Through custom, law and social norms, London’s early modern market favoured the involvement of adult men in Guild activities, and in early modern financial transactions and business more generally. London’s Guilds prohibited women from holding official offices and apprentices, both male and female, were constrained in the extent of their business dealings while serving out their apprenticeship. In Court of Chancery cases however, a more complicated picture emerges of the roles women and young people played in buying and selling goods, operating business and trading.

This paper explores the extent of apprentices’ and women’s participation in early modern economic activities and how, according to testimony in court cases, women and young people engaged in a range of market practices including skill training, mentoring, credit agreements and buying and selling. Inevitably these activities were shaped by the social and cultural expectations about women and young people in society, law and in the household.

This paper will ask to what extent the Court of Chancery cases can be used to understand women and young people’s place in London’s economy. By looking at a number of Chancery cases from the sixteenth century this paper uncovers the stories of women and apprentices who worked inside, outside, and in parallel with the London market.

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