

Village and Town: Occupations and Wealth in the Hinterland of Gloucester, 1660-1700

By PETER RIPLEY

I
DURING the years since the Second World War much use has been made of probate inventories in studies of the pre-industrial period, but no direct comparisons of towns and villages based on this source have been attempted.¹ In the present article it is proposed to focus attention on late seventeenth-century Gloucester and to identify the physical extent of its hinterland before examining the occupations of the city, the smaller towns, and the villages. Subsequently the opportunities for accumulating wealth within the three types of settlement will be assessed, and in conclusion the composition of wealth will be scrutinized. By selecting the area surrounding a county town it is possible to focus on an economic structure common to many parts of England. With its population of about 5000 in the seventeenth century, Gloucester was smaller than Bristol, the regional capital of the south-west, and in its network of commercial relationships was devoted to internal rather than international trade. Unlike new towns such as the port of Chatham and the burgeoning industrial complex of Birmingham, Gloucester was a traditional shire town in which administrative, legal and ecclesiastical business supplemented standard market and service activities. As only a few random diocese of Gloucester inventories survive for the period before the Civil War it is necessary

to turn to the late seventeenth century for satisfactory evidence, and documents for the years 1660-99 will be the main source used.

II
Evidence concerning the nature of Gloucester's hinterland is to be found in the records of the Tolsey Court which met every weekday with the sheriffs presiding. Although this body had competence over all personal causes arising within Gloucester's boundaries, the vast majority of cases heard were concerned with debt. Two books which embrace the years 1667-82 are of great value in revealing the extent of the city's hinterland, for they list the towns and villages in which defendants lived.² If attention is limited to defendants from outside Gloucester, 447 people were resident within a radius of ten miles, and only 157 came from further afield. Support for the hypothesis that the city's sphere of influence was so restricted lies in the figures for defendants who gained their livelihood from agriculture: 255 out of a total of 290 yeomen, farmers, husbandmen, and gardeners lived within ten miles' distance. Population figures obtained by the antiquary Sir Robert Atkyns throw further light on the nature of the hinterland: 15,083 lived in the western half and 21,306 in the eastern half; thus Gloucester was flanked on the one side by relatively underdeveloped tracts, many of them beyond the Severn, and on the other side by the more sophisticated Vale and Cotswold escarp-

¹Most of the relevant literature on probate inventories is conveniently listed in J D Marshall, 'Agrarian Wealth and Social Structure in Pre-industrial Cumbria', *Econ Hist Rev*, Vol XXXIII, 1980, pp 503-5. J Patten, 'Village and Town: an Occupational Study', *Ag Hist Rev*, Vol XX, 1972, is based on muster roll material.

²Gloucestershire Record Office: GBR 1426/1548, 1427/1549.

ment.³ There were six towns other than Gloucester within the hinterland, and five of these lay to the east of the city. Their size can only be estimated, for with the parish being the unit of measurement it is not possible to distinguish between relatively crowded urban centres and scattered hamlets with small populations. Stroud and Bisley each had about 3000 inhabitants, Tewkesbury 2500, Cheltenham and Painswick 1500 each, and Newent 1000. In addition to their abundance of people, these places possessed active markets to establish them clearly as urban communities. No other settlements qualify. King's Stanley contained 1100 inhabitants but was a sprawling village enlarged by an influx of clothworkers rather than a town. Although Newnham possessed a market it was yet to enjoy its boom as a Severn port and coaching stage on the road to South Wales; with fewer than 500 inhabitants it was smaller than ten parishes of the hinterland encompassing populations of between 500 and 1000. Sixty-two villages had like Newnham between 500 and 100 inhabitants, and ten communities possessed fewer than 100 people.⁴

III

The characteristic farm of the Vale possessed a dairy herd, and cheese was stored in the lofts of yeomen's houses until it was ready for transportation to market. Surplus milk was employed to feed pigs and thus supply bacon, greatly in demand among Gloucestershire consumers, and wheat, barley and beans were the most common

crops. These mixed farms were chiefly small units, with 82 per cent of yeomen leaving herds of twenty cattle or less, and with 75 per cent possessing no more than twenty acres under the plough. Pastoral farming was more firmly established on the higher land to the north-west of the Vale, where only 67 per cent of farmers had herds of twenty animals or less. The yeomen on the Cotswold Hills kept smaller herds on the whole than farmers in the north-west and the Vale, and a greater proportion owned sheep, but like farmers in other parts of the hinterland they tilled fields for wheat and barley. Although there were individuals leaving 280 and 220 sheep, 25 per cent of the farmers had flocks numbering twenty animals or less.⁵

With farming the hub of village life it was natural that the processing of agricultural products should provide occupations. All six of the tanners lived in villages to the west of the Severn where they were able to draw on the resources of a strong breeding area. One maltster was processing barley at Charlton King's, conveniently near Cheltenham's market, and another was serving the needs of small consumers at Redmarley. Grazier-butchers, blacksmiths, and coopers were found throughout Gloucester's hinterland. The limited number of other non-agricultural occupations underlines both the simplicity of rural life and the self-sufficiency of the villagers. Bakers, fishermen, innkeepers, tailors, shoemakers, masons and carpenters served householders' needs, and the survival of inven-

³Diocese of Gloucester parish figures are contained in R Atkyns, *The Ancient and Present State of Gloucestershire*, 1712. This source has been preferred to the hearth tax returns and lists of communicants; although not contemporary it is comprehensive and based on the estimates of well-informed witnesses, the incumbents. The four diocese of Worcester parishes of Eldersfield, Pendock, Redmarley, and Stoke lay in the hinterland, and estimates for these communities are derived from the hearth tax assessment for Michaelmas 1664 (PRO, E 179/201/312).

⁴There is no work providing a complete picture of the hinterland during the late seventeenth century. H P R Finberg, *The Gloucestershire Landscape*, 1971, is useful. The relevant volumes of the *Victoria County History* should also be consulted: *Gloucestershire*, Vol VIII, 1968; Vol X, 1972; Vol XI, 1976; Vol XII, 1981.

⁵The diocese of Gloucester records at Gloucestershire Record Office contain 863 inventories for the hinterland; the documents are identified by the year of probate followed by a serial number, and are referred to below by the abbreviation GI. Fifty diocese of Worcester inventories are in the Worcester branch of the Hereford and Worcester Record Office (BA 3585/249-359); the abbreviation WI followed by the box number is used below. Twelve Prerogative Court of Canterbury inventories have emerged so far among a collection being prepared for students at the Public Record Office; the relevant classes are PROB 4 and PROB 5. Because of shortage of space, references are confined to individuals and occupational groups of up to ten people. For examples of farming in the hinterland see GI, 1675/41, 1677/22, 1682/1, 1687/167, 1696/191, 1699/22; WI, 259/130, 321/80, 330/22.

TABLE I
Distribution of Occupational Categories among Settlements of Varying Sizes, 1660-1699⁶

Occupational category	Gloucester	Market towns	Villages	Total
Agriculture	7	67	407	481
Textiles	4	60	76	140
Food and drink	37	24	20	81
Clothing and footwear	16	14	20	50
Building and allied trades	7	10	25	42
Professions	16	4	18	38
Metalwork	11	6	13	30
Distribution	14	9	2	25
Transport	2	1	16	19
Leatherwork	5	4	6	15
Miscellaneous	1	1	2	4
	120	200	605	925

tories for only two distributors, a Birdlip mercer and a petty chapman of Rodborough, suggests that for all but the most basic goods the countryman was dependent upon a visit to his nearest market town.⁷

Since a great proportion of land was under grass and since there was a restricted number of trades and crafts in the villages, many countrymen were forced to search for alternative sources of employment. Fourteen men living in the riverside villages were mariners, and eight were the outright owners or had shares in vessels which plied between the Severn towns and Bristol. However, textiles absorbed a larger number of countrymen, and inhabitants of the Cotswolds and to a lesser extent of villages in the Vale such as Arlingham and Moreton Valence were engaged in the production of woollen cloth. Apart from the staple broadcloth, fabric was made by narrow-weavers at Cowley and Shurdington, and rugs by workers based at Woodchester. Although thirty-one of the thirty-nine weavers were independent enough of the clothiers to own their own looms, there was a contrast

between the small farmer-weavers and those who relied completely on industrial work, with the men in the first category leaving almost without exception greater personal wealth than the latter.⁸

The market towns possessed a greater number of specialist processors than the villages. While no inventories for village dyers survive, Stroud, Bisley, Painswick and Newent each contained a single member of the trade, and there were besides two clothiers at Bisley, two at Painswick and one at Stroud who owned vats and colours. Three maltsters at Cheltenham, two at Newent and one at Tewkesbury tapped neighbouring villages for supplies of barley, and the presence of two tanners in Newent reflects the pastoral nature of much of the farming in that town's vicinity. Mercers' and chandlers' shops were general stores from which might be purchased woollen cloth or lighter fabrics, groceries, candles, wines and spirits, tobacco, and hardware. Both the town resident and the country visitor could avail themselves of the services of barber-surgeons or sample the fare provided at coaching inns. The existence of inventories for a bodicemaker, a joiner, a

⁶Occupational categories are based on L Clarkson, *The Pre-Industrial Economy in England, 1500-1700*, 1971, pp 88-92.

⁷Gl, 1684/231, 1688/13, 1689/11, 1690/202, 1692/105, 1694/243, 1695/29, 1697/49, 147; Wl, 310/268.

⁸Gl, 1663/86, 1670/22, 1675/35, 1682/90, 1683/32, 1684/99, 119, 438, 1685/148, 203, 1686/176, 1687/184, 1690/62, 210, 242, 1692/33, 1695/32, 1697/78, 1698/25, 1699/28.

brazier, a pewterer, a saddler, and a collar-maker — occupations not found among the village documents — are eloquent testimony to the greater complexity of the economic structure of the small towns.⁹

Following the movement of clothiers from Gloucester to the Cotswolds during the sixteenth century the county town had ceased to be a centre for textile manufacture, but the existence of inventories for a combmaker and a feltmaker show that individuals might profit from supplying the craftsmen of the hinterland or from making raw material for hatters. Metal-working had supplanted cloth as the main industry, as is witnessed by documents for four pinmakers, two wiredrawers, two cutlers, and a gunsmith. Like the smaller towns Gloucester had a role as a processor of agricultural produce, and maltsters, curriers and tanners were working within its boundaries. But the city outclassed its urban neighbours chiefly because of its strength as a centre for distribution, shopping, and services. Mercers, haberdashers, vintners and booksellers assembled stock from Europe and North America to perform a dual role, as wholesale suppliers of small businessmen, and as retailers serving Gloucester's residents and visitors. The stock of these men was larger and more specialized than that of distributors in the market towns. The city's professional men, lawyers, scriveners, doctors, barber-surgeons and schoolmasters, provided services for the cross-section of country society attending the assizes, prosecuting litigation, attending to the needs of their families, or merely seeking diversion from the routine of rural life during autumn and winter.¹⁰

IV

The occupations of the wealthiest men illustrate the nature of the economy in the various settlements of the hinterland. The ten most prosperous men in the city of Gloucester were two mercers, a haberdasher, a woollen-draper, a grocer, a chandler, a baker, a maltster, a tanner, and a prebendary. William Niccolls, a tanner, had the largest personal wealth, £2522, but six men were members of the distributive trades which gave Gloucester economic leverage over the market towns. Textiles provided most opportunities for creating wealth in the small towns, where three clothiers were among the ten wealthiest men and in Painswick the clothier William Small with an inventory of £2331 was the richest man. A yeoman, a mercer, a haberdasher, an innholder, a maltster, a tanner, and a minister were among the ten wealthiest people. Agriculture and textiles provided residents of the village with a twofold opportunity of making a fortune, and the two men with the greatest personal wealth belonged to these occupational categories. Jeremiah Norris, clothier, left £5250 when he died in Rodborough in 1683 and Rees Heald, yeoman of Churchdown and occupant of Elmbridge Court, left £1445 in 1699. Five of the remaining most wealthy men were yeomen and three clothiers.¹¹

A more detailed picture of fortunes can be obtained through scrutiny of the inventories according to the occupations of the deceased. In Gloucester a market gardener and a yeoman left over £100, but the five other agriculturalists had personal wealth under that figure. Transport and textiles provided so few men for whom there are inventories that comment is not feasible. In building and allied trades only one cooper and one joiner left wealth over £100, and

⁹GI, 1666/8, 1670/100, 1671/16, 1677/12, 1678/28, 86, 1682/14, 47, 48, 119, 1684/14, 228, 1685/251, 1686/236, 239, 1687/47, 91, 1689/34, 114, 170, 1690/93, 1692/31, 1693/205, 1696/85, 115, 185, 1697/149, 1698/143, 1699/16; PRO, PROB 4/1955, PROB 5/378.

¹⁰GI, 1662/12, 1668/21, 1678/21, 1679/15, 1682/7, 92, 1683/35, 1684/3, 56, 193, 207, 1685/204, 309, 1686/129, 132, 1687/249, 1690/193, 1691/205, 223, 1692/118, 1694/79, 1695/139.

¹¹GI, 1677/12, 48, 65, 1682/73, 1684/148, 229, 246, 1685/204, 269, 289, 1686/161, 295, 1691/153, 1693/170, 224, 1695/196, 1696/176, 198, 1698/36, 143, 1699/3, 11, 16; PRO, PROB 4/361, 1179, 2986, 3422, 3892, 3895, 5629.

TABLE 2
Median Personal Wealth in Settlements of
Varying Sizes, 1660-99 (£)

Occupational category	Gloucester	Market towns	Villages
Agriculture	38	61	101
Distribution	684	270	—
Leatherwork	148	169	193
Food and drink	200	64	118
Professions	112	23	152
Clothing and footwear	118	36	28
Metalwork	39	123	27
Textiles	65	47	38
Building	44	33	44
Transport	—	—	39
All non-agricultural categories	131	58	46

among the metalworkers the reward for skill is reflected in £196 left by William Collier, gunsmith, and £113 by Thomas Farley, cutler, but by contrast three out of four pinner, the backbone of the city's metal trades, left sums under £100. Although the making of articles of dress and footwear was a vital part of the city economy, material rewards were slender, for the personal wealth of the tailors ranged from £3 to £369 with four out of seven men leaving less than £100. Nine documents for bakers show values from £19 to £747 and include four totals over £250; the butchers' inventories comprise two under £100, three between £100 and £250, and one of £536. The occupation of innholder included both the manager of a large coaching inn and the owner of a small alehouse; one man left £529, three between £250 and £500, four between £100 and £250, and three less than £100. The sum of over £2000 left by William Niccolls, tanner, has already been noticed, but the wealth of the one other tradesman was valued at £148. The wholesaling activities of the distributors allowed the accumulation of the largest sums: the value of the mercers' inventories began at £193 and rose

to £1128, with three of the five tradesmen represented leaving over £500; a grocer and a chandler each possessed wealth exceeding £1000. Caution must be employed when commenting on the wealth of the professional men, for few inventories are available. Two lawyers who practised in the consistory court left £231 and £114, a doctor £31, a schoolmaster £178 — all relatively small sums. The prebendary Abraham Gregory's inventory totalled £1729, that of John Middleton, archdeacon, £112, and those of three minor churchmen £354, £35 and £10. Altogether this élite appears to have had little business acumen, unless their assets were concealed in real property, and their wealth was on a par with that of the barber-surgeons, men of more humble status, who left £351, £172, £73 and £41.¹²

In the market towns three clothiers left over £1000, four between £500 and £1000, six between £100 and £500, and seven under £100. But no other men could rival these *entrepreneurs*, for although dyers' wealth ranged from £17 to £380 three men left less than £100, and of the nineteen broadweavers all but one had estates under £100 in value. Three of the mercers left sums between £500 and £750, but no distributor in the market towns left over £1000. Although two out of five maltsters had estates between £500 and £750, the food and drink trades appear to have suffered from the lack of custom such as was available in the county town, for five out of six bakers, both butchers and five out of seven innholders died worth less than £100. Likewise all six cordwainers had inventories under the same figure, and two out of the three tailors. As in Gloucester, high expertise brought rewards to the

¹²GI, 1663/78, 113, 220, 1664/15, 27, 1665/56, 1668/21, 1669/12, 1677/29, 107, 140, 1678/17, 20-1, 1682/7, 71, 1683/4, 1684/3, 56, 328, 399, 406, 442, 1685/20, 83, 204, 260, 309, 1686/132, 157, 1687/97, 102, 166, 171, 214, 1688/75, 1689/73, 119, 183, 1690/63, 86, 165, 193, 1691/87, 153, 223, 1692/196, 205, 1693/89, 101, 104, 170, 210, 224, 1694/79, 121, 242, 1695/139, 226, 241, 1696/176, 1697/180, 213, 221, 1698/86, 163, 170; PRO, PROB 4/446, 1179, 1951.

metalworkers, for a watchmaker who left £311 was the only man in this category to top £100, but unlike his counterpart in the county town the carpenter could leave over £100, and two out of three men had wealth exceeding that figure. Unfortunately there is very little evidence for the professional men, and lawyers, doctors and schoolmasters are unrepresented. Robert Pleydell, minister, had wealth of £811, but all three of the barber-surgeons' inventories totalled less than £100. Farming on the fringes of the market towns gave prosperity to a few but was probably only marginally profitable to half the men for whom documents survive. Three yeomen left between £500 and £1000, five between £250 and £500, sixteen between £100 and £250, and twenty-nine less than £100. All but one of the husbandmen had personal wealth under £100.¹³

Solid but unremarkable assets characterize the inventories of the village farmers. One left wealth over £1000, eleven men wealth in the range £500-£1000, fifty-five between £250 and £500, but the majority of the yeomen left smaller sums — 138 wealth between £100 and £250, and 157 less than £100. Probably the south-western quadrant produced the greatest prosperity within the hinterland. If one restricts analysis of inventory wealth to fortunes of £250 and over, twenty-seven men were residents of villages to the south-west of the city as against twelve to the north-west, fifteen to the north-east and eleven to the south-east. The village clothiers numbered eleven men leaving over £250, six between £100 and £250, and eleven under £100, but with the exception of two broadweavers and one clothworker all other members of the textile industry left less than £100. This

distribution of wealth — a few relatively affluent men outnumbered by a poorer majority — was common to all occupational categories within local rural society. In the food trades one butcher left £528, two men between £100 and £250, and three less than £100; although two cordwainers left over £250 and one between £100 and £250 all six other members of the craft left less than £100, as did all eleven tailors; one mariner's inventory was valued at between £250 and £500, two men's between £100 and £250, and the estates of ten men at less than £100. Much the same pattern is revealed by the inventories of the village parsons, the only professional men, for the personal estates of four were in the range £250-£500, six left between £100 and £250, and eight less than £100.¹⁴

V

It has already been seen that the nature of occupations and material assets divided countryman and townsman, and it is now appropriate to turn to the structure of individual wealth for which probate inventories are a rich and relatively untapped source. The Prerogative Court of Canterbury documents were more carefully prepared and detailed than those for the diocesan courts, but all enable the student to ascertain the distribution of personal wealth under the headings shown in Table 3. Only one difficulty was encountered in making the analysis, and this arose from the custom of the appraisers for men whose estates were administered by the consistory court of Gloucester grouping 'money in purse' together with clothing. From a study of the inventories where clothing and the cash left on an individual's person were shown separately it appears that £3 was the average value of the

¹³ GI, 1663/267, 1670/29, 100, 1675/27, 41, 1677/12, 63, 68, 108, 133, 1678/38, 113, 1681/172, 1682/48, 63, 1683/30, 1684/14, 121, 437, 1685/40, 46, 95, 161, 173, 251, 311, 1686/119, 126, 1687/91, 247, 1689/34, 170, 1690/93, 1692/31, 137, 184, 227, 1693/7, 20, 1694/25, 113, 1695/24, 145, 190, 238, 1696/85, 168, 203, 211, 1697/149, 1699/3, 16, 204; PRO, PROB 4/361, 1955, 2441, 2986, PROB 5/378.

¹⁴ See for example GI, 1663/263, 1664/93, 1675/35, 66, 1678/11, 1682/125, 1684/119, 220, 1685/67, 378, 1687/168, 1689/83, 1691/131, 1692/60, 82, 1694/230, 1695/177, 196, 1696/105, 212, 1697/118, 1698/87, 123, 1699/53; WI, 336/65.

TABLE 3
The Structure of Personal Wealth, 1660-99

	£			Per cent		
	Villages	Market towns	Gloucester	Villages	Market towns	Gloucester
Farm stock	32,872	4,664	792	39.6	15.0	2.7
Stock-in-trade	5,191	6,919	7,047	6.2	22.4	24.0
Money and plate	4,766	2,318	2,505	5.7	7.5	8.5
Credits	15,667	9,957	9,244	18.9	32.2	31.5
Leases	10,722	1,790	3,514	12.9	5.8	12.0
Household goods	13,892	5,288	6,273	16.7	17.1	21.3
Total	83,110	30,936	29,375	57.9	21.6	20.5

garments, and this allowance has been made when working out the calculations needed.

The figures for farm stock confirm that agriculture was the basis of the village economy, and that it shrank from marginal to minimal significance in the market towns and Gloucester. By contrast, stock-in-trade amounted to a small proportion of village wealth, but bulked larger in both the market towns and Gloucester. In the city the distributors, food and drink tradesmen, and leatherworkers held a variety of stock, but members of other occupations possessed exiguous quantities of materials and a few implements. Tailors and cordwainers tended to make suits and shoes for individual customers on request rather than keep articles on display, builders had little other than their tools, and pinmakers located in small workshops needed chiefly coils of copper wire in addition to the mills required by the manufacturing process. Finished cloths in Stroud and Painswick constituted £3209 of the stock of the market town testators, but for other occupational groups the pattern was much the same as in Gloucester. In the villages the yarn, cloth and implements of the clothiers and dyers were valued at £3349, much the highest proportion of stock. As in the towns builders, makers of clothing and footwear, blacksmiths and other metalworkers left less in this respect than

members of the food and drink trades, and leatherworkers. The vessels of the mariners were valued at £418.

The credits left by the deceased throw light on commercial and financial practice in the hinterland. From the city inventories which allow analysis £2660 had been placed in bills, bonds and other specialties, and a further £259 in rents and tithes, but £2167 appear in the documents as 'book' debts — the sums recorded in ledgers by tradesmen allowing their customers the privilege of delaying payment for purchases. Twenty-five tradesmen left credits worth £100 and over as assets, and twenty-nine less than that sum; five professional men had over the figure of £100, and the same number smaller amounts. In spite of the vagaries of business transactions the city residents seem to have been reasonably successful in making their creditors meet their obligations, for the documents describe £871 of debts as 'good', and only £422 as 'bad' or 'desperate'. The composition of credits in the market towns suggests a less adventurous attitude than in the city, for £2363 were in specialties, £171 in rents, and a mere £606 in book debts. However, testators appear to have been as skilful as Gloucester tradesmen in recovering debts, with £1107 categorized as good and £493 as bad. The mechanism of credit made less impact on village society, and the small creditor, almost invariably a farmer, was

typical. Ninety-five men's inventories contained credits less than £50, fifty-three men's sums between £50 and £100, and twenty-seven sums over £100. As compared with the deceased in both the city and the market towns, villagers were less adroit in recovering money and more inclined to resort to the safe device of the specialty. Of the debts which can be analysed a mere £315 were good and £519 bad. A total of £6800 had been placed in specialties, £319 in rents and the sale of produce, and £288 were book debts.¹⁵

The type of property leased reveals the divergent aspirations of the townsman and countryman. For the city tradesman the houses and tenements owned by the Corporation and the Dean and Chapter offered first a site for shop and workshop and later a means of increasing capital by subletting. A prosperous minority of those who held leases, eight out of a total of thirty-three, left £2284 out of the £3514 shown under Table 3 in this form of personal wealth. In the market towns urban housing formed the most popular attraction for the thirty-four tradesmen concerned, and only a few men invested in country property. The inventories reveal nothing about the leases held by the farmers who lived on the fringes of the small towns. By contrast, a clear picture of the villagers' holdings emerges. Altogether 188 men held leases of whom 134 were farmers, fifty-three craftsmen, and one a professional man. Many yeomen of modest means held a single farm by leasehold. For the more successful man investment in leasehold was often a device to secure a greater acreage in the village where the home farm was located. Alternatively the prosperous yeoman took leases in his own and a neighbouring village, and was thus able to provide more grazing for

himself or a sub-tenant. Most of the craftsmen held small amounts of arable, and typical of these men were the weavers and blacksmiths growing food in plots adjoining their cottages.

As regards household goods, residents of the city enjoyed marginally higher living standards than testators of the market towns and villages. Leather chairs and feather mattresses gave the tradesmen of Gloucester comfort, and prints and pieces of porcelain decorated their mantelpieces. Farmhouses of the hinterland contained sturdy and serviceable furniture, but there were few instances of the apeing of fashion. However, half the yeomen possessed parlours and were able to enjoy a degree of ease. In general the townsmen secured more spacious domestic surroundings than countrymen through owning or leasing larger houses; six men out of ten in the city and market towns lived in dwellings with six rooms or more as against four men out of ten in the villages.

VI

Finally, does a picture of contrasting town and village communities emerge from our study of the hinterland of Gloucester? In terms of occupations and leases there was polarization. Agriculture enjoyed primacy in the villages, and when it was practised by the residents of the market towns tended to be located in hamlet satellites, while in Gloucester the main emphasis was on market gardening to support the city population. Although both villages and towns participated in cloth production, weaving was predominantly a village occupation while town dyers and other specialists profited from central locations to finish the process. In both the city and the small towns distribution was a key function, with the shops of mercers and chandlers supplementing the weekly markets. There was both an urban and rural pattern in the acquisition of leases. Most of the tradesmen of Gloucester and the market towns

¹⁵ For comparison with another area, see B A Holderness, 'Credit in English Rural Society before the Nineteenth Century, with Special Reference to the Period 1650-1720', *Ag Hist Rev*, Vol XXIV, 1976.

turned their backs on the opportunity of obtaining country estates and farms, and invested in town houses. For townsmen, trade successfully prosecuted might lead to a *rentier* life and *bourgeois* comforts; for countrymen, agricultural profits allowed the accumulation of yet more property to be farmed or sublet. However, too simplistic a contrast between townsmen and countrymen must be resisted. Materially life in the city had more to offer than life in the smaller towns and the villages, for

whereas mean personal wealth in Gloucester was £244, it was £154 in the other towns and £137 in the countryside. Again in the more sophisticated use of credit the tradesmen of Gloucester showed a more modern outlook than the inhabitants of the market towns and villages. The county town presented the main channel of advance to the businessman, and because of the importance and diversity of its functions it was the hub of the hinterland.

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