', *Reading Medieval Studies*, 15 (1989), 35-58; D. Herlihy, *Opera Muliebria: Women and Work in Medieval Europe* (New York, 1990).

<sup>5</sup> Among the plethora of such studies: J. Bennett, *Women in the Medieval English Countryside: Gender and Household in Brigstock before the Plague* (Oxford, 1987); B. Hanawalt, ed., *Women and Work in Preindustrial Europe* (Bloomington, 1986); M. Erler and M. Kowaleski, *Gendering the Master Narrative: Women and Power in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca, N.Y., 2003); R. Smith, ed., *Land, Kinship and Life-Cycle* (Cambridge, 1984); P.J.P., Goldberg, *Women, Work, and Life Cycle in a Medieval Economy: Women in York and Yorkshire c.1300-1520* (Oxford, 1992); P. Hudson and W. Lee, ed., *Women's Work and the Family Economy in Historical Perspective* (Manchester, 1990); L. Charles and L. Duffin, ed., *Women and Work in Pre-Industrial England* (London, 1985); M. Mate, *Daughters, Wives and Widows after the Black Death: Women in Sussex, 1350-1535* (Woodbridge, 1998); M. Mate, *Women in Medieval English Society* (Cambridge, 1999); H. Jewell, *Women in Medieval England* (Manchester, 1996); M.K. McIntosh, *Working Women in English Society, 1300-1620* (Cambridge, 2005); R.R. Edwards and V. Ziegler, *Matrons and Marginal Women in Medieval Society* (Woodbridge, 1995); M. Kowaleski and P.J.P. Goldberg, ed., *Medieval Domesticity: Home, Housing and Household in Medieval England* (Cambridge, 2009); C. Barron and A. Sutton, *Medieval London Widows 1300-1500* (London, 1994); M. Kowaleski, *Local Markets and Regional Trade in Medieval Exeter* (Cambridge, 1995), S. Penn, 'Female wage-earners in late fourteenth-century England', *Agricultural History Review*, 35 (1987), 1-14.

<sup>6</sup> Marjorie McIntosh, in her introduction, provides a useful summary of the debates surrounding women's work, an assessment of the main documentary sources commonly used by historians, and the particular value of equity petitions as a source for her study; McIntosh, *Working Women*, pp. 3-42.

<sup>7</sup> In the context of this article the idea of commercial work relates to payment received for goods produced and sold, rather than women as servants, that is in employment.

<sup>8</sup> Again, there is an extensive historiography on the late medieval economy and the effects on society, including; M. Bailey and S. Rigby, ed., *Town and Countryside in the Age of the Black Death* (Turnhout, 2012); R. Horrox, ed., *Fifteenth-Century Attitudes: Perceptions of Society in Late Medieval England* (Cambridge, 1994); R.H. Britnell, *The Commercialisation of English Society, 1000-1500*, 2nd edn (Manchester, 1996); C. Dyer, *An Age of Transition? Economy and Society in England in the Later Middle Ages* (Oxford, 2005); C. Dyer, *Standards of Living in the Later Middle Ages: Social Change in England, c.1200-1520* (Cambridge, 1998); S. Rigby, *English Society in the Later Middle Ages: Class, Status and Gender* (Basingstoke, 1995); P.J.P. Goldberg, *Medieval England: A Social History, 1250-1550* (London, 2004); L.R. Poos, *A Rural Society After the Black Death: Essex, 1350-1525* (Cambridge, 1991); S. Penn and C. Dyer, 'Wages and earnings in late medieval England: evidence from the enforcement of the labour laws', *Economic History Review*, 2nd series, 43 (1990), 356-76.

<sup>9</sup> P.J.P. Goldberg, 'Marriage, migration, servanthood and life-cycle in Yorkshire towns of the later Middle Ages', *Continuity and Change*, 1 (1986), 141-69; P.J.P. Goldberg, "'For better, for worse': marriage and economic opportunity for women in town and country", *Women is a Worthy Wight: Women in English Society, c.1200-1500*, ed. P.J.P. Goldberg (Stroud, 1992), pp. 108-25.

<sup>10</sup> Examples from the historiography include; J. Hatcher, 'The Great Slump of the mid fifteenth century', *Progress and Problems in Medieval England: Essays in Honour of Edward Miller*, ed. R.H. Britnell and J. Hatcher (Cambridge, 1996), pp. 237-72; D.M. Palliser, ed., *Cambridge Urban History of Britain, 1: 600-1540* (Cambridge, 2000); R.H. Britnell, 'Urban demand and the English Economy, 1300-1600', *Trade, Urban Hinterlands and Market Integration, 1300-1600*, ed. J.A. Galway (London, 2000), pp. 1-21; A. Dyer, *Decline and Growth in English Towns, 1400-1640* (London, 1991); J. Hare, 'Regional prosperity in fifteenth-century England: some evidence from Wessex', *The Fifteenth Century 2: Revolution and Consumption in Late Medieval England*, ed. M. Hicks (Woodbridge, 2001), pp. 105-26. Although A.R. Bridbury's far more optimistic analysis of urban economic fortunes has been seriously questioned, and he has moderated his views more recently, some towns, due to their particular circumstances, did experience growth during the later Middle Ages, see for example; J. Lee, 'The trade of fifteenth-century Cambridge and its region', *The Fifteenth Century 2: Revolution and Consumption in Late Medieval England*, ed. M. Hicks (Woodbridge, 2001), pp. 127-39.

<sup>11</sup> M. Mate, *Trade and Economic Developments, 1450-1550: the Experience of Kent, Surrey and Sussex* (Woodbridge, 2006); M. Mate, 'The economy of Kent, 1200-1500: the aftermath of the Black Death', *Later Medieval Kent, 1220-1540*, ed. S. Sweetinburgh (Woodbridge, 2010), pp. 17-24; M. Mercer, 'Kent and national politics, 1461-1509', *Later Medieval Kent, 1220-1540*, ed. S. Sweetinburgh (Woodbridge, 2010), pp. 251-65.

<sup>12</sup> For the purposes of this study, the main source is Cowper but his published transcription was randomly checked against the chamberlains' accounts, or where there seemed to be some doubt. J.M. Cowper, ed., *Intrantes: a List of Persons Admitted to Live and Trade within the City of Canterbury, 1392-1592* (Canterbury, 1904); CCAL: CC-FA/1; FA/2. It is worth noting that Canterbury's liberty extended beyond the city wall on all bar the Westgate side.

<sup>13</sup> Of the six wards, Ridigate was probably never fully recorded and in some years was specifically noted under Newingate. However it was a poorer ward, included industrial areas such as lime kilns and may generally have been less densely populated.

<sup>14</sup> CCAL: CC-J/B/203; J/B/215; J/B/217; J/B/22; J/B/252; J/B/255; J/B/263; J/B/268; J/B/271; J/B/273; J/B/276; J/B/279; J/B/281; J/B/282; J/B/287; J/B/289; J/B/291; J/B/295; J/B/296; J/B/298. See; P.R. Schofield and N.J. Mayhew, *Credit and Debt in Medieval England c.1180-c.1350* (Oxford, 2002); C. Briggs, 'Empowered or marginalized? Rural women and credit in later thirteenth- and fourteenth-century England', *Continuity and Change*, 19 (2004), 13-43.

<sup>15</sup> For the value of these petty session records to explore other female activities, see; K. Jones, *Gender and Petty Crime in Late Medieval England: the Local Courts in Kent, 1460-1560* (Woodbridge, 2006).

<sup>16</sup> CCAL: CC-OA/1; OA/2. KHL: PRC 17/1-17/7; 32/1-32/5.

<sup>17</sup> Even though it is difficult to provide precise figures for the number of men who were intrants during the fifteenth century because of problems of identification, as a guide it appears there were probably around 2,500 individuals.

<sup>18</sup> S. Sweetinburgh, 'A revolt too far: paying the price in late medieval Canterbury', *Southern History* (submitted).

<sup>19</sup> Mate, *Trade*, pp. 24-5; CCAL: CC-FA/2, fols 236v, 238, 240v, 241v, 244, 244v, 251, 253, 260, 262v, 263, 267v, 270v, 276, 279, 285, 286, 296v.

<sup>20</sup> A.F. Butcher, 'Rent and the urban economy: Oxford and Canterbury in the later Middle Ages', *Southern History*, 1 (1979), 39-40.

<sup>21</sup> As well as structural changes within the industry, such as greater commercialisation; Mate, *Trade*, pp. 62-3, 68.

<sup>22</sup> W. Urry, 'The Jubilee of St Thomas, 1420: billeting and rationing problems in the fifteenth century', *Canterbury Cathedral Chronicle*, 42 (1947), 24; S. Sweetinburgh, Pilgrimage in 'an Age of Plague': seeking Canterbury's 'hooly blissful martir' in 1420 and 1470', *The Fifteenth Century 12: Society in an Age of Plague*, ed. L. Clark and C. Rawcliffe (Woodbridge, 2013), pp. 57-77.

<sup>23</sup> Mate, 'Economy of Kent', pp. 19-21, 23.

<sup>24</sup> Mate, *Trade*, p. 26.

<sup>25</sup> Mate, *Trade*, p. 12; J. Andrewes, 'Industries in Kent, c.1500-1640', *Early Modern Kent, 1540-1640*, ed. M. Zell (Woodbridge, 2000), p. 110.

<sup>26</sup> S. Sweetinburgh, 'Looking to the past: the St Thomas Pageant in early Tudor Canterbury', *Archaeologia Cantiana*, 137 (2016), 165-70.

<sup>27</sup> CCAL: CC-Woodruffs/54/9.

<sup>28</sup> Goldberg, *Women, Work and Life Cycle*, p. 334.

<sup>29</sup> C.C. Fenwick, ed., *The Poll Taxes of 1377, 1379 and 1381. Part 1: Bedfordshire-Leicestershire. Records of Social and Economic History: New Series 27* (Oxford, 1998), 418-33.

<sup>30</sup> For an assessment of the dominance of textile manufacture in Canterbury's economy in the late fourteenth century; A.F. Butcher, 'The social structure of Canterbury at the end of the fourteenth century' (unpubl., CCAL: Pamphlet M/22/34).

<sup>31</sup> Listed as a defendant in a trespass case (1479), it is possible Katherine Spynster's surname referred to her occupation; CCAL: CC-J/B/279.

<sup>32</sup> Goldberg, *Women, Work, and Life Cycle*, pp. 118-19; McIntosh, *Working Women*, pp. 214-5.



<sup>33</sup> J.M. Cowper, ed., *The Roll of the Freemen of the City of Canterbury from AD 1392 to 1800* (Canterbury, 1903). In the 14th century Alice Castel, in 1395, and Idonea Compton two years later (she is listed just below her husband who had similarly paid 13s. 4d. to become a freeman) achieved this status; CCAL: CC-FA/1, fols 23, 32v. Constance Bertyn is a very special case. She had previously been married to the powerful citizen John Lynde and the agreement to allow her to join the city's freemen had been approved by all 12 jurors. Moreover their approval was conditional and only lasted for her lifetime; CCAL: CC-FA/2, fol. 46. Such special circumstance do not appear to pertain to 1482/3, rather the general economic conditions may have aided the applications of Margaret Gryme and Margaret Chyrche, each paying 10s.; CCAL: CC-FA/2, fols 205v, 206.

<sup>34</sup> Regrators were those who bought food items or other goods to sell on for their own benefit, such street-sellers were not allowed to sell at a higher rate than that specified by assize.

<sup>35</sup> CCAL: CC-J/Q/237; J/Q/286.

<sup>36</sup> Among the benefits of being a freewoman of Canterbury was the ability to bequeath by will her freehold (property) held within the city's liberty to her husband or to anyone else, and she might receive her husband's property in the same way; A.R. Myers, ed., *English Historical Documents, 1327-1485*, vol. 4 (London, 1969), 570. This could involve commercial premises, such as the inn called *Le Vernicle* that Godelena Bachelere received in her husband Robert's will (1405); or the two shops in Jury Lane that Colete, who lived elsewhere in the city with her husband John Edmund, bequeathed to him (1417); CCAL: CC-OA/1, fols 29v, 31v. At the other end of the century in 1497, Thomas Cukowe bequeathed his messuage and shops in the same lane to his wife Johanna; KHL: PRC 17/6, fol. 339. During this same period several inns had similarly come into female hands: *le White Man*, *le Angel*, *le Taberd* in Westgate Street, and *le Flowerdelyse*; KHL: PRC 32/2, fol. 253; 17/2, fol. 391; 17/3, fol. 258; 32/2, fol. 583.

<sup>37</sup> In a minority of cases their craft or trade is designated, most followed 'hucstrycrafe', but there is one reference to 'shepstry'; CCAL: CC-J/B/268; J/B/276; J/B/281; J/B/282; J/B/287.

<sup>38</sup> For an assessment of this legal status, especially with respect to London; M.K. McIntosh, 'The benefits and drawbacks of *femme sole* status in England, 1300-1630', *Journal of British Studies*, 44 (2005), 410-38.

<sup>39</sup> As in the case of Johanna Slinere: she and her husband William were the defendants in court, but only she was taken into custody regarding the debt owed to Richard Mildnale; CCAL: CC-J/B/289.

<sup>40</sup> Yet note the presence of at least some female brewers as assize breakers above.

<sup>41</sup> CCAL: CC-OA/1, fol. 24.

<sup>42</sup> Huckster: petty traders who bought goods either to see in the street or from a market stall; shepster: a seamstress or 'sempster'; upholder: a second-hand clothes dealer, but could be applied more broadly to trading in used goods; Goldberg, *Women, Work, and Life Cycle*, pp. 118, 122-3, 132-3.

<sup>43</sup> CCAL: CC-J/B/217; J/B/263; J/B/268; J/B/271; J/B/276; J/B/281; J/B/282; J/B/287; J/B/289; J/B/296; J/B/298.

<sup>44</sup> A debt case between Henry Gosebourne and Robert Richardson involved, amongst other items, 'yearn' and 6 'knyttyng nedils' valued at 4d; CCAL: CC-J/B/289.

<sup>45</sup> Generally women do not seem to have been involved in the leather industry, as exemplified by the poll tax returns, but references do exist; Goldberg, *Women, Work and Life Cycle*, pp. 88-92, 129-30; Kowaleski, *Local Markets*, pp. 156-61; McIntosh, *Working Women*, pp. 234-5.

<sup>46</sup> Flax and linen manufacture: McIntosh, *Working Women*, pp. 221-2; P. Walton, 'Textiles', *English Medieval Industries*, ed. J. Blair and N. Ramsey (London, 2001), p. 348.

<sup>47</sup> Goldberg, *Women, Work and Life Cycle*, p. 347; McIntosh, *Working Women*, pp. 30-4, 250-3.

<sup>48</sup> To a degree, these records pose similar challenges to the assize records respecting life-cycle identification, but do offer certain advantages.

<sup>49</sup> The court records indicate migrants might also come from continental Europe, such as Johanna Duchewoman, Jenetruda Duchewoman, Amfia Duchewoman and Ide Douchewoman, as well as other parts of the British Isles: Margaret Scottisshwoman; CCAL: CC-J/B/282; CC-J/Q/286; J/Q/287; J/B/289.

<sup>50</sup> P.J.P. Goldberg, 'Female labour, service and marriage in the late medieval urban north', *Northern History*, 22 (1986), 19-23, 24-6, 33, 35.

<sup>51</sup> John Fydhole, baker, resided in Westgate which indicates that he lived outside the city's liberty; CCAL: CC-J/B/217. Isolde was not the only woman to die in jail that year because Margery Walcote, the defendant in a detention of chattels case, suffered the same fate.

<sup>52</sup> Cowper, *Intrantes*, pp. 41, 144. For women as laundresses, see; C. Rawcliffe, 'A marginal occupation? The medieval laundress and her work', *Gender and History*, 21 (2009), 147-69.

<sup>53</sup> Cowper, *Intrantes*, pp. 55, 62.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 35, 36, 38.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 40.

<sup>56</sup> CCAL: CC-J/B/263.

<sup>57</sup> Yet on more than one occasion John is seemingly listed as a musician, specifically a piper, in the years when he is not noted as a cloth maker.

<sup>58</sup> CCAL: CC-J/B/298.

<sup>59</sup> McIntosh, *Working Women*, p. 11.

<sup>60</sup> Cowper, *Intrantes*, pp. 129, 130.

<sup>61</sup> The latter may indicate widowhood, albeit this is not stated in the records.

<sup>62</sup> However in 1496 a Henry Hosteler is recorded for Worthgate ward and the following year for the same ward there is a 'wife of Henry Hosteler, shepster', which is highly suggestive that this is the same couple. Yet if this is the same Henry it seems strange that he only traded as an intrant, perhaps a hosteller, for a single year. There is no reference to him in the freemen lists, but a John Russhle, butcher, had become a freeman by redemption in 1469. The only other wife, then widow to follow a similar pattern in terms of longevity during the 1490s was that of John Smyth (1497-1505).

<sup>63</sup> CCAL: CC-J/B/271/i.

<sup>64</sup> CCAL: CC-J/B/281.

<sup>65</sup> McIntosh, 'Benefits and drawbacks', pp. 412, 419-21.

<sup>66</sup> CCAL: CC-J/B/291.

<sup>67</sup> CCAL: CC-J/B/295.

<sup>68</sup> CCAL: CC-J/B/281.