

The economic and social worlds of rural craftsmen-retailers in eighteenth-century Cheshire

by Jon Stobart

Abstract

The lives and activities of rural craftsmen-retailers have long been marginal to meta-narratives of rural change and retail revolution. Only with their disappearance in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century have they been regarded as important markers of more general processes. Drawing on a detailed reading of probate inventories and wills, this paper offers some new insights into the numbers, distribution and activities of rural tailors and shoemakers in eighteenth-century Cheshire. It highlights the limited capitalization of their craft activities and their close involvement with agricultural pursuits, including the ownership of livestock and husbandry ware. It also reveals the close social ties which they enjoyed with their rural communities: friends and family were primarily rural, as were their customer and credit networks.

Some twenty years ago, E. A. Wrigley outlined the growing importance of the non-agricultural rural population in England.¹ He argued that, by the start of the eighteenth century, one-third of the rural population gained their living by means other than farming; a figure which had risen to one-half by 1800. In certain areas – especially the Midlands and north of England – much of the ‘surplus’ labour was absorbed in rural manufacturing activity, the classic mechanism being the putting-out of work in an urban based proto-industrial regime.² Throughout the country, though, increased reliance on the market to provide goods and services encouraged growth in rural craft and retail activities.³ Whilst numbers varied in accordance with local farming regimes, much of the non-agricultural workforce of eighteenth-century rural England comprised carpenters and blacksmiths, carters and shopkeepers, tailors and shoemakers. Although essential to the rural economy, village craftsmen and retailers have received relatively little attention in the recent academic literature.⁴ For historians of shopping, they lie at the

¹ E. A. Wrigley, ‘Urban growth and agricultural change: England and the Continent in the early modern period’, *J. Interdisciplinary History*, 15 (1985), pp. 696–705.

² See F. Mendels, ‘Proto-industrialization: the first phase of the industrialization process’, *JEcH*, 32 (1972), pp. 241–61. Always a controversial thesis, the current state of debate is summarised well in P. Hudson, ‘Proto-industrialization in England’, in S. Ogilvie and M. Cerman (eds) *European Proto-industrialization* (1996),

pp. 49–66.

³ J. de Vries, ‘Between purchasing power and the world of goods’, in J. Brewer and R. Porter (eds) *Consumption and the World of Goods* (1993), pp. 85–132.

⁴ Amongst the rare exceptions are B. A. Holderness, ‘Rural tradesmen 1660–1850: a regional study in Lindsey’, *Lincolnshire History and Archaeology*, 7 (1972), pp. 77–81 and J. Martin, ‘Village traders and the emergence of a proletariat in south Warwickshire, 1750–1851’, *AgHR* 32 (1984), pp. 179–88.

functional and geographical margins of retailing and are too easily overlooked in favour of fashionable urban shops, modern selling practices and novel goods. Eighteenth-century villagers are generally seen as living in the shadows of the city's bright lights or they are cast in entirely separate socio-cultural worlds.⁵ For rural historians, retail activities are peripheral to meta-narratives of agricultural revolution, land reform or emergent social conflict. Only with their apparent decline in the twentieth century do rural craftsmen and retailers appear as important markers of more general processes. And yet both retailers and craftsmen were widespread within and central to life in rural communities.⁶ Martin suggests that as many as forty or fifty per cent of households in Warwickshire were supported by craft or trading activities in the years before enclosure.⁷ Even after the redistribution of lands and the socio-economic transformations that this brought about, lesser craftsmen such as carpenters, shoemakers and tailors comprised a significant proportion of village populations.

In contrast to their nineteenth- and twentieth-century counterparts, then, much remains obscure about the activities and lives of rural craftsmen in the eighteenth century.⁸ It is useful, though, to take stock of what is known about these men. First, we know something of their changing numbers and distribution, and the ways in which these were influenced by land-holding and agricultural systems. The importance of land-ownership to the livelihoods of village tradesmen in Warwickshire meant that enclosure inevitably had a significant impact on their ability to generate adequate household income.⁹ Whilst the same was probably true in other areas, there has been little attempt to assess this or other factors which might have influenced their distribution or prosperity.¹⁰ How important was local demand and the competition or stimulus afforded by urban retailers and craftsmen?

Second, it is widely acknowledged that village craftsmen-retailers were essential in serving the needs of a rural population that, as de Vries has argued, were increasingly market oriented in both their production and consumption. Shops formed an important link to the world of goods, supplying a range of non-local wares to an ever more sophisticated set of consumers. Here, market orientation was an inevitable consequence of the demand for exotic and novel items, but was underwritten by household specialisation which meant that many basic items were purchased rather than made in the home.¹¹ The numerous tailors and shoemakers answered the same need. Although inner garments were often made up in the home using

⁵ See H.-C. Mui and L. Mui, *Shops and shop-keeping in eighteenth-century England* (1989), pp. 148–59; N. Cox, *The complete tradesman: a study of retailing, 1550–1850* (2000), *passim*; C. Estabrook, *Urbane and rustic England* (1998).

⁶ P. Ripley, 'Village and town: occupations and wealth in the hinterland of Gloucester, 1600–1700', *AgHR* 32 (1984), pp. 170–7; Holderness, 'Rural tradesmen', pp. 77–81.

⁷ Martin, 'Village traders', p. 181.

⁸ Much of what we know is based on studies undertaken ten, twenty or even thirty years ago: J. Styles, 'Clothing the North: the supply of non-elite clothing in the eighteenth-century north of England', *Textile Hist.*,

25 (1994), pp. 139–66; N. Cox, 'The distribution of retailing tradesmen in north Shropshire, 1660–1750', *J. Regional and Local Stud.*, 13 (1993), pp. 4–22; Ripley, 'Village and town'; Martin, 'Village traders'; Holderness, 'Rural tradesmen'.

⁹ Martin 'Village traders', pp. 185–8.

¹⁰ Tailors and shoemakers do not feature in J. Chartres, 'Agricultural industries', in G. E. Mingay (ed.) *Agrarian History of England and Wales*, VI, 1750–1850 (1989).

¹¹ De Vries, 'Between purchasing power'; Cox, *Complete tradesman*, esp. pp. 38–75; Styles, 'Clothing the North', pp. 151–60.

lighter fabrics, many householders chose to have outer garments as well as shoes made by specialist craftsmen. As Styles argues, this may have resulted from a lack of appropriate or finely tuned skill, but it also reflected a willingness to pay for good quality workmanship, especially given the expense of the fabrics involved.¹² Certainly the purchase of clothing, either ready made or bespoke, was common even amongst the lower orders of rural society by the early nineteenth century.¹³ Much of this work, though, presents rural craftsmen as elements of a supply chain rather than individuals of interest in their own right. As a result, we know relatively little their own economic worlds: how they made a living and how they interacted with the mainly agricultural economy around them.

Third, it is apparent that rural craftsmen-retailers were far from being divorced from the land. Wrigley noted that some non-agricultural employment in the countryside might arise from increasing specialisation, a carter, for instance, taking on a role previously carried out part-time by a farmer.¹⁴ But the carter might also have a smallholding, making the switch from agricultural to non-agricultural livelihoods still more blurred. Work by Holderness and Martin makes clear the prevalence of livestock and land-holding amongst such individuals, suggesting close ties with the agricultural economy.¹⁵ Less clear is the extent to which such links were reflected and reinforced by the social lives of rural craftsmen-retailers. Were shoemakers and tailors, for example, connected to urban worlds and cultures, or were they the integral parts of village communities often portrayed in idealistic interpretations of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century rural life?

This paper seeks to address some of these questions through detailed analysis of the probate records of Cheshire tailors and shoe makers between 1700 and 1760.¹⁶ During this period, rural Cheshire was experiencing a range of socio-economic changes: some broadly typical of the North and Midlands; others more particular to the county. Most notable were the continued growth of commercialized livestock farming and the spread of rural manufacturing. From being a mixed agricultural economy in the early seventeenth century, wherein arable and pastoral land use was broadly equal, livestock grew increasingly important. By the end of the century Celia Fiennes noted that ‘this shire is remarkable for a great deal of great cheeses and dairies’.¹⁷ This process was most marked in the centre and west of the county. Further east, sheep farming was more important, initially supplying but later being overshadowed by domestic production of woollen and then linen and cotton textiles.¹⁸ These trends towards local specialisation brought increased diversity to Cheshire’s rural economy, making it an interesting microcosm of that of the country as a whole. Moreover, they had potentially profound impacts on rural crafts which have hitherto remained under-explored. Probate records have been used on many occasions in studies of retail or craft tradesmen and their shortcomings as

¹² Styles, ‘Clothing the North’, p. 156.

¹³ C. Fowler, ‘Robert Mansbridge, a rural tailor and his customers, 1811–1815’, *Textile Hist.*, 28 (1997), pp. 35–7.

¹⁴ Wrigley, ‘Urban growth and agricultural change’, p. 701.

¹⁵ Holderness, ‘Rural tradesmen’; Martin ‘Village traders’.

¹⁶ This work is part of a larger project, ‘Rural services

in the early eighteenth century’ funded by the British Academy, grant number SG–32878.

¹⁷ C. Morris (ed.) *The journeys of Celia Fiennes* (1949), p. 177.

¹⁸ A. D. M. Phillips and C. B. Phillips (eds) *A new historical atlas of Cheshire* (2002), p. 56; J. Stobart, *The first industrial region: north-west England, c. 1700–60* (2004), ch. 4.

an historical source are well known.¹⁹ Those that affect the current analysis most directly are the reliability of occupational titles given and the coverage of the population afforded. The first of these problems comprises two elements. One is the absence of an occupational title from the probate record – fortunately comparatively rare in the Cheshire records where less than five per cent of documents do not record an occupation – and the other is the masking of dual occupations under one heading. The importance of multiple incomes in rural households is a commonplace, and its prevalence amongst tailors and shoe makers forms part of the analysis offered here. More problematic is the possibility that individuals styled ‘husbandman’ or ‘weaver’, for example, might also be engaged in tailoring or shoe making. However, systematic analysis of all the probate records for twenty villages in Cheshire shows this to be very rare, certainly in terms of the internal evidence of inventories: only those of tailors and shoe makers listed germane stock or equipment. The social coverage of the probate records is more problematic. Only around 40 per cent of the adult population of Cheshire appear to have left probate records: a proportion which was undoubtedly much lower for the poorer sections of society, including tailors and shoe makers.²⁰ Whilst this means that we can recreate only a sketch of the true population of craftsmen, the comprehensive geographical coverage of the probate records allows county-wide analysis, rather than the localized studies possible from parish registers. Although the coverage may be thin, there is little reason to believe that the patterns or behaviour revealed should be misleading.

Drawing on these data, three main aims are addressed. The first is to map the distribution of tailors and shoe makers in Cheshire and relate this to a number of explanatory factors highlighted by Martin, Cox and Shamma.²¹ In particular, I will focus here on the relationship between rural crafts and population distribution, urban provision, and rural retailing and manufacturing. This allows us to assess the broad relationship between these craftsmen and the urban and rural worlds that formed their socio-spatial context. The second is to build on work by Martin and Holderness by exploring the economic worlds of the tailors and shoemakers. Of particular interest is their involvement in agricultural activities, but the nature and scale of their business activity is also significant. Here, the probate records can be very illuminating, especially in terms of the details they contain of wealth levels, stock and debts. The final aim is to offer a parallel analysis of these craftsmen’s social worlds: an important, but neglected, area. Were these men most strongly linked to urban or rural worlds? Again, the probate records prove helpful, but here the interest lies in the executorial relationships identified in wills. These provide invaluable insights into the close personal relationships that bound craftsmen to their rural communities and their customers.

¹⁹ For a general critique of probate records in historical analyses, see the various contributions to T. Arkell, N. Evans and N. Goose (eds), *When death do us part. Understanding and interpreting the probate records of early-modern England* (2000).

²⁰ J. Stobart, ‘Geography and industrialization: the

space economy of northwest England, 1701–1760’, *Trans. Institute of British Geographers*, 21 (1996), pp. 682–4.

²¹ Martin, ‘Village traders’; Cox, ‘Retailing tradesmen in north Shropshire’; Shamma, *Pre-industrial consumer*, pp. 225–65.

TABLE 1. Number of rural tailors and shoemakers in Cheshire, 1701–60

	1701–20	1721–40	1741–60	total
tailors	23	27	30	80
shoemakers	16	25	29	70
total	39	52	59	150

Source: Cheshire and Chester Archives, probate records.

I

Whilst the golden age of the rural tradesman was probably to be found in the mid-nineteenth century, there is evidence of a growing and prosperous rural service economy in the middle and late eighteenth-century. Shammaas argues that country retailers grew in number and Martin suggests a flowering of rural crafts during this period, reflecting general buoyancy in rural societies and economies.²² Cheshire appears to have shared in this expansion: the number of tailors grew steadily through the first half of the eighteenth century, whilst shoemakers nearly doubled in number (Table 1). As Styles argues for Yorkshire, then, this part of the north of England was far from being commercially backward, even in rural areas.²³ Some of the growth in provision may be attributable to the vagaries of the source, but as coverage of the population tended to deteriorate rather than improve over time, it is likely that expansion was stronger than these figures allow. The position later in the century is less clear, although evidence from early trade directories suggests that numbers had probably stabilized in the 1780s and 1790s. By this time all the larger villages contained at least three or four clothes-making craftsmen: a level of provision comparable to some smaller market towns. For example, the growing villages of Tarporley and Neston contained a shoemaker, a tailor and two breeches makers, and four tailors respectively; in comparison Malpas had two breeches makers and Frodsham a breeches maker and a tailor.²⁴ The spatial distribution of these craftsmen was fairly even throughout the early decades of the eighteenth century. Provision was best in the villages in the north-east of the county, whilst the central and western townships appear to have been relatively poorly served (Figure 1). But overall, the pattern shows few clusters: in all 104 villages had craftsmen listed and, with the exception of Wilmslow which contained four shoemakers and two tailors, nowhere had more than three tradesmen.

How can we best understand this growth and distribution of rural craftsman-retailing? At a basic level, it was clearly related to demand, and thus to the expansion, distribution and prosperity of population. Between the hearth tax and the first census, the rural population of Cheshire grew from around 75,000 to over 130,000, mostly from the mid-eighteenth century

²² Shammaas, *Pre-industrial consumer*, pp. 226–9; Martin ‘Village traders’, *passim*. See also Holderness, ‘Rural tradesmen’; Wrigley, ‘Urban growth and agricultural change’.

²³ Styles, ‘Clothing the North’, pp. 139–44.

²⁴ P. Broster, *The Chester directory and guide* (Chester, 1782). The early trade directories in Cheshire seem to be very poor at listing shoe makers, none being enumerated in Middlewich or Altrincham, while just one is listed in Macclesfield – then a town of c. 6,000.

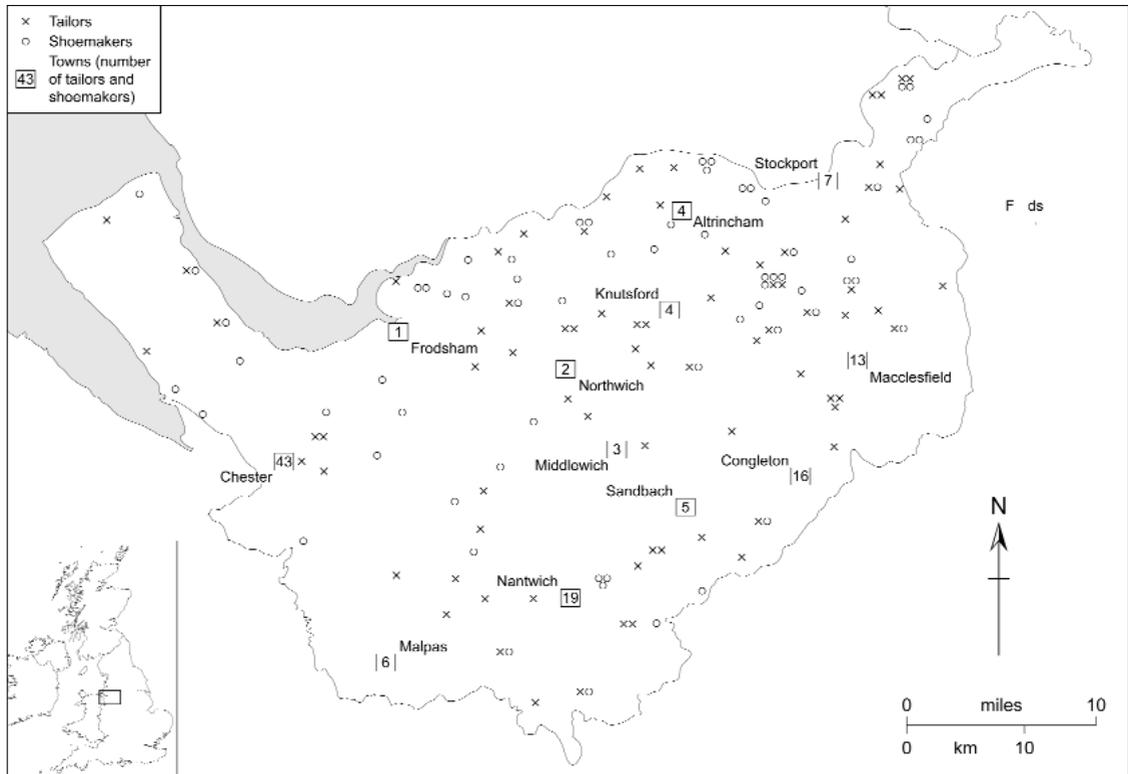


FIGURE 1. Distribution of tailors and shoemakers in Cheshire, 1701–1760.

onwards.²⁵ Even if the consumption habits of rural-dwellers remained unchanged (and there is considerable evidence that it did not²⁶) this clearly represented significant expansion in demand for clothing and, of course, for other goods and services. Yet population growth was uneven, being strongest in the parishes south of Manchester and around Macclesfield, and markedly less in the south and on the Wirral. Whilst this suggests a clear link to rural craft provision, levels of agricultural prosperity ran contrary to these patterns: rents were relatively low in north-east Cheshire and much higher in the west and centre of the county, indicating greater spending power in these areas.²⁷ Moreover, any additional demand could be supplied by a range of traders in a variety of locations. Principal amongst these were the urban markets and shops. Whilst markets were marginal to the direct provision of tailoring and shoemaking services, they did form important nuclei for retailing activity of all sorts.²⁸ The probate records for Cheshire list 123 urban tailors and shoemakers. This represents a considerable concentration of retail activity as these towns had a combined population of only around 30,000 in the early

²⁵ C. Phillips and J. Smith, *Lancashire and Cheshire from AD 1540* (1994), p. 134; J. Stobart, 'An eighteenth-century revolution? Investigating urban growth in north-west England, 1664–1801', *Urban Hist.* 23 (1996), p. 40.

²⁶ See Estabrook, *Urbane and rustic England*;

L. Weatherill, *Consumer behaviour and material culture in Britain, 1600–1760* (1988), esp. pp. 43–69.

²⁷ Phillips and Phillips, *Atlas of Cheshire*, pp. 42–5 and 62.

²⁸ Cox, 'Retailing tradesmen in north Shropshire', pp. 6 and 12.

eighteenth century, around one-third of which was in Chester.²⁹ It might be argued that the villages closest to these towns would be most heavily influenced by urban commercial economies and cultures. Their proximity would encourage greater market-orientation and so they would contain more craftsmen than remoter rural settlements. In contrast, it is possible that these same proximate villages might be served by urban tradesmen and so would have fewer traders of their own. In reality, these urban concentrations appear to have had little impact on the distribution of rural craft activities. Although urban provision was less in the north of the county where rural craftsmen-retailers were most numerous, as Figure 1 shows, there is little indication of a 'shadow' effect even around major centres such as Chester and Nantwich. This supports the arguments of Estabrook and Cox that urban and rural populations were often supplied by complementary systems of provision.³⁰ Urban shops undoubtedly drew in customers from the surrounding countryside, but much clothing was obtained from village craftsmen, from hawkers or, especially in the case of second-hand clothing, informally from friends or acquaintances.³¹

Given that rural tailors and shoemakers generally served local markets, it is unsurprising that the impact of towns would be muted.³² More significant would be the other activities present in the villages; the density and growth of population at a local level, and the economic conditions that prevailed in the locality. Concentrations of administrative and retail functions might encourage clustering of craft activities as well. Once again though, the evidence is equivocal. Of the 104 villages with tailors or shoemakers, just thirty-one were the centres of parishes, whilst forty parish centres were apparently without these craftsmen. It is likely that places at the centre of substantial parishes such as Newbold Astbury, Warmingham or Woodchurch also contained craftsmen-retailers not appearing in the probate records, but there was clearly no simple causal relationship. Much the same is true of rural retailing. Retailers or service providers in 101 Cheshire villages left probate records, and just eleven places recorded more than two such tradesmen. Of these, only Wilmslow stands out as a centre of craft activity: other notable retail centres recorded very few craftsmen. Eight retailers in Bunbury left probate records between 1700 and 1760, including three grocers, a mercer and a draper, but just one shoemaker did the same; similarly, in Mottram there were two chapmen, two tobacconists and a mercer, but again only a single shoe maker. To an extent, this again may be a product of the incomplete coverage of the source, but it is clear that we should not assume that retailing and craft activities were clustered into the same locations or were selling to the same people. Retailers probably had rather more extensive customer bases than the more basic craft activities of tailoring and shoemaking. This is clear from the probate inventory of Richard Smith, a mercer from Bunbury, which includes details of book debts from over 400 individuals, many from the village itself, but also from neighbouring settlements such as Tarporley, Spurstow and Tiverton, up to five miles distant by road.³³

²⁹ Stobart, 'Urban revolution', p. 40.

³⁰ See Estabrook, *Urbane and rustic England*; Cox, 'Retailing tradesmen in north Shropshire'; Styles, 'Clothing the North'.

³¹ Styles, 'Clothing the North', pp. 151–60; Fowler, 'A rural tailor', pp. 30–33.

³² By the early nineteenth century, the distances travelled by customers had increased, but the majority were still local and rural: Fowler, 'A rural tailor', p. 30.

³³ Chester and Chester Archives (hereafter CCA), WS 1716, Richard Smith of Bunbury.

Population density could vary considerably from parish to parish, but levels were generally highest in Bucklow, Macclesfield and Northwich Hundreds in the east and north of the county. These were, moreover, the areas with larger parishes and a more dispersed form of settlement. The establishment of craftsmen (and retailers) in each of the several villages and hamlets within the parish would thus produce higher levels of provision than characterized the more nucleated settlement patterns in the generally smaller parishes of western and southern Cheshire. Soils, climate and relief varied considerably across the county, but – as noted earlier – arable was giving way to pastoral farming in most parishes.³⁴ The inventories of Cheshire husbandmen and yeomen almost invariably record corn (usually barley or wheat) and sometimes peas, potatoes and flax, but the mainstay of most was their cattle, occasionally with a few sheep. Only in the extreme east of the county did sheep become the major element of farmers' stock, as with Thomas Haward, a Tintwistle husbandman whose 210 sheep were worth £67 10s. or 48 per cent of his estate.³⁵ This lack of major variations in the agricultural economy meant that opportunities for rural craftsmen and retailers were similar across Cheshire. Moreover, parliamentary enclosure had much less impact in Cheshire than was the case in many counties in the English Midlands: most common fields had already been enclosed by the end of the seventeenth century. Activity in the eighteenth century principally involved exchange and consolidation of land holdings and the enclosure of the small but numerous commons and wastes.³⁶ Under such circumstances, there was not the widespread or sudden loss of land from rural craftsmen seen elsewhere, again making craft activities viable, at least as by-employments, in many places – a point discussed in more detail below.

More significant to the distribution of tailors and shoe makers was the spread of rural industry. The increasingly populous parishes of the north and east of the county were also the areas experiencing rural industrial development, chiefly in terms of textile production. The jobbing weaver remained a feature of many Cheshire villages throughout this period and was recorded in the probate records of 68 settlements. However, the centralized organisation of rural manufacturing was restricted to the areas around Macclesfield, where button-making and silk weaving predominated, and the parishes of Mottram, Stockport, Poynton and Prestbury, where domestic spinning and weaving were increasingly brought under the control of urban merchants, often based in Manchester.³⁷ The probate records list five weavers in the township of Hyde and six in neighbouring Godley and Hattersley. By the time of Aikin's survey at the close of the eighteenth century, he could confidently write of these villages that 'the cotton trade is the principal source of employment to the young people'.³⁸ Such industrialisation, and the divisions of labour that it drew upon and encouraged, served to stimulate strong population growth. Thus, we see the population of Macclesfield Hundred increasing more than three-fold between 1664 and 1801, whilst that of Nantwich Hundred increased by less than one-third.³⁹ It

³⁴ A. Crosby, *A History of Cheshire* (1996), pp. 62–7.

³⁵ CCA, WS 1723, Thomas Haward of Tintwistle.

³⁶ M. Overton, 'Agriculture', in J. Langton and R. J. Morris (eds), *Atlas of industrializing Britain, 1780–1914* (1986), p. 45; Crosby, *Cheshire*, p. 65; Phillips and Phillips, *Atlas of Cheshire*, pp. 52–5.

³⁷ Stobart, *First industrial region*, ch. 4; A. Wadsworth and J. de L. Mann, *The cotton trade and industrial Lancashire, 1600–1780* (1931), p. 79.

³⁸ J. Aikin, *A description of the country from thirty to forty miles round Manchester* (London, 1793), p. 458.

³⁹ Phillips and Smith, *Lancashire and Cheshire*, p. 135.

also engendered an increasing market-orientation amongst the population, which helped to support a larger craft (and retail) sector in many villages. This helps to account for the distribution of craftsmen in rural Cheshire. It also gives us some pointers about the ways in which rural crafts and trading might have interacted with the local population. We can picture the village tailor or shoemaker linked to a network of customers drawn from the immediate neighbourhood and comprised of husbandmen and fellow-craftsmen. In this imagining, they form bastions of the rural community. Equally, though, we might see them as increasingly dependent upon a rural industrial workforce and a commercialized urban-centred world – tied to towns through chains of supply, capital and sociability. Which of these two images is more accurate?

II

The probate inventories of rural tailors and shoemakers reveal a great deal about the economic world in which these craftsmen lived. Most direct is the evidence of stock-in-trade. Only eleven of the inventories included items of stock or equipment, but these can still tell us much about the nature and scale of activity undertaken by these village craftsmen. In most cases, the value of these goods was relatively small and accounted for only 3–10 per cent of the total estate. This reflects the low cost of the tools required and suggests that entry costs to these trades were correspondingly low. Fairly typical were Humphrey Walmsley of Pownell Fee, who had tailor's shears, smoothing irons and a hacking table valued at just 4s., James Hardy of Wilmslow, with his shoemaker's kit valued at just 2s., and Robert Earle of Keckwick, whose shoemaker's seats were also worth 2s.⁴⁰ Although modest in value, these tools clearly allowed such men to meet local demand for shoes and clothing. The late mechanisation of both trades reflects not just technical challenges, but also the efficiency and suitability of existing hand manufacturing techniques.

Stocks of cloth and leather were more valuable, but again generally modest: Walmsley had camlet, druggit and rugg worth a total of £2 9s.; Thomas Heath of Wybunbury, possessed 'two pieces of cloth for two coats' worth £1 14s., whilst the leather and working tools in Samuel Wroe's workshop in Great Warford were valued at £3.⁴¹ These men must have run their businesses at a fairly modest scale. Like the Basingstoke tailor Robert Mansbridge two generations later, they were making or mending clothing for their neighbours, largely on a bespoke basis. It would be mistaken, though, to view all village craftsmen in this light: some shoemakers certainly operated at a larger scale. Robert Mercer of Eastham, for example, owned working tools, 47 lasts and three seats worth 13s. 6*d.* and had 12s. of 'leather not wrought up'. Samuel Roylance of Sale had 'seats and working tools in his shop' valued at £1 1s.⁴² Still more impressive is the list of tools, equipment and materials itemized in the inventory of Peter Hackney of Etchells. He possessed cutting boards, lasts, seats and shelves worth 14s. 6*d.*; a wax tub and a

⁴⁰ CCA, WS 1730, Humphrey Walmsley of Pownall Fee; WS 1753, James Hardy of Wilmslow; WS 1723, Robert Earle of Keckwick.

Fee; WS 1707, Thomas Heath of Wybunbury; WS 1713, Samuel Wroe of Great Warford.

⁴¹ CCA, WS 1730, Humphrey Walmsley of Pownall Fee; WS 1724, Robert Mercer of Eastham; WS 1748, Samuel Roylance of Sale.

⁴² CCA, WS 1724, Robert Mercer of Eastham; WS 1748, Samuel Roylance of Sale.

wax pan valued at 4s.; resin and beeswax worth £1 8s.; yarn and hemp to the value of 19s. 6d., and £14 10s. of curried and uncurried leather.⁴³

Hackney clearly operated on a much larger scale than men like James Hardy and Robert Earle, and there is also evidence that he ran his shoemaking business in a rather different manner. Unlike their urban counterparts and later rural craftsmen-retailers, few of these men had stocks of finished items of clothing: most seem to have made goods to order.⁴⁴ None of the tailors held finished garments and only three shoemaker's inventories list made-up shoes. When they do appear, however, these items were worth considerably more than tools and equipment. Thus, Robert Mercer's varied stock of shoes was valued at £1 18s. 8d. – more than three times as much as his tools – whilst those of Peter Hackney and John Arrundell were worth £5 19s. and £6 10s. respectively.⁴⁵ These shoemakers were clearly supplying ready-made shoes, either to a local clientele or to wider markets, as well as providing the more traditional jobbing service. This was not mass production: the equipment listed in Hackney's inventory comprised hand tools and he appears to have worked alone. Mechanisation and factory production came only 150 years later with the introduction of sewing and riveting machines.⁴⁶ However, these large stocks of shoes reveal that hand manufacturing could meet growing and increasingly varied demand, and indicate that commercial or retail innovation was not restricted to towns. The flexibility of production is underlined by the range of different types available from these shoemakers. Robert Mercer had shoes for men, women and boys as well as clogs and boots, whilst Hackney's inventory also distinguished brogues and hampers. Moreover, both men clearly had a considerable number of customers. Hackney had book debts totalling £27 0s. 2d. which, given that the shoes itemized in his inventory had an average value of about 2s. 6d., suggests credit sales of over 200 pairs of shoes or boots.

Unsurprisingly, perhaps, even these levels of stock were modest when compared with those of early eighteenth-century urban tradesmen. At the extreme were men like Robert Wilkinson, a Nantwich tailor, who had 127 items of finished clothing worth a total of £27 3s., or Charles Mason of Chester with nearly 250 pairs of men's, women's and children's shoes in his shop, along with 172 lasts, several hides, and 10,000 pegs.⁴⁷ This greater level of investment in stock-in-trade no doubt reflected a different scale of operation and the larger customer base being supplied in and from such towns. In addition to his extensive stock, Mason had £61 6s. of book debts owed by 117 individuals from Chester and its immediate hinterland. It is also likely that rural craftsmen produced to order more than their urban counterparts and so rarely generated substantial stocks of clothing and shoes. Whilst the evidence in craftsmen's inventories is equivocal, it is clear that village shops in Cheshire did not sell ready-made clothes in the way seen in a growing number of towns. Some carried stocks of caps, gloves and stockings, but none had the shoes, coats, breeches or gowns found in shops in the larger towns.⁴⁸

Notwithstanding such arguments, the most important factor in the relatively low

⁴³ CCA, WS 1707, Peter Hackney of Etchells.

⁴⁴ Styles, 'Clothing the North', p. 143; Holderness, 'Rural tradesmen', pp. 77–81; Fowler, 'A rural tailor', pp. 33–5.

⁴⁵ CCA, WS 1724, Robert Mercer of Eastham; WS 1707, Peter Hackney of Etchells; WS 1742, John Arrundell

of Hattersley.

⁴⁶ B. Trinder, 'Shoes', in *id.*, (ed.) *The Blackwell encyclopedia of industrial archaeology* (1992), p. 685.

⁴⁷ CCA, WS 1721, Robert Wilkinson of Nantwich; WS 1737, Charles Mason of Chester.

⁴⁸ See also Styles, 'Clothing the North', pp. 156–8.

capitalisation of rural crafts was probably the part-time nature of these activities. Holderness suggests that nearly all rural tradesmen in Lincolnshire engaged in some form of agriculture and Martin argues that the loss of ownership or access to land following enclosure severely undermined the economic viability of many Warwickshire craftsmen.⁴⁹ As we have already noted, parliamentary enclosure was a more radical process in the Midlands than in Cheshire, and seventeenth- and eighteenth-century enclosure by private agreement does not appear to have excluded Cheshire craftsmen from small-scale farming. Over four-fifths of a sample of fifty wills included specific references to tenements and messuages, and seventeen out of twenty-seven inventories include details of livestock. The amount of land held and bequeathed by these craftsmen was rarely specified, but values were given to livestock, crops and husbandry ware. On average, these items accounted for about two-fifths of the personal inventoried wealth of tailors and shoemakers (excluding debts), but the level of stock was extremely varied. It ranged from the two sheep and eight geese owned by the tailor John Shenton of Ridley to Robert Earle's four horses, ten cows, four calves, two carts, ploughs, hay and corn, which together were worth £49 10s. – about three-quarters of his personal property.⁵⁰

To an extent, this has resonance with Martin's argument that land-holding was crucial to the economic life-worlds and the survival of village craftsmen in eighteenth-century Warwickshire.⁵¹ However, the relative importance of agriculture and craft activities to individual households is difficult to judge, not least because the *stocks* of money held in animals, corn and hay, carts and ploughs inevitably loom much larger in the inventories than do the *flows* of income created through trade. As Table 2 indicates, livestock and husbandry ware were important features of poor tailors and shoemakers as well as those who were relatively wealthy. Indeed, such items formed a higher proportion of the inventoried goods on estates worth less than £20 than was the case for their wealthier neighbours. For some of these shoemakers and tailors, agricultural incomes must have been greater than those earned through their trade. Yet it would be wrong to see agriculture as an economic crutch for craftsmen otherwise unable to make a living. Combining an agricultural income with that from craft could be an active choice as much as a necessity: a small-holding may have acted as a buffer against downturns in the (local) economy, but it also formed a significant secondary source of income. It is difficult to imagine that Samuel Roylance's household could have survived without the corn and potatoes, the two cows and a calf, and the little grey horse that comprised over three-quarters of his inventoried wealth. In contrast, John Arrundell's two kines and his corn and hay, worth a total of £7 7s., were probably less important as income streams than his shoe-making activities which had generated £29 4s. of book debts and finished shoes.⁵² What is interesting is that both these men chose to call themselves shoemaker rather than husbandman. It seems likely that a number of others were engaged in a similar range of activities, but styled themselves husbandman, although the internal evidence of probate inventories does not suggest that this was common in Cheshire. Nonetheless, it is clear that rural crafts were more widespread than the records indicate and that many rural households drew upon multiple incomes.

⁴⁹ Holderness, 'Rural tradesmen', p. 77; Martin, 'Village traders', pp. 185–8.

⁵⁰ CCA, WS 1725, John Shenton of Ridley; WS 1723, Robert Earle of Keckwick. See Holderness, 'Rural

tradesmen', p. 79.

⁵¹ Martin, 'Village traders', p. 184.

⁵² CCA, WS 1748, Samuel Roylance of Sale; WS 1742, John Arrundell of Hattersley.

TABLE 2. Agricultural stock held by selected rural tailors and shoemakers, 1701–60
(value and percentage of total inventory value)

		<i>number in view</i>	<i>Cattle</i>	<i>Horses</i>	<i>Carts, ploughs</i>	<i>Corn & hay</i>	<i>Pigs, sheep, poultry</i>	<i>Total agricultural goods</i>	<i>Total inventory</i>
Inventories > £75	£	6	63.65	16.37	4.45	11.91	0.6	96.98	1057.68
	%		6.0	1.6	0.4	1.1	0.1	9.2	
Inventories £40–74	£	9	51.52	10.5	7.72	11.75	0	81.45	476.98
	%		10.8	2.2	1.6	2.5	0.0	17.1	
Inventories £20–39	£	7	27.75	12.0	0	14.0	4.55	58.3	209.72
	%		13.3	5.7	0.0	6.7	2.1	27.8	
Inventories < £20	£	5	10.5	2.62	0.75	4.05	1.75	19.67	57.08
	%		18.4	4.6	1.3	7.1	3.1	34.5	
Total	£	27	153.42	41.0	12.92	41.72	6.9	256.41	1612.22
	%		9.5	2.6	0.8	2.6	0.4	15.9	

Source: Cheshire and Chester Archives, probate records.

There are echoes here of the dual occupations so often associated with proto-industrial production and, in the activities of men such as John Arrundell, the suggestion that some were largely independent of the land. Yet there is little evidence that these men were drawn into larger scale, urban based, putting-out systems. This type of manufacturing of footwear was becoming widespread in the early nineteenth century, especially in Northamptonshire and Staffordshire. The 1835 edition of *Pigot's Directory* noted that many of the inhabitants of Abbots Bromley (Staffs.) had formerly been employed in 'the making of shoes for the manufacturers in Stafford'.⁵³ However, most tailors and shoemakers in eighteenth-century Cheshire appear to have operated independently and within local markets. This generally modest scale of activity is evident from the debts owed to these tailors and shoemakers. Debt was endemic amongst early-modern tradesmen and served to lock them into local and regional webs of trust and mutual obligation.⁵⁴ Half the inventories detailed debts of one sort or another, and several wills include bequests based on the repayment of debts owing to the testator. Exposure to debt and the nature of the debts themselves was very varied. John Adderton had £4 *os. od.* in 'money owing to ye deceased', whereas Randle Chatterton was owed £320 in three bonds taken out with neighbours.⁵⁵ In all, eight inventories identify what seem to be debts for work carried out or goods supplied, but few are specific about who owed these book debts or where they lived. Given that most customers were local, they did not need identifying beyond their name: they were well known to the deceased craftsman and presumably to his executors. However, there

⁵³ Pigot and co., *National Commercial Directory* (1835), p. 390.

⁵⁴ See B. A. Holderness, 'Credit in a rural community, 1660–1800', *Midland Hist.*, 3 (1975), pp. 94–116;

C. Muldrew, *The economy of obligation. The culture of credit and social relations in early modern England* (1998).

⁵⁵ CCA, WS 1748, John Adderton of Buglawton; WS 1730, Randle Chatterton of Davenham.

are one or two hints of more distant links. William Eaton's inventory includes 'a desperate debt in London' worth £3, as well as four others with named individuals, probably from elsewhere in Cheshire. Whilst the nature of these debts is unclear, more detail is given for the shoemaker John Arundell of Hattersley. He was owed £11 14s. in book debts and £6 in desperate debts. He also had shoes to the value of £4 15s. in his own house and at Chapel-en-le-Frith some twelve miles away, and a further £1 15s. at the house of John Lee in neighbouring Mottram and in Liverpool.⁵⁶ This amounts to a substantial amount of stock and an extensive trading network, linking rural production in east Cheshire to demand in Derbyshire and west Lancashire.

III

This is a rare insight into the economic geography of such craftsmen. However, if details of their economic lives are somewhat hazy, social links are much clearer and tell a consistent story: that tailors and shoemakers were firmly locked into their local, rural communities. This is apparent from analysis of executorial relationships outlined in wills and administration bonds. Probate records are economic, social and cultural as well as legal documents and so reflect many aspects of an individual's life-world. Being an executor or administrator publicly identified a person as trustworthy and gave them status; it also brought them into intimate contact with the finances and social workings of the deceased's household and family.⁵⁷ This made the choice of executor, or the willingness to act as administrator, very important to the successful management of the estate and to the social standing both of the deceased and their executor/administrator. Probate records therefore identify some of the closest and most personal of relationships, and so represent only part of the testator's social network. That said, they provide 'sensitive indicators of family awareness' and a reliable register of significant life relations, incorporating both friends and family.⁵⁸

The majority of executorial links recorded in the wills of Cheshire tailors and shoemakers were with family members (Table 3). This contrasts with the relationships identified by urban testators in north-west England, where non-kin formed almost one-half of all links.⁵⁹ It seems that urban and rural communities encouraged somewhat different types of social relationship. Towns offered a greater range of potential contacts: neighbours were more numerous, as were fellow tradesmen, workers and church-goers; and there were new opportunities to forge friendships through guilds, clubs, societies and associations. Urban living may also have served to dislocate kinship networks, although here the evidence is more equivocal.⁶⁰ Despite the

⁵⁶ CCA, WS 1705, William Eaton of Over Tabley; WS 1742, John Arundell of Hattersley.

⁵⁷ S. D'Cruze, 'The middling sort in eighteenth-century Colchester: independence, social relations and the community broker', in J. Barry and C. Brooks (eds) *The middling sort of people. Culture, society and politics in England, 1550-1800* (1994), pp. 181-2.

⁵⁸ D. Cressy, 'Kinship and kin interaction in early modern England', *Past and Present*, 113 (1986), p. 53.

⁵⁹ J. Stobart, 'Social and geographical contexts of

property transmission in the eighteenth century', in J. Stobart and A. Owens (eds), *Urban Fortunes: property and inheritance in the town, 1700-1900* (2000), pp. 108-130.

⁶⁰ For a summary of the social possibilities of urban living, see P. Sharpe, 'Population and society, 1700-1840', in P. Clark (ed.) *The Cambridge urban history of Britain*, II, 1540-1840 (2000), pp. 513-27; J. Ellis, *The Georgian Town, 1680-1840* (2001), pp. 65-86.

TABLE 3. Executorial links of selected rural tailors and shoemakers, 1701–60

	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Nuclear family (wife/children)	56	32.9
Family of origin (father/brother/sister)	16	9.4
Kin (brother-in-law/son-in-law/cousin/ kinsman)	26	15.3
Non-kin	72	42.4
Total	170	100.0

Note: n=83.

Source: Cheshire and Chester Archives, probate records.

growing impact of inter-rural migration, kinship relationships remained much stronger as a foundation for social interaction and support systems within villages, especially in these most intensely felt and most trusting of relationships where personal as well as financial matters were laid bare.⁶¹ Wrightson suggests that these family ties comprised a dense and local network of linkages, binding individuals to one another and to the spatial community within which they lived.⁶² In preferentially naming close family members as executors, these rural tailors and shoemakers were thus reflecting the likely structure of their life worlds. There were, though, a significant number of non-kin relationships identified in the probate records. Given the overarching importance of family to rural communal life, these non-kin contacts are particularly revealing of the broader social world of village folk: did they tie these craftsmen to rural or urban communities; to a world of trade and commerce or one of agriculture?

Many extended families appear to have been contained within local areas, but family ties could be sustained over considerable distance and without the need for regular contact.⁶³ Links to brothers and sons, nephews and brothers-in-law could extend over considerable distances as individuals moved to villages and towns elsewhere in the region or country for employment or for marriage. Thus we see John Watmough, a tailor from Bebington on the Wirral, naming as an executor his brother-in-law in Formby, Lancashire; and John Hyde, a tailor from Marple, nominating his son who lived in London.⁶⁴ Distance, though, seems to have been crucial in defining non-kin relationships (Table 4), suggesting a dense local network of social links. Nearly two-thirds of the non-kin executors named in the probate records lived either in the same village as the testator or in a neighbouring village (less than 3 miles distant), and less than

⁶¹ See S. King, 'Migrants on the margin? Mobility, integration and occupations in the West Riding, 1650–1820', *J. Historical Geography* 23 (1997), pp. 284–303; K. Wrightson and D. Levine, *Poverty and piety in an English village: Terling, 1525–1700* (1978, sec. edn, 1995); J. Johnston, 'Family, kin and community in eight Lincolnshire parishes, 1567–1800', *Rural Hist.*, 6 (1995), pp. 179–92.

⁶² K. Wrightson, *Earthly necessities. Economic lives in*

early modern Britain (2000), pp. 69–86.

⁶³ See Wrightson and Levine, *Poverty and Piety*, pp. 73–109 for the importance of the localisation of family networks in spatially defining social systems. Cressy, 'Kinship and kin interaction', discusses the maintenance of family ties over time and space.

⁶⁴ CCA, WS 1712, John Watmough of Bebington; WS 1734, John Hyde of Marple.

TABLE 4. Geography of non-kin executorial links of selected rural tailors and shoemakers, 1701–60

	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage (of known)</i>
Same village	22	33.3
Less than 3 miles distant	20	30.3
3–6 miles distant	15	22.7
6–10 miles distant	4	6.1
Over 10 miles distant	5	7.6
Unknown	6	
Total	72	

Note: n=83.

Source: Cheshire and Chester Archives, probate records.

one in twelve lived more than 10 miles distant. Not only were these links local; they were predominantly rural. Only one-fifth of links was with townspeople, almost invariably individuals in the nearest market town.

The principal dimensions of rural tailors' and shoemakers' social orbit were clearly local and rural; a geography that is underlined by the networks of personal credit and debt in which they were involved. The people to whom these craftsmen loaned money, in so far as they can be reliably traced, lived in nearby villages. For example, of the three debtors who took out bonds with Randle Chatterton, one cannot be traced, but the other two were a yeoman from Leftwich and a shoemaker from Weaverham, both under three miles from his home village of Davenham. Their creditors were also generally local men, engaged in related occupations. In signing the administration bond for Francis Hulme of Wilmslow, Joseph Potts – a yeoman from neighbouring Prestbury – was identified as the principal creditor of the deceased. Potts may have been supplying Hulme with cash, livestock or leather. A similar relationship may be represented in the case of Joseph Austin of Audlem, whose principal creditor was one Samuel Harding, a gentleman from the same village.⁶⁵ Whatever the precise reasons for a debt or credit, its existence adds another layer to the dense local networks of linkages that enmeshed village craftsmen.

These cases are unusual in the clarity they give to the relationship between deceased and their (non-kin) executor/administrator. Occasionally, we are given glimpses of the intensity of the bond between them – for example, when James Liverpool of Alraham appointed his 'trusty and honest neighbours' John Vickers and John Hough⁶⁶ – but the underlying reasons for friendships often remain hidden. Proximity provides a powerful explanation for friendship: it allowed regular interaction and sociability. Such social contact was often centred on local institutions. Clark argues that alehouses hosted a growing range of leisure activities, including games, clubs and societies. Equally, as Counce demonstrates, many communal rituals were

⁶⁵ CCA, WS 1730, Randle Chatterton of Davenham; Austin.
WS 1745, Francis Hulme of Wilmslow; WS 1759, Joseph

⁶⁶ CCA, WS 1746, James Liverpool of Alraham.

centred on the church or chapel.⁶⁷ These activities served to draw together communities and offered the basis of the strong bonds of friendship represented in the probate records. Shops also offered the possibility for frequent social interaction between shopkeeper and customer, and between fellow customers. No detailed accounts of the lives of Cheshire tailors and shoemakers survive, but evidence from an early nineteenth-century Hampshire tailor suggests that customers made regular, but infrequent trips to his shop.⁶⁸ It seems unlikely that most village craftsmen kept shop every day. Time might be better spent working in the field, making up shoes or visiting local gentry to repair clothes and/or linen. Specialist retailers probably formed more of a focus for sociability, therefore, not least because the goods they sold were bought more frequently than clothing. In the case of the butcher Ralph Williams of Wybunbury, his account book shows that several customers visited his shop almost every day that it was open, strengthening the economic ties of buying and selling with the sociability of frequent interaction. In mercer's shops, this socialising could go much further: in rural Sussex, Thomas Turner often spent many hours drinking tea and playing cards with his favoured customers.⁶⁹ Similar acts of sociability may have centred on tailors and shoemakers, but we have no evidence. It seems likely, thought, that the time spent in the workshop, being measured for and fitted with coats, suits or shoes, would have helped to cement close social bonds between craftsman and his predominantly local clientele. That some of the friendships thus forged or strengthened were reflected in executorial links seem certain.

Another possibility is that the testator and executor shared the same economic worlds. This can be most readily, if somewhat superficially, assessed by comparing their occupations (Table 5). The most trusted friends and neighbours of craftsmen-retailers (as measured by appointment as executors) were predominantly other craftsmen or were occupied in agriculture. In part this can be explained on the grounds that these were the most numerous occupational groups in villages, but it undoubtedly also links in with the economic lives of the tailors and shoemakers. We have already seen that village craftsmen were often involved in farming. This must have predisposed them to know and trust others involved in these activities. Shared economic concerns brought individuals closer in social and emotional terms, and an individual's business dealings often mapped closely onto their personal friendships.⁷⁰ We can see this with John Arundell who named John Lee (at whose house he had a sizeable number of finished shoes) as one of his executors. Conversely, the comparative lack of close social contact with individuals engaged in trading activities suggests a social distancing of these rural craftsmen from (urban) commercial life. Of the twenty townfolk named as executors or appointed as administrators, thirteen were craftsmen and just four were engaged in retailing. This is not to suggest that rural tailors and shoemakers were isolated from the influence of urban markets and supplies: almost half of the urban executors named were in related leather

⁶⁷ P. Clark, *The English alehouse. A social history, 1200–1830* (1983), pp. 233–5; S. Caunce, 'Complexity, community structure and competitive advantage with the Yorkshire woollen industry, c. 1700–1850', *Business Hist.*, 39 (1997), pp. 27–43.

⁶⁸ Fowler, 'A rural tailor', pp. 30–3.

⁶⁹ CCA, DDX 352/1; Cox, *Complete tradesman*, pp. 134–5.

⁷⁰ Muldrew, *Economy of obligation*, pp. 186–9; D'Cruze, 'Middling sort in eighteenth-century Colchester', pp. 187–90.

TABLE 5. Occupations of the executors of selected rural tailors and shoemakers, 1701–60

	<i>Executors: non-kin</i>		<i>Executors = kin</i>	
	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage (of known)</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage (of known)</i>
Agriculture	24	42.1	13	48.1
Crafts	20	35.1	13	48.1
Retail	7	12.3	0	0.0
Other	6	10.5	1	3.7
Unknown	15		71	
Total	72		98	

Note: n=83.

Source: Cheshire and Chester Archives, probate records.

or clothing trades.⁷¹ However, links which seem apparent in aggregate become more problematic in individual cases. For example, John Reed, a tailor in the town of Northwich, acted as administrator for his fellow tailor James Forshall; yet the lead signatory was Forshall's brother John – a gardener from a neighbouring village. Similarly, Robert Millington of Chester, currier, signed the administration bond of the cordwainer Thomas Lawrenson, but again the bond was taken out by a fellow shoemaker in Wimbolds Trafford, one William Hanley, who had married Lawrenson's widow.⁷² Occasionally, real trading links between town and country are revealed, as in the case of Thomas Patten, a Chester currier, who took out letters of administration for the estate of Peers Massey, a cordwainer in the village of Little Budworth, some twelve miles away. The administration bond identified Patten as the principal creditor, suggesting that he had been supplying leather to Massey and perhaps other shoe makers in the area. Significantly, Patten's co-signatories were a tanner and cordwainer – both fellow residents of Chester – suggesting a link between Massey and a nexus of urban leather tradesmen.⁷³ As noted above, however, most signatories identified as creditors were themselves rural dwellers and were engaged in agriculture or craft trades. The overall impression, therefore, is of village tailors and shoemakers living their social as well as their economic lives within craft and agricultural worlds.

This picture of family-centred local socio-economic systems is further strengthened by the gifting exhibited by testators. Predictably, there were very few bequests outside the family: people's duty was to their own.⁷⁴ Of those who felt that they could leave money beyond their immediate family circle, the beneficiaries were invariably local and often agriculture or craft related. Detailed analysis is possible for only four individuals (only rarely were locations given for beneficiaries and tracing individuals by name alone is fraught with difficulties), but the story

⁷¹ See Wrightson, *Earthly necessities*, pp. 93–8 and 235–40.

⁷² CCA, WS 1738, James Forshall of Comberbach; WS 1713, Thomas Lawrenson of Wimbolds Trafford.

⁷³ CCA, WS 1756, Peers Massey of Little Budworth.

⁷⁴ See Johnston, 'Family, kin and community', pp. 189–90; Stobart, 'Social and geographical contexts', pp. 123–8.

they tell is clear and consistent. Of the thirty-nine people positively identified, nearly 60 per cent lived in the same village or within three miles of the testator. Randle Thompson, a tailor from Odd Rode in south-east Cheshire, was fairly typical: in the absence of any immediate family, he left small amounts of money, clothes or furniture to eighteen named individuals, plus an uncertain number of minors.⁷⁵ Most were nephews or nieces, but they included two friends from Odd Rode and others in neighbouring Lawton and nearby Sandbach, as well as the village school to which Thompson gave 40 shillings. Other village craftsmen left money to the parish or to dissenting chapels.⁷⁶ The fullest analysis is possible for the shoemaker Samuel Wroe, who took the unusual step of giving the place of residence for the majority of his twenty-five beneficiaries.⁷⁷ On the basis of friendships marked by bequests, his social world was essentially local and rural. Whilst only three beneficiaries (including his wife, Alice) lived in Wroe's own village of Great Warford, just two were more than six miles distant. Most of his friends lived in Dean Row or Handforth, and many may have been linked to the local dissenting chapel to whose minister he gave 10 shillings for preaching his funeral sermon. If this link is true, then this confirms Caunce's argument for the importance of chapel life in the construction of local networks, especially in rural areas.⁷⁸ Yet it is impossible to be certain and, on the basis of the handful of Wroe's friends for whom occupations can be identified, it seems that his circle was centred on other shoemakers and farmers. Most interesting in this regard is William Millington, a shoemaker from neighbouring Woodford, who received broken shoe leather to the value of 10s. along with Wroe's working seat, lasts and wax pan. This reconfirms the close relationship between social and business networks, and between the economic and social worlds of these craftsmen.

IV

Tailors and shoemakers grew in number across Cheshire in the first half of the eighteenth century. Their distribution through the county seems to have been relatively unaffected by urban or rural clusters of service or retail provision, and there is little to distinguish lowland from upland parishes in terms of the number or growth of craftsmen. Any concentrations appear to have been related to the nature of settlement and, more especially, the local economy. Areas of dispersed and industrialising population seemed to offer better opportunities for craftsmen to earn a living. This relates to the ways in which these men conducted their businesses. Most appear to have operated at a small scale, selling their wares and offering their services to neighbours: few seem to have been drawn into wider commercial networks. There were exceptions, of course, but tailors especially seem to have undertaken much of their work within geographically confined economic worlds. Furthermore, these craftsmen were deeply involved in agriculture, combining two income streams in a way that effectively subsidized their crafts production and allowed them to locate in places with limited markets for the clothing they produced and sold. This agricultural orientation was strengthened through their social

⁷⁵ CCA, WS 1701, Randle Thompson of Odd Rode.

⁷⁶ See, for example, CCA, WS 1744, John Lamb of Great Boughton.

⁷⁷ CCA, WS 1713, Samuel Wroe of Great Warford.

⁷⁸ See Caunce, 'Community structure'.

relationships which tied them to their rural farming communities. They were thus both dependent on and a vital social and economic element of the rural world they inhabited.

All this has a number of important implications for our understanding of the broader processes of change affecting rural society and the provision of goods and services in the eighteenth century. The first concerns the relationship between village craftsmen and the growing market orientation of rural households. The link between the two is perhaps most apparent from the concentration of tailors and shoemakers in the industrialising parishes of north-east Cheshire, but the county-wide growth in the number of craftsmen far exceeded that of the rural population as a whole. The most obvious conclusion, that Cheshire villagers were increasingly inclined to purchase clothes from specialist producers, matches de Vries' arguments for an industrious as well as industrial revolution. Importantly, this demand was being met – at least during the early part of the eighteenth century – by rural as well as urban provision. Judging from the limited evidence of their debt patterns and the more comprehensive information on the networks of friends, tailors and shoemakers drew most of their customers from their neighbours in their own and the surrounding villages. The irony is that increased household specialisation and market-oriented consumption was facilitated by craftsmen who themselves remained non-specialized, drawing on dual income streams: craft-retailing and agriculture. This forms the second important point to emerge from this study. It can be interpreted, in line with Martin, as providing the individual with concerned with some security from the vagaries of the market for agricultural produce or their craft wares. Seen in this light, rural craftsmen-farmers might be seen as relic features from earlier times, soon to be replaced by more specialized individuals operating at a larger scale. A more positive interpretation – and one that fits with the experience of men such as John Arundell – is that non-specialisation was perfectly compatible with economic dynamism. For the family and household, it was a mechanism for maximising income; for the market more generally, it allowed flexibility in the supply of clothing. As with proto-industrial systems, such production could be highly responsive to changing demand and/or markets. If this was indeed the case, then it is unsurprising that the period under review saw no marked shift away from agriculture amongst rural shoemakers and tailors. Even those operating on a large scale and apparently linked with wider distribution networks owned land and kept livestock. Moreover, their social links were, and remained, essentially rural, locking these craftsmen into the local agricultural/craft economy.

The third point centres on the way in which rural craftsmen-retailers fitted into the wider transformation of retailing and consumption in the eighteenth century. Here, the broader picture shows the urbanisation of both supply and demand: improved transport allowed the spatial expansion of urban market areas, whilst an economic and cultural renaissance of towns meant that rural consumption was increasingly informed by urban tastes and priorities.⁷⁹ As their post-mortem debts make clear, craftsmen in Cheshire towns had many customers in the surrounding countryside, although – as noted above – this does not appear to have led to any widespread reduction in the number of rural craftsmen. It is clear, however, that any

⁷⁹ See P. Borsay (ed.), *The eighteenth-century town, 1688–1820. A reader in English urban history* (1990); J. Chartres, 'The marketing of agricultural produce', in J. Thirsk (ed) *The Agrarian History of England and Wales*, V (ii), 1640–1750 (1985), pp. 406–502.

eighteenth-century urban and commercial penetration of rural communities and cultures came, not through these village craftsmen-retailers, but through direct linking of urban traders and rural demand. The social and economic links of village tailors and shoemakers were firmly rural: their family, friends, creditors and debtors were predominantly found in their own or neighbouring villages. These links also mark the different social worlds of rural and urban craftsmen-retailers: the final point to arise from this study. Artisans in towns are increasingly being portrayed as part of the lower reaches of the burgeoning middle ranks. They shared the tastes and values of shopkeepers and service providers, and, like them, they emulated the behaviour of their social superiors. Those in villages remained firmly locked into rural life and rural society: they befriended other craftsmen or farmers and were thus part of a seemingly more conservative agricultural world.⁸⁰ Rather than harbingers of modernity, bringing urban values into the countryside, they are better seen as bastions of the rural community: much the position they are seen as holding when their late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century decline brings them more firmly into the spotlight.

⁸⁰ See Estabrook, *Urbane and rustic England*.