The following essay was submitted unsuccessfully to a journal for publication. Readers may be interested in the following anonymous reader’s report, quoted verbatim in full:

The article rehearses a history and historiography that are already well-known, and it adds nothing to it. Its comments on method are unremarkable, for even the cross-dressed John Rykener has been better studied elsewhere. It is also inappropriately rude at points. Barron's work is characterized as "absurd" p. 8 [p. 15 as formatted here], and a statement by Hanawalt as a "travesty" in note 43. There is nothing here that is new and much that is tendentious.

**Women in the later medieval English economy: past perspectives, new directions**

Writing in 1995 on the theme of women’s history and economic history, Pamela Sharpe argued:

Immense strides have been made in the last 20 years in establishing women’s economic importance in the past. We must now rewrite economic history texts to reflect a different set of priorities. In doing so we no longer need to be hampered by overarching narratives of ‘continuity’ versus ‘change’. Both are keeping women in a contingent position. In a multi- faceted economy like that of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, some women’s lives saw continuities, others changed. What must concern us now is understanding these individual experiences within the broad framework of the economic past. In doing so we will certainly learn more about the complex characteristics of the economies and societies in which women – and men – lived and worked.[[1]](#footnote-1)

Sharpe’s chronological focus was on the pre-industrial and early industrial eras, but her words have pertinence for medievalists. On the one hand, her characterisation of scholarship on women in the economy as being focused on continuity versus change very much applies. On the other, her call for a fresh approach remains largely unanswered. The focus on recovering individual experience is, of course, not one the medievalist can easily accomplish, nor is it an invitation for articles on Margery Kempe or the Wife of Bath as exemplars of female business acumen in the late fourteenth century. This paper attempts to locate the study of women in the later medieval English economy within a wider historical context, drawing attention to the significant pioneering scholarship of numbers of women scholars associated with the London School of Economics in the earlier decades of the last century. It suggests that there is much to learn from their example and agrees with Sharpe’s conclusion about the ultimate sterility of some of the debates over the past twenty years or so. The way forward, it is suggested, is in moving away from analysing that which is measurable, and so supposedly objective, to attempting a more nuanced understanding of the cultural context in which women and the economy operated. *En passant* some observations will be made about recent trends in the UK higher education system and how these have impacted on scholarship.

The scholarly exploration of women in the later medieval English economy is at least a century old. Annie Abram’s 1909 monograph *Social England in the Fifteenth Century: A Study of the Effects of Economic Conditions* devotes a whole chapter to ‘The Industrial Position of Women and Children’.[[2]](#footnote-2) A graduate of Girton College, Cambridge where she was influenced by William Cunningham and Ellen McArthur, Abram gained a University of London doctorate in 1909 having studied at the London School of Economics (LSE).[[3]](#footnote-3) It was her thesis that was published as *Social England*. Her *English Life and Manners in the later Middle Ages*, whose chapter four is entitled ‘The Position of Women’, was published four years later. This was followed by her 1916 article ‘Women Traders of Medieval London’.[[4]](#footnote-4) At the LSE Abram would have known Lillian Knowles, another student of Cunningham, first appointed as a tutor in 1904 and made a reader in economic history three years later. She helped foster a whole generation of pioneering women economic historians including Alice Clark and Ivy Pinchbeck.[[5]](#footnote-5) Eileen Power, herself a Girton graduate, held the Shaw research studentship at the LSE between 1911 and 1913 and returned there again in 1921 as a lecturer in economic history.[[6]](#footnote-6) She would have been there after Abram had graduated, but she would have known her work and they must surely have met.

Abram’s scholarship was conceived within the context of the first women’s movement and within a social context in which women were politically disenfranchised, paid significantly less than men, and marginalised within the job market. For Abram and numbers of the other pioneering women scholars, whose stories Maxine Berg has done much to record, their own experience informed the questions they asked of the past.[[7]](#footnote-7) Indeed Abram specifically compares the lot of medieval women to contemporary experience in her *English Life and Manners*.[[8]](#footnote-8) The LSE, founded on the Fabian principles of social democracy and the betterment of society, provided by the standards of the day a relatively egalitarian and encouraging environment for this new generation of female academics.[[9]](#footnote-9) It also encouraged questions and research relating to wages and wage differentials, women’s work and – as the question was then framed – ‘status’. Lilian Knowles was a passionate advocate of equal pay for women. Ellen McArthur, not herself a member of the LSE, but an influence on many who were, wrote pioneering articles on late medieval wages and was active in the women’s suffrage movement. Abram’s own commitment to contemporary social issues is manifested in her contribution to the 1915 report of the Women’s Industrial Council entitled *Married Women’s Work*. Abram’s chapter on Newcastle portrayed the very restrictive nature of married women’s work and described how working wives were resented by husbands who saw themselves as breadwinners even when their own employment position was precarious. Wives consequently sometimes hid their work activities.[[10]](#footnote-10)

I could elaborate on the connection between the personal and the political in the scholarship of this pioneering group of London and Cambridge women academics, but there are two further observations I wish to make. In the current UK climate of RAE (Research Assessment Exercise) and REF (Research Excellence Framework), teaching has become marginalised and quantity as well as quality of research output, i.e. publications, is all important.[[11]](#footnote-11) Although Abram did not herself pursue a formal academic career after completing her doctorate and seems to have published little after 1916, it is for their inspirational teaching that Ellen McArthur, Lillian Knowles and Eileen Power were remembered by those that knew them. All three published numbers of articles, but only Knowles would have rated by RAE standards, and then only for the first part of the 1920s. Eileen Power published only one monograph in her lifetime, her *English Medieval Nunneries* (1922), yet she inspired a generation of scholars and founded the *Economic History Review* as the then premier journal of social as well as economic history.[[12]](#footnote-12)

My second point concerns the nature of the scholarship these women both produced and nurtured. Ellen McArthur’s *ODNB* entry describes her as ‘attentive’ to primary sources and this is confirmed by a perusal of her 1909 article ‘**Women Petitioners and the Long Parliament**’.[[13]](#footnote-13) Annie Abram’s work references an impressive body of primary sources both unpublished and published. Eileen Power spent 1910-11 at the École des Chartes and translated in abridged form *The Goodman of Paris* in 1928. Her whole scholarly oeuvre is informed by an intimate knowledge of a formidable range of primary sources. We may relate this attention to sources back to an earlier tradition of women scholars who transcribed and disseminated a range of primary sources. The names of Lucy Toulmin Smith and Maud Sellers are comparatively well known, but many others remained the relatively obscure assistants employed by ‘great’ men.[[14]](#footnote-14) Again the demands of RAE and REF militate against this kind of fundamental scholarship and record societies increasingly rely on enthusiastic amateurs and retired academics.

This is perhaps a rather lengthy and certainly polemical preamble, but there is a bigger historiographical point here. Just before and just after the First World War there was a comparative wealth of scholarship on women’s social and economic issues in various historical contexts, including the late medieval. This was a direct product of women’s contemporary concerns and experiences. Eileen Power looked at evidence for women apparently outnumbering men in late medieval society and drew analogy with the legacy of the Great War.[[15]](#footnote-15) Annie Abram, writing in 1909, challenged Elizabeth Dixon’s 1895 argument that women ‘were, prior to the introduction of machinery, unpaid domestic workers rather than wage-earners’ arguing instead ‘the growth of industry increased the demand for labour and led to the employment of women. Moreover, then as now, women worked for a smaller wage than men, and it was cheaper to employ them’.[[16]](#footnote-16) This example alone shows that this first-wave feminist scholarship clearly identified changes in economic structure and the organisation of labour as significant influences on how women fared within the economy precisely because this was self evidently true of their own age.[[17]](#footnote-17) Such a political imperative waned in the era of depression and high unemployment in the decade or more prior to the Second World War and remained largely dormant during the socially conservative era of the nineteen fifties and sixties.

The renewal of scholarly focus on women’s history might be thought a product of the women’s movement or second-wave feminism. If so, it is not until the 1970s that this movement appears to have much impacted on historical scholarship with, for example, Sheila Rowbotham’s *Hidden from History* published in 1973 and Joan Kelly’s seminal article ‘Did Women have a Renaissance?’ four years later. Barbara Hanawalt’s 1977 pioneering study of peasant childrearing fits this model and signals something of the new agenda of second-wave feminism, which was concerned with sexuality, the family, reproductive rights etc. as much as earlier issues around wages and employment.[[18]](#footnote-18) On the other hand, second-wave feminism addressed contemporary issues and struggles. Academic study of the past was marginal to the cause beyond some interest in retrieving women’s voices and experiences from the past.[[19]](#footnote-19)

An interrogation of the *International Medieval Bibliography* (*IMB*), which lists medieval studies articles and chapters, but not monographs, allows us to refine this chronology. Between 1970, when the bibliography commences, and 1977 searching under ‘Women’s Studies’ for articles and chapters written in English about the British Isles, we find only twelve entries, mostly literary. Of the eight focused on the later medieval era, three concerned Chaucer and two Lydgate. Between 1977 and 1985, however, save for the anomalous year 1980, no such articles are listed.[[20]](#footnote-20) The concern of second-wave feminism to recover herstory in the face of a profession primarily concerned – at least until the advent of social history as a serious branch of historical research – with male elites and institutions seems to have generated little in the way of publications by medievalists before the mid 1980s. Indeed the evidence is that the scholarly community singularly failed to meet public demand. In 1975, thirty-five years after her death and more than fifty years after some were first written, several of Eileen Power’s essays were published as *Medieval Women*.[[21]](#footnote-21) Alice Clark’s *Working Life of Women in the Seventeenth Century*, first published in 1919, was reissued in 1968 and again in paperback in 1982. Ivy Pinchbeck’s 1930 monograph *Women Workers and the Industrial Revolution* was likewise republished in 1969 and in paperback in 1981.

Two important new journals did emerge, [*Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*](http://www.journals.uchicago.edu/loi/signs)(founded 1975) and *History Workshop Journal* (founded 1976). More recent are the *Journal of Women’s History* and *Gender and History* (both founded 1989), though these journals have come to attract few papers by medievalists.[[22]](#footnote-22) The title *Gender and History*, however, is significant of a new trend in scholarship that reflects the development of what has been dubbed third-wave feminism in the 1980s and 1990s. This has been a much more productive era for scholarship on medieval women, in part perhaps because the generation growing up in the 1960s and 70s began to make some headway in academia. That said, it has taken forty years for the proportion of women in UK academic teaching posts to double from about one in six in 1965 to slightly more than one in three in 2005.[[23]](#footnote-23) The trend in the United States appears broadly similar.[[24]](#footnote-24)

From 1985 until the mid 1990s a very rapid growth in scholarship is noticed. Searching the *IMB* as before, five entries are recorded for 1985, 24 for 1989, and 64 for 1995. There were peaks in 1990, 1992, and 1996; 84 titles are recorded in 1996. Thereafter numbers have remained fairly stable except for spikes in 2000, 2002 and 2003.[[25]](#footnote-25) Over this two decade period there has been a shift in the questions posed by scholars. 1986 publications included Barbara Hanawalt, ‘Peasant women’s contribution to the home economy in late medieval England’, Ralph Houlbrooke, ‘Women’s social life and common action in England from the fifteenth century to the eve of the Civil War’, and Maryanne Kowaleski, ‘Women's work in a market town: Exeter in the late fourteenth century’.[[26]](#footnote-26) Four years later in 1990 we find *inter alia* Caroline Barron, ‘The “Golden Age” of women in medieval London’, Helen Jewell, ‘Women at the courts of the manor of Wakefield, 1348-1350’ and my own ‘Women’s work, women’s role, in the late medieval North’.[[27]](#footnote-27)

By 1998 the legacy of third-wave feminism, with its emphasis ‘in response to the collapse of the category “women”’ on the diversity of personal experience, is manifest.[[28]](#footnote-28) Concerns with gender and sexuality have displaced discussion of ‘women’ as an unproblematised and implicitly homogenous collective.[[29]](#footnote-29) We now find such items as Karen Jones and Michael Zell, ‘Bad conversation? Gender and social control in a Kentish borough, c. 1450 - c. 1570’, and Jaqueline Murray, ‘Gendered souls in sexed bodies: the male construction of female sexuality in some medieval confessors’ manuals.’[[30]](#footnote-30) This trend – and evidence of first the linguistic and most recently the spatial turn – continues in 2007, for example Holly A. Crocker, ‘Performative passivity and fantasies of masculinity in the Merchant’s Tale’, Amanda Richardson, ‘Gender and space in English royal palaces c. 1160 - c. 1547: a study in access analysis and imagery’, and Linda Marie Zaerr, ‘Medieval and modern deletions of repellent passages’.[[31]](#footnote-31)

Questions concerning women in the economy and society such that Judith Bennett, Barbara Hanawalt, Rodney Hilton or I myself were asking in the late 1980s and early 1990s have rather fallen from favour.[[32]](#footnote-32) We now see the term ‘women’ as problematic, even an empty category.[[33]](#footnote-33) Women’s experiences – necessarily individual and unique – differed *inter alia* according to age, marital and social status, location, and over time. They can only be understood within broader cultural contexts, hence concerns with gender. For example, sheep shearing in contemporary Australian culture is understood as macho and hence men’s work, but in the English Middle Ages the care of smaller livestock was an extension of women’s nurturing role. Women were also associated with the primary stages of textile manufacture, notably carding and spinning – a process given almost scriptural authority by the tradition that after the expulsion from Eden, Adam delved, but Eve span.[[34]](#footnote-34) Shearing sheep then was women’s work, an activity that was seen properly, even naturally to belong to women. This has implications for how this task was valued and indeed remunerated when undertaken as waged employment.

If the category of ‘women’ is problematic, what of that of ‘the economy’? That women’s economic activities were diverse has long been known and observed, but it is only recently that the economic value of housework and childrearing has been recognised.[[35]](#footnote-35) Indeed it has yet to be fully taken up by medievalists. Another context is the relative decline of social and economic – as opposed to social and cultural – scholarship. Again using the *IMB* as a guide and searching under the heading ‘Economics – General’, the mean annual number of articles or chapters has fallen from over 22 in the period 1970-86 to only about 13 in the period 1987-2005. At the same time in the UK at least numbers of economic history departments have been absorbed into general history departments in ways that have tended to marginalise economic history. It follows that not only are there few practitioners in place in UK universities, but there is limited scope to train the next generation.[[36]](#footnote-36) Much the same appears to be true of some of the best known North American universities.[[37]](#footnote-37) Readers of the *Economic History Review* will note how the social and economic agenda imagined by Eileen Power has increasingly been displaced by ‘hard’ economics – without a good knowledge of statistics some articles are virtually unintelligible. Individual subscriptions have declined steadily from a peak reached in 1976, a trend that cannot be entirely be explained by the much more recent advent of electronic subscriptions by university libraries. Turning again to the *IMB* statistics, only five articles or chapters listed under ‘Economics – General’ for the period 2000-2005 relate to women’s history. Of these, four pertain to marriage or the marital economy.

Before the late 1980s there was very little research on women in the later medieval economy readily available to the student. Eileen Power’s *Medieval Women*, then available in affordable paperback, contained an excellent chapter entitled ‘The Working Woman in Town and Country’. The dedicated researcher could go to Dixon’s article on thirteenth-century Paris or Abram’s on later medieval London with which this paper begun. Whereas Abram argued women’s employment opportunities grew in the fifteenth century as the economy expanded, Power explained women’s employment in the context of a shortage of men consequent upon ‘the greater difficulty of rearing boys’ and higher rates of male mortality.[[38]](#footnote-38) Both, however, were struck by the volume of evidence for female employment which compared favourably with their own experience of the early twentieth century.

It is from the later 1980s that a new generation of scholarship begins. Shulamith Shahar’s *The Fourth Estate*, published in German in 1981 and in English in 1983, is more descriptive than analytical. Edith Ennen’s *Frauern im Mittelalter* (1984, translated into English as *The Medieval Woman* in 1989) is specifically about German women, but argues that urbanisation tended to benefit women.[[39]](#footnote-39) Martha Howell’s *Women, Production and Patriarchy* published in 1986, however, has a clear thesis, though her focus is Leiden and Cologne.[[40]](#footnote-40) Howell argues that women were increasingly marginalised by the later fifteenth century as guilds came to displace the family in controlling access to higher-status employment. Also in 1986 I published ‘Female Labour, Service and Marriage in the Late Medieval Urban North’ which likewise argued that for women a ‘living was harder to find and more precarious as the fifteenth century drew to a close’, but saw – reflecting the legacy of Power – a corresponding expansion of openings for women in town society in the context of acute labour shortage following the Black Death.[[41]](#footnote-41) Something of this thesis was echoed three years later by Caroline Barron in her provocatively entitled ‘The “Golden Age” of Women in Medieval London’, though she suggested that London women’s economic position was only eroded in the early sixteenth century.[[42]](#footnote-42) Judith Bennett has subsequently invented the polemical tag of the Barron-Goldberg thesis of the ‘Golden Age’ for women.[[43]](#footnote-43) I have never in fact subscribed to such an absurd proposition, but as Hill has observed, ‘rather than an argument about whether or not there ever existed a “golden age” for women, what the argument is really about is “great change”, about whether significant watersheds exist in women’s history.’[[44]](#footnote-44)

In her ‘Medieval Women, Modern Women: Across the Great Divide’ (1992), Bennett challenged the position that plague initiated a great transition between the late medieval and early modern eras in respect of women’s work, a paradigm of change that she claimed shaped and determined the revisionist scholarship she was challenging. For Bennett the continuities of women’s marginalised and subordinate place within labour force, the product of patriarchy, outweigh any changes associated with economic or demographic change.[[45]](#footnote-45) This is a theme that Bennett has developed at much greater length in her 2006 monograph *History Matters*.[[46]](#footnote-46) Because this lastrepeats some of her earlier arguments more or less verbatim, I feel justified in reiterating some objections. Her analysis used evidence for women’s occupations from the 1381 poll tax returns for Southwark to show broad similarity with the pattern of female employment derived from London deponents in the ecclesiastical court c. 1700, hence a pattern of essential continuity rather than change, but also of marginalisation and of limited occupations open to women. In fact the poll tax only offers evidence for the occupations of unmarried women.[[47]](#footnote-47) The economy of Southwark, a constitutionally separate and notably poor suburb associated with the sex industry, is, moreover, unrepresentative of the city. Had Bennett analysed the occupations of single men from the same returns she would have found a strikingly similar picture. Her analysis, moreover, depends on assuming an essentially static picture because the two moments she glimpses look similar (albeit using unlike evidence).[[48]](#footnote-48) In her 1992 discussion Bennett entirely erroneously stated that I had not then looked at evidence for women’s work beyond the late medieval.[[49]](#footnote-49) In fact I argued then that the later seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries had seen a marked improvement in employment prospects for women having reached a low point in the late sixteenth century.[[50]](#footnote-50) The similarities between 1381 and c. 1700 then represent not two points along a continuum of marginalisation and limited opportunity, but two like moments in an essentially dynamic model. By using 1381 – thirty-two years after the Black Death – as her starting point, moreover, Bennett singularly failed to demonstrate her own thesis that the Black Death was not a great transformative episode. This then is unsatisfactory evidence to challenge the arguments I made in 1992. Bennett’s thesis, however, does not constitute the current consensus. Thus a recent essay by Merry Wiesner-Hanks challenges Bennett’s argument for continuity from the later medieval into the early modern era by stressing the impact of the Reformation on women’s lives.[[51]](#footnote-51) A still more recent essay by Tine de Moor and Jan Luiten van Zanden reiterates and builds substantially on my arguments, though also, unfortunately, returns to the notion of a Golden Age.[[52]](#footnote-52)

The distance between myself and Judith Bennett is in fact not always as great as she insists. Bennett’s essay rightly highlights the qualitatively different nature of women’s employment to that of men: many men enjoyed a single occupational identity, but few women; men’s work tended to have higher status and be better remunerated where waged; within a familial context, women’s economic activities and control of resources tended to be subordinate to men’s. These she argues may have changed over time, but they were not transformed. The bigger picture remains essentially similar. These are important observations, though we may qualify them. Men’s work identity may be somewhat illusory since guild records, poll tax returns, and the like that record occupations fail to reflect the diversity of activities by which medieval people struggled to make a livelihood.[[53]](#footnote-53) The focus on waged work is misleading since many people were essentially self-employed or unpaid familial labour. It is, moreover, something of a puzzle how even waged labourers managed to make a livelihood, an observation that suggests that wages represent only part of the picture. Nevertheless in an urban context we might expect to find significant numbers working for wages.

Despite Sandy Bardsley’s 1999 assertions – her argument may be correct, but is unsupported at crucial points – it is not apparent that women were paid less for the same work.[[54]](#footnote-54) Indeed numbers of earlier scholars, notably Beveridge, have specifically argued otherwise.[[55]](#footnote-55) The importance of this issue has perhaps been overstated since women were only sometimes employed in the same tasks as men.[[56]](#footnote-56) The more important point, which Bardsley does indeed make, is that women were denied access to the best paid work.[[57]](#footnote-57) In a rural context women, for example, were excluded from ploughing and mowing, which commanded higher wages; as ‘men’s work’ these enjoyed higher status and, by excluding women, subject to less competition. Though women were disadvantaged in terms of inheritance, informally they may have had some voice in decisions regarding the expenditure of familial resources.[[58]](#footnote-58) For example, I have recently argued that distinctive patters of consumption within later medieval bourgeois households, whereby considerable investment is made in household furnishings vis-á-vis well-to-do peasants, may be ascribed to the influence of wives as household members.[[59]](#footnote-59) Indeed it is tempting to suggest, echoing the arguments made a number of years ago by Neil McKendrick in respect of the eighteenth century, that women as consumers helped stimulate demand for goods and services in the immediate post-plague decades. [[60]](#footnote-60) Notions of the male bread winner or of separate spheres are entirely anachronistic in a culture where males and females necessarily pursued a wide range of activities and periodically worked together.

The scholarship noted thus far has had, unsurprisingly, a strong economic history dimension to it and consequently some emphasis on quantification. Of course, sources that readily lend themselves to quantification, or which illuminate the later medieval economy, are comparatively limited. They may create optical illusion by privileging certain facets of society and the economy at the expense of others. There is, moreover, endless room to debate or challenge their statistical credibility. Thus there has been an interest in wages because paid work is documented in account rolls and in presentments for breach of the Statute of Labourers. The nature of account rolls, however, is that they are compiled to justify expenditure, not to tell future historians exactly who was employed. For example, can we be sure that the high remuneration, including a substantial food component, paid to harvest workers after the plague represents payments to individual male labourers – as the documentary evidence implies – or payments that in fact assume that those employed worked alongside their wives where the processes of binding and reaping were probably often performed turn and turn about by husbands and wives?[[61]](#footnote-61) How regularly individuals were employed, the degree to which they were experienced or competent, how far their earnings were controlled by the wage earner, were shared within a familial context, or were simply handed over to a father or other household head, these are questions account rolls will not answer. The same is true of Peace sessions’ evidence. As Simon Penn has speculated, certain categories of worker – notably women as against men – may have been especially at risk of being presented for receiving ‘excess’ wages.[[62]](#footnote-62) The source will not tell. Nor will sources focused on waged work illuminate, other than indirectly, unwaged work or even measure the relative importance of one against the other.

Much the same arguments can be made about other sources that pertain to the economy. The import and export of wool, textiles etc. have long been used as a barometer of the wider economy, but this is because the crown’s imposition of custom duties on overseas trade so as to bolster its revenue, particularly in the context of war generated customs’ accounts. Internal trade, on the other hand, has generated little in the way of extant documentation and so is much harder to explore, let alone measure.[[63]](#footnote-63) It may be, however, that the demand for pots, pans, basic furnishings, and locally produced textiles had an even greater impact on women’s employment than the trade in raw wool, but though the existence of local markets are documented, the composition and volume of trade that they supported from year to year is essentially a closed book. Poll tax returns, particularly from 1379 and 1381, do offer measurable indications of women’s occupations, but principally only of some unmarried women (including widows).[[64]](#footnote-64) They differ markedly in quality and in any case allow us only a snapshot in time. Comparisons with patterns of women’s employment at earlier or later dates are precarious because they necessarily involve unlike sources. We can choose to argue, as I have done, that there was a significant expansion of opportunities for women after the plague or conversely, as Bennett has argued, that there was not. What we cannot do is claim that the poll tax evidence demonstrates one or other thesis.

A further area where scholars have sometimes succumbed to the lure of quantifiable evidence is the study of marriage. The nature of the marriage regime is intimately related to power relations, particularly between fathers and daughters, husbands and wives. Thus an early marriage regime might suggest a high degree of familial or paternal control over marriage. A pattern of age disparity at marriage with husbands marrying younger wives might likewise suggest a rather unequal relationship between spouses. Unfortunately we lack robust sources prior to the advent of parish registration in 1538; there is no counterpart to the monumental Tuscan *catasto* of 1427. The sources that various scholars have deployed – variously manor court rolls (Zvi Razi), poll tax returns (Richard Smith, Larry Poos), Church court depositions (Jeremy Goldberg) – can only support – to borrow from the title of Smith’s 1983 article – hypotheses.[[65]](#footnote-65) All are open to varying degrees of scepticism or challenge. It would be hard not to accept the prevalence of a European marriage pattern from the earlier sixteenth century, but there is plenty of room for debate about what went before, when patterns changed, how far there was regional variation, differences between town and country or between different levels of society. In essence, it still just about possible to believe what we choose to believe and repeated iteration of entrenched positions is no way forward.

It would be possible to extend this discussion with further examples illustrating on the one hand the preference of economic historians to quantify and on the other the necessarily problematic and sometimes distorting nature of understandings that privilege quantitative approaches.[[66]](#footnote-66) Perhaps if we are to explore women’s economic role over the period of the Black Death it is time to step back, to concentrate less on the quantitative and to interrogate the qualitative rather more. We should be asking questions about changing social attitudes to work and gender since these provide the context in which the job market operated. Judith Bennett again asked interesting questions about just this issue in a 1991 article.[[67]](#footnote-67) Recently in an important monograph Cordelia Beattie has built upon Joan Scott’s insights into the politics of categorisation to show how medieval terminology is freighted with cultural resonances that we must unpick before we can recover meaning.[[68]](#footnote-68) The same term used in different kinds of source or text may play to a different agenda and be associated with a different range of resonances. The way forward then is to read more texts, but to read these in more nuanced ways.[[69]](#footnote-69) But the way forward is also a recovery of earlier traditions. We would in fact be retracing the pioneering approaches of Annie Abram and Eileen Power, whose close attention to primary sources made little distinction between conventionally historical or literary texts. I will illustrate this by reference to the 1395 Rykener case from the records of the mayor’s court for the city of London, which has achieved a certain fame since it was rediscovered by Boyd and Karras in 1995.[[70]](#footnote-70)

The Rykener case concerns a man presented before the mayor of London in 1395 having been caught *flagrante delicto* with another man whilst in women’s dress. It has been explored to date in relation to issues of sexuality and gender, but this is of course a very modern agenda. Medieval magistrates were interested in sexual conduct that deviated from the rules set down in clerical teaching, though the particular concerns of city magistrates differed from those of the canon-law courts. Both, however, shared a concern to regulate, to police, to punish. Rykener’s transgressions are not clearly articulated and the most serious – that of sodomy noted only in circumlocution (‘*ipsum vitium detestabile*’) – fell outside the city’s jurisdiction. If we re-read this text as a fiction in the technical sense of something that is made or constructed, then we must first consider its context and the agenda of the mayor’s court. The document represents a magisterial perspective. Superficially it purports to be a kind of deposition, recording Rykener’s testimony, but – and here the work of John Arnold on Inquisition is pertinent – the court controlled both the questions asked and something of Rykener’s answers.[[71]](#footnote-71) In recording details of the case at some length, it reflects the intensity of current magisterial concerns. *En passant* it reflects a bourgeois moral anxiety about priests who fail to live chaste lives, but this is itself related to the overriding concern with honesty.

Rykener is here represented as a tradesperson, though his labour is in allowing his body to be used for the sexual gratification of others rather than honest work. He is a dishonest trader, however, because he purports to be a woman selling implicitly straight sex to male clients whereas he is a man masquerading as a woman. The sex he sells to his supposedly unwitting, and hence cheated customers is in fact anal, gay sex. This is the purpose of John Britby’s reported testimony that he really believed Rykener to be a woman. Britby probably colluded in the magistrates’ agenda because he wished his actions to be seen as mere fornication rather than buggery, but the text’s purpose is not to exonerate Britby, but to highlight Rykener’s dishonesty. Rykener is no less complicit in his testimony. In offering a salacious history of cross-dressing and sexual transgression over a number of years, Rykener – assuming he is not merely a construct of the text – allows the mayor and his fellow magistrates powerful ammunition against a variety of targets.

One such target were dishonest women traders. Rykener related that he had first dressed as a woman at the instigation of one Elizabeth Brouderer who used her own daughter to lure male clients, but substituted Rykener during the night, telling the clients the following morning that they had in fact had sex with Rykener; no doubt this was a ploy to blackmail the duped customers into paying more. It is likely that this Elizabeth Brouderer is the Elizabeth Moring who was written up at length in the city’s Letter Book ‘H’ ten years earlier.[[72]](#footnote-72) Elizabeth was presented and punished for operating a brothel under the cover of an embroidery business and of luring girls into prostitution under the guise of apprenticeships. The detailed narrative once again takes a sideswipe at incontinent priests and offers an account of one Joan who had complained to the mayor that her mistress had made her spend two nights with a priest under the pretext merely of lighting his way home. Riley, who translated this entry, comments in a knowing footnote ‘this careful profession of ignorance deserves remark’. Indeed Joan’s innocent abroad naïveté, reminiscent of the eponymous heroine of *Fanny Hill*, another male-authored narrative albeit from another era, is a deliberate foil for Elizabeth’s wicked deception.[[73]](#footnote-73)

These two apparently related cases co-exist with more conventional prosecutions for deception such as of a baker for inserting a piece of iron into his bread to increase the weight, a scrivener for forging deeds, or a man who pretended to be the Earl of Ormond.[[74]](#footnote-74) The records insist on a moralising discourse of deceit and falsehood which serves to reinforce the claim to moral authority of the civic governors. What the Rykener and the Moring cases specifically reveal, however, is a concern to enforce conservative gender values – men and women should be clearly distinguished by dress, heterosexuality as normative etc. – and a certain anxiety about women traders. This must be contextualised in a contemporary understanding that society after the plague was a society in need of reform and a return to a supposedly divinely sanctioned social and gender hierarchy. On the other hand, the documents reflect an urban economy in which women were conspicuous as traders and apprenticeships were available to young women in much the same way as young men.[[75]](#footnote-75) Like the mid-eighteenth world critiqued by Cleland in *Fanny Hill*, moreover, London is represented as a place of trade and commerce, a place where people bought and sold a very diverse range of commodities and services. Concern about honesty is here a specifically bourgeois concern that grows out of the needs of commerce and trade.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s it was possible to make supposedly objective observations about women and economic continuity and change by reference to statistical indicators be they derived from poll tax records, franchise registers or whatever. We now see the category ‘women’ as problematic and we can no longer view these sources as objective. Nor should we prioritise these quantitative sources over other documentary evidence. Just as Annie Abram and Eileen Power readily used a wide range of sources and explored economic change alongside wider ideological and cultural considerations, so we need to gain a better understanding of how social and cultural attitudes to gender and work changed over the period. We must also realise that there is no single set of ideas. A magisterial perspective may well have differed from a clerical perspective. What an employer thought did not necessarily coincide with how an employee saw the world. The perspective of the native-born was not necessarily that of the migrant. The male shopkeeper may not have seen eye to eye with the female street trader. Of course some of these voices or perspectives are more readily available than others. It is, however, hard not to notice that the decades immediately after the plague seem to have generated particular anxieties around the social and gendered order of society, just as the last decades of the fifteenth century seem to have witnessed much more conservative and hierarchical values being articulated. Such changes may not constitute great transformations, they may defy statistical measurement, but they still command attention.

1. Pamela Sharpe, ‘Continuity and Change: Women’s History and Economic History in Britain’, *Economic History Review, Second series*, 48, no. 2 (1995): 353-69 quotation on 353. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. A. Abram, *Social England in the Fifteenth Century: A Study of the Effects of Economic Conditions* (London: Routledge, 1909). Abram is described on her title page as ‘B.A. Cambridge Hist. Tripos’. This is in effect a political statement as the University of Cambridge, though permitting women to take the tripos examinations, did not actually award degrees to women until 1921. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Janet Sondheimer, ‘Abram, Annie (1869–1930), historian’, in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 60 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), published electronically at <http://www.oxforddnb.com/>, hereafter *ODNB*. The LSE had been founded in 1895 by Beatrice and Sydney Webb, Graham Wallas and George Bernard Shaw. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. A. Abram, *English Life and Manners in the later Middle Ages* (London: Routledge, 1913); Annie Abram, ‘Women Traders of Medieval London’, *Economic Journal*, 26 (1916): 276-85. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Maxine L. Berg, ‘Knowles [née Tomn], Lilian Charlotte Anne (1870–1926), economic historian’, in *ODNB*. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Maxine L. Berg, ‘Power [married name Postan], Eileen Edna Le Poer (1889–1940), economic historian’, in *ODNB*; Maxine Berg, *A Woman in History: Eileen Power 1889-1940* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996). In his moving and affectionate obituary for Power, J.H. Clapham wrote, ‘She appreciated London and the free life ... she resented fiercely – yes, that is the word – the survivals in the older Universities of inequality between the sexes’: J.H. Clapham, ‘Eileen Power, 1889-1940’, *Eonomica*, New ser., 7, no. 28 (1940): 351-9, quotation on 352. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. In addition to a number of *ODNB* entries, her biography of Eileen Power (see note 4 above), see her ‘The first women economic historians’, *Economic History Review*, 2nd ser. 45, no. 2 (1992): 308-29. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. ‘A comparison of the status of women in different countries and at different times might not only furnish us with some of the causes of their advance or retrogression, but also throw light upon the institutions and national characteristics of the countries in question. Our inquiry into the position of women in the later Middle Ages, brief as it is, may perhaps supply a few data for such a purpose; it will also enable us to see if they were better or worse off than women are at the present day’: Annie Abram, *English Life and Manners in the later Middle Ages* (London: George Routledge and Sons, 1913), 31. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Berg, ‘The first women economic historians’, 317-9. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Annie Abram, ‘Newcastle’, in *Married Women’s Work*, ed. Clementina Black (London: G. Bell and Sons, 1915), 195-203. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. RAE exercises have been conducted by subject areas across the UK higher education sector in 1986, 1989, 1992, 1996, 2001 and 2008 whereby the research output (primarily publications) of faculty has been evaluated by subject panels of peers drawn from across the country. These evaluations have determined the level of research funding allocated from central government to each institution. The earlier exercises were more focused on the volume of output, but more recent exercises have evaluated quality by asking that only four publications be declared from each faculty member. Faculty deemed to have produced insufficient publications or publications not of the right standard have often not been declared, but this impacts on the research funding subsequently allocated since this is weighted by numbers declared. Certain kinds of publication are held to be more desirable than others. Thus monographs and articles in refereed scholarly journals are thought to be more desirable than essays in collections. Scholarly editions and books written primarily for teaching are very much discouraged. The result has been a considerable increase in publications, especially article publications, and some tendency for these to be bunched close to an RAE census deadline. The current (2014) Research Excellence Framework has a census date at the end of 2013 and is supposed to measure ‘research impact’ as well as quality of research output. This is taking place within a climate of unprecedented retrenchment in state funding with the consequence that pressure on faculty to produce is intensified. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Her *Paycockes of Coggeshall* was published in 1920 and *Medieval People* in 1924. *The Wool Trade in English Medieval History* was published posthumously. Power founded the Economic History Society in 1926 and the first issue of the *Economic History Review* followed soon after. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Amy Louise Erickson, ‘McArthur, Ellen Annette (1862–1927), historian’, in *ODNB*; Ellen McArthur, ‘Women petitioners and the Long Parliament’, English Historical Review, 24 (1909): 698-709. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Maud Sellers is noted for her editions of the York A/Y Memorandum Book, *The Acts and Ordinances of the Eastland Company*, and records of the York Merchant Adventurers. She is not included in the *ODNB*. Lucy Toulmin Smith (1838-1911), who in her latter years was librarian of the Unitarian Manchester College in Oxford, earlier assisted *inter alia* her father in completing *English Gilds* for the Early English Text Society, James Gairdner, the editor of the Paston correspondence, but, D.S. Porter notes, ‘her major clients were foreign scholars’. She also edited a range of medieval texts in her own right, including the *York Plays*, and translated Jusserand’s *English Wayfaring Life in the Middle Ages* from the French: D.S. Porter, ‘Smith, Lucy Toulmin (1838–1911), literary scholar and librarian’, in *ODNB*. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Eileen Power, ‘The working woman in town and country’, in eadem, *Medieval Women*, ed. M.M. Postan (Cambridge, 1975), 53-75 at 53-4. Power writes, ‘the total number of women, then as now, was in excess of the number of men.’ By ‘now’ Power was referring to the generation immediately following the First World War when she wrote this essay. Of this chapter Postan writes that it was ‘largely based on my researches and in which she [Power] embodied numerous passages written by me’ (7), but familiarity with Power’s own scholarship suggests that Postan almost certainly exaggerated his role. Clapham, commenting on *Studies in the History of English Trade in the Fifteenth Century* which Power co-edited with Postan, tellingly writes, ‘only those who were members and contributors can say just how much of the inspiration and guidance for the various sections was hers. I should guess most of both’: Clapham, ‘Eileen Power’, 357. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Abram, *Social England*, 131; Elizabeth Dixon ‘Craftswomen in the *Livre des Métiers*’, *Economic Journal*, 5 (1895): 209-28. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Bridget Hill, citing the examples of Alice Clark, Dorothy George, and Ivy Pinchbeck, rather than the medievalists noted here, has also challenged the view that such earlier feminist scholars tend to adopt a broadly similar position on the supposedly disadvantaged position of women consequent upon industrialisation. In so doing she has attempted to lay to rest the notion that these earlier scholars presented the pre-industrial era as a golden age for women: Bridget Hill, ‘Women’s history: a study in change, continuity or standing still?’, *Women’s History Review*, 2, no. 1 (1993): 5-22, especially 6-11. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Shiela Rowbotham, *Hidden from History: 300 Years of Women’s Oppression and the Fight against it* (London: Pluto Press, 1973); Joan Kelly, ‘Did Women have a Renaissance?’, in *Becoming Visible: Women in European History*, ed. Renate Bridenthal and Claudia Koonz (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1977), 137-64; Barbara A. Hanawalt, ‘Childrearing among the Lower Classes of Late Medieval England’, Journal of Interdisciplinary History, 8, no. 1 (1977): 1-22. The publication of Hanawalt’s pioneering article coincided with the National Women’s Conference at Houston, Texas, which made issues relating to child care high up its agreed plan of action. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. We may note, for example, the publication in 1982 of a modern English translation of Christine de Pisan’s *Book of the City of Ladies* in both hard and paperback editions. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. The anomaly is explained by the publication in 1980 of an essay collection entitled *The Welsh Laws of Women*. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Eileen Power, *Medieval Women*, ed. M.M. Postan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975). [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Judith M. Bennett, ‘Forgetting the Past’, *Gender and History*, 20, no.3 (2008): 669–677, especially table 1, 670. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Women represented 17.5 percent of academic teaching staff in British universities in 1965. This had grown to 24 per cent by 1979, by which date the total number of teaching posts had also expanded. These processes have continued subsequently, albeit slowly; women constituted 27 per cent of academics by 1995 and 36 per cent by 2005, i.e. it has taken forty years for the proportion of women in British academic teaching posts to double from about one in six to slightly more than one in three. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. For all higher education institutions women constituted 22.5 per cent of faculty in 1974-5, 33.8 per cent in 1997-8, 36 per cent in 2000-01, and 39 per cent in 2005-06. These statistics are not directly equivalent to the UK university sector and will tend to suggest a slightly more favourable gender ratio. In 2005-6 the proportion for institutions awarding doctorates – the equivalent of university-status institutions in the UK – was 34 per cent: Debra M. Easterly and Cynthia Lee A. Pemberton, ‘An Exploration of the Barriers and Supports Perceived by Female Faculty in Institutions of Higher Education as they Write proposals to Secure External Funds’, *Advancing Women in Leadership Journal*, published electronically at

    < http://advancingwomen.com/awl/awl\_wordpress/an-exploration-of-the-barriers-and-supports-perceived-by-female-faculty-in-institutions-of-higher-education-as-they-write-proposals-to-secure-external-funds/> In Canada women constituted only 16.5 per cent of full-time university teachers in 1985, but this had grown to 33.5 per cent in 2005: ‘The Tenure Gap: Women’s University Appointments 1985-2005’, *C.A.U.T. Equity Review*, 4 (2008), table 1 published electronically at

    < http://www.caut.ca/uploads/EquityReview4-en.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. These spikes may in part have been influenced by RAE exercises in 1992, 1996, and 2001, though of course not all publications are associated with UK academics. Unless there has been a sharp decline from 2003, *IMB* statistics appear not to be complete after 2005, so it is not possible to comment with confidence on the most recent trend. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Barbara A. Hanawalt, ‘Peasant women’s contribution to the home economy in late medieval England’, in *Women and Work in Preindustrial* *Europe*, ed. eadem(Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 3-19; Ralph Houlbrooke, ‘Women’s social life and common action in England from the fifteenth century to the eve of the Civil War’, [*Continuity and Change*](http://journals.cambridge.org/action/displayJournal?jid=CON) , 1, no. 2 (1986): 171-189; Maryanne Kowaleski, ‘Women's work in a market town: Exeter in the late fourteenth century’, in *Women and Work*, ed. Hanawalt, 145-64. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Caroline Barron, ‘The “Golden Age” of women in medieval London’, *Reading Medieval Studies*, 15 (1989): 35-58; Helen Jewell, ‘Women at the courts of the manor of Wakefield, 1348-1350’, *Northern History*, 26 (1990), 59-81; P.J.P. Goldberg, ‘Women’s work, women’s role, in the late medieval North’, in [*Profit, Piety and the Professions in Later Medieval England*, ed. Michael Hicks (Gloucester: Alan Sutton](http://apps.brepolis.net.libproxy.york.ac.uk/bmb/search.cfm?action=search_advanced_result&startrow=1&add_to_search_history=1&log_advancedsearch=1&source=IMB&title_boolean=and&title=%22Profit,%20Piety%20and%20the%20Professions%20in%20Later%20Medieval%20England.%20Ed.%20Michael%20HICKS.%20Pp.%20xxii,%20170.%20Gloucester:%20Alan%20Sutton%22), 1990), 34-50. The *IMB* erroneously lists Barron’s article as published in 1990 not 1989. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. R. Claire Snyder, ‘What is Third-Wave Feminism? A new Direction Essay’, *Signs*, 34, no. 1 (2008): 175-96, quotation on 175. Snyder goes on to conclude that ‘third-wave feminism potentially offers a diverse, antifoundationalist, multiperspectival, sex-radical version of feminism’ (193). [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Such scholarship tends to be published in specialist medieval journals and not, as Judith Bennett has observed (see note 22 above) in the main women’s and gender history journals. These last tend to be primarily focused on the modern era. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Karen Jones and Michael Zell, ‘Bad conversation? Gender and social control in a Kentish borough, c. 1450 - c. 1570’, *Continuity and Change*, 13 (1998), 11–31;

    Jaqueline Murray, ‘Gendered souls in sexed bodies: the male construction of female sexuality in some medieval confessors’ manuals’, in *Handling Sin: Confession in the Middle Ages*,ed. Peter Biller and A.J. Minnis , York Studies in Medieval Theology, 2, (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell, 1998), 79-93. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Holly A. Crocker, ‘Performative passivity and fantasies of masculinity in the Merchant’s Tale’, *The Chaucer Review*, 38, no. 2 (2003): 178-98; Amanda Richardson, ‘Gender and space in English royal palaces c. 1160 - c. 1547: a study in access analysis and imagery’, *Medieval Archaeology*, 48 (2003), 131-65;

    Linda Marie Zaerr, ‘Medieval and modern deletions of repellent passages’ in *Improvisation in the Arts of the Middle Ages and Renaissance*, ed. Timothy McGee, Early Drama, Art and Music Monograph Series, 30 (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 2003), pp. 222-46. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. In 1995 Sharpe noted that ‘far more new research has appeared on women’s employment in the medieval than in the early modern period,’ arguing that ‘the early modern period is still dominated by Clark’s *Working life of women in the seventeenth century*, published in 1919’: Sharpe, ‘Continuity and Change’, 356. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Joan W. Scott, ‘Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis’, [*American Historical Review*](http://www.jstor.org.libproxy.york.ac.uk/action/showPublication?journalCode=amerhistrevi), 91, no. 5 (1986): 1053-75, see especially1064 ff. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. ‘Whan Adam dalf, and Eve span / Wo was thanne a gentilman?’ was famously the text of a sermon by John Ball, a leader of the Peasants’ Revolt of 1381. For women’s employment in sheep shearing, carding, spinning etc., see Goldberg, *Women, Work, and Life Cycle*, 118-22, 139-40, 144-5. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. E.g. Ronald Colman, ‘The Economic Value of Unpaid Housework and Child Care in Nova Scotia’ (1998) published electronically at <http://www.gpiatlantic.org/pdf/housework/housework.pdf> Housework and childcare were matters of contemporary debate. See for example ‘The Ballad of the Tyrannical Husband’, a late fifteenth-century verse with a pronounced normative agenda. A modern edition is published in *The Trials and Joys of Marriage*, ed. Eve Salisbury (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 2002) and electronically at <http://www.lib.rochester.edu/camelot/teams/thfrm.htm>. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. With the retirement of John Hatcher, neither Oxford nor Cambridge has a specialist in later medieval economic history in something like a tenured position. The same is largely true of Birmingham, Bristol, King’s College, London, St Andrews, University College, London and York. Oliver Vlockart of the Department of Economic History at the LSE, formerly headed by the late Stephan Epstein, is a specialist on financial markets from the fourteenth to sixteenth centuries. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Of Berkeley, Chicago, Columbia, Cornell, Harvard, McGill, Notre Dame, Pennsylvania, Princeton, Toronto, UCLA, and Yale, I counted only three specialist faculty. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Abram, *Social England*, 131 ff.; Power, ‘The working woman’, quotation on 52. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Shulamith Shahar, *Die Frau im Mittelalter* (Königstein: Athenäum Verlag, 1981), *The Fourth Estate: A History of Women in the Middle Ages* (London and New York: Methuen, 1983); Edith Ennen, *Frauen im Mittelalter* (Munich: Beck, 1984), *The Medieval Woman*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990). [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Martha C. Howell, *Women, Production, and Patriarchy in Late Medieval Cities* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986). [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. P.J.P. Goldberg, ‘Female labour, service and marriage in the late medieval urban north’, *Northern History*, 22 (1986): 18-38, quotation on 37. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. Caroline M. Barron, ‘The “Golden Age” of Women in Medieval London’, *Reading Medieval Studies*, 15 (1989): 35-58. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. She has been followed *inter alia* by Sandy Bardsley and most recently Barbara Hanawalt, though Hanawalt does not specifically use the tag: Sandy Bardsley, *Venemous Tongues: Speech and Gender in Late Medieval England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 7-8; Barbara A. Hanawalt, *The Wealth of Wives: Women, Law, and Economy in Late Medieval London* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 161-2. Hanawalt characterises Barron and Goldberg (162) as offering a Golden Age thesis that is ‘based on laws that seem to treat women’s employment as equal to men’s, a few examples of widows who successfully continued their husbands’ businesses, silkwomen in London who practiced their craft and sold their goods, and a scattering of other women who had businesses or well-paid jobs.’ This is a travesty of my work, but her note references only Barron’s 1989 essay. She goes on, ‘an additional argument is that young, single women did so well in employment that they delayed marriage and many did not marry at all.’ Here she references my 1992 monograph with the further observation that my work ‘often relies on only fifteen to twenty cases.’ (n. 3, 269) This again constitutes a rhetorical strategy, but the implication is that my work merely adds additional tropes to Barron’s original theme. Bardsley, who references only my 1992 monograph, likewise implies that my work follows Barron’s ‘Golden Age’ article. The opposite is the case. Caroline Barron presented versions of her Golden Age paper at various locations for a number of years prior to her hearing a version of my 1986 paper, but her observations about long-term changes in women’s economic fortunes first appeared only in her 1989 paper. (I owe this observation to my colleague Peter Biller.) [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. Hill, ‘Women’s history’, *Women’s History Review*: 12-13. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. Judith M. Bennett, ‘[Medieval Women, Modern Women: Across the Great Divide](http://www-bcf.usc.edu/~judithb/medmodwom.pdf)’, in *Culture and History 1350-1600: Essays on English Communities, Identities, and Writing*, ed. David Aers (New York and Brighton: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992), 147-75. Bennett’s thesis has been challenged at length in Hill, ‘Women’s history’, *Women’s History Review*: 5-22. Bennett has replied to this in Judith M. Bennett, ‘[Women’s history: a study in continuity and change](http://www.informaworld.com.libproxy.york.ac.uk/smpp/content~db=all~content=a751271412~frm=titlelink)’, *Women’s History Review*, 2, no. 2 (1993): 173-84. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. Judith M. Bennett, *History Matters: Patriarchy and the Challenge of Feminism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 83 ff. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. The term ‘unmarried’ here indicates both never-married women and widows. The poll tax returns only sometimes distinguish **widows** as such. Only three women are specifically designated ‘*vidua*’ in the extant Southwark returns: *The Poll Taxes of 1377, 1379 and 1381, Part 2: Lincolnshire-Westmorland*, ed. Carolyn Fenwick, British Academy, Records of Social and Economic History, new series, 29 (Oxford: Oxford University Press / British Academy, 2001), 558-64. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. P.J.P. Goldberg, ‘Household and the Organisation of Labour in Late Medieval Towns: Some. English Evidence’, in *The Household in Late Medieval Cities: Italy and Northwestern Europe Compared*, ed.Miriam Carlier and Tim Soens, (Leuven and Apeldoorn: Garant, 2001), 59-70, see 67-9. Judith Bennett responds to these criticisms arguing that ‘these two snapshots are not arbitrarily chosen … they remain the best data for long term comparison of female occupations over these centuries that anyone has been able to locate,’ and that she looks for ‘general trends, not precise patterns’: Bennett, *History Matters*, n. 39, 184. Both these are reasonable positions in themselves, but evidence of he 1381 poll tax can tell us nothing about the period before 1348 and hence about changes either side of the Black Death. The occupations of unmarried women in a poor neighbourhood characterised by the sex trade, moreover, is not a suitable proxy for the wider female experience. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. Bennett cites the abstract to my 1987 doctoral thesis – the basis of my 1992 monograph – but clearly had not read the thesis itself: Bennett, ‘Medieval Women, Modern Women’, 150. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. These arguments were published in 1992 largely unchanged from my doctoral thesis: P.J.P. Goldberg, *Women, Work, and Life Cycle in a Medieval Economy: Women in York and Yorkshire c. 1300-1520* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 345-56. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. Merry E. Wiesner-Hanks, ‘Do Women Need the Renaissance?’, *Gender and History*, 20, no. 3 (2008), 539-57. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. Tine de Moor and Jan Luiten van Zanden, ‘Girl power: the European marriage pattern and labour markets in the North Sea region in the late medieval and early modern period’, *Economic History Review*, 2nd ser. 63, no. 1 (2010), 1-33. They discuss the notion of a Golden Age at 26-7. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. See for example Goldberg, ‘Household and the Organisation of Labour’, 59-70. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. Bardsley’s argument that women did not usually receive equal pay when engaged in the same work depends on identifying those males who earned the same wages as either pre-adult or elderly. This may be, but the sources do not show this anymore than they make distinctions between different categories of female worker: Sandy Bardsley, ‘Women’s Work Reconsidered: Gender and Wage Differentation in Late Medieval England’, *Past and Present*, 165 (1999): 3-29; John Hatcher has challenged parts of Bardsley’s thesis in his ‘Women’s Work Reconsidered: Gender and Wage Differentiation in Late Medieval England’, *Past and Present*, 173 (2001): 191-8, but my observation is not part of his critique which places greater emphasis on how ‘heavy manual labour ... militated against the employment of women and precluded them from competing on equal terms’ (198), a position I find no more satisfactory. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. William Beveridge, ‘Westminster Wages in the Manorial Era’, *Economic History Review*, 2nd ser., 8, no. 1 (1955): 18-35, see 34. Rodney Hilton and Simon Penn have also been sympathetic to this position. The historiography is usefully surveyed in Bardsley, ‘Women’s Work Reconsidered’: 6-9. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. Bardsley suggests that the relationship between men’s and women’s wages is ‘critical’ to what she dubs ‘the golden age debate’: Bardsley, ‘Women’s Work Reconsidered’: 4. In fact, save for a brief notice of servants’ money wages which shows male servants to have earned considerably more than female using urban evidence from 1391-2 and the second decade of the sixteenth century, discussions of wages is largely absent from my 1992 monograph: Goldberg, *Women, Work, and Life Cycle*, 186. Most work in later medieval society was performed within a familial context and done without formal payment. Live-in servants were hired primarily for bed and board and payments to older servants effectively represent contributions to future needs rather than wages as we conventionally understand them. Only day labourers (or journeymen) regularly received a money wage, often supplemented by the provision of meals. Many of the wages paid to women workers observed in the records – particularly presentations for receiving ‘excess’ wages contrary to the provision of the Statute of Labourers (1351 and later revisions) – represent seasonal tasks only and probably reflect women’s work only indifferently. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. Bardsley, ‘Women’s Work Reconsidered’, p. 11. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. Pamela Sharpe, whose focus is primarily post-medieval, astutely observes that ‘women’s access to economic resources did not always readily translate into wages. Indeed, controlling resources can be concerned with budgeting, looking after children or the sick, or managing a piece of land. None of these is readily measurable in terms of economic indicators’: Sharpe, ‘Continuity and Change’, 356. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. P.J.P. Goldberg, ‘The Fashioning of Bourgeois Domesticity in Late Medieval England: A Material Culture Perspective’, in Medieval Domesticity: Home, Housing and Household in Medieval England, ed. Maryanne Kowalewski and P. J. P. Goldberg (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 124-144. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. John H. Plumb, Neil McKendrick, John Brewer, *The Birth of a Consumer Society: the Commercialization of Eighteenth-Century England* (London: Europa Publications, 1982). McKendrick’s chronology has been challenged by Jan de Vries who sees women as playing a key role in an ‘industrious revolution’ which he sees as ‘gaining momentum for over a century before 1750’: Jan de Vries, ‘Between purchasing power and the world of goods: understanding the household economy in early modern Europe’, in Consumption and the World of Goods, ed. Roy Porter and John Brewer (London: Routledge, 1993), 85-132 quotation on 114. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. C.C. Dyer, ‘Changes in Diet in the Late Middle Ages: The Case of Harvest Workers’, *Agricultural History Review*, 36, no. 1 (1988): 21-37. There is good visual evidence for males and females reaping and binding in tandem, for example in one of the *bas de page* illuminations from the Luttrell Psalter and, over a century later, from an glass calendar roundel now in the Victoria and Albert Museum (London). [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. S.A.C. Penn, ‘Female Wage-Earners in late Fourteenth-Century England’, *Agricultural History Review*, 35, no. 1 (1987): 1-14. [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. Pamela Nightingale, for example, has made much of the Statute Merchant and Staple Certificates as sources, but her revisionist arguments still place particular emphasis on international trade, c.f. her most recent article, ‘The Rise and Decline of Medieval York: A Reassessment’, *Past and Present*, 206 (2010): 3-42. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. Cf. Goldberg, *Women, Work, and Life Cycle*, 86-104, 137-49, 158-68, 186-92, 196-9. [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. Zvi Razi, *Life, Marriage and Death in a Medieval Parish:* *Economy, society and demography in Halesowen 1270-1400* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980); R.M. Smith, ‘Hypothèses sur la nuptialité en Angleterre aux XIIIe-XIVe siècles’, *Annales: ESC*, 38 (1903): 107-36; L.R. Poos, *A Rural Society after the Black Death: Essex 1350-1525* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), especially 148-57; Goldberg, *Women, Work, and Life Cycle*, especially 217-32. [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
66. Marjorie McIntosh makes a similar point concerning the problem of interpreting ‘scant evidence’: Marjorie Keniston McIntosh, *Working Women in English Society 1300-1620* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005): 36-7. [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
67. Judith M. Bennett, ‘[Misogyny, Popular Culture and Women’s Work](http://www-rcf.usc.edu/~judithb/miso.pdf)’, *History Workshop Journal*, 31, no. 1 (1991): 166-88. Bennett used John Skelton’s ‘The Tunning of Elynour Rumming’, which she claimed ‘seems to be very much a popular poem, as suggested by its vocabulary, syntax, and meter, and by its particular suitability for oral presentation’ (173), as evidence for popular misogynistic sentiment against women brewers. Her discussion neglects to notice Skelton’s status as a court poet, the poet’s artifice in constructing what purports to be a plebeian oral text, and that the poem concludes with three stanzas of Latin verse (omitted from some modern editions). [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
68. Cordelia Beattie, *Medieval Single Women: the politics of social classification in late medieval England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007). [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
69. A good example of a close reading of a single medieval text to throw light on women in the late medieval English economy see Cordelia Beattie, ‘Single Women, Work, and Family: The Chancery Dispute of Jane Wynde and Margaret Clerk’, in *Voices from the Bench: The Narratives of Lesser Folk in Medieval Trials*, ed. Michael Goodich (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 177-202. [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
70. David Lorenzo Boyd and Ruth Mazo Karras, ‘The Interrogation of a Male Transvestite Prostitute in Fourteenth Century London’, *GLQ*, 1, no. 3 (1995): 459-65. [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
71. John H. Arnold, *Inquisition and Power: Catharism and the Confessing Subject in Medieval Languedoc* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), ch. 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
72. The case is translated in *Memorials of London and London Life in the XIIIth, XIVth, and XVth Centuries*,ed. Henry Thomas Riley (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1848), 484-6. [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
73. John Cleland’s *Fanny Hill* or *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure* was first published 1748-9. [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
74. *Memorials of London and London Life*, ed. Riley, 496-8. [↑](#footnote-ref-74)
75. Caroline M. Barron, ‘The Education and Training of Girls in Fifteenth-Century London’, in Diana E.S. Dunn, ed., *Courts, Counties and the Capital in the later Middle Ages* (Stroud, 1996), 139-53. [↑](#footnote-ref-75)