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Introduction

On 6 August 1745, Jane Holt, the daughter of John Holt, a deceased linen draper of Doncaster, York was apprenticed to Elizabeth Hutt, upholsterer of St Paul’s Churchyard and widow of John Hutt, Citizen and Clothworker, deceased. She was the last of five apprentices bound to Elizabeth Hutt between the years 1734 and 1745, and the only girl bound. In three of these apprenticeships, a premium of twenty pounds was paid to the mistress and in two (including that of Jane Holt), fifty pounds. Hutt was not a Freewoman of The Clothworkers’ Company in her own right and does not appear to have been apprenticed to a Clothworker master or mistress as a girl. It is not known whether she learnt upholstery through a formal apprenticeship into another Company or whether she received informal training working alongside her husband during their marriage or prior to leaving her parental home.

Jane Holt sued out her indentures for non-enrolment on 3 May 1750 and on 6 September that year was turned over to Marmaduke Smith, a haberdasher in Cornhill and Freeman of The Stationers’ Company.¹ Nine and a half years after she was first bound, and by this time in partnership with a Mistress Walton, Jane Holt took up her Freedom of The Clothworkers’ Company on 5 February 1755. Between 1760 and 1772, she took a total of six apprentices through the Company. In the surviving Registers of Apprentices held at Clothworkers’ Hall, Jane Holt is listed in each apprenticeship as a milliner, based first in Lombard Street and later in Fenchurch Street, and is on two occasions recorded as a ‘femme sole’, the only woman to have ever been explicitly described as, or to have termed herself, such in the Company’s records. Despite the rare appearance of this descriptor, it would be untrue to assume that Jane Holt was the only businesswoman or indeed working woman in
the Company’s history. Recent transcription and data entry of the Clothworkers’ Registers of Apprentices and Freedom Admissions has revealed that there were small but significant numbers of female apprentices, Freewomen and mistresses present in the Company in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, engaged in or receiving occupational training into, some form of business activity.²

The received wisdom in literature on the London Livery Companies posits that women are largely absent from Company records, that only a handful of women were ever permitted to serve apprenticeships and that there was no place for single women within them.³ Quantitative studies to date have calculated female membership at between 1 and 2% compared to men.⁴ Notwithstanding these conclusions, it is true to say that in general, little interest has previously been taken in subjecting women’s activities to detailed study and in many of the Companies’ own modern histories women receive cursory treatment, if any.⁵ However, in recent decades there have been a number of studies of female apprentices outside the capital – notably Colchester, Edinburgh, Oxford, Bristol, York and in rural parishes - that have thrown light on women entering skilled trades in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.⁶ This research forms part of a growing body of evidence which is reshaping opinion on women’s work in the early modern period, challenging the notion that the advent of industrialisation forced a female retreat from trade, leading in turn to a separation of spheres later.⁷ In London, where the impact of the Industrial Revolution has been debated by historians, there have been important studies of women’s work, but Erickson’s recent research on women in a number of City Livery Companies and luxury trades in the eighteenth century is the first to have utilised guild records.⁸ In his study of the female labour market in the capital for example, Peter Earle analysed church court depositions during the years 1695 to 1725 to identify that almost 75% of women be they spinsters, wives or widows were wholly or partly maintained by their own labour but only twenty-six of 256 married deponents said they worked with their husbands.⁹ More recently, historians such as Hunt and Phillips have examined extant insurance records to
demonstrate the often considerable business activities of middling women in this period.\textsuperscript{10} The latter also interrogated the records of legal cases in Chancery to reveal the complex business and credit arrangements in which such women were often involved.\textsuperscript{11}

It is in the context of these findings that a (re)-appraisal of the role of women in the Livery Companies is required, to broaden our knowledge of the working lives of women in this period. This article builds on the starting point of David Wickham’s chronological overview of women in The Clothworkers’ Company to provide a comprehensive analysis of female apprentices, Freewomen and mistresses in the Company in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries for the first time, examining each of these clusters of women in turn.\textsuperscript{12} It begins by analysing female apprenticeship in the Company, using detailed information on socio-economic origins, premiums and occupational activity recorded in the Company’s Registers of Apprentices in order to offer a comparative response to, and support of, Erickson’s recent findings, whilst comparing female apprentices with their male counterparts in the Company. The second section explores the characteristics and occupational activities of Freewomen from information recorded in the Company’s Registers of Freedom Admissions, in particular their motivations for joining the Company, and the third provides a survey of the larger cluster of mistresses, operating through the Company predominantly as the wives or widows of Freemen. The data reveal a significant number of milliners and millinery apprentices in the Company and a particular focus is given to this high end trade throughout, including a case study of one such milliner, Jane Holt, in order to demonstrate the potential of focussed research, exploiting Livery Company records and beyond, to add considerably to our understanding of women’s business activities at this time.

\textbf{Female apprentices in The Clothworkers’ Company}
Granted its Royal Charter by King Henry VIII in 1528, The London Clothworkers’ Company was established to protect and regulate the finishing of woven woollen cloth within the City of London and its immediate suburbs. Membership, as in other Livery Companies, was acquired primarily through servitude, patrimony or redemption (payment) and the wives, widows and daughters of Freemen were also permitted to operate through its auspices. Although the Company is considered to have lost control of its root craft by the mid eighteenth century – searches for bad workmanship and poorly finished cloth ceased in 1749 – apprenticeships to Clothworker masters and mistresses in clothworking and other trades continued after this time.

Between 1606 and 1908, for which period Registers of Apprentices survive, a total of 144 girls were apprenticed into The Clothworkers’ Company. There were in excess of 29,400 male apprenticeships registered in the same period. The first female apprenticeship was recorded in 1609 and the last in 1793, although male apprenticeships continued beyond. In many years no female apprenticeships were registered; however, in some years such as 1697, 1701, 1703 and 1772, they could represent 3-4% of the total. The number of female apprentices reached a decadal peak between 1650 and 1659 when nineteen girls were bound (13% of the total figure) but remained relatively high until the decade 1700-1709. Although it is important not to overstate statistical significance given the small sample size involved, it is nevertheless interesting to compare the distribution of female apprenticeships by decade against that for men. The latter peaked in the 1610s, remained high until the 1650s then experienced significant decline until the end of the century. This was followed by a more gradual decline in the eighteenth century. In contrast, the distribution for women shows a number of distinct spikes over time rather than a pattern of decline. Although the last female apprentice was bound in 1793, subsequent sections of this article will show that women were still joining or operating through the Company by other means at this time.
Table 1 [preferred size ½ page, colour]

Table appended to this article

In the first half of the seventeenth century, a majority of female apprentices came from considerable distances – including the North and South Midlands and western counties - to the capital to be bound, as Table 2 makes clear. However, from 1650 onwards, this pattern was reversed, with approximately two-thirds of female apprentices drawn from London and the home counties (Middlesex, Surrey, Kent, Essex and Hertfordshire), a trend confirmed by Earle. As the number of female apprenticeships registered was so small, it must be concluded that demand for recruits could easily be satisfied locally from an early date. Comparative data for male apprentices within the Company shows that those originating from London and the home counties did not predominate until the eighteenth century, as Leunig, Minns and Wallis have established. However, it should be noted that overall numbers were in significant decline by this time, as the growth of trade and manufacturing in other areas offered new opportunities outside the metropolis.

Table 2 [preferred size ½ or full page]

Table appended to this article

Twenty of the 139 apprentices (14%), for whose fathers an occupational or status descriptor was provided, were the daughters of Citizens of London (versus 11% for male apprentices). Far from the Livery Companies being closed to women, it would appear that Citizens and their families viewed apprenticeship as a means through which their daughters could achieve an economic independence away from their families prior to, in place of or during marriage. It is also striking that in sixty-eight (47%) of all female apprenticeships, the fathers of apprentices were recorded as deceased, suggesting not only that these girls were financially obligated to earn a living but that they and their
mothers possessed both the money and connections to find a suitable master or mistress for them to be placed with.

Table 3 [preferred size ½ or full page]

Table appended to this article

Table 3 plots the socio-economic origins of apprentices and reveals that in every period the daughters of merchants, trades and craftsmen predominated amongst female apprentices, similar to d’Cruze’s findings in late eighteenth century Colchester. Although categorisation is problematic given the fluidity of occupational titles employed by individuals and clerks, this grouping contains artisans, shopkeepers, and employers of others, in addition to merchants. In other words an emergent ‘middling class’ who, despite relative prosperity, may not have possessed sufficient wealth to afford for their children lives of leisure, presupposing an innate aspiration for the social advancement of their daughters. Comparative figures for male apprentices are similar, with a majority hailing from the same socio-economic group from 1650 onwards; however, male apprentices were more likely to be of middling or lower middling origins, with the sons of husbandmen, farmers and yeomen – i.e. sons not following in their fathers’ footsteps - forming a notable 40% of the apprenticeship pool in the seventeenth century. Male apprentices from genteel, professional or noble backgrounds formed between 9 and 16% of the total in each half century. As one of the Great Twelve Companies, the Clothworkers’ was therefore able to attract rich and well born recruits, compared to other Companies, but the higher percentages of women from this category underlines the importance and respectability of female apprenticeship through the Company for the upper ranks in society.
Sixty-nine (86%) of the eighty apprenticeships for which a specific occupational descriptor is supplied for the master and/or mistress were into some form of textiles, be it retail or manufacture. This figure is significantly higher than that for male apprentices, which stands at 59%. The largest occupational groupings were milliners (with 25 apprentices), glovers (10), clothworkers (8) and coat sellers (7). In this period, milliners made and sold all types of women’s clothing, accessories and headwear: the narrowing of the occupation to denote hat making alone did not occur until the late nineteenth century. Milliners were also predominantly female. Some contemporary writers suggested associations between millinery and prostitution but a closer examination of evidence reveals that millinery must have been considered one of the most respectable and skilled occupations for women to enter. An eighteenth century instructional guide for parents on trades into which children could be apprenticed in London stated:

“This is a considerable trade in the shopkeeping way, carried on by women who buy all sorts of fine linens and laces in whole pieces, which they cut into various necessaries, and have them ready made up, both for men and women to wear, chiefly for the latter, and it is a most genteel business for young maidens that are good proficients at their needles, especially if they be naturally neat and of a courteous behaviour. The better sort very rarely take less than 20 or 30 guineas for an apprentice but others will teach theirs for less money. They give a good shopwoman £20 a year and her board and a quick hand otherwise can earn 8 to 10 shillings a week. To fit up and stock a handsome shop will require £300 or more but a diligent, sober woman with a set of good acquaintance may do very well with £100.”

An examination of the socio-economic origins of the girls apprenticed to learn millinery and the premiums paid to their masters and mistresses bears this out. Table 4 contains details of the apprentices bound to Jane Holt and shows that all were in a position to pay the high premium demanded. Such parents would hardly allow their daughters to engage in dissolute employment.
Indeed fifteen of the twenty-five apprenticeships into millinery (60%) were of girls from a genteel, professional or noble background, in contrast to the cumulative figures for all female apprentices throughout the period.

Table 4 [preferred format landscape, full page]

*Table appended to this article*

Premiums were paid in twenty of the millinery apprenticeships (although figures were recorded for only nineteen) and fell predominantly within the range of £35 to £84, although one £10 premium and one £20 premium was recorded. This gives an average premium of £53 for millinery apprenticeships, versus £54 for female apprenticeships in general through the Company. These premiums are in most cases significantly higher than those paid for male apprentices in the Company and averages established by Brooks for male apprentices in Companies within and outside London using Inland Revenue records. In five sample years, average premiums for male apprentices in the Clothworkers’ were: £53 in 1713; £35 in 1733; £42 in 1753; £36 in 1773 and £18 in 1793, although it should be noted that some occupations commanded higher average premiums in these sample years such as packers (£43), grocers (£125) and linen or woollen drapers (£209).

In her analysis of apprenticeships in the Clockmakers’, Leathersellers’, Haberdashers’ and Salters’ Companies, Erickson postulates that millinery apprenticeships bear a striking number of hallmarks - namely female apprentices of genteel, professional or prosperous trade paternity, often from outside London, paying high premiums to serve a married couple or mistress alone. Some of these characteristics have also been remarked upon by other historians such as d’Cruze, Sanderson and Wickham. Female apprenticeships in The Clothworkers’ Company conform to this pattern closely. There are no instances of males being apprenticed to female milliner masters in the Clothworkers’
records and as Table 5 demonstrates, a majority (65%) of female apprentices were apprenticed to women, either a sole mistress or a husband and wife couple, a figure comparable with Smith’s findings in York, where 70% of female apprenticeships were to a mistress.26 These figures may in fact be underestimations, as a wife’s name was not necessarily always included in the indenture. For example, Jane Southcott was apprenticed to James Lynde in 1747. The trade and location recorded in the Register of Apprentices was ‘milliner, St James Pell Mell [sic], Middlesex’; however, at the time of his Freedom in 1743 Lynde was described as a packer, when he subsequently took on further apprentices (all male), he was listed as a packer and furthermore two of his sons, who became Freemen, were also packers. It seems highly probable that James Lynde had a wife who was operating her own millinery business quite separate to his packing concern and that the apprentice was in fact bound to her, although this detail is hidden from the record. Similarly, although a husband and wife might be named in the indenture it is probable that the wife was in fact taking sole responsibility for the apprentice. Susanna Evans and Susanna Parsell were apprenticed to Seymour and Mary Hussey in 1722 and 1725 respectively. In both apprenticeship records milliner is given as the occupation but it is unclear whether the descriptor applies to both husband and wife. However, when Seymour Hussey was made Free in 1703 it was as a callender; it seems likely that millinery was his wife’s trade alone.

Table 5 [preferred size ½ page]

Table appended to this article

Of the forty-three apprenticeships in which mistresses took on girl apprentices alone, 18 were to mistresses explicitly recorded as widows and 21 apprenticeships were to 11 women whose names have been traced in the Company’s Register of Freedom Admissions. The next section will look more closely at Freewomen in the Company in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.
Freewomen of The Clothworkers’ Company

Of the 144 female apprenticeships recorded in the Clothworkers’ Registers of Apprentices, only twelve (8%) women subsequently went on to take up their Freedom by servitude in the period 1606-1799. The male apprentice to Freedom rate was 39%. Why did so few women take up the Freedom? Alice Clark posited that apprenticeship served women instead of a marriage portion. The practical skills learned during occupational training would make women more desirable marriage partners in families where no dowry could be offered. This theory has been reiterated by Erickson who suggests a parental dual strategy - of apprenticeship followed by marriage for girls - as parents foresaw the need for daughters to earn a living, both during marriage and if and when it were to end prematurely. This argument reinforces the traditional view that marriage was the primary objective for young females, but one that appears to be confirmed by evidence: during the course of the eighteenth century the percentage of women who never married dropped from twenty-five to 6%. From their disappearance from the Company’s records thereafter, it is to be assumed that marriage was the path embarked upon by a majority of female apprentices; completing their terms and/or taking up their Freedom of The Clothworkers’ Company was perhaps considered to be of lesser consequence than the desire or need to find a husband. Once married they might work in partnership with their husbands, not work at all, or operate their own trade, participating in the metropolitan economy by virtue of their husband’s privileges as a Freeman and taking on apprentices for themselves in his name, as seen in the previous section. Although some references to such women occur in Freedom, apprenticeship and sometimes quarterage records, the full extent of their economic activities may never be uncovered without detailed prosopographical research.

It may also be considered that the Freedom of the City was no longer a prerequisite to trade in this period, given the growth of trade activities in the suburbs supposedly beyond guild control, although
recent research by Joseph Ward has shown that some Companies and their members did exert influence in the suburbs and liberties.\textsuperscript{30} Hester Pinney, perhaps the best-known female merchant in London in the eighteenth century, amassed a great fortune as a lacewoman, but has not, to date, been identified as a member of a City Company.\textsuperscript{31} However, this statement ignores evidence that the Company was still attracting an average of 510 new Freemen per decade in the eighteenth century (albeit less than the preceding century’s average - 981), and that an increasing number of women took up their Freedom of the Company by patrimony during this period. There were eighty-six new Freewomen between the years 1606 and 1799, seventy of which (81%) were made Free by patrimony. Table 6 maps the distribution of female Freedoms by method during this period and demonstrates an increasing level of female membership over time. Although beyond the range of this study, it is interesting to note that during the nineteenth century, a total of 275 women joined the Company (273 by patrimony; two by presentation), a figure over six times higher than the peak in the period 1750-1799. The nineteenth century seems to have represented a heyday for female membership, in keeping with the Company’s ethos and activities at this time as an active promoter of female education at all levels.\textsuperscript{32}

\textit{Table 6 [preferred size \(\frac{1}{2}\) page, colour]}

\textit{Table appended to this article}

It would appear that these women felt the Freedom had something to offer them. Of the eighty-six women who were made Free in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, an occupational descriptor was supplied for forty-two and details can be derived for a further four women from their presence as mistresses in later apprenticeship records, demonstrating that over 50% of Freewomen required the Freedom in order to operate a business in the City. The most common form of employment cited was millinery (thirteen of forty-six Freewomen or 28%). Thereafter, coat selling (4 Freewomen) and running a school (3 Freewomen) were the next most common occupations. A
proliferation of occupations followed below this such as china sellers, shopkeepers and bookbinders in addition to a victualler, painter and stationer amongst others. The presence of such occupations may be viewed as a response to the growth of consumerism and a taste for new products in the eighteenth century and evidence that women took advantage of new opportunities to establish themselves in business, although to what degree of success is unclear. Seventy of the eighty-six (81%) did not take any apprentices through the Company. This could be regarded as an indicator that their activities were small-scale and/or short term but should not be viewed as the only measure of a growing business. Ann Coward and Dorcas Seller, sisters and Freewomen by patrimony, established what may be considered a thriving dealership in china and earthenware based at 19 Garlick Hill, with John Seller (presumably Dorcas’ husband) and Joseph Bacon (relationship unknown). In 1780, they insured their premises and stock with the Sun Fire insurance company at a value of £2000, placing them within the top 10% of policy holders with most valuable goods in the period 1775 to 1780.\(^3\) Neither woman took any apprentices through the Company.

The trading privileges conferred via the Freedom may have been the primary reason why (working) women joined the Company but other, less tangible, factors may also have been taken into consideration such as establishing a new network of contacts, finding a suitable marriage partner and the prestige of joining a long established City institution. However, as women did not attend Livery dinners and were barred from positions of office, their ability to derive such benefits must have been limited. Financial factors may have weighed heavily in their minds or those of their parents. The Clothworkers’ Company has a long tradition of charitable giving, focussed in this period on education, blind welfare and relief of the poor, including needy members. It has often been likened to a benefit society, alleviating poor Freemen and their wives and children in times of illness, death, old age and poverty. The evidence suggests that Freemen may have encouraged their children to join the Company, knowing that it would provide for them when they could not or that prospective Freewomen realised they might benefit from the Company’s support. Martha and
Christiana Coulthurst, spinster and ‘poor Freewomen’ of the Company were recommended for financial aid on numerous occasions – receiving ten pounds and ten shillings each in April 1778, just one month after their Freedoms - before the Court of Assistants stipulated that no further relief be given to them until they availed themselves of the benefit of their parish workhouse. The Court later relented and appointed Martha a Company pensioner in 1782 and relieved both her and her sister on at least three occasions subsequently. The sisters had taken up their Freedom of the Company at the ages of 53 and 49 respectively, some sixty-eight years after their father William Coulthurst, a packer, had done so. Finding themselves financially straightened as they entered their dotage, joining the Company may have represented a lifeline to them. Their is an illuminating example of the fragile position unmarried and unemployed women could find themselves in - their father had been a Liveryman of the Company and thus presumably a wealthy man. Whether he left his two daughters an income upon his decease is not known, had he done so we must speculate that it had long since proved insufficient, hence Martha and Christiana’s need to turn to Company for help when parish and kin could no longer provide.

Closer analysis of Freedoms by patrimony in this period reveals that there was often a considerable time delay between the date of the father’s Freedom and that of his daughter, with 38 patrimonial Freewomen (54%) taking up their Freedoms between 40 and 79 years after their fathers did so. This suggests not only that their fathers may have been deceased by this time, but that these women may have been joining the Company at an advanced age themselves (the present day norm is to take up the Freedom by patrimony at the age of twenty-one). Twenty Freewomen (23%) have been traced in the Company’s Court Orders, pension and relief books and Index of the Poor as recipients of financial assistance on one or more occasions, be it in the form of pensions or temporary relief – of monies and clothing - and all were Freewomen by patrimony. Eleven of these women had no occupation listed at the time of their Freedoms, lending further weight to the
argument that a significant proportion of patrimonial Freewomen may have joined the Company purely for charitable assistance if they had no other means of supporting themselves.

They may not have been alone. On 4 April 1900, the Court of the Company considered an application from a Mr H. Blakeman, a Clothworker apprentice fifty years before. He had neglected to take up his Freedom at that time and now broken in health enquired whether ‘he could take up his Freedom at this late date, and, if so, whether he would be likely to share in any of the benefits that fall to the lot of Freemen of The Clothworkers’ Company?’.

Indeed, preliminary analysis also suggests that this strategy was not confined to patrimonial Freewomen. Of a sample of 100 patrimonial Freemen taking up their Freedoms between 1680 and 1720, 23% have been traced in the Company’s Index of the Poor. Further research is required to test whether this theory applies to non-patrimonial Freemen and across a broader span of the Company’s history.

**Mistresses in The Clothworkers’ Company**

Women are named as mistresses in 944 apprenticeship records and 451 records of Freedoms in the period 1606-1799. Whilst these figures represent only a small proportion of total apprenticeships and Freedoms through the Company in this period (3% in both cases), it is nevertheless important to consider these not insubstantial numbers in more detail. Indeed, whilst it has been shown that girls were much more likely to be apprenticed to a woman (either alone or as a husband and wife couple), female apprenticeships represent only 15% of the total number of apprentices bound by mistresses. Of this total of 944, there were 711 (75%) apprenticeships to women described as widows (either explicitly labelled a widow, or described as ‘Citizen and Consort’, ‘Consort of [husband’s name], Citizen and Clothworker, deceased’ or ‘Citizen and Consort of The Clothworkers’ Company’), and fifty-one to women explicitly described as wives. Rappaport’s findings that women presenting apprentices in the Livery Companies or paying quarterage were most identifiable as the
wives or widows of Companymen in the sixteenth century, therefore applies in subsequent centuries.\textsuperscript{41}

Of the 944 apprenticeship records with female mistresses, occupation was recorded in only 373 instances. In 187 of these bindings (50\%), mistresses gave their occupation as ‘clothworking’ or specified a particular finishing process such as cloth drawing, setting, buckram stiffening, calico glazing, calendaring and packing. The next highest occupational grouping was millinery (20 instances) and the third silk stocking making/weaving (13 references), so that participation in the textiles industry, be it through manufacture or retail, accounts for 264 of the 373 (71\%) occupations recorded. The continued predominance of clothworking occupations in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries amongst women and the great proportion of widowed mistresses suggests that not only did many women continue their husband’s business after his decease, but that they had probably been business partners to their husbands throughout their marriages and thus have possessed the requisite expertise to continue alone after their husband’s death. Indeed, many widows took on a substantial number of apprentices over long periods after their spouses’ deaths:

Joanne Wright took on ten apprentices (silk stocking maker); Mary Wilson (callender), Alice Gattonby (clothworker/cottoner) Mary Leadbeater (callender), and Martha Daker (buckram stiffner) all eight each; Mary Shipley (packer) seven. There is no evidence that these women sought to quickly wind up their businesses once widowed.

Although textiles related occupations dominate the figures, it should also be noted that over seventy distinct occupations were recorded for these mistresses. In his research on parish apprenticeships, Snell commented that the range of occupations evident might surprise those familiar with the strict male exclusiveness of so many trades later.\textsuperscript{42} In the Clothworkers’ case there were ten apprenticeships to sawyers; seven to butchers; five to gardeners; six to shoemakers; two to carpenters; one to a farrier; one to a coffin maker; one to a cabinet maker and one to a joiner for
example. By the Custom of London, Freemen (and women) of the City were permitted to operate any trade within the City, irrespective of the craft of their mother Company. However, the London Companies in effect endorsed the fact that it was possible to acquire sufficient mastery of a trade outside the formal apprenticeship system by permitting the wives and widows of their Freemen to take apprentices and operate through their auspices in trades and crafts outside that which they controlled. Indeed, following the death of the William Freanch, the Court of Assistants recorded that Elizabeth Freanch, his widow, was to be subsequently appointed his successor as Carpenter to the Company in 1806. The scope for women to receive occupational training outside the formal apprenticeship system, be it before or during marriage, must have been wide in this period.

Although apprenticeships to widows form the majority of total apprenticeships to women, female participation was not solely confined to them. Twenty-nine apprenticeships were to Freewomen of the Company, who worked in a variety of trades: millinery (12); wireworking (5); button makers (2); sempstress (1); one school mistress, one silk dyer, one flax dresser, one callender and one woman working in/running a coffee house. There were a total of twenty millinery apprenticeships to Freewomen and wives and widows of Freemen during the period, nineteen of which occurred in the eighteenth century. Albeit of small numbers, it is these apprenticeships in particular that demonstrate that profitable work opportunities for entrepreneurial women existed, and that single, married and widowed women were able to adapt to and take advantage of changing economic conditions and emerging markets to run their own businesses. We have already seen that millinery was considered a skilled trade, attracting girls of genteel status with high premiums, but it should also be noted that the geographical location of these mistress milliners within the City provides further evidence of its prestige. Of the nineteen female milliners in the Company in the eighteenth century, a majority were operating their businesses in prominent City locations: from east to west, three were located on Fenchurch Street, two on Leadenhall Street, three on Gracechurch Street, one on Cornhill, two on Lombard Street, one on Lothbury, one on Poultry, one on Paternoster Row, one
at St Paul’s Churchyard and one on Fleet Street. This information, obtained from addresses supplied
by mistresses at the time they bound apprentices or when they were themselves made Free, is
comparable with Erickson’s research which identified forty-five City milliners based along the
principal market streets of the capital in the period 1700-1750, and d’Cruze’s findings in
Colchester. Jane Holt was one of the female milliners in The Clothworkers’ Company who
established businesses in the eighteenth century, about whom a lot of information can be
uncovered.

*Figure 1 [preferred size full page, colour]*
Jane Holt had been operating as a milliner for at least eight years (subsequent to her Freedom of the Company) prior to her marriage to John Cox, a hatter in April 1763. She had become the proprietor of a millinery establishment in Lombard Street, supplying ‘everything in the millinery and childbed
way’, both wholesale and retail. Lombard Street was one of the principal thoroughfares in the City inhabited by wealthy merchants, goldsmiths and bankers. She must therefore have been able to finance the often extensive costs of setting up a shop with glass windows, smart fixtures and fittings, meet over a sustained period her clientele’s expectations of a diversity of stock which kept apace with rapidly changing fashions and extend long term credit to those who might settle their bills just once a year. She had also taken on three apprentices through the Company in this time, charging a very substantial premium of £70 for each. Following her marriage, Jane Holt, now Cox, did not cease trading; however, within a year of the wedding, both she and her husband were declared bankrupt.

In March 1764, a commission of bankruptcy was awarded against John Cox, in pursuit of a considerable debt that he had been unable to pay. Jane shortly after committed an act of bankruptcy – we may speculate that she did so in order to raise funds for her husband – and an action was similarly commenced against her. Subsequent events provide a salutary tale of the questionable status of women’s property rights and evidence of the way in which women’s enterprises were often considered to be of secondary importance to those of men. Assignees for John Cox’s creditors seized five fans from Jane’s shop in recovery of his debts, but her creditors protested that they had no right to do so and petitioned the Lord Chancellor for his intervention in the case. As a femme sole trader by the custom of London, they claimed that the stock was hers alone and that only they, as her creditors, had a right of recovery. Furthermore, they stated that Jane Cox had for many years prior to her marriage traded as a femme sole by virtue of her Freedom of The Clothworkers’ Company; her creditors and tradesmen continued to consider her a femme sole trader after her marriage; that her husband did not nor had ever intermeddled in her business, ‘the said John Cox seldom if ever came or was seen to come to the House or Shop of the said Jane Cox except at meal times or at night when he came home to go to bed’, and that John Cox had recognised that his wife was a femme sole trader by the custom of London, ‘in more instances than one the said John Cox made presents to his country relations when they came to London of
something in the millinery way and even bought and paid for those presents he so made his said
relations at the shop of the said Jane Cox. After hearing the petition, the Lord Chancellor
adjourned a decision on the matter until after a trial of the action at law. The subsequent legal
action in King’s Bench has been frequently cited in case law over married women’s property rights
and the ability of a married woman but femme sole trader to be subject to a commission of
bankruptcy. The defence argued that a husband’s rights should take precedence over his wife’s and
that as a married woman, Jane Cox’s stock constituted part of John Cox’s estate by right. However,
Lord Mansfield found in Jane Cox’s favour, a commission of bankruptcy was allowed to stand against
her and the five fans at issue were recovered for the benefit of her creditors.

*Figure 2 [preferred size ½ page, colour]*

Bill for Lord Mayor’s day sashes and cockades from Jane Cox and Anna Maria Moore, 9 November
1772. Combined Quarter and Renter Warden’s Bills and Receipts, 1772, fol. 9, CL/D/7/28, The
Clothworkers’ Company Archive.
Following this protracted legal case, which coincided with the births and premature deaths of her first two children, Jane Cox re-established her millinery business from a new location and subsequently took on a further three apprentices through the Company. It is from this point onwards that she is referred to as a femme sole in the Clothworkers’ records. By 1772, she was in a joint partnership with Anna Maria Moore, formerly her apprentice, on the corner of Gracechurch and Fenchurch Street. Following the death of John Cox at an untraced date, Jane Cox married James Bosom, Esquire, a widower of Harwich in Essex and Commander of H.M. Packet The Prince of Wales in December 1772 and announced the dissolution of her co-partnership in the London Gazette. Bosom’s death in 1780 left her with a small income; however, by the terms of her second husband’s will, she was only permitted to remain in the family home in Dovercourt for one year after his decease. In February 1781 she married William Hales, gentleman of Butt Lane, Deptford, Kent who may or may not have been the William Hales, merchant of Fenchurch Street, who became Free of The Clothworkers’ Company by redemption in 1776. At his decease in 1803, she received an annual income for life derived from the interest on £3000 of 3% Reduced Bank Annuities held in Hales’ name and the proceeds of sale of his household furniture and goods with the exception of his plate, china, books, bookcases, bureau, two paintings, a spinett and a violin which passed to his two sons and heirs. Her daughter Ann, her only surviving child by her first marriage, received a mourning ring. Thereafter, Jane Hales’ story is lost to history.

Conclusion

The article has provided a comprehensive survey of women and their activities within The Clothworkers’ Company in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries for the first time. Although
only a small number of girls were apprenticed into the Company in this period, their profile was rather different to their male counterparts. A majority travelled short distances to the capital to be bound, usually to women, who were either in business alone or jointly with their husbands although it is likely they took sole responsibility for the apprentice’s training. Female apprentices were also of middling and genteel socio-economic origins, and they predominantly entered the textile trades, whether retail or manufacture, and a significant proportion of this number millinery, considered one of the few genteel and prosperous trades for women in this period. They were much less likely to take up their Freedom of the Company compared to male apprentices, perhaps because of marriage; however, this disappointing take up rate was eclipsed by a rise in the number of women taking up their Freedom of the Company by patrimony in this period in order to operate businesses in the City, whether milliners, coat sellers, china dealers, stationers and bookbinders, although it is suggested that a notable proportion (in particular those without occupations) may have hoped to benefit from the Company’s tradition of charitable support.

The Clothworkers’ data also reveal over 900 instances of women acting as mistresses to apprentices, operating through the Company predominantly as the wives or widows of Freemen, demonstrating that marriage did not curtail their economic activities. On the contrary, marriage should be considered as an alternative method of acquiring the trading privileges of a Freeman. Snell wrote that using apprenticeship records alone ‘places an immediate limitation on any argument which stressed [female] economic participation, as most female involvement took place outside of the apprenticeship system.’ We must conclude that there is much truth in this statement. Very few of the Clothworkers’ mistresses were Freewomen in their own right; however, many used their husband’s Freedom to take on apprentices in their own businesses – often quite separate to their husband’s concerns - or operated businesses for sustained periods after their husband’s death, suggesting that at some time during their career, prior to leaving home or in partnership with their
husbands, they had accumulated the requisite knowledge and expertise to run a business independently.

A desire to quantify female participation in the London Companies must therefore be tempered by the knowledge that coverture masks the true number of women operating through them. However, by looking more closely at Livery Company records to identify who the recorded women were and what they were doing, it is possible to learn a great deal about the occupational geography of women in London in this period and in particular those in business. Amongst a concentration of women mistresses in clothworking and textile related occupations, this article has shown the existence of a small but important cluster of nineteen female milliners, engaged in high end business in the eighteenth century, keeping shops in fashionable City locations, attracting apprentices of high social status and able to command premiums that were in some cases significantly higher than average figures paid for male apprentices. Far from the London Companies being closed to women, it appears that millinery apprenticeships through them were recognised as a means of offering girls of prosperous middling and genteel origins a structured career path into a prestigious trade, as Erickson has demonstrated. Further research is required to demonstrate whether these conclusions are representative of women in other Livery Companies – in particular those whose craft roots were not in textiles - and widen our understanding of women’s work in this period, in particular of women in business such as Jane Holt.

6961 words (excluding notes)

Notes

1 In order to be eligible to take up the Freedom of the City of London (and thus the right to trade amongst other rights and privileges) following completion of an apprenticeship, indentures must
have been enrolled with the City Chamberlain within one year of the apprenticeship’s commencement. See V.E. Aldous, My Ancestors were Freemen of The City of London (London: Society of Genealogists, 1999), p. 46.

2 This has been made possible by the recent data entry of the Clothworkers’ Registers of Freedom Admissions, 1545-1908 (CL/C/3/1/2-3) and Registers of Apprentices, 1606-1908 (CL/C/3/2/1-3), undertaken in a partnership between the Company and the Centre for Metropolitan History, part of the Institute of Historical Research at the University of London. A freely accessible, fully searchable online database of these records, The Records of London’s Livery Companies’ Online: Apprentices and Freemen, 1400-1900, is available online: www.londonroll.org.uk.


8 Erickson, ‘Eleanor Mosley’.


13 Other methods of obtaining the Freedom existed in The Clothworkers’ Company, such as patrimonial redemption and presentation; however, these only account for a small minority of Freedoms.

14 Individuals with gender anomalous forenames have been discounted from the total. One female apprenticeship was crossed through in the Register of Apprentices, indicating that it was subsequently cancelled, albeit at an unknown date; however, its details have been retained in the dataset.

15 There is an overlap of approximately 2 years between the Company’s two earliest Registers of Apprentices, and thus the true figure for male apprentices will be slightly lower given duplication of entries in the years 1639-1641.


18 d’Cruze, ‘To acquaint the Ladies’, p160.

19 Brooks, ‘Apprenticeship, Social Mobility’, pp. 61-2. 17% of apprentices in The Haberdashers’ Company originated from the gentry; in The Carpenters’ Company the figure was 2%.

20 For a negative picture see R. Campbell, The London Tradesman: being a compendious view of all the trades, professions, arts, now practised in the Cities of London and Westminster, both liberal and mechanic (London: T. Gardner, 1747), pp. 206-9. See also Phillips, Women in Business, pp. 188-91 for a summary of literature on this and Erickson, ‘Eleanor Mosley’, pp. 163-64 for a response.

21 Anon, A General Description of All Trades ... (London: Printed for T. Waller, 1747), pp. 149-50.


23 These figures are rounded up or down to the nearest pound. The 1713 figure is skewed by the presence of an £800 bond.

24 Erickson, ‘Eleanor Mosley’, p. 152.


26 Smith, ‘Women’s Admission to Guilds’, p. 107.
for J. Wilkie, 1775), vol. 1, p. 996.

admitted to the Freedom more than 12 months after completion of their indentures.

the apprenticeship was beyond anyone’s recall, and further stipulated that no Freewomen in this period.

For a lesser Company, the property qualification was £1000. For a lesser Company, the property qualification was £500. See Report of the City of London Livery Companies’ Commission, vol. 1 (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1884), p. 21.

It has only been possible to trace with certainty the dates of freedom for 54 of the 70 patrimonial Freewomen in this period.

the occupations in the remaining four apprenticeships was not stated.

This female prominence (comparative to earlier years) appears to be unique to the Clothworkers amongst the Companies studies so far. For example, there were no female Freewomen admitted to The Mercers’ Company between 1797 and 2002. See ‘Women Re-admitted to The Mercers’ Company’ Mercers’ Company History Timeline entry, 2002. <http://www.mercers.co.uk/700-years-history> [Accessed: 5 Oct 2012].

By an Act of the Court of Alderman of 27 July 1697, Liverymen of the Great Twelve Companies were required to have an estate worth £1000. For a lesser Company, the property qualification was £500. See Report of the City of London Livery Companies’ Commission, vol. 1 (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1884), p. 21.

It should also be noted that there are no instances of males being apprenticed to husband and wife couples at any time in the Company’s records.

Rappaport, Worlds within Worlds, p. 38.

Snell, Annals, p. 272.

Orders of Court, 5 Feb 1806, p. 549, CL/B/1/15, Orders of Court, 1777-1806, CCA.


The occupations in the remaining four apprenticeships was not stated.

Erickson, ‘Eleanor Mosley’, p. 158; d’Cruze ‘To Acquaint the Ladies’, p. 159.


Hunt, The Middling Sort, p. 139.

Order Book of Petitions against Declarations of Bankruptcy, 1763-1764, B1/42, p. 99, 18 April 1764, TNA.

Liber Albus states: ‘where a women covert de baron follows any craft within the said city by herself apart, with which the husband in no way intermeddles, such a woman shall be bound as a single woman as to all that concerns her said craft. And if the husband and wife are impleaded, in such case the wife shall plead as a single woman in a Court of Record, and shall have her law and other advantages by way of plea just as a single woman. And if she is condemned she shall be committed to prison until she shall have made satisfaction; and neither the husband nor his goods shall in such case be charged or interfered with’. Liber Albus: The White Book of the City of London, trans. by H.T. Riley (London: Richard Griffin and Company, 1861), p. 181.

Order Book of Petitions against Declarations of Bankruptcy, 1763-1764, B1/42, pp. 280-81, 2 August 1764 & pp. 290-94, 5 November 1764, TNA.


Blackstone, Reports of cases, pp. 570-75.


Will of James Bossom Esq, of Harwich, Essex, 17 April 1780, PROB11/1063, TNA; Draft marriage settlement between James Bossom, Commander of the Prince of Wales packet and Jane Cox of London, Widow, November 1772, D/DEI B24, Essex Record Office.


Will of William Hales, 12 January 1803, PROB11/1385, TNA.

Snell, Annals, p. 277.

Erickson, ‘Eleanor Mosley’, p. 165.
Table 1
Distribution of female apprenticeships by decade, 1606-1799


Table 2
Geographic origins of female and male apprentices by half century, 1606-1799
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Place of origin</th>
<th>1606-1649</th>
<th>1650-1699</th>
<th>1700-1749</th>
<th>1750-1799</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home counties&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1709</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>1783</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1914</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>London</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1178</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>1525</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1157</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastern counties&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>827</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>366</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North East&lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>746</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>304</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Midlands&lt;sup&gt;d&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1373</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>947</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>273</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North West&lt;sup&gt;e&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1203</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>609</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>156</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<sup>a</sup> Home counties include the counties of the current United Kingdom.

<sup>b</sup> Eastern counties include the counties of the current East England.

<sup>c</sup> North East includes the counties of the current North East region.

<sup>d</sup> North Midlands includes the counties of the current Midlands region.

<sup>e</sup> North West includes the counties of the current North West region.
Table 3
Socio-economic origins of female and male apprentices by half century, 1606-1799

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Socio-economic group</th>
<th>1606-1649</th>
<th>1650-1699</th>
<th>1700-1749</th>
<th>1750-1799</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Citizens of London</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>785</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1047</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gentlemen &amp; Esquires</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1360</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1076</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Husbandmen and farmers</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2184</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1315</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labourers and servants</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>226</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mercantile, trade or craft</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4098</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>3262</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nobility</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


a Middlesex, Hertfordshire, Surrey, Kent, Essex
b Cambridgeshire, Lincolnshire, Rutland, Huntingdonshire, Suffolk, Norfolk
Yorkshire, Northumberland, Durham
c Warwickshire, Nottinghamshire, Derbyshire, Staffordshire, Leicestershire
d Lancashire, Cheshire, Shropshire, Cumberland, Westmorland
e Sussex, Hampshire
f Buckinghamshire, Bedfordshire, Oxfordshire, Berkshire, Northamptonshire
g Gloucestershire, Wiltshire, Somerset, Dorset, Devon, Cornwall, Worcestershire, Herefordshire
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Not given/Unclear</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>0</th>
<th>13</th>
<th>0</th>
<th>16</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Professionals(^a)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>364</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>283</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yeomen</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3482</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1604</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>228</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total(^b)</strong></td>
<td>18</td>
<td>12407</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>8847</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>4951</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>2725</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gentry, Professionals and Nobility as percentage of Total</strong></td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mercentile, trade and craft and Citizens as percentage of Total</strong></td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


\(^a\) Descriptors included in this category are clerks, scriveners, attorneys, doctors and physicians.

\(^b\) Some totals are lower than those recorded in Table 2, as fathers of male apprentices did not always have a socio-economic descriptor recorded, for example if they were deceased.

### Table 4
Apprentices to Jane Holt (later Jane Cox), Clothworker and milliner

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Apprentice</th>
<th>Father’s details</th>
<th>Premium</th>
<th>Mistress’ details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6 Feb 1760</td>
<td>Eliza Crawford</td>
<td>George Crawford, gent of London, deceased</td>
<td>£70</td>
<td>Milliner, Lombard Street</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Jun 1760</td>
<td>Judith Jennings</td>
<td>Roger Jennings, gent of Soddyll [sic], Shropshire</td>
<td>£70</td>
<td>Milliner, Lombard Street</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Mar 1763</td>
<td>Anna Maria Moore</td>
<td>Thomas Moore, doctor of Divinity of Chislehurst, Kent</td>
<td>‘£50 paid by the father, £20 by the Corporation</td>
<td>Milliner, Lombard Street</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Details</td>
<td>Amount</td>
<td>Notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Oct 1767</td>
<td>Elizabeth Maud</td>
<td>John Maud, chemist of Newnham, Gloucestershire</td>
<td>£50</td>
<td>Milliner, Fenchurch Street [now Jane Cox]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Jun 1768</td>
<td>Elizabeth Lee</td>
<td>John Lee, broker of Moorfields, London, deceased</td>
<td>£70</td>
<td>Milliner, Fenchurch Street. Jane Cox ‘late Jane Holt, femme sole’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 May 1772</td>
<td>Martha Hatchet</td>
<td>Richard Hatchet, linen draper of King Street, Covent Garden, Middlesex</td>
<td>£73 10s</td>
<td>Milliner, Fenchurch Street. Jane Cox ‘femme sole’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Table 5
Female apprenticeships to masters, mistresses or couples by half century, 1606-1799

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Master</th>
<th>Mistress</th>
<th>Couple</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1606-1649</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1650-1699</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1700-1749</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1750-1799</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 6
Female Freedoms by method by half century, 1606-1799