

## Gender and Women's History Research Centre Seminar

# 'Indian women' and 'Indian houses': East Indies goods and the rise of female retailers in early modern London

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Chair: Associate Professor Lisa O'Connell

**Monday 29 April, 2pm AEST**

To be held online via Teams

**Abstract:** In late seventeenth century England, textiles from the East Indies and Middle East abounded. Fashionable Londoners could purchase 'Indian sattin' and 'Indian painted calico', 'Chinese taffeta', 'Bengals', 'Persians' and 'Turkey silks', to name a few. These textiles irrevocably changed fashionable clothing and furnishings, as well as Europe's relationship with the wider world, forging powerful trade networks and laying the groundwork for colonial expansion.

While the global dimensions of these fabrics and their fashionable consumption have been widely studied, the role of retailers and makers in the distribution of these textiles in key markets has not been fully examined. The gendered nature of trades involved with these textiles has also not been considered; gender has primarily been the focus in studies of consumption.

This paper examines the roles of women as not just consumers but also merchants, retailers and makers during the period from 1670-1701.

The influx of brightly coloured, lightweight patterned 'Indian' cottons and silks, as well as porcelain and lacquerware furniture, encouraged new forms of merchandising and allowed women to play new key roles in the fashion marketplace. With this came both celebrity and social influence: some of these women were known as 'India women' or 'Indian gown makers' and their retail premises were popular 'Indian houses'. This notoriety not only gave these women access to elite clients and others in power, but some even used their newfound status and notoriety to help overthrow a king.

**Bio:** Sarah A. Bendall is a Research Fellow at the [Gender and Women's History Research Centre](#) in the Institute for Humanities and Social Sciences. She is a material culture historian whose research examines the roles of gender in the production, trade and consumption of global commodities and fashionable consumer goods between 1500-1800.

