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The Court of Chancery: Women, Apprentices and Chancery in 16th century London

Wednesday 3 October 2012 4:15-5:30pm

School of History Seminar Series

Dr Merridee Bailey, School of History, ANU

McDonald Room Menzies Library, ANU



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.



Dr Merridee Bailey lectures in the School of History, Research School of Social Sciences at the Australian National University. She has recently returned from lecturing at the University of New England. Her research interests include ideas about virtue and courtesy in fifteenth and sixteenth century England and more recently, the role of women in urban communities in sixteenth century London. She is an Associate Investigator for the ARC Centre of Excellence for the History of Emotions investigating emotive language in legal cases. She is the author of *Socialising the Child in Late Medieval England, c.1400-1600*.

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