Middling Women and Work in Eighteenth-Century Bristol

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How important were women in the eighteenth-century urban economy? Recent work in this period has claimed that women in various European, American and British cities played an indispensable and often under-recognised part in servicing the needs of urban life and that middling women played an especially dynamic role in this respect.

To paraphrase Deborah Simonton middling women ‘left bequests...managed household economies, bought luxury goods and fostered cultural production. They were also-and significantly-active in urban commerce and their status as traders was widely recognised.'

This paper, part of a wider project on Bristol women in the long eighteenth century, seeks to contribute to this on-going investigation of ‘middling women’ in the Atlantic economy. What did Bristol women of the middling sort do for a living and how was their experience shaped by the particular city in which they lived? What if any impact did they in turn have on the city in terms of its economic life and its cultural provision? These are big questions and the task of answering them has only just begun.

Mindful of the methodological discussions informing recent research, what follows is the product of a preliminary trawl through a variety of records (including Corporation minutes and registers, insurance records, diaries, legal cases, letters, wills, inventories, newspapers, trade directories and the like) and a re-interrogation of existing secondary sources on Bristol. Such an approach cannot provide a definitive picture of women’s occupations in this early period but it can identify a range of activities in which women were involved, and begin to give a fuller account of the backgrounds, experiences and locations of individual women engaged in commerce in this period. Though a number of occupations will be surveyed, particular attention will be paid to those involved in the print and publishing trades and in educational provision.

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For the purposes of this paper the imprecise category of ‘middling women’ or ‘women of the middling sort’ encompasses those who qualify for inclusion on the grounds, not only of occupation, but of other factors such as social status and independence from parish support. ‘Middling women’ will be deemed here to range from illiterate but independent artisans and traders on the one hand to very wealthy and educated women whose income might in part be derived from annuities and rents.4

The expanding Atlantic economy afforded new opportunities for women as well as men in Britain’s port cities.5 Bristol, it shall be argued here, was no exception and its particular civic and social structure, its involvement in the slave and plantation trades and its history as a centre for Protestant non-conformity shaped these opportunities for middling women in specific ways. It will argue that notwithstanding the very real limitations imposed by persisting patriarchal structures, their activities were generally more-wide ranging and had a greater impact on the city than has been previously assumed.

Though Bristol’s traditional civic governance was highly patriarchal, it left (as it did in some other well-established cities) some limited ‘room for manoeuvre’ for enterprising women especially if they enjoyed the right family connections and access to capital. This was particularly true for widows and, to a lesser extent, spinsters, but even married women were not always quite as constrained in practice by the law of covertures (which under Common Law consigned their property to their husbands) as is commonly assumed.6

Despite the constraints they experienced, some middling women played a significant and at times innovative role in the development of Bristol’s urban economy and cultural life especially with regard to the distribution and promotion of new consumer products, the expansion of educational provision and the promotion of print culture. The rationalisation and specialisation of economic organisation characteristic of this period affected even middling women in different and sometimes contradictory ways according to their specific place in the social order. Family and religious networks were important determinants of a woman’s chances at business success. Women from Dissenting backgrounds, for example, empowered by higher levels of literacy, a sense of spiritual entitlement, and access to networks of credit and trust, played a disproportionately active role in city life. It is possible to find an increasing number of individual women, some well-known in their day but now forgotten, playing an innovative role in the city and it is one of the aims of this paper to begin to reclaim and contextualise their stories for the historical record.

Surprisingly little has been written by academic historians about Bristol women in the long eighteenth century. This omission seems all the more unaccountable when one considers Bristol’s changing demography in this period. Between 1696 (when tax records afford us the first reliable estimate of the number of the city’s inhabitants) and

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1801, Bristol's population had tripled, from roughly 20,000 to just under 64,000 people. In this same period, the surplus of females over males quintupled from about 1,800 to 10,000.\(^7\)

Yet until recently, references to all but a few very prominent women such as Hannah More and Mary Robinson were scanty at best. It was not until the mid 1980s, that two important studies of the city in this period, namely Jonathan Barry's magisterial work on the cultural life of Bristol up to 1775 and Elizabeth Baigent's pioneering examination of the city's social geography in 1775, opened up the possibility of considering women's experience in Bristol in a more sustained way.\(^8\) Baigent in particular offered an invaluable snapshot of women's occupational status in 1775 and some important observations about the city's wider social structure for the century as a whole.

By the early 1990s Mary Fissell's imaginative work on the Bristol poor also incorporated women's experience into her analysis but gender as an analytical category was slower to affect treatments of the city's wider economic history as Kenneth Morgan's otherwise assiduous study of Bristol and the Atlantic trade published in 1993 was to show.\(^9\) Since then, some literary historians have written on the lives of individual Bristol writers with gender in mind. Some other more specialised studies have also begun to consider the respective roles of men and women in particular areas. Gerald Lorentz's work on late seventeenth century Bristol maritime culture specifically treats the role of women associated with sailors and mariners, while Carl Estabrooks' comparative analysis of Bristol's urban culture looks at women as consumers and Martin Gorsky's investigation of Bristol's charitable provision (which mainly concerns the nineteenth century) devotes a chapter to female philanthropy. But aside from Baigent, there seems to be virtually nothing on how middling women earned their living or how their economic activity contributed to the city as a whole.\(^10\)

This paper aims to build upon Baigent's and Barry's work to present a more wide-ranging account of 'middling women' in the long eighteenth century with particular reference to women in cultural production, most notably the print and publishing trades and teaching. It will begin by focusing briefly on Bristol's economic background and after providing a basic account of the way Bristol's Corporate and Guild structures limited the opportunities of women in the trades and crafts, it will discuss the range of middling women's occupations as documented in the local records, and


then go on to consider in more detail the role of middling women in the print and publishing trade and in educational provision.

**Bristol’s economic background**

Throughout this period, Bristol was an entrepot for regional, European and Colonial trade. Although Bristol ships transported over half a million Africans to the Americas between 1698 and 1807, Bristol’s slave trade, even at its height in the 1730s, comprised perhaps 10 per cent of the city’s foreign trade. But the servicing of customers in the slave-owning colonies constituted over 40 per cent of the city’s income as late as the 1790s and that figure was even higher earlier in the century, making it ‘hard to resist the conclusion that Bristol’s eighteenth-century “golden age” unequivocally rested on enslaved Africans and the products they were forced to produce.’

This commercial wealth spawned a wealthy merchant elite and soon attracted visiting gentry who flocked to its Hotwells spa. But Bristol was also an industrial city and its manufacturing enterprises were closely allied to the particular nature of its foreign trade: sugar was refined, tobacco processed, cloth woven (including, Daniel Defoe tells us, ‘considerable manufactures of woollen stuffs, particularly Cantaloons’).

Soap, Brass and metal ware, pottery and glass were important as was brewing and distilling. These and lesser known trades such as the production of hats and clay tobacco pipes combined to form the backbone of the city’s manufacturing sector. Growing from this was a burgeoning retailing and service sector which grew as the city prospered and in which women played a ‘disproportionately great role’. Women more than men, ‘benefited from the expansion of the tertiary sector and, whilst women had never been bound up in the traditional guild and craft structure to the same extent as men had, their employment patterns were to become ever more divergent’.

As Bristol was surpassed in the mid eighteenth century by Liverpool and Birmingham to become a lesser star in Britain’s urban firmament, its diverse commercial and industrial base ensured it still remained an important international port and regional capital. As such, it continued to play a vital role in what Peter Clark has called ‘the wider modernizing process affecting English society’. By the 1760s Bristol was said to have caught ‘the London itch’ for consumer goods. New networks of elegant squares and crescents, assembly rooms, theatres, libraries and shops - the spatial and cultural expressions of new economic realities - made the cityscape more genteel and in some respects more ‘female-friendly’ even as it signalled the evolution of a more socially polarised society. By the 1770s the middle classes were noticeably

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11 David Richardson, ‘Slavery and Bristol’s Golden Age’, *Slavery and Abolition*, 26 (2005), p. 49.
12 Daniel Defoe, *A Description of England and Wales: Containing a Particular Account of Each County*, Vol. VIII (London: printed for Newbery and Carnan, 1769) p.130 (Google ebook); Defoe’s *Tour of Great Britain* (1738 ed. 2) II, p. 25: ‘In Bristol and many towns on the Somersetshire side…Druggets, Cantaloons and other stuffs.’ OED Cantaloons were made in the workhouse in Bristol according to Friends men’s meeting Bristol Record Publication.
14 Ibid., p. 240.
expanding and more reform-minded professionals and manufacturers began to challenge the city’s mercantile elite and the older civic institutions that underwrote them. Bristol was not Liverpool or Manchester, in that the transition to a more industrialised society was slower and more piecemeal. Even as the numbers of working and independent poor poured into the increasingly congested city, colonial planters and their female relatives (some of whom had family connections with Bristol’s leading merchants) retired in increasing numbers to the nearby suburb of Clifton. So though reform was a foot, the ‘gulf between prosperity and poverty increased’ and even among the more prosperous progressive circles there was increasing unease about the threat the poor posed to the social order. These class divisions had a gendered dimension. And if the religious individualism of Bristol's non-conformist Protestants and their Low Church Evangelical allies provided a counterpoint to traditional values about a woman’s place, its impact on both class relations and women’s autonomy was double-edged. According to Douglas Catterall and Jodi Campbell, women within the emerging 'middle classes' still faced ‘economic, social political and cultural constraints that limited their access to education, commercial activity and wealth’.

Despite this, and despite the city’s wide range of industries, which by the turn of the nineteenth century grew to include the boot and shoe and garment industries, the lives of the vast majority of Bristol’s inhabitants, both male and female, were often hard and precarious. Baigent estimates perhaps 65% of the population in 1775 were actually or potentially poor, and this proportion expanded at times of economic crises. They included an increasing proportion of immigrants to the city, most but not all of whom were from the West Country and Wales, seeking work as domestic servants and sailors, as factory, shop and home workers. The Irish came through the port too, often as short-term agricultural workers and some settled in the city’s most crowded courts and dwellings. The consensus is that women worked primarily in the dress and boot and hat manufacturing industries and in the expanding service sector in food and drink and laundry keeping as well as general domestic service. As insecure as the lot of the middling ranks could be (and most of them led rather austere lives by modern standards), it was the bulk of the city’s population who suffered most from recurring economic downturns and an increasingly inadequate urban infrastructure. Women were over-represented amongst the city’s dependent poor and even middling women if they became detached from familial financial support structures could all too easily face impoverishment. Studies of other commercial towns in the early modern era point to the existence of women workers living outside the family household: widows, single women, deserted wives, the wives of impressed men; some residing on their own, others banding together in what Olwen Hufton has termed 'spinster clusters' who variously turned their hands to whatever labour might enable them to survive without having recourse to poor relief. It is known, for example, that the women living communally in Bristol’s Moravian single sisters house worked at embroidery (tambour

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17 The population of Clifton was 4,457 according to the 1801 Census. See BCRL, R433, and Population: Comparative Account of the Population of Great Britain in the years 1801, 1811, 1821 and 1831 (London: House of Commons, 10 October 1831), p. 101.
work) and found it a struggle to earn a living, but how many more lived together in less formalised arrangements?  

That being said, although Bristol women were over-represented amongst the poor, nearly a fifth of the city's 4,500 rate paying households were headed by widows and contrary to expectations the bulk of these households were 'neither very rich nor very poor', with a third of such households being relatively well off. Bristol's proportion of female property holders included some wealthy women and their role in the city's economic life as investors and patrons and the extent to which their presence distinguishes Bristol from other cities awaits further study.

Traditional civic restrictions on women's participation in economic life

Bristol's all-male Corporation kept a tight rein on who could legally participate in the city's economic and political life. It was the Common Council which had the power to decide which individuals duly qualified as freemen or Burgesses with its attendant rights to trade and vote for members of the Corporation. Burgess status could be claimed on various grounds: family inheritance, marriage to the daughter of a freeman, the completion of an apprenticeship and/or the payment of a fine. Entry into Bristol's established trades (which themselves were organized into guilds) was through apprenticeship to a burgess. Women were not explicitly banned under these ordinances on the grounds of their gender but if they were married their identity was subsumed under that of their husband's. If they were widowed they were customarily able to take on apprentices and if they were spinster women they were in theory eligible to become burgesses so long as they fulfilled the conditions for burger status.

In practice, only two spinster women were admitted as burgesses in their own right over our period, the milliner Cicell Carue in 1700 and the Sadler Mary Herring in 1768. But these were exceptional cases and it is perhaps significant that millinery was traditionally seen as a trade open to women because of its associations with needlework and saddler was one of the lower status trades. It is notable too that although they had the right to trade, the right to vote did not apparently go with their status as it did with male burgesses.

Most apprentices were formally indentured to a master and his wife to learn their craft or trade. The fact that most apprentices were assigned to married couples indicates that the efforts of both husband and wife were crucial to the success of a family business. What sort of 'rough and ready' equality this might have in practice conferred between husband and wife is open to debate and must have varied according to the internal politics of the individual family. Nevertheless, the very fact that both husband and wife (and in some cases widows and even spinsters) were responsible for apprentices meant that women made a contribution as managers and trainers to the local economy. In a small and declining number of cases male apprentices were

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22 Madge Dresser, 'Sisters and Brethren: Power, Propriety and Gender among the Bristol Moravians 1746-1833', Social History, 21(1996), pp. 304-6. See also Tambour works [FFBJ 8 February 1783].


24 For Cicell Carue see Bristol Record Office (hereafter BRO), 043594, p. 186, entry 2, Burgess Book 1699 [/1700] March 13; for Mary Herring see BRO 04359/14 p. 48 entry 454. Thanks to Margaret McGregor for corroborating this reference.

25 Lorentz, 'Bristol Fashion', p. 186. The six widows in charge of male apprentices included those training to be a butcher, a tiler, a button maker and a trunk maker, all trades of relatively lower status trades, though three widows were listed as taking on apprentice mariners between 1689 and 1694. Mary Fissell, however, observes that in the first half of the eighteenth century some widows of surgeons and
assigned to a widow of an established craftsman. Thus, for example, did Mary Orchard, the widow of John Orchard, take on nine apprentices to help her run her pottery business making delftware in Temple Street from 1698-1720. Similarly, Elizabeth Herring took on 6 apprentices to continue her deceased husband’s saddling business between 1747 and 1754. As apprenticeship and the guild system declined, the number of such independent women masters dwindled into insignificance. A preliminary consideration of the apprenticeship index for 1754-1760 reveals that out of 1068 masters only 11 (1 per cent) were widows.

Women as well as men who did not have burgess status defied the Council’s repeated and increasingly unsuccessful attempts to suppress their business activities. Up to the late eighteenth century, various Council pronouncements banned the right of such ‘foreigners’ to run a shop or other retail premises in the city and both sexes were prosecuted for defying this ordinance. A number of seamen’s wives were involved in running illegal shops providing lodgings, food and other goods whilst their husbands were at sea. Thus Susanna Dean the wife of James Dean was forced to shut down her business in 1697 and hers was one of a number of similar cases in this early period.

A quarter of the 24 people formally served with notice that they were contravening the city’s regulations on trade between 1738 and 1745 were women. One, Mrs Elizabeth Hawkins was prosecuted twice in 1740 and 1742. These strictures seemed to have been increasingly defied as the economy expanded with Councillors in 1752 threatening to impose a £5 fine on ‘any person or persons not being freed of the said city’ who ‘shall by any colour, way or means whatsoever directly or indirectly by him or her or themselves keep any shop or other place...within the said City...for sale’. [author’s emphasis].

There appear, however, to have been some lower status trades for which annual licences could be obtained without having free status. These included alehouses and hauliers [aka halliers] businesses and some women applied and obtained licences for these whilst others persisted in running breweries and alehouses from within the marital home illegally. The Corporation also had it within its power to grant stipends for widows of deceased Corporation officials. The power of patronage, however, did not always work to the advantage of women. When the widow of the keeper of the local Bridewell petitioned in 1749 to be kept on in her husband’s office, she was temporarily allowed to do so and to take the profits that went with the job, but she was soon ousted by a male candidate and having been thus reduced to ‘mean circumstances’ was later given a widow’s stipend.

apothecaries took over their husbands ‘careers with Sarah Pye commanding the same £200 apprenticeship premium that her husband had received and other women apprenticing the sons of gentlemen and merchants. Fissell, Patients Power and the Poor, p. 64.


27 BRO index to Bristol Apprenticeship Books for 1 March 1754-1760. This list compiled by volunteers of the Bath and Avon Family history Society, lists only the names of male masters and does not indicate if wives were also named.


29 BRO,43193/L/1, Orders for prosecution for selling goods in the borough or city of Bristol if not a freeman in contravention of the order of 14 December 1726.

30 BRO, M/BCC/CCP/1/12 (1745-1754), 29 September 1754, p. 160.

31 BRO, M/BCC/CCP, (1745-1749), 24 February 1749, pp. 115 and 120.
Middling women’s occupations

Records for the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, before the appearance of newspapers and trade directories, are dauntingly fragmentary. What survives indicates that for much of the period under review the majority of middling Bristol women like others in London and elsewhere in Britain were confined to a cluster of occupations deemed to be extensions of the ‘natural’ domestic role: the provision of food and drink, clothing, accommodation and the caring ‘professions’ of nursing and education. Yet, it will be argued that a significant minority of women, mainly but not entirely widows, were trading under their own names and were spread across a surprisingly wide range of occupations even from the beginning of the period and that as some new opportunities opened up for them in some areas, such as retailing, teaching, and victualling, there seems to be a narrowing of openings in others, especially the traditional crafts. Married women too, of course, were trading alongside their husbands, a point which occasionally surfaces in court records. We know, for example, that in 1746 Mrs. Jefferis, the wife of the baker Benjamin Jefferis, was working in her husband’s shop because it was she who was personally served with a city order for her husband’s illegal trading. Molly Moses the wife of a Jewish silversmith testified to the magistrates that she was selling gold buckles in her husband’s shop on the Key [Quay] when an attempt was made to sell her stolen goods in 1765.

Tax records for 1696 list Dorothy Woodhouse, as a vintner in Bristol High Street; a trade with long antecedents in the city and another female vintner, May Winpenny, was listed as a bankrupt in 1726. The Sun Insurance Records for Bristol from 1717-1730 show that at least one very well-connected woman, Alice Sloper, was running a millinery shop at this time, confirming Amy Erickson’s assertion that ‘the upper gentry assumption that respectable women did not work for remuneration has been extended to a much wider section of English society that it actually applied to’. Sloper, who also collected rents on properties in Wine Street and Bedminster, was the niece of Sir John Duddlestone, part of an eminent gentry family in Bristol. Also listed was Betty Skuse, a soap maker on Christmas Street in St. Nicholas parish, who seems to have had Baptist connections, underlining the particular correlation between the Dissenting community


34 Elizabeth Ralph and Mary Williams (eds.), The Inhabitants of Bristol 1696, (Bristol Record Society, 1968), XXV, googlebooks; Souden, ‘Migrants and population’, p. 159; Taunton Journal, 14 November 1726.


36 Alice Sloper seems to have been the only daughter and sole heir of William Sloper and Susanne Duddlestone, according to Rushcombe v Clement [The National Archives] C11/2036/39 1730 and the niece of Sir John Duddlestone a baronet in Bristol. A 1729 inventory on her decease in 1729 was listed at £117:13:6 She had rents from a property in Wine Street and a Bedminster tenement; BRO, P.Xch/D/62/b City Deeds Wine Street, 4 April 1715, P.Xch/D/62/a, 7 November 1689.
in the city and trade. Of the 240 registered policy holders in Bristol, fully 33 were women. Of these, only seven had a stated occupation but all of those named would, by the very fact of their taking out fire insurance, have been women of some status which again signals the significant presence of such women in the city.

A wider but still very incomplete view of middling women's occupations is offered in Sketchley's Bristol Directory of 1775. The virtues and limitations of provincial trade directories as a historical source in this regard have been extensively discussed and will not be reiterated here. Suffice it to say that Sketchley's affords us a view of 288 women working across a wide range of trade categories. Financed by subscribers, and aimed at a relatively upmarket readership, it lists only 4,231 names out of a total population of some 55,000. Like other provincial Directories that came out around the same time, it confirms the predominance of women in distribution (including shop keeping) food and drink, clothing, and personal services. Yet women who are listed in 39 per cent of all the occupational categories, feature in a surprisingly wide array of traditionally 'masculine' trades and crafts. Among these are Elizabeth Chew the organ builder and harpsichord maker, a tin-plate worker, a cutler, a plumber, and a painter and glazier. The one woman sexton mentioned reminds us that women were very occasionally appointed as parish officials. The female 'trader in ship's ballast' with the possibly Jewish surname of Cohoan, reminds us again of the opportunities granted to women by the expansion of shipping in what must have been a marginal trade.

Food and Drink Trades

Women in the Food and Drink Trades were particularly important to Bristol. Both the port and the Hotwells spa provided a particularly wide range of opportunities for Bristol victuallers and others in this sector. Certainly, women providing food and drink appear in a variety of earlier records. Elinor Biggs kept the Lamb Inn with eleven 'chambers' for her guests in Wine Street until her death in 1687 and her inventory recorded her property at the value of £91. Hannah Nicholas and Elinor Evans were recorded in the 1696 tax records as victuallers on Broad Street. Other provincials that came out around the same time also list women keeping 'chambers' for her guests in Wine Street and White Hart Inn in 1717 and 1718 respectively. By 1760 just under 62 (17 per cent) of the 371 licensed victualler and alehouse keepers in Bristol's seven inner parishes, were women and victuallers constitute the largest single female occupational group listed in Sketchley's Bristol Directory of 1775.

37 An Elizabeth Skuse is listed as a member of the Bristol Baptist Society at the Pithay in 1699. Bristol Baptist College Library, G96 Box G 14738, 'Book belonging to the Baptist Society Meeting in the Pithay.'
39 Of the 754 women included only 288 have specified occupations, the rest being women of 'gentle' status. Baigent, 'Bristol Society', pp. 133, 258, See Corfield, 'Business Leaders and Town Gentry', p. 35; James Sketchley, Sketchley's Bristol Directory, (Bristol: James Sketchley, 1775).
40 Edwin and Stella George (eds), Bristol Probate Inventories 1657-1689, (Bristol: Bristol Record Society, 2005) LVII, p. 156; 'Insurance Policy Holders 1714-1731, Bristol, Somerset and Wiltshire', Bristol and Avon Family History Society, (CD Rom) nd.; BRO, Pamphlet 261, Transcriptions of Quarter Sessions lists for 1760 in 'Notes on Bristol History' no. 9 compiled under the guidance of E. Ralph[Bristol city archivist]
VICTUALLERS AND INNKEEPERS WERE PARTICULARLY WELL PLACED TO RELAY INFORMATION AND PROVIDE SUPPORT SERVICES CRUCIAL TO THE DEVELOPMENT AND EXPANSION OF THE WIDER ATLANTIC ECONOMY. THE SOCIAL NETWORKS FEMALE VICTUALLERS DEVELOPED AND THE BUSINESS ACUMEN THEY COULD DISPLAY ARE VARIOUSLY IF INDIRECTLY INDICATED IN THE RECORDS. A 1712 COURT CASE REPORTED THAT THE VICTUAller ELIZABETH BOON WOULD OFTEN INVITE THE NEWLY WIDOWED BRISTOL MERCHANT THOMAS DEANE ‘TO COME THISHER [TO HER TAVERN THE PlUME AND FEATHERS] TO EATE AND DRINK TOGETHER’ ALLEGEDLY OUT OF ‘A DESIGN TO DRAW HIM FROM BEING A BATCHELLOR’ BEFORE CHARGING HIM FOR HER HOSPITALITY WHEN HER PLANS FAILED. MARY WILLIAMS’ HOUSE AT THE SIGN OF THE CROSS IN STOKES CROFT WAS THE VENUE FOR THE DISTRIBUTION OF PRIZE MONIES FOR OFFICERS AND SAILORS BELONGING TO THE FOX PRIVATEER IN 1747.41 THE 17 VICTUALLERS IN MARSH VICTUALLERS LISTED IN MARSH STREET IN 1775 WERE NOTORIOUS FOR LIAISING WITH UNSCRUPULOUS LABOUR AGENTS TO LURE SAILORS INTO SERVING ABOARD SLAVE SHIPS, AND FIVE OF THESE WERE WOMEN.

WOMEN WERE ALSO ENGAGED AS COFFEE HOUSE KEEPERS IN THE CITY, INCLUDING MARY LEDBETTER WHO IN THE 1720S KEPT THE ELEPHANT COFFEE HOUSE IN ALL SAINTS LANE, MRS. READ (OR REED) WHO IN 1742-1743 FAMOUSLY HAD THE POET RICHARD SAVAGE ARRESTED FOR DEBT AND ANN BARRY (D 1748) WHO HELD THE LEASE OF THE EXCHANGE COFFEE HOUSE, THE CITY’S MOST PRESTIGIOUS COFFEE HOUSE, OR MARY WHEALEN AND SARAH PERRY WHO RAN THE WEST INDIA COFFEE HOUSE AND THE AMERICAN COFFEE HOUSE RESPECTIVELY IN 1768.42 FEMALE ENTREPRENEURS IN HOTWELLS PROVIDED VENUES SPECIFICALLY GEARED TO SERVE EXOTIC DRINKS TO WOMEN AS WELL AS MEN SUCH AS THE ‘LADIES TEA ROOM’ ADVERTISED IN 1759 AND ELIZABETH REES’S ‘LONG ROOM’ WHICH OFFERED ‘COFFEE, TEA AND CHOCOLATE’ AS WELL AS MEALS.43 WOMEN ALSO NUMBERED AMONGST RESPECTABLE TEA DEALERS AND PURVEYORS OF CHOCOLATE. THEY SOLD TEAPOTS, SUGAR BOWLS AND OTHER SUCH EARTHENWARE GOODS, PROVIDING FURTHER EVIDENCE OF THE LINKS WHICH EXISTED BETWEEN COLONIAL PRODUCE AND THE NEW OPPORTUNITIES THEY AFFORDED FOR WOMEN IN THE RETAIL SECTOR.

TOBACCO RETAIL AND MANUFACTURE

A NUMBER OF WOMEN WERE INVOLVED IN THE TRADING OF COLONIAL PRODUCE SUCH AS SUGAR AND TOBACCO. THOUGH THE OVERWHELMING NUMBER OF TOBACCO IMPORTERS, TOBACCONISTS AND TOBACCO PIPE MAKERS WERE MEN, IT IS WORTH DOCUMENTING THE EXISTENCE OF WOMEN INVOLVED IN ALL THREE AREAS. TOBACCO WAS ONE OF THE EXOTIC SLAVE-PRODUCED PRODUCTS WHICH WAS PARTICULARLY IMPORTANT TO A PORT LIKE BRISTOL AND ITS PRESENCE SHAPED THE GROWTH OF THE DISTRIBUTIVE TRADES IN WHICH THE CITY’S WOMEN PLAYED A SIGNIFICANT PART. TOBACCO IMPORTS SPANNED THE TOBACCO PROCESSING INDUSTRY AND THE MANUFACTURE OF CLAY TOBACCO PIPES. A CONSIDERATION OF THIS COMMODITY SERVES TO ILLUSTRATE HOW THE SEEMINGLY SEPARATE ROLES OF MERCHANT, RETAILER AND CRAFT MANUFACTURER WERE IN PRACTICE SOMETIMES CONFLATED.

41 TNA, C6,406/18 Estwick v Evans, 25 January 1712; The Oracle Country Advertiser, 9 May 1747.
43 FFBJ 23 June 1759; Rees is mentioned in FFBJ, 19 March 1768.
Women were recorded as importing small amounts of tobacco into Bristol from Virginia along with more established merchants from at least the 1660s. Although such female merchants never numbered above 3 per cent of those recorded in the seventeenth century port books and their participation had declined into insignificance by the mid-eighteenth century, their presence confirmed the opportunities which Atlantic trade opened up to women with some capital and a sense of enterprise. It is reported that the Quaker, Martha Harford, imported 173 hogsheads of tobacco in 1698 but whether she sold it on to other traders or utilised it as a tobacconist is unknown. While Baigent rates it as a middle status retail trade, the term ‘tobacconist’ as defined in the seventeenth century variously meant both a retailer and ‘manufacturer’ of tobacco. There were female tobacco retailers in Bristol in this early period such as the Baptist Priscilla Fry, widow of the Wine Street Taylor John Fry. The inventory of her spacious premises (she lived over her shop) in 1706 included both quantities of tobacco and also ‘tobackopresis’, ‘tobacco wheals’ and a ‘tobackoingen’, presumably for their processing. Fry’s holdings were valued at over £300 and, in addition to tobacco and tobacco papers, her shop also sold ‘barbadus’ and loaf sugar and ‘chocke’ and a wide array of other consumables. Fry exemplifies the better off Dissenting businesswoman whose various commercial activities not only differed from those of her husband’s but encompassed a variety of colonial goods. Though only one female tobacconist appears in Sketchley’s Bristol Directory of 1775, the references to Mary Staines in 1753 and Grace Maggs in 1779 in other records suggest women had a long-standing if underdocumented involvement in the trade, some probably working with their husbands.

The increasing trade in tobacco also engendered an industry in clay pipes and the guild established in the mid-seventeenth century included women amongst its founders. Though guild rules stipulated that any further woman admitted into the guild would have to be a relative of existing guild members, tobacco pipe manufacture did provide an important source of female employment from the mid-seventeenth century. Some female pipe makers seemed to have a respectable living from this trade before its decline in the early nineteenth century, such as Rebecca Arthurs who in 1749 bequeathed her Lewin’s Mead home and premises and apprentices to her daughters Elizabeth and Margaret Jones. In 1770 Anna Viner (1731-1805) the widowed pipe maker of George Viner announced in the press her move from her house in St. Stephens parish to premises in St. Augustine’s Back Horse (now Host) street Bristol where she had a house and shop, advertising herself as one who supplied ‘captains and merchants

45 Edwin and Stella George (eds.), Bristol Probate Inventories: Part III: 1690-1804 (Bristol: Bristol Record Society, LX), pp. 57-60; TNA, RG4/3765 Register of Births, Marriages and Deaths, Priscilla Fry d. 11 June 1706, RG4/Bristol Broadmead Baptist 1679-1746 www.ancestry.co.uk [accessed 21 November 2013]. It is not known if Fry, Bradley & Co., tobacconists & snuff-maker listed in Mary le Port Street in Sketchley’s Directory is descended from the same Fry family.
46 BRO, 33647/37890/4 Marriage settlement 6 February 1753 mentions, Mary Staines, tobacconist; Elizabeth Johnson in Baldwin Street is named in Sketchley’s Bristol Directory (1775); Grace Maggs 1779 named in lease BRO, P/St.T/D/141; Ann Esterbrook took over her husband’s business in Old Market, FFBJ, 15 November 1783.
47 Wives were named with their husbands, ‘Clay Pipe Apprentices and Employees’ www.kalendar.demon.co.uk/pottapp.3htm [accessed 21 November 2013]; by the 1800s the industry was in the poor area of St. Jude’s, Bristol Observer, 10 December 1921.
48 BRL, B22946 Roger Price, Reg Jackson, Philomena Jackson (eds), ‘Bristol Clay Pipe Makers: a revised and expanded version’ (unpublished typescript, 1979) and B22946. This is an authoritative compendium of primary documents.
with tobacco pipes for the Africa and American trades’.\textsuperscript{49} She expanded her husband’s business and acted as manufacturer, retailer and small merchant as she made her pipes and exported them to Africa, New York, Canada and Barbados, sometimes utilising family connections to do so.\textsuperscript{50}

The fact that Viner shipped some of her pipes aboard slave ships is a reminder that Bristol’s slave trade afforded some opportunities for women in the trades and crafts. The records of the Becher family of Bristol, newly released into the public domain, show that five out of the 28 suppliers for Becher’s slave ship \textit{Jason Galley} in August 1743, were women, including two smiths and the gunsmith Margaret Braine.\textsuperscript{51} In 1768 the slave ship, the \textit{Kitty}, was being sold by the female proprietor of Bristol’s Muddock, probably on behalf of male ship owners though Catherine Stroud is reported to have played an active interest as the co-owner of a Bristol slave ship in this same period.\textsuperscript{52}

\textbf{Traders}

The rise of shop keeping from the late seventeenth century should not exclude from consideration the traders of foodstuffs and other commodities who worked in Bristol’s fairs and open markets. Though many of the hawkers and traders might be more properly designated as ‘the labouring poor’ they constituted as Sherylllyne Haggerty has noted part of the wider trading community.\textsuperscript{53} Though this group as a whole came under increasing pressure from the gentrification of public space in this period, some of them should be considered as having middling status. The Welsh traders who sold poultry and other produce on the Bristol back (also known as the Welsh Back) every Wednesday are a case in point. These women who regularly came aboard their trows to sell their poultry, fish and dairy products dominated the open market there and by the late eighteenth century Estabrook reckons, ‘as many as 30 women and never more than 4 men’ had a public presence there.\textsuperscript{54} Though contrasted unflatteringly in 1712 with ‘the polite ladies of Queen Square’, these ‘cackling Dames’ with their ‘medley stock’ of ‘feath’d Cacklers’\textsuperscript{55} surely qualified for inclusion as members of the middling sort. They may not have been urbane or genteel or have had their own shops but they had goods of their own to sell and had the initiative, organizational skills and social networks enabling them to make regular voyages into the city. One such trader, described in 1767 by the more respectful designation of a ‘Fowl Merchant’ by a Welsh diarist resident in Bristol was a married woman of 60 who died from ‘the fever’ whilst voyaging to Bristol. The fact that her body was taken back to her native Monmouthshire to be buried is itself

\textsuperscript{49} FFBj, 7 July 1770; Price \textit{et al}, \textit{Bristol Clay Pipe Makers} (revised edition 1979), BRO17126.
\textsuperscript{50} Peter Taylor, ‘Tobacco Pipes as Barter Goods on Bristol Slavers’, \textit{The Regional Historian} (Bristol: University of the West of England), 27 (2013), pp. 16-20; Price \textit{et al}, \textit{Bristol Pipemakers}.
\textsuperscript{51} BRO 45167/1 Becher volume.
\textsuperscript{52} Elizabeth Clements is listed as proprietess of the Mud Dock see FFBj, 31 December 1768. Like Alice Sloper she seems connected to the Duddlestone family; for Stroud see Anne Laurence, \textit{Women in England 1500-1760}, (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1994) p. 132 and Voyage 17542, \textit{Cape Coast} (1764) at www.slavevoyages.org.uk [accessed 13 November 2013]. Stroud was probably the wife of Walker Stroud who co-owned and captained the ship \textit{Cape Coast} which sailed to Sierra Leone and thence to St. Kitts before returning to Bristol in 1764.
\textsuperscript{53} Haggerty, \textit{British-Atlantic Trading Community}.
\textsuperscript{54} Estabrook, \textit{Urbane and Rustic England}, 79.
\textsuperscript{55} W. Goldwin, \textit{A Description of the Antient and Famous City of Bristol. A Poem} (Bristol printed for Joseph Penn book-seller against the Corn-market in Wine-Street Bristol) 1712.
an indication of some social and material standing.\textsuperscript{56} By the 1770s Bristol Corporation kept a register of Welsh traders renting stalls at Welsh Back and 85 per cent of those listed between 1776 and 1778 were women.\textsuperscript{57}

**Hauliers**

Heavy merchandise such as glassware had to be transported within the city by hauliers and newly discovered records reveal that some licensed hauliers were women. Though Baigent rates this as a high status trade, this seems doubtful. Bristol hauliers had a society of their own to which women were admitted only as widows of male members.\textsuperscript{58} But hauliers seemed to vary in terms of affluence. An inventory of 1689 indicates that the widow of John Brayne had run down her husband’s business as the five horses still in her possession were variously described as ‘flebiten’, ‘howllowbackt’, ‘clubfotted’ and ‘lame’ and her house full of old and broken furniture and harnesses. But the haulier register which survives for 1718-1760 reveals a different picture. In 1718 just three of the 43 hauliers signing up for what seems to be an annual licence, were women. However, by the 1740s there appear to be considerably fewer hauliers signing the register each year and as these include a coterie of some half dozen women, female hauliers may have made up a larger proportion of the total number of hauliers by that decade and a few such as Mary Stevens and Hannah Ayres reappeared in the register over some years.

Hauliers did not drive the horses themselves but employed between one and five journeymen or apprentices to drive a like number of horses. Hannah Eyres, who had only three horses, worked for ten years employing her 14 year old ‘son in law’ (probably step son) as one of her drivers. Like most of the female hauliers, she was illiterate; signing her name with a cross the most prominent of them, Ann Mansel, employed five journeymen, equal to the number employed by the largest male hauliers. Her slightly higher status is perhaps also indicated by the fact that one of her employees signed his name ‘for my mistress’. It is known too from inventory records that her husband’s premises on his death in 1736 were spacious and his goods were worth the substantial sum of £840-14 s. It seems his widow worked as a haulier for at least two years after his demise.\textsuperscript{59}

**Women and the knowledge economy: Publishers, printers and booksellers**

Readers of Sketchley’s Bristol Directory which first appeared in 1775 might conclude that women played little part in Bristol’s book and print trades. Of the city’s 13 listed book sellers, only one was female and only one woman was cited as a printer. In fact, Bristol women were involved in the production and dissemination of a burgeoning print culture from the 1660s onwards, as publishers, printers and booksellers, and most

\textsuperscript{57} BRO, F/M/Wel.Bk, 1776-1807.
\textsuperscript{58} BRO 05074 (1) Halliers Register Book by order of the Common Council of the City of Bristol 1718-1760; re status see Baigent, Bristol Society’, pp. 228, 403.
\textsuperscript{59} BRO 05074 (1); A Ann Mansell who appears some years after Hannah Mansell disappears from the register may be a relation but is probably not the same person.
probably as elsewhere in British and French cities as hawkers, chapmen, broadside sellers and 'book scanners' and later as proprietors of circulating libraries.

In the middle of the eighteenth century two of Bristol's main and rival papers were respectively run by Elizabeth Farley and her niece Sarah Farley both of whom and made wider contributions to commercial and cultural life in Bristol and beyond. Their careers show the importance not only of their individual achievements but also of the way their activities were embedded into wider networks based on religious, political and occupational affiliation and shared business interests.

A notable proportion of women in these trades had Dissenting connections and after 1740, Methodist ones. This was unsurprising given that both these movements valued literacy for both sexes as a means to salvation and were keen to take advantage of the print medium to achieve this end. Thus, just after the Restoration, Susanna Moore the widow of the Baptist printer Richard Moore came to the notice of the authorities for selling seditious literature having received 50 copies of the Fire of London by her fellow Baptist the radical London bookseller Elizabeth Calvert.

But others seemed to have been motivated by more purely commercial considerations or came to the trade through family connections. By 1697 Bridget Martin advertised in the Post Boy that she had books for sale at the Cross in Temple Street during the Temple fair. Mary Penn, aka the 'Widow Penn' (possibly a relation of William Penn) was listed as a printer and bookseller in 1728 and published secular as well as religious work.

In 1742 Mary Hook (aka Hooke), worked as a partner with her husband Andrew Hook on his newspaper The Oracle (aka the Bristol Oracle and County Advertiser). Though it is not clear how much she had to do with the technical aspects of printing (itself seen as a male preserve), it is likely she was centrally involved in the overall management of the paper given that Hook was in gaol for debt the year it was launched. It is not known how much she shared his dislike of John Wesley or his particular brand of Whig politics but she carried on her late husband's printing and book selling business on his death in 1753, evidently moving from the paper's premises in the St. Michael's Hill area to a coffee house she took over in Jacob's Well; first printing playbills for the nearby theatre before moving on in 1766 to the Maiden Tavern in

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60 Simonton, 'Widows and Wenches', pp. 103-4.
61 Barry 'Cultural Life'.
64 Gloucestershire Notes and Queries, (Rev. Beaver H. Blacker, ed), (London: Simpkin, Marshall, Hamilton, Kent and Co. Ltd; Bristol, William George Sr., 1890) vol.4, pp. 471-2; Clark Library, Proposals by the Co-Partners of the Bristol Crown Fire Office for Insuring Houses and goods for Loss and Damage by Fire (Bristol: printed by Mary Penn bookseller, 1728); Widow Penn also listed as seller of A Second Letter to the Men's Meeting of the People called Quakers, (London: printed at the Royal Exchange for H. Whitridge), ECCO; John Taylor, A Letter Humbly Inscribed to the Rev. Dr. Desaguliers ...recommended to the perusal of the Inhabitants of the city ...of Bristol (Bristol, nd, publisher widow Penn Bookseller in Wine Street).
Baldwin Street. She was still listed as a printer of historical songs over 30 years later, though she does not appear in Sketchley’s Directory in 1775.

Although their higher level of literacy alone would have distinguished them from other traders, particularly early in the eighteenth century, (one contemporary commentator talks about the characteristic arrogance of some booksellers), the status of women printers and booksellers would vary according to family connections and their financial standing. Corn Street (where Bristol’s first newspaper was printed by William Bonny) and Wine Street, both near the historic centre of the city, seemed to have had a concentration of higher-status printers, booksellers and stationers; their functions as seen previously in this paper often overlapped and were riven by gendered differences, with women less likely to have been formally involved in the activities of bookbinding and typesetting. Family connections seemed to have been important though in providing the capital, expertise and connections in ensuring success.

Martha Lewis was listed as a bookseller in Broad Street in 1744, whilst Hannah Wall, described in Elizabeth Farley’s newspaper as a ‘very eminent book seller’ in the city, retired from her trade shortly before her marriage in 1763 to a Gloucestershire landowner. Given her eminence and her ‘considerable fortune’ (she owned her Corn Street house and property outside Bristol) it is likely that Wall was descended from the long established dynasty of Presbyterian Whig booksellers in Corn Street, apparently founded by the former goldsmith Thomas Wall (d. 1688), and thence by his widow, who, according to Latimer, had herself ‘carried on both branches of his trade with great reputation.’

Mary Ward, is another forgotten Corn Street printer, listed in a Victorian compendium of West Country printers and stationers, as active in the mid-1770s and as ‘Mary Ward and Son’ by 1781. Her shop was next door to a Foster’s Coffee House run by Mary Darvill, a reminder of the connection between coffee houses and the reading of printed material. It is possible that she shared the premises in 52 Corn Street with another printer, Ann Bryan, whose publications (both secular and Baptist) also listed

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67 Bristol Central Reference Library (hereafter BCRL) B9453, The Songs in Alfred, ‘King of Britain’, (Bristol: printed by Mary Hooke, 1774), 8 pages.
68 Barry, ‘Cultural Life of Bristol,’ pp.90-1 re. location of bookshops.
69 FFBJ, 17 November 1744; FFBJ, 31 March 1743.
http://scans.library.utoronto.ca/pdf/1/2/a11notesqueries02london/a11notesqueries02london_bw.pdf

Though there is a will for a Mary Ward around this time who is the wealthy widow of a Bristol solicitor, it seems unlikely that this is the same person, particularly as the will shows that Mary Ward was the sister of the Bristol MP Matthew Brickdale who by the time of her death had a country estate in Somerset. Though her listing in the 1775 trade Directory indicates a woman of some standing, it would be unusual to say the least that such a wealthy woman had operated as an active businesswoman so late in the eighteenth century. TNA, Will of Mary Ward, Bristol, PROB, 11/1413, 25 August 1804.
her as in Corn Street from 1783 and who seems to have founded a printing dynasty of sorts.\textsuperscript{72}

Mrs. Alice Roberts who came from London in the 1770s advertising herself in the local press as a ‘map and print-seller, mounter, colourer and varnisher’ had experienced a harder time as an outsider establishing herself. She had come from London hoping to trade in Corn Street but in 1775, she advertised in the local press not only to detail her wares but to complain that her Bristol landlord, Mr. Schuster, who was himself a book and print seller, had reneged on their original contract for her to set up a shop in his premises in the Tolsey in Corn Street, reportedly the ‘oldest bookseller’s shop in the city.’\textsuperscript{73} As a result, she was forced to set up instead in the recently built Clare Street nearby. Her additional allegation that she had been informed by ‘certain Gentlemen’ that malicious rumours (presumably spread by Schuster) had caused her stock to be viewed with ‘indifference bordering on contempt’ is a reminder that this was still a ‘face to face’ society in which personal reputation and local connexions meant all. She implied her status as a stranger to the city was a factor in her treatment. (It seems likely that Schuster may have been worried by her lack of burgess status which was still a formal, if increasingly unworkable, prerequisite for all those wishing to trade in the city particularly in the Tolsey\textsuperscript{74}). The fact that she was not listed in Sketchley’s Directory in 1775, though she was clearly in business at the time, attested to her lower status relative to other more established purveyors of prints. The whole tone of her advertisement stresses her competence (she found new premises herself), her ‘elegant’ taste, and her engagement in the new knowledge of the day.

Overlapping religious and commercial motives and networks both bound and divided the various booksellers in Bristol. Elizabeth Palmer, whose bookshop in Wine Street 1775 was listed in Bristol’s first trade Directory in 1775, inherited the business from her husband, the Weselyan bookseller John Palmer, who bequeathed it to his ‘dear wife’ on his death in 1766. She was still operating the business in 1793.\textsuperscript{75} Closely associated with evangelicals and pietists in Bristol, she sold books published by Bristol publishers such as the Methodist William Pine and Thomas Mills. Like many others in the trade, she diversified her business opportunities by taking in lodgers and selling lottery tickets and advertising herself as one of the venues where people could come to


Bryan’s son and then her daughter-in-law continued the business until the early 19th century.

\textsuperscript{73} Re. Schuster see Bristol Journal, 20 May 1773; The Tolsey was a covered colonnade used for business transactions there.

\textsuperscript{74} See Barry, ‘Cultural Life of Bristol’, p. 73, n. 5.

\textsuperscript{75} TNA PROB11/915/84 Will of John Palmer, 8 January 1766.
subscribe to fund the publication of concert music.\textsuperscript{76} Her neighbours in Wine Street included the prominent printer Thomas Cadell and ‘M. Thomas’ the female proprietor of a ‘circulating library and perfume shop’.\textsuperscript{77}

More modestly placed booksellers, in less prestigious parts of the city included Mrs Campbell, a bookseller and milliner ‘at the Milliners and Straw hat makers, near the middle of Castle Ditch’ who seems to have been a respectable woman of means with Gloucestershire connections. She came from Cheltenham after the death of her husband who was a bookseller in that city and most likely to have had Presbyterian connections.\textsuperscript{78} Mary Ann Long, a working stationer who was unusual in advertising herself in 1783 as a bookbinder as well (an aspect of the book trade traditionally associated with men), operated from the less salubrious address in Tower Lane. Mrs. Howldy, operated as a stationer and paper dealer on the Back and may have, as was customary with stationers, combined her activities with book selling.\textsuperscript{79} Others sold at the fairs and Samuel Colman’s 1824 painting of the St. James’s Fair, Bristol’s largest annual fair, shows a Quaker couple manning a stall full of books and tracts along with gloves, hourglasses and sundries. One of the tracts hung up for sale is on the abolition of slavery, a favoured Quaker cause.\textsuperscript{80}

Perhaps the most prominent of circulating library proprietor in Bristol in the eighteenth century was Ann Yearsley who started as the impoverished wife of a dispossessed yeoman, became a notable poet under the patronage of Hannah More in the late 1780s but by the early 1790s was alienated from More and much of her circle. She still retained links with Cottle and Southey and as the proprietor of a moderately successful circulating library in Hotwells before ill health forced her to retire, she continued to make a contribution to the city’s cultural life.\textsuperscript{81}

Newspaper proprietors

As seen from the example of Mary Hook, women were involved in newspaper publishing as early as 1742 but it was in 1753 that Bristol’s two main papers \textit{Felix Farley’s Bristol Journal} and \textit{The Bristol Journal} were each bequeathed to female relatives. Elizabeth Farley took over her husband Felix’s paper, \textit{Felix Farley’s Bristol Journal}, on his death in 1753\textsuperscript{82} a year after he had split from his brother Samuel Jr., the proprietor of the \textit{Bristol Journal}. Samuel, who died that same year, bequeathed his paper to his niece.

\textsuperscript{76}PROPOSALS for printing by Subscription, SIX SONATOS (or five and a CONCERTO) for the Harpsichord, with Accompaniments for a Violin, German Flute and Violincello. Compos’d by WILLIAM BOYTON, of BRISTOL. Subscriptions at 10s. 6d. each taken in by the Author, near the Parade, on Kingsdown; and by Mrs. Palmer, Bookseller in Wine-street; Mr. Tyley, Organist, and Mr. Millgrove, in Bath; and Messrs. Longman, Lukey and Co. - No.26 in Cheapside, London: A fine ton’d HARPSICHORD, ... Make to be disposed of. Enquire as above’. Extracts from \textit{Bonner and Middleton Bristol Journal} Saturday, 28 October 1775. \url{http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~dutilleul/ZOtherPapers/NewB&M28Oct1775.html}

\textsuperscript{77}For Cadell, see Barry, ‘Cultural Life of Bristol’ and for Thomas see \textit{Bristol Journal}, 15 May 1773.

\textsuperscript{78}BRO, 37164/Cam/1/4 (4 October, no year), Letter, James Willington, Wexford, Ireland, to his brother Charles W Campbell, bookseller, Cheltenham, Glos.

\textsuperscript{79}\textit{FFBJ}, 23 August 1783; \textit{FFBJ}, 12 July 1783.

\textsuperscript{80}Samuel Colman, St. James’s Fair; Bristol Museum and Art Gallery, K353.


\textsuperscript{82}TNA PROB 11/802/434, 30 June 1753.
Sarah, whilst the rivalry and estrangement between these two brothers and their female successors has attracted historical notice;\textsuperscript{83} little attention has been given to the wider networks and activities of either woman. Both combined the running of their respective newspapers with other printing contracts. They employed agents to distribute their papers and made liaisons with other newspapers in the region.\textsuperscript{84} They continued the long standing practice in those less specialised days in selling patent medicines and other products from their newspaper offices and in so doing supported some female enterprises.

Both women expressed their political values through their newspapers. A Wesleyan Methodist, Elizabeth Farley was even more wedded to the High Tory cause than her husband had been, and she used her paper to back a virulent campaign against the naturalization of Jews in 1753 and also pursued an extravagantly-worded campaign against Whig corruption which brought her to national attention as the first newspaper proprietor to be (unsuccessfully) prosecuted for libel.\textsuperscript{85}

Elizabeth, Farley printed a wide range of material including poetry\textsuperscript{86} and at least 23 Methodist books hymns and pamphlets between 1755 and 1765 including sermons by John Wesley and hymns by his brother Charles with whom she was personally acquainted.\textsuperscript{87} She sold these through various booksellers including John Palmer whose father was a leader of one of John Wesley’s first bands in Bristol.\textsuperscript{88}

Her rival and niece, the Quaker Sarah Farley, was the daughter of the Exeter printer Edward Farley. Sarah Farley was brought up in Exeter where women in the printing trade were not uncommon. Though her father appears to have bequeathed his Exeter newspaper to her brother, her uncle Samuel left the Bristol Journal to her on the grounds that she remain a Quaker and that should she choose to get married, to marry within the Society of Friends. Farley ran the Bristol Journal from Small Street and later from Castle Green from 1753 until her sudden death in 1774, employing a Quaker Foreman and Clerk but also utilising the services of John Palmer’s Methodist widow Elizabeth along with that of the Presbyterian printer and bookseller Thomas Cadell to distribute her publications. In contrast to her Aunt’s paper, its politics were sufficiently Whiggish for her to become the preferred printer of the Corporation from 1760.\textsuperscript{89}

\textsuperscript{83} Barry, ‘Cultural Life of Bristol’, pp. 119-20
\textsuperscript{84} Sarah Farley renewed a connection with the Salisbury Journal.
\textsuperscript{86} Henry Jones Clifton: a poem, in two cantos. Including Bristol and all its environs (Bristol: printed by E. Farley and Co. for the author) and sold in London by Dodsley; Walters; Davies; Kearsley; and Almon; and by the booksellers of Bristol and Bath’ ECCO accessed 4 July 2013; BCRL, B1564 ‘Miscellanies in Prose and Verse by Emmanuel Collins’ (Bristol, printed by El Farley Small Street, 1762) found in a bound book compiled by George Catcott.
\textsuperscript{87} See e.g. John Wesley, The Doctrine of Original Sin: According to Scripture, Reason, and Experience (Bristol: Elizabeth Farley, 1757); Reasons against a Separation from the Church of England (Bristol: Elizabeth Farley, 1758). The Manchester University Library noted for its extensive collection of Methodist archives and publications lists 21 books mainly by John and Charles Wesley published by Elizabeth Farley between 1757 and 1767.
\textsuperscript{88} J. Barry (ed.), The Diary of William Dyer: Bristol in 1762, (Bristol: Bristol Record Society, 2012), LXIV.
\textsuperscript{89} Barry, ‘Press and Politics of Culture’, p. 61. A trawl through ECCO shows she also printed: ‘Union and loyalty recommended. A sermon preach’d at the Mayor’s chapel, in Bristol, on Sunday, September 15, 1754.’ By William Batt, … Versified for the author by S. Farley, and sold at the printing-office, and at the
the radical John Wilkes came to address his Bristol supporters in 1771, Sarah Farley showed herself to be, according to the Bristol chronicler John Latimer, ‘sufficiently venturesome’ to print the speeches of his Bristol supporters whilst ensuring that any direct mention of ‘the demagogues’ name or his own after-dinner oratory’ was ‘carefully suppressed’.90 Like many printers, including her uncle and grandparents, she sold medicinal remedies but also reportedly published a catalogue of medicines by a visiting Italian doctor and personally testified in favour of a patent remedy.91 And she seems to have been on friendly enough terms with other Bristol booksellers, notably Thomas Cadell and Sarah Palmer, through whom she sold her other publications. She ensured the books and papers she printed were distributed beyond Bristol, utilising Thomas Cadell’s London contacts and liaising with other provincial newspapers such as the Salisbury Journal. She published editions of two of Hannah More’s plays,92 letters on the building of the Bristol Bridge by the architect John Wood,93 and sermons by the Anglican divine and economic reformer Josiah Tucker.94

By the 1770s her circle included not only Quakers like Sarah Champion Fox and the industrialist William Cookworthy but Evangelicals like Hannah More, and two unsuccessful suitors, one a young surgeon at Bristol’s Infirmary and the other an established Bristol merchant.95 Sarah Champion Fox affords us a rare if someone eulogistic appraisal of her public reputation, recording in her diary shortly after Farley’s unexpected death that: She had been to us a near and very kind neighbour, and her benevolence and universal acquaintance rendered her removal a great loss and generally regretted. Men of distinguished abilities, of all ranks and descriptions, resorted to her house and were fond of her conversation. She succeeded her father or her uncle in the printing business, and it was not by education, but by superior talents that she emerged from obscurity. The poor bewailed her death as the loss of a benefactor. She was a single woman, but was at this time earnestly solicited to become a wife by her neighbour [the merchant] Wm. Green, whose entreaties had hitherto been unavailing.96

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91 An address of Bartholomew di Dominiceti, physician, from Venice, to the most illustrious and venerable Royal Society, of London (printed by J. Towers 1764) p. 11 refers to a catalogue of medicines compiled and published ‘for the satisfaction and benefit of the public’ by S. Farley of Castle Green in Bristol: ‘Cures performed by the pectoral balsam of honey; invented by Sir John Hill’ and sold by [blank] also by Mr. Baldwin, Pater-noster Row; Mr. Ridley, (1774); printed for the author, p. 36.
92 See Hannah More, The Inflexible Captive: a Tragedy, (Bristol: S. Farley, Castle Green and sold by T. Cadell, Bristol, 3d. edition 1774), ECCO. This was wrongly attributed to her uncle Samuel Farley in F.A. Hyett, ‘Notes on the First Bristol and Gloucestershire Printers’, Transactions of the Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society, 1895-1897 vol. 20, p. 47; that same year, she also printed an edition of Hannah More’s The search after happiness: a pastoral drama. Imprint: printed and sold by S. Farley; sold also by T. Cadell, Bristol; T. Cadell, in the Strand; Carnan and Newbery, and J. Wilkie.
93 A letter from Mr. Wood, to the commissioners for rebuilding the bridge at Bristol, and opening the avenues to it, (Bristol: S. Farley, 1760), ECCO and A second letter from Mr. Wood, to the commissioners for rebuilding the bridge at Bristol, and opening the avenues to it. printed by S. Farley 1760, ECCO.
94 Six sermons on important subjects. By Josiah Tucker (Bristol: printed by S. Farley; and sold by her; the booksellers in Bristol and Bath; and by S. Bladon, London, 1772).
95 The Diary of Sarah Champion Fox (Bristol: Bristol Record Society, LV) pp. 38 and 43; for Skone see BCRL, B1564 aka W509 George Catcott, Bound book of Miscellaneous writings both published and unpublished, p 116ff.
96 The Diary of Sarah Champion Fox, entry 15 July 1774, p. 43; BCRL, B1564 aka W509 G. Thomas Skone who seems unsuccessfully to have sought her hand in marriage before decamping to Tortola is mentioned
Fox's rather defensive approach to her friend's single status tells us something about prevailing social attitudes of the day but it seems clear that Farley was no passive inheritor of a family enterprise but a woman with an extensive network of intellectual substance who was held in some esteem by her peers; a point further indicated by the fact that after her death her paper was renamed *Sarah Farley’s Bristol Journal* by its male proprietors.

It seems odd, given the family and commercial rivalry between Elizabeth and Sarah Farley that Sarah bequeathed the newspaper to Elizabeth’s daughter Hester. Certainly, her foreman, Samuel Bonner, and her ex-Clerk, Thomas Middleton, both Quakers, refused to work with Hester going on instead to found another longstanding Bristol paper, *Bonner and Middleton’s Bristol Journal.* But it seems unlikely that it was religious differences accounting for their action for although Hester was a friend of Susannah Wesley, Charles Wesley’s daughter, she seems have ended up as the second wife of Thomas Rutter a local Quaker brush manufacturer and preacher who had been a visitor to her aunt’s home. 98

Hester Farley briefly ran the paper whilst her mother was still running *Felix Farley’s Bristol Journal*, but soon sold it in 1775 to the Routh Brothers, George and William, who re-named the paper *Sarah Farley’s Bristol Journal* in 1777 an act which must have been testament to the regard in which her name was still held. Though one local source puts the paper in exclusively male hands until its demise,99 it seems that Sarah Routh the widow of William then took over the business in 1800 and continued until selling it in 1806, her invoice of 1805 proudly proclaiming her as the 'printer of *Sarah Farley’s Bristol Journal'".100

**School mistresses and school proprietors**

The first parish school in Bristol (and the second in the nation) was funded by a bequest from Mary Gray of Temple parish in 1699 and women play a significant part in the provision of both private and charitable schools throughout the period. 101 Barry lists some 26 women teachers on record in the city before 1700 and 76 between 1700 to 1775 but there were also others running informal dame schools such as the ‘old woman’ who taught who taught reading to the Bristol pipe maker and poet John Frederick Bryant.102 Women’s role as school mistresses and teachers is on the one hand traditionally feminine but could be innovative too depending on the individual involved.

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98 John Ryland’s Library, Wesley family papers GB 2435 DDWF/25/4 letter 8 November 1778 from Hester Farley.
100 BRO,12881/4, Tradesmen’s bills: Catherine Routh, printer of Sarah Farley’s *Bristol Journal*, 18 Bridge Street (1805).
102 Barry, ‘Cultural Life of Bristol’, p. 46.
There was a world of difference between Joan Dixon, the ill-educated elderly school mistress at Redmaids School dismissed from her post in 1723 for not keeping up to the ‘new regime’ and some of the more dynamic and cultivated women such as Selina Mills who ran one of city’s leading female schools later in the century.

Girls’ boarding schools began to proliferate by the 1740s as the expansion of Bristol’s cultural life and the increasing gentility of its upper middling ranks provided ever more avenues for female employment in the professions and personal services. The widow of the Rev. Mr. Becher ran a boarding school in the exclusive area of College Green in 1743 and one Mrs. Bickers advertised hers that same year. The curriculum of such genteel schools so far as they had one, seems in most cases to have been geared to teaching ‘young ladies’ of a certain class the accomplishments needed to bag a husband. There was some anxiety that this might preclude the more utilitarian skills such as needlework and housewifery women needed to be useful in the home, and it is telling that such skills were taught certainly in the charity schools where the Dissenting women had a strong presence, such as, for example, in the ladies charity school set up in 1755 for the express purpose of ‘teaching [poorer] girls to read and spin’.

Anne Barbara Rosco an embroiderer who reportedly came to Bristol from London first ran a boarding school in St. Michael’s hill in 1749 for ‘little masters as well as misses’, with her husband, a well-known retired comedian at Jacobs Well theatre in the city. Widowed in 1762, she then set up a companion school for young ladies with her daughters and a French teacher. This school seemed to have had a broader cultural brief. One of her daughters, an established actress who had performed in Drury Lane gave up her own career to help her mother. By the late 1760s Mrs. Rosco was staged a public reading events to celebrate the achievements of her star pupils and was lauded in verse for championing the cultivation of the female intellect and at least one of her pupils went on to open her day own school in the less genteel environs of Stokes Croft. The spinster sisters of Hannah More opened up their school in 1758 first near the College Green for ‘daughters of the affluent’; which was apparently underwritten by a female patron, Ann Lovell Gwatkin, the cultivated Cornish wife of a Bristol soap manufacturer who had inherited money from her father. By 1762 the school had prospered sufficiently to take on 60 pupils and relocate to larger premises in Park Street. It continued to flourish and numbered Mary Darby (later Mary Robinson) amongst its pupils.

By 1775 schools had proliferated to such an extent that 47 names listed in Sketchley’s were School teachers or proprietors of schools, half of whom were women. Half of the ten Boarding Schools were run by women, all of them single sex. The precise number of schools is difficult to establish as it is unclear if some of those listing themselves as school mistresses or masters may not have had an establishment of their
own. A noticeable divide emerges between those schools situated in high prestige areas such as Clifton Hill and those ‘schools for children’ run in the back courts of poorer central parishes.

By the end of the period the Mores’ sisters’ school was being run by their’ protégé, Selina Mills, the Anglican daughter of Robert Mills a Quaker bookseller and publisher, who was later to marry Zachary Macaulay. Then as now, a reputation for propriety was crucial for a school’s survival and Mills’ school came under threat in the 1790s when one of her pupils, a 14 year old ‘sun kissed’ West Indian heiress, eloped with the adventurer Richard Vining Perry to Gretna Green. Though Mills’ school survived the trial that followed proved an ordeal for Mills personally as well as professionally. In a separate unrelated incident, one Mrs. Bowyer who ran a school in Clifton found it necessary to publicly refute the ‘injurious insinuation...industriously circulated’ that she intended quitting her school. Scandals aside, day and boarding schools for girls continued to proliferate to the end of our period.

A growing proportion of schools, advertised in the Bristol press, were run by women located outside the city in Wells, Thornbury, Chipping Sodbury and Warmley. Though female school teachers were poorly paid, with a little capital a woman running her own school could make a respectable living. And if the quality of the schooling provided was variable, at the very least they encouraged literacy and helped to stimulate a wider market for books in the city.

The contribution women made to the expansion of the city’s knowledge economy was not confined to publishers and teachers. Itinerant women actors and artists also contributed. The Bristol born actress Jane Hippsley (daughter of the impresario and actor John) and a raft of visiting actresses enlivened and broadened the city’s cultural repertoire as they sought to make a living from their craft. Sarah Harrington, an itinerant artist who was also a tutor, writer and inventor stayed in Bristol for some months in 1775 before going on to patent her invention (the pantograph) which reduced reflections from a camera obscura down to miniature size, enabling her to offer accurate and relatively cheap ‘likenesses’ of her clients. She went onto establish herself as one of the leading miniaturists silhouettists in the country and she and her Bristol business partner and fellow artist Sarah Collins exemplified a commercial acumen not usually associated with women artists in this era.

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108 BRO 36893 (36)d1 and e ii, miscellaneous materials regarding the scandal and the school including a contemporary account of ‘The trial of Richard Vining’ (Bristol nd c. 1784).
109 FFBJ, 3 July 1784; BRO, 35893/36/di, The Constitutional Chronicle. FFBJ, 10 July 1784.
110 See Matthew’s New Bristol Directory for the year 1793-4 which lists inter alia Ann Grummant’s ‘Ladies boarding school’ in Queen’s-Parade.
112 FFBJ, 10 July 1784.
Conclusion

It is intended that the above discussion has established that middling women’s economic activity in Bristol was more diverse and proactive than has been commonly assumed. Whilst it is impossible to quantify with precision what impact middling women had on the economy, it seems evident from even this preliminary exploration of the sources that the economy could not have functioned without their contribution. Limited though most of them were by their lack of access to capital and education, by the demands of constant child-bearing and by the social expectations laid upon them, they were not passive ciphers but individuals who responded to their circumstances in different ways. Widows who made the decision to keep on running their husbands’ businesses met that challenge with varying degrees of enterprise and success and this study shows how unjust it is to regard them as an undifferentiated and passive constituency. This attempt to identify individual women and the specific circumstances in which they operated is meant as a complement to any future statistical analyses of the evidence so far unearthed. It has indicated the importance of Bristol’s particular economic and social structure in shaping women’s experience and contribution as economic actors and highlighted the importance of religious, family and class relations in this regard.

It is beyond the brief of this paper to conclude definitively whether the range of women’s occupations expanded or contracted as the economy modernised. The evidence so far suggests a varied and complicated picture. Though the Atlantic economy afforded new opportunities, women were progressively excluded from overseas trade early in our period as trading networks became more formalised. Women with access to capital could on the other hand take advantage of the rise in demand for food and drink and consumer goods as victuallers, provisioners and the like. Some women benefited from the rise of the permanent shop. But this phenomenon, along with the increasing regulation of space in the interests of improvement and social order, did marginalise those other middling women who lacked the wherewithal to afford permanent premises.

The spread of gentility also progressively siphoned away women in the upper echelons of the middling ranks from direct involvement in business. Ann Bright, part of the Bright merchant dynasty, might have run Ann Bright and Company a pewter and braziers’ firm in the city as late as 1768, but a generation later the Bright women were no longer in Queen’s Square but on their country estate in Ham Green, Somerset, divorced from a hands-on involvement in their family’s business affairs.

The increasing hegemony of a domestic ideology becomes more evident in the popular discourse as the century draws to a close. Some of those who could afford to eschew paid work, especially those from Dissenting backgrounds, continued to play an engaged role in economic life under the guise of their philanthropic activities and concerned themselves with such issues as prison reform, debtors, the discipline and welfare of servants, and the provision of housing for distressed women of middling rank. Today such women might be called social entrepreneurs and then as now their

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114 FFBJ, 4 June 1768.
115 See for example BM 22/1/1827 where two female members of the Prudent Men’s Savings Bank (a voluntary mixed-sex charity) hold a meeting to raise funds for distressed manufacturers; Susanna Morgan’s pamphlet on prison reform, BRL, B957, Miss Morgan, Gaol of the city of Bristol, compared with what a gaol ought to be. 1815. and William Tyson, The Bristol Memorialist, (Bristol: Wm Tyson, 1823), pp. 87, 222 or Sarah Guppy’s plan for providing housing for impoverished but respectable women, British
activities force us to question the designation of economic activity strictly in terms of remunerated work.

At the other end of the spectrum, some market traders and women in declining trades such as tobacco pipe making were being jettisoned out of the middling ranks by the early nineteenth century and an initial comparison between *Sketchley’s Directory of 1775* and *Pigot’s Directory of 1830* suggests that despite the proliferation of new trades, middling women were being ghettoised into a narrower range of occupations.

Nevertheless, women continued to work as small businesswomen into the early nineteenth century, swelling the numbers of what would later come to be called the lower middle class. They are a neglected area deserving future study. How were they affected by the establishment in 1801 of Bristol’s Commercial Rooms which further formalised male networking amongst those who were not members of the older Society of Merchant Venturers? How marginalised were they by the establishment of the Bristol Chamber of Commerce in 1823? The participation of other middling women such as professional artists, writers, actors and teachers needs also to be further reconsidered in terms of their evolving status and in terms of the contribution they made to the city’s cultural and economic infrastructure.

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Library, *Considerations, with the sketch of a plan for providing suitable, agreeable and permanent residences for ladies*, (Bristol, 1814) General Ref collection T.934.(13).