

Women in Bristol 1373-1660

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Introduction: Later Medieval and Early-Modern Bristol

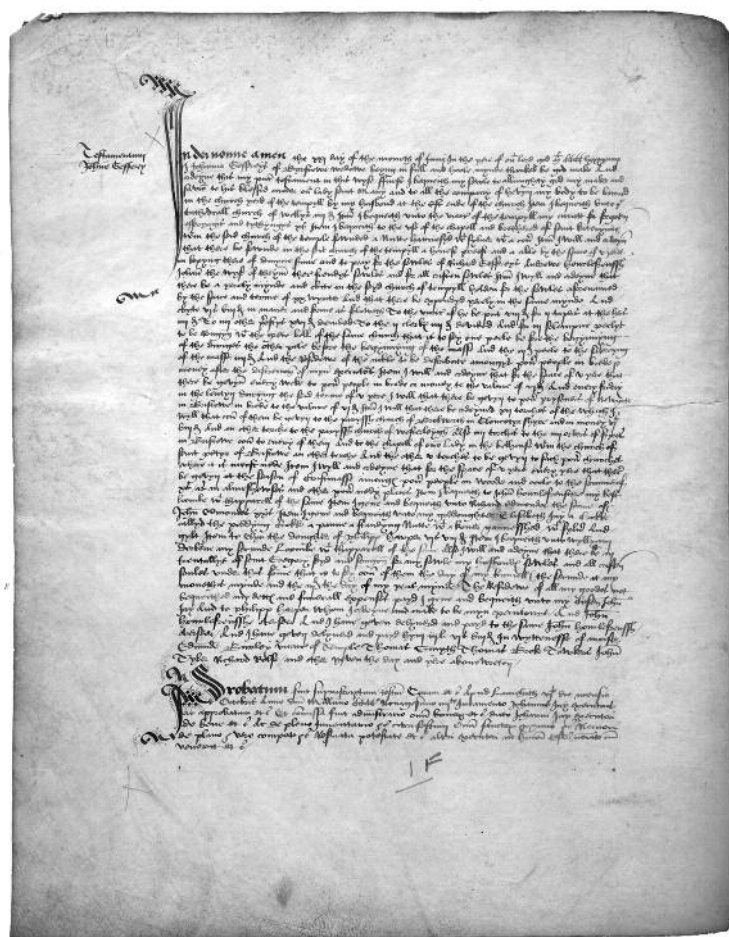
This chapter begins at the end of the 1300s and ends with the Restoration of the Stuart monarchy with Charles II in 1660. In 1373 Bristol was granted county status by the king, Edward III, roughly a generation after the demographic catastrophe of the 1340s when the Black Death ravaged England – carrying off between one third and one half of the population in a few months. Bristol was particularly badly affected. Subsequent epidemics prevented any meaningful recovery of numbers until the Tudor period, so that England's population stagnated for over a century.

By the 1370s, the consequences of this disaster had become apparent in a qualified rebalancing of power: wages were higher, rents and food prices were lower. Consequently, the century or so following the 1370s has been described, with some justification, as the 'Golden Age of Labour', and, more controversially, as a 'Golden Age for Women' with, supposedly, greater demand for labour resulting in more opportunities for ordinary women to break out of the restraints of what were considered appropriate female activities.¹ While attractive and superficially sensible, given the undeniable existence of new equations between capital and labour, this view has not always borne up to detailed scrutiny.² While the details of these arguments may remain contentious, it is plausible to assert that the end of the fourteenth century marks the beginning of the transition in England from 'medieval' to 'modern', that is, from a basically 'feudal' economy to a 'capitalist' one. Also, the end of the fourteenth century sees the emergence of primary sources that allow us, for the first time, to be able to get close to relatively ordinary people and, more particularly, to women as individuals. This is especially true of women in towns. From the 1380s we have the wills of the 'middling sort', including the wills of women, in useable quantities, as well as other new categories of records, such as the proceedings of the Court of Chancery, a tribunal that specialised in commercial cases and cases involving the property aspects of marriage. [*Fig. 1.1*]

The end date has been chosen because the Restoration was surely also a

turning point in English – and Bristol – history. Bristol endured particularly dreadful experiences in the Civil Wars (1642–51) between King and Parliament, when it was twice taken by siege. The first time, by Royalists led by Prince Rupert, ended with the surrender of the city in July 1643, and the second, by the Parliamentary New Model Army in September 1645, saw the city stormed. Bristolians suffered greatly during the course of these assaults and subsequent occupations. The suffering was compounded by an outbreak of plague in 1644 to 1645.³ The Restoration promised a brighter future. For about thirty years before the Restoration Bristolians were already beginning to take advantage of England's colonial expansion in the Caribbean, and such activities naturally affected the city's female population. While this chapter ends with Bristol on the brink of playing its central role in the first British Empire, throughout the later medieval period Bristol's position as England's major west-country port had also determined its history.

Medieval Bristol's significance arose in large part from its position at the centre of English colonialism: it provided the most convenient bridgehead for English military and commercial expansion into southern Wales and Ireland, and with the addition of the rich vineyards of Gascony to the English crown in 1154, Bristol soon became England's paramount provincial port for the importation of Gascon wine. From the second half of the fourteenth century Bristol's cloth industry provided it with a highly-valued export commodity with which to balance its wine imports. While Bristol's weaving industry gradually lost out to rural clothiers, the town continued to be a centre for cloth finishing (fulling, that is, breaking up, or 'felting', the individual fibres), and dyeing. England's loss of the Hundred Years War with France in 1453 brought an end to significant English territorial interests beyond Britain and Ireland until the period of trans-Atlantic expansion beginning in Elizabethan times. The loss of England's French possessions dealt a serious blow to Bristol's economy, and the town's economic depression lasted for about a generation. By the end of the fifteenth century its French trade was recovering, supplemented by increased trade with Spain, but from the beginning of the sixteenth century it is clear that Bristol's first 'golden age' was over. The Reformation period, beginning in the 1530s, brought about a major dislocation of Bristol's internal economy, transferring considerable wealth, particularly landed property, from ecclesiastical to lay proprietors, and severely damaging some aspects of its culture, as well, of course, as disrupting the religious lives of its inhabitants. The roots of Bristol's second 'golden age', based on the trans-Atlantic economy, can be discerned in the first half of the



1.1 Probate Copy of the Testament of Johanna (Joan) Geffereys, widow, of Bristol, 1494. The vast bulk of female wills were made by widows, since the wives of living husbands could only make a will with his permission, and few did so. This one is written in English, but most, before the middle of the fifteenth century, were written in Latin. A large number of Bristol testators, like this one, had their wills proved by the Prerogative Court of Canterbury, held at Lambeth (now South London) rather than, or in addition to, the diocesan consistory courts held within either Worcester or Bath and Wells or, after the creation of the diocese in 1542, Bristol. There was considerable social cachet in having one's will proved centrally, rather than locally.

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seventeenth century, but the city's tumultuous experiences during the Civil Wars bring the period covered in this chapter to an end amid crisis and uncertainty. However, despite the problems of the period from the Reformation to the Restoration of the Stuarts, Bristol was alone among cities in Southern England in being able to maintain its commercial and social independence from London: while ambitious Bristol men might seek their fortunes in London, their home town never became simply a glorified 'outport' for the metropolis, existing largely to provide the capital with another port through which commodities could be exported and imported.⁴ So, throughout this period, it is clear that Bristol was an important place; less clear is an answer to the question of how we can know about the lives of – probably – over half of its population. What sources are available from which we can learn about female Bristolians?

Researching the History of Later Medieval and Early-Modern Women

Bristol is no exception to the general rule that finding sources from which to reconstruct the lives of non-noble lay women in the pre-modern period is difficult, but far from impossible. There is a, perhaps, surprising quantity and variety of Bristol sources from which to construct a fairly detailed picture of some aspects of women's lives, with the usual caveats that in treating of around half the population we are in danger of assuming an unhelpful essentialism, that, in other words, women's gender gives them a commonality of interest that transcends socio-economic or political power, or religious outlook, in a way that we do not assume for men: a trap into which this chapter, despite its author's best intentions, doubtless falls on more than one occasion.

This chapter surely also fails to negotiate successfully the equally dangerous trap of over-emphasising the lives of members of small and unrepresentative elites, since it is they who have left us with the most evidence of their lives. Insofar as these conceptual and methodological traps allow, the themes of the book will be addressed, in terms of women's economic roles and their capacity to influence political, social and cultural life within a place that was near the heart of England's commercial and imperial ambitions.⁵ We shall begin with women's economic position.

The Evidence of the Early Tudor Subsidies

Taxation records promise to give an overview of demography, wealth, and social structure for both women and men, but Bristol is not well served by these: detailed returns for the late fourteenth-century poll tax do not survive

for the town, and so the earliest usable tax returns come near the middle of our period, with the Tudor subsidies of the 1520s. The most complete return for Bristol comes from 1524. The valuation was, broadly speaking, divided between property and wages. Property was defined as land or goods, and in the cases discussed here this was always goods rather than land, because we are discussing town-dwellers, most of whom owned little, if any, landed property. In Bristol the subsidy was levied on individuals worth at least twenty shillings (£1) in terms of annual property value or income from wages. There were 1081 property-holders (individuals assessed on land or goods) listed in the return, and 225 individuals assessed on wages. Most of the wage-earners were described as servants. The property-holders would have been heads of households, and therefore behind most of them would have been an unknown number of dependents. There were far more employees than the 225 assessed, but these others earned less than £1 *per annum* and were therefore not recorded. In total, the taxed population of Bristol, including the dependents of heads of household, probably amounted to about half of the town's entire population (of around 8,000), which in turn means that approximately half were too poor to be taxed.⁶

No women were assessed on wages, which means that none earned an annual wage of £1 or more. Female domestic servants were fairly common, but the 'superior' servants, receiving annual wages of £1 or more, were apparently all male. Forty-three living women were named as taxed on property. With one exception, all of these 43 were described as widows. The exception, Katherine Dee, assessed on £2 of property, may have been a propertied woman who had not married up to that point, but may also have been a widow whose status was accidentally omitted by a careless scribe. Therefore, and not surprisingly, perhaps, the only female householders to be taxed were widows, with one possible exception, an obvious reflection of the fact that single females from the lay propertied classes tended either to be young and destined to be married, or had survived at least one husband, and so were widows.

The average assessed property holding of these 43 women was just under £17, considerably more than the average for all Bristol assessed property-holders of £11 2s. For the most part this is evidently a group of widows who were financially fairly comfortably off, but there was considerable variation. For example, among the 31 widows assessed in Trinity Ward (one of five wards into which Bristol was divided), at one extreme we find Joan Broke in Redcliffe Street, whose goods were assessed at £40, her near neighbours Cecily Bedford, assessed at £80, and, wealthiest of all, Joan Ap Rhys, widow of a Bristol-Welsh-

man living on Welsh Back, with goods valued at £200; at the other extreme, six out of these 31 widows in Trinity had goods valued at only the £1 minimum, while another ten were valued at £2 in goods, meaning that half of the widows in this ward were living in relatively humble households.

Only two of the 43 assessed women are listed as having servants assessed for taxation, in both cases a male servant assessed on the minimum, £1 *per annum* in wages. This does not mean that the widows necessarily lived without servants – they probably all had some kind of servant – only that with two exceptions their servants were paid less than £1 per year, and were probably hired for periods of a year or six months at a time. As a whole this group of 43 women constituted a tiny minority of the town's property-holding taxpayers, and its members controlled a small share of Bristol's total wealth. Early-Tudor Bristol's property-holding society was overwhelmingly male, but some of the small number of female property-holders (exclusively, or almost all, widows) were wealthy and, presumably, could use that wealth to influence the lives of their fellow Bristolians. In addition, as we shall see, women, whether wives, widows, or even, perhaps, apprentices and servants, could also make an impact on this male-dominated society.⁷

Widows and Married Women

To some extent, the evidence provided by the Tudor Subsidy can stand for what we know about women in later medieval and early modern Bristol more generally: because women, apart from widows, were under the legal shadow of men, whether as fathers, guardians, husbands or employers, and hence tended not to appear in the documents that recorded public life, we can know relatively little about them. Widows, or at least those widows who enjoyed a certain level of property, operated much more independently, and so we are likely to know more about them. Hence, they tend to figure disproportionately prominently in our historical accounts, and the present chapter cannot be an exception.⁸

However, some married women with living husbands did leave evidence of their activities. Married women occasionally made wills. Their right, or need, to do so was severely constrained, since on marriage any landed property women owned – their real estate – continued in their possession but was controlled by their husband, while most of their moveable property passed completely into his ownership. Nonetheless, there are some Bristol examples, such as the will of 1489 made by Joan Twynyho, daughter of the Bristol merchant Thomas Rowley and his wife Margaret, in which she was careful to

state that she had made the will by the licence of her husband, Roger Twynyho, a Somerset esquire, and to him she bequeathed all the Bristol messuages – houses and associated land – and other property left to her by her parents' wills.⁹ Another example is provided by Joyce Deyos, a widow at the time of writing her will in 1599, who subsequently married her last husband, Thomas Prinne, between making her will and her death in 1601; Thomas added a codicil to the document, giving permission for it to be enacted.¹⁰

Women as Independent Traders

There was the option, available to some married women, of trading independently of their husbands, as *femme sole*, able to conduct business and contract debts in their own right, even though their husbands were still living. The financial records of Bristol's governing body, the Mayor's audits, are only extant from the 1530s, but in a sample ten years from 1532 there are occasional references to women paying to be registered as *femme sole*.¹¹ Even before the 1530s there are references to women trading as 'sole', but it is not clear if this meant that they were genuinely single – widows, or unmarried – or married women who had registered as *femme sole*. For example, in the 1430s the Bristol merchant Robert Sturmy and his wife Ellen claimed before the Chancery Court that she, 'being sole', had been bound in an obligation of £100 to abide by an arbitration between herself and William Reygate of Ireland, and while this could have been an agreement made by Ellen before her marriage, she may equally have been operating as a *femme sole* while being married to Sturmy. The Exchequer customs accounts give us further evidence. In the 33 years between 1461 and 1494 six Bristol women are described in these accounts as trading as *femme sole*. It would seem that some, at least, of these women had husbands who were living, indicating that the women had registered to trade independently of them.¹²

Another option available to women who wished to trade independently, at least until the 1470s, was to pay a fee to be officially recognised as a portwoman (on similar terms to a portman), which meant that they could operate as a small-scale retailer. The status of portwoman allowed them to act legitimately as retailers without incurring the costs of entering the 'freedom', that is, of becoming burgesses – members of a small elite of full citizens who were able to trade freely and to have a say in the town's governance. In 1366 a town ordinance established that those 'strangers' – that is, non-burgesses, not necessarily non-Bristolians – who could not afford the full £10 fee that would allow them to become burgesses by redemption (that

is, by paying for the privilege), could pay a lesser fee for a smaller bundle of rights as portman or portwoman. What they were buying was the status of portman or woman. The 'port' element in this name has nothing to do with Bristol's port function, but derives from an earlier meaning of the word, relating simply to trade, not necessarily of the water-borne variety.

The designation of portman and portwoman is found fairly frequently in the Bristol records, whereas the equivalent phrase for burgesses is 'burgesses and their wives'. This indicates that both portmen and portwomen could enjoy the status and freedom given by being a legitimate lesser retailer. This is distinct from the burgesses, where women could pass on the freedom through marriage, and could trade as burgess widows or *femme sole*, but usually could only do so as dependents, or former dependents, of male burgesses, and could not share their political rights. While the existence of female burgesses was countenanced in fourteenth-century Bristol, there is no mention of actual examples before the mid-1500s.¹³ The fifteenth century saw a steady decline in the status of portmen and portwomen, accompanied by increasing constraints on their activities. From 1454-5 portmen and women were allowed only to sell bread and ale, while in 1470-1 even this concession was withdrawn, effectively putting an end to this 'bargain basement' alternative to the freedom as enjoyed by burgesses.

The 1454-5 ruling is noteworthy as evidence of the significance of portwomen, since the association of women with selling bread and ale was well established by then. For example, an ordinance of 1344 concerning brewing which mentioned only male brewers (in Latin, *braciatores*), had to be re-issued to include their female equivalents (*braciatrices*). The same ordinance required bakers to pass their bread on to female hucksters, who would sell it at retail.¹⁴

Women in the Textile Industry

The virtual abolition of the rank of portwomen by 1471 followed an attempt to abolish female labour in the weaving industry a decade earlier. An ordinance of the Weavers' Guild, issued by the masters of the gild in 1461, made illegal the employment of weavers' wives, daughters and maidservants in their craft. This came at a time when Bristol was suffering an economic downturn, and was evidently intended to protect male employment within a shrinking industry. However, two years later a group of weavers petitioned the mayor that their masters' attempt to prevent the employment of their wives made it virtually impossible for them to carry on, and as a result this

restriction was lifted.¹⁵ Their petition demonstrates the importance of female employment to Bristol's fifteenth-century crafts, of which there are many other indications. For example, female dyers are specifically mentioned in an ordinance of the mid-1440s, and burgesses' wives and daughters were specifically excluded from a general ban on non-guild members practising wire-drawing and card-making in 1469/70 (wire-drawing was a stage in the production of cards, or wire combs, used to 'card' the wool before it was spun into thread).¹⁶

Female Servants

The greatest single category of employment for young people of both sexes was domestic service. Urban households tended to employ a greater proportion of female servants than was the case in the countryside, where household servants were predominantly male. However, even in towns female servants were in the minority. That said, female servants, usually young and unmarried, figure frequently as beneficiaries in the wills of Bristol testators. For example, the wills of two burgesses, William More, in 1411, and William Warminster in 1414, each mentioned two female servants, and William Cropnel's will of 1417 left bequests to the maid servants of three other male Bristolians, while by her will of 1574 Jane Compaine left clothes to her three maidservants.¹⁷ Female servants were usually left fairly modest bequests, but some testators rewarded particular maidservants much more generously.¹⁸ Bequests of money to help fund the marriages of maidservants were made in the wills of Henry Lokkein 1415, John Benley in 1416, James Cokkes in 1423, and Thomas Baker in 1492.¹⁹ In 1436 Edward Rede, parchment maker and burgess, left to his servant Alice Edward a life interest in three shops along with a bullock.²⁰ In his will of 1474 the merchant William Hoton left bequests to five named female servants, while a sixth, Elizabeth Cromwell, was to receive £8 and a quantity of cloth, and an additional 50s if her brother George Cromwell had died by the time of William's burial.²¹ Even more generous was Agnes Spelly, by whose will of 1404 her maid, Isabelle Ken, was to receive Agnes's bed with its accoutrements and the sum of £15, which was raised to £20 in a codicil.²² Topping all of these was John Bathe, who in his will of 1421 left one of his female servants, Katherine Lewys, a number of bequests, including £10 in money, silver cutlery and kitchenware, a gown, his best bed, and his cottage in Bath.²³ William Clifford, in his will of 1498, also left a house to his female servant, but she was to have this for only 15 months after her marriage.²⁴ In addition, female servants might on occasion

be charged with the responsibilities of acting as their employer's executor, as was the case with Alice Maisy, appointed as executor by her mistress, Margaret Joons, in 1597.²⁵

Not all female servants were young and unmarried: in his will of 1492 the grocer Thomas Baker left bequests to his servant Alice Bernard and to her daughter Joan Bernard when she reached the age of 16.²⁶ Sometimes female servants appear to have been related to their masters: in 1404 Thomas Knapp, former mayor of Bristol, left £50 to Anys Knapp, his servant, towards her marriage, while in her nuncupative will of 1602 Joan Bonner left all of her goods to her servant, who was also her niece, and whom she made her sole executor.²⁷

Most servants were probably English or Welsh, but a few came from much further afield. Among the clauses in the 1486 will of Alice, widow of Nicholas Wisby, butcher, was, 'Item, I leave Margaret Yseland a gown of brown colour' and a silver spoon.²⁸ Alice's servant had probably come to England as an Icelandic youth, kidnapped or purchased by English merchants to work as virtual slaves in the houses and workshops of Bristol and the east coast ports; while Margaret Yseland may not have arrived in Bristol willingly, she was at least thought worthy of the gift of a gown and a silver spoon by her mistress.²⁹

We usually assume that most domestic servants, whether medieval or modern, were temporary staff hired for a period of a year or less, and as such had little opportunity – or little desire – to form close relationships with their employers. While this was probably the case for *most* household servants in later medieval Bristol, the evidence from wills demonstrates that this was not *always* so. Nor does it seem that female servants were mainly remembered by female testators; in fact, the gender ratio between master/mistress will-makers and male/female servants seems roughly even. As we have seen, the two servants taxed as members of widows' households in 1524 were both male.

Women and the 'Freedom'

The most crucial distinction within Bristol society, as in any other large town or city, was between those who were included in the freedom, as burgesses, and those who were excluded. Only the former enjoyed the full panoply of commercial and political rights, and only they were regarded as citizens. The rest, even if they were Bristol-born, might be regarded as 'strangers'. The evidence for female burgesses is slight, but not non-existent in this period. The burgess books, recording entries to the freedom, begin in 1557, and they refer to a handful of female burgesses over the following century.³⁰

While rarely appearing as burgesses themselves, women still played a central part in two of the four ways by which men could become Bristol burgesses. Men could enter the freedom if they were the sons of a Bristol burgess, or if they married the daughter or widow of a Bristol burgess. Hence, in both cases marriage was crucial. The other two ways were redemption, by which an outsider might be allowed to purchase the freedom, provided he was deemed suitable, and apprenticeship, whereby an apprentice could enter the freedom if he successfully completed his apprenticeship to a Bristol master and mistress and, once again, could satisfy the civic authorities of his suitability. The roles of women as conduits for the transmission of burgess status as wives and mothers are dealt with later. However, women could also employ apprentices, and be apprenticed themselves.

Women and Apprenticeship

Apprenticeship was almost as common a feature of the urban environment as domestic service.³¹ The institution of apprenticeship provided training for young people, typically from the ages of 14 to 21, leading, in some – by no means all – cases to entry into the freedom, as burgesses. Bristol registers of apprenticeship indentures are extant from 1532. Taking the first decade as a sample, the great majority of Bristol indentures name both the husband and wife as master and mistress, and the general assumption was that the wife would play her part in the training of the apprentice.

Widows were expected to continue the training of their apprentices after their husband's death. Sometimes this was only until apprentices could be found new masters, but some widows carried on trading, and training apprentices, for years. While they may be largely invisible in the historical record, it seems certain that wives assisted in their husbands' business activities, implying the informal acquisition of skills before and/or during their marriages. In addition to couples, the Bristol Apprentice Book reveals thirteen women between 1532 and 1542 who took on apprentices alone, not as one half of a married couple. At least one, Alice Saxby in 1534, was described as a single woman rather than a widow.³²

There are also *female* apprentices among the Bristol indentures. From 1532 to 1541 there were 56 female apprenticeships, out of a total number of nearly 1500 (around 4%); from 1542 to 1552, 50 out of around 1800 apprentices (around 3%) were female.³³ In the eleven years between 1617 and 1628, 100 female apprentices were registered. From 1640 to 1658, 56 female apprenticeships have been found in the register.³⁴ While a tiny minority of apprentices

(never more than 4% of the total number of registered apprenticeships), female apprentices were a feature of Bristol life throughout the period.

Most, but not all, of these female apprentices were trained by a mistress, rather than by a master, in relatively low-status, 'female' occupations. In the decade from 1532, for example, only two girls were apprenticed to single male masters, one a mercer, the other a pin-maker. The rest were apprenticed either to single women or to a wife. Of these 54 girls apprenticed to mistresses, one was apprenticed as a seamstress, one as a mercer, and one as a tailor, all three to widow-mistresses, indicating in the case of the tailor and mercer that the woman was carrying on her husband's trade. Another three were apprenticed as knitters to women whose husbands were still alive. The remaining 48 were divided fairly evenly between those set to learn the trade of shepster, or needlewoman – an activity associated with women and of less prestige than tailor – and those committed to training in housewifery. For the most part, then, these girls were apprenticed to low-status crafts. A very few were evidently expected to pursue 'male' crafts, but what we may be seeing here is the tail end of a declining trend towards full female participation in more lucrative male-dominated crafts. In the following decade, from 1542 to 1552, of the 50 female apprentices registered, seven were apprenticed as needlewomen, 17 as housewives, while in the remaining 26 cases no occupation was given; so, none of the more prestigious 'male' crafts are mentioned as being taken up by female apprentices. By the seventeenth century female apprenticeships in relatively high status 'male' crafts have virtually disappeared, and over 30% of female apprenticeships were in service, with around half of the remainder being in a combination of domestic service and knitting and/or spinning.

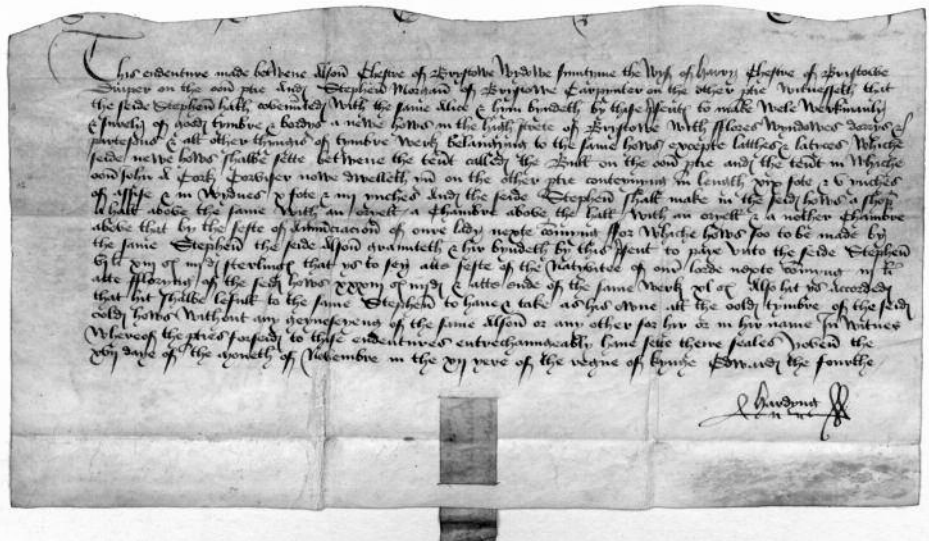
The long-term diminution in the status of female apprentices over the course of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries is indicated in other ways. In the twenty years from 1532 nearly half were the daughters of craftsmen, with gentry and yeomen, merchants and traders, and husbandmen making up most of the rest of the groups of parents, these three categories being represented in roughly equal proportions, and a little over half of all female apprentices were non-Bristolians. By the first half of the 1600s, however, about a quarter of female apprenticeships were arranged as part of the provision of parish poor relief, and the overall number of gentry and yeoman daughters had shrunk to around ten per cent. Fewer came from outside Bristol, and more were orphaned – that is, their fathers, but not necessarily their mothers, were dead – the proportion of fatherless daughters rising from less than a fifth in the 1530s to nearly two-thirds. The probable reasons for

this are complex, and we should hesitate before assuming that this is clear evidence of the end of any kind of later medieval 'golden age' for women, but there is no doubt that the sons of the gentry were increasingly taking up Bristol apprenticeships, making their acquisition for the children of lesser parents, be they male or female, more difficult.

Female apprentices were occasionally remembered in their masters' and mistresses' wills. This was the case with the testators Edith Mulward in 1388, Alice Wodeford in 1407, John Goodson in 1419, and Joan Wilshire in 1505.³⁵ Among the apprentices named in the 1409 will of Walter Seymour, burgess, were Juliana and John Littilton: one of Walter Seymour's servants was Agnes, John Littilton's sister; it would seem, therefore, that Walter Seymour was master to three Littilton siblings.³⁶ In 1421 Margaret Lowys, the apprentice of John Bathe, was left by her appreciative master 40s, a piece of silver weighing 5oz, and a silk girdle with silver letters spelling 'Jesus have mercy on me'.³⁷ Another female apprentice, Alice Reed, was the subject of a dispute that ended up in the Chancery Court: Margaret Sopemaker and Edward Rede, the latter presumably Alice Reed's relative, could not agree over which of them should have her as their apprentice, and so 'certain friends ... laboured between them to set them at rest', and the two parties bound themselves in £20 each to abide by an arbitrated settlement. When this proved unsuccessful, the case was taken to Chancery. As with most Chancery cases from this period, the outcome is unknown.³⁸

Female Merchants

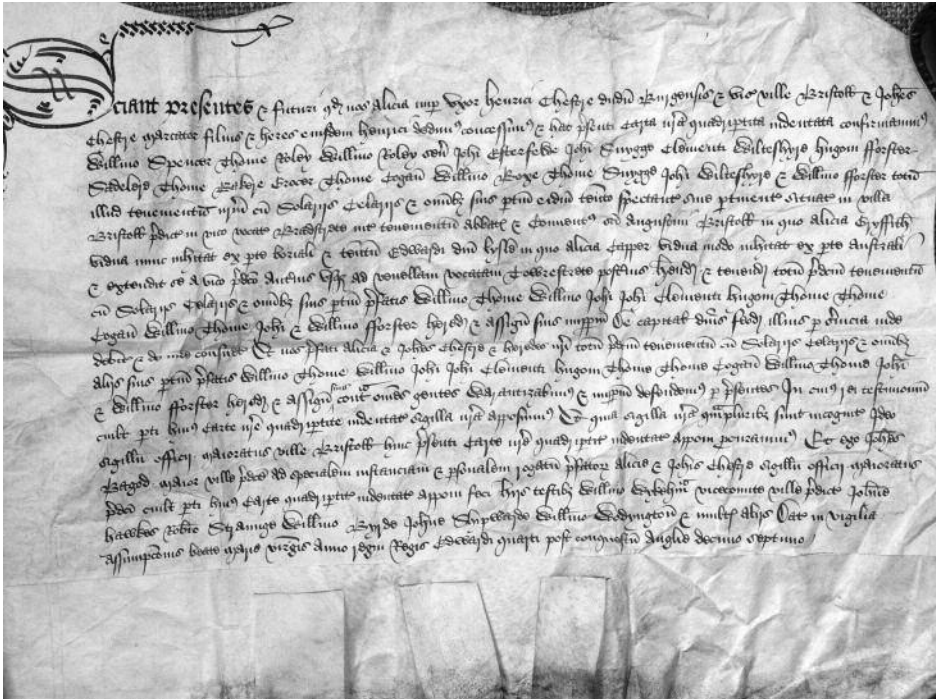
Overseas trade with an area that stretched from Iceland to Andalucía gave Bristol its special character as a port. Exchequer customs accounts reveal that a small number of women were involved in this trade. In the 33 years after 1461 around 50 female merchants appear in the accounts. The most famous of these is Alice Chestre. The death of her husband Henry Chestre in 1470 allowed, or forced, Alice to step into the historical record. She was a property-owner in her own right, [Fig. 1.2] and in 1472 she made a contract with a carpenter to build her a new four-storey house on High Street. The following year Alice appears in the customs accounts for the first time, and she continues to appear until her death in 1485. In these voyages she traded alone, often shipping goods in her own vessels. She traded cloth, wine, iron and other commodities with Ireland, Spain, Portugal and Flanders. During her fifteen years of widowhood Alice was engaged in various charitable activities, particularly in relation to her parish church of All Saints, using the rental income



1.2 Alice Chestre was notable as a widow who was also very active as a businesswoman in her own right after the death of her husband, Henry Chestre, a prominent Bristol merchant, in 1470. This document is an indenture binding Stephen Morgan to build a 'newe house' of good 'timbre and boards' on the High Street of Bristol for Alice Chestre.
BRO P.AS/D/HS/C/9

from some of her property to fund these activities, [Fig. 1.3] but her most notable gift was to pay £41 for a new crane on the Back, 'for the saving of merchants' goods of the town and of strangers'.³⁹

Alice Chestre is exceptional in the scale of her trading activities and in her wealth, but as a widow carrying on her late husband's business she is typical. However, most such women appear only briefly in the customs accounts, and were evidently simply honouring their recently deceased husband's commitments. Such, probably, were Joan and Margaret Rowley. Joan had been the wife of William Rowley, a Bristol merchant who by the time he made his will in 1478 was living in Bordeaux, and she was the sister-in-law of the Joan who made her will in 1489 as the wife of Roger Twynyho. For a year after her husband's death Joan Rowley imported sugar, oil and wax from Lisbon and woad – a much-used dyestuff – and wine from Spain into Bristol, but then stopped. Margaret, mother of both William Rowley and Joan Twynyho, née Rowley, was widowed within months of her son's death in 1478, and contin-



1.3 This document of 1477 is from the Bristol Record Office and shows Alice Chestre acting with her stepson, John Chestre, another merchant, to appoint a group of prominent men as trustees to ensure that the rent from a property in Broadmead that they hold is used to pay for religious services. BRO P.AS/D/BS/B/13. *Bristol Museums, Galleries & Archives*

ued her husband's business until 1481, shipping madder, tar, wainscot and hops from Flanders to Bristol in a Spanish vessel, and importing wine and woad from Bordeaux, madder – another dyestuff – from Flanders and oil from Seville.⁴⁰ [Fig. 1.4]

Female Executors

For most of Bristol's propertied widows, honouring a recently-deceased husband's commercial commitments was but a small part of their involvement with his estate. Most husband-testators appointed their wives as their executors, very often as the sole executor. One particularly dramatic death-bed scene involving the appointment of an executor is described in the 1599 nuncupative will of Agnes Mason, and reveals that she had been appointed by her deceased husband as his executor, but that she had forgotten this in her final illness:



1.4 The brass of Margaret and Thomas Rowley, in the church of St John the Baptist, Broad Street, Bristol. The Rowleys were members of a prominent Bristol merchant family. The brass states that Thomas died on 23 January 1478 (by modern reckoning, 1479) but leaves Margaret's dates blank, perhaps indicating that she was still alive when the brass was made. In his will of January 1479 Thomas appointed Margaret as the administrator of their son William's will, which had been made the previous November. William had been resident in Bordeaux. Like Alice Chestre, Margaret carried on trading after her husband's death: in February 1480 she shipped carrying madder, tar, wainscot and hops from Flanders to Bristol.

Being willed to make her will she answered they say I have nothing then she being told that her husband made her full executrix and that all was hers to dispose at her will saying who shall be your executor she the afore-said Agnes Mason straight away put her hand forth and took her cousin Ann Clovyll by the hand and said Ann and therewith all held her fast...⁴¹

Widows were sometimes appointed without a male supervisor or overseer. In some instances however, the male overseers were explicitly instructed to guide the inexperienced executrix: this was the case with both male and female testators. By her will of 1599 Margaret Langton appointed her granddaughter as her sole executor, but also desired her two male overseers 'to be as fathers to my executor, and to see that she be ruled for her own good'.⁴² Such occasional instances apart, the frequency with which widows were appointed as sole executors strongly suggests that wives were expected to assist their husbands in the management of their affairs, and so to familiarise themselves with the conduct of his business, since an executor should have a detailed and informed appreciation of the deceased's estate, as well as some knowledge of property law.

The responsibilities shouldered by many Bristol widow-executors would have been considerable, since they had to see that the provisions of the will were fully implemented, including their late husband's desires for burial and commemoration, charitable provisions, and the satisfaction of his debts. This process could take many years. William Lewis, a Bristol burgess, appointed his wife, Agnes, and another Agnes Lewis as his executors. William's widow died, leaving the other Agnes with the task of recovering a debt which she claimed William had contracted with the Abbot of Evesham in 1466: at least 52 years later she was still petitioning Chancery for satisfaction.⁴³

In some cases widows refused to act as their deceased husband's executor because they realised that if they did so they would become liable for debts that could not easily be paid. However, this was a dangerous tactic, since using any part of her husband's estate made her its administrator, a position carrying similar liabilities as executor. In the 1520s this is what Agnes, widow of the Bristol merchant John Vaughn, discovered to her cost when her admission that she had used some of her husband's estate to meet his funeral costs meant that his creditors could prosecute her as the administrator of his will.⁴⁴

Women and Inheritance

Equally difficult could be the process by which widows claimed what was legally theirs. On marriage, women surrendered ownership and control of most classes of whatever moveable goods they brought to the partnership. They also lost control, but not ownership, of landed property, or real estate, to their husband, but on his death control reverted to his widow. A Bristol widow could also benefit from a share of her husband's moveable goods and

real estate. Traditionally, she was entitled to *legitim*, a share of her husband's moveables (one-third if there were surviving children, otherwise a half), dower in one third of her husband's real estate, identified at the time of the marriage, and freebench, the right to occupy her husband's principal dwelling until her own death or remarriage. By the Tudor period, however, these arrangements had been supplemented by the jointure, a legal device whereby a certain proportion of the husband's property was held by a group of trustees for the couple in joint survivorship, so that if the husband should predecease the wife the trustees would automatically continue to hold it, but in her name alone and to her use. Often, male testators would include provisions in their wills preventing their widows from claiming both dower or freebench alongside jointure. For example, in his will of 1601 David John Loyde, a miller, granted his wife the life occupancy of his tenement and garden (that is, her freebench), together with a weekly pension of 2s 6d, on condition that she did not claim any dower. That such a provision was sometimes a legal formality, rather than an indication of tension between husband and wife, is indicated by the will of a Bristol gentleman, Patrick White, made in 1600, in which he provided £600 for a lifetime annuity for his 'well-beloved' wife, whom he trusted to do anything necessary to bar her own claims to dower.⁴⁵

The problems that could be presented by the presence of local customs coexistent with different, common-law ones, applicable nationally, is indicated by a dispute that occurred between 1527 and 1538. This involved Anne Norton, the widow of Andrew Norton, a Bristol gentleman with holdings in Gloucestershire, his son Richard, and after Richard's death (by 1531), Richard's widow Margaret and her second husband George Gilbert. The case centred on contending claims to the George Inn, which stood on High Street, close to Bristol Bridge. After Andrew Norton's death his widow Anne claimed that the property should be her common-law dower, as representing one third part of the value of the estate Andrew held during their marriage, but her claim was denied by, first, Richard, Andrew's son, and then by Margaret, Richard's widow and executor, later joined by her second husband George. Richard, Margaret and George all claimed that Bristol custom negated Anne's claim to this property by dower, since by its terms only property allocated immediately prior to the wedding could be so assigned, and that in Anne's case this did not include the George Inn. For some reason a jointure agreement does not seem to have been made between Anne and Andrew Norton.⁴⁶

Occasionally, husbands declared their trust in their wives' abilities and the

⁵The tomb of Joan Young and husband at Bristol Cathedral. Joan Young (d. 1603), daughter of John Wadham, a Somerset esquire, sister of the co-founder of Wadham College Oxford, and her second husband, Sir John Young (d. 1606), are shown here. Sir John had the 'Great House' built for him on the site of the Carmelite Friary in Bristol (now Colston Hall), and he was able to do this through his marriage to Joan in 1563, by which he acquired the extensive Dorset and Somerset estates inherited by Joan from her first husband, Sir Giles Strangways.



contribution they had made to the family's prosperity. Such was the case with John Ley, who in 1598 stated in his nuncupative will:

That which he had was gotten between his wife Joan and him and that the children which he had were hers as well as his and what debts were owed she knew better than he and therefore he did give her all which he and she had and willed her to pay all his debts and use her discretion therein.⁴⁷

Another fulsome deathbed declaration of a husband's debt to his wife was made by Harry May in 1573, in whose nuncupative will he said:

I know I shall now die and not recover and there is but one way with me. And therefore touching my worldly goods, so it is that I brought little or nothing to my wife Katheryn, and therefore I will not take or give any thing from her, but do refer all to her discretion and make her my executrix...⁴⁸

A similar sentiment was expressed by Richard Williams in 1593, who gave all his goods to his wife for her to use according to her discretion, adding 'and all little enough for her'; while in his nuncupative will of 1601 a joiner, David Williams, declared that, 'I am a poor man and all the goods and chattels that I have I give and bequeath to Dorothy my wife and would so do if I had ten

Women *and* Funerary Commemoration

c.1373-1660 Peter Fleming

One of the few ways in which images of women of this period survive is by way of funerary brasses and effigies. Of course, such memorialisation was an option open only to the rich. At the top of the range was the alabaster effigy on a stone tomb chest: in the late fourteenth century. This could cost over £17, a prohibitively expensive option for all but the wealthiest merchant, and for this reason likely to be the most impressive.¹ Two surviving examples of this form are the tombs of William and Joan Canynge and of Philip Mede and Isabel, both in St Mary Redcliffe Church.

William Canynge, five times mayor of Bristol, was one of the wealthiest men in the later medieval town, having made his fortune from ship-owning and international commerce. He had married Joan, daughter of John and Joan Mylton, by 1436. Joan died in September 1467, and William did not remarry.²►



The Mede Tomb, St Mary Redcliffe Church. This was constructed on the orders of Philip Mede (d.1475), and the western aperture contains his effigy, together with his wife Isabel's



Brass rubbing of an unknown lady (c.1460), taken from Temple Church, Bristol. Temple Church was badly bombed in World War II, and all of its original brasses were lost. Image from C.T. Davis, *The Monumental Brasses of Gloucestershire* (1899)

Effigy of Joan Mylton (d.1467), wife of William Canynges (d. 1474), from their tomb in St Mary Redcliffe Church. This tomb seems to have been constructed before 1474, since after Joan's death William took holy orders and became Dean of Westbury-on-Trym College, and as such was depicted in another monument, originally placed in Westbury-on-Trym Church. He probably commissioned the monument to himself and to his wife before taking orders. So, this is likely to have been a rare instance of an attempt to portray a medieval woman's actual likeness.

Photograph by Lobsterthermidor, Wikipedia



William Canynges paid 6s. 8d. to the church wardens of St Mary Redcliffe for the site of his wife's grave in October 1467, less than a month after her death.³

The Mede tombs take the form of a double tomb chest under an elaborate canopy. In the western alcove are the effigies of Philip Mede (d.1475), three times mayor of Bristol, and his wife Isabel, the daughter of John and Joan Sharp of Bristol.



The next bay is designed to contain matching effigies, but instead has a brass plate set in the rear panel above the surface of the tomb chest, depicting Philip and Isabel's son Richard (d.1491), and his two wives Elizabeth, granddaughter of John and Joan Sharp, and secondly Anne, daughter of Thomas Paucefoot of Gloucestershire. Brasses were considerably cheaper than stone effigies: by 1500, depending on the size and complexity, brasses usually cost between £2 and £10.⁴

Robert Kitchin, alderman of Bristol, died in 1595, and in his will he asked to be buried next to his first wife Joan, in St Stephen's Church.⁵ The brass plaque commemorating the couple may still be seen on the church wall, and it carries a verse crediting them both for charitable works and bounty. ■

Brass plaque commemorating Alderman Robert Kitchin and his wife.

Courtesy St. Stephen's Church, Bristol

times as much'.⁴⁹ Such declarations of trust and indebtedness towards wives seem to appear relatively more often in nuncupative wills, which made up a tiny proportion of the total number of recorded wills, suggesting that in the more formal, written, documents this evidence for the nature of the marital relationship was often hidden by the more sober details of arrangements concerning the disposal of property.

Relationships between Women and Men

There is a temptation for historians to dwell on relationships that fail, on disputes and on conflict, simply because it is such things that tend to generate the most documentation. This is certainly the case in the medieval and early modern periods, when much of our evidence comes through legal processes. Other sources, that could tell us more about the unexceptional, such as personal letters and diaries, are much scarcer before the latter half of the seventeenth century. Hence, we are left only with fragments from which to get a sense of the day-to-day relationships of women in later medieval and early modern Bristol. Women were denied direct access to civic decision-making, and, probably, were increasingly sequestered into the 'private sphere' of the household, and so what influence they could exert on the 'public sphere' largely resulted from their ability to persuade their menfolk – be they fathers, brothers, male guardians, masters or husbands – of their points of view. Thus, the nature of relationships between men and women is a crucial factor to be considered in any discussion of women's role in shaping the development of the city. Since, by definition, such influence would have been exerted in private, and so was not recorded, we are left only with the evidence of female-male relationships, not of the possible influence that women might have exerted through them.

From the seventeenth century come records of depositions made by witnesses in local disputes. These are still documents produced through the processes of law, but they can reveal aspects of everyday life previously hidden from the historian. For example, we are told how, in 1645, a young, unmarried woman, Mary Brookebanke, was repeatedly importuned by a sailor, John Barrow, his efforts coming to a head in an encounter in the Lamb Tavern in Tucker Street. Also present at this meeting was a glover, William Prowt, a close friend of Barrow. Barrow asked Prowt for his opinion of Mary, and he replied that, 'he liked her very well and that she might be a good wife to him'; Barrow,

thereupon asked the said Mary Brookebanke whether she would have him

or not and said he would be resolved of it before she went out of the room, and thereupon the said Mary Brookebanke being fearful of his constancy having been deluded by one young man before, told him so much there, and asked whether he would be constant to her, and marry her, and said that if he would, then she would have him. And there upon the said Barrow took her by the hand and vowed, that he would have nobody but her, and would be married to her very shortly...⁵⁰

More prosaically, perhaps, he also promised that as his wife she would receive an annual income of £16. A week later Barrow arranged for the banns to be read.⁵¹ Mary's caution was the fruit of a bitter experience doubtless mirrored by other instances of young women duped by unscrupulous suitors, but her experience was recorded, as a chance remark in a legal testimony.

Depositions also give some indication of the physical violence that some women suffered in seventeenth-century Bristol. In 1644 a 30-year-old spinster, Elizabeth Edgly, deposed that she had been sitting in her mistress's doorway one May evening when she saw a man, whom she afterwards learnt was called Simon Plomer, walking by on the other side of the street with Katherine Shipman, a maid living in the house of Ann James, a neighbour. The deponent recalled that after an exchange of words between the two,

the said Plomer struck the said Katherine Shipman on the head with his fist, and presently again gave her another in the neck with his fist and with it struck her down, who giving a great cry (and after rising again, being amazed with the blow) she reeled against the bulk [the wooden stall in front of a shop], but as soon as she came to herself ran home to the said Ann James as fast as she could...⁵²

The extent of domestic violence against Bristol women in this period can never be known, but it would be wrong to characterise relations between men and women as being universally cold and exploitative. We have already seen evidence of male testators expressing their gratitude toward their wives in their final dying breaths. There are further indications that relations between wives and their husbands could be cordial, even warm. For example, by her will of 1596 Agnes Baylie granted the goods due to her from her first husband to her second, Francis Baylye, and appointed him as her sole executor, describing him as loving and dear to her.⁵³ Other female testators state explicitly that they were carrying out their late husbands' wishes, such as Juliana

Gosnell, who in 1597 bequeathed all of her goods to her grand-daughter, 'for that it was her husband's mind it should be so': it is impossible at this distance to fathom what this comment implies about Juliana's relationship either with her deceased husband or with her grand-daughter.⁵⁴

Husbands were certainly capable of enforcing their wishes on their female kin, even from beyond the grave. For example, in his will of 1593 Francis Dennys, gentleman, made the unmarried Mary Dennys his sole executor (with a cousin and another man as overseers) and legatee, provided that she followed the advice of two other men when it came to choosing a husband; in 1597 Maurice Hill declared in his will that his legacy of £100 to his under-age daughter was only to be paid 'if she match by the consent of her friends ...', while the same year Edward Nicholls included a similar condition in his will, stating that his daughter was to receive £20 when she reached 21 provided she married 'by her mother's discretion', and, also in 1597, Thomas Rogers left all of his property, including two houses, to his wife Welsyon, but on condition that should she choose to remarry her new husband must be approved by his male overseers, or else she would forfeit the properties:

...but and if my wife do chance hereafter to marry with any man that William Cox and James Bellman, being my overseers shall like well of him that then the two houses which she have shall remain to the use of my son Edward and to bring him up to school...⁵⁵

The exercise of male control over women evident in these documents could be manifested in many other ways. One of the most chilling, perhaps, is the policing of female discourse through accusations of scolding, punishable by being ducked in the Frome in the cucking stool. This device was repaired in 1557, and rebuilt in 1621, after which it was used with some regularity, being employed to punish a woman from Redcliffe on two separate occasions that same year, while in 1624 two women were ducked together, and the chamberlain's accounts for 1625 record the purchase of ropes and *aqua vitae* (the latter presumably to bring the woman back to consciousness after her punishment) for the purpose of ducking.⁵⁶ Ducking was abandoned under the Republic (only to be resumed with the Restoration), but this did not mean that women's freedom was no longer constrained by the threat of public humiliation: in 1654 a butcher's wife was set in the stocks for three hours for having uttered profanities in a fit of passion, while her husband was also tried for having allegedly attempted to rescue her.⁵⁷

Women and Overseas Expansion

Bristol's later role in England's Atlantic empire was presaged in the second quarter of the seventeenth century when it became a significant participant in the trade with Barbados, which was settled by the English from the 1620s.⁵⁸ Barbados presented great opportunities for Bristolians, but the great distances involved threatened to destabilise family life for some. This appears to have been the case for Elizabeth and John Sherman, who were among the first English people to settle in Barbados, moving there from Bristol at the end of the 1620s and acquiring a plantation. The couple's six-year-old daughter, Elizabeth, was left behind in Bristol, in the care of a nurse. By 1642 the Shermans had died, and Elizabeth, now of age, appeared before the mayor to claim her inheritance. A similar instance of children being left in another's care while their parents pursued their fortune in Barbados is presented by the case of Mary and Thomas Williams, the children of the Bristol merchant Thomas Williams, who left them in the care of their grandfather while he settled in Barbados; in 1650, their father having died. Mary and Thomas, aged 15 and 14 respectively, appeared before the mayor to state their wish that their grandfather be appointed as their guardian in order to recover their Barbadian inheritance.⁵⁹

Ireland was the location of other English colonies with which the port of Bristol was closely connected. In November 1641 the indigenous Catholic Irish revolted against the Protestant English settlers, with the result that over the course of the following year approximately 400 refugees appeared in Bristol. Some of the women among them appear in the historical record, allowing us a glimpse of their plight. Such was the widow Elizabeth Gayney, forced to leave her house in Waterford and flee to Bristol, having entrusted her property to her brother-in-law, Edward Abbott, an English tobacco pipe-maker who had been allowed to remain in Ireland, allegedly because his trade was one that the Irish rebels valued but could not themselves practise. Another was Elizabeth Nethercott, a poor orphan who after her arrival in Bristol was bound apprentice in the craft of button-making.⁶⁰ After the revolt was suppressed Bristol's normal commercial and social links with Ireland were resumed. Ireland promised fortune for some, but, as with the Barbadian colony, this could sometimes come at the price of disrupting family life. In 1651 the mayor was informed that the previous year Richard Graves had taken his four children to Ireland, leaving his pregnant wife behind; she died giving birth to a daughter, Jane, and meanwhile Richard and all four of their other children had died in Ireland, leaving the

infant Jane as heir to the family property.⁶¹

Women and Political and Religious Protest

The participation of women in political and religious protest is a particular area where we are hampered by the sources, since, after all, as far as the male elite were concerned, this was not an area with which women should meddle, and it was the male elite on whose behalf our written sources were produced. The overall story is one of isolated instances of female participation through most of our period, with the appearance, right at its end, of a more coherent picture of concerted female involvement centred on emergent 'puritan' and nonconformist religious movements.

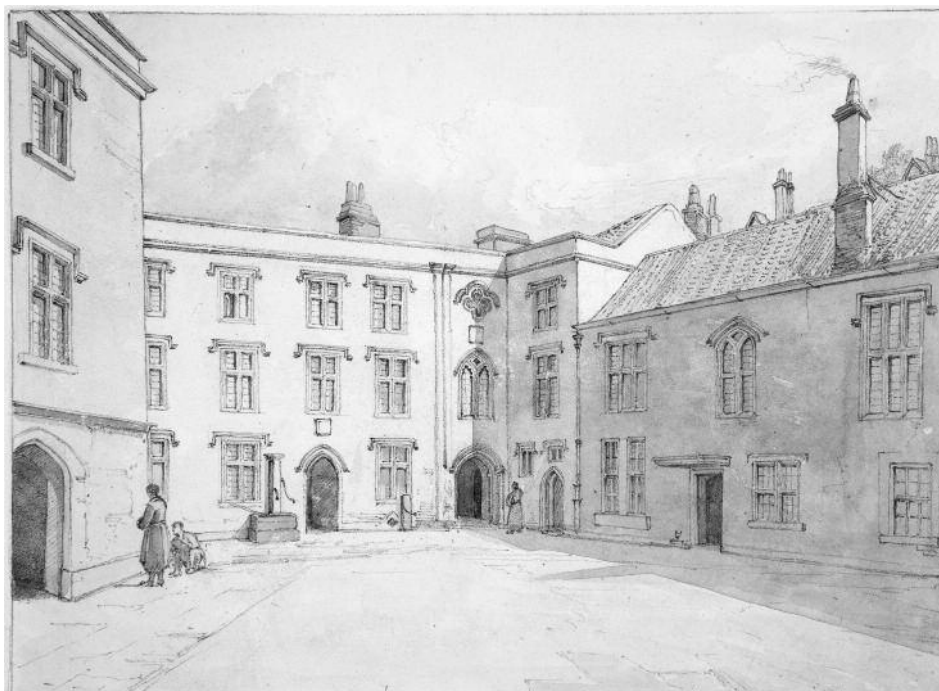
In the spring of 1400 a royal commission investigating Bristol merchants' evasion of the duty on cloth provoked an attempt by a gang of Bristolians to murder the customs collector. Remarkably, the gang seems to have been largely composed of the wives of Bristol burgesses. Their scheme was foiled by the mayor, who broke up the gathering, assisted by other 'good men' of the town. The male ringleaders were imprisoned and ejected from the freedom of Bristol, but there is no record of actions taken against the women.⁶²

This protest does not seem to have had any religious dimension, but by the early fifteenth century a movement of religious heretics, the Lollards, had appeared, inspired by the teachings of the fourteenth-century Oxford academic John Wycliff. The Lollards' beliefs had enough in common with the Protestants of the sixteenth century to lead some historians to believe that early English Protestantism may have owed something to surviving Lollardy. Bristol was notorious as a centre for Lollardy, which in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries tended to be found among urban artisan households and be associated with the textile industry, so Bristol's association with the heresy is unsurprising. Among other things, Lollardy is notable for allowing women a far greater voice than was the case in mainstream Catholic Christianity, and there are examples of women helping to organise Lollard cells and of female preachers. One notable Bristol female Lollard was Christina More. She and her husband, William, a Bristol burgess, kept a prominent Lollard household, including a Lollard chaplain. After William's death in 1412 Christina took over as a Lollard leader. In 1414 there was an uprising against the government of Henry V, which was portrayed by the authorities as a 'Lollard Rebellion', and Bristol contributed the single largest contingent. Among them were Christina's chaplain and a household servant, whom she supported in this doomed endeavour. We know this because she

was prosecuted for this offence: luckily for her, her punishment was no worse than being made to do penance. Others were hanged or burnt alive.⁶³

A story of, if not political or religious dissent, then at least of what appears to be female assertiveness in the face of male obduracy, relates to the Hospital of St Bartholomew, founded by Sir John de la Warre of Brislington in the thirteenth century. Originally, both men and women made up the religious community that cared for the inmates. However, in the 1330s the sisters expelled the brothers and master and elected a prioress. The bishop of Worcester (in which diocese the hospital was located) forced the women to allow the men to return in 1386. In 1412 the women tried again to expel the men, but failed. In 1445 Bristol's mayor and common council, working with the de la Warre family, refounded the hospital as the Fraternity of St Clement, to care for poor sailors. This seems to have put an end to any tussles between the sisters and brothers – perhaps because the sisters were evicted.⁶⁴ [*Fig. 1.6*]

By the early seventeenth century groups of religious radicals, or 'separatists', had emerged to challenge what they saw as the established Anglican Church's lack of rigour and true commitment to the Bible.⁶⁵ Bristol was an early centre of such agitation: the first Quakers, for example, appeared in the city as early as spring 1654, and women were prominent among these radicals. Of these Bristol radical women the best documented is Dorothy, wife of two separatist husbands, a grocer, Anthony Kelly, and Matthew Hazzard, vicar of St Ewen's church. From the 1620s she and her first husband Anthony were at the centre of a group of separatists among whom women figured prominently. They were allowed to preach, much to the violent ridicule of Bristol's more conservative male majority among its political-religious elite. After Anthony's death, and before her second marriage, Dorothy made a point of keeping her grocer's shop open on Christmas Day, since she and her followers did not approve of celebrating feast days. Her marriage to Matthew Hazzard around 1640 allowed her to use the St Ewen's parsonage as a refuge for other radical women awaiting passage to New England or who wished to escape churching, the process of purification of women 40 days after childbirth that most of the city's Anglican clergy insisted upon. In 1640 Dorothy was also a signatory to the foundation of the Broadmead Baptist Church, the first dissenting church in Bristol. There was a total of five involved and meetings were held at her house in Broad Street. Like most of her fellow separatists, Dorothy actively supported Parliament during the Civil Wars, and during the Royalist Prince Rupert's assault in July 1643 she, along with another radical Bristol woman, Joan Batten, led a group of 200 women and children

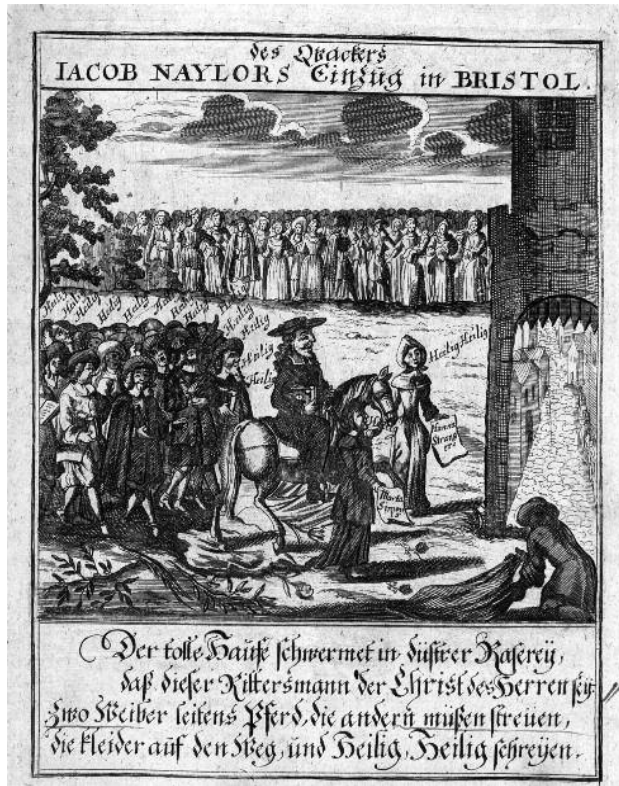


1.6 This 1820 watercolour, executed by 'Saunders of Bath', shows the City School in Christmas Street, which incorporated some of the remains of the medieval St Bartholomew's Hospital. (BMAG M2584). (*Braikenridge Collection*) *Bristol Museums, Galleries & Archives*

in defence of the Frome Gate, later declaring that they had been prepared to put themselves and their children in front of enemy bullets. Dorothy gave evidence against the Parliamentary commander of Bristol, Colonel Nathaniel Fiennes, at his subsequent trial for dereliction of duty. She had left all of her goods in the castle for safe-keeping before the siege, having been assured that Fiennes would defend it to the upmost, and their loss added to her anger at what she saw as his cowardice. [*Colour plate 4*] Dorothy and Matthew Hazzard fled Bristol after the Royalist takeover but returned in 1645 when the city changed hands again. She remained there, as a stalwart of the Baptist community centred upon Broadmead, until her death in 1674.

Conclusion

Telling the story of women in later medieval and early modern Bristol is inevitably hampered by imperfect, fragmentary evidence. The paucity of primary sources is matched by that of the poor, who constituted about one



1.6 *James Naylor and women entering Bristol.* In November 1656 the radical Quaker James Naylor entered Bristol in what seemed to be a conscious imitation of Christ's entry into Jerusalem, as commemorated by Christians on Palm Sunday. For this perceived blasphemy he was prosecuted in London and severely punished. This depiction of James Naylor's entry into Bristol in 1656, is taken from Benedikt Figken's translation into German of Richard Blome's *Fanaticke History* of 1660, published in 1701 as *Historia Fanaticorum, oder eine vollkommene relation und wissenschaft von denen Schwärmern, als alten Anabaptisten und neuen Quackern*, Frankfurt. Blome was an opponent of Quakerism, and so portrayed Naylor in a very unflattering light, and, as this translation suggests, his interpretation was both widely disseminated and highly influential. The women who accompanied Naylor, depicted here as shouting 'Heilig' (Holy), were not, as far as we can tell, Bristolians.
University of Bristol Library, Special Collections

half of the city's total population, but whereas the male elite were saved from obscurity as their actions and thoughts were increasingly commonly recorded – as one approaches both the later seventeenth century and the higher reaches of the socio-economic hierarchy – their female counterparts are much less evident in the historical record. That said, it is possible to offer some tentative conclusions. In many ways, Bristol was similar to other English towns and cities, in that its female population was denied access to the levers of

economic and political power that their male counterparts – at least among the elite – took for granted. Women were able to pursue occupations as traders and manufacturers, sometimes independently of men, but as the later middle ages gave way to the early modern period it seems that their access to the more high-status occupations was increasingly restricted. Most did not benefit from the formal training offered by a craft apprenticeship, but wives were still expected to acquire many of the skills practised by their husbands, and as widows, generally, were entrusted with the family business. While the evidence for female political or radical religious thought and activity is sparse in most instances, there were pockets of radicalism, beginning with Lollardy and ending with mid-seventeenth-century separatism, and Bristol seems to have been particularly prominent as a centre of such agitation. The willingness with which Bristol women were prepared to engage with such movements, often at very considerable personal risk, suggests that their apparent absence from long stretches of Bristol's history of political and religious radicalism was not a matter of choice on their part, but is the result of their being discouraged or prevented from participating, and of being imperfectly recorded even if they did manage to break through male prejudice. [*Fig. 1.7*]