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### *Social Mobility and the Worsted Weavers of Norwich, c.1450-1530*

DANA ANN DURKEE

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# Social Mobility and the Worsteds Weavers of Norwich, c.1450-1530

*A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements  
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy by*

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January 2017

# Abstract

Dana Durkee, 'Social Mobility and the Worsted Weavers of Norwich, c.1450–1530'

This thesis explores the question of occupational social mobility in late medieval English towns, using the worsted weavers of Norwich as a case study. Social stratification is a key topic in medieval urban history, and the question of rising oligarchy and class conflict have influenced the way historians understand the institutional and constitutional development of late medieval English towns.

This study employs a dual approach to the question of whether commercial success created an urban environment conducive to social and occupational mobility for craftsmen. It first considers the development of Norfolk's native worsted cloth industry in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. It then uses a prosopographical analysis of the worsted weavers to consider whether the commercial success of worsted cloth was creating the opportunity for social mobility among urban artisans. This study finds that opportunities for social mobility were indeed increasing in the late fifteenth century.

The thesis has been divided into two parts. The first part examines the economic and institutional context for the fifteenth-century commercial revival of worsted cloths in overseas trade. It also considers the way that the regional production of worsteds became regulated by the guild of worsted weavers in Norwich. It then considers the constitutional development of craft guilds in Norwich in the fifteenth century, and their integration as public institutions. The second part of the thesis examines the lives of Norwich's worsted weavers between c.1450 and 1530. It uses the framework of an artisanal *cursus honorum* to consider the various ways in which the worsted weavers, both as individuals and as a group, advanced professionally, socially, and economically.

# Table of Contents

|                                                                   |     |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| Abstract.....                                                     | 1   |
| List of Tables .....                                              | 4   |
| List of Illustrations .....                                       | 6   |
| List of Maps.....                                                 | 8   |
| Abbreviations.....                                                | 9   |
| Statement of Copyright .....                                      | 10  |
| Acknowledgements .....                                            | 11  |
| Part I: Medieval Worsteds                                         |     |
| 1 Introduction .....                                              | 14  |
| 1.1 <i>Historiographical context</i> .....                        | 16  |
| 1.2 <i>Problematising late medieval social mobility</i> .....     | 32  |
| 1.3 <i>Methodology and sources</i> .....                          | 38  |
| 1.4 <i>Outline of the thesis</i> .....                            | 43  |
| 1.5 <i>A note on Norwich geography</i> .....                      | 45  |
| 2 Worsteds .....                                                  | 48  |
| 2.1 <i>Cloth production: woollen or worsted?</i> .....            | 50  |
| 2.2 <i>Worsteds and the cloth trade</i> .....                     | 66  |
| 2.3 <i>Factors for change</i> .....                               | 89  |
| 3 Norfolk and Norwich .....                                       | 115 |
| 3.1 <i>The importance of place</i> .....                          | 116 |
| 3.2 <i>The geographical context of worsted production</i> .....   | 124 |
| 3.3 <i>The long struggle over standards</i> .....                 | 139 |
| 3.4 <i>Legislating a hinterland</i> .....                         | 148 |
| 4 The crafts in Norwich .....                                     | 168 |
| 4.1 <i>Norwich's reputation as a 'disorderly' city</i> .....      | 170 |
| 4.2 <i>The genesis of the crafts as public institutions</i> ..... | 176 |
| 4.3 <i>The integration of the crafts after 1450</i> .....         | 181 |
| Part II: The Worsted Weavers of Norwich                           |     |
| 5 Craftsmen and the <i>cursus honorum</i> .....                   | 202 |
| 6 The profession of worsted weaving .....                         | 209 |
| 6.1 <i>Apprenticeship and training</i> .....                      | 210 |



|     |                                                                     |     |
|-----|---------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| 6.2 | <i>Journeyman</i>                                                   | 222 |
| 6.3 | <i>Independent masters</i>                                          | 225 |
| 7   | The Guild of Worsted Weavers                                        | 237 |
| 7.1 | <i>Joining the freedom</i>                                          | 238 |
| 7.2 | <i>Guild masters</i>                                                | 247 |
| 7.3 | <i>The search juries</i>                                            | 250 |
| 8   | Civic office-holding                                                | 261 |
| 8.1 | <i>Craftsmen and civic office</i>                                   | 262 |
| 8.2 | <i>The constabulary and the common council</i>                      | 265 |
| 8.3 | <i>The co-opted financial offices</i>                               | 280 |
| 8.4 | <i>Higher office</i>                                                | 286 |
| 9   | End of life                                                         | 296 |
| 9.1 | <i>Wills and probate</i>                                            | 296 |
| 9.2 | <i>Using wills to estimate affluence</i>                            | 304 |
| 9.3 | <i>Intergenerational mobility</i>                                   | 319 |
| 9.4 | <i>Alms</i>                                                         | 327 |
| 10  | Conclusion                                                          | 333 |
|     | Appendix A: Wills referenced                                        | 338 |
|     | Appendix B: Common council seats by craft affiliation and by decade | 342 |
|     | Bibliography                                                        | 345 |

# List of Tables

|                                                                                                                                                                      |     |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| Table 1.1 – Types of Assets, Resources, and Valued Goods Underlying Stratification Systems.....                                                                      | 35  |
| Table 2.1 – Physical characteristics of some modern wool breeds.....                                                                                                 | 56  |
| Table 2.2 – The Petty Customs on cloth after 1347 .....                                                                                                              | 69  |
| Table 2.3 – Higher rates were charged on double worsteds shipped from Yarmouth, 1509-1514.....                                                                       | 89  |
| Table 3.1 – Worsted Assizes.....                                                                                                                                     | 163 |
| Table 4.1 – Norwich freedoms without occupational attributions, 1317-1524 ...                                                                                        | 184 |
| Table 4.2 – Frequency of shared surnames among the Norwich aldermen, 1450-1530.....                                                                                  | 186 |
| Table 5.1 – Phythian-Adams's conceptualisation of Coventry's early sixteenth-century <i>cursus honorum</i> .....                                                     | 206 |
| Table 5.2 – Andrew King's conceptualisation of Norwich's fifteenth-century <i>cursus honorum</i> .....                                                               | 207 |
| Table 5.3 – Suggested model for a late fifteenth-century artisanal <i>cursus honorum</i> , based on a prosopographical analysis of the Norwich worsted weavers ..... | 208 |
| Table 6.1 – Norwich apprentice origins, 1504-1530.....                                                                                                               | 214 |
| Table 6.2 – Length of Norwich apprentice indentures, 1504-1530 .....                                                                                                 | 220 |
| Table 6.3 – A comparison of worsted weavers and merchants who apprenticed 1450-1520, then took the freedom .....                                                     | 221 |
| Table 6.4 – Payments by worsted weavers towards the anticipation of subsidy in 1523.....                                                                             | 231 |
| Table 7.1 – Length of time between an apprenticeship and taking the freedom.....                                                                                     | 242 |
| Table 7.2 – Length of tenure for the Worsted Weavers' guild masters .....                                                                                            | 248 |
| Table 7.3 – Worsted Weaver guild masters, correlated by civic office holding .....                                                                                   | 249 |

|                                                                                                       |     |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| Table 7.4 – Correspondence of search jury participation and apprenticeship enrolments, 1492-1530..... | 257 |
| Table 7.5 – Comparison of search jury participation with levels of political office-holding .....     | 259 |
| Table 8.1 – Top ten guilds on the common council, ranked by seats held, 1453-1530.....                | 272 |
| Table 8.2 – Common council seats held by textile guilds.....                                          | 273 |
| Table 8.3 – Common council seats held by worsted weavers, by decade.....                              | 274 |
| Table 8.4 – The number of worsted weavers and mercers who joined the common council, by decade.....   | 274 |
| Table 8.5 – The financial offices, by craft enrolment.....                                            | 285 |
| Table 8.6 – Sheriffs from mercantile guilds .....                                                     | 290 |
| Table 8.7 – Sheriffs from textile guilds.....                                                         | 290 |
| Table 8.8 – Aldermen's seats held by mercantile guilds.....                                           | 291 |
| Table 8.9 – Aldermen's seats held by textile guilds.....                                              | 291 |
| Table 8.10 – Sheriffs enrolled as worsted weavers .....                                               | 292 |
| Table 8.11 – The chances for a sheriff to become alderman .....                                       | 293 |
| Table 9.1 – Wills written by worsted weavers, by decade .....                                         | 297 |
| Table 9.2 – Charitable bequests correlated by civic office-holding.....                               | 316 |

## List of Illustrations

|                                                                                                                                     |     |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| Figure 2.1 – Woollen fibres matted by fulling as viewed under a scanning electron microscope.....                                   | 58  |
| Figure 2.2 – Hand or drop spindle with distaff .....                                                                                | 61  |
| Figure 2.3 – The Great Wheel .....                                                                                                  | 61  |
| Figure 2.4 – Woollen yarn structure (A) and worsted yarn structure (B).....                                                         | 64  |
| Figure 2.5 – Exports of ‘cloths of assize’ by year, 1347–1530 .....                                                                 | 76  |
| Figure 2.6 – Coleman and Carus-Wilson’s estimate of the value of worsted exports expressed as a percentage of woollen exports ..... | 77  |
| Figure 2.7 – A reconstruction of Coleman and Carus-Wilson’s calculation of yearly worsted exports .....                             | 78  |
| Figure 2.8 – Double worsted exports, from Yarmouth, by year .....                                                                   | 79  |
| Figure 2.9 – Combined worsted exports, all ports, 1509-1547 (1-38 Henry VIII). ..                                                   | 80  |
| Figure 2.10 – Thomas More.....                                                                                                      | 94  |
| Figure 2.11 – Portrait of Thomas Cromwell .....                                                                                     | 95  |
| Figure 2.12 – Detail of printed worsted .....                                                                                       | 95  |
| Figure 2.13 – Cloth seals from Norwich.....                                                                                         | 96  |
| Figure 2.14 – Schematic of long-term climate change.....                                                                            | 106 |
| Figure 2.15 – Updated graph of long-term climate change.....                                                                        | 108 |
| Figure 2.16 – Lamb’s reconstruction of historical climate patterns in central England .....                                         | 110 |
| Figure 3.1 – The density of taxpayers in 1524/5.....                                                                                | 126 |
| Figure 3.2 – The distribution of lay wealth in the subsidies of 1334 and 1515... ..                                                 | 128 |
| Figure 3.3 – Weavers’ marks from the books of the Worsted Weavers .....                                                             | 157 |
| Figure 7.1 – Entries to the freedom of the city, all weaving professions, by decade, 1317-1530 .....                                | 240 |

|                                                                                                                                                                |     |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| Figure 7.2 – A comparison of woollen and worsted weaver entries to the freedom in Norwich, by decade, 1317–1530 .....                                          | 241 |
| Figure 7.3 – Number of known apprentices per weaver, 1450-1530.....                                                                                            | 246 |
| Figure 7.4 – Years between a weaver’s freedom and their first jury appearance ....                                                                             | 252 |
| Figure 7.5 – Frequency of search jury appearances.....                                                                                                         | 254 |
| Figure 8.1 – The civic <i>cursus honorum</i> in fifteenth-century Norwich.....                                                                                 | 267 |
| Figure 8.2 – Length of service in the Norwich constabulary, 1450–1530 .....                                                                                    | 269 |
| Figure 8.3 – Length of service on the Norwich common council, 1453–1530.....                                                                                   | 269 |
| Figure 8.4 – The turnover of seats on the common council, 1453-1530 .....                                                                                      | 276 |
| Figure 8.5 – First-time office holders, all civic offices, 1453-1530.....                                                                                      | 277 |
| Figure 8.6 – Worsteds weavers elected to the Norwich common council from the Northern ward .....                                                               | 278 |
| Figure 8.7 – Schematic illustrating the number of officers chosen each year to the offices of chamberlain, chamberlains’ council, auditor, clavor, and coroner | 281 |
| Figure 9.1 – Wills made by Norwich residents, by decade, 1371-1500.....                                                                                        | 299 |
| Figure 9.2 – The values of the worsteds weavers’ charitable bequests .....                                                                                     | 311 |
| Figure 9.3 – The distribution of testators’ bequests, ranked by total value .....                                                                              | 313 |
| Figure 9.4 – The average value of charitable bequests, in pence.....                                                                                           | 315 |
| Figure 9.5 – Phelps Brown and Hopkins Price Index 1451 to 1550.....                                                                                            | 329 |

## List of Maps

|                                                                                             |     |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| Map 1.1 – Map of the major and minor wards of late fifteenth-century Norwich..<br>47        |     |
| Map 3.1 – The Norfolk river catchment areas.....                                            | 130 |
| Map 3.2 – Norwich apprenticeship indentures, 1512-1530 .....                                | 133 |
| Map 3.3 – Debts owed to Robert Toppes, c. 1467 .....                                        | 134 |
| Map 3.4 – Norfolk towns mentioned in the royal petitions .....                              | 143 |
| Map 6.1 – Place of origin of enrolled Norwich worsted weaver apprentices,<br>1504-1530..... | 215 |
| Map 9.1 – Worsted weavers' wills, by parish, 1463-1540 .....                                | 303 |

# Abbreviations

|         |                                                                      |
|---------|----------------------------------------------------------------------|
| ANF     | Archdeaconry Court of Norfolk                                        |
| ANW     | Archdeaconry Court of Norwich                                        |
| BL      | British Library                                                      |
| CCR     | <i>Calendar of Close Rolls</i>                                       |
| CChR    | <i>Calendar of Charter Rolls</i>                                     |
| CFR     | <i>Calendar of Fine Rolls</i>                                        |
| CIM     | <i>Calendar of Inquisitions Miscellaneous</i>                        |
| CPR     | <i>Calendar of Patent Rolls</i>                                      |
| ECHR    | <i>Economic History Review</i>                                       |
| EHR     | <i>English Historical Review</i>                                     |
| IPCC    | Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change                            |
| LMA     | London Metropolitan Archives                                         |
| NCC     | Norwich Consistory Court                                             |
| NRO     | Norfolk Record Office                                                |
| NCR     | Norwich City Records                                                 |
| P&P     | <i>Past &amp; Present</i>                                            |
| Records | <i>The records of the city of Norwich</i> , eds. Hudson and Tingey   |
| RP      | <i>Parliament Rolls of Medieval England</i> , British History Online |
| SR      | <i>Statutes of the Realm</i>                                         |
| TNA     | The National Archives (UK)                                           |
| VCH     | <i>Victoria History of the Counties of England</i>                   |

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## **Part I**

### **Medieval Worsteds**

# 1 | Introduction

*AN HABERDASSHERE and a CARPENTER,  
A WEBBE, a DYERE, and a TAPYCER --  
And they were clothed alle in o lyveree  
Of a solempne and a greet fraternitee.  
Ful fressh and newe hir geere apiked was;  
Hir knyves were chaped noght with bras  
But al with silver, wroght ful clene and weel,  
Hire girdles and hir pouches everydeel.  
Wel semed ech of hem a fair burgeys  
To sitten in a yeldehalle on a deys.  
Everich, for the wisdom that he kan,  
Was shaply for to been an alderman.<sup>1</sup>*

There is perhaps no institution more quintessentially medieval than that of the guild. Chaucer's party of five guildsmen – a haberdasher, a carpenter, a weaver, a dyer, and a tapiter – needed no extensive introduction.<sup>2</sup> The universality of the guild experience would have been instantly recognisable to any medieval reader. More specifically, though, Chaucer was speaking to an urban audience through the archetype of the independent craft master. Chaucer's audience would have needed no prompting to realise that though this group wore the shared livery of a religious fraternity, individually each man also represented a different kind of guild.

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<sup>1</sup> Chaucer, G., *Canterbury Tales*, General Prologue, lines 361-372.

<sup>2</sup> 'A HABERDASHER and a CARPENTER, A WEAVER, a DYER, and a TAPESTRY-MAKER - / And they were all clothed in one livery / Of a solemn and a great parish guild. / Their equipment was adorned all freshly and new; / Their knives were not mounted with brass / But entirely with silver, wrought very neatly and well, / Their belts and their purses every bit. / Each of them well seemed a solid citizen / To sit on a dais in a city hall. / Every one of them, for the wisdom that he knows, / Was suitable to be an alderman'. Note that a tapiter could also be a carpet weaver. 'Interlinear Translation of the Canterbury Tales: The General Prologue', ed. by L. D. Benson, <<http://sites.fas.harvard.edu/~chaucer/teachslf/gp-par.htm>>, (accessed 15 May 2015).

Chaucer's witty portrait in miniature caricatures the ambivalent social position of the upwardly mobile artisan in late medieval England. Outwardly, the group conveys confidence, yet the subtext hints at an equivocal, if enduring, impediment to social mobility. Chaucer's craftsmen could buy the exterior symbols of urban status — fine garments, silver adornments, a livery, and urban citizenship — but was this sufficient to render them 'shaply for to been an alderman'? A jaundiced reading implies that money was not enough; an artisanal background tethered these men to a social identity constrained by vocational labels.

This thesis will use the experience of one particular craft guild in late medieval England to consider the question of social mobility and its potential impact on the urban social structure. Though seldom studied for lack of sources, the provincial crafts played a key role in English towns during the long fifteenth century. England's process of commercialisation, which has been widely written about in the last few decades, did not merely affect markets, money, and trade. The growth in demand for high-quality consumer goods also had a long-term, knock-on effect on the social structure of the nation's towns. This case study uses the example of the Worsted Weavers of Norwich, a guild which, like others, was formally incorporated into the urban craft system in the fifteenth century. The Worsted Weavers serve as an ideal case study for the socially aspirant craftsmen of the late Middle Ages. Cloth was England's chief commodity, and the wealth generated by this trade was enriching many men, including many from Norwich. By taking advantage of increased demand for higher grades of cloth both at home and on the European markets, the Worsted Weavers rose rapidly in social standing. Their experience over the course of the fifteenth century illustrates how a changing economy was blurring the supposedly stark divisions between merchants and artisans.

## 1.1 Historiographical context

The evolution of social history is inextricably linked to economic history. W. J. Ashley once lamented that economic history was too often lured into abstract discussions about 'historical' economies that had little connection to their historical contexts. Teleology should be banished from the study of past economic systems, and more effort put into understanding the factors unique to historical economies. Ideally, economic history would concern itself 'not only with the production of wealth, but also with the evolution of social organisation'.<sup>3</sup> Britnell concurred, noting that 'commercialisation is an aspect of profound social change', though he admitted that connecting the two is extraordinarily difficult.<sup>4</sup> Medieval source documents leave much to be desired, and reconstructing the economic activity of broad swathes of the population is now impossible. 'However', he continued, 'a good case can be made for supposing that the social changes of this period were associated with greater dependence upon money and trade.'<sup>5</sup>

Nowhere was this truer than in England's late medieval towns, where skilled artisans clustered into guilds, and local production fed an increasingly specialised market for high-quality consumer goods. One of these towns was Norwich. Located close to the eastern coast and to the port of Yarmouth, Norwich had long had good trade connections to the Baltic and to the Low Countries, as well as to its own hinterland region of Norfolk, where a native cloth industry had developed by the thirteenth century. Norwich was little affected by the 'urban decline' that hit other cloth towns like Coventry and York.<sup>6</sup> By 1525, Norwich had outpaced every other provincial town in terms of population level and taxable income, earning for itself the privilege of being called 'the second city of the realm'.<sup>7</sup> Much of this prosperity

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<sup>3</sup> Qtd. in K. Wrightson, *Earthly Necessities: Economic Lives in Early Modern Britain* (New Haven, 2002), 14.

<sup>4</sup> R. H. Britnell, *The Commercialisation of English Society, 1000–1500* (Cambridge, 1996), xiii.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> For an overview of the debate on urban decline, see A. Dyer, *Decline and Growth in English Towns, 1400–1640* (Cambridge, 1995).

<sup>7</sup> A. Dyer, 'Appendix: Ranking Lists of English Medieval Towns', in *The Cambridge Urban*

can be attributed to the continued presence of the worsted industry within the city and a renewed demand for worsteds overseas.<sup>8</sup>

While the importance of the sixteenth and seventeenth century worsted industry is well known in the literature, thanks to the phenomenal success of the Norwich 'New Draperies', the earlier success of medieval worsteds is less well understood. Worsteds were an early speciality of East Anglia, and Norfolk in particular; it was a woollen cloth that was lighter and cheaper to produce than broadcloth, which was England's primary export.<sup>9</sup> Unlike broadcloth, which was heavily fulled and soft like felt, worsted retained its original surface texture, which made it ideal for household furnishings, wall hangings, and some types of clothing.

Though most scholars of the cloth trade believe that worsted's medieval heyday was over by the fourteenth century, few realise that the industry carried on producing worsteds for the domestic market through the end of the Middle Ages. Nor is it well known that the industry experienced a minor renaissance in the export of worsteds to the continent, beginning in the late fifteenth century. Between roughly 1470 and 1520, overseas demand spiked for a time, and buoyant exports stimulated the local economy.<sup>10</sup> Worsted production in the later fifteenth century became the primary industry of of Norwich. An unusually high percentage of the city's inhabitants were directly or indirectly involved in the making of worsteds. More than a third of the city's freemen were either enrolled in the craft of worsted weaving, or in the ancillary crafts involved in the finishing of worsted cloths.<sup>11</sup>

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*History of Britain, Vol. 1: 600–1540*, ed. by D. M. Palliser (Cambridge, 2000), 747–770.

<sup>8</sup> P. Dunn, 'Trade', in *Medieval Norwich*, ed. by C. Rawcliffe and R. G. Wilson (London, 2004), 215–7; J. Oldland, '"Fyne Worsted Whech is Almost Like Silke": Norwich's Double Worsted', *Textile History*, 42 (2011), 182–3.

<sup>9</sup> J. L. Bolton, *The Medieval English Economy, 1150–1500* (London, 1980), 291–4.

<sup>10</sup> Chapter 2 includes a full discussion of the worsted trade.

<sup>11</sup> For the period 1475 to 1499, 38% of freemen's entries were occupations associated with textile production. King, *Borough Finances*, Table 3.2. There were 134 freedom entries for the Worsted Weavers between 1501 and 1525, which was the single largest occupational group in the city. The Mercers followed, with only 70 entries. J. F. Pound, *Tudor and Stuart Norwich* (Chichester, Sussex, 1988), Appendix II, 179–83.

Cloth production was at the centre of Norwich's urban economy, and by the end of the century, the city's guild of Worsted Weavers had become one of the largest and wealthiest organised crafts in the city. Though weavers are often portrayed in the literature as a particularly low status group in many towns, the worsted weavers of Norwich appear to have experienced a rather different social trajectory. Over the course of the fifteenth century, worsted weaving steadily displaced woollen weaving in the city, so that by the start of the sixteenth century, woollen weaving had almost completely disappeared. The worsted weavers outperformed every other artisanal guild in nearly every possible quantifiable measure: they held the largest number of common council seats, made the most number of wills, and registered the highest number of apprentices. Even more surprising is that in many of these measures, they approached or even equalled the performance of the Mercers, the most prestigious of the mercantile guilds. The second half of this thesis will look at some of these aggregate indicators in greater detail.<sup>12</sup> Even more unusual for a provincial guild, the Worsted Weavers received a royal charter in 1467 that granted them an unusually wide remit for search and oversight of production in rural Norfolk, Suffolk, and Cambridgeshire.<sup>13</sup>

By the start of the sixteenth century, the Norwich worsted weavers clearly constituted the premiere craft group in the city. When taken as a whole, the rise in social status and material prosperity of the worsted weavers in Norwich is not only unusual for weavers in the late middle ages, it is also a compelling case study in of artisanal success in a medieval urban milieu.

## **Models of urban social stratification**

Historians of English medieval towns have long considered the question of social stratification to be one of the key issues in urban history. Both medievalists and early modernists alike have worked to better understand the group dynamics inherent in late medieval society. Yet, at heart, there is a fundamental disagreement over the

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<sup>12</sup> See below, Chapters 6–9.

<sup>13</sup> See below, Chapter 3.



most basic forces that shaped urban social stratification. Approaches to the topic are split into two opposing views: the first focuses primarily on urban conflict and social polarisation; the other emphasises the medieval acceptance of a hierarchical social order.

Rodney Hilton and his student Heather Swanson have been among the most vocal proponents for viewing late medieval urban society through the lens of social polarisation and class conflict.<sup>14</sup> Swanson has been especially influential for her work on late medieval York. Her seminal study of York's artisans still stands alone in a field that has produced little work on English craftsmen outside of London.<sup>15</sup> Her focus on portraying craftsmen as victims of oligarchy has been foundational in helping to shape the debate about late medieval urban society. For Swanson and others, the fifteenth-century urban milieu became increasingly prone to expressions of social closure, and increasingly inclined to emphasise a bifurcation of society along occupational lines. Many historians of late medieval towns hold that the predominant constitutional development in fifteenth-century towns was the growth of oligarchy and a decrease in accountability to citizens.<sup>16</sup>

Opposed to this view are those historians who argue against the prevailing broad-brush theory of a polarised class divide, claiming that it fails to capture the untidy reality of urban life.<sup>17</sup> Scholars like Gervase Rosser, Susan Reynolds, and Ben

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<sup>14</sup> R. H. Hilton, *English and French Towns in Feudal Society* (Cambridge, 1992); H. Swanson, 'The Illusion of Economic Structure: Craft Guilds in Late Medieval English Towns', *P&P*, 121 (1988), 29-48; H. Swanson, *Medieval Artisans: An Urban Class in Late Medieval England* (Oxford, 1989). For early work on urban oligarchies, see C. W. Colby, 'The Growth of Oligarchy in English Towns', *EHR*, 5 (1890), 633-653; A. B. Hibbert, 'The Origins of the Medieval Town Patriciate', *P&P*, 3 (1953), 15-27. The literature on the subject is vast; some of the more important recent work includes M. Kowaleski, 'The Commercial Dominance of a Medieval Provincial Oligarchy: Exeter in the Late Fourteenth Century', *Mediaeval Studies*, 46 (1984), 355-384; J. Kermode, 'Obvious Observations on the Formation of Oligarchies in Late Medieval English Towns', in *Towns and Townspeople in the Fifteenth Century*, ed. by J. A. F. Thomson (Gloucester, 1988), 87-106; S. Rigby, 'Urban 'Oligarchy' in Late Medieval England', in *Towns and Townspeople in the Fifteenth Century*, ed. by J. A. F. Thomson (Gloucester, 1988), 62-86.

<sup>15</sup> Swanson, *Medieval Artisans*.

<sup>16</sup> See, for example, Kermode, 'Obvious Observations on the Formation of Oligarchies in Late Medieval English Towns'; Hilton, *English and French Towns*; S. H. Rigby, *English Society in the Later Middle Ages: Class, Status and Gender* (Basingstoke, 1995); Swanson, 'The Illusion of Economic Structure'.

<sup>17</sup> G. Rosser, 'Crafts, Guilds and the Negotiation of Work in the Medieval Town', *P&P*, 154

McRee established the groundwork by arguing that one must first understand medieval cultural norms and mores if we are to understand the forces at work in urban society. Reynolds especially disagreed with the way that historians like Hilton and Swanson have used the term 'oligarchy' to describe urban society. She argued that the term as used by historians is hopelessly ambiguous, and that historians make anachronistic judgements about urban political representation that stem from a modern expectation of full civic rights.<sup>18</sup> Some references to oligarchy might imply the specific mechanics of government; others might use the word to indicate a diminishing electorate, or loss of citizen consultation. Other scholars use oligarchy to refer to the composition of the ruling social group as a closed elite who ostensibly monopolised political office. By conflating social composition, political structure, and electoral process, the word has become too much of a catch-all phrase, in much the same way that the definition of 'feudalism' has vexed historians of the high Middle Ages.<sup>19</sup>

Yet, despite the counter-arguments of Reynolds and others, most studies of medieval English towns have all too readily accepted the static image of a society bifurcated by occupation into two opposing camps: on the one hand, the ascendant merchant oligarchy; and on the other, the oppressed and powerless craftsmen. The frequency with which phrases like 'merchant elite' and 'mercantile oligarchy' appear in the literature betrays a nearly axiomatic belief that civic government was monopolised by a privileged class of wealthy merchants, and that all others were systematically excluded. The wealthiest and most powerful merchants in English towns are held to have monopolised civic posts, reshaped urban democracies into closed corporations, manipulated local legislation to their own gain, and established a social network at the top of the urban social strata almost exclusively limited to elite merchant families.<sup>20</sup>

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(1997), 3-31.

<sup>18</sup> S. Reynolds, 'Medieval Urban History and the History of Political Thought', *Urban History*, 9 (1982), 14-23; S. Reynolds, *An Introduction to the History of English Medieval Towns* (Oxford, 1977).

<sup>19</sup> M. Bloch, *Feudal Society* (Chicago, 1964).

<sup>20</sup> P. Clark and P. Slack, *Crisis and Order in English Towns, 1500-1700: Essays in Urban*

## Medieval history and social mobility

The formal study of social mobility grew out of work in sociology in the twentieth century, which recognised that wealth, power, and resources are rarely apportioned in equal measure across society. Social actors, whether these be individuals, families, or organisations, are constrained by the limitations of the social stratum that they inhabit. Yet the boundaries of social strata are rarely impervious to movement. The study of social mobility seeks to understand the ways in which social actors improve (or worsen) their access to resources and opportunities, usually by moving up or down the 'social ladder' into new strata. In sociology today, the fields of social stratification and social mobility are vast and constitute one of the core problems of that discipline.<sup>21</sup> In 1994, David Grusky estimated that stratification research, including work on social mobility and social inequality, constituted around twenty-five percent of the total sociological journal content published over the previous thirty-five years.<sup>22</sup> Students of modern and early modern history have also produced large bodies of work addressing the theme of social mobility.<sup>23</sup> The most common topics, unsurprisingly, are elite groups and occupational mobility.

However, the methodologies used by sociologists to study modern-day social mobility are not always applicable to historical studies of pre-modern groups. Sociologists typically employ large-scale data sets together with highly mathematical models that capture statistics across an entire population. Such data are capable of supporting extensive statistical manipulation within an increasingly precise methodological field, but this approach has limited applicability when studying

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*History* (London, 1972), 20-5; Rigby, *English Society*, 176; D. M. Palliser, *Tudor York* (Oxford, 1979), 92-110.

<sup>21</sup> H. B. G. Ganzeboom, D. J. Treiman, and W. C. Ultee, 'Comparative Intergenerational Stratification Research: Three Generations and Beyond', *Annual Review of Sociology*, 17 (1991), 278.

<sup>22</sup> 'Preface', *Social Stratification: Class, Race, and Gender in Sociological Perspective*, ed. D. B. Grusky (Oxford, 1994), xiii.

<sup>23</sup> See especially A. Everitt, 'Social Mobility in Early Modern England', *P&P*, (1966), 56-73; S. Rappaport, *Worlds Within Worlds* (Cambridge, 1989); L. Stone, 'Social Mobility in England, 1500-1700', *P&P*, 33 (1966), 16-55.

historical populations, especially those of the Middle Ages.<sup>24</sup> Historians have unsurprisingly taken a more ad-hoc approach to the study of social mobility, employing quantitative methodologies when possible, but also rounding out their work with narrative and social contextualisation.<sup>25</sup>

In spite of the broad consensus between history and sociology over the value of investigating social mobility, it remains the case that medievalists have largely ignored the field.<sup>26</sup> There are several possible reasons for this. First, our knowledge of medieval culture has, perhaps unwittingly, has made it difficult to look past the period's own idealised resistance to social change. The ideals of the time undoubtedly have reinforced our own belief that medieval culture was inflexibly stratified, and that little opportunity existed for movement between social classes or occupations. Evidence of a cultural climate hostile to social climbers is readily evidenced by sermons, advice books, and philosophical tracts; by sumptuary laws and the Statute and Ordinance of Labourers; by images of Fortune's Wheel and metaphors of the body politic; by clerical injunctions against the amassing of worldly goods and wealth; and by the popular interest in the *Imitatio Christi* as a lay lifestyle. To accept one's lot in life was praised as an acceptance of the message of Christianity. The popularisation of the ideal that grouped society into one of three feudal orders (those who work, those who fight, those who pray) has undoubtedly led generations of students to believe that a thousand years of history was inflexibly stratified into

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<sup>24</sup> S. E. Fienberg, 'Advances in Categorical Data Methods and the Study of Historical Patterns of Social Mobility', *Historical Methods: A Journal of Quantitative and Interdisciplinary History*, 31 (1998), 99-100; L. A. Goodman, 'On the Statistical Analysis of Mobility Tables', *American Journal of Sociology*, (1965), 564-585; A. C. Kerckhoff, 'The Current State of Social Mobility Research', *The Sociological Quarterly*, 25 (1984), 139-153.

<sup>25</sup> Sociologists studying modern societies might seem to be advantaged by rich data sets that offer representative population samples across all sociological strata, but as Kaelble laments, understanding the causes of social mobility at one given place and time requires social history to explicate the 'causes and conditions' of change. H. Kaelble, *Historical Research on Social Mobility: Western Europe and the USA in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (London, 1981). For a plea directed at sociologists to employ more qualitative methodologies, see *Pathways to Social Class: A Qualitative Approach to Social Mobility*, ed. D. Bertaux and P. Thompson (Oxford, 1997).

<sup>26</sup> S. Carocci, 'Social Mobility and the Middle Ages', *Continuity and Change*, 26 (2011), 367-70.

clergy, nobles and serfs.<sup>27</sup> Other reasons that have prevented medievalists from exploring social mobility include, as noted above, a general lack of source materials suitable to quantitative analysis, and thus no clear means for how we might delineate 'social strata' or map them onto medieval society; and a broader sense that social mobility is bound up in the paradigm of modernisation, making it an unsuitable topic for the Middle Ages.<sup>28</sup> This general sense that medieval society was characterised by social immobility was widely reinforced by historians in the early twentieth century who, as Thrupp lamented, were misled into mistaking ideal for fact by the many medieval writers who zealously lionised such static paradigms.<sup>29</sup>

Yet, though the medieval *mentalité* praised the inflexibility of the social hierarchy, was society truly so resistant to social climbers? Since the middle of the twentieth century, medievalists have drawn inspiration from sociology, anthropology, and literary studies, and this has expanded and shifted the way that we now conceive of social norms and social structures. We have become more open to the idea that medieval society was not nearly as inflexibly stratified as we once believed. Thrupp wrote on this topic in 1959, suggesting that there might be 'very considerable currents of social mobility' in late medieval society. She posited that an outwardly static class structure did not necessarily negate movement between class boundaries.<sup>30</sup> Du Boulay believed in the mobility of the age enough to title his book after it. He believed that 'the late fourteenth and the fifteenth centuries in England formed an age of ambition, of upward class movements.'<sup>31</sup> David Herlihy proclaimed

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<sup>27</sup> G. Duby, *The Three Orders* (Chicago, 1980).

<sup>28</sup> Carocci, 'Social Mobility', 371-2.

<sup>29</sup> S. L. Thrupp, 'Hierarchy, Illusion and Social Mobility', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 2 (1959), 126; Carocci, 'Social Mobility', 368. For early work that downplayed medieval social mobility, see for instance R. H. Tawney, *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism: A Historical Study* (London, 1926). See also D. Herlihy, 'Three Patterns of Social Mobility in Medieval History', *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 3 (1973), 624.

<sup>30</sup> Thrupp, 'Hierarchy, Illusion and Social Mobility', 126-7.

<sup>31</sup> F. R. H. Du Boulay, *An Age of Ambition: English Society in the Late Middle Ages* (London, 1970), 66.

outright that 'The reality and importance of social mobility in the Middle Ages are today unquestioned'.<sup>32</sup>

In spite of the shift away from the belief that society was too rigidly stratified to accommodate social mobility, medievalists have rarely engaged directly with the topic, and to date, no large-scale study exists that deals with social mobility in medieval English towns.<sup>33</sup> Even a popular and well-received textbook on medieval society that so hopefully devotes an entire chapter to social mobility emphatically concludes with pessimism: 'In the end, then, it seems certain that throughout the period 1200–1500 successful careerists were the exception, not the rule, and that for the vast majority of people social immobility remained the norm.'<sup>34</sup> Though scholars are more open to the idea of mobility, the idea 'remains only implicitly present, a background as it were, that has received little special attention'.<sup>35</sup> Many studies have indirectly allowed for mobility, but few have explicitly attempted to grapple with how social mobility might be studied in a medieval context.

Among this work, the suggestion has often been made that urban institutions were especially well-placed to serve as informal mechanisms for social advancement. For example, Crouch's study of York's Corpus Christi guild refers to 'conduit[s] for influence and promotion' without ever explicitly addressing the topic of social mobility. 'Even if it is accepted that lay membership was principally driven by piety [...] commercial advantage and political ambition played a part in the motivation of, at least, some entrants.' He chronicles the paths of several individuals whose careers would normally have rendered them highly unlikely to achieve public office, but as members of the guild they became more attractive as political candidates. 'It was particularly difficult for butchers to attain civic office, prior to 1500, and guild

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<sup>32</sup> Herlihy, 'Three Patterns of Social Mobility', 625.

<sup>33</sup> Carocci, 'Social Mobility', 368–71. A few studies that have looked at more specific aspects of medieval social mobility include Du Boulay, *An Age of Ambition*; S. J. Payling, 'Social Mobility, Demographic Change, and Landed Society in Late Medieval England', *EcHR*, 45 (1992), 51–73; W. G. Runciman, 'Accelerating Social Mobility: The Case of Anglo-Saxon England', *P&P*, (1984), 3–30; Thrupp, 'Hierarchy, Illusion and Social Mobility'.

<sup>34</sup> P. Maddern, 'Social Mobility', in *A Social History of England, 1200–1500*, ed. by R. Horrox and W. M. Ormrod (Cambridge, 2006), 133.

<sup>35</sup> Carocci, 'Social Mobility', 368.

membership might well have been of material assistance to [these men].<sup>36</sup> Rosser's similar study of Coventry's Corpus Christi guild likewise emphasises the mixed social nature of the membership, and the guild's potential for forging contacts across more traditional occupational and status boundaries.<sup>37</sup>

Other work has intentionally drawn focus away from the idea of social polarisation between merchants and artisans, and instead underscored the importance of civic duty, low-level participation, and the multivalent nature of status and social stratification. Carpenter's thesis on elite formation in York emphasised the importance of looking at civic participation from a broader angle than just the highest civic offices. She concluded that York's *cursus honorum* should be considered as a series of interlinked stages that encompassed not just the traditional course of civic offices, but also minor offices, and parish and guild roles.<sup>38</sup> Her work built on the studies by Rappaport and Pearl of sixteenth and seventeenth century London that showed how civic power there was diffused through the citizen body by the holding of low-level offices outside of the traditional *cursus honorum*.<sup>39</sup>

One of the important institutions that all of these works have highlighted is the craft guild, and its growing importance to the administrative structure of late medieval towns. Craft guilds were a phenomenon common across medieval Europe, but the historiography of guilds in different regions has been shaped by the survival of records unique to each location. Historians of continental guilds have been able to engage in sophisticated economic debates because of the breadth of sources available to them, but the historiography of medieval English guilds has focused more on political issues, such as civic power and governance.<sup>40</sup> In similar fashion, English

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<sup>36</sup> D. J. F. Crouch, *Piety, Fraternity and Power: Religious Gilds in Late Medieval Yorkshire*, D.Phil thesis (University of York, 1996), 284.

<sup>37</sup> G. Rosser, 'Going to the Fraternity Feast: Commensality and Social Relations in Late Medieval England', *Journal of British Studies*, 33 (1994), 440-1.

<sup>38</sup> C. Carpenter, *The Formation of Urban Elites: Civic Officials in Late-Medieval York 1476-1525*, Ph.D thesis (University of York, 2000).

<sup>39</sup> Rappaport, *Worlds Within Worlds*; V. Pearl, 'Change and Stability in Seventeenth-Century London', in *The Tudor and Stuart Town: A Reader in English Urban History 1530-1688*, ed. by J. Barry (London, 1990), 139-65.

<sup>40</sup> The economic behaviour of continental guilds, for example, was hotly debated by Epstein and Ogilvie in a series of articles; S. Ogilvie, 'Guilds, Efficiency, and Social Capital:

historians are split between those who study London guilds and those who look more to the provincial towns. London itself is blessed with a wealth and range of sources unmatched in the rest of the country. Its 60,000 or so inhabitants at the end of the fifteenth century dwarfed the size of England's second-rank towns, each of which fell within the range of 8,000 to 12,000 residents. None could rival London for social prestige, political influence, or sheer wealth, but England's towns merit study for other reasons. As regional capitals and market hubs, the second-rank towns developed into relatively sophisticated urban centres that enjoyed a good measure of political autonomy from the crown. And though small by relative standards, each was large enough to sustain a well-diversified, craft-based economy.

The little work that has been done on artisans and the crafts in towns other than London has concentrated on the city of York. Swanson's work on York's artisans has been greatly influential, but regrettably, the bulk of her study focuses on the fourteenth century and the first three-quarters of the fifteenth century. She herself admitted that social relations seemed to be changing in York near the end of the fifteenth century, and that artisanal participation in York's civic government was growing, but she declined to investigate the changes in any detail.<sup>41</sup> However, Carpenter's work on York confirmed Swanson's suspicion; Carpenter's prosopographical study of civic officers in York found that craftsmen were increasingly involved in government between 1475 and 1525, especially in the council of forty-eight, York's counterpart to Norwich's common council.<sup>42</sup>

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Evidence From German Proto-Industry', *EcHR*, 57 (2004), 286–333; S. R. Epstein, 'Craft Guilds in the Pre-Modern Economy: A Discussion', *EcHR*, 61 (2008), 155–174; S. Ogilvie, 'Rehabilitating the Guilds: A Reply', *EcHR*, 61 (2008), 175–182. By comparison, Swanson's seminal study of artisans in York was more interested in their exploitation by the mercantile oligarchy than in questions concerning rent-seeking or monopolistic behaviour. Swanson, *Medieval Artisans*.

<sup>41</sup> This is unfortunate, as the chronological scope of her work extended to 1534. *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>42</sup> Carpenter, *Urban Elites*, 254.



## The impact of commercialisation

The period of study considered in this thesis, roughly 1450 to 1530, covers the second half of what we might term 'the long fifteenth century'.<sup>43</sup> Historiographically, the timeframe covered in this thesis straddles a significant chronological boundary in the literature. All too often, the decades to either side of 1500 are neglected by medievalists and early modernists alike. Medievalists often cease their work at the ascension of Henry Tudor to the throne of England, while early modernists tend to commence their studies later in the reign of Henry VIII, after sources become more plentiful.

The fifteenth century itself has also been relatively understudied. Historians often overlook the fifteenth century in favour of what might seem to be more 'exciting' events in the fourteenth or sixteenth centuries. The fifteenth century was long held to be a century of decline and decay, not only in art and literature, but also socially and economically.<sup>44</sup> From the 1980s, though, much work has been done to revise these older views. The image of a century consumed by decline and decay is gradually being swept aside in favour of more sophisticated reassessments. There is now a good case to be made that the period covered by this thesis was a time of dynamic change in urban centres, not only because of upheaval in social and political relations, but also because of the persistence of commercialising trends that had taken hold some centuries earlier.

Population and class conflict were long held by medievalists to be the 'prime movers' of history, but recent work on the impact of commercialism has shown that economic change has had more influence on medieval history than was once believed.<sup>45</sup> Though much of the work on English commercialisation has focused on

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<sup>43</sup> Dyer, for instance, uses the term to cover the years 1350 to 1520. C. Dyer, *An Age of Transition? Economy and Society in England in the Late Middle Ages* (Oxford, 2005).

<sup>44</sup> Huizinga, of course, was instrumental in crafting the image of a society enveloped in its own lingering demise, but equally important was the work of other modern historians, who followed the Tudor lead in downplaying any favourable aspects of the years that preceded that dynasty's rise to power. J. Huizinga, *The Waning of the Middle Ages* (New York, 1984); J. R. Lander, *Conflict and Stability in Fifteenth-Century England* (London, 1977), 11-17.

<sup>45</sup> For an overview of the historiography of these debates, see J. Hatcher and M. Bailey, *Modelling the Middle Ages : The History and Theory of England's Economic Development* (Oxford,

the pre-plague centuries – especially the thirteenth century, which saw a period of rapid growth in the establishment of markets and new settlements, a rise in prices for agricultural outputs, and profits for large landowners – work on the post-plague era has also revamped our understanding of the late medieval economy.<sup>46</sup>

Postan's view that the fifteenth century should be viewed as 'an age of recession, arrested economic development and declining national income' was influential through the middle of the twentieth century, but his thesis has been superseded in recent years.<sup>47</sup> Though the period immediately following the pandemic of 1348/9 was unquestionably affected by a sharp decrease in population, which led to a contraction in settlements, less demand for goods and food, and cheaper land and rents, this produced a complicated mix of positive and negative outcomes.<sup>48</sup> As has been adequately argued elsewhere, the decrease in population pressure led to generally improved standards of living for the middling and lower classes, partly due to higher wages, cheaper food, and better access to land.<sup>49</sup> The effect on urban economies has been harder to puzzle out. Despite many propositions that towns suffered a period of deep urban decline, the theory remains contentious.<sup>50</sup> Though this thesis does not specifically address the debate concerning urban decline,

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2001).

<sup>46</sup> Two seminal works here have been Britnell, *The Commercialisation of English Society* and B. M. S. Campbell, *English Seigniorial Agriculture, 1250-1450* (Cambridge, 2000).

<sup>47</sup> M. Postan, 'The Fifteenth Century', *EcHR*, 9 (1939), 160-167.

<sup>48</sup> Dyer, *An Age of Transition*, 8-9.

<sup>49</sup> Bridbury offers the rosier picture of life for the labouring and middling classes after the Black Death. A. R. Bridbury, *Economic Growth* (Westport, 1983). More measured approaches can be found in Bolton, *English Economy*, 236-240, and Britnell, *The Commercialisation of English Society*, 168-171. Dyer makes a strong case for understanding the economic significance of the long fifteenth century on its own terms, instead of constantly making unfavourable comparisons to the thirteenth century or to the modern day. Dyer, *An Age of Transition*.

<sup>50</sup> Postan argued that towns, including Norwich, were hard hit by decline in the fifteenth century. Postan, 'The Fifteenth Century', 163. The seminal work on urban decline is probably C. Phythian-Adams, *Desolation of a City: Coventry and the Urban Crisis of the Late Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 1979), but many other scholars have questioned whether his findings were universally applicable, arguing instead that the individual circumstances of each town must be considered separately. King was skeptical of the extent to which Norwich may have suffered from economic malaise. A. King, *The Merchant Class and Borough Finances in Later Medieval Norwich*, D.Phil thesis (Oxford University, 1989). For background on the urban decline debate, see Dyer, *Decline and Growth in English Towns, 1400-1640*.

evidence presented in later chapters strongly suggests that the presence of the worsted weaving industry helped keep Norwich's local economy buoyant, even when other similarly-sized towns struggled.

The relative resiliency of Norwich's local economy highlights a key point about the late Middle Ages, which was the growing importance of material consumption. Though the 'consumer revolution' is normally studied as a development of the eighteenth century, scholars like Britnell, Dyer, and Jenks have argued that its roots lay in the Middle Ages. Britnell argued that an increase in per-capita disposable income allowed a greater percentage of the population to buy non-essential material goods. In addition, many consumers developed a taste for higher-quality manufactured goods, which slowly replaced locally-produced goods of lesser quality.<sup>51</sup> Dyer has also been a strong proponent for increases in consumption levels, which, he argues, expanded greatly in the later Middle Ages, based largely on this increase in consumer purchasing power.<sup>52</sup>

Of course, the availability of merchant wares depended on markets to deliver them. Though the number of markets in England had been shrinking in absolute terms since around the fourteenth century, this should not be taken as evidence for stagnation in the later economy. Britnell and Masschaele both made the case that medieval markets had crystallised into a hierarchy of markets, with the most important markets serving as high-level distribution hubs.<sup>53</sup> Both argued that this 'slimming down' of markets actually strengthened the trade network. Improved distribution channels helped move a higher proportion of mercantile wares around the county than had previously been possible. Jenks dubbed this the 'Distribution Revolution', noting that a stabilisation of markets had the beneficial outcome of

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<sup>51</sup> Britnell, *The Commercialisation of English Society*, 164-171.

<sup>52</sup> Dyer, *An Age of Transition*, 126-156.

<sup>53</sup> J. Masschaele, 'The Multiplicity of Medieval Markets Reconsidered', *Journal of Historical Geography*, 20 (1994), 255-271; J. Masschaele, *Peasants, Merchants and Markets: Inland Trade in Medieval England, 1150-1350* (New York, 1997), 188, 231; R. Britnell, 'Urban Demand in the English Economy, 1300-1600', in *Trade, Urban Hinterlands and Market Integration, c. 1300-1600*, ed. by J. A. Galloway (London, 2000), 14-5, 20. Masschaele and Britnell disagreed on the timing of this 'rationalisation' of the English markets; Masschaele believed it to have been complete by 1300, whereas Britnell thought it took place between 1300 and 1520.

concentrating mercantile activity in fewer locations, making it easier to procure and sell merchandise, since buyers and sellers knew how to find each other.<sup>54</sup> Jenks also notes that it was consumer demand for such wares that created the need to rationalise markets in the first place -- without demand, this would never have happened.

In turn, the economy had to restructure itself in order to fulfil demand. The demand for an increasingly diverse array of manufactured goods will have made itself felt most keenly in urban centres. Though the overall population had decreased, it is generally thought that the ratio of urban to rural inhabitants remained stable, or even grew slightly.<sup>55</sup> Merchants had long clustered in large cities, where access to credit, markets, and social networks facilitated long-distance trade.<sup>56</sup> Artisans also naturally clustered in towns, especially those who catered to the demands of the long-distance or overseas trades.<sup>57</sup> This partly explains the growth of provincial craft organisations in English towns. Shifts in consumption patterns in the post-plague era likely helped prompt the expansion of a more structured, institutionalised craft system, with many towns following London's lead in institutionalising its occupational guilds. In spite of much mimicry of London's older system, the uptake of provincial craft institutions was slow and intensely localised. Though guilds are often described as if they were homogenous entities, in reality the crafts in each locale developed organically, expanding to fill the contours of each town's political arrangement. Just as no two urban constitutions were identical, so too did each town nurture its own system of regulating local industry and trade.

The rising demand for goods also helped push a greater diversification of goods, which itself is borne out by the number of specialised occupational labels

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<sup>54</sup> S. Jenks, 'The Missing Link: The Distribution Revolution of the 15th Century', in *Textiles and the Medieval Economy*, ed. by A. Huang and C. Jahnke (Oxford, 2015), 230-252; see also S. Jenks, 'Die Distributionsrevolution des 15. Jahrhunderts', *Hansische Geschichtsblätter*, 132 (2014), 47-78.

<sup>55</sup> Dyer, *An Age of Transition*; Britnell, *The Commercialisation of English Society*, 167.

<sup>56</sup> Bolton, *English Economy*, 132-6.

<sup>57</sup> Britnell, *The Commercialisation of English Society*, 168-171; Dyer, *An Age of Transition*, 128-32.

under which which craftsmen enrolled their freedoms in towns.<sup>58</sup> The expansion of late medieval material consumption is well attested by archaeological finds in England and on the continent, where artefacts as diverse as pottery, metal work, cloth fragments, and even houses show a rapid rise in diversification in quality, design, and materials.<sup>59</sup> It is also attested by bequests left in wills that show a population with a growing number and wider range of household goods to bequeath.<sup>60</sup>

Thus, though England's population may have fallen in the years after 1350, the country continued on the path of commercialisation.<sup>61</sup> Ultimately, though, we still know relatively little about the effects of commercialisation on the social structure of towns. Much has been written about the post-plague 'golden age' of the English labourer, but the backbone of that work is based on rural populations and manorial records, and as such, is skewed towards an agricultural labour base. The demand for more, and better, consumer goods, which led to a greater specialisation of labour, also likely spurred the growth of organised trade guilds, which helped to change the industrial structure of towns. This process had a significant impact on urban social structure in the fifteenth century, but of it, little is known.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Britnell, *The Commercialisation of English Society*, 168@172.

<sup>59</sup> The literature on material culture and consumption has grown considerably in recent years. See, for example, Dyer, *An Age of Transition*, 147-57; M. Kowaleski, 'A Consumer Economy', in *A Social History of England, 1200-1500*, ed. by R. Horrox and W. M. Ormrod (Cambridge, 2006), 238-259; P. J. P. Goldberg, 'The Fashioning of Bourgeois Domesticity in Later Medieval England: A Material Culture Perspective', in *Medieval Domesticity: Home, Housing and Household in Medieval England*, ed. by M. Kowaleski and P. J. P. Goldberg (Cambridge, 2008), 124-44; J. Hare, 'Production, Specialisation and Consumption in Late Medieval Wessex', in *Essays Presented to Michael Hicks*, ed. by L. Clark (Woodbridge, 2015), 189-206; L. Liddy, *Domestic Objects in York C.1400-1600: Consumption, Neighbourhood and Choice*, Ph.D thesis (York University, 2015). For information about archaeological finds, a good source of information is the body of 'grey literature' or unpublished field excavation reports. Many of these can now be searched online in the Archaeology Data Service, 'ADS Library of Unpublished Fieldwork Reports', <<http://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk/archives/view/greylit/>>, (accessed 9 Jun 2017).

<sup>60</sup> See, for instance, K. J. Dauteuille, *Household Materials and Social Networks in Norwich 1371-1500: A Study of Testamentary Evidence*, Ph.D thesis (Cambridge, 2005).

<sup>61</sup> Britnell, *The Commercialisation of English Society*, 228.

<sup>62</sup> The only large-scale study of provincial English artisans remains Swanson, *Medieval Artisans*.

## 1.2 Problematising late medieval social mobility

As Carocci argues, our inability to delineate medieval society into quantifiable social strata has surely made medievalists hesitant to engage with the concept of social mobility.<sup>63</sup> The propensity to use mathematical models has led us to think of social structure as being easily definable, rigidly hierarchical, and empirically measurable. Lacking large datasets that are easily quantifiable, or accurately representative of large populations, medievalists must instead look to other means for analysing patterns of mobility within urban social groupings.

One of the earliest scholars of social mobility advocated viewing social mobility in less rigid terms. Sorokin, who wrote about social mobility in 1927, put forth the idea that social mobility was a composite, multi-dimensional process that relied not on one variable, but on many. He posited that social stratification could be broken into the sub-facets of economic stratification, occupational stratification, and political stratification. Each exists independently, but all three combine to help shift an individual up and down the social ladder, or through what he termed 'social space'.<sup>64</sup> The recognition that stratification and mobility rely on multiple factors has spread widely since then. One such example would be Bourdieu's theory that an individual's place in the social world is reliant on their accumulation of a variety of types of capital, including social, economic, cultural, and symbolic capital.<sup>65</sup>

Up to now, many studies of medieval English towns have analysed stratification based on rather simple delineations using mercantile and artisanal occupational labels.<sup>66</sup> Historians do broadly agree that mercantile occupations attracted more social status than did productive occupations, which is evidenced by the wide-scale usage of terms like 'mercantile oligarchy'.<sup>67</sup> The same division can be

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<sup>63</sup> Carocci, 'Social Mobility', 369-70.

<sup>64</sup> P. Sorokin, *Social Mobility* (New York, 1927).

<sup>65</sup> P. Bourdieu, 'The Forms of Capital', in *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, ed. by J. Richardson (New York, 1986), 241-258.

<sup>66</sup> The most egregious examples of this can be found in Swanson, *Medieval Artisans*; Hilton, *English and French Towns*.

<sup>67</sup> S. L. Thrupp, *The Merchant Class of Medieval London, 1300-1500* (Chicago, 1948); J. W.

seen in sources that date to the end of the Middle Ages. Edmund Dudley's *Tree of Commonwealth* of 1509 described his vision of the 'three estates' of the realm, and specified that 'the substantiall marchauntes' sat at the pinnacle of the third tier, that of the 'commynaltie'.<sup>68</sup> The model for a specifically urban social hierarchy was further elucidated in an appendix to Stow's *Survey of London*, where the urban estates are imagined with merchants at the top, followed by craftsmen in the middle, and labourers at the bottom.<sup>69</sup> In a sense, this was a natural extension of the medieval division of the urban population into the *probi homines* or *potentiores* at the pinnacle of society; the *mediocres* or *medius populus* in the middle; and the *inferiores* or *plebs* at the bottom, though it shifted the ostensible source of stratification from political or civic to occupational attributes.<sup>70</sup>

However, the line between 'merchant' and 'artisan' is not always an easy one to draw. While merchants unquestionably enjoyed more social prestige, independent craft masters often blurred the line between the two categories. Though the act of buying and selling is clearly distinct from the act of producing goods, there were many men – and possibly even a growing number – who combined workshop production with buying and selling. Craftsmen with more capital assets were in a better position to act as consolidators within their industries, by hiring more in-house labour, or by purchasing completed items from other workshops and sub-contracting

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Laughton, *Life in a Late Medieval City: Chester, 1275-1520* (Oxford, 2008), 93, 108; Rigby, 'Urban 'Oligarchy' in Late Medieval England'; Kermode, 'Obvious Observations on the Formation of Oligarchies in Late Medieval English Towns'. Carpenter challenged this characterisation of York's civic elite in her thesis. Carpenter, *Urban Elites*.

<sup>68</sup> E. Dudley, *The Tree of Commonwealth*, qtd. in Wrightson, *Earthly Necessities*, 27-8.

<sup>69</sup> 'The singularities of London', in *A Survey of London*, Reprinted From the Text of 1603, ed. by C. L. Kingsford, *British History Online*, <<http://www.british-history.ac.uk/no-series/survey-of-london-stow/1603/pp199-217>>, (accessed 9 Mar 2016).

<sup>70</sup> In older usage, the label 'best sort' is often reserved for political elites, but the distinction is rarely made explicit. One example can be found in King's Lynn, which divides signatories to a royal document by political stratum: 'We the Mayor and *Potentiores* for our part and We the *Mediocres* and the *Inferiores* not burgesses for our part and the whole community of the town of Lenn...', which suggests that the distinction between *mediocres* and *inferiores* was citizenship. Historical Manuscripts Commission, 'The borough of King's Lynn: Charters, letters patent, etc.', in *The Manuscripts of the Corporations of Southampton and King's Lynn: Eleventh report, Appendix; Part III* (1887), *British History Online*, <<http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=67105>>, (accessed 2 Dec 2014).

work to other artisans.<sup>71</sup> Some guilds and companies, such as the Tailors and the Drapers, had a membership that was split between those who produced and those who retailed. Unfortunately, though, because so much emphasis has been placed on the political aspects of the crafts in England, less work has been undertaken concerning the entrepreneurial activities of independent masters.

Furthermore, occupation, and by extension wealth, were not the only factors that contributed to social standing. Many studies have acknowledged the importance of status to medieval society. Yet, here, we encounter the original problem that underlies the study of social mobility in the medieval context. Status is regrettably nebulous and difficult to quantify for vast swathes of the ‘non-elite’ population, especially in the kinds of written sources that survive from the fifteenth century. Nevertheless, as Carloci opines, ‘The difficulty of measuring social mobility and the certainty that we can obtain only approximate results that bear only on a part of social identities must be our starting point and not a pretext for avoiding enquiry.’<sup>72</sup>

If medievalists are to advance the study of social mobility, we must be more flexible in our approach to the subject. One way of doing this is to extend our scope of enquiry beyond the type of sources that are easily quantifiable. The first way to do this is to use Sorokin’s original work as an example, and thereby take a broader view of the types of stratifications that existed, and the variables that impacted such stratification. Grusky, for instance, argued that a wide variety of resources, assets, and ‘valued goods’ underlay modern measures of stratification (Table 1.1), and that the possession of one or more of these ‘assets’ enhance status, which in turn helped individuals and families ascend (or descend) the social ladder. Using Grusky’s table as a starting point, we can use his idea of status-bearing social assets to think about alternate means of gaining status in a medieval, urban context.

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<sup>71</sup> C. Lis and H. Soly, ‘Subcontracting in Guild-Based Export Trades, Thirteenth-Eighteenth Centuries’, in *Guilds, Innovation, and the European Economy, 1400-1800*, ed. by S. R. Epstein and M. Prak (Cambridge, 2010), 81-113.

<sup>72</sup> Carocci, ‘Social Mobility’, 370-1.



**Table 1.1:** Types of Assets, Resources, and Valued Goods Underlying Stratification Systems<sup>73</sup>

| Asset Group | Selected Examples                                                                                                     |
|-------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Economic    | Ownership of land, farms, factories, professional practices, businesses, liquid assets, slaves, serfs                 |
| Political   | Household authority (ie head of house), workplace (manager), party or social authority (i.e. legislator), charismatic |
| Cultural    | High-status consumption practices; 'good manners'; privileged life-style                                              |
| Social      | Access to high-status social networks, social ties, associations and clubs, union membership                          |
| Honorific   | Prestige; 'good reputation'; fame, deference and derogation; ethnic and religious purity                              |
| Civil       | Rights of property, contract, franchise, and membership in elective assemblies; freedom of association and speech     |
| Human       | Skills; expertise; on the job training; experience; formal education; knowledge                                       |

Though wealth was surely not the only criteria for status, it certainly was important nevertheless.<sup>74</sup> The acquisition and display of real property contributed to a family's standing, such as owning land, possessing a fine house (especially if it was in one of the more sought after locations in the town), owning extra tenements to rent, and so on. Other economic assets would have included having multiple servants in one's employ, having a workshop of one's own, and staffing it with journeymen and apprentices.

There is no question that political office-holding continued to confer status all through the period. Mayors, sheriffs, and aldermen were held in especially high regard in both late medieval and early modern towns. Civic office naturally carried

<sup>73</sup> Adapted from D. B. Grusky, 'The Past, Present, and Future of Social Inequality', in *Social Stratification: Class, Race, and Gender in Sociological Perspective*, ed. by D. B. Grusky (Boulder, 2001), 4, Table 1.

<sup>74</sup> Carus-Wilson claimed that 'Rank in the medieval city was determined by wealth'. Qtd. in Swanson, *Medieval Artisans*, 150. Swanson was a bit more circumspect about the relationship between wealth and status, acknowledging that 'prosperity did not always buy social acceptability among artisans.' Ibid.

status, but so did lesser offices in the craft guilds, in the parishes, and in other local jurisdictions. Related to political office-holding were civic prerogatives and duties. Induction into the freedom of the city lent civic status, and conferred special rights available only to freemen, such as the right to stand for office and elect officials, the right to buy and sell freely in the city, but also the obligation to pay taxes. However, a perusal of the tax lists suggests that paying tax also carried with it some prestige. In the 1523 Anticipation of Subsidy tax list that survives for Norwich, for instance, the mayor and sitting aldermen appear first for emphasis, apart from the other taxpayers, who were then grouped by city ward.<sup>75</sup>

Social and cultural assets were no less important. We know quite a lot about the use of fabric and clothing to indicate (or emulate) social rank, thanks in part to the many sumptuary laws, which tried to regulate clothing based on income, titles, or other forms of social rank.<sup>76</sup> The wearing of luxury textiles, such as silk, velvet, or cloth of gold or silver, was an easily discernible mark of prestige and wealth. The consumption of expensive food items, such as wine and spices, also brought status. Social connections could obviously be forged by joining a more prestigious occupational guild or company, such as the Mercers in Norwich. Membership in social, religious, and civic guilds could also confer prestige, as we have seen above with Chaucer's pilgrims, or as was the case in Norwich with membership in the St George's Guild.<sup>77</sup> Honorific markers, such as good reputation, wisdom, and 'worship' were crucial both in business and in politics.<sup>78</sup> Social capital helped one build trust networks, so necessary to securing credit and trade contacts. Finally,

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<sup>75</sup> TNA E 179/150/208.

<sup>76</sup> See page 101 for more on sumptuary laws.

<sup>77</sup> *Records of the Gild of St George in Norwich, 1389-1547*, ed. by M. Grace ([London], 1937); Phythian-Adams discusses the Coventry civic guilds in Phythian-Adams, *Desolation of a City*. See also V. Bainbridge, *Guilds in the Medieval Countryside: Social and Religious Change in Cambridgeshire c. 1350-1558* (Woodbridge, 1996); B. Hanawalt and B. McRee, 'The Guilds of Homo Prudens in Late Medieval England', *Continuity and Change*, 7 (1992), 163-179; G. Rosser, *The Art of Solidarity in the Middle Ages: Guilds in England 1250-1550* (Oxford, 2015).

<sup>78</sup> Carpenter's thesis emphasised the importance of good character in civic politics. Carpenter, *Urban Elites*.

specialised skills, such as apprentice training, literacy, and numeracy must also have contributed to a man's social standing.

This list aims to provide a jumping-off point for the many ways we can begin to interrogate social mobility in a medieval context. Though not all of these topics can be studied in depth for every possible historical setting, the second half of this thesis uses a broad sampling to consider the social position of the Worsted Weavers of Norwich between roughly 1450 and 1530. In many cases a quantitative approach is not possible, but it has been attempted in every case where the data supports some type of comparison.

One of the arguments of this thesis is that the urban craft system in the late Middle Ages was itself a channel for social mobility. In some cases, individuals are distinct enough in the historical record that we can compare their life experiences against one another. But it should be noted that the study of social mobility does not have to be confined to the study of individuals. This thesis also considers the worsted weavers as an aggregate group, and the position that that craft group occupied in social space in Norwich at the end of the Middle Ages. Furthermore, social mobility does not require vertical movement between external strata; mobility also occurred laterally, within a single social stratum or social group. For the worsted weavers, we will see that there was a great amount of difference between weavers who laboured as journeyman for wages, and independent masters who owned their own workshops. Though the craft as a whole gained significantly in status over the period under study, the wealth and status of its members ranged widely.

There is still much to be done to investigate the changes to urban society that were taking place in many towns across England at the end of the fifteenth century. Civic government structures were adapting to meet the needs of an increasingly affluent, and in some cases, vocal population. Many of these 'middling' citizens were upwardly-mobile craftsmen: independent masters, members of the franchise, and represented by an increasingly organised network of craft guilds. This confluence of factors has been little studied. Previous studies have focused too exclusively on only the highest civic offices. The natural result of such a limited field of study is a belief that late medieval towns were constricted by oligarchy, exclusionary social closure,

and elitism. This study instead puts craftsmen front and centre, and tries to look at the broader 'artisanal' *cursus honorum* from the bottom up.

## 1.3 Methodology and sources

In order to better understand the changes that were taking place in late medieval towns, this study employs a dual approach to the question of whether commercial success created an urban environment conducive to social and occupational mobility for craftsmen. By doing so, it takes a fairly unorthodox approach to the question of how to analyse social mobility in a medieval urban context. This thesis first considers the development of Norfolk's native worsted cloth industry in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. It then employs a prosopography of Norwich's worsted weavers for a more detailed analysis of urban society at the end of the Middle Ages.

Historians of late medieval towns grapple with two problems simultaneously: we must cope with the curse of scarcity, whilst also struggling with the curse of plenty. On the one hand, historians who study England's medieval towns wrestle with a highly unpredictable survival rate of written sources. Some records survive, but many more have perished over the last centuries. Record series that survive in one town often have completely vanished in other towns. And little was produced that recorded the day-to-day lives of the middling and the poor. Much of what we know about the lives of average urban residents has been pieced together from civic documents produced for other purposes. This approach yields much information about wealthy merchants and the civic elite, but far less about the middling social stratum in towns. We know far more about craft communities in the aggregate sense than we do about their particular composition or inner workings. When non-elites are discussed, it is more often in the context of institutions than of individuals. Craftsmen and skilled labourers too often disappear behind the facade of craft politics and labour disputes, or get lumped in with the undifferentiated body of disaffected citizens on those sporadic occasions when English towns erupted in protest and dissent.

Yet, on the other hand, there *is* much information available in English town archives. Thousands upon thousands of what I term ‘shallow records’ preserve the mundane details of everyday life in many of medieval England’s provincial towns, but because they are repetitious and formulaic, most languish unpublished and under-utilised. Where a deep record may reveal a thousand details about one person, a shallow record records one detail about a thousand people. Shallow records include the types of documents that are so commonly preserved as records of official business in late medieval towns, and include documents that historians think much about in the aggregate, but seldom pick apart name by name: deeds, court hearings, lists of freemen, taxpayers, office holders, apprenticeships, and so on. The data that forms the core of this study comes from lists of the names of weavers who attended presentment hearings of the craft of worsted weavers in Norwich – a seemingly trivial source that no one has ever analysed, but which has allowed me to reconstruct a much fuller picture of the membership of the craft than would have been possible otherwise.

One might be forgiven for thinking of these records as endless lists of Roberts, Williams, Henrys, and Johns, but it is crucially this naming of names that makes them useful in the creation of a prosopography. When sifted and aggregated, the information from shallow records can paint portraits of historic communities long thought lost to time. The creation of an urban prosopography (or ‘group biography’) starts by collecting these tiny, seemingly trivial scraps of information, then patiently collating them into biographical profiles. This information, once aggregated, can help historians spot patterns of behaviour or characteristics common to that population. It is a method that has been used for years to study under-documented populations.<sup>79</sup> Older prosopographical projects often ended in the production of encyclopaedic reference tomes that read like a historical *Who’s Who*, but the usefulness of these printed works is limited.<sup>80</sup> The earliest prosopographies were painstakingly hand-

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<sup>79</sup> A number of introductory essays discussing the merits of using a prosopography, as well as examples from a range of case studies, can be found in *Prosopography Approaches and Applications: A Handbook*, ed. K. S. B. Keats-Rohan (Oxford, 2007).

<sup>80</sup> J. Martindale, *Prosopography of the Byzantine Empire, 641-867* (Aldershot, Hampshire, 2001); A. H. M. Jones, J. R. Martindale, and J. Morris, *The Prosopography of the Later Roman*

written on index cards and stored in boxes, but the analogue method has significant drawbacks, which increase exponentially in a populous setting. The larger the scope and the longer the time span, the harder it becomes physically to manage the cards and retain confidence in the sorting and identification of individuals, especially among large urban populations with a high frequency of homonyms.<sup>81</sup> Databases have improved this situation immeasurably.<sup>82</sup> Data can be entered quickly, but more importantly, the functions of recording and identifying can be broken into discrete stages. Once the data is stored, it becomes available to search, filter, edit, and aggregate, regardless of whether it has been attached to an individual or not. Databases enable researchers to move seamlessly between analysing individual and group data, thus providing a better means for understanding the aggregate life patterns that underpin both short- and long-term change within a community.

In recent years, the prosopographical method has become more popular as a way to study late medieval urban populations.<sup>83</sup> Many of the studies noted here have incorporated prosopography as a means of getting past the biases inherent in other

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*Empire* (Cambridge, 1971).

<sup>81</sup> Helen Sutermeister spent the 1970s working on a prosopography of medieval Norwich. She collected details about individuals found in records between 1300 and 1500, and entered them on index cards. The collection of cards is now split over four large boxes, divided chronologically by time period. Unfortunately, her system exposes some of the weaknesses of the analogue method. She has instances of individuals who are split across multiple cards, cards that combine details of two different people, and individuals whose details are split across two boxes. This was nearly inevitable, as she was working before the advent of personal computers made databases accessible and affordable. For her collection of index cards, see NRO MC 146/1-4. For notes and drafts of her thesis, see NRO MC 146/14, Sutermeister thesis.

<sup>82</sup> For a discussion of the historical development in prosopographical technology, see R. Mathison, 'The Creation of Prosopographical Databases for the Ancient and Medieval Worlds', in *Prosopography Approaches and Applications: A Handbook*, ed. by K. S. B. Keats-Rohan (Oxford, 2007), 95-126.

<sup>83</sup> Late medieval urban prosopographical studies include: P. Dunn, *After the Black Death: Society and Economy in Late Fourteenth-Century Norwich*, Ph.D thesis (East Anglia, 2003); D. G. Shaw, *The Creation of a Community: The City of Wells in the Middle Ages* (Oxford, 1993); Thrupp, *The Merchant Class*; M. Kowaleski, *Local Markets and Regional Trade in Medieval Exeter* (Cambridge, 1995); R. Frost, *The Aldermen of Norwich, 1461-1509: A Study of a Civic Elite*, Ph.D thesis (Cambridge University, 1996); Carpenter, *Urban Elites*; L. R. Wheatley, *The Mercers in Medieval York 1272/3 to 1529: Social Aspirations and Commercial Enterprise*, Ph.D thesis (University of York, 2008).

urban sources, notably the kinds of sources which are more normative in nature. While normative documents are useful for analysing social values and mores, they also present a highly idealised image of societal norms. Guild ordinances especially have been noted as susceptible to this problem; but equally dangerous are city ordinances, sermons, literature and poetry, and so on. Finding ways to narrow the historiographical gap between desire and reality, or between plan and execution, is one of the continuing challenges that urban historians face. Prosopographical studies are tedious to construct, relying as they do on large bodies of repetitive data and a rigorous attention to detail, but they may be the best way to advance urban studies into subject areas not well served by official town sources.

This study employs a prosopography of the worsted weavers of Norwich in order to better understand the social context of the city in which they lived and worked between roughly 1450 and 1530. The prosopographical analysis in this study has focused on the worsted weavers, but the database also incorporates information about other groups and institutions, in order to place the weavers within a larger social context. The core of the database began with the names of the men who served as jury members at the worsted weavers' search presentment hearings between 1491 and 1530.<sup>84</sup> This group was then combined with the complete records of civic office-holders for the years 1453 to 1530.<sup>85</sup> To this was added: entries from the freedom rolls between 1317 and 1530, including all known weavers;<sup>86</sup> all surviving apprentice enrolments up to 1530;<sup>87</sup> tax lists between 1451 and 1530;<sup>88</sup> an index to the wills of

<sup>84</sup> NRO NCR 17d/7; NRO NCR 17d/8; NRO NCR 16c/1, ff. 28r-32r.

<sup>85</sup> *An Index to Norwich City Officers, 1453–1835*, ed. by T. Hawes (Norwich, 1989); NRO NCR 16a/2; NRO NCR 16c/1; NRO NCR 16c/2; NRO NCR 16d/1, Books of Proceedings; NRO NCR 16d/2, Books of Proceedings.

<sup>86</sup> Entries from the 'Old Free Book' are printed in J. l'Estrange, *Calendar of the Freemen of Norwich, From 1317 to 1603*, ed. W. Rye (London, 1888); note, however, that l'Estrange includes many errors in the transcription of regnal years; corrections were made from the Old Free Book and the Assembly minutes. NRO NCR 17c, OFB; NRO NCR 16d/1, Books of Proceedings; NRO NCR 16d/2, Books of Proceedings.

<sup>87</sup> NRO NCR 1/22, Apprenticeship indentures, transcribed in *An Index of Indentures of Norwich Apprentices*, ed. by W. M. Rising and P. Millican (Norwich, 1959).

<sup>88</sup> NRO NCR 7i; R. Virgoe, 'A Norwich Taxation List of 1451', *Norfolk Archaeology*, XL, Part II (1988), 145-154; M. Jurkowski, 'Income Tax Assessments of Norwich, 1472 and 1489', in *Poverty and Wealth: Sheep, Taxation and Charity in Late Medieval Norfolk* (Norwich, 2007), 99-156;

Norwich citizens;<sup>89</sup> common council members for the guild of St George;<sup>90</sup> indexed deeds for the years 1457 to 1479;<sup>91</sup> and the names of all known craft masters for the guild of the worsted weavers. The combination of these records has enabled two things. First, the names on the worsted weavers' jury lists have allowed the identification of more worsted weavers than was ever possible before. Second, every effort was made to identify every civic office holder for the period of this study, including every member of the common council and their craft affiliation. This has established a baseline of civic participation that encompassed far more of the citizen body than is normally accepted. The combination of many sources has also meant that a life and career profile could be built for many of the worsted weavers and for the civic office-holders, which facilitated identification, especially when individuals shared a name.<sup>92</sup>

Yet, even with a good data set, the fact remains that studying social mobility in a medieval urban setting is difficult. Modern studies typically focus on intergenerational mobility within families, by measuring movement between social strata at a highly granular level. This is simply not possible for medieval towns. Few medieval records systematically recorded lines of descent. High mortality and high immigration meant that few families were native to a town. The lack of English parish records prior to 1538 makes the reconstitution of family lines especially

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TNA E 179/150/208.

<sup>89</sup> Norwich wills have been indexed in the online catalog of the Norfolk Record Office. See <<http://nrocat.norfolk.gov.uk/>>, (accessed 4 February 2013).

<sup>90</sup> *Gild of St George*.

<sup>91</sup> NCR Case 1/19, Court Roll 19. See NRO NCR 3e/11 for Frederic Johnson's nineteenth-century calendar for this roll.

<sup>92</sup> It should be noted here that Norwich, with an estimated population of around 10,000 people by 1500-1520, is a good size for a prosopographical study. The city was large enough to have developed a moderately complex civic government, yet the population was not so large that homonyms were a barrier to identification. The impression afforded by a close reading of the Norwich sources is that few names overlapped; in those cases where two men shared the same name, they were typically differentiated in the sources with a nickname, such as 'the elder' versus 'the younger', or 'the baker' versus 'the draper'. I remain skeptical about the identification of men in prosopographies from cities like London, where the sheer size of the population meant that it was common for many men to share the same name.



difficult. Intergenerational social mobility in medieval towns cannot be studied quantitatively in the way that sociologists study modern populations.

Therefore, this study instead takes a wider and more abstract view of social mobility. If the worsted industry saw an extended period of high sales, as I show in Chapter 2, did this have an impact on the lives of the weavers who produced worsted cloth? On an individual level, would this manifest itself in the shape of more affluence among individual weavers? As wealth is generally considered to be the primary condition for elite recruitment, this seems logical. But more importantly, the other half of my question involves the negotiation of social identity and the strong links people had to occupational labels. Did commercialisation help raise the social profile of craftsmen in late medieval towns? Did a rise of affluence among artisans help break down social barriers and biases against craftsmen? If not universally, did craftsmen in Norwich at least gain more acceptance in roles of public authority? The latter question may be the most interesting. It is not hard to imagine single instances of wealthy individuals doing well, but for the overall question of late medieval social structures, it is far more interesting to consider whether the stereotypical gulf between merchants and artisans was lessening around the start of the sixteenth century.

## 1.4 Outline of the thesis

This thesis is divided into two parts. In the first part, I will explore the history and development of the worsted industry in Norfolk. The importance of medieval worsteds has been critically under-assessed for years. I contend that the success of the worsted weavers in Norwich was directly linked to the late fifteenth-century boom in worsted exports. The fortunes of the craft rose and fell in tandem with the fortunes of the industry. This position was in many ways shaped directly by the actions of the guild of Worsted Weavers in Norwich themselves. Not only was the worsted industry directed over the long term by the guild and its authority, the industry itself was rather unusual for an English industry. Norwich established itself

at the centre of a regional industry. Its relations to a productive hinterland more resemble continental regions and industries than what we know about their English counterparts. Chapter 2 will consider the evolution of worsted cloth, its technical divergence from woollen cloth, and its position in the overseas cloth trade. In particular, the importance of worsteds' revival around the 1470s on the European cloth markets, and the resulting 'boom' that lasted at least through the 1520s, will be considered in detail. Earlier historians have falsely characterised worsted exports as inconsequential to the fifteenth century exports; this position will be refuted. Chapter 3 sets the worsted industry within a regional context. Worsteds were not just a product of Norwich. The city of Norwich and the guild of Worsted Weavers played an unusual role in bringing a rural product under the control of urban institutions. This relationship between urban market and rural hinterland allowed Norwich to impose standards and quality assurance across the industry, which helped make worsteds into an internationally-recognised commodity at the end of the fifteenth century. Chapter 4 examines the development of craft guilds in Norwich as civic institutions. It will be argued that Norwich's constitutional flexibility and general eagerness to arbitrate in cases of public dissent, made for a civic environment that allowed guilds to 'come of age' as institutions, but without the attendant frictions seen in other towns.

Part II then moves on to consider the lives of the Norwich worsted weavers in detail. A prosopographical database was constructed from the sources noted above. The chapters have been framed by the concept of an 'artisanal *cursus honorum*', and examine successive stages in it. Chapter 6 considers weaving as a profession, and the stages through which a professional weaver would have passed on his way up the career ladder. Chapter 7 then turns to the guild, the roles that weaver might have played in it, and how participation in guild activities could have helped make successful careers. Chapter 8 looks at political participation in Norwich on a very granular level. As Norwich has one of the best surviving records of civic office-holding in all of England, much can be learned by a close examination of the personnel who filled civic offices. This chapter then considers patterns of office-holding in detail for the worsted weavers, and how that changed dramatically

between 1453 and 1530. Chapter 9 concludes by using the wills of the worsted weavers to consider some end-life strategies for the weavers, especially with regard to intergenerational social mobility and the transfer of assets to children. It also posits a way to use testamentary charitable bequests as a means to evaluate wealth on a relative scale among the group. Thus Part II gives an overview of what the career-cycle or *cursus honorum* might look like for artisans in this period.

## 1.5 A note on Norwich geography

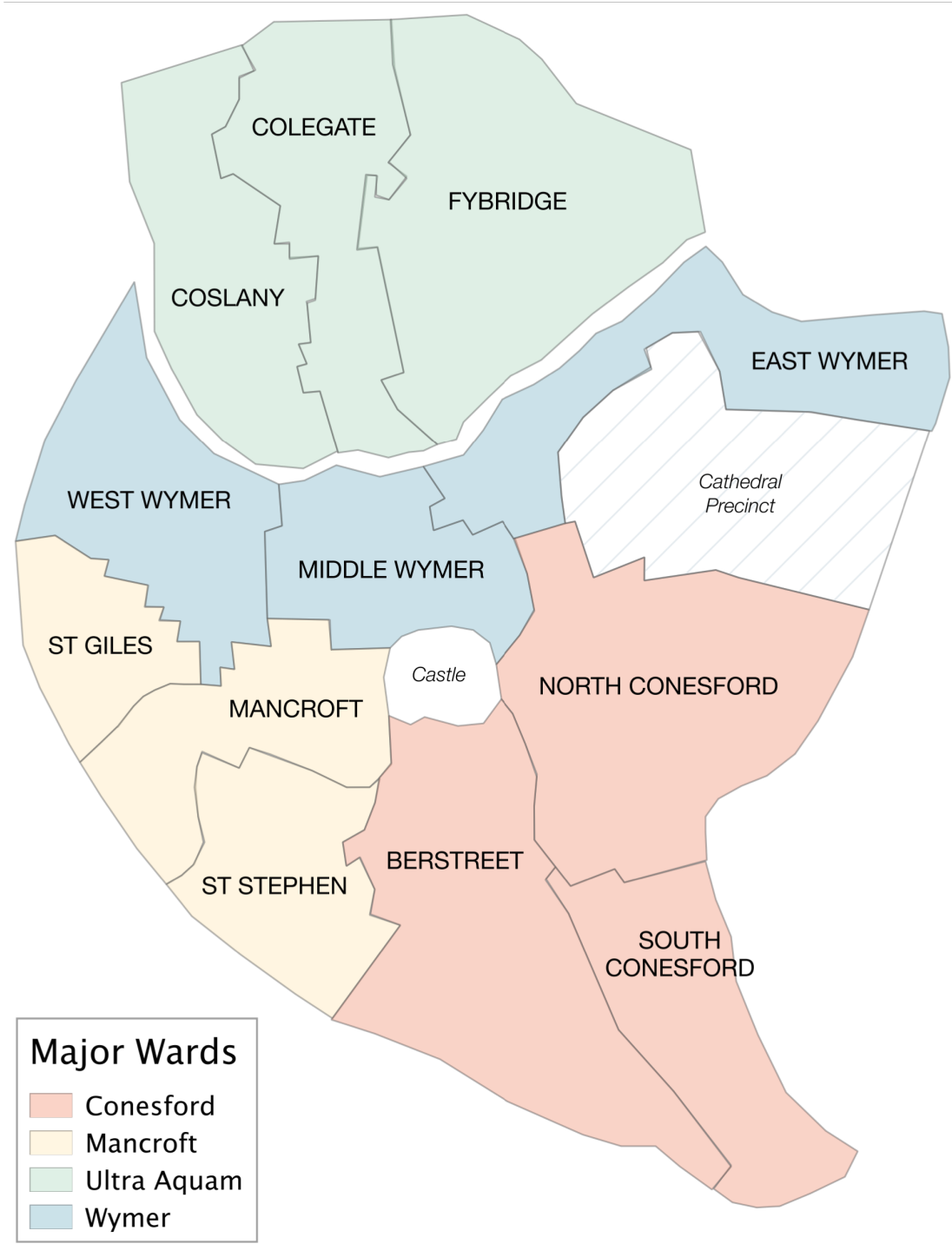
Medieval Norwich was divided into four major wards: Conesford, Mancroft, Wymer, and the Northern ward, which was also called ‘Ultra Aquam’ as it was the only ward located on the far side of the river. By the end of the fifteenth century, each major ward was also divided into three minor wards:

- Mancroft
  - St Peter Mancroft
  - St Giles
  - St Stephen
- Conesford
  - North Conesford
  - South Conesford
  - Berstreet
- Wymer
  - East Wymer
  - Middle Wymer
  - West Wymer
- Northern (Ultra Aquam)
  - Coslany
  - Colgate
  - Fybridge

A map of the wards, Map 1.1, follows on page 47.<sup>93</sup> Each of the minor wards elected its own slate of representatives to the common council and to the aldermen's council every year, and taxes were collected by ward, but the city's aldermen did not hold courts in their respective wards. A map of the medieval parishes of Norwich can be found on page 303.

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<sup>93</sup> This map was based on the one that appears in W. Hudson, *The Wards of the City of Norwich: Their Origin and History* (London, 1891), 10. See also *The Records of the City of Norwich*, ed. by W. Hudson and J. C. Tingey, vol. 1 (Norwich, 1906), 130-2.



**Map 1.1:** Map of the major and minor wards of late fifteenth-century Norwich

## 2 | Worsteds

'The report of my death was an exaggeration.'

*-Mark Twain*

It has long been believed that the fifteenth-century worsted industry in Norwich was an industry in deep decline. The image most often presented is that of a failed regional industry, one whose manufactures had enjoyed a reputation at home and abroad in the fourteenth century, but by the fifteenth century had sunk into a desperate obscurity, one that would only be revived with the injection of Flemish innovation in the 1570s. This chapter will argue the contrary: the fifteenth-century Norwich worsted industry was anything but inconsequential. The presumption of decline rests on a number of mistaken assumptions that have built up over time. This chapter will first redress misconceptions about the production of worsteds and woollens. It will then analyse the inherent problems in using customs accounts to reconstruct industrial history and show that worsteds made a comeback between the 1470s and 1520s. Factors that impacted the demand for worsteds will be considered; what was the role of a changing climate in driving consumer demand for certain textiles? And how did product innovation help alter the course of demand for worsteds in the fifteenth century?

Much stands in the way of our understanding of medieval textiles. Few physical remains have survived the test of time. The quick decomposition of natural fibres in damp soil all but guarantees that textile remains are rarely found in archaeological deposits. What little has been unearthed in England constitutes scraps and fragments, possibly no more than discards from the tailoring industry. Many of these fragments have been retrieved from waterlogged rubbish deposits in London,

and their condition has been greatly damaged by moisture and interaction with the soil. The original, bright colours and hues have faded to brown, and many of the finely finished surface textures are now effaced beyond recognition. It is not always easy to tell which of the samples were intentionally fulled, and which have been matted from time in the soil. There is a similar dearth of extant medieval soft furnishings, upholstery, and clothing.<sup>1</sup>

The lack of material evidence means that historians of cloth and clothing have had to piece together information from written sources and visual representations of textiles, yet this approach is problematic. It has proven vexingly difficult to align written sources with archaeological finds. The study of paintings, sculptures, brasses and manuscript illuminations can suggest changes in consumer demands and fashion trends, but they do not provide names of textiles, nor do they necessarily depict fabrics with sufficient detail to allow positive identification.

This uncertainty has been further compounded by the limited documentary sources that deal with cloth. No technical manuals survive to explain how and why English producers and merchants categorised cloths as they did, how different cloth types were produced, or even what distinguished one cloth from another. Much of the information about English cloth comes from sources generated by the cloth trade. Cloth was medieval England's darling commodity and as such has generated a large body of secondary literature. England's trade records are a tremendously useful and unique resource, but the heavy reliance on this one source has introduced a certain amount of bias. The English customs accounts were produced to track taxes, not to document fabrics. The categorisations used in these sources do not accurately reflect the breadth and vitality of the real market.

The field is further complicated by the many divisions between research areas. Archaeologists and historians do not share research as often as they could. Early modernists have produced many fine textile studies, but seldom delve far into details concerning their medieval antecedents. Historical research on medieval textiles has mostly been conducted by economic historians, who have naturally had

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<sup>1</sup> E. Crowfoot, F. Pritchard, and K. Staniland, *Textiles and Clothing, C.1150-C.1450* (London, 1992), 1-4.

more interest in the financial aspects of the cloth trade than in the textiles themselves. To look only at the trade in cloth is only one half of the equation; it was consumer demand that fuelled this trade in the first place.

Within this confused background, it has been difficult to untangle particulars about worsteds. Norfolk's worsted cloth was a well-known name on the market, but its importance as one of England's main export fabrics has become obscured behind a greater interest in English broadcloth. Its relative importance has been downgraded by scholars because of idiosyncrasies in how and why the customs accounts were produced. This chapter will consider the state of the English cloth market and the role that worsteds played in it. It will argue that worsteds have been marginalised in the literature due to a number of factors, the most important of which stems from over-reliance on the customs records, a source that was never meant accurately to document the cloth trade. It will also argue that worsteds were not 'negligible' to the fifteenth-century cloth trade; at the end of the century, they enjoyed a renaissance that spurred a return to fourteenth-century export levels. The chapter concludes by considering some of the factors that prompted fluctuation in the worsted trade, both that which caused them to falter in comparison to woollens, and that which encouraged their brief period of revival.

## 2.1 Cloth production: woollen or worsted?

As the nation's primary medieval manufacture, cloth figures prominently in the literature on the medieval English economy. No survey would be complete without reference to the rapid expansion of the English cloth industry, its usurpation of wool as England's most lucrative export, and the role of overseas trade.<sup>2</sup> Foreign trade was

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<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Bolton, *English Economy*, 287-301; M. M. Postan, *The Medieval Economy and Society* (Harmondsworth, 1975), 216-221. The seminal work on the medieval wool trade is E. Power, *The Wool Trade in English Medieval History* (New York, 1941), but see also T. H. Lloyd, *The English Wool Trade in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, UK, 1977) and J. H. Munro, *Wool, Cloth, and Gold : The Struggle for Bullion in Anglo-Burgundian Trade, 1340-1478* (Toronto, 1972).



instrumental in stimulating cloth production, but it is also the means by which we are best able to reconstruct the history of that industry, thanks to a copious amount of surviving documentation.

The first difficulty in discussing the English cloth market lies in navigating the minefield of terminology. In his study of the worsted industry in England, James lamented how little precision had been applied by authors when describing cloth in a historical context:

Again, under the terms implying fabrics formed from wool, the ancients when alluding to them, indiscriminately classed the articles we now distinguish as worsted or woollen. Indeed, until a very recent period, this distinction was not attended to by authors when noticing articles manufactured from wool, and has very materially added to the difficulty of tracing fully and satisfactorily the progress of the worsted manufacture.<sup>3</sup>

Little has changed since the 1850s. Though England produced a stunning variety of cloths, the literature often fails to acknowledge just how many types were available to purchase. Much of the best work on medieval cloth has focused solely on the genesis and subsequent success of the archetypal English 'broadcloth' to the exclusion of other cloths. This has partly resulted in a literature that does little to explain the most basic differences between worsteds and woollens, or woollens and broadcloths. Bridbury's survey of English clothmaking provides no overview of cloth types, nor even an explanation of how varied cloth could be.<sup>4</sup> E. M. Carus-Wilson wrote copiously about cloth and the cloth trade, but completely ignored worsteds and frequently described cloth in an entirely generic sense.<sup>5</sup> Miller's survey of clothmaking in the thirteenth century mentions worsteds and kerseys in passing, but

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<sup>3</sup> J. James, *History of the Worsted Manufacture in England* (1857), 4.

<sup>4</sup> A. R. Bridbury, *Medieval English Clothmaking* (London, 1982).

<sup>5</sup> E. M. Carus-Wilson, 'The English Cloth Industry in the Late Twelfth and Early Thirteenth Centuries', in *Medieval Merchant Venturers: Collected Studies* (London, 1967), 211-238; E. M. Carus-Wilson, 'Trends in the Export of English Woollens in the Fourteenth Century', in *Medieval Merchant Venturers: Collected Studies* (London, 1967), 239-264; E. M. Carus-Wilson, 'An Industrial Revolution of the Thirteenth Century', in *Medieval Merchant Venturers: Collected Studies* (London, 1967), 183-210.

does little to clarify that the bulk of his argument concerns only the making of woollens.<sup>6</sup>

Some authors use the term woollen and broadcloth interchangeably to refer to the cloth trade in general. This stems from the way in which cloths were categorised by the Exchequer in the customs accounts. Cloth of assize was the catch-all category for woollens woven to the width specified by the assizes.<sup>7</sup> This categorisation has unfortunately resulted in the assumption that all woollen exports were essentially uniform in construction. This was not the case. All broadcloths were woollens, but not all woollens were broadcloths. The term broadcloth comes from the Latin usage in accounts, *pannus latus*, which literally means ‘wide cloth’. It distinguished wider cloth woven on the horizontal broadloom from narrow cloth or ‘straits’, *pannus strictus*, which was woven on a narrow loom.<sup>8</sup> When the Cloth Custom was established in 1347, it relied on existing legislation concerning mandatory widths as the determining factor for export classifications. The wider, more expensive cloths were able to absorb the higher tariff of the Cloth Custom, and thus became the *de facto* standard for determining customs obligations. Over time, though, the term ‘broadcloth’ in the literature has come to mean a specific kind of heavy woollen, made from the higher grades of English wool, woven to statutory size, then fulled, napped, and sheared. To minimise confusion, this thesis will use the term ‘broadcloth’ only when referring to this specific type of wide cloth, ‘cloth of assize’ when referring to a notional standard cloth, and the term ‘woollens’ as the umbrella term for any non-worsted cloths.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> E. Miller, ‘The Fortunes of the English Textile Industry During the Thirteenth Century’, *EcHR*, 18 (1965), 64-82. Only on the last page does Miller point out that fulling mills have no connection to worsted production.

<sup>7</sup> The history of the English cloth assize is complex, and legislation changed often. See G. P. H. Chorley, ‘The English Assize of Cloth: A Note’, *Historical Research*, 59 (1986), 125-130; Bridbury, *Clothmaking*, 106-111.

<sup>8</sup> Wide cloth measured up to two yards wide. Narrow cloth was generally around a yard wide.

<sup>9</sup> This would include broadcloths, kerseys, russets, kendals, straits, dozens, Devon whites, and so on. Worsteds made in Norfolk included says, stamins, tapets, coverlets or chalons, and beds. There were also union cloths — that is, cloths with either a worsted or linen warp and a woollen weft — but these have received almost no attention in the English literature. There have not been many studies that look at particular aspects of different cloth types. Britnell’s

Worsteds, though made of wool, and though sometimes woven on a broadloom, were neither broadcloths, nor were they woollens. So what exactly were ‘worsteds’? This term has become something of an umbrella term, but because so little survives in the way of descriptive texts, it is difficult to know when it changed from being the name for textiles woven near Worstead, Norfolk, to a more generic appellation. Worsted weavers deposed in the sixteenth century that it was specifically the yarn that first provided the name for the cloth, ‘because that manner of spynning was first practised in Worsted in the countie of Norfolk’.<sup>10</sup> Historians and textile archaeologists have offered alternative definitions for worsteds, some of which focus on the wool, some of which focus on the yarn, and some of which focus on the finishing method. Archaeologists logically emphasise the physical properties of their finds.<sup>11</sup> Others follow the example of the worsted weavers and highlight the yarn itself. Kerridge, for example, argued that it was the spinning of Fenland wool on a drop spindle that distinguished worsteds.<sup>12</sup> Munro emphasised the continental distinctions in terminology; *draperie ointe* in French and *gesmoutte draperie* in Dutch were used to refer to the fact that the wool for woollens was greased prior to spinning, whereas worsted wools were left as is, thus *draperie sèche* in French or *drooge draperie* in Dutch.<sup>13</sup> Some additional difficulty arises from the variety of terminology used to describe worsted-type fabrics. In continental sources, worsted is

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study of Colchester discusses russets. R. H. Britnell, *Growth and Decline in Colchester, 1300-1525* (Cambridge, 1986), 53-71. Hulton’s study of weavers includes chapters on narrow cloth or straits, and chalons. M. Hulton, *Urban Weavers of Medieval England*, Ph.D thesis (University of Birmingham, 1990). Oldland briefly discusses the cloths produced by the London burellers, and categorises them primarily as a type of worsted, but not a serge. However, the record on burels is scarce, and he notes that burels disappear from the London records after 1270. J. R. Oldland, *London Clothmaking c. 1270-C.1550*, Ph.D thesis (London, Royal Holloway, 2003), 21-37. See note 68 on page 135 and the discussion on page 135 for more on the definition of a serge.

<sup>10</sup> Cited in E. Kerridge, *Textile Manufactures in Early Modern England* (Manchester, 1985), 8.

<sup>11</sup> For example, worsted is ‘A smooth thread spun from wool fibres which have been laid parallel by combing’. Crowfoot, Pritchard, and Staniland, *Textiles and Clothing*, 214.

<sup>12</sup> Kerridge, *Textile Manufactures*, 8.

<sup>13</sup> J. H. Munro, ‘Woollens, Worsteds, and (Hybrid) Serges’, International Medieval Congress, Leeds, UK (4 July 2013), . The slides for this session can be found at <<http://www.economics.utoronto.ca/wwwfiles/archives/munro05/ConferencePapers.html>>, (accessed 19 November 2015).

often referred to as ‘serge’, a term that also appeared in early English documents before worsted entered general usage in England.<sup>14</sup>

Most works that discuss worsteds only emphasise one or several of these features; in reality, it is the combination of all of them that makes an archetypal ‘worsted’ distinctive from a woollen. There were four main stages of cloth production, and each could be tailored either to a woollen output or a worsted output. Wool had to be selected and prepared first; then it could be spun into thread or yarn; only then could it be woven; after weaving, it required finishing. The type of wool selected depended on the type of fabric to be made, as did its preparation and spinning. The type of weave chosen was less important than the above, but all contributed to whether the finished cloth should be closer to a true woollen or closer to a true worsted. The next section will explain each of these steps and the reason why each was chosen.

## **Wool and cloth production**

To anyone who has never knitted or crocheted, one skein of yarn probably appears no different from the next. Most people who take up knitting for the first time fail to realise just how much their choice of yarn will impact the final shape of their project. Beginners typically select a yarn for its colour rather than its thickness or ply, resulting in some very unhappy outcomes. Fat yarns simply cannot produce thin knits — an obvious lesson in hindsight, but all too often one learned painfully through trial and error.

For most historians who study medieval cloth, textile analysis can be equally abstract. Just as for the novice knitter, the characteristics of wool, yarn, and cloth are several steps removed from the academic setting. But wool is a real material, with a surprisingly large range of characteristics. Wool can be short, medium, or long in staple. Fibres can be fine or coarse, straight or wavy, and more or less prone to felting. The type of wool that goes into a yarn has a direct impact on how yarn bends, how it feels, and how it wears.

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<sup>14</sup> F. Piponnier and P. Mane, *Dress in the Middle Ages* (New Haven, CT, 1997), 18. See note 68 on page 135 for more on the definition of serge.

Modern breeding practices have created a staggering number of sheep breeds, most of which did not exist in the Middle Ages.<sup>15</sup> English wool was the most expensive and most coveted of all the wools available on the international market. Its fineness was legendary, and its role as England's first export commodity gave life to the old adage, 'I praise God and ever shall / It is the sheep hath paid for all'.<sup>16</sup> The fineness of any given wool is, and was, the single largest determinant of cost, mostly because fine fibres are less likely to irritate the skin. However, not all English wool fell into the highest grade. Price lists show how widely regional breeds diverged. Just as today, there were also breeds that produced medium or long staple fibres, in a variety of thicknesses.

The Norfolk wool that appears on these lists were some of the cheapest available,<sup>17</sup> which has prompted historians to draw a direct connection between it and the supposed value and coarseness of worsteds. Much of the dismissal of worsteds as a cheap grade of cloth stems from this assessment. However, as Allison noted, there were actually two types of wool produced in Norfolk: fenland wool that came from sheep raised on the lush, marshy pastures in the western part of the county, and upland wool, that came from sheep raised on the sparse, higher elevations in the eastern part of the county.<sup>18</sup> Fenland sheep most likely enjoyed a better feed regimen, which would have made their wool longer and coarser.<sup>19</sup> In

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<sup>15</sup> M. L. Ryder, 'Medieval Sheep and Wool Types', *The Agricultural History Review*, 32 (1984), 14-28.

<sup>16</sup> Qtd. in Power, *The Wool Trade in English Medieval History*, 13.

<sup>17</sup> J. H. Munro, 'Wool-Price Schedules and the Qualities of English Wools in the Later Middle Ages c. 1270-1499', in *Textiles, Towns, and Trade* (Aldershot, Hampshire, 1994), 118-169 and T. H. Lloyd, 'The Movement of Wool Prices in Medieval England', *Economic History Review Supplement*, 6 (1973), ; see also J. H. Munro, 'The 1357 Wool-Price Schedule and the Decline of Yorkshire Wool Values', in *Textiles, Towns and Trade* (Aldershot, Hampshire, 1994), 211-219.

<sup>18</sup> K. J. Allison, *The Wool Supply and the Worsted Cloth Industry in Norfolk in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, Ph.D thesis (University of Leeds, 1955), 1-2.

<sup>19</sup> In a twist of fate, the quality of English wool may have declined as standards of animal husbandry improved. As farmers from the sixteenth century onwards noted, well-fed sheep tend to grow longer and coarser fleece. The wools that topped the medieval prices lists were probably from nutritionally deficient animals, which produced the wispy-fine, short-stapled wool so coveted for the making of woollens. See M. J. Stephenson, 'Wool Yields in the Medieval Economy', *EcHR*, 41 (1988-08-01), 368-391.

contrast, the upland wool would have been shorter and finer. Allison argued it was the upland breed that produced the wool for worsteds.<sup>20</sup> It is worth pondering whether the worsted weavers' repeated efforts to reserve their wool solely for use in their own weaving indicates that there was little to spare, and thus little available for sale outside the county.<sup>21</sup> If this were true, the price of Norfolk wool on the various medieval price lists is not necessarily indicative of the grade of wool that went into

**Table 2.1:** Physical characteristics of some modern wool breeds <sup>22</sup>

| Wool Type                                   | Merino <sup>23</sup> | Ryeland <sup>24</sup> | Romney  | Norfolk horn | Lincoln Longwool | Blackface |
|---------------------------------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|---------|--------------|------------------|-----------|
| Average diameter in microns                 | 18-23                | 30-32                 | 31.5-34 | 32-34        | 35-48            | 35+       |
| Average length in mm                        | 75-80                | 50-80                 | 100-170 | 70-100       | 150-300          | 150-300   |
| British Wool Marketing Board classification | --                   | Fine                  | Medium  | Fine         | Lustre           | Mountain  |

worsteds. It could also mean that the cheap Norfolk wools that appear on medieval price lists were not from the same breed that produced the wool used in worsteds, and that estimates of the 'coarseness' of worsteds is thus misjudged.

<sup>20</sup> Allison, *The Wool Supply and the Worsted Cloth Industry in Norfolk in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, 2.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 449-53.

<sup>22</sup> With the exception of the Merino, each of these breeds has been bred in England since the Middle Ages. While we cannot definitely state how different each is from their medieval antecedent, it gives an overview of the range of wools available today. Sources: The British Wool Marketing Board, <<http://www.britishwool.org.uk/british-sheep-breeds.php>>, (accessed 14 January 2016), and World of Wool, wholesale wool distributors in Yorkshire, England. <<http://www.worldofwool.co.uk/products/7/naturalwooltopsandfleeces.htm>>, (accessed 10 December 2015).

<sup>23</sup> Merino is included for comparison. It is the gold-standard for fine wools today, but the breed originated in Spain.

<sup>24</sup> Ryeland is the modern name for the famed medieval 'Leominster' wool of Herefordshire, which topped many of the fourteenth- and fifteenth-century English price lists. M. L. Ryder, 'The History of Sheep Breeds in Britain', *The Agricultural History Review*, 12 (1964), 77.

Modern perceptions of the relative fineness or coarseness of wool is necessarily conditioned by the range of wools available today. As animal husbandry improved over time, so too did the length and hairiness of wool. What may have rated as 'coarse' in the Middle Ages may not seem so coarse today. For instance, the modern Norfolk Horn sheep, which is presumed to be a descendent of Norfolk's upland breed, produces wool rated 'Fine' by the British Wool Marketing Board, yet its fibres average 32 to 34 microns in diameter.<sup>25</sup> Examinations of wool remnants undertaken in the 1960s attest to the extraordinary fineness of medieval wools. Fibres attached to medieval parchments were measured as fine as 7 to 10 microns in diameter, and a textile fragment from a thirteenth-century burial at Thetford Priory was woven from fibres sized as small as 15 microns.<sup>26</sup> Both of these examples suggest that modern assumptions about what constitutes fine and coarse may well be skewed by modern breed standards. Few modern wools, including merino, have diameters finer than 20 microns (see Table 2.1).<sup>27</sup>

### Wool Preparation

Before wool can be spun, it must first be carded or combed. Generally speaking, worsteds are combed and woollens are carded. Combing lines up the fibres parallel to each other and removes the shortest ones (the noils). The fine wools that went into woollens were probably too short to be combed, so they were carded instead. Carding creates a tangled clump that resembles cotton, with the fibres jumbled in multiple directions. Short fibres are difficult to hold together in a yarn; carding helps with this, as does finishing the cloth into a felt via fulling. Felting occurs because the shafts of wool fibres are covered in cuticles that resemble scales. When the fibres are

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<sup>25</sup> <[http://www.britishwool.org.uk/assets/uploads/sheep\\_breeds/Norfolk%20Horn%20FINE.pdf](http://www.britishwool.org.uk/assets/uploads/sheep_breeds/Norfolk%20Horn%20FINE.pdf)>, (accessed 5 May 2016).

<sup>26</sup> M. L. Ryder, 'The History of Sheep Breeds in Britain (Continued)', *The Agricultural History Review*, 12 (1964), 78-9.

<sup>27</sup> This is an area where DNA research can contribute. Research in the 1960s had to rely on blood markers to reconstruct presumed familiar heritages between sheep breeds. Future research could use genetic samples from wool and parchments to build more accurate historical profiles for English breeds.

agitated in warm water, the cuticles open or 'lift up' from the fibre shaft, allowing the scales to lock together with neighbouring scales, matting the fibres together into a felt (Figure 2.1). Not all wools felt equally well, and some felt very poorly, such as the breeds that would have been used in worsteds.

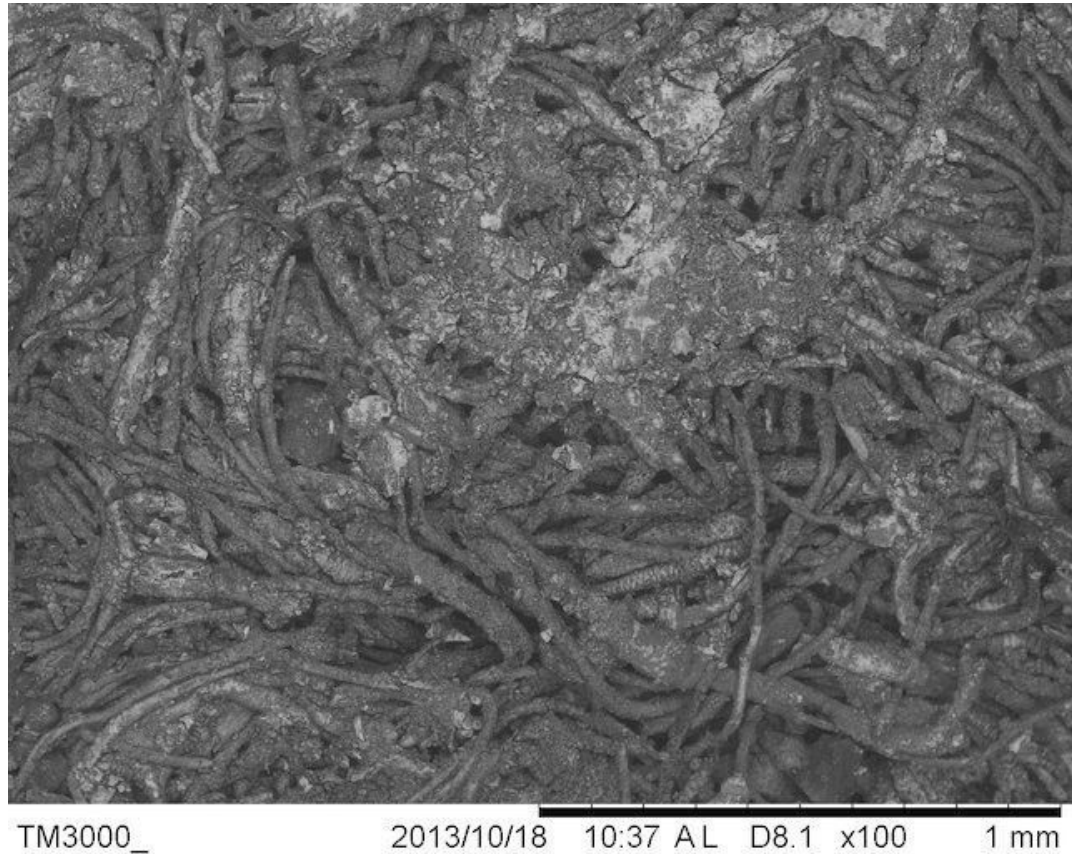


**Figure 2.1:** Woollen fibres matted by fulling as viewed under a scanning electron microscope. This fragment of cloth, attached to a late medieval or early modern lead cloth seal, was retrieved from the River Wear in Durham city.<sup>28</sup>

Despite fine wool being more desirable, it was not equally well suited to use in all fabrics. Regions like Norfolk that regularly produced lower-valued wools may seem to have been disadvantaged, but in reality those areas learned to use their local wools to best advantage. The most expensive wools were suited to making fulled woollens, but would have performed poorly in worsteds. The longer wools of the

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<sup>28</sup> Courtesy of Gary Bankhead, Department of Archaeology, Durham University.



upland Norfolk breeds were better suited to the production of worsteds, so it should come as no surprise that in spite of the growing market for fulled woollens, Norfolk continued to produce worsteds.

## Yarn

Once the raw fibre has been cleaned and prepped, it is ready for spinning. The two basic methods for spinning yarn are woollen spinning and worsted spinning. The choice of one or the other method has a direct impact on the surface characteristics of the finished fabric.

Woollen yarns are typically produced using carded wool. In woollen spinning, the goal is to produce yarns that are inwardly lofty and outwardly fuzzy. This creates a yarn that is soft, lightweight, and squishy. Ideally, woollen yarns should have a halo effect caused by fibre ends protruding from the yarn. Woollen yarns trap air, making them good at insulating and ideal for warm clothing. However, the fuzziness of the halo also means that woollen yarns are not well suited to creating a fabric with a distinct surface pattern or texture.

Worsted yarns are produced using combed wool. They are hard and sleek where woollen yarns are soft and fuzzy. The goal of a worsted yarn is to be outwardly smooth and inwardly dense. This produces a yarn that is tight, strong, and supple. They are poor at insulating, but more durable than a woollen.<sup>29</sup> They pill less and are harder wearing. The smooth finish of a worsted yarn means that, unlike woollens, they are well suited to use in fabrics that call for patterning via coloration or a well-defined surface texture. Worsted yarns also have better tensile strength, which is why they were commonly used for the warp threads in weaving.

Not all wools are equally suited to both types of spinning. Woollen yarns are easier to make from fine wools, spun loosely. Fine wools are more likely to have a natural waviness or crimp, which helps hold the fibres together when spun. A low amount of twist lets the fibres open up inside the yarn, creating the air pockets.

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<sup>29</sup> P. A. Gibson-Roberts, *Spinning in the Old Way* (Fort Collins, CO, 2006), 70-71.

Worsted yarns are easier to produce with longer fibres. Longer fibres are also more likely to have the natural shine that makes a worsted yarn look lustrous.

Different spinning techniques are used to make woollen and worsted yarns. The key differences lie in how the fibres are drawn out to form the thread, and how twist is allowed into the thread. Woollen spinners use a 'long draw', which combines drafting and twist in the same motion. This process lets the yarn expand naturally, leaving more air inside the yarn. Conversely, worsted spinners use a 'short draw', where the drafting and the twisting are separate actions. This method helps compress the yarn, minimising loose fibre ends and maximising smoothness and density.<sup>30</sup>

Woollens and worsteds further diverged in the way spinning technology developed. The time it took to spin yarn was one of the primary bottlenecks in production. Yarn was traditionally spun using a hand spindle (or 'drop spindle'), sometimes in conjunction with a distaff. A spindle is essentially a rod with a counterweight, or 'whorl'. Fibres are attached to the rod, which is then set to spinning (Figure 2.2). The weight of the whorl pulls on the fibres, elongating the thread, and the rotation introduces enough twist into the fibres to hold the thread together.<sup>31</sup> The distaff was a long, often forked, wooden implement; if it was used, it held the unspun fibres so the spinner could use both hands to manipulate the thread and the spindle. In many places in England, including Norfolk, the spindle was sometimes called a 'rock'.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> These are the two ideal types. Many hand spinners mix elements of both.

<sup>31</sup> A complete introduction to using a drop spindle can be found in Gibson-Roberts, *Spinning in the Old Way*.

<sup>32</sup> For the etymology of 'rock', see note 82 on page 138.

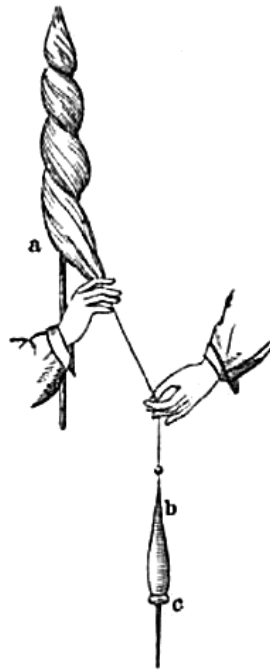


**Figure 2.2:** Hand or drop spindle with distaff.<sup>33</sup> A. Distaff B. Spindle C. Whorl

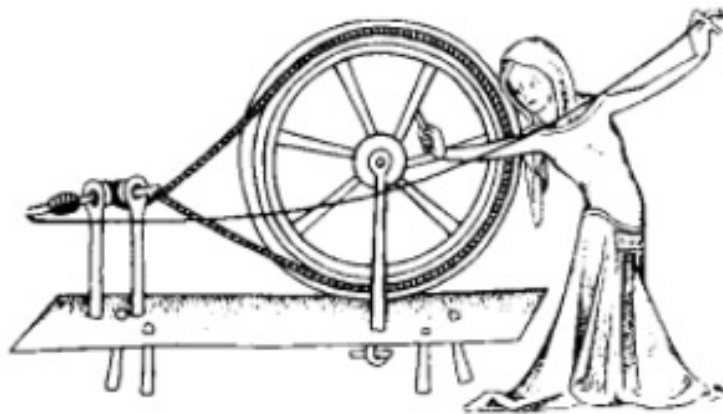


**Figure 2.3:** The Great Wheel, c.1338. From the Luttrell Psalter.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>33</sup> Wikimedia Commons, 'Abbildung des Spinnvorganges mit dem Spinnwirtel, aus Meyer's Conversationslexikon', <<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Wirtel01.png>>, (accessed 17 February 2016).

<sup>34</sup> C. 1338, after the Luttrell Psalter. Fasc edition by E.G.Millar, plate CXXXVIII, London British Museum, 1932.

Spinning changed radically with the introduction of the spinning wheel to Europe in around the thirteenth century.<sup>35</sup> The earliest wheel was called the Great Wheel or the Jersey Wheel, which is essentially a mechanical extension of the hand spindle.<sup>36</sup> A horizontal spindle and a wheel are attached to a baseboard (Figure 2.3). The spindle is rotated via a drive band that runs between the spindle and the wheel. The spinner holds the fibres with one hand and rotates the wheel with the other hand. The spinner alternates between drawing out the fibre, then winding the twisted thread onto the spindle.<sup>37</sup>

There were problems with the early wheels, which limited their uptake in the weaving industry. They were poorly suited to producing warp yarns. Warps are attached to the loom and provide the structure of a fabric. They must be uniformly sized and able to withstand a great deal of tension. Since the early wheels could not meet this requirement, guilds or cities often banned wheel-spun warp threads. The *'Livre des mestiers'*, written in Bruges in 1349, declared wheel-spun thread to be inferior to spindle thread, because wheels produced 'yarns that were too weak, too uneven, with insufficient twist, and with "too many knots"'.<sup>38</sup>

However, weft yarns for woollen cloth had no need to be strong or uniform, neither of which mattered if the fabric was to be fulled. Hence, the wheel slowly found acceptance in the woollen industry for making wefts. This sped up production immensely, because a wheel could produce yarn much faster than a spindle.<sup>39</sup> It may have been a crucial factor in why broadcloth production expanded so quickly from the fourteenth century.

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<sup>35</sup> Early documentation is sparse. Munro cites several Italian sources, with Venice being the earliest in 1224. J. H. Munro, 'Textile Technology in the Middle Ages', in *Textiles, Towns and Trade* (Aldershot, Hampshire, 1994), 9.

<sup>36</sup> It is also called a spindle wheel or a walking wheel.

<sup>37</sup> For a fuller discussion of the various spinning options in historical context, see R. L. Hills, *Power in the Industrial Revolution* (Manchester, 1970), 15-19. Some early references and images are found in M. L. Kissell, *Yarn and Cloth Making, an Economic Study* (New York, 1918), 18-71. Great Wheel spinning videos are available on YouTube, including <<https://youtu.be/z1KWQ1RE69E>> and <[https://youtu.be/YQpgKvbj\\_bQ](https://youtu.be/YQpgKvbj_bQ)>, (accessed 3 March 2016).

<sup>38</sup> Cited in Munro, 'Textile Technology', 9.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

Worsted, however, continued to use spindle-spun yarn long after the wheel became popular for spinning woollen yarn. The actions required to spin a worsted yarn limited the wheel's early use in the worsted industry. Since a Great Wheel must constantly be turned with one hand, the spinner is limited to manipulating the fibres with their other hand. This was not a problem for woollen yarns, because the 'long draw' used in producing woollen yarns needs only one hand, but worsted spinning requires the spinner to hold the yarn with both hands.<sup>40</sup>

It was not until well into the sixteenth century that the wheel had evolved into what we now call the Saxony Wheel. The Saxony added two key technological advancements. The first was the addition of the flyer. This allows the yarn to wind onto the wheel's spindle as the yarn is being spun. This was a useful innovation for woollen spinners, but provided no real incentive for worsted spinners to switch from the spindle to the wheel. The other improvement, however, was the crucial addition of a foot treadle to turn the wheel.<sup>41</sup> Until its invention, the spinning wheel remained unsuited for making worsted yarn because it could not accommodate a worsted 'short draw'. Once spinners could power the wheel with their feet, it left both hands available for drafting. As this later improvement did not occur until well into the sixteenth century, it had no effect on the medieval worsted industry.

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<sup>40</sup> Gibson-Roberts, *Spinning in the Old Way*, 112-117; See also <<http://www.ravelry.com/discuss/spindle-wheels>>, (accessed 21 January 2016).

<sup>41</sup> Munro describes the addition of the flyer in detail, but he misses the crucial point that foot treadles were more important for producing worsted yarns and warp yarns because of how the wool is held. Munro, 'Textile Technology', 11.

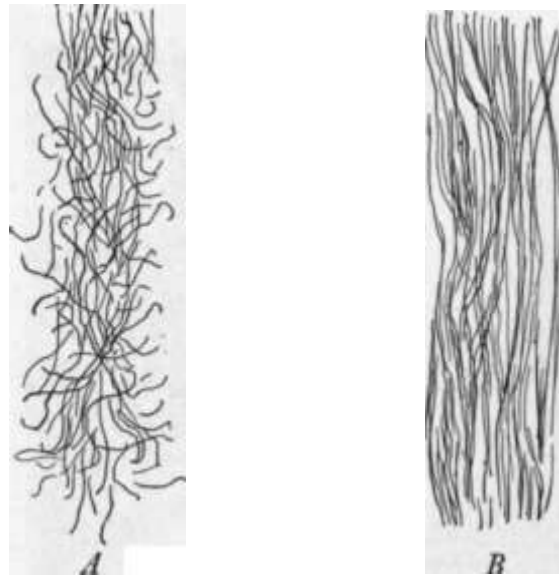


**Figure 2.4:** Woollen yarn structure (A) and worsted yarn structure (B)<sup>42</sup>

## Weaves

Once the yarn was spun, it could be woven. Technically, there was little to distinguish the weaving of a worsted cloth from that of other cloths. A worsted and a woollen *can* be woven using the same weave pattern. Broadcloths were often woven in plain weave, also called tabby weave, since a fulled cloth will lose any surface pattern in the fulling process. Finds of tabby weaves in London increase from the second half of the fourteenth century, around the same time that woollen exports were overtaking worsteds.<sup>43</sup> Worsted fabrics, on the other hand, used worsted yarn precisely because smooth yarns help emphasise surface patterns, which are created by more complicated weaves. The simplest of patterned weaves is a 2.1 twill, in which the weft passes over two warps and under one. This creates a simple diagonal

<sup>42</sup> H. Kinne, 'Clothing and Health. An Elementary Textbook of Home Making', <<http://chestofbooks.com/crafts/needlework/Clothing-And-Health.html>>, (accessed 15 May 2017), Ch. 5, Lesson 6, Fig. 124.

<sup>43</sup> Also called a plain weave. A tabby weave is the simplest weave: one thread over, one thread under.

pattern. More complicated twills use an increasing number of wefts and sheds to create increasingly complex patterns, such as herringbone, chevrons or diamonds.<sup>44</sup> Worsted fragments have been retrieved in London that used as many as six sheds.<sup>45</sup> The most important of these would have been patterns that give a satin or sateen effect. This type of weaving floats four or five threads over one to make the surface look and feel uniformly smooth, giving the impression of being unbroken by cross-threads, and comes the closest to imitating the look and feel of silk.

### Post-weaving

Fulling was an important finishing process for woollens, but not for worsteds. Fulling involved submersing the cloth in warm water, together with fuller's earth, soap, and urine, then beating or 'walking' on the cloth.<sup>46</sup> This felted the fibres together and shrunk the fabric, sometimes by as much as a half, making it firmer and denser. It is important to note here that fulling also enhanced the insulating quality of woollens, which made them intrinsically far warmer than worsteds. The woollen felt created by fulling causes the fabric to hold tiny pockets of air in the fabric. These air pockets help the body retain warmth. The same type of construction is used for polyester fleece today, which is popular for jackets and other cold-weather clothing.

After fulling, the cloth would be stretched on tenters to dry. Shearers then used teasels to lift up the surface of the fabric (called 'raising the nap'), a process that was facilitated by using a loose, fuzzy woollen yarn. The lifted fuzz was then carefully sheared off to create a smooth, silky finish. In contrast, worsteds were typically not fulled. A worsted cloth might be finished immediately after weaving, or

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<sup>44</sup> A 'shed' is created when some warps are raised and others are lowered, leaving a gap through which the weft passes. Increasing the number of sheds allows for more sophisticated weaves.

<sup>45</sup> Crowfoot, Pritchard, and Staniland, *Textiles and Clothing*, 41-3.

<sup>46</sup> Fuller's earth consists primarily of hydrous aluminium silicates, clay minerals that readily absorb oil and grease. Urine was used in the fulling process as an additive for scouring, but urine also contains ammonia. Ammonia stimulates the cuticles on wool fibres to lift and open away from the shaft, in much the same way that ammonia increases the effectivity of chemical hair dyes. For background on the invention of the fulling mill, see Carus-Wilson, 'Industrial Revolution'.

it could be calendered, a process of passing the cloth through hot rollers to press it, leaving the surface with a glossy sheen.

Thus, to understand the difference between true worsteds and true woollens, it is necessary to understand the complete process, from wool to finish. The selection of wool, carding or combing, and method of spinning all contribute to the look and feel of the finished product. If felting was the desired outcome, then the correct yarn was crucial to whether this was enhanced or inhibited. Likewise, if a smooth surface was the goal, then the right inputs were key. Every aspect of production could be tailored to get either the smooth, durable finish of a worsted, or the soft, fulled finish of a broadcloth.<sup>47</sup>

## 2.2 Worsteds and the cloth trade

In the thirteenth century the crown began experimenting with taxing imports and exports as a means to raise revenue. At first, the range of commodities that fell under this tax was modest. The *Ancient Custom*, instituted in 1275, taxed only the export of

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<sup>47</sup> Archaeologists in Eindhoven, Holland, attempted to recreate the production technique for fifteenth-century *Laken* or broadcloth. Their unfortunate choices in materials and method reveals a fundamental misunderstanding of the processes described above. They selected a *very* long-stapled and rather coarse Cotswold wool, with a staple length of 200-250mm long, which they then scoured and greased as for woollens, combed as for worsteds, and hand spun with a fairly low twist but without any indication of whether the spin was worsted or woollen. This they wove in a 2.2 twill. They were unable to produce a tabby weave because the sheds kept sticking, probably due to lumpy yarn and poor warping tension on the loom. The unfulled cloth was 1.53 meters wide and 19.85 meters long, but weighed only 12 kg — extremely light for a broadcloth. English broadcloths weighed as much as 80 or 90 pounds. Their fulling was too short, at 11 hours only, and the finished cloth was hung to dry, but evidently not tented or stretched. Even so, the resulting shrinkage was far too little, at a mere 7%. In their own estimation, ‘The surface and impression of the fabric did not correspond to what was expected and would not be suitable for napping and shearing’ because the warps and wefts had not shrunk uniformly, causing them to shift and produce loops on the surface of the fabric. A better understanding of each element of production would have served them better. A. Reurink and K. V. Pedersen, ‘Reconstructing 15th Century *Laken*’, in *The Medieval Broadcloth*, ed. by K. V. Pedersen and M.-L. B. Nosch (Oxford, 2009), 152-160.



wool, woolfells, and hides,<sup>48</sup> but it was successful enough to encourage the crown to expand the scheme. The *New Custom* (or *Petty Custom*) was introduced in 1303.<sup>49</sup> This rate was payable only by alien merchants, but the range of goods was much expanded. It included a new fixed customs rate on woollen cloths of assize, plus a separate *ad valorem* tax of 3d in the pound on other types of merchandise, including some cloths that did not fit into the rubric of a standard cloth of assize.<sup>50</sup> In 1347 the customs were expanded again. A new *Cloth Custom* (*custuma pannorum* or 'pannage' as it came to be known) was introduced, which now taxed denizens as well as aliens.<sup>51</sup> This added a new set of fixed rates on woollens, plus a different set of piece rates specifically for worsteds.<sup>52</sup> In time, the cloth custom was merged with the 1303 customs and together they came to be known as the Petty Custom.<sup>53</sup> It is primarily the accounts of the Petty Custom that have been used to evaluate the English cloth trade.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> See Gras for earlier debates on the extent of coverage under the ancient custom. N. S. B. Gras, *The Early English Customs System: A Documentary Study of the Institutional and Economic History of the Customs From the Thirteenth to the Sixteenth Century* (Cambridge, 1918), 59-65.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 66-71.

<sup>50</sup> The specifics of the new agreement were set down in the *Carta Mercatoria*. The clause concerning the other types of cloths is '*sicut de pannis tartenis de serico, de cindatis, et de cera et aliis diversis mercibus*'. H. T. Riley, *Munimenta Gildhallae Londoniensis: Liber Custumarum*, vol. II (London, 1860), 209-210. Stephen Alsford has translated this as 'cloths of silk, of cendal, or of serge, and various other wares'. <<http://users.trytel.com/tristan/towns/florilegium/economy/ecom21.html>>, (accessed 5 Jun 2012). 'Cendal' or 'sendal' was taffeta, a light silk weave. Piponnier and Mane, *Dress in the Middle Ages*, 20, 167.

<sup>51</sup> Gras, *English Customs*, 72.

<sup>52</sup> Hanseatic traders in the fourteenth century refused to comply with the new 1347 regulations for Petty Custom and Cloth Custom. They were able to negotiate an exemption by writ, and presumably only paid the Petty Custom of 3d in the £. For the rest of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries they appear sporadically in the accounts. There is, however, much confusion over their history of exemptions. See W. M. Ormrod, 'Finance and Trade Under Richard II', in *Richard II: The Art of Kingship* (Oxford, 1999), 175; E. M. Carus-Wilson and O. Coleman, *England's Export Trade, 1275-1547* (Oxford, 1963), Appendix III and V; and T. H. Lloyd, *England and the German Hanse, 1157-1611: A Study of Their Trade and Commercial Diplomacy* (Cambridge, 1991), 32-3.

<sup>53</sup> Gras, *English Customs*, 73-77.

<sup>54</sup> Cloth merchants also paid subsidy on cloth exports, which were accounted for separately in the Poundage accounts. Poundage was another *ad valorem* export tax, initially granted intermittently for specific needs. By the fifteenth century it had become *pro forma* lifetime grants to the sovereign, but for most of that century denizens and Hanseatic

Historians of English trade may be blessed with the copious survival of the customs accounts,<sup>55</sup> but their sheer volume means that only some of the records have been systematically studied. The two main series that survive from the medieval customs records are the Particular Accounts and the Enrolled Accounts. The Particulars are line item accounts that were compiled on a daily basis by port officials.<sup>56</sup> Typically, these provide the ship, the date, the name of the merchant, their status (denizen, alien, or Hansard), their goods that were dutiable, and the amount of that duty. For alien merchants who owed cloth subsidy in addition to the cloth custom, the value of the cloth is usually included as well. The other important series is the Enrolled Accounts, which are summaries of the Particular accounts, tallied by category.<sup>57</sup> Cloths taxed under the Petty Custom are grouped as woollens (cloths of

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merchants held exemptions, making the aggregate figures unrepresentative of general trends. Furthermore, the sums collected for cloth under poundage were not usually separated from other general merchandise, making them less useful than the cloth custom. The only way to reconstitute payments of poundage on cloth is to start with the detailed particular accounts created at the ports. See Ormrod for an overview of the misunderstandings surrounding cloth poundage. Ormrod, 'Finance and Trade Under Richard II', 172-3; also *The Customs Accounts of Hull, 1453-1490*, ed. by W. R. Childs (Leeds, 1986), xxv.

<sup>55</sup> Other countries have been far less fortunate. Customs were commonly not imposed at the national level and what little survives is fragmentary. Carus-Wilson, 'Export of English Woollens', 239.

<sup>56</sup> TNA E 122, Exchequer, King's Remembrancer, Particulars of Customs Accounts.

<sup>57</sup> TNA E 356, Exchequer, Pipe Office, Customs Accounts Rolls. There have been a number of extracts printed from the Enrolled Accounts. The most recent is by Jenks, who has produced the most complete reproduction of the accounts yet, covering the period from their inception to the start of the reign of Henry VIII. *The Enrolled Customs Accounts: 1279/80-1508/09 (1523/1524)*, ed. by S. Jenks, 12 vols. (Kew, 2004). The Enrolled Accounts for the reign of Henry VIII can be found in G. Schanz, *Englische Handelspolitik Gegen Ende des Mittelalters* (Leipzig, 1881). Gray published figures from the Enrolled Accounts but only for the period 1399 to 1482. H. L. Gray, 'Tables of Enrolled Customs and Subsidy Accounts: 1399 to 1482', in *Studies in English Trade in the Fifteenth Century*, ed. by M. M. Postan and E. Power (London, 1933), 321-360. For the cloth trade, Coleman and Carus-Wilson produced yearly figures port by port, but did not include annual national totals. Also note that they rounded fractional quantities. Carus-Wilson and Coleman, *England's Export Trade*. Bridbury published annual totals for cloths using Coleman and Carus-Wilson's data. Bridbury, *Clothmaking*, 116-122. Note that only Jenks and Schanz included figures for worsteds. Ramsay provides an overview of the historiography from the sixteenth century onwards. G. D. Ramsay, *The English Woollen Industry, 1500-1750* (London, 1982), 73-77.

**Table 2.2:** The Petty Customs on cloth after 1347<sup>58</sup>

| Type of cloth       | Denizens | Aliens       | Hansards |
|---------------------|----------|--------------|----------|
| Cloth of assize     |          |              |          |
| cloth in grain      | 2s 4d    | 5s 6d        | 2s       |
| cloth in half grain | 1s 9d    | 4s 1d        | 1s 6d    |
| cloth without grain | 1s 2d    | 2s 9d        | 1s       |
| Worsteds            |          |              |          |
| single worsted      | 1d       | 1½ d + 3d/£  | 3d/£     |
| double worsted      | 2d       | 3d + 3d/£    | 3d/£     |
| Beds                |          |              |          |
| single worsted bed  | 5d       | 7½ d + 3d/£  | 3d/£     |
| double worsted bed  | 9d       | 13½ d + 3d/£ | 3d/£     |

assize), worsteds, or beds. Woollens were subdivided into cloths with grain, cloths with half grain, and cloths without grain;<sup>59</sup> worsteds were taxed as singles, doubles, and sometimes as half-doubles. The Enrolled Accounts normally covered a period running from Michaelmas to Michaelmas,<sup>60</sup> though some ran longer or shorter.

The customs series provide an invaluable record of the cloth trade, though the records are not as straightforward as they may seem. The accounts were intended neither to be a complete reckoning of cloth exports, nor a record of the real value of

<sup>58</sup> *Enrolled Customs*, Part 2, iv; Gras, *English Customs*, 72.

<sup>59</sup> Grain referred to the red dye produced using kermes. Very few cloths in the accounts were ever taxed under this category. J. H. Munro, 'Scarlet', in *Encyclopaedia of Medieval Dress and Textiles of the British Isles, c. 450 - 1450*, ed. by G. R. Owen-Crocker, E. Coatsworth *et al.* (Leiden, 2012), 477–481; J. H. Munro, G. R. Owen-Crocker, and H. Uzzell, 'Kermes', in *Encyclopaedia of Medieval Dress and Textiles of the British Isles, c. 450 - 1450*, ed. by G. R. Owen-Crocker, E. Coatsworth *et al.* (Leiden, 2012), 301–2.

<sup>60</sup> Not all of the Enrolled Accounts start and end at Michaelmas. Coleman and Carus-Wilson used the year previous and the year following to estimate annual averages for fractional years.

those cloths. The customs accounts existed only to track the amount of income collected for the crown. In spite of this, historians have used them extensively as proxy data for measuring the size and vigour of the cloth market. The aggregate amounts from the Enrolled Accounts have been used by historians to compile statistics on the size and value of the English cloth trade.<sup>61</sup> Only a handful of Particular Accounts have been published,<sup>62</sup> partly because they are voluminous and partly because the Enrolled Accounts have been considered sufficient for the needs of most work. The survival rate of the Particulars is uneven, but they contain much information unavailable in the Enrolled Accounts and continue to be under-utilised.<sup>63</sup> Both series are incomparably useful, but historians must be aware of the idiosyncrasies and lacunae in the records. The next two sections will discuss the customs accounts with reference to the trade in worsteds, and some of the problems that arise from relying on this single source of information.

### **The limitations of using customs accounts for analysis**

The introduction of the cloth custom, and the almost complete survival rate of the Enrolled Accounts, means that English historians have an unusually good overview of the ebbs and flows in the overseas cloth trade. A small number of publications have attempted to present numerical statistics culled from the Enrolled Accounts. Yet many of the publications that purport to present the raw data as preserved in the Enrolled Accounts suffer from selection bias. Because exporters paid different

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<sup>61</sup> No denizens paid cloth customs prior to 1347, making it difficult to comment on the state of the cloth trade before that. Customs were farmed between 1343 and 1350. From 1350, the summary accounts survive with relatively few gaps. Carus-Wilson, 'Export of English Woollens', 240.

<sup>62</sup> Very few have been published. See *The Overseas Trade of Bristol in the Later Middle Ages*, ed. by E. M. Carus-Wilson (Bristol, 1967), D. M. Owen, *The Making of King's Lynn: A Documentary Survey* (London, 1984), *Customs Accounts of Hull, The Overseas Trade of London Exchequer Customs Accounts, 1480-1*, ed. by H. S. Cobb (London, 1990), and *The Overseas Trade of Boston in the Reign of Richard II*, ed. by S. H. Rigby (Woodbridge, 2005). Miscellaneous excerpts appear in *The Early Yorkshire Woollen Trade*, ed. J. Lister (York, 1924) and Gras, *English Customs*. A survey of earlier work on the accounts can be found in Carus-Wilson and Coleman, *England's Export Trade*, 4-7.

<sup>63</sup> W. Childs, 'The English Export Trade in Cloth in the Fourteenth Century', in *Progress and Problems in Medieval England*, ed. by R. H. Britnell and J. Hatcher (Cambridge, 1996), 124.

customs rates for worsted cloths and worsted beds (see Table 2.2), their summary totals appear separately from cloths of assize in the accounts. The phenomenal growth in woollen exports, and the way in which this data was recorded, makes the figures look very lopsided in favour of broadcloth, but the ways in which the statistics have been calculated do not fully represent the diversity of the cloth market.

Understanding the overseas worsted trade for the fourteenth century is particularly difficult because of the nature of the customs accounts. The early-to-mid fourteenth century is usually described as the golden period for worsteds, but that assessment relies on a very limited set of figures. Prior to 1347, the few extant customs particulars do show worsteds being shipped from east coast ports by alien merchants, but as denizen exporters were not taxed in the first half of the century, it is impossible to estimate national totals.<sup>64</sup>

The Cloth Custom accounts broaden our understanding considerably once they begin in 1347, but again, their coverage is uneven enough that estimates are problematic. For the period between 1347 and 1360, we have a narrow window of time that may or may not be representative of exports in the middle of the century. During that time, worsted exports significantly outnumbered woollen exports. After 1360 the data again becomes partial. Hanseatic purchases are unrecorded between 1360 and 1380,<sup>65</sup> and Yarmouth, which was Norfolk's primary outport, farmed its customs between July 1362 and November 1399.<sup>66</sup> After that period, worsteds are usually described by historians as having gone into severe decline, not to revive again until the advent of the New Draperies in the 1570s.

In spite of the near-perfect survival rate of the Enrolled Accounts, the published accounts have largely omitted worsteds.<sup>67</sup> Most twentieth-century work on

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 124-136; Carus-Wilson and Coleman, *England's Export Trade*, 2.

<sup>65</sup> See note 52 on page 67 for the Hanseatic exemptions from paying the Cloth Custom of 1347. See also the Writ of Exemption in CCR, vol. 11 (1360-4), 151-2.

<sup>66</sup> Yarmouth's last enrolled account covers November 1361 to July 1362. The accounts pick up again in November 1399. *Enrolled Customs*, Part 3, entry 343, and Part 5, entry 283.

<sup>67</sup> Before Jenks' recent edition for the List and Index Society, only Schanz had made any effort to include figures for worsted exports. He includes complete figures for the reign of Henry VIII, and summaries for Henry VII. Jenks includes full figures for all ports to 1509, noting that 'there is a competent calendar of the enrolled accounts for the entire reign of Hen

the medieval English cloth trade focused solely on the success of the broadcloth. When medieval worsteds are mentioned, if they are mentioned, it is usually as a footnote or a curiosity of pre-plague England. Gray was the first to produce estimates of annual cloth exports so that historians could compare year-on-year growth. His interest was limited in scope, though; he excluded worsteds with the justification that their early dominance had very quickly eroded in favour of the more important woollens:

[Worsteds'] separate entry in the customs record was reminiscent of a time when they actually rivalled broadcloths, and it was destined to have future interest when the manufacture of these stuffs in the sixteenth century was widely extended. For fifteenth century trade worsteds were of little significance.<sup>68</sup>

Gray's earlier paper on the woollen industry had already dismissed worsteds as a 'fringe of inferior stuffs'.<sup>69</sup> His assessment was to have considerable influence on successive studies. Munro argued that 'radical changes' had emerged from the mid-fourteenth century, primarily in 'the very sharp decline in English worsted exports that mirrored the expansion in broadcloth exports,' but he claimed that after the 1360s,

[T]here is no evidence of any further growth in worsted exports; and Allison and Holderness together suggest that the Norfolk industry had peaked by about the mid-fourteenth century. Subsequently, from the early 1350s to the mid-1380s, worsteds exports fell sharply [...]. Despite a slight and unsustained recovery around 1400, worsted exports generally remained at that very low level for almost two centuries.<sup>70</sup>

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VIII by Schanz.' Ibid., Part 1, iv; Schanz, *Englische Handelspolitik*.

<sup>68</sup> Gray, 'Enrolled Customs', 325.

<sup>69</sup> H. L. Gray, 'The Production and Exportation of English Woollens in the Fourteenth Century', *EHR*, XXXIX (1924), 19.

<sup>70</sup> J. H. Munro, 'The Origins of the English 'New Draperies': The Resurrection of an Old Flemish Industry, 1270-1570', in *The New Draperies in the Low Countries and England, 1300-1800*, ed. by N. B. Harte (Oxford, 1997), 67-68.

The relative inferiority of worsted additionally has been emphasised in various ways, commonly by stressing modifiers like ‘coarse’ and ‘cheap’. Allison, who produced the only major modern study of the Norfolk worsted industry, specifically linked the low cost of Norfolk wool to the assumed quality of the cloth: ‘Norfolk wool was of medium length, coarse and low-priced and was consequently neither included among the finer wools exported by the Staplers nor suitable for the manufacture of fine broadcloths.’<sup>71</sup> Munro also generally described medieval worsted as a cheap and coarse cloth, inferior to woollens: ‘Says or worsteds, a very ancient textile fabric, historically preceding genuine woollens, were generally the much lower quality, lighter, and least expensive of the three types. [...] Woollens, on the other hand, were generally much finer quality, much heavier, and more expensive of these three types.’<sup>72</sup>

However, other scholars who work on the medieval cloth trade have begun to reappraise worsteds in a new light. King’s thesis on Norwich’s civic finances noted the importance of the worsted trade to the city.<sup>73</sup> Dunn’s thesis acknowledged the importance of worsted weaving to the city’s economy, and lamented the lack of studies about its late medieval developments, but the industry’s boom lay outside the chronological scope of her work.<sup>74</sup> Others have started to question the traditional assumption that worsteds were uniformly inferior in quality and lower in price than woollens. Sutton, for instance, lately commented, ‘Worsted export figures need to be redone and the industry rethought.’<sup>75</sup> The most important work to date has been Oldland’s article on the Norwich double worsted, which was the first modern piece of scholarship to examine the fifteenth-century worsted trade in any detail, and

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<sup>71</sup> Allison, *The Wool Supply and the Worsted Cloth Industry in Norfolk in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, 376.

<sup>72</sup> J. H. Munro, *Three Centuries of Luxury Textile Consumption in the Low Countries and England, 1330-1570: Trends and Comparisons of Real Values of Woollen Broadcloths*, ed. K. V. Pedersen and M.-L. B. Nosch, *The Medieval Broadcloth: Changing Trends in Fashions, Manufacturing and Consumption*, (Oxford, 2009), 4.

<sup>73</sup> King, *Borough Finances*, 17-19, 47, 391.

<sup>74</sup> Dunn, *After the Black Death*, 152.

<sup>75</sup> A. F. Sutton, *The Mercery of London: Trade, Goods and People, 1130-1578* (Aldershot, 2005), 148, n. 103.

brought much-needed light into the topic.<sup>76</sup> Yet, as Sutton's comment should make clear, scholars who are unfamiliar with the cloth trade are more likely to rely on the work of Allison, Munro, and the older published summaries of export figures, all of which perpetuate the belief that worsteds remained in decline through the fifteenth century.

The most damning summary of export figures came in 1963 when Coleman and Carus-Wilson published *England's Export Trade*, a compilation of aggregate summaries of cloth and wool exports, arranged year by year and port by port, together with graphs that demonstrated the concurrent rise of cloth against the fall of wool. Their data are widely used as evidence for the size and extent of the cloth market, both regional and national.<sup>77</sup> These summaries provide a useful overview of the pace at which cloth exports expanded, and at times contracted. However, their statistics on cloth exports followed Gray's lead in including only the number of cloths that were customed as cloths of assize. They declined to publish their full data on worsteds, choosing instead to produce a single table that was relegated to an appendix.<sup>78</sup> Rather than presenting annual unit totals, they instead attempted to estimate the *value* of the worsted trade as a percentage share of the broadcloth trade.<sup>79</sup> This cannot be stressed enough. Because of the method they used, the resulting percentages do make worsteds look inconsequential, with the maximum fifteenth-century percentage never topping 2% of the woollen trade and averaging a meagre 0.6%.

They justified their treatment of worsteds citing three reasons. First, Hanseatic merchants often obtained exemptions from the Cloth Custom, skewing the total transactions recorded in the Enrolled Accounts.<sup>80</sup> Second, they argued that to

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<sup>76</sup> Oldland, 'Norwich's Double Worsted'. Oldland's article was instrumental in helping to shape this chapter.

<sup>77</sup> Munro, for example, cited Coleman and Carus-Wilson in the passage above regarding worsted exports.

<sup>78</sup> This was included in *England's Export Trade* as Appendix V. Carus-Wilson and Coleman, *England's Export Trade*, 199-200.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 199. In their words, 'the recorded worsted export as a percentage of the total export of broadcloths'.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.



include worsteds would require equating them with woollens, which ‘would be impossible on account of the great variety of worsted sizes’.<sup>81</sup> Lastly, they justified their omission based on the same argument Gray used with reference to worsteds:

[T]hough exceedingly important to the county of Norfolk, where they were made, and of considerable magnitude in the late thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, [the trade in worsteds] was probably always small compared with that in woollen cloth, and in the fifteenth century it became negligible.<sup>82</sup>

It is the opinion of this author that much of the marginalisation of worsteds in the literature can be traced back first to Gray’s early assessment, and then to Coleman and Carus-Wilson’s use of his methodology to emphasise the insignificance of worsteds as a national export. Their calculations imply that worsted exports fell in real terms and never saw any recovery in the fifteenth century, when in fact worsteds did experience a considerable period of revival starting in the 1470s. There are four counter-arguments to be made concerning the size and importance of the fifteenth-century worsted trade. First, Coleman and Carus-Wilson’s calculations failed to account for real fluctuations in the overseas worsted trade, including a significant revival at the end of the fifteenth century. Second, they incorrectly estimated that the customs duty charged on worsteds reflected a real valuation of average worsted prices. Third, the method by which the Exchequer accounted for woollen cloth duty was not indicative of the real size of the ‘broadcloth’ market. Lastly, a hitherto unnoticed increase on the specific duty of double worsteds suggests that worsteds were more important to overseas trade receipts than has been generally acknowledged.

### **The real versus perceived fluctuations in the worsted trade**

The first problem concerns how Coleman and Carus-Wilson constructed their table of worsted exports. It is true that woollens rapidly overtook worsteds, and that by the fifteenth century worsteds constituted a small percentage of the cloths that were

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

being sent overseas. Despite some fluctuation, the trend of woollen exports was generally upward between 1350 and 1550.<sup>83</sup> Annual totals rose from a few thousand in the 1350s to over 100,000 by the 1530s, as shown below in Figure 2.5. Coleman and Carus-Wilson published roughly the same illustration in *England's Export Trade*, and since then it has been republished many times in other publications.<sup>84</sup>

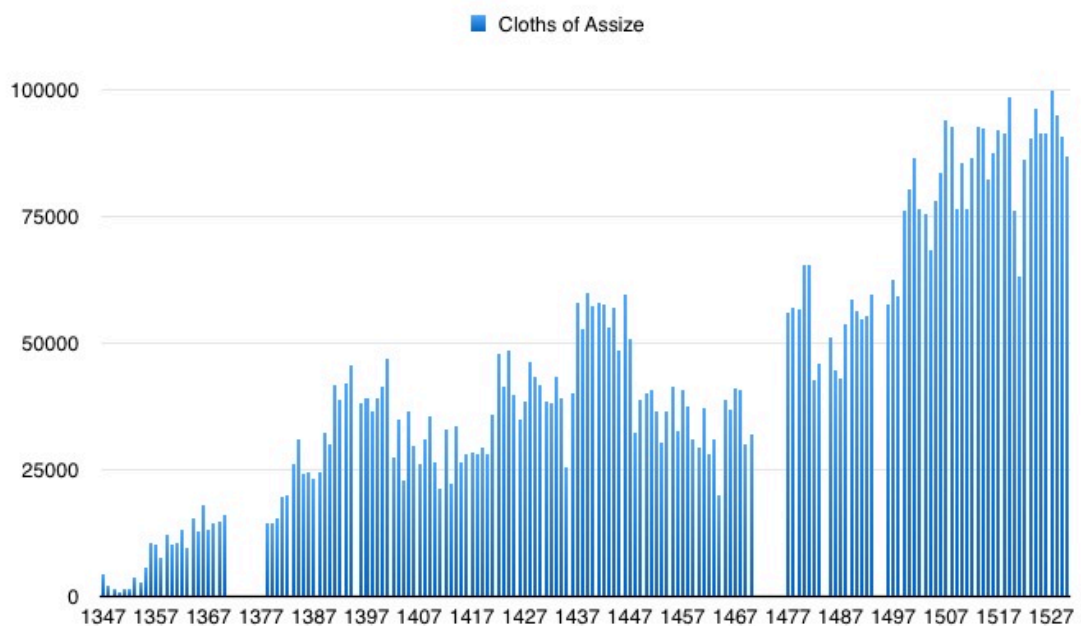


**Figure 2.5:** Exports of 'cloths of assize' by year, 1347–1530<sup>85</sup>

Figure 2.6 shows the percentages published by Coleman and Carus-Wilson in their table of worsted exports. Strictly speaking, this is not a like-for-like comparison,

<sup>83</sup> The periods from 1403 to 1421, and from 1449 to the early 1470s were particularly bad for cloth exports. R. H. Britnell, 'The Economy of British Towns, 1300–1540', in *The Cambridge Urban History of Britain*, ed. by D. M. Palliser (Cambridge, 2000), 318.

<sup>84</sup> For instance, Bridbury, *Clothmaking*, 115; Bolton, *English Economy*, 291; and A. R. H. Baker, 'Changes in the Later Middle Ages', in *A New Historical Geography of England*, ed. by H. C. Darby (Cambridge, UK, 1973), 219. A revised version that superimposed wool and cloth exports appeared in E. M. Carus-Wilson, *Medieval Merchant Venturers* (London, 1967), unpaginated, after xxii.

<sup>85</sup> Coleman and Carus-Wilson's data compiled from the Enrolled Accounts, published in Bridbury, *Clothmaking*, 118–122.

as Figure 2.5 shows units and Figure 2.6 shows relative percentages. However, when comparing the two graphs, it is easy to see why scholars have downplayed worsted as an export commodity. The comparison makes worsteds appear entirely marginal.

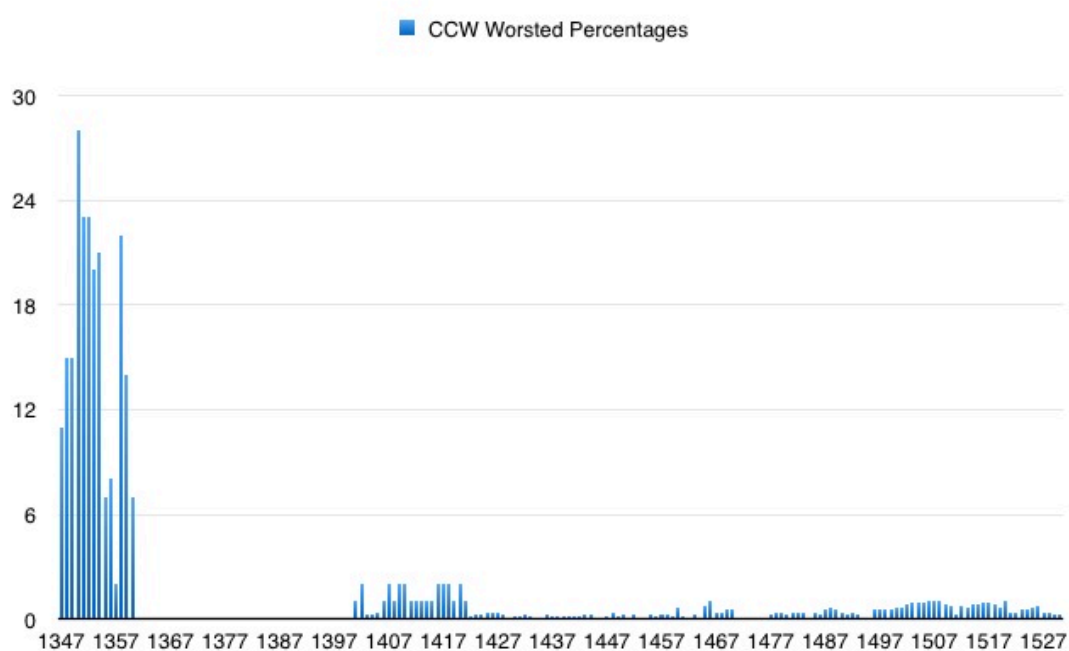


**Figure 2.6:** Coleman and Carus-Wilson's estimate of the value of worsted exports expressed as a percentage of woollen exports.<sup>86</sup>

The problem with Coleman and Carus-Wilson's table is that it makes the size of the later worsted trade appear smaller than it was. Consider a hypothetical scenario where woollen exports are rising while worsted exports remain unchanged. In this situation, worsteds' performance would decline in relative terms, because their *share* of the total would continually shrink. It is impossible to state with any certainty whether domestic sales of worsteds rose and fell in tandem with exports, or whether worsted production remained more or less constant. It is, however, clear that as the growth of woollen exports continued to outpace worsteds, worsteds represented a smaller and smaller proportion of the whole. Because of this, the

<sup>86</sup> Carus-Wilson and Coleman, *England's Export Trade*, Appendix V.

percentage figures published by Coleman and Carus-Wilson mask the real fluctuations in worsted exports because they are a fraction of a growing total, not an independent figure.

Coleman and Carus-Wilson did not provide their data on worsteds in numeric form, but Bridbury obtained access to their figures and published them in 1982.<sup>87</sup> Using his data, it was possible to work backwards from the percentages to the valuations that Coleman and Carus-Wilson had calculated for worsted exports, and from there to their base number of units.<sup>88</sup> When unpacked, their original numbers tell a very different story (below, Figure 2.7). First, worsteds' celebrated fourteenth-century 'heyday' appears extremely short-lived. Because of the gaps in the Enrolled Accounts, it is impossible to tell whether the two-year spike in the 1350s was an anomalous outlier, or indicative of a larger trend in the second half of the fourteenth century.

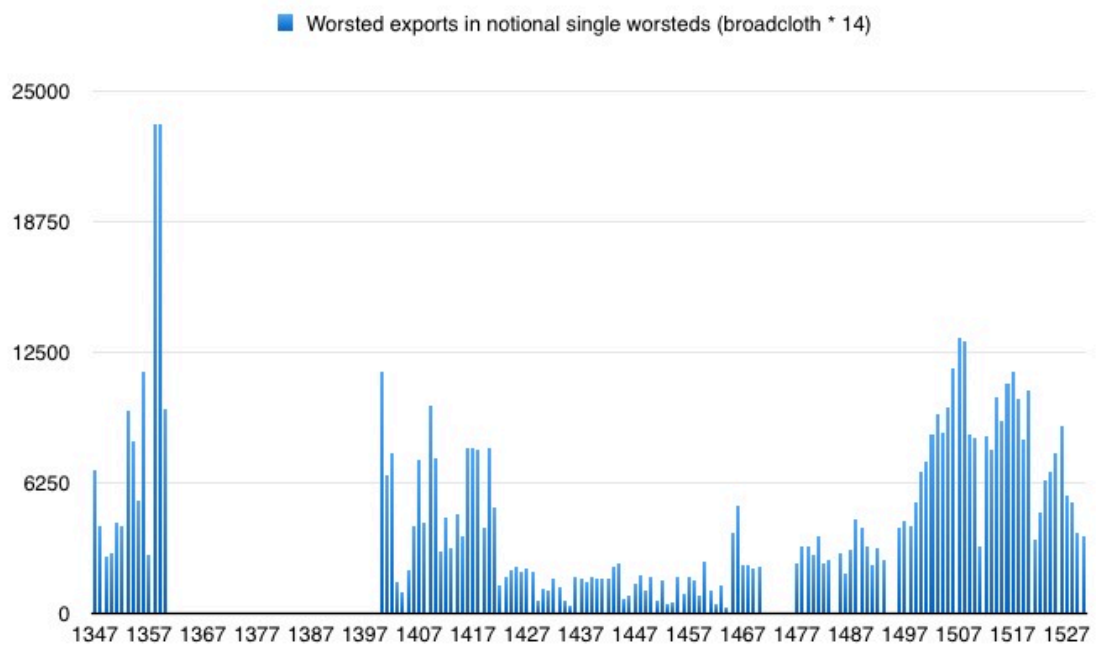


**Figure 2.7:** A reconstruction of Coleman and Carus-Wilson's calculation of yearly worsted exports, expressed in the notional unit of single worsteds.

<sup>87</sup> Bridbury, *Clothmaking*, 116-122.

<sup>88</sup> See page 81 below for their method of calculation.

More important is how Coleman and Carus-Wilson's percentages completely mask a period of recovery for worsteds at the end of the fifteenth century. Fifteenth-century worsted exports were nowhere near as flat as the percentages would imply. In fact, worsted exports enjoyed a period of significant revival, starting with a small boost in export numbers in the 1470s, before really taking off between the 1490s and 1520s.<sup>89</sup> During this time, the number of annual worsted exports rose rapidly, from

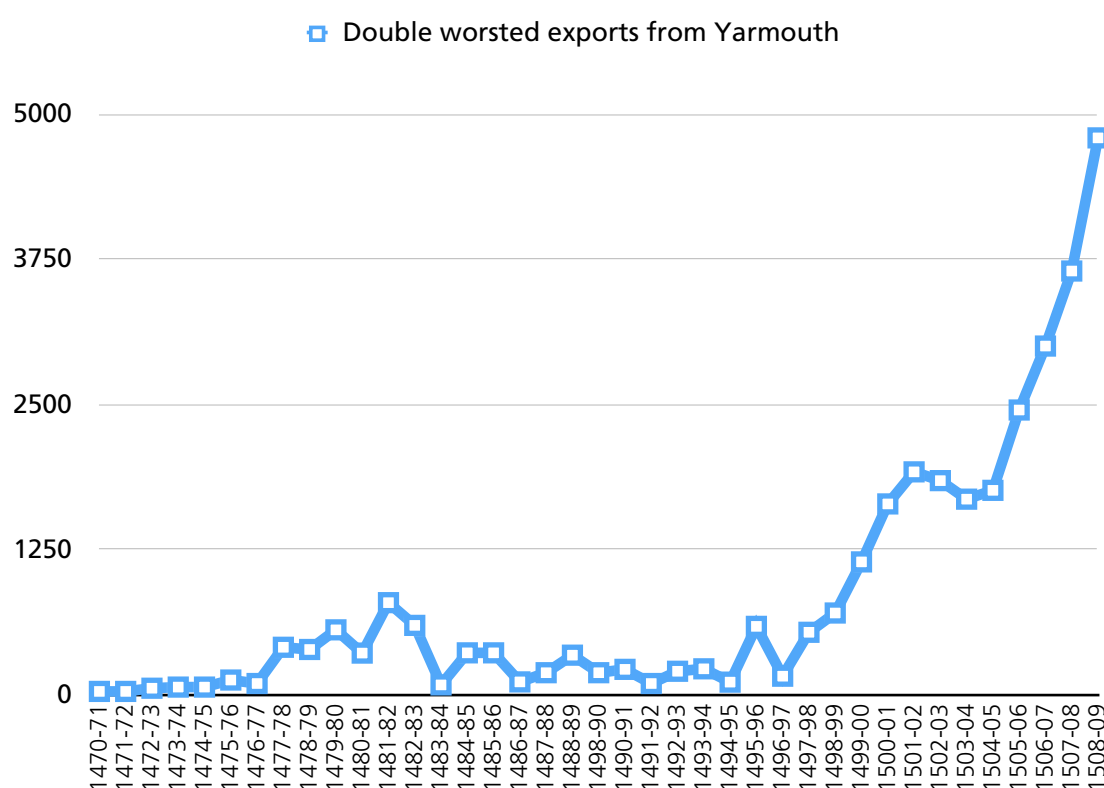


**Figure 2.8:** Double worsted exports, from Yarmouth, by year, 1470/1-1508/9<sup>90</sup>

<sup>89</sup> Oldland was the first to look at this phenomenon quantitatively. He compiled some 10-year averages for worsted exports from London and Yarmouth 1400-50, 1430-1516, and 1510-1547 using Jenks' and Schanz's figures. Oldland, 'Norwich's Double Worsted', 185, 190.

<sup>90</sup> Data from Jenks, *Enrolled Customs*, Parts 10, 11 and 12. Figures are the combined exports of denizens, aliens, and Hansards. Accounts run Michaelmas to Michaelmas, except for the years 1470-2, 1473-5, and 1484-6. In these cases, the figures have been averaged across two years as the accounts did not end at Michaelmas.

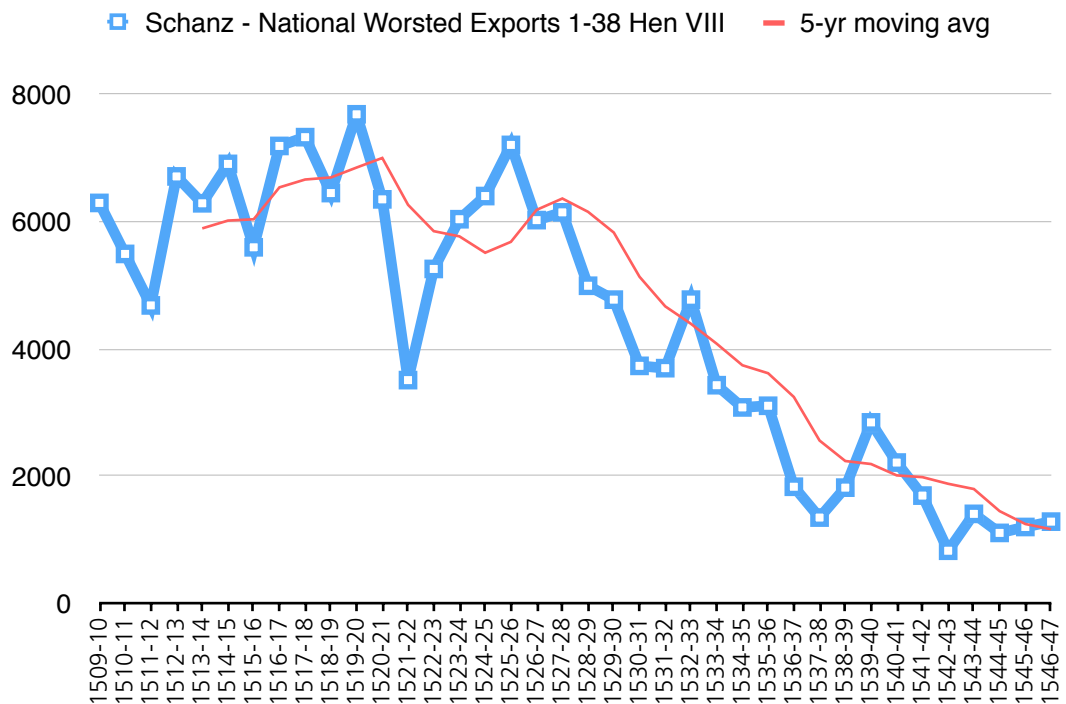


**Figure 2.9:** Combined worsted exports, all ports, 1509-1547 (1-38 Henry VIII), with a 5-year moving average.<sup>91</sup>

what had been a few hundred units per year, to over 7,600 units for the accounting year 11-12 Henry VIII (September 1519 to September 1520).<sup>92</sup> However, the bubble could not be sustained. Exports were soon on the wane again. The accounting year 1521/2 was particularly bad, with the accounts showing a mere 3,509 units; the next four years improved, but ultimately the boom was over by 1525. Thereafter, the trend was mostly downward. But for five decades or so, worsted exports had returned to or exceeded their earlier levels.

<sup>91</sup> Schanz, *Englische Handelspolitik*, 104-5.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 105.

### The real value of worsteds

The approach that Coleman and Carus-Wilson used to produce the values for their comparison table is also problematic. In order to compare worsteds as a percentage of total cloth exports, they felt they had to establish a common denominator for comparing worsteds and woollens. Rather than comparing the number of units shipped, they instead attempted to compute estimated values for each and then compare those. To do this, they converted all worsted exports into a notional unit using the single worsted. The underlying assumption, as postulated by Gray,<sup>93</sup> was that the differential in customs rates on woollens and on worsteds represented their real-world values on the open market. The denizen rate on a cloth of assize was 1s 2d (or 14d), while the same rate on a single worsted was only 1d. Coleman and Carus-Wilson took this to mean that the price of 14 single worsteds equalled the cost of a single broadcloth.<sup>94</sup>

In order to compare worsteds with broadcloths, they first reduced double worsteds and worsted beds into single worsteds:

1 double worsted = 2 single worsteds

1 single bed = 5 single worsteds

1 double bed = 9 single worsteds

They then converted their base figure of single worsteds into an equivalent number of broadcloths by dividing the total number of single worsteds by 14.

However, as both Lloyd and Ormrod note, it is highly unlikely that the real price differential between worsteds and woollens was this great. Lloyd cites negotiations between the English crown and the Hanseatic League in the 1350s that suggest that an average value for worsteds at the time was closer to 10s, compared to broadcloths at around £2 each.<sup>95</sup> This led Lloyd and Ormrod to surmise that a more

<sup>93</sup> Gray, 'Production and Exportation of English Woollens', 18.

<sup>94</sup> Carus-Wilson and Coleman, *England's Export Trade*, Appendix V, 199-200.

<sup>95</sup> T. H. Lloyd, 'Overseas Trade and the English Money Supply in the Fourteenth Century', in *Edwardian Monetary Affairs (1279-1344)*, ed. by N. J. Mayhew (1977), 114.

likely conversion factor would have been one to four. In addition, however, are the numerous fourteenth-century account books that valued worsteds even more highly. Childs, for example, notes some valuations of both worsteds and woollens at various points in the fourteenth century. In the customs particulars she examined from the early half of the century, she found the average valuations on woollens to be lower than £2, and the average valuation of worsteds to be higher than 10s. In her data, the average for a standard 'English' cloth fell between 13s 4d and £1 17s 6d the piece, while the average for worsteds fell between 10s and £1 10s the piece in London.<sup>96</sup> Other sources show similar data. Accounts from the royal household for 1323-4 show two entries for worsteds purchased in London: one for 2s 3d the ell, which would have come to 13s 6d for a six-yard piece of single worsted; and another for three pieces of 'serge of worsted' for 14s the piece.<sup>97</sup> In the later part of the century, Childs notes that broadcloths were most commonly valued between 1s 1d to 3s the ell in London shipments, compared to 2s 4d the ell for worsteds. Piece rates spread between 4s to 6s for a single worsted and 12s to 18s 4d for a half-double.<sup>98</sup> Though only a small sample, the evidence does not at all bear out a 1-to-14 price differential for the type of worsteds that were being shipped overseas. As Childs remarked, 'Double worsted at 2s 4d the ell was clearly not a cheap cloth.'<sup>99</sup>

Understanding cloth values is made all the more difficult when cloths are compared without using equivalent measures. Munro, for instance, was fond of quoting the cost of a whole English broadcloth:

With cloth exports in the range of £2 0s. 0d. to £2 10s. 0d. sterling apiece (24 yd by 1.75 yd), such woollens were far from being cheap and vastly more expensive than worsteds; and in the later fourteenth century, such broadcloths would have cost an English master mason, [...] then earning 5d.-6d. per day, from 80 to 120 days' wages.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Childs, 'English Export Trade', 141-2.

<sup>97</sup> E. W. Moore, *The Fairs of Medieval England: An Introductory Study* (Toronto, 1985), 44.

<sup>98</sup> Childs, 'English Export Trade', 144-6.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 146.

<sup>100</sup> J. H. Munro, 'The Symbiosis of Towns and Textiles: Urban Institutions and the Changing Fortunes of Cloth Manufacturing in the Low Countries and England, 1270-1570',



When reckoned by length, however, his sample broadcloths respectively cost 1s 8d and 2s 1d the ell – quite on par with the worsteds cited above. Furthermore, it may well be that the cost of an entire broadcloth was out of the reach of a master mason, but what mason needed 72 feet of cloth? The average suit of clothing required no more than several yards to make up.

It is even more unlikely that later median values for broadcloths and worsteds diverged by as much as Gray, Coleman, and Carus-Wilson thought. Trade agreements made between the Merchant Adventurers of London and the rulers of the Low Countries throughout the fifteenth century suggest that worsted continued to be an important commodity for the overseas cloth markets. The privileges they negotiated in Antwerp and Bergen op Zoom specifically note fees and duty associated with the trading of worsteds. Never did the differential between broadcloths and worsteds approach 14-to-1. The agreement made in Antwerp in 1446 set two worsteds equal to one whole English cloth.<sup>101</sup> Brokage fees (most likely dating to c. 1405-17) on ‘a brode English cloth, of a pece’ required a fee of 4 Flemish groats the piece, whereas English says were charged half this rate.<sup>102</sup> Later in the century, the privileges granted at Bergen op Zoom in 1470 stipulated an excise fee on whole cloths of a half groat Brabant, which was again deemed equal to two pieces of worsted.<sup>103</sup> This is further supported by evidence found in various Royal Wardrobe accounts of Henry VII and Henry VIII and of the Scottish Treasury. Some accounts list fabric purchases by the ell or by the yard. A warrant for clothing for the daughter of the earl of Northumberland in 1498 included 2.5 ells of worsted for a kirtle valued at 7s the ell.<sup>104</sup> This differential compares rather favourably to other high-status fabrics in the same account. Thomas Mount received four yards of crimson in grain at

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*Journal of Early Modern History*, 3 (1999), 31.

<sup>101</sup> *The Book of Privileges of the Merchant Adventurers of England, 1296-1483*, ed. by A. F. Sutton and L. Visser-Fuchs (Oxford, 2009), 133 (Latin) and 140 (English).

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 190.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 253 (English) and 260 (Latin).

<sup>104</sup> *The Great Wardrobe Accounts of Henry VII and Henry VIII*, ed. by M. Hayward (Woodbridge, 2012), 18.

6s 8d per yard,<sup>105</sup> which would have been one of the most expensive kinds of woollen available; Perkin Warbeck received black damask for a doublet at 5s 8d per yard;<sup>106</sup> and the king was allocated black satin for doublets at 11s per yard.<sup>107</sup> This assessment places this particular purchase of worsted firmly in the upper-middle range, suited for garments of importance but still beneath the most expensive fabrics such as silk, velvet, or satin. Of course, it must be noted that this profiles only the very top end of the market, however, it also demonstrates the difficulty of defining what an average value for any single type of cloth might have been. Every kind of cloth was produced for multiple gradations in the market and could be found at a range of price points. Worsteds are no different in this.

The most likely explanation is that the rates on worsteds did not represent their real market value at all. Rather, it is a hypothesis of this work that the customs rates on worsteds were negotiated by merchants in the worsted trade who had a personal interest in keeping worsted sales profitable.<sup>108</sup>

### **The misleading customs classification of woollens**

The third major problem with Coleman and Carus-Wilson's argument lies in their assertion that worsteds cannot be compared to woollens because worsteds came in so many different sizes. This implies, of course, that woollens did not, most likely because of the expectation that cloth taxed under the Cloth Custom had to conform to the minimum sizes laid out in the assize for cloth. Presumably this led Gray, Coleman, and Carus-Wilson to argue that the only meaningful comparison of woollens and worsteds could be a comparison of values, not units. Their hesitation to include worsteds in the export figures rests on the assumption that even if worsted units were too varied to be usefully compared, 'broadcloths' or woollens could be.

As mentioned above, the idea that woollen exports constituted a monolithic category is a fiction. Some scholars try to make this clear by using only the term

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<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>108</sup> See also discussion on page 145.

‘cloth of assize’ instead of ‘broadcloth’. Gras merely noted that the cloth custom was imposed on ‘ordinary’ cloth, whole cloth, and cloth of assize (*‘pannus, pannus integer, and pannus de assisa’*), as separate from worsteds and bed pieces.<sup>109</sup> Other types of cloth were exempt from the Cloth Custom, but instead paid an *ad valorem* duty of 3d in the pound.<sup>110</sup> This state of affairs changed somewhat after 1388, when kerseys and straits, two types of narrow cloths, were added to the Cloth Custom. The crown had realised that kerseys and straits were being exported in large quantities, and that their taxation under the lower Poundage rate was losing the crown potential revenue. To capitalise on this trade, it was decided that kerseys should henceforth be taxed under the Cloth Custom, *pro rata*, at the conversion rate of three kerseys to one cloth of assize. Straits, likewise, were to be rated at two, four, or six straits to a cloth of assize, depending on the type.<sup>111</sup>

This analysis illustrates the dangers of relying on the Enrolled Accounts too heavily. The sums provided under the category of standard cloths in the accounts actually represent a mix of wide and narrow cloths, the latter of which did not conform to the broad assize at all. However, their share of the trade is almost entirely hidden within the category of standard cloth. Kerseys and straits were often converted to cloths of assize ‘on the fly’ dockside, making their real share of the overseas trade impossible to estimate. The London particulars that have been published for 1480-1, for example, have no entries for kerseys at all.<sup>112</sup> The Southampton Port Books have entries that make the local conversions between narrow cloths to cloths of assize explicit. For example,

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<sup>109</sup> Gras, *English Customs*, 414.

<sup>110</sup> Lloyd, *England and the German Hanse*, 75-7.

<sup>111</sup> RP, January 1390, item 55; RP, November 1390, item 31; RP, November 1391, item 43; *Customs Accounts of Hull*, xxv.

<sup>112</sup> *Overseas Trade of London*.

*i Fardel continente xxi doz' qui faciunt iii pan' di' ..... Cust' viid*<sup>113</sup>

The conversion factor in the example above rates six dozens as equivalent to one standard cloth. Kerseys in Southampton were deemed equivalent to three short cloths of assize:

*vj kers' qui faciunt ii pan' Curt' ..... Cust' iiii d*<sup>114</sup>

Uneven conversions might be left as kerseys or straits, which is why occasionally there are some fractional 'remainders', both in the Port Books and in the Enrolled Accounts. This can be seen in the third example from Southampton, where 80 kerseys are taxed the equivalent of 26 woollens, plus a remainder of two kerseys:

*ii bal' continentibus xL kers' per b'  
Summa in kers' iiiiXX [80] qui faciunt xxvi pan' Curt' et ii kers'*<sup>115</sup>

Though the breakdown of cloth types shipped under the rubric of 'cloths of assize' cannot be definitively known, there is evidence to suggest that the number of narrow cloths could be surprisingly large. For instance, Lloyd found that the Hanseatic totals for cloths of assize and kerseys was respectively 1,378 and 7,545 from Michaelmas 1388 to Michaelmas 1390.<sup>116</sup> Gras also noted that in particulars where actual numbers were given, kerseys 'were by long odds the most important'.<sup>117</sup> Not only does this undermine Coleman and Carus-Wilson's argument that woollens can be counted as a unified category, but it also places into question the share of the overseas trade that

<sup>113</sup> '1 Fardel containing 21 dozens, which makes 3 ½ cloths. Custom 7d'. *The Port Book of Southampton, 1509-10*, ed. by T. B. James (Southampton, 1990), 22.

<sup>114</sup> '6 kerseys which makes 2 short cloths. Custom 4d'. Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> '2 bales containing 40 kerseys per bale. Total 80 kerseys which makes 26 short cloths plus 2 kerseys'. Ibid., 31.

<sup>116</sup> Lloyd, *England and the German Hanse*, 77.

<sup>117</sup> Gras, *English Customs*, 560.

properly can be called 'broadcloth'. This also has the side effect of reducing the seeming marginality of worsteds.

### The change in duty on worsteds, c. 1507–1509

Lastly is the recognition that customs rates were at times tweaked or modified by the crown to boost crown revenue.<sup>118</sup> The addition of kerseys and straits to the Cloth Custom is the best example of this financial imperative. As Lloyd noted, if the crown had not brought kerseys and straits into the Cloth Custom in 1388-90, the 7,545 kerseys he counted would have realised only £22 9s 2.5d under poundage rates. Under the cloth custom rates, this instead netted the crown £125 15s 3/4d.<sup>119</sup> There was a significant financial gain to be made by selectively raising rates on high-volume commodities.

There has been some debate regarding modifications to the customs rates during the final years of Henry VII's reign. This was prompted by Gras's discovery of a 1507 'Book of Rates', which provides valuations for some 300 commodities. The document purports to stem from a meeting of the King's Council, on 15 July 1507, which solicited the advice of the controllers and customers of the port of London together with representatives of the Merchant Adventurers. The general assumption has been that this first book of rates points to efforts to standardise valuations on goods owing *ad valorem* duty, possibly as part of an effort to raise customs revenue.<sup>120</sup> Merchants were supposed to declare the actual price paid for their goods, but there is suspicion that valuations had become customary over the years and bore little resemblance to real values. Cooper, replying to Elton, argued that Henry had considered raising the duty on cloth exports in 1508,<sup>121</sup> but Elton, and others since,

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<sup>118</sup> Lloyd, *England and the German Hanse*, 77; Ormrod, 'Finance and Trade Under Richard II', 171-2.

<sup>119</sup> Lloyd, *England and the German Hanse*.

<sup>120</sup> H. S. Cobb, 'Books of Rates' and the London Customs, 1507-1558', *The Guildhall Miscellany*, 4 (1971), 5. Elton asserted that rates changed in 1503 and again in 1507 as a means of extracting more income from customs. G. R. Elton, *England Under the Tudors* (London, 1974), 49. However, Cobb used the London particulars to show that few goods were rated differently after 1507.

<sup>121</sup> J. P. Cooper, 'Henry VII's Last Years Reconsidered', *Historical Journal*, 2 (1959), 103-129.

have denied any modification to the Cloth Custom. Elton stated quite emphatically that 'there is no proof at all that the rates of 1507 had led to an increase in the levy'.<sup>122</sup> Others have followed suit. Lander, in the third edition of his survey of the fifteenth century, stated that 'No attempt was ever made during this period to increase the customs duties which ... were absurdly low.'<sup>123</sup>

Cooper's argument about changes to the cloth custom in 1508, however, should have been taken more seriously. The complaints of the Merchant Adventurers, who 'were anxious to see rates returned to the old values', could have been in reference to worsteds and not woollens. Close examination of the Yarmouth Particulars shows a change in the worsted rates that took place between roughly 1507 and 1509, which hitherto has gone unnoticed. Particular accounts for 1509-11 and 1512-14 include shipments of double worsteds owned by denizen merchants. The original Cloth Custom of 1347 had imposed a duty of 2d the piece on denizens exporting double worsteds and 3d the piece for aliens. However, a calculation of the per unit cost for exporting worsted shows denizen exporters to have been paying 2.5d the piece instead of 2d (Table 2.3).

This evidence only serves to underscore the importance of worsted exports at the end of the fifteenth century. Had worsteds remained in their depressed state there would have been little motivation to raise the rates. But as we saw with kerseys and straits, much of the impetus to raise rates stemmed from the crown's acknowledgement of a commodity's success. This was certainly the impetus behind the customs reorganisation in 1558.<sup>124</sup> An increase in the specific duty owed on worsteds is an implicit acknowledgement of the value of the worsted trade at the end of the fifteenth century.

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<sup>122</sup> G. R. Elton, *Studies in Tudor and Stuart Politics and Government*, vol. 1 (Cambridge, 1974), 84.

<sup>123</sup> Lander, *Conflict and Stability in Fifteenth-Century England*, 100. See also N. S. B. Gras, 'Tudor "books of Rates": A Chapter in the History of the English Customs', *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 26 (1912), 766-775; Sutton concurred: 'An analysis of the new Book of Rates, produced in 1507, has shown that there was no attempt by the government to raise the rates charged on goods overall.' Sutton, *The Mercery of London*, 343.

<sup>124</sup> F. C. Dietz, *English Government Finance, 1485-1558* (Urbana, 1921), 206-8.

**Table 2.3:** Higher rates were charged on double worsteds shipped from Yarmouth, 1509-1514<sup>125</sup>

| Particular account (Yarmouth) | Merchant      | Nr of double worsted pieces | Customs duty | Customs duty in pence | Duty per piece |
|-------------------------------|---------------|-----------------------------|--------------|-----------------------|----------------|
| E122/153/1                    | Edward Rede   | 64                          | 13s 4d       | 160d                  | 2.5d           |
|                               | William Rede  | 56                          | 11s 8d       | 140d                  | 2.5d           |
|                               | Edward Rede   | 72                          | 15s          | 180d                  | 2.5d           |
|                               | Edward Rede   | 52                          | 10s 10d      | 130d                  | 2.5d           |
| E122/210/1                    | John Parrysch | 27                          | 5s 7d ob     | 67.5d                 | 2.5d           |
|                               | John Marsham  | 11                          | 2s 3d ob     | 27.5d                 | 2.5d           |

## 2.3 Factors for change

As previously stated, relying solely on export figures to reconstitute the cloth market is necessary but carries with it certain risks, the first and foremost being the assumption that overseas sales move in tandem with internal demand. In this sense, the cycle of worsted exports presents an intriguing conundrum. Is the level of worsted exports in the 1350s indicative of a real trend in the fourteenth century — unfortunately masked by a lack of corroborating data between 1361 and 1400 — or is it just an outlier in the data? Without having better information about Hanseatic purchases in those years, and without having either enrolled accounts or particulars for Yarmouth between 1362 and 1399, the full figures are irretrievably lost to time. Other national sources are ambiguous at best. Parliamentary petitions from the fifteenth century concerning worsteds do not necessarily indicate decline. Fabric

<sup>125</sup> E122/153/1 (1-2 Hen VIII, 1509-1511); and E122/210/1 (4-5 Hen VIII, 1512-1514).

finds from fifteenth-century London contexts are almost nil, which makes it difficult to draw any conclusions based on artefact survival.<sup>126</sup>

The evidence from Norwich suggests that production did rise and fall to meet foreign demand, but that even in the slump years, domestic demand persisted. The average number of worsted weavers taking the freedom every year in Norwich rose periodically through the fifteenth century.<sup>127</sup> If the industry were in collapse, it is difficult to rationalise why increasingly more men would undertake such a costly action. Worsteds never disappear from wills, inventories, and accounts. More importantly, though, the export ‘boom’ very clearly made its mark on Norwich. The worsted weavers rose to be the preeminent non-mercantile guild in the city, and as we shall see in the second half of the thesis, the social status and wealth indicators of the worsted weavers rose markedly in tandem with exports. A better understanding of the contextual drivers for the supply and demand of consumer products would help us to delineate the larger picture of how market forces impacted late medieval urban social structure. It may be a truism to say that consumer preference is constantly changing, but beneath these surface ripples lie much deeper factors that enable great leaps and shifts in material culture to happen in the first place. War and politics are obvious enablers or obstructions to international trade; less obvious are some of the contextual and environmental shifts that impacted the ability of different fabrics to compete on the market or that influenced consumer choice.

The rest of this chapter will consider some of the factors that may have influenced the supply of worsteds versus woollens, and the changing demand for different fabric types.

## The domestic market

The domestic market is always the great unknown quantity in discussions such as these. The domestic movement of goods has left no significant record of its activities.

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<sup>126</sup> Crowfoot, Pritchard, and Staniland, *Textiles and Clothing*, 37.

<sup>127</sup> See Section 7.1 below.



Customs accounts tell us nothing about how the country was spending its excess cash on goods and services, or how providers were meeting consumer demand. A handful of fragmentary accounts survive that record ships sailing between domestic ports, but as they were not taxed under the customs scheme, they were also under no obligation to document their cargoes.<sup>128</sup> Nor are there detailed accounts of worsted sales between producers and wholesale merchants, or between wholesalers, retailers, and customers. In theory, the aulnage accounts could serve as a superb proxy for reconstructing the domestic cloth trade, but as Carus-Wilson demonstrated, they are also highly problematic.<sup>129</sup> There are very few surviving aulnage lists that record particulars of sales for the fifteenth century, as the aulnage was farmed with the exception of 1465 to 1478. During this short window, aulnagers were theoretically responsible for submitting the totality of their receipts to the Exchequer along with detailed lists of sellers and amounts. Unfortunately, the surviving fifteenth-century aulnage lists from Norwich were falsified in much the same way that Carus-Wilson found in other parts of the country.<sup>130</sup> Either way, the aulnage is of little use for reconstructing the worsted trade, as worsteds were exempt from the national

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<sup>128</sup> Yarmouth is one of only three ports that has retained a record of local customs payments. However, unlike Southampton, Yarmouth's were included in the annual rolls that documented the town's administrative business between 1331/2 and 1604/5. This makes them particularly unwieldy. No indices have been produced, nor have any been transcribed for publication. Due to time constraints, this source has not been used in this study, but this would be an excellent avenue for future research. NRO Y/C 4. See also H. S. Cobb, 'Local Port Customs Accounts Prior to 1550', *Journal of the Society of Archivists*, 1 (1958), 213-224. For examples of Southampton's local customs records in print, see *The Local Port Book of Southampton, 1439-40*, ed. by H. S. Cobb, vol. v (Southampton, 1962) and *Port Book of Southampton*. The coastal trade is better documented from the sixteenth century when port books began to be kept. For the difficulties in estimating internal trade, see J. A. Chartres, *Internal Trade in England, 1500-1700* (London, 1977). The coasting trade is discussed in T. S. Willan, *The Inland Trade* (Manchester, 1976), 26-41. *English Inland Trade, 1430-1540: Southampton and Its Region*, ed. M. Hicks (Oxford, 2015) discusses overland trade routes from Southampton, but this network did not seem to stretch as far as East Anglia.

<sup>129</sup> E. M. Carus-Wilson, 'The Aulnage Accounts: A Criticism', *ECHR*, 2 (1929), 114-123. Heaton used the aulnage lists from Yorkshire to estimate fifteenth-century woollen production, broken down by county. H. Heaton, *The Yorkshire Woollen and Worsted Industries* (Oxford, 1920), 84-88. See also *Enrolled Customs*, Part 2, iv and 578-624; Bridbury, *Clothmaking*, 114.

<sup>130</sup> For instance, three of the Norwich lists created by John Flegge (13/14 Edward IV, 16/17 Edward IV, and 17/18 Edward IV) are practically exact copies of each other. See TNA E 101/343/9-11.

aulnage. Worsted cloths were aulnaged and sealed at the Norwich Worsted Seld independently of the national system, under the joint authority of the city and the worsted weavers.<sup>131</sup>

Despite our lack of data concerning domestic purchasing patterns, it is generally acknowledged that a great amount of worsted material was purchased for use in the household. Fifteenth-century consumers could choose from a large range of soft furnishings. In Norwich, some worsted weavers specialised in making worsted beds, coverlets, or tapets, very few of which ever found their way into the customs records. It is easy to underestimate how vibrant and colourful medieval homes could be. As Thrupp noted, rooms 'blaz[ed] with color'.<sup>132</sup> Bright hangings on the walls, cushions, and draperies added to the warmth and comfort of homes. Wills and inventories, when extant, demonstrate the richness of a merchant's furnishings, but more importantly, attest to the range of uses to which worsted fabrics were put. The portraits painted by Hans Holbein the Younger give some impression of how fabrics on walls and tables were used to decorate homes. Thomas Cromwell in Figure 2.11 sits before a table covered with a tapet or carpet; behind him, the wall covering very much resembles worsted drapery from Norwich that was still being produced there in the seventeenth century (Figure 2.12). Thrupp's London merchants owned beds with coverlets and hangings made of worsted, such as those of John Pultney, a bed of 'red or green worsted wreathed with white roses', or a stained cloth painted with figures of the apostles, also on worsted. Richard Lyons owned a bed covered in red and blue worsted curtains, worked over with a pattern of embroidered lions. John Coggeshale the grocer also owned stained worsted wall hangings decorated with animals.<sup>133</sup> One merchant bequeathed a stained worsted bedcover embroidered with images of presumably himself and his four sons ('*cum le Fader & quatuor filiis*').<sup>134</sup>

Users of worsted extended as far as the royal family and household. The inventory of Henry V made in 1423 contains a remarkable number of references to

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<sup>131</sup> The worsted aulnage is discussed in Chapter 3, on pages 148-167.

<sup>132</sup> Thrupp, *The Merchant Class*, 140.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, 141.

worsted goods, including 45 worsted beds, many of which included multiple curtains, dossals, counterpanes, and canopies; over 90 worsted coverlets, many embroidered; 64 worsted wall hangings; plus miscellaneous other worsted carpets, cushion covers, and unused pieces, bolts, and remnants, in colours of blue, black, red, green, and white, some plain and some striped. One worsted bed was embroidered with castles, and was valued at 26s 8d. Seven hangings of white worsted were worked with images of the garter; they were valued at 8s each.<sup>135</sup> Later Great Wardrobe accounts list worsted fabrics purchased for the royal household to make the same types of items. An inventory of 1498/9 included worsted wall hangings for two chambers and two full sets of bed coverings and curtains.<sup>136</sup> A warrant for purchase dated 1499 for Edmund, the son of Henry VII, allocated 100s toward the purchase of five pieces of red worsted to make bed hangings.<sup>137</sup> Even the Parliament Chamber was draped in red worsted in 1497.<sup>138</sup> Knowing this, it is not inconceivable that the drapery seen behind Thomas More in Figures 2.10, in the portrait painted by Hans Holbein, could also be of worsted. It is always difficult to know how accurately the household furnishings were portrayed, but it is clear that fabrics that had a certain sheen were highly prized. Silk and velvet were very expensive, possibly too expensive for most people to use merely as wall decoration. Worsteds, as we will see, ably filled the role of looking very much like silk, but at a much lower cost.

It is well acknowledged that worsteds were tremendously popular in domestic settings, but what is less known is the extent to which worsteds were used for ecclesiastical garments. Chaucer's friar rode to pilgrimage wearing a cloak made of double worsted, a fabric that Chaucer wryly used as social commentary on the widening gulf between the avowed abstemious principles of the mendicant orders and their actual worldly ways:

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<sup>135</sup> *RP*, Henry VI: October 1423.

<sup>136</sup> *Great Wardrobe Accounts*, 7.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, 245.

For ther he was nat lyk a cloysterer  
 With a thredbare cope, as is a povre scolér,  
 But he was lyk a maister, or a pope;  
 Of double worstede was his semycope,  
 That rounded as a belle out of the presse.<sup>139</sup>

As a customs official working in the port of London, Chaucer would have been familiar with many of the cloth types that were being shipped abroad. His satirical phrasing may have been doubly amusing to an audience familiar with the range of



**Figure 2.10:** Thomas More, by Hans Holbein the Younger, with detail of wall hanging -- possibly of worsted<sup>140</sup>

<sup>139</sup> *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. by L. D. Benson, 3rd ed. (Oxford, 2008), 27, lines 259-263.

<sup>140</sup> Portrait of Thomas More, by Hans Holbein the Younger, from the Frick Collection, Wikimedia Commons, <[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Hans\\_Holbein,\\_the\\_Younger\\_-\\_Sir\\_Thomas\\_More\\_-\\_Google\\_Art\\_Project.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Hans_Holbein,_the_Younger_-_Sir_Thomas_More_-_Google_Art_Project.jpg)>, (accessed 4 Dec 2016).



**Figure 2.11:** Portrait of Thomas Cromwell<sup>141</sup>



**Figure 2.12:** Detail of printed worsted produced in Norwich c. 1680<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> Portrait of Thomas Cromwell, by Hans Holbein the Younger, from the Frick Collection, Wikimedia Commons, <[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Cromwell,Thomas\(1EEssex\)01.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Cromwell,Thomas(1EEssex)01.jpg)>, (accessed 4 Dec 2016).

<sup>142</sup> Printed worsted fabric, item T.45-1981, The Victoria and Albert Museum, London.



worsted cloths produced specially for the ecclesiastical market. The worsted weavers in Norwich made '*monkscloth*' and '*canonscloth*', presumably sized for habits and vestments. In this category, the worsted weavers' presentment books also include infractions concerning 'black' cloth, which may have been the same black serge that was purchased by Durham Cathedral Priory every year to clothe its monks.<sup>143</sup>

Medieval and early modern lead cloth seals from Norwich, shown in Figure 2.13, have been found in the River Wear in Durham, proving that worsteds were traded up the coast in the centuries before the Yorkshire worsted industry had



**Figure 2.13:** Cloth seals from Norwich, retrieved from the River Wear in Durham.<sup>144</sup>

<sup>143</sup> M. Threlfall-Holmes, *Monks and Markets : Durham Cathedral Priory, 1460-1520*, Ph.D thesis (Durham University, 2000), 164-5. For the definition of serge, see note 68 on page 135.

<sup>144</sup> Courtesy of Gary Bankhead, Department of Archaeology, Durham University. Bankhead Catalogue nrs 62, 65, 67.

established itself.<sup>145</sup> Norwich itself was home to the four major orders of mendicant friars, the Dominicans, the Franciscans, the Carmelites, and the Austin Friars, each of which must have required large periodic purchases of cloth.<sup>146</sup> There are other accounts that additionally suggest that worsteds were being purchased in bulk lots for institutional use. The Templars and the Hospitallers were buying worsteds in bulk in the thirteenth century for use in Cyprus and Jerusalem, as were Durham and Norwich Cathedral Priories.<sup>147</sup> Thetford Priory bought worsteds for garments in the early sixteenth century.<sup>148</sup>

Though it is likely that many other large institutions consumed large amounts of worsted fabric, there are reasons why this may not appear so, even if the medieval accounts survive. Threlfall-Holmes's study of purchasing and consumption at Durham Cathedral Priory highlights one of the problems associated with institutional purchases. For the period 1460 to 1520, Durham Priory purchased an average of 1,474 yards of cloth per year, some for garments and some for household use.<sup>149</sup> Cloths were very carefully allocated to different levels of the ecclesiastical hierarchy based on the price of the cloth and the perceived social status that attached to each. Cloths for the prior were far more expensive than cloths for the monks, which were again more expensive than cloth for the servants. However, the cloths in the accounts often appear under completely undifferentiated terms, such as 'linen' and 'woollen'. Threlfall-Holmes quite rightly argues that any given cloth typology often contained within it a broad spectrum of qualities:

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<sup>145</sup> Local purchasers may have dyed or re-dyed cloths to their own specifications. Once coloured, the cloths would have been rinsed in the river, which explains the large deposit of cloth seals found at this location. The seals are difficult to date precisely, but none seems to post-date the establishment of the Yorkshire worsted industry. Personal communication, Gary Bankhead.

<sup>146</sup> VCH, *A History of the County of Norfolk*, ed. W. Page, Victoria County History, vol. 2 (London, 1906), 428-33.

<sup>147</sup> Sutton, *The Mercery of London*, 56; Crowfoot, Pritchard, and Staniland, *Textiles and Clothing*, 39; CCR, vol. 3, 551.

<sup>148</sup> *The Register of Thetford Priory*, ed. by D. P. Dymond, vol. 59-60 (Oxford, 1995), 262, 331, 356, 535.

<sup>149</sup> Threlfall-Holmes, *Monks and Markets*, 144.

The only warning given in these accounts that these cloths were very different items is their widely differing prices. ... it is very possible that ostensibly similar cloths may in fact have been of greatly differing qualities without such a difference being noted in the surviving records.<sup>150</sup>

In addition, many medieval accounts of cloth purchases simply fail to provide any identifying information, other than colour, when the cloth was less than exceptionally expensive. Thus we often find line items for silk, cloth of gold, or velvet, but beneath that tier the description is often merely 'black', 'red', or 'blue'. It is entirely possible that a wealth of worsted is disguised within the less descriptive tiers of many medieval accounts.

### **A case study in product innovation: double worsted**

One more driver in the changing demand for worsteds was the evolution of the product.<sup>151</sup> As noted above, 'worsted' was not one type of cloth; rather, it was a family of cloths, unified by their preparation and production methods. The customs rates on worsteds differentiated between singles, doubles, and half-doubles, but give no clue as to the difference. Single worsteds had been the predominant export in the fourteenth century, but by the fifteenth century the double worsted was overtaking the single in popularity. Over the next 50 to 60 years, exports of singles largely collapsed and doubles supplanted them in the accounts. What, then, were these categories and how do they factor into the worsted trade?

The logical assumption might be that 'single' and 'double' referred to widths, with singles being woven on a narrow loom, and doubles on a wide loom. However, the sizes given in the 1441/2, 1444/5, and 1467 statutes do not support this conclusion. Double and half-double worsteds, and single and double motleys are all given as being 5 quarters wide.<sup>152</sup> The parliamentary petition of 1410 is even more specific. There, single, double, and half-double mantels are all specifically named as

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<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*, 173-4.

<sup>151</sup> Oldland, 'Norwich's Double Worsted'.

<sup>152</sup> *SR*, vol. 2, 322-3; *SR*, vol. 2, 328-31; *SR*, vol. 2, 418-21. See Chapter 3 for more on the worsted weavers' grants, and a table of the various worsted assizes in Table 3.1 on page 163.



being one and a quarter ells wide. Canoncloths are given in single, double, and half-double varieties, each one being five ells long and one and three quarters wide.

Worsted beds of both single and double variety came in three sizes each.<sup>153</sup> Clearly, it was not the use of the narrow loom or broadloom that distinguished singles, half-doubles and doubles.

Cloth finds from London and documentary evidence suggest instead that the terms double and half-double refer to the ratio of warps to wefts. Double worsteds probably got their name from having twice as many weft threads as warp threads, and a half-double had a ratio of one and a half wefts to warps.<sup>154</sup> An unbalanced ratio like this is useful for producing a satiny-type of twill, where the wefts outnumber the warps and are tightly beaten down to cover the warps as far as possible. This produces the smoothest possible surface texture because it minimises the number of cross-threads and hides the ones that are necessary.<sup>155</sup> A handful of 'fine' worsted fragments from London have an even more pronounced ratio of wefts to warps. One group in particular are worsted twills woven using six sheds. Of the fine worsteds, 'all the yarns shine', but the fragments from the late fourteenth century are decidedly different. The warp/weft ratio of two of these fragments are 18/100 and 18/80, indicating a very high probability that the worsted weavers were already experimenting with different weaves to produce higher quality fabrics. The technique appears to have been short lived, for 'the same effect could be obtained with less effort' using four sheds instead of six, but the general lack of fifteenth-century finds makes it difficult to generalise any further.<sup>156</sup>

Crowfoot *et al* suggest that these developments in weaving came about partly as a response to the growing amount of imported silk.<sup>157</sup> As they say, 'the weft-faced character of the later six-shed twills seems likely to have been designed to imitate the

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<sup>153</sup> *RP*, Henry IV: January 1410, VIII, 48.

<sup>154</sup> Kerridge, *Textile Manufactures*, 9.

<sup>155</sup> C. P. Brooks, *Satin and Other Weaves* (Scranton, 1905), §76, 1-10.

<sup>156</sup> Crowfoot, Pritchard, and Staniland, *Textiles and Clothing*, 43.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

newly-introduced silk satins.’<sup>158</sup> Non-fulled cloths relied on the surface texture of a fabric to impart a sense of quality. Woven silk and velvet were luxury fabrics because of the extraordinary softness of silk fibres. Some wool fibres are naturally lustrous; it is clear that the worsted weavers were learning to exploit these traits to emulate the handle of silk. John Paston’s oft-quoted letter to his wife Margaret in September 1465 highlights the worsted weavers’ growing success in producing a silk substitute:

Nomore at this tyme but that I pray yow ye woll send me hedir ij elne of worsted for dobles to happe me this cold wynter, and that ye inquire where Will[ia]m Paston bought his tepet of fyne worsted which is almost like silk; and if that be [moch] fyner thanne y[at] ye shuld bye me after vij or viij s, thanne bye [m]e a q[ua]rter and the nayle therof for colers, thow it be derrer thanne the tother, for I wold make my doblet all worsted for worship of Norff[olk] rather thanne like Gonnores doblet.<sup>159</sup>

Margaret’s answer came soon thereafter: ‘Item, I haue do spoke for yowr worstede, but ye may not haue it tylle Halowmesse; and thane I am promysyd ye challe haue as fyne as maye be made.’<sup>160</sup>

A statute of 1463, just two years prior, had sought to limit foreign silk merchandise from coming into England. A petition submitted by silk weavers in London claimed that ‘divers Lombards and other Aliens Strangers, imagining to destroy their Crafts and all such virtuous Occupations for Women within this land, to the Intent to enrich themselves’, won for themselves a five year ban on silk imports.<sup>161</sup> The ban did not appear alone, though; it was accompanied by two similar statutes: one that banned the import of other manufactured commodities, including woollen cloth and haberdashery items; and a sumptuary act that limited apparel according to social ranks.<sup>162</sup>

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<sup>158</sup> Ibid., 43.

<sup>159</sup> BL BL Add. MS 34889, f.33r. Available online at <[http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/Viewer.aspx?ref=addms34889\\_fs001r](http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/Viewer.aspx?ref=addms34889_fs001r)>, (accessed 18 July 2016). Printed in *Paston Letters and Papers of the Fifteenth Century, Part 1*, ed. by N. Davis (Oxford, 2004), 140.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid., 322.

<sup>161</sup> This included wrought silk, ribbons, laces, courses, and ‘all manner of other Things’. SR, vol. 2, 395-6.

<sup>162</sup> SR, vol. 2, 396-402.

Sumptuary regulations in medieval England in recent years most commonly have been analysed as part of a social or moralistic discourse.<sup>163</sup> The rhetoric used by legislators often grounded itself in a condemnation of vanity and excess, whilst protesting the erosion of the traditional social hierarchy by limiting access to specific commodities according to social rank. The economic aspects of the English laws have been less well explored, though their ‘distinctly mercantilist cast’ has been noted.<sup>164</sup> England’s first sumptuary law, decreed by statute in 1337, linked the wearing of expensive furs with social rank.<sup>165</sup> However, this statute also did not appear in isolation. Four other statutes came out of the same parliament session that promoted protectionist measures for the nascent English cloth industry, and all five should probably be viewed as a group.<sup>166</sup> The first chapter was a short-lived attempt to starve foreign markets of English wool. The fifth chapter invited foreign clothworkers to ply their trade within the realm. Chapters two and three prohibited the importation of foreign cloth whilst simultaneously barring the wearing of garments made from foreign cloth. The connection between the regulation of clothing and its point of origin is made explicit: ‘No Man nor Woman great nor small [...] of what Estate or Condition he be, the King, Queen, and their Children only exempt, shall wear no Cloth [...] other than is made in England, Ireland, Wales, or Scotland.’<sup>167</sup> While the statute on wearing fur is ambiguous enough that its intent can be debated, the limitation on wearing foreign cloth is undeniably linked to concern for the state of the domestic market.

It is worth considering whether the three statutes in 1463 were likewise connected by the common thread of protectionism. The sumptuary statute of 1463 decried ‘excessive and inordinate Array and Apparel’ as a means of ‘impoverishing...

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<sup>163</sup> For a discussion of sumptuary laws in this context and further references, see M. C. Howell, *Commerce Before Capitalism in Europe, 1300-1600* (Cambridge ; New York, 2010), 220-223.

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*, 218.

<sup>165</sup> SR, vol. 1, 280; see also E. M. Veale, *The English Fur Trade in the Later Middle Ages* (Oxford, 1966), 4-5.

<sup>166</sup> SR, vol. 1, 280-1. See also W. Cunningham, *The Growth of English Industry and Commerce: During the Early and Middle Ages*, vol. 1 (Cambridge, 1922), 308.

<sup>167</sup> SR, vol. 1, 280.

the realm of England and [...] enriching [...] other strange realms and countries to the final destruction of the husbandry of this fair realm.’<sup>168</sup> As Piponnier points out, monarchs thought themselves to gain doubly from protectionism: first by stemming the amount of bullion leaving the realm; and second by promoting domestic industries.<sup>169</sup> Even though the silk ban was temporary, it raises questions about how the market adjusted; if the ban was enforced, it is worth speculating whether the sumptuary statute was in any way a reaction to the fact that silk replacements would be in high demand. Paston’s letter of 1465 indicates that fine worsteds had become expensive, and in some cases, more dear than woollens. Paston’s letter certainly suggests that the worsted weavers were finding ways to redress the diminished supply of imported silk.

Other ways to make worsteds look like silk came from innovation in the finishing methods. Calendering was the process used on worsteds to achieve a fine surface.<sup>170</sup> A calender is a set of heavy rollers that apply heat and pressure to materials to create a surface a smooth or glazed appearance.<sup>171</sup> The combination of fine sateen weaves and expert calendering may have been the specific combination that put worsteds back on the map in the fifteenth century. The importance of calendering is reinforced by the lengths that the city went to secure John Lesour as a resident calenderer. Though a Scotsman by birth,<sup>172</sup> the city assembly debated his case and offered him the freedom of the city in 1462/3.<sup>173</sup> The unusualness of his case was made evident by the proviso that his children could not inherit his citizenship, and implies that his skills were desired even if his family’s permanence was not. The importance of calendering is evident from later attempts to imitate it. A statute of

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<sup>168</sup> SR, vol. 2, 399-402.

<sup>169</sup> Piponnier and Mane, *Dress in the Middle Ages*, 82.

<sup>170</sup> Kerridge, *Textile Manufactures*, 10. Oldland describes calendering as using hot plates instead of rollers, but the effect would be the same. Oldland, ‘Norwich’s Double Worsted’, 186.

<sup>171</sup> Calendars are used more often today to press paper or plastic sheets.

<sup>172</sup> Licence to remain, 28 Nov 1461 in CPR 1461-7, 152. He enrolled his letters patent with the city three times: NCR 1/19, Roll B, m.3d, (7 Edward IV); NCR 1/19, Roll B, m.6, (9 Edward IV); NCR 1/19, Roll D, m.1d, (10 Edward IV).

<sup>173</sup> NRO NCR 16d/1, Books of Proceedings, f. 58v.

1513/4 prohibited the dry calendaring of cloths, which involved the use of gums and oils to give a temporary sheen to fabrics of lesser quality. The process was banned because the effects were mere illusion; once the fabric became wet, it would 'spotte and shewe foule and ev[er] after contynue still foule and woll not endure, to the great decetye and hurte of the werers therof and losse of the said Com[m]oditie'.<sup>174</sup>

Whatever the reason, by the end of the fifteenth century, worsted had definitely become a popular choice again for use in high-status garments. Hayward, for example, examined 1,284 wills from the first half of the sixteenth century looking for fabric names in bequests of clothing. Worsteds was one of the three most popular fabrics. It was the single most frequently mentioned fabric for doublets, jackets, and kirtles.<sup>175</sup> For doublets, the next most commonly mentioned fabrics were satin and camlet. The selections here hint at a common factor in the choosing of fabrics for doublets. Satin, of course, was highly coveted for its glossy lustre. Imported camlets were expensive, as they often incorporated fine fibres like silk or camel hair to add softness and shine.<sup>176</sup> The worsteds weavers in Norwich were producing their own type of worsted camlets prior to 1530, which proved popular at home and overseas.<sup>177</sup> The innovations in the Norwich double worsted probably gave it similar characteristics, such as good drape, a smooth handle, and light to medium sheen, that made it desirable for use in doublets, and more appealing to status-conscious consumers. The accounts of the Lord Treasurer of Scotland record a number of purchases of worsteds specifically for use in kirtles and doublets for the Scottish royal household. Five quarters were purchased in 1503 to make doublets for the Earl of Murray and for Lord Lyle, for the occasion of the wedding of James IV and Margaret Tudor, at a cost of 24s the ell.<sup>178</sup> In 1506/7, 'Mistress B.' received 3 ells of double

<sup>174</sup> SR, vol. 3, 94. This statute was made perpetual in 25 Henry VIII.

<sup>175</sup> M. Hayward, *Rich Apparel: Clothing and the Law in Henry VIII's England* (Farnham (Surrey), 2009), 93-5.

<sup>176</sup> The 1507 import duty on camlets was 13s 4d the piece, which is an indication of their high value. *Ibid.*, 86.

<sup>177</sup> Kerridge, *Textile Manufactures*, 42-4.

<sup>178</sup> *Accounts of the Lord High Treasurer of Scotland, 1500-4*, ed. by J. B. Paul, vol. 2 (Edinburgh, 1900), 315.

worsted for a kirtle, valued at 24s the ell.<sup>179</sup> Another 1<sup>1</sup>/<sub>8</sub> ell was purchased for a different doublet at 20s the ell.<sup>180</sup> John Campbell, who made lanterns for the King's ships, received 5 quarters of double worsted for his livery in 1511, also valued at 24s the ell.<sup>181</sup> In 1526, Urre Schennek, 'lutair', received 5 quarters of black worsted for a doublet, valued at 28s the ell.<sup>182</sup> The next year, 7 ells of black worsted were purchased at 30s the ell.<sup>183</sup> In a range of accounts that covers mid-grade to fine fabrics, worsteds here fall in the upper-middle range of values, costing more than kerseys and russets, but less than silk or velvet.

The success of the worsted weavers in expanding their range of cloths, and the range of qualities, to cater to a fashion-conscious middle and upper classes, surely helped fuel the late-century 'bubble' and allowed the worsted weavers to thrive in Norwich.

### **A case study in demand: temperature and cloth choices**

Changes to spinning will have affected the potential supply of woollen yarns, which in turn allowed more woollen cloths to be produced every year. But not all changes affected supply. Changes in consumer demand also played a role in what producers chose to make. However, the link between fashion and material culture is not always driven purely by human whim. At a more fundamental level, environment also feeds into fashion. For historians, a by-product of the recent surge in climatological studies is the opportunity to incorporate climate change into the historical narrative.

The current debate on climate change has prompted a massive increase in data on historical climate shifts. Climatologists are working to establish historical baselines for temperature, sea levels, and glaciation in order to ascertain whether

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<sup>179</sup> *Accounts of the Lord High Treasurer of Scotland, 1506-7*, ed. by J. B. Paul, vol. 3 (Edinburgh, 1901), 316.

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.*, 301.

<sup>181</sup> *Accounts of the Lord High Treasurer of Scotland, 1507-13*, ed. by J. B. Paul, vol. 4 (Edinburgh, 1902), 261.

<sup>182</sup> *Accounts of the Lord High Treasurer of Scotland, 1515-31*, ed. by J. B. Paul, vol. 5 (Edinburgh, 1903), 312.

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid.*, 314.

twenty-first century climate patterns are anomalous. Because of this, science journals are awash with the results from studies of ocean sedimentation and glacial ice cores, among others, in an effort to produce enough proxy data for scientists to reconstruct shifts in ocean temperatures, glaciation, solar radiation, volcanic activity, and species die-back. Data generated by these studies is then aggregated into larger models that refine our understanding of regional and global climatological oscillation over the past millennium.<sup>184</sup>

For historians, one exciting outcome has been an advancement in our understanding of the two major climatological events in the pre-modern period.<sup>185</sup> Hubert Lamb was one of the first people to postulate the existence of a medieval climate shift in his work in the 1960s. Lamb constructed estimates of average temperatures for central England going back to 800. Using those estimates, he hypothesised the existence of an unusually warm period followed by an unusually cool period (a schematic of his hypothesised climate shift is shown in Figure 2.14).<sup>186</sup> These estimates became part of the foundation for the first Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) in 1990.<sup>187</sup> Subsequent studies have confirmed Lamb's hypothesis. The first period, originally termed the 'Medieval Warm Period' (MWP)

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<sup>184</sup> For an overview of the methods and problems key to this process, see *Surface Temperature Reconstructions for the Last 2,000 Years*, ed. the National Research Council of the National Academies (Washington, D.C., 2006).

<sup>185</sup> The literature on climate change is extensive and growing rapidly. The references that follow are not exhaustive, but merely point up some recent reputable research. Unfortunately, the proliferation of non-scientific opinions on climate change makes it difficult for non-specialists to evaluate the veracity of information available on the Internet. Particularly germane to this topic is the fact that climate change deniers use the period of medieval warming to argue that the current warming trend is not influenced by anthropogenic factors. I am indebted to Lars Duening for his assistance in evaluating the following sources.

<sup>186</sup> H. H. Lamb, 'The Early Medieval Warm Epoch and Its Sequel', *Palaeogeography, Palaeoclimatology, Palaeoecology*, 1 (1965), 13-37.

<sup>187</sup> *IPCC First Assessment Report. Climate Change: The IPCC Scientific Assessment*, ed. J. T. Houghton, G. J. Jenkins, and J. J. Ephraums, Report Prepared for Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change By Working Group I, (Cambridge, 1990).

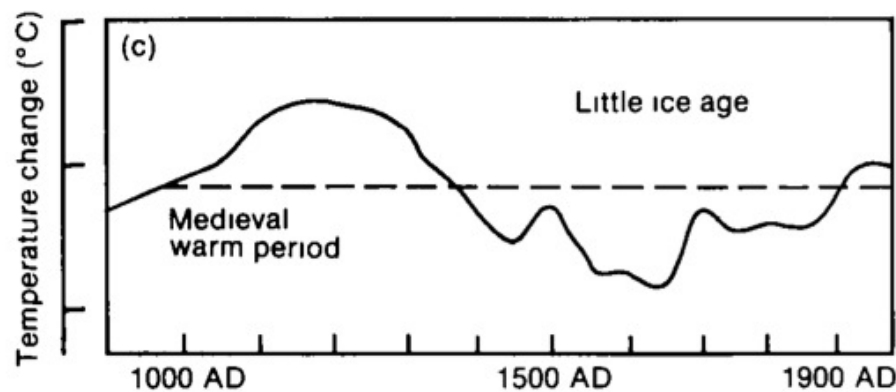


**Figure 2.14:** Schematic of long-term climate change from the first IPCC report, based on Hubert Lamb's original findings <sup>188</sup>

but now more commonly referred to as the 'Medieval Climate Anomaly' (MCA), was a period of warming between roughly 950 and 1350.<sup>189</sup> It is still unclear whether the MCA was a global phenomenon or limited to regions in the Northern Hemisphere,<sup>190</sup> but enough data exists to indicate that the MCA certainly affected Britain, Iceland, the Baltic, and parts of Northern Europe.<sup>191</sup> There was a brief transition period between the end of the MCA in the fourteenth century followed by a prolonged

<sup>188</sup> The first schematic temperature reconstruction for the years 900 to 2000 was based on Lamb's original data. This has since been superseded with newer data in Figure 2.15. Though it is no longer believed that the scale of warming during the MCA was as extreme as depicted here, this graph gives a sense of the medieval and post-medieval shifts in climate. Ibid., Figure 7.1, 202.

<sup>189</sup> There is some debate concerning how warm the MCA really was, and whether or not anthropogenic factors are driving the current climate anomaly. Climate change deniers overemphasise the extent of the MCA to make the current temperature shift looks less anomalous. See D. L. Hartmann, A. M. G. K. Tank *et al.*, '2013: Information From Paleoclimate Archives', in *Climate Change 2013: The Physical Science Basis. Contribution of Working Group I to the Fifth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change* (Cambridge, 2013), 383-464.

<sup>190</sup> N. E. Graham, C. M. Ammann *et al.*, 'Support for Global Climate Reorganization During the "Medieval Climate Anomaly"', *Climate Dynamics*, 37 (2011), 1217-1245.

<sup>191</sup> G. Massé, S. J. Rowland *et al.*, 'Abrupt Climate Changes for Iceland During the Last Millennium: Evidence From High Resolution Sea Ice Reconstructions.', *Earth and Planetary Science Letters*, 269 (2008), 565-569.



period of cooling known as the 'Little Ice Age' (LIA). The exact onset of the LIA is debated; some models place its inception in the sixteenth or seventeenth century, but more recent models have revised that date to around 1450.<sup>192</sup> There is general agreement that the LIA ended in the nineteenth century. Like the MCA, it is still being debated whether cooling in the LIA was regional to Europe and the North Atlantic,<sup>193</sup> or global, in scale.

Historians of the early modern period are well acquainted with textual evidence that supports the existence of the LIA, such as accounts of ice skating and open-air fairs held on a frozen Thames in London. Other events found in the historical record emphasise the impact of the MCA and the LIA on medieval Europe. Icelandic exploration and the settling of Greenland in the tenth century imply warmer seas and melting ice. Likewise, cooler seas and expanding glaciation has been cited as a plausible explanation for the abandonment of the Greenland settlements four centuries later. In Britain, the expansion of settlements during the thirteenth century and the rise in population seem a logical result of warm summers more conducive to food production.<sup>194</sup> The demographic crises of the fourteenth century equally could have been aggravated by a cooling climate. Improved climate models offer a more fine-grained approach to future demographic research in an otherwise poorly-documented historical period.

It is worth considering the correlative links between fashion and climate, especially at a time in history where living spaces were draughty and difficult to heat. It may be no coincidence that the fourteenth century saw a decline in worsted exports and a rise in fulled woollens at the same time that paleoclimatologists postulate a cooling period in northern Europe. If the climate was transitioning from a warmer to a cooler period, it is logical to assume that different textiles would be in

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<sup>192</sup> Recent research has suggested that the shift out of the MCA into the LIA was triggered by severe volcanic activity in the thirteenth and mid-fifteenth centuries. G. H. Miller, Á. Geirsdóttir *et al.*, 'Abrupt Onset of the Little Ice Age Triggered By Volcanism and Sustained By Sea-Ice/ocean Feedbacks', *Geophysical Research Letters*, 39 (2012), 1-5.

<sup>193</sup> M. Ahmed, K. J. Anchukaitis *et al.*, 'Continental-Scale Temperature Variability During the Past Two Millennia', *Nature Geoscience*, 6 (2013), 339-346.

<sup>194</sup> M. W. Beresford, *New Towns of the Middle Ages: Town Plantation in England, Wales and Gascony*. (New York, 1967).

higher demand. The distinctive appeal of a fulled textile over a non-fulled textile for garments is obvious when one considers that fulled cloths provide not just substantial thickness, but also that the loftiness of woollen yarns create air pockets within the fabric (enhanced by fulling), which help trap and retain warmth. This is why a fulled woollen is an excellent insulator. This specific difference in the insulating quality of a woollen, when compared to a worsted, could be a contributing factor in explaining why broadcloth exports rose and worsted exports fell off so dramatically in the fourteenth century.

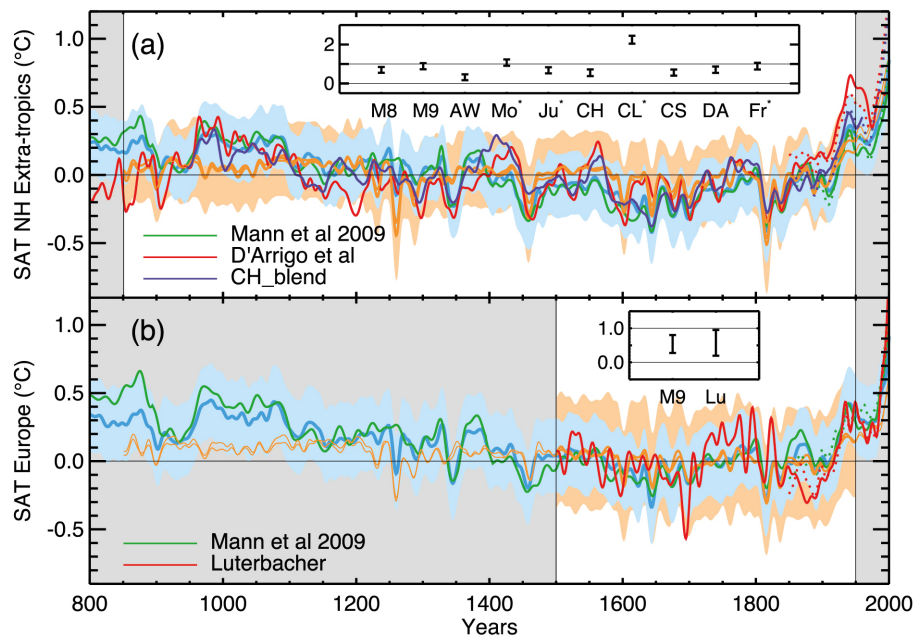


**Figure 2.15:** Updated graph of long-term climate change from the 5th IPCC report <sup>195</sup>

<sup>195</sup> This graph shows surface air temperature reconstructions from the 5<sup>th</sup> IPCC report. While the improved granularity makes it more difficult for non-specialists to interpret, the overall shift in average temperatures is clear. Contributors to the 5th IPCC report still agree that the data support the end of a medieval warm period followed by the cooling of the LIA. N. L. Bindoff, P. A. Stott *et al.*, 'Detection and Attribution of Climate Change: From Global to Regional', in *Climate Change 2013: The Physical Science Basis. Contribution of Working Group I to the Fifth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change*, ed. by T. F. Stocker, D. Qin *et al.* (Cambridge, 2013), Figure 10-19.

There is one intriguing point in Lamb's data that should be mentioned in connection with the late fifteenth-century surge in worsted exports. Lamb's first published report included a graph of mean temperatures, in 50-year averages, for central England. This graph, shown in Figure 2.16, presents a small reversal beginning around the 1450s or 1460s, at exactly the same time that worsteds were making a comeback, and ending by the 1510s or 1520s. This rise was included in the first reconstruction schematic published by the IPCC in 1990 (Figure 2.14).

Every iteration of the IPCC's reports has improved on their initial assessment as more data has become available, as shown in Figure 2.15, though it also means that Lamb's original estimates for central England have been merged with datasets that cover a much larger geographical area. If anything, higher resolution proxy studies are showing that estimating a global mean temperature shift is very difficult in the face of regional anomalies and the limitations of gathering proxy data. The latest studies are emphasising the importance of recognising regional fluctuations and the difficulty of establishing global trends using primarily regional data. Regardless, it should be noted that there is a distinct possibility that parts of northern Europe did experience a brief period of anomalous climate — a last 'hurrah' of the medieval warm period — just prior to the real onset of the LIA. Though not well corroborated,<sup>196</sup> one reconstruction of regional temperatures points to a brief but significant warming between 1470 and 1520 around the Arctic.<sup>197</sup> Whether this would have affected England or the major northern markets for English cloth around the Baltic region remains uncertain.

Paleoclimatology is still a nascent field, and the data will continue to be refined for many years to come. Though the argument presented here is mostly conjectural, it is certain that future developments will offer historians of

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<sup>196</sup> 'Was There a 15th-Century "Little" Medieval Warm Period?', <<http://www.co2science.org/articles/V7/N26/EDIT.php>>, (accessed 29 November 2015). Note that this site summarises published research, but slanted to minimise human impact.

<sup>197</sup> E. Cressin, H. Goosse *et al.*, 'The 15th Century Arctic Warming in Coupled Model Simulations With Data Assimilation', *Climate of the Past*, 5 (2009), 394-7.

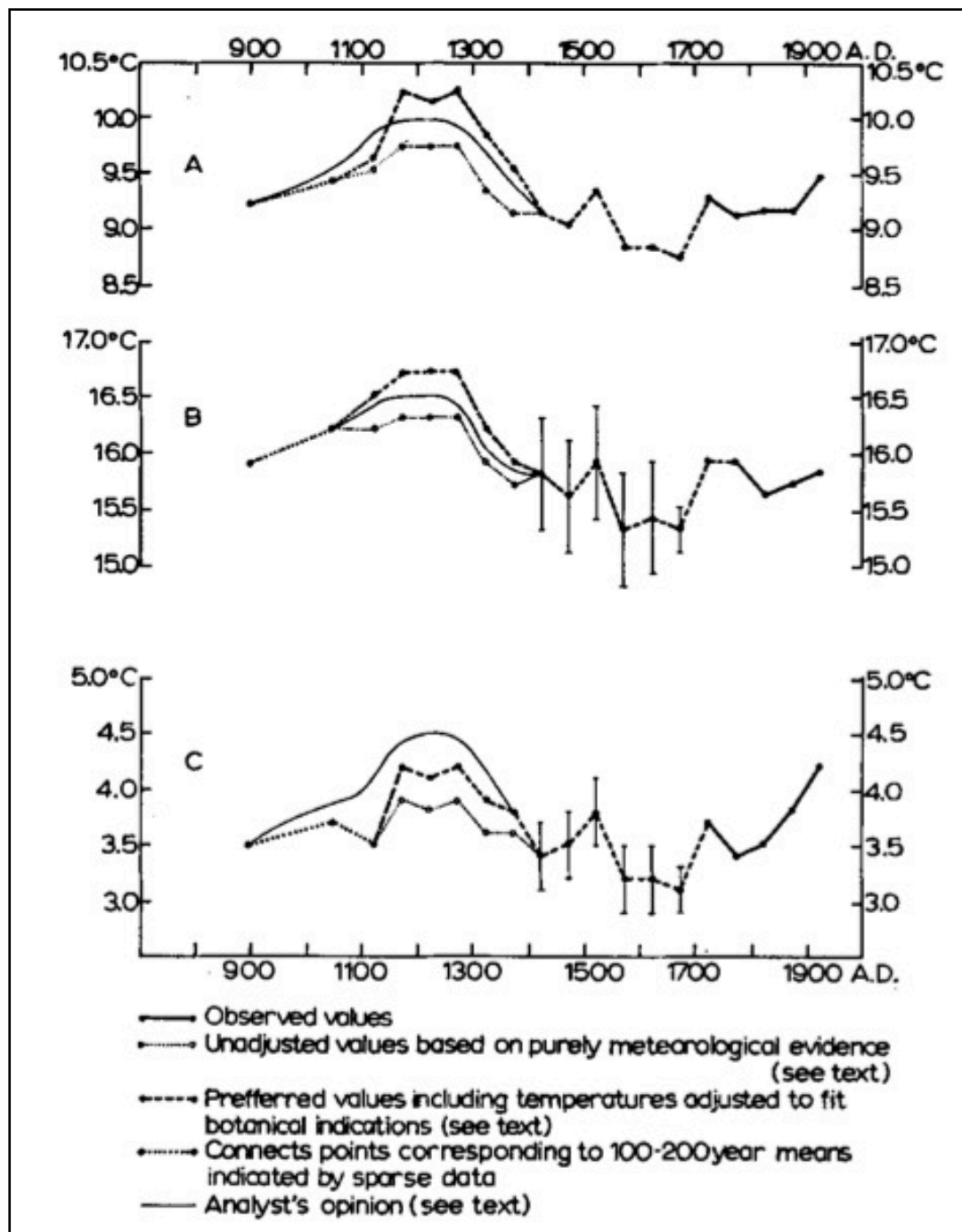


**Figure 2.16:** Lamb's reconstruction of historical climate patterns in central England <sup>198</sup>

<sup>198</sup> Note the brief reversal in temperature that begins in the fifteenth century but ends just after the start of the sixteenth century. Reprinted from Lamb, 'The Early Medieval Warm Epoch and Its Sequel', 26, with permission from Elsevier.

material culture exciting new avenues for research. Climate will have impacted the trajectory of material culture and fashion in very real ways. Was the fourteenth-century demise of worsted and growing desirability of woollens triggered by a cooling climate? Likewise, was the renewed desirability of worsteds the result of a brief respite from the cooler winters?

As discussed earlier in the chapter, the significant differences in construction between worsteds and woollens surely played some role in consumer choice.<sup>199</sup> The air pockets created within the fabric of a fulled woollen offered significantly enhanced insulation for its wearers. Woollens were a considerably warmer fabric than worsteds, in much the same way that a thin satin provides much less insulation than does a polyester fleece jacket or a heavy woollen jumper. Given the incontrovertible evidence we now have that the climate was cooling around the same time that woollen exports were rising, it seems likely that there was some link between the increasing popularity of English woollens and the concomitant decline in worsteds. Additionally, if there was a brief return to warmer winters at the end of the fifteenth century and start of the sixteenth century in England, as suggested above, the link between climate and worsted consumption would only be strengthened.

Another variable is, of course, the changes in clothing design in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Though the fragmentary evidence provided by wills and account books reaffirms that worsteds did continue to be used for bed covers, wall hangings, pillow cushions, and such, it seems unlikely that home furnishings alone could explain why woollen exports began to outstrip worsted exports in the fourteenth century, or the late fifteenth-century surge in worsteds. Wide swings in fashion conceivably could have created demand for a product that its producers could not immediately satisfy, such as with late fifteenth-century worsteds and the growing demand for them on the continent.<sup>200</sup> Furthermore, the growing complexity

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<sup>199</sup> See above, pages 59, 65, and 108.

<sup>200</sup> This could explain why fifteenth-century English worsted exports boomed for a time, before continental producers made their own comeback on the European market in the early sixteenth century, after which English worsted exports again dwindled. Munro, 'Symbiosis', 62-66.

of fashion at the time, including the trend for layering, and the desire to wear fabrics that had the shiny look of silk and satin, could have triggered a renewed interest in fabrics that were not intrinsically as warm, but which had a certain 'look'. If double worsteds did indeed serve as a good silk substitute, then they also conferred the additional benefit of appearing to be more costly than they actually were.<sup>201</sup>

Yet, regretfully, our understanding of fashion as a driver is limited. Visual evidence, as mentioned earlier, is not very helpful for helping us understand the choices that consumers made with regard to textile varieties. While it is well known that worsteds were widely used for household items and furnishings, this chapter has shown that worsteds were in fact also widely used for clothing, especially kirtles and doublets, and for ecclesiastical garments.<sup>202</sup> However, paintings, manuscript illustrations, and funeral effigies – being among the major sources of clothing depictions – are simply not detailed enough to allow us to differentiate between worsteds and woollens.<sup>203</sup> Trends in fashion will have impacted cloth markets, but research into the economic intersection between the cloth trade and fashion trends has been limited, and further stymied by a lack of archaeological evidence.<sup>204</sup> The extent to which fashion impelled customers to choose worsteds over woollens is difficult to estimate, and the best we can do is extrapolate from sources like wills.

The forces that drove consumer choice and material consumption were complex, and in reality, these choices can never be reduced to a single variable. Obviously, consumers were limited by their budgets, so some choices will have been

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<sup>201</sup> Ramsay, *The English Woollen Industry, 1500-1750*, 14.

<sup>202</sup> See page 103, above, for Hayward's work on fabric types used for items of clothing in wills.

<sup>203</sup> For more on the difficulties of aligning art with reality, as concerns clothing, see Piponnier and Mane, *Dress in the Middle Ages*, 3-13; S. Vincent, *Dressing the Elite: Clothes in Early Modern England* (Oxford, 2003), 13-41.

<sup>204</sup> For early work on this area, see Thirsk's article on the early modern knitted-stockings industry. She begins by lamenting that economic history had all too often overlooked the connection between fashion and economic history. J. Thirsk, 'The Fantastical Folly of Fashion: The English Stocking Knitting Industry, 1500-1700', in *The Rural Economy of England* (London, 1984), 235-257. This situation is improving, if slowly. Dyer, for instance, briefly discusses the importance of clothing and fashion in his work on late medieval trends in consumption. Dyer, *An Age of Transition*, 143-150.

driven by price. But, as demonstrated above, the extant literature on worsteds has created a false sense that to choose between woollens and worsteds was to choose solely on price.<sup>205</sup> One of the primary arguments of this chapter has been that the traditional understanding of worsteds as a coarser and cheaper fabric is flawed. Worsteds were produced in a wide range of qualities, and in many cases, the cost per ell of a middle to high-grade worsted equalled or exceeded the cost of comparable woollens. Thus, the choice was never simply a binary decision based on cost.

## Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated that the vitality of the medieval worsted trade has been underestimated by scholars. Historians of the English textile trade have long focused on woollen broadcloth to the exclusion of worsteds. Worsteds and woollens require different inputs, different production methods, and different finishing techniques, which meant that as the industry matured, craftsmen began to divide into guilds that specialised in one type of product or another.

England is fortunate that so many documents survive which record the export of English cloth, but the interpretation of these records has been problematic. Much of our knowledge about the magnitude of the cloth trade in England has had to rely on the summary accounts produced by the English customs officials. Yet much of the categorisation employed by the Exchequer is a fiction that relied on a nominal 'cloth of assize'. Furthermore, evaluating the scale of the worsted trade has been made more difficult by published accounts that misrepresented the size of the trade.

We also know little about domestic demand for worsteds and the number of cloths sold within England in any given year. Worsteds were commonly used for garments and for household furnishings. The amount of cloths sold both to individuals and to institutions has likely been severely underestimated. Norfolk producers constantly innovated with their product. Advances in weaving and finishing methods led to the creation of the calendered 'double worsted', a pressed

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<sup>205</sup> See above, pages 71–74.

fabric that resembled silk, but cost much less. As a result, demand for worsteds rose significantly around the end of the fifteenth century and start of the sixteenth century. The expansion of the industry propelled the worsted weavers to new prominence, both in the region and in the city of Norwich.



## 3 | Norfolk and Norwich

As historians, we tend to prioritise chronology over geography. Too often, the concept of ‘place’ in history is considered merely as an accident of location, and little thought is given to properly exploring the link between history and geography. Yet all historical events are contingent on both place and time, and history is much the richer when we draw on multiple fields for analysis.

This chapter takes a geographical focus by considering medieval worsteds from the perspective of a regional industry. Medieval Norfolk was an ideal environment for the growth of early industry, and indeed, clothmaking began there at an early date. Worsteds were commercially produced in Norfolk from at least the thirteenth century. However, over the course of the next two centuries, the industry changed significantly. It moved from being a widely dispersed, rural pursuit in the fourteenth century to a highly regulated, urban industry by the fifteenth. Not only does worsteds’ transplantation from rural Norfolk into the urbanised environs of medieval Norwich contravene the belief in the decline of urban weaving, but its success under a strong, fifteenth-century regulatory framework also counters the traditional idea that woollen cloth only succeeded due to a lack of regulation. Double worsted partly owes its success to Norwich’s imposition of standards and quality control over production, not just in the city, but throughout its entire hinterland.

### 3.1 The importance of place

A combination of geographical remoteness and unique cultural heritage have, over time, nurtured a particularly distinctive image of Norfolk in the British imagination. Those who write of it often eulogise that which sets it apart: its majestically unassuming landscape, its peculiar dialect, its humour, its eccentricity, or simply its sense of otherness.<sup>1</sup> Yet Norfolk's placid veneer belies a precocious medieval heritage that was highly productive, densely settled, and wealthy. Seemingly remote by today's standards, it is easy to forget that Norfolk in the Middle Ages was well-situated for transport by water, both by river and by sea.<sup>2</sup> Its coastal location helped foster a Janus-faced orientation, simultaneously maintaining inward links to London, the nation's increasingly all-important trade entrepôt, and outward links to the cloth centres of Flanders, which lay just over the channel from East Anglia's ports.<sup>3</sup> Small wonder, then, that this sleepy corner of England once produced the urban wonder we now call the New Draperies.<sup>4</sup>

What was the secret to building a successful regional industry? In some cases, the necessary factors may well have converged through a combination of good timing, adequate materials, and raw luck, but serendipity can only carry us so far. Just as today, a lasting business required both action and reaction. Industry will always be buffeted by the exigencies of the market; a clever industry learns to shape

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<sup>1</sup> Indeed, one of Britain's favourite sons is the fictional Alan Partridge of Norwich, a spoof character whose humour is enhanced by his connection to East Anglia. Partridge's sobriquets for East Anglia include 'the plump peninsula', 'Albion's hind quarters', and 'The Wales of the East'. See also <<http://www.literarynorfolk.co.uk/>>, <<http://www.norfolkdialect.com>> and <<http://public.oed.com/aspects-of-english/english-in-use/east-anglian-english/>>, (accessed 1 June 2016). The precise definition of what constitutes 'East Anglia' is debated -- Norfolk and Suffolk are unquestionably East Anglian, but many people also include parts of Essex and Cambridgeshire.

<sup>2</sup> J. Thirsk, 'The Farming Regions of England', in *The Agrarian History of England and Wales: V4, 1500-1640*, ed. by J. Thirsk and H. P. R. Finberg (Cambridge, 1967), 40-1.

<sup>3</sup> N. Williams, *The Maritime Trade of the East Anglian Ports, 1550-1590* (1988); D. Bates and R. Liddiard, *East Anglia and Its North Sea World in the Middle Ages* (Woodbridge, Suffolk, 2013).

<sup>4</sup> *The New Draperies in the Low Countries and England, 1300-1800*, ed. N. B. Harte, Pasold Studies in Textile History, No. 10, (Oxford, 1997); Kerridge, *Textile Manufactures*; E. Lipson, *The History of the Woollen and Worsted Industries* (London, 1921), 21-4.

itself to best suit its market. Overseas demand for worsteds had peaked in the fourteenth century, but by the start of the fifteenth century, worsted exports were falling to an all-time low. Nevertheless, by the end of the fifteenth century this position had reversed itself and worsteds were again in demand overseas.<sup>5</sup> Though the end of the fifteenth-century recession and the cessation of England's hostilities with the Hanse and Burgundy figured in the recovery of cloth exports,<sup>6</sup> there were other factors involved as well. Overseas demand played its part, but a growing market is meaningless if a producer cannot supply what a buyer desires. European markets had certain expectations in the cloth trade, and worsted producers had to learn to meet these expectations.

### Hinterlands, cloth, and proto-industry

Medieval hinterlands are only beginning to be explored by English historians, but they have much to offer our understanding of the geospatial underpinnings of industry and commerce in the Middle Ages. Urbanised areas did not function as isolated, self-contained units. Behind every town was a support network of some shape and size; the two relied on each other like two halves of a whole.<sup>7</sup> Work on English hinterlands to date has explored elements of these spatial relations, including their geographical range, their provisioning, and their migratory pull using sources as diverse as credit and debt registers, apprenticeship indentures, grain sales, court records, wills, and legal depositions.<sup>8</sup> The common thread that links these topics is

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<sup>5</sup> See Section 2.2.

<sup>6</sup> J. Hatcher, 'The Great Slump of the Mid-Fifteenth Century', in *Progress and Problems in Medieval England*, ed. by R. Britnell and J. Hatcher (Cambridge, 1996), 237-272; J. N. Hare, 'Growth and Recession in the Fifteenth-Century Economy: The Wiltshire Textile Industry and the Countryside', *EcHR*, (1999), 18-23.

<sup>7</sup> Though this chapter will use the terms 'urban' and 'rural' as if the two can be precisely demarcated, this is only to facilitate a discussion about Norwich as a corporate entity separate from its surrounding countryside.

<sup>8</sup> See, for example, all of the essays in *Trade, Urban Hinterlands and Market Integration, c. 1300-1600*, ed. J. A. Galloway (London, 2000); P. Slavin, *Feeding the Brethren: Grain Provisioning of Norwich Cathedral Priory, c. 1280-1370*, Ph.D thesis (University of Toronto, 2008); Kowaleski, *Local Markets and Regional Trade in Medieval Exeter*; C. Dyer, 'The Consumer and the Market in the Later Middle Ages', *EcHR*, 42 (1989), 305-327; B. J. Hamblen, *Communities of the Hinterland: Social Networks and Geographical Mobility Beyond the Walls of Late Medieval York*, Ph.D thesis

the overarching issue of markets and commercialisation. Distribution networks in the late Middle Ages continually evolved to meet the demands of an increasingly consumer-oriented economy. After several centuries of market creation, the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries saw hundreds of small markets abandoned in favour of larger trade hubs, the most important of which floated to the top of the emerging market hierarchy.<sup>9</sup> As both Britnell and Jenks have argued, much of this process was fuelled by the growing consumer economy. Commercial demand drove a process that linked markets together in ladder form, from small to big. Demand for high-quality manufactures linked rural areas to regional market hubs;<sup>10</sup> these hubs in turn relied on top-level markets like London to provision them with all manner of consumer goods, in what Jenks has dubbed the 'Distribution Revolution'.<sup>11</sup> This flow of items up and down the supply chain helps explain how key towns expanded and consolidated their hinterlands, thanks to their ability to monopolise trade in specialised commodities and services.<sup>12</sup> But it does less to explain how regional producers helped meet the growing demand for consumer goods.

Perhaps the lack of discussion about regional production areas is due to the fact that clothmaking's 'fate' was decided long ago, and few scholars since then have probed the issue. This, of course, is the notion that clothmaking failed in the towns, but was successfully reborn in the countryside. 'Generally speaking, [historians of clothmaking] assign to the towns a role in the history of clothmaking which steadily diminishes in importance with the passage of time: the earlier the period the more urban the industry; the later the period the more rural.'<sup>13</sup> Pirenne long ago

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(University of York, 2008).

<sup>9</sup> Britnell, 'Urban Demand'.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 12-3; C. Dyer, *Standards of Living in the Later Middle Ages: Social Changes in England, c. 1200-1520* (1989), 140-50, 158-60.

<sup>11</sup> Jenks, 'Die Distributionsrevolution des 15. Jahrhunderts'.

<sup>12</sup> Christaller developed his 'Central Place' theory to explore the effect of geography on market hierarchies. His work has been very influential on how geographers and historians conceptualise the confluence of markets and geography. W. Christaller, *Central Places in Southern Germany* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1966). See also the work of Hektor Ammann, who worked on market zones that spanned urban and rural areas. H. Ammann, *Die wirtschaftliche Stellung der Reichstadt Nürnberg im Spätmittelalter* (Nürnberg, 1970).

<sup>13</sup> Bridbury, *Clothmaking*, 62; see also E. Lipson, *The Economic History of England*, vol. 1

hypothesised that the reason for this was cost. He believed rural clothmaking succeeded because it lay beyond the reach of urban guilds and civic regulations. The move to the cheaper countryside, free from external control, had given English cloth the cost advantage it needed to begin fatally undermining continental producers.<sup>14</sup> Such arguments against industrial control can be traced all the way back to the Enlightenment champions of market liberalisation. Adam Smith famously vilified guilds and civic regulation in *The Wealth of Nations*, for he believed that industrial limitations served only to protect guild interests.<sup>15</sup> Proponents of this view continue to argue Smith's position, claiming that urban oversight did nothing but inhibit the functioning of a free market.<sup>16</sup>

Further work on the English cloth industry expanded the historiographical arguments in favour of urban decampment. De-urbanisation was said to have enhanced productivity by encouraging the use of time-saving devices, such as fulling mills, which urban guilds supposedly opposed for no better reason than a general resistance to innovation.<sup>17</sup> Freedom from sundry impositions, such as civic taxation, further improved profitability. And many scholars argue that it was the opportunity for consolidation under merchant-clothiers, who were able to compete on cost, that specifically expanded rural clothmaking.<sup>18</sup>

The clothier's system of 'putting-out' to rural workers was common both in England and on the continent. Clothiers who invested directly into industry often realised immense profits because they maximised vertical integration. Most

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(London, 1929), 397-8.

<sup>14</sup> Munro, 'Symbiosis', 2-3, 12-14; Lipson, *Economic History*, vol. 1, 415-6; H. Pirenne, *Histoire De Belgique*, vol. 1 (Bruxelles, 1907), 225-56.

<sup>15</sup> A. Smith, *An Inquiry Into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (London, nd), ch. IX, part II, 102.

<sup>16</sup> Ogilvie has been one of the most vocal critics of pre-modern guilds in recent years. Ogilvie, 'Guilds, Efficiency, and Social Capital: Evidence From German Proto-Industry'; Ogilvie, 'Rehabilitating the Guilds: A Reply'.

<sup>17</sup> Carus-Wilson, 'Industrial Revolution', 206-7; J. Thirsk, 'Industries in the Countryside', in *The Rural Economy of England* (London, 1984), 220.

<sup>18</sup> C. Dyer, *Making a Living in the Middle Ages: The People of Britain 850-1520* (London, 2002), 325-6; Miller, 'The Fortunes of the English Textile Industry During the Thirteenth Century', 74-77; Bolton, *English Economy*, 272-3.

explanations of clothiers' successes paint the relationship between clothiers and weavers as one of pure financial exploitation.<sup>19</sup> Clothiers could encourage greater or lesser economic dependency on themselves, ranging from hiring artisans to work in clothiers' workshops, to paying piece rates to weavers who worked up clothiers' materials in their own homes, to merely buying finished cloth from independent weavers but paying in arrears. Clothier families in the woollen regions became fabulously wealthy by presiding over mini-empires of cloth; especially well-known are the Paycockes of Coggeshall in Essex, and the Springs of Lavenham, Suffolk, who made small fortunes for themselves.

Zell recently countered this one-sided view with the argument that rural clothiers in the Weald also performed the crucial function of linking rural producers with higher-level markets.<sup>20</sup> Increasingly, the only cloth market that mattered was London, but participation in it required significant capital resources because international trade functioned on long-term credit. Re-payment often took months or years, and merchants had to be able to wait out long periods of living in arrears.<sup>21</sup> Small producers often lacked the capital to weather these conditions, hence they used clothiers as a local point of entry to the market. Therefore, in addition to vertical integration, clothiers fulfilled the key role of consolidating local manufactures for distribution up the supply chain to London. However, it is important to note that in doing so, they bypassed local markets, thereby undermining the commercial services of regional urban centres, and likely reinforcing arguments for urban decline and the failure of town clothmaking.

The belief in the failure of urban clothmaking is now so deeply entrenched that it has practically become canon,<sup>22</sup> though the timescale for the 'exodus' varies.

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<sup>19</sup> See, for example, Lipson, *Economic History*, vol. 1, 412-6.

<sup>20</sup> M. Zell, 'Credit in the Pre-industrial English Woollen Industry', *EcHR*, (1996), 667-691.

<sup>21</sup> For mercantile transactions and letters of credit, see R. de Roover, 'The Organization of Trade', in *Cambridge Economic History of Europe*, ed. by M. M. Postan and E. E. Rich (1963), 95-98. For the use of credit in medieval trade generally, see M. Postan, 'Credit in Medieval Trade', *EcHR*, 1 (1928), 234-261, or P. Nightingale, 'Money and Credit in the Economy of Late Medieval England', in *Medieval Money Matters*, ed. by D. Wood (Oxford, 2004), 51-71. On the importance of credit in a rural setting, see C. Briggs, 'The Availability of Credit in the English Countryside, 1400-1480', *Agricultural History Review*, 56 (2008), 1-24.

The older literature tends to site it mostly in the thirteenth or fourteenth centuries, however Britnell more recently argued that the older and larger cloth towns, such as Coventry, Salisbury, York, Norwich, and Colchester, were able to sustain production through at least the 1470s; after this point, though, he claims that the main beneficiaries of the woollen expansion were small towns in the West Country.<sup>23</sup>

The significance of de-urbanisation to clothmaking was further bolstered by its inclusion in the proto-industrial debate. In 1972, the term 'proto-industry' appeared for the first time in an article by Franklin Mendels.<sup>24</sup> Mendels suggested that the seeds of the Industrial Revolution could be found in areas distinguished by high levels of cottage industry, and that certain regions seemed more predisposed than others later to spawn full-scale industrialisation. The proto-industrial debate has generated a ream of literature since.<sup>25</sup> The issue ties in well with the history of clothmaking.<sup>26</sup> As the quintessential example of a rural yet highly commercialised industry, clothmaking regions naturally ticked most of Mendels' criteria for areas likely to diversify into cottage industries. He argued that proto-industrial regions required high concentrations of commercial farming; that manufactures must be targeted not for local consumption, but specifically for commercial markets; that the industry was practiced as a by-employment of agriculture; and that these industries were located close to, but not in, urbanised centres.<sup>27</sup> Mendels argued that this

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<sup>22</sup> As Britnell noted concerning the marketing of wool, 'since all the emphasis of the literature on the English textile industry stresses the failure of urban industries and the development of clothmaking in rural areas', there was little point in seeking wool in the urban markets. Britnell, 'Urban Demand', 9; See also Bolton, *English Economy*, 265-73; E. Miller and J. Hatcher, *Medieval England: Towns, Commerce and Crafts, 1086-1348* (London, 1995), 109-127.

<sup>23</sup> Britnell, 'Urban Demand', 14.

<sup>24</sup> F. Mendels, 'Proto-Industrialization: The First Phase of the Industrialization Process', *Journal of Economic History*, 32 (1972), 241-261.

<sup>25</sup> For overviews of the debate, see L. A. Clarkson, *Proto-Industrialization: The First Phase of Industrialization* (Basingstoke, 1985); D. C. Coleman, 'Proto-Industrialization: A Concept Too Many', *EcHR*, 36 (1983), 435-448; S. C. Ogilvie, 'Proto-Industrialization in Europe', *Continuity and Change*, 8 (1993), 159-179.

<sup>26</sup> As Clarkson notes, the proto-industrial debate suffers from an over-reliance on clothmaking. The debate would profit from including a wider range of industries. Clarkson, *Proto-Industrialization*, 19.

<sup>27</sup> Mendels, 'Proto-Industrialization', 2. His argument is summarised in Clarkson, *Proto-*

specific set of environmental factors was common in areas where domestic production became commercialised prior to the advent of factory industrialisation. Part-time handicraft work was enormously beneficial for filling in slack periods in the agricultural calendar.<sup>28</sup>

In an earlier article, Joan Thirsk had drawn on similar examples of clothmaking in the West Country, Suffolk, and Kent to postulate why manufacturing by-employments emerged in certain non-urbanised regions. Like Mendels, she also listed factors she felt would predispose an otherwise heavily agricultural region to diversify its production. The main English woollen regions were linked by dense population and under-employment in the farming sector.<sup>29</sup> She also theorised that handicraft industries tended to emerge in England in those regions marked by weak manorial systems and partible inheritance, which generated high population levels in general, and a high degree of freeholding in particular.<sup>30</sup>

Despite the fact that medieval Norfolk fulfils these criteria, medieval worsteds have never been seriously considered as a contender for proto-industry, probably because the debate on proto-industry has focused primarily on post-medieval times. Nor has medieval English proto-industry been investigated in the context of hinterland analysis. Because of the way the proto-industry debate has isolated rural handicrafts from the urban environment, there has been relatively little investigation into its industrial linkages between town and country. The situation of the woollen industry and its dominance by clothiers has too readily been generalised to the rest of the country. Yet, as Munro and others have argued, the proto-industrial argument is too limited in scope, and too eager to focus solely on rural production.<sup>31</sup> As Munro contended, clothmaking continued to feature as an urban endeavour, in spite of assertions to the contrary. Towns that retained their cloth industries did so

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*Industrialization*, 15-16.

<sup>28</sup> Mendels, 'Proto-Industrialization', 242, 245-6.

<sup>29</sup> Thirsk, 'Industries', 231-3.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 223-4.

<sup>31</sup> Munro, 'Symbiosis', 30-7. Bridbury also argued that urban production was higher than has generally been accepted. Bridbury, *Economic Growth*, 52-82; Bridbury, *Clothmaking*, 62-83.



because these particular industries emphasised quality over cost. Only urban institutions could leverage the kind of industrial control necessary to impose rigorous standards on producers.<sup>32</sup> Equally important was the power that urban centres could bring to bear on their surrounding regions, as in the case of the *drie steden*’ ban on the importation of English woollens into any part of Flanders in the fourteenth century.<sup>33</sup>

This type of argument is no doubt more readily accepted by historians of continental towns, where cities are often described as ‘city-states’ with high levels of autonomy. In his paper, Munro was referring specifically to cities in the Low Countries. It is harder to see English towns in the same light. English towns are seldom portrayed as having the ability to act independently in terms of regional or supra-regional politics, especially when compared to the breadth of strategies used by European cities to protect or exploit their economic hinterlands. Naturally, cities in Italy, Germany, and the Low Countries enjoyed more political latitude, but even in cases where continental cities did not formally pursue territorial acquisition, they were still able to enforce policies that enhanced urban production at the expense of rural production. In comparison, the latitude afforded to European cities has made English towns seem very constricted in their range of options. Unlike on the continent, English towns could establish no formal claim over the counties that surrounded them, making it seem that there was little they could do to influence their economic hinterlands.

Although Munro’s argument focuses on Flemish production, it also can be applied to the Norwich worsted industry. As this chapter will show, despite the political barriers, there were still ways for English towns effectively to establish economic hegemony over a region or an industry, even if they were prevented from creating outright territorial dependencies. Much of Norwich’s success hinged on the very atypical relationship that it developed with its hinterland in the fifteenth century, which differed greatly from the low level of urban involvement seen in the English woollen regions. It will be argued in this chapter that Norwich’s ability to

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<sup>32</sup> Munro, ‘Symbiosis’, 55.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 54. The *drie steden* were Ghent, Bruges, and Ypres.

regain its popularity on the European cloth markets at the end of the fifteenth century was at least partly due to its ability to do what Munro suggested: that is, Norwich was able to create and maintain a process of urban oversight that guaranteed the quality and standardisation expected by continental purchasers.

### 3.2 The geographical context of worsted production

If Thirsk and Mendels were correct in their estimation that environmental factors predisposed certain places towards early industry, then it should be no surprise that worsteds took root in rural Norfolk. As outlined below, Norfolk fulfilled most, if not all, of Mendels' criteria for the type of environmental and social factors that characterised early proto-industrial regions.

#### Late medieval Norfolk

Medieval Norfolk was one of England's premier agricultural districts and one of the earliest to specialise in commercial food production.<sup>34</sup> Sometimes called the 'breadbasket' of England, East Anglia often produced significant surpluses that provisioned other areas of the country or were exported overseas. The accounts produced by the the Water Bailiffs in Yarmouth reveal just how much of the port's business lay in shipping grain. Yarmouth sent barley, wheat, and oats to Colchester, Ipswich, London, and Newcastle, but also overseas to Gascony, to Calais, and to the Low Countries.<sup>35</sup> The region's dry climate meant fewer harvests failed than in other parts of England, and that crop yields were less susceptible to unpredictable weather.<sup>36</sup> Analysis of manorial regimes suggests that farming in Norfolk was

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<sup>34</sup> B. M. S. Campbell and M. Overton, 'A New Perspective on Medieval and Early Modern Agriculture: Six Centuries of Norfolk Farming c. 1250-c. 1850', *P&P*, (1993), 51-2 called Norfolk 'the county most closely associated with the genesis of the agricultural revolution'.

<sup>35</sup> T. R. Adams, *Aliens, Agriculturalists, and Entrepreneurs: Identifying the Market-Makers in the Port of Great Yarmouth From the Evidence of the Water Bailiff's Accounts 1399-1460*, M.Litt thesis (University of Birmingham, 1993), 101-2, 174-6.

<sup>36</sup> T. Williamson, 'Explaining Regional Landscapes: East Anglia and the Midlands in the

considerably advanced for its time, and that the county ranked as one of the most productive regions in the country.<sup>37</sup>

This abundance of food helped Norfolk become one of the most densely settled areas of England.<sup>38</sup> While the difficulties of estimating medieval populations are well known, Norfolk consistently rates among the densest county populations by every available measure.<sup>39</sup> Domesday Book suggests that Norfolk and Suffolk both had a higher than average population density in the Anglo-Saxon period,<sup>40</sup> while the post-conquest era saw a large number of new markets and settlements established.<sup>41</sup> Population estimates for 1290 rank Norfolk's density as the highest in the country, at 77 persons per square kilometre for rural areas, and rising to 82 when urban centres are included.<sup>42</sup> This is on a par with the Southern Low Countries in the fifteenth century, which ranked among the highest population densities at that point: Flanders and Holland had an estimated density of 70 persons per square kilometre and southern Brabant 55.<sup>43</sup>

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Middle Ages', in *Medieval East Anglia*, ed. by C. Harper-Bill (Woodbridge, Suffolk, 2005), 21.

<sup>37</sup> See, for example, B. Campbell and J. P. Power, 'Mapping the Agricultural Geography of Medieval England', *Journal of Historical Geography*, 15 (1989), 35-6.

<sup>38</sup> T. Ashwin and A. Davison, *An Historical Atlas of Norfolk* (Chichester, 2005), 38, 90.

<sup>39</sup> A brief overview of the study of historical population of England can be found in B. Campbell and L. Barry, 'The Population Geography of Great Britain C.1290: A Provisional Reconstruction', in *Population, Welfare and Economic Change in Britain 1290-1834*, ed. by C. Briggs, P. M. Kitson, and S. J. Thompson (Woodbridge, 2014), 43-6.

<sup>40</sup> Ashwin and Davison, *An Historical Atlas of Norfolk*, 38-43; Williamson, 'Regional Landscapes', 22.

<sup>41</sup> B. Brodt, 'East Anglia', in *The Cambridge Urban History of Britain*, ed. by D. M. Palliser (Cambridge, 2000), 645-51.

<sup>42</sup> The next four counties are Huntingdonshire with 60 per sq kilometre, followed by Rutland, Northamptonshire, and Suffolk, with 58, 53, and 53 respectively. The estimated mean population density for England overall in 1290 was 33 persons per square kilometre. Campbell and Barry, 'Population Geography', 53, 56.

<sup>43</sup> T. Scott, *The City-State in Europe, 1000-1600: Hinterland, Territory, Region* (Oxford, 2012), 133.

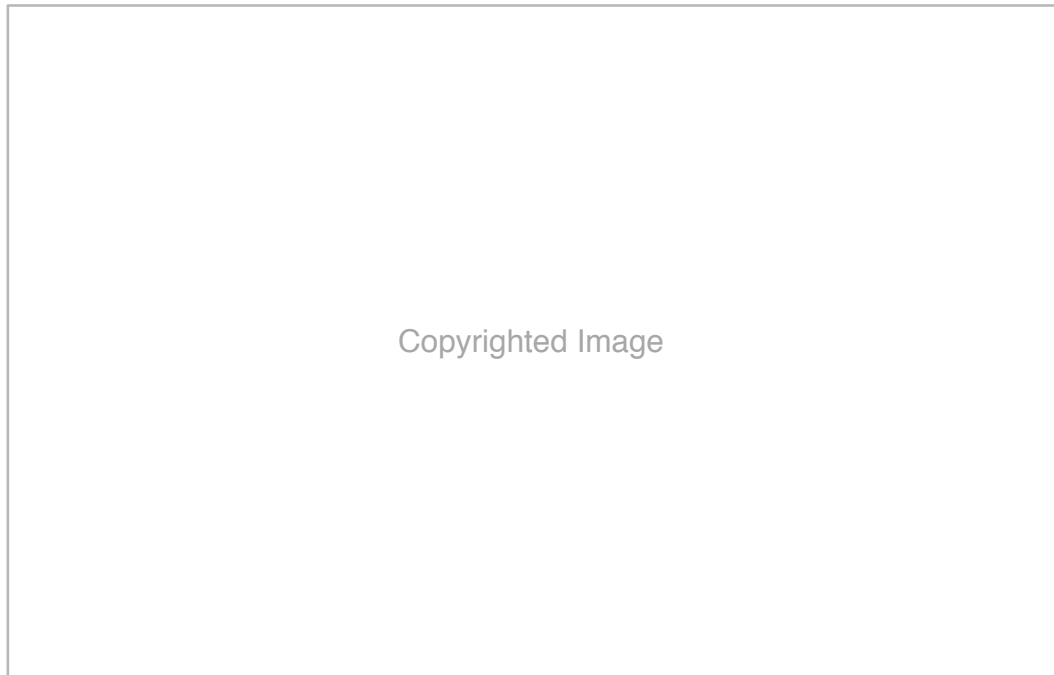


**Figure 3.1:** The density of taxpayers in 1524/5<sup>44</sup>.

In terms of wealth, Norfolk also ranked highly both in terms of density and in absolute terms. In 1334, Norfolk rated third in the nation in total lay wealth collected in the subsidy. By 1515, its position had slipped to twelfth; though still higher than average, it was slowly being overtaken by other cloth regions (Figure 3.2).<sup>45</sup> Norfolk still rated highly, though, when comparing taxpayer densities in 1524 (Figure 3.1).<sup>46</sup> Norfolk also shows comparatively well in other measures. Nightingale ranked Norfolk among the top three counties in terms of available credit based on an

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<sup>44</sup>J. Sheail, *The Regional Distribution of Wealth in England as Indicated in the 1524/5 Lay Subsidies*, Ph.D thesis (UCL London, 1968), 129.

<sup>45</sup>R. S. Schofield, 'The Geographical Distribution of Wealth in England 1334-1649', *ECHR*, 18 (1965), 483-510.

<sup>46</sup>Seven of its hundreds ranked among the highest density of taxpayers per square mile. These were N. Greenhoe, Holt, N. Erpingham, S. Erpingham, Tunstead, Happening, and W. Flegge. Neither Sussex nor Essex had any hundreds with this density. Three Norfolk hundreds, four Essex hundreds, and four Suffolk hundreds have no surviving taxpayer lists. Sheail, *Distribution of Wealth*, 189, 261, 317.

analysis of the Statute Merchant debt certificates.<sup>47</sup> The foundation of markets in East Anglia had been rapid in thirteenth century, and its market density remained higher than in any other region.<sup>48</sup> Norfolk also had a high proportion of confraternities and guilds. Farnhill found reference to 1229 fraternities in Norfolk, compared to only 500 in Suffolk. He argued that the high incidence of fraternal foundations outside of the major urban centres indicated a high degree of commercial activity in and around the county's smaller market towns.<sup>49</sup>

Though the county was rich on average, there were still a goodly number of people who were land poor, which was surely the greatest contributing factor to rural industrial growth. A buoyant land market, made possible by weak manorial control, plus the survival of the Danelaw tradition of partible inheritance, helped break landholdings into ever smaller parcels, which all but guaranteed a high percentage of secondary employment. Weaving was the most common of these by-employments, analogous to what Thirsk had described in the woollen regions. Clark's analysis of the 1381 poll tax suggested that 14% of the rural population of East Anglia were involved in cloth production, as compared with a national average of only 6%.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> P. Nightingale, 'The Lay Subsidies and the Distribution of Wealth in Medieval England, 1275-1334', *EcHR*, 57 (2004), 26-7. Nightingale argued that the lay subsidies do 'not adequately chart the full extent of Norfolk's economic advance'. She used debt certificates enrolled under the Statute Merchant to further analyse the country's distribution of wealth. She ranked Norfolk among the country's top three counties in terms of available credit.

<sup>48</sup> S. Letters, 'Online Gazetteer of Markets and Fairs in England and Wales to 1516', <<http://www.history.ac.uk/cmhl/gaz/gazweb2.html>>, (accessed 19 Oct 2016), Table 1.

<sup>49</sup> 'The link with towns is part of a wider phenomenon of guild activity being higher in parishes with commercial functions, such as those containing markets, roads or rivers.' K. Farnhill, *Guilds and the Parish Community in Late Medieval East Anglia, c. 1470-1550* (York, 2001), 33.

<sup>50</sup> G. Clark, '1381 and the Malthus Delusion', *Explorations in Economic History*, 50 (2013), 11.

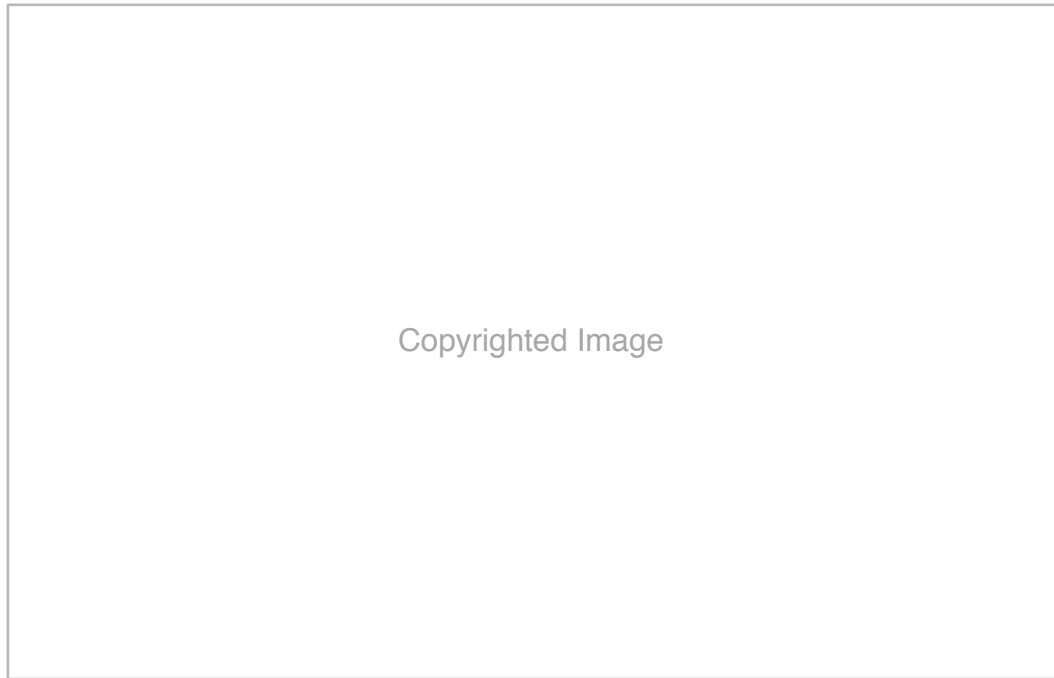


**Figure 3.2:** The distribution of lay wealth in the subsidies of 1334 and 1515<sup>51</sup>

### **Norfolk's watersheds and rivers**

Norfolk had one more advantage over other counties, which was its unusually high concentration of navigable rivers. Eastern and western Norfolk are, to a large part, defined by the presence of two major watersheds. Western Norfolk is dominated by the river network of the Great Ouse and the Fens, while eastern Norfolk is bounded by the drainage basin formed by the Yare, the Bure, and the Waveny, plus the Broads and their tributaries (Figure 3.1).<sup>52</sup>

In real terms, the topographical boundaries of the two watersheds helped determine the limits of the county's major markets. In the west, the tributaries of the Ouse funnelled movement towards Lynn and the Wash. In the east, Norwich and Yarmouth shared dominance through the fourteenth century, though once London began to sap trade away from the provincial ports, Norwich moved up in size and importance, while Yarmouth's influence ebbed away. By the end of the fifteenth

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<sup>51</sup> Schofield, 'Geographical Distribution', 506.

<sup>52</sup> Ashwin and Davison, *An Historical Atlas of Norfolk*, 87.

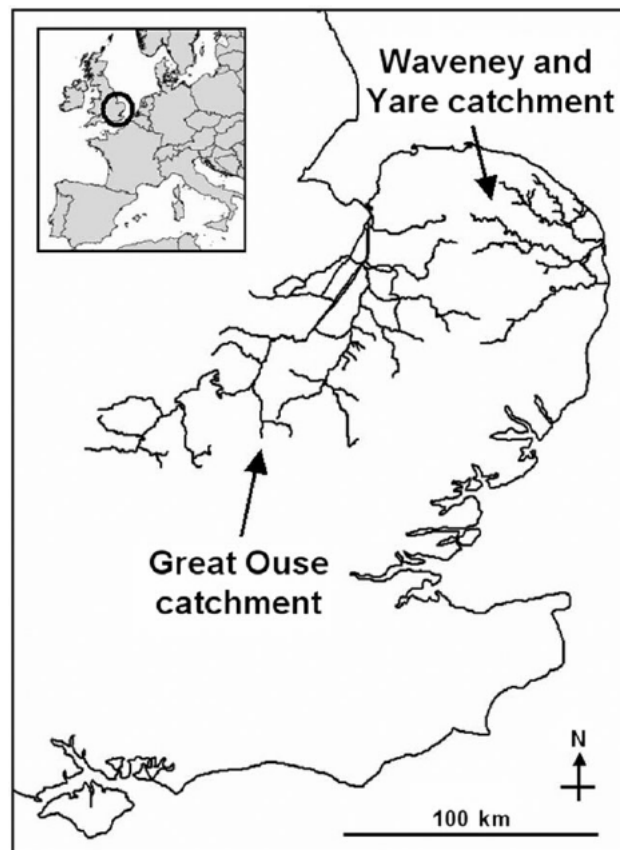
century, Norwich had pulled far ahead of Lynn and Yarmouth in terms of market dominance. While it always had ranked high in population and wealth in the medieval subsidies, by 1524 it had risen to national prominence, second only to London. Population estimates for the period vary, with most placing it between 8,000 and 12,000 residents.

Cheap and accessible water transport will have provided Norfolk with a significant commercial advantage.<sup>53</sup> Commercialisation hinged on the movement of goods. Early records make it clear that goods were commonly shipped by river, and in many cases, rivers were more extensively navigable than now. Water transport was advantageous because it cost as little as one-half to one-tenth the cost of road transport. Lower transport costs meant greater potential market reach; if carriage by water cost half that by road, then producers could send goods twice the distance.<sup>54</sup> Lower operating costs meant that more capital was available for reinvestment in other areas.

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<sup>53</sup> E. T. Jones, 'River Navigation in Medieval England', *Journal of Historical Geography*, 26 (2000), 60-75; D. H. Kennett, 'Caister Castle, Norfolk, and the Transport of Brick and Other Building Materials in the Middle Ages', in *The Art, Science, and Technology of Medieval Travel*, ed. by R. Bork and A. Kann (Burlington, VT, 2008), 65-6; Ashwin and Davison, *An Historical Atlas of Norfolk*, 156-7.

<sup>54</sup> Chartres, *Internal Trade in England, 1500-1700*, 43. See also J. Masschaele, 'Transport Costs in Medieval England', *EcHR*, 46 (1993), 266-279.



**Map 3.1:** The Norfolk river catchment areas<sup>55</sup>

Norwich undoubtedly reaped material benefits from its connection to the river network. Though the Broads do not converge on Norwich, its location where the Wensum intersects the Yare linked the city directly with the sea port at Yarmouth. In Roman times, the Yare had been an open estuary, with Norwich situated at its head.<sup>56</sup> The river provided a cheap and direct means for country producers to access Norwich's market. The city was still known as a '*havene*' as late as the thirteenth century,<sup>57</sup> and the number of staithes erected on riverside property

<sup>55</sup> A. L. Mcivor and D. C. Aldridge, 'The Reproductive Biology of the Depressed River Mussel, *Pseudanodonta Compladata* (Bivalvia: Unionidae), With Implications for Its Conservation', *Journal of Molluscan Studies*, 73 (2007), 260, by permission of Oxford University Press and the Malacological Society of London.

<sup>56</sup> Ashwin and Davison, *An Historical Atlas of Norfolk*, 28.

<sup>57</sup> C. Bonnier, 'List of English Towns in the Fourteenth Century', *EHR*, XVI (1901), 502. The original transcriber presented it as a fourteenth-century list, but Carus-Wilson dated it to the



in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries points to a healthy amount of trade by water.<sup>58</sup> The city owned staithes in Conesford that merchants were meant to use for unloading commercial merchandise.<sup>59</sup> The staithes generated between £30 and £39 in income per year for the city in the 1390s and 1400s, which gives some indication of the magnitude of trade that arrived via water.<sup>60</sup> To put this into perspective, a skilled labourer in the fifteenth century might have earned around 4d a day.<sup>61</sup> Norwich's overall annual income is impossible to estimate, but the city owed the crown an annual fee farm of £113 8s.<sup>62</sup>

Studies of hinterlands that analyse pre-modern market coverage show that a market's reach increased with its specialisation. Local food markets might only cover a few kilometres; livestock perhaps up to twenty kilometres; consumer goods and manufactures would have the greatest coverage, perhaps topping out at 50-60 kilometres or 30-35 miles.<sup>63</sup> This last figure will have defined Norwich's hinterland coverage for worsted cloth, once the city became the region's central textile market in the fifteenth century. The range of Norwich's commercial influence is clear when we consider the geographic origins of Norwich apprentices. Of the indentures enrolled between 1512 and 1530, those that included a town of origin have been mapped

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mid-thirteenth century. *English Historical Documents 1189-1327*, ed. by H. Rothwell (London, 1996), 913.

<sup>58</sup> Dragon Hall in Norwich, the restored fifteenth-century hall built by Robert Toppes, is located on the east shore of the river. It had staithes or docks and storage areas for goods. Deeds provide evidence of other privately owned staithes, as for example the messuage with outbuildings and a quay conveyed by deed to the cofeoffees Thomas Johnson and his wife Margaret, John Chittok the alderman, and Reginald Harneys. NRO NCR 1/19, Roll A, m.5, (1 Edw IV).

<sup>59</sup> King, *Borough Finances*, 375-7; Dunn, 'Trade', 228-9.

<sup>60</sup> King, *Borough Finances*, Table 10.5, 'Farms of the Common Staithes and the New Mills, 1397-1537'. In later years, income from the staithes fell off, which King believed was indicative of London's growing preeminence in long-distance trade.

<sup>61</sup> C. Dyer, 'A Golden Age Rediscovered: Labourers' Wages in the Fifteenth Century', in *Money, Prices, and Wages*, ed. by M. Allen and D. Coffman (2014), 180.

<sup>62</sup> Though most of the accounts of Norwich's Chamberlain's are extant, there are few surviving account rolls of the mayors, the sheriffs, or the clavors. The Chamberlains' revenue tended to average between £125 and £175 annually. King, *Borough Finances*, 258-61, 283.

<sup>63</sup> B. Scribner and T. Scott, 'Urban Networks', in *Germany: A New Social and Economic History*, ed. by B. Scribner (London, 1996), 117-8.

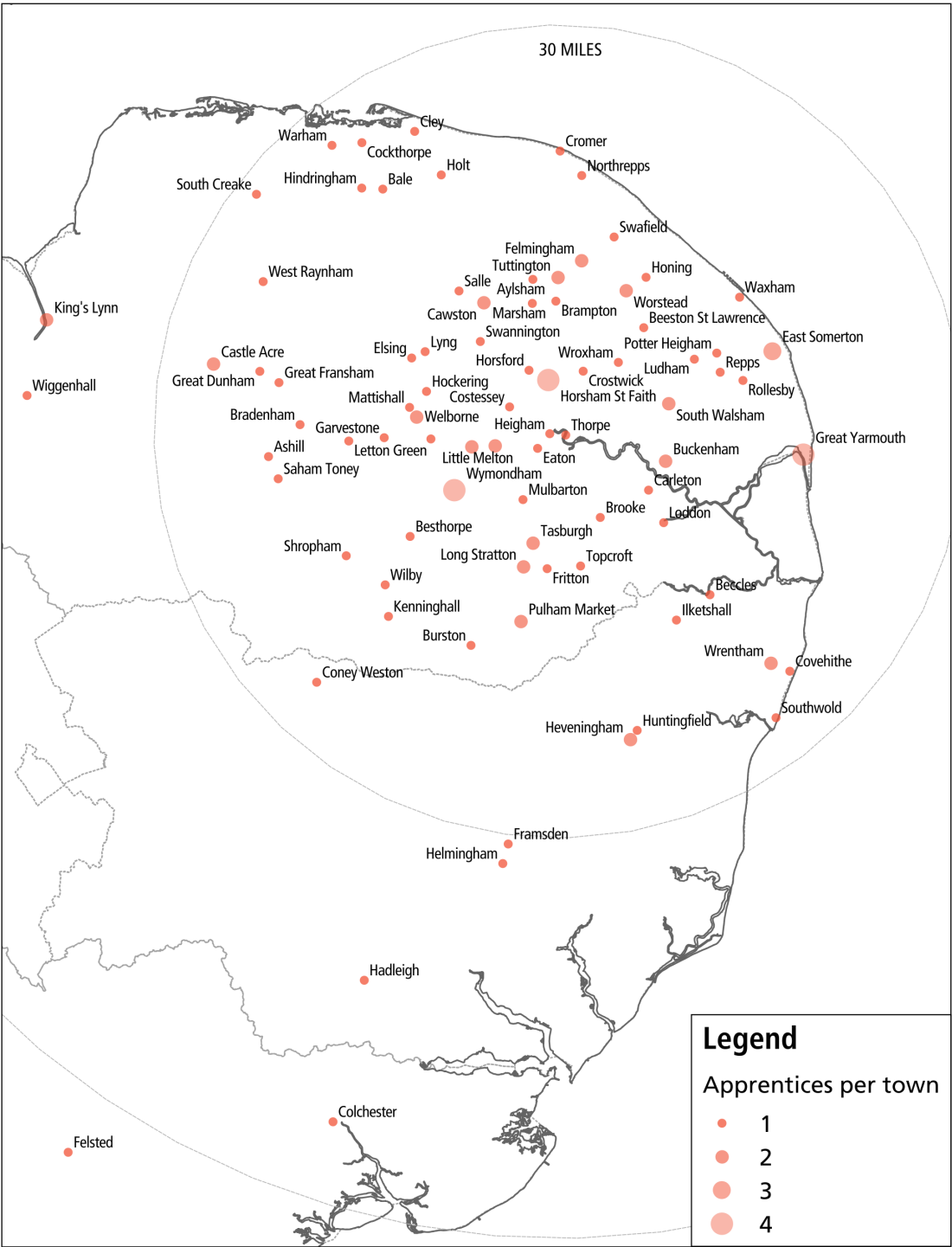
(Figure 3.2). The vast majority of the apprentices hailed no further away than 30 miles from Norwich.<sup>64</sup> Robert Toppes, mayor of Norwich in 1435, 1440, 1452 and 1458, left an account of debts owed him on his death.<sup>65</sup> His debtors, similar to the apprentice origins, clustered in a similarly-sized radius around Norwich (Figure 3.3).

Both instances strongly imply that Norwich was developing a large traditional hinterland in eastern Norfolk, one that was most likely dependent on supplying food to the city. The easy intercourse between Norwich and rural Norfolk obviously facilitated the flow of provisions and materials. But it also helped transmit the kind of interpersonal connections that rely on human capital – such as skills, knowledge, and social networks – that were necessary to turn dispersed home production into a proto-industrial region.

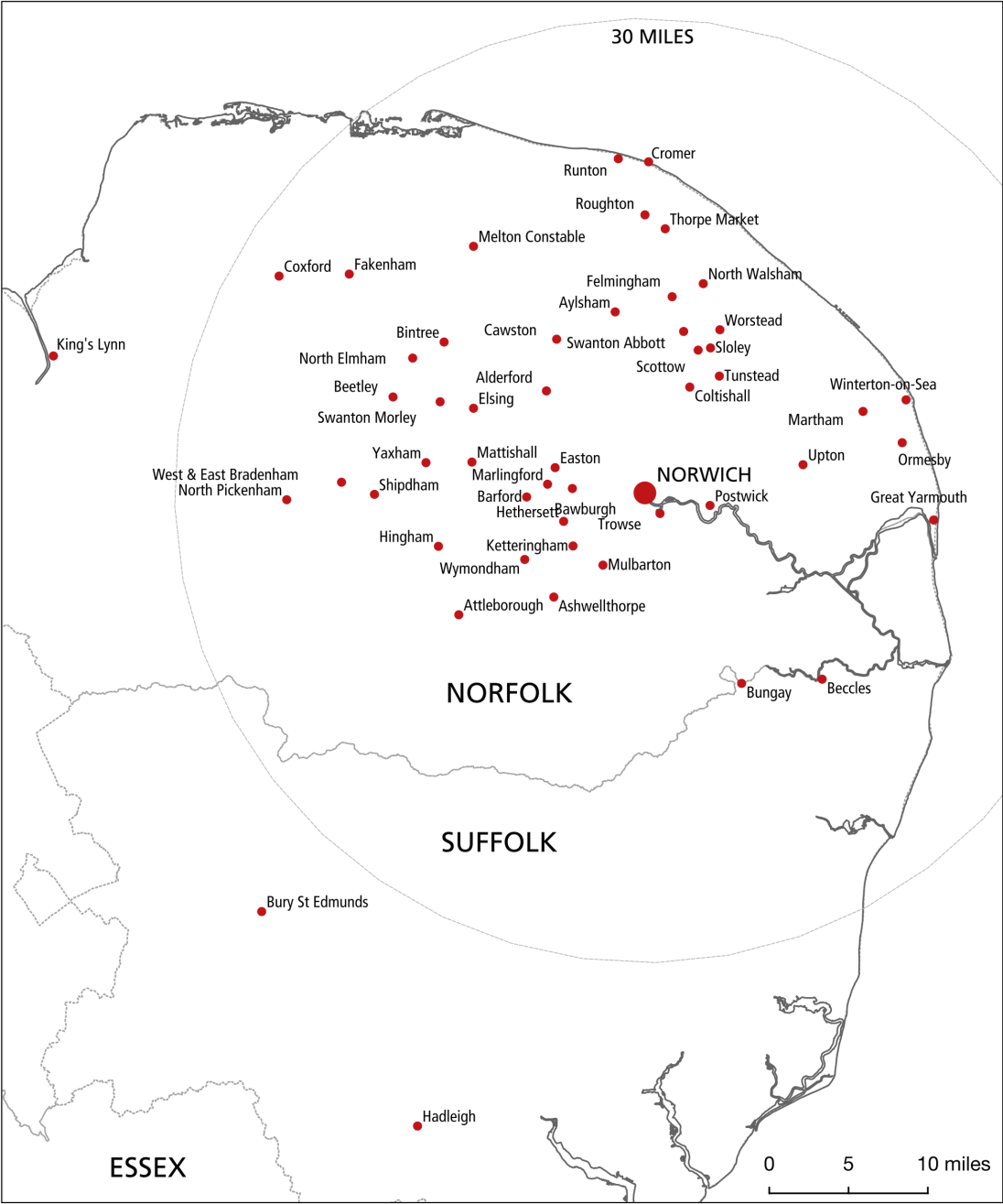
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<sup>64</sup> Figures compiled from *Norwich Apprentices* and NRO NCR 1/22, Apprenticeship indentures. The map shown in Figure 3.2 is a close-up, designed to show only the immediate area around Norwich. The full map of apprentice origins appears in Figure 6.1 on page 215. Apprenticeships will be discussed further in Chapter 6, beginning on page 210.

<sup>65</sup> NRO DCN 9/5.



**Map 3.2:** Norwich apprenticeship indentures, 1512-1530



**Map 3.3:** Debts owed to Robert Toppes, c. 1467

## The emergence of worsteds

The introduction of worsteds to Norfolk must unfortunately remain something of a mystery. Though there is good circumstantial evidence that points to Flemish origins, and though many historians have repeated earlier assertions that worsteds were introduced to England, there is little firm evidence to support this. Norfolk's location on the east coast meant easy communication with the Low Countries; the close relationship between the two regions historically has been marked by cultural borrowings back and forth over the channel. Whether the stuff woven in Norfolk was truly a Dutch introduction or not is now, at this juncture, impossible to say, although there is good circumstantial evidence that points very much in that direction.

As was common with medieval fabrics, 'worsted' was originally an appellation of origin,<sup>66</sup> with the village of Worstead being located about thirteen miles north of Norwich.<sup>67</sup> Over time, '*pannis de Worstede*' simply became 'worsteds'. The original fabric was clearly a serge.<sup>68</sup> The Enrolled Customs entries for London from September 1361 to September 1366 explicitly identify worsteds as serges: '*vocati panni de worsted*', '*worsted simplex vocati serge*', '*sarg' de worsted*', '*serges (worsted simplex)*', and '*worsted simplex voc' sarges*'.<sup>69</sup> The clause in the *Carta Mercatoria* concerning non-woollen tariffs referenced serges.<sup>70</sup> The connection to northern Europe can only be strengthened by this, as medieval French and Flemish *sayettries*

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<sup>66</sup> Other examples include kerseys, which supposedly came from the town of Carsay, kendals from Kendal in Westmoreland, and arras cloths named for Arras in France.

<sup>67</sup> James considers whether the Flemish weavers invited to England by Henry I could have given name to the town, but this is unlikely as it was settled before the Conquest. It was also populous enough to have two churches recorded in Domesday. James, *Worsted Manufacture*, 37-40.

<sup>68</sup> Historians disagree on the exact definition of 'serge'. Piponnier defined serge as a twill that showed its weave in diagonal ridges. Piponnier and Mane, *Dress in the Middle Ages*, 167. Hayward specifically identifies serge as a worsted twill. Hayward, *Rich Apparel: Clothing and the Law in Henry VIII's England*, 386. In contrast, Munro felt that serges were distinguished more by the use of hybrid materials than by the weave. Munro, 'The Origins of the English 'New Draperies': The Resurrection of an Old Flemish Industry, 1270-1570', 92. Kerridge thought that says and serges were distinguished by whether the yarn was single-ply or multi-ply. Kerridge, *Textile Manufactures*, 7, and note 72 below.

<sup>69</sup> *Enrolled Customs*, Part 4, entries 390-411.

<sup>70</sup> See note 50 on page 67.

were well known in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries for their light and inexpensive range of says and serges (*sagie, sargie, saie*).<sup>71</sup>

Much has been conjectured about when and why worsteds could have been introduced to England from Flanders. James reported that some early historians had fixed on the fact that weavers from Flanders had followed William the Conqueror to England, and that says were being produced in this country from the eleventh century.<sup>72</sup> James noted that others, including Blomefield, believed that Flemish weavers came to settle in the area around Worstead later, during the reign of Henry I (1100-1135), 'and so early introduced the art of stuff-weaving there'.<sup>73</sup> Blomefield probably based his supposition on the fact that William of Malmesbury had chronicled the arrival of many Flemish weavers to England at that time, following 'a great inundation'. By Blomefield's estimation, its introduction was successful, so much so that by the reign of Edward II, 'worsted-stuff was famous; and Norwich increased very much by the making of it'.<sup>74</sup> Blomefield also noted that other historians had thought that it was the marriage of Edward III with Philippa of Hainault that solidified the 'great intercourse' between England and the Low Countries. While it is true that Edward III did invite weavers from the continent to immigrate to England, worsteds were already well established by that date. Any

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<sup>71</sup> Munro, 'The Origins of the English 'New Draperies': The Resurrection of an Old Flemish Industry, 1270-1570', 53-4.

<sup>72</sup> James, *Worsted Manufacture*, 35-6. Say was either a type of worsted, or a fabric that used worsted-spun yarn. Kerridge defined say as being specifically a 2.2 twill woven from two-ply or three-ply yarn. Kerridge, *Textile Manufactures*, 6-7. Sutton, on the other hand, defines say as French for serge. A. F. Sutton, 'The Early Linen and Worsted Industry of Norfolk and the Evolution of the London Mercers' Company', *Norfolk Archaeology*, 40 (1989), 214. The term serge fell out of use in Norwich by the fifteenth century, but says were still being produced there in the sixteenth century; Thetford priory purchased it for garments. *The Register of Thetford Priory*, vol. 59-60, 166, 197, 207, 235.

<sup>73</sup> James, *Worsted Manufacture*, note 'S' on page 36.

<sup>74</sup> Francis Blomefield, *An Essay Towards A Topographical History of the County of Norfolk* (London, 1806), vol. 3, Chapter 15, British History Online, <<http://www.british-history.ac.uk/topographical-hist-norfolk/vol3/pp79-101>>, (accessed 8 October 2014). See also *The Records of the City of Norwich*, ed. by W. Hudson and J. C. Tingey, vol. 2 (Norwich, 1910), lxii - lxiv. On Flemish weavers coming to England during the reign of Edward III, see Lipson, *Economic History*, vol. 1, 399-401.

skills that those weavers brought with them were likely to involve the making of fulled broadcloths, not serges or worsteds.<sup>75</sup>

Although the reign of Edward III was too late for the introduction of worsteds to England, it seems equally unlikely to have happened in the reign of Henry I (1100-1135). There is a list of towns with the products that they are known for, which Carus-Wilson dated to the mid-thirteenth century. On the list are a number of named fabrics and the towns that produced them. Neither Worstead village, nor worsted cloth (nor serge, nor say), appears on it, though Aylsham in Norfolk and its linen does.<sup>76</sup> Worsteds do not start appearing on accounts as a named item until the end of the thirteenth century. The fact that cheaper worsteds were used for quotidian purposes is suggested by the fact that the City of London purchased 86 ells of worsted to outfit a galley they had built in 1295.<sup>77</sup> However, worsted also appears in high status accounts of the time, often for the purpose of making garments. In 1293, the Privy Purse of John of Brabant purchased for Thomas and Henry of Lancaster, the nephews of Edward I of England, 11 ells 'de wrstede' valued at 8s 4½d to make garments for them.<sup>78</sup> Hudson and Tingey recount that Peter Flynn in 1301 had made a gift of cloths of 'Aylsham and Wrthsted', which were 'given out of courtesy to the King's Justices', underscoring the high status attached to cloths from north-east Norfolk.<sup>79</sup> And worsted's market radius likely reached overseas, as well. Bogo of Clare, the thirteenth-century personality notorious for his accumulation of benefices, had garments of worsted tailor-made for him.<sup>80</sup> His household accounts additionally detail the purchase of two lots of worsted fabric between 1284 and 1286,

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<sup>75</sup> That period also aligns well with the spectacular increase in broadcloth exports we see in the Enrolled Customs Accounts.

<sup>76</sup> *English Historical Documents 1189-1327*, 912-7.

<sup>77</sup> C. Johnson, 'London Shipbuilding, a.d. 1295', *Antiquaries Journal*, 7 (1927), 428.

<sup>78</sup> 'Pro xj ulnis de wrstede ad caligas faciendas viij s. iiij d.' J. Burtt, 'Account of the Expenses of John of Brabant and Thomas and Henry of Lancaster, A.D. 1292-3', in *The Camden Miscellany* (London, 1853), 13.

<sup>79</sup> *Records*, vol. 2, lxiv. Aylshams were linen cloths. See Sutton, 'The Early Linen and Worsted Industry of Norfolk and the Evolution of the London Mercers' Company'.

<sup>80</sup> M. S. Giuseppi, 'The Wardrobe and Household Accounts of Bogo De Clare, Ad 1284-6', *Archaeologia*, 2nd ser., vol. XX (1920), 31.

one for two cloths of worsted (*'panni de Wortested'*), the other for three pieces (*'peciis de Worcested'*) valued at 18s each.<sup>81</sup>

The strongest evidence that speaks in favour of a Flemish connection is actually the etymology of textile vocabulary local to East Anglia. Spinning with a hand spindle was usually referred to as spinning on 'the rock' in Norfolk sources, a term that has a long Germanic lineage. The stem *rok-* in Danish etymologically derives from the Old Norse *rokkr*, meaning 'to spin'.<sup>82</sup> *Spinnrocken* in German and *Spinrokken* in Dutch today mean distaff, while spinning wheel is *rokkur* in Icelandic and *Spinderok* in Danish.

A second etymological connection is found in the Norfolk term 'irlond'. As Kerridge notes, Flemish says in the twelfth century were noted especially for having been produced using 'local' wool. This appears in Dutch sources as *'hierlandsche wol'*, or the French equivalent, *'laine nostrée'*.<sup>83</sup> The German term *'hierländische'*, with reference to local sheep breeds and wool, was used in Germany at least to the early nineteenth century,<sup>84</sup> though it has now fallen out of use.<sup>85</sup> The word potentially came to Norfolk with Flemish weavers, who found the indigenous Norfolk wool well-suited to weaving the light cloths of the Flemish *sayettries*. Over time, the term *hierlandsch* in Norfolk became corrupted to 'irlond' while retaining a link with weaving. It appears in fourteenth-century Norfolk texts as 'irlond weaving' or 'irlondish'. Whether locals understood its original Flemish meaning is debatable. Hudson and Tingey contended that it meant 'Irish', and speculated that it may have been used with reference to Irish frieze.<sup>86</sup> Fourteenth-century freedom enrolments in

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>82</sup> The Danish Dictionary, <[http://ordnet.dk/ddo\\_en/dict?query=rok](http://ordnet.dk/ddo_en/dict?query=rok)>, (accessed 23 June 2016).

<sup>83</sup> Kerridge, *Textile Manufactures*, 6-8. Etymologically, *Hierland* literally means 'this land'. The term has fallen out of use in modern German and Dutch, in preference to *hiesig* or *inländisch* or *binnenlands*.

<sup>84</sup> See for instance, 'Ueber die Vortheilhaftigkeit der Veredlung der Schäfereien', in *Neues Hannoverisches Magazin*, vol. 104, 27 December 1802, 1651, Google Books, <<https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=yOgWAAAAYAAJ&dq=hierlandische&pg=PT781#v>>, (accessed 9 September 2016).

<sup>85</sup> Modern German retains *'hierzulande'* to mean 'local to an area'.

<sup>86</sup> *Records*, vol. 2, lxvii.



Norwich often used the term ‘irlonder’ or ‘irlond weaver’, and only over time gradually adapted ‘worsted weaver’ instead. That the terms are synonymous is shown by the few cases where both were used interchangeably, such as the freedom entry of John Knowte, in which his master, John Western, is described as a ‘worsted weaver *alias dict’ irlonder’*.<sup>87</sup>

### 3.3 The long struggle over standards

Though little evidence survives to indicate worsteds’ economic importance prior to the thirteenth century, by the start of the next, national authorities had become involved in the question of whether worsteds should be subject to an assize. Between 1302 and 1315, three petitions were submitted to Parliament requesting that the size of worsted cloths be regulated by national legislation.<sup>88</sup> This inaugurated a debate that would stretch over the next century and a half. At issue was the question of standardising the size of cloths produced in Norfolk. The late Middle Ages saw both woollen and worsted producers struggle with the issue of whether or not standard sizing would be beneficial to the industry in the long run. The history of the assize of woollens, and its companion aulnage tax, is far more convoluted than the story of the worsted assize; nevertheless, worsted merchants and producers went back and forth on the issue several times over the course of the fourteenth century. In the case of woollens, it took until nearly the end of the fifteenth century for the crown to stop ‘vacillating’ between establishing and revoking statutes concerning the woollen assizes.<sup>89</sup> For worsteds, the debate was less complicated; but it saw its own share of vacillation over the course of the fourteenth century.

The petitions of 1302 laid out arguments that would change little over the course of the century. Those who argued in favour of standards usually cited fraud

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<sup>87</sup> l’Estrange, *Freemen*, 82.

<sup>88</sup> TNA SC 8/313/E105 and TNA SC 8/313/E106, transcribed and answered in *RP*, Edward I: Roll 25, m. 1 and Appendix 18; *RP*, Edward II: January 1315, m. 4d, item 24.

<sup>89</sup> Lipson, *The History of the Woollen and Worsted Industries*, 111-2, and note 7 on page 52.

as grounds for regulation. Cloths, they claimed, were often sold under false pretences. Advertised lengths did not always meet actual lengths. Some pieces suffered from shoddy workmanship or low quality materials. Without any centralised control, merchants purchasing cloth were forced to unroll, measure, and inspect each and every cloth at the point of sale. The petitioners requested legislation to clamp down on fraud and promote sales.

The answer to this petition was negative if noncommittal: 'the King has no plan at present to make any other ordinance about cloth than the one contained in the Great Charter.' Yet the issue was raised again in January 1315.<sup>90</sup> The proponents in favour of an assize (who must have been merchants, for they were certainly not guildsmen at this early date) must have been more persuasive this time, for by August of 1315, John Pecok had been appointed to the position of aulnager to oversee the sale of worsteds. This remit was appended to his existing license to aulnage canvas, linen, napery, wadmol, Irish serges, and cloths of Lincoln and Essex,<sup>91</sup> which had been granted in April earlier the same year.<sup>92</sup> His new license was expanded to include 'heydok', 'mendeps', kersey, serge of Louthe, worsted 'of Northwys, Ireland and Causton', and other 'serges and scarlets and cloths of Lincoln, Essex, Norfolk, Suffolk, Kent, Stanford, Beverley, St. Osiths, Devon, and Cornwall.'<sup>93</sup>

Pecok may have been somewhat lax in exercising his not inconsiderable remit, for nothing more is heard until after his license to oversee worsteds in Norfolk had passed to Robert de Poley in March 1327.<sup>94</sup> Poley presumably was the instigator of an inquisition empaneled in Norwich that same week to consider the state of the worsted assize in Norfolk.<sup>95</sup> John Ston of Worthstede and others presented testimony at this hearing concerning the sizes of serges (*sargiorum*), coverlets, and carpets. They deposed that serges — presumably meaning worsted piece goods — had been

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<sup>90</sup> *RP*, Edward II: January 1315, m. 4d, item 24.

<sup>91</sup> *CPR*, 1313-17, 344.

<sup>92</sup> *CPR*, 1313-17, 275.

<sup>93</sup> *CPR*, 1313-17, 344.

<sup>94</sup> *CPR*, 1327-30, 31 and *CFR*, 1327-37, 32.

<sup>95</sup> *CIM*, vol. 2, no. 934, 232.

produced since 'time beyond memory' in Norfolk in four sizes, namely 50, 40, 30, and 24 ells in length, and that bed fabrics (*superlectilium*) were commonly produced in 3 set sizes.

Whether this was true, or whether Poley had encouraged local weavers to give false testimony, is difficult to say. Clearly Pecok had not been vigorous in his pursuit of a worsted assize, but Poley was, and he used the testimony as grounds to pursue weavers who refused to produce the stated sizes. Complaints soon surfaced in Parliament that Poley was enforcing an assize where none had existed previously.<sup>96</sup> Matters were urgent enough that the king ordered an enquiry in May 1328.<sup>97</sup> Poley countered the complaints in February 1329, claiming that weavers were forcibly preventing him from carrying out his aulnage duties in Norwich, King's Lynn, Worstead, Walsham, Catton, Scottow, Tunstead, Honing, and 'other places'.<sup>98</sup> It did not help him. The outcry of the weavers must have been powerful, for by July 1329, Poley's license to aulnage had been revoked by the king, and the sheriffs of Norfolk were commanded to publicise the fact that the worsted assizes had been nullified.<sup>99</sup>

The question of a worsted assize rested for a time, but re-emerged again in connection with the introduction of the cloth custom in 1347. As part of the program to increase income for the crown, the government was again considering the imposition of a woollen assize and a tax on cloth.<sup>100</sup> Writs had already been sent to the ports in 1347 outlining the new excise tariff on worsteds.<sup>101</sup> This may have triggered the reaction from Norfolk, in which producers and merchants involved in the worsted trade sent a joint petition to Parliament in 1348. They requested an exemplification of their earlier patent exempting them from any assize on worsteds.

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<sup>96</sup> TNA SC 8/17/811; TNA SC 8/266/13292; TNA SC 8/268/13364.

<sup>97</sup> CPR, 1327-30, 297-8. However, the king subsequently suspended the enquiry in June 1328. CCR, 1327-30, 395-6.

<sup>98</sup> CPR, 1327-30, 424. See also his petition at TNA SC 8/268/13369.

<sup>99</sup> CCR, 1327-30, 483.

<sup>100</sup> W. M. Ormrod, *The Reign of Edward III* (New Haven, 1990), 192.

<sup>101</sup> CPR, 1345-48, 276-7. Writs were sent to the Norfolk ports of Yarmouth, Orford, Dunwich, Kirkele and Little Yarmouth.

This was granted, and a copy of their patent of 1329 was appended to a new patent of exemption issued in April 1348.<sup>102</sup>

### **Emigration, credit, and rural markets**

For the remainder of the century, then, worsteds remained by and large unregulated, and worsted producers were left to their own devices for a time. Very little else of the early history of the worsted industry can be discerned apart from these formal interactions with and on behalf of the crown, but they do give us some indication of the size and shape of worsted production in fourteenth-century Norfolk.

There was no central organisation in the industry to speak of. The early petitions support the impression that worsteds were spread out across a large area of north-east Norfolk. The signatories to the 1302 petitions name the ‘small villages and hamlets’ in the hundreds of Tunstead and Erpingham, including Worsted, Felmingham, Swanton, and Skeyton. When Poley complained of being prevented from carrying out the aulnage on worsteds in 1329, he claimed he was prevented from sealing worsteds in Norwich, Lynn, Worstead, Walsham, Catton, Scottow, Tunstead, Honing, ‘and other places’ (Figure 3.4).<sup>103</sup> More importantly, the petition of 1302 certainly implied that Norwich had not yet become important in marketing worsteds. The petition suggests erecting a market hall on the border between Tunstead and Erpingham Hundreds, where a permanent assize could be established as a convenience to buyers and sellers alike, so that

The producers immediately after the assay may sell their cloths there to merchants, who would more gladly come there once the arrangements have been agreed and published than they do now seeking out the houses of the producers in the countryside.<sup>104</sup>

This supports Sutton’s claim that the merchants who dealt in worsteds in the fourteenth century did so directly; that is, they acted as the link that connected local

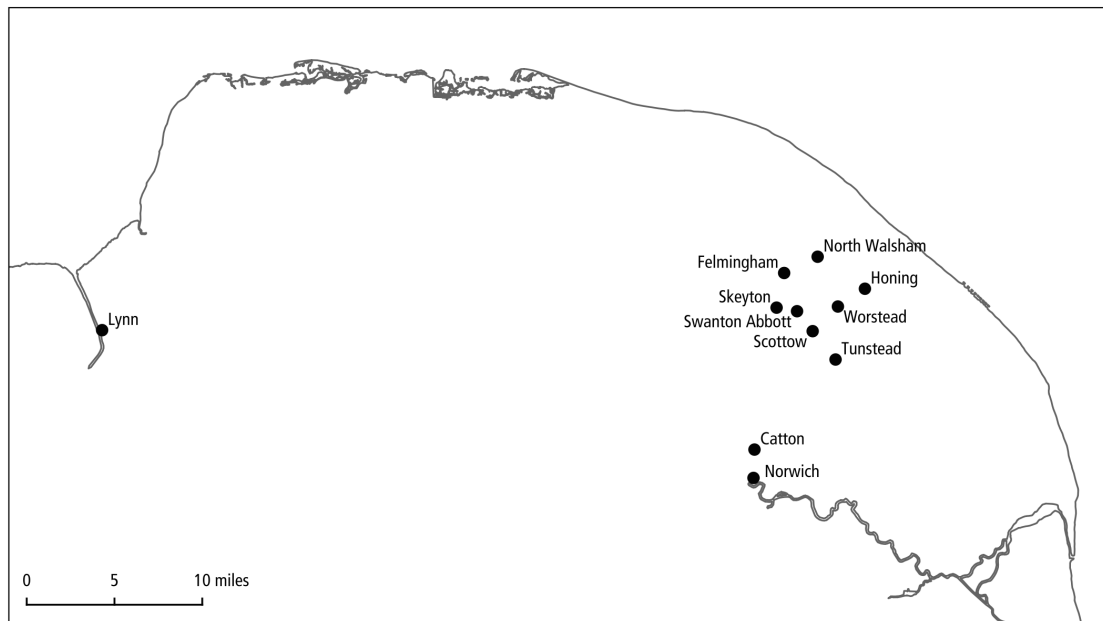
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<sup>102</sup> *CPR*, 1348-50, 56.

<sup>103</sup> *CPR*, 1327-30, 424.

<sup>104</sup> *RP*, Edward I Parliaments: Roll 25, Appendix 18.

producers and upstream markets, in much the same way that clothiers did later in the Weald. As she noted, 'What the local merchants did not export through Great Yarmouth themselves or sell to the Hanse, they sent to London where mercers exported it or sold it to aliens.'<sup>105</sup> Though involved peripherally — most likely in shearing and dyeing — Norwich was not yet the regional hub for sales that it would later become.



**Map 3.4:** Norfolk towns mentioned in the royal petitions: Norwich, Worstead, Tunstead, Felmingham, Skeyton, Swanton Abbot, North Walsham, Lynn, Catton, Scottow, and Honing

Over time, though, this changed. The London mercers had long enjoyed strong ties to Norfolk. Sutton and Ekwall argued that a large proportion of the London mercers were actually emigrants from rural Norfolk.<sup>106</sup> By their estimate, as

<sup>105</sup> Sutton, *The Mercery of London*, 146-7.

<sup>106</sup> Ekwall identified 500 surnames in London that had a Norfolk origin. Of these, he and Sutton found 93 men with 'certain' ties to the Mercers, and 130 when expanded to include the uncertain cases. To this, Sutton added 14 more from Suffolk and 16 from Cambridgeshire. E. Ekwall, *Studies on the Population of Medieval London* (Stockholm, 1956), xliv-xlvii, 35-92; Sutton,

much as a third of London mercers could have hailed from Norfolk. Sutton agreed with Ekwall's earlier conjecture that emigration from Norfolk likely coincided temporally with the expansion of the worsted and linen industries, both of which were favoured commodities traded by the mercers. In her further analysis of the Norfolk group, she found most of them to have surnames that pointed to origins in and around the main textile area close to Aylsham.<sup>107</sup>

In the long term, emigration of this sort will have had a negative impact on the Norfolk worsted market. As Sutton notes, the London mercers over time engaged less in direct trade with Norfolk producers, and more with moving goods between London and the continent.<sup>108</sup> This draining of purchasing power from the county conceivably also could have removed the single largest source of credit available to rural weavers. This may have been at the root of Nightingale's appraisal that intra-county credit in rural Norfolk was drying up in the mid fourteenth-century, while more credit was being extended from Norwich.<sup>109</sup>

In hindsight, the transplantation of Norfolk mercers into London's trade network seems inevitable, given London's rising importance in finance and overseas trade from the fourteenth century onwards. The city's disproportionate size and well-developed economy, its connection to the royal government, and its protected position at the head of the Thames estuary all contributed to its attraction as a centre of trade and finance. The process became self-reinforcing; as more traders relocated to the capital, its share of international trade continued to grow at the expense of the provincial ports, especially those along the east coast. As London's dominance in overseas trade grew, it became ever more likely that more merchants would relocate there from other parts of the country.

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*The Mercery of London*, 54-5.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 148.

<sup>109</sup> Nightingale found decreasing evidence of credit being extended from lenders in rural hundreds to borrowers who also lived in rural hundreds over the period 1300 to 1350. Though overall credit was decreasing, a higher percentage of loans were originating in Norwich. P. Nightingale, 'Norwich, London, and the Regional Integration of Norfolk's Economy in the First Half of the Fourteenth Century', in *Trade, Urban Hinterlands and Market Integration, c. 1300-1600*, ed. by J. A. Galloway (London, 2000), 83-101.

The hand of the London mercers, and their Norfolk connection, is evident when we consider the legislation on worsteds in the 1340s. The decision taken in 1347 to fix such a low export tariff on worsteds, as discussed in Chapter 2, could only have been made at the urging of some special interest lobby. The legislation was targeted directly at Norfolk products, and no other type of cloth received its own special tariff separate from cloths of assize. The writs identify worsteds as worsteds, not as the more generic serges, which could have encompassed other kinds of light twills, says, or burels made elsewhere in England. Moreover, at a time when the aulnage was reimposed on the woollen industry, worsteds were expressly declared exempt. Coming as it did at a time when the crown was especially keen to expand its revenue, this special treatment for worsteds suggests that a powerful group was working behind the scenes to ensure favourable treatment.

In any case, the loss of credit in the hundreds certainly opened the door to new involvement. Most likely, men from Norwich stepped in to fill the gap between rural weavers and the newly-established London mercers. As rural dealers became thinner on the ground, Norwich's market would have become more important.

### **Norwich becomes a market**

Norwich had always been involved in the worsted trade, but at the start of the fourteenth century its involvement had been far less than it was to become. Property deeds enrolled with the city between 1285 and 1311 suggest that cloth finishing was more prevalent than weaving.<sup>110</sup> Dyers constituted the largest group of property owners from the category of non-mercantile textile producers. They owned a cluster of riverfront properties in the west of the city, mainly located in the sub-leets of St Gregory (especially on the street known as 'Dyer's Row'), St Giles, and St Michael Coslany. Other large properties were given over to tentering fields. Of the 144 individuals mentioned with known textile connections, a mere fourteen were

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<sup>110</sup>S. Kelly, 'The Economic Topography and Structure of Norwich C.1300', in *Men of Property: An Analysis of the Norwich Enrolled Deeds, 1285-1311*, ed. by U. Priestley (Norwich, 1983), 24.

weavers.<sup>111</sup> The relative unimportance of weaving in the first half of the century is reinforced by the low number of weavers taking the franchise, in comparison with other occupations.<sup>112</sup> Only 7% of entries between 1300 and 1324, and 8% between 1325 and 1349, were involved in textiles. Between 1475 to 1499, that number had risen to 38%.<sup>113</sup>

Over the second half of the fourteenth century, Norwich seems to have expanded its role as the regional market for rural worsteds. Woollen cloth exports were booming in the 1380s and 1390s, and worsted exports were likely equally robust. It was at this point that the city purchased a large tavern on the market square, which came to be known in later years as the Common Inn. The main function of the Common Inn was to lodge alien merchants, but it also became the home of the Worsteds Seld, the city's designated worsted market.

Once established, the city took steps to channel sales through their new market. An ordinance of 1388 stipulated that 'no citizen should buy any worsteds of any country weavers, in the city liberties,' unless it be done openly in the Worsteds Seld. Penalties for non-compliance were 40s for the first offence, £4 for the second, and the loss of the franchise for the third.<sup>114</sup> It was widely held that medieval citizens should enjoy equal access to business opportunities, and that private sales unfairly skewed opportunity.<sup>115</sup> The rights of freemen, enshrined in the city's *Custumal*, explicitly forbid engrossing, forestalling and regrating on the grounds that all citizens should have the chance to claim a share of any available merchandise: 'Fellow citizens and peers of the city who may wish to join in such purchases and

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<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, 24-5.

<sup>112</sup> See pages 182 and 238 for more on the freedom of the city in Norwich.

<sup>113</sup> King, *Borough Finances*, Table 3.2.

<sup>114</sup> *Records*, vol. 2, xxxvii; Blomefield, *An Essay Towards A Topographical History of the County of Norfolk*, vol. 3, 113, <<http://www.british-history.ac.uk/topographical-hist-norfolk/vol3/pp102-117>>, (accessed 11 November 2015). Hudson and Tingey also note that 1388 was also the first year that the city recorded income from taxes levied at the Seld.

<sup>115</sup> This was much of the rationale behind outlawing regrating and forestalling. See R. H. Britnell, 'Forstall, Forestalling and the Statute of Forestallers', *EHR*, 102 (1987), 89-102.



merchandise be not hindered from sharing equally according to their means as they ought.<sup>116</sup>

The designated worsted market was initially successful, and for a time it generated a healthy income for the city. In the 1390s, the city recouped an annual average of £18 per year from renting stalls in the Seld.<sup>117</sup> But when exports began to fall, so too did the market's income.<sup>118</sup> By the first decade of the fifteenth century, receipts from the Seld were roughly half their previous value; by the 1420s, the Seld was being farmed for a mere £4 annually.<sup>119</sup> Unfortunately, the continuation of the farm makes it difficult to discern later fluctuations in the export trade.<sup>120</sup> Needless to say, though, when the downturn in exports did come in the fifteenth century, the city was already too vested in worsteds to not feel the effect. Demand in Norwich will have fallen as well. Less demand will have meant a glut of cloths on the market. Producers will have faced stiff competition to find buyers for an oversupply of worsteds. This was undoubtedly what motivated the complaint in 1414 about parties who evaded public trading at the Worsted Seld.<sup>121</sup> Once it had settled into a buyer's market, it was logical that producers would bypass the Seld in favour of selling directly to established contacts, even if it contravened the custom of the city.

Presumably, the depressed market had been the trigger that led civic officials to act in (what can now be described as) an unusual manner for a provincial English town. It was not enough to corral the city's share of sales into the Seld; far more effective would be to canalise *all* county sales through the gates of Norwich. However, this alone would be insufficient to rescue the fortunes of the city if

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<sup>116</sup> *Records*, vol. 1, 184-5; King, *Borough Finances*, 50-1.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, Table 10.4.

<sup>118</sup> Exports were still high 1399-1401, and on a par with the 1350s. 10,041 single worsteds were shipped from Yarmouth between November 1399 and November 1400, and 11,136 between December 1400 and November 1401. *Enrolled Customs*, Part 5.

<sup>119</sup> King, *Borough Finances*, Table 10.4.

<sup>120</sup> The farm later fell from its £4 in the 1420s to a mere 20s in the 1450s, rising to 26s 8d by the 1490s, but after the worsted weavers took over the farm of the Seld, the low fee could have been the result of political haggling rather than a reflection of supply and demand in exports. See King, *Borough Finances*, Table 10.4 for city revenue from the Seld.

<sup>121</sup> This was part of the complaint made by the commons in 1414 that resulted in the Composition of 1415. *Records*, vol. 1, 74-5.

overseas demand remained low. Town officials needed to address the root of the problem, which was to find a way to once again boost demand on foreign markets. To this end, then, town officials sent a new petition to the crown in 1410, this time requesting that they be granted the authority to oversee Norfolk's worsted industry.

### 3.4 Legislating a hinterland

#### The grant of 1410

The Norwich petition of 1410 decried the state of affairs in worsted production. As was typical of petitionary language of the time,<sup>122</sup> the authors made claim that wrack and ruin awaited those involved in the trade if current practices went unchecked:

Whereas previously worsted cloths used to be well and properly made in the said city, as in the county of Norfolk, and used to keep their proper measures and sizes in all points ... these worsteds named above have recently been very deceitfully made by the workers in that trade, both in their quality and in their aforesaid size, to the great disgrace and detriment both of the loyal merchants of the said city and of the countryside around, and to the great injury of the lords, gentlemen and all other people of the realm who used to buy worsteds for their use; and to the manifest ruin of the merchants who cross with the aforesaid worsteds to Flanders, Zeeland, and various other places overseas.<sup>123</sup>

The central charge of the petition was that worsteds lacked regulation, and that this was causing irreparable harm to the trade. Disregard for 'the old ways' had led to a ruinous state of anarchy. Merchants who engaged in the export trade to the Low Countries were threatened with having their cloths forcibly 'examined and measured' at the cloth marts, an action that the petition makes clear would be shameful indeed, as it implies that the worsted merchants could not be trusted to deliver what they sold. Any cloths that did not meet the standards there were to be

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<sup>122</sup> G. Dodd, *Justice and Grace: Private Petitioning and the English Parliament in the Late Middle Ages* (Oxford, 2007), 298-9.

<sup>123</sup> *RP*, Henry IV: January 1410, VIII, 48.

forfeit to the foreign authorities, who also had the option 'to ordain dreadful and shameful penalties for the sellers of the said worsteds, which would be a great disgrace and reproach to the realm, as well as to the said city [Norwich] and to the county of Norfolk'.

While medieval petitions were commonly padded out with stock exaggerations, the petitionary hyperbole of 'complete and utter ruin' may not have been so far off the mark. The timing of the petition suggests that the downturn in exports was already being felt in Norwich; underlying the claim of devastation was the assertion, by now probably true, that the city and county in question produced nothing of note 'but only the said worsteds'. The extent of production can be seen in the long list of cloths itemised by the petitioners: singles in both wide and narrow widths; 30-ell bolts; mantels; 'motley, striped, checked, hooped, flowered, plain'; monkscloths and canoncloths; and beds.

The petition requested that the mayor of Norwich be granted the right of search over worsteds. All cloths were to be examined and measured before sale. Cloths that passed inspection should be sealed by the city. The proceeds of any forfeits would be shared equally with the crown. The petition was signed by the mayor, sheriffs, and commonalty of the city, though the latter could perhaps have been appended in name only. Producers in the fourteenth century had fought standardisation fiercely, but now representatives of the same industry were requesting that which they had previously rejected. Perhaps they better understood the arguments in favour; perhaps they were motivated to make changes in light of slipping exports; whatever the case, this time the request for a worsted aulnage went unopposed in Norfolk. The king agreed to the petition, allowing the city to seal worsteds for a term of seven years.<sup>124</sup>

The grant might have made little difference to Norwich itself, but in a rather interesting departure from the norm, it also requested extraordinary jurisdiction:

The mayor of the said city at the time, and his deputies, should have full power to examine and measure all the aforesaid worsteds of any kind, and all

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<sup>124</sup> *RP*, Henry IV: January 1410, VIII, 48; *CPR*, 1408-13, 194-5.

others, in the said city of Norwich, and in the county of Norfolk, whether within a franchise or outside, before they are put up for sale.<sup>125</sup>

The request to extend Norwich's jurisdiction to cover any and all worsteds produced in the entire county of Norfolk, 'whether within a franchise or outside', extended the mayor's power well beyond the limits of Norwich's normal jurisdiction. Any worsteds sold anywhere in the entire county of Norfolk that had not been sealed and taxed by the city ran the risk of confiscation.

This was a highly unusual power to grant to a provincial town. As stated previously, English towns typically did not exercise direct power over their surrounding countryside. England's early national consolidation severely limited the type of power that any single town could exercise. Towns were legally — and sometimes forcibly — subordinated to the crown, and generally had little autonomy, legal or otherwise, to act beyond their immediate boundaries. In special cases, a few of the largest towns had extended civic control over suburban areas, such as at York, Gloucester, and Coventry, but these were rare occurrences.<sup>126</sup> The case was similar with guilds. Only a handful of London companies are known to have secured national search rights, and most of those were granted in the sixteenth century or later.<sup>127</sup> The Pewterers and the Goldsmiths acquired national search rights in the fifteenth century, but they were the exception rather than the rule.<sup>128</sup> In general, both towns and guilds were limited to acting within the boundaries of their franchise.

Because of this, the actions that English towns took with regard to their economic hinterlands are rarely compared to those of continental Europe, which is

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<sup>125</sup> *RP*, January 1410, VIII, 48.

<sup>126</sup> J. Kermode, 'The Greater Towns 1300–1540', in *The Cambridge Urban History of Britain*, ed. by D. M. Palliser (Cambridge, 2000), 441.

<sup>127</sup> I. A. Gadd and P. Wallis, 'Reaching Beyond the City Wall: London Guilds and National Regulations, 1500–1700', in *Guilds, Innovation, and the European Economy, 1400–1800*, ed. by S. R. Epstein and M. Prak (Cambridge, 2010), 291–2.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, 288–290; See also R. F. Homer, 'The Pewterers' Company's Country Searches and the Company's Regulation of Prices', in *Guilds, Society & Economy in London 1450–1800*, ed. by I. A. Gadd and P. Wallis (London, 2002), 101–113; J. Forbes, 'Search, Immigration and the Goldsmiths' Company', in *Guilds, Society & Economy in London 1450–1800*, ed. by I. A. Gadd and P. Wallis (London, 2002), 115–125.

unfortunate. European cities were successful at combining elements of legal coercion, economic inducement, and land acquisition to consolidate their position vis-à-vis their surrounding countrysides. Of course, the quasi-independent nature of cities in Italy, Germany, Switzerland, and the Low Countries allowed for territorial and political control in a way that conditions in England did not. But not all hinterlands took the form of a dependent Italian *contado*. Some of the most successful European cities never pursued territorial aggrandisement at all. For example, Cologne relied on a combination of private land leases, putting-out, and the strategic extension of citizenship to secure its influence over the metalworking and textile industries located in its hinterland.<sup>129</sup> Nuremberg also had a metal-working region in its hinterland that produced armour, utensils, weapons and such of international repute; to promote this industry, the city prohibited certain types of putting-out, extended the city's *Bannmeilen*, and implemented a program of quality control over items produced in the hinterland but destined for the international market.<sup>130</sup> Other cities with legal jurisdiction pursued more radical strategies for controlling their economic hinterlands. The three great Flemish cities of Bruges, Ypres, and Ghent went as far as prohibiting weaving in their hinterlands in the fourteenth century.<sup>131</sup> Zurich did much the same, while promoting its own internally produced cloth.<sup>132</sup> Florence forced its subordinate town of Pisa to only produce cloth for the local market so that Florence could target international markets.<sup>133</sup> By comparison, the emphasis on political and constitutional developments in English polities has tended to draw attention away from economic discussions, with the general exception as noted previously of putting-out in the woollen industry.

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<sup>129</sup> Scott, *The City-State in Europe*, 146-7, and H. Eiden and F. Irsigler, 'Environs and Hinterland: Cologne and Nuremberg in the Later Middle Ages', in *Trade, Urban Hinterlands and Market Integration, c. 1300-1600*, ed. by J. A. Galloway (London, 2000), 44-50. On outburghership, or extending citizenship to hinterland inhabitants, see Scott, *The City-State in Europe*, 130-1.

<sup>130</sup> Eiden and Irsigler, 'Environs and Hinterland', 55-6.

<sup>131</sup> F. Rörig, *The Medieval Town* (Berkeley, 1969), 92.

<sup>132</sup> D. Nicholas, *The Later Medieval City, 1300-1500* (London, 1997), 98.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, 90-1.

### Controlling for quality in textile production

One of the key processes by which European towns exerted economic control over industry, most especially in textiles, was by establishing an officially recognised process of oversight. This process was not unknown in England; in towns, it was generally termed 'the search'. Little has been written about the actual process of the search in the Middle Ages; it appears in London records by at least the early fourteenth century,<sup>134</sup> and gradually was adopted in the larger towns by the late fourteenth century or early fifteenth century.<sup>135</sup> Though responsibility for conducting the search seems to have originated with civic officials, by the fifteenth century this was increasingly coming under the remit of craft guilds. Craft wardens were held responsible for seeing that reasonable standards were met among the practitioners of their craft.

The aulnage on woollens expanded the search to include all cloths of assize sold within the realm. However, the spread of lead sealing throughout the cloth industry has received puzzlingly little attention from English medievalists. Geoff Egan wrote widely on seals, but as an archaeologist his work focused more on the materiality of the objects as finds, and naturally more on post-medieval than medieval seals, for they are easier to identify.<sup>136</sup> Historians have devoted little space to the reasons that motivated cities to engage in extensive programs for sealing cloth. From the English side, there are two factors that have contributed to this lack of interest. The first is the way in which the aulnage on woollens was administered in England. From the 1350s, woollen cloth was taxed by aulnagers, but much of their work is obscured by the fact that the aulnage was typically farmed out, leaving no records for evaluation. Furthermore, for those few aulnage lists that have survived, the fraud perpetrated by some aulnagers has put off economic historians from using

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<sup>134</sup> The topic of the search appears often in the fourteenth-century City of London Letter Books; for the search on cloth, see for instance, *Calendar of Letter-Books of the City of London*, ed. by R. R. Sharpe, vol. G (London, 1905), 248-58.

<sup>135</sup> See Chapter 4 for more on the search in Norwich.

<sup>136</sup> His Ph.D thesis included a section on Norwich, but his discussion of sealing worsteds confusedly mixed in statutes dealing with woollens. G. Egan, *Provenanced Leaden Cloth Seals*, Ph.D thesis (UCL London, 1987), 168-9.

them at all.<sup>137</sup> The second reason is that the topic of the search is mostly seen as an urban phenomenon rather than as an extension of a broader economic trend. For medievalists such as Heather Swanson, questions concerning the search most commonly get reduced to expressions of civic oligarchy, rather than practical considerations about how pre-modern market economies functioned. Swanson explicitly relegates the search to being no more than a way to generate income for city coffers.<sup>138</sup>

The decision to embrace an assize for worsteds in 1410 is surprising only in the lateness of its implementation. As mentioned above, the crown had been experimenting with a woollen assize since the twelfth century. For worsteds, the 1410 petition marks a turning point in their relationship to an assize. Where previously it had been so strenuously rejected, from this point we see no further public reactions against it.

Though forced standardisation may seem an unfair imposition on the surface, in practical terms standard sizing did have benefits. Standardisation was primarily a means of lowering costs. Whole cloths were large and unwieldy to handle. The bolts of single worsted described above, for example, measured 90 feet (27 meters) in length. Statutory cloths of assize from 1464/5 were to measure 24 feet long and could weigh more than 80 pounds each.<sup>139</sup> For merchants buying in bulk, the time it would take to unwrap each individual cloth and measure it at the point of sale, to be certain it was actually as long as it should be, constituted a significant impediment to business in the form of vastly higher opportunity costs. The 1302 petition complaints about needing to unroll each cloth before sale were accurate, 'if it be not to the great damage of the merchants'. This was not merely an inconvenience but also a transgression against accepted practice, for it was 'not fitting that such cloths be unrolled before sale'.<sup>140</sup> When buyers were confident that their purchases would meet a stated minimum norm, merchants could purchase bulk lots in advance or from

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<sup>137</sup> For fraud in the woollen aulnage, see notes 129 and 130 on page 91.

<sup>138</sup> Swanson, 'The Illusion of Economic Structure', 43.

<sup>139</sup> SR, vol. 2, 403.

<sup>140</sup> TNA SC 8/313/E106.

afar, via letter or via factor, or alternately resell stock for a unitary price, without the need to measure individually and re-price each cloth accordingly. The complaints above also imply that the commodity market had reached a level of sophistication and maturity, whereby goods were simply expected to show a high degree of consistency.

Cloth was no different from other types of merchandise in that there were many ways to cheat a customer. The simple fact that cloth had been regulated so early, and so universally across Europe, is an indication of its importance as a long-distance trade item and its susceptibility to chicanery. Langland lampooned this behaviour with his character 'Avarice' in *Piers Plowman*, who fraudulently over-stretched his cloths.<sup>141</sup> There were many other creative ways of cheating the buyer. Long bolts of cloth might use good yarn at the ends and poor quality in the middle, which would be hidden when the cloth was rolled or folded. The complaints presented in one of the 1302 petitions describe cloths that were tightly woven in the first several yards, but loosely woven thereafter.<sup>142</sup> Short-selling cloth, as Avarice did, was probably the most common deception. If a weaver produced 60 bolts of 30-yard worsted in a year, weaving each cloth one yard too short would save enough yarn to weave two additional cloths, essentially at no cost to himself.<sup>143</sup>

To combat fraud, cities had devised a system of tagging cloth with lead seals. The seal was a tangible means of certifying that a cloth met the standards of some body charged with oversight; this was normally a town, though it could also be a guild, as in the case of the worsted weavers. Search commonly occurred at the point

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<sup>141</sup> Langland, *Piers Plowman*, B, passus v, lines 209-14. Qtd. in D. Wood, *Medieval Economic Thought* (Cambridge, 2002), 99. The statute books are also replete with attempts to outlaw such practices; see for example SR, vol. 3, 28, which includes penalties for over-stretching cloth, using poor quality wool, and false measures.

<sup>142</sup> TNA SC 8/313/E106.

<sup>143</sup> In a similar vein, Martha Carlin discusses a thirteenth-century instruction manual for embezzling agricultural produce on a rural manor. She estimates that the system portrayed therein could net an employee as much as 12.5% of the lord's agricultural yield every year. M. Carlin, 'Cheating the Boss: Robert Carpenter's Embezzlement Instructions (1261x1268) and Employee Fraud in Medieval England', in *Commercial Activity, Markets and Entrepreneurs in the Middle Ages: Essays in Honour of Richard Britnell*, ed. by B. Dodds and C. D. Liddy (2011), 183-198.



of sale, which was the Worsted Seld in Norwich. Worsteds that met the city's standards were tagged with a seal, which would be imprinted with the city's name or insignia for identification. At least some worsted seals carried the initials of the elected wardens of the guild.<sup>144</sup> This was essentially a city-backed guarantee of quality.

England's long and complicated relationship with an assize for woollens was surely motivated by continental practice. Cloth sealing as a mark of quality control may have been introduced into Western Europe from the east as early as the ninth to eleventh centuries. Seals spread into the west attached to luxury Byzantine imports, and by the twelfth century other countries were imitating the practice.<sup>145</sup> It had certainly become a feature of long-distance trade by the thirteenth century, when orders concerning sealing and statutory sizing regulations begin appearing in European civic ordinances. Cologne seems to have been inspecting and sealing cloths as early as the 1230s.<sup>146</sup> Venice passed an ordinance requiring sealing on fustians in 1275.<sup>147</sup> By the fourteenth century, it was assumed that trade-quality cloths would carry seals as a matter of course. A statute of 1348 banned the importation of Hanseatic cloths into Novgorod if they lacked seals to show their provenance.<sup>148</sup> The information imprinted into a seal could convey more information than merely provenance. Some seals also indicated a cloth's measurements or gradations in quality. St Gallen's canvas industry used five different imprints to indicate a range from highest quality to unsaleable.<sup>149</sup>

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<sup>144</sup> See Figure 2.13 above, which includes Norwich seals with two sets of four initials, therefore probably dating to when the guild employed eight wardens. Egan, *Provenanced Leaden Cloth Seals*, 187-92.

<sup>145</sup> W. Endrei and G. Egan, 'The Sealing of Cloth in Europe, With Special Reference to the English Evidence', *Textile History*, 13 (1982), 432-3.

<sup>146</sup> R. Holbach, 'Cloth Production and Cloth Trade in Hanseatic Towns With Regional and Non-Regional Products Reflected in Normative and Other Sources', in *Textiles and the Medieval Economy*, ed. by A. Huang and C. Jahnke (Oxford, 2015), 169.

<sup>147</sup> Endrei and Egan, 'The Sealing of Cloth', 433.

<sup>148</sup> The term used was '*ungheloyede*', meaning *ungestempelt*.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, 435.

That towns took it upon themselves to seal cloths holds with the understanding that civic officials had a responsibility for preserving the common weal. It was an accepted role of the city, and later of the guild, to protect consumers from fraud and unfair practices. The mayor or bailiffs of a town normally oversaw weights and measures and the assizes of food and drink, and protected the market from unfair trading practices such as forestalling and regrating. That quality assurance was necessary is proven by the long list of deceptions practiced in the marketplace. Bread might be artificially whitened with chalk or bulked out with admixtures; meat or fish would be sold before first light of day to mask its lack of freshness; pots were painted to look fireproof, but in fact melted once set on the fire; and so on. Besides sealing, there were other measures that could be implemented to control cloth. Some cloth selvages have been found that have coloured threads along their edges, which seemed to be a system for indicating size or quality. The 1302 petition described such a system, in which ‘all the light draperies before named are to have certain borders at the top in signification of their measure ... so that each may know by the marks how much the cloth ought to contain even though it is not unfolded or unrolled’.<sup>150</sup> Weavers were often instructed to weave identifying marks into their cloth, similar to merchant marks. Many such weavers’ marks appear in the books of the Norwich Worsted Weavers (see Figure 3.3). John Wattys of Norwich noted that he had sealed his will with his own such weaver’s mark.<sup>151</sup> Blomefield reported that the woollen weavers in Norfolk had been ‘obliged to bring in a roll of the names of all their craft, with the several marks belonging to each man, by which the goodness of every man's cloth might be known by his mark’.<sup>152</sup>

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<sup>150</sup> TNA SC 8/313/E106.

<sup>151</sup> Will of John Wattys the elder, ANW, Cook, 73.

<sup>152</sup> Blomefield, *An Essay Towards A Topographical History of the County of Norfolk*, vol. 3, 136-165, British History Online, <<http://www.british-history.ac.uk/topographical-hist-norfolk/vol3/pp136-165>>, (accessed 20 November 2015).

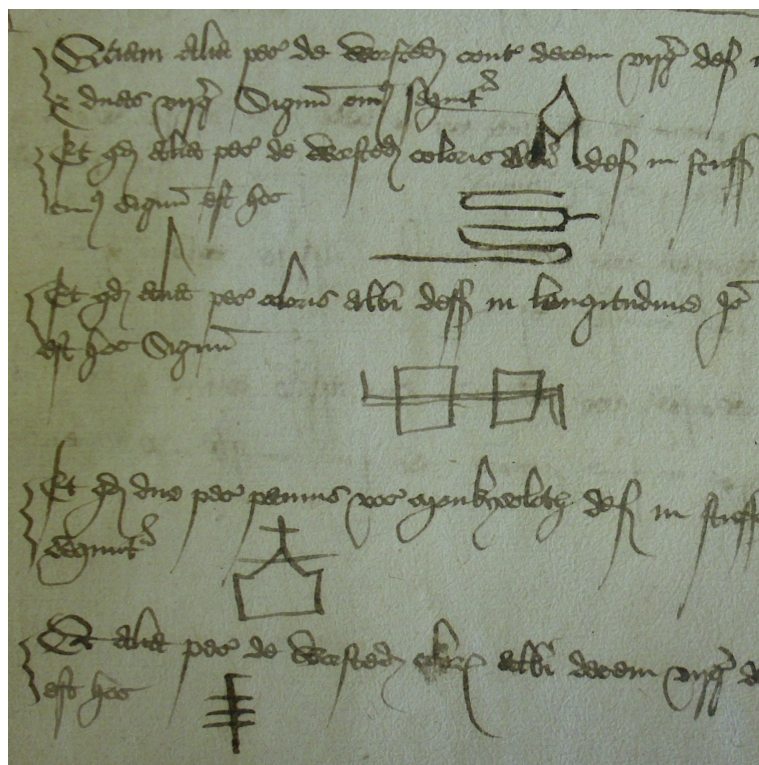


**Figure 3.3:** Weavers' marks from the books of the Worsted Weavers<sup>153</sup>

Textiles were one of Europe's most stringently controlled commodities, but the real interest lies in the way that cloth controls superseded local or even national jurisdictions. There is a real sense, when reading town documents, that European cities felt a greater impetus to work together in matters of trade, and that trade leagues, such as the Hanse, helped create a cooperative framework of agreed-upon controls and expectations. For example, in 1423 merchants of Russia had complained to representatives of the Hanseatic council that cloths sold to them by Hanseatic merchants were not long enough. This triggered a letter from the Hanseatic council to the city of Göttingen, where they had been woven, instructing the city '*Also dat se de lakene lang genuch maken na older wiise*' (to 'make cloths that were long enough, in the traditional way').<sup>154</sup> The city passed the complaint to the guild of woollen

<sup>153</sup> NRO NCR 17d/8, f. 6v, with permission of the Norfolk Record Office.

<sup>154</sup> 'Die Ratssendeboten Der Hansestädte in Lübeck an Göttingen: Warnen Vor Anfertigung Und Ankauf Von Zu Kurzen Tuchen', in *Hansisches Urkundenbuch*, ed. by K.

weavers, which responded by issuing ordinances aimed at slowing production as a way to raise standards.<sup>155</sup> This chain of correspondence shows quite clearly the web of interconnectedness between buyers, sellers, and producers. European cloth markets were tightly integrated into a system of commercial responsibilities that extended from the great trading leagues down to the humble town guilds.

A second, similar letter, also sent to Göttingen at around the same time, is recorded as coming from English merchants working in Bergen. They complain that the width of Göttingen linen was not meeting the traditional standards, and threaten an English ban on the importation of Göttingen linen if the situation is not rectified.<sup>156</sup> Whether they had the authority to follow through on such a threat is unclear, but it does illustrate that English merchants were also concerned with establishing international standards for cloth production. English producers may have felt themselves disconnected from this web because of England's geographical isolation, but English cloth could not compete fully on continental cloth markets without adopting practices like standardisation and sealing.

Cloths that were sealed by a town carried the additional benefit of being guaranteed by that town. A town's name was essentially its 'brand'. We should not discount the importance of a town's reputation when it came to the marketing of cloths for long-distance trade. Modern consumers are accustomed to thinking of product branding as specifically limited to corporate identification, but such a link was impossible in the Middle Ages. Lacking that, medieval consumers relied heavily on origin as the most important identifier for commodities. Surviving examples of Latin doggerel verse that eulogise towns and their products highlight how towns became associated with their outstanding products. The 'Stores of the City' rather coarsely lauds seven cities for their various wares: Norwich's best features included

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Kunze (Leipzig, 1905), 293.

<sup>155</sup> Schmidt, K. G. (ed). *Göttinger Urkundenbuch*, (1867), no. 104. Qtd in A. L. Huang, 'Hanseatic Textile Production in 15th Century Long Distance Trade', in *Textiles and the Medieval Economy*, ed. by A. L. Huang and C. Jahnke (Oxford, 2015), 212.

<sup>156</sup> 'Der Englische Kaufmann Zu Bergen an Göttingen: Beschweret Sich Über Die Schlachte [Sic] Qualität Und Zu Geringe Breite Der Dort Angefertigten Leinwand.', in *Hansisches Urkundenbuch*, ed. by K. Kunze (Leipzig, 1905), 298. A translation of the letter (which is in Dutch) can be found in Sutton, *The Mercery of London*, 158.

such highlights as barley bread and flint buildings; Coventry was known for its wire-drawing, York for its lampreys, and Canterbury for pilgrim staffs and pickled plums.<sup>157</sup> Another list, dating to perhaps the mid-thirteenth century, includes towns and their cloths: scarlet of Lincoln, haberget of Stamford, blanket of Blyth, russet of Colchester, linen of Aylesham, cord of Warwick, chalons of Guildford, plus an assortment of other commodities, like soap, plaster, needles, and even prostitutes.<sup>158</sup> This link between town and product was in some cases intentionally reinforced by civic authorities who wanted to maintain a chain of responsibility. A regulation from Göttingen in 1406 stated that cloth must be sold under the name of its place of origin, thus a cloth from Hesse must be called 'a Hessian, a cloth from Aachen as a cloth from Aachen, a cloth from Ghent as a cloth from Ghent, [and] a cloth from Göttingen as a cloth from Göttingen'.<sup>159</sup> In this way, buyers in distant markets could estimate the quality of purchases based on a city's reputation, with provenance functioning effectively as a name brand, but which could also direct complaints more easily when they arose.

By the end of the Middle Ages, commercialisation was making the connection of 'brand identity' to a town or location increasingly important in the high-end textile market. For instance, Huang, in her study of the linen producing areas of the German Hanse, noted a progression in how German linens were marketed in England over the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.<sup>160</sup> Fourteenth-century linens had been identified in the English customs records merely by their general region, most commonly Westphalian or Prussian. Their low price suggested that they were of no outstanding quality. From the 1420s, though, she found that Hanseatic linens with regional identifiers were slowly replaced by linen from specific cities: Braunschweig, Göttingen, and Salzwedel, and later Herford, Osnabrück, Münster, and Hannover.

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<sup>157</sup> A. G. Rigg, 'The Stores of the Cities', *Anglia-Zeitschrift für englische Philologie*, 85 (1967), 127-137.

<sup>158</sup> The Latin original is printed in Bonnier, 'List of English Towns in the Fourteenth Century'; an English translation is in *English Historical Documents 1189-1327*, 912-7.

<sup>159</sup> Ropp (1907), 411 no. 236. Qtd. in Holbach, 'Cloth Production', 173.

<sup>160</sup> A. Huang, *Die Textilien des Hanseraums* (Cologne, 2015); her argument is summarised in English in Huang, 'Hanseatic Textile Production'.

Linens identified with city names also cost more. That these linens carried their 'urban attributions' all the way through the customs process in London indicates that buyers were increasingly concerned with variation and quality.

In the example of Osnabrück, linen cloth was an important export of the town, but little or none of it seems to have been produced in the town itself. Osnabrück sealed and marketed a significant quantity of linen cloth to England by the fifteenth century, but the town had no guild of linen weavers, suggesting that 'Osnabrück cloth' was in reality produced by weavers from its hinterland. However, the city of Osnabrück had built up an extensive regulatory framework for controlling linens under the seal of the city. As Huang notes, it was less important to end buyers whether the linens had been produced in the town or in the countryside; what counted was that their quality was guaranteed by the city of Osnabrück, allowing it to be marketed abroad as 'Osnabrücker linen'.<sup>161</sup>

Huang argues that the process of standardisation and quality control in the Hanseatic towns allowed sellers to capitalise on name brand recognition, both to penetrate foreign markets and to recoup that recognition in the form of higher prices. The attached seals were the guarantee, backed by the town, that the cloth would meet expectations. The German linen industry succeeded because urban regulation was able to raise the quality, and just as importantly, consumers' expectations of quality. Osnabrück's trade in linens evolved 'from an unspecific regional production to a standardised industry'.<sup>162</sup> Much the same process was happening with worsteds in the fifteenth century.

### **The statutes of 1441/2 and 1444/5**

Though the 1410 grant had only been for a term of seven years, it marks the beginning of the fifteenth-century change in attitude toward the assize for worsteds in Norwich. The 1410 statute expired by 1418. Why was it not renewed immediately? Was it perceived as beneficial to the city? The city's figures for income from the

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<sup>161</sup> Huang, *Textilien des Hanseraums*, 101-7.

<sup>162</sup> Huang, 'Hanseatic Textile Production', 211.

Worsted Seld are unrecorded between 1410 and 1418. The Seld earned roughly the same amount in 1419/20 that it did in 1409/10, but that began to tail off in the 1420s. By 1425, the Seld was being farmed for an annual fee, making it impossible to guess at the state of the market in Norwich.<sup>163</sup>

After a twenty-three year pause, Norwich renewed its interest in a worsted assize. In 1441/2 and 1444/5, two statutes similar to the 1410 statute were again granted by the crown.<sup>164</sup> These were shorter in duration than the first, each being limited to a term of three years. Coming as they did at the start of the fifteenth-century recession, it is unlikely that they would have made any difference to exports, and with the income from the Worsted Seld mostly unrecorded for these years, it is hard to say whether they greatly affected market sales.

There were other distinguishing features of the 1440s legislation, though, which did differ from the previous grant in 1410, and which ultimately impacted the future of the worsted industry. First and most importantly, the grants were not issued to the mayor and commonalty of Norwich as before. This time, authority for the search was divided between the mayor and the 'Men of the Craft of Worsted Weavers within the said City'. The guild was to have the authority to inspect and seal all manner of worsteds within Norwich and Norfolk. As before, the statutes empowered the searchers to seize cloths from sellers who failed to meet standards, and malefactors were summoned to appear at presentments held in the Mayor's Court. The weavers were to have the backing of the mayor and justices of the peace in enforcing the new statutes. The 1444/5 grant extended the city's right to search in Suffolk as well as Norfolk.

The other unusual aspect was the extent to which weavers from the county were integrated into this new system of search. Men of the Norwich guild were to select four wardens each year from among the city weavers; those four wardens were to then select two additional wardens from among the men of the craft in the county (*'deux hōmes de mesme la art en le dit Counte hors du dit Citee'*). This part of the grant may have sought merely to confirm what was already local practice, though. The

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<sup>163</sup> King, *Borough Finances*, Table 10.4.

<sup>164</sup> SR, vol. 2, 322-3, and SR, vol. 2, 328-31.

wardens or master of the craft guilds were commonly sworn in to their annual service by a city's mayor; this had been done in London for years.<sup>165</sup> Lists in Norwich are only extant from 1441, but they already name six wardens for the worsted weavers, when most crafts only had two.<sup>166</sup> From 1443 the lists explicitly identify which wardens represent Norwich and which represent Norfolk, 'by patent of the king'.<sup>167</sup>

Though this seems unbalanced in favour of the city, it was soon rectified. The grant of 1444/5 upped the number of county wardens to four to match the number of city wardens, and the craft lists reflect this change. In 1444 (23 Henry VI), the mayor swore in John Western, Wiliam Kyng, John Bron, and John Mannyng for the city, and William Starlyng of Sco'Ruston, William Hynde of Scottow, John [Borp?] of Tunstead and Thomas Dykeman of North Walsham for the county.<sup>168</sup> This seems to have continued; in 24 Henry VI, four men from Ruston, Tunstead, North Walsham, Scottow were selected;<sup>169</sup> in 25 Henry VI, four more names appear on the list, one each from Pockethorpe, Swanton Abbot, Sco' Ruston and Scottow.<sup>170</sup> This close cooperation between city and county seems highly unusual for an English town. It is certainly a tacit admission of the importance of country weaving to the business of Norwich. Though the guild ultimately carried the weight of authority over the search, the task was equally shared by the eight wardens.

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<sup>165</sup> See, for example, the masters of the London misteries sworn for the year 1378 in *Calendar of Letter-Books of the City of London*, ed. by R. R. Sharpe, vol. H (London, 1907), 86-97. A similar ceremony in Bristol is described in R. Ricart, *The Maire of Bristowe is Kalendar*, ed. L. T. Smith (Ithaca, NY, 1992), 77.

<sup>166</sup> NRO NCR 16a/1; the first court book is fragmentary, and has some folios bound out of order. It additionally contains a list of craft masters from the first mayoral term of William London, (1490), which should properly be in the second book (NRO NCR 16a/2).

<sup>167</sup> NRO NCR 16a/1, f. 39. The same for 1444, f. 40.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 42.

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 43.

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 45.



**Table 3.1:** Worsted Assizes

|                                       | 1327                   | 1410                   | 1441/2 & 1444/5                  | 1467                             |
|---------------------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| <b>Singles, doubles, half-doubles</b> |                        |                        |                                  |                                  |
| Serges ('sargiorum')                  | 50, 40, 30, or 24 long |                        |                                  |                                  |
| Roll worsted                          |                        | 30 ells x 0.75 ell     |                                  |                                  |
| Roll worsted (narrow)                 |                        | 30 ells x 0.5 ell      | 30 yards x 0.5 yards             | 30 yards x 0.5 yards             |
| Double worsted                        |                        |                        | 10 yards x 5 quarters            | 10 yards x 5 quarters            |
| Half-double                           |                        |                        | 6 yards x 5 quarters             | 6 yards x 5 quarters             |
| <b>Clerical</b>                       |                        |                        |                                  |                                  |
| Monks' Cloth                          |                        |                        | 12 yards 'at least' x 5 quarters | 12 yards 'at least' x 5 quarters |
| Canon Cloth (1)                       |                        | 5 ells x 7 quarters    | 5 yards x 7 quarters             | 5 yards x 7 quarters             |
| Canon Cloth (2)                       |                        |                        | 6 x 2 yards                      | 6 x 2 yards                      |
| <b>Motley</b>                         |                        |                        |                                  |                                  |
| Single Motley                         |                        |                        | —                                | 6 yards x 5 quarters             |
| Double Motley                         |                        |                        | —                                | 7 yards x 5 quarters             |
| <b>Mantels</b>                        |                        |                        |                                  |                                  |
| Single, half-double, double           |                        | 6-10 ells x 5 quarters | —                                | —                                |
| <b>Covertlets</b>                     |                        |                        |                                  |                                  |
| Large                                 | 6 x 5 ells             |                        |                                  |                                  |
| Medium                                | 5 x 4 ells             |                        |                                  |                                  |
| Small                                 | 4 x 3 ells             |                        |                                  |                                  |
| <b>Beds</b>                           |                        |                        |                                  |                                  |
| Large beds                            |                        | 14 x 4 ells            | 14 x 4 yards                     | 14 x 4 yards                     |
| Medium beds                           |                        | 12 x 3 ells            | 12 x 3 yards                     | 12 x 3 yards                     |
| Small beds                            |                        | 10.5 x 2.5 ells        | 10 x 2.5 yards                   | 10 x 5 quarters (2.5 yards)      |

### The worsted weavers' charter of 1467

The last step in the effort to establish an assize for worsteds came finally in 1467 in the form of a royal charter issued to the Norwich Worsted Weavers' guild.<sup>171</sup> The charter was similar in content to the statutes of 1441/2 and 1444/5, but it was an unlimited, permanent grant. Notably, it extended their search jurisdiction to include Cambridgeshire as well as Norfolk and Suffolk. As before, the accepted sizes of various types of worsted products were enumerated. All worsteds were to be 'signed' with weavers' marks. Any cloths that failed to meet the stated norms for sizing or for quality were, as before, to be ruled forfeit. The city craft wardens were to administer the search in Norwich, while county locations were to be set up for sealing cloths outside the city. Perhaps this last was a tacit admission of failure on the part of the city to force all county worsteds through the Norwich market. By controlling the sealing of cloths, however, both the city and the guild still earned an income,<sup>172</sup> which may have been enough to replace what the Seld had generated in earlier decades.

There were several small changes to the 1467 charter that are important. The city weavers still selected their wardens, but now the country weavers were allowed to select theirs instead of being co-opted: 'and also that Artificers of the same Craft likewise out of the City, that to say, within the County of Norfolk, shall have Power every Year at the same Day to choose Four Wardens within and of the said County, of the same Craft.' This practice continued well into the sixteenth century; there are fragmentary lists from miscellaneous county meetings that show sometimes as many as one hundred or more county weavers turned out for their warden elections.<sup>173</sup>

Furthermore, the job of overseeing the presentation of faulty cloths was now also shared out between men of the city and men of the county. The 1467 charter

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<sup>171</sup> SR, vol. 2, 418-21. The charter was also copied into the city's *Liber Albus*. NRO NCR 17b/3, f. 52-3.

<sup>172</sup> The grant of 1410 had expressly allowed the city to claim 1½d from sealing every bolt or piece of worsted.

<sup>173</sup> Allison provides the dates and number of weavers present at the country meetings between 1513 and 60. Allison, *The Wool Supply and the Worsted Cloth Industry in Norfolk in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, 379.

included a provision for a jury of weavers to oversee the presentment hearings that took place in the Mayor's Court. The juries were composed of six weavers from the city and six weavers from the county. The jurors were ostensibly responsible for the neutrality of the process, any necessary mediation, and the negotiation of appropriate fines or penalties. They were also responsible for carrying out the search in the workshops of the guild's wardens, ensuring that all parties had some element of oversight. This split structure between town and country remained in place for the duration of the presentment records, which survive into the sixteenth century.<sup>174</sup>

Whether the re-introduction of sealing worsteds in the 1440s made any material difference to the economy of Norwich is difficult to estimate. England was heading into one of the worst medieval recessions on record,<sup>175</sup> and even woollen cloth was struggling overseas. Too little survives from Norwich during the years of the recession to guess at why the program was formally revived with a new grant in 1467. Furthermore, the 1440s had been a decade marked by the political upheaval surrounding Wetherby and the Gladman's Insurrection. The city's mayor was languishing in the Fleet prison in London, and the city's government was in the hands of an appointed governor. Given the circumstances, it may not be any surprise that the guild did not seek a further extension of the royal grant immediately after 1447. The city Assembly discussed abandoning the sealing of worsteds in 1458, so it would seem that even without the grant being re-issued after its expiration in 1447, that the city decided to continue sealing worsteds, at least for the time being.<sup>176</sup> That the discussion was had at all could be an indication that the program had produced poor results. By the 1460s, however, the city had regained its political stability and the franchise; worsted exports were on the rise; and the crafts were becoming recognised institutions within the city's constitutional framework. The fact that the guild sought a new grant in 1467 near the end of the recession may indicate that the weavers in Norwich were again feeling optimistic about increasing their market share overseas.

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<sup>174</sup> The search juries will be discussed in greater detail in Chapters 4 and 7.

<sup>175</sup> Hatcher, 'The Great Slump of the Mid-Fifteenth Century'.

<sup>176</sup> *Records*, vol. 2, 93.

## Conclusion

It is difficult to imagine that Norwich double worsteds could have made significant inroads on the European cloth markets after the 1460s without conforming to accepted practice there. England's long ambivalence regarding cloth assizes suggests that there was significant pushback on the part of lawmakers (perhaps reacting to pressure from producers) to implement national laws on standardisation. National legislation on mandatory sizing for woollens had been enacted and repealed many times since 1196. It took until 1464/5 for the woollen assizes to hold firm to a statutory definition for broadcloth. That worsteds followed only three years later with a permanent declaration of the worsted assize cannot be mere coincidence.

Though we certainly cannot chalk up the success of the Norwich double worsteds entirely to regulatory oversight, there is nevertheless enough evidence to suggest that without the proper marketing materials — which lead seals undoubtedly were — Norwich stuffs would have found it very difficult to compete on the Antwerp market as a high-grade textile.

Furthermore, it should be clear that 'Norwich' worsteds were really a joint product of the city working in tandem with its hinterland. Contrary to the theories on urban cloth production, weaving did not in fact cease in Norwich. If anything, the position of the weavers in Norwich was strengthened by their involvement in the guild, and the guild's position in the city was strengthened by overseeing the worsted assizes. The whole structure was made that much more robust by the inclusion of the county products carrying the seal of the city of Norwich, which bulked out the city's ability to establish a presence on foreign markets. This process becomes something of a positive feedback loop, in that more worsteds available overseas means more brand-name recognition, which leads to even more demand abroad.

Munro's critique of the rural bias prevalent in the proto-industrial thesis is as applicable to late medieval Norwich as it was to the Southern Low Countries. His argument, that the urban institutions involved in clothmaking 'rescued their cloth industries from seemingly certain destruction in the fourteenth century and staved off ultimate, inevitable decline for almost a hundred years', provides an important

counterweight to the belief that urban clothmaking ceased to be successful by the fifteenth century.<sup>177</sup> Norwich's example is equally useful in breaking down some of the stereotypes about English clothmaking. If Norwich had not become involved in the worsted trade, would it, or could it, have revived in the fifteenth century?

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<sup>177</sup>Munro, 'Symbiosis', 4.

## 4 | The crafts in Norwich

A feature of the late medieval town is the near ubiquitous spread of the craft guild as a public institution. But while craft guilds are broadly recognisable in outline across Europe, the way in which the institution developed was unique from place to place. Towns across England, and indeed across Europe as a whole, had to grapple with the growing pains of industrial diversification in an increasingly commercialised economy. As the municipal records of England's largest towns show, York, Bristol, Coventry, and Norwich all shared broadly similar concerns over how to manage employment, apprenticeship, and industrial growth, but each implemented slightly divergent regulatory policies.<sup>1</sup>

Many fine studies have been written about London's livery companies, yet outside of London, medieval crafts remain poorly studied and poorly understood.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, *The York House Books 1461–1490*, ed. by L. Attreed, 2 vols. (Stroud, 1991); *The Little Red Book of Bristol*, ed. by F. B. Bickley, 2 vols. (Bristol, 1900); *The Coventry Leet Book*, ed. by M. D. Harris, vol. 1-2 (London, 1907–1913); *York Memorandum Book, Part II (1388–1493)*, ed. by M. Sellers (Durham, 1914); Ricart, *The Maire of Bristowe is Kalendar*.

<sup>2</sup> Unwin was one of the earliest scholars to undertake a study of the London companies. G. Unwin, *The Gilds and Companies of London* (London, 1938). The field has grown considerably since then. More work has been undertaken on the early modern period than the medieval, however, for even in London more sources survive after 1500. For work that specifically focuses on the medieval years, see Sutton, *The Mercery of London*; S. L. Thrupp, 'The Grocers of London: A Study of Distributive Trade', in *Studies in English Trade in the Fifteenth Century*, ed. by M. M. Postan and E. Power (London, 1933), 247–292; P. Nightingale, *A Medieval Mercantile Community: The Grocers' Company and the Politics and Trade of London, 1000–1485* (New Haven, 1995); Veale, *The English Fur Trade*; M. Davies, *The Tailors of London and Their Guild, C.1300–1500*, D.Phil thesis (Oxford University, 1994). For studies that focus on the medieval crafts outside of London, see Wheatley, *The Mercers in Medieval York 1272/3 to 1529: Social Aspirations and Commercial Enterprise*; E. M. Carus-Wilson, 'The Merchant Adventurers of Bristol in the Fifteenth Century', *Trans. Royal Hist. Soc.*, 11 (1928-01-01), 61–82; Swanson, *Medieval Artisans; The Merchant Taylors of York: A History of the Craft and Company From the Fourteenth to the Twentieth Century*, ed. R. B. Dobson and D. M. Smith (York, 2006).

The main reason is simply a lack of source material. Despite losses over the years, the London companies preserve a range of sources unparalleled in any other location. No other English town possesses a fraction of the sources that survive in London. The internal archives of nearly every occupational guild outside of London begin only from the sixteenth century. Even York's Merchant Taylors, one of that city's wealthiest and most successful guilds, left no court minutes, apprentice registers, or account books, the 'three standard components of most craft guild archives', that date earlier than 1560.<sup>3</sup> Scholars who work on late medieval guilds outside of London have had to piece together information from administrative documents created by city officials. These fragments are difficult to interpret and spotty in coverage. Civic records are ambiguous in their treatment of the guilds, and rarely explain the motivations that led cities to incorporate them into the framework of civic governance.

It has been argued that the structure and organisation of the crafts provided avenues of social mobility for middling artisans who had drive and ambition.<sup>4</sup> It has also been argued, to the contrary, that the crafts were creations of an oligarchic elite, interested only in using guilds as tools to repress and restrict a burgeoning stratum of middling urban craftsmen.<sup>5</sup> Engaging with this debate first requires a better understanding of the structure and development of the provincial guild in English towns. What did the guilds in Norwich look like, how did they function, and how did they come to be part of the civic framework?

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<sup>3</sup> R. B. Dobson, 'The Tailors of Medieval York: From Craft to Company', in *The Merchant Taylors of York*, ed. by R. B. Dobson and D. M. Smith (York, 2006), 23-52.

<sup>4</sup> D. J. F. Crouch, *Piety, Fraternity and Power: Religious Gilds in Late Medieval Yorkshire, 1389-1547* (Woodbridge, 2000), 182. Other types of guilds functioned similarly. Rosser, 'Going to the Fraternity Feast: Commensality and Social Relations in Late Medieval England'.

<sup>5</sup> Swanson, 'The Illusion of Economic Structure', 31.

## 4.1 Norwich's reputation as a 'disorderly' city

Medieval Norwich has long entertained a reputation in the literature as a polity beset by disorder and unrest. Samuel Cohn, a historian who has devoted a considerable amount of his career to studying riots and revolutions, ranked Norwich as one of medieval England's most 'insurrectionary towns', together with London, York, Bristol, and Oxford.<sup>6</sup> In 1272, citizens violently assaulted the cathedral precinct.<sup>7</sup> The Gladman's Insurrection of 1443 has attracted considerable interest, even though the handful of sources that mention it are internally contradictory.<sup>8</sup> Kett's Rebellion, whether we see it as Norfolk's last great medieval uprising, or the first of the new Protestant era, still excites historians.<sup>9</sup> In addition, Cohn cites a further 22 'riots and revolts' that appear in the Patent Rolls between 1267 and 1437, which he dryly remarks indicate 'an insurrection every eight years in the city'.<sup>10</sup>

So much for the image. It will be argued here that the historiographical assessment of late medieval Norwich has been distorted by focusing too much on periods of political and civil disturbances. Scholarly interest in sensational episodes has obscured the surrounding, quiet periods of Norwich's history that were *not* troubled by disorder and unrest. Many of Cohn's 'insurrectionary' incidents were in fact juridical disputes between the city and the cathedral. Cohn's quantitative approach lumps many types of events together, regardless of severity, cause, or involvement. As Maddern argued, tarring Norwich with a reputation for 'continuous social disorder' is unwarranted, for it grossly inflates the impact of the few events that do merit attention. Her own attempt to establish a pattern of violence in

<sup>6</sup> S. Cohn, *Popular Protest in Late Medieval English Towns* (Cambridge, 2013), 56.

<sup>7</sup> *Records*, vol. 1, xxx-xxxi; *Records*, vol. 2, 269-271.

<sup>8</sup> *Records*, vol. 1, lxxxviii-xciii; Cohn, *Popular Protest in Late Medieval English Towns*, 260-1; R. Hutton, 'Seasonal Festivity in Late Medieval England: Some Further Reflections', *EHR*, 120 (2005), 77-8; P. Maddern, *Violence and Social Order: East Anglia, 1422-1442* (Oxford, 1992), 196-205. As McRee notes, Hilton inaccurately describes it as violence between merchants and artisans. Hilton, *English and French Towns*, 123-5.

<sup>9</sup> A. Wood, *The 1549 Rebellions and the Making of Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 2007).

<sup>10</sup> Cohn, *Popular Protest in Late Medieval English Towns*, 56.



fifteenth-century Norwich yielded poor results.<sup>11</sup> Though turbulent periods admittedly are the bread and butter of history, ‘uneventful’ periods are no less deserving of our attention. Telescoping history, or attaching too much importance to brief events whilst collapsing the long stretches of time around them, glosses over what those longer periods also might teach us. In the case of Norwich, the fifteenth century was not just a century of upheaval and recession; it was also a time when the town was coming to grips with changing political expectations, driven in part by an increasingly affluent class of urban artisans. More wealth in the pockets of the middling classes meant an expanded citizen body, and new frictions that tested its constitution in unexpected ways. The long stretches of relative ‘silence’ are as important to the development of the urban polity as are the brief points of outburst.

### **Constitutional development**

It is the argument of this chapter that Norwich’s formal recognition of the crafts as corporate bodies must be understood within the context of its early constitutional crises, and the manner in which those crises were resolved. Between 1404 and 1452, Norwich was indeed beset by recurring political disputes between various factions in the city. Changes to the civic constitution, as approved in royal charters between 1380 and 1404, had unleashed some pointed criticisms of the city’s civic leaders. The royal charter of 1404 had altered the framework of municipal government to the effect that the city was now a county in its own right, and the four ruling bailiffs had been replaced with a mayor, two sheriffs, and a council of aldermen.<sup>12</sup> In addition, though, the commons charged these men with adding limitations to the 1404 charter that would endow themselves with more power at the expense of the commons, and specifically with removing the phrase ‘by the assent of the commonalty’ from the 1380 charter to give the mayors and aldermen unbridled command of the city’s

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<sup>11</sup> P. Maddern, ‘Order and Disorder’, in *Medieval Norwich*, ed. by C. Rawcliffe and R. G. Wilson (London, 2004), 188–212.

<sup>12</sup> The 1380/1 and 1404 charters are printed in *Records*, vol. 1, 29–36.

affairs.<sup>13</sup> This charge sparked off the first in a long string of political disputes that spanned the first half of the fifteenth century.

The first dispute over the changes to the civic constitution was resolved by a brokered settlement that became known as the Composition of 1415. Under the terms of the Composition, the structure of the municipal government was rebalanced to satisfy the grievances raised by the commons. Representatives to a Common Council of 80 men (later reduced to 60) were to be elected each year from the householders resident in each of the twelve minor wards. In addition, the process of co-option to the various unelected offices was re-arranged so that the Common Council, as representatives of the commonalty, chose half of the co-opted office holders, and the aldermen chose the other half.<sup>14</sup> This method of power sharing seems to have worked well, for it remained substantially unchanged until 1835.<sup>15</sup>

The Composition of 1415 was followed in 1424 by the production of another document called the Tripartite Indenture, which settled a dispute between the aldermen and sheriffs. This was followed by yet another political crisis in 1437, led by Wetherby and his party of malcontents. The city lost its liberties briefly over this episode. Not long after that came the Gladman's Insurrection in 1443, a murky event involving rioting, Wetherby, and the ongoing dispute with the cathedral priory over jurisdictions. The city again lost its liberties for this, and the result was a further series of constitutional reforms.

By the 1450s, however, Norwich's problems had subsided, and the city entered a prolonged period of political stability.<sup>16</sup> Cohn noted no major events in Norwich between the cessation of the Gladman's Insurrection and the outbreak of Kett's Rebellion; and Wood's portrayal of Kett's Rebellion as the culmination of 'late medieval popular rebellions' nevertheless only traced fractious uprisings in the city back to the 1520s, when failed harvests triggered food riots.<sup>17</sup> Compare this to York's

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., lx-lxvi; B. R. McRee, 'Peacemaking and Its Limits in Late Medieval Norwich', *EHR*, 109 (1994), 850-1.

<sup>14</sup> The most important co-opted offices will be discussed in Chapter 8.

<sup>15</sup> *Records*, vol. 1, cix.

<sup>16</sup> King, *Borough Finances*, 33.

<sup>17</sup> Cohn, *Popular Protest in Late Medieval English Towns*; Wood, *The 1549 Rebellions and the*

record of civic unrest during the same period. Between the 1470s and the early sixteenth century, York was almost constantly riven by political turmoil.<sup>18</sup> This upheaval included election riots (1471, 1473, 1482, 1489, 1504, and 1516-7), enclosure riots (1480, 1484, 1486, 1492, 1494, 1534, and 1536), and popular uprisings in 1504 and 1529. The period especially between 1480 and 1500, when York's civic relations were 'at their most adversarial', stands quite in contrast to Norwich's near century of relative quietude.<sup>19</sup>

### The political settlement

Drawing conclusions from Norwich's political disturbances depends to some extent on the broader approach one takes to the development of late medieval civic governance. There have been two major schools of thought. On the one side of the debate are historians like Swanson, Hilton, and Rigby, who argue that medieval towns were internally riven by social polarisation. The wealth generated by long-distance trade tended to pool in the hands of a small group of merchants; this narrow elite, it is argued, was able to collect political power into its own hands, bending urban constitutions into limited oligarchies.<sup>20</sup> Swanson's work on York has been particularly influential, for she produced one of the only full-length treatments of craftsmen outside of London. She worked mostly using evidence drawn from York's civic archive, and her work filtered the city's history through the lens of class conflict.

However, Swanson's approach to medieval governance has been controversial, and many scholars disagree with her insistence that it was class conflict that shaped the urban social structure. This group instead highlights the importance of communalism to the medieval *mentalité*. Reynolds, for instance, has argued for a more nuanced understanding of how corporatist values affected both

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*Making of Early Modern England*, 13.

<sup>18</sup> Swanson, *Medieval Artisans*, 123. See also *A History of the County of York: The City of York*, ed. P. M. Tillott, Victoria County History, (London, 1961), 80-4.

<sup>19</sup> C. D. Liddy and J. Haemers, 'Popular Politics in the Late Medieval City: York and Bruges', *EHR*, 128 (2013), 771-805.

<sup>20</sup> Swanson, 'The Illusion of Economic Structure'; Swanson, *Medieval Artisans*; Hilton, *English and French Towns*, especially chapters 3, 4 and 6; Rigby, *English Society*, 145-77.

the social structure and the political structure of medieval towns. This was a world that overtly prized consensus and collectivity over strife and individualism.<sup>21</sup> She argues that medieval town dwellers approached urban politics with the understanding that political responsibilities were stratified by wealth, for only the wealthy could afford to shoulder the burdens of public service. The split between elite and commons was an accepted fact of life as long as both halves contributed to the common interest, each according to their ability.

This corporatist mindset can be seen in the way in which Norwich dealt with its fifteenth-century political strife. In the case of 1414, the civic elite could have drawn a hard line against the commons, but instead they used arbitration to produce a settlement agreeable to both parties. McRee argues strongly that politicians in Norwich had a particularly distinctive history of employing mediation and accommodation to solve political disagreements, and that this provided for a high degree of political stability. Much of this was due to the elite's willingness to involve the commons in the decision-making process, to negotiate with them when disagreements arose, and to find solutions that satisfied all parties.<sup>22</sup> The problems of the first half of the century were severe, but they could have been far more contentious and far more violent, had Norwich's civic leaders not been convinced of the need to find common ground when problems arose.

The gradual inclusion of Norwich's craft guilds into the public framework must be seen as part of the long, fifteenth-century political settlement. Though the crafts had arguably been 'coming of age' in Norwich since the fourteenth century, it was the fifteenth century that saw the maturity of the craft system. This was probably true of most English towns outside of London. Their relatively small populations meant that English towns lacked the numbers and the diversity that had driven the crafts to organise earlier elsewhere.

However, the historiography of the English crafts has been split by interpretations that diverge over a frustratingly small and ambiguous body of evidence. These interpretations tend to parallel opinions concerning oligarchy and

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<sup>21</sup> Reynolds, 'Medieval Urban History and the History of Political Thought'.

<sup>22</sup> McRee, 'Peacemaking and Its Limits in Late Medieval Norwich'.

the polarisation of the urban social structure. Swanson's views on oligarchy have filtered through to her analysis of guilds. She has been the leading proponent for understanding guild history as an extension of urban class conflict. She argues that the crafts grew as tools of the oligarchy, and were used to impose greater control over urban craftsmen.<sup>23</sup>

Swanson's view on guilds is also disputed. Other scholars posit a more nuanced and more culturally-informed approach to the crafts, one that seeks to downplay the rigid abstractions inherent in the oligarchy debate. Veale's work on the Skinners' guild emphasised the vitality of the artisanal crafts and the importance of the workshop economy. Importantly, her work challenges the overly-simplified paradigm of merchant-artisan polarisation by complicating our picture of what a London company looked like.<sup>24</sup> In the case of the Skinners, it was a widely mixed group that included both artisan and mercantile interests. Others have argued against Swanson's dismissal of the crafts as tools of oligarchy. Rosser argued that her position 'greatly underestimated the internal vitality' of that movement. In his view, the crafts and their fraternities were tools that urban residents did use for themselves, quite frequently, to help them succeed in the working world. Characteristics such as status, reliability, and respectability were key to establishing a public identity, and the guilds were elemental to this process.<sup>25</sup> Davies followed on from this point, arguing for a pragmatic and balanced approach to the study of guilds. As he put it, guilds functioned in the space between the "'ascending" aspirations' of the membership and the "'descending" obligations' of governance and the maintenance of public order.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Swanson, 'The Illusion of Economic Structure'; Swanson, *Medieval Artisans*.

<sup>24</sup> Veale, *The English Fur Trade*; E. M. Veale, 'Craftsmen and the Economy of London in the Fourteenth Century', in *The English Medieval Town: A Reader in English Urban History 1200-1540*, ed. by G. Rosser and R. Holt (London, 1990), 120-140.

<sup>25</sup> Rosser, 'Crafts, Guilds and the Negotiation of Work in the Medieval Town'.

<sup>26</sup> Davies, *The Tailors of London*, 266.

## 4.2 The genesis of the crafts as public institutions

The integration of Norwich's crafts into the public framework was a long, gradual process that began in the fourteenth century. One of the city's earliest documents, the *Custumal*, is an early collection of local ordinances that dates to c. 1308.<sup>27</sup> The majority of the document deals with the rights and responsibilities intrinsic to membership in the franchise. Industry figures little, except for one section that directs the city's governing bailiffs to select two to four searchers from every craft or trade in the city who are 'trustworthy', 'discreet', and 'have knowledge'.<sup>28</sup> Correction is left to the discretion of city officials, who will mete out fines on behalf of the community, 'so that no scandal should arise against the city'. This is possibly the first mention of the search in Norwich. However, the implementation seems somewhat *ad hoc*. There is no mention made in this text of the crafts as organised institutions.

In 1389, the crown demanded an accounting of guilds and fraternities across the country.<sup>29</sup> Of the Norwich returns that survive, 7 out of 19 present themselves as fraternities with occupational links.<sup>30</sup> However, of the ordinances that these fraternities sent to Chancery, none is specifically economic in nature; for instance, none deals with apprenticeship, or the regulation of labour, or production.<sup>31</sup> Even

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<sup>27</sup> *Records*, vol. 1, 132-199.

<sup>28</sup> Hudson and Tingey read the phrase '*cuiuslibet officii seu artificii in ciuitate usitati*' to indicate industry in general, not guilds.

<sup>29</sup> The classic reference for the Chancery guild returns is H. F. Westlake, *The Parish Gilds of Mediaeval England* (New York, 1919). For more recent commentary, see C. M. Barron and L. Wright, 'The London Middle English Guild Certificates of 1388-9', *Nottingham Medieval Studies*, 39 (1995), 108-145; J. Gerchow, 'Gilds and Fourteenth-Century Bureaucracy: The Case of 1388-9', *Nottingham medieval studies*, 40 (1996), 109-148; B. R. McRee, *Bonds of Community: Religious Gilds and Urban Society in Late Medieval England*, Ph.D thesis (Indiana University, 1987).

<sup>30</sup> Certificates survive from the candlemakers, pelters, tailors, barbers, carpenters, saddlers and spurriers, and one founded by 'diverse artificers and labourers'. Westlake, *Parish Gilds*, 201-8.

<sup>31</sup> Most of the Norwich guild returns were printed in *English Gilds: The Original Ordinances of More Than One Hundred Early English Gilds*, ed. by J. Toulmin Smith and L. Toulmin Smith (London, 1870), 22-44.

though Norwich fraternities were clearly amalgamating around occupations, their returns concern only the social and devotional activities of the guilds.<sup>32</sup>

By the start of the fifteenth century, references to the crafts and their organisation become more plentiful. Though the Composition of 1415 primarily addresses political office-holding, one clause is a reformulation of the city's policy on the search. Whereas the fourteenth-century bailiffs had selected searchers to act on the city's behalf, now each craft should select 'wit in hemself ij Maistres for ye 3er comyng' who are empowered to act as searchers on behalf of the corporate body of the craft.<sup>33</sup> Presentments concerning defective wares were to be made to the mayor and to other 'sufficient men' of the same craft. Half of the fines levied were to be returned to the craft. The mayor was only empowered to select a craft's searchers if the craft failed to do so on its own. Furthermore, any craft that had the right of search in London was also to have search in Norwich under the same form, unless that craft was privileged with an exemption in the form of a royal charter.<sup>34</sup> Put together, this evidence suggests a crystallising of the functions that the craft served, and its recognition as a public body.

As far as the crafts are concerned, the Composition is also notable for its attempts to make entry to the freedom contingent on craft membership. It stated that 'alle manere of men now Citezeyns of the Cite shal be enrolled of what Craft that he be of within 2 month and 1 day up[on] payne [of] forfeiture of his fraunchise.'<sup>35</sup> It is probable that Norwich borrowed the idea from London, where it had been enforced since 1319.<sup>36</sup> The attempt was only partly successful. Unaffiliated men were still entering the freedom, though the numbers began falling in this period. Lists divided by crafts, dating to this period, were begun in the first Mayor's Book, but they are

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<sup>32</sup> As other authors have pointed out, it is unclear whether this means they were only concerned with social and devotional activities, or whether they were unwilling to disclose their full range of concerns to the crown.

<sup>33</sup> *Records*, vol. 1, 105.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> King, *Borough Finances*, 70.

<sup>36</sup> Unwin, *The Gilds and Companies of London*, 70-6; C. M. Barron, 'London 1300-1540', in *The Cambridge Urban History of Britain*, ed. by D. M. Palliser (Cambridge, 2000), 400.

incomplete and seem to have been abandoned rather quickly.<sup>37</sup> It would take several more decades for this policy to become fully established.<sup>38</sup>

### The mid-century developments

The crafts continued to grow and attract members over the next several decades. But it was not until the crisis that surrounded the events known as the Gladman's Insurrection in 1443 that the city made an effort formally to bring the crafts into the civic framework. The Gladman's insurrection caused significant problems for the city, the most critical of which was the forfeiture of the liberties yet again.

As part of the negotiations to regain the liberties, civic leaders drew up a petition addressed to the Marquis of Suffolk, requesting his help in negotiating a settlement. In it are outlined strategies that the city thought might improve peacekeeping, including breaking up the four wards into twelve, reducing the independent power of the aldermen, assigning constables responsibility over individual wards, and increasing oversight over guilds and the crafts. It was suggested that small crafts should be amalgamated into larger bodies, and that masters should continue to be selected by each craft, but now should also function as the formal interface between city and craft.<sup>39</sup> Though not all of these proposals made it into the final restitution agreement, the sheer breadth of suggestions suggests that civic officials did not trace the city's ongoing problems back to a single source or faction. Clearly there was concern that traditional measures for keeping the peace were no longer sufficient.

Although the liberties were returned to the city in 1447, it took several more years to put all the resulting reforms in place. Ultimately, these were Norwich's last major reforms to the civic constitution until the nineteenth century. The first of these reforms was the dissolution of the *Bachery*, or the Guild of the Annunciation.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> NRO NCR 16a/1, ff. 29-34, 67-73.

<sup>38</sup> See below, from page 182, and Table 4.1 on page 184.

<sup>39</sup> *Records*, vol. 1, 117-119.

<sup>40</sup> For background on the *Bachery*, see *Ibid.*, lxxiv-lxxvi; *Gild of St George*, 7-8; N. P. Tanner, *Popular Religion in Norwich, With Special Reference to the Evidence of Wills, 1370-1532*, D.Phil.



Though the guild is known only through a handful of indirect references made to it, it seems to have been a fairly influential guild, and the membership may have been composed of up-and-coming journeymen. A number of complaints had at times been lodged against the *Bachery*, some of which dated back to 1414.<sup>41</sup> Depositions from the Gladman's inquests implicated the *Bachery*, and it disappears from view after 1443.<sup>42</sup> There is no evidence to explain its disappearance; it was presumably either disbanded, or subsumed into Norwich's other major civic fraternity, the Guild of St George.<sup>43</sup>

The Guild of St George also underwent reform in the wake of the troubles. This was completed in 1452 via an agreement known as 'Yelverton's Mediation'.<sup>44</sup> The agreement formally linked the city's most prestigious fraternity with Norwich's civic government. It conferred the annual leadership of the guild on the outgoing mayor; it automatically conferred membership in the guild on the city's aldermen; if common councillors wished to join, it also guaranteed their admittance as a function of their position on the council.<sup>45</sup> Many did.<sup>46</sup> A memorandum in the Mayor's Book, dating to the mayoralty of William Ashwell (1448-9), indicates that the city had been working on this agreement since recovering the liberties: 'And þe same felashipp to be uned and corperate in þe cite from þs tyme forth in þs foorme; þt is to wite, þe

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thesis (Oxford University, 1974), 155-8.

<sup>41</sup> The complaints included meddling with elections and the *Bachery's* circumvention of the Worsted Seld for cloth sales. *Records*, vol. 1, 66-77.

<sup>42</sup> *Records*, vol. 2, xlvi.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, cxlii.

<sup>44</sup> NRO NCR 17b/9, f. 189, printed in *Gild of St George*, 39-43. For background on the St George fraternity, see Mackerell's eighteenth-century account in B. Mackerell, 'Account of the Company of St George At Norwich', in *Norfolk Archaeology, Or Miscellaneous Tracts Relating to the Antiquities of the County of Norfolk* (Norwich, 1852), 315-374 and B. McRee, 'After 1452: The Evolution of the Gild of St. George in the Wake of Yelverton's Mediation', *Norfolk Archaeology*, XLV, Part I (2006), 28-40.

<sup>45</sup> There are other examples of 'civic guilds' or 'ruling guilds' becoming affiliated with municipal governments. In York, three guilds including the Corpus Christi seem to have functioned in this role. Crouch, *Piety, Fraternity and Power: Religious Gilds in Late Medieval Yorkshire, 1389-1547*, 118, 158-9. In Coventry, the Corpus Christ and the Trinity guilds become linked with civic office. Phythian-Adams, *Desolation of a City*, 118-22.

<sup>46</sup> The assembly records note from time to time the swearing in of new members of the St George, many of whom were newly elected common councillors.

Mayre, Shirreves, Aldermen and Common Counsell of þe cite to be named and cleped seynt Georges Gylde.<sup>47</sup>

The timing of the memorandum in the Mayor's Book coincides chronologically with the city's concomitant effort to reform the guilds via the 'Ordinances for Crafts' of 1449.<sup>48</sup> In 39 chapters, the Ordinances for Crafts presents a full explication of how the crafts should intersect with the rights and responsibilities of citizenship, starting from the establishment and governance of the guilds or mysteries themselves, to the selection of wardens, rules on apprenticeship and joining the freedom, liveries, public processions with the mayor, the treatment of foreign (non-enfranchised) craftsmen, and others. It is an extraordinary document that, among other things, formally outlines the role of the crafts as public institutions.

There are certain hints that the Ordinances for Crafts was produced in response to the troubles in the city, especially with the Gladman's crisis provoking a second loss of liberties in less than a decade. Clauses such as the one that directed guild masters 'To certefyen ye names and defauctis of all Rebellious' make it clear that guilds were envisaged as sharing the responsibility for maintaining order in the city. Does this make the crafts into 'tools of the oligarchy'? Not necessarily. The decentralised nature of medieval cities meant that services — and responsibilities — were spread across a multiplicity of city organs.<sup>49</sup> If journeymen were indeed implicated in the riots connected to the Gladman's incidents of 1443,<sup>50</sup> then giving guilds more oversight may have been seen as a practical solution for keeping the peace in a city that had at least 10,000 inhabitants and fewer than 30 constables. Furthermore, city leaders might have been troubled by the recent upheaval in London precipitated by the tailors and Ralph Holland, and the role that the crafts played in that set of disturbances.<sup>51</sup> The Ordinances for Crafts should be seen as part

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<sup>47</sup> *Records*, vol. 2, 152.

<sup>48</sup> NRO NCR 17b/3, ff. 16d-164, printed in *Records*, vol. 2, 278-296.

<sup>49</sup> J. Haemers and W. Ryckbosch, 'A Targeted Public: Public Services in Fifteenth-Century Ghent and Bruges', *Urban History*, 37 (2010), 203-225.

<sup>50</sup> Hilton, *English and French Towns*, 125; for an alternate view, see Maddern, *Violence and Social Order*, 196-204.

<sup>51</sup> See C. M. Barron, 'Ralph Holland and the London Radicals, 1438-1444', in *The English*

of the city's response to the real problems of governing a growing city, especially one with a large non-citizen body that could not easily be held to account via distraint of property or disbarment from the franchise. That the guilds were expected to shoulder more responsibility should be read as evidence of their growing importance to the citizenry and to the city in general.

### 4.3 The integration of the crafts after 1450

What was the practical outcome of these new arrangements? First, by opening the membership body of the St George's guild to members of the Common Council, it opened what had been an exclusive organisation up to a much broader demographic. One member list preserved in the papers of the guild shows names and city wards next to regnal years; these correlate to the years those men were elected to the civic common council, suggesting that councillors did take the opportunity to become brethren.<sup>52</sup> Opening membership up to what once had been the exclusive preserve of the city's wealthiest merchants must have been seen as a concession to the growing affluence of the city's middling citizens. If there had been tensions previously, either between the St George and the *Bachery*, or over more intangible questions of social exclusion from the St George guild, then those issues were effectively cleared away with the Mediation.

The Ordinances for Crafts probably represented a cornerstone in the city's strategy for maintaining public order in the city. Its 39 chapters outlined almost every conceivable aspect of how the city wanted the crafts to function, and can be grouped loosely under the following headings:

1. The freedom, craft membership, and craft translations

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*Medieval Town: A Reader in English Urban History 1200-1540*, ed. by G. Rosser and R. Holt (London, 1990), 160-183.

<sup>52</sup> NRO NCR 8g, miscellaneous list of brethren, c. 1496-1508.

2. The governance of the crafts and misterys
3. The role of wardens, and the search
4. Apprenticeships
5. Liveries, civic ceremony, and public presentation
6. Miscellaneous other topics

Some of the chapters no doubt formalised behaviour that was already practised in the city. In other cases, the Ordinances for Crafts probably attempted to modify existing behaviour or create new precedents for future behaviour. But, as with any type of normative document, it is important to separate the idealised image from the reality. In practice many of its directives seem either to have never been fully implemented, or simply ignored. We should not read that document as a declaration of fact, but rather as a statement of intention. One example was the chapter that outlined rules for taking apprentices. Norwich had been trying to control apprenticeship since the start of the fifteenth century. The Composition of 1415 had attempted to instil limits on non-citizens holding apprentices and hiring servants.<sup>53</sup> This seems to have been largely ineffective. The Ordinances for Crafts in 1449 again tried to limit apprentice-holding to citizens, and again to force the enrolment of apprentices. This time, the responsibility for policing the policy was passed on to the guilds, yet again, it seems to have been largely ineffective. The enrolment of apprentices did not take hold until the 1510s.<sup>54</sup>

### **The freedom**

The Ordinances for Crafts reiterated the previous order of 1415 that stipulated entry to the freedom should be channeled through the crafts. This seems finally to have been successful: whereas the 'Old Free Book'<sup>55</sup> originally had listed names in a simple, chronological list, from 1451 names were entered on pages dedicated to

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<sup>53</sup> *Records*, vol. 1, 106.

<sup>54</sup> See page 211 below.

<sup>55</sup> The 'Old Free Book's is the first of Norwich's extant freedom registers. NRO NCR 17c, OFB.

specific guilds. The Ordinances for Crafts also directed that men entering by redemption must join a guild.<sup>56</sup> For the most part, this seems to have been successful. After 1451, the number of unaffiliated entries recorded in the Old Free Book drops almost to nil. However, this initiative probably encapsulated a policy that was already underway. Even before the Ordinances for Crafts made craft membership a prerequisite of the freedom, the city had experienced a steady drop in unaffiliated freedom entries. The situation was similar in York, where unaffiliated freedoms were also falling.<sup>57</sup> The percentage of men who entered the freedom in Norwich with no stated craft, as shown in Table 4.1, fell from 72% in 1325 to 0.3% in 1500-1524. Swanson attributes this trend in York to the city's desire to 'corral' all craftsmen into a craft. It would be difficult to downplay these numbers, or to argue that the city did not find it advantageous to have its citizens be members of crafts, but this is not necessarily for the reasons presented by Swanson. There is no suggestion that Norwich forced non-citizens to join a craft, nor did it limit work in handicraft production only to citizens. If the city were indeed using the crafts as a control mechanism, it seems likely that there would have been a stronger push to enrol everyone in a craft, but as it stands, the crafts were mostly the preserve of the citizenry. It is more likely that the drive to enrol citizens in a craft was part of the city's mandate to oversee production standards and safeguard quality in the provision of food and services. Furthermore, if journeymen were thought to be a source of problems, then having their masters be beholden to a craft was a means by which the city's governors could pressure masters to keep their journeymen in check.

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<sup>56</sup> *Records*, vol. 2, 293.

<sup>57</sup> Around 25% of York's freedom entries made between 1301 and 1350 were unaffiliated to a craft, but by 1451 to 1500 that figure was only 2%. Swanson, *Medieval Artisans*, 4.

**Table 4.1:** Norwich freedoms without occupational attributions, 1317-1524<sup>58</sup>

| <b>1317 -<br/>1324</b> | <b>1325 -<br/>1349</b> | <b>1350 -<br/>1374</b> | <b>1375 -<br/>1399</b> | <b>1400 -<br/>1424</b> | <b>1425 -<br/>1449</b> | <b>1450 -<br/>1474</b> | <b>1475 -<br/>1499</b> | <b>1500 -<br/>1524</b> |
|------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|
| 83                     | 354                    | 208                    | 259                    | 137                    | 22                     | 0                      | 3                      | 2                      |

Furthermore, the Ordinances for Crafts allowed some autonomy to the crafts in terms of enrolment. It directed that applicants to the freedom, who were entering via redemption — that is, those men who had neither apprenticed in Norwich, nor could claim entrance by right of their father's patrimony — needed to secure the assent of the wardens of their craft: 'that is to sey the wardeyns of the crafte that he shall be enrolled of shall come to the chaumbre and wnesse that it is here wyll that he shall be made citezein of their crafte'. This, again, may have been inspired by London's example. In London, the charter of 1319 had set a precedent that citizenship by redemption required sureties from six established citizens.<sup>59</sup>

The craft connection was not immutable once established, however. The Ordinances for Crafts also provided a clause on craft translations. This clause gave citizens a way to change their guild affiliations, ostensibly for political reasons. It guaranteed that anyone who had enrolled in a craft that had never previously generated a mayor, alderman, sheriff, or bailiff, but who 'fortuneth be wisdom and good gouernaunce to growe to habundaunce of worldely godes and likly to ber worshipp and astate in the said cite', should have the opportunity to 'trade up' to a craft of higher standing: that is, one that had been bestowed with greater social status by virtue of its record of civic office holding. The clause makes clear that wardens of such guilds are within their rights to allow such translations. The need for that proviso was likely added, both to quell complaints about guilds poaching members from each other, and to make it clear that this was only allowed in certain situations.

<sup>58</sup> King, *Borough Finances*, Table 3.2.

<sup>59</sup> *The Historical Charters and Constitutional Documents of the City of London*, ed. by W. De Gray Birch (London, 1887), 46.

Craft translations were rare but not unknown. There are a few men who were noted in the Old Free Book as having changed their affiliations. Instances can be found in London as well as in other cities.<sup>60</sup> That some crafts were held in higher regard than others is made clear by an entry in the Assembly minutes from 1456 that made reference to 'the 24 honourable crafts of the city', but unfortunately without stipulating which crafts belonged to this group.<sup>61</sup> Chapter 8 will consider the political realities of craft translations in greater detail, and will suggest, based on office-holding data, that implementation of this clause was less vigorously pursued as more crafts were represented on the common council.

As in other towns, the clauses in the Ordinances for Crafts that pertain to the freedom do advantage the children of existing citizens. The children of citizens could enrol their own citizenship from age 16, at no cost, provided that they did so as members of the same craft as their fathers.<sup>62</sup> Ralph Wilkyns, for example, appears in the minutes of the city assembly, petitioning for the right to entry via the patrimony of his father Thomas Wilkyns, worsted weaver and alderman.<sup>63</sup> Though such a policy might seem to augur the formation of an urban patriciate, closed to outsiders and reliant on internal recruitment, the evidence from Norwich does not support this. An examination of the surnames of the aldermen in Table 4.2 reveals few duplicate names. Of the 130 surnames that appear among the 160 aldermen who held a seat between 1452 and 1530, 69% had unique, non-repeated surnames. Of the aldermen who did share a family name, at least three pairs were separated by a generation, some were very common surnames in Norwich (Broun, Clerk, Cook, and Sweyn, for instance), and six more groups likely included different kin groups, judging by their occupations.<sup>64</sup> Few lineal families produced more than one alderman, and there is little evidence to suggest that the hereditary preferences in the Ordinances for Crafts

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<sup>60</sup> For more on craft translations, see page 287 below.

<sup>61</sup> *Records*, vol. 2, 92.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 292.

<sup>63</sup> NRO NCR 16c/1, 82r.

<sup>64</sup> An example of this was William Sweyn the draper, who was probably unrelated to the three generations of Sweyn bakers.

encouraged the formation of familial dynasties. This pattern is equally valid for the wardens of the worsted weavers. No families dominated leadership of the guild, and the sons of successful weavers were just as likely to join other guilds as they were to stay in their fathers' guilds.<sup>65</sup>

**Table 4.2:** Frequency of shared surnames among the Norwich aldermen, 1450-1530

| Unique surnames | Shared surnames                                                                                                  |                          |                                     |                      |
|-----------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------------------|----------------------|
|                 | Shared by 2 aldermen                                                                                             | Shared by 3 aldermen     | Shared by 4 aldermen                | Shared by 5 aldermen |
| 111             | 13                                                                                                               | 2                        | 3                                   | 1                    |
|                 | <i>Aleyn, Aylmer, Best, Brasier, Burgh, Colman, Hemmyng, Pynchamor, Read/Rede, Rose, Styward, Warons, Welles</i> | <i>Cook/Cok, Wilkyns</i> | <i>Broun/Brown, Ferroure, Sweyn</i> | <i>Clerk/Clarke</i>  |

It should be noted that Norwich, like other towns, could not sustain its population without immigration. Towns could alter the terms of enfranchisement when they wished to expand or restrict numbers. In Exeter, the cost of admission was raised when civic officials wanted to slow immigration.<sup>66</sup> In Wells, by contrast, the offer of free entrance by patrimony was extended to apprentices to bolster citizen numbers, and may have been enacted to encourage young men to enter the franchise sooner than they would otherwise have done.<sup>67</sup> The most successful sons from Norwich were always drawn to the opportunities that beckoned in London.<sup>68</sup> It is

<sup>65</sup> Davies found similar results among the members of the London Tailors. Davies, *The Tailors of London*, 141-4.

<sup>66</sup> Kowaleski, 'The Commercial Dominance of a Medieval Provincial Oligarchy: Exeter in the Late Fourteenth Century', 186-9.

<sup>67</sup> Shaw, *The Creation of a Community: The City of Wells in the Middle Ages*, 150-1.

<sup>68</sup> Examples of this can be seen in the deed rolls. For instance, the brothers John and Henry Gilbert, sons and heirs of the Norwich alderman John Gilbert, both moved to London. NCR



entirely possible that hereditary clauses in documents such as the Ordinances for Crafts were meant to encourage sons — and their accumulated capital wealth — to remain firmly at home in Norwich.

### **Guild governance**

The internal structure of the Norwich guilds was fairly uncomplicated. Heading up the guild were the masters or wardens. There is no indication that the Norwich crafts ever had anything like a Court of Assistants, as was common in the London companies. Also dissimilar to London was the fact that Norwich craft wardens served the dual role of guild master and guild searcher. The Composition of 1415 had allowed each craft to select two wardens or masters each year, who simultaneously acted as its searchers. The Ordinances for Crafts extended this in 1449 by allowing the larger crafts to select up to four wardens each.<sup>69</sup> The worsted weavers, of course, had been selecting four wardens since at least 1441; occasionally, other guilds posted more than two wardens, such as the woollen weavers did in 1443/4.<sup>70</sup>

The Ordinances for Crafts also added the provision for each craft to annually select a governing common council of twelve from among its members. The Ordinances for Crafts laid out a process of selection by co-option.<sup>71</sup> Outgoing wardens were to select four men for the coming year's council, who would then choose eight more representatives. The new council of twelve would then, among themselves, select the next year's wardens. At a minimum, the selection process endured, at least within the worsted weavers. Several loose fragments have been

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1/19, Roll B, m. 5d, (8 Edward IV); NCR 1/19, Roll C, m.2, (9 Edward IV). Henry Asshewell, son of Norwich alderman William Asshewell, also became a citizen of London. NCR 1/19, Roll D, m.1, (10 Edward IV).

<sup>69</sup> The Ordinances for Crafts has a chapter dedicated to directing wardens how and when to make search of their crafts. *Records*, vol. 2, 282-3. See also the oath of the craft masters, whose first charge was to keep peace and tranquility within the craft, and whose second charge was to make 'gode and trewe serche'. *Ibid.*, 315.

<sup>70</sup> The woollen weavers that year appointed John Nocton, John Arnold, John Coupere, and William Coket as masters. NRO NCR 16a/1, f. 45.

<sup>71</sup> The financial offices of the municipal government were selected by co-option, as was the common council of the Guild of St George. *Gild of St George*, 38.

bound into the end of the Second Book of the Worsted Weavers that record the results of elections, such as that of John Wattys, Edward Cosyn, William Harte, and Peter Marlyng.<sup>72</sup> Twelve men are named as having chosen these four as the wardens for the 'yere next to come'; a second list names those who witnessed the election, 'wt many mo[re]' appended to the bottom.

The idea of the guild common councils was presumably modelled on the example of the London Courts of Assistants, and was likely intended to provide the same type of administrative oversight provided by them. In practice, however, the Norwich councils probably differed quite a bit from their antecedents in London. The membership of the Courts of Assistants included some of the eldest and most experienced members of the London guilds. Unwin believed that court members, once selected, held their seats for life.<sup>73</sup> The courts of the larger London companies held sessions on a regular basis and transacted a considerable amount of business, including directing their extensive financial investments, arbitrating in disputes between members, and overseeing their charitable activities.<sup>74</sup> As some of this type of business appears in the minutes of the worsted weavers' craft presentments, it is unlikely that they needed to hold additional court sessions, or that there was enough guild business to justify convening an additional, full-fledged craft court. In any case, there are no surviving medieval court minutes from any Norwich guild.

The city and county wardens of the worsted weavers were formally presented after the Mayor's yearly riding<sup>75</sup> every spring.<sup>76</sup> The wardens took an oath binding them to fair and just enforcement of city and guild policies, and the mayor formally

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<sup>72</sup> NRO NCR 17d/8, unpaginated. No year is given, but judging from the names that appear, it was likely 1518 or 1519.

<sup>73</sup> Unwin, *The Gilds and Companies of London*, 217.

<sup>74</sup> Sutton, *The Mercery of London*, 180; Davies, *The Tailors of London*, 156-60.

<sup>75</sup> This took place on the Tuesday immediately following Trinity Sunday, making it an unfixed date. In the Western liturgy, Trinity Sunday follows Pentecost or Whit-Sunday, making it the 8th Sunday after Easter. The earliest date of Trinity Sunday is May 17th and the latest is June 20th.

<sup>76</sup> Most of the lists of craft masters in the fifteenth century have been lost with the missing folios of the Mayor's Court. The lists re-commence in the second Mayor's Court book in 1510. NRO NCR 16a/1; NRO NCR 16a/2.

granted them authority to make search in their craft.<sup>77</sup> This public swearing of oaths helped highlight the accountability of the new searchers to the corporate body of the community as much as it publicised the authority wielded by the wardens.<sup>78</sup>

In the case of the worsted weavers, the mastership was a fairly fluid position. Some men held the role for several years at a time, while others moved in and out of the role quite frequently. The number of men who passed through the role in the worsted weavers makes it seem quite evident that there was little fixed hierarchy, and that the role was far more open than it was in London. The role of guild master will be considered further in Section 7.2.

## The search

Scholars who work on craft guilds like to speculate about the reason for their emergence. Epstein, for instance, argued that cities bestowed a formal role on craft guilds in order to better control apprenticeship.<sup>79</sup> Swanson described the crafts as vehicles of municipal control.<sup>80</sup> However, it is the topic of the search that appears throughout the Norwich documentation, from the early *Customal* in 1308, right through the end of the Middle Ages. As Dobson noted regarding York, 'To an extent now hard to appreciate and often unduly neglected by historians of craft guilds, it was this power of search which probably did more than anything to bind the craft together.'<sup>81</sup>

Whereas the *Customal* had allowed the city's ruling bailiffs to select searchers on behalf of the city, the Composition of 1415, as noted above, provided more structure to the process by allowing each craft to select searchers-*cum*-wardens for itself. Presentment hearings were held before the mayor, at which the wardens could

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<sup>77</sup> *Records*, vol. 1, 105.

<sup>78</sup> For the importance of public oath-taking, see C. V. Phythian-Adams, 'Ceremony and the Citizen: The Communal Year At Coventry, 1450-1550', in *The English Medieval Town*, ed. by R. Holt and G. Rosser (London, 1990), 241-244.

<sup>79</sup> S. R. Epstein, 'Craft Guilds, Apprenticeship, and Technological Change in Preindustrial Europe', *The Journal of Economic History*, 58 (1998), 684.

<sup>80</sup> Swanson, *Medieval Artisans*, 113.

<sup>81</sup> Dobson, 'The Tailors of Medieval York', 25.

put forth defective goods for judgement. Fines were levied with the assistance of ‘oyer mo suffisant men of ye same craft’.<sup>82</sup> Presumably, these men were expected to act as *ad hoc* juries, both to provide the specialist knowledge necessary to render judgement, and to offset any accusations that the wardens were acting unilaterally, or taking advantage of their positions. And, unlike London, the role of searcher and warden were combined into the same role, which lends further support to the idea that much of the justification for the institutionalisation of the crafts was motivated by a desire to better manage the search.

Because of the loss of most of the Mayor’s Court records prior to c.1510, there is no way to guess how often presentment hearings were held in the fifteenth century. Once the books recommence, there are sporadic entries for hearings from various trades. Multiple crafts sometimes presented together, as in September 1512, when the shoemakers, butchers, and worsted shearmen appeared together as a group, suggesting that the minor crafts did not normally commit enough infractions to warrant their own hearings.<sup>83</sup> Some fragmentary minutes including craft presentments also survive on loose slips, suggesting that record keeping was not exactly rigorous, and that the records of presentments did not always find their way into the court books.<sup>84</sup>

The craft common councils that were added by the Ordinances for Crafts in 1449 were intended to formalise the ‘juries’ of sufficient men who attended the craft’s presentment hearings. The Ordinances for Crafts made clear that the men named to the craft council should have ‘full power, auctorite and jurisdiction to demen [judge] upon the defautes founded be þe said wardeyns and fynes maken’.<sup>85</sup> For the smaller crafts that seldom made presentments, having their councils act as juries may have been feasible, for they probably appeared no more than quarterly. For the worsted weavers, however, it seems that this arrangement was untenable, no doubt because

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<sup>82</sup> *Records*, vol. 1, 105.

<sup>83</sup> NRO NCR 16a/2, f. 13r.

<sup>84</sup> NRO NCR 5d/34.

<sup>85</sup> *Records*, vol. 2, 281.

of the frequency of their presentments, and the volume of business transacted at every hearing.

In 1467, the worsted weavers' patent had amended the way in which their juries were formed. Their patent allowed that the wardens could select 'Six of the most discreet of the said Artificers within the said City [Norwich], and Six of the same Artificers within the said County [Norfolk]' to assist at the hearings. Furthermore, these twelve men were also granted the power to make search over the eight guild wardens, to prevent 'Deceits and Falsehoods'. Because of this concession, not even the wardens of the guild were exempt from oversight.

If minutes were kept of the early search presentment hearings, regrettably they have been lost along with the early records of the Mayor's Court. Fines from the first surviving presentments are bound into the first of the draft Assembly minute books. They document seven hearings that were held during the mayoralty of William London, in 1491 and 1492.<sup>86</sup> After this, the worsted weaver hearings began to be minuted in two dedicated books that date from 1492 to 1506, and then from 1510 through the sixteenth century.<sup>87</sup> The entries typically began by declaring the names of that day's jury members, divided by whether they represented the city or the county. Sometimes the names of the Norwich guild wardens also appear. Judgements and fines followed. The most common complaints concern technical deficiencies of cloths, improper measurements, and poor materials. Occasionally contraventions of rules and ordinances were prosecuted, such as by weavers who exceeded the allowed number of looms or apprentices.

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<sup>86</sup> NRO NCR 16c/1, fos. 28r-32r. These are possibly stray folios from the Mayor's Court. This is suggested by the inclusion of Mayor's Court business in the worsted weavers' books.

<sup>87</sup> It is not entirely clear when the first book was broken off from the main business of the Mayor's Court, for it also contains memoranda of court sessions and random other entries made between 1495 to 1506. The second worsted weavers' book also contains some minutes of presentments held by the newly-constituted guild of Worsted Shearmen. NRO NCR 17d/7; NRO NCR 17d/8.

## Expressions of corporate identity

Medieval craft guilds have provided a rich backdrop to study the culture of symbolism and corporate identity. Late medieval guilds could draw on a range of options for self-promotion; dress, ritual, and architecture were all employed as visual and material markers of the corporate embodiment of the guild.<sup>88</sup> Much scholarship has been devoted to demonstrating that guilds did use public symbols and performances to promote cohesion and unity, but less time has been spent considering how individual towns developed their own localised versions of common practices. In many cases these differed quite markedly from practices in London.

The men who produced the Ordinances for Crafts were clearly influenced by the examples of London, but it is dangerous to assume that London practice automatically came to be implemented in the provincial towns, or that normative documents such as the Ordinances for Crafts were in all cases able to establish or modify local practice. At numerous points throughout the Ordinances for Crafts, the document makes explicit reference to practice in London, and it is clear that much of the document relied on that city's example for inspiration. However, not all of London's practices translated to reality in Norwich. One example of the questionable efficacy of the Ordinances for Crafts involves that of dividing the crafts into liverymen and non-liverymen. The Ordinances for Crafts stipulated that the wardens were empowered to select men 'that ben sufficient aswell in godis as gode gouernaunce' to wear a livery.<sup>89</sup> The livery was only to be bestowed on citizens who were full members of their craft and permanent residents of Norwich, who 'have and holde a place or a tenement or a chaumbre with in the said cite be hym self'. However, there is no indication that the guilds in Norwich ever divided their membership into a liveried section and a non-liveried section, in the way that the London companies did. Most likely this can be attributed to the city's smaller

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<sup>88</sup> Phythian-Adams, 'Ceremony and the Citizen'; Rosser, *The Art of Solidarity in the Middle Ages: Guilds in England 1250-1550*.

<sup>89</sup> *Records*, vol. 2, 285.

population. Few of the crafts had enough members to make such a division practicable.

There were other ways in which the Norwich crafts were less formally organised than their London counterparts. One of these was their confraternal societies. The crafts in Norwich, as in London, were linked to religious fraternities, though the Ordinances for Crafts does not regulate them. The fraternities of some crafts are known only because of charitable contributions left in members' wills.<sup>90</sup> But in contrast to their London counterparts, none seems to have been chartered or formally incorporated. Swanson has noted that the York records also barely mention fraternities. This is quite in contrast to the London companies, where the fraternities played important roles as independently chartered, corporate bodies.

The fraternity of the Worsted Weavers was that of the Holy Ghost, though to date the only known document that links the two is the will of the worsted weaver Thomas Richeman. He provided a bequest of 4d to the brethren of 'the holi gost gilde called the worstedwevers gilde' if they would pray for his soul.<sup>91</sup> However, a second worsted weaver, Thomas Swan, stated in his will that he desired the guild of the Holy Ghost to be present at the service commemorating the thirtieth day following his death, 'according to their dutie as a brother of the said fraternite'.<sup>92</sup> It is not known whether this fraternity was attached to a parish church or was held elsewhere. Only three crafts in Norwich are known to have had connections to specific parishes; the rest met and conducted services either at the Cathedral, or in one of the friaries, or at one of the non-parochial chapels such as St Mary in the Fields.<sup>93</sup>

The Ordinances for Crafts had directed that the crafts should annually keep a day of 'of solempnite in worshipp of ther avowe' or patron saint. Not all the crafts

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<sup>90</sup> Tanner, *Popular Religion in Norwich*, Appendix 8; Farnhill also lists references to over 50 fraternities in Norwich, a few of which were specified as being attached to crafts. Farnhill, *Guilds and the Parish Community*, 196-7.

<sup>91</sup> NCC, Ryxe, 271d; Tanner, *Popular Religion in Norwich*, 346.

<sup>92</sup> NCC, Robinson, 5.

<sup>93</sup> Only the fishmongers, fishers, and tanners are known to have held their fraternal meetings in parish churches. *Ibid.*, 146.

followed this directive, but by the time of the Reformation the majority of them had established a day on which members would attend a commemoration mass for the souls of their brethren. The *Liber Albus* includes a list compiled by the city in 1543 of the sixty-one crafts which had a day set aside 'ffor the kepyng off ther [gild]'. The Worsted Weavers celebrated their guild day on Pentecost Sunday in the Cathedral, which was fitting for a guild whose dedication was the Holy Ghost.<sup>94</sup>

By the 1520s Norwich seems to have begun performing a cycle of Biblical pageant plays similar to those performed in Coventry or York, though the Norwich plays were performed on Pentecost Monday instead of on Corpus Christi. In 1527 the Guild of St Luke, which was an amalgamation of the pewterers, brasiers, bell founders, plumbers, glaziers, and painters, complained that they were unable to continue financially supporting the pageant on their own, which they had been doing for some years.<sup>95</sup> A list dating from c.1530 shows that this was rectified by apportioning the financial burden for the plays among sixty-three crafts. Each play was supported by multiple guilds, with two exceptions: 'David and Goliath' was supported solely by the Smiths, and the Worsted Weavers alone financed 'The Holy Ghost'.<sup>96</sup>

Crafts and fraternities often built guildhalls for themselves, which functioned as meeting spaces, but also as material expressions of their corporate identity.<sup>97</sup> In London, the larger companies spent sizeable sums on their halls. Grocers' Hall in Conyhope Lane, for example, was purchased by the company in 1411 for 320 marks.<sup>98</sup> The Mercers rented their premises in the fifteenth century, and in the sixteenth century built for themselves a great hall in Cheap Ward, in addition to a 'fair and beautiful chapel, arched over with stone', and later a grammar school housed within

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<sup>94</sup> *Records*, vol. 2, 310-1.

<sup>95</sup> N. Tanner, 'Religious Practice', in *Medieval Norwich*, ed. by C. Rawcliffe and R. G. Wilson (London, 2004), 149.

<sup>96</sup> *Records*, vol. 2, 230. See also Tanner, *Popular Religion in Norwich*, 341-6.

<sup>97</sup> K. Giles, *Guildhalls and Social Identity in Late Medieval and Early Modern York, C.1350 - 1630*, D.Phil thesis (University of York, 1999), 25.

<sup>98</sup> J. Stow, *A Survey of London*, ed. H. Morley (London, [nd]), 259; Nightingale, *The Grocers' Company*, 399-431.



the grounds of a hospital purchased after the dissolution.<sup>99</sup> Nor was the possession of a company hall limited to the great mercantile crafts. Stow dutifully records the location of many lesser companies, including the bakers, blacksmiths, bowyers, brewers, bricklayers, carpenters, clothworkers, cooks, cutlers, embroiderers, fletchers, girdlers, plasterers, plumbers, saddlers, and tallow-chandlers. Some crafts in York had halls, including the surviving exemplars of Trinity Hall of the Merchant Adventurers, and St John the Baptist's Hall of the Merchant Taylors; others have been lost, including those of the skinnners, butchers, cordwainers, pinners, smiths, weavers, carpenters, and fishmongers.<sup>100</sup>

Yet guildhalls are curiously absent from the history of the crafts in Norwich.<sup>101</sup> There are no extant records to indicate that the worsted weavers owned a hall of their own, there or anywhere else. The worsted weavers' search presentments took place in the civic guildhall, most likely in the Mayor's Court.<sup>102</sup> The Norwich Mercers were the guild most likely to have owned their own hall, yet the few fragmentary minutes of their meetings show that they, too, met in the civic guildhall.<sup>103</sup> The Guild of St George had originally met at the George Inn, which they owned; after its sale, they also moved their meetings to the civic guildhall.<sup>104</sup> A possible reason was that the guildhall in Norwich was surprisingly commodious, one of the largest in England.<sup>105</sup> The Norwich Guildhall had three large chambers, whereas York and Bristol had only one each. The cost of building it had been large, and the city had pressed labor from the community to finish it. Thus it may be that the finished building was seen as a communal resource and that groups outside of

<sup>99</sup> Stow, *Survey*, 263-4; Sutton, *The Mercery of London*, 72-3, 360-5.

<sup>100</sup> Giles, *Guildhalls and Social Identity in Late Medieval and Early Modern York, C.1350 - 1630*, vol. 2, Fig. 167b.

<sup>101</sup> Tanner, *Popular Religion in Norwich*, 147.

<sup>102</sup> The location of the search hearings is noted throughout the two Books of the Worsted Weavers. NRO NCR 17d/7; NRO NCR 17d/8.

<sup>103</sup> NRO NCR 10c/1.

<sup>104</sup> *Gild of St George*, 119-20.

<sup>105</sup> The Norwich guildhall 'has no real parallel in England', and may have been fashioned on the example of continental guildhalls. I. Dunn and H. Sutermeister, *The Norwich Guildhall* (Norwich, 1977), 2.

the civic hierarchy had use of the building. On a more abstract level, it is also possible that the guilds in Norwich felt less need to put their corporate identity on display with exhibitions of material wealth, and thus never felt the need to build their own halls. Giles hypothesised that when groups built guildhalls for themselves, often they were motivated by 'a specific moment of change, expansion, or crisis in the corporate identity of the guild or mystery concerned'.<sup>106</sup> Perhaps Norwich's guilds felt more secure than London's or York's, and less need to metaphorically to 'define' or 'defend' their corporate identity with lavish displays of wealth.

If the worsted weavers ever did use a building other than the civic guildhall for meetings, it was likely located in the Northern ward, or Ultra Aquam, where so many of the weavers lived and worked.<sup>107</sup> It may be that property was simply cheaper in the north, as it was neither close to the market district, nor was it one of the fashionable districts favoured by the wealthy.<sup>108</sup> Whatever the reason, by the end of the fifteenth century the northern ward was firmly associated with worsted weaving and remained so for several hundred years.

## Conclusion

The framers of the Ordinances for Crafts consciously modelled their ordinances on London's, as had the authors of the Composition of 1415. In the latter document, the authors had specifically referred to Norwich searchers having the same privileges as those exercised in London; and in the case of a livery, that 'alle Craftes yt wilbe Cladde shal be cladde after ye fourme of London'.<sup>109</sup> Given London's prominence, it is hardly surprising that they would seek to emulate its example. The capital outpaced every other town in England, not merely in terms of social prestige,

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<sup>106</sup> Giles, *Guildhalls and Social Identity in Late Medieval and Early Modern York, C.1350 - 1630*, 117.

<sup>107</sup> So called for being the only ward located on the far (northern) side of the river. See Map 9.1 on page 303 for the weavers' parishes of residence.

<sup>108</sup> The area around St George Tombland and Elm Hill, near the Cathedral, also seem to have been particularly fashionable in Norwich. The Pastons owned a townhouse in Elm Hill, and several fine early Tudor houses survive today in Tombland, including two owned by the mayor Augustine Styward.

<sup>109</sup> *Records*, vol. 1, 108.

political influence, and sheer wealth, but also in the development of a craft system. London had begun integrating its companies into the civic framework by the early fourteenth century, whereas the need to integrate the crafts in the provincial towns came much later. Without reaching the critical mass of a fully diversified craft industry, smaller towns simply had not felt the impetus to incorporate guilds as a formal element of civic governance. By the fifteenth century this was changing. Whether it was the increased sophistication of provincial governments, or the rapidly diversifying economy, provincial crafts were taking on more elements of public responsibility.

Heather Swanson saw this as an expression of exploitation, but that argument draws on sources written from the perspective of civic officials, such as the Ordinances for Crafts. Civic documentation will always seem one-sided in hindsight, because it preserves only a single viewpoint. Seen from another perspective, one can also argue that the guilds' new responsibilities were an indication of their maturity. It was a tacit admission that town governments lacked the resources and manpower to balance every aspect of urban life on their own. Towns were held together by a delicate, complex balance of social and moral expectations. They relied on an individual's integration into an overlapping network of religious, fraternal, political, and occupational groupings to generate the social cohesion necessary to keeping public order.<sup>110</sup> This requirement was rendered more difficult in towns where immigration was high and life expectancy was low, for it made kinship and communal ties less effective than they might have been elsewhere. Guilds were a natural additive to the process.

Guilds should be seen as actors in a relationship that was not always perfectly equitable, but nevertheless a relationship in which both sides profited from the association. Manufacturing guilds, such as the worsted weavers, logically had an interest in maintaining high standards; to do this, they actively needed the city's co-operation. By participating in civic governance, the crafts gained a legal position and

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<sup>110</sup> Haemers and Ryckbosch, 'A Targeted Public: Public Services in Fifteenth-Century Ghent and Bruges', 204; P. Lantschner, 'Revolts and the Political Order of Cities in the Late Middle Ages', *P&P*, 225 (2014), 8-9.

a measure of authority. By accepting the sanction of civic government, craft guilds shared in the political legitimacy of the city. Whereas many guilds certainly operated outside of this relationship as *de facto* associations, their participation as a civic actor gave them a greater share in the respectability earned by working on behalf of the commonalty. Their participation in the performance of civic ceremony, such as the mayor's riding, the Corpus Christi processions, the swearing in of the craft wardens, and even the public registration of guild ordinances, lent them legitimacy in the eyes of the public. It made the guild into an extension of the municipal framework of the city with all of the power of burghal law behind it.

Civic ordinances, which are normative in nature, are unfortunately some of the only extant written sources we have that directly address guild life outside of London. It is difficult not to take them strictly at face value, but we should remember to read against the grain as well as with it. In the case of Norwich, some of the supposed impositions on the guilds, which were outlined in the Ordinances for Crafts, cannot be independently corroborated in other sources.

More importantly, in spite of the heavy borrowings from the London companies, there is little to suggest that Norwich guilds adopted the same kind of internal hierarchies that were common to the London companies. Specifically, Norwich guilds do not seem to have been stratified between an elite group of liverymen and a rank-and-file membership. The reason could be simple pragmatism: Norwich guilds were far smaller, and probably could not have sustained two separate member bodies. Norwich guilds also had no Courts of Assistants, which were one further means of hierarchicalising the membership. Nor were masters elevated to some permanent higher status once elected, if the worsted weavers are an example of common practice. Masters cycled in and out of the role; some stayed for a run of several years, but many did not. As we will see in the second half of this thesis, the worsted weavers remained internally flexible and open to newcomers.

In the same vein, Norwich seems to have lacked any kind of formal yeomanry or journeyman guilds once the Ordinances for Crafts had been put into place. The document itself makes no mention of journeymen associations or rankings; it is

entirely possible, even probable, that if the *Bachery* were indeed implicated in the problems of the 1440s, that the settlement had swept away any official tolerance of journeymen guilds. While on the surface this may seem unreasonably restrictive, it is also possible to point to problems in other cities where relations between masters and journeymen were caused precisely by rivalries between competing organisations. The types of disputes between apprentices, journeymen, and masters that appear in the London sources are surprisingly absent from the Norwich municipal record.<sup>111</sup> The Norwich guilds possibly solved this problem by allowing journeymen simply to join the main body of the guild, or to serve as *de facto* members. Though the Ordinances for Crafts made nominal efforts to restrict guild membership to citizens only, the worsted weavers had non-citizens serving on their presentment juries.<sup>112</sup> By integrating competing interest groups into the main guild, they effectively diffused the natural tension that arises from a divided membership.

Norwich may be best known for its periods of 'disorder', but this may be a reputation undeserved. If the first half of the fifteenth century was troubled by political contention, the second half of the century was notably stable. Norwich's political settlement made the guilds into full-fledged corporate entities, whilst avoiding some of the structural limitations that sometimes came with greater corporate recognition. In London, for example, company membership was adopted as a test of electoral eligibility. From 1475, only company liverymen there were allowed to vote for the mayor and sheriffs.<sup>113</sup> In comparison, Hudson and Tingey commented that the Ordinances for Crafts seems to have opened civic government, rather than restricted it. 'Though one would hardly expect it from the language used, those in authority were conceding rights rather than curtailing them.'<sup>114</sup> The mayor's office had been occupied almost exclusively by men of the mercers' guild, yet within two decades after 1449, Norwich had mayors who were enrolled with the grocers,

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<sup>111</sup> Cohn, *Popular Protest in Late Medieval English Towns*, 57.

<sup>112</sup> This will be discussed in Chapter 7.

<sup>113</sup> Veale, *The English Fur Trade*, 105. All freemen continued to vote for the aldermen and common councillors.

<sup>114</sup> *Records*, vol. 2, li.

goldsmiths, dyers, drapers, and yes, the worsted weavers. Hudson and Tingey concluded their discussion of the Ordinances for Crafts by noting that it must have worked 'smoothly', for after 1449, 'little or nothing is heard of the craft gilds for nearly fifty years'.<sup>115</sup> The second half of this study will test this observation, using the example of the worsted weavers as a case study to illustrate the situation of craftsmen in the city between 1450 and 1530.

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<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, lii.

## **Part II**

### **The Worsted Weavers of Norwich**

## 5 | Craftsmen and the *cursus honorum*

The first part of this thesis considered the development of the medieval worsted as an international commodity. It framed this development within the contexts of long-distance trade, regional production, and local institutions. Chapters two, three, and four progressively narrowed the field of focus, starting with worsted cloth itself and the late medieval European cloth market, before moving on to examine how Norwich integrated rural cloth production into an urban regulatory framework, and concluding with the institutionalisation of Norwich's craft system in the fifteenth century.

The second part of this thesis looks at how economic development in the worsted industry impacted the relationship between occupational identity and social structure in late medieval Norwich. Did the late fifteenth-century commercial success of worsteds have a significant influence on the lives of the men who produced this cloth? Did the worsted boom overseas propel artisans into positions of local prominence? How did the guild system affect artisanal production in Norwich? Indeed, there is a direct correspondence between the late fifteenth century spike in worsted exports, and the rising social prominence of the Norwich worsted weavers. Worsteds' success overseas had a direct and tangible impact on the social structure of Norwich.

One of the primary questions in this part of the thesis concerns the extent to which an 'artisanal *cursus honorum*' existed in late medieval Norwich. Historians have long used the Roman idea of a political *cursus honorum*, or a set course of offices, as a means of analysing urban social structure. Though the phrase appeared sporadically in early twentieth-century writing on English towns, it was Charles Phythian-Adams who really brought the idea to bear in his seminal study of



Coventry published in 1979.<sup>1</sup> In it, he posits the existence of a 'career-cycle of the successful citizen', where the stages of adulthood are pegged to increasingly higher civic and institutional offices.<sup>2</sup> Since then, the term has appeared with increasing frequency, though not always with the same intention. The medieval *cursus honorum* has seldom been considered outside of its traditional application to the progression of political offices. Its usefulness as a model of social pathways between disparate civic institutions remains under-explored. Most studies use the idea of a *cursus* as a negative example of social stratification and as a barrier to social mobility.<sup>3</sup> This approach typically places the *cursus* solely within the context of civic government. Yet, by limiting its scope to civic office-holding, we lose sight of the full scope of a man's *public* career, and all of the other elements that combined to form his social identity.

In *The Desolation of a City*, Phythian-Adams devised a schematic model of how Coventry's *cursus*, or as he termed it, 'the career-cycle of the successful citizen', might have looked in the early sixteenth century (shown in Table 5.1). Most importantly, he included not only the traditional course of political offices, but also several other categories, including formal positions in the crafts, and membership in Coventry's two civic guilds, the Corpus Christi and the Trinity. However, he failed to include any life stages or personal achievements that were not directly connected to formal institutions. This type of model has proved useful; Andrew King used Phythian-Adams' example to devise his own model *cursus* for Norwich (shown in Table 5.2). King adapted the stages slightly to suit Norwich's different offices and guilds, but in general he did not deviate from the categories that Phythian-Adams had used. His model, like Phythian-Adams', is also less well suited to the career progression of artisans, and more towards an ideal mercantile career.

In his work on the Merchant Taylors of London, Davies argued for a slightly broader interpretation of how an artisanal *cursus* might look. He included some of

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<sup>1</sup>Phythian-Adams, *Desolation of a City*.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 126.

<sup>3</sup>See, for example, P. Clark and P. Slack, *English Towns in Transition, 1500-1700* (Oxford, 1976), 128-32; Rigby, *English Society*, 145-76; Swanson, *Medieval Artisans*, 120-5.

the less easily demarcated stages of an artisan's professional life, including that of waged labour.<sup>4</sup> Charlotte Carpenter also expanded on this point, adding the suggestion that the traditional *cursus honorum* 'interlocked' with an 'informal' *cursus honorum* through the holding of minor offices, such as low-level parish and guild roles.<sup>5</sup> Taking only a top-down view of the *cursus* puts too much emphasis on the 'end game' of donning the mayor's mantle, and not enough on the contribution of average citizens. For medieval town dwellers, the need to be in 'lot and scot' perfectly summed up the dual expectation that the perks of citizenship had to be balanced against the shared burdens of running a city. Far more men engaged in public service than the few who appear on the lists of mayors and aldermen. The challenge lies in expanding our view beyond the obvious echelon of high civic office.

A successful artisan was not merely a man who was elected to civic office; he could also be a householder, a citizen, an employer, a workshop owner, a guild member, a guild master, a fraternal brother, and a husband and father. We need a broader understanding of the greater urban *cursus honorum* if we are to understand the full extent of social manoeuvrability in the medieval city. Low- and mid-level opportunities existed for middling craftsman without requiring great personal wealth or extensive kinship connections, but understanding where and how these opportunities arose requires a different methodology. We need to look beyond the narrow *cursus honorum* of civic office to include the other pathways available to middling residents. Understanding that the *cursus honorum* was a broadly accessible social mechanism is important, because it demonstrates that urban society was not rigidly demarcated by occupational boundaries. Social mobility was a force for change in urban settings; the question is to what extent, and how, men were able to take advantage of this mechanism, and how high they might be propelled up the social ladder by following the available pathways.

Therefore, the second half of this study builds on the example set by Phythian-Adams and King, by using the life-cycle of citizens as a way to analyse

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<sup>4</sup> Davies, *The Tailors of London*, 151.

<sup>5</sup> Carpenter, *Urban Elites*, 248-73.

urban cohesion and social mobility within urban society.<sup>6</sup> I follow his approach, in viewing the *cursus honorum* more as an opportunity than an obstacle. A schematic of my understanding of what an artisan's *cursus honorum* might have looked like in late fifteenth century Norwich follows in Table 5.3. My model departs slightly from the other two by its inclusion of important life stages that were, as Carpenter suggested, 'interlocked' to the traditional *cursus honorum*. In particular, I have separated the categories of 'work' and 'guild', as the former did not necessarily require participation in the latter. I have also included a stage for personal achievements, such as home ownership, as the possession of space for a workshop was crucial to the career progression of an artisan. The structure of the following chapters broadly follows this model.

As a final note, this thesis uses Kowaleski's ranking system to label office-holders by the highest office they held during their lifetime.<sup>7</sup> The Ranks are as follows:

|        |                          |
|--------|--------------------------|
| Rank A | mayor, alderman, sheriff |
| Rank B | common council           |
| Rank C | constable                |
| Rank D | (no political office)    |

This provides a simple method of comparing the broader achievements of the worsted weavers with the more traditional way of measuring success via the civic *cursus honorum*.

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<sup>6</sup>Phythian-Adams, *Desolation of a City*, 71-184.

<sup>7</sup>For an explanation of her system, see Kowaleski, *Local Markets and Regional Trade in Medieval Exeter*, 102-4.

**Table 5.1:** Phythian-Adams's conceptualisation of Coventry's early sixteenth-century *cursus honorum*<sup>8</sup>**Table 8. *The career-cycle of the successful citizen through the formal institutions of the city*****(C.C.G. = Corpus Christi Gild T.G. = Trinity Gild)**

| Approx. age        | Craft fellowship                                                             | Gild                   | Civic office                                      | City Council                |
|--------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| c. 12–24<br>c. 25  | 'Young man'<br>New brother<br>(Summoner or beadle)                           |                        |                                                   |                             |
| c. 30              |                                                                              | New brother of C.C.G.  |                                                   |                             |
| early 30s<br>c. 40 | Junior Craft Officer<br>Senior Craft Officer<br>(except Mercers and Drapers) | C.C.G.                 | Chamberlain/<br>Warden<br>Ex-junior civic officer | Junior 24 of Common Council |
| mid-40s            | 'Ancient' of Craft<br>(Senior Craft office for Mercers and Drapers)          | C.C.G.<br>T.G.         | Sheriff<br>Ex-Sheriff                             |                             |
| Early 50s          | 'Ancient' of Craft<br>(occasional searcher)                                  | Master of C.C.G.       |                                                   | Junior 12 of Leet           |
| mid-50s            |                                                                              | T.G.<br>Master of T.G. | Mayor<br>T.G.<br>12 or 6 Alderman                 | Council House 12            |
| Sixties            |                                                                              | T.G.                   |                                                   |                             |

<sup>8</sup>Phythian-Adams, *Desolation of a City*, 126, with permission of Cambridge University Press.

**Table 5.2:** Andrew King's conceptualisation of Norwich's fifteenth-century *cursus honorum*<sup>9</sup>

| Age   | Craft                    | Gild of St George | Civic Offices                                        | Council Membership   | Higher Civic Office                              |
|-------|--------------------------|-------------------|------------------------------------------------------|----------------------|--------------------------------------------------|
| 10-20 | Apprentice               |                   |                                                      |                      |                                                  |
| 20-30 | Freeman                  |                   |                                                      |                      |                                                  |
| 30-40 | Craft master or searcher | Member            | Constable<br>Chamberlains'<br>Counsellor             |                      |                                                  |
| 40-50 |                          | Collector         | Chamberlain<br>Senior<br>Chamberlains'<br>Counsellor | Common<br>Counsellor |                                                  |
| 50-60 |                          | Master            | Auditor /<br>Supervisor                              | Alderman             | Sheriff                                          |
| 60+   |                          |                   |                                                      |                      | Mayor and<br>J.P.<br><br>Member of<br>Parliament |

<sup>9</sup> King, *Borough Finances*, Table 6.1 (unpaginated).

**Table 5.3:** Suggested model for a late fifteenth-century artisanal *cursus honorum*, based on a prosopographical analysis of the Norwich worsted weavers

| Age | Work                        | Craft                        | Civic Office          | Guild of St George | Personal  |
|-----|-----------------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------|--------------------|-----------|
| 10  |                             |                              |                       |                    |           |
|     | Apprentice                  |                              |                       |                    |           |
| 20  |                             |                              |                       |                    |           |
|     | Journeyman /<br>wage earner |                              |                       |                    |           |
|     |                             | Freeman                      | Constable             |                    |           |
| 30  |                             | Jury member,<br>presentments |                       |                    |           |
|     | Independent<br>workshop     | Apprentice<br>master         | Common<br>council     | Member             | homeowner |
| 40  |                             | Guild master                 | Financial<br>offices  |                    |           |
|     |                             |                              |                       | Feastmaker         |           |
|     |                             |                              | Sheriff /<br>Alderman | Common<br>council  |           |
| 50+ |                             |                              | Mayor                 |                    |           |
|     |                             |                              |                       | Guild master       |           |
|     |                             |                              |                       |                    | probate   |

## 6 | The profession of worsted weaving

Most people are familiar with the archetypical stages of progression through which craftsmen passed as they worked their way up the career ladder. Though we almost always couple the idea of a carefully gradated hierarchy of ‘apprenticeship, journeyman, master’ with the guild system, in truth these stages probably predated the guild system, and only became attached to and regulated by the guilds at a much later date. In Norwich, even in the late fifteenth century, a craftsman could still ascend through each of these career stages with little or no formal affiliation with the his guild. Apprenticeship in Norwich seems to have been overseen by the city, as evidenced by the civic registers. The status of journeymen in Norwich is ambiguous, at best; whether the guilds regulated waged work, or allowed journeymen to form fraternities and associations of their own, remains unknown. The final stage in a craftsman’s career progression would have been achieving autonomy by operating an independent workshop. Yet unless the man in question wanted to take apprentices, or hire outside labour, or buy and sell at wholesale or retail – all of which were protected as benefits of the franchise – a craftsman in Norwich was probably free to operate a family-run business without further need for formal involvement in his craft. This chapter will look at the purely vocational aspects of progressing from apprentice to master weaver.

## 6.1 Apprenticeship and training

Many professional careers began in adolescence with the agreement of a formal apprenticeship indenture. Although there are no manuals or training regimens that have come down to us, it is logical to assume that training for a career in manufacturing would differ from the training for a career in mercantile trading and wholesaling. The successful completion of a weaving apprenticeship would ideally provide a trainee with the skills he needed to run a workshop and produce cloths, whereas a merchant's apprentice would learn accounting systems, inventory management, and the ins and outs of establishing long-distance contacts, and managing credit networks.

Did artisanal masters rely more heavily on apprentice labour than their mercantile counterparts? The practical difference between the two types of occupations suggests this possibility. Trading required capital investment to scale up a merchant's volume of business. Artisanal manufacturing, on the other hand, scaled up linearly by labour input. Without automation, manual production could only increase with the addition of more craftsmen. An independent weaving master who wanted to expand output from his workshop had to employ more labour. If a man's family members did not satisfy his needs, his only other choice was to take on apprentices or to hire journeymen. Of the two, apprentice labour was the cheaper way to occupy looms. Even if apprentices were not fully skilled in their younger years, the wider, two-seat looms were ideal for training an apprentice with a more experienced weaver at his side.<sup>1</sup>

Apprenticeships offered more than just advanced training for young men. In many towns, successful apprentices were given preferential treatment for entry to the franchise, should they choose to take advantage of it. The normal fee in Norwich for entry to the freedom by redemption was usually 20s. Successful apprentices,

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<sup>1</sup> Hovland notes that journeymen or waged employees were often responsible for training apprentices in learning specific skills. S. R. Hovland, *Apprenticeship in Later Medieval London, C.1300-C.1530*, Ph.D thesis (Royal Holloway, University of London, 2006), 98-9.



however, enjoyed a reduced fee of 13s 4d.<sup>2</sup> Thousands of youths in Norwich entered the freedom this way, though unfortunately there is little direct evidence of their training, save the name of their apprentice master which might appear in the Assembly minutes or the Old Free Book. There are no extant registers of apprenticeship kept by any of the crafts, and the city's registers of apprentices only survive from 1512.<sup>3</sup>

Norwich, like other towns, spent much of the fifteenth century attempting to bring apprenticeship under the legal purview of the city. The Composition of 1415 had directed that all apprenticeships were to last a minimum of seven years, and that masters were to enrol their apprentices with the chamber within a year and a day lest they risk forfeiting their freedom.<sup>4</sup> The seven year minimum term was undoubtedly copied from London, which had employed it since at least the fourteenth century.<sup>5</sup> However, the order to enrol all contracts seems to have been ineffectual, for no registers survive from the fifteenth century. The directive was repeated in the Ordinances for Crafts of 1449, with the amendment that non-compliance to register indentures within a year and day would dissolve any apprentice contract not enrolled with the city, leaving the apprentice free from any further obligation.<sup>6</sup> Again, the order seems to have been largely ignored, and there are no registers to indicate that any effort was made by the city to enforce compliance. The order was

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<sup>2</sup> See, for instance, NRO NCR 16d/1, Books of Proceedings, f. 86r, where William Wafyn, grocer and un-apprenticed, paid 20s, while John Cook, fishman and apprentice to William Penyston, paid only 13s 4d. Unfortunately, few of the assembly rolls indicate how much applicants paid.

<sup>3</sup> York by comparison has a fragmentary register of weaver apprentices that dates to c.1450-1505. It is that city's only medieval register of apprentices. York, City Archives, Register of Apprentices, D11. Transcribed in *The Indentures of the Weavers' Apprentices of York, 1450-1505*, ed. by H. Swanson and P. Stell (York, 2000).

<sup>4</sup> *Records*, vol. 1, 106.

<sup>5</sup> Hovland estimated that seven years had been the custom since at least 1365. It was described as being of 'ancient and established usage' in London's *Liber Albus* in the fifteenth century. Hovland, *Apprenticeship*, 152. Coventry's apprenticeships seem to have varied in length until a civic ordinance of 1494 mandated a seven year minimum term. Prior to that, the carpenters had expected a minimum of five years, while the grocers and drapers required nine. Phythian-Adams, *Desolation of a City*, 84; *Coventry Leet Book*, vol. 1-2, 553-4.

<sup>6</sup> *Records*, vol. 2, 291.

repeated yet again by the City Assembly in 1512.<sup>7</sup> It is unclear why this order was effectual when the others were not, but from November 1512, records of apprentice enrolments begin to be appended to the city's annual court rolls.<sup>8</sup> 140 of the early entries are for retroactive enrolments, which provide details about contracts that had commenced between 1504/5 (20 Henry VII) and 1511/2 (3 Henry VIII). Between 1512 and 1530, the end of the period of this study, 475 indentures were enrolled with the city.

An unexplained oddity of the first register is that nearly all of the apprenticeships enrolled with the city in the first register were for apprentices of worsted weavers. Only 18 of the 475 entries up to 1530 were not apprenticed to worsted weavers: eight of them were apprenticed to masons, two to grocers, two to carpenters, two to butchers, and one each to a skinner, a bladesmith, a goldbeater, and a parchment-maker.<sup>9</sup> Given this admixture of crafts, it seems unlikely that the enrolments on the court rolls could be copies of internal registers kept by the Worsteds Weavers. If any such registers did exist in the fifteenth century, they have been lost; the Ordinances for Crafts of 1449 makes no mention of internal craft registers.<sup>10</sup> It was not until the late 1540s, with the commencement of the city's third apprentice register, that the number of other craft enrolments began to rise.<sup>11</sup>

The defective nature of the first register is reinforced by the number of men who provided the name of an apprentice master upon taking the freedom, but for whom no enrolled apprenticeship survives. Nor are such lacunae limited to the late

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 108.

<sup>8</sup> NRO NCR 1/22, Apprenticeship indentures. These are appended to Court Roll 22 and run to 1541. They appear as document 'A' in Millican and Rising's index. This was followed by document 'B', which were enrolments made between 1541 and 1547 in a Chamberlain's account book. NRO NCR 18a/4.

<sup>9</sup> The apprentice enrolment of John Carter to Thomas Rysing gave no occupation for Rysing, but he had joined the freedom as a worsted weaver. *Norwich Apprentices*, 33; NRO NCR 1/22, Apprenticeship indentures, 29d.

<sup>10</sup> From 1622, a re-issue of the Ordinances for Crafts added the stipulation that the crafts were to keep their own registers internally in addition to the city enrolments, and that these should on occasion be produced for the Town Clerk to look over. *Norwich Apprentices*, xiii.

<sup>11</sup> The third register, which is Rising and Millican's document 'C', covers 1548 to 1581. NRO NCR 17d/1, f. 1-105.

medieval period. Rising and Millican analysed the 15,000 freedom entries that were enrolled in Norwich between 1512 and 1752. Of the roughly 7,000 citizens who took their freedom as a former apprentice, Millican and Rising could only locate enrolled apprenticeships in the city registers for half, suggesting that as many as 50% of former apprentices did not have their contracts enrolled.<sup>12</sup> Enrolments in the early years were even scarcer. 57 worsted weaver freedom entries made in the years between 1512 and 1530 included the name of the master who had trained them, but only 16, or 28%, of those men had a matching apprentice enrolment on the city's register. For other crafts, that number is virtually nil.

The larger a town, the greater was its potential to draw in labour and apprentices from far afield.<sup>13</sup> Medieval cities struggled to sustain their populations; most relied on immigration to replenish high losses to early mortality, and apprenticeship was one of the main processes by which cities were able to attract immigrants. As the realm's largest city, London was able to attract apprentices from every county in England, plus a good number of youths from Wales and Ireland.<sup>14</sup> Hovland estimated that the majority of London's medieval apprentices had not been born in London.<sup>15</sup> Given the lack of provincial apprentice registers that survive before the sixteenth century, it is difficult to compare geographic origins in any detail, but if sixteenth-century trends are any indication, then towns the size of Norwich should have been relatively successful at attracting apprentices. From the sixteenth century, the evidence for apprentice migration becomes plentiful. In Bristol, for example, over

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<sup>12</sup> *Norwich Apprentices*, xii.

<sup>13</sup> There has been considerable work done on migration into the larger English towns. See, for example, E. Rutledge, 'Immigration and Population Growth in Early Fourteenth-Century Norwich: Evidence From the Tithing Roll', *Urban History*, 15 (1988), 15-30; P. McClure, 'Patterns of Migration in the Late Middle Ages: The Evidence of English Place-Name Surnames', *EcHR*, 32 (1979), 167-182; R. B. Dobson, 'Admissions to the Freedom of the City of York in the Later Middle Ages', *EcHR*, 26 (1973-01-01), 1-22; D. M. Palliser, 'A Regional Capital as Magnet: Immigrants to York, 1477-1566', *Yorkshire Archaeological Journal*, 57 (1985), 111-123; S. Penn, 'The Origins of Bristol Migrants in the Early Fourteenth Century: The Surname Evidence', *Transactions of the Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society*, 101 (1983), 123-130.

<sup>14</sup> Hovland, *Apprenticeship*, 61-71.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 60.

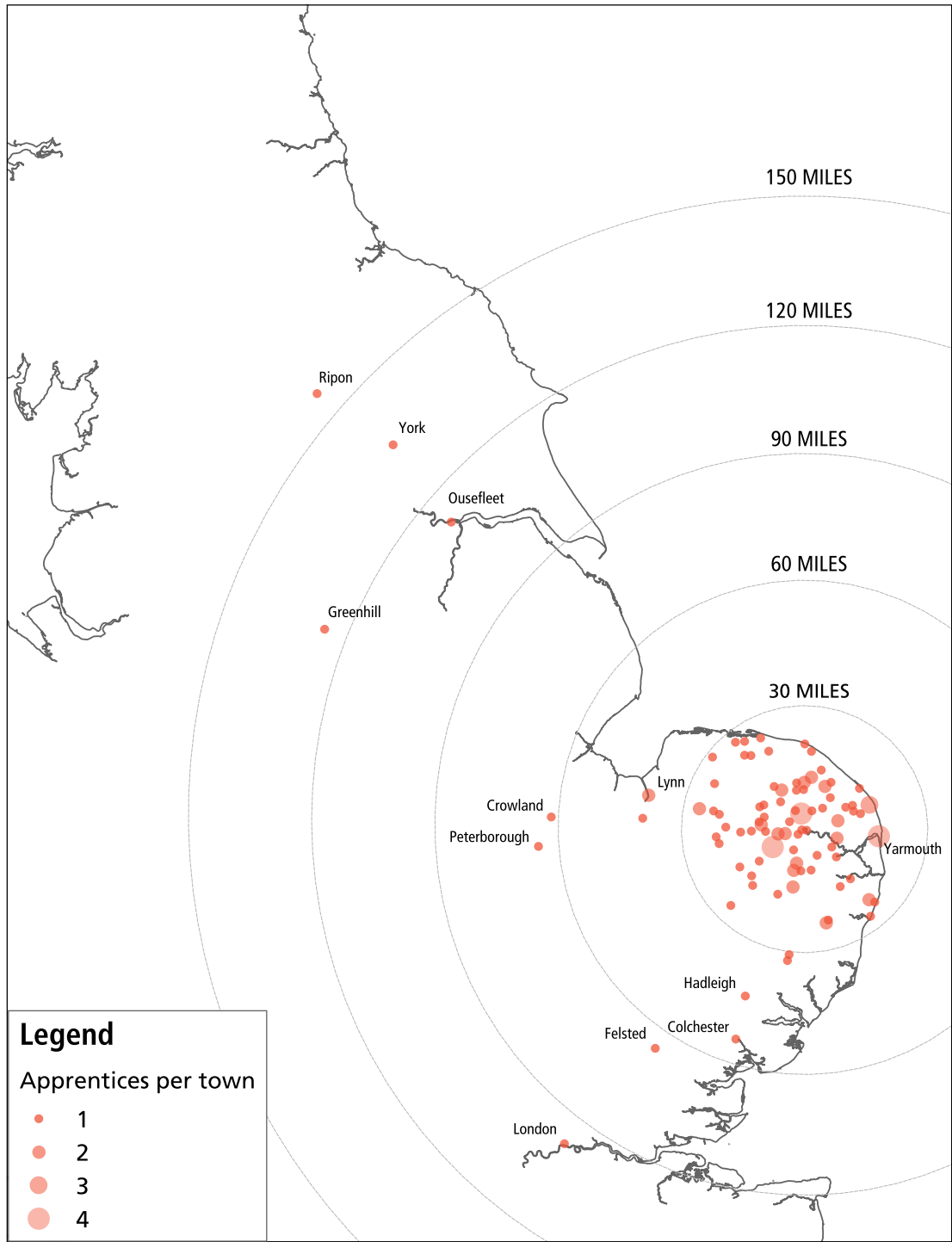
78% of apprentices registered between 1542 and 1565 gave a place of origin as outside of Bristol.<sup>16</sup>

**Table 6.1:** Norwich apprentice origins, 1504-1530

|                            | N   | No origin | East Anglia |         |         |       | Other |
|----------------------------|-----|-----------|-------------|---------|---------|-------|-------|
|                            |     |           | Norwich     | Norfolk | Suffolk | Essex |       |
| All apprentices            | 475 | 293       | 49          | 104     | 16      | 2     | 11    |
| Worsted weaver apprentices | 457 | 289       | 47          | 99      | 13      | 2     | 7     |
| Other crafts               | 18  | 4         | 2           | 5       | 3       | -     | 4     |

Yet Norwich's ability to attract worsted weaving apprentices from outside its immediate hinterland was surprisingly limited. As noted in Chapter 3, most of the city's apprentices came from the worsted weaving areas of Norfolk. Of the 475 contracts enrolled before 1530, 457 were with worsted weavers, and 168 supply a place of origin. The breakdown is shown in Table 6.1 and in Map 6.1. The vast majority of the worsted weaver apprentices, 96%, came from one of the East Anglian counties. Only 4% did not. Furthermore, of the 161 youths from East Anglia, 146 of them (84%), came from Norfolk or Norwich. Of the few weaving apprentices who came from outside East Anglia, only one hailed from London, two from Lincolnshire, three from Yorkshire, including one from the city of York, and one from Derbyshire. These figures seem small when compared to other towns of its size, but the difference could stem from several factors. It highlights the close connection within the worsted industry between Norwich and Norfolk. It also points up the the highly localised nature of worsted weaving in general. Cloth production was probably more regionalised than other industries, depending as it did on the availability of wool types and qualities. It suggests that the skills specific to worsted weaving were not

<sup>16</sup> A. Yarbrough, 'Apprentices as Adolescents in Sixteenth Century Bristol', *Journal of Social History*, 13 (1979), 68.



**Map 6.1:** Place of origin of enrolled Norwich worsted weaver apprentices, 1504-1530

perceived to be readily transferable outside of Norfolk. If the availability of Norfolk wool was as crucial to worsted weaving as has been suggested in Chapter 2, then it made little sense for families in other regions to send their sons to Norwich to learn to weave worsteds, when other, local options were available closer to home.

Certainly, a family must have believed there was a tangible advantage to sending their sons to train away from home -- and one suspects, the further the distance, the higher the perceived benefit.

Sending a child away for specialised training was no guarantee, however, that he would complete his training successfully. In fact, large numbers of apprentices left their training early. Davies' comparison of drop-out rates in fifteenth-century London estimated that only around half of the Mercers' apprentices and 35% of the Tailors' apprentices finished their training and took up their freedom of the city.<sup>17</sup> By the sixteenth century, it became normal for the London livery companies to track the progression of their apprentices through the stages of their careers, from training, to freedom, shop-holder, liveryman, and so on.<sup>18</sup> Rappaport's study of these later registers concluded with roughly similar retention rates.<sup>19</sup> As the Norwich crafts left no such registers, we can only guess at retention rates by matching the names of apprentices with names on the freedom rolls.<sup>20</sup> Rising and Millican were able to pair only around 1,500 of the apprenticeship enrolments made between 1512 and 1750 to the 15,000 names on the freedom rolls, which suggests a take-up rate of around 10%. The rate is marginally lower for the worsted weavers in this study. Of the 457 worsted weavers who apprenticed before 1530, only 16 of them can be positively matched to later freedom entries, with a further 13 matches that are probable.<sup>21</sup> This would imply that as few as 6% of weaver apprentices successfully finished their

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<sup>17</sup> Davies, *The Tailors of London*, 193-5.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 193.

<sup>19</sup> Rappaport, *Worlds Within Worlds*, Appendix 2, 394-5.

<sup>20</sup> This is admittedly problematic, as both the apprentice enrolments and freedom entries are defective in coverage.

<sup>21</sup> The 16 firm matches provide the name of the master both in the freedom entry and in the apprentice enrolment. The 13 probable matches are based purely on matching the names in the indentures with a later worsted weaver freedom entry.

training and stayed to take up the freedom of the city. However, it should be noted that this statistic is skewed by the number of apprenticeships that went unrecorded.

This high drop-out rate of apprentices has often been used to argue for the inadequacy of a system in which apprentices did not subsequently assimilate into urban society. Rising and Millican, for instance, after commenting that many apprentices simply up and left for home, went on to ponder how much of the 'failure' of apprentices to enter the freedom should be attributed to high urban mortality rates.<sup>22</sup> Those apprentices deemed to be 'successes' were the ones who opted to become citizens. However, this attitude is problematic, for it puts too much weight on completion as the only goal of an apprenticeship. It ignores the question of skill acquisition, and has likely been coloured by a failure to recognise that a family's motivation for sending their children away from home to learn a trade could differ from the reasons that adults migrated in search of work.

Families who chose to send their sons away for training did so for a variety of reasons. Given the cost of an apprenticeship, it is very likely that the wishes of the youth's family played a role in this decision. For some, the acquisition of technical skills was a means of enhancing the family business; for such boys, there was likely no intention of remaining in Norwich.<sup>23</sup> In fact, the role that apprenticeships played in disseminating skills across the region was in all likelihood a positive thing. An apprentice had probably learned enough to work independently by year four or five of their training.<sup>24</sup> Rappaport estimated that in the sixteenth century, the vast majority of London apprentices who failed to complete their training did so because they returned home after having learned enough to carry on in that trade.<sup>25</sup> For many boys, their sole goal may have been to set themselves up as independent weavers in their home towns. Even if they did not complete their full terms, they still returned home with practical knowledge and personal contacts. Apprenticeship was a crucial means of circulating technical knowledge in a society that is often characterised by

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<sup>22</sup> *Norwich Apprentices*, xii.

<sup>23</sup> Hovland, *Apprenticeship*, 38.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 92-4; Davies, *The Tailors of London*, 196.

<sup>25</sup> Rappaport, *Worlds Within Worlds*, 314-5.

high asymmetries of information. For the country worsted weavers, sending their sons to Norwich was a way to keep abreast of advances in technology and fashion, and of improving contacts between town and country, or between market centre and hinterland. The best example of the usefulness of such contacts is seen in the equal representation of county weavers at the worsted weavers' search presentment juries.

Though apprenticeship could be a means of furthering a family business, it was also a means of expanding a child's occupational opportunities beyond the familial occupation. Though some of the apprentices' fathers were themselves weavers, many were not, and training in the city was for many a means of upward occupational mobility. Of the families from outside Norwich, 41 fathers provided their occupation in the enrolled indentures. Only six of the 41 were weavers, including three worsted weavers, two woollen weavers, and a linen weaver. The remaining 35 fathers represented a mix of skilled and unskilled backgrounds. The majority lived from agriculture, with sixteen identifying as husbandmen and four as yeomen. The remainder represented a mix of occupations, including a carpenter, a cook, a cooper, a mason, a shearman, a shipman, a smith, a spooner, a tailor, a thaxter, a gentleman, a draper, and a labourer. Of the families who already lived in Norwich, there was also a distribution of occupations, though in this case weavers were more prominent. Of the 49 fathers listed, 17 were worsted weavers, one was a coverlet weaver, and one was a thick woollen weaver. In addition, of the 16 Norwich men who did not provide an occupation, at least four of them were also worsted weavers. There was also a range of other occupations, including a carpenter, a cooper, a fuller, three labourers, a pattenmaker, a rafman, a sawyer, a barber, a shoemaker, a smith, and two tailors. This range correlates to similar findings for London. Hovland found that fewer than 25% of apprentices who appeared before the Mayor's Court were training in the same field as that in which their father worked.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Hovland, *Apprenticeship*, 39. Thrupp's study of aldermen's sons in London showed that less than two-thirds of the sons in her sample followed their fathers' occupations in London between c.1300 and 1500. In the second half of the fifteenth century, only 50% did so. Thrupp, *The Merchant Class*, 205. Veale's study of London skinners found an even more pronounced discrepancy: only 5 of 132 youths apprenticed between 1496 and 1515 had fathers who also were skinners. Veale, *The English Fur Trade*, 95.



While there were ‘worsted weaving families’ in Norwich, like the Skowes, the Mannyns, or the Wilkyns, where several generations of sons took up worsted weaving like their fathers, there is little evidence that occupations in Norwich were expected to be hereditary. That these sons followed in their fathers’ footsteps may have had more to do with the economic attraction of worsted weaving over other occupations. The fact that a draper, a rafman, and a gentleman chose to send their sons to train with worsted weavers gives some indication that the craft may have been looked on favourably, even by parents in high-status occupations.<sup>27</sup>

As shown in Table 6.2, most of the Norwich apprentice enrolments were contracted to last the minimum term of seven years.<sup>28</sup> A significant number, however, did surpass the minimum. 37% of the contracts lasted eight years or more. Only four boys contracted for less than the minimum term.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Although apprentices were almost always boys, girls also sometimes received formal training, especially in fields like silk throwing or embroidering. Hovland, *Apprenticeship*, 42; M. K. Dale, ‘The London Silkwomen of the Fifteenth Century’, *EcHR*, 4 (1933), 324-335. In Norwich, there were no girls enrolled in the period considered for this study. For more on the apprenticeship of girls, see, for example, R. Goddard, ‘Female Apprenticeship in the West Midlands in the Later Middle Ages’, *Midland History*, 27 (2013), 165-181; C. M. Barron, ‘The Education and Training of Girls in Fifteenth-Century London’, in *Courts, Counties and the Capital in the Later Middle Ages*, ed. by D. Dunn (Stroud, 1996), 139-153; B. Hanawalt, *Growing Up in Medieval London* (Oxford, 1993), 142-44.

<sup>28</sup> Two enrolments did not provide the length of term of the contract.

<sup>29</sup> There were instances where masters died during an apprentice’s term of training. In some cases, the wife took over the responsibility for the completion of a training contract. This is noted in a few of the worsted weavers’ wills. John Kyng left directions in his will that his wife, Emma, should see out his apprentices’ indentures, with the assistance of his eldest son Robert. See Kyng’s will, ANF, Liber 2a (Bulwer), 15. But sometimes a wife was unwilling, or unable, to take on this responsibility, and so apprentices might be transferred to new masters to finish out their years of training, in some cases with new contracts that stipulated the shorter terms of the agreements. Hovland, *Apprenticeship*, 91-2.

**Table 6.2:** Length of Norwich apprentice indentures, 1504-1530

|                  | 3-6 years | 7 years | 8 years | 9 years | 10 years | 11 years |
|------------------|-----------|---------|---------|---------|----------|----------|
| Nr of indentures |           |         |         |         |          |          |
| Worsted weavers  | 4         | 279     | 135     | 20      | 13       | 3        |
| Other crafts     | 0         | 12      | 3       | 2       | 2        | 0        |
| Total            | 4         | 291     | 138     | 22      | 15       | 3        |

Some master-apprenticeship relationships developed into close personal ties.<sup>30</sup> We see this in the testamentary bequests that some of the weavers made to their apprentices. Robert Swanton, for instance, left his apprentice Robert Fissare a cash bequest of 6s 8d.<sup>31</sup> Robert Rose went even further, leaving 12d to every one of his apprentices ‘that now be or have been’.<sup>32</sup> Others provided equipment. Thomas Hemmyng asked that his apprentice, William Fennyng, be given a worsted loom, four cloths, and ‘xx/iiij [80] dosyn Woffe [weft]’.<sup>33</sup>

To what extent did a choice of master affect one’s later life? Did apprenticeship with a well-connected or affluent master commute to other quantifiable advantages? Apprentices who lived with their masters for many years, we must assume, had the opportunity not only to learn a trade, but also to develop personal relationships with other men of the trade or other apprentices. It would be logical to assume that affective ties between master and apprentice created social advantages for the apprentices of higher-status masters in contexts where social networking played an important role. Rappaport and Davies found that high-status masters in London tended to have apprentices who themselves became liverymen.<sup>34</sup> Similarly, Frost argued that ‘from an early age many aldermen-to-be became

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 118-129; Veale, *The English Fur Trade*, 99.

<sup>31</sup> NRO, NCC Johnson 18.

<sup>32</sup> TNA PROB 11/11/154.

<sup>33</sup> TNA PROB 11/14/283.

<sup>34</sup> Rappaport, *Worlds Within Worlds*, 349; Davies, *The Tailors of London*, 144-5.

acquainted with the household of a successful and ambitious citizen', and found that 20.5% of her sample of Norwich's aldermen had themselves been apprenticed to aldermen.<sup>35</sup>

**Table 6.3:** A comparison of worsted weavers and merchants who apprenticed 1450-1520, then took the freedom. Apprentices and their masters are correlated by the highest civic office that each achieved.<sup>36</sup>

|          | Worsted Weavers |             |             |           | Merchants |             |             |           |
|----------|-----------------|-------------|-------------|-----------|-----------|-------------|-------------|-----------|
|          | N               | Apprentices |             |           | N         | Apprentices |             |           |
|          |                 | Rank<br>A   | Rank<br>B+C | Rank<br>D |           | Rank<br>A   | Rank<br>B+C | Rank<br>D |
| Masters  |                 |             |             |           |           |             |             |           |
| Rank A   | 21              | 1           | 5           | 15        | 77        | 22          | 13          | 42        |
| Rank B+C | 60              | 1           | 26          | 33        | 13        | 3           | 4           | 6         |
| Rank D   | 55              | 1           | 20          | 34        | 44        | 7           | 10          | 27        |
| Total    | 136             | 3           | 51          | 82        | 134       | 32          | 27          | 75        |

As there is no evidence for a liveried class of guildsmen in Norwich, I have, like Frost, compared the political involvement of masters and apprentices to consider whether craftsmen profited in the same way from having apprenticed with a politically-active master. I have compared the political participation of 136 worsted weaver apprentices and 134 merchant apprentices with the office-holding of their masters. As Table 6.3 (left side) shows, the master with whom a worsted weaver apprentice trained had little impact on the youth's future civic career. Yet when comparing weaver apprentices to merchant apprentices (right side, Table 6.3), a noticeable difference emerges. Rank A merchant apprentices were far more likely to have trained under a Rank A master. Of the 77 known merchant apprentices who

<sup>35</sup> Frost, *The Aldermen of Norwich*, 55.

<sup>36</sup> The merchant freedoms in this sample include the four leading mercantile guilds in Norwich: Mercers, Grocers, Drapers, and Rafmen.

did, and who subsequently enrolled their freedom as a mercer, a draper, a grocer, or a rafman, 16% of them went on to hold Rank A offices themselves. In comparison, only 0.7% of the weavers did the same.<sup>37</sup>

There are two possible conclusions to draw from the data. The first is that patronage could have worked differently for the two groups. Merchant culture and business was predicated on trust networks, and merchants may have employed this type of social interchange more effectively within urban social circles. The second possible conclusion is that the higher success rates of the youths apprenticed to Rank A merchants was not caused by apprenticing to high-status masters, but rather was a side effect of their own families' abilities to purchase apprenticeships with high-status masters. In other words, the correlation seen in the other studies does not necessarily imply causation. The accumulated wealth of the merchant class meant that merchants' sons were more likely to possess the unseen advantages of familial prestige, social connections, and inherited wealth, all of which would have contributed to a greater likelihood of him attaining high office. It should also be noted that the two conclusions are not necessarily mutually exclusive, and that both may have worked to the greater advantage of merchant apprentices.

## 6.2 Journeymen

Little can be said with any certainty about the lives of journeymen weavers in Norwich once they had finished their training. For young men in their twenties, the initial years of their adulthood was often given over to working as waged labor in the workshops of other men. There was an expectation that these young men fresh out of their training should first work under the direction of another master before setting themselves up as independent craftsmen.<sup>38</sup> However, one of the difficulties of

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<sup>37</sup> It should be noted that entry to the freedom by patrimony often went unrecorded. Thus, these numbers could underrepresent successful office-holders who trained with their fathers and became citizens, but for whom no formal record of training survives.

<sup>38</sup> Hovland, *Apprenticeship*, 40.

knowing how many unenfranchised weavers were working in Norwich is the fact that they are nearly invisible in the documentary record. Unlike apprentices, the status of journeymen was often ill-defined by the crafts.<sup>39</sup> As the Norwich crafts did not seem to regulate journeyman or to keep registers of them, we often only catch glimpses of them indirectly.

Some journeymen who had followed in the career paths of their fathers stayed to work in the family business, probably with the hope of inheriting it in later years. It is clear from the will of John Kyng that either one or both of his sons were working in his workshop at the time of his death, and he tasked his eldest son Robert with its oversight after his death.<sup>40</sup> Others lived with their masters, and in some cases, integrated closely into the families they served.<sup>41</sup> Contracts could be short-term agreements covering days or weeks, or longer contracts of a year or more. One example of such an agreement is hinted at in the will of the worsted weaver Henry Scolhous. He left a large cash bequest in his will of 1515 to his servants 'Pope and Barbour', provided that after his death they continued to work under the direction of his widow, to the terms of their indenture:

To Pope and Barbour my [Ser]v[e]ntes if they doo diligently ther [Ser]vices to my wyffe ther mastres xl s to be paid evenly divided amonge them too and above ther salary of ther indentures.<sup>42</sup>

No apprenticeship enrolment survives for either Pope or Barbour, though both did attain their freedoms within a decade of Scolhous' passing.<sup>43</sup> John Pope apprenticed under Scolhous, and it appears that he continued to work for him once his training

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<sup>39</sup> The Ordinances for Crafts does not define how the relationship between masters and journeymen was to function, but it does stipulate that non-citizens were 'ne to haue an hyred man but if he may not use hise crafte alone and wip oute helpe'. *Records*, vol. 2, 289.

<sup>40</sup> ANF Liber 2a (Bulwer), 15.

<sup>41</sup> See above, page 220.

<sup>42</sup> PROB 11/18/364, fo. 147v. Scolhous was equally generous to his other household servants, leaving Alice Harydaunce 'my [Ser]vant' for her 'diligent service' a black gowne and 6s 8d to pay for tailoring, and to Thomasina 'my [Ser]vant', 20s to put towards her marriage.

<sup>43</sup> John Pope entered the freedom as the former apprentice of Henry Scolhous in 1524/5. A John Barber, worsted weaver, entered the freedom in 1526/7.

was finished. As there is no indication of when either man entered the workforce, it is impossible to know when Pope ceased serving under Scolhous as an apprentice and began working as a journeyman. However, the wording of Scolhous's will implies that both men had entered into a contractual agreement with him for a set salary.

The wording of Scolhous's will also highlights a second problem of the sources when dealing with journeymen employees. In the Norwich sources, journeymen were often referred to as 'servants'. This description was complicated by the fact that the word servant at the time was also used to refer to apprentices, and it is not always clear to which category a document might refer.<sup>44</sup> In the example of the will of Thomas Hemmyng, he describes Will Fennyng only as 'my servant'.<sup>45</sup> Fennyng took his freedom two years after Hemmyng's passing, but it is impossible to know from the will whether Fennyng was still an apprentice at the time or had stayed on to continue working with Hemmyng. A second example, that of Thomas Swan, another worsted weaver, appears in the surviving fragment of the 1515 city assessment for the Northern ward.<sup>46</sup> Swan was assessed for 8s 6d. His name was followed by five other names, who together were labelled as his 'servants takyng noon wages', and the way in which they were clustered together implies that the five men were living at Swan's premises. In the case of Swan, at least three of the young men listed as his 'servants' were more likely to have been his apprentices than his journeymen. John Munford had apprenticed with Swan in 1508/9, Christopher Sanders in 1509/10, and Edmund Kyng in 1511/12.<sup>47</sup> The other two could also have been apprentices, though their names appear neither in the enrolled records, nor in the freedom entries, nor in the lists of jury members for the guild, making it difficult

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<sup>44</sup> This was also the case elsewhere; see Hulton, *Urban Weavers*, 5.12. Even Hudson and Tingey ran afoul of this in their translation of an order of the Assembly of 1518. Their translation read that no artificer shall employ 'apprentices' working by the day, with a footnote to indicate that the original Latin text had used the term 'servant'. *Records*, vol. 2, 110.

<sup>45</sup> TNA PROB 11/14/283.

<sup>46</sup> NRO NCR 7i.

<sup>47</sup> NRO NCR Case 1/22, ff. 3d and 4r. Mundford's term of apprenticeship was for seven years, so he may have been finished or close to completion at the time of the assessment.

to know what their status was when the tax was assessed. Given that they are specifically listed as taking no wages, it seems more likely that they, too, were still under the terms of their apprenticeship, rather than working as contracted labour.<sup>48</sup>

These records underscore the inherent ambiguity of the term 'servant' and the difficulty in determining the status of the men so named. It is improbable, however, that skilled weavers would enter a contractual relationship in which the only remuneration was room and board. Such an agreement would deeply disadvantage young craftsmen, for they would not be able to set aside any savings to put toward their futures. Hulton estimated that a 'young man' of the craft, working outside of London, and skilled enough to produce high-quality textiles, could have earned as much as 4s per week, quite enough to pay for room and board, and still have something to put aside for the future.<sup>49</sup> The ability to save money would have been a necessary step for any journeyman hoping to advance to the next stage of a skilled weaver's life, that of becoming an independent workshop proprietor.

### 6.3 Independent masters

Becoming an independent master required more than just skill. Craftsmen also needed working capital to cover the setup costs for equipment and a workspace. The first cost a young weaver might face would be for a loom. The price of a professional loom could equal or even exceed the cost of purchasing the freedom. Whereas citizenship for a completed apprenticeship in Norwich was only 13s 4d, the cost of a loom and its equipment could go as high as £1 or more. Britnell found two references to the cost of looms in the court records of Colchester, where each loom was valued

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<sup>48</sup> Another of the worsted weavers, John Clarke, also appears in the assessment. He, too, has four servants, also taking no wages, all of whom were enrolled as his apprentices: Herry Somer, John Anger, John Warnes, and Barnard Hatford. NRO NCR 1/22, Apprenticeship indentures, ff. 8-8d.

<sup>49</sup> Hulton, *Urban Weavers*, 5.28-29.

at 18s, plus a shilling each for shuttles.<sup>50</sup> And as weaving increasingly specialised, so too did the equipment. The most important characteristic of a loom was its size, broad or narrow, but references in the Norwich wills indicate that they differed based on specialisation, and a weaver often owned multiple types. Brice Skowe bequeathed 'a mentyll lome [mantle loom], a Monkys lome, [and] a stamen lome' in his will, and Robert Leche owned mantle looms and a camlet loom.<sup>51</sup> Clearly, the generic broadloom had been improved to better support the individual characteristics of different textiles, but this advancement will also have made diversification expensive for young weavers.<sup>52</sup> In addition to looms, an independent weaver also needed to source yarns and find a space to work. The fact that several of the weavers' wills specifically devised yarns for both warps and wefts, in conjunction with the bequest of their looms, suggests that the cost of the yarn was not insignificant.<sup>53</sup> And a workspace would have needed to be large enough to accommodate one or more freestanding horizontal looms.

A family's assistance may have been one of the more important ways in which they could help to establish a son professionally. For those few artisanal families that had been particularly successful, sons might start their professional careers with unusually large gifts that provided clear advantages over their peers in the progression of their professional and civic careers. Such bequests were rare, because few of the worsted weavers achieved that kind of wealth, but the Wilkyns family demonstrates how inherited wealth advantaged the sons of craftsmen. Thomas Wilkyns, the elder, entered the freedom in 1467 after having apprenticed with Brice Skowe, himself the son of a weaving family.<sup>54</sup> Wilkyns' ascent up the civic *cursus honorum* was slow but steady: he served as constable for a year, then a

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<sup>50</sup> Britnell, *Growth and Decline in Colchester, 1300-1525*, 75.

<sup>51</sup> NCC, Woolman, 221; NCC, Goldingham, 128.

<sup>52</sup> NCC Ryxe, 221v.

<sup>53</sup> Alice Richeman could have yarn in place of her cash bequests, if she so chose. NCC Ryxe, 270. See also NCC Palgrave, 195; ANW, Cook, 31; NCC Underwoode, 29; TNA PROB 11/21/264.

<sup>54</sup> l'Estrange, *Freemen*, 149.



common councillor for 14 years.<sup>55</sup> He took on the task of providing the feast for the Guild of St George in 1476, nine years after being made free of the city.<sup>56</sup> He then served on the chamberlain's council and as auditor and supervisor in the 1480s, before becoming sheriff in 1486 and an alderman in 1489, shortly before his death in 1492. His rise in civic office most likely indicates a successful business, a fact reinforced by the amounts he paid in the city assessment of 1489: 5s for possessing more than 10 marks worth of goods and chattel, plus 3s 10 for properties he owned in Ultra Aquam.<sup>57</sup> His will was proved in the Prerogative Court of Canterbury, where he left over £100 in personal bequests to his wife and children.<sup>58</sup>

The careers of Thomas Wilkyns's children show the effect that familial wealth could have on children. At his death, Thomas was able to provide a sizeable head-start for his two sons, Thomas and Ralf. Ralf received a tenement, plus 40 marks in cash. Thomas also received a tenement, plus 20 marks cash to be paid when he came of age. Both boys entered the freedom soon after their father's passing, Ralf in 1500/1 and Thomas in 1504/5.<sup>59</sup> Ralf had served on at least four worsted weaver presentment juries even before being made free.<sup>60</sup> His rapid ascent in the guild can be seen by the fact that he served as guild master within six months of taking his freedom.<sup>61</sup> Both Thomas junior and Ralf in turn became aldermen, and more rapidly than had their father. Within ten years of joining the freedom, Ralf had already been made sheriff, followed by alderman in 1512, and mayor in 1527.<sup>62</sup> For these two sons, both of whom carried on their father's occupation as a worsted weaver, and both of whom were lucky enough to inherit property and cash, their start in life was quicker and more assured than many others.

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<sup>55</sup> *Norwich Officers*, 166.

<sup>56</sup> *Gild of St George*, 75-6.

<sup>57</sup> *Poverty and Wealth: Sheep, Taxation and Charity in Late Medieval Norfolk*, ed. by M. Bailey, M. Jurkowski, and C. Rawcliffe, vol. 71 (Norwich, 2007), 152-4.

<sup>58</sup> TNA, PROB 11/9/82.

<sup>59</sup> l'Estrange, *Freemen*, 150, 153.

<sup>60</sup> NRO NCR 17d/7, f. 5r, 5v, 7v.

<sup>61</sup> He served as master during the mayoralty of John Waryn in 1500-1. *Ibid.*, f. 17v, 18r, 45r.

<sup>62</sup> *Norwich Officers*, 166.

But familial help was not limited to the wealthier weavers. Many of the worsted weavers left modest bequests to their sons, which nevertheless helped their sons achieve independence. The simplest bequests involved looms and other equipment. William Mylys provided his son John with the modest gift of a loom and 20s.<sup>63</sup> In other cases, bequests hint at the status of children. Peter Marlyng devised his broad and narrow looms, plus 20s, a feather bed, and sundry household items, which suggests that his son John was already an adult, but likely had not yet set up his own household.<sup>64</sup> In the case of sons who were still minors at their father's death, the gift of a loom could be a significant material advantage for a potential future career. William Dowce devised 'that if any of my sonnes to be of my occupation I will that iche of them have a lome'.<sup>65</sup>

The number of sons who took their freedom closely following the death of their father suggests that many needed the familial inheritance to enable their professional independence. Among the worsted weavers, it was particularly common for sons to enrol their freedoms shortly after their fathers' deaths. For instance, Brice Skowe died in 1496, and his son Thomas took his freedom within a year of his father's passing.<sup>66</sup> And it was not only fathers who provided assistance to young weavers. Thomas Hemmyng's bequest to his apprentice, William Fennyng, of a loom and yarn was a generous and useful gift for a weaver who wanted to start working independently.<sup>67</sup> Fennyng also took the freedom shortly after Hemmyng's will was proved.<sup>68</sup>

For sons who had followed their fathers into the occupation of weaving, their father's passing might shift responsibility for the family workshop from father to son. Examples of this transfer can be seen in wills. John Kyng left his workshop to his eldest son Robert, with the implication that Robert was already a partner in his

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<sup>63</sup> NCC Palgrave, 195.

<sup>64</sup> NCC Palgrave, 131.

<sup>65</sup> NCC Herman, 39.

<sup>66</sup> NCC Woolman, 221; l'Estrange, *Freemen*, 121.

<sup>67</sup> TNA PROB 11/14/283.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 51.

father's business.<sup>69</sup> But bequests of real property did not always come as outright gifts. Richard Tedde, whose will provided only moderately-sized bequests, directed that his son-in-law John Carter could purchase Richard's house for £20, but spaced out in yearly payments of 40s, which was surely better than needing to secure a loan.<sup>70</sup> Others offered their sons the opportunity to purchase their homes for an advantaged price, such as Robert Gerard's offer that his son Robert could purchase his home for what he had originally paid, less 40s.<sup>71</sup> He was however, also generous in other ways. He additionally provided Robert with all of his looms, his warpings, and 'the yere of my prentyse after my descease'. Robert Gerard the younger was made free in December of that year.<sup>72</sup> William Wattys combined the offer of his house with a way to support his widow. He stipulated in his will that his wife Joan was to have the house, but if she remarried, his eldest son was to have the choice to purchase it from William's attorneys for ten marks, with that money to go to Joan.<sup>73</sup> This type of 'gift with a price' did several things for a man's family. It allowed the testator to provide his widow with a cash income after his death. For the sons, it provided them with a workspace of their own, at a cost for some, but what was likely a manageable cost on advantageous terms. It also provided a way for a son to ease onto the property ladder and secure a home and workspace without needing to resort to outside loans.

### **Master weavers, not clothiers**

The question of scale, and of how to quantify the size of a craftsman's business operations, has bedevilled historians for over a century. Early work in economic history looked to the cloth industry for examples of industrial organisation and economic development, and authors such as Unwin, Lipson, and Cunningham,

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<sup>69</sup> ANF Liber 2a (Bulwer), 15.

<sup>70</sup> NCC Craforde, 83.

<sup>71</sup> ANW Cook, 31.

<sup>72</sup> NRO NCR 16c/1, f. 113.

<sup>73</sup> NCC, Jekkys, 183.

among others, used the evidence they found in the cloth industry to theorise about the 'stages' of early economic development. Their first, somewhat idealised, stage was the guild system, where apprentices, journeymen, and masters laboured in small, family-run workshops. Over time, the growth of the 'Domestic system' edged out the guild system, whose distinctive characteristic was embodied in the clothier -- a well-capitalised merchant entrepreneur who either hired outside labour into his workshop, or put out piece work to external weavers, but who himself did not engage in the production of his textiles. Lipson recounted facts about the size of the most successful clothiers's businesses of the later sixteenth century, including that of William Stumpe of Malmsbury, who in 1546 is said to have filled Osney Abbey, then defunct, with up to two thousand of his own employees, all labouring to make cloth 'for the succour of the city of Oxford'.<sup>74</sup>

However, quite unlike the English woollen regions, or indeed many of the textile regions in continental Europe, worsted production in Norfolk and in Norwich does not seem to have been much affected by clothiers. Allison found little to no evidence of putting-out, and the term 'clothier' is almost never used in the Norwich sources.<sup>75</sup> Despite the many arguments in favour of viewing guilds as agents of monopolistic behaviour, the evidence from Norwich does not support a small cabal of guildsmen enriching themselves whilst preventing others from engaging in their industry. The crafts oversaw quality control in their fields, but men were not obliged to join the craft, nor were weavers in the guild allowed prerogatives when others were not. The question under consideration here is whether the more successful of the Norwich worsted weavers functioned more as clothiers, earning their fortunes by controlling the labour of others, or whether they continued to function as master craftsmen in a guild system that continued to hold sway, at least for the period under consideration in this study.

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<sup>74</sup> Lipson, *The History of the Woollen and Worsted Industries*, 47-8.

<sup>75</sup> Allison, *The Wool Supply and the Worsted Cloth Industry in Norfolk in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, 410.

**Table 6.4:** Payments by worsted weavers towards the anticipation of subsidy in 1523<sup>76</sup>

| Name           | Tax paid  |
|----------------|-----------|
| Ralf Wilkyns   | £8 13s 4d |
| Robert Leche   | £5        |
| William Hast   | £4 10s    |
| Thomas Wilkyns | 66s 8d    |
| Henry Cutler   | 53s 4d    |
| John Wattys    | 40s       |
| John Clarke    | 40s       |
| Adam Lawes     | 40s       |
| William Dunham | 33s 4d    |
| Robert Garrard | 33s 4d    |
| Simon Westgate | 30s       |

Robert Leche, worsted weaver and two-time mayor, is a good case study of a wealthy textile producer. Leche was one of eleven worsted weavers assessed in the 1523 anticipation of the national subsidy. The anticipation required those with £40 or more in lands or goods to pay in advance of the main subsidy; in consequence we have a convenient catalogue of the city's most wealthy residents at the time.<sup>77</sup> Leche's ownership of what was roughly £100 in land or goods indicates a high level of financial activity. His payment of £5 tax was the second highest among the worsted weavers, but fell far short of the wealthiest merchants, one of whom paid £55 tax.<sup>78</sup> Yet, in spite of this wealth, the documentary evidence also points towards his continued involvement in weaving. He sat on at least 36 presentment juries for the worsted weavers and continued throughout his career to enrol apprentices with the city, identifying himself as 'Robert Leche, ald. & worsted weaver'. Finally, he was fined by the worsted weavers in 1531 for operating five broad looms, one over the

<sup>76</sup> TNA E 179/150/208.

<sup>77</sup> Land was assessed at 12d in the pound. Moveable goods were assessed at 12d in the pound for those who owned more than £20 in goods. The anticipation was levied only on those with more than £40 in lands or goods, though unfortunately the Norwich list does not distinguish between the two categories. Ibid. See also <<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/e179/notes.asp?slctgrantid=241>>, (accessed 19 March 2016).

<sup>78</sup> Robert Jannys, grocer and alderman, paid £55, Thomas Aldryche paid £35, and John Terry, the current mayor, paid £27 10s in tax.

allowed limit, 'contrary to the statute therupon made & provyded'.<sup>79</sup> In his will of 1559 he directed his executors to sell his looms and worsteds, and instructed his journeymen to complete the weaving of any unfinished cloths, 'they to have for the working of the same stuff of myn Executores as they had of me', plus 'to every one of my Jorneymen which shall be with me at the day of my decease a black cope'.<sup>80</sup>

From this alone it cannot be proven whether Leche was personally involved in the weaving of cloths, though the wording is suggestive. However, one further hint is worth pondering. As freedom entries became coupled to craft guild membership, the number of men in the fifteenth century who were identified solely by the term 'merchant' had fallen off sharply. It is my suspicion that those few who were known as 'merchant' rather than as 'mercier' or 'grocer' or 'rafman' were, by the early sixteenth century, all men who had entered the freedom as a member of a non-mercantile craft guild, but thereafter made their living via one of the distributive trades. An example of such a man was John Terry, mayor in 1523-4. Terry identified himself in his will merely as a 'merchant'. No freedom entry in a mercantile guild exists for a man with his name, but a John Terry, stainer, was made free in 1498/9.<sup>81</sup> John Terry appears among the brethren of the fellowship of the Mercery from 1506, implying that he already had mercantile interests.<sup>82</sup> The names on that list constitute the kind of mix one would expect to see in the fraternity of the city's most important trade guild. The group includes enrolled mercers, many of the city's aldermen, plus a number of other men who had mercantile interests but who had not enrolled their freedoms as mercers. It did not, however, include Robert Leche, nor indeed any of the other worsted weavers. Nor have I located any documents that declare Leche to be a merchant rather than a weaver.

Of the eleven worsted weavers who paid towards the anticipation of the subsidy in 1523, the only one to pay more than Robert Leche was Ralf Wilkyns. His anticipation payment of £8 13s 4d suggests that he, too, had business affairs that

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<sup>79</sup>NRO NCR 17d/8, f. 64r.

<sup>80</sup>NCC Goldingham, 128.

<sup>81</sup>l'Estrange, *Freemen*, 136.

<sup>82</sup>NRO 10c/1.

could have crossed into mercantile trading.<sup>83</sup> Like Leche, Wilkyns also became mayor, though he only held the position once.<sup>84</sup> Cozens-Hardy, in his study of Norwich mayors, identified Wilkyns as a 'woollen draper', though he provided no evidence for why he came to this conclusion.<sup>85</sup> Like Leche, Wilkyns also participated in the worsted weavers' guild activities, including serving a year as guild master in 1500.<sup>86</sup> And like Leche, Wilkyns also enrolled apprentices throughout his career as 'ald. & worsted weaver' who themselves became free as weavers, not as merchants.<sup>87</sup> The examples of Leche and Wilkyns, and possibly even John Terry, hint at a changing attitude toward guild affiliations among men who were wealthy enough to become aldermen. Though difficult to prove, it is possible that there was less inclination in the sixteenth century to urge successful craftsmen to translate their guild affiliations to 'higher status' guilds, and more acceptance of the fact that artisanal guilds represented a mixed membership of artisanal and mercantile interests.<sup>88</sup>

## Conclusion

Urban guilds played a crucial role in helping to shape an environment that either fostered or hindered the formation of large-scale clothier concerns. Lis and Soly recently argued that master artisans in export industries, who operated within an urban context, were often able to counter the dominance of merchant capital in cities where strong guild systems provided regulatory frameworks.<sup>89</sup> In a town like Norwich, access to the market was guaranteed by membership in the franchise, regardless of craft guild. Therefore, weavers were not dependent on merchants to market their wares. However, the extent to which weavers were able to subcontract

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<sup>83</sup> TNA E 179/150/208, f. 1r.

<sup>84</sup> *Norwich Officers*, 166.

<sup>85</sup> B. Cozens-Hardy and E. A. Kent, *The Mayors of Norwich 1403 to 1835* (Norwich, 1938), 47.

<sup>86</sup> Wilkyns served during the mayoralty of John Waryn, 1500-1. NRO NCR 17d/8, ff. 17v, 18r, 45r.

<sup>87</sup> NRO NCR 1/22, Apprenticeship indentures, f. 7r, 13r, 13v, 17r, 19r, 23r, 26r, 29r.

<sup>88</sup> Chapter 8 will discuss the issue of changing political representation in further detail.

<sup>89</sup> Lis and Soly, 'Subcontracting', 84.

among other weavers is less clear. The worsted weavers' ordinances of 1511 stipulated that weavers were limited to owning four broadlooms and one narrow loom. Furthermore, all looms were to be kept on the premises of the said weavers.<sup>90</sup> It is difficult to see ordinances limiting workshop size as anything other than a way to guarantee that individual workshops remained small. Lis and Soly suggest that merchant capitalists favoured such ordinances, because they offered protection from competitors.<sup>91</sup> Yet more compelling is the argument in favour of guilds protecting small masters against the encroachment of large-scale workshops under the control of those same merchant capitalists. None of the Norwich worsted weavers can be shown to have operated large concerns that spilled out beyond the limits set by the guild. More than ten of the weavers bequeathed multiple looms in their wills, though the largest number mentioned is only four.<sup>92</sup>

Given the range of wealth among the worsted weavers, as indicated by the 1524 subsidy and by bequests left in wills,<sup>93</sup> it is probable that most master weavers ran modestly-sized operations.<sup>94</sup> The few wealthy outliers, such as Leche and Wilkyns, most likely found ways to combine production in their own workshops with subcontracting to other workshops, and the direct marketing of those goods in the way suggested by Lis and Soly. The Norwich worsted industry, which had good guild representation, likely blossomed in the way they envisaged: as a robust, artisanally-led export industry, that grew out of a network of overlapping relationships between independent producers and specialists, rather than from the

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<sup>90</sup> NRO NCR 10b, printed in *Records*, vol. 2, 377. The ordinances were confirmed by the crown, and a copy of that patent can be found in the *Liber Albus*, NRO NCR 17b/3, ff. 94v-97v.

<sup>91</sup> Lis and Soly, 'Subcontracting', 108-110.

<sup>92</sup> TNA, PROB 11/21/264.

<sup>93</sup> See below, pages 304-318.

<sup>94</sup> K. J. Allison, 'The Norfolk Worsted Industry in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries (Part I)', *Yorkshire Bulletin of Economic and Social Research*, 12 (1960), 76. Allison used inventories to analyse the size of the weavers' estates during the 'New Drapery' period (after 1570). He concluded that the master worsted weavers almost universally operated 'small-scale' businesses. The few wealthy outliers at that time were leaving estates of around £300 to £400, which was far short of what wealthy clothiers in Wiltshire and Suffolk were worth. No probate inventories survive in Norwich for the period of this thesis, but the evidence presented here concurs with Allison's later findings.



narrower and more financially exploitative practice of putting out piece work to dependent craftsmen. A putting out system controlled by merchant capital was always more likely to succeed in the countryside, away from the scrutiny of urban guilds.

In addition to guild protections, two other minor factors speak in favour of worsted concerns remaining small. The first is the fact that less capital was required to set up as a worsted weaver than as a woollen weaver. Double worsted cloths were just under a third the size of a standard broadcloth.<sup>95</sup> Worsteds were made from local wool, and they required little to no fulling. As Bridbury remarked, 'If we want to find the self-employed clothmaker we must look for him where the cloth being made was small, light and cheap.'<sup>96</sup> This may have made it easier for worsted weavers in Norwich to remain in positions of independence.

The other thing that may or may not have played a role in the worsted weavers' independence was the time period. This study concludes at the onset of the Reformation, whereas most studies of putting-out in the woollen regions have concentrated on the post-Reformation period and later. The medieval weavers had one financial advantage that was lost to later weavers: that is, modest financial assistance, in the form of small loans, was still available to artisans and craftsmen from the dense network of religious guilds.<sup>97</sup> The forced elimination of confraternities in the 1540s will have had a decidedly deleterious effect on local economies, though its impact may be difficult to quantify as so many of the account books of these guilds subsequently disappeared in the wake of the Reformation.<sup>98</sup> Their destruction removed a substantial source of credit that had been widely available to artisans and craftsmen of modest means. In the long run, the loss of this kind of credit must have

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<sup>95</sup> This assumes a size of 10 yards for a double worsted and 28 yards for an unfulled broadcloth.

<sup>96</sup> Bridbury, *Clothmaking*, 11.

<sup>97</sup> Farnhill, *Guilds and the Parish Community*, 64-5, 166; Rosser, *The Art of Solidarity in the Middle Ages: Guilds in England 1250-1550*, 157-9.

<sup>98</sup> Religious guilds were formally dissolved in England by the Chantries Act of 1548, though they had been under attack by the government since the 1530s. Farnhill, *Guilds and the Parish Community*, 153-165.

taken its toll on the ability of small, independent producers to remain financially solvent.

## 7 | The Guild of Worsted Weavers

A professional weaver in Norwich could work either for himself independently or for another master without any further qualification. Weavers in Norwich were under no obligation to join a craft guild or to join the freedom of the city. However, by the second half of the fifteenth century, the former had become coupled with the latter. As the civic constitution crystallised, so too did the rights and responsibilities of citizenship. The restrictions on trading may not have affected most weavers, but the ability to hold apprentices did affect them. By the start of the sixteenth century, the example of the worsted weavers suggests strongly that workshop owners who wished to expand their business, either by hiring outside labour or by taking apprentices, were increasingly joining the freedom in order to do so. It was at this stage that a weaver was most likely to become involved in the formal activities of the craft, since sponsorship by a craft, as in London, was essential to entry to the civic franchise.

Weavers participated in the guild in one of several ways. First, men could serve as one of the four masters of the guild who were elected annually to oversee the guild's affairs. Second, they could assist in the guild's oversight of the search by serving as jury members at presentment hearings, where contraventions against the search were presented and fined. This chapter looks at a weaver's involvement with the craft guild as a distinct stage on the *cursus honorum*. The ways in which a man might formally contribute to the activities of the guild, plus the ways that citizenship and guild membership benefitted enfranchised weavers, was allied to, yet distinct from, his development as a professional craftsman.

It is well acknowledged in the literature that a man's attainment of the freedom of the city, and his election to the post of guild master, were both important

stages in his career progression. Less well known is the role that jury members played with regard to the search. The data from this chapter show that the fulfilment of jury service for the Worsted Weavers was of far greater benefit than has been realised. Though the position was informally held, of no fixed tenure, and most likely not remunerated, it will be shown that men who spent more time serving as jury members were, on average, more successful in their later careers than their peers.

## 7.1 Joining the freedom

For those men with the ambition of becoming an independent master, taking the freedom was the next step in their career progression. Despite Hudson's assertion in his early work that 'no one might follow an occupation except the members of that trade or craft', there is no firm evidence that he was correct.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, the worsted weavers' craft ordinances of 1511 explicitly referred to the 'men and *women* of the craft'.<sup>2</sup> As citizenship was generally unavailable to women in Norwich, and as women were not formally admitted to the craft guilds, it is more likely that the crafts oversaw production and sales of both formal members and unaffiliated practitioners. Unfortunately, though, as the records of the leet courts and the sheriffs' tourns have largely disappeared for the fifteenth century, we lack information about how aggressively the city courts prosecuted petty infractions against the city's customary laws protecting the franchise.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> W. Hudson, *Leet Jurisdiction in the City of Norwich* (Norwich, 1892), lxxxix.

<sup>2</sup> *Records*, vol. 2, 376-9.

<sup>3</sup> Extant leet rolls for Norwich are largely limited to the years between 1287 and 1391, though there is evidence that they continued to function through the seventeenth century. For the early rolls, see NRO, NCR Case 5b. One additional fragment of a leet roll survives for 1554; see NRO, NCR Case 5c/4. For more on the history of the Norwich leet courts, see Hudson, *Leet Jurisdiction*. Kowaleski used the records of the minor courts extensively in her work on fourteenth-century Exeter. Kowaleski, *Local Markets and Regional Trade in Medieval Exeter*. King cites a few instances from the surviving fourteenth-century leet rolls. King, *Borough Finances*, 67.

Much ink has been spilled over the importance of the freedom in late medieval towns. Historians have disagreed over its significance, over the extent to which artisans were encouraged or discouraged from joining the franchise, and over the extent to which extant freedom rolls can be used to reconstruct the industrial development or trade structure of any given city.<sup>4</sup> Despite the uncertainty that surrounds the topic, freedom entries remain a key source of information for prosopographical reconstructions. Regardless of how we choose to interpret the freedom, the fact remains that a growing number of artisans chose to enter the franchise in Norwich, and the fact remains that citizenship provided artisans with the right to trade within the city as well as the right to contract apprentices.<sup>5</sup> The prerogative rights of citizenship were unquestionably important for any independent master who wished to expand production.

Over 770 weavers entered the freedom of the city between 1317 and 1550.<sup>6</sup> The number of weavers who became citizens was fairly low in the early years, averaging between zero and seven entries per decade through the 1360s. The earliest records show little professional differentiation; occupations were normally given simply as 'weaver' or 'webster'. From the 1370s, though, freedom entries began to rise sharply (Figure 7.1). 12 weavers entered in that decade, followed by 26 in the 1380s and 35 in the 1390s. The fifteenth century experienced further fluctuation, and predictably there was some falloff during the mid-century recession, but numbers never fell back as far as their fourteenth-century lows.

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<sup>4</sup>Dobson, 'Admissions to the Freedom of the City of York in the Later Middle Ages'; D. M. Woodward, 'Freemen's Rolls', *Local Historian*, 9 (1970), 89-95; J. F. Pound, 'The Validity of the Freeman's Lists: Some Norwich Evidence', *EcHR*, (1981-02-01), 48-59; M. M. Rowe and A. M. Jackson, *Exeter Freeman, 1266-1967*, Devon & Cornwall Record Society, (Exeter, 1973); *The Rolls of the Freeman of the City of Chester, 1392-1700*, ed. by J. H. E. Bennett, vol. 51 (1906); A. F. Butcher, 'The Origins of Romney Freeman, 1433-1523', *EcHR*, 27 (1974), 16-27; Rowe and Jackson, *Exeter Freeman*; J. F. Pound, 'The Social and Trade Structure of Norwich 1525-1575', *P&P*, 34 (1966), 49-69.

<sup>5</sup>King felt that the large number of worsted weavers who joined the freedom did so specifically for this privilege. King, *Borough Finances*, 49.

<sup>6</sup>The sources used to construct this part of the database were l'Estrange, *Freemen*, NRO NCR 17c, OFB and NRO NCR 16d/2, Books of Proceedings.

From the 1380s, however, a change in how entries were recorded suggests that weaving was becoming more specialised. Worsted weaving as a distinctive occupation became more pronounced around the end of the fourteenth century. In the 1390s, 18 men enrolled specifically as irlond weavers, plus 3 bedweavers. From the 1420s, entries start to appear for ‘woollen weavers’, while the term ‘irlonder’ was mostly superseded in favour of ‘worsted weaver’. The divergence between the specialisations continued to increase in the following decades. Worsted entries (Figure 7.2, shown in green) hit a low period in the 1420s and 1430s, but increased significantly thereafter, while entries for woollen weavers (shown in blue) went into sharp decline after the 1430s. Though woollen ‘Norwich cloths’ were still being produced in the city, worsteds were clearly overtaking woollens. By 1500, the number of woollen weavers seeking entry to the freedom had fallen to single digits

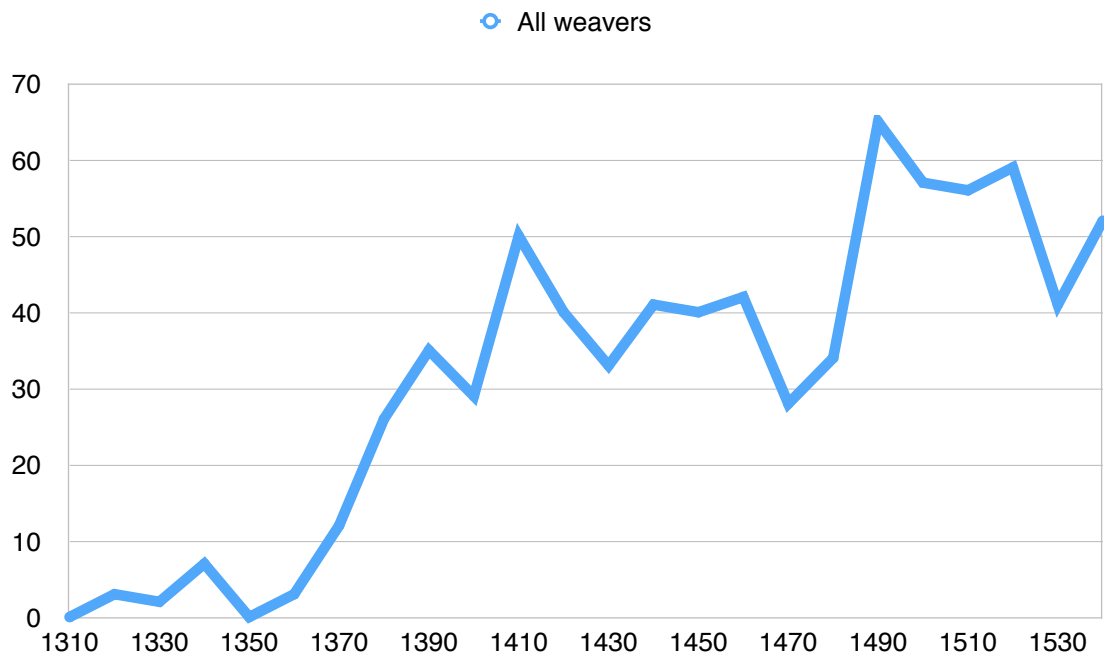


**Figure 7.1:** Entries to the freedom of the city, all weaving professions, by decade, 1317-1530<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Weaver freedoms appear from 1327. Decades are counted from, e.g., 1321 to 1330. Weavers include websters, textors, irlond weavers, worsted weavers, woollen and thick

per decade. In contrast, the worsted weavers saw their highest numbers of the Middle Ages in the decades between 1490 and 1520, which aligns with the evidence presented earlier concerning export figures during those years. As already noted, the ordinances promulgated by the worsted weavers in 1511 suggest that the craft had decided to oversee apprentice enrolment more aggressively; this alone could have encouraged an uptake in citizenship.<sup>8</sup> While freedom figures in and of themselves cannot fully model participation rates in a given industry,<sup>9</sup> the number of freedoms enrolled during the worst of the fifteenth-century recession does indicate a

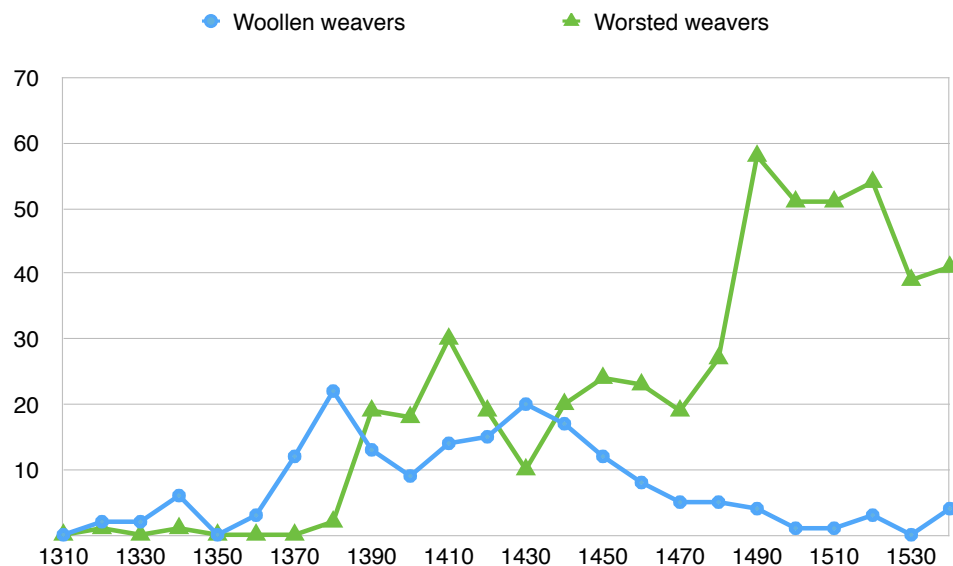


**Figure 7.2:** A comparison of woollen and worsted weaver entries to the freedom in Norwich, by decade, 1317–1530

woollen weavers, and coverlet and bedweavers.

<sup>8</sup>The first rule in the new ordinances stipulated, once again, that apprentices must be enrolled with the city, though now the fine for non-compliance was only 6s 8d. *Records*, vol. 2, 376. The low fine could explain why so many apprentices went unenrolled in spite of the city's new enrolment registers.

<sup>9</sup>Dobson, 'Admissions to the Freedom of the City of York in the Later Middle Ages', 16; Pound, 'The Validity of the Freeman's Lists: Some Norwich Evidence'; Woodward, 'Freemen's Rolls'.

continuance of business, in spite of low exports. Given the expense of citizenship, continued interest in the freedom for weavers must indicate that Norwich was still producing for the domestic market, even if we cannot substantiate the size of this market.

How long did weavers wait to become citizens? It is possible to estimate the age at freedom in the few cases where both an apprenticeship enrolment and a freedom entry exist. Table 7.1 shows a breakdown of statistics for 27 worsted weavers for whom we have an enrolled apprentice indenture as well as a freedom entry. Of this group, most waited at least five years after the completion of their apprenticeships to become citizens, though the sample size is unfortunately small. Many young men likely needed the cash infusion from a parental inheritance to pay the fine for joining the freedom. Thomas Nabbys waited to join the freedom until 1512, the year his father Nicholas' will was proved.<sup>10</sup> Likewise, John Dunham's apprenticeship was enrolled in 1508/9, but he did not apply for citizenship until 1541/2, which was shortly before his father William died. In John's case he was probably around 47 when he took the freedom.

**Table 7.1:** Length of time between an apprenticeship and taking the freedom

|            | N  | Became<br>guild master | Jury<br>appearances | Nr of<br>apprentices | Attained<br>rank A<br>or B | Average nr<br>of years as<br>apprentice |
|------------|----|------------------------|---------------------|----------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------------------------|
| 1-5 years  | 8  | 6 (75%)                | 7 (88%)             | 8 (100%)             | 6                          | 8                                       |
| 6-10 years | 11 | 4 (36%)                | 7 (64%)             | 9 (82%)              | 5                          | 7.25                                    |
| 11+ years  | 8  | 3 (38%)                | 7 (88%)             | 6 (75%)              | 3                          | 7.125                                   |

Table 7.1 also compares the length of time between apprenticeship and freedom with several other statistics. Though a master's political activism seemingly had little to no effect on an apprentice's later civic involvement,<sup>11</sup> for those

<sup>10</sup> NRO NCR 16d/2, Books of Proceedings, f. lxxviii; DCN 69/2, f. 29.

<sup>11</sup> See Section 6.1 above, on page 210.



apprentices who did become citizens, there is some correspondence between an apprentice's future success after joining the freedom, and the length of time it took between ending their indentures and joining the franchise. Eight of the men joined the freedom within five years of completion; twelve joined within six to ten years of completion; and a further eight took eleven years or more to join. Of the three groups, those who joined the fastest seem to have been the most successful in every other measure. 75% of them went on to be masters in the worsted weavers' guild, 88% served on one or more presentment juries, and 100% enrolled apprentices with the city. This group also had the largest number who went on to hold civic office — of the eight, six of them held seats on the common council at a minimum. Though the data are admittedly limited, there does seem to be a connection between the rapidity with which a man was able to obtain citizenship, and his other activities in the guild and in the city.

The one common feature that might indicate why this group fared better was their length of indentures.<sup>12</sup> The journeymen who took their freedoms the fastest, within one to five years after apprenticing, also served the longest apprenticeships. For this group, the mean length of their term of service was eight years, including one who served a term of nine years and one a term of ten years. In comparison, the group who joined the freedom within six to ten years served slightly shorter apprenticeships, averaging 7.25 years, and the last group averaged just 7.125 years for their apprenticeships. One possible explanation is that the top group belonged to families that could afford to purchase longer, and perhaps 'better', indentures for their sons. Davies speculated that longer apprenticeships could have arisen from families which could not afford the full cost of an apprenticeship, and thus effectively traded a few extra years of service for a reduction in fees.<sup>13</sup> Yet the evidence of the Norwich worsted weavers suggests the opposite. Apprentices who served longer could have received more advanced training at the end of their indentures, or built stronger relationships with their masters or to the weaving community. They may

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<sup>12</sup> Table 6.2 on page 220 shows the distribution of indenture lengths by years.

<sup>13</sup> Davies, *The Tailors of London*, 186.

well have received the kind of patronage advantages that boys with shorter training were less likely to receive.

Though familial wealth surely played a role here, it should also be noted that Table 7.1 does *not* indicate a starkly polarised landscape between ‘haves’ and ‘have-nots’. As it makes clear, even men who took longer to join the freedom did still meet with a fair amount of career success. 38% become a master of the Worsted Weavers’ guild, 88% sat on juries, and 75% enrolled apprentices. A boy’s familial status helped, but it was not determinative of the path his life would later take.

### The benefits of guild membership

There is no indication in the city records that weavers were obliged to join the guild if they wished to work within the city limits, nor were weavers taxed per loom as they were in some cities.<sup>14</sup> Most likely, the motivation to join the freedom came from a weaver’s desire to take on apprentices.

As stated above, it was common for cities and towns to try to limit the number of apprentices allowed to any one master at a time. In Norwich, a city ordinance of 1499 restricted a master’s workforce to a maximum of three concurrent apprentices.<sup>15</sup> The penalty for non-compliance was £5. The worsted weavers’ ordinances of 1511 upped this to four apprentices for their masters residing within the city.<sup>16</sup> Many similar regulations survive in other towns. Brewers in London were charged with keeping ‘two or three apprentices at the most’.<sup>17</sup> In Coventry, a master capper was allowed only two apprentices; if one quit, the master was to wait until

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<sup>14</sup> In London, for example, the Ordinances of the English weavers in 1492 declared ‘That every member of the Craft attend on summons at a place prescribed on certain quarter-days and bring in and deliver to the Bailiffs their “lome ferme” for the King’s duty’. *Calendar of Letter-Books of the City of London*, ed. by R. R. Sharpe, vol. L (London, 1912), f. 295-296d. The farm on looms was also mentioned in an earlier dispute over search rights, where it had been decided in 1422 that the masters of the linen weavers’ guild had no right of search over woollens, as only the woollen weavers paid a farm to the king for every loom owned. *Calendar of Letter-Books of the City of London*, ed. by R. R. Sharpe, vol. I (London, 1909), 271-2.

<sup>15</sup> *Records*, vol. 2, 105.

<sup>16</sup> The fact that the guild ordinances coincide with the start of the register could help explain why the majority of the enrolled apprentices are worsted weavers. *Ibid.*, 377.

<sup>17</sup> *Calendar of Letter-Books of the City of London*, vol. L, 199-200.

the indenture would have expired before taking another.<sup>18</sup> And cities did not merely threaten action. In York in 1480 the searchers for the Capmakers craft presented charges against Richard Standyssh for taking on an apprentice whilst he himself was still an apprentice, 'against the ordinances of the city'.<sup>19</sup> In London, one enterprising master tried to circumvent the limits by joining two guilds at once, thinking he could double his quota. He was fined £10 for his efforts.<sup>20</sup>

It was specifically this throttling of numbers that suggests apprentices should be viewed as a type of limited resource, and that masters may have felt some competition to secure them. The reasons for limiting apprentices remain unclear. The seemingly obvious rationale points to demographic pressures and demand for labour, but justifications can be constructed that work for both high and low labour supplies. Thrupp felt that the imposition of such limits in London was due to a scarcity of labour in the city.<sup>21</sup> However, De Munck's study of apprenticeship in early modern Antwerp found similar efforts to limit apprentices during a period of 'unprecedented demographic growth' in what is termed Antwerp's 'golden age'.<sup>22</sup> He ultimately concluded that efforts to limit apprentice-holding had more to do with maintaining an equitable distribution amongst masters. This balance would have prevented the very richest of producers from 'cornering the market' in apprentices, an admittedly cheap source of labour.

At least 185 worsted weavers are known to have held one or more apprentices between 1450 and 1530.<sup>23</sup> Given the large number of undocumented apprentices, it is difficult to estimate what maximum numbers might have been, but the surviving records seem to suggest that apprentices were apportioned out

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<sup>18</sup> *Coventry Leet Book*, vol. 1-2, 573.

<sup>19</sup> *The York House Books 1461–1490*, 245-6.

<sup>20</sup> Thrupp, *The Merchant Class*, 33.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> B. De Munck, 'Gilding Golden Ages: Perspectives From Early Modern Antwerp on the Guild Debate, c. 1450 – c. 1650', *European Review of Economic History*, 15 (2011), 224.

<sup>23</sup> This number has been compiled from a combination of freedom entries that provide the name of the apprentice's former master, and the apprenticeship enrolments that commenced in 1512. It will under-represent the real total.

relatively well. 79% of the 185 weavers had between one and four apprentices (Figure 7.3). Only 11 of the 185 weavers held ten or more apprentices. Ralph Wilkyns, alderman and future mayor, topped the list at 13 apprentices. The other weavers in this group represent a wide mix of backgrounds and experiences. Seven of the group served as guild master, but four did not. The 11 weavers also spanned the entire range of civic office-holding: John Clerk, John Wattys senior, Thomas Wilkyns and Ralph Wilkyns held the office of sheriff or alderman; John Mannyng, Thomas Baseley, Henry Cutler, Peter Marlyng, and Thomas Harston only sat on the common council; John Sellers was a constable; and Richard Mannyng held no office at all. Also, while five of the group paid towards the 1523 anticipation of subsidy, marking them as being among the wealthiest worsted weavers, the other six did not.<sup>24</sup>

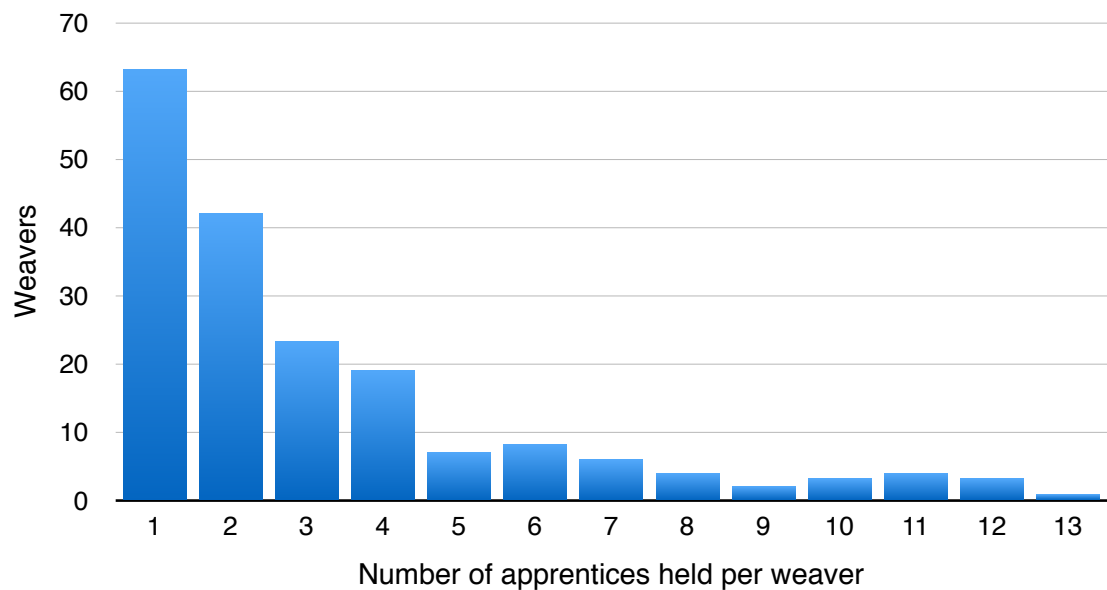


**Figure 7.3:** Number of known apprentices per weaver, 1450-1530

<sup>24</sup> The five were Ralf Wilkyns, Thomas Wilkyns, John Wattys sen, John Clarke, and Henry Cutler. See Table 6.4 on page 231.

In short, it is difficult to make the case that there was any one social group within the worsted weavers that was able to manipulate factors to their own advantage, in this case being the apportionment of apprentices to members of the guild. A small minority of members did hold a relatively high number of apprentices, but they were not able to ‘corner the market’ to the detriment of others. Most of the weavers were able to participate in the sharing out of apprentices on a modest scale, in line with the wishes of the city and of the guild.

## 7.2 Guild masters

For men interested in moving further up the guild *cursus honorum*, the highest position was that of guild master or warden. The Composition of 1415 had guaranteed each craft the right to select its own master. Every year the worsted weavers convened in the week after Corpus Christi to elect four masters for the coming year. The wardens had the primary responsibility over the administration of the guild in addition to their mandated responsibility for search. They served as the interface between civic and guild administration.

The annual selection of new masters for the city’s guilds was timed to coincide with the annual swearing-in of the new mayor. The mayor was elected on May 1, but did not take office until three to five weeks later, a delay that was likely timed to coincide with Trinity Sunday and the celebration of Corpus Christi. The Mayor’s Court book preserves lists of men who were sworn in as craft masters, though the lists are inconsistent; not every craft appears on every list. Unfortunately, the worsted weavers are one of the crafts that is often missing from the mayor’s lists. From around 1520 the worsted weavers’ search book, however, contains dedicated entries detailing the election of their new guild masters, whose selection occurred on the Monday following Corpus Christi. Since the craft presentment hearings already took place before the mayor of the city, the worsted weaver wardens probably did not need to appear with the other crafts as well, most of whom did not hold search hearings of their own.

**Table 7.2:** Length of tenure for the Worsted Weavers' guild masters

| 1 year | 2 years | 3 years | 4 years | 5 years | 6 years | 7 years | 8 years |
|--------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| 13     | 22      | 8       | 4       | 7       | 2       | 1       | 1       |

At least 58 of the worsted weavers who took their freedom before 1530 went on to hold the position of guild master. Most of them did not serve long as guild master. More than half served one or two years in the role; only four wardens served six or more years. The mean length of service was 2.7 years. Though turnover was generally high, there were no obvious impediments to holding office year on year, unlike in some of the London companies where masters had to wait before serving again.<sup>25</sup> John Basse, in particular, held the position for eight consecutive years, from 1494 to 1501, and most others held the position for at least two consecutive years. A few came back to the role after a break; William Hast, for instance, had held the office in 1513 and 1514, then returned to it again from 1521 to 1523.<sup>26</sup>

Most of the weavers who took up the position of guild master had already spent nearly a decade and a half in the profession, though there were no hard and fast rules. Some men rose quickly to the position, while others waited until their late career years. Only 13 of the masters who held the role after 1500, rose to the position within 10 years of joining the freedom, while 38 took more than a decade. The mean length of time between joining the freedom and holding the office of guild master was 14.8 years, but there were still many who rose to the position quickly. Ralf Wilkyns became guild master the same year he took the freedom<sup>27</sup> – but he had

<sup>25</sup> The London Grocers, by contrast, 'thought that being a warden was a burden; no one had to serve a second term until 7 years had elapsed'. Thrupp, 'The Grocers of London: A Study of Distributive Trade', 252. The London Mercers ruled that wardens had to wait at least five years before holding the position again. Sutton, *The Mercery of London*, 172.

<sup>26</sup> NRO NCR 17d/8, ff.13v, 35v, 38r, 39v; NRO NCR 16a/2, f. 45r.

<sup>27</sup> NRO NCR 17d/7, f. 17v.

already participated in craft juries, and as shown earlier, his inheritance had put him ahead of his peers.

Surprisingly, the position of guild master was not monopolised by weavers who might qualify as members of the city's civic elite. Though only seven of the above group of masters -- William Godfrey, Ralf Wilkyns, Thomas Wilkyns, Adam Lawes, William Hast, John Clarke, and John Bungay -- went on to serve as sheriff or alderman, none of the seven had served in either of those positions prior to their tenure as guild master. Men who entered the freedom more quickly were twice as likely to hold the position of guild master, and for slightly longer. The average tenure for a Rank A master was 3.1 years, which represented a mere 0.4-year increase over the general average. For these men, the role of guild master was likely a mid-career staging point before progressing further up the *cursus honorum*. Neither Robert Leche, Ralf Wilkyns, William Hast, Thomas Wilkyns, nor Adam Lawes spent time in guild offices once they had moved up to the aldermen's council.

**Table 7.3:** Worsted Weaver guild masters, correlated by civic office holding

| Rank A | Rank B | Rank C | Rank D |
|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| 7      | 41     | 3      | 7      |

For others, though, the position of craft master was likely a career destination in its own right, especially for those men with little time or ambition to rise to higher civic office. The vast majority of worsted weavers' guild masters served no higher than a seat on the common council. Given a comparison between the two positions, it is also likely that experience on the common council was seen as a useful precursor to holding high guild office. Of the 48 masters who served on the common council, 34 were councillors before they were guild master, while only 10 served as guild master first.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Additionally, four weavers first held both posts in the same year.

Considering that the majority of guild masters also had experience in the civic government, but not necessarily at the highest levels, there is a strong suggestion that experience in one area of the *cursus honorum* helped make a man more attractive for advancement in other areas. For the worsted weavers, time spent on the common council undoubtedly provided men with experience in civic affairs, but it also demonstrated a commitment to community service and a willingness to work on behalf of public institutions. The *cursus* here may have been flexible to some degree, more flexible than ascent through the civic *cursus honorum*, but again it underscores the importance of having a large body of citizens who were committed to the importance of mid-level administrative work. The role of guild master in Norwich was still a relatively low stage of the greater *cursus honorum*, and the openness of the role probably differed from London, where many of the guild masters were either members of, or selected by, the most senior and most wealthy of companies' liverymen.<sup>29</sup> The relative poverty of the Norwich guilds, in terms of financial assets and property, made the role less prone to exclusionary closure.

### 7.3 The search juries

The guild wardens in Norwich were simultaneously responsible for search in the city. They were responsible for presenting defects in workmanship, materials, and improperly sized worsteds to a jury of their peers and to the mayor and his assistants. As noted in Chapter 4, there are two surviving manuscripts that record the worsted weavers' search presentments in Norwich.<sup>30</sup> The presentment records show that the search on worsted was carried out on a regular basis from at least the 1490s through the mid-1550s. The frequency of hearings peaked during the 1520s, with an average of seven meetings per year. The most common complaints concerned technical deficiencies of cloths, improper measurements, and poor materials. Only

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<sup>29</sup> Davies, *The Tailors of London*, 18.

<sup>30</sup> NRO NCR 17d/7; NRO NCR 17d/8.



rarely were contraventions of restrictions on work practices, such as numbers of apprentices or looms, prosecuted. The presentment minutes show an aspect of the search that is rarely documented; they prove that producers for a lucrative export industry were keen to maintain standards for manufacturing and accountability.

The guild wardens of the worsted weavers were joined at each presentment hearing by a rolling jury of weavers. As stipulated in their charter of 1467, each jury was composed of six weavers from Norwich city and six weavers from the county of Norfolk.<sup>31</sup> The minutes of each hearing began with a list of the names of the jurors present. 148 individuals have been identified who sat on the juries from 1492 to 1506 and 1511 to 1530.<sup>32</sup> Young weavers would have found the juries a useful introduction to the concerns and expectations of a professional body of cloth producers, especially for men who had not apprenticed in Norwich and who instead had joined the freedom via redemption. It would also have been a way to acquire status among their peers and recognition from civic leaders by displaying good judgement and knowledge of production techniques.

The weavers' search juries were temporary and highly fluid. The composition of the juries changed from meeting to meeting and rarely repeated from one to the next. In a sample taken from five hearings in the year 1500, nineteen different men filled the six Norwich seats at each hearing. Only one, Thomas Swan, appeared three times. Nine other men – John Wattys, Robert Garrard, John Senyour, Richard Lely, William Wilkyns, William Broun, Thomas Lely, Thomas Baseley, and Thomas Harston – each appeared twice. The remaining nine men each appeared once. The number of names struck out with emendations scribbled in the margins suggests that substitutions often had to be made, sometimes at the last minute.

An important characteristic of the Norwich juries is the fact that they were affiliated with the guild, but not exclusively so. That half of the men on each jury were drawn from the county suggests that the process of search in Norwich could

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<sup>31</sup> *SR*, vol. 2, 418-21. See also above, page 191.

<sup>32</sup> There is a chronological gap of five years between books. Only the names from Norwich have been collected; this study does not include weavers from the county. Five of the names were illegible or could not be distinguished between homonyms; NRO NCR 17d/8 and NRO NCR 17d/7.

not be controlled exclusively by a single interest group.<sup>33</sup> The jury would have found itself equally split between the goals of the guild and the interests of unincorporated county weavers. The city jurors for the most part acted *ex officio* as representatives of the city guild, but there is nothing to suggest that the county weavers were formally affiliated with the urban guild. Presentments were overseen by the guild wardens, but to what degree did they control the process? Given that there were hearings where one or more wardens were absent, the wardens cannot have acted as sole arbiters, with the jury serving only to rubber-stamp their decisions. It is far more likely that the process had to strike a measure of equilibrium between civic,

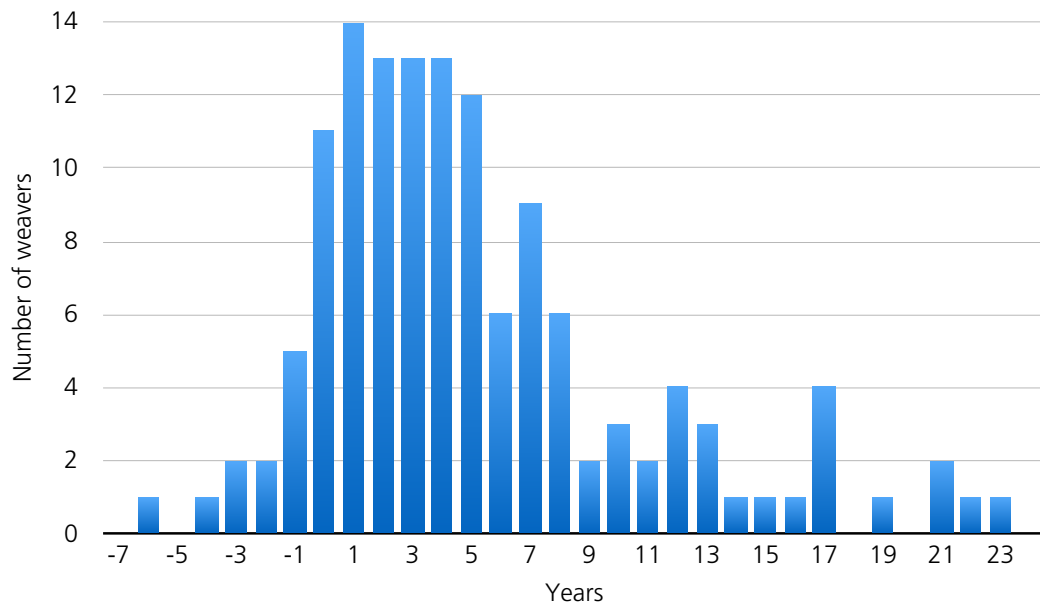


**Figure 7.4:** Years between a weaver's freedom and their first jury appearance

county, and craft interests for the efficient management of the worsted trade. This fluidity may have prevented the juries from ossifying into a standing body reserved solely for elite guild members.

<sup>33</sup> Allison, *The Wool Supply and the Worsted Cloth Industry in Norfolk in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, 379-80, discusses the selection of the Norfolk wardens later in the sixteenth century; attendance varied greatly, but could include as many as 100 weavers, as at the Aylsham election meeting in 1549.

The jury groups are intriguing in that they do not represent any single demographic within the guild. Participation was high. 225 weavers took the freedom between 1490 and 1530, and of these, 148 (66%) served on one or more search juries. Indeed, the most surprising aspect of the search juries lies in the great spread of ages represented. Far from being a perk reserved only for the elder and most experienced members of the guild, the role of juror was open to a wide range of experience, from 'early career' weavers to ex-masters of the guild. It was not at all uncommon for weavers to appear in the search juries within zero to three years of taking the freedom. Slightly more than half of the sample sat on their first jury within five years of joining the freedom. A quarter, or 38 weavers, served on a jury within the first two years of their freedom (Figure 7.4). Because the juries did not represent standing bodies, an individual's jury service was usually sporadic. Many of the jurors served only in this position, appearing in no further records of either guild or city. Thomas Saddeler, for example, was made free in 1514 and served once as juror in the same year. He then enrolled one apprentice and disappeared from view.<sup>34</sup> Many others like Saddeler leave little trace in the records save for a handful of jury appearances. As can be seen from the totals in Figure 7.5, nearly half of the weavers participated in only one to five juries; a further half of that number sat on six to ten juries; and half again of that number sat on eleven to fifteen. The role was important to the functioning of the guild, but the lack of remuneration may have prevented it from becoming a coveted role monopolised by the few. This may also have been the reason why so many weavers dropped out after a small number of sessions.

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<sup>34</sup> l'Estrange, *Freemen*, 119; NRO NCR 17d/8, f. 19r; *Norwich Apprentices*, 155.

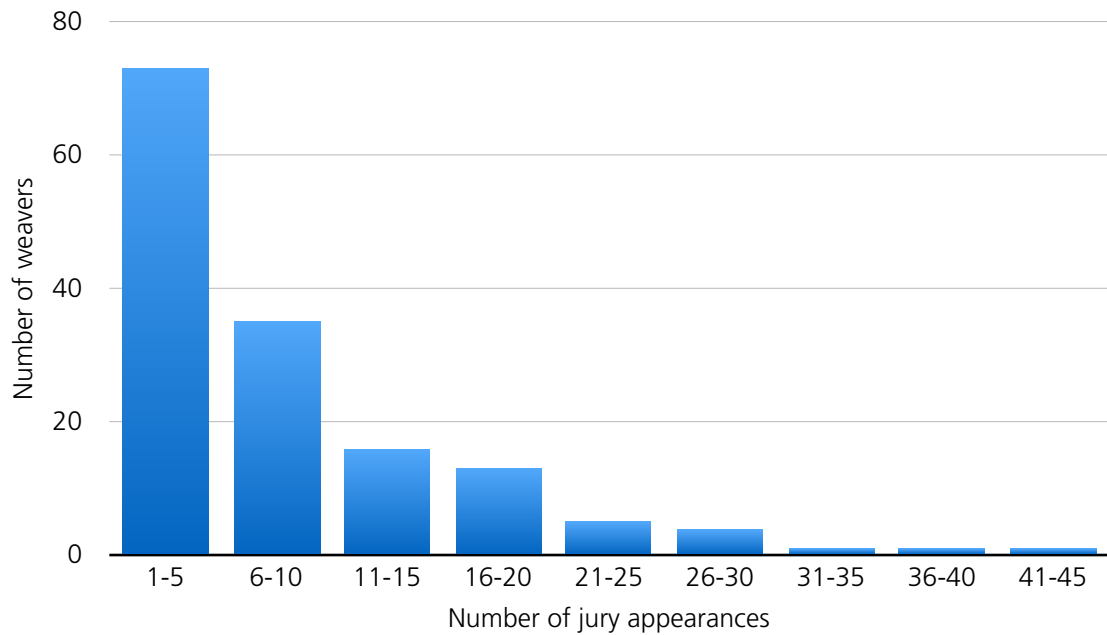


**Figure 7.5:** Frequency of search jury appearances

The worsted weaver jurors seem to have sat on their first juries relatively early in their careers, most being in their late twenties or early to mid-thirties.<sup>35</sup> William Wilkyns may well have been as young as 25, though as the son of Ralf Wilkyns, he was connected to a family that produced a mayor and two aldermen and thus could have been better placed for advancement than the average weaver. He took the freedom only two years after the completion of his apprenticeship, and was empanelled on his first presentment jury two years after that.<sup>36</sup> William Chaunte and Robert Abell likely were more representative of the norm. Chaunte and Abell both applied for their freedoms 16 years after beginning their apprenticeships, making them around the age of 30 when they became citizens. Chaunte sat his first jury within two years of becoming free, and Abell within four years.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>35</sup> NRO NCR 17d/8, ff. 48r, 51v.

<sup>36</sup> NRO NCR 16a/2, f. 155; NRO NCR 17d/8, f. 41v; *Norwich Apprentices*, 180.

<sup>37</sup> *Norwich Apprentices*, 1, 35; l'Estrange, *Freemen*, 1, 30; NRO NCR 17d/8, ff. 48r, 51v. l'Estrange incorrectly gives Abell's year of freedom as 14 Hen VII. It should read 14 Hen VIII. The correct year can be found in the Assembly minutes. NRO NCR 16d/2, Books of

Importantly, though, not all of the men who took part in the juries were freemen. Around 20 weavers, or 13% of jurors, were not freemen when they first began sitting on juries. Eleven weavers sat on juries one to six years prior to joining the freedom. This group spanned the range of involvement. They included the aldermen Ralf and Thomas Wilkyns, but also John Broun and Robert Trace, who served on one jury each and never held civic office. Furthermore, 9 of the 20 weavers have no recorded freedom entry at all. As the freedom records are known to be defective in coverage, some of these men may indeed have joined the freedom without there being a surviving record of the event. However, the fact that 7% can specifically be shown to have joined the freedom after serving on a jury indicates that citizenship was not a mandatory condition of the role. Historians are inclined to see the freedom as a baseline for participation in political life, but in reality, non-citizens also participated in city government. Though the offices of common councillor and above were limited to the citizenry, there were other roles at the neighbourhood, parish, or ward level that did not require the freedom.<sup>38</sup>

Jury service will have brought distinct advantages to young weavers trying to establish themselves as independent masters. After mid-century, when the freedom was mediated through the channels of the guild, having a pre-established connection to the guild can only have been beneficial, especially for those men who had not apprenticed in Norwich. If the craft did in fact exercise some power of veto over its members, as is suggested by the Ordinances for Crafts, then serving on a jury prior to applying to the freedom via redemption would have been a pragmatic move.<sup>39</sup> For recent immigrants who lacked social contacts, serving on a jury could have been one

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Proceedings.

<sup>38</sup> Sagui has found evidence of constables who served without being freemen in Norwich. My own research aligns with her finding. Other studies have emphasized the relative openness of lower offices in other towns such as York and London: S. Sagui, 'Mid-Level Officials in Fifteenth-Century Norwich', in *The Fifteenth Century XII: Society in an Age of Plague*, ed. by L. Clark and C. Rawcliffe (Woodbridge, Suff., 2013), 101-121; C. E. Carpenter, *The Office and Personnel of the Post of Bridgemaster in York 1450-1499*, MA thesis (University of York, 1996); Rappaport, *Worlds Within Worlds*, 180-2.

<sup>39</sup> *Records*, vol. 2, 293.

means of establishing a trust network.<sup>40</sup> It could also have served as a means of publicly proving one's expertise in the chosen craft. A jury member lacking the expected level of skill or experience would have been extremely visible when asked to weigh-in on defective wares during the search hearings. Such a man might then have found it difficult to gain admission to his chosen guild if the masters expected some minimum level of technical competence.

### **Jury service and the career-cycle correlated**

If there is one outstanding measure by which a man's future career successes could be predicted, it is probably the measure of his participation as a jury member in the craft presentment hearings conducted as part of the search process. By comparing the records of jury service against the frequency of other events in the lives of the weavers, it is possible to gauge the importance of craft involvement to these individuals.

Table 7.4 presents the number of jury appearances correlated against apprentice-holding. As can be seen, there is a moderate positive correlation ( $r=0.57$ ) between the number of times a man sat on the jury and the number of apprentices that he enrolled with the city. Men who served the guild were more likely to enrol apprentices than those who did not; on the whole, the number of apprentices rose with the amount of service offered to the guild. Weavers who appeared more frequently in the jury lists were more likely to enrol three or more apprentices over the span of their career.

The role that the guild may have played in helping to match masters with prospective apprentices is worth considering. As discussed previously, a significant number of apprentices came to Norwich from outside the city. Of the 534 apprentice indentures enrolled by worsted weavers between 1512 and 1530, at least a quarter were drawn from rural areas of Norfolk.<sup>41</sup> Families seeking training for their sons

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<sup>40</sup> Rosser, 'Crafts, Guilds and the Negotiation of Work in the Medieval Town'.

<sup>41</sup> See above, Table 6.1.

**Table 7.4:** Correspondence of search jury participation and apprenticeship enrolments, 1492-1530

|              | N   | Mean frequency of<br>appearance on search<br>juries, per juror | Mean number of<br>apprentices, per juror |
|--------------|-----|----------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|
| 20+ juries   | 16  | 27                                                             | 8                                        |
| 10-19 juries | 29  | 14                                                             | 5                                        |
| 1-9 juries   | 102 | 4                                                              | 3                                        |
| No juries    | 74  | -                                                              | 2                                        |

cannot always have had personal connections to the masters in Norwich. Those families may well have sought out city officials or guild wardens, hoping for a referral to a suitable master for their son. Weavers with better connections to the craft surely benefitted more from internal recommendations. The search juries would have been an ideal forum for young weavers to generate social capital and a network of contacts. The data strongly suggests that the weavers who provided service to the guild later reaped benefits commensurate with their engagement levels. The correspondence between enrolled apprentices and search involvement suggests that jurors with strong ties to the guild were able to attract more trainees. And if the amount of employed labour is any indication of financial success, then masters with more apprentices were more likely to have built out larger businesses based on their ability to produce more cloths.

Once again, though, while Table 7.4 does show differentials in apprentice-holding, it also demonstrates that even medium and smaller producers still had access to apprentices. This is an important point. Limits on apprentice-holding imposed by the city or by the guild, when taken together with the restrictions on the number of looms that one person could employ in a business, were instrumental in deterring the great merchants in Norwich from gaining control of the production chain for worsteds, or as de Munck argued, from ‘cornering the market’ for

apprentices.<sup>42</sup> As discussed previously, putting-out was negligible in worsted production in Norwich.<sup>43</sup> Limitations on holding apprentices helped share out contested resources more equitably, which itself helped urban production remain viable within the context of guild-based, small-scale artisanal workshops.

The juries also likely served as a mechanism by which guild members could demonstrate their activism in support of the guild, and become known to other weavers in the city. All of the guild wardens rose to their position having first served on a considerable number of juries. None of the known guild wardens ascended to the role without first having proved themselves at the lower level of jury membership.

A further examination of jury participation with civic office-holding suggests that guild offices could serve as an important step for those artisans interested in ascending the *cursus honorum*. A comparison of the level of office-holding for the worsted weavers and the frequency with which they sat on juries shows a weak positive correlation ( $r=0.36$ ). On average, men who participated more often in the juries also tended to rise higher in civic office. The majority of the weavers who served on juries, 60 per cent of the jury pool, did later go on to hold at least one civic office, including that of constable. But it was not a requirement of the role.

As shown in Table 7.5, 77 jurors, or roughly half of the total, are characterised by low political participation. This group is made up of the Rank C and D weavers, those men who either served only as constable, or who held no civic office at all. The large number of weavers in the 'Rank D' category confirms that the jury positions were open to all weavers, including those who had no intention of forging a career in public office.

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<sup>42</sup> De Munck, 'Gilding Golden Ages: Perspectives From Early Modern Antwerp on the Guild Debate, c. 1450 – c. 1650', 224. The Worsted Weavers' Ordinances of 1511 stipulated that a worsted weaver dwelling in Norwich could own no more than five looms, while weavers in Norfolk, Suffolk, or Cambridgeshire could own no more than three looms, nor could any of the above-mentioned weavers own and operate looms outside of their own 'dwelling place'. *Records*, vol. 2, 377.

<sup>43</sup> See pages 229-233 above.



**Table 7.5:** Comparison of search jury participation with levels of political office-holding

|                                     | <b>Rank A:<br/>Mayor,<br/>alderman,<br/>sheriff</b> | <b>Rank B:<br/>Common<br/>councillor</b> | <b>Rank C:<br/>Constable</b> | <b>Rank D:<br/>No civic<br/>office</b> | <b>Unidentified</b> |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|------------------------------|----------------------------------------|---------------------|
| Jurors                              | 9                                                   | 62                                       | 19                           | 58                                     | -                   |
| Total appearances                   | 120                                                 | 755                                      | 125                          | 341                                    | 5                   |
| Average<br>appearances<br>per juror | 13.3                                                | 12.2                                     | 6.6                          | 5.8                                    | -                   |

The second group constitutes those jurors of Rank A or B, who went on to hold civic office at the level of common councillor or above. For them, the juries could have acted as a staging point for easier entry to civic governance. Looking purely at the raw number of weavers in each column may seem confusing. It might be expected that the number of men should taper off like a pyramid, but instead there are as many men who served on the common council as there are men who never served at all (Rank B with 62 men versus Rank D with 58 men). However, when the total numbers of jury appearances are summed up for each group and then averaged by the number of weavers, it becomes clear that men who served on juries also tended to rise to higher offices in the political *cursus honorum*. The Rank A weavers averaged 13.3 jury hearings each, whereas the Rank B weavers averaged 12.2, the Rank C weavers averaged 6.6, and the weavers with no political experience at all came in last, with 5.8 hearings each.

Of the weavers made free between 1490 and 1530, only 10 of the 81 who held public office have no corresponding record of jury service. For those with political ambition, proving oneself through service to the guild seems to have been the first step in gaining public exposure. The first group, Ranks A and B, dedicated a significant amount of time to serving in mid to high-level civic offices, while the second group, Ranks C and D, comprised those men who were content to fill low-

level positions, such as juror and constable. Weavers who felt the urge to engage in public service clearly had a range of opportunities open to them.

## Conclusion

The jurors who participated in the worsted weavers' presentment hearings represented a cross-section of weavers who aimed for self-sufficiency as independent masters. The point at which we see them entering the search juries is undoubtedly the point at which they felt ready to move up the craft *cursus honorum*, from journeyman or paid labour to self-employed master. It is well worth considering the extent to which this simple participation in the craft juries later opened doors in the careers of these weavers. An alderman's *cursus honorum* included civic offices that would have been essential for the elite *cursus*, but unnecessary or even undesirable for the average craftsman, who would have been far more interested in a *cursus* that established him as a small business owner. Once that was secured, he could move on to consider expanding the business, running for guild master, or holding office. Productive capability for craftsmen was a direct outcome of the amount of labour that one master craftsman could command. Only after a career was established did most of the weavers turn their mind to the further steps of their *cursus*, including guild master and political office.

How many were unable to build a business because of the choices they made and the connections they failed to forge? We can never know, but the steady influx of new names onto the jury lists highlights the role newcomers could play, and shows that the presentment juries in Norwich were an important first step along the craft *cursus honorum*.

## 8 | Civic office-holding

Civic office-holding has long formed the foundation of most urban medieval prosopographies, and for good reason. In the towns where good records survive to document the identity of office-holders, it has been possible to reconstruct the career progressions of many of England's mayors, sheriffs, and aldermen. It has been more problematic, though, to find information about men who served in the lower levels of civic governments. Many towns in the fifteenth century expanded their political structure to include lower councils or common councils, many of which were designed to represent the interests of the community. These lower councils, contrary to some opinions,<sup>1</sup> were filled by men from a broad range of backgrounds, including many of modest means.<sup>2</sup>

The example of the worsted weavers's office-holding in Norwich demonstrates clearly that the experience of office-holding was changing in the late fifteenth century. By focusing only on the most elite offices, scholars have long been convinced that English town governments were increasingly restricted to a minority of inhabitants. A broader view of office-holding, however, shows that Norwich's citizens actively participated at many levels in the city's administration. By including mid and low-level offices, this study shows that craftsmen played an active role in civic government, and that their rate of participation was increasing, not decreasing.

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<sup>1</sup>Swanson, *Medieval Artisans*, 123-6.

<sup>2</sup>Carpenter, *Urban Elites*, 252-4.

## 8.1 Craftsmen and civic office

Keith Allison produced some of the earliest scholarly work on the worsted industry. In an article he published in 1960, drawn from his doctoral thesis of 1955, he briefly discussed the political aspirations of the worsted weavers. Though his work focused neither on social issues, nor specifically on the medieval worsted trade, he believed that the worsted weavers in the period of this study had played little to no role in Norwich's civic governance:

It is hardly surprising that Norwich worsted weavers rarely aspired to councillorship, aldermanry, or mayoralty during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries: few achieved the necessary wealth and 'sufficiency', and if they did, they were encouraged to move into the more fashionable distributive trades which held a virtual monopoly of city government.<sup>3</sup>

Though Allison worked primarily on agricultural history, his statement has been influential in reinforcing several key ideas about medieval Norwich and civic office-holding: first, that merchants monopolised civic office-holding; second, that craftsmen rarely held civic office in Norwich, not even on the common council; and third, when they did take office, they had little choice but to change their citizenship enrolment from an artisanal craft to a mercantile craft. However, Allison's only evidence for this assertion came from a reading of the clause in the Ordinances for Crafts that allowed for craft translations,<sup>4</sup> and Cozen-Hardy's biographical sketches of the mayors of Norwich, a source whose accuracy has already been criticised earlier in this thesis.<sup>5</sup> Allison's work was based on a wide reading of the civic records, but did not include a prosopographical study of office-holders.

Allison's assertions about political participation in Norwich concurs with the conventional historiography of late medieval English towns. In 1948, Sylvia Thrupp wrote *The Merchant Class of Medieval London*, in which she outlined the rise to power

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<sup>3</sup> Allison, 'The Norfolk Worsted Industry', 78. It should be noted that Allison's work on the fifteenth century was cursory at best, and meant only as context for later developments.

<sup>4</sup> *Records*, vol. 2, 289-90.

<sup>5</sup> Cozens-Hardy and Kent, *The Mayors of Norwich*, and above, page 233.

of the city's merchants, arguing that they constituted a singular and well-defined class apart from the rest of the city's inhabitants. Thrupp felt that by the start of the fourteenth century, London's civic government was controlled by a 'highly privileged oligarchy';<sup>6</sup> by 1500 it had seen 'little alteration in the distribution of power'. Though Thrupp was not the first to write about mercantile power in the city, or oligarchy as a controlling concept, her work was seminal in creating an image of the 'merchant class' as a well-defined group that had surmounted the pinnacle of medieval urban society. Her work became a touchstone for later studies that grounded social stratification in class identity. Authors like Hilton and Swanson emphasised class division and conflict in their work, and argued that the evidence from towns showed a systematic and deliberate exclusion of artisans from public office.<sup>7</sup> This argument has been fuelled partly by an over-reliance on civic documents, which are often ambiguous or biased in their treatment of town history.

The application of prosopography to the analysis of political office-holding is neither new nor novel, but given the nature of the evidence that survives from medieval cities, it should not be surprising that most prosopographical studies have focused on senior office-holders, such as mayors and aldermen.<sup>8</sup> But understanding the dynamics of civic government requires building models that examine personnel at all levels, not just the highest offices. It has only been in the last few decades that historians have begun to chip away at the debate on oligarchy, by expanding analysis to include lesser-known offices.<sup>9</sup> By creating detailed prosopographies of actual

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<sup>6</sup>Thrupp, *The Merchant Class*, 65.

<sup>7</sup>Swanson, *Medieval Artisans*; Hilton, *English and French Towns*. The rise of oligarchy has been especially prevalent in the early modern literature. Clark and Slack felt that 'the continuous growth of oligarchic magistracy is the most obvious theme in English urban history from 1500 to 1700.' Clark and Slack, *Crisis and Order*, 25.

<sup>8</sup>Thrupp's study was based on a core prosopography of London aldermen. Thrupp, *The Merchant Class*. Frost's study looked only at Norwich aldermen elected between 1461 and 1509. Frost, *The Aldermen of Norwich*. Neither Kermode nor Swanson included York's council of forty-eight in their studies, which was the equivalent of Norwich's common council.

<sup>9</sup>Kowaleski created a prosopography of small traders and artisans in Exeter using debt rolls and court records. Kowaleski, *Local Markets and Regional Trade in Medieval Exeter*, 5. Charlotte Carpenter created a prosopography of York's Bridge Masters for her Master's dissertation, in addition to her Ph.D on elite status in York. Carpenter, *The Office and Personnel of the Post of Bridgemaster in York 1450-1499*; Carpenter, *Urban Elites*, 50-53; see also R.

office-holders, we can begin to better understand the underlying social and economic pressures that led to changes in civic constitutions in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

Norwich is remarkably fortunate that full returns survive from nearly all civic elections from 1453 onwards.<sup>10</sup> Few cities can boast of such a repository.<sup>11</sup> The present study has digitised the election returns from 1453 to 1530.<sup>12</sup> The offices selected for analysis here will be presented in three groups. The first group includes the low and mid-level offices of constable and common councillor. The second section examines the co-opted financial offices of chamberlain, chamberlain's councillors, auditor, and clavor. The final section considers the high civic offices of sheriff, alderman, and mayor.<sup>13</sup> Special emphasis was put on identifying as many members of the common council as possible, as it is a topic that has received little attention up to now. The end result is a picture of a civic government that was becoming more diverse, not less. Nor do the data support the argument for increased oligarchy in Norwich. In both the lower and upper councils, men from the traditional mercantile crafts were losing their positions of dominance, most commonly to men involved in worsted production.

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Goddard, 'Medieval Business Networks: St Mary's Guild and the Borough Court in Later Medieval Nottingham', *Urban History*, 40 (2013), 3-27; Sagui, 'Mid-Level Officials in Fifteenth-Century Norwich'.

<sup>10</sup> The only notable gap between 1453 and 1530 is the loss of ward returns for the 1475 elections. Other minor lacunae are noted in *Norwich Officers*, xvi-xvii.

<sup>11</sup> Scholars of London, for example, have pieced together various lists which remain incomplete; see Appendices 1 and 2 in C. M. Barron, *London in the Later Middle Ages: Government and People, 1200-1500* (Oxford, 2004), 308-374.

<sup>12</sup> The sources used to compile the statistics for this chapter are Hawes, corrected and supplemented as necessary by the assembly minutes and mayor's court books. *Norwich Officers*; NRO NCR 16a/2; NRO NCR 16c/1; NRO NCR 16c/2; NRO NCR 16d/1, Books of Proceedings; NRO NCR 16d/2, Books of Proceedings.

<sup>13</sup> In addition, there were a number of other offices that have not been included in this study, including those of recorder, town clerk, ditchkeeper, sergeant at mace, speaker of the assembly, supervisor, coroner, and swordbearer.

## 8.2 The constabulary and the common council

Most men's civic careers in Norwich followed a traditional pathway of ascent as laid out by the city's *cursus honorum*. The course of offices usually began in the constabulary. This was followed by several years of service in the common council. The majority of office-holders stopped there, but men who were 'sufficient' enough (that is, wealthy enough) could move on to the higher office of sheriff or alderman. Once elected, an aldermen sat for life; sheriffs served only a year. The occupation of both offices was required for candidacy to the mayoralty, the highest position in Norwich's civic government. Norwich was not unusual in having a *cursus honorum*,<sup>14</sup> and though there were some exceptions, most office-holders followed the conventional course of offices.

How easy was it, then, to find entry to political office in late medieval Norwich? Maddern produced an estimate of what she thought the rate of political participation had been for both inhabitants and citizens of Norwich. She believed that between 1.6% and 3.1% of the city's total population may have held office at one point or another. She estimated the city's population to lie between 5,000 and 10,000 inhabitants in the fifteenth century.<sup>15</sup> Though we lack the data to establish definitive population levels for any medieval English town, most other authors who work on Norwich have thought its numbers to be slightly higher, with estimated figures usually falling between 8,000 and 12,000.<sup>16</sup> However, with citizen numbers, we are on

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<sup>14</sup> York seems to have had a well-defined *cursus*; its political system is described in Appendix 1 of J. Kermode, *Medieval Merchants: York, Beverley and Hull in the Later Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 1998). See also A. Kulikundis, 'The Cursus Honorum in Fifteenth-Century York', unpublished MA dissertation, Center for Medieval Studies, University of York (1993). Not all towns had a discernible *cursus honorum*, however; Carr found no evidence for one in Salisbury, nor did Britnell find evidence of a *cursus* in Colchester. D. R. Carr, 'The Problem of Urban Patriciates: Office Holders in Fifteenth-Century Salisbury', *Wiltshire Archaeological and Natural History Magazine*, 83 (1990), 128; Britnell, *Growth and Decline in Colchester, 1300-1525*, 129-30.

<sup>15</sup> Maddern, 'Order and Disorder', 192-3.

<sup>16</sup> Maddern falls at the lower end of estimates for Norwich's late medieval population. King estimated that the city may have housed between 8,000 and 12,000 at the time of the 1379 poll tax. King, *Borough Finances*, 23. Pound and Rawcliffe guessed the city had around 11,000 inhabitants in the 1520s from their studies of the early sixteenth-century subsidy records. C. Rawcliffe, *The Hospitals of Medieval Norwich* (Norwich, 1995), 24; J. Pound,

firmer ground. The freedom rolls indicate that just over 2,200 men took the freedom in Norwich between 1450 and 1530.<sup>17</sup> Maddern estimated that a mere 4% to 8% of this group held office during their lifetimes.<sup>18</sup> This estimate, on the surface, would seem to support the argument in favour of a 'rise of oligarchy' in the fifteenth century – yet, it is important to understand how such estimates are produced. Maddern did not elaborate upon her definition of 'office-holding', but her count must have included only the most visible, high-status offices. In comparison, this study has identified 1,416 men who held one or more offices during those years, and which produces a much higher political participation rate of over 60% of the citizen body. Though this number seems high in comparison to Maddern's calculation, I have included all of the data on civic office-holding, and included the low-level offices of constable and common counsellor, as well as the co-opted financial offices, such as auditor, chamberlain, chamberlain's counsellor, and clavor, which she most likely did not.

It should be stressed here that the medieval concept of citizenship encompassed both privilege and duty, and office-holding straddled both sides of that line. Public service was an important contribution to the common good, and citizens

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'Government to 1660', in *Norwich Since 1550*, ed. by C. Rawcliffe and R. G. Wilson (London, 2004), 35. The city saw its relative population ranking increase between 1377 and 1524, though the criteria for the two taxes are not comparable. In 1377, Norwich had ranked fifth in the realm, when counted by the number of its inhabitants who paid the poll tax; by 1523/4, it ranked as the town with the largest number of taxpayers, second only to London. Dyer, 'Appendix: Ranking Lists of English Medieval Towns', 758-761. However, the study of medieval demography is notoriously fraught with difficulties. No document series survives that universally tallied either citizens or inhabitants. Scholars have made qualified estimates using data from sources like the poll taxes of 1377-81 or the royal subsidies of 1523-5, usually by incorporating a corrective factor, or 'multiplier', to account for the unenumerated population. Even small changes in multipliers, however, can render radically different results. Campbell's analysis of the 1522 muster returns and the 1524 and 1525 lay subsidies, for example, produced three very different estimates for a national population of England: a 'most plausible' figure of 1,843,468, in addition to an upper and a lower estimate of 2,922,218 and 1,049,712 respectively. B. M. S. Campbell, 'The Population of Early Tudor England: A Re-Evaluation of the 1522 Muster Returns and 1524 and 1525 Lay Subsidies', *Journal of Historical Geography*, 7 (1981), 145-154. For more on the difficulty of estimating urban populations, see Postan, *Medieval Economy and Society*, 30-44, and Bolton, *English Economy*, 47-59, who discusses the problems with using multipliers in some detail.

<sup>17</sup> King, *Borough Finances*, Table 3.1.

<sup>18</sup> Maddern, 'Order and Disorder', 192-3. Her actual estimate was that between 1 in 12 to 1 in 23 freemen held office.



were expected to contribute according to their means. Serving in the lower levels of the government was one way of discharging this obligation.

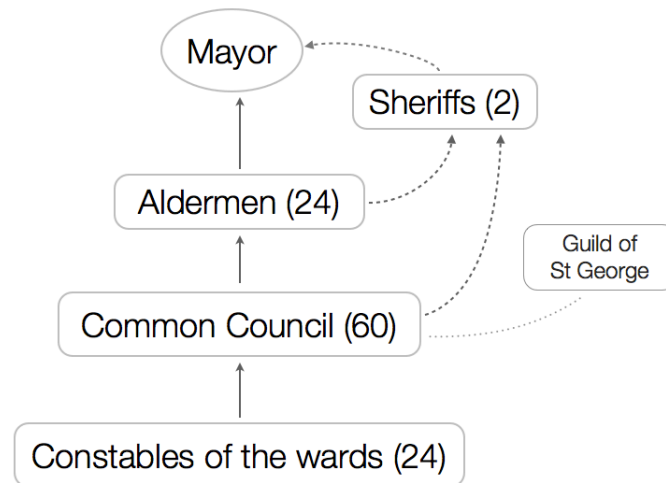


**Figure 8.1:** The civic *cursus honorum* in fifteenth-century Norwich

For most new entrants to the freedom, the constabulary would be their first experience of office-holding in Norwich, and participation was high. Over a thousand men (1,095) served as a constable in Norwich between 1453 and 1530. As can be seen in Figure 8.2, the average term of service was short, with the majority serving for only one year. 78.5% (858) of constables spent one to two years on the job, while only 8.7% (65) served five years or more.<sup>19</sup> Only seven spent more than 15 years in the position. Though Sagui argued that the role of constable should be seen as valuable in and of itself, the data presented here suggest a slightly different interpretation.<sup>20</sup> Few men served solely as a constable. Nearly four-fifths of all constables served but one year in the role. Given the preponderance of short tenures, it is difficult to make the claim that the office of constable was coveted for its own merits. More likely is that men with no intention of forging a political career instead served briefly as a constable, which effectively discharged their civic duty.

<sup>19</sup> 91.3% (998) served four or fewer years.

<sup>20</sup> Sagui, 'Mid-Level Officials in Fifteenth-Century Norwich', 102.

Alternately, for those men who did have political ambition, the role of constable was the first step on the civic *cursus honorum*. Fully 90% of the worsted weavers who held office began in the constabulary.<sup>21</sup> It was not mandatory to serve as a constable, but it may have been an advantage to do so, particularly for men who were less well known in the wards or who lacked the social contacts to get elected directly to the common council. Of the 83 worsted weavers who sat on the common council, only 9% have no record of having previously served as constable.<sup>22</sup> In comparison, 37% of the mercers who sat on the common council did not previously serve as constable before taking their council seat.

According to the terms of the Composition of 1415, sixty men were elected annually to the common council as representatives from each of the four major wards of the city (Mancroft, Conesford, Wymer, and the Northern ward or 'Ultra Aquam'). Unlike aldermen, who only were expected to be resident inside the city limits, councillors had to reside in the ward from which they were elected. 727 men served on Norwich's lower council between 1453 and 1530. Once elected to the council, members typically spent more time there than they had in the constabulary. As Figure 8.3 shows, only a third (32.2%) of common councillors served between one and two years. Roughly half (49.6%) served five years or longer, and a quarter of those held their seats for more than a decade.

To what extent did occupational bias against craftsmen limit office-holding in Norwich? The chapter in the Ordinances for Crafts on craft translations suggested that high office-holders were expected to come from one of the 'honourable' crafts in the city, but nowhere does it stipulate that this was a condition of all office-holding.

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<sup>21</sup> 324 worsted weavers entered the freedom between 1450 and 1530. 108 joined either the constabulary or the common council, or both.

<sup>22</sup> However, three worsted weavers were already sitting councilors in 1453 when the records begin in 1453.

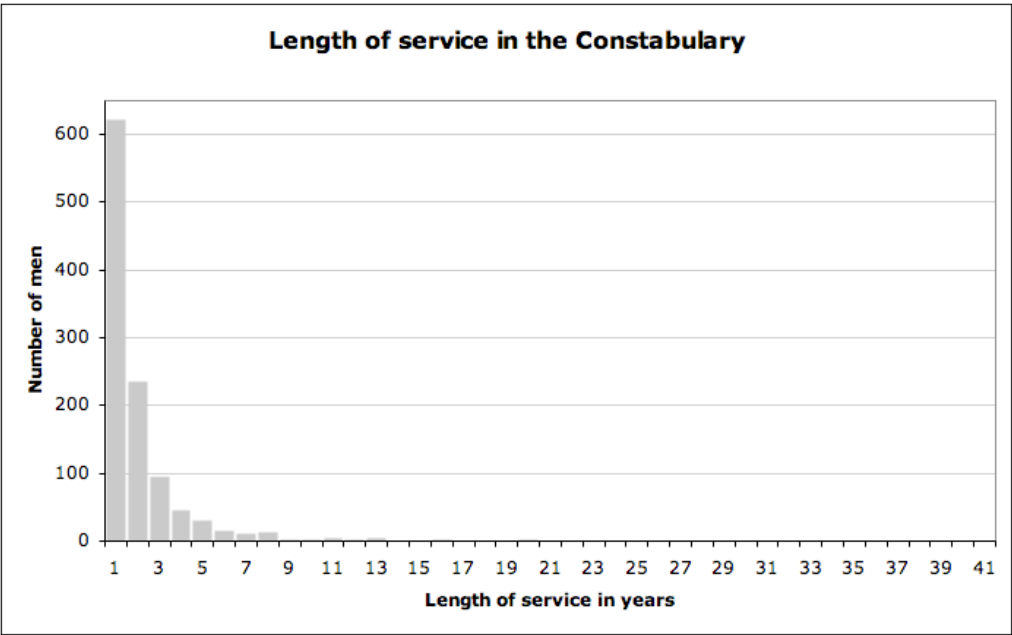


Figure 8.2: Length of service in the Norwich constabulary, 1450–1530

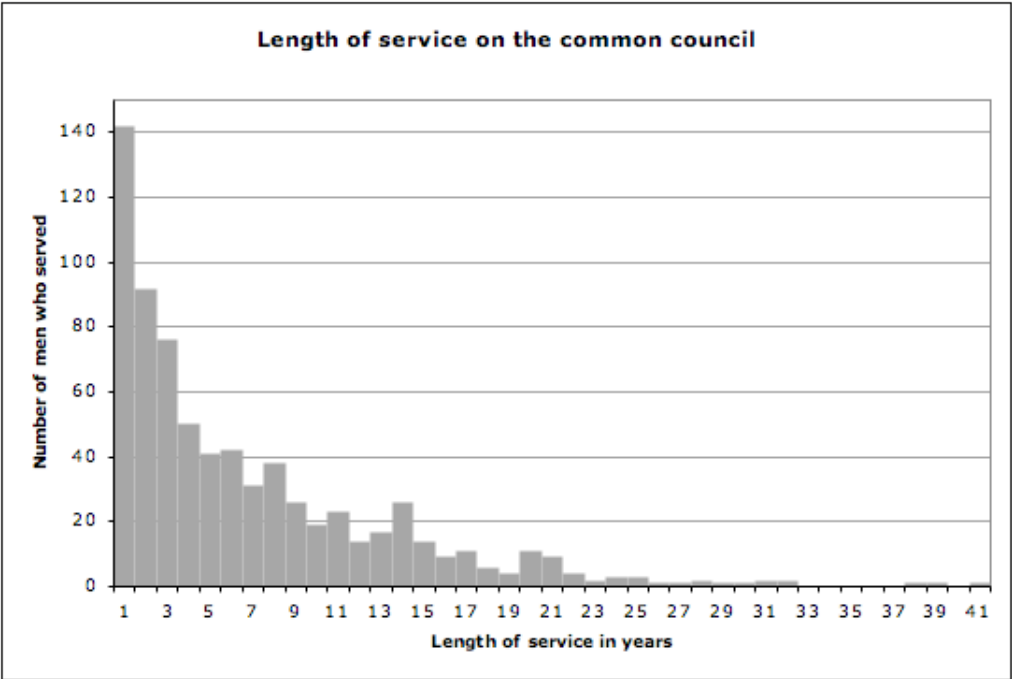


Figure 8.3: Length of service on the Norwich common council, 1453–1530

A document written in 1456 obliquely referenced ‘the 24 honourable crafts’ of the city without providing any further details.<sup>23</sup> There is no question that the high-status mercantile guilds, including the Mercers, Drapers, Grocers, and Rafmen, were on this list. The rest of the list is open to speculation. There are no other policy documents that present real barriers to craftsmen holding office. There were, however, two separate incidents that were chronicled in town documents, and which often have been cited in favour of occupational limitations. However, neither of these incidents was as straightforward as one might think, and both should be understood within the greater context of other office-holding experiences. The first incident took place in the common council, and will be examined here. The second incident concerns a newly-elected alderman, and will be considered later in the chapter.<sup>24</sup>

In 1463 a shoemaker named Thomas Antyngham was elected to the common council to represent Mancroft ward.<sup>25</sup> The assembly minutes record an attempt to block Antyngham’s election on the grounds that shoemaking did not meet the ‘requisite’ social status for Antyngham to join the council and its affiliated Guild of St George:

On this day Thomas Antyngham Shomaker one of the Co-citizens of the 60 Co-citizens elected for Common Council by assent of the residue of the Common Council is stopped from taking his oath as the other Citizens do because it was desirable for advice and counsel to be taken whether it is to the dishonour of the City and the gild of Saint George in the said City to receive a person of such a craft into the Common Council of the City.<sup>26</sup>

Though many historians are aware of Antyngham’s experience, thanks to its publication in Hudson and Tingey’s compilation of Norwich documents, few are aware of how the incident was resolved. Hilton, for example, believed that ‘even entry to the common council was denied to a shoemaker because of his trade’.<sup>27</sup> As

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<sup>23</sup> *Records*, vol. 2, 92.

<sup>24</sup> See page 286 below.

<sup>25</sup> *Norwich Officers*, 5.

<sup>26</sup> *Records*, vol. 1, 286.

<sup>27</sup> Hilton, *English and French Towns*, 102.

the record notes, the case was deferred for consultation. There is no record of whether a debate ensued, or what conclusion was reached. Yet contrary to Hilton's assumption, an examination of later elections shows that the will of the voters in Mancroft ward eventually overrode the objections. Antyngham was returned to the council again in the following year, and continued to hold his seat until 1475.<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, three other probable shoemakers also took seats on the common council after Antyngham's election: Robert Herman held a seat for Wymer ward between 1467 and 1471;<sup>29</sup> Thomas Dereham held a seat for St Peter Mancroft ward in 1471;<sup>30</sup> and Robert Car held a seat for Mancroft ward in 1485 and 1491.<sup>31</sup> Whether a discriminatory policy towards the 'lower' crafts had actually held sway in earlier years, or whether it was contrived on the spot by a particularly conservative councillor, or group of councillors, remains unclear. Either way, it did not reflect the actual composition of the council going forward.

A detailed look at other returns shows that, on the whole, the wards were not opposed to returning men from the 'lesser' crafts. The common council always included a wide range of crafts. A craft affiliation has been established for 85.5% of the seats held by common councillors during the 77 years covered by this study. Appendix B presents the full tabulation of seat-holding on the common council for the years 1453 to 1530, broken down by craft affiliation and by decade. As the data show, men from many of the humbler crafts occupied seats on the council, and the

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<sup>28</sup> *Norwich Officers*, 5.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 81. A Robert Herman, shoemaker, appears on two deeds, one for a tenement in St Benedict, West Wymer, dated 1472/3. NCR 1/19, Roll A, m.9, (4 Edw IV); NCR 1/19, Roll F, m.1, (12 Edw IV).

<sup>30</sup> *Norwich Officers*, 52; A Thomas Dereham, cordwainer, was made free in 1447/8. *l'Estrange, Freeman*, 43. He appears in five deeds between 1464 and 1471, all with the occupational attribution of shoemaker or cordwainer, three of which were located in St Peter Mancroft parish. NCR 1/19, Roll A, m.11, (4 Edw IV); NCR 1/19, Roll B, m.3, (7 Edw IV); NCR 1/19, Roll C, m.1, (9 Edw IV); NCR 1/19, Roll C, m.2d, (9 Edw IV); NCR 1/19, Roll E, m.2d, (11 Edw IV). He paid 5s in tax for a property in Mancroft ward in 1472, and made a will in 1485. Jurkowski, 'Income Tax Assessments', 129; NCC, Caston, 258.

<sup>31</sup> *Norwich Officers*, 33. Robert Car, cordwainer, paid landgable on several properties in St Stephen and St Andrew c.1488-90. NRO MC 146/1-4; A Robert Carre was taxed 12d for property and 20d for goods and chattels in 1489 in St Stephen's parish. Jurkowski, 'Income Tax Assessments', 145-6. Robert Kerre of St Stephen's parish wrote a will in 1496. NCC, Multon, 10.

rate of uptake of previously unrepresented crafts into the council accelerated in the years that followed Antyngham's election. More than 35 'new' crafts joined the common council in the decades following 1463.

Though merchants were well represented on the common council, at no time did they monopolise the council. In fact, the balance of representation favoured craftsmen. Non-mercantile guilds outnumbered mercantile guilds by a ratio of about two to one. As Table 8.1 shows, the top ten crafts on the council comprised a mix between mercantile and non-mercantile guilds. Craftsmen also spent longer on the common council once they were elected. Men from artisanal guilds constituted about 48% of the elected membership, but controlled 53% of the seats. This discrepancy is possibly explained by the fact that merchants were more likely than craftsmen to move up to the aldermen's bench. Around 43% of merchant common councillors became aldermen, while only around 16% of non-mercantile councillors were called to the bench.

**Table 8.1:** Top ten guilds on the common council, ranked by seats held, 1453-1530

| Craft           | Seats |
|-----------------|-------|
| Worsted weavers | 415   |
| Mercers         | 402   |
| Grocers         | 312   |
| Bakers          | 226   |
| Rafmen          | 217   |
| Butchers        | 196   |
| Drapers         | 163   |
| Tailors         | 144   |
| Tanners         | 125   |
| Scriveners      | 123   |

Furthermore, candidates for the common council do not seem to have faced the same occupational discrimination seen in other towns. Several towns had longstanding policies of preventing men in certain occupations from taking office, especially those concerned with victualling. Butchers and tanners had an unusually hard time getting elected to office in York in the fifteenth century,<sup>32</sup> yet butchers and tanners ranked among the top ten seat holders on the common council in Norwich.

### Textile producers in the common council

The most striking growth in participation on the common council came from textile producers. The rise in seats held by worsted weavers, calenderers, and shearmen in the 1490s directly mirrors the growth in worsted exports seen at the end of the fifteenth century, and the concomitant decline of Norwich woollens. A comparison of seat-holding from 1453 to 1490 with the later period of 1491 to 1530 shows that worsted weavers, calenderers, and shearmen had increased the number of seats they held by 164%, whereas fullers and woollen weavers had lost 79% of their seats.

**Table 8.2:** Common council seats held by textile guilds

| Common Council        | 1453-1490 | 1491-1530 |
|-----------------------|-----------|-----------|
| Bedweavers            | 15        | 19        |
| Blexter               | -         | 2         |
| Calenderers           | 9         | 46        |
| Coverlet weavers      | 4         | 4         |
| Dyers                 | 49        | 35        |
| Fullers               | 91        | 1         |
| Shermen               | 6         | 16        |
| Thick woollen weavers | 39        | 14        |
| Weavers               | 30        | 19        |
| Worsted weavers       | 120       | 295       |
| Total                 | 363       | 451       |

<sup>32</sup>Swanson, *Medieval Artisans*, 125.

The real surprise in Norwich politics is in the strength of the worsted weavers' representation on the common council. Contrary to Allison's assertion, the worsted weavers more than doubled their position on the council after 1490. In the 1450s they controlled just 14 seats; by the 1530s that number had jumped to 106 (a stunning 657% increase), with an almost constant growth decade on decade (Table 8.3). There was significant growth not just in the number of seats held, but also in the number of weavers who joined the council as new members (Table 8.4). In the years between 1453 and 1490, 22 weavers joined the council as new members. This number more than doubled in the years between 1491 and 1530, when 54 weavers were newly elected to seats on the council. In contrast, the mercers show far less volatility between the two periods; they presented only a modest increase in the number of men who joined the council, from 33 in the first half of the period, to 38 in the second half.

**Table 8.3:** Common council seats held by worsted weavers, by decade

| 1453-1460 | 1461-1470 | 1471-1480 | 1481-1490 | 1491-1500 | 1501-1510 | 1511-1520 | 1521-1530 |
|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| 14        | 21        | 36        | 49        | 42        | 57        | 90        | 106       |

**Table 8.4:** The number of worsted weavers and mercers who joined the common council, by decade

| Craft           | 1453-1460 | 1461-1470 | 1471-1480 | 1481-1490 | 1491-1500 | 1501-1510 | 1511-1520 | 1521-1530 | Total |
|-----------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-------|
| Worsted weavers | 3         | 4         | 8         | 7         | 8         | 18        | 18        | 10        | 76    |
| Mercers         | 12        | 14        | 4         | 3         | 10        | 8         | 9         | 11        | 71    |



Much has been written about the so-called phenomenon of 'flight from office', an argument that posits that the financial burden of late medieval office-holding had become so onerous that even wealthy citizens were ceasing to volunteer for public service.<sup>33</sup> Towns and organisations passed ordinances that established penalties for men who declined to fill a position for which they had been nominated. Penalties ranged from small fines to disbarment from the franchise. However, the data from Norwich does not fit easily into this narrative. Andrew King found little evidence that supported the argument for 'widespread flight from office' in his study of Norwich's financial and civic records.<sup>34</sup> There are a handful of such instances where men in Norwich paid a fine in lieu of holding office. The majority of these are confined to the offices of sheriff and mayor, and most seem to date from the start of the sixteenth century. There is not enough data from Norwich to suggest that fines were extracted from craftsmen in a strategic or discriminatory manner, and of the 16 incidents collected for this study, no clear pattern of guild affiliation emerges.<sup>35</sup>

The pattern of elections to the common council, in fact, suggests that there could have been a real contestation for seats, as opposed to an evasion of office. The common council often experienced high seat turnover, however some of the turnover was only apparent. Many councillors held office for multiple years, but in discontinuous blocks. In the case of the worsted weavers, fully half (50%) of the weavers who sat on the common council did so with a gap of years between terms. Some came back to office many times. Robert Garrard held seats on and off throughout his life, coming back to the council nine separate times.<sup>36</sup> He was unquestionably successful in politics, for he was appointed to the governing council of the St George's fraternity multiple times.<sup>37</sup> He also held the positions of clavor and

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<sup>33</sup>J. Kermode, 'Urban Decline? The Flight From Office in Late Medieval York', *EcHR*, 35 (1982), 179-198.

<sup>34</sup>King, *Borough Finances*, 254.

<sup>35</sup>Dispensations included three worsted weavers, one butcher, one sheerman, one gentleman, two drapers, one hosier, one freemason, one scrivener, one mercer, one grocer, and one thick woollen weaver. *Norwich Officers*.

<sup>36</sup>*Ibid.*, 65.

<sup>37</sup>*Gild of St George*, 113-5, 118-9, 123.

chamberlains' councillor, which was a rare achievement for the worsted weavers.<sup>38</sup>

Many of the other worsted weavers on the common council show the same pattern of council service broken up by periods spent not holding office.

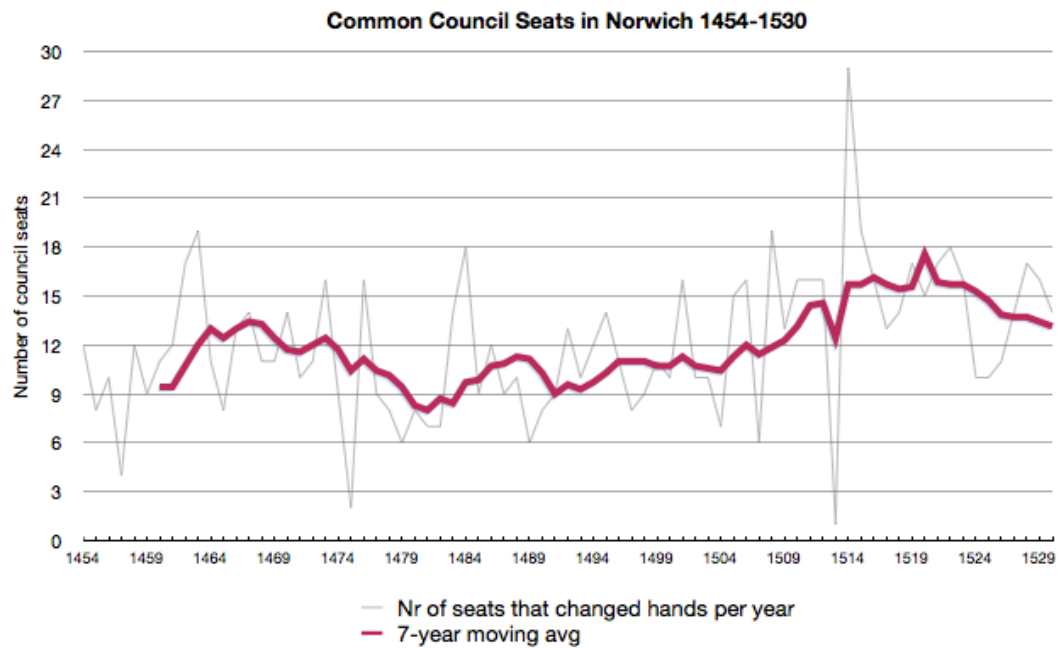


**Figure 8.4:** The turnover of seats on the common council, 1453-1530

When the amount of turnover is graphed, it is interesting to note that the highest peak in turnover occurred right around 1520, which aligns with the peak in the worsted export trade. This turnover is directly attributable to the number of worsted weavers who were joining the common council. The rise in worsted exports gave more men from the textile industry the financial means to volunteer for political office. The decades before and after 1520 saw a greater number of men take office for the first time than at any other point in this study (Figure 8.5). It is worth pondering whether increasing affluence among craftsmen led to an increase in competition for seats, and whether incumbent councillors, like Robert Garrard, were finding it

<sup>38</sup> *Norwich Officers*, 65. For the financial offices, see Section 8.3 below.

difficult to remain on the council once elected. Alternately, perhaps councillors specifically did not stand for office year on year in an effort to share out the role between more people. Most of the common councillors were clearly not careerists, nor did they hope to rise to the level of alderman. This kind of role-sharing would have been compatible with the belief that office-holding was the shared responsibility of the entire citizen body.

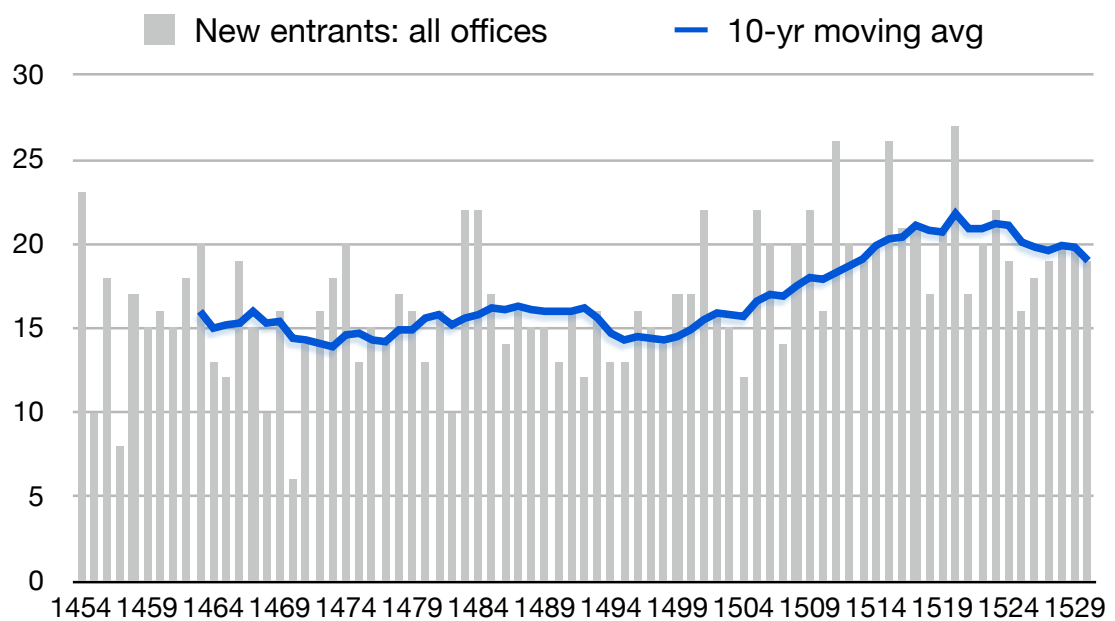


**Figure 8.5:** First-time office holders, all civic offices, 1453-1530

In this vein, it is also worth considering the extent to which guilds could have strategically urged members to run for seats as a means of maintaining a corporate presence on the council. Most of the worsted weavers who were elected to the common council represented the Northern ward of Ultra Aquam. As candidates to the common council were only allowed to stand from the wards in which they were resident, the high number of worsted weavers in Ultra Aquam indicates that occupation played some role in shaping the city's social topography. By the 1480s the weavers had managed to capture half the ward's seats, and by the 1520s they enjoyed a decided majority. It seems likely that Ultra Aquam became attractive to textiles

because of the proximity of the affiliated finishing industries. Dyers and fullers especially are known to have been located along both sides of the Wensum on the northern side of the city.<sup>39</sup> The northern ward may also have provided the space necessary to house tenter's grounds, where cloths were stretched and dried over wooden frames after fulling or shearing. As noted previously, though, the guild itself had no known links to edifices or specific institutions located north of the river.<sup>40</sup> Whatever the case, higher craft concentrations in the Northern ward must have translated to easier election wins. We cannot do more than speculate, but it

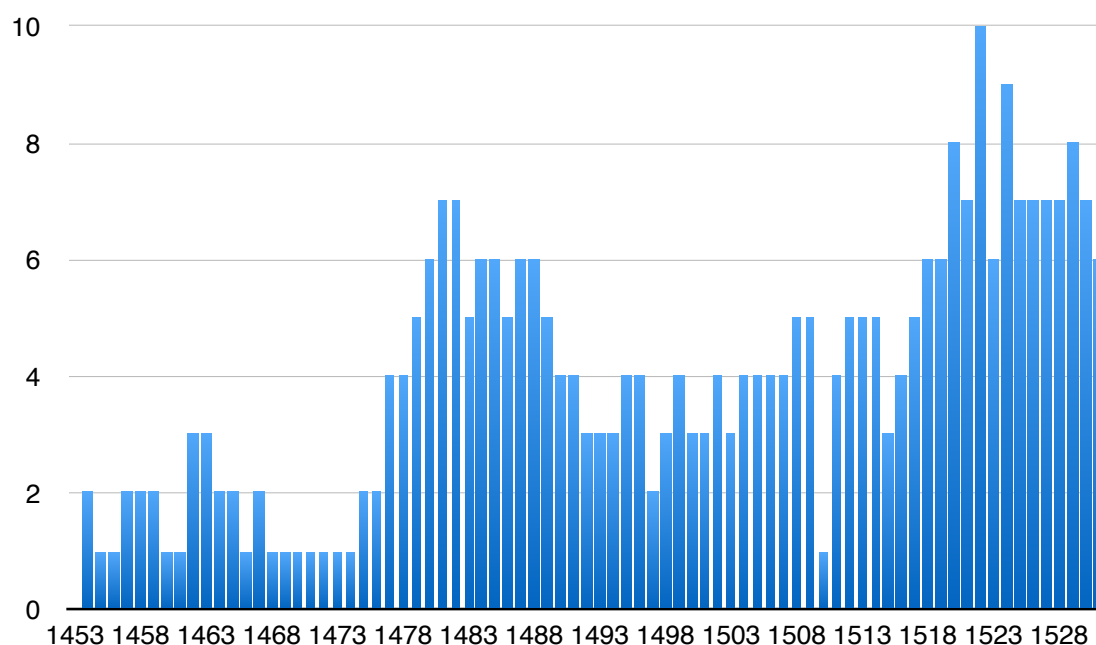


**Figure 8.6:** Worsteds weavers elected to the Norwich common council from the Northern ward

<sup>39</sup> E. Rutledge, 'An Urban Environment: Norwich in the Fifteenth Century', in *Society in an Age of Plague*, ed. by L. Clark and C. Rawcliffe (Woodbridge, Suff., 2013), 84. Textile finishing had been concentrated in this area of Norwich for at least two centuries. See Kelly, 'The Economic Topography and Structure of Norwich C.1300', 24-5, for a description of textile production on riverside properties in Coslany and West Wymer at the end of the thirteenth century.

<sup>40</sup> See page 195 above.

would have been a pragmatic move by the guild to encourage its members to work together, and cycle in and out of council seats, if it saw council representation as beneficial to guild interests.

It is worth making the point that the common council could be of immense benefit to guild interests. Though much of the day-to-day business was conducted by the aldermen in the mayor's court, citywide issues were brought before the greater Assembly, which combined the sitting aldermen with the common council. Though the common council has often been called powerless in the literature – Hilton especially emphasised that the lower councils in English towns were toothless creations meant for placating disaffected artisans<sup>41</sup> – the common council in Norwich did enjoy some real power, including the right to veto financial impositions. The city could only levy civic taxes with the assent of the common council. The Composition of 1415 had conceded that the aldermen's council 'may enact nothing binding on the city without assent of the commonalty'.<sup>42</sup> Legislation that affected the whole city was to be presented to the common council before being passed. Key to this process was the fact that members of the common council were also given the right to deliberate among themselves before consenting to new legislation.<sup>43</sup> The Assembly minutes contain many examples of the council taking advantage of this right to 'take advice' through deliberation. For example, in 1455, the Mercers submitted a petition to the Assembly. The matter seems to have stalled when council members invoked their right to be advised on the matter at hand (*'quod volunt avisari'*) before making a decision.<sup>44</sup> A request for a grant of taxation for the defence of Calais in 1457 met the same answer ('the common council wishes to be advised').<sup>45</sup> Calling for deliberation could have been a delaying tactic; but it also could have been employed specifically to kill proposals that ran counter to the majority interests. Given that these matters are not always revisited in later assemblies, it seems likely that the common council

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<sup>41</sup> Hilton, *English and French Towns*, 100.

<sup>42</sup> *Records*, vol. 1, lxix, 103-4.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> NRO NCR 16d/1, Books of Proceedings, f. 28v.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 35v.

did exercise this power from time to time to bury unpopular legislation. However, it should also be noted that the Assembly only ever dealt with a small fraction of the business of the city. Much of the work of daily governance was undertaken elsewhere, including the mayor and aldermen's court, the shrieval courts, and the administrative offices.

### 8.3 The co-opted financial offices

What made a man's contemporaries consider him 'suitable' for higher office? Personal wealth was unquestionably a key determinant,<sup>46</sup> in addition to other less tangible personal qualities, such as good judgement, wisdom, and honesty.<sup>47</sup> In addition, candidates to higher office surely were also judged on the extent to which they demonstrated a dedication to the ideal of public service. The ethos of corporatism was a powerful motivator in the civic culture of pre-modern towns, and a man's suitability for higher office was undoubtedly judged in the light of his past service to the 'common good'. There were many ways he could demonstrate his commitment to the community, but one that is often overlooked is the range of administrative positions that existed within the civic government. Though these positions were unglamorous, they were crucial to the functioning of any moderately-sized town.

Norwich's civic government included a number of non-legislative offices that were responsible for the day-to-day administration of the city. While the common council and the aldermen's council were elected annually in Passion Week by householders from the wards, the officers for the administrative positions were co-opted by these two bodies. This shared responsibility was one of the compromises that had been reached in the Composition of 1415, and was designed to divide power

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<sup>46</sup> Sutton, *The Mercery of London*, 127; Thrupp, 'The Grocers of London: A Study of Distributive Trade', 252; Swanson, *Medieval Artisans*, 125, 150.

<sup>47</sup> Carpenter, *Urban Elites*, 283.

more equitably between the two chambers. The most important of the administrative roles, those of the financial officers, were filled by groups of two, four, or six men, with half chosen by the common council and half chosen by the aldermen and sheriffs. The assembly minutes detail these selections, noting precisely which party chose each candidate. Changes were made from time to time regarding the number of officers in a position, but never to the principle that the responsibility for selection should be shared between the two bodies.<sup>48</sup>

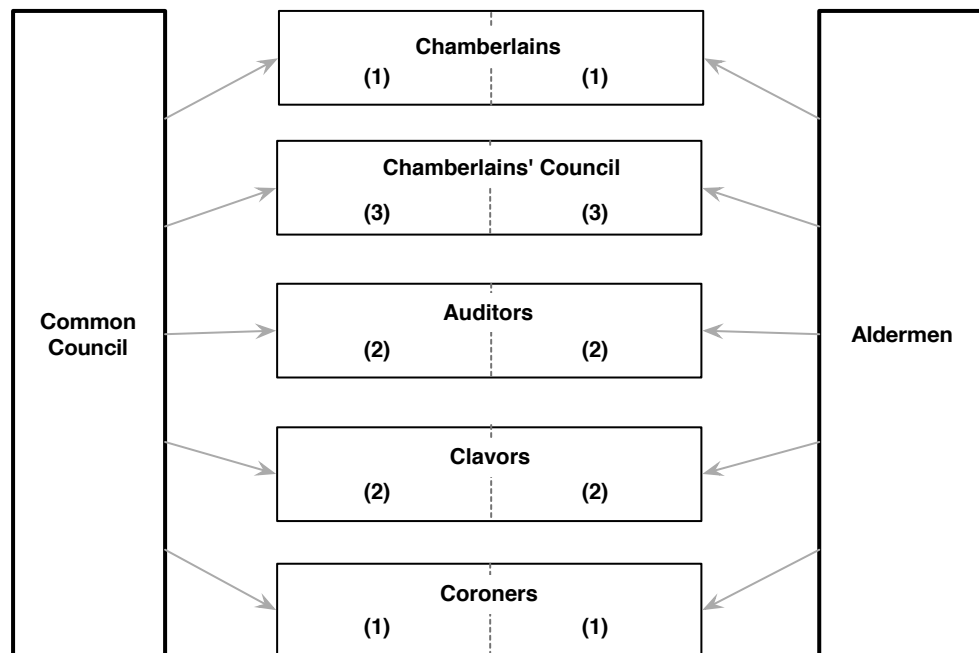


**Figure 8.7:** Schematic illustrating the number of officers chosen each year to the offices of chamberlain, chamberlains' council, auditor, clavor, and coroner

Several groups of officers shared responsibility for managing the city's finances. The chamberlains acted as the city's treasurers, and accounted for a large

<sup>48</sup>For example, the assembly chose only one chamberlain each year from 1516, noting the selection was '*pro totam congr[egacionam]*'. Hawes provides a useful table of the changes to offices between 1453 and 1835. *Norwich Officers*, xvi-xvii.

portion of the city's revenue, including freedom entry fines, rents from city properties and market stalls, and trading fees, including income from the Worsted Seld and the city's quays and staithes.<sup>49</sup> The chamberlains' councillors were appointed to assist the chamberlain in his work and to offer advice. The auditors had the duty every year of auditing the city's accounts. In addition to these financial roles, the clavors held the keys to the locked chests where the city's paperwork and the official seal were housed.<sup>50</sup> But beyond their immediate duties, to what extent did these positions constitute a step on the *cursus honorum*? How important were they as enablers of a man's political career, and how open or closed were they?

There seemed to be some positive relationship between a man's serving as a co-opted financial officer, and his subsequent election to one of the higher offices. As might be expected, the majority of the men who rose to the higher offices of sheriff or aldermen had previously experienced serving in one or more of the financial offices. Of the 120 aldermen who took the bench between 1460 and 1530, 78% had spent one or more years in the office of chamberlain, chamberlain's councillor, auditor, coroner, or clavor. The same was true of the sheriffs, where 75% also had served in one of the above offices. While not mandatory, it would seem that there was a strong feeling that candidates for higher office should have some experience of administering the city's finances.

If we view this aspect of the *cursus honorum* from the bottom up, instead of from the top down, the view looks much the same. Though many, if not most, of the financial officers were drawn from the ranks of the common council, a majority of the financial officers went on to hold the office of sheriff or alderman. Of the chamberlains who served between 1453 and 1530, 72% rose to higher office. The other offices produced similar results, with 64% of the 132 chamberlains' councillors, 75% of the clavors, and 83% of the auditors also later becoming sheriff or alderman. One must ask, then, if men who were being put into these positions while still in the

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<sup>49</sup> King, *Borough Finances*, 283. Before 1447, the Chamberlains were called Treasurers in the account rolls.

<sup>50</sup> Supervisors were also elected between 1468 and 1501, though there is some confusion about their precise roles. *Norwich Officers*, xvii; King, *Borough Finances*, 295-7.



common council already belonged to what Hilton might term the social elite? The Composition of 1415 had gone to some length to create a balance of power for this branch of the city's government. In the case of the chamberlains' councillors, the Composition of 1415 had expressly stated that the officers should *not* be aldermen, but instead were to be 'commoners', presumably drawn from the common council.<sup>51</sup> With a small number of exceptions at the start of the sixteenth century, this principle generally held firm for the period of this study.<sup>52</sup> Appointments to the other positions tended to be mixed between new candidates from the common council and more experienced candidates from among the aldermen.

In reality, the question of recruitment to the financial offices becomes something of a chicken-and-egg problem. Were the men who were co-opted to serve in the financial offices already considered 'elites' by their peers? Or was it the additional step of having served as a financial officer that made certain men eligible for recruitment into the city's most elite political offices? As half of the officers served at the behest of the common council, not of the aldermen, it becomes difficult to make the argument that the aldermen were a self-perpetuating and self-selecting elite. It is also difficult to argue that merchants promoted only merchants or that craftsmen promoted only craftsmen, for the common council was a true mix of both backgrounds.

One aspect of this system, however, did work more in favour of merchants than of craftsmen. Having the skills to serve as an auditor or chamberlain was contingent on professional experience. The financial offices required not just literacy but also numeracy and experience in accounting. This was a skill set that merchants were far more likely to possess, and one possible reason that merchants were able to edge out craftsmen for these positions. The statistics on craft enrolments seem to bear this out. Mercers, drapers, grocers, and rafmen held more of these positions than did all of the other crafts combined (Table 8.5).

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<sup>51</sup> *Records*, vol. 1, 104.

<sup>52</sup> William Roone, Reginald Litelprowe, and Nicholas Sywhat were each sent to the council as aldermen, but they were exceptions to the rule.

On the one hand, by giving the common council an equal voice in co-opting men to these positions, the council was able to place its members into positions of real responsibility, including some men who in an actual 'closed corporation' would not have been afforded such opportunities. With hindsight, it is impossible to know whether the majority of the financial officers would have gone on to hold higher office without the experience of serving in an administrative role. It seems highly likely, though, that many of these offices served as a proving ground prior to holding higher office. Furthermore, building a portfolio of civic engagement was important for men who aspired to have a political career at the highest level of civic government. Willingness to volunteer for extra positions above and beyond a seat on the council signalled to the electorate, and to other civic leaders, that a man was prepared to devote the amount of time that was necessary when holding higher office.

**Table 8.5:** The financial offices, by craft enrolment

| Craft of enrolment | Chamberlain | Chamberlain's Council | Auditor | Clavor |
|--------------------|-------------|-----------------------|---------|--------|
| Mercer             | 14          | 30                    | 17      | 17     |
| Grocer             | 8           | 15                    | 8       | 7      |
| Dyer               | 4           | 5                     | 1       | 3      |
| Draper             | 4           | 11                    | 6       | 7      |
| Hosier             | 3           | 1                     | --      | --     |
| Baker              | 3           | 6                     | 2       | 3      |
| Vintner            | 2           | 2                     | --      | 1      |
| Rafman             | 2           | 4                     | 1       | 1      |
| Goldsmith          | 2           | 5                     | 1       | 1      |
| Calanderer         | 2           | 2                     | 2       | 1      |
| Tanner             | 2           | 4                     | 1       | 2      |
| Worsted weaver     | 1           | 9                     | 3       | 4      |
| Tailor             | 1           | 2                     | --      | --     |
| Scrivener          | 1           | 5                     | 1       | --     |
| Merchant           | 1           | 1                     | 1       | 1      |
| Goldbeater         | 1           | 1                     | 1       | --     |
| Glazier            | 1           | 1                     | --      | --     |
| Brewer             | 1           | 3                     | 1       | 1      |
| Bedweaver          | 1           | 2                     | 1       | 1      |
| Fuller             | --          | 2                     | 1       | --     |
| Spicer             | --          | 1                     | --      | 1      |
| Skepper            | --          | 1                     | 1       | 1      |
| Shearman           | --          | 1                     | 1       | 1      |
| Innholder          | --          | 1                     | --      | --     |
| Gravour            | --          | 1                     | --      | --     |
| Gentleman          | --          | 1                     | 1       | --     |
| Fletcher           | --          | 1                     | 1       | 1      |
| Cook               | --          | 1                     | --      | --     |
| Carpenter          | --          | 1                     | --      | --     |
| Bower              | --          | 1                     | --      | 1      |
| Bladesmith         | --          | 1                     | --      | --     |
| Unknown            | 3           | 10                    | 1       | 2      |

## 8.4 Higher office

In April 1508, Robert Broun was elected to the aldermen's council to represent Mancroft ward. This position, second only to the mayor, conferred power and prestige, and was generally held only by the wealthiest, most respected men. Broun was undoubtedly a high flyer; he was selected sheriff in September that same year, and had previously served two years on the governing council of the prestigious St George's guild.<sup>53</sup> However, much like the case of Thomas Antyngham discussed above, an objection was raised in the Assembly to his occupation:

The condition of this recognisance is such, that...Robert Broun, bocher, who is this day elected into the estate of an Alderman, shall for the future renounce his craft of bochers craft... and receive the oath of an Alderman..., and shall cause himself to be enrolled in another occupation.<sup>54</sup>

Unlike in the case of Thomas Antyngham, however, Broun's occupation did seem to constitute a real impediment to his new office. The clause in the Ordinances for Crafts on craft translations had seemed aimed specifically at aldermen because of its focus on men 'likly to ber worshipp and astate'.

There is one detail about Swanson's study on artisans in York that is often missed in critiques of her work; though not emphasised well enough in her book, she does comment at several points that she believed the social and political environment for artisans was changing at the end of the fifteenth century. 'The assumption has sometimes been made that the fifteenth century was full of opportunity for aspiring artisans, fairly free of class barriers and favourable to social mobility', which was followed by a time of diminishing opportunities by the early sixteenth century. She countered this idea with a proposal for a reversed chronology of towns, one that had 'effectively subordinated the vast majority of artisans' to the end of the fifteenth century, but which had changed by the dawn of the sixteenth: 'then not only

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<sup>53</sup> *Norwich Officers*, 27; *Gild of St George*, 100-2.

<sup>54</sup> *Records*, vol. 2, 107.

individuals, but entire craft groups seem to have acquired a status that they had not previously enjoyed'.<sup>55</sup>

The example of Robert Broun has often been used as evidence of the former stance; that is, that towns had enjoyed a post-plague 'golden age' for the labouring masses, but by the sixteenth century were becoming more oligarchic and less open to social mobility. On the surface, Broun's case would seem to work strongly in favour of this argument. Broun appears in the membership lists of the Fellowship of the Mercery after 1508, wherein is also noted his request for a translation of his craft membership to the Mercers.<sup>56</sup> On May 3, 1508, he announced before the Assembly his intention to renounce his membership with the Butchers and to be enrolled with the Mercers.<sup>57</sup> He served as an alderman for the rest of his life, and became mayor in 1522.<sup>58</sup>

But was the case of Robert Broun truly representative of a long-standing policy against 'low status' occupations rising to high political office? Craft translations did take place from time to time in Norwich, but they were never numerous.<sup>59</sup> The Ordinances for Crafts present a fairly ambivalent stance towards social mobility. On the one hand, the document provided a mechanism for aspiring artisans to climb the political ladder; on the other, its framers probably assumed that wealth could only be generated through mercantile activity, and thus a transferral to a mercantile guild merely would be a *de facto* acknowledgement of a man's actual livelihood, not an affirmation of diversity. It is worth pondering, as well, whether this particular clause from the Ordinances for Crafts was a tradition that was native to Norwich, or whether it was in fact just one more importation of London's customs inserted wholesale into that document.<sup>60</sup> It is difficult to know whether the tradition

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<sup>55</sup> Swanson, *Medieval Artisans*, 150.

<sup>56</sup> NRO 10c/1, f. 13r.

<sup>57</sup> *Records*, vol. 2, 107.

<sup>58</sup> *Norwich Officers*, 27.

<sup>59</sup> For example, Henry Holden is listed among the Grocers in the Old Free Book for the year 38 Hen VIII, with a note that he had previously been admitted as a barber. NRO NCR 17c, OFB, f. 136.

<sup>60</sup> For instance, Harry Grene in London translated his freedom from the weavers to the tailors in 1486. *The Merchant Taylors' Company of London: Court Minutes, 1486-1493*, ed. by M.

of craft translations had obtained in Norwich prior to the creation of the Ordinances for Crafts in 1449, since election results do not survive before 1453.

As with the case of Thomas Antyngham, doubts about the real extent of craft bias are raised when we again expand our view to look at the experience of other office-holders in the same position. Was Robert Broun a watershed case? Did his circumstances raise a debate? Again, as the documentary record is so deficient, we can only read between the lines. Two other men followed Broun to the aldermen's bench who are less well known, and who also may have been butchers. The first, Edmond Mitchell, had been made free as a butcher in 1485. He served as a constable for a year in 1487, then sat on the common council from 1490 to 1499, and again from 1503 to 1508. He is noted in the election returns as being a butcher. In 1509 – the year after Broun's election – he was chosen to represent Berstrete Ward on the aldermen's council, but paid 20 marks to be excused from service. Thus, though he was selected, he never served, and his occupation never became an issue. A second alderman, Thomas Grewe, was elected in 1526. Grewe was probably also a butcher, though the record is less clear in his case.<sup>61</sup> Like Broun, Grewe served many years as an alderman, and went on to become mayor, but unlike Broun, his occupation does not seem to have become an issue.

The returns from Norwich's elections for sheriff and for the aldermen's council suggest that Swanson was correct with regard to a changing political

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Davies (Stamford, 2000), 52. Other examples of craft translations can be found in the Letter Books, such as in 1432 when Godfrey Martynson and Richard Lyon petitioned the mayor to change crafts. *Calendar of Letter-Books of the City of London*, ed. by R. R. Sharpe, vol. K (London, 1911), Letter Book K, ff. 107d and 109. The expectation that aldermen specifically were expected to 'trade up' to a higher-status craft is shown in the minutes of a hearing conducted in London's Court of Aldermen in 1515. William Bayly of London had translated his craft from the Shearmen to the Drapers 'accordyng to the Custummes & ordinaunces of the Citie in case of Translac' afore tyme vsed from the lower ffelysshyp' un to the high'er ffelyship' when' eny ffreman' shalbe made alderman'. LMA, London Metropolitan Archives COL/CA/01/01/002, f. 188r-189r.

<sup>61</sup> Cozens-Hardy gives no occupation for Grewe. Cozens-Hardy and Kent, *The Mayors of Norwich*, 50. A Thomas Grewe, butcher, enrolled two apprentices in 1519/20, *Norwich Apprentices*, 95; and a Thomas Grewe, butcher, was plaintiff in a suit brought against him in Chancery, c. 1504-1515. TNA C 1/313/3. There is no entry for him in l'Estrange, but a John Grewe was made free as a butcher in 1520/1. There are no other men with the name 'Grewe' in l'Estrange, so the name was not common. l'Estrange, *Freemen*, 64.

environment around the end of the fifteenth century. An examination of the returns shows that fewer men from the traditionally dominant mercantile guilds of the Mercers, Grocers, Drapers, and Rafmen were being elected as sheriffs and aldermen over the period. Unsurprisingly, the greatest gains were being made in the textile industry. For instance, a comparison of the freedom enrolments of sheriffs between 1453 and 1530, broken into two periods, shows that sheriffs involved in textile production increased from 6 to 20, more than a threefold increase (Table 8.7), compared to the mercantile guilds, who were down by 15% in the second half (Table 8.6).

**Table 8.6:** Sheriffs from mercantile guilds

| Craft      | 1453-1490 | 1491-1530 |
|------------|-----------|-----------|
| Mercer     | 20        | 21        |
| Grocer     | 8         | 12        |
| Draper     | 5         | 6         |
| Rafman     | 7         | 2         |
| Merchant   | 4         | 1         |
| Woolman    | 1         |           |
| Worstedman | 1         |           |
| Vintner    | 1         |           |
| Total      | 47        | 40        |

**Table 8.7:** Sheriffs from textile guilds

| Craft           | 1453-1490 | 1491-1530 |
|-----------------|-----------|-----------|
| Bedweavers      | 1         | 1         |
| Calenderers     |           | 2         |
| Dyers           | 2         | 6         |
| Shermen         |           | 1         |
| Woollen weavers |           | 1         |
| Worsted weavers | 3         | 9         |
| Total           | 6         | 20        |



The results from elections to the aldermen's council are more telling of the shift towards the worsted industry. The number of seats held by men enrolled in mercantile guilds fell by 17% in the second half of the period, but participation from textile crafts rose by 152%.

**Table 8.8:** Aldermen's seats held by mercantile guilds

| <b>Craft</b> | <b>1453-1490</b> | <b>1491-1530</b> |
|--------------|------------------|------------------|
| Spicer       | 14               |                  |
| Draper       | 101              | 96               |
| Grocer       | 99               | 128              |
| Mercer       | 249              | 237              |
| Merchant     | 101              | 40               |
| Rafman       | 54               | 1                |
| Woolman      | 8                |                  |
| Worstedman   | 5                |                  |
| Vintner      |                  | 20               |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>631</b>       | <b>522</b>       |

**Table 8.9:** Aldermen's seats held by textile guilds

| <b>Craft</b>    | <b>1453-1490</b> | <b>1491-1530</b> |
|-----------------|------------------|------------------|
| Bedweavers      |                  | 23               |
| Calenderers     |                  | 15               |
| Dyers           | 63               | 121              |
| Shermen         |                  | 15               |
| Woollen weavers |                  | 12               |
| Worsted weavers | 29               | 46               |
| <b>Total</b>    | <b>92</b>        | <b>232</b>       |

Ten worsted weavers were elected to the aldermen's council between 1453 and 1530. Four of them — Robert Leche, Ralf Wilkyns, John Rose and Robert Rose — served more than 15 years, and Leche and Wilkyns became mayor.<sup>62</sup> Only three

<sup>62</sup> William Norwich, mayor in 1461, may also have been a worsted weaver, but his

joined prior to 1490; eight joined after. They had all held the office of sheriff, though it was not a prerequisite of the position. All of them were independent masters with a workshop, presumably, for all of them have known apprentices. Almost without exception, these apprentices, if they later took the freedom themselves, did so as worsted weavers.

**Table 8.10:** Sheriffs enrolled as worsted weavers

|                     | Sheriff | Alderman | Known apprentices |
|---------------------|---------|----------|-------------------|
| Robert Leche        | Y       | Y        | 17                |
| Ralf Wilkyns        | Y       | Y        | 12                |
| John Rose           | Y       | Y        | 4                 |
| Robert Rose         | Y       | Y        | 4                 |
| Adam Lawes          | Y       | Y        | 4                 |
| Thomas Wilkyns 1    | Y       | Y        | 11                |
| William Hast        | Y       | Y        | 7                 |
| Thomas Wilkyns 2    | Y       | Y        | 2                 |
| Thomas Hemmyng      | Y       | Y        | 3                 |
| Henry Scolehous     | Y       | Y        | 2                 |
| William Godfrey     | Y       | -        | 3                 |
| John Wattys, senior | Y       | -        | 7                 |
| John Clarke         | Y       | -        | 11                |

Sheriffs and aldermen were both expected to be men of sufficient means, which raises the question of whether both jobs drew from the same pool of candidates. Did suitability for one role translate to an equivalent suitability for the other? Alderman were not required to have served as sheriff before being called to the bench, which meant that some sheriffs were drawn from the common council and some from the aldermens' council. Two new sheriffs were required each year,

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identification is less certain.

whereas aldermen's seats typically opened only when a sitting member had died. Thus, in theory, there was usually a pool of ex-sheriffs available when seats on the alderman's council did come free, though not every sheriff with aspirations to a career on the aldermen's bench could be accommodated, nor had all aldermen already served as sheriff at the time of their election. Members of the mercantile crafts were overall more likely to serve as sheriff; but once they had done so, they were slightly less likely than their non-mercantile counterparts to move up to the aldermen's bench, as shown in Table 8.11. This pattern suggests two things. First, the criteria for suitability cannot have relied greatly on craft membership. If they had, there would be a greater differential between success rates from mercantile and artisanal guilds. Second, if sheriffs from different guilds had a roughly equal chance of becoming aldermen, then the filtering for 'suitability' had already taken place at the point when they were elected sheriff.

**Table 8.11:** The chances for a sheriff to become alderman

| Craft           | Sheriffs who became aldermen | Sheriffs who did not become aldermen | Per cent chance of becoming an alderman |
|-----------------|------------------------------|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|
| Mercers         | 25                           | 7                                    | 16%                                     |
| Drapers         | 18                           | 2                                    |                                         |
| Grocers         | 10                           | 1                                    |                                         |
| Worsted Weavers | 10                           | 3                                    | 25%                                     |
| Bakers          | 7                            | 2                                    |                                         |
| Butchers        | 2                            | 1                                    |                                         |

The pathway up the *cursus honorum* was not always direct. Common councillors were eligible to join the Guild of St George, though not all councillors opted to do so. The guild had its own ruling common council, which met periodically to oversee guild business and manage the guild's finances. The guild's council co-opted its members; assured entry came by way of serving as a feastmaker for the

guild. Every year, four feastmakers were chosen to host and help bear the cost of the guild's annual dinner. The feastmakers from the previous year automatically became full council members in the year following.<sup>63</sup> While serving on the guild's council was undoubtedly a useful means of expanding one's social network, it was also a means of publicly demonstrating one's personal 'sufficiency'. An analysis of the guild's council minutes that survive for the years between 1468 and 1520 show that nearly every man elected to the shrievalty had previously served as a feastmaker for the St George's Guild. Serving as feastmaker was a way of publicly displaying one's dedication to the corporate ethos in a public context.<sup>64</sup> It was likely also a signal to the greater civic community that a man was not just willing, but also financially able, to serve as sheriff for the city.

## Conclusion

What seems clear from the foregoing discussion is that the prevailing historiographical approach to civic office-holding needs reconsideration. It is impossible to substantiate Allison's claim that mercantile guilds monopolised Norwich's civic government. Furthermore, although normative sources show that at least some parties desired the implementation of exclusionary measures, desire did not always translate to action. Election returns show increasing craft participation at every level of the civic government. The biggest gains were made, unsurprisingly, in the common council and by the textile guilds.

Worsted weavers fared well in city government, especially once the worsted trade had been revitalised. Their performance in the common council bore no resemblance to Allison's assertion whatsoever, and their penetration into the higher offices of sheriff and alderman are a testament to the growing wealth within the craft.

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<sup>63</sup> The guild used two versions of co-option, which they described as the 'old' ordinances and the 'new' ordinances. *Gild of St George*, 67-8, 136-7.

<sup>64</sup> It was also at times a contentious issue. Guilds in Norwich were reprimanded for forcing members into the role, and in 1495 the city banned guilds and fraternities from forcing members to become feastmaker, for many could not bear the cost. *Records*, vol. 2, 105.

Wealth has always been put forth as the first necessity for any man seeking office, and the data here concur with that assessment.

However, other considerations need to be taken into account as well. The co-opted administrative offices in Norwich seem to have been an important stage on the *cursus honorum* for men who were seeking higher office. Participation in the guild of St George was also important; men who sat on the guild's ruling council could not only demonstrate their commitment to public service, but also their financial 'sufficiency'. If a narrowing of suitable candidates for high office can be said to have taken place in Norwich, the financial offices are likely the first stage of its manifestation. Artisans may not have been targets of active occupational discrimination, but their lack of proficiency with accounting will have put them at a disadvantage when men were co-opted to these roles. This divergence in the skills acquired by merchants, as opposed to the skills learned by craftsmen, may have been more important than previously realised.

## 9 | End of life

Though wills provide only the slimmest glimpse into the life of a testator, they are nevertheless invaluable sources of information. Wills provide a snapshot view of the end of a testator's life. Though they do not present a complete record of a man's assets and liabilities, a will can still give historians an alternate means of estimating a man's financial status for a period in which few other personal sources provide such financial data. This chapter examines the charitable bequests that were left by the worsted weavers in their wills, and proposes that charitable bequests could be used as an alternate means of estimating wealth on a relative scale. It also examines the personal bequests of the weavers in the light of intergenerational social mobility. In particular, the bequests of professional equipment and workshops to wives and children were strategies employed by craftsmen to assist their heirs. The chapter concludes with a brief examination of weavers who had fallen on hard times at the end of their lives. Many of the weavers likely faced financial difficulties once overseas trade had begun to diminish in the 1520s. The bubble of prosperity that had raised the worsted weavers to prominence at the end of the fifteenth century had burst by the 1530s.

### 9.1 Wills and probate

Norwich has one of the country's largest surviving collections of medieval urban wills.<sup>1</sup> Two large-scale studies of Norwich's late medieval wills have been produced

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<sup>1</sup>Tanner counted 1,804 wills written by residents of Norwich between 1370 and 1532,

since the 1970s. Tanner's study of pre-Reformation religious expression, and Dauteuille's study of material bequests, both incorporated statistical analyses of the wills that were written in late medieval Norwich. Both found that wills were being left in ever greater numbers by the end of the fifteenth century. Tanner located 21 worsted weaver wills; Dauteuille identified 25.<sup>2</sup> This study has expanded that number to 67 wills written by worsted weavers between 1463 and 1540.<sup>3</sup> By more than doubling the number of known wills, I have been able to expand the view to include many of the less financially successful weavers into this analysis. Of these, five were registered with the court of the Archdeacon of Norwich, two with the court of the Archdeacon of Norfolk, two with the Cathedral Priory, forty-nine in the Norwich Consistory Court, and ten with the Prerogative Court of Canterbury.<sup>4</sup> Table 9.1 provides a breakdown by decade. The rise in wills left by worsted weavers also aligns temporally with the rise in worsted exports at the end of the fifteenth century.

**Table 9.1:** Wills written by worsted weavers, by decade

| 1461-1470 | 1471-1480 | 1481-1490 | 1491-1500 | 1501-1510 | 1511-1520 | 1521-1530 | 1531-1540 |
|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| 4         | 1         | 1         | 11        | 10        | 10        | 12        | 11        |

Dauteuille concluded that not only were more wills being written, but also that the percentage of artisans and craftsmen who left wills was much higher by the

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1,348 of which were written after 1440. Roughly 8,000 medieval wills from London, written between 1370 and 1530, are distributed between the London Court of Hustings, the Commissary Court of London, and the Prerogative Court of Canterbury. Other large collections of medieval wills can be found in York and in Canterbury. Tanner, *Popular Religion in Norwich*, 217-8.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 222; Dauteuille, *Household Materials and Social Networks*, 81.

<sup>3</sup> The year 1540 was chosen as the cut-off because of the changes instigated by the Reformation, and because of the impact of inflation on the value of testamentary bequests. I omitted the wills of men who were active during the primary years of this study (1450 to 1530), but whose wills were proved after 1540.

<sup>4</sup> See Appendix A for a list of the wills consulted.

end of the century. She concluded that the share of 'mercantile' wills as a percentage of the whole fell drastically over the fifteenth century. Between 1421 and 1430, wills written by self-identified merchants constituted 43.8% of the total; that percentage had fallen to only 13.4% by the 1490s.<sup>5</sup> At the same time, the number of wills being left by testators in artisanal occupations was rising. Of those, the textile trades were consistently one of the largest groups in Dauteuille's sample, exceeding even the mercantile group in the 1490s with 16.4% of her collected wills.<sup>6</sup> The large growth in the number of artisanal wills written in the fifteenth century likely indicates a growing affluence among non-mercantile urban residents.

How useful are wills for getting an insight into the life of a testator? In many cases, the will is the only personal record of a person's life that may exist. Their use has been much contested, though, and pitfalls exist for historians who wish to use them quantitatively.<sup>7</sup> Wills cannot be relied upon accurately to reflect the words of the testator, as they were highly formulaic and often composed by scribes. Family size is difficult to judge, because personal bequests may not always mention children. Many bequests were given prior to death, as *inter vivos* gifts, sometimes at marriage or sometimes at the age of majority, masking family size or total wealth. Nevertheless, wills do provide a small, if sometimes distorted, view into a testator's life, and the range of testators' wealth is likely greater than has commonly been believed. Most historians believe that wills over-represent the wealthy portions of a population, but Tanner found that about one-fifth of his sample of wills proved after 1490 were accompanied by a note of '*dimiss' est in forma pauperis*', meaning that their estates were worth less than 30s.<sup>8</sup>

In absolute terms, the number of wills left by Norwich residents rose significantly in the 1440s (Figure 9.1). Tanner estimated that around 10% of adult

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<sup>5</sup> Dauteuille, *Household Materials and Social Networks*, 80-1.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 77, 81.

<sup>7</sup> C. Burgess, 'Late Medieval Wills and Pious Convention: Testamentary Evidence Reconsidered', in *Profit, Piety and the Professions* (Gloucester, 1990), 14-5; R. B. Dobson, 'Review of N. Tanner, *The Church in Late Medieval Norwich, 1370-1532*', *EHR*, CII (1987), 477-8.

<sup>8</sup> Tanner, *Popular Religion in Norwich*, 221-2.



men and 2% to 3% of adult women made out a will between 1440 and 1489, with that number doubling between 1490 and 1517.<sup>9</sup> Most of Norwich's wills were proved in the Norwich Consistory Court, though many were also proved in the Prerogative Court of the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Archdeaconry of Norwich, the Archdeaconry of Norfolk, or Norwich Cathedral Priory (which later became the Dean and Chapter Peculiar Court).<sup>10</sup> Unfortunately, in Norwich, as in many English towns, the medieval originals are mostly lost and only registered copies survive.

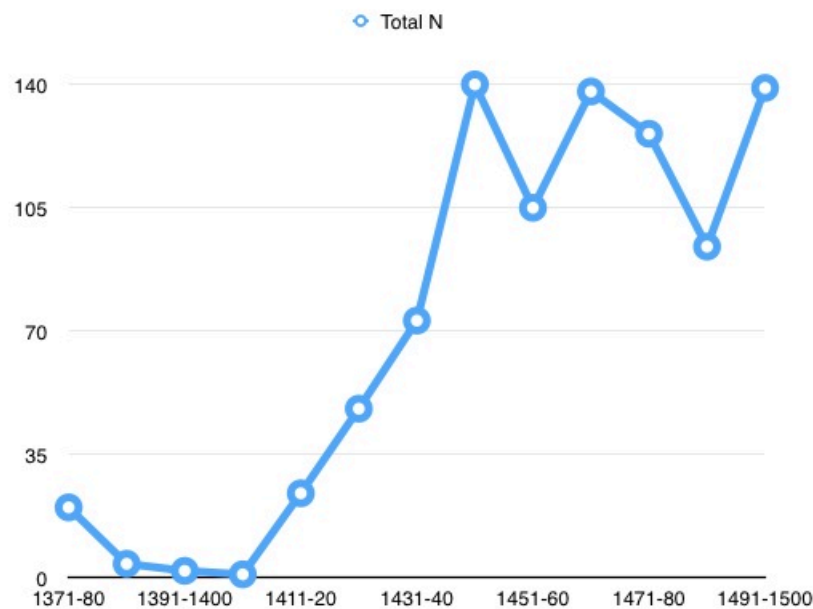


**Figure 9.1:** Wills made by Norwich residents, by decade, 1371-1500<sup>11</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 221.

<sup>10</sup> For more on the probate records now held at the Norfolk Record Office, see NRO Information Leaflet 68, 'Wills and Other Probate Records', <<http://www.archives.norfolk.gov/view/NCC106310>>, (accessed 10 October 2016).

<sup>11</sup> Dauteuille, *Household Materials and Social Networks*, 45-46.

Unfortunately, however, the large number of urban residents who died intestate makes it impossible to estimate population size from probate documents. Medieval testators commonly did not draw up wills far in advance of their deaths. Over four-fifths of the medieval wills written in Norwich were proved within a year of their writing.<sup>12</sup> Jordan analysed a sample of wills written between 1504 and 1517 that were proved in the Prerogative Court of Canterbury. For this group, the median time between the writing and probate of a will was only 59 days.<sup>13</sup> Unfortunately, this lack of 'forward planning' means that many craftsmen who were affluent enough to have written a will to dispose of their estate nevertheless died intestate, making it difficult to estimate the extent of wealth distribution using personal bequests.

Though wills can provide hints and glimpses of the testator's personal life, including his social networks, kinship relations, and wealth, the amount of personal information that can be extracted from them is often disappointing. Some of the worsted weavers' wills imply that the testator had reached a certain stage of his life. Some mention bequests to underage children, suggesting an unfortunate and early demise. Some mention no wife at all, and one or two married children, suggesting that the weaver in question was an older widower. Yet in spite of frequent mentions of family, wills are still notoriously difficult to use for reconstructing familial structures. The weavers in this sample, more often than not, nominated their wife to be executrix of the estate, but often in conjunction with a son or friend. Only 14 of the 68 nominated a supervisor. Children are even more problematic. Not all of the weavers left bequests to children; in those cases, it is impossible to ascertain whether they had no children, whether the children did not survive to adulthood, or whether adult children had already received *inter vivos* gifts. Even fewer of the weavers left personal bequests outside their circle of immediate family. Additionally, a minority of the weavers appointed other worsted weavers as executors. For these reasons, I

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<sup>12</sup> Tanner, *Popular Religion in Norwich*, 224.

<sup>13</sup> W. K. Jordan, *Philanthropy in England, 1480–1660: A Study of the Changing Pattern of English Social Aspirations* (London, 1959), 17.

have not attempted to use the wills to reconstruct the social networks of the testators.<sup>14</sup>

One thing the wills can tell us, however, is where the weavers resided in Norwich, and whether they lived in close proximity to each other. Studies of London have shown that trades and occupations often clustered together geographically. In Norwich, this type of study is limited, for property deeds, one of the main sources used to reconstruct residence, survive in limited numbers for the fifteenth century. Wills do allow us, however, to identify a testator's parish. The will preamble was normally followed by the testator's burial wishes and bequests to the testator's local parish church. Of the 67 worsted weaver wills, 66 provided enough information to determine their likely parish of residence, which have been plotted on Map 9.1.<sup>15</sup> As Norwich had an unusually high number of parishes – just over 50 in the medieval period – the likely area of residence can be pinpointed fairly exactly.

The wills, when viewed spatially, confirm the same geographical clustering pattern that was seen for worsted weavers who were elected to the common council to represent their wards. The majority of the worsted weavers bequeathed to, or were buried in, parishes of the Northern ward ('Ultra Aquam').<sup>16</sup> The clustering was especially heavy in the parishes located in the minor ward of Coslany: St Mary of Coslany, St Michael of Coslany, and St Martin at Oak (also commonly referred to as St Martin of Coslany).<sup>17</sup> These three parishes alone accounted for 30 of the 68 wills, including 8 of the 9 worsted weavers who held 'Rank A' civic offices. Colgate minor ward produced another 13 wills, and Fybridge a further 11. In total, 54 of the 68

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<sup>14</sup> For use of wills to reconstruct social networks, see for example J. R. Colson, *Local Communities in Fifteenth Century London: Craft, Parish and Neighbourhood.*, Ph.D thesis (London, 2011).

<sup>15</sup> Only in one cases could the testator's parish not be determined. Peter Lesyngham bequeathed 16d to the church of St Martin, without stipulating whether he meant St Martin at Oak, St Martin at Palace, or St Martin Balliva. NCC, Spurlinge, 26.

<sup>16</sup> There are no worsted weaver wills for St Olave, St Mary Unbrent, or All Saints from the Northern ward. St Olave's church was demolished in 1546 and the area was absorbed by St George Colgate. All Saints Fyebidge was sold in 1550, and St Mary Unbrent was also lost in the Reformation. It is possible that none of the three was operating as full parishes during the period of this study.

<sup>17</sup> See the ward map on page 47.

testators resided north of the river. The rest of the testators were scattered among the southern parishes, with the largest number located in West Wymer, just over the river from Coslany.

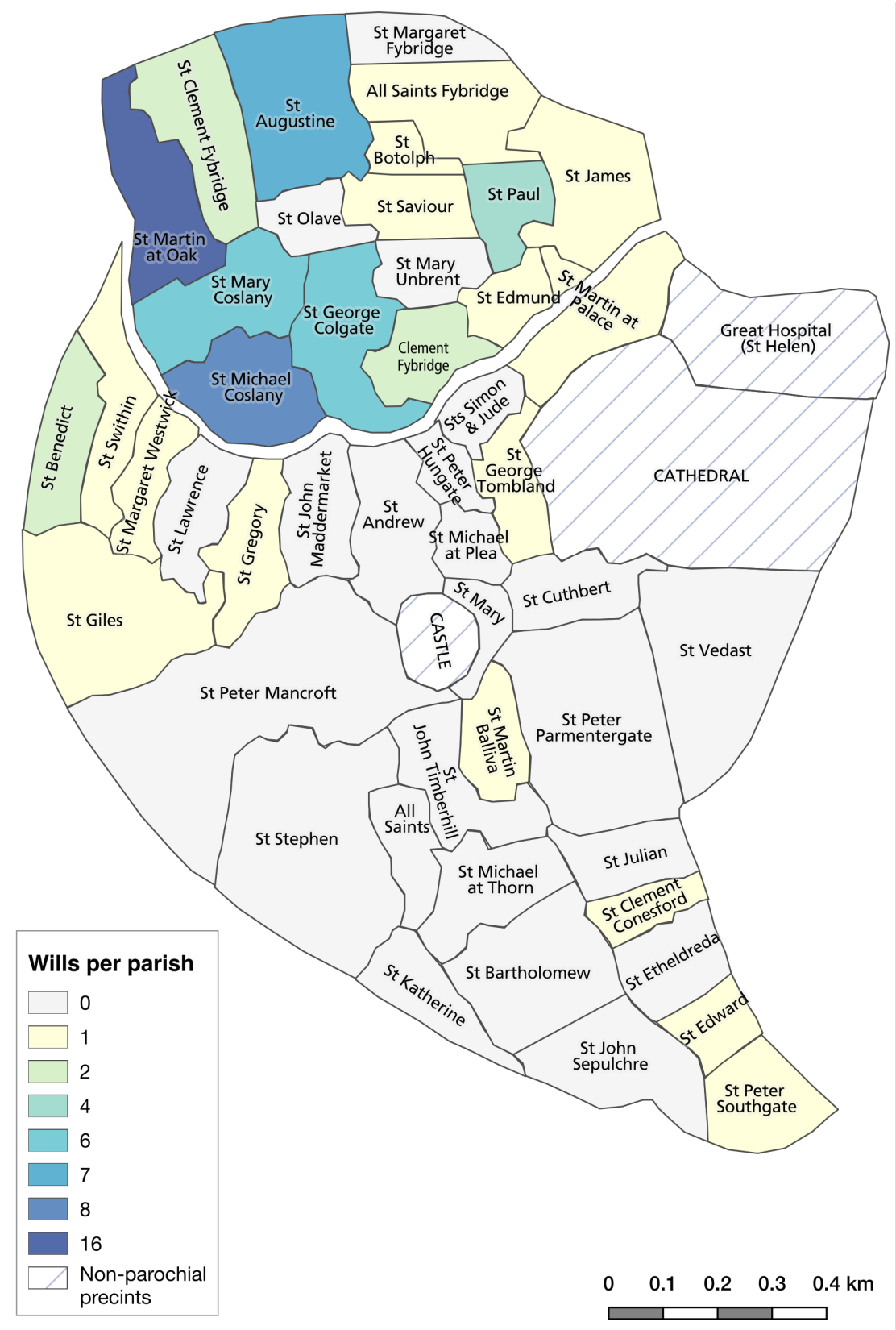
The motivations for seeking to reside close to other members of the craft range from access to other skilled members of the trade, access to materials, social and kinship ties, and access to services. The geographic nucleation of the weavers follows a common trend seen elsewhere, especially among the companies in London.<sup>18</sup> In the case of the worsted weavers, although they are not known to have owned or rented a hall, the existence of a guild building would explain their residential clustering pattern.<sup>19</sup> Other possible reasons for their proximity to one another include social connections or financial considerations. As buying and selling was supposed to happen in the Worsted Seld, which was located off the market square in St Peter Mancroft, the Northern ward was unlikely to be a retail district for cloth, but other business concerns could have brought the weavers to cluster north of the river. Proximity to the river could have been an advantage of their location, as dyers's establishments and tenter fields were located along the riverside banks.<sup>20</sup> Access to a localised, skilled labour force could have been another. If it was common to hire in outside labour, so much the better to live close by. Lastly, if weavers took delivery of yarn that had been spun elsewhere in Norfolk, having easy access to the river (for deliveries by boat or barge) could have been an advantage.

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<sup>18</sup> Colson, *Local Communities in Fifteenth Century London: Craft, Parish and Neighbourhood*, 138-186.

<sup>19</sup> For the discussion of guildhalls in Norwich, see page 194.

<sup>20</sup> Kelly, 'The Economic Topography and Structure of Norwich C.1300', 24-5.



**Map 9.1:** Worsteds weavers' wills, by parish, 1463-1540

## 9.2 Using wills to estimate affluence

Swanson used the wills of York's artisans as a means of 'extracting some information about the relative prosperity, if not the absolute wealth, of artisans'.<sup>21</sup> Taking into account the provisos given above, there is still a great deal we can learn about the weavers from an examination of their wills, such as their strategies to provide for their families, and from the amounts they were able to set aside for charitable giving.

### Charitable bequests

The medieval church encouraged charitable giving as an act of devotion. Once the doctrine of purgatory had been broadly established, pious contributions to good works, to the church, and to the poor, took on new significance for the Christian believer who wished to speed his soul through purgatory. Pious testamentary bequests in the fifteenth century became an important vehicle by which a testator could achieve a final measure of atonement for his sins after his death.<sup>22</sup>

One outcome of this trend was an outpouring of support for the local parish church. Some of this support manifested itself in bequests for items to adorn a testator's local church. The material remains of a few such testamentary bequests survive today in Norwich's churches. For instance, Robert Gardener, a three-time mayor, left money for windows to be fashioned for St Andrew's church, depicting himself and his family; two other mayors provided for similar windows for the church of St Peter Mancroft.<sup>23</sup> Other well-heeled citizens donated large sums, in

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<sup>21</sup> Swanson, *Medieval Artisans*, 155.

<sup>22</sup> Tanner's thesis, finished in 1974, predated the work of Eamon Duffy and other revisionists who have worked to rehabilitate the reputation of the pre-Reformation church. Tanner focuses on charitable bequests that alleviated poverty as separate from those he considered solely religious (such as chantries). This thesis does not make the distinction. Tanner, *Popular Religion in Norwich*, 265-6; E. Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England, C.1400-C.1580* (New Haven, Conn., 2005); G. W. Bernard, *The Late Medieval English Church: Vitality and Vulnerability Before the Break With Rome* (London, 2012), especially chapter 6.

<sup>23</sup> For Gardener's will, NCC, Spyltymber, 93. Robert Toppe and Thomas Elys and their families are pictured in windows in St Peter Mancroft. <<http://www.norfolkstainedglass.co.uk>>.

return for which they secured the right of self-commemoration through funerary effigies, brasses, or tombs. But such gifts as these were generally confined to the wealthiest testators, most of whom numbered among the city's mayors and aldermen. No objects of this sort survive from any worsted weavers, or indeed any craftsmen at all.

Though not everyone could afford funerary self-commemoration, the charitable spirit that governed such gifts permeates late fifteenth-century and early sixteenth-century wills. Tanner argued that the large number of charitable testamentary bequests seen in Norwich wills constituted an affirmation of support for the church and for its views, both of purgatory and of the efficacy of good works.<sup>24</sup> The lack of wills prior to the 1370s in Norwich makes it difficult to know if this differed from earlier practice, but the body of surviving pre-Reformation wills shows that nearly all testators wanted some portion of their estates to be directed to religious and charitable causes.<sup>25</sup> Ninety-five per cent of the testators in Tanner's study of Norwich wills provided, at a minimum, bequests to their local parish church.<sup>26</sup> In the collection of 68 worsted weaver wills analysed for this thesis, only one testator made no provision at all for any charitable causes.<sup>27</sup>

Though motivated in the first instance by spiritual concerns, it is impossible to pretend that such gifts were without social benefit as well. The practice of publicly-acknowledged charitable giving was an important and highly visible feature of late medieval mercantile culture, and as such, will have been an important means of consolidating and perpetuating urban social status.<sup>28</sup> The status won for a family by its sizeable testamentary gifts was likely considered a fine bonus in addition to the

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(accessed 6 December 2014), and D. King, *The Medieval Stained Glass of St. Peter Mancroft, Norwich* (Oxford, 2006).

<sup>24</sup> Tanner, *Popular Religion in Norwich*, 270-1.

<sup>25</sup> This ceased with the onset of the Reformation. As Tanner notes, 'In fact almost all bequests of a directly religious nature except those to parish churches and to the Cathedral - faded out of the wills during the two decades after 1530'. *Ibid.*, 269.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 246.

<sup>27</sup> Thomas Gylmyn made no charitable provision in his will of 1536. NCC, Hyll, 12.

<sup>28</sup> See, for instance, Thrupp's notes on the London merchants' attitude to charity. Thrupp, *The Merchant Class*, 177-180.

spiritual benefits that accrued to one's soul. Indeed, Maddern's short study of charitable giving in Norwich concluded that testamentary charitable provision for the poor was too limited to have any significant long-term impact on poverty. However, she used the term 'ostentatiously charitable performance' to describe an activity governed nearly as much by social expectation as it was by spiritual motivation.<sup>29</sup>

That Norwich's up-and-coming middling classes would adopt these practices was likely a measure of their social and spiritual impact, even if the scale of their giving was much reduced. Only a few weavers were able to provide material adornments for their local churches, which was the most visible and lasting reminder of a testator's generosity. Thomas Swan, a weaver heavily in debt at his death, nonetheless set aside 3s 4d to purchase a printed missal for the chapel of St Nicholas.<sup>30</sup> Most donations of items, however, came from weavers who were more financially advantaged than Swan. Thomas Dowe left a bequest for a cope worth £10 to be given to the church of St Mary Coslany, and John Moore donated ten marks for a vestment to the same church.<sup>31</sup> Only John Senyour bequeathed real property, a tenement to St Botolph which stood in its churchyard, with its 'ferme' intended as support for the parson.<sup>32</sup> The largest gifts came from the few weavers who themselves had served as aldermen. The most generous was Thomas Hemmyng, an aldermen of only three years, who left to St Clement money for a silver cross, two chalices, and two censers to the total value of £42.<sup>33</sup> Though the weavers' bequests are dwarfed by the more grandiose gestures of the city's wealthiest merchants, testamentary bequests were a way for the less-wealthy to participate in that same culture of charitable provision that is often seen to be the preserve of the urban elite. In contrast, how do the gifts of the worsted weavers compare to wealthiest office

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<sup>29</sup> P. Maddern, 'A Market for Charitable Performances? Bequests to the Poor and Their Recipients in Fifteenth-Century Norwich Wills', in *Experiences of Charity, 1250-1650*, ed. by A. Scott (Farnham, Surrey, 2015), 83.

<sup>30</sup> NCC Robinson, 5.

<sup>31</sup> PROB 11/20/203; NCC Alblaster, 49.

<sup>32</sup> PROB 11/19/453.

<sup>33</sup> PROB 11/14/283.



holders? None of the worsted weavers could equal the munificence of the richest aldermen and the ex-mayors. For instance, Robert Toppe, merchant and four-time mayor of Norwich, left £13 6s 8d to his parish church, 3s 4d to every other parish church in Norwich (of which there were around 50), and additional money to 17 other parishes in East Anglia, in addition to his other charitable bequests.<sup>34</sup> John Terry, merchant and one-time mayor, was the single largest contributor in pre-Reformation Norwich; the cash bequests in his will totalled around £1,300, of which £868 was designated for charitable concerns.<sup>35</sup>

The amount that a testator should bequeath for the good of his soul had, over time, crystallised into the principle of *Legitim* (from ‘the legitimate part’), which directed a testator to divide his estate into three equal parts: a man’s wife and children should each receive a third, while the last third could be devised as he wished. It was this last part that was expected to be used for the good of the testator’s soul, through contributions to the church and other worthy causes.<sup>36</sup>

Some historians have expressed doubt that we can use wills to estimate the size of a testator’s estate. First, there is the problem of who exactly made out wills. Burgess and Tanner, among others, argued that wills were more likely to be made by the very wealthy, thus skewing any potential use of wills for statistical purposes. As Burgess noted, ‘Surviving wills are probably more likely to represent the wealthier classes but ascertaining the social status of testators whose wishes survive is difficult and frequently impossible.’<sup>37</sup> However, the data produced by the wills of the worsted weavers call this into question.

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<sup>34</sup>NCC Jekkys, 97.

<sup>35</sup>PROB 11/21/258; Tanner, *Popular Religion in Norwich*, 266; Maddern, ‘Charitable Performances’, 80.

<sup>36</sup>Ford discusses the practice of *Legitim* and its legal and customary aspects. She felt that the division of bequests into three parts may have been dying out in parts of the country by the sixteenth century, J. Ford, *A Study of Wills and Will-Making in the Period 1500-1533*, Ph.D thesis (The Open University, 1991), 20-2, 41-2; Dauteuille, *Household Materials and Social Networks*, 23. However, Henry Swinburne wrote a treatise on the custom in 1590, suggesting that it did not die out as rapidly as Ford believed. Tanner, *Popular Religion in Norwich*, 225. Dauteuille felt it was still the custom in Norwich through the end of the fifteenth century.

<sup>37</sup>Burgess, ‘Late Medieval Wills and Pious Convention’, 15.

Very wealthy testators sometimes made extra-testamentary arrangements prior to their deaths that do not appear in wills. Burgess claims that because of this trend, charitable provision in wills is probably too uncertain to be used as an indicator of economic standing.<sup>38</sup> It is true that many of the wealthiest testators, the ones most likely to have made extra-testamentary arrangements, may well have arranged for large, charitable *inter vivos* bequests. However, in studies such as this one, we should question whether the potential existence of extra-testamentary bequests is justification enough to merit excluding wills as potential economic sources. Only three weavers left more than £20 in charitable bequests, and only one of those exceeded £50. It seems unlikely that extensive *inter vivo* giving would have greatly altered the balance of testamentary charity for the majority of the middling population. Therefore, it has been taken as the working hypothesis here that a comparison of the 'charitable thirds' of the weavers might provide a relative index to their economic status and state of liquidity at death.

To test this theory, the charitable contributions of the 67 worsted weavers have been extracted into a database. This task was made easier by the fact that the majority of bequests were devised to a limited number of local institutions. These bequests have been collated under the following headings:

- The testator's own parish church<sup>39</sup>
  - to its high altar
  - for reparation and running costs
  - gifts in kind
- Other churches
- Votive lights and candles
- Norwich cathedral
- The four orders of friars in Norwich<sup>40</sup>
- The five leper houses at the city gates<sup>41</sup>
- Anchorites and anchoresses in Norwich

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<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>39</sup> This was determined by where a testator asked to be buried, and where he directed that money for the high altar and for tithes should be sent.

<sup>40</sup> These were the Dominicans (Black Friars), the Franciscans (Grey Friars), the Carmelites (White Friars), and the Augustinians (Austen Friars).

<sup>41</sup> St Leonard, SS Mary & Clement, St Benedict, St Giles, and St Stephen.

- The nuns at Carrow Priory
- The sisters at Norman's hospital
- Prisoners<sup>42</sup>
  - held at the Castle
  - held at the Guildhall

Tanner and Maddern noted that other studies of medieval testators have found similar patterns elsewhere.<sup>43</sup> Testators almost always provided for their church. Testators also commonly left bequests to friars, to lepers, to hospitals, and to prisoners. The advantage of this approach is that it allows for a structured comparison across categories. The bequests made to these institutions were almost always in the form of cash sums. The hypothesis is that when comparing gifts to the same institution, wealthier testators were likely to give more, while the less wealthy would scale down their contributions to match the smaller size of their estate.

Of course, this is not a perfect method. The sums compared here are not always the sum total of bequests from a will. Several of Tanner's categories were omitted from this study when there were not enough bequests to make a useful comparison. For instance, Tanner's analysis included 'civic projects'. Of the weavers, Henry Scolhous left £4 to the repair of Fybridge Gate, and Thomas Hemmyng provided 5 marks to repair the walls in his ward.<sup>44</sup> Both Hemmyng and Scolhous were aldermen, and their bequests already put them into the highest bracket of giving (£9 and up). Including their civic bequests would only have elongated the 'long tail' of their bracket even further.

Another category of Tanner's that was omitted was bequests 'to the poor'. It seldom appeared in the worsted weavers' wills, and when it did, it rarely stipulated

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<sup>42</sup> This category was tallied separately because most testators left each bequest separately. Two gave money to the prisoners in the castle but not the guildhall, and a few gave more to one than to the other.

<sup>43</sup> London's wills were studied by J.A.F. Thomson, 'Clergy and Laity in London, 1376-1531', D.Phil thesis (Oxford University, 1960), cited in Tanner. See also P. Heath, 'Urban Piety in the Later Middle Ages: The Evidence of Hull Wills', in *The Church, Politics and Patronage in the Fifteenth Century*, ed. by R. B. Dobson (Gloucester, 1984), 209-234.

<sup>44</sup> PROB 11/18/364; PROB 11/14/283.

a monetary sum for the activity. Richard Sonelawe directed that the bread given out thirty days after his burial should cost 26s 8d, but Thomas Dowe asked only that his executors should put on a dinner 'both for poure and riche' in the parishes of St Mary Coslany and St Martin at Oak.<sup>45</sup> For this reason, the only bequests under scrutiny here are quantifiable cash gifts that were provided to named institutions.

One last omitted category was guilds and fraternities. Surprisingly few of the weavers left bequests to guilds. Tanner commented on the popularity of the St George's Guild, but only two worsted weavers devised to it. William Godfrey devised 40s in cash to the St George fraternity, but Peter Marlyng's will directed only that his executors should host a drinking session for the guild brethren without providing a cost.<sup>46</sup> Only four other bequests were made to fraternities: Richard Austyn left 20d to guilds outside Norwich, Robert Thorpe left 24d, Harry Goodwyn left 24d, and John Dowce left 12d, none of which would have shifted the total of their overall giving by much.<sup>47</sup>

What does an analysis of the Norwich data show? Tanner studied the Norwich wills because he was interested in their theological underpinnings. He argued that the bequests left by Norwich testators provide a strong argument in favour of the strength and vitality of the medieval church. He found strong support for local 'Catholic' institutions right up to the point when such support was outlawed.<sup>48</sup> This study does not contest his findings, but rather seeks to add a second dimension to them. Bearing in mind the limitations already presented, the results nevertheless suggest that charitable institutional bequests additionally do reflect the economic standing of the testator in question.

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<sup>45</sup> NCC Palgrave 291; PROB 11/20/203.

<sup>46</sup> NCC Spurlinge, 103; NCC Palgrave, 131.

<sup>47</sup> NCC Groundesburgh, 135; ANF Liber 5 (Cooke), 163; NCC Caston, 242; NCC Wight, 6.

<sup>48</sup> Tanner, *Popular Religion in Norwich*, 269.

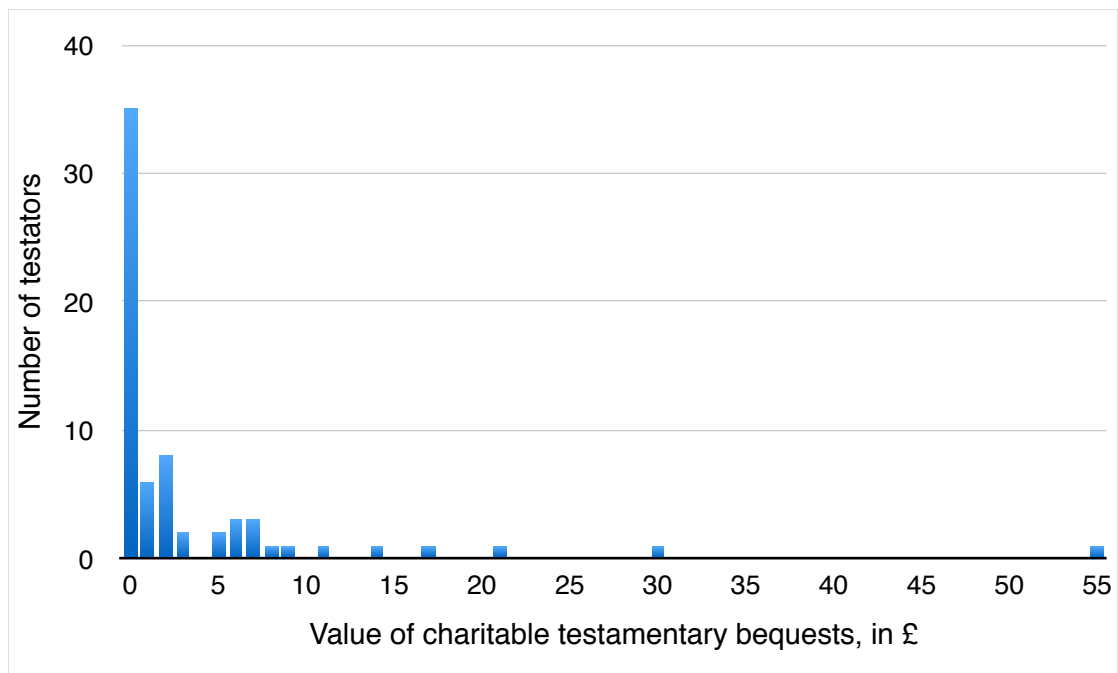


**Figure 9.2:** The values of the worsted weavers' charitable bequests

The first thing to note is the wide distribution of institutional bequests. When plotted as a histogram, the resulting curve resembles the distribution of wealth seen in medieval subsidies (Figure 9.2). There is a clustering of testators at the low-end, and a stretching across the high-end. The bequests left by each testator ranged from a low of 8d to a high of over £55.<sup>49</sup> Just over half of the weavers, 36, devised money totalling less than £1, while only seven testators devised more than £9, and five of those seven had served as aldermen or sheriffs. Furthermore, as stated previously, the categories of giving that were excluded from this analysis were generally restricted to the top givers. In short, this was not a financially homogeneous group.

At the outset of this study, it was assumed that the worsted weaver data would support Tanner's assertion that bequests indicated a personal attitude towards the specific institutions named above. Tanner argued that bequests were devised according to individual preference, and that the spread of bequests should

<sup>49</sup> In addition, one testator, Thomas Gilmyr, left no charitable bequests at all in his will of 1536.

be read as a function of a testator's personal orientation towards the church and good works in a theological sense.<sup>50</sup> Indeed, if a testator were motivated purely by personal and religious sentiment, then it would be logical to expect his bequests to be distributed in a somewhat randomised fashion, both horizontally across the categories, and vertically from largest to smallest contributions, perhaps with smaller amounts and lower frequencies to account for less wealthy testators.

This assumption did not prove to be entirely accurate. More specifically, it held true for the upper end of the scale, but it broke down among the less wealthy testators. The heat map in Figure 9.3 shows how the bequests were distributed between individual testators (vertically) and between institutions (horizontally). Individuals were ranked by summing the total institutional contributions from each testator and arranging them from highest to lowest.

The distribution of bequests reveals an unexpected pattern. There is a marked division between testators in the £1 bracket and the others. For testators who left more than about £1, the pattern of bequests does look randomly distributed. Not every testator gave to every institution, but most provided bequests to a number of institutions. Only five provided for their parish and nothing else, suggesting that they may have been of a reformist persuasion and disputed the efficacy of charitable bequests.<sup>51</sup> However, for testators who left less than around 200d, the pattern shifts, and the number of institutions that received bequests falls off sharply. No testator in the bottom bracket provided money for prisoners, and only one provided for the nuns at Carrow Priory and for the anchorites.

We can assess the internal consistency of the data by comparing total contributions with bequests to parish churches. Tanner's data showed that the single most popular institution was the parish church. The results here show the same devotion to the parish. All but one testator provided a bequest to a parish church, whether it was in the form of cash or gifts in kind. Tanner also noted that enthusiasm for supporting the parishes did not flag with the Reformation. Even though

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<sup>50</sup> Tanner, *Popular Religion in Norwich*, 227.

<sup>51</sup> PROB 11/14/283; PROB 11/19/453; NCC, Spyltymber, 291; NCC, Woolman, 170; NCC, Haywarde, 158.

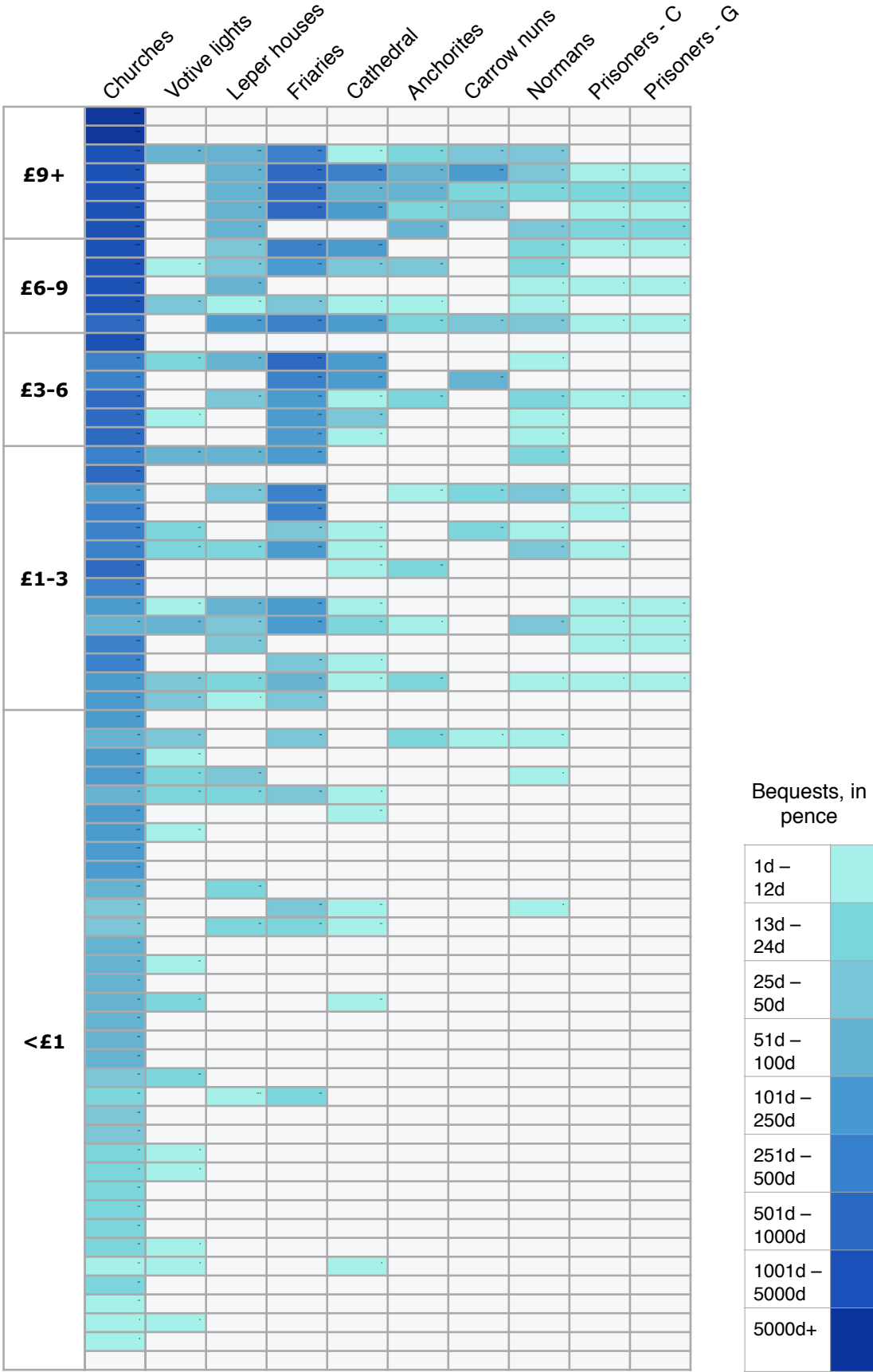


Figure 9.3: The distribution of testators' bequests, ranked by total value

charitable bequests to the other institutions disappeared almost entirely after the 1530s and 1540s, contributions to churches continued unabated through the Reformation.<sup>52</sup> This continuity makes the parish bequests a useful internal check for estimating whether or not a testator's bequests were likely to have been impacted by reformist ideals, as well as being a means of measuring that testator's financial status. The data shows a strong positive correlation between donations to the church and total donations, plus an additional weaker correlation between total donations and gifts to other institutions beyond the parish churches. This suggests that in addition to a testator's spiritual convictions, the financial realities of a testator's estate also played a role in determining the size and shape of their charitable bequests.

Figure 9.4 shows that the average amounts devised to each of the institutions tended to rise with each successive bracket. Though not every testator gave to every institution, on average the size of the bequests increased as the overall size of charitable giving went up. Tanner was also correct in assuming that different institutions attracted different levels of funding. When comparing across categories, for instance, the correlation between total donations and gifts to the four orders of friars was the strongest of all the institutions ( $r=0.72$ ). They received much higher amounts than did, say, the lepers, the prisoners, or the anchorites. The second highest correlation was between total donations and gifts to the Trinity Cathedral of Norwich ( $r=0.57$ ). The other categories showed attracted fewer gifts in total, and from fewer of the weavers. The prisoners received bequests that ranged only between 6d and 24d; the sisters of Normans received bequests ranging from 4d to 50d; and the anchorites received between 4d and 72d. In contrast, the leper houses received anywhere between 5d and 480d, and the friaries between 24d and 960d.

One last test of the data was undertaken to compare the sum of each testator's bequests to their record of political office holding. Many scholars have emphasised

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<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 246.



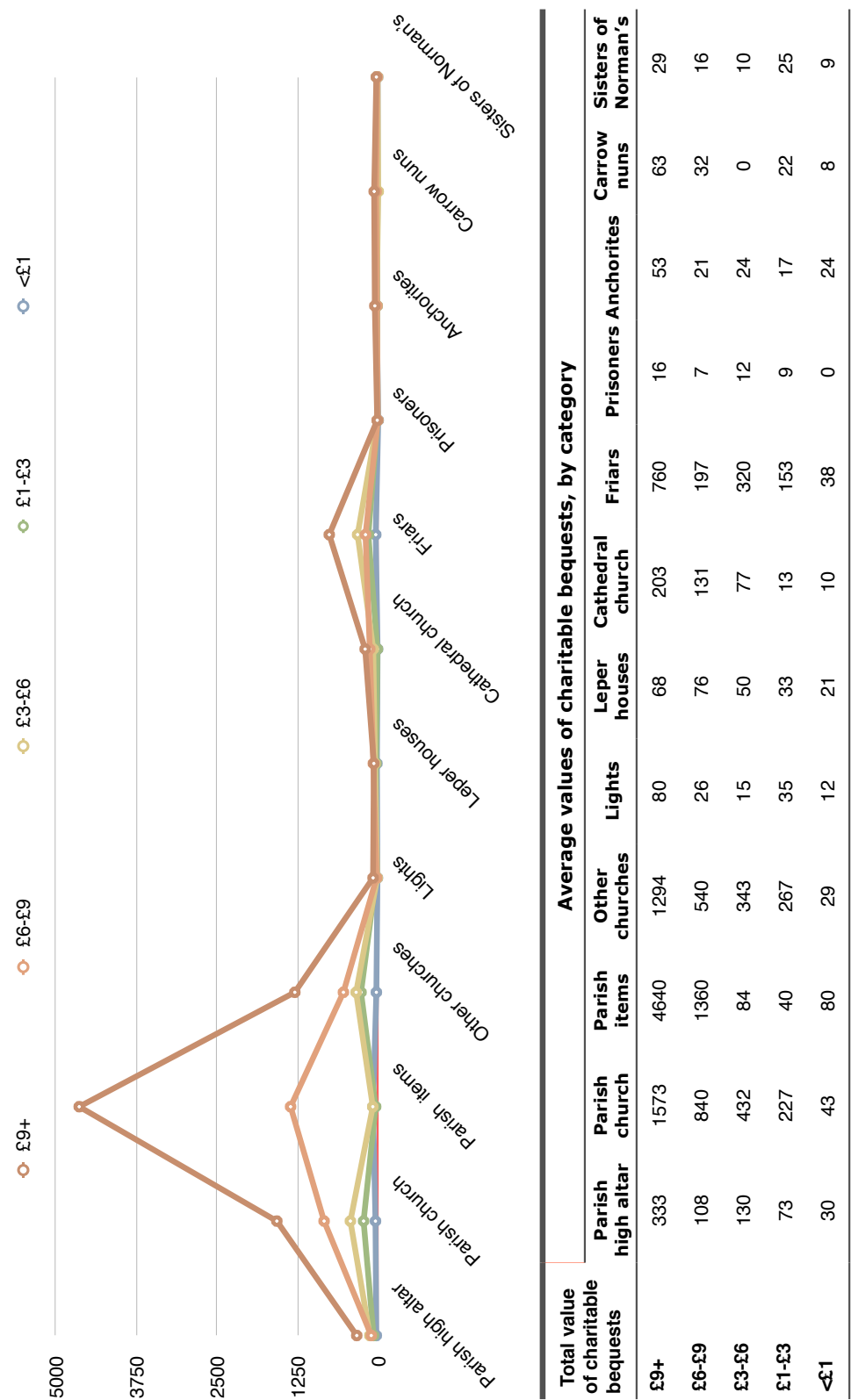


Figure 9.4: The average value of charitable bequests, in pence

the importance of personal wealth in enabling civic office holding.<sup>53</sup> The wills in this sample support this view. As shown in Table 9.2, those men who left the smallest aggregate bequests also had the lowest participation rates for office holding. Conversely, those men who rose to the offices of sheriff, alderman, or mayor were the most likely to have left large charitable bequests. Of the 36 weaver in the category who devised less than £1, none had achieved a 'Rank A' level of office, and 24 never held civic office at all. At the other end of the scale, the weavers who left the largest bequests were also the most likely to have had extensive experience in municipal government.

**Table 9.2:** Charitable bequests correlated by civic office-holding

| Value of charitable bequests | Nr of wills | Political ranks of testators |           |          |           |
|------------------------------|-------------|------------------------------|-----------|----------|-----------|
|                              |             | Political Office 'Ranks'     |           |          |           |
|                              |             | A                            | B         | C        | D         |
| <£1                          | 35          | -                            | 7         | 5        | 23        |
| £1-3                         | 14          | 1                            | 8         | 2        | 3         |
| £3-6                         | 6           | 2                            | 3         | 1        | -         |
| £6-9                         | 5           | 1                            | 2         | 1        | 1         |
| £9+                          | 7           | 5                            | 2         | -        | -         |
|                              | <b>67</b>   | <b>9</b>                     | <b>22</b> | <b>9</b> | <b>27</b> |

This extended excursion into the value of the worsted weavers' charitable bequests may seem tautological on the surface. Logically, the wealthier weavers had

<sup>53</sup> Palliser estimated that a man in early sixteenth century York had to be worth between £80 and £100 per year to become sheriff. D. M. Palliser, *Some Aspects of the Social and Economic History of York in the Sixteenth Century*, D.Phil thesis (Oxford University, 1968), 166; Kowaleski, 'The Commercial Dominance of a Medieval Provincial Oligarchy: Exeter in the Late Fourteenth Century'; Rigby, *English Society*, 176; C. Platt, Medieval Southampton, *The Port and Trading Community, 1000-1600* (London, 1973), 92-105, 175-7; Carpenter, *Urban Elites*, 3; Kermode, *Medieval Merchants*, 47.

more money to give away in their wills. However, this examination of bequests still demonstrates several things. First, it is surprisingly difficult to estimate wealth in the Middle Ages. Tax lists are helpful when they survive, but they are also notoriously problematic. Few assessments survive; the ones that do often differ slightly in the way that they were carried out. In Norwich, Andrew King found that a single assessment could be inconsistently levied in the different wards of the city.<sup>54</sup> Comparison between years is even more difficult, when thresholds for assessment and criteria for exclusion changed. But given the overall scarcity of economic sources that survive for the medieval period, we must learn to work with sources, even when they are imperfect. From the evidence presented here, despite the misgivings of some historians about the usefulness of wills for quantitative study,<sup>55</sup> the data presented here suggest that charitable bequests could be used as an additional method of broadly estimating relative wealth within a set population. Its period of applicability may be best limited to that period at the end of the fifteenth century and start of the sixteenth century, after bequests were becoming popular even among the less wealthy, but before the Reformation in England irreparably altered the practice.

Furthermore, the charitable bequests of the worsted weavers further demonstrate a social issue related to social mobility. As Carocci noted, one common strategy among social groups who aspired to upward mobility is the extent to which they mimicked the social values of the social stratum to which they desired entry, in order to win recognition from that group; 'in other words, they adopted the cultural models most typical of the dominant classes'.<sup>56</sup> The distribution of charitable bequests suggests that the weavers were indeed employing this strategy. The breakdown of values as shown in Figure 9.3 presents an intriguing but distinctive pattern. Those weavers at the very bottom of the chart, in the bracket of testators who left less than £1 in charitable bequests, gave to few institutions beyond their own local church. The spread of bequests across institutions increases as the total

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<sup>54</sup> King, *Borough Finances*, 137.

<sup>55</sup> Dobson, 'Review of N. Tanner, *The Church in Late Medieval Norwich, 1370-1532*'; Burgess, 'Late Medieval Wills and Pious Convention', 30.

<sup>56</sup> Carocci, 'Social Mobility', 394.

contributions rise; above the range of around £1, the pattern clearly changes. Above this line, the spread of bequests becomes quite wide. This suggests two things. First, we should consider the extent to which social obligation played a role in determining how a testator chose to distribute his charitable bequests. Given the medieval ethos of responsibility to community, this pattern strongly suggests that social expectations played a role in the allocation of charitable bequests. Men who died with larger estates were likely expected to distribute their charitable funds across multiple institutions; in contrast, men with little to spare did not go to lengths to spread their money around nearly as widely.

The corollary to this finding concerns the extent to which the cultural norms of the very wealthy were being adopted by men of lesser means. The pattern of giving bequests to multiple charitable organisations extended down to men who left as little as a single pound in bequests. These were not men of great means, but their behaviour in giving widely to Norwich institutions implies that they too wished to be recognised publicly as donors to good works, just as their wealthier neighbours did.

One last benefit of this statistical analysis is that it allows us to further refine the data we have regarding the location of wealth in the city, and how it was moving over time. Archaeologists working in Norwich have argued that wealth was moving to Ultra Aquam in the sixteenth century 'as a result of difficulties and changes in the textile and dyeing industries'.<sup>57</sup> King's analysis of the extant tax lists for Norwich found much the same. He believed that Conesford was losing population and wealth to the northern ward. The data from the wills further reinforce how the wealth among the worsted weavers was moving to the north side of the city.

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<sup>57</sup> King, *Borough Finances*, 128.

### 9.3 Intergenerational mobility

Swanson, in her work on York's artisans, claimed that 'Social mobility was no more easily achieved over two generations than one.'<sup>58</sup> Yet the lived experience of Norwich's worsted weavers suggests that intergenerational mobility was indeed a very real possibility for many of the city's weavers. Among the worsted weavers, we can point to several outstanding instances of weaver families ascending quickly to the top of the social ladder. The example of Thomas Wilkyns and his two sons, Thomas and Ralf, described above, has already been used to demonstrate how the passage from journeyman to independent master was eased by the consolidation and transfer of familial resources.<sup>59</sup> The example of Thomas Wilkyns the elder, and his sons Thomas and Ralf, provide a clear example of intergenerational mobility among the worsted weavers over two generations. The Parker family provides an even more intriguing example of multigenerational mobility. Richard Parker enrolled as a worsted weaver in 1476/7, but of him little more can be said.<sup>60</sup> He paid a mere 4d tax on a property in Colegate ward in 1489, and had apprenticed the worsted weaver William Dunham prior to 1492.<sup>61</sup> There is no indication that he ever held civic office, nor did he seem to have left a will. Richard's son, William Parker, enrolled his freedom as a worsted weaver in 1505/6.<sup>62</sup> William seems to have enjoyed a rapid career ascent: he was active in the worsted weavers' guild, sitting on eleven craft juries, and enrolling at least five apprentices, before serving as guild master twice, all within eleven years of taking his freedom.<sup>63</sup> William seems to have died relatively

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<sup>58</sup> Swanson, *Medieval Artisans*, 165.

<sup>59</sup> For the Wilkyns family, see page 226 above.

<sup>60</sup> 16 Edward IV, NRO NCR 17c, OFB.

<sup>61</sup> Jurkowski, 'Income Tax Assessments', 154. William Dunham enrolled his freedom in 1492, claiming Parker as his apprentice master. NRO NCR 16d/2, Books of Proceedings, f. 10.

<sup>62</sup> 21 Henry VII, NRO NCR 17c, OFB. Richard may have had a second son, Thomas Parker, who also enrolled as a worsted weaver in 1505/6, and who also was heavily active in the guild, both on juries and as guild master. l'Estrange, *Freemen*, 106; NRO NCR 17d/8, 6r, 17v, 22v, 26v, 27r, 32v, 34v, 35r, 40v, 49v, 50v, 54v, 60r, 65r.

<sup>63</sup> NRO NCR 17d/8, for juries ff. 1v, 4v, 6r, 7r, 9v, 15r, 16r-17r, 18v, 20r, and for guild master ff. 20v and 24v; *Gild of St George*, 7, 33, 67, 75, 131.

young in 1516;<sup>64</sup> notwithstanding that, his two young sons fared very well for themselves. His younger son, Thomas Parker, enrolled his freedom as a haberdasher in 1537/8.<sup>65</sup> Thomas served in a wide range of civic offices in Norwich, starting with constable, before moving up to the common council in 1546. He went on to hold the offices of chamberlain's councilor, clavor, sheriff, and alderman, before finally attaining the mayoralty in 1568.<sup>66</sup> His brother, Matthew Parker, however, cut an even more impressive figure; having being sent to study theology at Cambridge after his father's death, he there become involved with the religious reformers, ultimately taking on the roles of Master of Corpus Christi College and Vice Chancellor of Cambridge University, before eventually being elected to the position of Archbishop of Canterbury.<sup>67</sup>

A slightly less impressive example of intergenerational mobility would be that of the alderman and worsted weaver Henry Scolehaus. Henry was the son of

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<sup>64</sup> William Parker's will was written and proven in 1516. NRO NCC, Spurlinge, 213.

<sup>65</sup> 29 Henry VIII, l'Estrange, *Freemen*, 106.

<sup>66</sup> *Norwich Officers*, 117.

<sup>67</sup> J. Strype, *The Life and Acts of Matthew Parker*, vol. 3 (Oxford, 1821), 19. Strype's early nineteenth-century account of the life of Parker seems to be the accepted authority for his early biographical details. Strype reproduces an account of Parker's early life, ostensibly written by the archbishop himself, in which he claims birth in the parish of St Saviour in Norwich, and early life in Fyebridge ward. It also provides his father's name, '*Guilielmo patre, qui vixit ad annum Dni. 1516 et ad annum aetat 48*', followed by the name of his mother, Alice. . This agrees with the will of William Parker, worsted weaver, which was written and proven in 1516. NRO NCC, Spurlinge, 213. Given the short time between William Parker's freedom in 1505/6 and his death in 1516, he appears to have died young, supporting the son's claim of his father being around 48 at death. William Parker's will identifies himself as a worsted weaver, and a resident of Fyebridge, asking to be buried in the churchyard of St Clement at Fyebridge Gate in his will, and providing bequests to All Saints and St Botolf, also both in Fyebridge. William's will names his wife, Alice, to be the recipient of a house in St George's parish (presumably the one in Colgate ward, which bordered on St Clement). However, some of Strype's other claims, which have made their way into many of the modern reference sources (including the *Dictionary of National Biography*) are more tenuous, including Strype's suggestion that the family had an armigorous background (a presumption based purely on Strype's matching the surname 'Parker' with another Parker family resident in Norfolk), or that William Parker's grandfather had been a registrar in Canterbury. In short, I find the identification of Matthew Parker's father as William Parker the worsted weaver of Norwich to be convincing, but the other familial claims lack evidence to support them. 'Matthew Parker (1504-1575)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/>>, (accessed 10 May 2017); 'About Matthew Parker & the Parker Library', *Parker Library on the Web*, <[https://parker.stanford.edu/parker/actions/page.do?forward=about\\_parker](https://parker.stanford.edu/parker/actions/page.do?forward=about_parker)>, (accessed 10 May 2017).

Nicolas Scolehaus and the grandson of Henry Scolehaus, both worsted weavers as well.<sup>68</sup> Henry was clearly the most successful of the group. He became active in politics, being elected to the office of sheriff in 1514 and alderman in 1515.<sup>69</sup> He served on the common council of the St George's Guild at least five times.<sup>70</sup> His will was proven in the Prerogative Court of Canterbury, itself a coveted indicator of wealth and status.<sup>71</sup> In his will, he left generous bequests to friends and family. He bequeathed furred gowns to friends, both signs of affection and clear displays of affluence. He provided for his apprentices. His cash bequests to his family were also very generous, including a cash payment of 200 marks to his wife.

Of course, not all of the worsted weaver families saw such exceptional rises in their social stations. Most intergenerational advances were more modest. There are many examples of craftsmen in this period whose sons later enrolled as members of Norwich's top mercantile guilds, suggesting that the offspring of craftsmen often looked to occupational mobility as one of the outward markers of social position. Among the worsted weavers, for instance, John Skowe's son Thomas enrolled as a mercer, as did John Gosbett's son Robert; Robert Trace's son John enrolled as a grocer; and William Bowde's son John enrolled as a rafman.<sup>72</sup> Woollen weavers also had sons who moved into the distributive trades: William Coket's son Roger became a grocer, and Nicholas Corpusty's son Richard became a mercer.<sup>73</sup> Some of the worsted weavers' sons moved into other professions, such as Thomas Storme's son Thomas who became a notary.<sup>74</sup> This type of occupational movement was not rare, for it is seen in many other crafts as well. William Multon, butcher, had a son who became a grocer; John Gogeon, a locksmith, had a son who became a vintner; Geoffrey Bacon and John Basse, both shearmen, had sons who became mercers.<sup>75</sup> Not

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<sup>68</sup> 5 Edward IV, NRO NCR 17c, OFB.

<sup>69</sup> *Norwich Officers*, 135.

<sup>70</sup> *Gild of St George*, 107-9, 111.

<sup>71</sup> PCC PROB 11/18/364.

<sup>72</sup> *l'Estrange, Freeman*, 18, 62, 124, 140.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 34, 37.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 132.

all parents could afford to place their sons into an expensive apprenticeship with a master from one of the elite mercantile guilds, but for those who could, a career in one of the distributive trades must have constituted an important, and highly visible, form of social advancement.

Unfortunately, however, the limitations of urban records make it difficult to investigate intergenerational mobility in any depth. Few records provide any details of parentage, so family reconstitution remains difficult prior to the inception of parish records. One of the few extant document sources that do mention family members are wills. The next section will consider how some of the worsted weavers used testamentary bequests to assist their children.

### **Bequests as strategies for intergenerational mobility**

The intergenerational transfer of wealth is one of the primary strategies by which a family can help its offspring succeed, but understanding the process relies on the survival of appropriate source material. Swanson, for instance, argued that craftsmen rarely owned property, because the properties of craftsmen do not often appear in the deed registers of the city: 'Most artisans owned no property, but rented their homes and workplaces, the more fortunate being able to afford a lease of years.'<sup>76</sup> This conclusion, of course, lends the impression that craftsmen as a group were distinctly less well-off than their merchant counterparts, and far less likely to have anything worth passing on to their offspring at their time of death. Furthermore, as only around 20% of craftsmen in York left wills,<sup>77</sup> this further reinforces the impression that craftsmen were less likely than merchants to be financially affluent or socially mobile. Though she stressed that the 80% who did not make a will were not necessarily destitute, Swanson also surmised that artisans mainly owned moveable goods, and were more likely to rely on the traditional division of thirds, obviating the need for a will.

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 8, 11, 61, 99.

<sup>76</sup> Swanson, *Medieval Artisans*, 160-1.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 155-6.



Dauteuille's data for Norwich, cited above, suggests that York's example may not be so universal after all. Craftsmen in Norwich were increasingly likely to make provisions for their estates after their deaths in the fifteenth century. One possible cause for the difference can be seen in the wills of the worsted weavers. Unlike Swanson's craftsmen in York, nearly three-quarters of the worsted weavers who made wills in Norwich had a financial stake in one or more properties in the city. Property ownership may have been the underlying reason why more artisans in Norwich went to the trouble and expense of making a will.

If enough deeds survived over a long enough span of time, we could build profiles that showed change over time in property ownership for different occupational groups. The Norwich Survey attempted this on a very small scale, but limited its analysis to deeds registered between 1285 and 1311.<sup>78</sup> It concluded that at the start of the fourteenth century, weavers held little property in the city when compared to other textile producers. The largest group of textile producers with properties were dyers.<sup>79</sup> By the end of the fourteenth century this pattern had changed. Dunn also used enrolled deeds to estimate home ownership among worsted weavers in the late fourteenth century. She estimated that around 57% of weavers were 'known property owners' at the time, a figure that correlates with the high point in fourteenth-century worsted exports.<sup>80</sup>

This sort of analysis is clearly important when trying to establish a financial profile for members of a craft. Unfortunately, deeds in Norwich become much less useful in the fifteenth century. First, deed enrolment fell dramatically in the fifteenth century. It is unclear whether properties were being enrolled elsewhere, whether the court rolls are defective, or whether property owners were simply forgoing the step of having property transactions enrolled with the city.<sup>81</sup> The other problem lies with

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<sup>78</sup> The NRO houses research from the Norwich Survey project. See NRO MC 146.

<sup>79</sup> Kelly estimated that only around 10% of properties belonging to manufacturers of textiles belonged to weavers. Kelly, 'The Economic Topography and Structure of Norwich C.1300', 24-5.

<sup>80</sup> Dunn, *After the Black Death*, 158.

<sup>81</sup> The low rate of fifteenth-century enrolment is partly why the Norwich Survey chose to focus on the years 1285 to 1311.

the way in which property exchanges were being documented in the fifteenth century.

The practice of enfeoffing property via 'feoffees to use', that is, formally transferring ownership to a group of trustees, had become popular as a means of evading certain property laws, including the national prohibition on devising real property by will.<sup>82</sup> Though burgage law typically did allow testators to devise real property, the popularity of the use nevertheless increased in fifteenth-century Norwich. By the 1450s, practically every deed that conveys a tenement or a messuage was executed between a group of four to ten grantors and four to ten grantees. As this type of conveyance was developed to mask the identities of buyers and sellers, it is impossible to separate the trustees from the owners. Even if we could distinguish feoffees from owners, the low incidence of deed enrolment means that few of the weavers appear in deeds enrolled after 1450.<sup>83</sup>

However, the body of wills left by the worsted weavers allows us to look at the issue from a slightly different angle. If we relied on the evidence of deeds alone, it would seem that few weavers did own homes. But a side effect of conveying property via the use was that owners could include directions for executors to dispose of real property in their wills. Property owners typically added a line to their wills, directing their co-feoffees to 'deliver estate' when required. Though it is not always possible to identify the property in question, the testamentary wishes of the worsted weavers suggests that the majority of the weavers in Norwich did own property. Of the 67 weaver wills discussed earlier, 41 made bequests of tenements or dwelling places, and eight more additionally directed their co-feoffees to relinquish trusteeships, which suggests that 72% of the weavers who left wills did have a financial stake in real property.

Homes were not always left as outright bequests. Most were left to wives, but a few weavers left their homes to their children. In some cases, the weaver in

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<sup>82</sup> R. A. Houlbrooke, *Church Courts and People in the Diocese of Norwich, 1519-1570*, D.Phil thesis (Oxford University, 1970), 177-8.

<sup>83</sup> Only 25 worsted weavers appear in deeds that date between 1457 and 1479. NRO NCR 1/19.

question arranged for the sale of some or all of his property, with the stipulation that the value recouped from the sale would go to the residue of the estate, or directly to the wife and children. Thomas Harston, for example, directed that if his son-in-law Thomas Snellyng wished to have his tenement, Snellyng should buy it from the estate for £16, rather than inherit it as a gift.<sup>84</sup> Snellyng was married to Harston's daughter, Joan. This balanced out competing needs; on the one hand, to help provide for his daughter's family, while on the other providing his widow with extra cash after his death. A similar strategy was employed by Robert Gerard. He directed that his son should buy his home for a discounted price; that money would go to the widow, 'to by her any house to dwell in'.<sup>85</sup>

The early death of a craftsman in the prime of his working years obviously impacted his ability to provide for his heirs. For those who did die young, leaving behind a wife and small children, the need to provide for them was a high concern. A number of the weavers expressly instructed that money was to be left in trust for their underage children, to be given to them usually between 20 and 24 years of age, or when the girls married. Though many of the sums were not great by comparison with what a mayor could leave his family, even a small sum could materially assist a son who needed to purchase a loom, rent a workspace, or pay for his citizenship. Cash bequests did not need to be large to be beneficial.

Nor did a bequest need to be monetary to be useful. Many of the weavers chose to bequeath their businesses to their wives for the express purpose of supporting the family. The bequest of one or more looms could provide for a man's family by ensuring that his workshop continued to operate past his death under the management of his wife. Around half of the weavers who bequeathed looms, left them to wives instead of to their sons. John Kyng's will, for instance, instructed that his looms should pass first to his wife Emma, and then to his sons thereafter:

I beqweth to the seyde [torn] wyff my worsted lomes to have and to occupy to  
hyr own use duryng [torn] terme of hyr lyffe and after the deceasse of the

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<sup>84</sup> NCC, Palgrave, 121.

<sup>85</sup> ANW, Cook, 31.

seyd Emme I wull that [Robert] Kynges my sone shall have my best lome and I will that john kynges my sone shal have my other lome.<sup>86</sup>

From John's other directives, first that his eldest son Robert should be a 'good helper and comfort unto ye said Emme my wife at all times whanne she is in necessite and neede', and second, that he should 'have the rule and governance of the werkmanship in my workhous', it seems that the expectation was that although the ownership of the looms would sustain both Emma and the boys once John was deceased, it fell to the elder son to manage the day to day activities of the workshop. John Kyng also considered the futures of the apprentices who were currently indentured to him. He left instructions that his apprentices should serve out the 'term of ther yeres of prentishode with the seyde Emme my wife', and that she should fulfil any commitments according to the terms of their indentures, which surely was a further benefit for the family.<sup>87</sup> And in fact, the number of weavers who specifically bequeathed looms to their widows suggests that this was a common strategy. William Mylys provided that his wife Alice should have 'the occupying of oon my lomys for terme of her lyfe'.<sup>88</sup> Thomas Richeman, John Deynes, Thomas Hemmyng, and Thomas Wilkyns all also stipulated that their wives should have the use of their looms for the term of their lives, no doubt providing the women with a means of income to sustain themselves after the decease of their husbands.<sup>89</sup> Unlike John Kyng, it is not clear whether they expected their sons to do the actual work, or whether it would be conducted by hired servants, but the number who did leave looms suggests that many more such bequests of professional equipment did take place informally outside of the instrument of the will.

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<sup>86</sup> ANF, Liber 2a (Bulwer), 15.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> NCC Palgrave, 195.

<sup>89</sup> NCC Ryxe, 270; NCC Underwoode 29; PROB 11/14/283; PROB 11/9/82.

## 9.4 Alms

Of course, not all of the weavers were in a position to make wills or leave assets to their children. By the middle of the 1520s, worsted exports were on the wane again. By the 1540s, petitions to Parliament on behalf of a now 'impoverished' industry, though laden with all the properly formulaic tropes of medieval petitioners, suggest that the cycle had run its course. The reasons are unclear why this happened, though the industry's decline was more likely caused by a confluence of variables. First, the quality of worsted cloth depended on having the right kind of wool available. A statute of 1541/2 lamented that the worsted industry had entered a state of decay, citing 'disceite and craftie practises' on the part of yarn brokers and merchants, who were undermining the production of Norfolk worsteds by constricting the supply of good worsted yarn.<sup>90</sup> The statute particularly decried the export of Norfolk wool overseas, to be used by Norfolk's competitors in France and Flanders. The weaving industry in those areas were staging a comeback after several lacklustre decades, and were now weaving 'sayes, russelles, worstedes, and diverse and sondrie other clothes and thinges' and selling them 'agayne to us Englishmen [...] to their great profitt lucre and advantage'.<sup>91</sup> Overseas producers were possibly even incorporating aspects of the Norwich cloths into their own products.<sup>92</sup> Such a move was hardly unusual in the Middle Ages; the cloth industries in England and on the continent had been borrowing technological advances from each other for centuries, and would continue to do so, as alternately English producers, then continental producers, were able to capitalise on improvements to their native industries.

In addition to the wool supply and increased competition from Flemish and French producers, Norfolk also had to contend with bad harvests in 1519-21 and 1527-9 in England, plus the plague made a return again in that decade. On top of these problems, producers were also greatly impacted by the severe inflationary trend of the sixteenth century. Though good price data is scarce, it seems certain that

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<sup>90</sup> *SR*, vol. 3, 852.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>92</sup> Munro, 'Woollens, Worsteds, and (Hybrid) Serges'.

prices had been slowly increasing since the 1470s or 1480s. In the 1510s or 1520s they started to rise more sharply; in the 1530s and 1540s they rose yet more steeply again.<sup>93</sup> However, the cost of food and commodities did not all rise in tandem. The cost of food may have gone up more quickly than wages did, lowering living standards for many people. Guy estimates that the value of craftsmen's wages may have fallen by as much as 30% between 1500 and 1540.<sup>94</sup> The diminished purchasing power experienced by many in the middle and lower strata of society would have fed back into the worsening economic cycle by limiting the non-essential consumption of material goods. Consumer items that had been affordable for broad swathes of the middling classes would have drifted out of the reach of many by the 1530s, making items like fine quality worsted into an unnecessary luxury.

One last factor that made for an inelastic economy was the fixed nature of apprenticeship indentures. The contractual agreement between master and apprentice legally bound them to each other for a fixed term of seven years or more. In an expanding market, this type of arrangement works well; in a contracting market, fixed contracts leave little room to manoeuvre. A master with multiple apprentices would have found it hard to make ends meet, as he could not easily shed labour costs when demand fell.

By the middle of the sixteenth century, it seems clear that Norwich's worsted industry had fallen on hard times. Repeated legislation attempted to force wool sellers to keep the wool for worsteds within the county, but the demand overseas must have been high, for sellers continued to evade the law.<sup>95</sup> Worsteds exports continued to fall after the 1520s, and by the 1550s had once again hit lows last seen in the mid-fifteenth century.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> P. H. Ramsey, *Tudor Economic Problems* (London, 1963), 113-120; R. B. Outhwaite, *Inflation in Tudor and Early Stuart England* (London, 1969), 9-15.

<sup>94</sup> J. A. Guy, *Tudor England* (Oxford, 1988), 38-9.

<sup>95</sup> Allison, *The Wool Supply and the Worsteds Cloth Industry in Norfolk in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, 455-7.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 462; see also Figure 2.9 on page 80.

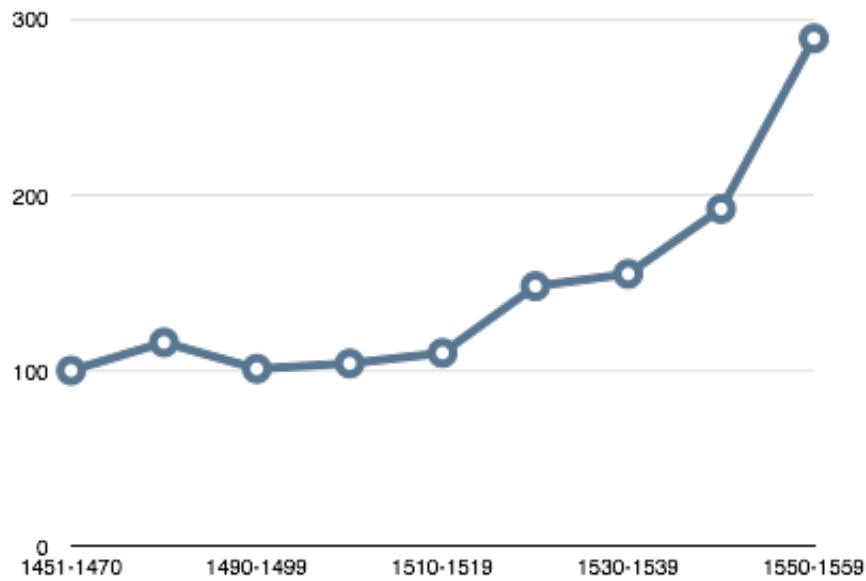


**Figure 9.5:** Phelps Brown and Hopkins Price Index 1451 to 1550<sup>97</sup>

If the original premise of this thesis – that is, that a rising demand for a consumer item will have had a visible impact on the lives of producers – then the inverse is also demonstrated by the plight of a few of the weavers by the end of the 1520s. Richard Mannyng was one of the worsted weavers who seems to have fallen on hard times after a long career in the industry. Mannyng had been one of the Worsteds Weavers’ most active search jurors, appearing on 31 jury lists between 1498 and 1526. He enrolled ten apprentices over the course of his career. He was one of the longest-serving guild wardens for the worsted weavers, including terms of office in 1512 and 1520, and then from 1522 to 1526.<sup>98</sup> There is no indication that he ever served in civic office, yet in spite of that he appears as a member of Norwich’s prestigious civic fraternity, the Guild of St George. Unlike the other worsted weavers who joined the fraternity by virtue of their position on the common council, Mannyng could have been accorded the privilege of membership for his service as the Master of the Worsteds Weavers. He also served on the ruling council of the St

<sup>97</sup>I. W. Archer, *The History of the Haberdasher’s Company* (Chichester, 1991), 285.

<sup>98</sup>NRO NCR 17d/8, f. 10r, 33v, 38r, 39v, 41v, 43v, 47r.

George's Guild for a year in 1522-23.<sup>99</sup> By 1533, however, he must have experienced some reversal of fortune, for in this year he is described in the minutes of the fraternity's annual meeting as having 'fallen in povertye'. He was granted alms of 6d per week for the next four years, after which he disappears from the fraternity's meeting records.<sup>100</sup> It is likely that his previously high position in the guild made him eligible for financial support in his later years.

Davies' study of almsgiving by the London companies posits that guilds may have commonly pursued a targeted strategy in their provision of welfare assistance to members. In his opinion, fraternal organisations were often more concerned to 'maintain the status and dignity of liverymen, and their wives, rather than attempting the difficult task of helping all poor members of the mistery'.<sup>101</sup> If this was a widely practised tactic employed by civic guilds such as the St George, it could explain the gap between the large number of weavers who automatically became members as a condition of their election to the Common Council, and the proportionately small number of weavers who received alms from the fraternity. The weavers who received financial support were all well-known personalities within the guild, having frequently served on search juries over the span of their careers. In addition, all but one rose to the level of guild master. John Mannyng, a possible relation of Richard, appears in 26 jury lists, Robert Clifford appears in 17, Thomas Baseley in 28, Richard Senyour in 16, and Matthew Lesyngham in 23.<sup>102</sup> For most of these men, the years of payment in the 1530s coincide with what would have been their late career or early retirement years. Unfortunately, none of them is known to have left wills, which might have provided some indication of their level of financial solvency at death.

That the time they spent as almsmen coincides with the downside of the worsted market suggests that the industry was in real decline by 1528.<sup>103</sup> A

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<sup>99</sup> *Gild of St George*, 121-2.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 134, 136-138.

<sup>101</sup> Davies, *The Tailors of London*, 72-4.

<sup>102</sup> NRO NCR 17d/7; NRO NCR 17d/8.

<sup>103</sup> Schanz, *Englische Handelspolitik*, 104-5.



contracting market would surely have meant economic hardship for many of the weavers. Unfortunately, no accounts survive to indicate whether the Worsted Weavers' guild made similar payments to aged or impoverished members, but it is telling that the city's leading civic guild financially supported a select group of craftsmen who were not members of mercantile guilds.

## Conclusion

Assessing strategies for intergenerational mobility is obviously simpler in the case of the wealthier testators who left long and explicit instructions for their executors. If we compare the Wilkyns family to some of the other weaving families, for instance, it is instantly clear that the Wilkyns children had greater structural advantages than many of their peers, because of the wealth and social position that Thomas Wilkyns the elder could pass on to his sons. Transmission of wealth and property between generations will always advantage the recipients. But the data from the weavers also strongly suggest that familial benefits did not have to be excessive to be beneficial. Though Thrupp had postulated that London merchant families often failed to reproduce in the male line,<sup>104</sup> Hanawalt showed how wealth was passed, less visibly, from family to family via women's marriages.<sup>105</sup> The wills of the worsted weavers suggests that a transference of working assets had a similar impact on their heirs' intergenerational social mobility. The fact that most of the weavers owned a home, contrary to Swanson's assertions, already suggests this point. The ability of the wives to continue an established business and carry forward what their husbands had established, meant that that business and its earning potential, in addition to all its equipment, and accumulated technical knowledge, was preserved for the sons of those weavers – but that this kind of nearly-invisible wealth transmission is hard to detect. If craftsmen did not leave a will, any intergenerational transfers, whether of

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<sup>104</sup> Thrupp, *The Merchant Class*, 191-204.

<sup>105</sup> B. Hanawalt, *The Wealth of Wives: Women, Law, and Economy in Late Medieval London* (Oxford, 2007).

cash or equipment or property or other types, are almost invariably lost from the historical record.

The analysis of the weavers' charitable bequests demonstrates two things. It strongly suggests that the membership of the craft itself was not financially monolithic. The bequests left by the craft's members suggest that their individual financial status ranged from meagre to substantial, likely indicating that the wealthiest of the weavers were engaging in some form of entrepreneurial business enterprises. Yet that the majority of the weavers also bequeathed real property implies that the real wealth of craftsmen often could have been invisible in the historical record. Personal bequests alone are not enough to estimate a craftsman's financial status. Some of the weavers were poor in liquid assets, but not necessarily poor. That three-quarters of the worsted weavers owned property suggests that their first priority was to secure the material necessities for running a business.

## 10 | Conclusion

This thesis has attempted to bring together the dual strands of social and economic history to showcase one example of the way that commercialisation could impact medieval social structure. The question I set out to answer was twofold: First, was it possible to reconstruct an economic profile of a commodity that was tied to a specific urban centre? Second, how did the fluctuating demand for worsteds affect the community that produced them? Would commercial success enable social mobility for a class of producers? Did craft guilds help or hinder this process?

England's medieval woollen industry has been studied in great detail, but less so its worsted industry. The late fifteenth-century boom in overseas worsteds sales is significant because it exposes a textile industry that remained stubbornly urban, and stubbornly guild-centric. Worsteds and woollens did not evolve along similar paths, and researchers interested in the rise of the commodity culture would do well to consider that the urban production environment for other types of commodities may also have resisted the decentralisation of the rural putting-out model.

Norwich's unusual relationship to its hinterland production area also signals another area for further study. The complex network of regional worsted production that centred on Norwich better resembles the 'city-state' regions of continental Europe, but Norfolk's seeming exceptionalism may be more a function of our ignorance about English regional economies. There is still much to be learned about the importance of hinterlands to urban production, especially with regard to export-oriented urban economies. Worsteds may not be unique, and future research could uncover other similar regional economies elsewhere in England.

Of course, the crucial element in the export-economy for worsteds was the craft guild. The Norwich guild of worsted weavers played a key role in helping to regulate and maintain a minimum standard of quality in order to meet the demanding expectations of international consumers. Though the function of guilds are often downplayed and vilified in the economic literature, the regulatory framework they helped to establish in cities was the means by which local merchants could rely on standardisation. Standardisation was crucial to making worsteds more attractive to the international markets.

Moving from the big picture to the small, a prosopographical analysis of Norwich's worsted weavers showed that the group increased in number and influence when overseas exports increased. Though guild membership was anything but monolithic, the group as a whole had risen to a position of higher social prominence by 1530, a fact most easily measured by their increased participation in civic office. The flexibility of guild office, and relative lack of hierarchicalisation when compared to London companies, made the guild more than just a professional organisation. It was also a fairly flexible means of entry to the *cursus honorum*. Through service to the guild, weavers could take advantage of opportunities for social networking and for gaining experience in roles of public responsibility.

Indeed, one of the undercurrents that runs through this study is the importance of citizen participation in mid-level and low-level positions. Mary Beard's comments published in the wake of the 'Brexit' vote suggest that pre-modern urban administration has always played a role in disseminating and distilling the value of citizenship, and on a wider scale than we often acknowledge. As Beard noted, participation in ancient Athens's civic government was not merely a perk of elitism, nor was it confined to a limited few. 'Many Athenian democrats would have argued that people must learn to do politics, they must learn to be citizens; it is not something that comes naturally. Much of the Athenian political system was about that process of learning.'<sup>1</sup> Athens' practice of assigning seats on the city council by lottery was fair but also pragmatic,

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<sup>1</sup> M. Beard, 'Power to the people?', *The Times Literary Supplement*, <<http://www.the-tls.co.uk/articles/public/power-to-the-people-2/>>, (accessed 15 November 2017)

For it ensured that practical political experience was spread widely across the citizen body.... At a rough estimate something like 70 per cent of the citizens would have served on the Council once during their lifetime.... Serving on the Council was a practical course in political administration and argument.<sup>2</sup>

The experience of Norwich's middling citizens should be seen in the same light. Norwich may have been no Athens, but its open structure, particularly in the mid- and low-level offices of the constabulary, the common council, and guild functionaries, among others, taught citizens in a very hands-on kind of way that local government functioned because of, not in spite of, the commonalty. Historians who still argue that oligarchic control increased in late medieval cities need to incorporate the results of prosopographical studies, such as this one, that look beyond the limited echelon of the alderman's bench. They also need to better assess how town constitutions differed one from another in both in ideological thrust and in practical implementation. Norwich witnessed a much greater rate of civic participation than is often allowed for in the debates on oligarchy, and its flexible constitution has been systematically undervalued.

If we draw our attention away from the topic of elite recruitment, and focus instead on the body of up-and-coming craftsmen and enfranchised masters, the parameters for social mobility seem less stratospheric and more achievable. Those who argue for rising oligarchy in medieval towns all too often present their argument in a motivational vacuum, blithely assuming that all citizens felt an equally strong desire to hold the office of alderman – something that was exceedingly unlikely, considering the high demands placed on an alderman's time and income. The lives and achievements of the middling stratum of medieval urban society should be measured on their own terms.

I think the practical lesson to take away from this examination of Norwich's civic structure is that social mobility did exist, but should be qualified as a multivariate phenomenon. Weavers who established themselves in the city by the 1490s often had sons who followed in their footsteps, but many had little to pass on to the next generation. Wealth was undoubtedly the key to getting an early start in

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

life, but only a handful of weaving families had the kind of wealth that gave their sons a decided advantage over their peers. The sons of middling weaving masters might profit modestly from the work of their fathers, possibly inheriting a loom or a workshop, but those at the bottom of the socio-economic scale had to rely solely on their own efforts. It is important to note here that in spite of structural disadvantages, there were still weavers who did find social mobility in the city, and who did succeed in building a career for themselves. These were the men who took advantage of the opportunities offered by institutions like the guilds, who committed themselves to the principles of civic service, and whose service to the city's various institutions in turn rewarded them with careers that spanned the breadth of the artisanal *cursus honorum*.

But social mobility is not merely about the success or failure of distinct individuals. This study also advocates that social mobility can be a lens through which to view societal developments on a macro scale. The worsted weavers' guild began its life as an artisanal guild of no great account, but by 1530 it ranked as the city's preeminent non-mercantile craft guild. This is the story of how the worsted weavers of Norfolk leveraged commercial, regional, and constitutional factors to their advantage, reinvigorated a stalled industry, and ultimately elevated their guild to one of social prominence. That journey highlights how the creation of urban social identity pivoted on questions of wealth, status, occupation, and service to community, and the ways in which social identity adapted to changing environments. The introduction of the craft guild into late medieval society complicated political life, and every city reacted to the rise of the guilds in its own way. Norwich's history of using arbitration to settle public disputes served it in good stead, for that reliance on compromise surely helped create a constitutional context in which the crafts assumed the mantle of public responsibility, yet without the turbulent recoil of identity politics seen elsewhere. The history of social mobility in late medieval Norwich is not just the story of individual craftsmen's elections to the city council; it is also the meta-story of how successful artisanal guilds prevailed against the prejudiced belief that occupational affiliation justified barring craftsmen from public service.

# Appendices

## Appendix A: Wills referenced

| Name              | Parish                  | Ward | Minor ward | Will reference                         | Date written  | Date proved    |
|-------------------|-------------------------|------|------------|----------------------------------------|---------------|----------------|
| Austyn, Richard   | St Martin at Oak        | N    | Coslany    | NCC, will register, Groundesburgh, 135 | 23 Feb 1525/6 | 3 Mar 1525/6   |
| Barfote, John     | St Augustine            | N    | Colegate   | NCC, will register, Jekkys, 130        | 14 Feb 1468/9 | 5 Mar 1468/9   |
| Basse, John       | St Martin at Oak        | N    | Coslany    | NCC, will register, Ryxe, 340          | 28 Jul 1504   |                |
| Blakdam, William  | St Paul                 | N    | Fyebridge  | NCC, will register, Gelour, 230        | 15 May 1479   | ? Jun 1479     |
| Buxton, John      | St Martin at Oak        | N    | Coslany    | NCC, will register, Johnson, 227       | 16 Jul 1513   | 19 Jul 1513    |
| Catour, Thomas    | St Martin at Palace     | W    | East Wymer | NCC, will register, Palgrave, 32       | 8 Jul 1528    | 14 Jul 1528    |
| Deynes, John      | St George Colegate      | N    | Colegate   | NCC will register Underwoode 29        | 26 Oct 1537   | 16 Jan? 1537/8 |
| Diver, Richard    | St Augustine            | N    | Colegate   | ANW, will register, Gloys, 321         | 4 May 1517    | 30 Sep 1519    |
| Dowce, William    | St Swithin              | W    | West Wymer | NCC, will register, Herman, 39         | 20 Sep 1523   | 21 Jan 1523/24 |
| Dowce, John       | St Augustine            | N    | Colegate   | NCC, will register, Wight, 6           | 13 Jun 1499   | 23 Aug 1499    |
| Dowe, Thomas      | St Mary in Coslany      | N    | Coslany    | PROB 11/20/203                         | 4 Jun 1521    | 15 Jul 1521    |
| Drynkewater, John | St Giles                | M    | St Giles   | NCC, will register, Cobald, 99         | 9 Oct 1465    | 10 Apr 1466    |
| Foxe, Robert      | St Mary in Coslany      | N    | Coslany    | NCC, will register, Haywarde, 158      | 11 Feb 1528/9 | 28 Feb 1529    |
| Fuller, Thomas    | St George Colegate      | N    | Colegate   | NCC will register Alpe, 84             | 3 Apr 1531    | 24 May 1531    |
| Gerard, Robert    | St George Colegate      | N    | Colegate   | ANW, will register, Cook, fo. 31       | 22 Jul 1506   | 7 Aug 1506     |
| Gobet, John       | St George Colegate      | N    | Colegate   | NCC, will register, Aubrey, 64         | 18 March 1487 |                |
| Godefrey, William | St Michael Coslany      | N    | Coslany    | NCC, will register, Spurlinge, 103     | 28 Mar 1514/5 | 17 Feb 1515/6  |
| Goodwyn, Harry    | All Saints at Fyebridge | N    | Fyebridge  | NCC, will register, Caston, 242        | 8 Jun 1485    | 16 Jun 1485    |
| Grene, Robert     | St Martin at Oak        | N    | Coslany    | NCC, will register, Haywarde, 163      | 28 Nov 1528   | 26 Jan 1528/9  |



| Name             | Parish                  | Ward | Minor ward   | Will reference                           | Date written  | Date proved    |
|------------------|-------------------------|------|--------------|------------------------------------------|---------------|----------------|
| Gylmyn, Thomas   | St Martin at Oak        | N    | Coslany      | NCC will register Hyll, 12               | 5 Dec 1535    | 19 July 1536   |
| Harneys, Robert  | St George Tombland      | W    | East Wymer   | NCC, will register, Popy, 256            | [24 Oct] 1500 | 10 May 1503    |
| Harston, Thomas  | St Mary in Coslany      | N    | Coslany      | NCC will register Palgrave, 121          | 16 Nov 1531   | 8 Feb 1531/2   |
| Haste, William   | St Edmund               | N    | Fyebridge    | PROB 11/26/297                           | 16 Jan 1535/6 | 13 Feb 1539/40 |
| Hemmyng, John    | St Michael Coslany      | N    | Coslany      | PROB 11/9/85                             | 24 Nov 1491   | 27 Mar 1492    |
| Hemmyng, Thomas  | St Michael Coslany      | N    | Coslany      | PROB 11/14/283                           | 26 Aug 1504   | 15 Sep 1504    |
| Hervy, Richard   | St Botolph              | N    | Fyebridge    | NCC, will register, Wight, 18            | Sep 24 1499   | 30 Oct 1499    |
| Hobbes, John     | St Gregory              | W    | West Wymer   | NCC, will register, Woolman, 88          | 19 Sep 1492   | 5 Mar 1492/3   |
| Hodgys, John     | St Augustine            | N    | Colegate     | NCC, will register, Woolman, 170         | 12 Apr 1493   | 20 May 1493    |
| Hogon, John      | St Paul                 | N    | Fyebridge    | NCC, will register, Aubrey, 132          | 26 Mar 1493   | 1 May 1493     |
| Kynge, John      | St Benedict             | W    | West Wymer   | ANF, will register Liber 2a (Bulwer), 15 | 4 Jan 1504/5  |                |
| Larke, Robert    | St Augustine            | N    | Colegate     | NCC, will register, Coppinger, 126       | 20 May 1514   | 29 May 1514    |
| Latered, Henry   | St Martin at Oak        | N    | Coslany      | NCC, will register, Norman, 54           | [28 Oct] 1492 | 10 Nov 1492    |
| Lely, Richard    | St Martin at Oak        | N    | Coslany      | ANW, will register, Cook, 29             | 19 Aug 1504?  | 21 Aug 1504?   |
| Lesyngham, Peter |                         |      |              | NCC, will register, Spurlinge, 26        | 3 Sep [1514]  | 22 Sep [1514]  |
| Marlyn, Peter    | St George Colegate      | N    | Colegate     | NCC will register Palgrave, 131          | 23 May 1529   | 11 Nov 1529    |
| Moone, John      | St Mary in Coslany      | N    | Coslany      | NCC, will register, Alblaster, 49        | 3 Jun 1521    | 13 Jun 1521    |
| Mylys, William   | St Augustine            | N    | Colegate     | NCC, will register, Palgrave, 195        | 6 Dec 1525    |                |
| Nabbis, Nicholas | St Paul                 | N    | Fyebridge    | DCN 69/2, 29                             | 13 Jan 1511/2 | 20 Aug 1512    |
| Nele, John       | St Clement in Conesford | C    | S. Conisford | NCC, will register, Johnson, 168         | 6 May 1513    | 13 Jul 1513    |

| Name             | Parish                  | Ward | Minor ward   | Will reference                          | Date written   | Date proved    |
|------------------|-------------------------|------|--------------|-----------------------------------------|----------------|----------------|
| Palmer, Henry    | St Augustine            | N    | Colegate     | NCC, will register, Groundesburgh, 58   | 6 Dec 1525     |                |
| Parker, William  | St Clement at Fyebridge | N    | Fyebridge    | NCC, will register, Spurlinge, 213      | 4 Jan [1516]   | ? Feb 1516     |
| Redham, Edmund   | St Martin at Oak        | N    | Coslany      | NCC, will register, Brosyard, 320       | 10 Jun 1460    | 16 Dec 1464    |
| Richeman, Thomas | St Martin at Oak        | N    | Coslany      | NCC, will register, Ryxe, 270           | 13 Oct 1505    | 14 Jan 1505/6  |
| Roper, John      | St Clement at Fyebridge | N    | Fyebridge    | NCC, will register, Johnson, 207        | 16 Dec 1512    | 20 Jan 1512/13 |
| Rose, Robert     | St Michael Coslany      | N    | Coslany      | PROB 11/11/154                          | 31 Dec 1496    | 2 Feb 1496/7   |
| Rysynge, Robert  | St Edward and St Julian | C    | S. Conisford | NCC, will register, Alpe, 12            | 12 Sep 1530    | 21 Oct 1530    |
| Scolehons, Henry | St Michael Coslany      | N    | Coslany      | PROB 11/18/364                          | 7 Nov 1515     | 14 Jul 1516    |
| Sendle, Henry    | St Martin in Balliva    | C    | Berstreet    | NCC will register Cooke, 93             | 28 Jan? 1540   | 16 Feb 1540    |
| Senyoure, John   | St Saviour              | N    | Fyebridge    | PROB 11/19/453                          | 18 Mar 1517/18 | 22 Dec 1520    |
| Skowe, Brice     | St Martin at Oak        | N    | Coslany      | NCC, will register, Woolman, 221        | 31 May 1494    | 25 Jun 1494    |
| Sonlawe, Richard | St George Colegate      | N    | Colegate     | NCC will register Palgrave, 291         | 3 Jul? 1526    | 4 Feb 1532     |
| Story, John      | St Margaret of Westwick | W    | West Wymer   | NCC, will register, Aubrey, 5           | [17 Aug] 1478  | 20 Oct 1479    |
| Swan, Thomas     | St Martin at Oak        | N    | Coslany      | NCC, will register, Robinson, 5         | 8 Nov 1520     | 5 Dec 1520     |
| Swanton, Robert  | St Peter Southgate      | C    | S. Conisford | NCC will register Johnson, 18           | 9 Jan 1509/10  | 27 Feb 1510    |
| Tedde, Richard   | St Michael Coslany      | N    | Coslany      | NCC, will register, Craforde, 83        | 4 Aug 1500     | 14 Aug 1500    |
| Thompson, John   | St Mary in Coslany      | N    | Coslany      | ANW, will register, Gloys, 52           | 22 Dec 1511    | 17 Apr 1512    |
| Thorpe, Robert   | St Martin at Oak        | N    | Coslany      | ANF, will register Liber 5 (Cooke), 163 | 20 Oct 1506    | 20 May 1508    |
| Wattes, John     | St Martin at Oak        | N    | Coslany      | ANW, will register, Cook, 73            | 25 May 1538    | 9 Nov 1538     |
| Wattes, Richard  | St Paul                 | N    | Fyebridge    | DCN 69/2, 27                            | 11 Mar 1502/3  | 10 Dec 1504    |

| Name            | Parish             | Ward | Minor ward | Will reference                      | Date written  | Date proved   |
|-----------------|--------------------|------|------------|-------------------------------------|---------------|---------------|
| Wattys, William | St Martin at Oak   | N    | Coslany    | NCC, will register, Jekkys, 183     | 10 Aug 1470   | 27 Aug 1470   |
| Welles, Walter  | St Benedict        | W    | West Wymer | NCC, will register, Popy, 426       | 9 Feb 1502    | 22 Jan 1503/4 |
| Westerne, John  | St Mary in Coslany | N    | Coslany    | NCC, will register, Brosyard, 311   | 18 Apr 1463   | 20 May 1463   |
| Westgate, Simon | St Jacob           | N    | Fyebridge  | NCC, will register, Haywarde, 116   | 28 Nov 1528   | 14 Oct 1529?  |
| Whytred, Robert | St Martin at Oak   | N    | Coslany    | NCC, will register, Spyltymber, 291 | 17 Jul 1510   | 30 Aug 1510   |
| Wilkyns, Thomas | St Martin at Oak   | N    | Coslany    | PROB 11/9/82                        | 24 Jan 1491/2 | 24 Feb 1491/2 |
| Wylkyns, Thomas | St Michael Coslany | N    | Coslany    | PROB 11/21/264                      | 8 Dec 1523    | 27 Jan 1523/4 |
| Wylkyns, Raufe  | St Michael Coslany | N    | Coslany    | PROB 11/25/396                      | 13 Jul 1535   | 25 Oct 1535   |

## Appendix B: Common council seats by craft affiliation and by decade, 1453-1530

| Craft           | 1450 | 1460 | 1470 | 1480 | 1490 | 1500 | 1510 | 1520 |
|-----------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Baker           |      | 19   | 41   | 35   | 28   | 41   | 27   | 34   |
| Barber          | 5    | 7    | 1    | 10   |      |      | 3    | 10   |
| Barker / Tanner | 8    | 16   | 28   | 22   | 17   | 8    | 10   | 16   |
| Bedweaver       |      |      | 4    | 11   | 2    | 10   | 7    |      |
| Bladesmith      | 11   | 10   | 2    |      |      |      |      |      |
| Blexter         |      |      |      |      |      |      | 2    |      |
| Bower           | 2    | 8    | 6    | 13   | 13   | 5    |      |      |
| Brasier         | 1    |      |      | 15   | 4    | 5    | 4    |      |
| Brewer          |      | 3    | 7    | 12   | 14   | 20   | 15   | 14   |
| Butcher         | 19   | 37   | 32   | 6    | 16   | 39   | 16   | 31   |
| Calanderer      |      | 1    |      | 8    | 14   | 13   | 13   | 6    |
| Cardmaker       | 8    | 1    |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| Carpenter       |      |      | 5    | 7    | 7    |      | 5    | 1    |
| Cook            | 7    | 5    |      | 1    | 2    |      |      |      |
| Cooper          | 5    | 10   | 5    | 11   | 10   | 7    | 3    |      |
| Shoemaker       |      | 12   | 5    | 7    | 8    |      |      |      |
| Coverlet weaver |      |      | 4    |      |      | 1    | 1    | 2    |
| Draper          | 19   | 27   | 11   | 7    | 35   | 35   | 19   | 10   |
| Dyer / Lister   | 14   | 12   | 13   | 10   | 12   | 13   | 10   |      |
| Fishman         |      | 2    | 10   | 10   | 23   | 5    |      | 3    |
| Fishmonger      |      | 5    | 11   | 6    | 4    |      |      | 3    |
| Fletcher        | 8    | 12   | 10   | 4    |      |      |      |      |
| Freemason       | 1    | 4    |      |      |      | 1    | 6    |      |
| Fuller          | 34   | 21   | 26   | 10   | 1    |      |      |      |
| Gentleman       | 2    | 3    | 10   | 2    | 8    | 1    |      | 6    |
| Glasswright     |      |      |      |      |      |      | 1    |      |

| <b>Craft</b> | <b>1450</b> | <b>1460</b> | <b>1470</b> | <b>1480</b> | <b>1490</b> | <b>1500</b> | <b>1510</b> | <b>1520</b> |
|--------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Glazier      |             | 2           | 7           | 5           | 11          | 15          | 2           | 3           |
| Glover       |             | 7           | 2           |             |             |             |             |             |
| Goldbeater   | 8           | 10          | 3           |             |             |             |             | 2           |
| Goldsmith    | 16          | 12          | 9           | 7           | 11          | 16          | 5           | 12          |
| Gravour      |             |             |             |             |             | 5           | 17          | 8           |
| Grocer       | 19          | 19          | 29          | 43          | 40          | 39          | 51          | 72          |
| Hosier       | 3           | 18          | 8           | 4           |             | 1           |             |             |
| Innholder    |             |             |             |             |             |             | 8           | 9           |
| Keelman      |             |             |             |             |             |             | 2           |             |
| Limeburner   |             |             |             |             | 2           | 1           |             | 3           |
| Mason        |             |             | 2           | 2           | 3           | 15          | 14          | 4           |
| Mercer       | 40          | 83          | 44          | 26          | 35          | 50          | 58          | 66          |
| Merchant     | 1           | 2           |             | 9           | 4           | 5           | 4           |             |
| Miller       |             |             |             |             |             |             |             | 4           |
| Notary       | 5           |             |             |             | 2           |             |             |             |
| Painter      |             | 2           | 1           |             |             |             |             |             |
| Parchmener   |             |             | 1           | 10          | 6           |             | 2           | 3           |
| Pattenmaker  |             |             | 2           |             |             |             |             |             |
| Pewterer     |             |             | 3           | 10          | 1           | 4           |             |             |
| Pinner       |             |             |             | 6           | 5           |             | 1           | 3           |
| Plomer'      |             |             |             |             | 5           | 7           |             |             |
| Rafman       | 30          | 50          | 31          | 17          | 45          | 20          | 9           | 15          |
| Saddler      | 2           | 1           | 5           |             |             | 3           |             |             |
| Sawyer       |             | 4           | 8           |             |             |             | 2           |             |
| Scrivener    | 7           | 7           | 11          | 22          | 27          | 25          | 11          | 16          |
| Shearman     |             |             |             | 6           | 1           | 8           | 5           | 2           |
| Skepper      |             |             |             | 10          | 10          |             | 7           |             |
| Skinner      | 3           | 1           | 9           | 3           | 1           |             | 6           |             |
| Smith        | 5           |             | 2           | 2           | 4           | 7           | 4           | 1           |
| Spicer       | 8           | 1           |             |             |             |             |             |             |
| Spurrier     |             |             |             |             |             | 1           | 1           |             |
| Staymaker    |             |             |             |             |             |             | 4           |             |
| Tailor       | 12          | 21          | 23          | 23          | 31          | 21          | 7           | 5           |

| <b>Craft</b>        | <b>1450</b> | <b>1460</b> | <b>1470</b> | <b>1480</b> | <b>1490</b> | <b>1500</b> | <b>1510</b> | <b>1520</b> |
|---------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Thick wollen weaver | 6           | 13          | 11          | 4           |             |             |             |             |
| Turner              |             | 3           |             |             |             |             |             |             |
| Unknown             | 147         | 92          | 91          | 102         | 61          | 79          | 120         | 128         |
| Vintner             |             | 3           | 7           | 6           | 2           |             |             |             |
| Waterman            |             |             |             |             |             |             | 4           |             |
| Wax chandler        |             |             |             |             |             |             | 9           | 2           |
| Weaver              |             |             | 7           | 23          | 15          | 4           |             |             |
| Wheelwright         |             | 1           |             |             |             |             |             |             |
| Woollen weaver      |             |             |             | 5           | 10          | 4           |             |             |
| Worsted weaver      | 14          | 21          | 36          | 49          | 42          | 57          | 90          | 106         |
| Wright              |             |             |             |             |             |             | 2           |             |

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 E 122                      Exchequer, Particulars of Customs Accounts  
 E 179/150/208          Exchequer, Anticipation of Subsidy, Norwich, 1523  
 E 356                      Exchequer, Pipe Office, Customs Accounts Rolls  
 PROB11                  Prerogative Court of Canterbury will registers

### *The Norfolk Record Office*

ANW                      Archdeaconry Court of Norwich will registers  
 ANF                      Archdeaconry Court of Norfolk will registers  
 DCN 9/5                  Account Roll of Debtors of Robert Toppes, nd [c. 1467]  
 MC 146/1-4              Norwich Survey, Persons in Norwich Sources, 1300-1500  
 NCC                      Norwich Consistory Court will registers

|             |                                                           |
|-------------|-----------------------------------------------------------|
| NCR 1/19    | Court Roll 19, 1461-1483                                  |
| NCR 1/22    | Enrolments of Apprenticeship Indentures, 1510-1541        |
| NCR 3e/11   | Calendar of Norwich Deeds Enrolled, 1413-1508             |
| NCR 5d/34   | Miscellaneous court papers, c.1506-c.1636                 |
| NCR 7i/1-14 | City Assessments                                          |
| NCR 8g      | Records of the St George's Guild                          |
| NCR 10c/1   | By-Laws of the Mercers, 1449, 1477-1516 (*NCR Case 10b)   |
| NCR 10c/2-3 | Ordinances of Worsted Weavers, 1511 (*NCR Case 10b)       |
| NCR 16d/1   | Folio Books of the Municipal Assembly, 1434-1491          |
| NCR 16d/2   | Folio Books of the Municipal Assembly, 1491-1553          |
| NCR 16d/1   | Assembly Proceedings, 1434-1491                           |
| NCR 16d/2   | Assembly Proceedings, 1491-1553                           |
| NCR 16a/1   | Mayor's Court Book, 1424-1449, 1490/91                    |
| NCR 16a/2   | Mayor's Court Book, 1510-1532                             |
| NCR 16c/1   | Assembly Minute Books, 1492-1510                          |
| NCR 16c/2   | Assembly Minute Books, 1510-1550                          |
| NCR 17b/3   | <i>Liber Albus</i> , 1426-1635                            |
| NCR 17b/9   | Guild of St George, miscellaneous documents, 1441-1525    |
| NCR 17c/1   | Freeman's admissions, ' <i>Old Free Book</i> ', 1317-1549 |
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