

Mrs Helena Aylward: A British Catholic mother, spouse and businesswoman in the Commercial Age (1705–1714)

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Mrs Helena Aylward, as a Catholic merchant and investor, enriches the literature on both female Catholicism and on the Atlantic-Mediterranean trade. Recent historiography has stressed the importance of women in business, but Catholic women have been overlooked in the mercantile world and in the British fiscal-military economy. I contend that female Catholics were accustomed to their husband's dealings, and after bereavement, took financial responsibility for the family's business. Helena was proactive and did not limit herself to the exchanges already established by her husband. She moved independently and diversified her trade with financial investments. Mrs Aylward's involvement in business challenges the prevailing image of Catholic women as wives, patrons or nuns. She suggests a new economic role for British female Catholics: entrepreneurs that succeeded in a Protestant and patriarchal maritime world.¹

Keywords: Catholicism, Women, Commerce, British, Merchant

In 1705, Mrs Helena Aylward became a widow for the second time. In spite of her distress over the loss of her 'dear spouse', she assumed full financial responsibility for the family business which she would then run until 1714.² Helena was an English Catholic, born in Middlesex in 1655 into a merchant family, the Porters. Already a widow, in 1687 at the age of thirty-two she married John Aylward, a British merchant working in the Anglo-Spanish trade. Aylward's career had begun in the early 1670s in Cadiz and Malaga, Spain, where he met Helena when he went into partnership with her family. The Porters were transatlantic merchants active in Spanish and French ports. In the year of their marriage, John and Helena moved to St Malo, France. In 1698 they moved back to London, from where they monitored their Anglo-Spanish shipments, and where

¹ The Aylward Papers (1672–1717) (hereafter AY) are held at Arundel Castle Archives, and reproduced by kind permission of His Grace the Duke of Norfolk.

² AY 128, *Personal Correspondence*, Letters from Helena Aylward to various relatives on the death of her husband, June and August 1705.

Helena remained and worked after John's death. Over four decades, until 1714, the Aylward family worked and prospered in European-Atlantic commerce.

Despite being British Catholics, theirs is a story of inclusion and success. Their involvement in trade may have been a consequence of penal legislation which barred them from following political or civic careers.³ In over three decades of successful trading their religion appears not to have been an impairment, nor do they seem to have experienced or practiced religious intolerance. Rather, their non-Catholic partners looked to them for their ability to access Catholic markets, particularly those in France and Spain during the years when England was at war with both countries (1688–1714).⁴ Their familial and religious ties co-existed alongside wider commercial networks. They worked with anyone deemed trustworthy in the knowledge that extensive connections were crucial for success in the commercial age. Through their ability to move beyond national and religious borders, the Aylwards built a successful business, defying the stereotype of idle and risk averse Catholics.

Their story is even more fascinating if one takes into account that at the beginning of the eighteenth century, Catholics, popularly associated with obscurantism and political conspiracy, were facing renewed penal legislation aimed at their further marginalisation.⁵ The lives of the Aylwards, however, move beyond this traditional narrative. They offer a new perspective on the British Catholic community. Like many other British citizens, they adapted to the emergent society—in which money bought many opportunities—and reinvented themselves as merchants and entrepreneurs. As in the case of other religious minorities, the ban from politics forced their most talented members into commerce and finance.⁶ Catholics could not pursue public careers, however there was no precise penal legislation about Catholic investors or speculators.⁷ Although the Catholic Church officially forbade lending money at interest, this prohibition

³ Frederick B. Tolles, *Meeting House and Counting House, The Quaker Merchants of Colonial Philadelphia, 1682–1763* (New York: Norton & Co., 1963).

⁴ Giada Pizzoni, 'British Catholics' Commercial Strategies in Times of International Warfare, 1688–1714', *The Seventeenth Century Journal*, 1, 32 (2017): 81–102.

⁵ Edward Norman, *Roman Catholicism in England, from the Elizabethan Settlement to the Second Vatican Council* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 33–56: These new laws revised the old Acts. They stressed the prohibition for Catholics of purchasing and inheriting land. They banned Catholic involvement in politics and the opportunity of holding public offices. Catholic families faced hostile prejudice; nevertheless, they were still prominent and actively involved in society. The Catholic landed nobility declined. However, this trend was part of the change in act within the British society as a whole.

⁶ Tolles, *Meeting House*.

⁷ Westminster Diocesan Archive (hereafter WDA), A 41–57, *Report about English Catholics*. Only one report of the English Catholic Mission declared how Catholics could not invest into the government companies. However, this document was certainly biased and not entirely reliable, because it was written by a Catholic bishop for the Roman Holy See.

seem not to have impeded Mrs Aylward's financial dealings with a variety of mercantile companies.⁸ And in spite of being barred from governmental appointments, Catholics financed the British government, by buying its stock and subscribing its trading monopolies. The newly-born British state and its fledgling empire needed funds and the religious identity of their moneylender was deemed irrelevant. This response by British Catholics to these commercial and financial opportunities, suggest a new narrative in which Catholicism can be equated with commercial success. Their story serves as proof that British Catholics, both men and women, were able to integrate themselves successfully into the British economy, contributing to the eventual achievement of Catholic social and political emancipation.

This article examines and discusses Helena Aylward's commercial career during her widowhood during the years 1705–14. However, it is important to note that she had played an active role in the family enterprise since the 1680s; indeed, John Aylward's commercial success owed much to both the capital and the commercial networks that she had brought to their union. Helena was the daughter of Matthew Porter, an affluent merchant of Irish origin established in Cadiz and St Malo. In 1674, she married a merchant Jacques de la Herse Trublet, a renowned French businessman, a partner in and possibly one of the founders of the trading firm Woulfe & Trublet, based in Cadiz. On Trublet's death, Helena was left with five young children, as well as considerable capital and extensive, well-established business networks all of which she brought into her new union with John Aylward. Merchants commonly married later in life than most men at this time; only after years of apprenticeship and the accumulation of sufficient capital were they in a position to seek a bride.⁹ Indeed, at the time of his marriage John must have been in his late thirties because in 1672 he was already working in Malaga as a trader. There was gossip about her second husband having been cheated financially in the marriage settlement; James Porter, Helena's brother, told Aylward one year after the union 'how great a cheat was done you [John] in your marriage, how unhappy you were therein'.¹⁰ However, judging by the length of the union, which brought Helena a further three daughters, and by the prosperity of their merged businesses, Aylward clearly benefited from the marriage. The merchant house of Woulfe & Trublet served Aylward for almost two decades. Marriage to the widowed

⁸ Patrick Walsh, *The South Sea Bubble and Ireland, Money, Banking and Investment, 1690–1721* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2014), 27: Only in the 1780s, the Catholic Church would introduce new legislation on finance.

⁹ Grassby Richard, *Kinship and Capitalism, Marriage, Family and Business in the English-Speaking World, 1580–1740*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 117–150.

¹⁰ AY 20, *Business Correspondence*, f. 34.

Mrs de la Herse Trublet secured credit for Aylward's young firm and introduced new business contacts and other opportunities. The Aylward's marriage is known to have been happy and John's death caused Helena great distress. 'God has been pleased to afflict me with the death of my dear spouse', is how Helena informed her brother several weeks after John's death.¹¹ Helena did not remarry, perhaps out of loyalty to her late husband or perhaps because she was afraid of being criticised for taking a third husband at a time when—towards the end of the seventeenth century—it was becoming less common for widows to marry again, in particular those from the middle classes. Equally, she may have been unwilling to lose legal control of her newly acquired wealth and independence.¹²

She was certainly capable of running a business; she had been raised in a family of merchants and married into another, and had proved to be as able as her husband in managing the family enterprises. Her behaviour in widowhood was, however, not exceptional; it was not uncommon for merchants' widows to take the reins of the family business on the death of the husband. Helena's story, however, is significant in that she was a Catholic woman, working as a merchant and investor in a patriarchal, Protestant economy. She traded across various European countries, entering into business with co-religionists as well as non-Catholics. Helena's case supports the argument that British Catholic women, as well as men, played a significant role in the economic life of the country, seizing the opportunities offered by the new financial-commercial age and integrating themselves into Britain's economy and society. Her story, therefore, challenges any lingering stereotype of Catholic women as being solely 'women of prayer, and of deeply felt religious emotions' and offers a new perspective.¹³

In the secondary literature on women in business, religion is not much discussed by historians. There are some examples of non-Conformist female entrepreneurs, but Catholic businesswomen are almost completely absent.¹⁴ The only previous attempt by historians

¹¹ AY 128, *Personal Correspondence*.

¹² Sara Mendelson and Patricia Crawford, *Women in Early Modern England, 1550–1720*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 174–183; Barbara J. Todd, *The Remarrying Widow: A Stereotype Reconsidered*, in Mary Prior, ed. *Women in English Society 1500–1800* (London and New York: Routledge, 1985), 54–85; Jeremy Boulton, 'London Widowhood Revisited: The Decline of Female Remarriage in the Seventeenth and Early Eighteenth Century', *Continuity and Change*, 5, 3 (1990): 323–355: When there were employment opportunities, women choose not to remarry and London's economy offered women the possibility to supporting themselves. Employment opportunities offered an alternative to remarriage.

¹³ Marie B. Rowlands, 'Recusant Women 1560–1640' in *Women in English Society 1500–1800*, 175.

¹⁴ Sheryllyne Haggerty, *The British-Atlantic Trading Community, 1760–1810, Men, Women, and the Distribution of Goods* (Leiden: Boydell Press, 2006), 79, 222; Pamela Sharpe, 'Gender in the Economy: Female Merchants and Family Businesses in the British Isles, 1600–1850,' *Social History/Histoire Sociale* 34 (2001): 291; Amy Froide, 'The Religious Lives of Singlewomen in the Anglo-Atlantic World: Quaker Missionaries, Protestant Nuns,

to go beyond the older traditional stereotype of Catholic women as nuns or benefactors, one which has been successfully and extensively challenged in recent years, is a portrait of the Catholic Lady Mary Herbert who was a speculator in the Mississippi Company.¹⁵ However, in this case Catholicism is not a fundamental feature of the story, Lady Mary's religion is only mentioned in the context of her social background. Helena's story, therefore, presents a new narrative that of a loving wife and mother, who was also an astute and skilful merchant and financier. Her aim, it seems, was simply to support the family business, religion was a private matter. She could be considered a feminist *ante-litteram*, a pioneer who faced unforeseen circumstances with shrewd expertise and succeeded in a male, Protestant society. She gained access to trade and financial capital through her family and was an adroit and skillful business woman who worked effectively alongside male partners—Catholic and Protestants. Her life encompassed the traditional role of Catholic women: for example, Helena had eight children, and she negotiated excellent marriage contracts for her daughters—but having a family does not appear to have impeded her work in any way. She represents another class of Catholic Englishwoman: a wife and mother who was also a clever and successful businesswoman active in Atlantic and Mediterranean commerce.

Catholic women and their economic role in the literature

Much scholarly research has, in recent years, been focused on the subject of 'gender in the economy' during the early modern period.¹⁶

and Covert Catholics', in Kostroun and Vollendorf, eds. *Women, Religion and the Atlantic World (1600–1800)*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 60–78.

¹⁵ On recent literature on women and religion see: Jenna Lay, 'An English Nun's Authority: Early Modern Spiritual Controversy and the Manuscripts of Barbara Constable', in *Gender, Catholicism and Spirituality, Women and the Roman Catholic Church in Britain and Europe, 1200–1900*, ed by Laurence Lux-Sterritt and Carmen Mangion (Palgrave: New York, 2011), 99–114; Claire Walker, 'When God Shall Restore them to their Kingdoms' Nuns, Exiled Stuarts and English Catholic Identity, 1688–1745', in S. Apetri and H. Smith, eds. *Religion and Women in Britain, c. 1660–1760* (Ashgate: Burlington, 2014), 79–98; Caroline Bowden, 'The English Convents in Exile and Questions of National Identity, 1600–1688' in David Worthington, ed, *British and Irish Emigrants and Exiles in Europe 1603–1688* (Brill: Leiden, 2010) 297–314; Jaime Goodrich, 'Ensign-Bearers of St Claire: Elizabeth Evelinge's Early Translations and the Restoration of English Franciscanism', 83–101 and Susanna Brietz Monta, 'Anne Dacre Howard, Countess of Arundel and Catholic Patronage', 59–82 in M. White, ed. *English Women Religion and Textual Production 1500–1625* (Ashgate: Burlington, 2011). On Lady Mary Herbert see: Antoin E. Murphy, *Richard Cantillon: Entrepreneur and Economist*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986).

¹⁶ Pamela Sharpe, "Gender in the Economy": 283–306; Susan A. Amussen and Allyson M. Poska, 'Shifting the Frame: Trans-imperial Approaches to Gender in the Atlantic World', *Early Modern Women, An Interdisciplinary Journal* 9 (2014): 3–24; Gayle Brunelle, 'The Price of Assimilation: Spanish and Portuguese Women in French Cities, 1500–1650,' in Douglass Catterall et al., eds. *Women in Port, Gendering Communities, Economics, and Social Networks in Atlantic Port Cities, 1500–1850* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 155–182; Amy Froide, "The Religious Lives of Single Women in the Anglo-Atlantic World: Quaker Missionaries,

Scholars such as Hannah Barker, Sheryllyne Haggerty and Pamela Sharpe have carried out significant surveys of female merchants and businesswomen in the early Atlantic world. These studies reveal a clear narrative of female-run enterprises, and the ways in which women worked within the family and the community, and show that although only a handful of women were merchants, many worked in trade-related activities in the port cities.¹⁷ At the turn of the eighteenth century, the new fiscal-military state offered British middle-class women greater work opportunities than before. In fact, although involvement in commerce and finance was not a peculiarity of the early modern times, the Atlantic world opened new ‘financial options’ and led to the emergent role of women as financiers. Women displayed ‘awareness of the interest rates and of the financial trends’;¹⁸ they invested in the various sea companies, in the Navy and the Bank of England. Dickson shows that women were public creditors in government companies, and demonstrates how their number increased during the second half of the eighteenth century. Widows were particularly numerous among investors and money lenders because they found themselves with cash to invest.¹⁹ Many of them held shares in South Sea annuities, possibly because this stable stock was considered ‘more suitable for trustee investment’.²⁰ However, Sharpe has highlighted how female creditors were also owners of East India Company stock, providing capital, voting on committees and running businesses in the East India ports. ‘By 1685 20 per cent of East India Company bonds were held by women, and they held 5 per cent of bank stock’.²¹

Besides owning public credit, during the eighteenth century women also operated independent businesses, although the start-up capital was always accessed through family.²² While the extent of their independence shall not be exaggerated, women were clearly businesspeople in their own right, demonstrating economic prowess

Protestant Nuns, and Covert Catholics,” in *Women, Religion and the Atlantic World (1600–1800)*, ed. Daniella Kostroetal et al., 60–78; Hannah Barker, *The Business of Women, Female Enterprise and Urban Development in Northern England 1760–1830* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 105–133; Sheryllyne Haggerty, *The British-Atlantic Trading Community, 1760–1810*.

¹⁷ Haggerty, *The British-Atlantic Trading Community*, 79, 222. Women were part of commerce as shopkeepers, wholesalers or employees in any of the many businesses of the port cities.

¹⁸ Margaret R. Hunt, ‘Women and the Fiscal- Imperial State in Late Seventeenth and Early Eighteenth Centuries’ in Kathleen Wilson, ed. *A New Imperial History, Culture, Identity, and Modernity in Britain and the Empire, 1660–1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 29–47; Sharpe, ‘Gender in the Economy’, 301.

¹⁹ Mendelson and Crawford, *Women in Early Modern England*, 336.

²⁰ P. G. M. Dickson, *The Financial Revolution in England, A Study in the Development of Public Credit, 1688–1756* (London: MacMillan, 1967), 298. There is often mention of a trustee when benefactors were women.

²¹ Sharpe, ‘Gender in the Economy,’ 294–65, 301.

²² Barker, *The Business of Women*, 105–133.

and the skills to run commercial enterprises. In fact at the time of the Financial Revolution women's education was more focused on accounting and arithmetic.²³ These various studies reveal a common pattern, one that can easily apply to Helena. It is clear that the primary role of a middle class woman was one centred on the family. In general research shows that middling women usually worked alongside their husbands and when widowed, they took charge of the business themselves, or they appointed guardians, or ran the business with their sons or son-in laws.²⁴ However, there are numerous records of women who were head of family trades in possession of outstanding managerial skills. Indeed, Helena mirrors this model; she fits perfectly into the representation of middle-class women, offered by recent literature: 'they could perform the public role of deferential woman, yet in private they were less concerned or confined by such norms'.²⁵

What, however, does this historiography tell us about Catholicism? Did Helena defy the traditional role of Catholic women? Was it possible for women members of religious minorities to be openly engaged in business? Recent work on female enterprise have revealed a Quaker and a Presbyterian answer to this question. Haggerty integrates the recent debate about women, work and the Atlantic economy, with an analysis of Quaker widows in Pennsylvania. She shows that although they sometimes sold the family businesses, because they did not have the necessary knowledge to manage them, widows usually took them over and continued to run them thus assuring an income for their families. Haggerty argues that women were facilitated by family and religious ties, which provided the right contacts and assured the continuation of the enterprise. Indeed, Sharpe has applied a similar pattern of networks to the Bristol Presbyterian communities, which, unlike the Quakers, were not communal in their dealings.²⁶ Nonetheless, in both communities businesswomen mastered commercial skills, trading with family and unrelated partners. They acted on their own account as well, and they faced all the hazards and risks of the Atlantic world.²⁷ Like their male counterparts, some succeeded while others failed.

The Quaker widows of Pennsylvania or the Presbyterian widows of Bristol utilised religious and blood ties, in order to continue the family enterprise. The same dynamics in commerce have been noticed in the

²³ Amy Froide, 'Learning to Invest: Women's Education in Arithmetic and Accounting in Early Modern England', *Early Modern Women: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, Volume 10, 1, (2015): 3–26.

²⁴ Sharpe, 'Gender in the Economy'.

²⁵ Susan Cogan, 'Reputation, Credit and Patronage: Throckmorton Men and Women, c. 1560.1620,' in Peter Marshall et al., eds. *Catholic Gentry in English Society, The Throckmortons of Coughton from Reformation to Emancipation* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2009), 76.

²⁶ Sharpe, 'Gender in the Economy', 291.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 288.

Iberian communities in France from where merchants moved French products into the Iberian markets via their familial and business connections. The women here, as in any mercantile community, supported their husbands. It is clear therefore that the business dynamics of the religious minorities were universal. However, the latter groups were Catholics or Jewish *converso*, who had assimilated quickly into their host Catholic country, whereas, the Quakers and Presbyterians, although non-Anglican, acted from a shared Protestant background.²⁸ Helena Aylward worked as a Catholic in Britain and, although as a widow she behaved exactly like any woman of the time in accordance with social expectations, in business she did not act like the other religious minorities. She was not acting communally with other Catholic women and she did not rely solely upon family and co-religionists. The available literature on the mercantile community, therefore, while providing insight on and analysis of the relationship between women, religion and business does not tell much about Catholic women and their economic role in a Protestant environment.

Equally, the historiography on English/British female Catholicism has not focused much on women's economic role, usually representing them as pious upper-class ladies with two potential careers that lay ahead of them: patrons, devoted to their communities, or nuns devoted to their God.²⁹ In England, Catholic women nurtured their communities and their religion by patronising and promoting charities. Eventually, the only other opportunity offered to them was enclosure in a nunnery.³⁰ Recent studies, however, have

²⁸ Brunelle, 'The Price of Assimilation': In this work there is a substantial difference between Spanish and Portuguese women. Spanish women were more dynamic and assimilated easily within the French society. Whereas, the Portuguese women, perhaps due to their Jewish heritage, never severed the ties with their home country. They relied on other Portuguese for business. They married among themselves, and they did not invest in French property or finance.

²⁹ Jenna Lay, 'An English Nun's Authority'; Claire Walker, 'When God Shall Restore them to their Kingdoms' Nuns, Exiled Stuarts and English Catholic Identity, 1688–1745'; Caroline Bowden, 'The English Convents in Exile and Questions of National Identity, 1600–1688'; Jaime Goodrich, 'Ensign-Bearers of St Claire: Elizabeth Evelinge's Early Translations and the Restoration of English Franciscanism' and Susanna Brietz Monta, 'Anne Dacre Howard, Countess of Arundel and Catholic Patronage'.

³⁰ John Bossy, *The English Catholic Community, 1570–1850* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1975), 150–168, 229–249; Froide, 'The Religious Lives of Singlewomen in the Anglo-Atlantic World'. Bossy argues that Catholic women were influential in domestic religious decisions, in a sort of matriarchal household, where men had a minor role. In the historiography, the only instance of Catholic enterprise seems to be the founding of religious schools, covert nunneries, in which young single women could be boarded and educated. Yet again, women's role was to serve their communities and to offer a place of worship in their non-enclosed cloisters. Rowlands in 'Recusant Women' argues that Catholic women literally ensured the survival of Catholicism by offering spiritual and financial support to their local communities. They nurtured the faith in sustaining the parishes, hosting services in their private chapels and sheltering priests. Meanwhile, they patronised charities and employed the villagers in their households. WDA, B 1536 *Challoner's Ledger* (Bishop Richard Challoner, Vicar Apostolic of the Catholic Mission, 1758–1781) In their wills, Catholic women often dictated specific clauses, such as where and to whom to distribute the money.

introduced more complex figures, identifying Catholic women's activities. For instance, Marshall and Scott's recent work about the Throckmorton family describes how Catholic women were involved in various enterprises.³¹ They managed households, or large estates, and disposed of charitable funds; and although these activities were less evident or lucrative than male employment, their work should not be discredited. Their humanitarian effort was noticeable, they supported charities and promoted projects such as funding female schools, hospices for the sick; as well as money for scholarships or prison fees.³² They dealt with the financial issues of these plans, and even when managing the family estates, their effort was significant. Upper-class households were serious businesses, which required resources and a clearly structured staffing system. As a widow or spinster, women could be solely responsible for managing their houses and properties, therefore noble women worked and were involved to some extent in economic activities. Consequently, it is clear that Catholic women were proactive in society, beyond the patriarchal family nucleus, thus linking female Catholicism and work. However, with Helena Aylward the narrative goes further, by coupling Catholicism with business.

Mrs Helena Aylward: Catholic women and business

Exploring Helena Aylward's commercial activities after her husband's death suggest the experience of the Catholic Throckmorton women was far from unique. Mrs Aylward suggests that a new narrative on female Catholicism is possible, one that sheds more light on Catholic women's economic roles.

They donated money to the local priests or the parish and they always specified where and to whom funds would be allocated. The money left had various destinations, ranging from priests' salaries, poor relief, spiritual retreats for new missionaries, to housekeeping expenses, breakfasts, or boxes of candles. The sums left for the communities were significant, from the £500 from Mrs Brent, to the £4,000 left by Lady Howard. Catholic women cared for their communities as well as for their families. Their charity ensured the survival of anyone with no means of bettering their lives. Indeed, there are various funds for long-term projects, such as funding female schools, nunneries, and hospices for the sick; as well as money for scholarships or prison fees.

³¹ Peter Marshall et al. eds. *Catholic Gentry in English Society, The Throckmortons of Coughton from Reformation to Emancipation* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2009). Catholic women faced additional difficulties in fulfilling their public duties as patrons, as their faith was prosecuted. Moreover, among aristocratic families, female patronage was fundamental in establishing and maintaining connections within their class. Indeed, British Catholics' social inclusion was also ensured by the ability of these women to maintain familial and communal ties. In sharing certain habits of sociability, Catholics strengthened their role within the aristocracy. In the study, there is a clear focus on Catholic integration and the similarities within defined social groups. The Throckmorton women engaged in what was appropriate for their status. Their interests and social relations were transversal and overcame religious differences. Good behaviour was fundamental for the financial stability of the household and for maintaining a good name and solid relations within the social class.

³² WDA, B 1536 *Challoner's Ledger*, The fund left by Mrs Eliot was meant to help Mrs Margaret Morris, born Dec. 1753. £10 *per annum* till she attained to the age of fifteen and then £20 to put her out of business.

As Hannah Barker has argued, women's roles as active entrepreneurs is revealed as much by their failure as by their success. For instance, the ledgers of the London Vicar Apostolic, Bishop Challoner (1758–81), held at the Westminster Diocesan Archive record the Marshalsea's prisoners, hinting, perhaps, at failed female businesses and their inability to pay their creditors. Therefore, although Catholic women's sources are scant, it can be seen that some were involved in some sort of 'middling' professions as testified to by instances of the charitable funds offered to 'put her out in a business', and to a greater extent by the story of Helena Aylward and the Throckmortons.³³

Mrs Aylward exemplifies the role of a widow becoming legally responsible for her own actions.³⁴ Indeed, immediately after the bereavement of her husband, Helena found herself dealing with all financial matters, not least the funeral charges; there was the need to supervise all the account books, and to deal with creditors and debtors. The first debtor in the list was her brother Nicholas, who owed her the third part of a sum they had disbursed in 1697 after the death of their father, Matthew, for the funeral expenses and some charities. She also tried to contact the widow of her other deceased brother, James, who was not replying to her letters. In the early stages of bereavement women were thrown into a whirlpool of emotions filled with anxieties, legal papers, and duties all deeply intertwined with their own family relationships. Any merchant's widow needed to assess the financial situation to calculate losses and expenses, thus determining the net value of the deceased's estate. Helena was certainly acquainted with the economic activities of the family. Furthermore, she had lengthy exposure to the skills required to run a business, as she was born into one merchant family and married into another. As noted above, middle-class women were educated in numeracy. However, knowledge of accounting and bookkeeping could be also accessed through family and kin.³⁵

Indeed Helena, thanks to her upbringing, possessed a range of skills, allowing her to read, write and keep accounts. She was capable of carrying on the trade of her husband and father, if necessary, and already by the mid-1680s, in Cadiz, she frequently corresponded with other prominent European merchants. Her first husband may have already been sick at this time, because she was managing all the accounts, and the letters were specifically addressed to her. In the south of Spain, her family was involved in the transatlantic

³³ *Ibid.* women were involved in various economic activities, among many bookselling; On the topic see Laura Cruz and Joel Mokyr, eds. *The Birth of Modern Europe, Culture and Economy, 1400–1800, Essays in Honour of Jan de Vries* (Leiden: Brill, 2010).

³⁴ Barker, *The Business of Women*; Murphy, *Richard Cantillon*, 210.

³⁵ Froide, 'Learning to Invest', 11.

trade; twice a year, from Cadiz, the fleets *Flota* and *Galleon* would set off loaded with European and Mediterranean goods, and come back from the Americas with silver, gold and dyes. Indeed, in 1685, Helena corresponded with a Spanish trader based in Cadiz who remitted '500 mexican coins' to her for a transaction. The other partners involved in these exchanges were the Goughs, prominent Catholic merchants based mainly in St Malo. French partners were fundamental for supplying provisions such as wine and fruit, in high demand in colonial and English markets. In 1686, Helena again corresponded with the Goughs and also the Lynches, discussing the American fleets harboured in Cadiz and ready to sail in June, by which time the West Indian galleons would have returned. All these partners were Catholic businessmen, influential in the mercantile community, with vast interests that spanned from Atlantic-Mediterranean trade, to smuggling and privateering.³⁶ The Lynches in particular also had interests in politics, and for more than two decades they corresponded with the Aylwards. By the month of June 1686, Helena's first husband had died as she was addressed for the first time as widow de la Herse Trublet by Dominick Lynch. In the letter various issues regarding transatlantic shipments were discussed. Interestingly, Lynch advised her to have the superscription of the letter written by another hand because her brother, in Cadiz, was picking up her letters at the consul's [merchants' headquarters], recognising her handwriting. Therefore, Lynch had to explain why she was corresponding with him and the Goughs. He may have deemed Helena more trustworthy than the rest of her family and so wanted to deal directly with her. This letter also suggests how Helena played an active and independent role within the family business, an approach that as Barker and Chalus state 'equipped women to take over, if circumstances demanded'.³⁷

In 1705, after John's death, Helena Aylward became head of the family firm. Her letters spanned a variety of issues and partners, and the tone of the conversations was as professional as it would be between two men. Helena was always addressed as 'merchant Madame Helena Aylward', although as any woman of the time, she inherited the title from her husband.³⁸ Nevertheless, Helena Aylward merited the title since she had grown up surrounded by mercantile activities; in fact, her clear knowledge of commercial transactions enabled her to master trading skills. The letters available are scarce; yet, the few samples available present a woman with excellent

³⁶ Paul Monod, 'Dangerous Merchandise: Smuggling, Jacobitism, and Commercial Culture in Southeast England, 1690–1760,' *The Journal of British Studies* 30 (1991): 150–182.

³⁷ Hannah Barker and Elaine Chalus, *Gender in Eighteenth-Century England, Roles, Representations and Responsibilities* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 98.

³⁸ MS, Lett. C. 192 Bodleian Library. Letter 93 from Daniel Arthur to Helena Aylward in London, the 3rd of August 1710. Haggerty, *The British-Atlantic Trading Community*, 79.

managerial skills, who exemplifies the recent theories on women in business in this period. In fact, widows acted independently, without necessarily handing the business over to a son or a relative. Indeed, from her first marriage, Helena had a son, Michael Trublet de la Herse, who was certainly of age in 1705. Nevertheless, there is no mention of him in the correspondence, suggesting that she was the sole head of the family firm. Furthermore, Helena's son-in-law, Charles Howard, is only mentioned clearing a debt after Helena's death,³⁹ strengthening Barker's argument that the passage of the firm from mother to son or other male relative was not automatic.⁴⁰

In accordance with recent literature concerning early modern widowhood and commerce, Helena as a widow took initiative and did not limit herself to the exchanges already established by her husband. Initially, based in London, she continued engagement in the trade of English fabrics, and Spanish and French provisions that journeyed from Cadiz to the New World. She closed the final transactions left by her spouse, such as remitting payments and collecting debts. However, during the War of the Spanish Succession (1702–14) when England and the Netherlands were at war with Spain and France, she expanded her interests and moved independently, taking advantage of the new opportunities offered by the economy of war; she diversified her business, by investing in the arms trade and in the South Sea Company. She realised how the new British fiscal-military state offered new markets. Indeed, in 1707 during the war she wrote to a London merchant, asking for twenty five *fuzils*, garnished with iron and twenty five garnished with silver. She also ordered 25 iron carbines and 25 in silver, with the request that the barrels of the carbines be about 'three and half spans or two and half foot long'. She would have paid 40 reals for each fusil and carbine wrought with iron, and 46 reals for each *fuzil* and carbine wrought with silver:

which silver I will supply you, but the casting and working of it as also the loss of weight to be borne by you, the said armes are to be made of the same good quality and fashion as those you lately made for monsignor Delacombe and at the same prices if under the prices above mentioned the said arms must be sold me on or before the latter end of august next instead of your own name on each barrel you will please to put the name of Peyrelonque in earnest and part payment of the said arms, I now pay you £20. I also want a pouch, flask and a tool for tacking off and putting on the lock for each *fuzil* and carbine also a carbine belt.⁴¹

In this deal she shows a clear knowledge of her work asking for a very technical specification and she proves to be an acute observer of the

³⁹ AY 125, *Business Correspondence*.

⁴⁰ Barker, *The Business of Women*, 111.

⁴¹ AY 126, *Business Correspondence*, Letters addressed to her after her husband's death. Includes a few accounts and receipts (some for household expenses) May 1705–June 1711.

market in which only a certain ‘price’ would have provided her with a competitive edge. While there is no explicit explanation for this purchase, it was likely that Helena saw potential profits in providing war supplies. Furthermore, her partners introduced her to financial markets. In 1713, she invested £500 in South Sea stock and ‘in capital and principal stock of the company of merchants of Great Britain trading to the South Seas and other parts of America with the aim of encouraging the fishery’.⁴² This investment was significant if considered that the average annual salary of a plasterer was £30.⁴³ The sum of £500 was the minimum required in order to have the right to vote in the company’s council. Electors received special commercial treatments and influence in the office appointments.⁴⁴ The South Sea Company was created in 1711 by the British government to pay off the war debts of its creditors. Its initial purpose was to monopolise the South-American trade and to exchange the debts for the stock of the company.⁴⁵ Since it was created during wartime, the company’s main purpose was always to oust Spain from the Atlantic, or at least to disrupt the Spanish monopoly in trade and slave trafficking. However, the achievements were not as expected, because after the peace treaty of 1713 the company only obtained access to some South American ports; moreover, the control of the slave trade, with the concession of the *Asiento*, was burdened by high duties, therefore, the profits were greatly affected. The company failed mainly because the debts exchanged for the stock were all war debts and when the government realised the impossibility of paying, proprietors were offered the option to receive the profits in bonds instead of cash.⁴⁶ This was not

⁴² AY 131, *Executors Accounts*, Receipts and acquittances made out to the executors of John and Helena Aylward for debts owed by them at their deaths, May 1710–Mar 1717.

⁴³ Haggerty, *The British-Atlantic Trading Community, 1760–1810*, 41. Haggerty in her work argues how religion and family were still used to provide networks, however like Hancock she agrees that the choice of a partner was based on trading and personal skills, or only the ability to get along with someone. Therefore, relying only on religious and family contacts would have not been successful, in particular in the wider Atlantic world.

⁴⁴ David Hancock, *Citizens of the World, London Merchants and the Integration of the British Atlantic Community, 1735–1785*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 271–2.

⁴⁵ Hoppit J., ‘The Myths of the South Sea Bubble’, *Transactions of the RHS* 12 (2002): 141–65.

⁴⁶ Dickson, *The Financial Revolution in England*, 65–71; *Ibid.*, 47: The wars proved extremely expensive and the situation at first was misjudged. There was no acknowledgment that the Nine Years War or the War of the Spanish Succession would have been that long and expensive. The political situation was unstable because of the new role of the Parliament and because it was believed King William III had his interests mainly outside England. The land taxes were too high and landowning was becoming less attractive. Moreover, taxation was not covering the debts, and the government was insisting on short term loans. At times of warfare, money had to be found quickly, and the creation of the stock market answered this need and in particular the duty of paying it back. With the companies, the debts were paid in stock and the capital was provided by the possibility of selling the shares. The *Asiento* was assigned for thirty years, but 10% of the profits had to be paid to the King of Spain. Whereas 28% was the duty on all trade to South America.

welcome news, particularly since in order to attract creditors the government had promised great profits and the alluring prospects of sharing the riches of the Spanish trade.

Helena Aylward acquired the company's shares in 1713, the last year of the Spanish War. Acquiring funds during the last years of a conflict was the best strategy, as the prices were lower and, with the expectation of peace, prospects were potentially high. She invested her money in the stock market probably because she thought other investments would not be profitable and as a Catholic she could not invest in real estate. Nevertheless, investing in the stock market was common practice among merchants with high savings and the ambition to influence the companies' policies. Investments are attested in various letters and in her correspondence with her bankers, there is also mention of Richard Cantillon, possibly the biggest investor at the time, who was involved in the South Sea Bubble.⁴⁷ She was part of a network of financiers with many interests in politics; as Catholics, they defied the religious precepts on lending money at interest, but as British they financed the Protestant government and the establishment welcomed their support.

In all of the above dealings, Helena showed significant awareness of commercial strategies, by adapting to the changing market. She relied on the partnerships already established by her husband for reaping the profits of the new Atlantic economy. Like any skilled trader she adjusted her business to circumstances, hoping to maximise profits. Indeed, trading in weapons and artillery could be advantageous in time of war, as the financing of the government's war debt. Her ability to manage the family firm is demonstrated by her capacity to decide what to invest and how to ensure that the enterprise remains economically viable by pursuing debtors and supervising the exchanges. For instance, in 1706, she demanded money from a trader involved in the south seas trade and also from a silk merchant. In 1709, she wrote to an insolvent partner, who had promised to pay £15 sterling; in the same year, as many other merchants during the war, she dealt with the imprisonment of a captain and his crew in Cadiz, with the hope to recover the cargo. Nevertheless, while running a business and rescuing her associates, she did not forget that she also was the head of the household, recording in

⁴⁷ Murphy, *Richard Cantillon*, 26–27. Cantillon was a French speculator of Irish origin close to the circle of the finance minister John Law. Together they conceived and created the company in Louisiana where Cantillon amassed an impressive fortune. After the financial crash of 1720 he was involved in various litigations, such as the one with Lady Mary Herbert. Nevertheless, he was a precious contact for the Aylwards. He was family of the Arthurs, who were prominent bankers in Paris. They were renowned money lenders and at time of war they lent money to various governments, the British as well. They were established in the business world, counting on vast economic networks. Moreover, thanks to their Catholicism they were able to dispose of funds within France and Spain. This ability of channeling money through hostile countries gave them an advantage over their Protestant colleagues. Therefore, the newly-born British government disregarded their religious affiliation.

her papers the price of bricks and bricklayers for maintenance of the family property.⁴⁸

Helena Aylward's letters reveal a woman who worked hard to ensure the success of her business. When her husband died she did not hand over the responsibility for it to her son or son-in-law, as might have been expected of a woman at the beginning of the eighteenth century, she took control of it herself. She confidently assumed financial responsibility for the business and settled effortlessly into the role of merchant, the title by which she is always addressed in the correspondence. She continued to deal with all the partners of her deceased husbands as well as relatives. During these years, when she was dealing on her own account, Helena frequently traded in partnership with the firm of Woulfe & Trublet. This is unsurprising, since the business relationship with this house had begun in the 1680s, in the time of Helena's first husband, and it was she who had introduced the merchant house to John Aylward. They were clearly happy to continue to trade with Helena after she assumed full responsibility for the business because their association lasted until 1710s. Through them she dealt mainly in the transatlantic trade, their major destinations being the West Indies and South America. Despite being based in London during her widowhood, Helena never severed contacts with the associates of the firm based in Spain and France.

Relying on Woulfe and Trublet allowed Helena to supervise her Anglo-Spanish transactions, while from London she could provide English fabrics, in high demand, to the American colonies. In England, she mainly worked with non-Catholic partners, whereas in Spain she mainly resorted to family networks. In France, she tapped into the vast community of British Catholic expatriates in St Malo, that supplied her with French provisions. The ability to exploit these various networks assured Helena of a flow of commodities, even when trade was severely disrupted by warfare. As a British Catholic she offered Protestants the possibility of accessing lucrative Catholic markets, closed to the English when at war with Spain and France. She made sure that Mediterranean fruit, olive oil, and wines would reach England and that English manufactured goods would be delivered to Spain. From Cadiz the major destinations were the West Indies, where products from South America and the North American colonies would be exchanged for Mediterranean goods.

Helena had the advantage of operating from a privileged position because her family was well-established in the mercantile community. She traded efficiently in her own right and was well-aware of the values on which the business was based. She knew that a good reputation was crucial in the mercantile world and clearly developed excellent rapport with associates some of whom ensured the association by treating her

⁴⁸ AY 126, *Business Correspondence*, Letters addressed to her after her husband's death. Includes a few accounts and receipts (some for household expenses) May 1705–June 1711.

with gift. One such was Paul Den who, in 1693, presented her with a small dog which he was sure Helena would 'have found her very acceptable'.⁴⁹ In business, a good reputation ensured contacts and financial stability; besides this, Helena certainly knew which partnerships to cherish. Indeed, Paul Den proved crucial for her business during the War of the Spanish Succession (1702–14). He was a Woulfe & Trublet's associate and he had known the Aylwards since the 1680s.⁵⁰ They mainly worked together during the Spanish War when Den was based in Portugal which was a strategically important country, the only English southern European ally of the English. The Aylwards smuggled French and Spanish commodities through the Portuguese ports of Lisbon and Faro, and exchanged them for English fabrics. The partnership with Den fundamentally sustained the Aylwards' business during the conflict. His work was crucial for Helena as it had been for her husband.

In all these exchanges, Helena used her religion to advantage: she utilised her family and Catholic ties in Spain and France to ensure a continuous supply of goods, while her commercial networks in London secured the availability of the English commodities. Like her husband, Helena made sure that the wheels of commerce continued to turn, despite the international turmoil.

Social conventions tended to act against women's involvement in trade; they were usually considered to be risk averse. It was believed that the customary role of carer affected their behaviour in commerce and finance.⁵¹ If married to a merchant they perhaps dealt with part of the family activities, such as retailing or shop-keeping, but the most potentially lucrative decisions were left to the men. When the men were absent, or ill, their wives acted on their behalf, but they faced various barriers. For instance, women could not access capital, apart from family capital or inheritance. Moreover, they could not sign legal contracts or be sued for debts because only widows or single women had legal status.⁵² For this reason, businessmen were not enthusiastic about trading with someone that could not be prosecuted if insolvent. Therefore, female access to trade was almost impossible and their assets would always be their husbands'. Only widows could be fully independent, as sole heir or executrix.⁵³ However, widowhood opened up

⁴⁹ AY 30, *Business Correspondence*, Letters from Paul Den one from Cadiz and one from St Malo.

⁵⁰ AY 30, *Business Correspondence*, Letters to John Aylward from Paul Den.

⁵¹ Dickson, *The Financial Revolution in England*, 298; Sheryllyne Haggerty, 'Merely for Money'? *Business Culture in the British Atlantic, 1750–1815* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2012), 34–65.

⁵² Haggerty, *The British-Atlantic Trading Community*, 71–74. Barker and Chalus, *Gender in Eighteenth-Century England*, 98.

⁵³ Grassby Richard, *Kinship and Capitalism, Marriage, Family and Business in the English-Speaking World, 1580–1740* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 117–150. Grassby argues how women usually outlived their husbands. They were named as executrix, although towards the end of the seventeenth century joint appointments became more

new opportunities. Particularly in the mercantile world, exchanging letters with partners' widows was common and, since exchanges took months or years, closing deals with the widows was common and in everyone's interest. In Helena's case the family business benefited from her rich dowry, so she had a vested interest in its survival. When John Aylward died she checked her husband's accounts accurately and dealt with the debts and remaining profit. To maintain the exchanges, she surveyed the ledgers' books, calculated credit and debts, and wrote to the partners.

Indeed, in the Aylwards' letters show various female traders were methodical and systematic and, if successful, scorned by their competitors. In fact, one of their many partners commented on the unnatural success of another widow in trade, saying: 'for God almighty having made woman for man, and being at the same tyme deprived of the faculty to use the creature according to the intent of the creatour'.⁵⁴ Possibly this man had been refused a marriage proposal by a woman who did not want to give up her bequests and legal power to a new husband.

Conclusion

Undeniably, there were social restraints on women's involvement in business and public life. Social conventions and expectations required women to run the household and raise children, and, therefore successful female traders were deemed unnatural. Access to trade was hindered by the inability to access capital and by the lack of basic technical skills. Although able to inherit, female resources would be eventually be absorbed by the new spouse. Only widows would have been offered some legal and financial opportunities. Nevertheless, women did participate in the economic life of Britain. Certainly they were not prominent merchants nor did they cover leading roles in the companies' directories, yet, they were traders.⁵⁵ As retailers, shop assistants, or merchants' widows, they were involved in trading in the wider sense. Recent historiography has looked at commerce as a whole range of activities.⁵⁶ Trade entails buying and selling, but more generally it implies all the activities of the port cities. Manufacturing, retailing, and

frequent. (Not because they were not trusted but because being an executrix could be a risky task). As executrix they had to liquidate stock, collect debts, pay all the fees, charges and file accounts. They could become matriarchs with dependents or remarry, but at risk of losing their independence again.

⁵⁴ AY 16, f. 6 *Business Correspondence* Letters to John Aylward from Benjamin Bake, one also from Thomas Hill at Exeter, Aug. 1688–Aug. 1689.

⁵⁵ Haggerty, *The British-Atlantic Trading Community*, 16, 71–74, 164–167; Grassby, *Kinship and Capitalism*, 117–150.

⁵⁶ Haggerty, *The British-Atlantic Trading Community*: Haggerty argues how men and women were involved in the distribution of goods in the port cities. Although usually, only the male elite is considered as merchants, this is not entirely correct. A trader was not only a merchant but could also be a factor, a broker, a shopkeeper, a grocers. Therefore, this definition widens the discussion on women. For instance, in a port city, men needed to be fed

entertainment were all cogs in the wheels of commerce. Therefore, although with a minor profile, women were active within the mercantile community. Moreover, other analysis go even further, in arguing that women were also independent entrepreneurs.⁵⁷ It is clear that family was crucial in providing capital and support, nevertheless, businesswomen did exist and, like Helena, were able to operate beyond their direct family networks, and often in challenging and conflict-prone arenas.

The aim of this work is not to emphasise Catholic female independence; Helena was in trade as a daughter and wife, and as a middle-class woman she did not stray from the conventions expected of her.⁵⁸ She was well aware of her social duties; and fulfilled her role by negotiating excellent marital deals for herself and her children. Undoubtedly for women of the time marriage was the measure of success, and if a girl was not a suitable candidate, she would have faced a life in a nunnery. Indeed, three of the four daughters that Helena had from her first marriage became nuns, and only one was betrothed with a copious dowry of 8,000 *livres*. The only son of this first union died childless in 1755. The daughters of her second husband were more successful, since they married into the aristocracy. She had three daughters with John: Maria-Alsen, Anne-Helene, and Anastasia-Jeanne. Maria-Alsen was born in 1688, and in 1708 she married Henry Charles Howard, whose son, Charles, would become the 10th Duke of Norfolk, whereas, Anastasia married Richard Moore, third Baronet Foweley, in 1707. They would have fourteen children.⁵⁹

However, despite not emphasising their independence, it is possible to highlight their economic role and integration. The commercial

or entertained and involvement of women in the mercantile community was consistent and fundamental.

⁵⁷ Barker, *The Business of Women*, 105–133.

⁵⁸ AY 120, *Personal Correspondence*, Personal letters to John Aylward from Joseph Comerford and Nicholas Porter. 2 about the breaking of Porter's daughter's engagement to Walsh, July–Oct. 1696. Middle-class families still saw marriage as the best deal to close and the only opportunity for social advancement and even for the Aylward women marriage was still the main purpose. Indeed, in the family papers there are instances of women being considered as assets to exchange in the marital market. For instance, in 1699, Helena's brother, Nicholas, complained about his daughter who refused to marry 'a good deserving honest man' chosen by him. The young girl showed great aversion towards the union, and the family blamed her young age and how 'Happiness was preferred to her future richness'. Usually, she was such an obedient daughter and Nicholas was utterly surprised by her behaviour. The marital deal was not completed and the young girl concluded her life in a convent. AY 54, f. 1, *Business Correspondence*, Letters to John Aylward from Nicholas Kehoe at Puerto de Santa Maria, Mar. 1701–Mar. 1702. 1 bundle. Some personal matters included, mainly relating to Kehoe's niece, Mary Bray. Mary was advised by Aylward to stay in a convent in Cadiz for two years. She was frequently visited by the partners Woulfe and Trublet. She had been forced into a nunnery because a marriage could be uncertain for her, 'if not well' and she probably was not the most good-looking daughter chosen for it. However, after few months she left the convent, but she was unwell because she could not adapt to the Spanish lifestyle, being Irish.

⁵⁹ T 30 Helena last Will and Testament 1713–1714; Julian Walton, *The Irish Genealogist* 5 (1974). Helena's only son Michael Trublet died unmarried in 1755 in Paris.

world offered new opportunities for women; they could be better educated and socialise in clubs and public assemblies. If unmarried or widowed, women were granted legal status, and a new legal support was being organised to protect their dowries.⁶⁰ They were part of the family business and worked with their husbands. Indeed, Helena's family responsibilities did not constrain her involvement in business. Her social background provided her with a good education and the right skills. She could read, write, and keep accounts in good order which she used not only for running the household but also for having a more public economic role. Helena Aylward introduces a new narrative on female Catholicism, where the economic dimension has been previously overlooked. Her figure introduces a new concept of a woman well-integrated in the mercantile world, not particularly concerned with her local community, or with her religion. She defies the stereotypes of Catholic women as patrons or nuns. She introduces a different type of Catholic family, in which wives and daughters worked and traded, and religion was not their only focus.

The documentation available demonstrates that for Helena, Catholicism did not prove to be detrimental in commerce, despite its being a social and political impairment. Thus, it secured safer trading strategies and the opportunity to integrate in the economic and financial life of the newly-born British state. In order to continue working, she tapped into networks of religion, nationality, and family. She worked in the Atlantic and Mediterranean trade, and invested in the government companies, that offered the most lucrative prospects at the time. She made a great use of her religious community and commercial contacts, but she only nurtured Catholic contacts as long as they were valuable for business. Helena discussed mainly trade deals and finance in her correspondence. In the figure of this woman, two different narratives merge. She embodies two contrasting stereotypes. She was a mother, loyal wife, and daughter hoping for a good marriage. However, she was also an investor, merchant, and speculator. What has been argued for other religious minorities in trade can apply also to Catholic women. Unlike other dissenting groups, Catholic women resorted to their religious community, as well as business relations. They did not deny domestic Catholicism; nevertheless, they were not only focused on religion, or on promoting charitable institutions, but also on the economy. The new commercial age allowed female Catholics to begin to think of new roles. Between employment in the convent or the household, the Atlantic world offered Catholic women a third way: business.

⁶⁰ Paul Langford, *A Polite and Commercial People: England 1727–1783* (Oxford: Clarendon Press), 61–121.