Working Women in English Society, 1300–1620

This study explores the diverse and changing ways in which English women participated in the market economy between 1300 and 1620. Marjorie K. McIntosh assesses women’s activity by examining their engagement in the production and sale of goods, service work, credit relationships, and leasing of property. Using substantial new evidence from equity court petitions and microhistorical studies of five market centers, she challenges both traditional views of a “golden age” for women’s work and more recent critiques. She argues that the level of women’s participation in the market economy fluctuated considerably during this period under the pressure of demographic, economic, social, and cultural change. Although women always faced gender-based handicaps, some of them enjoyed wider opportunities during the generations following the plague of 1348–9. By the late sixteenth century, however, these opportunities had largely disappeared and their work was concentrated at the bottom of the economic system.

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USA
To the memory of Robert Keir McIntosh 1966–1999
whose delight in beauty
and engagement with the world around him
encouraged others to develop
the richness of their own lives
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Acknowledgments

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Notes on the text

All spellings from manuscript sources have been modernized. Dates are given in the Old Style in use at the time, but the start of the year has been moved to 1 January. Money is recorded in the system used then, as pounds, shillings, and pence.

1 pound (written as £) contained 20 shillings (written as s.).
1 shilling contained 12 pence (written as d.).
Thus, £2 3s. 8d. = 2 pounds 3 shillings and 8 pence, or 43 shillings and 8 pence.
### Abbreviations

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<tr>
<td>BL</td>
<td>British Library, London</td>
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<tr>
<td>CEMCRL, 1298–1307</td>
<td>Calendar of Early Mayor’s Court Rolls of London, 1298–1307 (ed. A. H. Thomas, Cambridge, 1924)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPMRL, dates</td>
<td>Calendar of Plea and Memoranda Rolls of London</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ERO</td>
<td>Essex Record Office, Chelmsford</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KUL T MSS</td>
<td>Keele University Library, Archives Room, Tamworth Manuscripts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NYRO</td>
<td>North Yorkshire Record Office, Northallerton</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRO</td>
<td>The National Archives, Public Record Office, London (Kew)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SRO</td>
<td>Somerset Record Office, Taunton</td>
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