

**MANUFACTURING AND TRADES:  
THE URBAN ECONOMIES OF THE  
NORTH ESSEX CLOTH TOWNS  
c.1770-1851**

**Thesis submitted for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
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**by**

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**To my parents**



# CONTENTS

|   | <b>Page</b> |
|---|-------------|
| <b>Abstract</b>   | ii          |
| <b>Acknowledgements</b>   | iii         |
| <b>List of Figures, Tables and Maps</b>   | iv          |
| <b>Glossary of Abbreviations</b>  | viii        |
| <br><b>Part I</b><br>   |             |
| <b>Introduction</b>   | 2           |
| <br><b>Chapter 1: Small Towns: A Review of the Literature</b> - The neglect of the small, slow growing towns of late Georgian and early Victorian England   | <br>7       |
| <br><b>Chapter 2: The Case Study: The Small Cloth Towns in the County of Essex, 1770-1851</b> - Industrialisation without rapid urban growth: an hypothesis | <br>26      |
| <br><b>Part II</b><br>  |             |
| <br><b>Chapter 3: The Economies of the North Essex Cloth Towns, c.1770-1811</b> - Town descriptions and profiles of the principal inhabitants               | <br>45      |
| <br><b>Chapter 4: The Economies of the North Essex Cloth Towns, c.1820-1851</b> - Urban business communities and business biographies                       | <br>110     |
| <br><b>Chapter 5: The Mid Victorian Cloth Town Economies</b> - Qualifying the qualitative: occupational structure and the quality of employment             | <br>153     |
| <br><b>Part III</b><br>   |             |
| <br><b>Chapter 6: The Role of the North Essex Urban Economies in Influencing the Development of Silk Manufactories</b> - The policy of capital dispersal    | <br>205     |
| <br><b>Conclusions</b>  | <br>240     |
| <br><b>Bibliography</b>   | <br>270     |

# **Manufacturing and Trades: The Urban Economies of the North Essex Cloth Towns c1770- 1851**

**Neil. Raven**

## **Abstract**

The thesis seeks to contribute to the study of the urban economies of the small, slow growing towns of the late Georgian and early Victorian period. This is undertaken at two levels. First, consideration is given to sources. A number of mainly quantitative sources became available from the later 18th century. Four principal ones are identified. Each of the main chapters deals with one of these; evaluating the information contained and considering methods by which this can be used to assess the character and prosperity of the small town urban economy.

At the second level the thesis applies these methodologies to a case study of three north Essex cloth towns. Despite experiencing the transition to factory-based production, these towns did not witness the associated urban expansion. A two-part hypothesis is advanced to explain this phenomenon. The first suggests that differences in economic orientation existed between the case study towns and their rapidly growing counterparts in the north; the second, that the dominance of these non-industrial activities restrained the extent to which industry in the Essex towns grew.

Results gained from application of the sources to the case study are shown to support the hypothesis. First, in contrast to towns such as Halifax and Macclesfield, marketing and thoroughfare functions formed the staple economic activities of the Essex towns. Second, the Essex silk manufacturers pursued a low wage policy requiring expansion of production through the establishment of additional mills in other settlements. This policy is shown to have been a rational response to local labour markets created by the operation of the towns as agricultural marketing and thoroughfare centres. In concluding similar observations are made for other towns in southern England.

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## LIST OF FIGURES, TABLES AND MAPS

| Figures | Page  |     |
|---------|---|-----|
| 2.1     | Population growth in the three north Essex cloth towns  | 30  |
| 2.2     | Population growth in two northern cloth towns   | 37  |
| 2.3     | Population growth rates in selected cloth towns: north Essex, the West Riding of Yorkshire and the south-west Pennines, 1801-1851 | 39  |
| 2.4     | Population growth rates in selected Essex settlements, 1801-1851  | 39  |
| 3.1     | Trades innkeepers appeared with in Bailey's <i>Directory</i>  | 105 |
| 3.2     | Trades innkeepers appeared with in the UBD  | 105 |
| 3.3     | Duel and multiple trades of shopkeepers   | 107 |
| 3.4     | Duel and multiple trades of corn dealers, merchants and factors   | 108 |
| 4.1     | An indicator of economic growth in the three towns, 1824-1851   | 125 |
| 4.2     | Composition of enduring businesses in the three towns   | 129 |
| 4.3     | Changes in business population, 1832-1851: Braintree and Bocking  | 137 |
| 4.4     | Changes in business population, 1832-1851: Halstead   | 137 |
| 4.5     | Changes in business population, 1832-1851: Coggeshall   | 137 |
| 4.6     | Turnover in silk and the most dynamic business groups, 1832-1851: Braintree and Bocking   | 140 |
| 4.7     | Turnover in silk and the most dynamic business groups, 1832-1851: Halstead  | 140 |
| 4.8     | Turnover in silk and the most dynamic business groups, 1832-1851: Coggeshall  | 140 |
| 4.9     | Weekly coach services operating through the three towns, 1826-1851  | 145 |
| 4.10    | Weekly carrier services operating through the three towns, 1826-1851  | 148 |
| 5.1     | Occupational structure of Braintree and Bocking: Booth/Armstrong scheme   | 157 |
| 5.2     | Distribution of town populations by occupational group  | 159 |
| 5.3     | Occupational structure of Braintree and Bocking: revised classification scheme  | 163 |
| 5.4     | Occupational structure of Halstead  | 164 |
| 5.5     | Occupational structure of Coggeshall  | 164 |
| 5.6     | Composition of town populations by five qualitative measures  | 173 |

|      |  |     |
|------|--|-----|
| 5.7  | Composition of occupational classes by age group: Braintree and Bocking        | 176 |
| 5.8  | Composition of occupational classes by age group: Halstead                     | 176 |
| 5.9  | Composition of occupational classes by age group: Coggeshall                   | 176 |
| 5.10 | Composition of occupational classes by gender: Braintree and Bocking           | 185 |
| 5.11 | Composition of occupational classes by gender: Halstead                        | 185 |
| 5.12 | Composition of occupational classes by gender: Coggeshall                      | 185 |
| 5.13 | Composition of occupational classes by place of birth: Braintree and Bocking   | 189 |
| 5.14 | Composition of occupational classes by place of birth: Halstead                | 189 |
| 5.15 | Composition of occupational classes by place of birth: Coggeshall              | 189 |
| 5.16 | Composition of occupational classes by relation to head: Braintree and Bocking | 195 |
| 5.17 | Composition of occupational classes by relation to head: Halstead              | 195 |
| 5.18 | Composition of occupational classes by relation to head: Coggeshall            | 195 |
| 5.19 | Composition of occupational classes by household status: Braintree and Bocking | 198 |
| 5.20 | Composition of occupational classes by household status: Halstead              | 198 |
| 5.21 | Composition of occupational classes by household status: Coggeshall            | 198 |
| 6.1  | Average weekly wages in East Anglian silk factories, 1833                      | 212 |
| 6.2  | Age distribution of female silk factory workers in East Anglia, 1833           | 217 |

## Tables

|     |  |    |
|-----|--|----|
| 3.1 | Directory coverage of Essex small towns, 1784-1811                         | 49 |
| 3.2 | Economic descriptions of towns and villages in late 18th century Essex     | 54 |
| 3.3 | The market days of Essex towns   | 64 |
| 3.4 | Regional variations in Essex farm rents, 1701-1790                         | 66 |
| 3.5 | Transport services operating through Essex towns in the late 18th century  | 71 |
| 3.6 | Coach services operating through Halstead                                  | 73 |
| 3.7 | Carrier services operating through Halstead                                | 73 |
| 3.8 | Town transport services recorded in Holden's <i>Directory</i>              | 74 |
| 3.9 | Number of inhabitants in Essex towns recorded in Bailey's <i>Directory</i> | 78 |



|      |   |     |
|------|---|-----|
| 3.10 | Inhabitants of Coggeshall recorded in Bailey's <i>Directory</i>   | 81  |
| 3.11 | Range of trades in Essex towns recorded in Bailey's <i>Directory</i>  | 82  |
| 3.12 | Number of inhabitants recorded in Essex towns by Bailey's <i>Directory</i> and the UBD                                | 87  |
| 3.13 | Level of coverage received by Essex settlements in the UBD  | 90  |
| 3.14 | Adjusted trade range scores for Essex settlements featured in the UBD   | 93  |
| 3.15 | Population of towns appearing in Bailey's <i>Directory</i> , the UBD and Holden's <i>Directory</i>                    | 98  |
| 3.16 | Level of coverage given to Essex towns by the UBD and Holden's <i>Directory</i>                                       | 99  |
| 3.17 | Inhabitants of Braintree recorded in Holden's <i>Directory</i>  | 100 |
| 3.18 | Adjusted trade range scores for Essex towns recorded in Holden's <i>Directory</i>                                     | 102 |
| 4.1  | Commercial durability of businesses in the three towns, 1826-1851   | 128 |
| 5.1  | Distribution of age groups by levels of employment  | 168 |
| 5.2  | Composition of town population by age group   | 171 |
| 5.3  | Composition of town population by gender  | 171 |
| 5.4  | Composition of town population by place of birth  | 171 |
| 5.5  | Composition of town population by relation to head  | 172 |
| 5.6  | Composition of town population by household status  | 172 |
| 5.7  | Significance of variation in the composition of the 12 occupational classes in each town by five qualitative measures | 174 |
| 5.8  | Mean rank scores for age by occupational class in Halstead  | 178 |
| 6.1  | Poor relief per head of population for counties with factory based textile manufactories, 1833                        | 215 |
| 6.2  | Proportion of persons or families in the Essex towns 'chiefly employed in agriculture', 1801-31                       | 225 |
| 7.1  | Bibliographical coverage of towns by type   | 241 |
| 7.2  | Coverage of town type in local and national journals  | 242 |
| 7.3  | Coverage of small towns in books and articles by region   | 242 |
| 7.4  | Small town coverage in national journals by region  | 243 |

Maps

|     |   |     |
|-----|---|-----|
| 2.1 | Eastern counties: showing provincial centres and the location of the case study towns   | 27  |
| 2.2 | Towns with populations of 1,000 or more calculated from the hearth tax returns of Norfolk (1664), Suffolk (1674) and Essex (1670) | 29  |
| 3.1 | Essex small towns recorded in Bailey’s <i>Eastern Counties Directory</i> , 1784   | 79  |
| 3.2 | Essex small towns recorded in the <i>Universal British Directory</i> , 1794-98  | 88  |
| 3.3 | Essex small towns recorded in Holden’s <i>London and Country Directory</i> , 1811   | 97  |
| 7.1 | Location of the six counties selected for small town investigation  | 257 |
| 7.2 | Small towns in the selected counties possessing manufacturing concerns, c1790-c1840   | 259 |

GLOSSARY OF ABBREVIATIONS

|      |  |
|------|--|
| ERO  | Essex Record Office                    |
| NSTP | National Small Towns Project           |
| UBD  | <i>The Universal British Directory</i> |



# Part I

## INTRODUCTION

Investigation into the fortunes of England's small towns has, until recently, received little attention. The work undertaken at Leicester University's Centre for Urban History and the ESRC funded National Small Towns Project represents, however, the first major study of the subject.<sup>1</sup> The findings from the Project offer a framework for more detailed research to be undertaken. The Project revealed that England, on the eve of industrialisation, was very well endowed with small towns. Indeed, numbering a little under 600, places identified by contemporaries as towns, whose populations were under 5,000, constituted the predominant urban form at the commencement of the 19th century.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, from work on contemporary town descriptions it also appears that in addition to operating as foci for local trade and commerce, some of these settlements also functioned as manufacturing centres.

During the last 20 years the theory of proto-industrialisation has been eminent in explanations of early modern manufacturing.<sup>3</sup> According to this theory growth of consumer industries, from the 16th century, occurred in rural districts where merchants were able to take advantage of cheap labour, unrestrained by urban guild regulations. Formerly centres of manufacture in the medieval period, early modern towns came to play a secondary role, serving the rural economy.<sup>4</sup> However, recent work undertaken on small towns suggests this understates the role performed by members of the urban fraternity. Indeed, Clark has suggested that in early modern Europe 'proto-industrialisation might be re-styled small-town industrialisation'. In support of this claim Clark presents examples of small towns involved in manufacturing processes found throughout Europe - including the Dutch Republic and Catalonia.<sup>5</sup> He also gives reference to similar developments in Britain.<sup>6</sup>

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1. Hereafter NSTP.

2. P. Clark, 'Small towns in England 1550-1850: national and regional population trends', in idem (ed.), *Small Towns in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, 1995), 90.

3. See, for example, F.F. Mendels, 'Proto-industrialisation: the first phase of the industrialisation process', *Journal of Economic History*, 32 (1972), 241-61; L.A. Clarkson, *Proto-industrialisation: The First Phase of Industrialisation?* (London, 1985); P. Hudson, *The Genesis of Industrial Capital: A Study of the West Riding Wool Textile Industry, c.1750-1850* (Cambridge, 1986), amongst others mentioned in this introduction.

4. M. Berg, P. Hudson and M. Sonenscher (eds.), *Manufacture in Town and Country Before the Factory* (Cambridge, 1983), 26. Towns provided a market, capital, entrepreneurial talents, and a site for the finishing processes, but 'any independent dynamic which they had is seen as subordinate to the pulse of rural expansion'.

5. Clark, 'Introduction', in idem (ed.), *Small Towns*, 18. 'In the Dutch Republic when the textiles migrated from major urban centres such as Leiden, the small towns like Eindhoven, Enschede and Helmond en Brabant were significant beneficiaries serving as manufacturing points but also as intermediaries between big-city entrepreneurs and rural producers. In 18th century Catalonia the wool textile industry moved to small towns with looser guild structures and easy access to large rural markets.' The same was also true of Ulster. Here a close relationship was identified between the region's market towns and the linen industry. Merchants provided finance for improving the appearance of the towns, whilst the towns supplied temporary offices in the form of inns, as well as markets. See W.H. Crawford, 'The evolution of Ulster towns, 1750-1850', in P. Roebuck (ed.), *Plantation to Partition* (Belfast, 1981), 144. See also, J.D. Marshall, 'The rise and transformation



Indeed, the central role played by England's small towns in manufacturing is also evident in a number of recent studies which claim to examine rural manufacturing. In Rollinson's study of early modern Gloucestershire, the small towns of Stroud, Bisley, Painswick and Minchinhampton operated as centres of the region's woollen cloth industry.<sup>7</sup> Likewise, Zell's study of the 16th century Kent Weald reveals the prominent role played by the market towns of Tenterden and, more particularly, Cranbrook, as manufacturing sites. Zell's evidence shows that cloth-making was actually carried out in these towns.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, he refers to the latter town as the 'clothing district's economic centre'.<sup>9</sup> Between the 1480s and 1590s Cranbrook boasted the highest concentration of clothiers - many of them amongst the wealthiest found in the 'region'. The presence of manufactories probably contributed to Cranbrook's position as one of the largest towns in late 17th century Kent.<sup>10</sup>

The predominance of small towns as the foci of early modern manufacturing is also evidenced at a national level. In his opening chapter on the Yorkshire woollen industry Gregory presents a map showing the geography of woollen cloth manufacturing in mid-18th century England.<sup>11</sup> This is undertaken by identifying places petitioning Parliament over 'pitching, tarring and the false winding of wool' in 1752. The picture generated from this source confirms the regional pattern of woollen cloth distribution. The West Country and West Riding along with Essex, Huntingdon, Gloucester, and East Lancashire are all identified. Closer examination of the source used reveals that the

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of the Cumbrian market town, 1660-1900', *Northern History*, 19 (1983), 155. Marshall refers to the importance of the textile industry to the development of various Cumbrian towns.

6. See also D.C. Coleman, 'Proto-industrialisation: a concept too many', *Economic History Review*, 36 (1983), 435-448. One of Coleman's criticisms of the theory is that 'it does not take sufficient heed of urban industry of either the domestic or centralised variety'.
7. D. Rollison, *The Local Origins of Modern Society* (London, 1992), 'Cradles of change: the manufacturing districts', 21-44.
8. M. Zell, *Industry in the Countryside: Wealden Society in the Sixteenth Century* (Cambridge, 1994), 67.
9. Zell, *Industry in the Countryside*, 63.
10. Cranbrook's population in 1676, calculated from the hearth tax returns, was 1,950, which would have made it the sixth largest of Kent's 39 towns. See P. Clark and J. Hosking, *Population Estimates of English Small Towns 1550-1851* (Leicester, 1993). Zell also offers evidence that Cranbrook was no mere 'industrial village'. Although his marriage register evidence for the period 1653 to 1661 identifies 45 percent of occupied males in textiles and 26 percent in agriculture, the other third were in a range of crafts and trades not found in such numbers, or varieties, outside the district's other principal market centres. Zell, *Industry in the Countryside*, 121. Other examples where small towns were identified as sites of rural manufacturing, include Palliser's study of York. Palliser described the demise of the city's industry as the consequence of the growth of rural manufactories. However, amongst the examples of expanding rural manufactories identified were Lavenham in Suffolk, 'the Cotswold wool towns', along with Halifax and Leeds. D.M. Palliser, 'A crisis in English towns: the case of York, 1460-1640', *Northern History*, 14 (1978), 108-125. Similarly, in referring to the rural manufacture of cloth around Worcester, Dyer makes reference to a number of the county's market towns being involved in the trade. A.D. Dyer, *The City of Worcester* (Leicester, 1973). The same is evident in Macaffrey's study of Exeter and its cloth trade. W.T. MacCaffrey, *Exeter, 1540-1640. The Growth of an English County Town* (London, 1975), 165-66. Finally, in describing the rise of rural woollen cloth manufacturing during the 15th and 16th centuries Ramsay refers to places defined as small towns by the NSTP. G.D. Ramsay, *The English Woollen Industry 1500-1750* (London, 1982), 23-31.
11. D. Gregory, *Regional Transformation and Industrial Revolution: A Geography of the Yorkshire Woollen Industry* (London, 1982), 38.



large majority of petitioning settlements were described as towns. Some were large provincial centres, such as Norwich, Coventry and Leeds, the bulk, however, were places the NSTP identifies as small towns. Beyond this, the nature and range of their petitioner's trades suggests strongly that these small towns possessed manufactories of their own, and that they were not merely finishing and trading centres. For example, clothiers and manufacturers of woollen cloths comprised the principal signatories in the petitions originating from the Wiltshire towns of Westbury, Heytesbury, and Warminster, as they did in the Devon towns of Tiverton, Culmstock and Honiton.<sup>12</sup>

One explanation for this small town pre-eminence in early modern textile manufacturing has been offered by Berg, Hudson and Sonenscher. They argue that the impression of towns as increasingly restrictive, 'feudal' institutions, from the 14th century, conflicts with the evidence of the rise of new, unincorporated towns.<sup>13</sup> A similar point has been made by Clark,<sup>14</sup> whilst Langton has noted that labour in these towns could be comparable, in its cheapness, to that of the surrounding villages and hamlets.<sup>15</sup> It also possessed the advantage of being found in larger concentrations.

In the ensuing industrial age the growth of manufactories in some of these towns led them to experience rapid demographic expansion. Indeed, Clark observed that industry supplied the momentum for some of these place to become great cities of the Victorian age.<sup>16</sup> However, work undertaken by the NSTP reveals that for most of these demographic performance was in line with the majority of other small towns. Although their populations increased they suffered relative decline, with growth rates far below those experienced by the rapidly growing urban centres of the age.<sup>17</sup> Clark has identified a strong regional component to this picture with small towns in the industrialising Midlands, Yorkshire, the North and North West displaying impressive rates of expansion compared with those in the West Country, South-East and East Anglia.

The aim of this study is to examine the urban economies of a group of these cloth towns during this period of dramatic change. However, in contrast to the general pre-occupation with growth,<sup>18</sup> those selected were not from amongst the contingent that

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12. J. Bischoff, *A Comprehensive History of the Woollen and Worsted Manufactures*, Vol. I (London, 1968), 146-171.
  13. Berg, Hudson and Sonenscher, *Manufacture in Town*, 26.
  14. Clark, 'Introduction', in *Small Towns*, 18.
  15. J. Langton, 'Industry and towns 1500-1730', in R.A. Dodgson and R.A. Butlin (eds), *An Historical Geography of England and Wales* (London, 1978), 173-198.
  16. P. Clark, 'Small towns in England 1550-1850: national and regional population trends' (unpublished paper presented at the University of Leicester, 1990).
  17. *Ibid.*
  18. See chapter 1 for a discussion about the urban historian's pre-occupation with growth in the modern period.



witnessed dramatic demographic change, instead they originate from the ranks of the slow growing. In making this selection the study will consider two broad questions:

- i how did these towns differ economically from their fast growing counterparts (and how should the state of their economies be judged)?; and
- ii what explanations can be offered to account for the ‘poorer performance’ of their manufactories?

In addressing these questions a hypothesis will be advanced that will claim:

- i important structural differences existed between the urban economies of the cloth towns selected for consideration in the case study and their rapidly growing counterparts (differences which are also influential in evaluating the condition of their economies); and
- ii that these differences help explain why the case study towns did not experience industry-induced urban expansion.

The study will also afford a forum for considering the sources available for examining the urban economies of England’s small towns during the late 18th and early 19th century. This period is often associated with a dearth in source material as those employed by early modern urban historians become less readily available. The argument of this study, however, is that a number of other sources become accessible. By devising new methods for their use, detailed insights into small town economies can be gained.

To achieve these objectives the thesis will be divided into three parts. In the first, comprising chapters 1 and 2, a review of the literature will be followed by an introduction to the case study towns. This will confirm their small town credentials, and association with textile manufacturing, it will also argue that these places experienced industrialisation without the accompanying rapid urban expansion.

Each of the chapters comprising Part II and, indeed, also the chapter for part III, will commence with a detailed evaluation of one of the principal sources under consideration, and the construction of methodologies by which the data each source presents can be used to investigate the small town urban economy. The value of these sources and methods will be assessed in terms of their ability to reveal aspects of the character and economic orientation of the case study towns. In this respect the first of the chapters in Part II, chapter 3, will consider the urban economies of the three north Essex towns during the first half of the period under investigation, c1770 to the 1810s,

the other two, chapters 4 and 5, will shift attention to the second half of the period, c1820-1851. In each comparisons will be made with groups of small towns that underwent industrial-induced urban transformation. It is intended that with each of these three chapters the picture of the urban economies of the case study towns will become increasingly detailed, and the argument for structural differences progressively stronger. This is because a different unit of analysis is used by the chief source in each chapter. In chapter 3 the unit is that of the 'principal inhabitant', in 4 it is the business and in 5 the occupied population.

In Chapter 6, which forms part III, the approach becomes more qualitative. Detailed examination is made of business practices - principally those of a host of silk manufacturers in the 1820s and 1830s. These are contrasted with the policies pursued by manufacturers in various rapidly growing towns. An explanation is then advanced for the distinct growth behaviour of those in the case study towns which is based upon the structural characteristics identified in Part II.

The study will be completed with a conclusion. This will summarise the findings of the case study. It will also suggest directions for further research. First, in this respect, reference will be made to the potential for more detailed investigation into aspects of the urban economies of the three north Essex cloth towns. Second, a cursory exploration of the urban economies of a host of other small towns in southern England will be undertaken to ascertain the extent to which the north Essex cloth towns represented a distinct class of urban settlement.



# CHAPTER 1

## SMALL TOWNS: A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

In an article which appeared in the *Urban History Yearbook*, 1974, Alan Everitt observed that very few adequate histories of the small, market towns of England have been written, 'unless they have also been country towns (like Worcester and Lincoln), or have developed into industrial cities (like Leicester or Leeds), or into watering places (like Cheltenham)'.<sup>1</sup> Over 20 years have passed since Everitt wrote this, the picture is now rather more complicated. The small town has received some welcome attention, notably from early modernists. However, Everitt's remarks may still apply to the modern period. Relatively little research has been conducted into the economic fortunes of England's small towns in the age of the classic industrial revolution. Before considering the reasons for this neglect let us place the subject in perspective; a review of the literature will also offer background to the period examined in this study.

Glennie outlined the conventional four 'level' distinction of early modern towns by size, role and character.<sup>2</sup> London, at the top of the urban pyramid, stood alone in size and range of functions. Indeed, with a population exceeding 500,000 by the end of the 17th century it dwarfed all other English towns by comparison.<sup>3</sup> Some way below the capital came the provincial centres, then the country towns, which formed the 'backbone of provincial urban society' and, below these, a multitude of small, mainly unincorporated towns,<sup>4</sup> amongst them was the small town of Banbury which lent its name to the title of Everitt's article.

The major provincial capitals included Norwich, Bristol, Newcastle, Colchester, Exeter and York. By 1700 all had populations of 10,000 or more.<sup>5</sup> These were regional, administrative, commercial and social centres and all, with the exception of York, supported some form of industry - with Colchester it was the manufacture of bays, with Exeter the serge industry, whilst both Newcastle and Bristol had developed their roles as ports and national distribution centres.<sup>6</sup> Norwich, however, with a population

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1. A. Everitt, 'The Banburys of England', *Urban History Yearbook* (Leicester, 1974), 28-38.
  2. P. Glennie, 'Industry and towns 1500-1730', in R.A. Dogshon and R.A. Butlin (eds), *An Historical Geography of England and Wales* (London, 1990), 213.
  3. P. Clark and P. Slack (eds), *English Towns in Transition* (Oxford, 1976), 9.
  4. P. Clark (ed.), *Country Towns in Pre Industrial England* (Leicester, 1981), 2.
  5. E.A. Wrigley, 'Urban growth and agricultural change: England and the Continent in the early modern period', in P. Borsay (ed.), *The Eighteenth Century Town: A Reader in English Urban History, 1688-1820* (London, 1990), 39-82.
  6. C.W. Chalklin, *The Provincial Towns of Georgian England A Study of the Building Process, 1740-1820* (London, 1974), 13-15. In addition to the above, Chalklin adds Yarmouth, important for coastal and foreign trade, whose population may have exceeded 10,000 by 1700. Further, Clark and Slack suggest that, by the 16th century, Coventry and Salisbury had some claim to this position as well. Clark and Slack, *Transition*, 9.



approaching 30,000 by 1700, was clearly the largest of these provincial capitals. Its role as a major livestock and grain market, administrative, social and financial centre, and popular retreat for the county's gentry, combined with its location at the heart of the East Anglian woollen cloth trade, underpinned this pre-eminent position.<sup>7</sup>

Beneath the provincial capitals were the country towns. As regional centres they performed similar functions to those outlined above, although on a more modest scale. In addition, some, amongst them Canterbury, Coventry, Leicester, Nottingham and Salisbury were also supported by industry, while those of Chatham, Portsmouth and Plymouth had become more renowned for ship building and, in the latter case, as a naval station.<sup>8</sup> Clark has estimated that, in total, there were about 100 of these country towns, with populations ranging from between 1,500 and 5,000 in 1500, although by 1700 some were approaching the 7 - 8,000 mark. By the later date all had become incorporated.<sup>9</sup>

The existence of an inevitable grey area between the smallest of the country towns and the larger of the small towns prevents anything more than estimates of their respective numbers being made. This problem is, however, exacerbated in the case of the small towns. There is often no clear division between the smallest of these and the largest villages operating as important 'rural service centres'.<sup>10</sup> This said, Gregory King suggested the existence of some 810 market towns in the 1690s.<sup>11</sup> However, it is probable that a number of these would have been little more than decayed towns of 3-400 inhabitants; perhaps better described as 'villages'.<sup>12</sup> Arguably the most reliable figures have been provided by the National Small Towns Project [hereafter NSTP] based at Leicester University. Using a combination of contemporary town lists,<sup>13</sup> and population

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7. Chalklin, *The Provincial Towns*, 15-16.

8. *Ibid.*, 11.

9. Clark and Slack, *Transition*, 9.

10. See R. Hall, 'Occupation and population structure in the Derbyshire Peck District in the mid-nineteenth century', *East Midland Geographer*, 6 (1974) 66-77.

11. S. Lewis, 'An historical and geographical study of the small towns of Shropshire 1600-1800' (unpublished PhD thesis, Leicester University, 1990), 2.

12. These were amongst the casualties of a period of de-urbanisation initiated from the later 14th century, the consequence of population decline and economic stagnation, when the stock of urban sites may have been reduced by as much as two-thirds. See M. Reed, 'Decline and recovery in a provincial urban network: Buckinghamshire towns 1350 - 1800', in idem (ed.), *English Towns In Decline 1350-1800* (Leicester, 1986), unnumbered. Whilst the real losers came in the lower half of the urban hierarchy Dobson shows that decay was fairly general. He uses evidence gathered for York which he considered to be fairly representative of the fortunes of other provincial towns during this period. This evidence points to a period of contracting personal fortunes, an ever growing percentage of which was being invested in rural rather than urban property or trade, and the migration of several eminent urban leaders to London and elsewhere. Although a number of possible causes for this urban decay are considered Dobson is drawn to the conclusion that 'only the existence of prolonged and remorseless demographic attrition in England as a whole ... seems capable of explaining the ubiquity of the urban malaise'. This is a process which, by definition, Dobson suggests, was likely to have crippled the smaller centres first. R.B. Dobson, 'Urban decline in late medieval England', in R. Holt and G. Rosser (eds), *The Medieval Town, A Reader in English Urban History, 1200-1540* (Leicester, 1990), 284- 285.

13. From R. Blome, *Britannia* (London, 1673), and J. Adams, *Index Villaris or an Alphabetical list of all Cities, Market towns, Parishes, Villages and Private Seats in England and Wales* (London,



estimates,<sup>14</sup> approximately 700 small towns were identified for the end of the 17th century, with populations ranging from 400 to 2,500.<sup>15</sup>

While doubts may continue to linger over their exact number during the early modern period, greater agreement appears to exist over the role of these small towns. According to Clark and Hosking, 'They were the indispensable centres for agricultural marketing and local trade; for craft and later specialist industries; and for the spread of new cultural values among the wealthier classes of the countryside.'<sup>16</sup> A similar account is given by Chalklin, but he makes the important additional point that,

Although these towns were in the country they were not wholly part of it. A difference between their activities and those of their hinterlands was visible ... Most of the occupations of the tradesmen and craftsmen ... were also to be found in the countryside but the majority of townsmen did not work on the land directly. Many of them ... processed agricultural products; others were concerned with agricultural tools and equipment ... but relatively few farmed land.<sup>17</sup>

## II

What has been outlined above is the urban composition and character of England as it existed in the later 17th century, a situation, which Carter argues, had altered little since the later middle ages.<sup>18</sup> At a superficial level this may be true. However, it takes little account of the considerable amount of attention the early modern town has received in recent years. Such studies have shown that the urban landscape of 16th, 17th and 18th century England was far from static. Indeed, many of the features more readily associated with the modern period, including the rise of the industrial city, have their origins in earlier centuries.

A brief review of the work undertaken on the early modern town is best approached by dividing the period into pre and post revolutionary eras. Until comparatively recently most attention had been directed towards the earlier of the two periods. A study of this material

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1680). See P. Clark and J. Hosking, *Population Estimates of English Small Towns 1550-1851* (Leicester, 1993), i-ix.

14. Derived from the Compton Census 1676, and the Hearth Tax of 1670 and 1674.

15. Allowing a 10-15 percent margin of error on these figures, given the sources they were drawn from. See Clark and Hosking, *Population Estimates*, i-ix; E. Sullivan, 'Report on the state of research', (unpublished paper presented at the Mamers Small Town conference, August 1991).

16. Clark and Hosking, *Population Estimates*, i.

17. Chalklin, *The Provincial Towns*, 5-6. Indeed, this distinction between town and countryside encapsulates a functional approach to defining a small town. This has been adopted by, amongst others, Reed. Reed suggests that a town can be distinguished from a village where at least one-third of its working population were engaged in non-agricultural occupations. He adds that if this criteria is met then one would expect to find at least 30 different occupations present. Although this is undoubtedly a more stringent approach, its limitation comes from a dependence upon comprehensive occupational sources, which, it is widely accepted, few small towns possessed before the middle of the 19th century. Reed, 'Decline and Recovery'.

18. H. Carter, 'Towns and urban systems 1730-1914', in R.A. Dogshon and R.A. Butlin (eds), *Historical Geography of England and Wales* (London, 1990), 401.



reveals a degree of consensus amongst those who have considered the fortunes of the English small town during the Tudor and early Stuart periods.

Clark and Slack argue that the century preceding the Civil War witnessed an increase in the number of small towns. This, they argue, was the consequence of an expansion in internal trade which was generated by population growth during the 16th century.<sup>19</sup> In *Country Towns* Clark expands this argument, noting that the growth in local demand was also the result of agrarian change. This led to an improvement in the living standards and, therefore, purchasing power of the towns' rural clientele. It was a period, Clark claims, which saw the growth of urban trades complementary to farming, including butchering and tanning.<sup>20</sup> There were, inevitably, some losers, but it is argued that the large majority of small towns prospered between 1560 to 1640.

A similarly optimistic impression is offered by Reed. He argues that small towns had been the major casualties of a period of de-urbanisation initiated from the later 14th century. The renewal of growth, from the mid 16th century, was thus distributed amongst a much smaller network of urban centres, 'one from which the smallest and weakest members had long been eliminated'.<sup>21</sup> It is also possible that expansion of demand would have initiated 'organic' growth amongst a number of 'old agricultural villages' leading to the emergence of new towns. Indeed, despite difficulties in definition, Dyer has attempted to quantify such expansion. Using market lists he has argued that the period 1588 to 1673 witnessed the creation of 70 new towns.<sup>22</sup>

With a few exceptions, notably Dyer and Reed, those who have considered towns in pre-revolutionary England have been primarily concerned with settlements further up the urban hierarchy. However, reference is made to small towns because a number of commentators believe them to have been the main beneficiaries of urban decay amongst provincial and country towns. Phythian-Adams is one who has adopted this line of thinking.<sup>23</sup> Using evidence gathered from petitions for and granting of fee-farm and tax remissions he claims that the period 1520-1570, particularly the later years, can be considered a time of acute crisis for provincial centres. Exposed to growing rural competition and crippled by the restricting costs of urban settlement, a process of de-urbanisation ensued. It is argued that economically, though not demographically, the main beneficiaries of this process were the

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19. Clark and Slack, *Transition*, 24-25.

20. P. Clark (ed.), *Country Towns in Pre Industrial England* (Leicester, 1981), 13.

21. Reed, 'Decline and Recovery'.

22. A. Dyer, 'Growth and decay in English towns 1500-1700', *Urban History Yearbook* (Leicester, 1979), 64-69.

23. C. Phythian-Adams, 'Urban decay in late medieval England', in P. Abrams and E.A. Wrigley (eds), *Towns in Societies: Essays in Economic History and Historical Sociology* (Cambridge, 1980), 159-185.



leading market towns.<sup>24</sup>

Clark and Slack adopt a similar stance, arguing that during the period 1500-1700 most old-established cities and medium sized towns faced difficulties. They were confronted with problems of food supply, sanitation, public order, high mortality and devastating crises of plague and fire. The cause of these difficulties lay with the escalating number of poverty stricken rural immigrants who sought refuge in these towns, and with the dislocation of urban industries.<sup>25</sup> They conclude by stating that, during this period, the 'balance of advantage in the close interrelationship between town and country did not lie with the towns'.<sup>26</sup> It can be suggested that here the word 'town' refers to those places in the higher and middling ranks. As the authors acknowledge, small towns would have benefited from the switch in the balance of power. The considerable reliance upon the prosperity of their rural hinterlands has already been established.<sup>27</sup>

A similarly pessimistic view of the fortunes of England's provincial towns in this period is taken by Patten, although here greater emphasis is placed upon the role of fire, plague, war, adverse weather and weak urban economies in preventing change.<sup>28</sup> In this respect Patten points to the fact that, 'Throughout the 16th and 17th centuries the urban proportion of the country's population increased only slowly', and that it continued to represent a relatively small proportion of England's entire population.<sup>29</sup> He develops this line of thought by considering, in detail, the urban system of East Anglia (defined as Suffolk and Norfolk). With the arrival of the New Draperies in the 16th century this was one of the most buoyant regions.<sup>30</sup> Its typicality may thus be in question. Yet, Patten's findings broadly conform to the national picture. Emphasis is again placed upon stability, with little change in the basic urban pattern, although he acknowledges that the smaller towns were enjoying faster rates of growth during the 16th century than the larger centres.<sup>31</sup>

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24. The cultural implications of this crises have also been considered by Phythian-Adams. He argues that the middle and later years of the 16th century represented a bleak period for larger urban communities, without comparison. Specific customs and institutions were either changed or abolished, while a 'whole vigorous and variegated popular culture' perished. C. Phythian-Adams, 'Ceremony and the citizen', in P. Clark and P. Slack (eds), *Crisis and Order in English Towns, 1500-1700* (London, 1972), 57-85.

25. It is likely that such problems were further exacerbated by the dissolution of religious institutions following the Reformation. These had been an important source of urban revenue, their loss, according to Clark and Slack, would have 'seriously undermined the economies of numerous middling towns'. Clark and Slack, 'Introduction', in idem (eds), *Crisis and Order*, 10-12.

26. *Ibid.*, 15.

27. *Ibid.*, 4. This general view is reiterated in Clark's *Country Towns*, although consideration is also given to the few pre-civil war provincial successes, notably Norwich, and Colchester from the 1570s. However, these, it is stressed, were amongst the exceptions, most suffered from a shift of capital investment outside the urban arena. Clark, *Country Towns*, 5-6.

28. J. Patten, *English Towns 1500-1700: Studies in Historical Geography* (Kent, 1978).

29. *Ibid.*, 46.

30. See also R.E. Pilgrim, 'The rise of the new draperies in Essex', *University of Birmingham Historical Journal*, 12 (1959-60) 36-39.

31. Patten, *English Towns*, 296.



This impression of continuity should not, however, be considered all embracing. Although differences exist concerning the degree of emphasis placed upon the 'progressive' centres during this period, all acknowledge their existence. London's spectacular growth is difficult to ignore. In 1500 some 55,000 people lived in the capital, constituting approximately two percent of the English population and 44 percent of the total urban population, by 1700 the capital had a population of 575,000 and the corresponding figures had risen to 11.5 and 67 percent respectively.<sup>32</sup> London, however, was part of the traditional urban network. Clark and Slack suggest that even at this early stage the established system was being challenged by growing numbers of 'new towns'.<sup>33</sup> Likewise, Patten acknowledges the emergence of places with growing manufactures, amongst them Birmingham, Leeds and Manchester, in addition to spa towns, including Bath, Tunbridge Wells, and Epsom, and ports, including Portsmouth, Plymouth, the Medway towns, Hull and Liverpool.<sup>34</sup> These dynamic aspects of the urban system have been emphasised in a study by Corfield covering the period 1520-1700. Although she accepts that very few large towns grew faster than the nation as a whole, there were some that did, notably industrial towns, ports and naval bases.<sup>35</sup> Yet, perhaps the most optimistic general view for the period is taken by Dyer. He claims that the number of towns suffering decline was roughly equalled by those enjoying expansion, amongst the latter Dyer includes established small towns, as well as the new centres.<sup>36</sup>

From the later 17th century, as we enter the post-revolutionary period, disagreements begin to emerge amongst those considering the fortunes of England's small towns. Clark and Slack in *Crisis and Order*, and Clark in *Transition and Country Towns*, maintain a pessimistic outlook. They suggest that as the 17th century drew to a close the prospects for small towns were looking rather gloomy. From the 1660s and 1670s there were clear signs of a revival amongst the leading provincial towns. These major regional centres appear to have weathered the storm of the 16th and early 17th centuries better than many communities in the middle ranks. They, along with the larger country towns, now began to enjoy increasing demand for their goods and services; the result of improvements in living standards, as national population contracted, prices fell and wages advanced.<sup>37</sup>

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32. Wrigley, 'Urban growth and agricultural change', 41-45. The total urban population figures used by Wrigley are calculated from towns with populations of 5,000 or more.

33. Clark and Slack, *Transition*, 35-45.

34. Patten, *English Towns*, 54.

35. P. Corfield, 'Urban development in England and Wales in the 16th and 17th centuries', in D.C. Coleman and A.H. John (eds), *Trade, Government and Economy in Pre-industrial England* (London, 1976), 214-247. In addition, one can find the prosperity and vitality of such places enthusiastically described by Celia Fiennes. Although, equally important, her accounts point to the many similarities that existed between old and new towns. C. Morris (ed.), *The Illustrated Journeys of Celia Fiennes c.1682-c.1712* (London, 1982).

36. Dyer, 'Growth and decay', 69.

37. The supply of these products was aided, it is argued, by the 'positive effects of economic liberalisation amongst corporate towns', as traders and craftsmen returned to the urban scene. The demand for urban services, specialist manufactures and luxury goods was further bolstered by a growing custom amongst members of the rural elite and their wives to spend weeks, or months of



However, this recovery, it is claimed, was at the expense of many smaller towns. Faced with a slackening in national population growth such places found their business usurped by larger neighbours; a process evident in Patten's study of East Anglia. By the 17th century the small towns in Suffolk and Norfolk were being left behind by the far higher rates of growth enjoyed in the region's larger centres. The latter, according to Patten, were now starting to capitalise on their 'complexity' and the greater range of provisions and manufactured products they could supply.<sup>38</sup>

Adopting this pessimistic outlook Everitt has attempted to quantify the resulting decline in the number of small towns. He concludes that by 1770 up to one-third of the towns of Tudor and Early Stuart England and Wales had become extinct. Concentrating on 16 Metropolitan Western Counties during the period 1690-1790, John Chartres arrives at similar conclusions.<sup>39</sup>

It is accepted, however, that not all small towns faced decay and decline. Whilst maintaining a pessimistic view of their general fortunes Clark acknowledges that significant numbers prospered from the later 17th to the mid 18th century. Some benefited from a favoured location, others by acquiring important craft specialisms, or developing as leisure resorts.<sup>40</sup> Corfield makes a similar point when she talks about a 'streamlining of the market town network in the 18th century'. Trade, it is argued, was becoming increasingly concentrated in the most accessible and established market towns. This was one aspect in a large scale process of rationalisation as England's urban world became notably multi-centred rather than focused upon a single city. This was reflected in a 'new and more specialised terminology', which could identify not only market towns and ports, but also dockyard, thoroughfare, manufacturing, spa, resort and university towns. The main casualties in this process, however, were inevitably the unspecialised minor towns whose urban status was increasingly threatened.<sup>41</sup>

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the year, in such places. See P. Clark and P. Slack (eds), *The Transformation of English Provincial Towns, 1600-1800* (London, 1984), 14. The presence of the gentry in England's provincial towns has led Borsay to talk of an 'urban renaissance' from the later Stuart period. P. Borsay, 'The English urban renaissance: the development of provincial urban culture, c1680-1760', *Social History*, 2 (1977), 581-603. Further, as regional centres, they were amongst the major beneficiaries of advances made in transport and communications during the 17th and 18th centuries. In addition, prosperity was also being enjoyed by a number of ports, including Liverpool, Hull and Whitehaven, several spa towns, such as Bath and Scarborough, various industrial towns, like Birmingham and Manchester, and dockyard centres, like Portsmouth. See Clark and Slack, *Transformation*, 15.

38. Patten, *English Towns*, 296.

39. A. Everitt, 'Urban growth 1570-1770', *Local Historian*, 4 (1968), 120; J. Chartres, 'Markets and marketing in metropolitan western England in the late 17th and 18th centuries', in M.A. Havinden (ed.), *Husbandry and Marketing in the South East 1500-1800* (Exeter, 1973), 64.

40. Clark, *County Towns*, 29. Here Clark adds that, 'those small towns which maintained no more than a general market and were served by poor communications came under intense pressure from specialist markets in other towns'. These places, it is claimed, turned into economic and social backwaters.

41. P. Corfield, *The Impact of English Towns 1700 -1800* (Oxford, 1982), 16.



However, this generally pessimistic impression has been challenged, most notably in the work of Dyer, who has argued for the continued growth and prosperity of small towns. This impression is supported by quantitative evidence derived from lists of markets. These show that, in addition to the 70 new markets formed between 1650 and 1673, a further 70 were added by 1690. Dyer claims this phase of expansion was followed by a period of stability until 1792, when the number of markets began to decline.<sup>42</sup> However, he acknowledges the existence of regional variations within this general picture.<sup>43</sup>

Perhaps the last word on the fortunes of England's small towns in the early modern period should lie with work by the NSTP. This represents the most extensive study of the subject to be undertaken. The results have appeared in a number of working papers with a summary of the most recent findings contained in Clark's chapter in *Small Towns in Early Modern Europe*.<sup>44</sup> The findings lend qualified support to the optimistic case.

Contrary to Dyer's assessment the 100 years up to 1670 appear to have been a period of comparatively slow growth for England's small towns, with the greatest rates of expansion occurring amongst the bigger provincial centres. This, Clark suggests, may be explained by the creation of new towns in the 16th century which led to the rewards of commercial growth being spread thinly across a larger array of small centres. Whatever the causes of their modest growth rates, the Project's evidence points to an improvement in small town fortunes from the later 17th century. Indeed, this generally optimistic picture is maintained until the early 19th century. Small towns, it is argued, were 'expanding at a similar or faster pace than the national population, though slower than the larger industrialising provincial centres'.<sup>45</sup>

In support of this optimistic interpretation Clark presents figures which, it is claimed, confirm that as a class small towns were not excluded from the process of 18th century urban growth. In 1700 approximately 54 percent of English townspeople lived in settlements of fewer than 5,000 inhabitants, constituting around 14 percent of the national population. By 1801 the same figures were 31 percent and 12 percent respectively. However, it can be suggested that, if anything, these figures underestimate the extent of small town participation in this process. The expansion experienced by a significant number of these places meant that by the beginning of the 19th century they had outgrown

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42. Dyer, 'Growth and decay', 64-69.

43. Notably in southern England. Here Dyer highlighted the differences between 'orthodox counties', including Kent and Gloucester, and those of Devon, Somerset and Hampshire. The former reflect trends outlined in the main text, while the latter experienced decline between 1588 and 1673, but then entered upon a period of expansion which persisted until 1792. A. Dyer, 'The market towns of southern England 1500-1700', *Southern History* (1979), 123-134.

44. P. Clark, 'Small towns in England 1550-1850: national and regional population trends', in idem (ed.), *Small Towns in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, 1995), 90-120.

45. As we have seen this contradicts with the views of most of the writers that have been considered, who claim that small towns were unsuccessful in their attempts to compete with larger centres.



the 5,000 population ceiling employed by the Project. In Staffordshire, for example, no fewer than six towns possessed in excess of 5,000 people by 1811.<sup>46</sup>

Arguably, however, the greatest contribution made by the NSTP has been to demonstrate the regional dimension of change. To a degree the differential rates of small town growth reflect the pattern of industrial and commercial advance.<sup>47</sup> In accordance, the North East, Lancashire and the West Riding witnessed the largest formation of new settlements; as well as the expansion of a considerable number of existing ones.<sup>48</sup> Similarly, in the South East the close proximity of the Metropolis stimulated the settlement of 29 new towns and led to seven with populations exceeding 5,000 in 1811.<sup>49</sup> A slightly different pattern emerges in the West Midlands. Here the growth of traditional craft trades resulted in the expansion of established settlements rather than the creation of many new ones.<sup>50</sup> However, small town expansion and formation appear to have been far less notable in the South West and East Midlands where transformation of industry was less evident. Nevertheless, it was in East Anglia where least growth occurred. Here no new towns were established, and none of the old centres were able to surpass the 5,000 mark in 1811, indeed a number appear to have decayed.<sup>51</sup>

### III

Despite these recent findings it is probable that disagreements will continue over the fortunes of small towns in the early modern period. It would appear, however, that as the period draws to a close something approaching a consensus starts to emerge. Most historians appear to accept that from the late 18th and early 19th centuries a general eclipse and marginalisation of the traditional urban hierarchy occurred. As we have seen the established order had been under attack from the 16th century, but the processes of urbanisation and industrialisation were, by the later 18th and early 19th centuries, embarking upon a more vigorous phase.

The impact of this process on the comparative fortunes of the larger provincial towns can be seen by considering the composition of England's 10 biggest towns in 1750 with that a century later. In the middle of the 18th century Bristol, Norwich, Newcastle and Exeter

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46. Clark, 'Small towns in England 1550-1850', 90 and 110.

47. Sullivan, 'Report on the state of research'.

48. The population of these regions having been stimulated by mineral extraction and textile manufacture. Clark, 'Small towns in England 1550-1850', in *Small Towns*, 101-118. For a detailed consideration of town growth in Lancashire and Cheshire see J. Stobart, 'An 18th century revolution? Urban growth in north-west England, 1664-1801', *Urban History* 23 (1996), 26-47.

49. Clark, 'Small towns in England 1550-1850', 111. Here it is added that in the Home Counties expansion was due to a 'spread of suburban or 'commuter' towns in the vicinity of capital, and the growth of dockyard towns in North Kent, boosted during the Napoleonic Wars'.

50. Fourteen of the 15 small towns which grew to beyond 5,000 in 1811 in this West Midlands were old established ones. Sullivan, 'Report on the state of research'.

51. East Anglia is defined by the Project as Suffolk and Norfolk, but it can be argued that a large part of North Essex may also have possessed similar characteristics.



all featured amongst the country's largest urban centres, as they had done in 1700 and, indeed, in 1600. Although by 1750 they were joined for the first time by the likes of Liverpool and Manchester.<sup>52</sup> In comparison, however, by 1851 the only old provincial centre to appear in the top 10 was Bristol. Besides Liverpool, Manchester, and Sheffield, those others now appearing amongst the largest urban centres included the former small towns of Bradford and Salford.<sup>53</sup>

The general nature of marginalisation amongst smaller members of the established urban fraternity has been demonstrated by the work of the NSTP. Not only were the small towns of East Anglia, the South-West, the East Midlands, and large parts of the Home Counties experiencing growth rates generally no greater than those of their respective counties, the same was also true for areas adjacent to industrial regions. After 100 years of considerable expansion the period between 1790 and 1850 was one of relatively slow growth for the small towns of the North Riding of Yorkshire.<sup>54</sup> Indeed some, including Helmsley, experienced absolute decline during the 1820s and 1830s. Even in the industrial districts a process of rationalisation was becoming observable as the growth rates enjoyed by the larger centres began to exceed those of the smaller ones.<sup>55</sup>

The reasons for this relative stagnation have been considered by various commentators. In addressing the waning fortunes of the larger country towns Clark argued, in *Country Towns*, that renewed demographic expansion after 1750 placed growing strains on their economic and social structures, squeezing wages and creating unemployment and poverty.<sup>56</sup> A situation which, it is suggested, was exacerbated by the agricultural crisis following the Napoleonic wars and,<sup>57</sup> from the 1790s, by the migration of local gentry back to their country homes.<sup>58</sup>

A similar assessment is maintained by Clark in analysing the results from the NSTP. The modest rates of growth experienced by the small towns of East Anglia, and the South-West, are explained in terms of the loss of industrial specialisms. For example, the 1820s and 1830s appear to have been a time of contraction for Gloucestershire's woollen textile industry.<sup>59</sup> Likewise, whilst a few towns in the Home Counties and the South-East expanded, as a consequence of developing resort functions, or as burgeoning commuter

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52. E.A. Wrigley, 'Urban growth and agricultural change, 41-44,

53. B.R. Mitchell, *British Historical Statistics* (Cambridge, 1988), 26-27.

54. N.D. Raven, 'De-industrialisation and the urban response: the small towns of the North Riding of Yorkshire, c1790-1850', in R. Weedon and A. Milne (eds), *Aspects of English Small Towns in the 18th and 19th Centuries* (University of Leicester, 1993), 46-69.

55. Clark, 'Small towns in England 1550-1850', 114.

56. Clark, *Country Towns*, 16-18.

57. Leading to falling prices curtailing local demand for urban goods and services.

58. 'As transport improvements and domestic amenities made rural life more congenial.' Clark, 'Small towns in England', 102.

59. Clark, 'Small towns in England 1550-1850', 117.



centres, many towns experienced industrial decline as cheap mass-produced goods infiltrated their markets. Small towns closer to the industrial districts also appear to have lost their industrial specialisms. For a number of North Riding towns, including Yarm and Stokesley, the 1820s and 1830s were decades of de-industrialisation, as their linen manufactories fell victim to factory production in the West Riding and cheap Irish and Scottish imports.<sup>60</sup> Even in the midst of the industrial districts a similar process of rationalisation appears to have occurred, as the domestic manufacture which had embraced many small towns was superseded by more centralised factory production in a handful of larger urban centres.<sup>61</sup>

The subject of relative stagnation amongst the market and country towns of the southern agricultural districts, in particular, has also received consideration from Chalklin. He claims that the increase in consumption, observable particularly from the 1780s, was unevenly distributed in favour of the rising industrial areas with their generally higher incomes.<sup>62</sup> In contrast, agricultural labour's wages were from the 1760s lagging behind rising prices - a trend evident amongst various craftsmen in the southern counties as well. The resultant decline in the purchasing power per head of a large part of the population would have helped to check the demand for a number of urban services. This situation, it is argued, was eased in those districts close to manufacturing centres or London. In such places emigration would have reduced the labour surplus which had been the prime cause of low wages, high poor rates and a lack of demand for urban goods and services.<sup>63</sup>

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60. Raven, 'De-industrialisation and the urban response', 62-63.

61. Current research by my third year students, Richard Clarke and Brendan Knowles, suggests this was also true for Derbyshire. Duffield, for example, appears to have enjoyed rapid growth from the mid 18th century, associated with the local expansion of the hosiery trade. However, by the end of the century the town's rate of growth declined as factory-based production developed in neighbouring urban centres.

62. Whilst agricultural prices were rising the benefits were primarily reaped by landlords. Chalklin, *Provincial Towns*, 31.

63. Indeed, Chalklin talks of a 'vicious circle' developing as the 'relative poverty of the mass of the population in the countryside held down the demand for urban services, while the consequent slow growth of the market towns cut off a potential outlet for the surplus rural labour force'. *Ibid.*, 28-31. On the general view expressed in this paragraph see W.A. Armstrong, *Farmworkers: A Social and Economic History 1770-1980* (London, 1988), 19-35. Armstrong argues that after 1755 the common experience amongst farm workers was of seeing their wages failing to rise commensurably with prices, although the growing regional variations are also acknowledged. With industrialisation and provincial urban growth the balance of supply and demand in the labour market was coming to favour the Northern labourer and, from the 1790s, the tendency for higher wages and more regular employment in the north becomes observable. Whilst in the southern districts, the increase in casual relief among able bodied men receives contemporary comment from the 1770s. Hunt suggests that the southern field labourer may have become trapped in a cycle of low wages, malnutrition and low productivity. See also E.H. Hunt, *Regional Wage Variations in Britain, 1850-1914* (Oxford, 1973), 204.



## IV

Not only do small towns appear to have become marginalised from the process of growth, but also from the attentions of urban historians of late Georgian and early Victorian England. With the arrival of the modern period, attention appears to focus increasingly upon the expanding or, to use Welton's term, 'progressive' towns and cities of the age.<sup>64</sup> It is a trend which, arguably, can be traced back to Weber's pioneering study undertaken at the end of the last century. In this Weber stated 'That the most remarkable social phenomenon of the present century is the concentration of population in cities.' He then set out a series of questions relating to this trend.<sup>65</sup> These questions have been very influential in establishing an agenda for subsequent studies.<sup>66</sup> It may also account for the fact that most of the literature considered in this review concludes by 1800, if not before.<sup>67</sup>

Whilst quite evident, the extent of this neglect is not, however, complete. A number of studies have considered the fortunes of the small town in the modern period. Brown has produced a general economic and social survey of market towns for the period 1750-1914.<sup>68</sup> At a local level Brown et al have adopted a team approach for a study of late 18th to mid 19th century Kendal, whilst Marshall takes a longer time period, encompassing the late 17th, 18th and 19th centuries, to consider the rise and transformation of Cumbria's small towns.<sup>69</sup> Complementing these have been the detailed insights afforded by the research of: Royle, for mid-Victorian Melton Mowbray, Hinckley and Coalville; Noble, for the country towns of eastern Yorkshire; and Lewis, for the small towns of Shropshire.<sup>70</sup> To these may be added various working papers published by the Centre for

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64. T.A. Welton, 'On the distribution of population in England and Wales, and its progress in the period of 90 years from 1801-1891', *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society*, 63 (London, 1900), 527- 596.

65. 'What are the forces that have produced such a shift of population? Are they enduring? What is to be the ultimate result? What are the economic, moral, political and social consequences of the re-distribution of population? What is to be the attitude of the publicist, the statesman, the teacher toward the movement?' A.F. Weber, *The Growth of Cities in the Nineteenth Century* (1899; New York, 1963 edition), 1-2.

66. In fact Carter used the questions posed by Weber to categorise the numerous recent attempts to analyse the modern urban system. H. Carter, 'Towns and urban systems 1730-1914', in Dogshon and Butlin, *Historical Geography*, 401.

67. See works of Clark and Slack, Patten, Corfield, Chartres, Dyer, Phythian-Adams and Reed, while those of Chalklin and Borsay do not venture far into the 19th century. Indeed, in terms of sheer coverage it may not be too wide of the mark to suggest that the small 'unprogressive' market town of the later 18th and 19th centuries continues to be dominated by the enthusiastic writings of antiquarians.

68. J. Brown, *The English Market Town: A Social and Economic History, 1750-1914* (Wiltshire, 1986).

69. S.M. Brown, C.A. Dyhouse, J.D. Marshall, A. Palmer and D.W. Twiss, 'A small town study: an experiment in teamwork', *Urban History Yearbook* (1974), 19-23; J.D. Marshall, 'The rise and transformation of the Cumbrian market town, 1660-1900', *Northern History*, 19 (1983), 128-209.

70. S. Royle, 'Aspects of the social geography of Leicestershire towns, 1837-1871', (unpublished PhD thesis, Leicester University, 1976); idem, 'Aspects of the social geography of Leicestershire towns, 1837-1871', *Midland History*, 5 (1979-80), 50-62; M.C. Noble, 'Growth and development of country towns: the case of East Yorkshire, c1700-1850' (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Hull, 1982); idem, 'Growth and development in a regional urban system: the country towns of Eastern Yorkshire', *Urban History Yearbook* (1987), 1-21; S. Lewis, 'Historical and geographical



Urban History at Leicester University.<sup>71</sup> Nevertheless, such studies continue to be heavily out numbered by those concerned with the 19th century industrial city, resort and large provincial town. The fate and fortunes of the late Georgian and early Victorian small town remains, in both relative and absolute terms, an under-explored area.

Why have so few studies been undertaken of 'small towns that never grew'?<sup>72</sup> One reason implicit in the discussion of the last few pages has been articulated by Lewis.<sup>73</sup> She suggests that a preoccupation with the phenomenon of growth may account for some of the neglect.<sup>74</sup> This explanation is, perhaps, most valid when applied to the late 18th and 19th centuries since, as we have seen, a number of studies do consider the early modern town, either in detail or in relation to the larger provincial centres.

Clark has suggested that the roots of this modern neglect can be traced back to the attitudes of contemporary commentators. Their interest in small towns was swept aside by the heavily publicised attractions of the great Victorian cities. The slow growing market towns, it is argued, were dismissed as the 'detritus of an out-moded agrarian economy'.<sup>75</sup> These impressions, it can be observed, closely correlate with those used by Everitt in his criticism of modern urban historians. To paraphrase Everitt, for most English historians the small town continues to be thought of as a 'mere backwater, a stagnant place necessarily living on the past and out of touch with the realities of the contemporary world'.<sup>76</sup> Although it may be understandable this rather 'cavalier' approach to late 18th and 19th century urban history can be criticised on two fronts - the theoretical and factual.

The former has been outlined by Brown. In neglecting such towns he claims, 'we have an example of the sterilising effect of conventional academic approaches, delimiting not only the scope of a given study but the coverage of an entire historical field'.<sup>77</sup> Indeed, reiterating a point made by Lewis, without a better knowledge of these unassuming places it remains impossible to develop a complete picture of the modern urban system as it emerged in the 19th century.<sup>78</sup> Until much more is known about such towns, the complex

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study of the small towns of Shropshire 1600-1830' (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Leicester, 1990).

71. These include, R. Weedon and A. Milne (eds), *Aspects of English Small Towns*, and P. Clark and P. Corfield (eds), *Industry and Urbanisation in Eighteenth Century England* (Leicester, 1994).

72. H.J. Dyos, 'Agenda for urban historians', in idem (ed.), *The Study of Urban History* (London, 1968), 38.

73. S. Lewis, 'Historical and geographical study', 8.

74. A similar point is made by Marshall, 'Students of towns think in terms of economic and demographic growth, and lurking within this very notion is a value-judgement. Bigger, in other words, equals better.' Marshall, 'The rise and transformation', 128.

75. P. Clark, 'Small towns in England 1550-1850: national and regional population trends' (unpublished conference paper, University of Leicester, 1990).

76. Everitt, 'The Banburys of England', 36-37.

77. Brown, 'A small town study', 19.

78. A remark which was made by Lewis when referring to the 17th and 18th centuries and one accepted by a number of early modernists, as the growth in small town conferences, workshops, research



processes of industrialisation and urbanisation will not be fully realised.<sup>79</sup> As discussed earlier, urban historians of the early modern period have long appreciated that a consideration of the 16th and 17th century small town is a necessary prerequisite before the fortunes of the provincial and country town can be comprehended.

Intellectually too, the shift in academic attention from the pre-industrial town to the industrial city begs the question: what was happening to those old centres which were not transformed by the processes of urbanisation and industrialisation? It appears that, generally, little more is known beyond the fact that their rates of demographic growth rarely exceeded those of the surrounding rural districts. This, however, does not invalidate further academic study. As we have seen, a rate of growth similar to this during the 16th and first half of the 17th century generated a fair amount of interest and analysis amongst early modernists. Further, Clark has shown, in his study of *Country Towns*, that in the 17th and 18th centuries demographic stability did not necessarily equate with economic and social stagnation.<sup>80</sup>

Moreover, the research that has been conducted into the late Georgian and early Victorian small town suggests the period was one of considerable change and development. In his examination of Cumbria's market towns Marshall talks of a period of economic and social 'transformation' occurring primarily between 1760 and 1830.<sup>81</sup> Similarly, in her study of eastern Yorkshire Noble demonstrates that quite dramatic variations could occur in the demographic fortunes of a region's small towns.<sup>82</sup> In accordance with this finding investigation into the towns of the North Riding of Yorkshire shows that the response to the loss of the region's linen industry differed markedly between towns.<sup>83</sup>

Neglect of the traditional small town for reasons of comparatively low growth can also be questioned on a more factual and quantitative level; with justification for the study of these places being made in terms of their numbers, and the size of the population resident in and dependent upon them. At the start of the 19th century there were still some 600 of these towns; as such they constituted by far the most common urban form. Beyond this, even in 1851 Clark calculates that between 20 and 25 percent of England's urban population

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papers and projects underlines. Lewis, 'Historical and geographical study', 8.

79. Marshall also makes a similar observation, when he notes that without a consideration of these places 'it is difficult to see how any meaningful discussion of urbanism can take place'. Marshall, 'The rise and transformation', 128.

80. A similar point is made by Phythian-Adam in his study of the 16th century. Phythian-Adams, 'Ceremony and the citizen', 76.

81. Marshall, 'The rise and transformation', 169-197.

82. Noble, 'Growth and development in a regional urban system', 1-21

83. Raven, 'De-industrialisation and the urban response', 46-69. Likewise, preliminary findings for Derbyshire suggest some quite dramatic variations in the demographic and economic fortunes of the county's towns from the later 18th century. Project work undertaken by history students on the third year 'Changing Communities' course, University of Derby, 1998.



lived in places under 5,000; and this may well exclude many towns whose populations exceeded 5,000 but which were described as small towns by contemporaries.<sup>84</sup> Perhaps even more significant than their number or contribution to the urban population, is the implication that arises from their uneven distribution. What, in spatial terms, the neglect of the small town means is that the late 18th and early 19th century urban history of whole swaths of the country is ignored. In this respect Clark has observed that, 'even in the early 19th century, despite all the turmoil of the industrial revolution, the traditional network of small towns continued to persist in many parts of the country'.<sup>85</sup> Prominent amongst these 'parts' were East Anglia, the East Midlands, the Home Counties, and the South West, as well as large parts of the north, including the North Riding of Yorkshire and Cumbria.<sup>86</sup>

A second, and related reason, which may explain why the small town has been overlooked lies with methods of defining 19th century urban settlements. Population size appears to be the most popular defining variable. From 1801 a series of basic and comparatively accurate population statistics becomes available at decennial intervals. Their use in plotting the process of urbanisation was realised at an early date, and a number of pioneering studies were published before the end of the century.<sup>87</sup> Unfortunately, as Law points out, no attempt was made by the census authorities to distinguish between the urban and rural elements of the population before 1841. Even when attempts were made to define urban settlements, from 1851, the results were not very satisfactory. Relying on administrative and Parliamentary boundaries, these often failed to cover areas of urban expansion.<sup>88</sup> As a consequence the early pioneers were forced to develop their own methods of classification. Given the great range of settlement sizes that were emerging and the main terms of reference,<sup>89</sup> the tendency was to group the smaller centres with villages and rural settlements, thus adopting a relatively high urban threshold.<sup>90</sup>

Indeed, it can be argued that this practice continues with modern studies.<sup>91</sup> Most admit to

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84. Clark, 'Small towns in England 1550-1850', 101.

85. *Ibid.*

86. See R. Millward, 'The Cumbrian town between 1600 and 1800', in C.W. Chalklin and M.A. Havinden (eds), *Rural Change and Urban Growth: 1500-1800* (London, 1974), 202-228.

87. See T.A. Welton, 'On the distribution of population', 527-596; G.B. Longstaff, 'Rural depopulation', 380-433; and W. Ogle, 'The alleged depopulation of the rural districts of England', *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society* (London, 1889), 205-232.

88. Law, 'The growth of urban population', 125.

89. Which appears to have been tracing the rapid growth of large towns and cities. See Weber, *The Growth of Cities*.

90. See Weber, *The Growth of Cities*; Welton, 'On the distribution of population', 527-596; Ogle, 'The alleged depopulation'; 205-232; and R.P. Williams, 'On the increase of population in England and Wales', *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society* (London, 1880), 462-496.

91. For example see E.E. Lampard, 'Introduction', in H.J. Dyos and M. Wolff (eds), *The Victorian City*, Vol. I, (London, 1973), 7-8. It is argued here that most modern demographers agree with a minimum size of 20,000 for the agglomerated population, although Lampard admits that 'not all populations in places with less than 20,000 inhabitants can be sensibly classified as rural' but he, nevertheless, adopts this definition.



the existence of settlements with urban characteristics below these thresholds. However, the decision to exclude such places is based upon the belief that they formed part of the 'rural organism', an assertion which is open to the same set of criticisms outlined above, in addition to those derived from the studies of Chalklin and Reed.<sup>92</sup> Chalklin has pointed out that whilst such towns were in the countryside they were not wholly part of it, while Reed, concerned with a longer time period, has been able to distinguish the small towns of Buckinghamshire from the large villages by the more complex and developed occupational character of the former.<sup>93</sup>

Indeed, if we are to include the numerous small towns still existing in the first half of the 19th century then the work conducted on them in the early modern period can offer important guidance. One of the main problems that has confronted studies for the early period is a lack of reliable quantitative data. The demographic sources that exist require statistical manipulation and it is accepted that, at best, the results they produce are no more than estimates.<sup>94</sup> Aware of this, and the inflexibility of using a single variable, the most recent and detailed early modern studies have combined quantitative with qualitative sources to identify small towns. Arguably the most accessible and acceptable of the qualitative sources are contemporary descriptions. As Corfield acknowledges, 'for most purposes a purely subjective but common sense definition is quite satisfactory: a town is a human settlement known to contemporaries as a town'.<sup>95</sup> Fortunately, the later 18th and 19th centuries are well blessed with such accounts and many of these derive from reliable sources.

A final problem, which may also explain the relative neglect of the late 18th and early 19th century town, has been identified by Brown. He has suggested that such places do not appear to have enough manageable data for economic and demographic study.<sup>96</sup> In this respect Lewis has pointed to the problem of data survival for her small towns of Shropshire.

Many of the towns were unincorporated and relied on deteriorating manorial courts and parish councils for their organisation and administration. Such bodies did not generate copious historical sources. The corporations of the larger towns, however, generated a greater volume of paperwork covering a wider range of topics and often existing in a form more readily utilised by the historian. Being more numerous, documents of these towns tend to have better survival rates and so have attracted more attention.<sup>97</sup>

To this one might add that, by the 19th century, the rise of the great industrial city was

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92. A phrase first coined by Longstaff, 'Rural depopulation', 380-433.

93. Reed, 'Decline and recovery'.

94. See Carter, 'Towns and urban systems 1730-1914', 402.

95. Corfield, *Impact*, 4-5.

96. Brown, 'A small town study', 19.

97. Lewis, 'Historical and geographical study', 8.



generating a considerable amount of contemporary interest and comment, both qualitative and quantitative, private and public. Against such rivalry for attention it can be suggested that the apparently stagnant and antiquated small town would have fared rather badly.

Indeed, it has been argued that this general scarcity of reliable primary source material is at its most acute during the period from the later 18th century until the arrival of the 1851 census enumerators' returns. It is during this period that questions arise over the accuracy of many sources used by early modern historians, including freeman's records and apprenticeship returns; both are considered to be at their most reliable during the 17th century.<sup>98</sup>

However, this apparent dearth in source material has not prevented Marshall, Noble and Lewis, amongst others, from conducting detailed investigations into the Georgian and early Victorian small town. An examination of their work reveals the application of a range of sources which can be grouped into two broad classes. The first of these can be described as peculiar to a specific settlement, locality or region, and include: diaries; county histories; local censuses; guides and surveys; as well as the early, pre-1813, parish registers of those clerics diligent enough to record the occupational details of their congregations.<sup>99</sup> The second offer a wider, national coverage and include: the decennial census returns and enumerations; trade directories from the later 18th century; and various Parliamentary Papers that refer to the state of local manufactories, the employment of women and children and of the operation of the poor laws.<sup>100</sup>

If further analysis of the Georgian and Victorian small town is to occur then, on a practical level, these source based distinctions may represent a useful guide. Whilst nation-wide sources offer a broad framework within which economic, social and demographic comparisons between small towns of different districts and regions can be drawn, more

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98. A similar point has been made in relation to Georgian country towns by Clark. 'Although town archives often survive in greater profusion for the later period, they are frequently uninformative and intractable, while major series of national Government records remain uncatologued and inaccessible.' Clark, *Country Towns*, 15.

99. Diary entries and late 18th century county histories were used by Marshall to offer descriptions of town life; evidence derived from local topographical studies and guides were used to afford an insight into the fate of urban industry and the role of communications amongst the towns of Yorkshire's North Riding; and Anglican parish registers recording occupational information have been employed to analyse small town economic change in eastern Yorkshire. Marshall, 'The rise and transformation', 170; Raven, 'De-industrialisation and the urban response', 59 and 65; Noble, 'Growth and development in a regional urban system', 8-13.

100. The decennial census returns, available from 1801, have been utilised by Noble to highlight local variations in the demographic performance of towns within particular regions; Marshall has drawn upon Parliamentary Papers to illustrate early 19th century urban manufacturing activity; Lewis and Raven have employed early trade directories to compare small town occupational structures and commercial functions; whilst Noble has used the information directories offer on carriers to measure urban nodality. Noble, 'Growth and development in a regional urban system', 13-15; Marshall, 'The rise and transformation', 156; Lewis, 'Historical and geographical study'; Raven, 'De-industrialisation and the urban response', 46-69.



locally initiated sources can be employed to enrich each local study. However, if more systematic investigation is to be undertaken into the life and character of the 600 or so small towns that England possessed at this time, a greater appreciation of the character of these nation-wide sources, and the methods by which they may be employed, is necessary.

## Conclusion

The post-war period has seen a growth of interest in the English small town. Most of the attention, however, has derived from early modernists. Initially their interest lay with the larger provincial and country towns. However, increasingly the fortunes of the 16th, 17th and 18th century small towns have claimed central attention and, in this process, generated considerable debate. The most recent work into the early modern small town has been undertaken by the National Small Towns Project, at Leicester University. This suggests that small towns constituted a dynamic component of the urban system. Whilst debate over the fortunes of the early modern small town is likely to persist, a consensus begins to emerge regarding its fate in the burgeoning industrial age. The late Georgian and early Victorian small town appears to have become marginalised from the main forces of urbanisation as it failed to retain its share of the rapidly expanding urban population.

As the literature survey demonstrated, this marginalisation process possesses a counterpart in terms of historical investigation. The observation made by Everitt some 20 years ago retains much of its relevance, few studies have been undertaken into those towns that failed to grow. The fate and fortunes of the late 18th and early 19th century small town remains, in both relative and absolute terms, an under-explored area. Whilst part of this explanation may lie with definitions which only identify places with 10,000 or more inhabitants as towns, two more entrenched reasons may account for the bulk of this neglect, both of which have been challenged.

The first of these has been identified as a pre-occupation with growth, and the more rapidly expanding towns of the age; the roots of which have been traced back to the interests of contemporary observers. However, it has been argued that by ignoring the 600 or so places that may be described as small towns, the process of economic and social change - both at a national and local level - can not be fully appreciated. Furthermore, given the uneven geographical distribution of these places, evidence suggests that this problem was most acute in southern England where the urban system was dominated by these unassuming places. Moreover, in defiance of the contention that slow growth equated with economic and social stagnation the research that has been undertaken suggests that the late 18th and 19th century was a period of considerable change and development for England's small towns.



The other reason for neglect concerns the claim that an insufficient amount of primary source material exists with which to undertake detailed academic study of the late Georgian and early Victorian small towns of England. Against this the work that has been undertaken into the small towns of this period highlights the presence of a range of sources. Whilst some of these were local in origin, the identification of a number of national sources creates the opportunity for a comparative examination of small towns across regions. What appears to be required to assist in the wider investigation of the small town in the industrial age is a detailed and critical assessment of these sources.

Through consideration of the fortunes of three small towns between c.1770 and 1851, this study challenges their portrayal as rural backwaters, marginalised from the processes of economic change. In addition, the study also seeks to demonstrate new methods by which a selection of nationally available sources can be used to offer a detailed insight into the urban economies of England's small towns in the industrial age, particularly those of the very neglected south. However, before this the small towns that comprise this study need to be introduced.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE CASE STUDY: THE SMALL CLOTH TOWNS IN THE COUNTY OF ESSEX

In chapter 1 the general subject of the thesis was identified - the small, slow growing towns of England. It was argued that investigation into the fortunes of these settlements during the Georgian and early Victorian period has been a subject of considerable neglect. Instead, attention has been focused on the rapidly growing cities of the age. Compared to these the small, slow growing towns of England have, to borrow Everitt's phrase, been dismissed as 'stagnant places, out of touch with the realities of the contemporary world'.<sup>1</sup>

The need for more studies of small towns is clear, however. Brown has argued that without a consideration of these places, which formed the base of the urban pyramid, a full appreciation of the processes of industrialisation and urbanisation cannot be attained.<sup>2</sup> The broad research question that this study is concerned with is why, during the period from the later 18th century to the middle of the 19th century, did some small towns grow rapidly and others not?

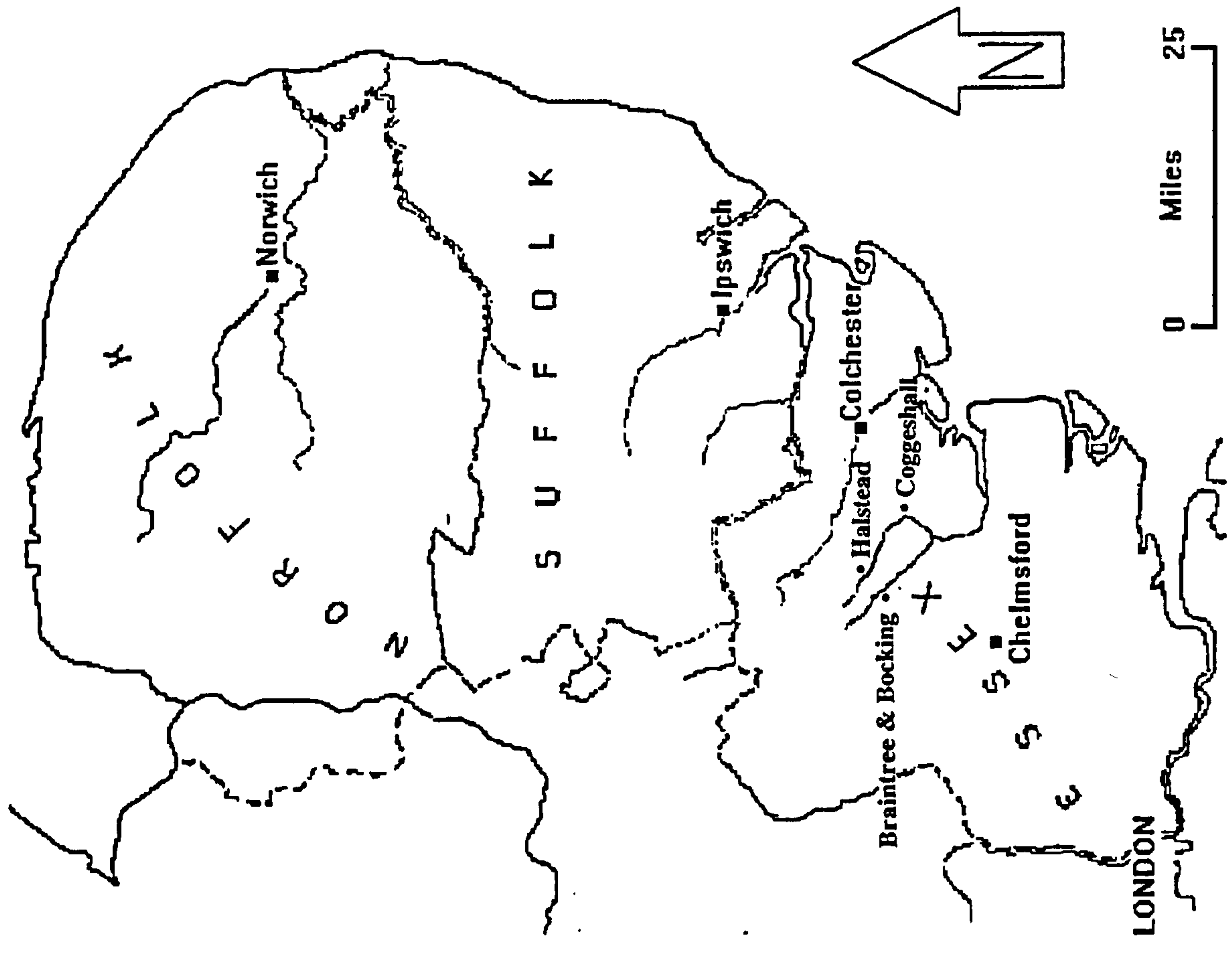
This chapter will commence by introducing the three towns that form the local case study upon which this question of growth will be considered. Having confirmed their small town credentials, the second section of the chapter will give reasons for the selection, set out the specific question of urban growth to be addressed, and discuss the limitations of existing explanations. The final section will advance an alternative explanation - the case for which will be made during the course of the following four chapters of the thesis, as well as including a brief introduction to the sources that will be used.

#### I

The small towns that comprise the case study are Braintree and Bocking [constituting one urban settlement], Coggeshall and Halstead. These three towns are located in the northern half of the county of Essex, along the rivers Blackwater, in the case of the first two, and Colne in the latter. Their location within the Eastern Counties and Essex, and in relation to the region's provincial centres, is depicted in map 2.1. Topographically, north Essex can be described as comprising rolling countryside, further south the county becomes more uniformly flat. The geology of north Essex, consisting in the main part of boulder clay, appears to have proved more suitable for early urban settlement than the heavier clays of the central belt and the marshes of the east coast and Thames estuary.<sup>3</sup> In consequence,

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1. A. Everitt, 'The Banburys of England', *Urban History Yearbook* (1974), 36-38.
  2. S.M. Brown, C.A. Dyhouse, J.D. Marshall, A. Palmer and D.W. Twiss, 'A small town study: an experiment in teamwork', *Urban History Yearbook* (1974), 19-23.
  3. W. Page and J.H. Round (eds), *The Victoria History of the County of Essex*, Vol. II (London, 1907), 328.





Eastern Counties: Showing Provincial Centres and Location of Case Study Towns

the case study towns were located in the part of the county that experienced most early urban development. Although by the late 17th century Essex as a whole was well endowed with towns - the NSTP identifies 31 - the largest were still found in the north. Map 2.2 identifies those towns in Essex, as well as Suffolk and Norfolk, with populations of 1,000 or more calculated from the Hearth Tax returns of the 1660s and 1670s.<sup>4</sup> From examination of this map it is also evident that amongst the Eastern Counties Essex boasted the largest number of sizeable towns, with north Essex arguably the most urbanised of the region's districts. Indeed, the county has been considered, along with Kent, to be one of the most urbanised in 17th century England.<sup>5</sup>

As outlined in chapter 1, the study of small towns has been plagued by problems of definition. Aware of these, the scheme initiated by the NSTP probably offers the most robust definition by combining contemporary judgements - from the late 17th century and the turn of the 19th century - with population evidence.<sup>6</sup> However, given the countrywide nature of the project, local research is always likely to uncover particular anomalies. The situation with Braintree and Bocking is such a case. In *Population Estimates* the two appear as separate urban entities. They certainly constituted distinct parishes with their own administrations. However, in terms of geography and economy there is a stronger case for representing them as one settlement. From the late 18th century and throughout the early 19th century contemporary observers referred to Bocking as 'Braintree's northern suburb', or as part of the 'combined town' of Braintree and Bocking.<sup>7</sup> Certainly one of the main commercial and thoroughfare streets of Braintree, Bradford Street, ran through much of the length of Bocking,<sup>8</sup> whilst, as will be seen presently, early 19th century sources considered them to represent one settlement. For the purposes of this study the same judgement will be made and Braintree and Bocking will be considered as one settlement.

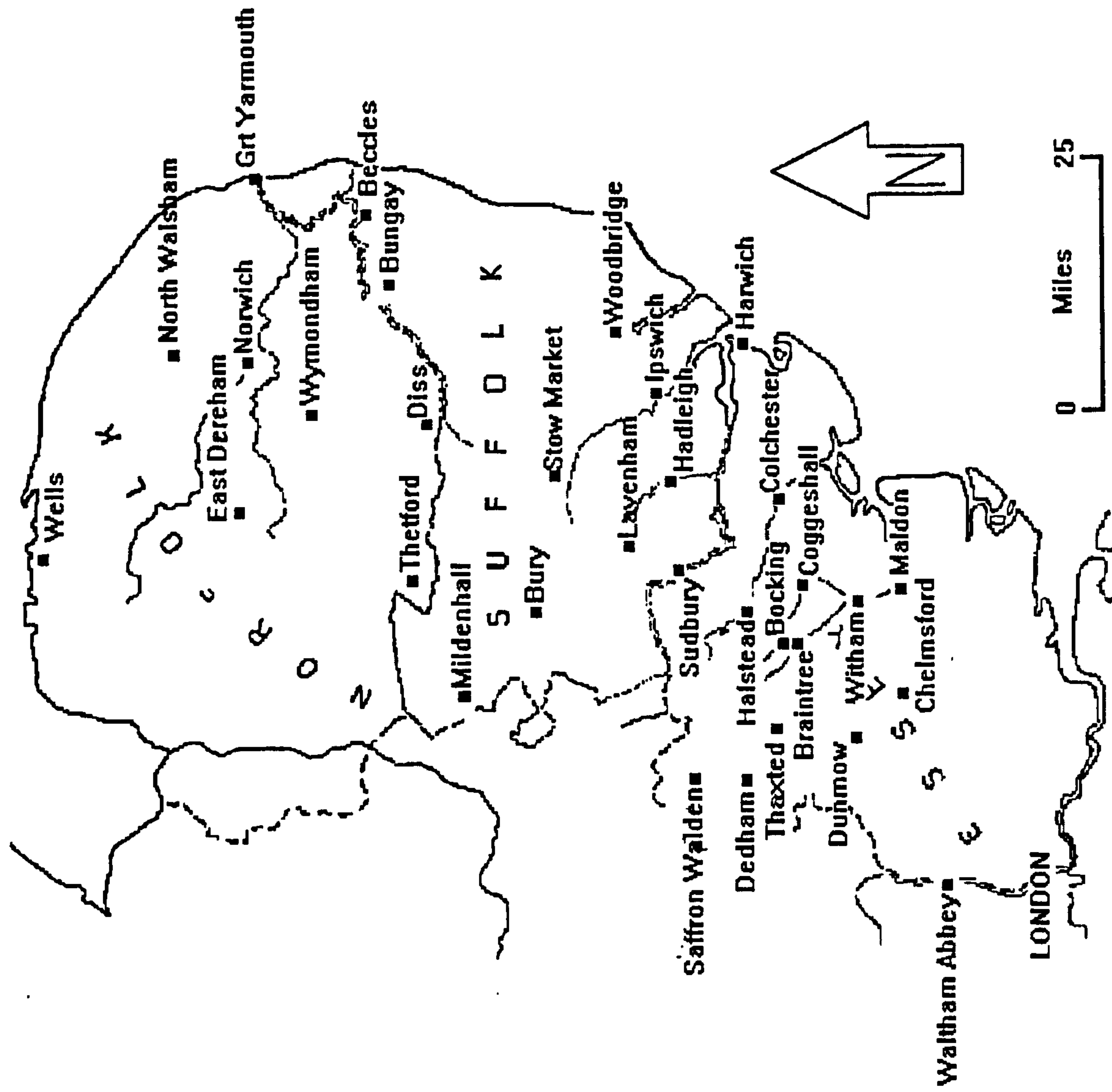
However, even with their combined populations Braintree and Bocking still represented a small town. In 1851 the population of the two parishes amounted to 8,186 souls. The same assessment can also be made for both mid-Victorian Halstead and Coggeshall. By 1851 the former possessed 6,982 people, the latter, 4,010. Using evidence from the decennial census returns, which began in 1801, figure 2.1 plots the demographic fortunes

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4. P. Clark and J. Hosking, *Population Estimates of English Small Towns, 1550-1851* (Leicester, 1993).
  5. J. Whyman, 'Industrialisation by fits and starts: the Kentish experience', in *The Onset of Industrialisation* (Nottingham, 1976), 12; C.W. Chalklin, *Seventeenth Century Kent: A Social and Economic History* (London, 1965), 32.
  6. Clark and Hosking, *Population Estimates*, i-ix.
  7. 'Bocking forms the northern suburb of Braintree', Pigot & Co., *London & Provincial Commercial Directory* (London, 1826), 519; 'The village of Bocking ... forms the northern suburb of Braintree', Pigot & Co., *National and Commercial Directory* (London, 1839), 86; 'Braintree and Bocking, though distinct parishes, form one continuous town', E. Kelly, *Post Office Directory of London and the Six Home Counties* (London, 1845), 29-30.
  8. Although the smaller, linear settlement of Bocking Church Street was located as a separate entity to the north-east of Bradford Street.



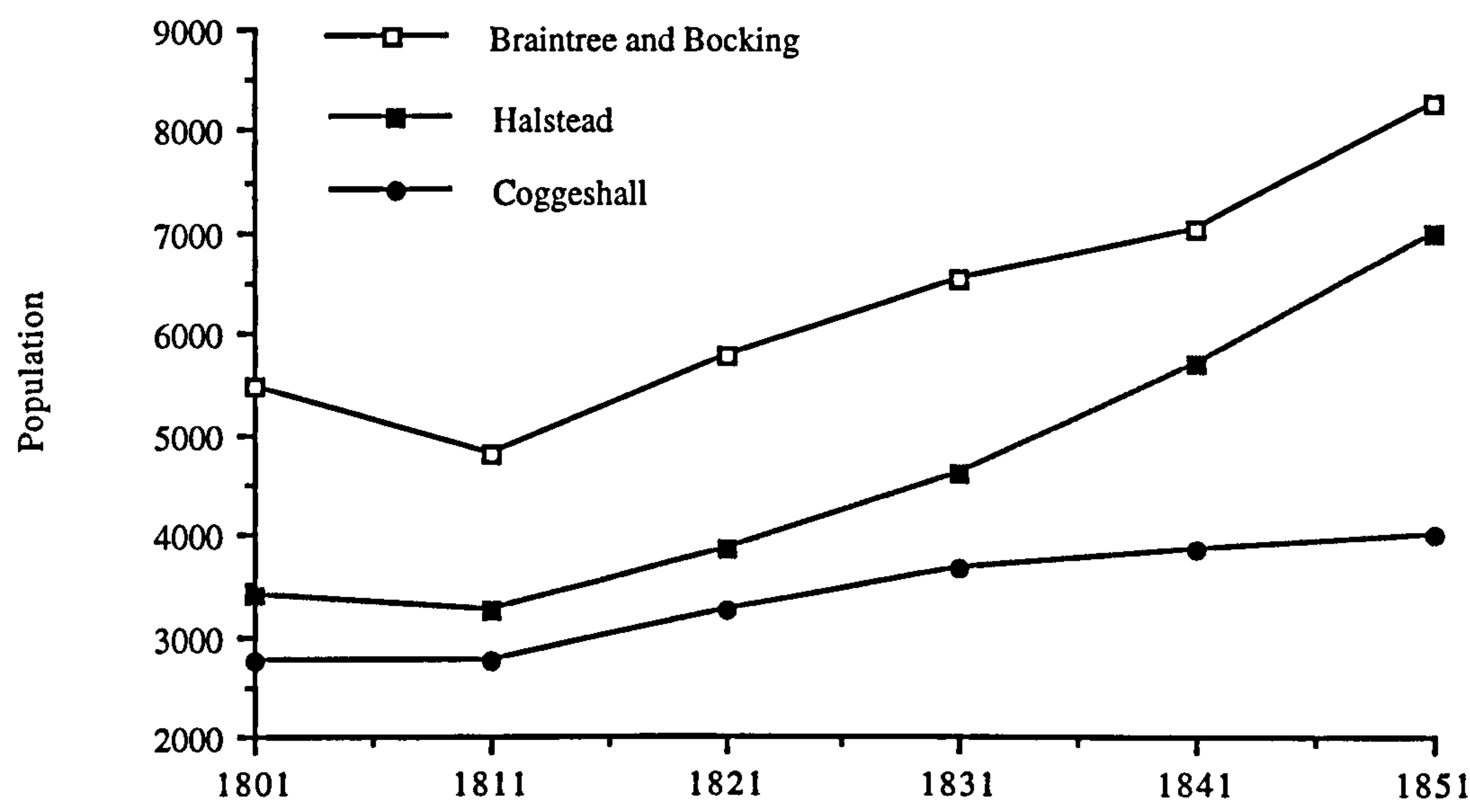
Map 2.2.

Towns with Populations of 1,000 or more, calculated from the Hearth Tax Returns of Norfolk (1664); Suffolk (1674); and Essex (1670)



of the three towns. The fall or stagnation of population growth visible in all three between 1801 and 1811 was said by the census enumerators to be caused by the decline in the wool trade. The near doubling of population in the subsequent 40 years was largely consistent with the rate of growth experienced in the county as a whole. In 1811 Essex possessed 252,473 inhabitants, by 1851 this had grown to 367,318.<sup>9</sup>

Figure 2.1 Population growth in the three north Essex cloth towns



Source: Census 1851, Population Tables, Vol. I.

Their failure to attract much contemporary attention has meant that little is known about the appearance of the case study towns before the second half of the 19th century and the arrival of Broad of Health maps, along with the early ordinance surveys. However, from the few contemporary descriptions made - principally by local antiquarians - glimpses into the physical character of these places at the start of the period can be gained. These reveal the settlements to have possessed certain common urban traits such as streets and market places. They can also be compared with accounts made in the 1830s and 1840s to give a strong impression of continuity of appearance and scale.

Writing in the early 1770s, the author of Muilman’s *History of Essex* observed of Braintree that:

The buildings are mostly old and of timber; but somewhat improved of late by a few new ones of brick and plaster. The principal street being very narrow in one part, has occasioned much complaint from the obstruction carriages sometimes meet with in their passage through it, to the great inconveniencing of travellers as well as the inhabitants.<sup>10</sup>

9. Census 1851, Population Tables, Vol. I (London, 1852), 208.  
10. *A New and Complete History of Essex from a Late Survey by a Gentlemen*, Vol. I (Chelmsford, 1771), 411. See chapter 3 for a more detailed consideration of this source.



The same author also commented of Bocking, that it extended 'into what appears to be the heart of the town of Braintree', adding that it 'consists chiefly of one street' and 'some very good houses'.<sup>11</sup> Little appeared to have changed by the time Thomas Wright described the town in 1836 as:

populous and flourishing ... this town joins Bocking ... What remains of the old town of Braintree, which forms the central part, consists of several streets, irregularly formed, and inconveniently narrow: many of the houses are ancient, and some of them built of wood.<sup>12</sup>

The descriptions offered for both Halstead and Coggeshall are even more brief. However, the same impressions of continuity in appearance and size emerge. Halstead, we learn from Muilman's author, was a 'pretty large, and populous' town, with 'some very good houses', which was judged to be 'remarkably pleasant and healthy'.<sup>13</sup> Sixty years later Thomas Wright, considered the same town to be 'irregular' consisting 'of chiefly one wide and spacious street, rising by an easy ascent from the river Colne'. Elsewhere he observed the town to contain 'many good houses.'<sup>14</sup> Similarly, in 1839 Coggeshall was described as an agreeably situated market town with several good inns.<sup>15</sup> However, accounts of the 1840s suggest that certain developments had taken place to the urban infrastructures of these towns. In 1848 Halstead was judged to be 'much improved, and many new houses erected during the last 20 years.'<sup>16</sup> By this time it also possessed a gas works, as did Coggeshall. Likewise, by the same date Braintree and Bocking boasted the construction of a new road. Yet, these were features common to other small towns, and could not disguise the predominant impression that they were, as William Wright described Coggeshall at the end of the 1840s, still very much 'small towns'.<sup>17</sup>

## II

Having confirmed their small town credentials and presented evidence of their slow growth, the question is raised as to why have these three particular Essex small towns been selected? After all, the county was well endowed with small, slow growing towns throughout the period of study. Indeed, only one established urban settlement in Essex - Colchester - failed to meet the definition of a small town. The selection of Braintree and Bocking, Halstead and Coggeshall was based on the fact that they formed a distinct class of town in Georgian and early Victorian Essex. All three possessed manufactories producing for non-local markets in an otherwise largely agrarian-based county.<sup>18</sup>

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11. *Ibid.*, 425.

12. T. Wright, *The History and Topography of the County of Essex*, Vol. II (London, 1836), 16-30.

13. *History of Essex by a Gentleman*, Vol. II (Chelmsford, 1769), 48-49.

14. Wright, *History and Topography*, Vol. I, 458.

15. Pigot & Co., *Commercial Directory* (1839), 100.

16. W. Wright, *History, Gazetteer and Directory of Essex* (Sheffield, 1848), 690-698.

17. *Ibid.*, 134.

18. Yet, by comparison with Colchester as a manufacturing centre, these places have received little attention. See N.R. Goose, 'Pre-industrial urban economies', *Urban History Yearbook* (1982), 24-30; A.F.J. Brown, *Colchester, 1815-1914* (Chelmsford, 1980); P. Sharpe, 'De-



The association of these towns with manufacturing was established long before the 18th century however. Pilgrim observed that white and coloured cloths had been made in a number of scattered towns and villages in north Essex since at least the 13th century.<sup>19</sup> Similarly, whilst acknowledging that little is known about the early development of woollen textile production in the county, Johnson observed that by 1300 Coggeshall was sending textiles to Ipswich for export.<sup>20</sup> Throughout the 14th, 15th and 16th centuries the cloth manufactories of north Essex and those across the border in south-west Suffolk, prospered. Indeed, Langton considers Essex's woollen industry to have been amongst the most important in early 16th century England.<sup>21</sup>

However, unlike most of the other cloth manufacturing districts of southern England Essex continued as an important woollen cloth producer after 1600.<sup>22</sup> Indeed, Johnson considers that Coggeshall did not enter into a 'golden age of textile production' until the end of the 16th century.<sup>23</sup> Cloth production in the Kentish Weald began to decay from the early 17th century. By the time Defoe toured the area the trade was judged to be 'now quite decay'd, and scarce ten clothiers left in all the county'.<sup>24</sup> The decline of the manufactories of Huntingdonshire and Berkshire occurred at a similar time. According to Thirsk 16th and early 17th century Berkshire had been one of England's major cloth producing counties. By 1640, however, 'decline had already set in, and was hastened by the Civil War'. Likewise, Hampshire's woollen industry appears to have decayed rapidly after the 16th century.<sup>25</sup>

Essex's more enduring association with woollen textile manufacture can be explained by the replacement of its decaying old manufactories with the New Draperies. The success with which these became established led Powell to describe later 16th century Essex as being converted into a mildly industrial region.<sup>26</sup> In the light of this Berg's assessment that Essex represented the first southern woollen manufacturing district to decline, and

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industrialisation and re-industrialisation: women's employment and the changing character of Colchester, 1700-1850', *Urban History*, 21 (1994), 77-96.

19. J.E. Pilgrim, 'The rise of the new draperies in Essex', *University of Birmingham Historical Journal*, 7 (1959-1960), 36-59.
20. C. Johnson, 'A proto-industrial community study: Coggeshall in Essex, c1500-1750' (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Essex, 1989), 8-9.
21. J. Langton, 'Industry and towns 1500-1730', in R.A. Dogshon and R.A. Butlin (eds), *An Historical Geography of England and Wales* (London, 1978), 174-75.
22. K.H. Burley, 'The economic development of Essex in the later seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries' (unpublished PhD thesis, University of London, 1957), 101-161.
23. Johnson, 'A proto-industrial community study', 50.
24. B.M. Short, 'The south east: Kent, Surrey and Sussex', in J. Thirsk (ed.), *The Agrarian History of England and Wales, 1640-1750*, Vol. V, Part 1 *Regional Farming Systems* (Cambridge, 1984), 308.
25. J.R. Wordie, 'The South', 350-353.
26. Page and Round, *Victoria County History of Essex*, 330-331. Likewise, Coleman talks about the New Draperies bringing a 'major transformation of the output of the important Suffolk-Essex industry after their arrival in the 1570s'. Those centres that took to the making of 'Dutch Bays' on a 'substantial scale' were identified as Colchester, Bocking and Coggeshall. D.C. Coleman, 'An innovation and its diffusion: the new draperies', *Economic History Review*, 22 (1969), 427.



Langton's that Essex's woollen industry had dwindled away by the early 18th, ignore the role played by the manufacture of the bays and says of the New Draperies.<sup>27</sup> Indeed, in his study of crime King offers evidence for the continued presence of these manufactories into the closing years of the 18th century. King records that in 1784 Essex cloth manufacturers made plans to establish a 'county-wide committee to combat yarn embezzlement on a statutory basis'. Similarly, clothiers were found amongst those sitting on quarter session grand juries and on the assize, whilst weavers were found amongst the less wealthy quarter session petty jurors.<sup>28</sup>

The prominence of the county's towns in the manufacture of woollen cloth has received comment from Whyman and Chalklin - both talk of 'Essex's cloth towns.'<sup>29</sup> Similarly, regarding the location of the new draperies, Thirsk noted that 'the new centres of this trade were usually revived medieval textile towns.' She also commented that the finishing processes, and even weaving, were concentrated in the towns which were supplied with yarn from dozens of country villages right across north Essex, with commercial control in the hands of urban draper.<sup>30</sup> In confirmation Defoe remarked of north Essex that 'all the towns around carry on the same trade ... of making bays which are known over most of the trading parts of Europe'.<sup>31</sup>

Pilgrim identifies the Essex towns involved in this manufacture. In the broad cloth era these consisted of the three case study towns along with Witham, all of whom were involved in the production of white cloth, as well as Colchester, Dedham and Manningtree which, along with the nearby villages of Horkesley, Langham, Boxted, concentrated on coloured cloths.<sup>32</sup> The demise of broadcloth saw a gradual disappearance of manufacturing amongst the latter group of settlements, with the exception of Colchester.<sup>33</sup> By contrast, the first group of towns, along with the provincial centre, witnessed the successful establishment of the New Draperies. The white cloth manufactories of these towns, Pilgrim argues, were organised by a smaller number of large clothiers who possessed the resources and, perhaps, less conservative outlook, to undertake the transition to the production of bays and says. In consequence, outside Colchester, the major manufacturing centres in Essex were Coggeshall, Braintree, Bocking and Halstead,

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27. M. Berg, *Age of Manufactories. Industry, Innovation and Work in Britain, 1700-1820* (London, 1985), 98-115; and Langton, 'Industry and towns 1500-1730', 174-5. Arthur Young noted in 1772 that the woollen textile industry continued in Braintree. Burley, 'The economic development of Essex', 158.

28. P. King, 'Crime, law and society in Essex, 1740-1820' (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Cambridge, 1984), 221; 313-315.

29. Whyman, 'Industrialisation by fits and starts', 12; C.W. Chalklin, *Seventeenth Century Kent: A Social and Economic History* (London, 1965), 32.

30. B.A. Holderness, 'East Anglia and the Fens', in J. Thirsk (ed.), *The Agrarian History of England and Wales*, Vol. V, Part 1, 200.

31. D. Defoe, *A Tour Through the Whole Island of Great Britain* (London, 1962), 17.

32. Pilgrim, 'The rise of the new draperies', 36.

33. Although Dedham is considered to have sustained production of traditional types of cloth for a longer period. Pilgrim, 'The rise of the new draperies', 37.



with some lesser activity in the surrounding villages and at Witham.<sup>34</sup> Likewise, in identifying the county's production centres at the start of the 18th century, Brown named Coggeshall, Halstead, Braintree and Bocking as the most important locations, with Witham, Dedham constituting minor players.<sup>35</sup>

Although uncertainties remain over the long-term causes of the decline of North Essex's woollen manufactories, something of a consensus emerges over the more immediate impact of the Napoleonic Wars.<sup>36</sup> Spain and Portugal were the district's major markets.<sup>37</sup> The disruption to overseas trade caused by the regular conflicts that raged through 18th century Europe were well known to contemporary observers. For most of the century the fairly rapid return to peace had seen the speedy recovery of these manufactories. In contrast, the more prolonged damage caused by some 20 years of conflict appears to have sounded the death knell to the majority of the districts clothiers.<sup>38</sup>

However, within a short time of the demise of wool, silk manufactories were becoming established in the three case study towns.<sup>39</sup> Indeed, one of the earliest silk manufactories appears to have been that of John Newman, who was recorded in the Bocking parish census of 1807.<sup>40</sup> This suggests some overlap between the two sets of manufactories for, at that date, woollen cloth was still being produced in Braintree and Bocking. The same census records the name of John Savill, wool merchant, along with a considerable number of weavers, spinners, and wool combers. However, by this time Savill was the last of the town's clothiers. Although his business survived the war, production was finally abandoned in 1819. Interestingly, upon winding up the business, Savill sold his mill in Bradford Street to a silk manufacturer.<sup>41</sup>

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34. *Ibid.*, 51. Pilgrim's assessment that the white cloth manufactories were controlled by a smaller group of wealthy merchants is supported by Johnson's examination of 1523 lay subsidy returns for Hadleigh, Suffolk, and Coggeshall. Johnson, 'A proto-industrial community study', 22-24.

35. A.F.J. Brown, *Essex at Work 1700-1815* (Chelmsford, 1969), 1-3. This also accords with King's study of urban prosecution associations for the second half of the 18th century. The composition of these associations reflected the commercial concerns of their communities. Whilst most were 'distributors, retailers or food processors', in Braintree and Bocking, woollen manufacturers also featured prominently. Similarly, King notes the formation, in 1786, of an informal association of Halstead and Hedingham wool manufacturers that aimed to prosecute embezzlers of yarn. King 'Crime, law and society in Essex', 196-198; 221.

36. Burley, for instance, suggests decline was the consequence of successful undercutting by foreign and domestic manufacturers, coupled with changes in fashion. Burley, 'The economic development of Essex', 159.

37. *History of Essex by a Gentleman*, Vol. I, 411.

38. See King, 'Crime, law and society in Essex', 7-10. A similar assessment is also made by Sokoll in his study of Braintree. T. Sokoll, *Household and Family Among the Poor* (Bochum, 1993), 185-190.

39. In fact the French Wars may have helped to nurture the silk trade in Essex, by protecting the infant industry from foreign imports. P. Sharpe, *Adapting to Capitalism: Working Women in the English Economy, 1700-1850*, (London, 1996), 39.

40. *A survey of the inhabitants of the town and parish of Bocking*, Essex Record Office (Hereafter ERO) D/P 268/18/1.

41. T. Rayner, 'Account of the textile industry in Bocking up to 1939' (unpublished), 74, ERO T/Z 27.



Although there is less evidence of the timing of the transition in Halstead it probably occurred at a similar date. Brown mentions the survival of wool firms into the early years of the 19th century, whilst a witness brought before a select committee of 1823 mentioned the presence of silk concerns in the town.<sup>42</sup> In Coggeshall production of wool and silk appears to have co-existed for a little longer. The 1833 Factory Returns identify a small, wool manufactory amidst a number of silk concerns.<sup>43</sup> This said, it seems likely that the dominance of silk over wool was attained in this town some 15 or more years earlier.

The silk manufacturers who arrived in north Essex came predominantly from London and, in particular, from the old silk centre of Spitalfields.<sup>44</sup> In this regard the origins of the north Essex silk industry were the same as those for the south-west Pennine towns of Macclesfield, Congleton and Leek - about which more will be said presently.

Portraits of the case study towns as early 19th century silk-producing centres are found in the work of various modern historians. Hudson, for example, refers to them as Essex's 'silk towns'.<sup>45</sup> Likewise, they received comment from contemporaries of the early and mid-19th century whose accounts, moreover, afford some guide to the importance of the industry to the towns.<sup>46</sup> Writing in 1836 Thomas Wright, observed how, like wool before it, the silk manufactories of Braintree and Bocking had enriched the town, whilst observing that in Coggeshall, 'the flourishing and extensive silk manufactories [are] what remains of the ancient clothing trade'. These manufactories, he added, 'gives this place some appearance of business and animation'.<sup>47</sup>

The replacement of wool by silk in early 19th century Essex appears to conflict with notions of *agrarianisation* advanced by Jones. In a number of pieces Jones has argued that the decline of manufacturing in southern England was the consequence of forces of comparative advantage.<sup>48</sup> The topography, labour supply conditions, as well as the

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42. Brown, *Essex at Work*, 10-15; Wages of Persons Employed in the Manufacture of Silk, and of Silk Mixed with Other Materials. Lords Committee. Minutes of Evidence: Parliamentary Papers 1823 (HL. 86) CLVI., 164 and 167. In his evidence Ambrose Moore, a Spitalfields silk manufacturer, referred to three manufacturers that had established in the county. Of these, one, described as the firm of the House of Rutter, Spieres and Field, was said to have been manufacturing at Halstead. Another, a Mr Smith, was mentioned as having conducted a manufactory at Coggeshall.

43. Return of Mills and Factories Specifying the Number of Persons Employed in Cotton, Woollen, Worsted, Flax, and Silk Factories of the United Kingdom: Parliamentary Papers 1839 (41) XLII. I, 222.

44. See L.D. Schwarz, *London in the Age of Industrialisation: Entrepreneurs, Labour Force and Living Conditions, 1700-1850* (Cambridge, 1992); F.W. Warner, *The Silk Industry of the United Kingdom: Its Origins and Development* (London, 1921).

45. P. Hudson, 'Proto-industrialisation', in *ReFRESH*, 10 (1990).

46. White, *Directory of Essex*, 37.

47. Wright, *History and Topography*, Vol. II, 16-30 and Vol. I, 262-267.

48. E.L. Jones, 'Agriculture and economic growth in England, 1660-1750: agricultural change', *Journal of Economic History*, 25 (1965), 1-18; idem, 'Agricultural origins of industry', *Past and Present*, 40 (1968), 58-71; idem, *Agriculture and the Industrial Revolution* (Oxford, 1974), 85-127; idem, 'Environment, agriculture, and industrialisation in Europe', *Agricultural History*, 51 (1977), 491-502; idem, 'De-industrialisation as economic adjustment: the case of south-west



lighter soils and the milder climate of the south made agriculture a more attractive commercial proposition than manufacture. In consequence, Jones claims that during the course of the 17th and 18th centuries labour and capital shifted out of industry and into land. Yet, as Berg noted, 'in a number of former woollen cloth manufacturing centres a series of smaller, domestic industries became established, including that of silk.'<sup>49</sup>

Moreover, the arrival of silk manufactories also contrasts with Johnson's assessment of north Essex after 1750. In his study of Coggeshall, Johnson suggests that the community 'experienced neither an industrial revolution, nor an agricultural revolution'. Instead, it 'declined and adjusted to non-industrial status', becoming largely indistinguishable from agrarian villages like Earls Colne.<sup>50</sup>

### III

The above section showed that the case study towns were distinct amongst Essex's smaller urban settlements in their possession of industry throughout the late Georgian and early Victorian era. The reason why this feature should be so intriguing for the question of urban growth is that industry in this period is strongly associated with rapid urban expansion. Indeed, industrial growth is recognised as the main force behind urban growth at this time. For example, Morris observed that

Industrialisation in Britain as in many other economies included not only change in economic structure and a sustained increase in population and per capita income, but also changes in the spatial organisation of that population which included both urban growth (an increase in the size of towns) and urbanisation (an increase in the proportion of the population living in towns).<sup>51</sup>

He added that this growth involved very few 'new towns'. In 1800 Britain was already well endowed with population centres and growth involved the development of those nuclei.

The reasons for industries converging on towns have been outlined by Morris and Rodger. These included the opportunity of better supervision in the production process as well as a variety of external economies, amongst them proximity to customer firms and a range of commercial services.

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England', *Economics Discussion Papers*, 13 (1987). Also E.J.T. Collins, 'Servicing and processing industries', in G.E. Mingay (ed.), *The Agrarian History of England and Wales 1750-1850*, Vol. VI (Cambridge, 1989), 'Introduction', 384-397.

49. Berg, *The Age of Manufactures*, 108-128.

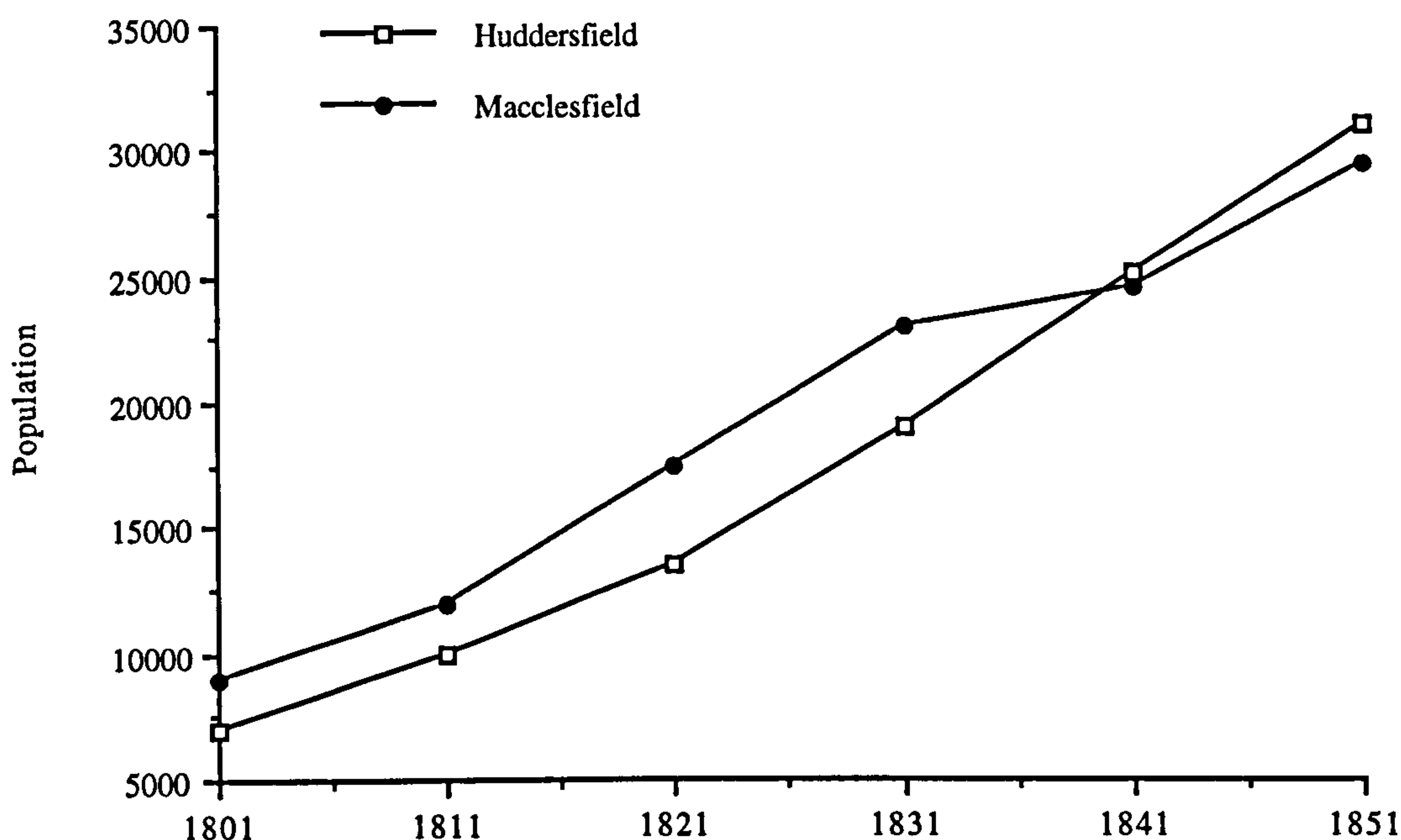
50. Johnson, 'A proto-industrial community study', 77-122.

51. R.J. Morris, 'Urbanisation', in J. Langton and R.J. Morris (eds), *Atlas of Industrialising Britain 1780-1914* (London, 1986), 164-79. The same point is also made by Morris and Rodger, 'Introduction', in R.G. Rodger and R.J. Morris (eds), *The Victorian City: A Reader in British Urban History 1820-1914*, (London, 1993), 4-6. In this, urban population growth was said to have been 'closely linked with a parallel process-industrialisation'. Similarly, Brown argues that 'the development of industry was the most important influence on English provincial urban growth'. R. Brown, *Society and Economy in Modern Britain, 1700-1850* (London, 1991), 403.



Evidence of the dramatic impact industry had on small town growth can be seen in the West Riding towns of Huddersfield, Halifax, Bradford and Wakefield, and the south-west Pennine towns of Macclesfield, Congleton and Leek. These two groups offer particularly appropriate comparisons with the case study towns because of the industries they were associated with. The chief industry in the former was woollen cloth, whereas in the latter group - as alluded to earlier - it was silk. All seven were included amongst the small towns identified by the NSTP. To offer a graphic comparison, figures 2.2 illustrates the growth rates experienced by members of these two groups over the first half of the 19th century.

Figure. 2.2 Population growth in two northern cloth towns



*Source:* Census 1851, Population Tables, Vols. I and II.<sup>52</sup>

Contemporaries were also very aware that such rapid urban growth was caused by industry. In presenting evidence for the 1823 Lords Committee on wages in silk manufacture, the Macclesfield solicitor, Thomas Grimsditch, identified the silk trade as the catalyst for the dramatic growth in population the town had experienced over the previous twenty years. He considered it to be the 'principal, almost only, Trade of the Town', adding that beside the weavers 'a great Number of the Population of Macclesfield are employed in the throwing and twisting, and other Acts of Preparation of the Silk before it comes to the Loom'.<sup>53</sup> Similarly, in commenting on the growth in and around

52. The population figures relate to the townships of Huddersfield and Macclesfield.

53. Asked by the 1823 Lords committee to state the increase of the population of Macclesfield during the previous 20 years, Grimsditch observed that whilst in 1801 'it did not exceed Eight thousand three or four hundred', by the next census 'it had increased to 12,000 and upwards' and by 1821

Huddersfield the census enumerators' of 1831 observed, 'The increase of population in most of the Townships of the District is attributed to the prosperity of the manufacturing interests, and the facilities of communication afforded by the construction of railways; the decrease in a few places arises principally from removals to the manufacturing Towns.'<sup>54</sup>

Despite the presence of industry the growth rates experienced by the Essex case study towns were in sharp contrast to those for the two groups just considered. Figure 2.3 illustrates this by comparing the mean annual compound growth rates experienced by the north Essex towns for the first 50 years of the century, against those calculated for the other seven towns. In general, the case study towns grew at half the annual rate experienced by most of the others, a third that of Huddersfield and less than a quarter of that for Bradford.

One way of assessing what these differences in annual compound growth rates indicate is to illustrate the growing difference in population size between the Essex towns and those of the West Riding and south-west Pennines. This can be done by expressing the difference in population size as a percentage. For example, the population of Huddersfield township at the 1801 census was 32.1 percent larger than that of Braintree and Bocking (7,268 compared to 5,501). By 1851, however, the difference had escalated to over 277 percent (30,880 compared to 8,186). Even more dramatic was the growing difference between Braintree and Bocking and Bradford. In 1801 it was calculated at only 16.2 percent, with the West Riding town the slightly larger with a population of 6,393. By 1851 Bradford possessed 52,493 souls, a difference with Braintree and Bocking that had grown to over 541 percent. Amongst the silk towns, the same trends were evident. In 1801 Congleton returned a population just under 30 percent less than Braintree and Bocking, at 3,861, by 1851 it was 28.5 percent larger, at 10,520. Similarly, Macclesfield was 59 percent larger than Braintree and Bocking in 1801 (8,743) and over 262 percent (29,648) bigger just 50 years later.

Even when compared with other Essex settlements the case study towns were far from displaying abnormal rates of growth during the 1820s, 1830s and 1840s, as figure 2.4 displays. This compares average growth rates for the three case study towns with the suburbanising settlement of West Ham, the fishing town of Barking, the market town of Saffron Walden and Dedham - a town that had lost many of its marketing functions by the early 19th century.

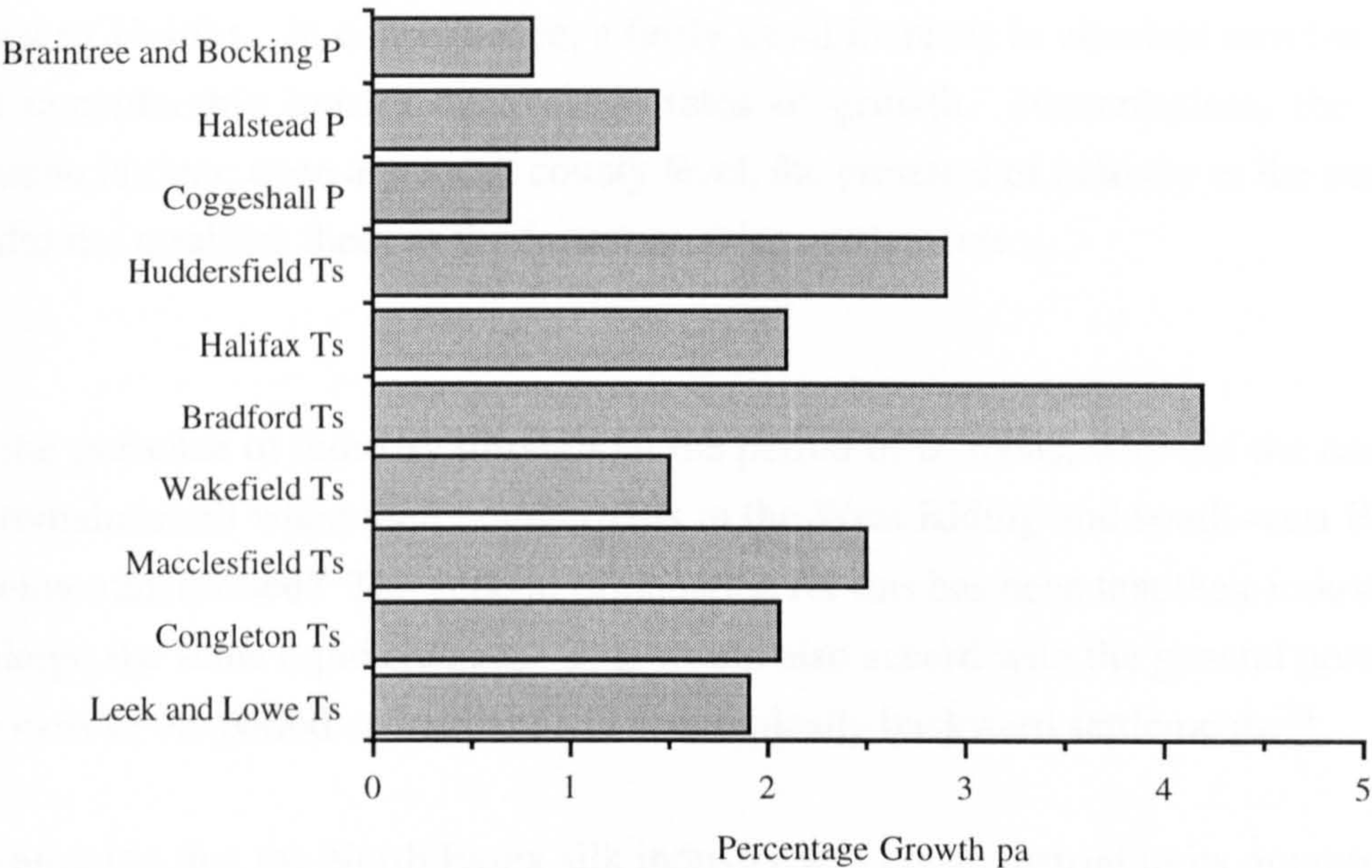
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'the Population was 17,800 within the Borough only [and] not less than 24,000', if the two other townships, which formed an integral part of the town, were included. Lords Committee. Minutes of Evidence: P.P. 1823 (HL. 86) CLVI, 196.

54. Census 1851, Population Tables, Vol. II. For the town of Leek, likewise, the 1831 enumerators recorded that, 'The increase of population is attributed partly to the success of the silk manufacture.' Census 1851, Population Tables, Vol. I. For an account of the growth of the West Riding industry and its impact on the region's towns see D. Hey, 'The textile industries', in *idem*, *Yorkshire from A.D. 1000* (London, 1986), 230-265.

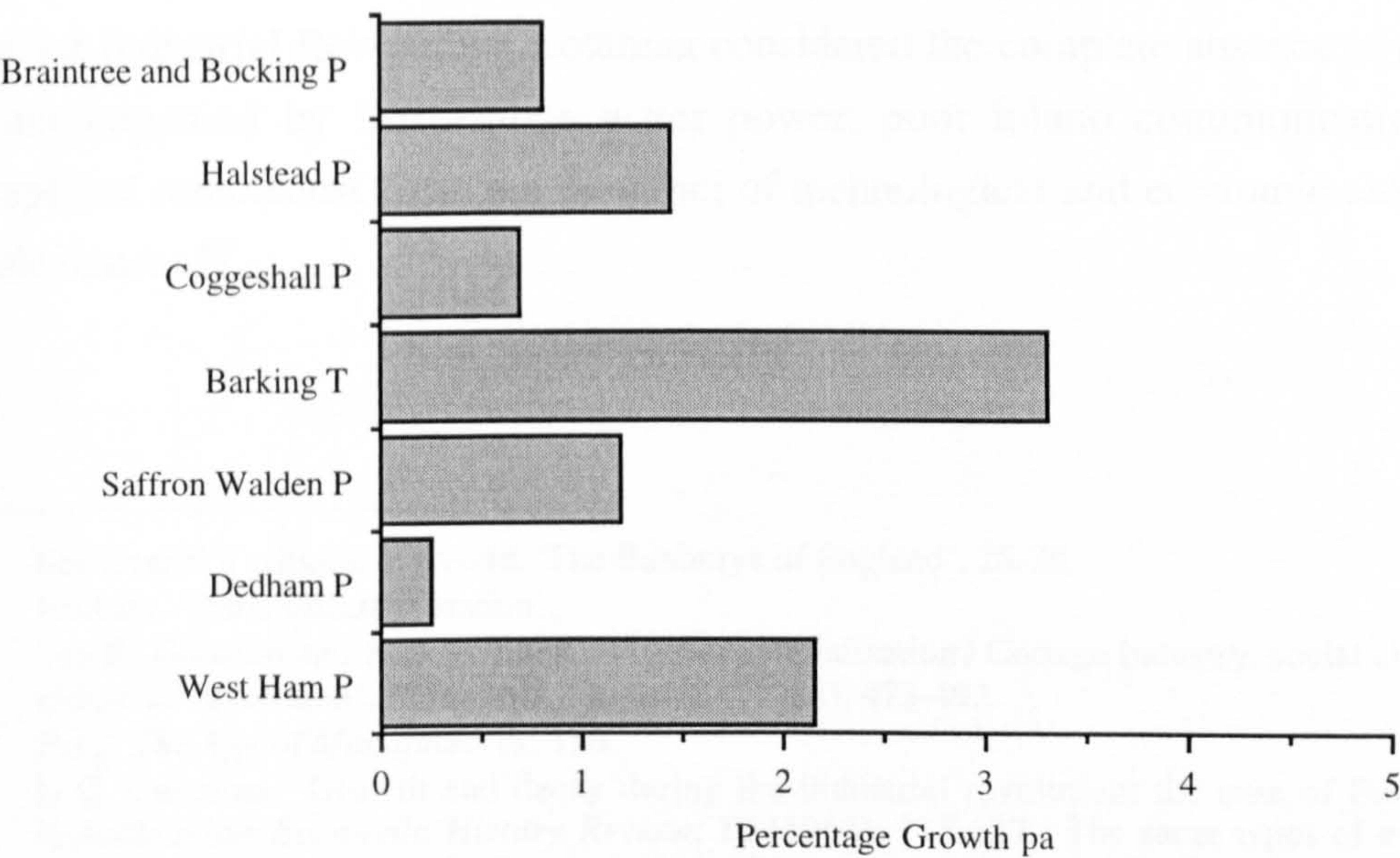


Figure 2.3 Population growth rates in selected cloth towns: north Essex, the West Riding of Yorkshire and the south-west Pennines, 1801-1851



*Notes:* P - Parish population; Ts - Township population. The township represents a smaller unit of measurement than the parish. This contrast in the two was particularly prominent in the West Riding. For example, in 1851 Halifax parish measured 75,740 acres, compared with the town area of just 990. The latter had a population of 25,077 compared to the 149,257 of the former.  
*Source:* Census 1851, Population Tables, Vols. I and II.

Figure. 2.4 Population growth rates in selected Essex settlements, 1801-1851



*Source:* Census 1851, Population Tables, Vol. I.



The rates of growth experienced by Barking, as well as West Ham, at 2.30 and 2.15 per annum respectively, may be misleading when compared to those of Halifax, Wakefield, Congleton and Leek. The former were starting from a lower point in terms of their total populations. In 1801 Barking's population was only 1,585 - half that of Leek's and a sixth that of Halifax. In consequence, a fairly small increase in absolute numbers would have a considerable impact on average rates of growth. Nevertheless, the general observation is clear; even at a local, county level, the presence of industry in the case study towns did not establish them as the fastest growing settlements.

#### IV

Given the presence of industry throughout the period of analysis, why did the case study towns remain small when their counterparts in the West Riding and south-west Pennines were being transformed? The general explanation for this has been that their industries did not undergo the same rapid changes. This would also accord with the general portrayal of small towns in the period as stagnant and economically backward settlements.<sup>55</sup>

The impression that the North Essex silk industry was pre-industrial in its organisation is supported by Hudson. Amongst the examples she offers of domestic manufacturing - where production takes place in workers' homes and is organised by merchants - were East Anglian textiles and Essex silk.<sup>56</sup> Similarly, Houston and Snell present Essex silk as a case of 'rural domestic industry'.<sup>57</sup> Even Berg in her critique of comparative advantage considers the Essex silk industry to have operated on a domestic basis and, moreover, to have been considerably poorer and smaller than its woollen predecessor.<sup>58</sup>

The reasons for the apparent failure of the Essex silk manufactories to undergo industrial transformation are well rehearsed. In explaining the decline of industry in East Anglia during the Industrial Revolution, Coleman considered the complete absence of coal and iron, accompanied by 'inadequate water power, poor inland communications, and geographical remoteness from the new foci of technological and economic change', as possible causes.<sup>59</sup>

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55. See Everitt's critique in Everitt, 'The Banburys of England', 28-38.

56. Hudson, 'Proto-industrialisation'.

57. See R. Houston and K.D.M. Snell, 'Proto-industrialisation? Cottage industry, social change, and industrial revolution', *Historical Journal*, 27 (1984), 473-492.

58. Berg, *The Age of Manufactures*, 116.

59. D.C. Coleman, 'Growth and decay during the industrial revolution: the case of East Anglia', *Scandinavian Economic History Review*, 10 (1962), 115-127. The same types of explanation have been offered in the more recent work of Fisher and Havinden for the 'once-powerful cloth industry of the south-west'. S. Fisher and M. Havinden, 'The long-term evolution of the economy of south west England (from autonomy to dependence)', in M. Havinden, J. Quéniart and J. Stanyer (eds), *Centre et Périphérie: A Comparative Study of Brittany and Cornwall and Devon* (Exeter, 1991), 80.



However, in the case of the north Essex towns such explanations appear to be based on a false premise. The silk industry of Essex was, in many respects, comparable in its organisation to that of Macclesfield. Whilst there were businesses putting out work, others were operating from factories.

The evidence for this derives from Parliamentary papers.<sup>60</sup> First, a number of businesses were recorded as London based concerns giving out-work to weavers operating from their own cottages. Examples of the same were to be found in Macclesfield. For the case study these businesses included: Remington and Mills; Carter and Vavasour; and Daniel Walters in Braintree and Bocking; Westmacott and Goodson and William Beckwith in Coggeshall; and Thomas Field Gibson in Halstead.<sup>61</sup> However, at least one of these, William Beckwith, had established a non-integrated factory in which weavers were paid 1s. a week for 'loom and loom-standing'.<sup>62</sup> In addition, the reports show other manufacturers resided in the towns. These included John Hall of Coggeshall and the Courtaulds in Braintree and Bocking. Both businesses gave outwork to weavers, with the latter the owner of 20 weavers cottages.<sup>63</sup> Beside this, however, both were involved in factory production. The 1832 Report on the Silk Trade recorded Hall as the owner of a factory containing 100 looms. These consisted of 30 rack and bar looms and 70 broad looms, which appear to have been powered by hand.<sup>64</sup> The Courtaulds operated a similar factory. This company also came to possess 'a factory for power-loom weaving' at Halstead, whilst Hall had constructed a silk throwing mill in Coggeshall by 1838.<sup>65</sup>

As with manufacturing organisation, the silk manufacturers of these towns varied widely in the numbers they employed. Some were fairly modest enterprises. William Beckwith, for example, 'had about a score of looms', whilst Messrs. Westmacott and Goodson were said to employ from 60 to 70 looms.<sup>66</sup> Others, however, operated on a grander scale. Thomas Field Gibson gave work to nearly 200 hands in Halstead, some 270 people worked in Hall's throwing factory according to the 1833 Factory Returns, whilst the Courtaulds employed 441 hand loom weavers - a figure that does not include the power loom weavers of Halstead.<sup>67</sup> Similarly, the 1834 Report on Children's Employment showed that some of these businesses were expanding at considerable rates. The Courtaulds first occupied an old building at Braintree in 1816. This was soon followed by the conversion of an old water bay mill in 1819, the construction of a mill at Halstead in

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60. A source which will be considered and employed in greater detail in Chapter 6.

61. Handloom Weavers: Assistant Commissioners' Reports: P.P. 1840 (43.1.) XXIII, 286, 288, 293.

62. Handloom Weavers Reports: P.P. 1840 (43.1.) XXIII, 289.

63. Report from the Select Committee on the Present State of the Silk Trade: Parliamentary Papers 1831-32 (678.) XIX, 378; Handloom Weavers Reports: P.P. 1840 (43. 1.) XXIII, 288. The Report notes that Hall 'had at one time weaving shops'.

64. Silk Trade: P.P. 1831-32 (678.) XIX, 378.

65. Handloom Weavers Reports: P.P. 1840 (43.1.) XXIII, 288.

66. *Ibid.*

67. *Ibid.*, 293, 287.



1825, and the erection of further mills in Braintree and Bocking in 1826, 1830 and 1832. Moreover, the same report shows that steam-power was being applied at a date comparable to that in the mills of Macclesfield. The first steam powered mill was erected at Braintree and Bocking in 1826, at Halstead in 1832 and, according to the 1840 report, at Coggeshall in 1838.<sup>68</sup>

The evidence from the Parliamentary papers also indicated that, far from appearing backward and slow to adapt, these enterprises were innovative. The 1840 Handloom Weavers Report identified that Messrs Brown and Moy, operating a large silk-throwing mill at Colchester, were employing Courtauld's patent spindles.<sup>69</sup> Similarly, Hall's evidence in the 1834 report suggests he was introducing power looms into his mills some time before they were to be found in the mills of Coventry.<sup>70</sup>

An awareness of the level of development and organisation which the Essex silk industry had acquired by the late 1830s, led John Booker to claim that the industry constituted the one direct connection between Essex and the Industrial Revolution.<sup>71</sup> In this respect, he considered it to offer the one local case of a transition from domestic production to the factory system. The example Booker offers for this is that of John Hall. 'In 1838, when John Hall had built his ... silk factory in Coggeshall, he sold off his [workers] cottages ... Hall's steam factory, apparently known as the Crouch Factory in 1839 and later as the Orchard Mill, was ... a conscious and emphatic move to the factory system.'<sup>72</sup>

In terms of the impact of such developments on their host towns, Booker considers Coggeshall to have formed an industrialised town by the late 1830s. Not only could it boast Hall's works, 'the show piece of Coggeshall', but also a silk throwing concern in Back Lane set up by William and Charles Beckwith in about 1827, and a factory in the Gravel which, from 1839, was owned and operated by Westcott, Goodson and Co., in addition to two iron-founders which would have served these businesses.<sup>73</sup>

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68. Supplementary Reports from Commissioners Appointed to Collect Information in the Manufacturing Districts, Relative to Employment of Children in Factories, 1834 (2530) XX.1, 123. Answers of Messrs. Courtauld and Co., Braintree, Question 3, which concerned the date that each works was erected and the time when first employed; Handloom Weavers Reports: P.P. 1840 (43.1) XXIII, 288.

69. Handloom Weavers Reports: P.P. 1840 (43.1) XXIII, 291.

70. Report on Children's Employment: P.P. 1834 (2530) XX.I, 377-380.

71. J. Booker, *Essex and the Industrial Revolution* (Chelmsford, 1974), 61.

72. Although Booker acknowledges that 'At Braintree the move to factory premises was even earlier'. *Ibid.*, 55.

73. Indeed, with regard to the latter, Booker considered that 'The presence of two ironfounders in a town of that size, at that date, is evidence of its industrialisation.' *Ibid.*, 58.



## **Conclusion and Hypothesis**

This thesis is concerned with explaining the slow rate of growth experienced by the three north Essex towns of Braintree and Bocking, Coggeshall and Halstead during the period from the late 18th to the mid-19th century. In their demographic fortunes they were comparable to many of the country's other small, unincorporated towns. Indeed, the late 18th and early 19th century has been associated with the marginalisation of most of England's small towns as they failed to retain their share of the urban population. However, what makes the question of slow growth of particular interest in the study of the three north Essex towns is the presence of industry in them. The same kinds of industry were found to have been responsible for the dramatic growth experienced by a number of their counterparts in the West Riding of Yorkshire and the south-west Pennines. Why, then, did the same not occur to the towns of north Essex?

Views that industry in the north Essex towns was less developed have not been supported by examination of contemporary sources. In terms of organisation and level of development, the industry in north Essex appears to have been comparable with that in towns which experienced rapid demographic growth. In fact, the three case study towns appear to offer instances of industrialisation without accompanying rapid urban growth.

Faced with this evidence an alternative explanation must be sought. The thesis will advance the hypothesis that important differences existed in economic orientation between the north Essex cloth towns and their rapidly growing counterparts in the West Riding of Yorkshire and south-west Pennines. Whilst the latter specialised in textile manufacturing, driven by the demands of London marketing and thoroughfare functions formed the staples of the north Essex towns. From this derives the supposition that it was the dominance of these other commercial activities which operated to restrain the extent to which the manufactories of the north Essex towns grew. The rest of the thesis will be devoted to assessing the validity of this as an explanation of the economic history of the cloth towns of north Essex in the industrial age.

# Part II



## CHAPTER 3

### THE ECONOMIES OF THE NORTH ESSEX CLOTH TOWNS, c.1770-1811

#### Introduction

Chapter 1 demonstrated that little work has been undertaken into the fortunes of the small, slow growing towns of late Georgian and early Victorian England. Various explanations were proffered which might account for this neglect. Whatever the reasons, Everitt's view that these places have been considered as economic backwaters would still seem to be reflected in the lack of research they have generated in the last 20 years.<sup>1</sup> In chapter 2 the three slow growing small towns of the case study were identified - the north Essex towns of Braintree and Bocking, Coggeshall and Halstead. This chapter also presented evidence that these towns possessed manufactories whose development was similar to those in places that qualified as small towns at the end of the 17th century but experienced rapid growth during the late 18th and early 19th centuries. From this comparison it was suggested that the north Essex towns represented instances of industrial development without accompanying rapid urban growth. The concern of this study is to explain this phenomenon. To this end chapter 2 advanced an hypothesis that in their economic orientation the north Essex cloth towns differed from their rapidly expanding counterparts in the West Riding of Yorkshire and south west Pennines.

This chapter begins the examination of the urban economies of the case study towns. Here attention will be focused on the period from c1770 through to the second decade of the 19th century. As outlined in chapter 2, this period is associated with woollen textile production. At its start the towns still represented important woollen manufacturing centres. However, by the beginning of the 19th century these manufactories were in sharp decline and soon after silk manufactories began to arrive. In focusing on the late 18th and very early 19th centuries this chapter will, therefore, be concerned with the urban economies of the case study towns in the generation that saw the last days of woollen textile production.

The intention of this chapter is to refute the perception of these places as principally manufacturing sites. The small, unincorporated towns found in the manufacturing belts of southern England have been considered as pseudo-urban.<sup>2</sup> Their urban status is judged to have been achieved through the presence of manufacturing. These manufactories accounted for the concentration of population, whilst also generating wealth that was invested in houses, churches, and cloth halls which helped nurture their appearance as

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1. A. Everitt, 'The Banburys of England', *Urban History Yearbook* (1974), 28-38.
  2. G.D. Ramsay, *The English Woollen Industry, 1500-1750* (London, 1982), 23-31.



towns.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, Johnson has argued that as Coggeshall's woollen manufactories declined economically the settlement become largely indistinguishable from north Essex villages like Earls Colne.<sup>4</sup>

Against this it will be argued that the settlements of the case study possessed other functions which, moreover, were of greater significance to their economic welfare than manufacturing. In this respect it will be shown that the economies of the case study towns differed from towns such as Halifax and Bradford with their greater orientation to wool. Moreover, even as their woollen textile manufactories declined the strength of their other economic functions ensured that the case study settlements retained their urban status. To undertake this the study will use a new methodology to examine a neglected source - the first generation of national trade directories. To this end the chapter will be divided into three sections, reflecting the three types of information contained in the source. The first of these will consider town descriptions, the second information on markets and transport networks, and the third the composition of those identified as 'principal inhabitants'. The final section will be completed by advancing a method for linking economic descriptions to the trades displayed by these 'principal inhabitants'. To comply with the other joint aim of the study the value of each of the three types of information will be considered with regard to the wider study of the late 18th and early 19th century small town. Before this may be undertaken, consideration of the source and the approach to be adopted must be made.

### **Source and Approach: The First Generation of National Trade Directories, 1784-1811**

One of the reasons offered for the paucity of investigations into the economies of England's small towns during the 18th and early 19th centuries concerns the lack of available primary source material. This feature was commented upon by Lewis.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, an argument was advanced in Chapter 1 suggesting that, although generally poor, the situation may have become acute during the later 18th century.

Countering this, however, is the emergence of a relatively new source - the trade directory. The first directory appeared in 1677. Entitled *A Collection of the Names of the Merchants Living in and about the City of London*, it was compiled by Samuel Lee and was produced as a purely commercial venture, recording the names and addresses of some 1,950 London wholesale merchants and traders. Outside London, the first directories to

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3. Along similar lines Johnson has argued that in Coggeshall the expansion of textile production in the late 16th and early 17th centuries led to population growth, which encouraged local market gardening, dairy production, and the development of fisheries, as well as brewing, victualling and alehouse keeping, all of which contributed to the expansion of the weekly market. C. Johnson, 'A proto-industrial community study: Coggeshall in Essex, c1500-c1750', (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Essex, 1989), 42-50; 110-119.
  4. Johnson, 'A proto-industrial community study', 122.
  5. S. Lewis, 'An historical and geographical study of the small towns of Shropshire 1600-1800' (unpublished PhD thesis, Leicester University, 1990), 2.



appear were for Birmingham in 1763, and Manchester in 1772.<sup>6</sup> Other centres of early coverage included Bristol (1775) and Liverpool (1766). From the 1780s the publication of town directories quickened in momentum.<sup>7</sup>

The potential of directories in the examination of the economies of larger provincial centres was explored by Corfield and Kelly. They concluded that these publications constitute a 'relevant source for the study of towns and their networks', being able to offer an insight into the occupations of the urban commercial and industrial elite, along with details about multiple employment, the existence and identification of firms, and the economic activity of women which they considered to be 'often unrecorded in other sources in this period'.<sup>8</sup>

However, whilst directories devoted to single settlements were mainly confined to larger towns, three sets of national directories included smaller members of the urban fraternity. The first of these was William Bailey's *British Directory*. This was published in 1784 and appeared in four volumes. Volume I covered London and its environs; volume II encompassed 14 counties in the west and in the southern midlands; volume III covered 13 northern counties; and volume IV, *The Eastern Directory*, produced in September of 1784, included the 'principal' towns in 11 eastern counties.<sup>9</sup>

The second of these national directories was Barfoot and Wilkes's *Universal British Directory of Trade, Commerce, and Manufacture* [hereafter UBD]. This was an even larger undertaking. It was published in five volumes with three supplements. Volumes II to IV, published between 1794 and 1798, covered provincial settlements alphabetically.<sup>10</sup>

The next, and final attempt, at a national directory was Holden's *Annual London and Country Directory of the United Kingdoms and Wales*. Despite the title only one directory was published, that in 1811. It appeared in three volumes. The first dealt with London, the second with larger provincial towns - referred to, on the index page, as 'Manufacturing and Commercial Towns'. The latter were arranged in alphabetical order, from Aberdeen to York. With regard to the comparisons made in the introduction, Halifax, Huddersfield, Wakefield and Bradford were amongst the towns included in this volume, Colchester was the one Essex representative here. The third volume dealt with smaller towns. Again

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6. J.E. Norton, *Guide to National and Provincial Directories of England and Wales, Excluding London Published Before 1856* (London, 1950), 1-24.

7. See P.J. Corfield and S. Kelly, 'Giving directions to the town: the early town directories', *Urban History Yearbook* (1984), 22-35; Norton, *Guide to Directories*, 1-24.

8. Corfield and Kelly, 'Giving directions', 32.

9. Norton, *Guide to Directories*, 31.

10. Vol. I, published in 1790, dealt with London and its environs; Vol. II, published in 1797, and the first of the provincial directories, covered settlements beginning with the letter A through to D; Vol. III, published paradoxically three years earlier in 1794, dealt with Es to Ms; Vol. IV, published in 1798, with Ns to Ys; and Vol. V, which also appeared in 1798, as an appendix, covered a range of settlements not included in the earlier volumes, again arranged in alphabetical order. The complete work was said, by its compilers, to include 'all the cities, towns, and principal villages ... of the country'. See also Norton, *Guide to Directories*, 32-36.



these appeared in alphabetical order and were said, on the title page, to number upwards of 300 towns.

With the completion of this work Holden continued as a directory publisher. However, his subsequent publications, numbering four and appearing between 1814 and 1816, were confined to the recording of particular traders.<sup>11</sup> The next generation of directory compilers to cover small towns was led by Pigot and Slater. Their sets of commercial directories, each covering certain groups of counties, can be said to constitute a new development in the evolution of directories. The depth of coverage was rather greater than that of their predecessors. They employed skilled agents to collect information, and the commercial success they achieved stimulated the production of further editions for the same places. These distinguishing features warrant a separate examination of this source and offer the potential to develop a different methodology for their use in analysing small town economies. This will be undertaken in the next chapter.

Unlike the recent attention awarded to late 18th and early 19th century town directories, the value of the first generation of national directories for examining small towns remains comparatively unexplored. There are three distinct types of data discernible in the directories. First, settlement descriptions; second, details of market days and communications; and third, lists of some of the local inhabitants.

The next concern in assessing the potential of these directories, and the methods by which they may be employed to investigate the economies of the case study towns, is to consider the extent of their coverage. Based on contemporary descriptions and population estimates the National Small Towns Project identified 31 small towns in Essex at the start of the 19th century.<sup>12</sup> Table 3.1 identifies these and records, by an 'x', which ones were included in the three directories.

As the table indicates, the extent of small town coverage varied considerably over the three directories. Holden's offered the most restricted coverage, referring to only five small towns. Bailey's was rather more extensive in its inclusion of 11. However, the UBD in recording details for 19 towns was clearly the most extensive. The table also shows that the actual towns covered varied considerably between the three directories. Only the

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11. That of 1814, for example, listed 'calico, cotton, silk, woollen & ... other connected manufacturers & tradesmen ... in London & 455 ... Towns'. Norton, *Guide to Directories*, 42-43.

12. P. Clark and J. Hosking, *Population Estimates of English Small Towns, 1550-1851* (Leicester, 1993), 49-56. To meet the Project's criteria for inclusion a small town had, first, to be identified as a town in the late 17th and early 19th century; and second, to return a population of less than about 2,500 for the late 17th century and less than 5,000 at the start of the 19th. For the earlier period the sources used for contemporary identification were Roger Blome's *Britannia*, 1673, and John Adams's *Index Villaris* of 1680. For the latter, a range of directories were consulted, including the UBD and the *London Post Office Directory*, 1801. Population evidence was calculated from the Hearth Taxes returns of the 1660s and early 1670s, in conjunction with the 1676 Compton Census and, for the 19th century, the 1811 and 1851 census returns.



county town of Chelmsford, along with Romford and Harwich, were included in all three publications. A slightly larger number were recorded in two of the three. Epping, Great Dunmow, Harlow, Maldon and Witham were all recorded in both Bailey's *Directory* and the UBD. No towns appear to have been covered by the UBD and Holden's alone. However, most towns, numbering 16, appeared in just one of the three directories. These were Billericay, Braintree, Brentwood, Chipping Ongar, Coggeshall, Dedham, Grays Thurrock, Halstead, Castle Hedingham, Horndon on the Hill, Manningtree, Rochford, Saffron Walden, Thaxted and Waltham Holy Cross.

Table 3.1 Directory coverage of Essex small towns, 1784-1811

| Town                | Bailey's | UBD | Holden's |
|---------------------|----------|-----|----------|
| Barking             |          |     |          |
| Billericay          |          | X   |          |
| Bocking             |          |     |          |
| Braintree           |          |     | X        |
| Brentwood           |          | X   |          |
| Burnham             |          |     |          |
| Chelmsford          | X        | X   | X        |
| Chipping Ongar      |          | X   |          |
| Coggeshall          | X        |     |          |
| Dedham              |          | X   |          |
| Epping              | X        | X   |          |
| Grays Thurrock      |          | X   |          |
| Great Burstead      |          |     |          |
| Great Bardfield     |          |     |          |
| Great Dunmow        | X        | X   |          |
| Halstead            |          | X   |          |
| Harlow              | X        | X   |          |
| Harwich             | X        | X   | X        |
| Hatfield BroadOak   |          |     |          |
| Castle Hedingham    |          | X   |          |
| Horndon on the Hill |          | X   |          |
| Maldon              | X        | X   |          |
| Manningtree         |          | X   |          |
| Rayleigh            |          |     |          |
| Rochford            |          | X   |          |
| Romford             | X        | X   | X        |
| Saffron Walden      |          |     | X        |
| St. Osyth           |          |     |          |
| Thaxted             |          | X   |          |
| Waltham Holy Cross  | X        |     |          |
| Witham              | X        | X   |          |

*Sources:* Bailey, *British Directory*, (1784); Barfoot and Wilkes, *Universal British Directory of Trade, Commerce, and Manufacture* (1794-98); Holden, *Annual London and Country Directory of the United Kingdoms and Wales* (1811).

In total, 23 of the county's small towns were included in at least one of the three directories, while eight were not mentioned at all. Three explanations for these absentees can be suggested. First, amongst the eight were three of the smallest towns in the county.



According to the 1801 census, Burnham's population was just over 1,000; St Osyth's 1,168; and Rayleigh's 897.<sup>13</sup> Perhaps their diminutive size failed to attract the attention of the various directory compilers. The second reason may relate to county boundaries. Perhaps Barking's exclusion reflected its proximity to, and close commercial associations with, London? The town was located in the far south-western corner of the county and functioned as the capital's main fishing port. Similarly, Hatfield Broadoak's absence may be tied to its location on the boarder between Essex and Hertfordshire. This may have raised uncertainties about its county affiliations, and inclusion as an Essex settlement. The third explanation for absence relates to contemporary definitions of what constituted a distinct and separate settlement. According to the 1801 census Great Burstead was not considered a town, but a parish in which the hamlet of Billericay was located. For this and the censuses of 1811, 1821, and 1831, the populations of Great Burstead parish and Billericay hamlet were given as one. A similar observation may also be made for Braintree and Bocking.<sup>14</sup>

Table 3.1 does not, however, contain all the Essex settlements covered in the directories. Colchester received detailed consideration in all three, whilst the UBD also paid attention to Ingatestone, Sible Hedingham, Earls Colne, Mistley and Bardfield. Colchester does not appear because it does not meet the criteria for being a small town: it had a population of over 11,500 in 1801 and was more than three times the size of Chelmsford, the county town. By contrast, the five other settlements recorded in the UBD were described in the directory as 'villages'.

The UBD's inclusion of various Essex villages raises the question of whether an examination of small towns alone offers an adequate picture of the county's main centres of non-agrarian, commercial activity. It is a question of some importance to this chapter since one of the principal aims is to consider whether the case study towns are best portrayed as a distinct cluster of cloth making centres or as part of a wider urban network of marketing and thoroughfare centres. Given that, particularly from the later 18th century, a considerable amount of development was occurring outside the county's small town network, it was decided to also include, where available, references to other settlements. Not only does this include Colchester and the five other settlements detailed in the UBD but also places supplied with settlement descriptions but not lists of principal inhabitants. Amongst these are the south western villages of West Ham, Wanstead and Woodford.

The varying levels of directory coverage illustrated in table 3.1 raise specific methodological implications for an investigation centred on the three case study towns. In none of the directories were town descriptions, lists of principal inhabitants along with

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13. Census 1851, Population Tables, Vol. I.

14. See chapter 2.



marketing and communication details, offered for all three cloth towns. Bailey's contained lists of inhabitants and market day details for only Coggeshall; Holden's did the same for Braintree (and Bocking), with the addition of evidence on transport links; and whilst the UBD presented town descriptions and market day details for all three, it, likewise, only offered a list of the principal inhabitants and details of communications for Halstead.

Three methodological approaches have been devised to take account of these features and will form the three main sections of the chapter. In the first approach an examination of settlement descriptions will be undertaken. The UBD will be the principal source used since Bailey's affords no descriptions and Holden's offers only a few very brief observations. The UBD's descriptions usually commenced with the settlement's locational and topographical details which, most importantly for this study, were followed by an account of the nature and state of trade and business. The last section tended to be reserved for an account of local antiquities. Since the UBD made descriptions for all three case study towns, along with the rest of the county's urban fraternity and a number of its larger villages, this will offer a detailed introduction to the settlements under examination and an opportunity to place them in their local setting. A comparison with settlement descriptions in other sources will be used to assess the value of the UBD as a qualitative source, and its distinguishing characteristics.

The second approach, which will build upon the findings from the settlement descriptions, will be to consider markets and transport networks. All three directories recorded market days, although references to the chief products being dealt with were largely confined to the UBD. This directory also offered some reference to the extent and importance of markets. In consequence, the UBD will act as the principal source in considering whether the case study towns were involved in agricultural marketing activities and, if so, to what extent.

Turning to transport networks, no reference is made to these in Baileys, however, both the UBD and Holden's *Directory* offered details of the routes, times, numbers and fares of coaches, carriers and water borne vessels passing to, from and through the towns. Whilst out of these two the UBD's accounts were more extensive and detailed amongst the cloth towns only evidence for Halstead is supplied. As the representative cloth town the findings for Halstead will be compared to the 24 other places the directory gave transport network details for. Similarly, for Holden's *Directory* Braintree will operate as the representative and will be compared with Saffron Walden, Romford, Chelmsford, Harwich and Colchester. In both instances, however, some attempt will be made to assess the likely extent and nature of communication links for the two unrecorded cloth towns in each directory. A consideration of carrier and, more particularly, coach networks can present an insight into whether the case study towns were involved in thoroughfare trade. Examination of the county's other non-manufacturing towns in this respect can



offer a useful comparison of the extent to which the case study towns were, or were not, participating in this trade.

The third approach, again building on the findings from the first and second, will be to consider what light an examination of the principal inhabitants can throw on the economic character of the case study towns. All three directories offered these lists, although, as will be shown, the description of whom these lists included, and the method of organisation, varied amongst them. The focus here will be on the range and types of activities represented by these individuals. To what extent did textile manufacturing feature; was it the most frequently occurring activity; or did occupations associated with other urban functions - notably marketing and thoroughfare activities - predominate? Again, the nature and extent of coverage in the various trade directories will determine the way these questions are addressed. Since only one cloth town featured in each directory a similar approach to that taken for transport networks will be adopted. First, the evidence presented in Bailey's directory will be considered. An examination of the findings for Coggeshall will be made and then compared with those for the other 10 towns covered. Second, the UBD will be considered, with an examination of Halstead and a comparison with the 24 other towns and villages presented with lists of principal inhabitants. Third, attention will be turned to Holden's directory, with an assessment of Braintree and a comparison with the four other towns covered. Finally, multiple trade entries will be used to establish the range and types of activity that can be associated with the marketing and thoroughfare functions of the towns.

Some attempt will also be made to monitor the changes occurring to the towns during the three decades under consideration. To facilitate this other sources will be used to investigate the composition of those listed as the 'principal inhabitants' in each directory. Thus, Bailey's can be compared with a rate book and the UBD and Holden's with the census returns of 1801 and 1811. Such comparisons enable the depth and nature of the coverage of the three directories to be assessed. The depth of this analysis will, however, be fairly rudimentary due to variations in the quality of coverage offered by the trade directories and differences in the character of the three towns. Finally, by comparing the three types of data contained in the directories an overall assessment can be made of the value of early trade directories to the study of late 18th and early 19th century small towns.



## I. Town Descriptions

References to woollen cloth manufactories were prominent in the UBD's settlement descriptions of all three case study towns. For Halstead the 'manufacture of bays and says' is adjudged to represent the town's general trade.<sup>15</sup> Braintree parish is described as being noted for a 'great manufactory of baize and says'.<sup>16</sup> Similarly, reference is made to Bocking's 'great trade for baize', whilst Coggeshall is described as standing on the river Blackwater, 'where is a manufacture of baize and says'.<sup>17</sup> Some comment is also given to the considerable quantity of cloth the towns produced. Baize is said to have been 'manufactured in such quantities in Braintree and Bocking as to send weekly to London four, five or six waggons laden with them'.<sup>18</sup> Similarly, for Halstead, the annual return from the manufacture of bays and says was described as having 'been very considerable'.<sup>19</sup>

Beyond this, references to the other towns and larger villages described in the UBD confirms that woollen cloth manufacture was centred on a cluster of north Essex towns. The main trade observations for each place covered by the UBD, along with accompanying settlement descriptions, have been reproduced in table 3.2.

Outside the case study towns the only reference to other woollen manufactories was for the provincial centre of Colchester, and the borough town of Dunmow. Although the former was described as 'chiefly subsisting by the trade', no reference to the scale of Dunmow's manufactory is made although, unlike those of Braintree and Bocking, it is not described as 'great'.<sup>20</sup> This may indicate that Dunmow's industry was a rather more modest undertaking. If so, it would be in accordance with Brown's view that by the early 18th century the town was no longer one of the county's main manufacturing centres.<sup>21</sup> The geographical concentration of cloth production is also evident from the fact that no mention of woollen manufactories is made for other north Essex towns. This is made explicit in the case of Castle Hedingham, where the UBD states, 'There is no particular manufactory carried on.'<sup>22</sup> By contrast, the only reference to trade for Witham relates to the town's thoroughfare functions, whilst for Saffron Walden it is to malting.

Indeed, consideration of the trades mentioned for the other settlements covered by the UBD highlights the fact that woollen cloth manufacture was a quite distinct feature in a county whose economy was otherwise heavily influenced by its maritime situation, and proximity to the great food markets and wealthy citizens of London. Amongst maritime

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15. UBD, Vol. III, 231.

16. UBD, Vol. V, 27.

17. UBD, Vol. II, 40.

18. UBD, Vol. V, 24.

19. UBD, Vol. III, 231.

20. UBD, Vol. II, 849 for Dunmow; Vol. II, 518 for Colchester.

21. A.F.J. Brown, *Essex at Work, 1700-1815* (Chelmsford, 1969), 1-3.

22. UBD, Vol. III, 251-52.



Table 3.2 Economic descriptions of towns and villages in late 18th century Essex

| Place                    | Trade Description   | Settlement Description                            |
|--------------------------|---|---|
| Billericay               |   | Hamlet  |
| Brentwood                | '... chiefly maintained by the multitude of carriers and passengers constantly passing through it ...'  | Hamlet  |
| Chelmsford               | 'The chief support of this place, besides the business of the county, is the multitude of carriers and passengers constantly passing'   | County Capital of four streets                    |
| Dedham                   | 'There is a small trade in the making of stocking-yarn carried on here'   | Town ... one principal street                     |
| Dunmow                   | '...Here is a manufacture of baize.'  | Borough Town                                      |
| Epping                   | 'The butter made in this part of the county, ... is [held] in particular esteem'  | Town  |
| Grays<br>Thurrock        | 'Its trade is inconsiderable'   | Town ... small                                    |
| Purfleet                 | 'Inhabited chiefly by the people belonging to the chalk-pits, which are in the hands of a company, who carry on from hence a very great traffic for lime.'                      | Small Village                                     |
| Harwich                  | 'is the station of the packet-boats for Holland, and is a safe harbour ... Here is a very good yard for building ships, with the necessary store-houses, cranes, launches, &c.' | Town ... not large, but well-built and populous   |
| Castle<br>Hedingham      | 'There is no particular manufactory carried on, but the growth of hops is very considerable.'   | Market Town                                       |
| Sible<br>Hedingham       |   | Village   |
| Earls Colne              |   | Village   |
| Horndon on<br>the Hill   |   | Village   |
| Harlow                   |   | Town  |
| Ingatestone              | 'is a great thoroughfare to Harwich but has no trade of its own'  |   |
| Maldon                   | 'Here is a convenient haven for ships...Maldon is famous for salt ... It has also a great trade in coals, deals, and iron.'   | Populous borough ...two long streets              |
| Ongar                    | 'has no manufactory, but chiefly consists of traders'   | Small Market Town                                 |
| Rochford                 | 'no general trade ... but the tradesmen, merchants, and shopkeepers, have the chief part of their custom from the neighbouring gentlemen and farmers'                           | Market Town                                       |
| Romford                  |   |   |
| Thaxted                  | 'no particular manufactory is carried on to any great extent'   | Borough Town                                      |
| Colchester               | 'The town chiefly subsists by the trade of making baize.'   | Populous Town ... contains 40,000 people ...      |
| The Hythe                | '[possessing] a large quay by the river, and a good custom-house.'  | 'a long street, on the south side' of Colchester  |
| Witham                   | 'a great thoroughfare'  | Town  |
| Barking                  | 'inhabited by fishermen'  | Town  |
| Hatfield<br>Broadoak     |   | Large Parish                                      |
| Manningtree              |   | a dirty Town                                      |
| Mistley                  |   | Village/Port                                      |
| Bradfield                |   | Small Village                                     |
| Saffron<br>Walden        | 'A great deal of malt is made here'   | 'Incorporated' town, ... a large straggling place |
| Stratford                | 'inhabited by rich citizens...who are able to keep a country-house as well as a town one, or of such to have left off trade altogether'   | Village   |
| Waltham<br>Abbey         | 'some manufactories for printed linens, and some newly-erected buildings for the manufacture of pins'   | Town  |
| Walton under<br>the Nase | 'there are several large works, called copperas-houses, where it [copperas stone] is made with great expense.'  |   |
| South End                | 'a place of great resort in the bathing season'   | Parish of Prittlewell                             |

Source: *The Universal British Directory*, Vols. II-IV, 1794-98.<sup>23</sup>

23. Billericay, Vol. II, 323; Brentwood, Vol. II, 355; Chelmsford, Vol. II, 511-14; Dedham Vol. II 897-98; Dunmow, Vol. II, 948-49; Epping Vol. III, 42-43; Gray's Vol. III, 163-64; Purfleet Vol.



settlements Harwich, the Hythe at Colchester, Maldon and Barking appear to have been prominent, although the descriptions also identify the smaller ports of Grays Thurrock, Leigh on the south-east coast, and a chain of settlements trading along the Stour, including Dedham, Manningtree and Mistley. With regard to the beginnings of metropolitan suburbanisation the directory descriptions identify the south-west Essex villages of Stratford, Walthamstow, West Ham and Plaistow, amongst others, as places where affluent London merchants and citizens reside. Similarly, reference is made to the development of Southend as a resort, whilst central Government investment is evident in the large gun-powder magazine established at Tilbury. Finally, the influence of London's coaching trade and her great food markets is evident in descriptions of carriers and passengers passing through Chelmsford, Ingatestone and Brentwood destined for the Capital.

Examination of the UBD's descriptions raises the question of whether the north Essex cloth towns should be portrayed as a specialised cluster or as integrated into the broader county economy? In deciding this it is first necessary to consider the reliability of the UBD's descriptions, followed by an examination of the depth of the directory's coverage.

Reliability can be assessed in terms of contemporary relevance and originality. The accusation that information was filched from pre-existing work would bring into question the accuracy of the source on both counts. To test this a comparison of the settlement descriptions appearing in the UBD can be made with those in other source. If the descriptions were plagiarised then, it can be argued, one of the most likely sources would have been Daniel Defoe's *Tour*.<sup>24</sup> Although this appeared first in 1724, the popularity of the work led to the publication of some nine editions during the course of the 18th century. The last of these appeared only 16 years before the publication of the first provincial volume of the UBD. Examination of letter 1, dated 1722, and containing Defoe's journey through Essex, suggests that the authors of the UBD made considerable use of Defoe's observations.

Numerous examples of plagiarism may be cited. Amongst maritime towns the example of Harwich will suffice. Reference to the great use made of the harbour in the old Dutch War, and the fact that it could accommodate '100 sail of men of war and their attendants, and between three and four hundred sail of collier ships', appears to have been copied directly from Defoe. However, much of the rest of the UBD's account of the town's

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III, 164; Harwich Vol. III, 239; Castle Hedingham Vol. III, 251-52; Earls Colne Vol. III, 252-53; Horndon, Vol. III, 289; Harlow Vol. III, 358; Ingatestone Vol. III, 443; Maldon Vol. III, 877-879; Ongar Vol. IV, 175-76; Rochford Vol. IV, 335; Romford Vol. IV, 336; Thaxted Vol. IV, 621-22; Colchester Vol. II, 517-19; The Hythe Vol. II, 518; Witham Vol. IV, 805; Barking Vol. V, 12; Hatfield Broad Oak Vol. V, 78; Manningtree Vol. V, 121; Mistley, Vol. V, 121; Bradfield Vol. V, 121; Saffron Walden Vol. V, 171-72; Stratford Vol. V, 203; Walton under the Nose Vol. II, 527; Southend Vol. IV, 336.

24. D. Defoe, *Tour through the Whole Island of Great Britain* (London, 1962).



trade, on ship building, baths, and cod-smacks is different. Turning to the county's developing suburban settlements; the account for Stratford is another direct copy from Defoe.<sup>25</sup> The only notable factual difference in the UBD's account is over the number of coaches offered as evidence of the expansion of this group of south-west Essex villages. For Defoe the figure is 'no less than two hundred', in the UBD's account it is put at not less than 'between four and five hundred'. Similarly, amongst the thoroughfares of Brentwood, Ingatestone and Chelmsford, there is further clear evidence of lifting from Defoe.

Brent-wood and Ingarstone, and even Chelmsford itself, have very little to be said of them, but that they are large thoroughfare towns, full of good inns, and chiefly maintained by the excessive multitude of carriers and passengers, which are constantly passing this way to London, with droves of cattle, provisions, and manufactures for London.<sup>26</sup>

Likewise, amongst the cloth towns the UBD's account of Colchester's principal trade appears to have been some 70 years out of date. The observation that 'The town chiefly subsists by the trade of making baize, though indeed all the towns carry on the same trade; as Kilverdon (Kelvedon), Witham, Coggeshall, Braintree, Bocking, &c.' is a direct copy from Defoe. However, for the case study settlements there is no evidence of accounts being plagiarised from the *Tour*. This may, in part, be due to the lack of comment they received from Defoe. The only time Defoe alludes to them is: first, to note that he 'Saw Braintree and Bocking, two towns, large rich ... at a distance'; and, a little later on, to observe that, 'Four market-towns fill up the rest of this part of the county; Dunmow, Braintree, Thaxted and Coggeshall, all noted for the manufacture of bays, and for very little else.'<sup>27</sup>

This said, however, there were other potential sources of plagiarism open to the UBD. Morant's *History of Essex*, published in two volumes during the course of the 1760s, would have been readily accessible, as would Muilman's *History of Essex*, published in five volumes between 1769 and 1772.<sup>28</sup> Although the latter has been dismissed by Essex historians for over a century as little more than an inferior copy of the former, closer examination suggests that it is potentially a far richer source for accounts of trade and commerce, both to the economic historian and possibly to the compilers of the UBD.<sup>29</sup>

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25. *Ibid.*, 5.

26. *Ibid.*, 37.

27. *Ibid.*

28. P. Morant, *The History and Antiquities of the County of Essex*, Vols. I and II, 1763-68 (Essex, Republished, 1978); *A New and Complete History of Essex from a Late Survey by a Gentlemen* (Chelmsford, 1769-1772). Vol. I (1771); Vol. II, (1769); Vol. III, (1770); Vol. IV, (1771); Vol. V, (1772).

29. E.A. Fitch, writing in the *Essex Review* of 1899, dismissed *History of Essex by a Gentleman* as 'a copy of Morant with a few fresh notes added, mostly monumental inscriptions'. Fitch concluded by stating, 'The first volume (by which he meant Morant's *History*) is certainly by far the best.' E.A. Fitch, 'Historians of Essex VI - A gentleman', *Essex Review* (1899), 20-28.



Amongst the thoroughfare towns the UBD's description of Chelmsford appears to have contained extracts not only from Defoe, but also Morant and Muilman. With regard to Morant, there is the observation that the town was 'much frequented on account of public business, assizes, quarter sessions and the like'.<sup>30</sup> Similarly, the observation that 'The town consists of four streets ... Each street lies within an easy descent towards the centre', matches, word for word, that appearing in Muilman.<sup>31</sup> Furthermore, amongst the maritime settlements, part of Maldon's description appears to have been transplanted from Morant. This includes the observation that the town 'consists of one wide street, extending from west to east near a mile'.<sup>32</sup>

By contrast, Morant's and Muilman's accounts for the three cloth towns appear different from those of the UBD. However, closer examination of Bocking's description, with its reference to the 1730s, suggests that other sources, besides those considered above, may have been pilfered by the UBD's compilers.

In sum, these findings suggest that the value and originality of the UBD's descriptions must be assessed on an individual settlement level given the considerable variation in coverage and the sources used to extract accounts. This said, it does appear that those settlements most likely to contain elements of originality and detail in their descriptions were the places for which lists of principal inhabitants are supplied. This was probably because the acquisition of such information was likely to involve a visit to the settlement by one of the compiler's agents.

In this respect, the remarks for both Braintree and Coggeshall, neither of whom were supplied with lists of inhabitants, reveal little more than they possessed manufactories. Indeed, in the former case Muilman and, in the latter, Morant, offer more detailed accounts. Of Braintree's manufactory Muilman's author observed, 'The principal manufacture is long baize, chiefly exported for Spain and Portugal and which employs many hands.'<sup>33</sup> Similarly, for Coggeshall Morant noted that, 'The town ... was of old, famous for the clothing trade, as appears from the epitaphs of several clothiers in the church ... When the Bay trade came into the county it soon insinuated itself at this place which was famous for one sort called Coggeshall-Whites, on account of their remarkable fineness many traders in these goods raised great estates.'<sup>34</sup>

By contrast, the UBD's descriptions for Dedham and Halstead, both of whom were recorded with lists of inhabitants, offer an insight into the contemporary condition of their manufactories. For Dedham the *Directory* recorded that,

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30. Morant, *History of Essex*, Vol. II, 1.

31. *History of Essex by a Gentleman*, Vol. I, 54.

32. Morant, *History of Essex*, Vol. I, 328.

33. *History of Essex by a Gentleman*, Vol. I, 411.

34. Morant, *History of Essex*, Vol. II, 120-21.



A considerable trade in the making of baize hath been carried on here till lately; Mr Parker, who had realised a considerable fortune in it, dying, his representatives have discontinued it; and the poor, who were mostly concerned in the manufactory, have been obliged to seek employment at Colchester. There is a small trade in the making of stocking-yarn carried on here.<sup>35</sup>

This accords with Morant's account, 'This was anciently a famous cloathing town, even as early as King Richard II's reign and the bay trade extended into it afterwards, which is now greatly upon the decline'.<sup>36</sup> Similarly, for Halstead the UBD recorded that 'the annual return from the manufacture of bays and says has been very considerable, but for some years past has been in a declining state (as is the case of the neighbouring towns)'.<sup>37</sup> This description compares favourably with Muilman's, where the only reference made to the woollen cloth trade is that 'A manufactory for bays and says is established here.'<sup>38</sup>

From such accounts we gain an insight into the state of the county's wool trade at the end of the 18th century which would appear to have been in general decline. In this respect, the UBD's subdued descriptions of Halstead's trade offers a noticeable contrast with those for the West Riding cloth towns. Whilst extracts plagiarised from Defoe can be identified, the original sections of the text give the impression of a far more vibrant and dynamic industry. Halifax, for example, was identified by the *Directory* as 'in the centre of the woollen manufactory, being 16 miles from Rochdale, eight from Huddersfield, eight from Bradford, 16 from Wakefield, and 16 from Leeds, whence the merchants come on market-days to purchase the various goods exposed for sale'. The nature of the products on sale are also presented in a long list, 'The principal manufactures of this parish are shalloons, tammies, duroys, says, moreens, and shags; also, kerseys, half-thicks, serges, honlies, baize, narrow and broad cloths, coatings, and carpets.'<sup>39</sup>

By comparing the UBD's descriptions with those from the two Essex county histories the general and non-local nature of the former's settlement descriptions is revealed. Again, this has implications for the depth and accuracy of its coverage. Muilman's *History* offers suitable comparison. Although the author of this county history is undeclared - Muilman is judged to have been the sponsor - a number of possibilities have been floated.<sup>40</sup> Whatever the individual's identity the evidence from examination of descriptions suggests that the individual was a resident of north-west Essex. Moreover, the emphasis on trade suggests that, in comparison to the Reverend Morant, Muilman's author had an interest in and, knowledge of, commercial activities.

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35. UBD, Vol. II, 898.

36. Morant, *History of Essex*, Vol. II, 247.

37. UBD, Vol. III, 231.

38. *History of Essex by a Gentleman*, Vol. II, 48-49.

39. UBD, Vol. III, 320.

40. Fitch, 'Historians of Essex', 20-28.



An examination of the descriptions for Epping ably demonstrate this difference between the county perspective and that adopted by the UBD. As observed earlier, the UBD commented, in an approving manner, on Epping's butter being highly esteemed in London. For Muilman's author, however, the situation was far from satisfactory. Having observed that the principal commodities sold at Epping's market were fowls and butter, the author comments on the fact that these products are 'soon purchased at an extravagant price by higlers, who immediately carry them to the metropolis'.<sup>41</sup> The author's low opinion of this practice, and the local inconvenience it caused, is further expressed in his/her account of the market at Waltham Holy Cross.

There are so many higlers who come and buy up the provisions of the market, and carry the same to London, where they vend them again with great profit, that a townsman or inhabitant is often disappointed ... This indeed is an evil to which this place is not alone subject, as even Chelmsford and other markets of a like distance from the metropolis, are pestered with these lawless visitors.<sup>42</sup>

The second peculiar feature of the UBD's descriptions that emerges from a comparison with those of Muilman is the former's concentration on what were the more distinguishing features of a settlement's trade and commerce. The case of Waltham Abbey offers an example. The only reference the UBD presents of its economy is to 'some powder-mills, in the hands of government; some manufactories for printed linens, and some newly-erected buildings for the manufacture of pins, which happily affords employment to a great number of children of both sexes.'<sup>43</sup> By contrast, a more complete picture is presented by Muilman's author who, besides mentioning the town's calico works and pin manufactory comments, at length, on its marketing functions. The UBD's pre-occupation with distinguishing features may, similarly, explain the absence of economic comment for places such as Romford and Harlow whose chief functions, like the majority of the county's towns, were those of agricultural marketing.<sup>44</sup>

The UBD's concern with the distinct and neglect of the common may tell us something about the aim of these descriptions and the publication itself. They were designed to introduce the settlement to a non-local, possibly London-based, public. As such it would seem logical that the descriptions would have concentrated on the features that distinguished one settlement from the next. What, besides its location, differentiated Ongar from the other towns of the county, and what the directory compiler dwelled upon, were its castle, its free school, and its principal inns.<sup>45</sup> The fact that nothing was said about its commercial character suggests that in this respect it was undistinguished; possessing the kinds of agricultural marketing and processing trades common to many of

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41. *History of Essex by a Gentleman*, Vol. IV, 175.

42. *Ibid.*, 147.

43. UBD, Vol. V, 233.

44. See section III.

45. UBD, Vol. IV, 175-76.



the county's other towns.<sup>46</sup> Only where commercial activity deviated from the norm was reference likely to have been made to it in the town description.

Turning to the specific implications of this assessment for the case study settlements, the non-local slant of the UBD may be said to have manifested itself in two ways. First, a consideration of descriptions in Muilman identifies that the number of settlements involved in the wool trade, and the geographical area over which production was undertaken, was far greater than suggested by the UBD. Absent from comment were those places, without manufactories, but involved in spinning. In the Hinckford Hundred which incorporated Halstead and Braintree and Bocking,<sup>47</sup> these included the villages of Stamborn, Sturmere, Birdbrook, Bumstead Steeple and Great Yeldham. For the last of these Muilman's author noted that 'The chief employment of the inhabitants, besides husbandry, is spinning for the bay trade at Colchester and Bocking, and for the says at Halstead, Hedingham, and Sudbury.'<sup>48</sup> In the adjoining north-western Hundred of Uttlesford these included the 'small vill' of Depden, Widington, Takely, Wickham Bonhunt, Arksden, Littlebury, Strethall, Elmdon Christhall, Little and Great Chesterford.<sup>49</sup> In the Dunmow Hundred, which included Thaxted as well as Great Dunmow, these consisted of Little Dunmow village, Bernstone, Pleshey, High Easter.<sup>50</sup> Finally, in the half hundred of Freshwell these comprised of the villages of Bumpsted Helion, Great Sandford, Hempsted, Little Sandford, Little Bardfield, Radwinter and Great Bardfield. The settlement description for the last mentioned of these places is of particular interest in what it reveals about the spatial organisation of the industry.

The only manufacture carried on in this place, is the making of spindles and wheels for the use of spinning; with which articles almost every part of this county, and the neighbouring ones of Cambridge and Suffolk, are supplied from this town; besides which, husbandry and spinning are the chief employments of the inhabitants.<sup>51</sup>

Outside these north western hundreds few other villages were identified as occupied in spinning. In the case of the Hundreds of Ongar<sup>52</sup> and Clavering,<sup>53</sup> to the south, this may have reflected the geographical extent of the spinning area. Most of the settlements in these two district were accompanied with accounts like that for Shelly, in the Ongar Hundred. In this village the inhabitants were described as 'chiefly supported by husbandry'. Elsewhere, however, noticeably in the Lexden hundred which included Coggeshall and the Colchester hundred,<sup>54</sup> the absence of villages occupied in spinning

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46. What these may have comprised will be considered in detail in section IV.

47. Part of which appears in Vol. I, and part in Vol. II.

48. *History of Essex by a Gentleman*, Vol. II, 206.

49. Part of this hundred appears in Vol. II, and part in Vol. III.

50. *History of Essex by a Gentleman*, Vol. III.

51. *History of Essex by a Gentleman*, Vol. II, 288.

52. Appears in Vol. III and Vol. IV.

53. *History of Essex by a Gentleman*, Vol. III, 365.

54. *History of Essex by a Gentleman*, Vol. VI.



may say more about the geographical extent of comment than the livelihood of individual communities. Other hundreds for which Muilman's author offered little or no original economic comment were principally located in south-west, south-east and central Essex along with a belt running along the north-east coast. Where references were made to the commerce of these places it was usually lifted from Morant. However, from these intermittent insights it would appear that these hundreds lay outside the county's woollen manufacturing district.<sup>55</sup>

In addition to these villages Muilman identifies that a number of towns also operated as spinning centres, but whose involvement was again overlooked in the UBD. The greatest part of Thaxted's inhabitants were said to be 'supported by husbandry and spinning'.<sup>56</sup> Similarly, of Harlow, Muilman's author commented that, 'The great woollen-manufactory which was carried on at this place for many years is now removed, and the poor are principally supported by spinning'.<sup>57</sup>

The second impact of the UBD's non-local slant was that other, more ubiquitous, urban functions went unrecorded. From a consideration of the descriptions contained in Muilman, the case study towns appear rather more multi-faceted than the UBD's accounts, or those of other non-locals, such as Defoe, would suggest. Besides wool Muilman's author noted that Braintree possessed a weekly market 'well supplied with all kinds of necessities', and that it was also 'a great thoroughfare from London into Suffolk and Norfolk'.<sup>58</sup> Similarly, Halstead was identified as possessing a weekly market, as well as being 'a great thoroughfare.' In addition, comment is made to the fact that, 'The soil, though various is very fertile, and produces many hops; for the excellency of which commodity this town is famous.'<sup>59</sup> Because the bulk of detailed, original settlement descriptions are reserved for the hundreds of Hinckford, Uttlesford and Dunmow, the same insight into Coggeshall's economy can not be gained from Muilman. Morant, however, reveals that it was a 'pretty large and populous town, with a market on Thursday, 'for corn &c. but some little market is still kept on Saturday, and the fair on Whitsun-Tuesday'.<sup>60</sup>

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55. They included the hundreds of Harlow, Becontree, Chafford (including Grays), Barstable (including Billericay), Rochford (including Rayleigh), Dengey (including Maldon), Thurstable (including Heybridge), Winstree Hundred (encompassing Mersey Island), Tendring (including Manningtree), Chelmsford and Witham, along with Waltham Half Hundred.

56. *History of Essex by a Gentleman*, Vol. II, 188.

57. *History of Essex by a Gentleman*, Vol. IV, 65.

58. *History of Essex by a Gentleman*, Vol. II, 411.

59. *Ibid.*, 48-49.

60. Morant, *History of Essex*, Vol. I, 160- 61.



## Summary

As a descriptive source the UBD is worthy of consideration. The extent of its coverage affords comment on small towns, in addition to provincial centres and more prominent villages. This said, uncertainties exist over the originality of accounts. A number of descriptions appear to have been lifted directly, or with very little modification, from a range of other sources, including Defoe, Young and two county histories of Essex. In general, it appears that the descriptions most likely to be original, or at last to contain some elements of originality, were those accompanying settlements where principal inhabitants were recorded. In these instances comparison with descriptions presented in locally initiated works, such as county histories, offers an insight into the orientation of the source. In this respect the UBD's focus appears to have been similar to that of Defoe, with comments on trade and commerce generally reserved for distinguishing features.

With regard to the specifics of the case study, as with Defoe, and even earlier with Celia Fiennes, the UBD's descriptions portray Braintree and Bocking, Coggeshall and Halstead as woollen cloth towns. The manufacture of woollen cloth is presented as their general trade. However, consideration of Halstead's description suggests the county's woollen textile trade was in decline. The subdued account of this town's manufactories contrasts strikingly with that of Halifax and points to an emerging gap between the fortunes of the cloth trade in north Essex, and that in the West Riding of Yorkshire. From this perspective directory descriptions would fit the impression of the case study towns as backwaters detached from developments in the wider economy. However, since no reference is made to any of the other urban functions these towns may have possessed, this portrait is incomplete. Descriptions in more locally based county histories for the same period suggest that manufacturing was not the only commercial function performed by the case study towns. The question raised at the end of this section concerns the importance of these other commercial functions. To what extent did Braintree and Bocking, Coggeshall and Halstead participate as Essex marketing centres and thoroughfares? Other information supplied in the UBD and, to a lesser degree in Bailey's and Holden's directories, can be used to throw more light on this question.

## II. Agricultural Marketing

The UBD identified 24 weekly markets held in late 18th century Essex, these are recorded in table 3.3. In terms of their geographical distribution they were found throughout the length and breadth of the county; from Manningtree in the north-east and Saffron Walden in the far north-west, to Barking in the south-west and Rochford in the county's south-eastern corner. Of all these, however, the UBD comments on only six. The reason for referring to these six in particular is unclear. One theory might be that they constituted the largest of the county's markets and, consequently, that the markets of the case study towns were too small to be worthy of comment. If this was the case it would support the idea that, economically, these towns were principally cloth manufacturing centres, that



other functions were of secondary importance, and that the eclipse of their industries meant they were becoming backwaters.

Certainly the character of the market descriptions given to the six towns covered would appear to support the view that these were amongst the county's largest markets. Billericay, for instance, was described as possessing a 'considerable market especially for corn'.<sup>61</sup> Chelmsford was said to have 'a good market, supplied with corn meat, fish, fowls, &c'.<sup>62</sup> Besides corn, which formed the principal commodity sold at Maldon's market, the directory recorded that great quantities 'of horse and tick beans with clover and other seeds' were also sold.<sup>63</sup> Similarly, 'considerable quantities of grain' were said to be sold at Grays.<sup>64</sup> The other markets which the UBD commented on comprised those at Romford and Epping. Three weekly markets were said to be held at the former, 'one for hogs, one for calves, sheep, and lambs, and the third for corn, cattle, horses, sheep, hogs, lambs, poultry, and butchers' meat',<sup>65</sup> whilst two weekly markets were mentioned for Epping - one for cattle, the other for provisions.<sup>66</sup>

An examination of the distribution of these six markets also appears to offer support to the theory that these were Essex's premier markets. All were located in the southern half of the county. This would suggest that the distribution of large markets owed something to accessibility and proximity to the Metropolis. Certainly, the comments for Maldon and Grays suggest that London was the principal market for much of the produce on sale. At Grays the grain was said to be sold by sample to 'the London factors'.<sup>67</sup> Likewise, 'a great part' of the corn on sale at Maldon was 'bought by millers and corn dealers to be sent to London'.<sup>68</sup>

From this perspective it could be argued that their greater distance from London meant that the markets of the case study towns were not frequented by metropolitan merchants, but instead catered for more modest local demands. Consequently, as smaller undertakings the marketing functions of the case study towns may have been of lesser economic importance. The UBD's descriptions include a reference to the distance of each settlement from London. An examination of these highlights the more distant location of the case study towns in comparison to the six for which market comments were made. Chelmsford was recorded as being 29 miles from the Capital, Epping 17, Romford 12, Billericay 24 and Grays 25 miles. Of the six, Maldon, at 37 miles, was the furthest from London. However, its location on the Blackwater river and via this the coast, would have

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61. UBD, Vol. II, 323.

62. *Ibid.*, 513.

63. UBD, Vol. III, 879.

64. *Ibid.* 163.

65. UBD, Vol. IV, 336.

66. UBD, Vol. III, 42.

67. *Ibid.*, 163.

68. *Ibid.*, 879.



enhanced its accessibility with the capital. By contrast, Halstead was recorded at 47 miles from London, Braintree and Bocking 42 and Coggeshall 44. Although situated along the rivers Stour, Brain and Colne respectively, none of these were navigable as far inland as the towns.

Two gauges can be employed to evaluate the standing of the markets in the case study towns and, in so doing, assess whether the presence of comment in the UBD was an indicator of a market's comparative status and importance. The first of these is based upon the premise that successful markets attracted buyers and sellers from a large geographical area. One guide of this is to consider the distances that separated one market from the next. In recording the day(s) upon which each town's market was held the UBD enables such a study to be undertaken. Table 3.3 lists those places identified by the directory with market days and arranges them according to the day upon which their markets were held. Thus, Braintree's market emerges as one of only four to be held on a Wednesday, and that the three others were all located a considerable distance away. Colchester was some 15 miles to the north-east, whilst Harlow and Romford were just over 20 miles and 29 miles to the south-west respectively. Similarly, Halstead was one of five to hold a market on Friday, again the others were some distance away. In fact, the nearest were those of Thaxted, some 14 miles to the north-west, and Chelmsford, 18 miles to the south. Likewise, the nearest towns to Coggeshall that also held markets on Thursdays were Manningtree, 18 miles to the north-west, and Rochford, 23 miles to the south-east.

Table 3.3 Market days of Essex towns

| Market Day | Town  |
|------------|---|
| Monday     | Romford   |
| Tuesday    | Dedham, Castle Hedingham, Witham, Billericay, Romford                     |
| Wednesday  | Harlow, Braintree, Romford, Colchester                                    |
| Thursday   | Rochford, Coggeshall, Waltham Abbey, Manningtree, Epping, Gray's Thurrock |
| Friday     | Harwich, Thaxted, Halstead, Chelmsford, Epping                            |
| Saturday   | Dunmow, Ongar, Barking, Hatfield, Saffron Walden, Colchester, Maldon      |

Source: *The Universal British Directory*, Vos. II-IV, 1794-98.

Table 3.3 reveals that all the county's weekly markets were fairly well distributed. In fact, the only example of neighbouring towns holding markets on the same days was for Epping and Waltham Abbey. However, closer examination reveals that Epping's market on Thursday was a specialised one for cattle, with its second, more general market, for 'provisions', on Friday. Conversely, the table suggests that those towns whose markets declined, did so due to competition from neighbouring towns. Brentwood's Thursday market, for example, may have lost out to the well supplied one of Grays nine miles away.



The second way to gauge the importance of the markets in the case study towns involves an examination of the prosperity of their agricultural hinterlands. The ability of the local farming sector to produce good quantities of high quality produce would have had a considerable influence on the success of a market. The UBD makes a few comments concerning the state of local farming in Essex. For example, under the entry for Witham and the adjoining villages of Terling, Kelvedon, and Hatfield Peveral, the following appears,

The product of all this part of the country is corn, as that of the marshy-feeding grounds is grass, where their chief business is breeding of calves, which are allowed to be the best and the fattest, and the largest veal in England, if not in the whole world.<sup>69</sup>

Comments such as this, however, appear only sporadically throughout the UBD's descriptions of Essex settlements and, together, are insufficient to form a detailed picture. Moreover, comparison with Defoe's *Tour* shows that they were also plagiarised. Shrimpton's examination of 'regional' levels of farm rents in 18th century Essex does, however, offer a valuable guide to the prosperity of local agriculture.<sup>70</sup> Indeed, consideration of average rents may present a better guide to levels of marketing than contemporary descriptions of farms and land use. This is because one of the primary factors influencing rents would have been the prices farmers were able to command for their produce. High prices, in turn, meant high demand and, it can be suggested, that this would have required an efficient marketing system introducing sellers to large numbers of buyers.

As table 3.4 illustrates, Shrimpton divided the county into five districts, or regions, and calculated average farm rent for the first and second halves of the 18th century. Considerable variations in the average levels of farm rents were found to have existed between these regions.

The region that returned the highest averages throughout the 90 years covered in these two counts was the south-west. This would probably have encompassed three of the six market towns commented upon by the UBD, namely Romford, Billericay and possibly Grays, although this is not made explicit by the author. Shrimpton's explanation offers some support to the earlier proposition that closeness to London, and its large demand for food products, was an influential factor in their success.

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69. UBD, Vol. IV, 806.

70. 'In Essex there were marked regional variations in the levels of rents.' C. Shrimpton, *The Landed Society and the Farming Community of Essex in the Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries* (PhD thesis, University of Cambridge, 1965; printed New York, 1977), 249.



Farmers in close proximity to the London market received higher prices, and so paid higher rents; there was also a great demand for accommodation land in the region and for the rich riverside grazing around Barking and Dagenham.<sup>71</sup>

Likewise, support for this proposition also derives from the low averages returned by the more distant south-east, containing the market town of Rochford, and the north-east. Indeed, Shrimpton's explanation for the latter's poor showing is that it suffered from being the most distant of the county's regions from London.

Table 3.4 Regional variations in Essex farm rents, 1701-1790

| Region     | Rent/Index | 1701-1750 | 1751-1790 |
|------------|------------|-----------|-----------|
| North West | Av. Rent   | 11.3      | 17.4      |
|            | Index      | 100       | 154       |
| North East | Av. Rent   | 6.1       | 13.7      |
|            | Index      | 100       | 225       |
| South West | Av. Rent   | 13.6      | 23.0      |
|            | Index      | 100       | 170       |
| Central    | Av. Rent   | 9.1       | 14.9      |
|            | Index      | 100       | 162       |
| South East | Av. Rent   | 7.5       | 10.9      |
|            | Index      | 100       | 145       |
| County     | Av. Rent   | 9.6       | 15.10     |
|            | Index      | 100       | 167       |

*Source:* C. Shrimpton, *The Landed Society and the Farming Community of Essex* (New York, 1977), 248.

However, against this is the performance of the north-west. It is in this region that the case study towns, along with Saffron Walden, were located. In the first half of the century the average rents here were over 45 percent higher than those of the north-east, more than 30 percent higher than those of the south-east, and some 19 percent more than the central belt containing Chelmsford and Maldon. Although in two of the cases the gap was closed slightly during the second half of the century, the region still returned the second highest average rents. By this period the north-west's average rent was 21 percent more than the north-east, 37 percent more than the south-east, and 14 percent above the central region. These figures suggest that the north-western part of Essex possessed a comparatively successful farming regime. Although the local agricultural sector may not have enjoyed the prices of the area immediately adjacent to London, its landowners, nevertheless, were able to command rents some way above those charged elsewhere in the county.

One factor which may help explain the comparatively commercialised nature of the north-west's agricultural sector was the landed investment made by affluent merchants from

71. *Ibid.*; UBD, Vol. V, 12.



London. Defoe refers to these. For instance, of the area encompassing Witham up to Braintree he remarked:

It is observable, that in this part of the country, there are several very considerable estates purchased, and now enjoy'd by citizens of London, merchants and tradesmen, as Mr. Western an iron merchant, near Kelvedon, Mr. Cresnor, a wholesale grocer ... nam'd for sheriff at Earls Coln, Mr. Olemus, a merchant at Braintree ... I mention this, to observe how the present encrease of wealth in the city of London, spreads it self into the country, and plants families and fortunes, who in another age will equal the families of the ancient gentry.<sup>72</sup>

Indeed, his accounts of such individuals take up greater space than those made to the cloth industry of the case study towns.

More direct support for the prosperity of the markets in the case study towns is found in Muilman's settlement descriptions, at least for Braintree and Halstead. Of the former Muilman's author wrote 'Here is a market every Wednesday, well supplied with all kinds of necessaries, and at which vast quantities of corn, malt, hops, &c are sold by sample.'<sup>73</sup> Of Halstead, the same source observed 'A market is held here every Friday; and two fairs annually for cattle, hops and toys.'<sup>74</sup> Beyond this, the *History* also paid reference to the condition of the soil in each parish. Braintree's soil was judged 'various',<sup>75</sup> and Halstead's 'very fertile', producing 'many hops; for the excellency of which commodity this town is famous'.<sup>76</sup> Whilst nothing new is said about Coggeshall in Muilman, Morant makes reference to the presence of a market for 'corn &c'.<sup>77</sup> This reference to the 'town' of Coggeshall would also conflict with Johnson's claim that, in the latter half of the 18th century, Coggeshall's market decayed and the settlement came to resemble nearby villages like Earls Colne.<sup>78</sup> Indeed, the only reference Earls Colne receives from Morant is that it possessed a yearly fair, whilst Muilman's author merely added that its situation was 'upon the ascent', with its soil being 'sandy and heavy'.<sup>79</sup>

Further support for the idea that agriculture and its resulting marketing were prosperous in north-west Essex can be found in Arthur Young's assessment of the county's chief markets. Young considered 10 towns to comprise the county's principal markets. Two of these were found in the south-west. They were Romford and Epping. Two were found in the central belt - Chelmsford and Maldon. Another two were located in the north-east; Witham and Colchester. The other four, however, were located in the north-west. Beside Saffron Walden, these consisted of the three case study towns.<sup>80</sup> It is highly probable that

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72. Defoe, *Tour*, 15.

73. *History of Essex by a Gentleman*, Vol. I, 411.

74. *History of Essex by a Gentleman*, Vol. II, 48-49.

75. *Ibid.*, 411.

76. *History of Essex by a Gentleman*, Vol. II, 48-49.

77. Morant, *History of Essex*, Vol. II, 161.

78. Johnson, 'A proto-industrial community study', 122.

79. Morant, *History of Essex*, Vol. II, 215; *History of Essex by a Gentleman*, Vol. VI, 196.

80. A. Young, *General View of the Agriculture of the County of Essex*, Vol. II (London, 1813), 386.



London was still the chief market destination. Richardson makes reference to this fact.<sup>81</sup> It is also hinted at in Muilman's observation of Braintree, where corn is described as sold by sample. Indeed, a case can be made for suggesting that further away from London the services and facilities offered by such towns would have been of greater value to the marketing of agricultural produce. In contrast, south-west Essex's proximity to London meant, possibly, that some transactions were done directly between producers and merchants, thereby cutting out the urban middleman.

This evaluation would suggest that the markets of the case study towns were certainly of comparable importance to the county's other market towns. However, from this little is revealed about the relative importance of these functions to the urban economies of the north Essex cloth towns. Indeed, this thorny subject will consume the remaining sections of this chapter. However, an interesting perspective on the matter is offered by a comparison of the settlement descriptions recorded in table 3.3 with the list of places holding markets given in table 3.4. What emerges from this is that all the places with markets were described as towns. By contrast, settlements without markets were referred to as villages. In most instances, including those of Prittlewell, Sible Hedingham, Earls Colne, Mistley, Stratford, West Ham, Walthamstow and Woodford, the assumption that no market existed is based on the lack of any reference to one. Occasionally, however, the UBD makes the fact more explicit, as with Bradfield, 'It has no market.'<sup>82</sup>

Moreover, it would seem that the UBD based this distinction not only on a settlement's ancient right to hold a market, but on the fact that markets were actually taking place at the close of the 18th century. In this respect the directory described Brentwood as a hamlet, adding that 'the market was formerly on Thursday, but now it is discontinued.'<sup>83</sup> Even more telling is the description of Horndon-on-the-Hill; 'now only a village, but had formerly a market on Saturday, which has been discontinued for many years'.<sup>84</sup> These findings would suggest that to contemporaries, or at least the UBD's compilers, the presence of a market was necessary if a settlement were to be judged a town. This assessment can be related to the situation in the case study towns. Halstead's manufactories may have been in decline but its urban status remained.

## Summary

The UBD generally did not comment on the size of town markets, or on the products sold. It did, however, refer to the presence of a market and the day it was held. From this information it is possible to generate a picture of the county's marketing system, and the

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81. T.L. Richardson, 'Agricultural labourers' wages and the cost of living in Essex, 1790-1840: a contribution to the standard of living debate', in B.A. Holderness and M. Turner, *Land, Labour, and Agriculture, 1700-1920* (London, 1991), 69-90.

82. UBD, Vol. V, 121.

83. UBD, Vol. II, 355.

84. UBD, Vol. III, 289.



place of individual town markets within this. Moreover, the fact that the directory appears to have defined a town by the presence of an active market offers support for using the source as a contemporary guide to the existence of towns. One major concern with using the UBD to identify towns has been that it may fail to distinguish between operational and defunct markets. The above analysis suggests this was not the case.

Turning to the three north Essex towns, this analysis reveals that each possessed an active market. Moreover, taking into account their distance from other markets, and the conditions of their agricultural hinterlands, in terms of size and importance, it is highly likely that the case study towns were comparable to those found in the county's other large towns. Indeed, Arthur Young judged all three to be amongst the county's 10 chief markets. The central question this raises concerns the relative economic importance that should be attached to marketing activity and, in particular, how it compared with that of wool. One gauge to this was offered by the terminology employed by the UBD's compilers. Despite the fact that by the 1790s the wool trade was in decline the existence of a market seems, in their eyes, to have secured the urban standing of these three places. However, this raises the question of whether the presence of a market was more a status attribute than an accurate reflection of wealth generation and economic dynamism. One method for testing this is to consider the extent of transport activity operating to and from these towns. The business generated by a busy market would, almost certainly, have nurtured a considerable amount of such activity. By undertaking this analysis it should also be feasible to assess whether, with the decline of wool, these places did, literally, become 'remote backwaters' with few communication and trade links to the outside world.

### **Transport Networks and Thoroughfares**

Although Bailey offered no reference to the transport networks operating from the 11 Essex towns he considered, such details are supplied by both the UBD, for 25 settlements, and Holden's *Directory*, for six. In the former, the names, days and times of coaches, carriers and, where applicable, water borne vessels, arriving and departing from the towns, appear at the end of the settlement descriptions. In the latter they precede the lists of inhabitants. Since, according to their compilers, the aim of these directories was to facilitate trade it seems reasonable to assume the information on transport links would have been accurate and up to date. Certainly, there is no evidence that this information was plagiarised from earlier works such as Defoe, or either of the two county histories. No mention is made about transport links in the former, whilst Morant and Muilman's only references are more general concerning the roads and rivers running through or near to the settlements (as can be seen in the study undertaken below).

As noted above, the UBD's descriptions identified Brentwood, Ingatestone and Chelmsford as thoroughfares. References to these towns in Morant and Muilman confirm this. Brentwood, as Muilman's author commented, was to be found,



standing upon the high road to London, eighteen miles from the city, and between eleven and twelve from Chelmsford. It is a post town, and post goes out and comes in every day in the week ... Being so great a thoroughfare, a considerable number of stage coaches, &c. daily pass through this town.<sup>85</sup>

Likewise, for Ingatestone the same author observed that it was located on

the great thoroughfare to Norfolk, Suffolk, Harwich, Colchester, and many other parts of this county; most of the stages either Norfolk or Suffolk dine here in their way to London, or breakfast in their return.<sup>86</sup>

From the lists of coaches and waggons recorded in the UBD, an insight is offered into the type and number of services associated with these thoroughfares. For Chelmsford, the directory recorded the following coach, caravan, wagon and cart services:

A coach from the Four Swans, Bishopsgate-street, daily, at seven in the morning; from the Cross Keys, and Spread Eagle, Gracechurch-street, daily, at two in the afternoon in summer, and ten in the morning in winter. - A caravan from the Saracen's Head, Aldgate, every Saturday, at eleven in the morning. - A waggon from the Catherine Wheel, Bishopsgate-street, every Saturday, at five in the afternoon; from the Blue Boar, Whitechapel, Tuesday and Friday, at four in the afternoon; from the Saracen's Head, Aldgate, every Saturday, at ten in the morning; and from the Ipswich Arms, Cullum-street, every Thursday, at noon. - A cart from the Ram, Smithfield, every Friday, at six in the morning.- A vessel from Harrison's wharf.<sup>87</sup>

For Ingatestone a stage coach was recorded setting off every morning at eight o'clock in summer, ten in winter, and returning from the Cross Keys or Spread Eagle inns, Gracechurch street, London, every afternoon at two. In addition, the directory noted that a number of other coaches, as well as waggons, passed through Ingatestone on their way to and from London.<sup>88</sup> Finally, for Brentwood a daily stage-coach is recorded, running to and from London, in addition to two stage-waggons, 'which go to, and return from, London twice a week.'<sup>89</sup>

Table 3.5 compares the transport services for these three towns with the other places the UBD gave transport information on and, in particular, Halstead. The first observation to make regards the destination column. This illustrates that the great majority of services operated to and from London. This is consistent with the earlier observation that the *Directory* was orientated to a metropolitan market with its large contingent of wealthy merchants.<sup>90</sup> It is an assessment moreover that has important implications for analysis of transport. The picture of communication links produced by the UBD is likely to be a

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85. *History of Essex by a Gentleman*, Vol. V, 7 and 8.

86. *History of Essex by a Gentleman*, Vol. I, 245.

87. UBD, Vol. II, 514.

88. UBD, Vol. III, 444.

89. UBD, Vol. II, 355.

90. Evidence that the UBD was a London-based publication derives from the title pages of each volume which show it to have been printed in London.



Table 3.5 Transport services operating from Essex towns in the late eighteenth century

| Place            | Type of Transport  | Destination          | No Per Week | Total Services Per Week |
|------------------|--------------------|----------------------|-------------|-------------------------|
| Brentwood        | Stage Coach        | London               | 6           | 10                      |
|                  | Stage Waggon (2)   | London               | 4           |                         |
| Chelmsford       | Coach (3)          | London               | 18          | 27                      |
|                  | Caravan            | London               | 1           |                         |
|                  | Wagon (5)          | London               | 7           |                         |
|                  | A Cart             | London               | 1           |                         |
| Ingatestone      | Stage Coach        | London               | 6           | 6                       |
| Billericay       |                    |                      |             |                         |
| Dedham           | Several barges     | Unspec               | Unspec      |                         |
| Dunmow           | Van                | London               | 1           | 4                       |
|                  | Diligence          | Harlow (the London)  | 3           |                         |
| Epping           | Stage              | London               | 6           | 6                       |
| Gray's           | Vessels            | London               | 2           | 2                       |
| Harwich          | Coach (2)          | London               | 4           |                         |
|                  | Packets (6)        | Holland              | 6           |                         |
|                  | 8 Wherries         | Ipswich              | 48          |                         |
| Castle Hedingham | Stage Coaches (2)  | London               | 6           | 9                       |
|                  | Carriers (3)       | London               | 3           |                         |
| Horndon          | Coach              | London               | 6           | 6                       |
| Harlow           | Diligence          | Dunmow (then London) | 6           | 8                       |
|                  | Errand Cart        | London               | 2           |                         |
| Maldon           | Coach              | London               | 6           | 11                      |
|                  | Stage Fly          | London               | 3           |                         |
|                  | Stage Caravans (2) | London               | 2           |                         |
|                  | Corn Vessels       | London               | Not Regular |                         |
| Ongar            | Coach              | London               | 3           | 5                       |
|                  | Wagon              | London               | 2           |                         |
| Rochford         | Stage Coach (2)    | London               | 6           | 12                      |
|                  | Diligence          | London               | 3           |                         |
|                  | Caravan (2)        | London               | 3           |                         |
| Romford          | Stage Coach        | London               | 6           | 9                       |
|                  | Stage Wagon        | London               | 3           |                         |
| Thaxted          | Coach              | London               | 3           | 4                       |
|                  | Common Carrier     | London               | 1           |                         |
| Colchester       | Coaches (8)        | London               | 27          | 47                      |
|                  | Coach              | Hadleigh, Sfk        | 6           |                         |
|                  | Coach              | Unspec               | 6           |                         |
|                  | Stage Waggon (4)   | London               | 4           |                         |
|                  | Vessels, Hoys      | London               | 4           |                         |
|                  | Hoys (2)           | Gainsboro'           | Unspec      |                         |
| Witham           | Coaches (Unspec)   | Harwich, Ipsw,       | 6           | 12                      |
|                  | Waggon (Unspec)    | London               | 6           |                         |
| Halstead         | Stage Coach (2)    | London               | 6           | 8                       |
|                  | Stage Waggon (2)   | London               | 2           |                         |
| Manningtree      | Coaches (Unspec)   | London               | 6           | 7                       |
|                  | Vessels (Unspec)   | London               | 1           |                         |
| Mistley          | Vessels (Unspec)   | London               | 1           | 1                       |

Source: *The Universal British Directory*, Vos. II-IV, 1794-98.<sup>91</sup>

91. Brentwood, UBD, Vol. II, 355; Chelmsford, Vol. II, 514; Ingatestone, Vol. III, 444; Billericay, Vol. II, 323; Dedham, Vol. II, 898; Dunmow, Vol. II, 949; Epping, Vol. III, 43; Grays, Vol. III, 163; Harwich, Vol. III, 241; Castle Hedingham, Vol. III, 252; Horndon, Vol. III, 289; Harlow, Vol. III, 358; Maldon, Vol. III, 879; Ongar, Vol. IV, 175-76; Rochford, Vol. IV, 335; Thaxted, Vol. IV, 622; Colchester, Vol. II, 525-26; Witham, Vol. IV, 805; Halstead, Vol. III, 231; Manningtree, Vol. V, 121; Mistley, Vol. V, 121. Where the directory describes services as being daily this is assumed to constitute six a week, unless otherwise stated.



partial one, with those carriers and coaches operating between the east and west, along with more local ones plying between the county's various towns, and also between towns and surrounding countryside, under-recorded. For instance, what one would imagine to be the far larger numbers engaged in local carriage between Halstead and the surrounding villages and towns goes undocumented.

Even amongst metropolitan connected services there appears to have been some under-recording for particular settlements. For example the directory noted that for Ingatestone, Witham and Colchester, besides those services specified and appearing in the table, 'There are several other coaches pass to and from London ... at different hours every day ... There are also waggons pass through the town ... from London.' Likewise, Witham's entry read, 'There are coaches going through this place, daily, to Harwich, Ipswich, and Colchester. Waggons also [travel] daily, from Ipswich and Colchester, to the Ipswich Arms, Cullum-street.'<sup>92</sup>

Since the number of coaches this entailed was not specified it was decided to regard these as single coach services. In consequence, for such places the number of services listed in table 3.5 is likely to represent an under-recording. Accepting these limitations, Halstead emerges possessing regular, weekly coach links with London. By this yardstick it does not appear to have acted as a remote and isolated settlement. In fact the town appears to have been amongst the best served by coaches and wagons; the number of London bound services operating to and from Halstead was comparable with those settlements identified as 'thoroughfares'. In this respect Colchester emerges as the busiest thoroughfare with at least 43 services per week, and Chelmsford comes second with 27. Below the county town were Witham and Rochford, with 12 each, Maldon with 11, Brentwood with 10, Castle Hedingham and Romford with nine each and then Halstead with eight. However, the majority of places received fewer services than this. Indeed, Thaxted, Dedham and Dunmow would appear better candidates as backwaters, each having only four weekly services recorded.

Although not quantifiable, it is also worth noting that Halstead's transport entries were among the few for which the *Directory* offered details on times, fares and carriage charges. This information is reproduced in tables 3.6. and 3.7. Could one reason for this relate to the demand for such information - was Halstead one of the places considered most likely to be visited? The others for which this information was proffered were Romford, Epping, Brentwood, Grays, Rochford, Castle Hedingham, Colchester and Harwich.

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92. In the case of Colchester the directory made reference to 'several other coaches ... passing through every day'. The ambiguity of this statement means that table 3.5 does not take account of these.



Table 3.6 Coach services operating through Halstead

| Stage Coaches                | Outward Journeys               | Time | Return                       | Time | Fare       |
|------------------------------|--------------------------------|------|------------------------------|------|------------|
| Norwich coach, from London   | Tuesdays, Thursdays, Saturdays | 8 am | Monday, Wednesday, Friday,   | 4 am | Inside 12s |
| Yarmouth Coach, from London; | Mondays, Wednesdays, Fridays   | 5 am | Mondays, Wednesdays, Fridays | 11pm | Inside 12s |

Source: *The Universal British Directory*, 1794.<sup>93</sup>

Table 3.7 Carrier services operating through Halstead

| Stage Wagons       | Outward                            | Time                      | Return            | Time    | Carriage (per 8 wght) |
|--------------------|------------------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------|---------|-----------------------|
| Sudbury Carrier    | Thursday (Winter), Friday (Summer) | 11 pm & 6 am respectively | Following Mondays | 12 noon | 1s 6d                 |
| Long Melford Wagon | Thursday (Winter), Friday (Summer) | 11 pm & 6 am respectively | Following Mondays | 12 noon | 1s 6d                 |

Source: *The Universal British Directory*, 1794.<sup>94</sup>

Halstead’s findings raise the question of the role played by the other two cloth towns excluded from the UBD. Did they similarly partake in this trade? Clues regarding the services operating through Braintree and Bocking are found amongst the transport references made in some of the other towns covered by the directory. For Ingatestone, the source records that,

There are several other coaches pass to and from London to Chelmsford, Maldon, Southminster, Braintree, Sudbury, Bury, Colchester, Harwich, Ipswich, Norwich, Yoxford, and Yarmouth, at different hours every day. - There are also waggons pass through the town to most of the above places from London.<sup>95</sup>

Holden provides more direct evidence for Braintree’s role as a thoroughfare. The information on transport services derived from this directory are recorded in table 3.8. The first observation that can be made from this table is that, like its predecessor, Holden’s *Directory* appeared to have adopted a similar London-centred perspective. However, in so doing it appears less detailed in its coverage of these services than the UBD. Three of the towns covered lacked the detail necessary to calculate the number of weekly services. For example, in Romford’s account no reference is made to the number of coaches and carriers operating to and from the town. Similarly, the figure calculated for Colchester is likely to represent an underestimation. Under wagons reference is made in the plural, ‘London waggons every Thursday evening to the Saracen’s Head, Aldgate ...

93. UBD, Vol. III, 231.  
94. *Ibid.*  
95. UBD, Vol. III, 444.



London waggons twice a week to the Bull, Leadenhall-st, London.’<sup>96</sup> As before, where unspecified such entries have been treated as representing one vehicle. In addition, Holden made no reference to times of departure and arrival, nor to costs of carriage.

Table 3.8 Town transport services recorded in Holden’s *Directory*

| Place          | Type of Transport                    | Destination      | No Per Week      | Total Services Per Week |
|----------------|--------------------------------------|------------------|------------------|-------------------------|
| Braintree      | Coach                                | London           | 6                | 7                       |
|                | Wagon                                | London           | 1                |                         |
| Chelmsford     | Coach (2)                            | London           | 12               | 12                      |
| Romford        | Coaches (Unspec)<br>Waggons (Unspec) | London<br>London | Unspec<br>Unspec |                         |
| Saffron Walden | Coach                                | London           | 3                | 6                       |
|                | Waggons (2)                          | London           | 3                |                         |
| Harwich        | Coaches                              | London           |                  |                         |
|                | Wagon                                | London           |                  |                         |
|                | Vessels                              | London           |                  |                         |
|                | Packet Boats (12)                    | Holland          |                  |                         |
| Colchester     | Coaches                              | London           | 18               | 29                      |
|                | Coaches (Unspec)                     | London           | 6                |                         |
|                | Wagons (3)                           | London           | 5                |                         |

Source: Holden's *London and County Directory*, 1811.<sup>97</sup>

Beyond this, even when it is clear how many coaches were operating, the coverage is less detailed than the UBD. Chelmsford, for instance, was recorded with 12 weekly services by Holden, compared to the UBD’s 27. However, if it is assumed the latter directory was fairly constant in its under-recording of services, some measure of Braintree's likely role as a thoroughfare centre is possible by considering its standing relative to the other towns covered by Holden. In this respect, Braintree appears to have been involved in slightly more services than Saffron Walden, just over half as many as the county town and a fourth of the recorded number operating through Colchester. This compares favourably with Halstead's relative position in the UBD. Here Halstead returned just over a fourth of the number operating through Chelmsford and just under a seventh of those through Colchester. Indeed, if the 55 percent reduction in the number of Chelmsford's services evident between the UBD's list and that of Holden were applied to Braintree then, with an estimated 16 weekly services, this town may well have been a major thoroughfare centre in the 1790s.

Thus the findings for Halstead and Braintree suggest that both compared favourably to other Essex towns operating regular services to London. This raises the question of what economic significance should be attached to the role of these towns as thoroughfares? Given that a limited number of people travelled by coach, it could be argued that the

96. All entries in Holden Vol. III, except Colchester which appears in Vol. II.  
97. Colchester appears in Vol. II, the others in Vol. II. No page numbers are given in these two volumes. The towns, however, appear in alphabetical order.



coaching trade was not a huge generator of income. Colchester's entries in the UBD offer some guidance. The two Colchester stage-coaches, plying between the town and London, were recorded as carrying six inside passengers.<sup>98</sup>

Additional support for this cautious view derives from the fact that, in the eyes of contemporaries, at least those of the UBD's compilers, operating as a thoroughfare did not secure a settlement urban status. Brentwood and Ingatestone offer the most prominent examples - both identified as busy thoroughfares, but neither described as a town.<sup>99</sup> Similarly, it would appear from the references made by the UBD, along with Morant and Muilman, that the only trade benefiting from thoroughfare activity was that of innkeeping. Of Ingatestone, Morant noted it 'is a great thorough-fare from Harwich and Colchester to London, on which account the chief part of it consists of inns'.<sup>100</sup>

There are, however, a number of reasons for suggesting thoroughfare activity was not a marginal concern to the economies of Essex towns in general and those of the case study towns in particular. First, consideration needs to be directed to the wealth of those travelling. The fares charged would have been far beyond the purse of an agricultural labourer.<sup>101</sup> Therefore, although modest in number, these individuals were likely to have been able to wield considerable purchasing power. It is also probable that the demand they generated for the facilities of the inns they stayed at would have had a multiplier effect, benefiting those supplying these establishments with food and victuals. The trades likely to have profited would have encompassed maltsters, brewers, bakers and butchers, amongst others.<sup>102</sup> Moreover, as suggested above, the number of services recorded by the directories probably only represented a minority of those in regular operation.

The descriptions of Morant and Muilman support further the view that thoroughfare trade was of considerable economic importance to the fortunes of the towns. Away from the main turnpikes Morant described Great Dunmow as being 'no great thoroughfare, [and in consequence, possessing] but a slender trade'.<sup>103</sup> Similarly, for Harlow Muilman's author noted 'The traffic...is very trifling',<sup>104</sup> and for Hatfield Broad-Oak Morant observed, 'As this place is no great thoroughfare, it hath, of course, but little trade.'<sup>105</sup> This assessment accords with what is known about the county's road network from the

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98. UBD, Vol. II, 525-26.

99. See table 3.2.

100. Similarly, the UBD recorded that Witham 'is a neat-built pleasant town, with several fine inns, it being a great thoroughfare to Harwich, and to the farthest part of Essex and Suffolk'. UBD, Vol. IV, 805. Likewise, Muilman's author commented that Epping 'on the middle road from London to Cambridge, Newmarket, Isle of Ely, &c. &c. consists chiefly of inns and public-houses'. *History of Essex by a Gentleman*, Vol. IV (1771), 176.

101. See chapter 5.

102. See the final section of this chapter for a more detailed assessment of this.

103. Morant, *History of Essex*, Vol. II, 143.

104. *History of Essex by a Gentleman*, Vol. II, 65.

105. Morant, *History of Essex*, Vol. II, 502.



work of Booker and Pawson. It also suggests that Coggeshall may have been a significant trading centre located as it was on a major east/west road.

Booker has noted that, overland, 18th century Essex possessed a network of good roads which received favourable comment from contemporary travellers. Arthur Young, for instance, praised the county's major roads, although he was a good deal more critical of some of the minor ones. Most of the major roads ran south to north and were also the first to be turnpiked. Essex's earliest turnpikes date from the late 17th century.<sup>106</sup> However, the major period of turnpiking occurred in the early 18th century. By 1726 turnpike trusts were operating the entire length of the major overland route from London through the county and into Suffolk. One of the two major south-north routes taken by the turnpikes passed through both Braintree and Halstead. What is more, the work on turnpike density carried out by Pawson identifies that these roads would have been very heavily used. In this regard, Pawson observed that although amongst the first counties to experience a turnpike boom, Essex's turnpike density remained comparatively low. One reason, he argues, was the county's maritime position and the consequent use made of coastal and river communications. The other, however, was that much of the traffic operated along relatively few roads running to and from the Metropolis.<sup>107</sup>

If we consider Coggeshall's position within this scheme and the possible role played by thoroughfare activity, it emerges that whilst not located on one of the principal south-north roads, it was, nevertheless, situated on an important stretch of turnpike road running between Colchester and Bishop Stortford. It seems likely that this would have generated considerable commercial demand, although perhaps not to the same extent witnessed by the other two case study towns.

## Summary

This section has demonstrated that the first generation of trade directories, particularly the UBD, are of considerable value to the study of carrier and coach services in late 18th and early 19th century small towns. Few other sources at this date possess such information. The details afforded, relating to days, times and sometimes fares, would suggest that the evidence presented may be judged to have been reliable. By considering the carrier and coach services operating from such towns, it becomes possible to link them into the wider commercial network of the period, and to assess their role in the growth of regional and national markets. However, consideration of the case study towns suggests that the

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106. J.M.L. Booker, 'The Essex turnpike trusts' (unpublished MLitt thesis, University of Durham, 1979). The first of these was constructed in 1696, and covered five short stretches of road; two issuing from Colchester heading towards Dedham and Marks Tey; one running across the county boarder with Suffolk and linking Bulmer Tye with Sudbury; another operating between Harwich and Manningtree/Mistley; and a fifth running between Shenfield and Margareting.

107. E. Pawson, *Transport and Economy: The Turnpike Roads of 18th Century Britain* (London, 1977).



source was restricted in its coverage of the movement of people and goods to that occurring between small towns and larger centres, particularly London.

Although not overtly identified in descriptions as thoroughfare centres the three case study towns, particularly Halstead and Braintree and Bocking, appear to have functioned as important thoroughfare centres, linking London to a number of provincial centres in the Eastern Counties. Moreover, comparison of the quantity of services operating from a number of other Essex settlements suggests they were amongst the more important of the county's thoroughfares. Such findings do much to discredit the idea that, as wool declined, these settlements became remote places.

To summarise the findings so far, both examination of transport and marketing reveal that the case study towns were full participants in the county's marketing and thoroughfare activities. In terms of late 18th century urban functions they constituted far more than merely centres for woollen cloth manufactories. The links they possessed with London, which were evident in examinations of transport and marketing, belie the perception of these towns as isolated backwaters. However, what neither of these two studies are capable of showing is the relative importance of these other functions to the economies of Braintree and Bocking, Coggeshall and Halstead. Was wool the economic staple, and marketing along with thoroughfare undertakings, of secondary importance? If this were the case, given the waning fortunes of wool, the perception of these towns as stagnating, economic backwaters might still hold true. The other major set of data present in the directories, and the one which may offer some insight into the economic orientation of these places, are lists of inhabitants. It is to these that the remaining part of this chapter is devoted, beginning with Bailey's *Directory*.

### III. Principal Inhabitants

#### Bailey's *Directory*, 1784

Coverage of Essex towns is contained in Volume IV of Bailey's *British Directory*, published in 1784, entitled *The Eastern Directory*. According to the title page this comprised 'an Accurate List of the names and places of abode of the Bankers, Merchants, Gentlemen of the Law and Physic, Manufacturers, and respectable Traders in every principal Town in Bedfordshire, Cambridge, Essex, Hertfordshire, Kent, Middlesex, Norfolk, Suffolk, Sussex, Surrey, and Warwickshire.' In fact, only 11 Essex towns feature; namely Chelmsford, Colchester, Dunmow, Epping, Harlow, Harwich, Maldon (spelled Malden), Romford, (Rumford), Witham and Waltham Abbey (Walltham) along with Coggeshall. From the earlier examination of settlement descriptions all 11 can be judged as towns. Indeed, they meet both the criteria used by the NSPT and the UBD. Horndon on the Hill and Brentwood whose urban status appears in doubt by the time the UBD was published are not amongst the 11.



However, it is questionable what criteria the *Directory* employed in its definition of the county's 'principal' towns. If based either on population size or economic importance there is a case for including the boroughs of Saffron Walden and Thaxted, along with Barking and the two other case study towns of Halstead and Braintree and Bocking. A consideration of the distribution of the 11 towns covered by Bailey's suggests, however, that selection may have owed something to geography. Map 3.1. locates the 11 towns Bailey recorded with lists of inhabitants. In terms of their location in the county, those selected do not represent the full breadth of the late 18th century urban network. Instead, they derived from a central belt running from Romford in the south-west, to Maldon on the southern coast and from Dunmow in the north-west, to Harwich on the north east coast. Most of those towns excluded, including the five substantial settlements noted above, were to be found either north or south of this belt.

Turning to the depth of the *Directory's* coverage, table 3.9 records the number of individuals appearing in the lists of 'Bankers, Merchants, Gentlemen of the Law and Physic, Manufacturers, and respectable Traders' for each of the 11 towns. The towns have been arranged according to the number of entries each was returned with, from the largest down to the smallest number.

Table 3.9 Number of inhabitants in Essex towns  
recorded in Bailey's *Directory*

| Settlement    | Number of Entries |
|---------------|-------------------|
| Colchester    | 142               |
| Chelmsford    | 79                |
| Maldon        | 44                |
| Harwich       | 41                |
| Witham        | 30                |
| Romford       | 29                |
| Coggeshall    | 26                |
| Waltham Abbey | 22                |
| Harlow        | 12                |
| Epping        | 8                 |
| Dunmow        | 8                 |

Source: Bailey's *British Directory*, Vol. IV, 1784.<sup>108</sup>

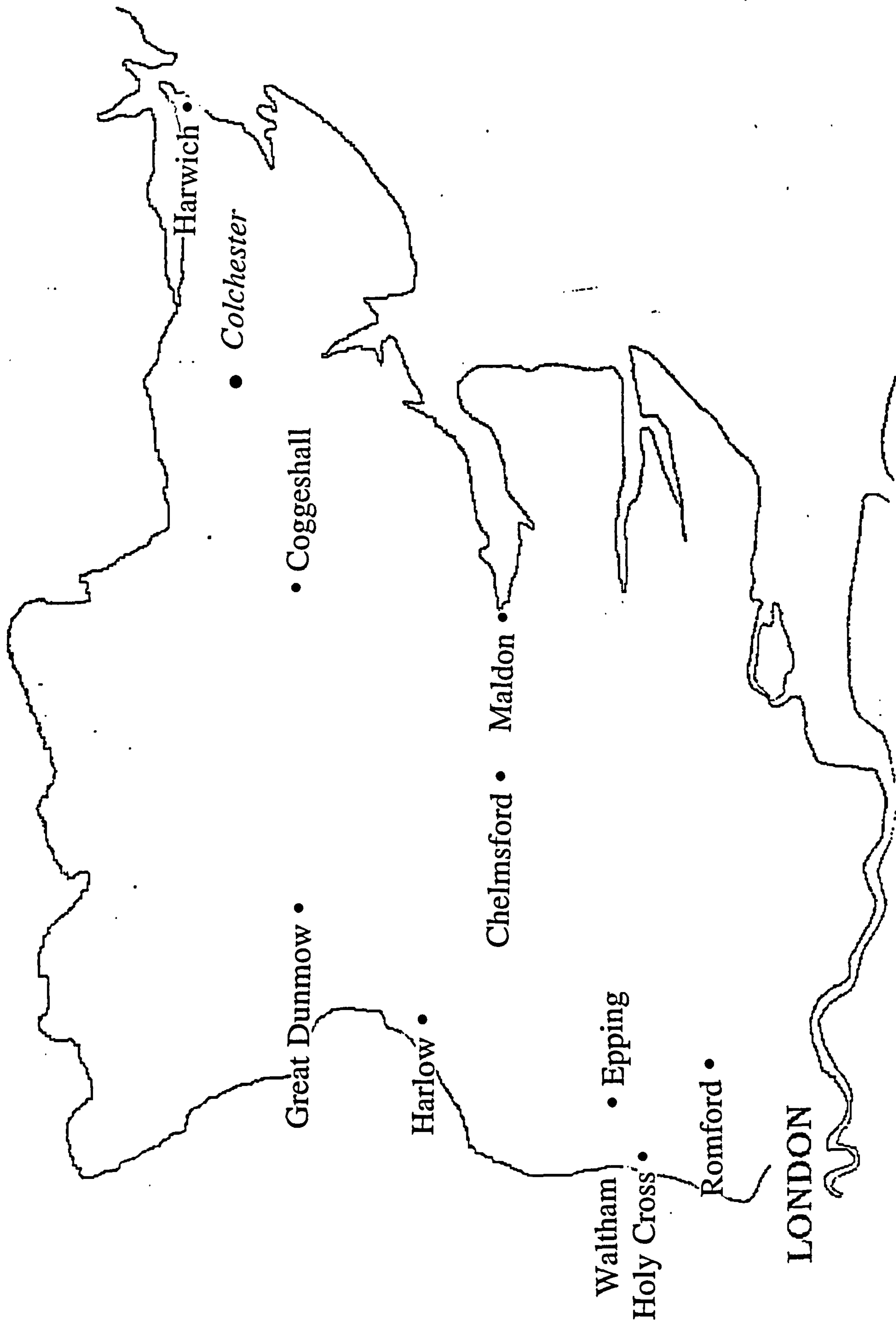
Table 3.9 highlights that the number of entries recorded for each of the 11 towns varied considerably. Whilst 142 individuals were recorded for Colchester, only eight were listed for both Epping and Dunmow. Some idea of the variations in comparative

108. Towns appear in alphabetical order: Colchester, 794-97; Chelmsford, 792-93; Maldon, 867-68; Harwich, 875-76; Witham, 907; Romford, 881-82; Coggeshall, 793; Waltham Abbey, 918; Harlow, 821; Epping, 806; Dunmow 803.



Essex Small Towns Recorded in Bailey's Eastern  
Counties Directory, 1784

Map 3.1.





coverage this represents can be gained from considering the percentage difference in the numbers recorded for each town. By this method five levels of coverage can be discerned. The first of these features Colchester. This town returned over 44 percent more entries than Chelmsford. With 79 entries the county town, in turn, represented the second level of coverage, returning 44 percent more than the next highest. With 44 and 41 entries the two towns of Maldon and Harwich, respectively, comprised the third level. Each of these listed some 27 percent more individuals than the next group of towns comprising Witham, Romford, Coggeshall and Waltham Abbey. Finally, these four returned 45 percent or more entries than the three remaining towns of Harlow, Epping and Dunmow.

Although some 16 years separate the publishing of these lists from the first census returns, examination of town populations in 1801 offers a rough guide to levels of directory coverage. In this respect, Colchester's position as the town returning the largest number of entries accords with the fact that it was by far the largest town in the county. The populations of the other 10 towns at the 1801 census ranged from a little under 4,000 to just over 1,500. Here the differences in directory coverage were far greater than those in population size were likely to have been. In 1801 Chelmsford was 37 percent more populous than Harwich, whilst its coverage in Baileys was over 48 percent more. Similarly, by comparing levels three and four we find that in 1801 Romford with 29 entries was a more populous town than either Maldon or Harwich, with 44 and 41 respectively. Finally, a similar disequilibrium appears between levels four and five. Witham, for example, possessed just under 20 percent more people than Epping, but its coverage in the first national directory was over 70 percent greater. Even if dramatic demographic changes occurred between 1784 and 1801, and there is little evidence for this, it seems a reasonable judgement that examination of the lists of inhabitants for the last three towns can reveal little about the nature of their economies.

This last judgement is supported by the fact that the most likely activities to be recorded in the *Directory* were for 'gentlemen of law and physic'. For the places where few entries were returned this class assumed a very high proportion. In both Epping and Dunmow these individuals constituted some 37 percent of all entries.<sup>109</sup> In the towns with larger numbers these gentlemen were still quite prominent. In Coggeshall they represented over 19 percent of entries, in Witham 10 percent.<sup>110</sup> Even in the towns with the largest number of entries the presence of these individuals was probably disproportionate to their true number in relation to the wider commercial and professional population. In Chelmsford they represented 6.3 percent of entries, in Colchester 7.7 percent.<sup>111</sup> Nevertheless, it is

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109. Bailey, Vol. IV, 806.

110. *Ibid.*, 907 and 793.

111. *Ibid.*, 792-93 and 794-97.



arguable that those places with more than 20 entries offer a sufficient range of other trades to allow some very cursory examination of their economies to be made.

These limitations accepted, analysis of the lists of inhabitants can offer valuable insights into the character of Coggeshall's economy and how it compared with those of a number of other Essex towns. Bailey's coverage of Coggeshall is reproduced in table 3.10. The sequence has been altered from the original which listed entries in alphabetical order of surname. Instead, the aim has been, first, to distinguish the woollen cloth associated trade entries from the rest and then to arrange the non-cloth trades according to the number of appearances each made.

Table 3.10 Inhabitants of Coggeshall recorded in Bailey's *Directory*

| No | Woollen Cloth Entries |                            |
|----|-----------------------|----------------------------|
| 1  | Anthony, Abraham      | Wool-card-maker            |
| 2  | Appleton, Richard     | Wool-card-maker            |
| 3  | Bolt, Joseph          | Baize-maker                |
| 4  | Cable, Richard        | Baize-maker                |
| 5  | Unwin, Stephen        | Baize-maker                |
| 6  | White, Richard, jun.  | Baize-maker                |
|    | Ambiguous             |                            |
| 7  | White, Richard        | Merchant                   |
|    | Other Trade Entries   |                            |
| 8  | Cardinal, John        | Surgeon                    |
| 9  | Crumpton, David       | Surgeon                    |
| 10 | Dixon, William        | Surgeon                    |
| 11 | Forbes, William       | Surgeon                    |
| 12 | Godfrey, John         | Surgeon                    |
| 13 | Matthews, Robert      | Linen-draper               |
| 14 | Stafford, John        | Linen-draper               |
| 15 | Wade, Daniel          | Linen-draper               |
| 16 | Skingley, Henry       | Brewer                     |
| 17 | Unwin, Fisher         | Brewer                     |
| 18 | Evans, Mary           | Tallow-chandler            |
| 19 | Rudkin, Haddon        | Grocer and Tallow-chandler |
| 20 | Andrew, Thomas        | Upholder and Cabinet-maker |
| 21 | Cardinal, John        | Tanner                     |
| 22 | Dicks, John           | Currier                    |
| 23 | Appleby, Robert       | Ironmonger                 |
| 24 | Fordham, John         | Clock-maker                |
| 25 | Havard, Thomas        | Hatter                     |
| 26 | Potts, William        | Attorney at Law            |

Source: Bailey's *Directory*, Vol. IV, 1784.

The first observation to make is that woollen cloth manufacture is represented amongst the 26 entries Bailey records for the town. Indeed, six individuals were listed; two wool card makers and four baize makers. Evidence that woollen cloth manufacturing was a distinct feature of this representative of the case study towns (along with Colchester), can be seen from the fact that besides one wool-comber in Waltham Abbey, woollen cloth trades are



not mentioned in any of the other towns.<sup>112</sup> The lone representative of this trade in Waltham Abbey would support Muilman's assessment that, by the later 18th century, this town's involvement in the industry was minor. More generally these findings would underpin the view that Bailey's coverage was sensitive enough to identify distinctions amongst small town economies.

This finding raises the question of to what extent does Coggeshall appear as a specialised woollen cloth manufacturing town? One calculation that may assist in answering this is produced in table 3.11. This records the number of different trades appearing in all of Bailey's 11 towns then divides this by the total number of entries listed in each town. It can be suggested that the nearer to 0.00 the resulting figure is the more homogeneous the town's occupational structure would be. By contrast, the nearer the figure is to one the more varied, or heterogeneous, the trades recorded in Baileys were.

Table 3.11 Range of trades in Essex towns recorded by Bailey's *Directory*

| Town          | Range of Trade Types | Range Over Total |
|---------------|----------------------|------------------|
| Colchester    | 71                   | 0.50             |
| Chelmsford    | 59                   | 0.74             |
| Maldon        | 34                   | 0.77             |
| Witham        | 31                   | 1.03             |
| Harwich       | 30                   | 0.73             |
| Romford       | 25                   | 0.86             |
| Waltham Abbey | 21                   | 0.95             |
| Coggeshall    | 16                   | 0.61             |
| Harlow        | 9                    | 0.75             |
| Epping        | 8                    | 1.00             |
| Dunmow        | 5                    | 0.62             |

Source: Bailey's *Directory*, Vol. IV, 1784.<sup>113</sup>

Before considering what the results of this study may reveal about the economy of Coggeshall, it is necessary to acknowledge that the calculation of range over total can produce misleading results. First, it is possible to return a score of 1 and, as the case of Witham illustrates, even surpass it. This is because the presence of multiple trades means that the range of trade types can exceed the number of people recorded. This apparent anomaly is most likely to occur where coverage is small. The second type of misleading result may occur in places returning a large number of principal inhabitants, most noticeably here Colchester. This is simply because the law of diminishing returns will set in; the larger the number of entries the greater the chance that existing trades will re-appear.

112. *Ibid.*, 918. Colchester returned a dyer along with eight baize manufacturers. Bailey, Vol. IV, 794-97.

113. See footnote 109 for full references.



This said, the calculation does offer a rough and ready guide to levels of occupational concentration, and one that has the potential to be refined, as will be demonstrated when attention turns to the results for the UBD and Holden. The findings in table 3.11. suggest that, in comparison to other towns with a similar depth of directory coverage, namely Maldon, Harwich, Romford, Waltham Abbey, Witham, Coggeshall did display some measure of specialisation. Whilst the others returned figures of between 0.73 to 1.03, Coggeshall's score of 0.6. was lower. However, this raises the questions of how much lower? Did the concentration in wool that was primarily responsible for this figure represent a level of 'specialisation' absent in the other towns?

One quick method of answering this is to calculate the proportion of Coggeshall's principal inhabitants returned with wool occupations and compare this with the percentages produced by the most frequently occurring trades in the other towns. Twenty-three percent of Coggeshall's principal inhabitants were recorded with wool trades. However, comparable levels of concentration were found in some of the other towns, most noticeably Romford. Twenty percent of this town's entries were corn chandlers (five out of a total of 29).<sup>114</sup> Elsewhere, just under 14 percent of Maldon's entries were coal merchants, whilst a little more than seven percent of Chelmsford's principal inhabitants were returned as grocers.<sup>115</sup> From this perspective Coggeshall does not appear as a particularly specialised manufacturing centre.

Indeed, the clearest example of economic specialisation amongst Essex towns covered by Bailey's *Directory* was Harwich, in its capacity as an important cross-channel port and ship building centre. The reason why this town failed to feature prominently in table 3.11 is due to the range of activities associated with this function. Of its 41 entries the *Directory* lists four packet commanders, four surveyors of customs, three sail makers, two block makers, two custom house officers and two cutter commanders, as well as one anchorsmith and roper.<sup>116</sup> These individuals represent just over 39 percent of the towns 'principal inhabitants'. A comparison with the *Directory*'s portrayal of Maldon confirms that this level of trade concentration was not typical of the county's maritime settlements. In Bailey's coverage of Maldon no ship building activities were listed. Instead, the range and types of trades returned suggest the town operated as a marketing centre for its agricultural hinterland, and that its harbour facilitated these commercial functions.<sup>117</sup>

Numbers recorded for certain trades is, however, a limited guide to the economic importance of particular urban activities. Beside other possible short comings, no account is taken of their wealth generating abilities. Although the percentage of Coggeshall's

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114. Bailey, Vol. IV, 881-82.

115. *Ibid.*, 867-68 and 792-93.

116. *Ibid.*, 875-76.

117. *Ibid.*, 867-68.



principal inhabitants returned with wool trades may have been comparable to the proportion of corn chandlers in Romford it might be that the bay makers and manufacturers of Coggeshall were particularly affluent. One guide to wealth can be acquired by examining rate books which record the rateable value of private property. Rate books dating back to the late 18th century survive for all three towns. However, unlike their 19th century counterparts, these identify occupiers rather than owners and occupiers, and only do so for those with property valued at £1 or above. In many instances these were probably the same individuals. However, in others property would have been rented or leased out. It seems reasonable to assume that a good correlation would have existed between wealth and the value of property occupied. Indeed, since valuations would have been made on property that included commercial premises it is arguable that occupancy is a better guide to the prosperity of the economically active. The only rate book to survive for the same year in which an early trade directory was published was that for Coggeshall in June, 1784.<sup>118</sup>

Twenty-three out of the 26 entries appearing in Bailey's coverage of Coggeshall were found in the rate book. There are various reasons why three failed to appear. The date when the directory list was compiled is not recorded and may well relate to an earlier part of the year or even a previous year. These 23, however, only represent 15.3 percent of the 150 occupiers appearing in the rate book. Moreover, the average rateable value of their property suggests that those appearing in the *Directory* were not necessarily the town's wealthiest occupiers. The average rateable value of their property was slightly above the average for all 150 occupiers, at £18 compared with just over £11. Moreover, this £18 average masked a range of property valuations. Abraham Anthony, a wool-card maker, occupied property valued at just £1. In contrast, the value of Henry Skingley's property was assessed at £86 and that of Richard White at £133. Amongst those excluded, however, were Thomas Bridge whose total valuation was £100 and Hanbury Osgood whose valuation was £130. Although the rate book did not identify the trade of either of these individuals, other evidence returned in the source suggests both were farmers. The former was recorded as paying tithes, the latter had a property description that included a farm.

In addition, from other property descriptions it is also evident that a number of individuals associated with trades, and returning high valuations, also went unrecorded in the *Directory*. For instance, Levitt Appleby returned an £8 property which included a malting house. Similarly, Andrew Blackborne's property was valued at £15 and included a windmill, whilst James Whitcher's £6 property included a slaughter house. In addition, a number of innkeepers were excluded from Bailey's coverage of the town. These included

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118. ERO D/P 36/11/87, Coggeshall overseers rate book, 1784.



John Evans, of the 'Cock and Angell', valued at £6, and Michael Piggott, of the 'Chappell Inn', valued at £26.

If we turn to the specifics of a comparison of property valuations between the wool traders appearing in the directory and others, the evidence does not suggest the former represented a distinctly wealthy group. The two wool-card makers valuations, at £4 and £1, were comparatively low, whilst those for the three baize makers, at £5, £8, and £9, were comparable with the £5, £5, £7, and £8, valuations returned by the three linen drapers and the hatter, as well as the average for the four surgeons. However they were somewhat less than the £13 valuations recorded for both the tanner and the attorney. The trade that possessed the most wealthy practitioners, however, was brewing. As noted earlier, Henry Skingley's property was valued at £86, whilst Fisher Unwin's totalled just over £63. Further evidence that brewing was a sizeable venture can be seen in the property descriptions of these two individuals which included a maltings, along with a malting office, brew house, cellar, ale house, and a farm.

The one possible anomaly that emerges from this study is that of Richard White. His directory description of 'merchant' is rather ambiguous. However, with property valued at £133 he emerges as Coggeshall's largest occupier. White would, therefore, appear to afford the one possible instance of the large merchant clothiers associated with woollen cloth manufacture in 18th century Essex, but in comparison with others recorded with cloth trades he would not appear to have been representative.

## Summary

Consideration of the principal inhabitants listed in Bailey's *Directory* does offer a valuable insight into the urban economies of small towns. This said, examination of coverage in the case study highlights a number of limitations. First, although claiming to include all the county's towns, a number of the more demographically and economically significant places failed to receive consideration. Beyond this, amongst those that were covered considerable variations emerged in the number of principal inhabitants listed. In some instances the number of entries were judged too few for even cursory economic examination to be undertaken. These limitations accepted, for those with an adequate depth of coverage - considered to number 20 - the *Directory* was found capable of identifying economic distinctions and of enabling some preliminary judgements to be made about economic orientation.

Finally, with regard to the criteria employed in selecting individuals to be listed comparison with a rate book suggested those recorded derived from the wealthier contingent of the urban population. However, it was also found that these represented only a small proportion of the major rate payers and not necessarily the biggest



contributors, nor were they all in trade. Some degree of random selection seems to have occurred, perhaps relating to the way the data was originally collected.

Turning to the specifics of the case study, although the woollen cloth industry is represented amongst the principal inhabitants recorded for Coggeshall, from a comparison with entries in other towns this does not appear to constitute a particularly high level of trade concentration. The port and shipbuilding town of Harwich emerges as the most 'specialised' centre. Moreover, from cross referencing directory entries with those in a rate book wool traders do not emerge as a distinctly wealthy group. Indeed, more prominent were brewers - an undertaking which has clear associations with the town's role as a marketing centre and thoroughfare. However, given the number of towns covered, coupled with the shallow depth of coverage, the results from analysis of Bailey's *Directory* remain very cursory. In both terms of extent and depth of coverage the UBD, to which attention will now be turned, is stronger, affording more definite findings.

### ***The Universal British Directory, 1794-98***

Less than a decade after Bailey had provided details of 11 Essex towns the UBD listed inhabitants for 25. These towns comprised Chelmsford, Colchester, Dunmow (described as a borough town); Maldon (populous borough), Thaxted (borough town), Harwich (borough town), Dedham (town); Harlow (town), Witham (town) Manningtree (town), Castle Hedingham (market town), Rochford (market town), Ongar (small market town), and Grays Thurrock (small town), Romford and Epping, as well as Halstead. In addition, a number of other settlements featured which were not described as towns, namely: Billericay, (referred to as a hamlet); Brentwood (hamlet), and Ingatestone (unspecified); as well as places identified as villages - specifically Horndon-on-the-Hill, Sible Hedingham, Earls Colne, Mistley and Bradfield. This wider coverage appears to accord with the *Directory*'s claim, made on the title page for each volume, to include 'all the Cities, Towns, and Principal Villages.' However, disputing this there were a number of notable absentees from the 25. These included Barking, Saffron Walden, and Waltham Abbey, and the two case study towns of Braintree and Bocking and Coggeshall. Map 3.2. locates the 25 towns the UBD recorded with lists of inhabitants.

The exclusion of such places may be the consequence of the collection policy the directory compilers adopted. Shaw and Norton consider that the most accurate way information was collected was by visiting the settlement in question and canvassing each household. This is the approach Bailey claimed to have adopted.<sup>119</sup> In contrast, Wilkes and Barfoot used a variety of methods to collect material for the UBD. It was claimed that an agent had been appointed in every town. There are two possible reasons why, therefore, not every town returned lists. First, not every town was assigned an agent; second, not every agent

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119. Norton, *Guide to Directories*, 16.



carried out his/her tasks. Whatever the explanation, Halstead has to assume the role of the representative cloth town, since Braintree and Bocking and Coggeshall were omitted. Thus, Halstead's returns will be compared with the other 24 towns and villages for which information was collected.

Turning to the depth of coverage amongst the places recorded with lists; in comparison with Bailey's certain differences in the format employed by the UBD are evident. The UBD listed those it identified as 'principal inhabitants' and divided them under the sub-headings of 'Gentry', 'Clergy', 'Physic', 'Law' and, the largest category, 'Traders &c'. The reliability of these lists has been questioned by both Shaw and Norton. Norton argues that entries were 'lifted' from existing guides and directories, 'with or without the owner's permission [and] without too particular a regard for their date'.<sup>120</sup> One of the examples presented for this is of Hull. This was copied from Battle's *Hull Directory* of 1791. In the case of Essex, the only previous directory from which entries could have been taken would have been Bailey's. Most of the settlements covered in the UBD were different to those in the earlier directory. However, the following nine settlements featured in both; Chelmsford, Colchester, Dunmow, Epping, Harlow, Harwich, Maldon, Romford, Witham. Table 3.12 compares the number of entries appearing for each of the towns in the two directories.

Table 3.12 Number of inhabitants recorded in Essex towns by Bailey's *Directory* and the UBD

| Settlement | Bailey's | UBD     | Difference (Years) | Difference (% Increase) |
|------------|----------|---------|--------------------|-------------------------|
| Colchester | 142 (1)  | 512 (1) | 13                 | 360.6                   |
| Chelmsford | 79 (2)   | 210 (3) | 13                 | 265.8                   |
| Maldon     | 44 (3)   | 161 (4) | 10                 | 365.9                   |
| Harwich    | 41 (4)   | 247 (2) | 10                 | 602.4                   |
| Witham     | 30 (5)   | 47 (9)  | 14                 | 156.7                   |
| Romford    | 29 (6)   | 63 (8)  | 14                 | 217.2                   |
| Harlow     | 12 (7)   | 68 (7)  | 10                 | 566.7                   |
| Dunmow     | 8 (8)    | 71 (6)  | 13                 | 887.5                   |
| Epping     | 8 (9)    | 91 (5)  | 10                 | 1137.5                  |
| Average    | 43.7     | 163.3   | -                  | 374.5                   |

Sources: Bailey's *Directory* Vol. IV, 1784; *The Universal British Directory*, Vols. II-V, 1794-98.<sup>121</sup>

The towns have been arranged in descending order according to the number of entries they received in Bailey's *Directory*. Colchester's 142 entries placed it at the top and Epping's

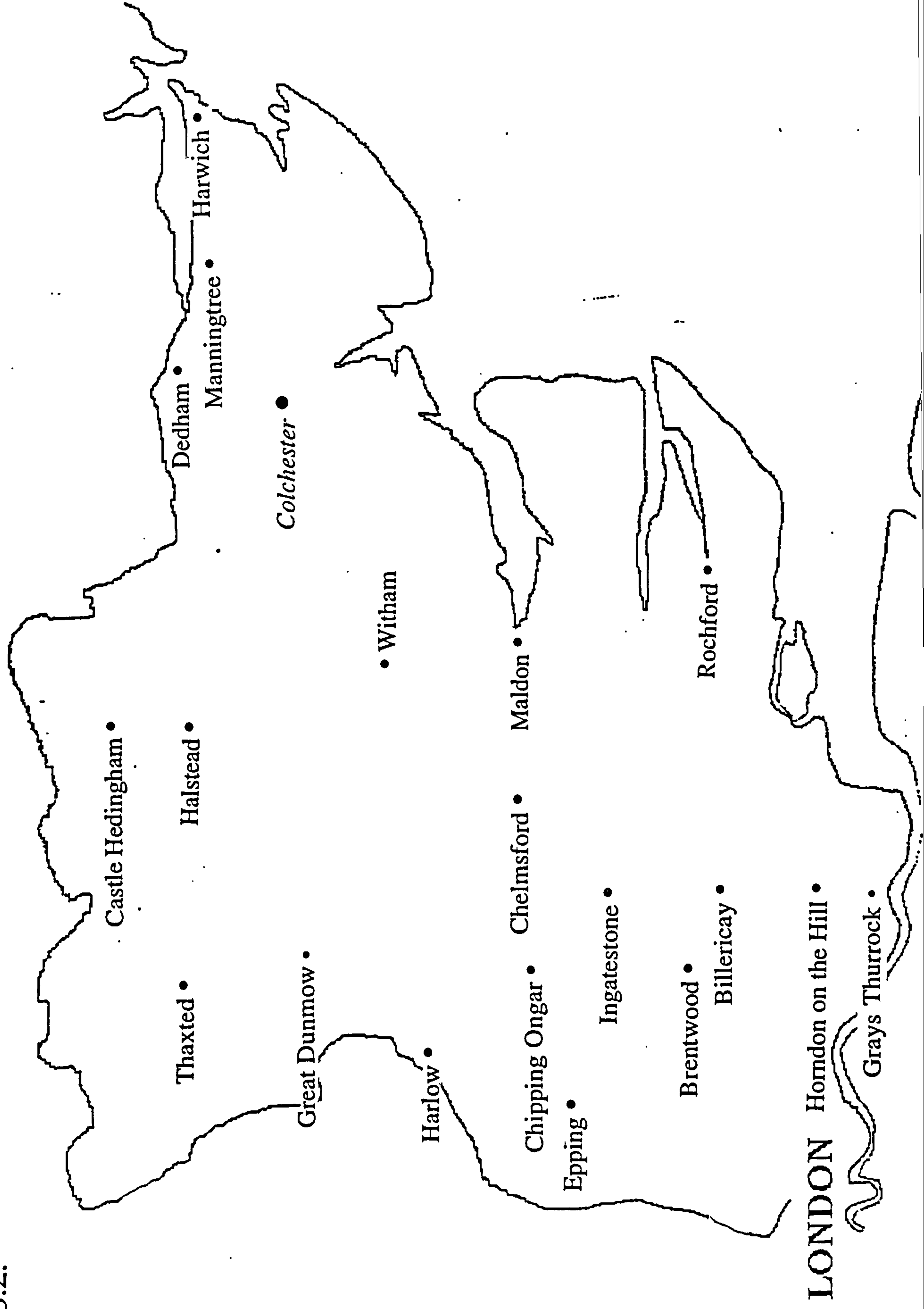
120. *Ibid.*, 18.

121. For Bailey's *Directory* see footnote 108. UBD references: Colchester, Vol. II, 520-25; Chelmsford, Vol. II, 514-17; Maldon, Vol. III, 879-81; Harwich, Vol. III, 240-43; Witham, Vol. IV, 805-6; Romford, Vol. IV, 337; Harlow, Vol. III 358-59; Dunmow, Vol. II, 949-50; Epping, Vol. III, 43-44.



Essex Small Towns Recorded in the Universal  
British Directory, 1794-98

Map 3.2.





eight located it at the bottom. The bracketed figures in the UBD column refer to each town's relative position in terms of the number of entries received in that *Directory*. A comparison of the two show there to have been differences between the directories in the relative coverage of a number of towns. These differences afford some preliminary support for the view that Barfoot and Wilkes were not lifting from Bailey. In fact, only Colchester, which received the largest number of entries in both directories, and Harlow, which ranked seventh in both, retained the same positions. In contrast, the greatest differences in relative coverage occurred in Epping, which moved from ninth position in Baileys' to fifth in the UBD, and Dunmow, which advanced from eighth to sixth. These distinctions do much to confirm the view that Bailey's coverage of Epping and Dunmow, as well as Harlow, was very poor.

More obvious support for the UBD's originality is evident from considering the numbers recorded. On average just over three and a half times more entries appeared in the UBD's lists than in Bailey's. However, for Epping, Dunmow and Harlow the increases were far greater. The number of individuals listed in Harlow rose from 12 to 68, constituting an increase of more than 560 percent; for Dunmow the growth was from 8 to 71 individuals - a more than 880 percent increase, and for Epping, from 8 to 91 - an increase of more than 1,000 percent. Alternatively, those with lower than average percentage increases comprised Chelmsford, Colchester, Maldon, Witham and Romford. However, even in these cases the difference in numbers returned is sufficient to dismiss the idea of direct plagiarism. For example, whilst Bailey returned 79 entries for the county town, the UBD listed 210. In sum, in comparison to Bailey's the UBD offered lists of principal inhabitants for a far larger number of settlements, and in those covered by the former, the UBD was also found to have returned a far greater number of entries.

Table 3.12 also reveals that the number of entries the UBD returned varied considerably between settlements. Whilst Colchester received over 500 entries, Witham had just 47. If account is made of all the settlements covered by the UBD the spectrum is even greater, with Mistley receiving only 13 entries. To what extent did this correspond to settlement size? The populations recorded in the 1801 census for each settlement suggest a greater correlation with population size than in Bailey's *Directory*. Nevertheless, as table 3.13 illustrates, there were still some considerable variations. The settlements have been ordered in the table according to the size of their 1801 population. Column four records, in brackets, the ranking of towns in terms of the number of individuals listed, ranging from 1 (which had the highest number of entries) to 25. The final column records the percentage of the 1801 population this number represents, and ranks this in descending order.



Table 3.13 Level of coverage received by Essex settlements in the UBD

| Settlement       | Year of Coverage | 1801 Population | No of Entries | Percent of 1801 |
|------------------|------------------|-----------------|---------------|-----------------|
| Colchester       | 1797             | 11,520          | 512 (1)       | 4.44 (14)       |
| Chelmsford*      | 1797             | 3,755           | 210 (3)       | 5.59 (10)       |
| Halstead *       | 1794             | 3,380           | 69 (11)       | 2.04 (22)       |
| Romford *        | 1798             | 3,179           | 63 (14)       | 1.98 (23)       |
| Harwich *        | 1794             | 2,761           | c247 (2)      | 8.94 (2)        |
| Maldon *         | 1794             | 2,358           | 161 (4)       | 6.82 (6)        |
| Witham *         | 1798             | 2,186           | 47 (16)       | 2.15 (20)       |
| Thaxted *        | 1798             | 1,894           | 131 (5)       | 6.91 (5)        |
| Sible Hedingham  | 1794             | 1,866           | 18 (23)       | 0.96 (25)       |
| Dunmow *         | 1797             | 1,828           | 71 (10)       | 3.88 (15)       |
| Epping *         | 1794             | 1,812           | 91 (6)        | 5.02 (12)       |
| Dedham *         | 1797             | 1,537           | 90 (7)        | 5.85 (8)        |
| Harlow *         | 1794             | 1,514           | 68 (12)       | 4.49 (13)       |
| Billericay *     | 1797             | 1,472           | 86 (8)        | 5.84 (9)        |
| Rochford *       | 1798             | 1,228           | 39 (17)       | 3.17 (16)       |
| Castle Hedingham | 1794             | 1,065           | 18 (23)       | 1.69 (24)       |
| Manningtree *    | 1798             | 1,016           | 32 (19)       | 3.14 (17)       |
| Brentwood *      | 1797             | 1,007           | 64 (13)       | 6.35 (7)        |
| Earls Colne      | 1794             | 972             | 20 (22)       | 2.05 (21)       |
| Grays Thurrock * | 1794             | 677             | 35 (18)       | 5.16 (11)       |
| Ingatestone      | 1794             | 645             | 49 (15)       | 7.59 (4)        |
| Ongar *          | 1798             | 595             | 80 (9)        | 13.44 (1)       |
| Bradfield        | 1798             | 582             | 23 (21)       | 2.23 (19)       |
| Mistley          | 1798             | 554             | 13 (25)       | 2.34 (18)       |
| Horndon *        | 1794             | 359             | 28 (20)       | 7.79 (3)        |

*Notes:* The astrix ‘\*’ identifies those places defined as town in the National Small Towns Population Estimates. Billericay's population figure is based on that for the parish of Great Burstead in which it is located.  
*Sources:* *The Universal British Directory*, Vols. II-V, 1794-98; Census 1801, Population Tables.<sup>122</sup>

As a percentage of the 1801 population the UBD’s coverage ranged from 0.9, in the case of Sible Hedingham, to 13.4 for Ongar. Indeed, three groups of settlement can be discerned from the figures presented in table 3.13. The first consisted of Ongar; the second included those places whose coverage ranged from 8.9 to 5 percent; the third comprised those with under 4 percent coverage. In explaining these differences distance from London appears to have played some role. Of the 13 towns that received the greatest coverage nine were situated within a 30 mile radius of London, principally in the central and southern parts of the county. The four exceptions to this were: Harwich 72 miles away, Thaxted 41, Maldon 37 and Dedham 58. By contrast, of the 12 to receive the

122. Colchester, Vol. II, 520-25; Chelmsford, Vol. II, 514-17; Halstead, Vol. III, 231-32; Romford, Vol. IV, 337; Harwich, Vol. III, 240-43; Maldon, Vol. III, 879-81; Witham, Vol. IV, 805-6; Thaxted, Vol. IV, 622-23; Sible Hedingham, Vol. III, 252; Dunmow, Vol. II, 949-950; Epping, Vol. III, 43-44; Dedham, Vol. II, 899; Harlow, Vol. III, 358-59; Billericay, Vol. II, 324; Rochford, Vol. IV, 335-36; Castle Hedingham, Vol. III, 252; Manningtree, Vol. V, 121; Brentwood, Vol. II, 355-56; Earls Colne, Vol. III, 253; Grays, Vol. III, 164; Ingatestone, Vol. III, 444; Ongar, Vol. IV, 176; Bradfield, Vol. V, 122; Mistley, Vol. V, 121; Horndon, Vol. III, 289.



poorest coverage 11 were beyond 35 miles of the city, seven of which were more than 45 miles from London. With the exception of Romford and the south-eastern town of Rochford, all these places were located in the northern half of the county. Despite this, the depth of coverage provided by the UBD was sufficient to permit analysis of the principal inhabitants of these more distant towns, including Halstead.

Of the 55 traders, including physicians and attorneys, the UBD recorded for Halstead no fewer than six were returned with wool-related occupations.<sup>123</sup> They comprised three say makers, a wool stapler, a bay maker and a manufacturer of bays and says. In comparison with the other 24 settlements Halstead clearly emerges as the town with the largest number and array of wool trades. However, this begs the question of what level of specialisation does this accord Halstead? If the same approach used to answer this question for Coggeshall is applied to Halstead wool occupations are found to account for 8.69 per cent of all entries, or 10.9 per cent if the gentry and clergy are excluded. In comparison with levels of trade concentration found amongst the other 24 settlements covered in the *Directory*, this is not particularly high.

Some of the most prominent cases of specialisation were found in Harlow, Dedham, Horndon-on-the-hill, Thaxted and Bradfield. In all five the most frequently occurring trade was that of farmer. In Harlow farmers accounted for a little under 12 percent of all entries, in Dedham, over 17 percent, in Horndon-on-the-Hill 28 percent, and in Thaxted 30.53 percent of all entries.<sup>124</sup> However, it was in Bradfield that the largest proportion of farmers were returned. Here they amounted to over 43 percent of all entries. In accordance with the agrarian orientation that these figures suggest both Horndon on the Hill and Bradfield were referred to by the *Directory* as 'villages'. Similarly, Muilman's author commented upon the small amount of traffic Thaxted received and the fact that the 'greatest part of it's inhabitants [were] supported by husbandry and spinning'.<sup>125</sup> The UBD made similar references to Harlow and Dedham.

Away from agriculture some occupational concentration was also evident amongst places identified as thoroughfares. As noted earlier, innkeeping and victualling were closely associated with this activity. In Brentwood 15.6 percent of entries were returned with these trades, or 17.85 if the gentry and clergy are excluded.<sup>126</sup> The corresponding figures for Chelmsford were 13.3 and 14.43 percent,<sup>127</sup> and for Witham, 10.6 and 13.88 percent.<sup>128</sup> By contrast, 7.14 percent of Hordon's entries, and 6.4 percent of Thaxted's

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123. UBD, Vol. III, 231-32.

124. UBD, Vol. III, 358-59, Vol. II, 899; Vol. III, 289.

125. *History of Essex by a Gentleman*, Vol. III, 188.

126. UBD, Vol. II, 355-56.

127. *Ibid.*, 514-17.

128. UBD, Vol. IV, 805-6.



were described as innkeepers or victuallers.<sup>129</sup> In both the gentry and clergy were excluded. Interestingly, however, the same calculation made for Halstead produces 13.04 and 16.36 percent respectively.<sup>130</sup> These figures accord with the earlier assessment that this town was a thoroughfare; they are also suggestive that this function was of greater importance to the town than woollen manufacturing with its lower representation.

As with Bailey's coverage, however, the town that emerges as the most specialised non-agrarian settlement was Harwich in its capacity as packet-boat station, and ship building yard. The UBD's greater depth of coverage affords more insight into the range of activities associated with these functions. Amongst the trades listed were those of ship broker, mariner, sail maker, ship-store dealer, boat builder, ship chandler, ship joiner, mast maker, fisherman, block maker, anchor-smith, shipwright, cod smack owner, packet commander, cutter commander, chief mate of cutter, setter of handfleet boat, boat man, clerk of the Cheque and store keeper, pilots, as well as customs collector and comptroller, land surveyor, land waiter, tide surveyor, tidesmen, and riding officer. In total 42.9 percent of the town's principal inhabitants were returned with port and boat-building related trades.<sup>131</sup>

Similarly, in comparison with woollen cloth manufacturing centres elsewhere Halstead does not emerge as a particularly specialised centre. Over 27 percent of the UBD's entries for Huddersfield were associated with woollen cloth production, whilst for Halifax the figure was over 38 percent.<sup>132</sup> Moreover, in the latter, nine different wool related trades were distinguished compared to four in Halstead. Amongst these were: woolstapler, card maker, badger, manufacturer, merchant, woollen draper, dyer, and carpet maker. The range of trades recorded for Halstead gives more weight to the argument that its role was that of a marketing and thoroughfare town, rather than a specialised woollen manufacturing centre.

Further evidence of Halstead's economic orientation can be derived from calculating an adjusted trade range figure. Earlier a comparative trade-range assessment was undertaken for Coggeshall and the other towns covered by Bailey. However, since no corresponding population figures were available the range of trades could not be compared with the depth of directory coverage, as defined by the proportion of population represented by the list of principal inhabitants. With UBD such a comparison is possible. The findings of this exercise are presented in table 3.14. The second column records the proportion of the 1801 population covered in the *Directory*. The final right hand column is described as the adjusted trade range and is displayed as a percentage. This figure has been calculated by

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129. UBD, Vol. III, 289; Vol. IV, 622-23.

130. UBD, Vol. III., 231-32.

131. *Ibid.*, 240-43.

132. *Ibid.*, 297-98; 322-23.



dividing the range of entries by the percentage of the population covered in the directory. In the case of Colchester, 138 was divided by 4.4. to give an adjusted trade range figure of 31.4.<sup>133</sup>

Table 3.14 Adjusted trade range scores for Essex settlements featured in the UBD

| Settlement       | No of<br>Different<br>Trades | Percent of 1801<br>Census Covered<br>by Directory | Adjusted<br>Trade Range<br>% |
|------------------|------------------------------|---|------------------------------|
| Colchester       | 138                          | 4.4   | 31.4                         |
| Halstead         | 39                           | 2.0   | 19.1                         |
| Chelmsford       | 104                          | 5.6   | 18.6                         |
| Dunmow           | 46                           | 3.8   | 12.1                         |
| Sible Hedingham  | 11                           | 1.0   | 11.4                         |
| Romford          | 22                           | 2.0   | 11.1                         |
| Epping           | 53                           | 5.0   | 10.5                         |
| Maldon           | 66                           | 6.8   | 9.7                          |
| Witham           | 19                           | 2.1   | 8.8                          |
| Rochford         | 27                           | 3.2   | 8.5                          |
| Harwich          | 70                           | 8.9   | 7.8                          |
| Manningtree      | 23                           | 3.1   | 7.3                          |
| Billericay       | 41                           | 5.8   | 7.0                          |
| Harlow           | 31                           | 4.5   | 6.9                          |
| Thaxted          | 46                           | 6.9   | 6.6                          |
| Castle Hedingham | 11                           | 1.7   | 6.5                          |
| Grays            | 32                           | 5.2   | 6.2                          |
| Dedham           | 36                           | 5.8   | 6.1                          |
| Brentwood        | 35                           | 6.3   | 5.5                          |
| Bradfield        | 12                           | 2.2   | 5.4                          |
| Earls Colne      | 9                            | 2.0   | 4.4                          |
| Ongar            | 47                           | 13.4  | 3.5                          |
| Mistley          | 8                            | 2.3   | 3.4                          |
| Ingatestone      | 20                           | 7.6   | 2.6                          |
| Horndon          | 17                           | 7.8   | 2.2                          |

Source: *Universal British Directory*, Vols. II-IV, 1794-98; Census 1801, Population Tables.<sup>134</sup>

The adjusted trade range figure offers a measure of the importance of a settlement’s marketing role. This is based upon the assumption that the more dynamic and important a market the greater the range of trades that can be sustained. Places with a narrow range of trades, such as villages and agricultural settlements along with specialist centres in which a large number of principal inhabitants are recorded with the same trade, will return a low score. As with the exercise conducted for Baileys’ the results will produce two main biases. The first is likely to occur where either the percentage of the recorded population is particularly high, or where the absolute number of entries is very high. Ongar is the most obvious example of the former, with over 13 percent of its 1801 population appearing amongst the list of principal inhabitants. Colchester with 510 principal

133. The term ‘adjusted’ is used because the trade range has been adjusted for the proportion of the settlement’s 1801 population covered by the directory.

134. See footnote 119.



inhabitants is the clearest instance of the latter. The explanation for both rests with the law of diminishing returns. In the first, the greater the number of traders mentioned the more likely the prospects that individuals with the same concerns will appear. In the second, bias is likely to occur for the very opposite reasons - the lower the proportion or absolute number recorded the lesser the chances of replication.

Accepting these limitations, Halstead emerges with a comparatively high adjusted trade figure. Indeed, by this yardstick it appears as one of the county's principal marketing towns along side Chelmsford. Only the provincial centre of Colchester scores higher. The credibility of this calculation, as a guide to marketing importance, is enhanced by the fact that the top towns to emerge from this were also amongst those places Arthur Young identified in 1813 as the county's chief markets. These were Colchester, Halstead, Chelmsford, Romford, Epping, Maldon, Witham, Braintree, Saffron Walden and Coggeshall.<sup>135</sup> The last three were not covered by the UBD, but the other seven all featured in the top nine highest scoring settlements. Colchester came first, Halstead second, Chelmsford third; Romford sixth, Epping seventh, Maldon eighth and Witham ninth. Sible Hedingham's fifth position, with a score of 11.4, can largely be explained in terms of the bias caused by the low coverage received. Indeed, less than one percent of the 1801 population was represented. By contrast, it can be suggested that, although not mentioned by Young, Dunmow's 12.1 was probably in keeping with what was generally recognised to be a good market town. Muilman's author, for instance, commented on its good corn market.<sup>136</sup> Indeed, as a rough dividing point it can be suggested that a score of eight plus would represent a reasonable marketing centre. Those failing to meet this standard included, appropriately, the small, rural towns of Harlow, Thaxted, Manningtree and Castle Hedingham, the declining centres of Horndon and Dedham, and the three villages and two hamlets represented in the UBD. Even Ongar's appearance amongst this group does, to some degree, fit the general comments about the town losing much its market business to the likes of Romford, Epping and Chelmsford.<sup>137</sup>

Moreover, amongst those settlements failing to reach the eight percent score was the 'village' of Earls Colne whose economy, Johnson claimed, closely resembled that of Coggeshall by the second half of the 18th century.<sup>138</sup> Against this, however, a score of just 4.4 per cent places Earls Colne at the other end of the trade range spectrum to the representative cloth town of Halstead. Indeed, if a comparison is made between Coggeshall's entry in Bailey's *Directory* and that of Earls Colne in the UBD, the former emerges with a far greater range of trades. Excluding those of wool, Coggeshall returned

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135. A. Young, *General View of the Agriculture of the County of Essex*, Vol. II (London, 1813), 386.

136. *History of Essex by a Gentleman*, Vol. III, 145.

137. According to Muilman's author, these three, and not Ongar, were 'engaging in the principal business of this part of the county'.

138. Johnson, 'A proto-industrial community study', 122.



16 different trades compared to the nine of Earls Colne - this despite the fact that Bailey's *Directory* tended to record significantly fewer entries per settlement than its successor.<sup>139</sup>

Unfortunately it is not possible to calculate a comparable adjusted trade figure for Halifax, or indeed, any of the other three main cloth manufacturing small towns of the West Riding of Yorkshire. This is because the parish, which is what the Essex town population figures were based upon, takes on far greater proportions in the West Riding of Yorkshire. Whilst Halstead's parish measured 5,633 acres, Halifax's exceeded 75,000 with a population of 63,434. Although smaller township figures are available for these West Riding settlements, few Essex towns possessed them.<sup>140</sup>

### Summary

The UBD presents an opportunity to advance the analysis of small town economies undertaken using Bailey's *Directory*. The former was found to include lists of principal inhabitants for a significantly larger number of settlements than its predecessor - not all of whom were towns. It was also found to do this at a deeper level of coverage, recording, on average, over three times more entries per settlement. Analysis of the range and types of trade covered confirmed that the UBD was able to identify specialisms within small town economies. Moreover, when combined with population figures from the 1801 census returns it was possible to devise a useful guide to the probable marketing role of towns - a feature associated here not with concentration in a narrow range of comparable trades but with an ability to sustain a considerable variety of trade-types.

Turning to the case study, the representative cloth town of Halstead was distinct amongst the 25 Essex settlements covered in returning a number of woollen traders. However, in comparison to trade concentrations found in a number of other places this proved to represent a small proportion of those listed. Various villages and declining towns were found to possess much large proportions of farmers, whilst Harwich, once again, emerged as the most specialised of the county's larger towns. A comparison of woollen cloth representation was also made with the West Riding towns of Halifax and Huddersfield. Both were found to possess a far larger proportion, and range, of woollen cloth trades. In contrast to its modest performance as a manufacturing centre, however, Halstead's adjusted trade score placed it amongst the county's leading marketing centres, a finding that accorded with Arthur Young's assessment of Essex's chief markets. Moreover, it is also consistent with the underlying argument of this chapter that not only were the Essex cloth towns more than manufacturing centres, but other activities, namely marketing and thoroughfare functions, were of greater importance. However, before this assessment can be fully endorsed evidence must be found that confirms the same was also

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139. Bailey's *Directory*, Vol. IV, 793; UBD, Vol. III, 253.

140. Clark and Hosking, *Population Estimates*.



true for the third case study town - Braintree and Bocking. For this we turn to Holden's *Directory*.

### Holden's *London and Country Directory*, 1811

Holden's *London and County Directory* was published 13 years after the UBD. In contrast to its predecessor, Holden's coverage was restricted to only six towns and is therefore the most limited of the three early directories. The towns for which lists were collected comprised Colchester, Harwich, Chelmsford, Saffron Walden, Romford, and Braintree. Colchester appeared among the 102 towns featured in Volume II of the *Directory* entitled 'Manufacturing and Commercial Towns in the United Kingdom and Wales'. The other five featured in Volume III which contained nearly 300 towns.

The location of these six towns within Essex, shown in map 3.3, does not suggest any strong geographical explanation for their selection. However, in terms of their population size these six were amongst the largest of the county's towns at the start of the 19th century. Table 3.15 lists the populations of all the towns covered in the three directories at the 1811 census. These have been arranged according to size, with the six covered by Holden's appearing in bold. Although included in Clark and Hosking's *Population Estimates*, the urban standing of Brentwood and Horndon-on-the-Hill by the late 18th and early 19th century is questionable. As mentioned in section I, the UBD noted that both had lost their marketing functions.

Five of the six towns featured in Holden's *Directory* were also considered by Arthur Young to be among the county's principal markets. The most notable absentees from Holden's, in terms of Young's list and population size, would appear to have been Maldon and Witham, along with the other two case study towns. These omissions may have been due to the methods Holden employed to collect information. This entailed using local 'gentlemen to assist' in his 'enterprise'. Perhaps no suitable correspondents could be found in the county's other large towns?

Certainly it seems likely that variations in the numbers listed for each town would have been influenced by the zeal with which these 'gentleman of the first respectability' carried out their tasks.<sup>141</sup> In table 3.16 the number of entries recorded by Holden for each of the six towns has been calculated. To assess the depth of coverage for each town, these numbers have also been expressed as percentages of the population at the 1811 census.

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141. Norton, *Guide to Directories*, 16.



Essex Small Towns Recorded in Holden's London  
and Country Directory, 1811

Map 3.3.

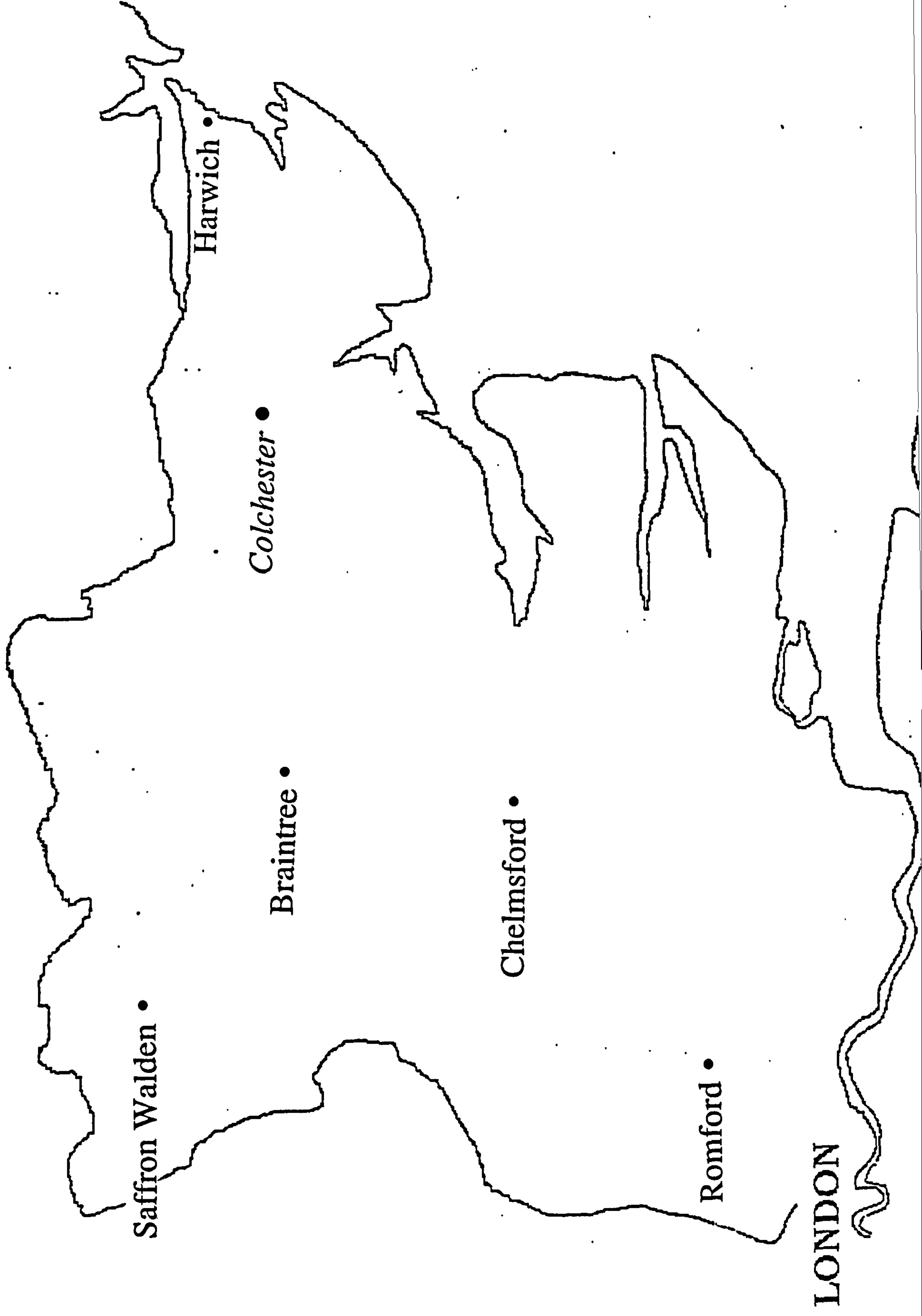




Table 3.15 Population of towns appearing in Bailey’s *Directory*, the UBD and Holden’s *Directory*

| Town                           | 1811 (parish figures)   |
|--------------------------------|-------------------------|
| <b>Colchester</b>              | <b>12,544</b>           |
| <b>Chelmsford</b>              | <b>4,649</b>            |
| <b>Harwich</b>                 | <b>3,732</b>            |
| Waltham Abbey                  | 3,685                   |
| <b>Romford</b>                 | <b>3,244</b>            |
| <b>Saffron Walden</b>          | <b>3,403</b>            |
| Halstead                       | 3,279                   |
| Maldon                         | 2,679                   |
| Coggeshall                     | 2,807                   |
| Witham                         | 2,352                   |
| <b>Braintree and Bocking</b>   | <b>4,842 (Bt 2,298)</b> |
| Dunmow                         | 2,015                   |
| Epping                         | 1,874                   |
| Thaxted                        | 1,733                   |
| Harlow                         | 1,695                   |
| Billericay, with Grt. Burstead | 1,533                   |
| Dedham                         | 1,432                   |
| <i>Brentwood</i>               | 1,238                   |
| Rochford                       | 1,214                   |
| Manningtree                    | 1,075                   |
| Castle Hedingham               | 1,052                   |
| Grays                          | 1,055                   |
| Ongar                          | 678                     |
| <i>Horndon-on-the-Hill</i>     | 378                     |

Sources: Bailey’s *Directory*; 1784; *The Universal British Directory*, Vols. II-IV, 1794-98; Holden’s *London and County Directory* Vol. II and III, 1811.<sup>142</sup>

Whilst for five of these Holden’s list captures less than two percent of the entire population, the coverage for Romford is rather better at a little under four percent. Table 3.16 also records the UBD’s coverage for these towns. From this it appears that the earlier of the two directories was the more extensive in coverage, with the exception of Romford with its comparatively poor showing in the UBD. These variations between the two directories, coupled with the fact that two of the six towns selected by Holden were not included in the UBD, helps dismiss the idea that Holden plagiarised his lists from those appearing in the earlier *Directory*.

Turning to the composition of Holden’s lists, the format for entries was similar to that employed by Bailey. The gentry were not included whilst the clergy, along with those practising medicine and law, were incorporated into a single list arranged in alphabetical order by surname. However, the one feature that particularly distinguished the format of this *Directory* from its predecessors was that, following this list, Holden identified

142. Colchester appears in Holden, Vol. II, the other towns in Vol. III. As noted earlier, Holden’s does not give page numbers. Towns appear in alphabetical order in each volume.



bankers and Post Office employers, as well as innkeepers. Whilst the first two had already appeared in the main list, innkeepers had not.

Table 3.16 Level of coverage given to Essex towns by the UBD and Holden’s *Directory*

| Town           | No in UBD | Percent of 1801 | No in Holden's | Percent of 1811 |
|----------------|-----------|-----------------|----------------|-----------------|
| Colchester     | 512       | 4.44            | 345            | 2.75            |
| Romford        | 63        | 1.98            | 122            | 3.76            |
| Chelmsford     | 210       | 5.59            | 92             | 1.97            |
| Saffron Walden | N C       | N C             | 58             | 1.70            |
| Braintree      | N C       | N C             | 36             | 1.56            |
| Harwich        | 161       | 8.94            | 48             | 1.28            |

Sources: *The Universal British Directory*; Holden's *London and County Directory* ;<sup>143</sup> Census 1801 and 1811 Population Tables.

Table 3.17 reproduces Holden's coverage of Braintree. To identify evidence of specialisation trades have been arranged according to the frequency with which they appeared in the *Directory*. Bankers and innkeepers have been incorporated into this list, with the Post Office entry appearing last. The first observation that can be made from table 3.17 is the absence of any wool trades in Braintree. Did this reflect the economic situation by the early 19th century or a peculiarity of the source?

With regard to the second of these possibilities, Holden's *Directory* certainly offered a more limited coverage than the UBD in terms of the proportion of the urban populations recorded. Whilst the average for the UBD was some four percent of the 1801 population, Holden's was nearer two percent of the 1811 population, and with Braintree it was less than this. However, in the case of Halstead the UBD's coverage was little more than two percent and yet woollen cloth trades were recorded. Similarly, if the absolute number of entries are examined, Braintree’s 36 compares favourably with the 26 recorded for Coggeshall by Bailey. Since woollen cloth trades appeared amongst Coggeshall’s entries their absence from Braintree cannot be blamed on the lack of depth in coverage. Underpinning this is the fact that Holden's coverage of Colchester included woollen cloth trades. Amongst the trades featured in Colchester were those of dyer, scourer, baize manufacturer, baize maker and fulling miller.<sup>144</sup> Yet, as with Braintree, Holden’s coverage of Colchester’s 1811 population was under two per cent.

Meanwhile, Sokoll’s analysis of pauper apprenticeship indentures for Braintree suggests the economic profile created by Holden’s coverage may, indeed, reflect the decayed state of the town’s wool trade by the start of the 19th century. Between 1760 and 1800, 70

143. See footnote 123 for full references to UBD entries. Colchester, Holden, Vol. II; the other towns, Vol. III.  
144. Holden, Vol. II.



percent of the paupers assigned by the town's overseers to masters in Braintree and Bocking went to 'clothiers, weavers and other cloth workers'. By contrast, none of the town's pauper children took up apprenticeships in the wool trade after 1800.<sup>145</sup>

Table 3.17 Inhabitants of Braintree recorded in Holden's *Directory*

| No | Name  | Trade                                   |
|----|---|---|
| 1  | Ramsey Ezekiel                              | Ironmonger                              |
| 2  | Reeve Thomas                                | Ironmonger                              |
| 3  | Shave William                               | Ironmonger and whitesmith               |
| 4  | Holmes Robert                               | Spirit-merchant                         |
| 5  | Tunbridge Samuel                            | Brewer and spirit merchant              |
| 6  | Lacey Josh                                  | Maltster and spirit-merchant            |
| 7  | Bright Samuel                               | Maltster                                |
| 8  | Bright Samuel, jun.                         | Maltster                                |
| 9  | Joscelyne James                             | Baker                                   |
| 10 | Joscelyne Isaac                             | Baker and tallow-chandler               |
| 11 | Joscelyn Ben                                | Cabinet-maker, auctioneer, &c.          |
| 12 | Nash Thomas                                 | Cabinet-maker and chair-maker           |
| 13 | Daniell Peter                               | Grocer and draper                       |
| 14 | Josline and Sons                            | Grocers and drapers                     |
| 15 | Hiffill Henry                               | Linen-draper                            |
| 16 | Sargeant Robert                             | Linen-draper                            |
| 17 | Cartwright William                          | Inns, Bugle Horn                        |
| 18 | Lee Edward                                  | Inns, White Hart                        |
| 19 | Garret Joseph                               | Tailor and man's-merc                   |
| 20 | Goldsmith William                           | Tailor and man's-merc                   |
| 21 | Scale Rev. Bernard                          | Vicar                                   |
| 22 | Wakeham Rev. P.                             |   |
| 23 | Sparrow Brown, Hanbury, Savill, and Simpson | Bankers                                 |
| 24 | Bowtell Joseph                              | Basket-maker                            |
| 25 | Knowles J                                   | Classic and commercial academy          |
| 26 | Nash John                                   | Cooper and turner                       |
| 27 | Cole Edward                                 | Currier                                 |
| 28 | Death Samuel                                | Fellmonger and glover                   |
| 29 | Dee William Henry                           | Glazier and painter                     |
| 30 | Newman William                              | House-joiner, auctioneer, and appraiser |
| 31 | Tyler James                                 | Saddler and harness-maker               |
| 32 | Harding Luke                                | Shoemaker                               |
| 33 | Smith Martha                                | Stationer                               |
| 34 | Challis James                               | Stone and marble-mason                  |
| 35 | Harrion John, Esq.                          | Surgeon                                 |
| 36 | Wheatly Francis                             | Post Office                             |

Source: Holden's *London and County Directory*, 1811.<sup>146</sup>

However, the possibility can not be ruled out that Holden's *Directory* may have excluded some remnants of the woollen cloth industry that continued in Bocking parish. It is uncertain whether Holden's coverage was confined to Braintree parish or embraced both

145. T. Sokoll, *Household and Family Among the Poor* (Bochum, 1993), 194-195.

146. Holden, Vol. III.



parts of the town. It seems most likely that this false dichotomy was made and reference was only given to the southern part of the settlement. From other sources it is evident that one Bocking clothier, John Savill, was able to continue in business into the second decade of the 19th century.<sup>147</sup>

Holden's coverage would, nevertheless, support the general observation that the late 18th and early 19th centuries witnessed the final decline of the wool trade in the north Essex towns. It would certainly fit the comments made in the UBD's description of Halstead about the trade's general state of decline.<sup>148</sup> However, the evidence presented by Holden would also dismiss the idea that the decline of wool led to the economic demise of the case study towns. First, there is the fact that Braintree featured amongst the select few towns considered by Holden. Second, the range of trades recorded in the town suggests an active role as a market and thoroughfare centre. This evidence is supported by adjusted trade scores for the six towns covered by Holden's *Directory* and are produced in table 3.18. The method of calculation was the same as that employed for analysis of the UBD, with the exception that the percentage covered is based upon the 1811 census population figures.

With the exception of Harwich, discussed presently, the adjusted trade figures were reasonably comparable with those derived from analysis of the UBD. Chelmsford's UBD score was 18.6, compared to 23.1 in Holden's coverage, whilst Romford's was 11.4 against 11.6. Even the figure for Colchester offers a degree of comparability, although this town was included amongst the more select band considered in Holden's Vol. II which appears to have afforded more extensive lists of inhabitants. The provincial town's UBD score was 31.4 compared to 46.9 in Holden's coverage. From this perspective Braintree's figure would place it amongst the highest scoring towns, below Colchester but comparable with Chelmsford and Halstead. Braintree's function as a marketing centre in this regard is supported by the fact that many of the same trades listed by Holden were also recorded in Chelmsford, Saffron Walden, Romford, and Colchester. Amongst the most frequently occurring were those of butcher, brewer, saddler, coach master, cabinet maker, bookseller, fishmonger, woollen draper, tallow chandler and grocer.<sup>149</sup>

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147. Likewise, King's examination of the occupations of Braintree and Bocking's prosecution associations for the period 1780-1810 identifies six 'woollen textile manufacturers'. However, in accordance with the argument of this chapter, these manufacturers comprised less than 18 per cent of association members. By contrast, over 35 percent of subscribers to the town's prosecution associations were 'food processors and victuallers', (including millers, bakers and brewers), 'merchants and shopkeepers', and 'artisan producers and transport occupations', (including tailors, glaziers, tanners and wheelwrights). P. King, 'Crime, law and society in Essex, 1740-1820' (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Cambridge, 1984), 196-198. For greater detail on the Bocking clothier John Savill, see chapter 2.

148. It is also consistent with evidence from the next generation of directories, as will be seen presently.

149. Sokoll makes a similar assessment in his 'economic profile of Braintree, c. 1760-1830', Here he argues that the de-industrialisation of Braintree did not result in the 'return to an agricultural economy as suggested in the theory of proto-industrialisation for some of those cases where the transition to the factory failed.' Instead Sokoll claims that during the 'first two or three decades of the 19th century' Braintree developed into a market centre. Sokoll, *Household and Family*, 190-



Table 3.18 Adjusted trade scores for towns recorded in Holden’s *Directory*

| Town           | Range of Entries | Percentage Covered | Adjusted Trade Range |
|----------------|------------------|--------------------|----------------------|
| Colchester     | 129              | 2.7                | 46.9                 |
| Harwich        | 30               | 1.3                | 23.1                 |
| Chelmsford     | 42               | 2.0                | 21.0                 |
| Saffron Walden | 36               | 1.7                | 21.2                 |
| Romford        | 44               | 3.8                | 11.6                 |
| Braintree      | 35               | 1.6                | 21.9                 |

Source: Holden’s *London and County Directory* ; Census 1811, Population Tables.<sup>150</sup>

This situation somewhat contrasts with that of Harwich. Although 30 different trades were recorded just under 40 percent of these, numbering 12, were associated with its port and ship building functions.<sup>151</sup> Consequently, the range of non-maritime trades was fairly narrow; no saddlers, butchers, cabinet makers, booksellers, ironmongers, tallow chandlers, joiners, fellmongers or even grocers were listed. Nevertheless, as table 3.18 illustrates, the town was still able to return a high adjusted trade figure - in contrast to the low 7.8 score calculated from the UBD’s coverage. Part of the explanation for this is simply the range of maritime trades recorded for the town. However, in addition it can be suggested that Holden’s figure was rather too high, whilst the UBD’s was too low. Two main reasons may be offered for this. The first of these relates to the basic mathematics of the calculation. As discussed earlier, questions arise over the comparability of the adjusted trade range figures where the percentage of the population represented in the *Directory* is either very low or very high. In the UBD Harwich’s 8.9 percent figure was the second highest after Ongar and, for reasons already alluded to, may well have produced a comparatively low trade range figure. By contrast, the coastal town’s 1811 population was the least well represented in Holden’s and this may, conversely, have generated a comparatively high trade range figure.

A second reason for the inconsistencies in the two adjusted trade figures relates to the unique economic character of Harwich amongst the county’s principal settlements and the different ways in which the two directories sought to represent it. A number of large occupational categories were included in the UBD which were absent from Holden’s. Besides recording 40 members of the corporation, the UBD also listed 46 cod smack owners, along with 18 river pilots, six boatmen, four packet commanders and three chief mates.<sup>152</sup> In total these categories accounted for 120 entries, or 48.6 percent of those

198. Evidence from Holden’s *Directory* , however, suggests that Braintree was established as a marketing and thoroughfare centre by at least the start of the 19th century.

150. Holden, Vol. II for Colchester, and Vol. III for the other towns.

151. These include sail maker, ship agent, marine store dealer, mast and block maker, packet office agent, ship builder, anchormsmith, clerk to the Cheque, Collector of Customs, Inspector of aliens and ordinance store keeper. Holden, Vol. III.

152. UBD, Vol. III, 240-43.



recorded by the UBD, whilst representing only six (excluding corporation members since they are not recorded with a trade), or 8.5 percent of the trades. The effect of including a large population in a few trades would reduce the trade range figure which is weighted to account for the proportion of population covered, whilst conversely to exclude it, as Holden did, would radically inflate the figure.

Finally, an interesting comparison can be made between Braintree's representation in Holden's and that of Halifax. Unlike the Essex town which appeared in Volume III, Halifax, along with the three other principal West Riding cloth towns of Bradford, Huddersfield and Wakefield, appeared in Volume II of Holden's *Directory*, covering 'Manufacturing and Commercial towns'. Justifying this separation over 105, or 36 percent, of Halifax's 322 entries appeared with wool trades. The variety of these was also considerable. They included: woollen manufacturers, manufacturers of baize and kerseys, worsteds, stuff, fancy woollens, fustians, carpets, stockings, and woollen yarns as well as cotton manufacturers and hosiers. Various spinning enterprises were also listed including worsted and cotton spinners. In addition, reference was also made to the range of ancillary trades such as dyers, woolstaplers, kersey printers, worsted card manufacturers, tow card manufacturers and cotton merchants. Finally, the address information given in the *Directory* also offered evidence of centralised production. Hadwen and Co., cotton-spinners, for instance, were located at Kebroyd mills.<sup>153</sup>

### Summary

Although covering a far smaller number of settlements than the UBD and recording a generally smaller proportion of their populations, Holden's *Directory*, nevertheless, affords valuable insights into small town urban economies. One compensatory factor in recording details for fewer settlements is the tendency of the *Directory* to select from amongst the larger, more dynamic small towns. As with the two previous directories, Holden's also seems capable of identifying economic specialisms within small town economies, although the case of Harwich suggests this capability was more limited than in the UBD. Beyond this, comparison to the 1811 census returns enables the adjusted trade figure to be calculated and some measure of marketing importance to be made.

The results derived from Braintree - the representative cloth town - suggest that by the early 19th century the woollen cloth trade had largely disappeared from the north Essex cloth towns. This contrasts dramatically with the situation of the small cloth towns of Yorkshire's West Riding. Yet, far from showing economic demise, evidence from Holden's supports the underlying argument of this chapter, that functions other than manufacturing were the mainstay of the urban economies of the case study towns. First, in this regard is the simple observation that Braintree featured amongst the select band of

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153. Holden, Vol. II.



Essex towns considered by Holden. Second, is the range of trades the *Directory* lists for the town and the high adjusted trade figure these generated.

There remains, however, one area of uncertainty that has run through the discussion so far. By these 'other economic functions' reference has been made to the role of the north Essex towns as marketing and thoroughfare centres. As yet no firm link has been established between these functions and the types of trade recorded for Coggeshall, Halstead and Braintree by Bailey, the UBD and Holden respectively. This issue will be considered in the closing part of the chapter.

### **The Application of Multiple Trades**

It is argued in this section that a consideration of multiple occupations affords a method for establishing links between descriptions of urban economic function and trade type. In their concluding remarks Corfield and Kelly observed that early town directories recorded much detail about multiple employment. These are of interest because, it has been suggested, they indicate the size and state of the market. Their presence suggests that demand was insufficient to enable concentration in one activity. By noting the types of occupations most frequently appearing in combinations it has been claimed that those sectors where demand was less buoyant, or perhaps where marketing was less developed, can be identified.<sup>154</sup> Examination of multiple occupations appearing amongst the first generation of national directories suggests, however, that with this source other factors influenced their recording. The situation with innkeepers offers an illustration.

Innkeeping was one of the most frequently occurring trades in the Essex settlements recorded by each of the directories. Figure 3.1. illustrates the variety of trades those recorded in Bailey's *Directory* appeared with. As can be seen the range was limited to three other activities each of which was rather more administrative than commercial.<sup>155</sup>

By contrast, the innkeepers recorded in the Essex settlements covered by the UBD were associated with a much wider variety of activities, as figure 3.2 illustrates. Although these included an excise officer the other eight were commercial undertakings. However, as noted earlier, in Holden's *Directory* innkeepers were separated from the main list of traders. Moreover, they appeared only as innkeepers, rather than in combination with other trades.

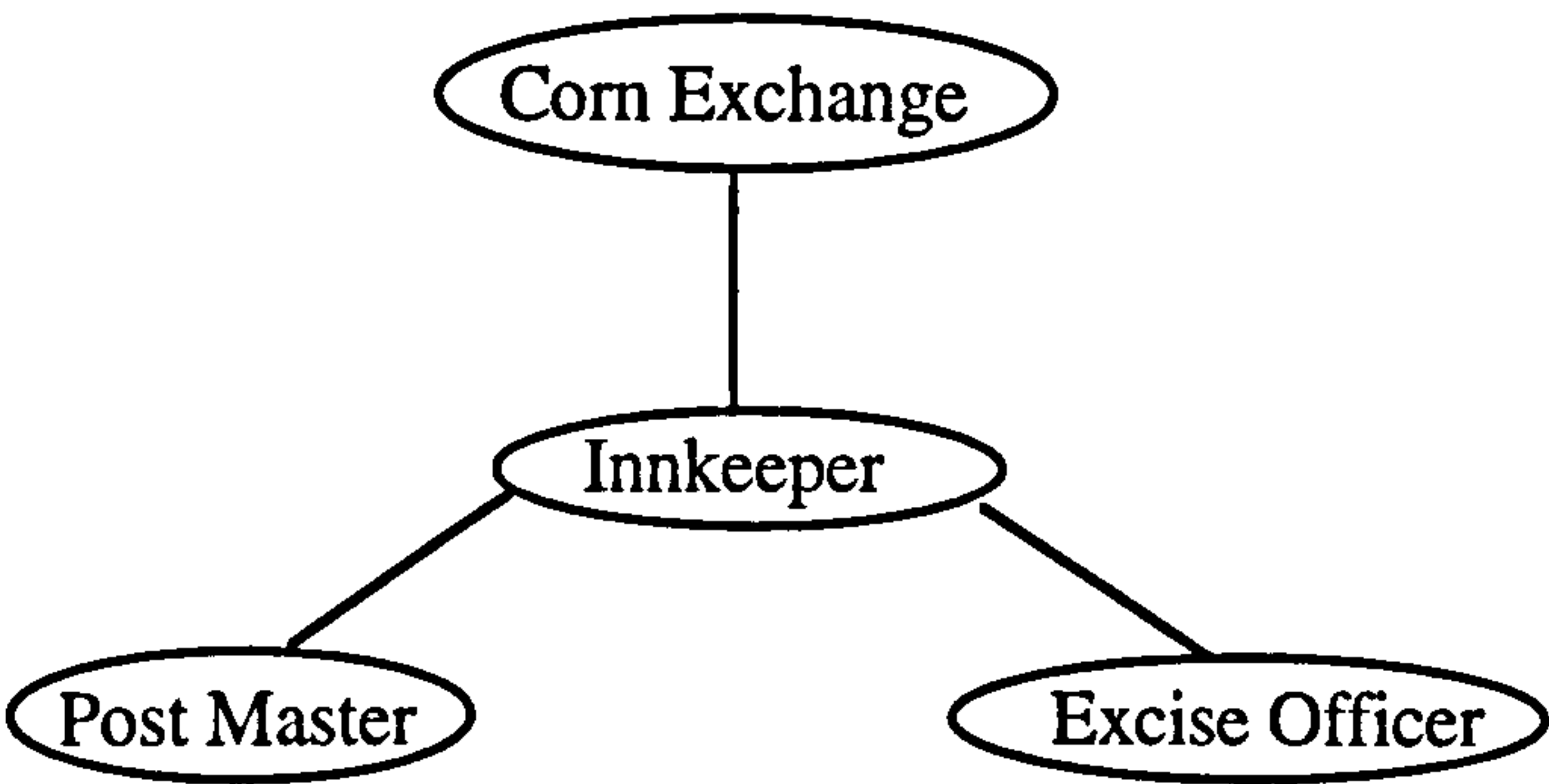
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154. Corfield and Kelly, 'Giving directions to the town', 22-35.

155. Certainly, when the early 19th century regional directories are examined in chapter 4 it will be found that post masters and mistresses, along with excise and customs officers, and keepers and clerks of corn exchanges were recorded separately from the lists of traders in the 'public service' section.

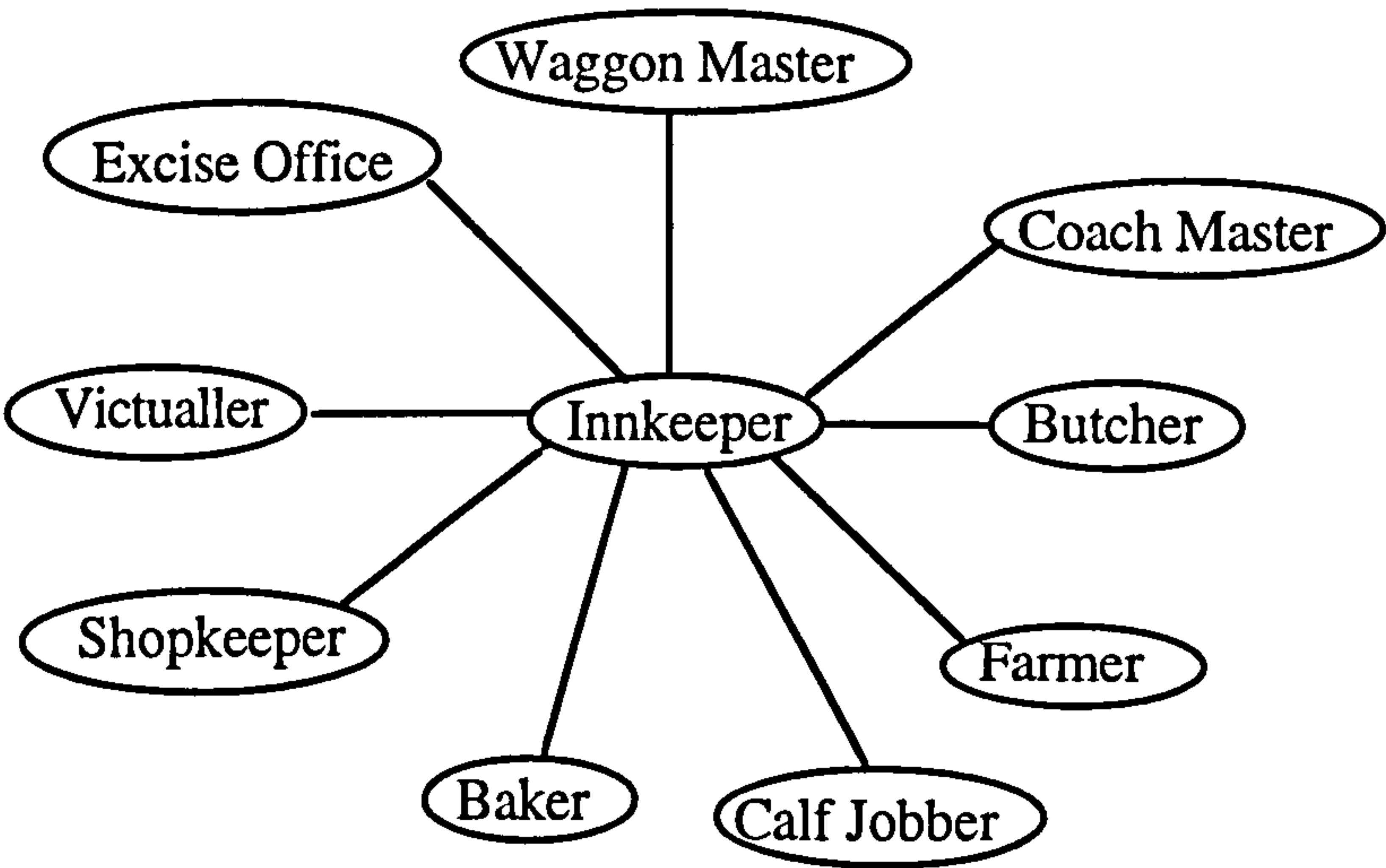


Figure 3.1 Trades innkeepers appeared with in Bailey’s  
*Directory*



Source: Bailey's *Directory*, 1784.<sup>156</sup>

Figure 3.2 Trades innkeepers appeared with in the UBD



Source: *The Universal British Directory*, 1794-98.<sup>157</sup>

These findings suggest that the presence, or absence, of multiple trades had much to do with the character of the source. This raises the question of why were multiple trades more likely to be recorded by the UBD than the other two directories? Although it might be assumed that most of these multiple trades would be found in villages, evidence from the UBD does not support this view. Indeed, very few multiple occupations appear in these smaller settlements. This finding suggests, instead, that the presence of multiple trades may be more of a guide to the level of detailed coverage awarded to particular settlements.

This assessment is supported by a comparison of the number and range of multiple entries appearing amongst the towns covered by all three directories. Four towns are available for such an examination - Harwich, Romford, Colchester and Chelmsford. Using the county

156. Taken from the 11 Essex towns covered by the *Directory*. See footnote 108.  
157. Taken from the 25 Essex settlements covered by the *Directory*. See footnote 122.



town of Chelmsford as the example, five entries with multiple trades appeared amongst Bailey's list.<sup>158</sup> This compared with three in Holden's coverage and 10 in the UBD's.<sup>159</sup> In absolute terms, then, the UBD appears the most likely to have included multiple trades, regardless of its more extensive coverage of settlements. Comparing the number of individuals recorded with multiple trades to the total number of entries, suggests that the same was also true in terms of the percentage of overall coverage. Whilst 10 percent of Bailey's and 5 percent of Holden's entries for Chelmsford were allotted more than one trade, the same figure for the UBD was just over 15 percent.

Having established the UBD as the best source for identifying multiple entries the question arises of how this knowledge can be employed to establishing links between economic function and trade type? More specifically, which trades can be associated with thoroughfare and marketing functions? The answer to this is contained in figure 3.2. Taking the thoroughfare role first, it is evident from town descriptions in the UBD and Muilman that this function was allied to innkeeping. A number of innkeepers, in turn, pursued second and even third trades. These other trades, it seems reasonable to assume, were able to be undertaken because they were complementary to the running of an inn. In other words, they would, likewise, have benefited from thoroughfare custom. According to figure 3.2 these activities included baking, calf jobbing, victualling, shopkeeping and farming.

The same logic can also be applied to reveal the types and range of trades benefiting from agricultural marketing functions. The point of entry in this instance would be shopkeeping. Muilman observed that Saffron Walden had 'several very reputable shops in most branches of trade suitable for a large market town'.<sup>160</sup> Similarly, the UBD observed of Rochford that 'There is no general trade, but the tradesmen, merchants and shopkeepers have the chief part of their custom from neighbouring gentlemen and farmers.'<sup>161</sup> Figure 3.3 illustrates the range of dual and multiple trades shopkeepers appeared with in the UBD.

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158. Bailey, Vol. IV, 792-93.

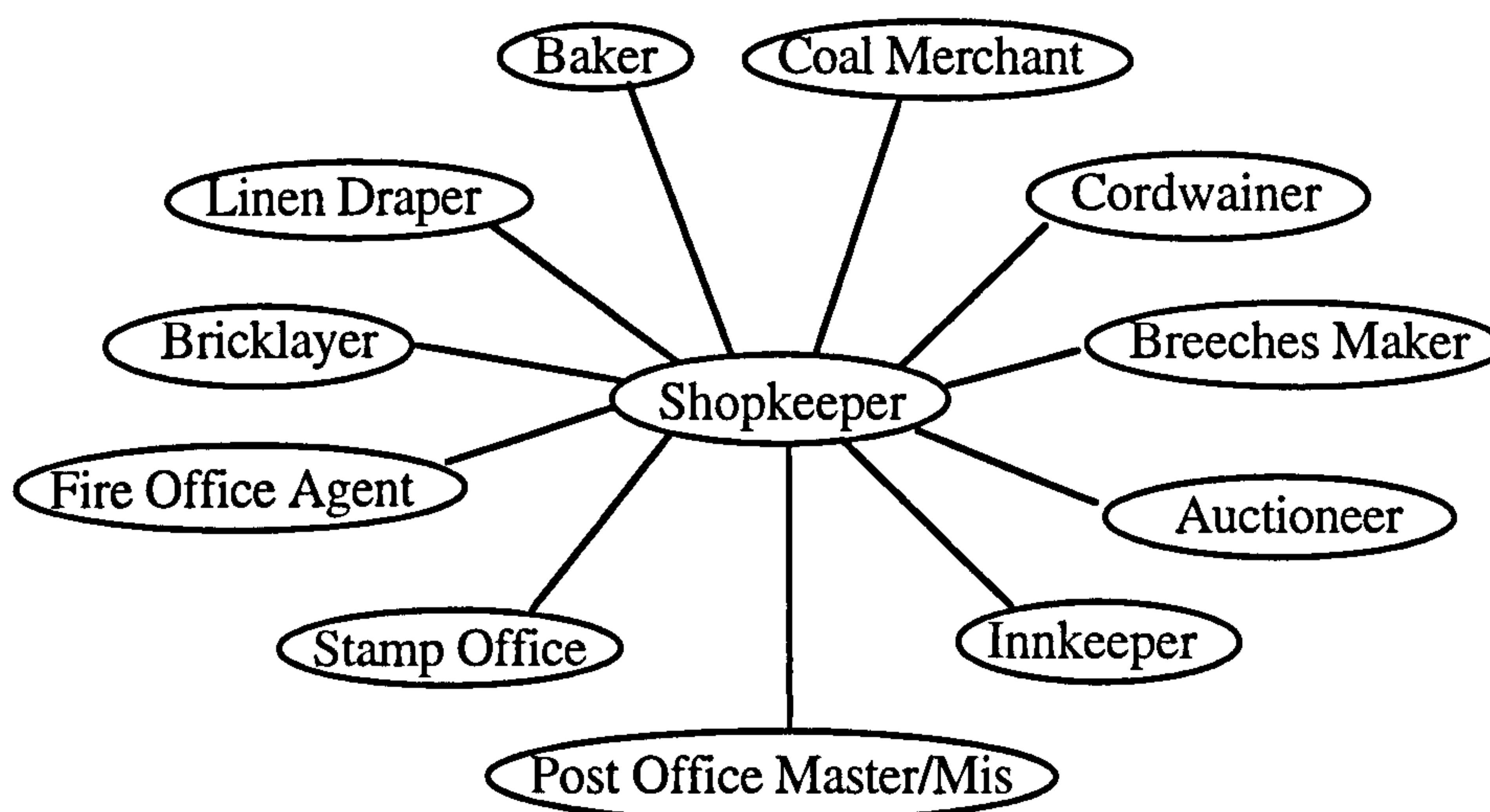
159. UBD, Vol. II, 514-17; Holden, Vol. III.

160. *History of Essex by a Gentleman*, Vol. II, 343.

161. UBD, Vol. IV, 335-36.



Figure 3.3 Dual and multiple trades of shopkeepers



Source: *The Universal British Directory*, 1794-98.<sup>162</sup>

In addition, another point of entry from which to measure the range of trades benefiting from agricultural marketing derives from considering the chief products dealt with on market days. Amongst these corn was prominent. Corn was mentioned in the UBD's accounts of Billericay and Chelmsford markets.<sup>163</sup> Likewise, Muilman's author observed that in Braintree vast quantities of corn, malt, and hops, were sold by sample.<sup>164</sup> The UBD records a number of trades directly involved in the sale and purchase of this commodity, consisting of corn dealers, merchants, chandlers and factors. Figure 3.4. displays the other occupations these traders were recorded with. Some corn dealers, merchants and factors appear to have operated enterprises displaying vertical linkages - either with an earlier stage of production, noticeably farming, or with a subsequent stage, for instance malting and victualling, or milling and baking. In other instances, such as breeches making, gloving and china dealing, no obvious connections spring to mind.

This same approach can also be used to identify those trades which do not appear to have been associated with marketing and thoroughfare functions. In accordance with the general tenor of the argument in this chapter the most notable here were wool trades. These included: manufacturer of bays and says, woolstapler, weaver, bay maker, baize maker, say maker, cloth maker, wool card maker, baize dresser, say scourer, scrivener and woolcomber. Very few were found in combination with marketing and thoroughfare

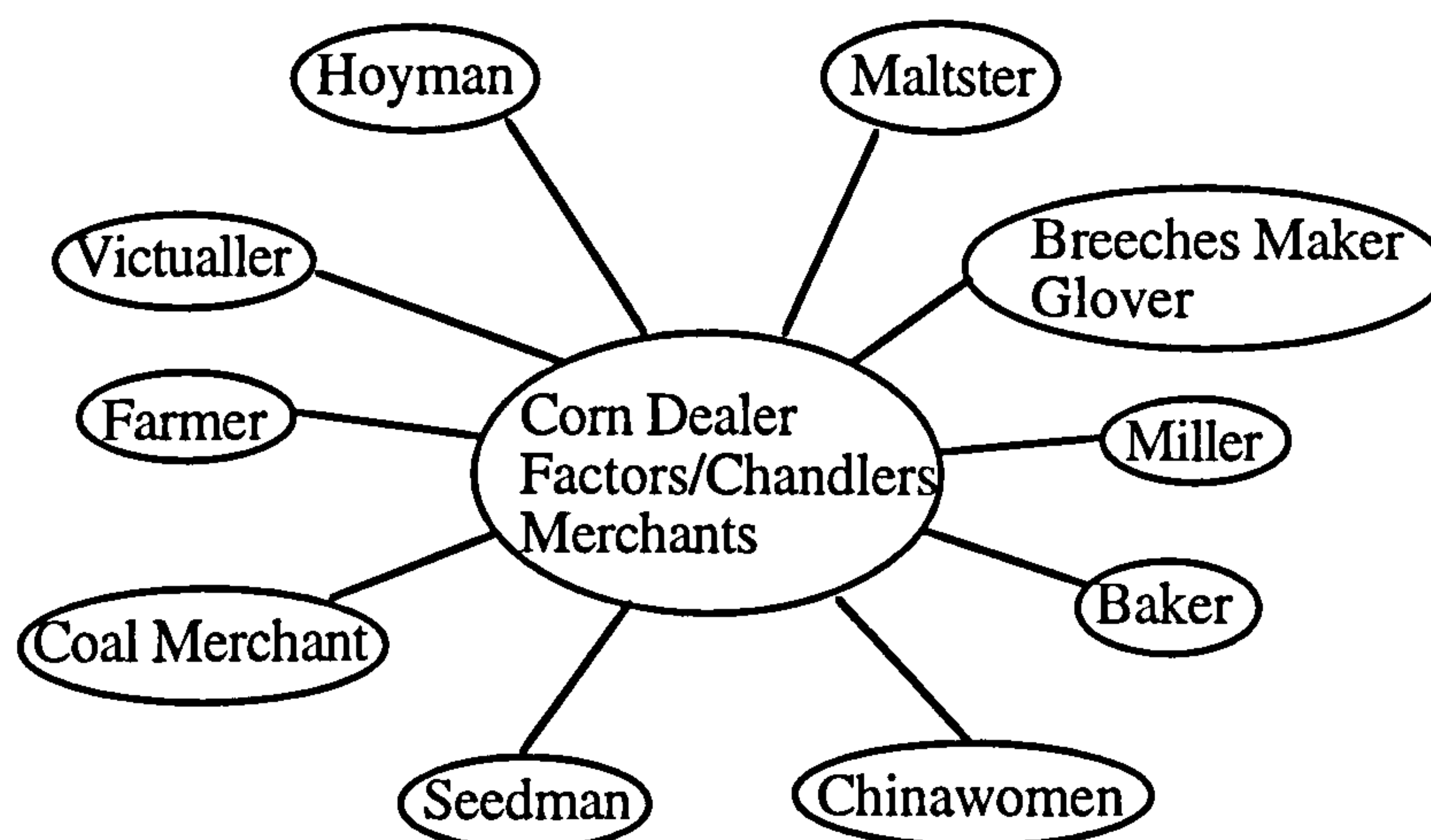
162. Taken from the 25 Essex settlements covered by the *Directory*, Vols. II-V. For full references see footnote 122.

163. UBD, Vol. II, 323 and 513.

164. *History of Essex by a Gentleman*, Vol. I, 411.



Figure 3.4 Dual and multiple trades of corn dealers, merchants and factors



Source: *The Universal British Directory*, 1794-98.<sup>165</sup>

activities. It can be argued that these distinctions reflect the different markets these functions catered for. Essex wool appears to have depended heavily upon overseas custom, whilst demand for thoroughfare and marketing functions was more regional and, most prominently, linked to the dynamic and growing market of the Metropolis as a centre of consumption in addition to the focal point for coaches and carriers.<sup>166</sup> This, in turn, suggests that the waning fortunes of the former would not necessarily mean the decline of the urban economies of case study towns as thoroughfare and marketing centres.

## Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated that the first generation of national directories offer a valuable insight into the urban economies of many of England's small towns. Moreover, they do so for a period associated with considerable change and upheaval, when other sources were disappearing or losing their reliability. Beyond this, the chapter offered three broad methodologies by which the source could be used in the analysis of urban economies: the first employing settlement descriptions, the second market and transport information and the third lists of principal inhabitants.

The results of applying these methodologies to the directory coverage of the three case study towns support the claim that they were more than manufacturing sites. First, settlement descriptions hinted at involvement in other commercial activities. Second, evidence from market and transport information revealed these to have been associated

165. Taken from the 25 Essex settlements covered by the Directory. See footnote 122.

166. See chapter 2. Muilman's author identifies Spain and Portugal as the major markets. *History of Essex by a Gentleman*, Vol. 1, 411. Similarly, Defoe remarked that the bays made in north Essex were 'known over most of the trading parts of Europe'. Defoe, *Tour*, 17.



with marketing and thoroughfare functions. Third, the trades of their principal inhabitants suggested that these other functions were of greater importance to the economic fortunes of the towns. This situation was shown to have contrasted with that of the cloth towns of the West Riding of Yorkshire. Not only were the latter described as more extensive and dynamic manufacturing centres, but a far higher proportion of their principal inhabitants were returned with woollen cloth related trades. In addition, these findings refute Johnson's claim that as the woollen manufactories of these north Essex cloth towns declined so their economies would begin to resemble those of nearby villages.

Through analysis of multiple occupations, positive links were established between the trades that featured most frequently amongst the principal inhabitants of the north Essex towns and their marketing and thoroughfare functions. The observation that wool trades were rarely to be found in association with those linked to thoroughfare and marketing activity offered evidence that the fortunes of the latter would not necessarily impact upon those of the former. This finding seems to accord with the fact that the markets for these two functions were different.<sup>167</sup> Finally, some comparison of the urban economies of the case study towns was undertaken. From this Coggeshall emerged as less of a thoroughfare centre, though still an important marketing town.

These findings, however, raise a vital question of interpretation. Should these towns be interpreted as dynamic urban economies, centred upon marketing and thoroughfare functions? Or, alternatively, are the trades associated with these functions more accurately portrayed as primitive and backward. After all, many of these are considered to have originated in the later 17th century, and been associated with 'traditional' workshop, apprenticeship organisations.<sup>168</sup> The question of how dynamic were the activities associated with marketing and trade will be addressed in the next chapter, when comparisons can be made with the developing silk industry.

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167. It also raises doubts over Johnson's claim of a symbiotic relationship between the textile and non-textile economies of Coggeshall. Johnson, 'A proto-industrial community study', 110-119.

168. P. Borsay, 'The English urban renaissance: the development of provincial urban culture c.1680-c.1760', in idem (ed.), *The Eighteenth Century Town: A Reader in English Urban History, 1688-1820* (London, 1990), 159-187. Borsay's discusses a golden age from the later 17th century to the 1760s. See also A. Everitt, 'Country, county and town: patterns of regional evolution in England', in Borsay (ed.), *The Eighteenth Century Town*., 83-115.



## CHAPTER 4

# THE ECONOMIES OF THE NORTH ESSEX CLOTH TOWNS, c.1820 TO 1851

### Introduction

In examining the first generation of national trade directories chapter 3 presented evidence that marketing and thoroughfare functions were of greater economic importance to the cloth towns of north Essex than textile manufacturing. This evidence initially derived from a consideration of town descriptions, an assessment of the size and scale of weekly markets, and the extent of transport links. The first of these revealed the towns to be involved in activities other than textile manufacture, the second and third hinted at the significance of these other functions. This interpretation was underpinned by an examination of the 'principal inhabitants' recorded in each town. This showed that most were involved in trades associated with marketing and thoroughfare functions - amongst them were maltsters, corn dealers, innkeepers, drapers and grocers - rather than woollen cloth manufacture.

Beyond this, comparison of the 'principal inhabitants' in a range of other Essex settlements, including villages and hamlets, Chelmsford and Colchester, as well as other small towns, suggested that the case study towns were amongst the most important of the county's marketing and thoroughfare centres. Furthermore, comparison with the cloth towns of the West Riding of Yorkshire suggested that the three north Essex towns were relatively well endowed with such trades. A finding that suggests specialisation amongst these places in marketing and thoroughfare functions facilitated by the influence of London.

Whilst this study was able to confirm the value of the first generation of national trade directories to the investigation of small town economies it also identified the source's limitations and reasons for caution in the drawing of any conclusions. First, many of the settlement descriptions offered by the directories were found to be plagiarised. Second, information on markets was limited. Third, the evidence on transport was primarily concerned with that operating to and from the Metropolis. More significantly, given that it constituted the major concern of the publications, the study revealed the limitations of drawing firm conclusions from lists of 'principal inhabitants'. Not all the county's towns, let alone the smaller settlements, were returned with lists. Furthermore, although they appear to have been amongst the largest and economically most significant of Essex's towns only one of the places under investigation featured in each of the three directories. The fact that in each case it was a different town highlights the uncertain criteria the compilers applied to determine inclusion.



Beyond this the actual number of individuals listed for each town varied, both between and within the directories. In some instances the number was insufficient to exceed a listing of gentlemen of law and physic. However, even where the numbers were greater they were still found to represent a very small proportion of the total urban population. In the case of Bailey Coggeshall's coverage probably amounted to less than two percent; that of Halstead's, in the UBD, represented a similar proportion, whilst Holden's coverage of Braintree was even less at 1.5 percent. In drawing conclusions about urban economies the small size of the sample may be off set by a knowledge of the nature of the sample. Cross referencing directory coverage with a rate book did suggest that the 'principal inhabitants' derived from amongst the main rate payers. However, they did not emerge as the top two percent, nor did they constitute a comprehensive list of all those in trade.

These findings suggest that analysis of lists of inhabitants in the first generation of directories offer only a shallow guide to economic orientation. Uncertainties surrounding the criteria for inclusion mean that it is unclear how representative coverage of the different economic activities was. Likewise, since each directory made only one survey of Essex settlements, and since each covered a different town, no qualitative judgement is able to be made about the comparative dynamism of entries in each sector - how long traders succeeded in business, and which sectors were most active in terms of generating new traders. It is to these issues that the present chapter will turn.

Holden represents the last of the nation-wide directory producers. In his wake a new generation of directory compilers emerged. Their age coincides with the second 30 years of this investigation - the 1820s, 1830s, and 1840s. It is their directories that offer the medium through which a more detailed examination of the economies of the case study towns can be undertaken, and questions concerning the dynamism of the manufacturing sector compared to that associated with marketing and thoroughfare trades addressed. As detailed in chapter 2, by the beginning of the 1820s silk had replaced wool as the principal manufactory in the north Essex towns. In the process manufacturing had become a more centralised activity. Whilst some putting-out persisted a number of factories had appeared in the towns. By the end of the 1840s Braintree and Bocking could lay claim to four large silk factories, Halstead to three, and Coggeshall to two.<sup>1</sup> The question of the comparative importance of marketing and thoroughfare functions in the second 30 years of analysis, therefore, relates to a period in

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1. In his 1848 town description of Braintree and Bocking, White observed that, 'Four firms ... have large silk factories here'. For Halstead he noted that, 'The town ... has three large silk and crape factories', whilst Coggeshall boasted, 'a large silk throwing mill' in addition to 'several silk velvet weaving establishments and a large mill, built ten years ago, for the manufacture of French patent silk plush'. W. White, *History, Gazetteer, and Directory of the County of Essex* (Sheffield, 1848), 668, 691 and 135.



which manufacturing ‘progressed’ to the factory, whilst craft and trade remained workshop bound.

The settlement descriptions contained in this new generation of directories are able to reveal both the silk and marketing aspects of the urban economies of the case study town. Coggeshall is observed as possessing ‘extensive’ silk manufactories including the only one in England manufacturing French patent silk plush for hats which ‘give the town the appearance of business and animation.’<sup>2</sup> Similarly, in descriptions of both Halstead and Braintree and Bocking silk assumes a prominent position.<sup>3</sup> Equally, though, comment is awarded to thoroughfare and marketing activities. Coggeshall’s market is described as being ‘abundantly supplied with corn, &c’.<sup>4</sup> Braintree and Bocking’s market is judged ‘one of the largest in Essex’,<sup>5</sup> whilst the principal street in this ‘improving market town’ is referred to as ‘a great thoroughfare’ with ‘many good houses, inns and well stocked shops’<sup>6</sup> Similarly, Halstead’s High Street was described as ‘of considerable length [with] many good houses, shops and inns as also have several other streets’, whilst it was said to possess a ‘prosperous corn market’.<sup>7</sup>

However, the lack of detail afforded in these descriptions prevents any assessment of comparative importance from being made. For this attention needs to turn to the far richer quantitative evidence available in the directories. To this end the chapter will be divided into three main sections. First, consideration will be given to an evaluation of the new generation of directories as a quantitative source. This will consist of an examination of their contents with the assessment that the information contained in them is considerably more detailed and comparable than that of their predecessors. Based on these findings two new methodologies will be devised for analysis of the case study towns. The second section will consider the results of this investigation and assess whether the evidence supports and advances the findings of chapter 3. In the final section reference will be given to the coach and carrier journeys the directories recorded operating to and from the towns, and how this information may help to underpin these results.

## **i. Source and Approach**

Amongst the most prominent and respected of the new generation of directory compilers were Pigot and Kelly. Their directories form the basis of this study. One of the most significant characteristics that distinguished these compilers from those considered in chapter 3 was that they produced a series of editions covering the same area. Comparing

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2. E. Kelly, *Post Office Directory of London and the Six Home Counties* (London, 1845), 46-47.
  3. Pigot & Co., *London and Provincial Commercial Directory* (London, 1832), 682 and 658.
  4. Pigot & Co., *National and Commercial Directory* (London, 1839), 101.
  5. Pigot & Co., *Commercial Directory* (London, 1839), 86.
  6. White, *Essex Directory*, 668.
  7. *Ibid.*, 691.



the contents of different editions presents the opportunity to consider changes over time. Pigot was the first compiler to cover Essex settlements after Holden. His *Directory* of 1823/4 recorded details for all three case study towns along with 24 other Essex towns and villages. Subsequent editions appeared in 1826, 1832, and 1839.<sup>8</sup> Although Pigot continued to be associated with directories after 1839 none of his later publications covered the region. This mantle was taken up by Frederick Kelly who was able to utilise the considerable resources of the Post Office.<sup>9</sup> The first of Kelly's *Post Office Directories* covering the Home Counties, and incorporating Essex and the case study towns, was published in 1845. Further editions appeared regularly throughout the rest of the 19th century and into the early 20th. However, it will be with the second edition of 1851 that analysis will conclude.<sup>10</sup> Although described variously as 'national', or 'provincial' directories, in terms of spatial coverage they are best considered as *regional* directories, and will be referred to as such during the proceeding discussion.<sup>11</sup>

The format adopted by these directories was comparable to that used in the three earlier national directories. A brief town description was followed by a list of 'private residence' or 'gentry'. Besides the clergy, magistrates and military officers these comprised individuals of independent means. The next section to appear was described as a list of 'traders' or, what the title page of Pigot's *Directory* of 1839 more fully described as, 'Professional Gentlemen, Manufacturers, and Traders'. Consideration of this section will be undertaken shortly. In Kelly's directories this section was preceded by a list of public officers, such as the registrar of births, deaths and marriages. In Pigot's directories such individuals were recorded amongst a miscellaneous list that, similarly, appeared at the end of the trader's section. In both sets of directories the final section was reserved for a catalogue of coach, carrier and later rail links, more will be said about these in the final section of the chapter. It is the contention of this study,

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8. Pigot & Co., *London and Provincial New Commercial Directory* (London, 1823-4), containing 'London, Middlesex and places within 12 miles of London and 300 places in Beds, Berks, Bucks, Camb, Cornwall, Devon, Dorset, Essex, Hants, Herts, Hunts, Kent, Nhants, Oxon, Suffolk, Surrey and Sussex'; Pigot & Co., *London and Provincial Commercial Directory* (London, 1826), containing 'London, Mdsx, Essex, Herts, Kent, Surrey and Sussex'; Pigot & Co., *Directory* (London, 1832), containing 'London, Essex, Herts, Kent, Mdsx, Surrey, Sussex'; Pigot & Co., *Commercial Directory* (London, 1839), containing 'Beds, Camb, Essex, Herts, Hunts, Kent, Mdsx, Norfolk, Suffolk, Surrey, Sussex and London'.
  9. For a more complete account see J.E. Norton, *Guide to National and Provincial Directories of England and Wales, Excluding London Published Before 1856* (London, 1950), 1-24; G. Shaw, *Directories as Sources in Historical Geography* (Lancaster, 1982). See also M. Morgan, *Sources and Methods in Geography: Historical Sources in Geography* (London, 1979); G. Shaw, 'The evolution and availability of directories', *Local History Magazine*, 44 (1994), 14-17; G. Shaw and T. Coles, 'Methods of compilation and the work of large-scale publishers', *Local History Magazine*, 45 (1994), 10-14; and G. Shaw and A. Alexander, 'Directories as sources in local history', *Local History Magazine*, 46 (1994), 12-17.
  10. E. Kelly, *Post Office Directory* (London, 1845), contains 'Essex, Herts, Kent, Mdsx, Surrey, and Sussex'; E. Kelly, *Post Office Directory of the Six Home Counties* (London, 1851), containing 'Essex, Herts, Kent, Middlesex, Surrey, and Sussex'.
  11. A shortened version of this chapter, which focused on Braintree and Bocking, entitled, 'The trade directory: a source for the study of early nineteenth century urban economies', appeared in *Business Archives Sources and History*, 74 (1997), 13-30.



however, that the most significant development between the first generation of directories and those of Pigot and Kelly occurred in the extent and depth of coverage awarded to the trader's section. This accords with the commercial nature of the publications, as a means of facilitating communication between buyers and sellers.<sup>12</sup> It is from amongst the entries in this section that the demand for these publication would have derived, and it is in the analysis of this section that this study will focus.

Before we can begin to construct a method for the analysis of this traders section the question of what were these lists of 'traders' actually recording needs addressing. Previous studies have operated on the basis that they were individuals. However, as Page's examination of Ashby de la Zouch revealed, the occupational structure produced by trade directories differed markedly from that generated by the census enumerators' returns.<sup>13</sup> In this study Page compared the 1861 census returns for the Leicestershire market town with its coverage in Drake & Co.'s *Directory* of 1862 and that of White in 1862. The directories were found to be biased in favour of tradesmen and professionals, whilst totally ignoring labourers, servants and agricultural workers. This finding led Page to conclude that directories are no substitute for the census enumerators' books in revealing the relative numbers in each occupation.

It is the contention of this chapter, however, that the entries appearing in the 'traders' section of these directories are better considered as businesses. This assessment would appear most consistent with the principal aim of these publications - to facilitate trade and exchange.<sup>14</sup> Taking each entry - whether identifying one, two or more individuals - to represent a single enterprise would also make sense of the results produced by Page. First in this respect, the complete absence of labourers and domestic servants as employees is comprehensible. Second, this approach would also explain the bias Page identified in the directory's coverage of other groups. The reasons why White's list of accountants appeared more complete than that of shoemakers may reflect variations in the size of concerns. It can be suggested that shoemakers were, for instance, more likely to employ hands, and so appear under-recorded, than accountants who were more likely to be self-employed at this date. Indeed, in this respect part of the reason for Page's distorted results may lie with shortcomings in the census enumerators' returns. In many instances the census returns failed to distinguish between employers and employees. Both were likely to be returned with the same occupational label, for example shoemaker. Only in a few cases were employers distinguished by the prefix of master.

Evidence to support the interpretation that businesses were recorded in the traders section of the directories derives from a comparison of addresses - admittedly only in the

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12. Norton, *Guide to Directories*, 1-24.

13. D. Page, 'Commercial directories and market towns', *Local Historian*, 2 (1974), 85-88.

14. Norton, *Guide to Directories*, 1.



minority of instances where workplace was distinct from residence. One example of this was John Hall who, in the 1851 census, was recorded at Orchard Place, West Street, Coggeshall, but whose entry as a silk manufacturer in Kelly's 1851 *Directory* was at Orchard Mills. The same comments can be made when comparing entries in the trading section of the *Directory* with those in the 'gentry and clergy' section. For example, in Pigot & Co.'s 1839 *Directory* of Braintree and Bocking Samuel Courtauld appears in the gentry section at Folley House, but in the traders section at Church Street Bocking - where, incidentally, he is not recorded as an individual but part of a company, that of 'Courtauld Samuel, Taylors & Courtaulds'.

Further support derives from comparison with entries in rate books. Rate books have been considered good indicators of a settlement's employers although generally failing to record the businesses they were involved in.<sup>15</sup> Comparison with one of the first surviving post-war rate books - that for Halstead in 1826 - reveals a good match between the two.<sup>16</sup> With only a very few exceptions those recorded in the directory appeared amongst the host of rate payers with property valuations of £1 or above. The number of rate payers appearing in the directory was calculated at 87. This compared very favourably with the equivalent figure for Coggeshall's coverage in Bailey's directory which was just 23. An examination of those rate payers not appearing in Halstead's directory entry affords more evidence that those included were the principal business proprietors.

The first, and chief difference between the two sources, was concerned with those in the rate book possessing Great Tithe valuations which would imply that they were farmers. However, even some of these appear in the directory where their commercial interests extended into trade, most prominently milling and malting. This was true of Abraham May of Gladfield Hall, who appeared as a maltster, along with Joshua Fitch, recorded in the directory as a miller and baker, and Thomas Allen who was returned as a butcher. These and a number of other cases afford a degree of reassurance in establishing the nature of entries in this section, suggesting that qualification for directory inclusion required commercial involvement in secondary or tertiary activity. It also represents a difference from the earlier generation of directories. Here, as observed in chapter 3, farmers associated with no other commercial activity regularly featured.

Amongst the other principal rate payers absent from the directory lists were those which can be considered to have been of independent means. These included a Mrs Kay and a Reverend Manistre, both with rateable property valued at £9. However, the greatest differential occurred amongst those with the lowest valuations of £1 and £2. It is

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15. D. and J. Mills, 'Occupation and social stratification revisited: the census enumerators' books of Victorian Britain', *Urban History Yearbook* (Leicester, 1989), 63-77.

16. Essex Record Office (hereafter ERO) D/P 96/11/87.



probable that many of these would not have been in trade themselves, but instead were amongst the population of employees. However, in a few instances the rate books offer property descriptions which suggest otherwise. D. Chaplin, with a valuation of £1, was recorded with a bake office, whilst John Pendle and William Rayner, both with £1 valuations, were identified with 'shops'. These cases suggest that the directories were not comprehensive in their coverage of all the town's businesses. Given their rateable values it can be suggested that those most likely to be excluded would be the smaller concerns. Support for this proposition derives from a consideration of a rare 1821 census enumerators booklet for Braintree.<sup>17</sup> Whilst the census is concerned with the occupations of heads of household there are a number of instances of occupations that could constitute trading enterprises not appearing in the *Directory* of 1823/4.<sup>18</sup> Amongst them were a pawnbroker, basket maker, and fishmonger.

Similarly, a comparison can be made between the coverage of trade types in White's 1848 *County Directory* and those in the two straddling Kelly's *Directories* of 1845 and 1851. As a local publication it is arguable that Whites would have adopted a lower inclusion threshold and, indeed, a number of cases supporting this can be found. White's coverage of Halstead, for instance, included cow keepers, swine dealers, a well sinker, and a thatcher.<sup>19</sup> None of these was recorded in either of the Kelly directories.<sup>20</sup>

The same comparative exercise can also be used to demonstrate short-comings in the depth of *regional* directory coverage - the deficit being determined by those entries that appear in White's *Essex Directory* of 1848, but not in either the 1845 or the 1851 *Post Office Directories*. Taking Halstead, whilst 16 boot and shoemakers appear in 1845, and 12 in 1851, 23 were recorded in 1848.<sup>21</sup> Looking at individual entries it becomes evident that whilst 16 of those found in Whites appear in at least one of the Kelly's *directories*, seven remain unaccounted for. It is possible these may have been in business for a very short period, more likely this reflects the shallower coverage of the two *regional* directories. The view that this difference may be explained by the more extensive spatial coverage of the *County Directory* does not, however, receive validation from a comparison of the addresses given to the boot and shoemakers. Those that only appeared in Whites were recorded in parts of the town covered in both *regional* directories. The most likely explanation would, therefore, be that those excluded from the *regional* directories were more local in nature and customer base. The efficacy of this interpretation is reinforced by repeating the exercise for other trades.

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17. ERO D/DU 65/83.

18. Pigot & Co., *Commercial Directory* (1823-4), 283-84.

19. White, *Essex Directory*, 694-97.

20. See Kelly, *Post Office Directory* (1845), 71-73; Kelly, *Post Office Directory* (1851), 81-83.

21. Kelly, *Post Office Directory* (1845), 71-73; Kelly, *Post Office Directory* (1851), 81-83; White, *Essex Directory*, 694-97.



What becomes apparent from this is that the depth of coverage - expressed as a percentage difference between those only appearing in Whites and those recorded in Whites and at least one of the *regional* directories - varied across trades. In accordance with the above explanation, the greatest differences were found amongst the poorer and predominantly female trades of straw hat maker and milliner. Besides boot and shoemakers, other trades exhibiting noticeable differences included bricklayers, braziers, grocers, drapers, and shopkeepers. The larger numbers that tended to comprise these trades hint at the fact that they were generally small concerns, with lower barriers to entry, amongst whom were likely to be businesses catering for a local market where advertising in a *regional* directory would have been unnecessary and too costly.<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, this would explain the complete exclusion of the types of trade mentioned above from the regional directories. These would have been the smaller concerns - those more likely to fluctuate in status between the self-employed and employees depending on the trade cycle or even the season.<sup>23</sup> From this it can be argued that whilst not constituting comprehensive registers of businesses the early 19th century directories can, nevertheless, afford detailed and reliable lists of the larger, less transient, concerns.

The question the above assessment prompts is whether the directories selected were comparable with each other? This condition is a necessary prerequisite for a comparison over time. If they are not comparable then the likelihood is that a time-series analysis will reveal more about the evolution of the source than the settlements being investigated. The choice of directories in this study was designed to afford maximum comparability and, thus, minimise this risk. First, Pigot and Kelly are acknowledged to be amongst the most reliable of early 19th century directory companies, using their own agents to collect information.<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, both were responsible for a series of directories, as opposed to one-off editions. If their records were found wanting it seems a reasonable deduction that subsequent editions would have failed to find a sufficient market.

How comparable were Pigot's series of directories for the 1820s and 1830s, with the two later Kelly directories? Both may have been accurate and reliable, but it is possible that they employed different criteria for inclusion. Certainly, the two companies adopted distinct formats for the presentation of their trading sections. Whilst Pigot listed entries under trade headings organised in alphabetical order, from 'accountants' to 'wine and spirit merchants', finishing with a 'miscellaneous' section, Kelly's arranged its trading

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22. Certainly these were expensive publications. For example, Pigot's *Directory* of 1839, bound in cloth, with plain maps, was priced, for subscribers, at £1.5s.

23. Mills, 'Occupation and social stratification', 67.

24. Norton, *Guide to Directories*, 17.



section nominally, from Agar Philip to Wright Thomas.<sup>25</sup> Nevertheless, evidence suggests the two were comparable. First, the range and type of trades appearing in each was broadly the same, with the few additions in the latter directories reflecting real developments 'on the ground'. In this regard the greatest changes were to be found outside the commercial sector amongst those in public office, such as clerks to the Board of Guardians, police officers and work house masters and mistresses.

Similarly, as discussed below (see figure 4.1), the total number of entries for Pigot's last *Directory* and Kelly's first were largely consistent - a greater difference emerging between the numbers identified in the later *regional* directories and Whites. The fact that in producing *regional* directories both companies were concerned with similarly extensive areas of coverage may go some way in explaining this good fit. Indeed, the criteria for inclusion may have been determined for the directory compilers by the size of the territory they decided to cover. This would have dictated the types, range and number of businesses likely to use the directories and, therefore, feature in them. Furthermore, the fact that Kelly's directories superseded Pigot's in southern England strongly implies that they were vying for the attentions of the same market.

The question the above finding raises is were the trade descriptions contained in the directories sensitive and detailed enough to capture changes in activity over time? In this respect comparison of the same entries in other sources suggests that directories offered the most complete descriptions. For example, Richard Bell of Coggeshall was recorded in the 1851 census enumerations as a grocer.<sup>26</sup> In Kelly's *Directory* for the same year the corresponding entry read 'grocer and baker'.<sup>27</sup> To make another source comparison, in the mid 1820s Coggeshall's baptism register recorded Mathias Gardener of Church Street, as a carpenter.<sup>28</sup> In the 1823-24 *Directory* he appears as a 'builder and carpenter'.<sup>29</sup> The reason why directories would offer more detailed descriptions seems most satisfactorily explained by the commercial rationale of recording the full range of business activities. No such incentive existed in either the census, whose information remained confidential, or baptism registers, whose principal ecclesiastical role did not lie with the detailed recording of a father's 'trade'.<sup>30</sup>

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25. A revision which reflects the fact that, in compiling his directories, Kelly utilised the resources and organisation of the Post Office whose records were likely to have been organised by name rather than trade.

26. ERO HO 107/1783.

27. Kelly, *Post Office Directory* (1851), 52-53.

28. ERO D/P 36/1/10-15.

29. Pigot & Co., *Directory* (1823-4), 287-88.

30. Indeed, from an investigation carried out on Coggeshall's parish registers it was also evident that 'trade' descriptions could vary from one incumbent to the next - who in Coggeshall seems to have been the person completing the form. For example, during the mid-1820s the description of 'agricultural labourer' completely disappeared from the baptism register to be replaced by 'husbandman'. ERO D/P 36/1/10-15, Coggeshall baptism and marriage registers. Further examples of this can be found in chapter 6.



Finally, what will be the kinds of changes witnessed over time by the directories? It can be suggested that the changes observed in entries, from one directory to the next, may be best described in character as long-run and structural. According to neo-classical economic theory it is only in the long-run, with all factors of production variable, that firms can enter and exit the market, introduce new equipment, alter the range of their operations, pass from one generation to the next, and change their organisation. It is exactly these changes that the directories were dealing with in recording alterations to address, proprietorship, trade type and range, as well as the entry of new and exit of old businesses.

This assessment seems consistent with the nature of the source. As regional publications the scale of coverage would have made it impractical to include information on short-term sales and whether businesses were trading at a profit or loss. In any case such information amongst small companies was unlikely to have been forthcoming. This said, to retain their commercial viability the information contained in directories would have needed to be accurate. This would have necessitated the publication of a new edition after a certain lapse of time. It can be suggested that, Pigot's first *Directory* excepted,<sup>31</sup> the regular six to seven year gap may have, in part, reflected the speed of structural change in the region. Whilst a number of disparate factors were likely to have influenced the timing of a new edition, prominent amongst them must have been the consideration that a sufficient number of changes had occurred in the character and composition of the trading population to necessitate a revision that would prove commercially viable.

To summarise, the case has been advanced that the regional trade directories of the first half of the 19th century represent reliable, temporally comparable registers of urban business communities. In so doing it has been suggested that they have the potential to offer a unique and detailed insight into the fortunes of small town economies during a decisive period in their evolution. A period, furthermore, in which few other sources are available. More specifically, in revealing the composition and character of their businesses communities trade directory analysis presents the opportunity to undertake a detailed assessment of the commercial orientation of the north Essex cloth towns.

## ii

The question that now needs to be addressed is how to use the information in the directories to offer an insight into the economies of our three towns and, in particular, to assess the comparative importance of the manufacturing sector against marketing and trade. The key in this regard must be to consider developments in the business

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31. During the methodology section a case will be made for excluding the 1823-4 directory from analysis based upon the principle that it was the first of the series, possessing weaknesses that were subsequently corrected.



communities of each town over time as a guide to the direction their economies were moving in.

With this criterion in mind two schemes were devised, each designed to reveal key features of the urban economy. The first is a durability study. It consists of measuring the 'commercial life span' of each business to appear in the directories, as defined by the number of consecutive directory appearances - from first to last. This will test the economy's ability to sustain a stable business environment.<sup>32</sup> An absence of enduring businesses would suggest poor conditions for enterprise and, perhaps, that they were sites of entrepreneurial failure. At the other end of the spectrum, a predominance of long enduring businesses would suggest a lack of dynamism, and that these towns were sites of commercial conservatism.

Recording the types of trade each enduring concern practised should reveal which activities the economy was most suited to. Monitoring how these changed over successive directories should also offer a guide to the way in which the urban economy was developing. If, for example, the trades remained unchanged this would support an assessment that, during this period of wider urban development, the economies of our study towns were stable. If, however, the analysis reveals considerable change in the trades these enduring concerns were associated with, coupled, perhaps, with evidence of an expansion in production (may be through integration of activities, or moving from being described as a 'maker' to that of 'manufacturer'), this would imply a rather more dynamic economy. More specifically, it can be suggested that in an industrialising silk town these dynamic features would have been most evident amongst businesses concerned with the manufacture and marketing of silk and silk products.

The second scheme will take the form of an entry/exit study. This will record new businesses appearing in each directory for the first time, and those that had been recorded in the preceding directory, but which failed to appear in the subsequent one. The rate of business turnover is often considered a useful guide to levels of economic dynamism.<sup>33</sup> Beyond this, in a prosperous and expanding urban economy new business generation would be expected to match, or surpass that of decline. In contrast, with a decaying economy a greater amount of business failure might be expected, with exits out-numbering entries. Identifying the trades associated with the greatest amount of activity will offer a further guide to what were the most dynamic sectors of the urban economy. Conversely, the least commercially sustainable areas ought to be those

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32. See E.L. Jones, 'De-industrialisation as economic adjustment: the case of south-west England', *Economics Discussion Papers*, 13 (1987); J. Hoppit, *Risk and Failure in English Business 1700-1800* (Cambridge, 1987), especially 1-17; S. Pollard, 'Entrepreneurship, 1870-1914', R.C. Floud and D. McCloskey, *The Economic History of Britain Since 1700*, Vol. II, 1860-1939 (Cambridge, 1994), 62-89.

33. See footnote 32, especially Hoppit, *Risk and Failure*, 75-103.



displaying comparative inactivity, or where departures outstripped arrivals. In an industrialising silk town the greatest amount of turnover, along with the highest ratios of new recruits, would be associated with silk.

All classification schemes are built on sets of assumptions. For this one it is that businesses will behave in rational ways; that their aim is to make a profit and remain in business. By these criteria, firms surviving longest are assumed to have possessed the most successful strategies - in terms of location and organisation, as well as type and range of trade. Second, based on the same principles, it is assumed that new businesses will move into areas affording the best opportunities for commercial success, (that is where the greatest profits are judged to be made). Conversely, little business creation would be expected in areas of stagnation, and in those of decay - where costs exceeded profits - exits would predominate.

### iii

The final concern for this section relates to the method by which the businesses should be grouped. In chapter 3 the issue did not arise because the numbers dealt with were of manageable size. Bailey's coverage of Coggeshall amounted to 26 entries, the UBD's for Halstead to a total of 69 entries, and Holden's for Braintree to 36.<sup>34</sup> However, in the second generation of directories coverage was far more extensive. The number of businesses recorded in Braintree and Bocking by the later Pigot directories, and those of Kelly, exceeded 250. This, however, underestimates the true number that will be dealt with since in the two above methodologies consideration will be given to entries from all five directories. In this case the total number of firms appearing in the directories for Braintree and Bocking exceeded 700. A need, therefore, exists for a classification scheme to group these businesses into more manageable numbers.

Various classification schemes have been employed in previous directory based studies. However, these have tended to reflect the assumption that directories constituted partial censuses - an assessment that has been rejected here.<sup>35</sup> In devising an alternative scheme, based upon the premise that businesses were being recorded, two criteria had to be met. The first was that the groups should bear a close resemblance to the types of trade combination businesses were recorded with in the directories. The second was that businesses should be grouped in a way that was conducive to exploring the central concern in this study; that is to compare the dynamism and durability of businesses involved, on the one hand, with the manufacture of silk and, on the other, with marketing

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34. Bailey, *Eastern Counties Directory* Vol. IV (London, 1784), 793; *The Universal British Directory* Vol. III (London, 1784), 231-32; Holden's *London and County Directory*, Vol. III (1811).

35. See for example, Page, 'Commercial directories', 85-88; also N.D. Raven, 'De-industrialisation and the urban response: the small towns of the North Riding of Yorkshire, c1790-1850', in R. Weedon and A. Milne (eds), *Aspects of English Small Towns in the 18th and 19th Centuries* (Leicester, 1993), 46-69.



and thoroughfare functions. In identifying commercial groupings the scheme developed in chapter 3 was adopted. This used dual and multiple trade entries to establish trade associations. By this method chapter 3 identified commercial divisions between those involved in marketing and thoroughfare trades and those associated with wool. Few, if any, of the latter were found with second, or third, trades involved with marketing and thoroughfare activities.

Conducting the same exercise on entries appearing in the next generation of directories revealed silk to have behaved in the same way as wool. None of those with silk occupations returned second or third occupations in marketing. Indeed, it can be argued that the groupings which emerge from applying this procedure to the second generation of directories are more clearly delineated than those derived from the three national directories. This is because, first, of the larger numbers involved, and the greater accuracy and detail associated with this next generation of trade lists, and second, because the same exercise could also be applied over time, to take account of the ways businesses evolved.

Beyond identifying the two trade classes of marketing and silk, the greater depth of detail in this next generation of directories revealed two further classes - the professions, and straw hat makers. Few of those recorded as practising law, finance or medicine were returned with second or third occupations in either marketing or silk. Meanwhile, as revealed previously, the businesses in the straw hat maker's class included more marginal producers, appearing in greater numbers in the *County Directory* than the two straddling regional ones. The judgement that this group of trades also constituted its own class was, in part, based upon this distinguishing feature along with the fact that, once again, links outside the group with other trades - either associated with marketing, silk or the professions- were extremely rare.<sup>36</sup>

In addition, the more detailed coverage of Pigot and Kelly's directories also enabled the marketing and thoroughfare class to be sub-divided into a number of smaller trade groups. Again, these trade groups were based on the most common dual and multiple trade entries, along with the most common evolutionary strategies. Examination of these groups will enable variations in the marketing fortunes of each town to be identified. The 15 different groups, and the four classes they belong to, are listed below. Those trades appearing in italics represent the group titles, with other trades qualifying for inclusion appearing after.<sup>37</sup> It was also decided to add those appearing in the

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36. P. Sharpe, 'The women's harvest: straw-plaiting and the representation of labouring women's employment, c.1793-1885', *Rural History*, 5 (1994), 129-142.

37. Where business combinations involved trades that embraced more than one marketing group the business was assigned to the group in which most of the trades belonged. For example, William Porter's business, recorded in the 1832 *Directory* for Halstead, was included in group six since two of the three trades - grocer and tea dealer - appeared in this group. The other activity was that of retailer of beer. If, on the odd occasion, only two trades, each of a different class, were recorded,



miscellaneous section, number 15, to the marketing class. Although less common, where dual or multiple entries did appear they were most likely to occur in combination with those in the other marketing trade groups.<sup>38</sup>

#### Marketing Class:

- 1     *Bakers and Millers* - Confectioners, Corn Factors/Dealers/Merchants/Chandlers and Flour Dealers.
- 2     *Butchers and Poulterers* - Fishmongers and Pork Butchers.
- 3     *Brewers and Maltsters* - Beer House Keepers, Beer Retailers, Coopers, Hop Merchants, Innkeepers and Wine and Spirit Merchants.
- 4     *Gardeners and Seedsmen* - Nurserymen.
- 5     *Bootmakers and Curriers* - Leather Cutters, Shoemakers and Tanners.
- 6     *Hat Makers and Drapers* - Breeches Makers, Cheesemongers, Clothes Dealers, China and Glass Dealers, Fellmongers, Fruiterers, Glovers, Grocers, Habit Makers, Pawnbrokers, Shopkeepers, Tailors, Tallow Chandlers and Tea and Coffee Dealers.
- 7     *Cabinet Makers and Builders* - Appraisers, Auctioneers, Bricklayers, Brush Makers, Carpenters, Furniture Brokers, Harness Makers, Joiners, Saddlers, Turners and Upholsterers.
- 8     *Painters and Plumbers* - Glaziers and Ornamental Plasterers.
- 9     *Braziers and Whitesmiths* - Agricultural Implement Makers, Bellhangers, Blacksmiths, Coachsmiths, Cutlers, Farriers, Hardwaremen, Iron and Brass Founders, Ironmongers, Millwrights, Tinmen and Wheelwrights.
- 10    *Clock Makers and Gunsmiths* - Jewellers, Silversmiths and Watch Makers.

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the decision was based on the trade the business was longest associated with. The business of Robert Gallafant of Halstead was assigned to group two since he appeared as a butcher in the directories of 1826, 1832, 1839, 1845 and 1851, but was also recorded as a tavern keeper in those of 1832, 1839 and 1845.

38. For instance, cases were found where bricklayers also doubled as brickmakers, and where corn dealers also operated as coal dealers.



Straw Hat Making Class:

- 11      *Straw Hat Makers and Milliners* - Lace Dealers, Dress Makers, Embroideries, Straw Bonnet Makers, Straw Plait Dealers and Tuscan Hat Makers.

Silk and Wool Class:

- 12      *Woollen Cloth and Silk Manufacturers* - Crape Manufacturers and Silk Throwsters.

Professional Class:

- 13      *Attorneys and Bankers* - Solicitors.
- 14      *Physicians and Veterinaries* - Chemists, Dentists, Druggists and Surgeons.

Miscellaneous (included amongst marketing class):

- 15      *Miscellaneous* - Booksellers, Printers and Stationers, Brick and Tile Makers, Carriers, Coal and Wood Dealers, Music and Musical Instrument Sellers, Perfumers and Hair Dressers, Sieve and Basket Makers, Stay Makers, Stone and Marble Masons, Violin Teachers and Whip Makers.

From a consideration of the contents of each of these groups it is evident that the associations were generally based on products used. Taking those in marketing, the first group, *bakers and millers*, included an array of trades associated with grain and flour. Likewise, those in group 2 were associated with meat, those in 3 with drink, those in 5 with leather, and members of group 9 with metals. However, in other groups associations do not appear to have been based on a common product but a particular activity. Those in group 7, for example, were associated with building and the making of household contents. In theory it would be expected that members of group 8, including painters and plumbers, would also appear in this group 7. However, they are featured separately because their members were rarely found to possess second or third occupations found in group 7. The existence of group 6 can, similarly, be explained by the common activity of dealing in clothes and foodstuffs. Finally, it can be suggested that the difference between groups 9 and 10 was in terms of skill and scale - the latter being involved in finer, more intricate metal work.

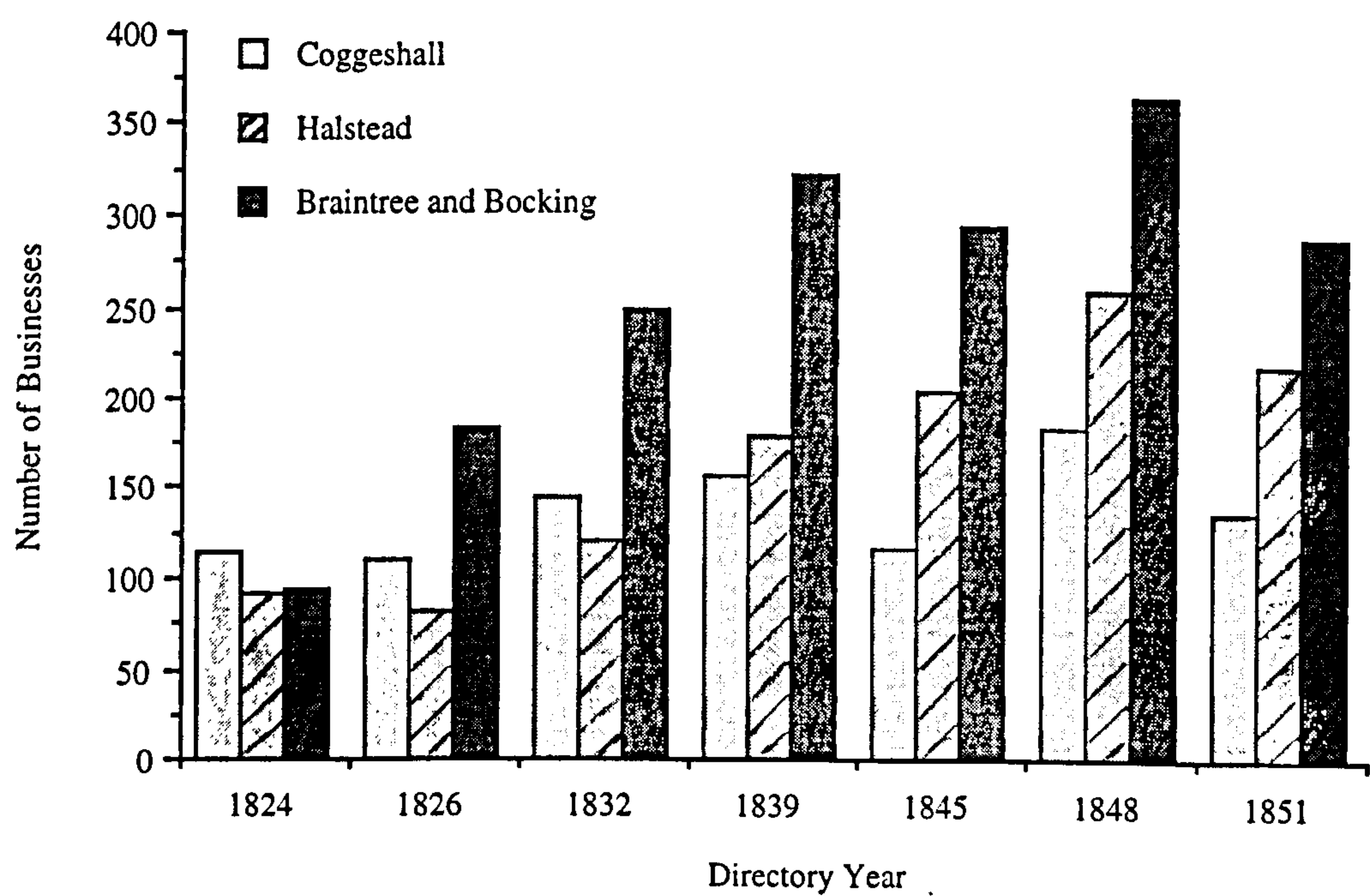


II. Results

i. General Business Community Profiles

In order to undertake the two time-series studies it was first necessary to identify the number of businesses recorded for each of the towns by each directory. This involved counting every entry made. The results are presented in figure 4.1.

Figure 4.1 An indicator of economic activity in the Essex towns, 1824-1851



Sources: Pigot & Co. *Directory*, 1823/4, 1826, 1832, and 1839; Kelly, *Post Office Directory* 1845; Whites *Essex Directory* 1848 and Whites *Post Office Directory* 1851.<sup>39</sup>

The graph illustrates that the towns experienced similar trends. For all three the 1820s and 1830s represented a period of growth. This was followed by a phase of no growth, which, in the case of both Coggeshall and Braintree and Bocking, witnessed a slight decline in businesses, although in all three towns the number of businesses operating in 1851 was greater than that recorded in the 1820s. The idea that the early 19th century was a period of economic stagnation or decline for the small towns of southern England is not borne out by the behaviour of the business communities in the case study towns.<sup>40</sup>

39. Pigot & Co., *Commercial Directory* 1823/4, Braintree and Bocking 283-84, Halstead 294-295, and Coggeshall 287-88; Pigot & Co., *Commercial Directory* 1826 (in same order), 520-21, 536-37, 527; Pigot & Co., *Commercial Directory* 1832, 658-60, 683-4, 670-71; Pigot & Co., *Commercial Directory* 1839, 86-89, 116-18, 101-2; Kelly, *Post Office Directory* 1845, 30-33, 71-73, 47; White, *Essex Directory* 1848, 673-70, 694-97, 138-40; Kelly, *Post Office Directory* 1851, 31-35, 81-83, 52-53.

40. C.W. Chalklin, *The Provincial Towns of Georgian England* (London, 1974), 28-31.



Before comparing in greater detail the business profiles for each town, consideration needs to be given to the question of which of the first two directories to begin analysis from. Since, unlike subsequent editions, they were published within two to three years of each other one needs to be dropped, so that the regular pattern of identifying changes every seven or so years can be adopted. Based upon the assumption that the first in any series will be the least reliable it was decided that analysis should begin with the 1826 *Directory*, thereby abandoning the 1823/4 *Directory*. This decision was underpinned by the results the 1823/4 *Directory* produced for Braintree and Bocking. When compared with those of 1826 the town's business community appeared to have doubled in numbers in less than three years. Whilst, in theory, this level of development may be possible there is nothing in the descriptive sources to account for it. Moreover, it is quite out of character with developments in the other two towns. In Coggeshall the number of businesses recorded in the former *Directory* totalled 114, and in 1826 they amounted to 111 - a difference between the two of just over 2.5 percent. Similarly, in Halstead the 1823/4 *Directory* listed 92 businesses compared with 82 in 1826/7 - a difference of under 11 percent. The belief that Braintree and Bocking's figures reflect the limitations of the 1823/4 *Directory*, rather than the size of the towns business community, was supported by closer examination of the entries in this *Directory*. Although some were identified in the Bocking part of the town, the great majority were located in Braintree parish. By contrast, far more coverage was awarded to Bocking parish in the 1826 *Directory*.

The first observation from a comparison of profiles is the considerable differences in the absolute size of each town's business community. That of Braintree and Bocking was considerably larger. Disregarding the results from the 1823/4 *Directory* and also, for the time being, White's *County Directory* of 1848, the average for the period exceeded 300. In Halstead the number of businesses recorded was about a third less, whilst in Coggeshall they were down to around a half of the number found in Braintree and Bocking.

These rough averages, however, hide considerable variations in the rates of business growth experienced over the period. Whilst between 1826 and 1851 Coggeshall grew by only 23 percent, from 111 business to 137, Braintree and Bocking increased its number of businesses from 180 to 280, an expansion of over 55 percent. However, it was Halstead that experienced the largest growth from 82 businesses to 218, a 147 per cent increase. From this cursory examination the least dynamic community would appear to have been that of Coggeshall, whilst Halstead emerges as the site of greatest development. However, despite its considerably more rapid rate of business growth, Halstead remained behind Braintree and Bocking in the proportion of enterprises to population. (In 1851 Braintree and Bocking returned 280, Halstead 218, and Coggeshall



137). In 1851 the former returned 31 business per 1,000 while the latter achieved over 34.

A consideration of the differential between numbers recorded in the two Post Office directories, and those returned by Whites, reveals further differences between the three towns. As expected, in all three the *County Directory* recorded the largest number of businesses. However, whilst in both Braintree and Bocking and Halstead the differences between coverage in the county and the two regional directories were similar, they were considerably greater for Coggeshall. In the two former towns White's coverage was around 24 per cent higher than that of 1845 and between 16.5 and 26 per cent more than in 1851. By contrast in Coggeshall White returned 58.6 percent more business entries than the *Post Office Directory* of 1845, (184 compared to 116) and 34.3 percent more than that of 1851 (184 compared to 137).

Two explanations may be suggested for the greater differentials in Coggeshall's results. First, the town's business community was comparatively under-recorded in the two regional directories. There is, however, little evidence of this when considering the character of individual entries in the three directories in question. The alternative appears more likely; that a larger proportion of Coggeshall's business community were operating as marginal concerns failing to qualify for entry in the more selective regional directories. This would fit with the view that, of the three, Coggeshall had the less developed businesses community. To verify or reject this point, and to assess whether marketing and thoroughfare functions were of greater commercial importance to the three towns, a detailed consideration of the character of their business communities must be given. This investigation will begin with an examination of the composition of the most enduring concerns and continue with a consideration of rates of business turnover.

## ii. Durability Analysis

In order to identify the longest enduring concerns in each town it was first necessary to link up entries between directories, so that profiles for every recorded business could be constructed. A series of rules were established which had to be met before a positive 'inter-directory' identification could be made.<sup>41</sup> Having organised the entries in this way

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41. For a business to be identified in two directories as the same concern it had to return the same name, address and trade. This is based upon Glennie's suggestion that to be certain the same individual, or entity, is being referred to in two different sources three positive connections must be made. When applied to the trade directory data it was decided to allow some flexibility in applying this rule. This was considered justifiable on the grounds that linkages were being made across the same source type. In practice, where businesses experienced no change the rule could be applied without compromise. The same was also true where development involved the acquisition of additional trade activities. The great majority of cases fell into these two categories. However, in some instances development involved a change in name. In this case it was decided to make a positive identification where evidence suggested the business had been inherited. This demanded that the same surname be returned, along with the same address and trade type(s). In practice the cases proved fairly clear cut, for example John Metcalf to Mrs Mary Metcalf. The cases of inheritance by the wife tended to be easily identifiable because the directories applied the title of



it was then possible to identify the number of consecutive *regional* directory appearances each business made. It was decided that those listed in four or five directories would constitute the enduring members of each town's business community. To a degree the choice of four or five directories was arbitrary. However, it did mean that all those businesses selected would have been in continuous existence for at least 20 years. The results are presented in table 4.1.

Table 4.1 Commercial durability of businesses in the three towns, 1826-1851

| No of Directory Appearances (percentage) | Braintree and Bocking | Halstead | Coggeshall |
|--|-----------------------|----------|------------|
| 1  | 56.05                 | 58.26    | 56.61      |
| 2  | 18.21                 | 19.87    | 16.95      |
| 3  | 11.66                 | 10.49    | 12.93      |
| 4  | 7.4                   | 6.70     | 5.17       |
| 5  | 6.69                  | 4.69     | 8.33       |

Sources: Pigot & Co., *Directory*, 1823/4, 1826, 1832, and 1839; Kelly, *Post Office Directory* 1845; White, *Essex Directory* , 1848; and Kelly, *Post Office Directory*, 1851.<sup>42</sup>

All three towns displayed what might be expected of fairly dynamic business communities - descending hierarchies of durability. Whilst each offered an economy open to entry and exit - the details of which will be considered presently - they also generated commercial environments capable of sustaining businesses over a long time period. Indeed, for the three towns the percentage spreads appear to have been very

‘Mrs’. The limitation of this procedure, however, was that it could not identify inheritance where the surname changed - from say father to daughter in law, or son-in-law. However, it was considered that such practice probably occurred in only a very few cases. In other instances of name change it was easier to identify continuation of the same business where, for example, reference was made to a ‘son’, or a partner with the same surname, possibly a brother or cousin. In the few cases where a new proprietor with a different surname was recorded it was decided to consider the entry as an existing concern that had received a new injection of capital. Other possible changes between directories included the recording of different addresses. In the three case studies this occurred only rarely. Where it did the business was considered to be the same if the name and trade remained unaltered. In fact, it was found that in most cases changes in address were caused by the directories renaming entire streets.

Besides making these concessions it was decided to adopt another rule, one that was strictly kept to. A positive identification of the same concern was only possible where entries appeared in consecutive regional directories, for example Pigot's *Directory* of 1839 and Kelly's *Directory* of 1845. If an entry appeared in one directory, but was absent from the next, its return in any subsequent directories was judged to represent the appearance of a new business. This was based on the assessment that absence from a regional directory meant the concern had either stopped trading, or that its circumstances had been reduced sufficiently that it failed to meet the criteria for inclusion in the next directory. This was considered to be the most rational decision since absence would probably have reflected the loss of at least some employment, a decline or loss of customers and, for the town, the loss of some services and revenue. P. Glennie, *Distinguishing Men's Trades: Occupational Sources and Debates for Pre-Census England* (Historical Geography Research Series, No 25, December 1990).

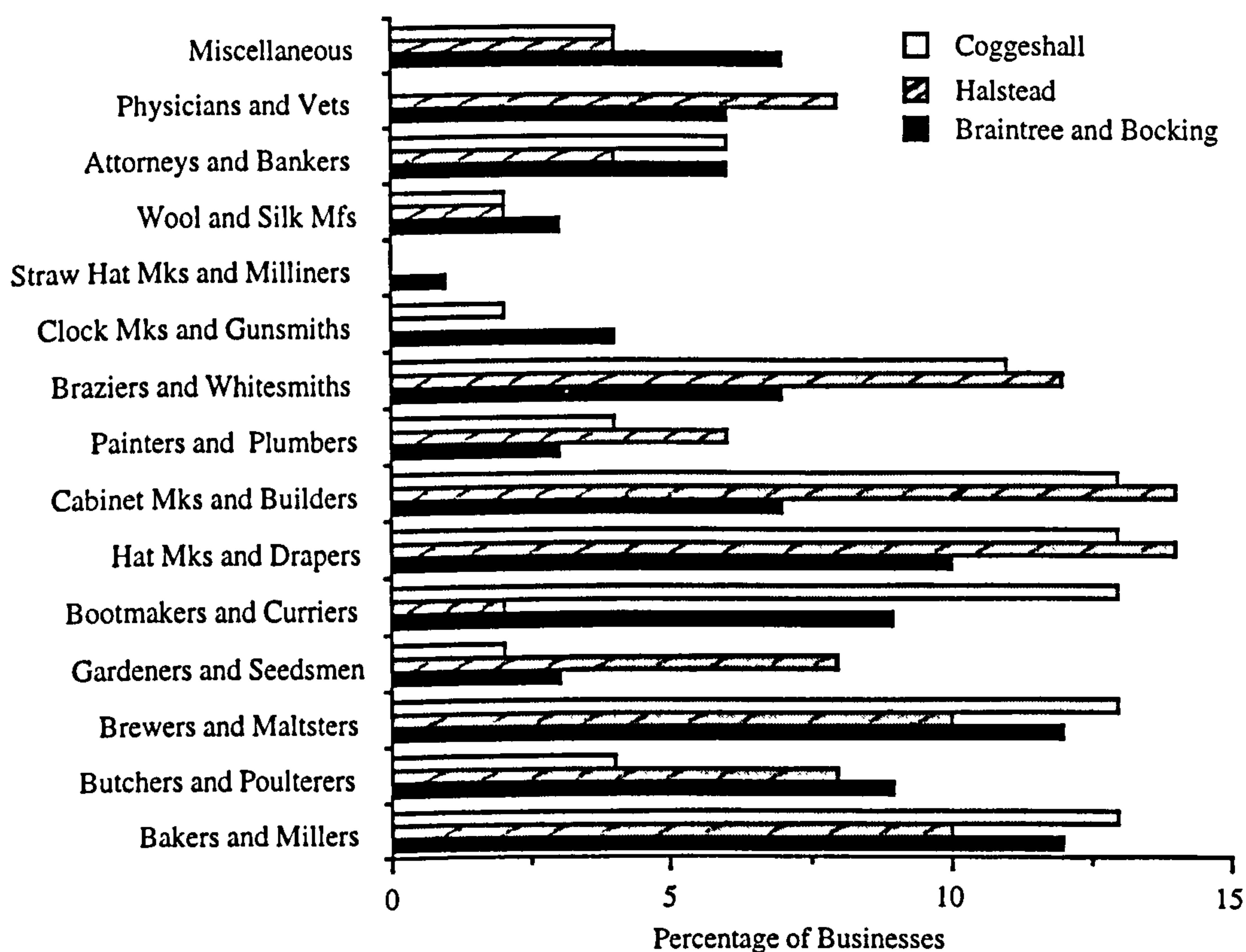
42. Pigot & Co., *Commercial Directory* 1823/4, Braintree and Bocking 283-84, Halstead 294-295, and Coggeshall 287-88; Pigot & Co., *Commercial Directory* 1826, (in same order) 520-21, 536-37, 527; Pigot & Co., *Commercial Directory* 1832, 658-60, 683-4, 670-71; Pigot & Co., *Commercial Directory* 1839, 86-89, 116-18, 101-2; Kelly *Post Office Directory* 1845, 30-33, 71-73, 47; White, *Essex Directory* 1848, 673-70, 694-97, 138-40; Kelly *Post Office Directory* 1851, 31-35, 81-83, 52-53.



similar. In each the majority, between 56 percent in the case of Braintree and Bocking, and 58.3 percent in Halstead, appeared in only one directory. By contrast, a small minority were in business long enough to appear in four or five directories. Again the proportions were very similar in each town. In Braintree and Bocking these enduring businesses represented 14 percent of the total, in Coggeshall 13.5 percent, and in Halstead 11.4 percent. However, whilst the proportion of total businesses these enduring concerns represented was very similar for each town, the actual numbers varied considerably, reflecting the size of each business community. In Braintree and Bocking enduring businesses numbered 99 out of a total number of businesses to make a directory appearance of 703. In Halstead this came to 51 out of 448, and in Coggeshall 47 out of a total of 348.

By their longevity these concerns can be considered to have formed the mainstay of each town's business community. Their importance to the wider economic welfare of the town would have been reflected in their position as sources of regular, long term employment, in addition to representing some of the town's principal rate payers. What now needs to be considered are the types of trade practised by these concerns in each town. Figure 4.2 illustrates this.

Figure 4.2 Composition of enduring businesses in the three towns



Sources: Pigot & Co., *Directory*, 1823/4, 1826, 1832, and 1839; Kelly, *Post Office Directory* 1845; White, *Essex Directory*, 1848; and Kelly, *Post Office Directory*, 1851.<sup>43</sup>

43. For full references see footnote 42.



If we first consider the fortunes of the wider trade classes in all three towns, the two professional classes made only modest appearances. Only seven percent of the total number of Braintree and Bocking's enduring concerns appeared in the attorney and banker's class. Coggeshall's figure was similar, whilst Halstead's amounted to just four percent. Likewise, only seven percent of all Braintree and Bocking's enduring businesses were found in the physicians and veterinary class. In Halstead the figure was slightly higher at eight, whilst in Coggeshall no businesses appeared in this class at all. An even lower general profile was found in the straw hat and milliners trade group. In Braintree and Bocking only one business associated with this group appeared, whilst none were recorded in Halstead and Coggeshall.

Silk businesses also failed to feature strongly amongst those enjoying long-run commercial success. In Braintree and Bocking only two businesses survived throughout the 1820s, 30s and 40s, whilst only one concern endured in Halstead and one in Coggeshall. For Braintree and Bocking the firms were Courtaulds and Walters. Courtaulds were also the firm that survived in Halstead, whilst in Coggeshall it was the business of John Hall that featured in four of the five directories.<sup>44</sup>

In terms of the business durability criteria this finding would seem to belie the description of the three settlements as 'silk towns', since it can be suggested that silk would be expected to have made a stronger appearance amongst firms enjoying long term success. Although Wilde did not undertake a durability study for the silk businesses identified in Macclesfield, Leek and Congleton, the evidence he presents is suggestive of this. Wilde gathered information on the number and types of silk businesses operating in the three south-west Pennine towns from a number of early 19th century directories.<sup>45</sup> Whilst no ribbon manufacturers, smallware manufacturers, or silk merchants appear for Macclesfield in the *Directory* of 1825, five of the other categories of silk trades constantly returned businesses.<sup>46</sup> Whilst some of their constituents may

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44. However, in contrast to the straw hat and milliners class, but consistent with those in the medical and legal profession, White's coverage of the number and names of silk business in all three towns was consistent with that in the two Post Office directories. This suggests that businesses in the two professional classes, as well as in silk, were more substantial commercial enterprises.

45. P. Wilde, 'The use of business directories in comparing the industrial structure of towns: an example from the south-west Pennines', *Local Historian*, 12 (1976), 152-156. For Macclesfield these consisted of directories by Barfoot and Wilkes 1790, Pigot & Dean 1818, Pigot 1828, and 1834, and Williams 1846. For Congleton, the same directories for 1790, 1828, 1834 and 1846 were used along with S. Yates, *An History of the Ancient Town and Borough of Congleton*, 1818. Finally, for Leek the author used Bailey 1784, Holden 1809, Parsons and Bradshaw 1818, Pigot 1828, White 1834, and Williams 1846. The extent to which entries between directories were comparable is uncertain since a number of these were county-wide publications rather than regional. However, as assessed in section I, for silk concerns depth of coverage between the regional and county directories was generally consistent. It is unlikely that any additional firms recorded in White's or William's directories would have seriously distorted the numbers. It is not, however, certain that this would have been the case with information acquired from Yate's town based directory.

46. These comprised twisters, throwsters, unspecified manufacturers, dyers and finishers, as well as a group of ancillary activities such as silkmen, agents and waste dealers.



have changed it seems reasonable that others would have endured throughout the period. This seems particularly likely for categories such as throwsters which in the lowest directory count for Macclesfield numbered 36.

The low performance of silk in the case study towns contrasted with the experience of the trade groups associated with marketing and thoroughfare functions. In all three towns businesses appearing in these dominated the ranks of the enduring trades. Together bakers, brewers, drapers, bootmakers, butchers, builders, braziers, clockmakers, seedsmen, painters and a host of miscellaneous traders, including brick makers, hairdressers and whip makers, formed the large majority. In Braintree and Bocking these totalled 83.8 percent of all enduring concerns (numbering 83). In Halstead they represented 86.3 percent (numbering 44), and in Coggeshall 91.5 percent (totalling 43).

The details gathered in undertaking the durability study also enabled a consideration of the way businesses evolved over the course of their directory appearances. The identification of such changes amongst concerns enjoying long term success offers an indication of what sectors in the urban economies were most dynamic. Such changes could be identified in a number of ways. Evidence of expansion could be witnessed by alterations in trade description, perhaps the acquisition of additional activities, or expansion of existing ones. With regard to the latter, cross referencing directory entries against the periodic references made in the 1851 census enumerators' returns to numbers employed by masters, suggests that the use of the term manufacturer, instead of maker, was, at least in part, based on quantitative differences. Those described as 'manufacturers' tended to be large employers. Beyond this, changes could also be observed in terms of proprietorship.<sup>47</sup> For example, it seems reasonable to assume that the appearance of additional partners represented the input of new capital. Finally, consideration was also given to descriptions of premises and, in particular, where references were made to mills or factories.

Beginning with enduring concerns amongst the two professional groups, the only noticeable changes occurred to attorneys, and these took three forms. The practice of Orbel Hustler, of Chapel Street, Halstead, and later the High Street, offers an example of the first. In the 1826, 1832 and 1839 directories the practice was described as that of an attorney, in the two subsequent Kelly directories it was returned as that of a solicitor.<sup>48</sup> It can be suggested that this change probably reflects differences in the nomenclature of

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47. See G.H. Evans, 'A sketch of American business organisation, 1832-1900', *The Journal of Political Economy*, 60 (1952), 475-486. In his examination of businesses appearing in state and city directories Evans uses a classification scheme based on the number of proprietors named in the firm.

48. Pigot & Co., *Commercial Directory* 1826, 536-37; Pigot & Co., *Commercial Directory* 1832, 683-4; Pigot & Co., *Commercial Directory* 1839, 116-18; Kelly *Post Office Directory* 1845, 71-73; Kelly, *Post Office Directory* 1851, 81-83.



the two directories, rather than a qualitative or quantitative change. The second, which appears to have been general amongst attorneys, and later solicitors, was the acquisition of public offices and duties. Typically these included clerks to the magistrates, and boards of guardians, as well as superintendent registrars. The fact that these posts were held by individuals offers further support for the claim made in section I; that attorneys, and other professionals, tended to be self employed, or small partnerships, in which those involved in the firm - perhaps with the exception of a clerk - would be identified in the name of the concern. Related to the same point, the only other development to occur to representatives of this group was the appearance and disappearance of partners. The case of the Braintree and Bocking firm which in 1826 was listed as 'Walford, Cunnington and Walford' is an example of this. In 1832 it had changed to 'Cunnington & Walford', in 1839 to 'Cunnington & Veley', in 1845 to 'Cunnington, Veley & Cunnington', and in 1851, back to 'Veley & Cunnington'.<sup>49</sup>

Turning to the straw hat making class, for the one enduring representative, Ann Laver of London Road, Braintree and Bocking, there is little evidence of growth, certainly not of a sustained kind, although certain changes did occur. In 1826 the concern appeared as that of a straw hat maker. Although the trade title remained the same in the following *Directory* Ann had been joined by Elizabeth - possibly a sister - as proprietor. In 1839 Ann and Elizabeth were described as straw hat manufacturers. Whilst this may suggest growth the 1845 *Directory* entry, where only Ann is mentioned and described as a straw bonnet maker, is suggestive of a more modest enterprise - one that by 1851 had disappeared.<sup>50</sup> From other entries there is reason to suppose that straw hat, or plait manufacturing, on its own could not easily sustain long term commercial success. Robert Byford's business, located on Coggeshall Road, in Braintree and Bocking is indicative of this. In the four *Directory* appearances this concern made the straw plait manufacturing, and later dealing activity, was accompanied, in 1832, by that of tea and coffee dealer, in 1839 by that of grocer and tea dealer, and in both 1845 and 1851 by shopkeeper.<sup>51</sup>

Amongst enduring silk concerns some growth is discernible. With regard to proprietorship, in the first four directories Daniel Walters concern at Pound End, Braintree and Bocking, appeared as that of a single proprietor. However, in 1851, the enterprise was returned as Daniel Walters and Son. By this date the entry also listed Thomas Cheeseman as an agent. Similarly, the firm of Courtaulds, operating in both Halstead and Braintree and Bocking, first appeared in 1826 as a single proprietorship - that of Samuel Cortall. From 1832 onwards, however, it was returned as Samuel

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49. Pigot & Co., *Commercial Directory* 1826, 520-21; Pigot & Co., *Commercial Directory* 1832, 658-60; Pigot & Co., *Commercial Directory* 1839, 86-89; Kelly *Post Office Directory* 1845, 30-33; Kelly, *Post Office Directory* 1851, 31-35.

50. See footnote 49 for full references.

51. *Ibid.*



Courtauld, Taylors and Courtauld. Other evidence of expansion derives from information contained in addresses. John Hall's business in Coggeshall was returned without an address in 1826 and 1832. However, in 1839 his business was located at Crouch Factory and Abbey Mills, whilst in the two Kelly *Directories* his address was given as Orchard Steam Mill.<sup>52</sup> Courtaulds entries offer similar evidence for the growth of commercial premises. In 1832, the business was located at Bocking Mills, and Halstead Crape Mill,<sup>53</sup> by 1845 the firm was also operating from Braintree Mill.<sup>54</sup>

However, in terms of trade descriptions the evidence of development amongst silk is less conclusive. The one clear indication of this again concerned Courtaulds. In 1826, and 1832, the business was described as that of a silk throwing and silk manufacturing enterprise, by 1839 it was also returned as a crape manufacturers. However, other changes in description appear to have had more to do with the rather more succinct descriptions used by Kelly's directories and offer little evidence of change. Both Hall and Walters' concerns were described in the three Pigot directories as silk manufacturers and throwsters. However, in 1845 and 1851 their descriptions were shortened to that of silk manufacturer.

The other evidence taken from the *Directory* entries of these concerns suggests that from their first appearances they were fairly substantial enterprises. In this respect all were described as 'manufactures'. The likely explanation for this is that they derived from outside the three towns, most prominently London.<sup>55</sup> In 1832 Daniel Walters concern was returned with a second, London-based address. Similarly, in 1824, John Hall's other addresses were given as Earl's Court, Coventry, and 20 Foster Lane, London. At this date, and in 1826, Hall was recorded in partnership with a Mr Sawyer. The fact that from their earliest appearances these were substantial concerns suggests the towns were not responsible for the generation of enduring silk businesses. Whether this was also true of other silk businesses appearing perhaps from 1832, or later, and therefore not meeting the criteria for enduring firms, will be considered in the entry/exit study.<sup>56</sup> Beyond this, the results suggest that, perhaps with exception of Courtaulds, the silk businesses of these towns did not experience much change. This appears to have been true in both comparative and relative terms.

With regard to the former, trade *Directory* evidence identifies considerable development, in terms of trade description, occurring amongst the silk businesses of the three south-

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52. Pigot & Co., *Commercial Directory* 1826, 527; Pigot Co., *Commercial Directory* 1832, 670-71; Pigot Co., *Commercial Directory* 1839, 101-2; Kelly *Post Office Directory* 1845, 47; Kelly, *Post Office Directory* 1851, 52-53.

53. Pigot & Co., *Commercial Directory* 1832, 658-60 and 683-84.

54. Kelly, *Post Office Directory*, 1845, 30-33.

55. D.C. Coleman, *Courtaulds: An Economic and Social History*, Vol. I: The Nineteenth Century, Silk and Crape (Oxford, 1969).

56. See also chapter 6.



west Pennine towns. In Congleton, for example, various throwing firms also developed the merchanting side of their businesses, acquiring the label of 'silkmen'. Moreover, as referred to earlier, Wilde's study also suggests that the other enduring silk concerns of these three towns included businesses involved in dyeing and finishing, as well as throwing and manufacturing.

Turning now to the view that this lack of change was also relative, the situation of the silk businesses in the case study towns contrasts with that observed amongst enterprises in the marketing and trade groups. Some businesses concentrated throughout the period of analysis on a narrow range of activities. For example, Habakkuk Willsher's boot and shoe making concern in Coggeshall remained unchanged for all five *Directory* appearances. Others evolved in ways that did not necessarily indicate growth. For example, in 1826, 1832, and 1839 William Brown's business on London Road, Braintree and Bocking, was that of 'nurseryman, seedsman and gardener'. By 1845 Mrs Brown appears to have taken over the concern, which was now involved in beer retailing as well as gardening. By 1851 the gardening side had disappeared, and beer retailing activities were being supplemented by the keeping of a beer house. However, a number of clear cases of growth can be discerned.

First, Samuel Hawkes' business on Bradford Street, Braintree and Bocking, displayed signs of vertical integration. In 1826, Hawkes was described as a blacksmith and wheelwright, by 1845 as a blacksmith and iron founder and, finally, in 1851, as an iron and brass founder, and agricultural implement maker, as well as blacksmith. Another case of emerging vertical integration, but in a different trade group, was that of Isaac Walford, of Halstead High Street. In 1826 Walford was returned as a brewer and cooper, in 1832 as a brewer, cooper and timber merchant, in 1839 as a brewer, maltster, timber merchant, cooper, and, in 1845, as a brewer, cooper, timber merchant and maltster.<sup>57</sup>

Second, the case of John West, of Braintree and Bocking High Street affords an example of horizontal integration, and is also amongst the clearest instances of commercial expansion. In his first entry of 1826 West was described as a turner, in 1832 he was recorded as a brush maker and turner, in 1839 as a brush maker, patten maker, and clog maker, and, by 1851, as a wholesale brush manufacturer, general turner, patten maker, and clog maker.

Finally, there were also examples of more general growth. The case of the Unwins, of Coggeshall, is representative of this. In 1826 the proprietor was Stephen, from 1832

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57. Although this concern does receive coverage in White's *Directory* of 1848 as a 'farmer, brewer, cooper, maltster, timber merchant'.



through to the last entry in 1845 he was joined by Stephen Fisher - possibly his son.<sup>58</sup> Over the same period the firm's activities also appear to have grown. In the first two directories it was recorded as a maltsters, in 1832 it was also returned as a wool staplers and clothiers, and in 1839 as a corn dealers, woolstaplers, seed and coal merchants. By 1845, however, its activities appear to have been curtailed to that of just wool stapling.<sup>59</sup>

To summarise the findings so far, the broad trade class findings from the durability study refute the general notion that the economies of the case study towns failed to offer an environment in which business could enjoy long-term commercial success. However, what consideration of trades associated with these enduring businesses reveals is that the great majority of long-term successes were to be found amongst the various groups associated with marketing and thoroughfare activities. Beyond this, examination of the membership in the marketing class also presents the clearest evidence of growth in commercial functions. By contrast few silk manufacturers featured amongst those enjoying long-term success and, amongst the ones that did, there was little evidence of growth. The performance of Essex silk concerns in these two respects was found to contrast with those operating in the three silk towns of the south-west Pennines. Whilst these findings do much to undermine the perception of the case study settlements as silk towns, they offer support for the argument that marketing activities formed their economic stables. This said, closer examination of the behaviour of the marketing and thoroughfare groups amongst the three towns identifies variations in the success with which they functioned as marketing and thoroughfare centres.

Braintree and Bocking appears to have displayed the most even spread of coverage amongst enduring concerns. The highest proportion of businesses in one of the classes amounted to 12 percent of the total number of enduring businesses, the lowest three percent. By contrast the variation in Halstead was between 13.7 percent and 0 percent, and in Coggeshall between 12.8 and 2 percent. The same point is evident if a comparison is made of returns for particular classes. Halstead failed to record any businesses in the gun and clock making group, whilst also returning a comparatively low proportion of entries in the bootmaking group - two percent. This compared to nine percent in Braintree and Bocking and 12.8 percent in Coggeshall. Similarly, Coggeshall returned a comparatively low proportion of entries in the butchers class - four percent, compared to 7.8 in Halstead and nine in Braintree and Bocking. It can be suggested that the more even distribution of businesses across the various marketing groups portrayed in Braintree and Bocking is consistent with the idea that, of the three, it was the most important marketing and thoroughfare centre. Such a profile suggests this town was able to offer a wide range of commercial services, and that the level of trade these received

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58. A supposition supported by an entry in White's *Directory* which records the concern as 'Stephen sen & jun'.

59. White's *Directory* also records them as just 'woolstaplers'. White, *Essex Directory* 1848, 138-140.



was sufficient to ensure their long-term success. However, in considering the composition and behaviour of enduring concerns a large proportion of each towns business community remains unexamined. To consider these we need to turn to the entry/exit analysis.

### **iii. Entry/Exit Analysis**

The entry/exit analysis represents the second method of examining the urban business communities. As outlined in section I, this offers a measure of the levels of business turnover. Figures 4.3, 4.4, and 4.5 plot the total number of businesses recorded for each of the three towns, alongside those appearing for the first time in a directory, and those disappearing from the lists.

What becomes apparent from examination of the three graphs is that the aggregate figures mask a considerable amount of turnover in the composition of the business populations - a feature that did not wane as the total number of businesses stabilised in Braintree and Bocking and declined in Coggeshall during the 1840s. The idea that the business communities of the case study towns were stagnant and unchanging must, therefore, be rejected.

However, these general findings raise the question, in which business classes and trade groups was turnover most prominent? Rates of turnover offer a further guide to commercial dynamism since they are associated with change and, potentially, of development, as the arrival of new proprietors brought new ideas and innovations. Beyond this, comparing rates of entry against those of exit for each class and group also enables the areas of commercial expansion to be identified.

If we consider the fortunes of the four main trade classes first, it becomes evident that in all three towns the legal and medical groups experienced very low rates of business turnover. The fortunes of the two groups in Braintree and Bocking are representative of the levels of activity evident in the other two towns. In the case of the former group entries varied between 0.6 and 2.4 percent of the total, whilst exits ranged from zero to one percent. Similarly, amongst the medical group entries ranged from 1.8 to 5.9 and exits from zero to four percent.



Changes in the business population, 1832-51

Figure 4.3 Braintree and Bocking

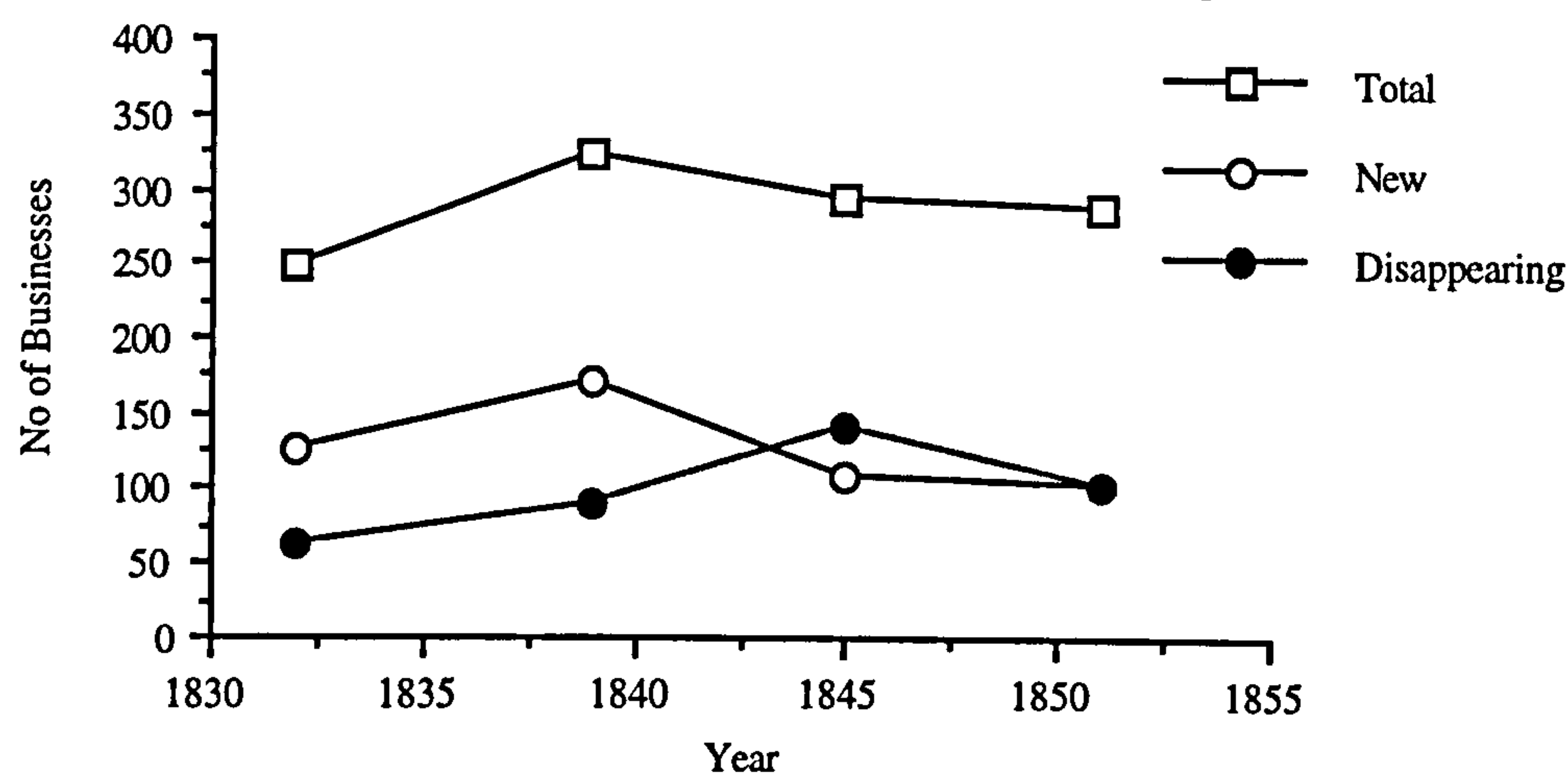


Figure 4.4 Halstead

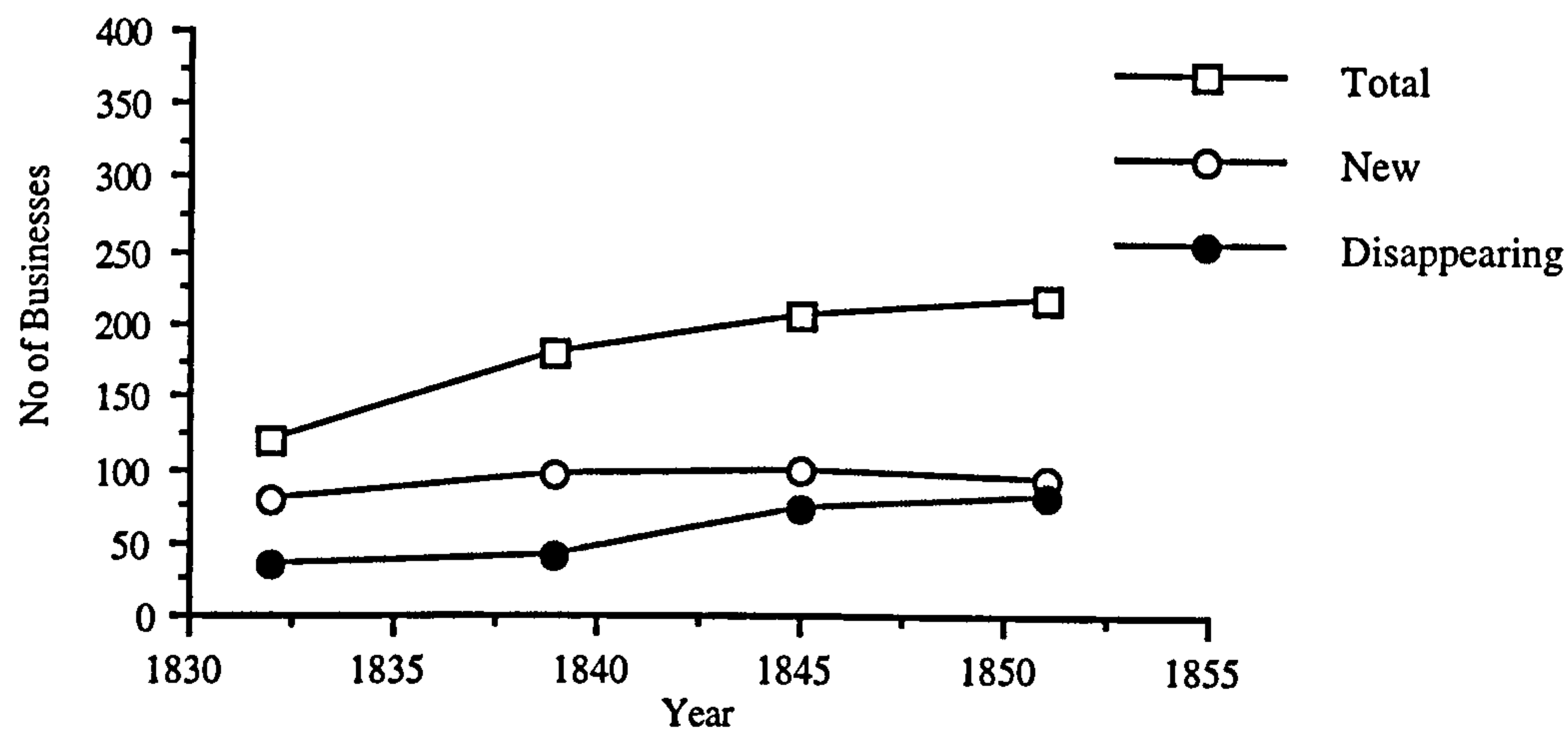
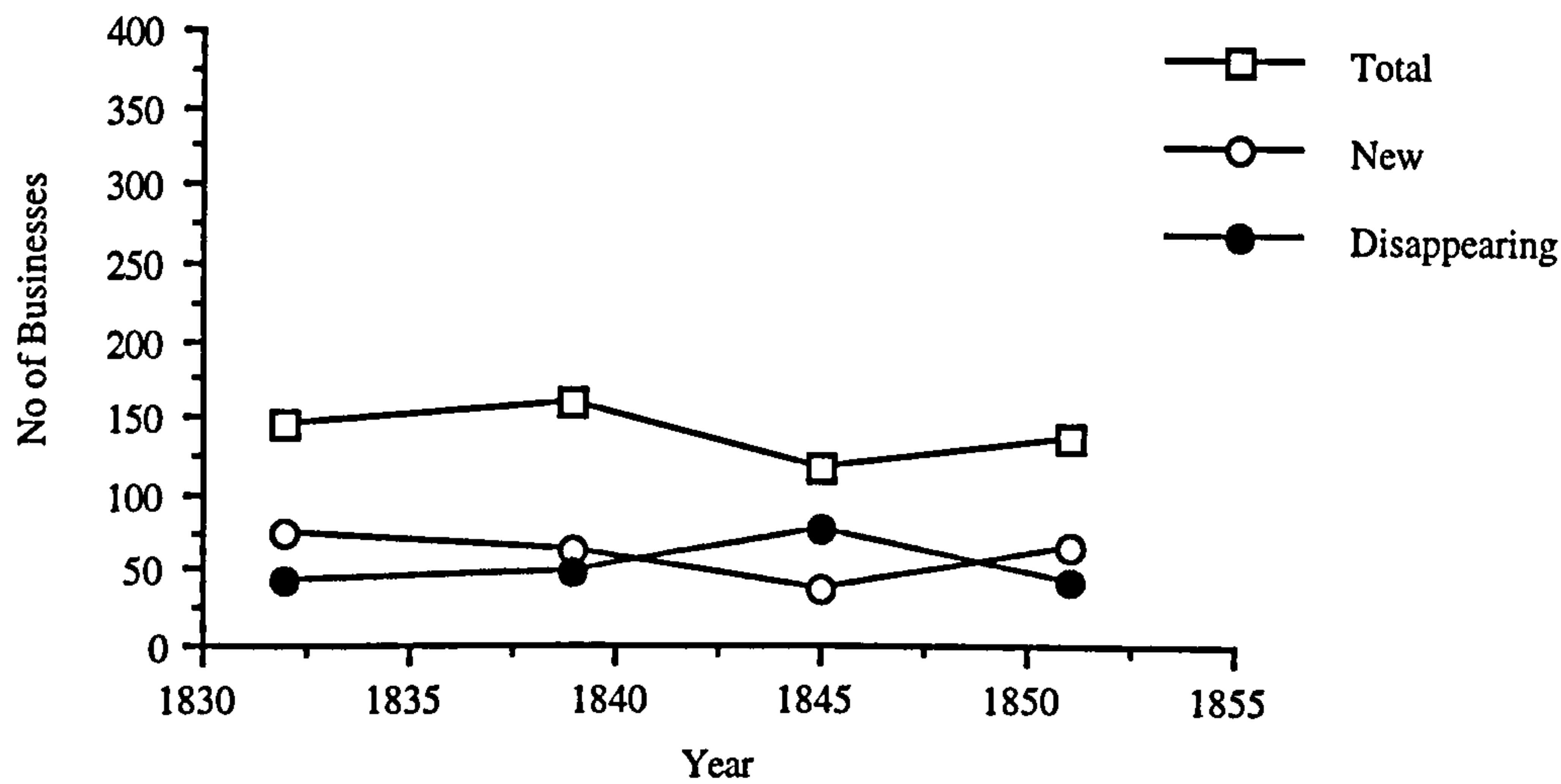


Figure 4.5 Coggeshall



Sources: Pigot & Co., *Directory*, 1823/4, 1826, 1832, and 1839; Kelly, *Post Office Directory*, 1845; Whites *Essex Directory*, 1848; and Kelly, *Post Office Directory*, 1851.



The straw hat making class appears, on the other hand, to have represented a far more active sector, as considerable levels of entry and exit activity were recorded in all three places. In Braintree and Bocking entries in this class ranged from 7.8 percent to 16.5 and exits from 6.3 to 18.8 percent. In Halstead the same figures for entries were 2.6 percent to 12.5 and for exits 0 to 17.3 percent respectively. In Coggeshall, entries fluctuated from 5.4 to 14.1 and exits from 7.1 to 11.9.

Turning to the level of entry and exit activity in the silk business class, this was comparable, in its subdued nature, to that found amongst professionals. In Braintree and Bocking entries varied between zero and 1.8 percent of the total, whilst exits fluctuated from one to 3.3 percent. In Halstead and Coggeshall the ranges were very similar. For Halstead entries varied from 1 and 2.6 percent and exits from zero to 5.6 percent, and in Coggeshall entries ranged from 1.6 to 3.1 percent and exits from 0 to 1.3 percent. This very low level of turnover appears to contrast with that experienced by the three south-west Pennine silk towns. Although Wilde did not undertake such an exercise, the evidence he offers is suggestive of a high degree of turnover amongst the silk businesses identified in the five directories used. Taking the returns for Macclesfield, businesses appearing in the twisters category ranged in number from five in 1818, to 10 in 1825, 15 in 1828, eight in 1834, and three in 1846. Similarly, in the category of 'other silk manufacturers' numbers ranged from 34 in 1818, to 65 in 1825, 41 in 1828, 39 in 1834 and 55 in 1846. The same fluctuations were also evident amongst the various categories of silk business identified in Congleton and Leek.<sup>60</sup>

Once again, the picture of commercial inactivity portrayed by the silk businesses of the north Essex towns contrasts with the marketing and thoroughfare business groups. Of the four classes these experienced the highest rates of turnover. In fact, in all four directories for which examination of numbers entering and exiting were possible, these groups accounted for over 75 percent of all entries and exits. Those for Braintree and Bocking, which are representative of the other two towns, were, in 1832, 83.3 percent of entries and 89 percent of exits, in 1839 80 percent of entries and 83.5 percent of exits, in 1845 76.8 percent of entries and 76.4 percent of exits, and in 1851, 84.3 percent of entries and 75 percent of exits.<sup>61</sup>

The contrast in levels of business turnover between silk and marketing is illustrated in figures 4.6, 4.7 and 4.8. In each the silk class is compared against the three marketing trade groups which witnessed the greatest amount of entry and exit activity. In Braintree

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60. Wilde, 'The use of business directories', 152-156.

61. In Halstead the exact percentages for each directory year were: 90.9 of entries and 91.6 of exits in 1832; 79.2 of entries and 93 of exits, in 1839; 80 of entries and 79.2 of entries, in 1845; and 86 of entries and 75.3 of exits in 1851. In Coggeshall the same grouping exceeded 75 percent of entries and exits for each year. In 1832 the exact figures were 76 and 85.7 percent respectively; in 1839, 83.6 and 77 percent; in 1845 83.8 and 87 percent; finally, in 1851 the marketing class accounted for 81 percent of both entries and exits.



and Bocking these were found to be brewers, hat makers and cabinet makers, in Halstead and Coggeshall they comprised brewers, hat makers and bakers.

The comparatively high rates of turnover evident amongst businesses in the various trade and marketing groups adds support to the view that this constituted the most dynamic sector in the urban economies of the case study towns. However, as observed at the start of this section, high rates of turnover can be associated with declining sectors if exits exceed entries. This observation prompts the question of which classes experienced growth over the period of examination, and which decayed? Since in all three towns the absolute number of businesses grew over the 30 years under examination, decline is most likely to have been witnessed in relative terms; that is where levels of business increase fell below the average rate.

Considering the two professional groups first, in all three towns these increased above, or at the same rate, as average business growth. In both Braintree and Bocking and Halstead the number of entries over the course of the four directories were double those of exits. These 100 percent growth rates compared with the average in Braintree and Bocking of 28 percent, and in Halstead of 58.4 percent. The actual figures for Braintree and Bocking were 24 entries to 12 exits, and in Halstead, 22 entries to 11 exits. By contrast, the 13.3 percent growth rate experienced by these two groups in Coggeshall mirrored the average for the town; here there were 17 entries to 15 exits.

Contrasting with the performance of the professionals was that of the straw hat makers class - at least in Braintree and Bocking and Halstead. In the former the rate of growth was just eight percent, with a total of 66 entries to 61 exits. In the latter it was higher at 34 percent, but still significantly behind the average, with 31 entries and 23 exits. In Coggeshall, however, straw hat making concerns increased at almost twice the average rate. Here the 24 entries to 19 exits constituted an increase of 26 percent.

The fortunes of the silk class, for Braintree and Bocking along with Halstead, were worse than those of straw. Indeed, the only case of absolute decline was that of silk in Braintree and Bocking. Here six businesses entered and seven exited, constituting a 14 percent fall. The situation in Halstead was marginally better, with six entries to six exits. Only in Coggeshall did silk show an increase. Here the growth rate was 400 per cent. However, it needs to be acknowledged that the small numbers involved will bias the true significance of this growth (as they do for silk in the other towns and, indeed, for the performance of the professional class generally). Nevertheless, the number of silk businesses entering Coggeshall over the four directories amounted to 5 compared with only 1 exit.



Turnover in silk and the most dynamic business groups, 1832-1851

Figure 4.6 Braintree and Bocking

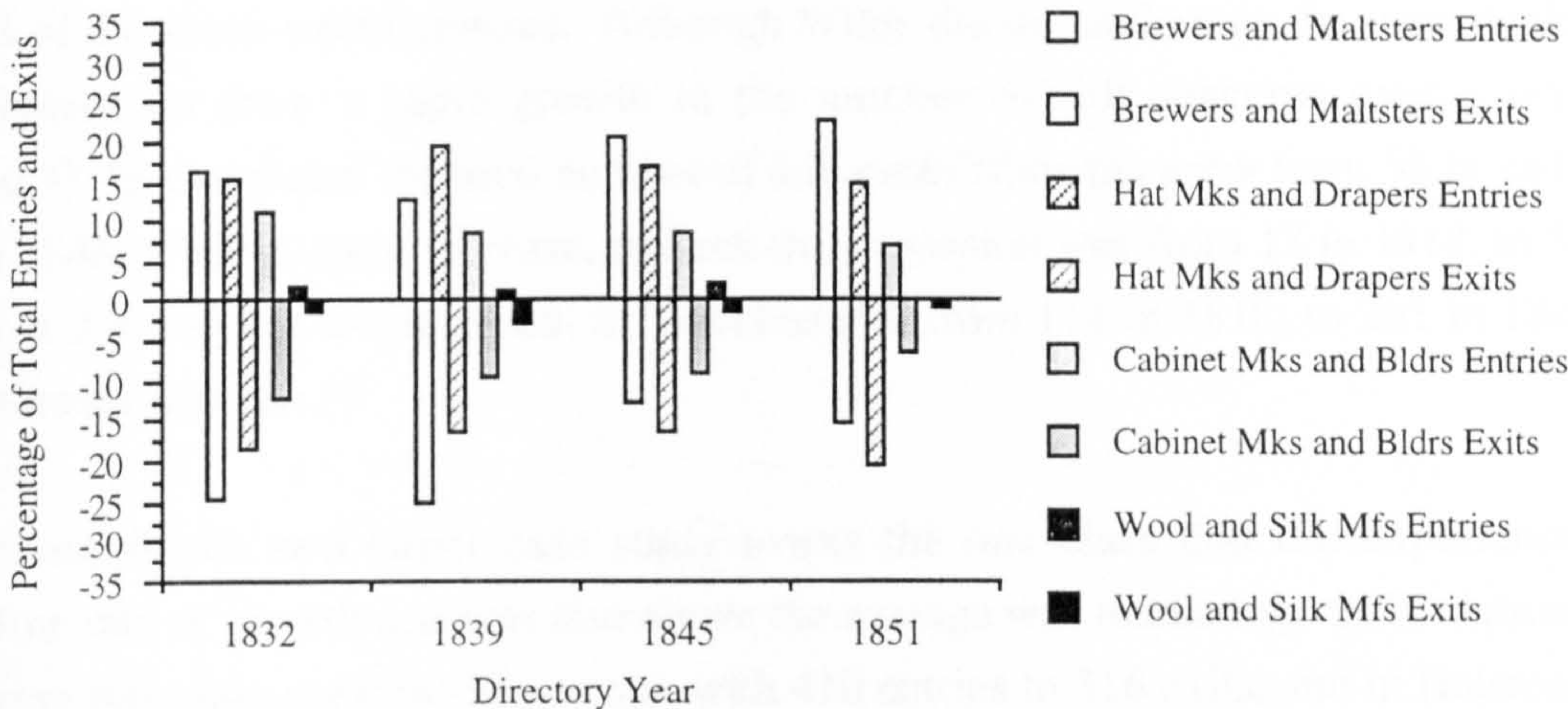


Figure 4.7 Halstead

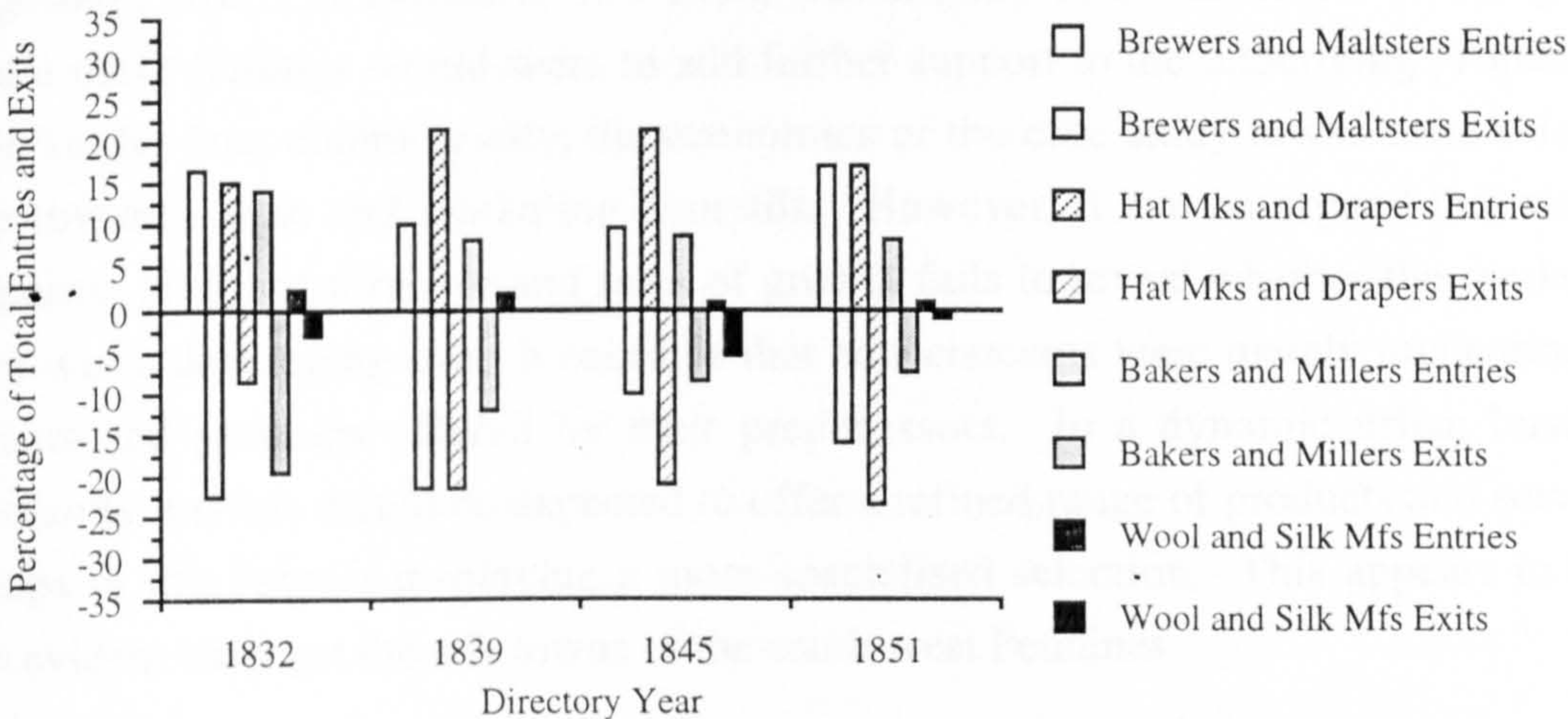
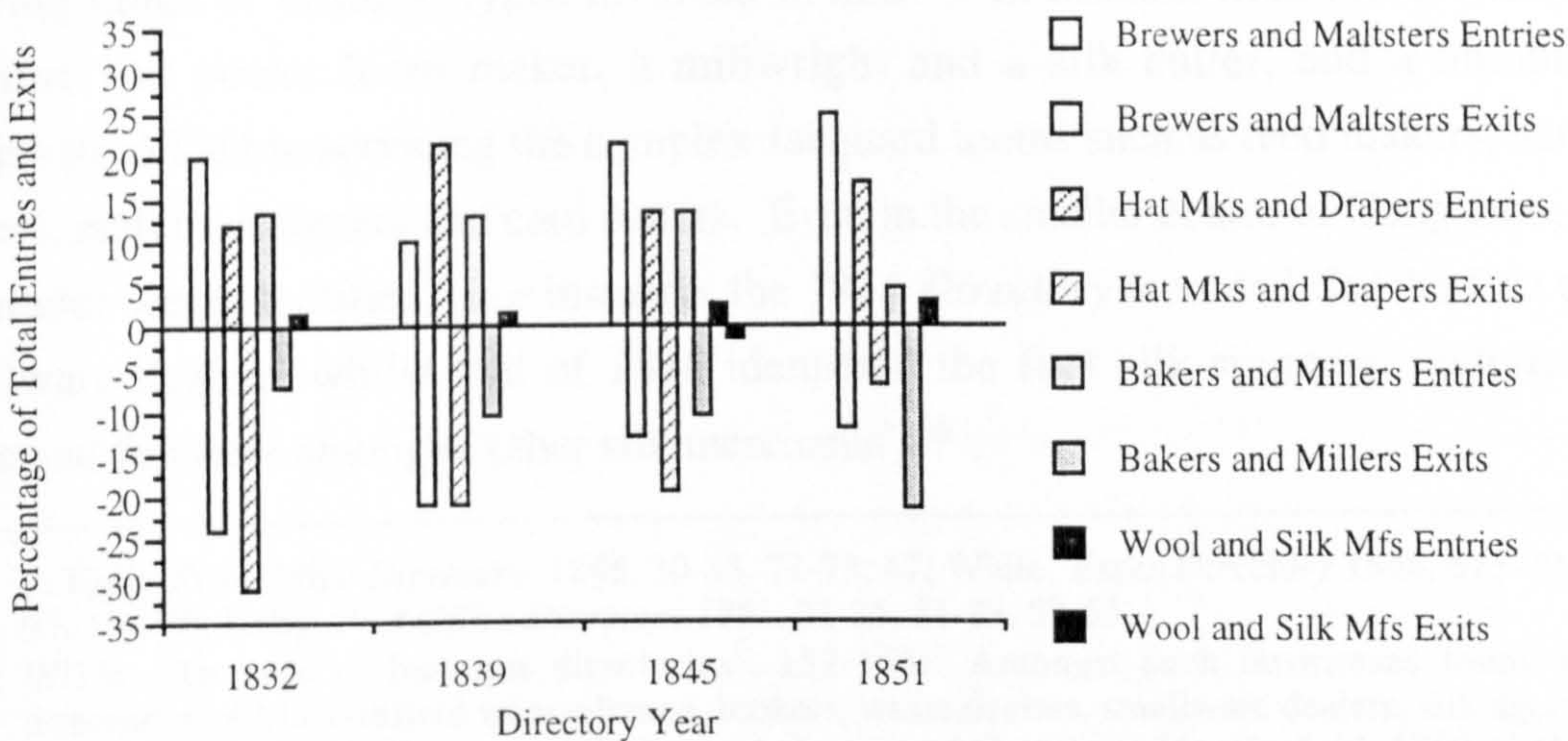


Figure 4.8 Coggeshall



Sources: Pigot & Co. *Commercial Directory*, 1823/4, 1826, 1832, and 1839; Kelly, *Post Office Directory*, 1845; White, *Essex Directory*, 1848; and Kelly, *Post Office Directory*, 1851.<sup>62</sup>

62. Pigot & Co., *Commercial Directory* 1823/4, Braintree and Bocking 283-84, Halstead 294-295, and Coggeshall 287-88; Pigot & Co., *Commercial Directory* 1826, (in same order) 520-21, 536-37, 527; Pigot 1832, 658-60, 683-4, 670-71; Pigot & Co., *Commercial Directory* 1839, 86-89, 116-18, 101-



Regardless of Coggeshall's experiences, the levels of business growth witnessed by the silk industry of the case study would appear, once again, to contrast with those in the silk towns of the south-west Pennines. Although Wilde did not undertake the same analysis, his figures do show a rapid growth in the number of silk concerns over a similar period.<sup>63</sup> In Congleton the total number of silk establishments grew from 38 in 1818 to 76 in 1846, a 100 percent increase, in Leek the expansion was from 17 in 1818, to 56 in 1846, a 230 percent increase and, in Macclesfield, from 114 in 1818, to 261 in 1846, a 129 percent increase.<sup>64</sup>

However, in the two larger case study towns the one class that did experience an absolute rate of growth that was also above the average was marketing. In Braintree and Bocking this class grew by 30 percent, with 410 entries to 316 exits, and in Halstead by 61 percent, with 306 entries to 190 exits. By contrast, the 10 percent growth rate for Coggeshall, with 191 entries to 174 exits, was slightly below the town's average. In general these findings would seem to add further support to the underlying proposition of the study; that, commercially, the economies of the case study towns were oriented more towards trade and marketing than silk. However, it can be argued that simply comparing levels of turnover and rates of growth fails to reveal whether the marketing sector was a developing one. It could be that new concerns were merely replicating the services and products offered by their predecessors. In a dynamic urban business community arrivals would be expected to offer a refined range of products and services, perhaps in this respect displaying a more specialised selection. This appears to have been evident amongst the silk towns of the south-west Pennines.

Over the course of the five early 19th century directories he examined, Wilde observed a growing range of business types involved in silk.<sup>65</sup> In Macclesfield these included a machine and power loom maker, a millwright and a silk cutter, and a number of specialists skilled in servicing the complex Jacquard looms such as reed makers, harness makers, pattern designers and card cutters. Even in the smaller centre of Congleton, new silk trades were identified. For instance, the 1834 *Directory* recorded, for the first time, smallware dealers, whilst that of 1846 identified the first silk spinners, undertakers, dyers and finishers amongst 'other silk merchants'.<sup>66</sup>

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2; Kelly *Post Office Directory* 1845, 30-33, 71-73, 47; White, *Essex Directory* 1848, 673-70, 694-97, 138-40; Kelly, *Post Office Directory* 1851, 31-35, 81-83, 52-53.

63. Wilde, 'The use of business directories', 152-156. Amongst such businesses found in the directories of Macclesfield were silkmen, brokers, waste dealers, smallware dealers, silk agents and dyers. See also G. Malmgreen, *Silk Town: Industry and Culture in Macclesfield, 1750-1835* (Hull 1985), 9-23.

64. Wilde, 'The use of business directories', 152-156.

65. *Ibid.*

66. A further example of the sub-division and specialisation of tasks was evident in Duggan's trade directory study of Birmingham. In this instance they were concerned with the metal industry, which the author described as 'deeply enmeshing the city to the industrial revolution'. In comparing entries in Pearson and Rollason's *Birmingham Directory*, 1777, with Wrightson's *History, Topography, and Directory of Birmingham*, 1830, Duggan concluded that businesses were



How did the different business sectors in the case study towns perform by comparison. Did any display signs of external economies as tasks were sub-divided amongst businesses? The case of Braintree and Bocking will be used as the representative. If evidence exists then it is arguable to have been most likely in the town with the largest business community. Considering the professional classes first, there is little evidence of any sub-division and specialisation. In 1826 attorneys, banks and surgeons were listed, the only new activities to appear in subsequent directories were in 1832 with those of physician, surgeon dentist and veterinary surgeon. There was also little evidence of emerging external economies amongst members of the straw hat making class. To the straw hat manufacturer, straw plait manufacturer and straw plait dealer identified in 1832 were added, in 1839, a tuscan hat maker, and in 1845 a straw bonnet maker. Similarly, there was no evidence of external economies in the silk class. With the exception of a dyer in 1851 the few new businesses to appear were described as throwsters and manufacturers. No references were made to the likes of machine and power loom makers, silk cutters, reed makers, and pattern designers. Given that Wilde consulted three Pigot directories it seems reasonable to assume that had such concerns existed in the case study towns they would have been recorded.

By contrast, examination of new entries appearing amongst the marketing and traders class does offer evidence of developing external economies. Amongst those to display the clearest signs of this were classes six, seven and nine. In class six, hat makers and drapers, the 1832 *Directory* saw the arrival of clothes dealers and coffee dealers, these were joined in 1839 by cheesemongers and earthenware dealers, in 1845 by a baby linen warehouse proprietor and haberdashers, and in 1851 by a Berlin repository. In class seven, cabinet makers and builders, 1832 saw the appearance of furnished undertakers, 1839 carvers, and patten makers, and 1851, a wholesale brush maker. Finally, in group nine, braziers and whitesmiths, 1832 witnessed the arrival of an agricultural implement maker, brass founder, hardwareman, and tinplate worker, 1845, a bell hanger, furnishing ironmonger, and manufacturing cutler, finally these were joined in 1851 by an agricultural machine maker, brass founder, coachsmith &c, colourman and oilman.

However, a comparison of the performance of the trade and marketing class in the three case study towns reveals that in terms of turnover, as with durability, their performance

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becoming increasingly specialised. 'Entrepreneurs and workers spun off from established lines to produce allied goods ... besides button makers, were pearl button manufacturers and button shank and cramp makers ... Besides gun and pistol makers there were eight other types of firms, including ... gun barrel makers ... gun stock makers ... and gun lock and furniture forges and filers.' This process continued after 1830. Duggan also consulted Kelly and Co.'s *Post Office Directory of Birmingham* for 1860, and suggested that, 'Although eighty-three percent of the entries in the 1860 directory were absent from the 1830 directory, new categories were often simply more specialised versions of established industries.' In 1830, for instance, the gun industry consisted of nine different types of business which, by 1860, had expanded to 35 types. P. Duggan, 'Industrialisation and the development of urban business communities: research problems, sources and techniques', *Local Historian*, 8 (1975), 457-465.



varied. One guide to the success of a town as a marketing centre was the ability to offer a wide range of products and services.<sup>67</sup> In terms of the method of classification used here this would translate into growth in the various trade groups connected with marketing. By this measure Braintree and Bocking appears to have been the most successful. Here seven trade groups returned growth rates above the town average (bakers, boot makers, braziers, butchers, gardeners, painters and watch makers). Halstead also performed well, with five above average rates of growth - braziers, butchers, gardeners, painters, watch makers. By contrast, as indicated early, Coggeshall performed poorly. Here six out of the 11 marketing and trade groups grew at below average rates (bakers, butchers, drapers, builders, gardeners and watchmakers). Only bootmakers, painters, braziers, as well as members of the miscellaneous class, expanded at rates faster than the average. Moreover, whilst in the other two towns the fastest growth rates occurred in trade and marketing groups, for Coggeshall the silk and straw classes performed best. In terms of growth, then, it is arguable that, over the 30 years under consideration, Coggeshall become less of a marketing and thoroughfare centre and slightly more of an industrial based settlement. Although in terms of durability, and the absolute number of businesses being generated, the marketing and trade sector remained the most important to mid Victorian Coggeshall. It is to the question of whether these findings are underpinned by the trade directory evidence on transport networks that the study now turns.

### III. Transport Networks

#### i. Coaches

As alluded to earlier, the final section of both Pigot's and Kelly's directories consisted of lists of coach, carrier and later rail services operating from the towns each week. This information enables consideration to be given to these places as centres of trade and communication, and can be set along side the results from the business community analysis. The precedent of employing directory data for this purpose is well established, indeed, directories have been judged to represent the most important source for recording coach and carrier services.<sup>68</sup> Previous studies, including Nobels, have been concerned with establishing the comparative nodality of towns within a regional urban system. This tends to be a fairly static approach, emphasising spatial distribution rather than change over time. Although not feasible with the first generation of directories, detailed analysis of change over time is possible with those of Pigot and Kelly.<sup>69</sup>

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67. J. Patten, 'Urban occupations in pre-industrial England', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 2 (1977), 293-313.

68. See for example, M. Noble, 'Growth and development in a regional urban system: the county towns of East Yorkshire 1700-1880', *Urban History Yearbook* (1987), 1-21; M.J. Freeman, 'The carrier system of south Hampshire, 1771-1851', *The Journal of Transport History*, 2 (1977), 61-85; and Raven, 'De-industrialisation and the urban response', 46-69.

69. Bailey fails to record coach and carrier services, whilst Holden under-recorded the number of services, even those operating to and from London. See chapter 3.



Indeed, with the information available in these directories consideration can be given to changes in the frequency of these services during the 1820s, 1830s and 1840s, as well as in the number and types of places these connected the towns to. The number of weekly coach services operating through each of the case study towns for the five directories examined is illustrated in figure 4.9.

Whilst all three enjoyed some thoroughfare activity, Braintree and Bocking, and to a slightly lesser extent Halstead, appear to have been more important coaching centres than Coggeshall. In the 1832 *Directory*, which recorded the greatest number of services, Braintree and Bocking returned 83 weekly services, Halstead 63 and Coggeshall 12. In fact, Coggeshall's number peaked in 1839 with 13. Some guide to the extent of urban business likely to have been generated by this activity may be gained from a consideration of the number of people travelling on these coaches. According to Gerhold, with the introduction of Elliot's elliptical spring, early 19th century stage coaches were capable of carrying four inside passengers and 10 or 12 outsiders.<sup>70</sup> This would suggest that up to 1,328 coach travellers stopped off in Braintree and Bocking in a typical week; a considerable number in a town whose population at the 1831 census was 6,550. Although many of these were probably destined for the larger provincial centres to the north, or the port of Harwich in the east, their brief stay was likely to have generated custom for the proprietors of the inns involved in the trade, as well as the multitude of traders and craftsmen serving these establishments. Amongst the inns of Braintree and Bocking receiving coaches in 1832 were the Horn, situated in the High Street, and referred to as commercial inn and excise office, and the White Hart, in Bocking End, described as a commercial, posting inn and hotel, equipped with a news and reading room.<sup>71</sup>

Of the places the coaches passing through the towns were destined for, London was dominant, a finding that accords with the assessment that thoroughfare activity was heavily metropolitan influenced. Of the 83 weekly services recorded for Braintree and Bocking in 1832 40 were London bound. This, however, underestimates the true significance of the metropolis. Many other coach services passing through the towns originated from London. In the case of Braintree and Bocking this accounted for a further 40 services. Amongst their destinations were Diss, Sudbury, Bury St Edmunds and Norwich. Indeed, the only services operating through this town that were not linked to London were three to Colchester and one to Chelmsford.

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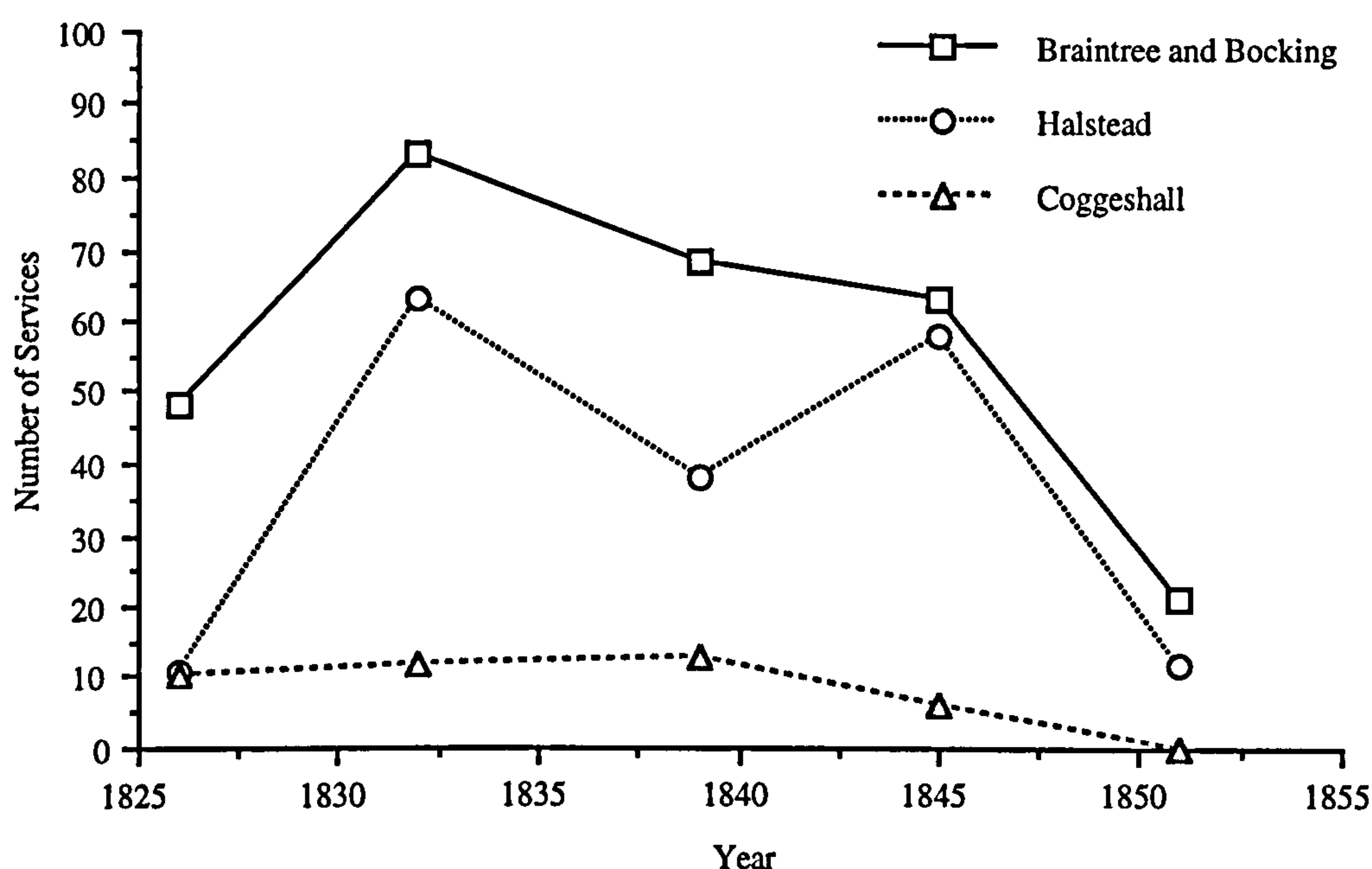
70. D. Gerhold, 'Productivity change in road transport before and after turnpiking, 1690-1840', *Economic History Review*, 49 (1996), 510.

71. The other inns identified by the *Directory* of 1832 were the Boars Head and King's Head, both located in the High Street.



Moreover, the information presented on the route taken by the coach companies confirms the position of both Braintree and Bocking and Halstead amongst the county's principal thoroughfare centres. The 1832 *Directory* records that those operating from London went through Stratford, Romford, Ingatestone and Chelmsford, then on to Braintree and Bocking and Halstead, before continuing to Colchester, Bury, Diss, Sudbury, and Norwich. It may be recalled that this major south/north route was also the one taken by the stage coaches listed in the UBD and Holden's *Directories*.

Figure 4.9 Weekly coach services operating through the Essex towns, 1826-1851



Sources: Pigot & Co., *Commercial Directory*, 1823/4, 1826, 1832, and 1839; Kelly, *Post Office Directory*, 1845 and 1851.<sup>72</sup>

The demise of coaching, following the boom years of the 1830s, is also clear from examination of figure 4.9. In Braintree and Bocking the number of services fell from 83 in 1832 to 68 in 1839, 63 in 1845 and 21 in 1851. In Halstead the same period saw numbers drop from 63, to 38, to 12, although the 1845 *Directory* records a temporary resurgence to 58 services. The lower and flatter curve of Coggeshall may have reflected the fact that, removed from the main metropolitan centred thoroughfare route, the town did not participate in the boom, but instead maintained a more even base level of activity, ranging from a peak of 13 services in 1839 to six in 1845. Although the absence of any services in 1851 shows the town was not immune to the final demise of the trade.

72. Pigot & Co., *Commercial Directory* 1826, Braintree and Bocking 521, Halstead 537, Coggeshall 527; Pigot & Co., *Commercial Directory* 1832, (in the same order) 660, 683-4 and 670-71; Pigot & Co., *Commercial Directory* 1839: 89-90, 118-19 and 102; Kelly, *Post Office Directory* 1845: 31-32, 73 and 47-48; Kelly, *Post Office Directory* 1851, 34, 83, 53.



The directories afford both implicit and explicit evidence that the chief instigator of this decline was the railway. They also demonstrate the complexity of the process.<sup>73</sup> The first signs of the impact of the railway on Braintree and Bocking's services occurred in 1845. Whilst in 1839 62 out of 68 services were London centred, by 1845 the same figure had fallen to 12 out of 63. The new set of replacement services, numbering 25, linked Braintree and Bocking to Chelmsford. This can be explained by the completion of a railway line between London and Colchester. Chelmsford was on this line and constituted the most convenient railhead for Braintree. In this regard Kelly's *Directory* of 1845 recorded that coaches from Braintree and Bocking travelled the 12 miles to Chelmsford from thence passengers were conveyed by rail to London.<sup>74</sup> The completion in 1848 of a branch line to Braintree witnessed an end to these services. In their stead the town's new railway station offered five daily services to 'Witham, Maldon, Colchester, Chelmsford, London, &c'.<sup>75</sup> The arrival of the railway did not, however, lead to the complete demise of coaches operating through the town. Instead, those operating to Braintree became local, offering services that linked Gosfield, the Heddinghams, Yeldham and Clare to the town's railway station. Likewise, the 12 weekly coach services recorded for Halstead consisted of two daily journeys to Braintree, one in the morning the other in the afternoon, both timed to meet in and out going trains.

Although the arrival of the railway marks the end of the period under consideration, its early establishment at Braintree and Bocking, rather than the other two towns, is significant. Whilst the decline of coaching may have been detrimental to the trade of Halstead and Coggeshall, the arrival of the railway in Braintree and Bocking may have generated new business. The downward sloping curves in figure 4.9 must, therefore, be placed alongside the arrival of the railway. Beyond this, it can be suggested that as a commercial venture the route taken by the railway, in part, reflected existing commercial routes. The reason why Braintree received a line may reflect the fact that it was the busiest commercial centre. In explaining the impetus to build a local line to Braintree, Walsh argued that lines serving such places were promoted by local people and those towns which had the most enterprising business proprietors were the ones which got the railways. He added that Coggeshall's failure to acquire any rail link - Halstead received one in 1863 - suggests the town had few enterprising people.<sup>76</sup> Although this may be a simplification it is consistent with the findings from the business community analysis.<sup>77</sup>

73. Brown, by contrast, has argued that, 'The railways killed the coaching trade almost over night.' J. Brown, *The English Market Town: A Social and Economic History* (Wiltshire, 1986), 106.

74. Kelly, *Post Office Directory* 1845, 31.

75. Kelly, *Post Office Directory* 1851, 679.

76. *The Great Eastern Journal*, 80 (1994), 38-39.

77. For further consideration of the benefits that the early railway could bring see D.I. Gordon, *A Regional History of the Railways of Great Britain*, Vol. V: The Eastern Counties (Devon, 1968), 13-52.



## ii. Carriers

According to Brown the number and range of carrier services 'was one of the strongest indicators of the status of a town and the strength of its retail market and shops'.<sup>78</sup> The number of weekly carrier services operating through each of the case study towns is illustrated in figure 4.10. As with coaches, the peak in weekly activity occurred in the 1830s and, in accordance with both the findings from the business community analysis and Brown's observation, Braintree and Bocking emerges as the busiest of the three, with Coggeshall returning fewest carriers. In the former services peaked at 68 in 1839; in Halstead, they reached 35 in the same *Directory*, whilst in Coggeshall the maximum was nine, achieved in both 1832 and 1839. The same hierarchy emerges when consideration is given to the number of places served by these carriers. In the peak year carriers linked Braintree and Bocking to 12 other towns - Bury, Cambridge, Cavendish, Chelmsford, Colchester, Diss, Dunmow, Halstead, Maldon and Sudbury, as well as London. The same figure for Halstead was six which included Bury, Cambridge, Clare, Colchester, Witham and London. For Coggeshall only three other towns were identified, London, Braintree and Colchester. Of the various places visited London, however, emerged as the most important centre. In Braintree and Bocking 19 out of the 68 carrier services of 1839 journeyed to London, in Halstead the same figure was eight out of the 35. By contrast, in Coggeshall the number of carrier services was more evenly spread, with two out of the nine destined for London.<sup>79</sup>

The directories also afford insights into the operation of the various carrier companies serving the towns. First in this regard, the figures presented in figure 4.10 may well underestimate the extent of carriage. Although recorded in Braintree and Bocking as a single, daily operation, the 1839 *Directory* records Sykes's business as operating an undisclosed number of wagons to London.<sup>80</sup> Entries in the directories also reveal that carrier companies could operate services to a number of towns. Amongst these was Hodge's business at Braintree which offered carriage to Chelmsford on Fridays, Colchester on Wednesdays and Saturdays, and Dunmow on Mondays. Most of these services appear to have operated from various town inns. In Braintree in 1839 these comprised the Pack Horse, Wool Pack, King's Head, Horse and Groom, and Falcon. Furthermore, the days upon which these journeys were made suggests many of these

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78. Brown, *The English Market Town*, 108.

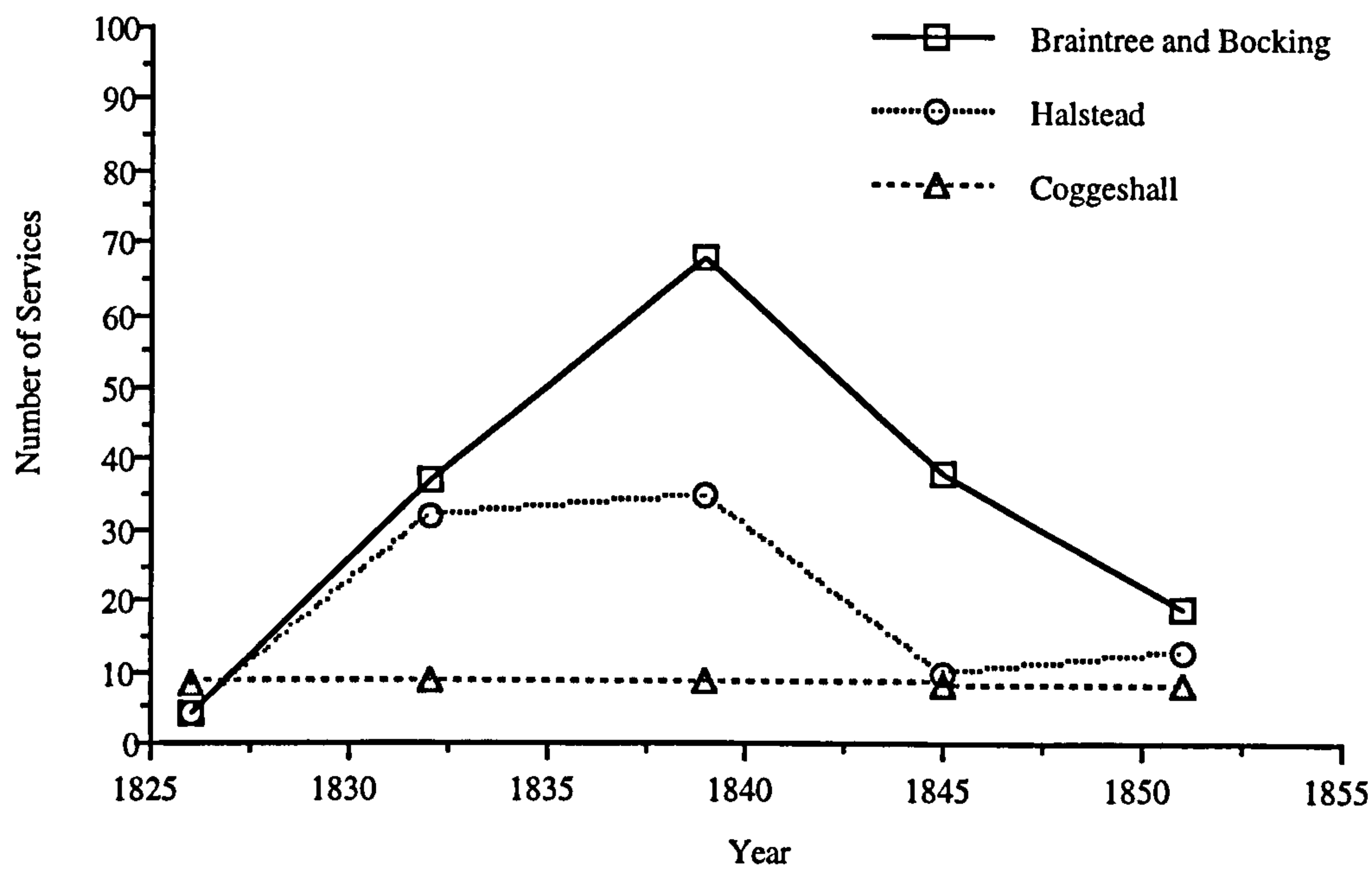
79. D. Gerhold, 'The growth of the London carrying trade, 1681-1838', *Economic History Review*, 41 (1988), 392-410. Carrier services to the Home Counties accounted for 58 percent of all London originated services in 1838, with the period 1765 to 1838 seeing a high growth in services to the south and East Anglia. Braintree and Bocking, and Halstead appear to have shared in this growing commerce. See also P. Glennie, 'A county study: occupational change in Hertfordshire, 1759-1851', in idem, *Distinguishing Men's Trades* (1990), 66-95. In accounting for the distribution of crafts and trades in Hertfordshire, Glennie concluded that commercial rather than environmental factors were of greater influence. Most concentrations of trades and crafts were found in areas with good road links to London.

80. The same point can also be made for Warlow's Wagons which were listed in 1839 as operating, daily, between Braintree and Bocking and Norwich.



services provided market day transportation. Amongst those operating from Braintree and Bocking to Chelmsford Friday, the county town’s market day, appears most frequently. Likewise, carriers travelling to Colchester offered transport on a Wednesday and Saturday, the provincial centres two market days.

Figure 4.10 Weekly carrier services operating through the Essex towns, 1826-1851



Sources: Pigot & Co., *Commercial Directory*, 1823/4, 1826, 1832, and 1839; Kelly, *Post Office Directory*, 1845 and 1851.<sup>81</sup>

Figure 4.10. also illustrates the decline in carriers. From the peak of 68 in 1839, Braintree and Bocking’s carrier services fell to 38 in 1845 and 19 in 1851. Over the same period Halstead’s fell from 35 to 13. By contrast, the number of services recorded for Coggeshall remained at a base rate of between eight and nine. Some of the decline witnessed between 1839 and 1845 may, nevertheless, relate to the source. Kelly appears to have offered less extensive coverage of provincial services than Pigot. Whilst six different destinations were recorded for carriers in Halstead by the last of Pigot’s directories, the number had dropped to only three by 1845. Likewise, the same figures for Braintree and Bocking were 11 to eight. By contrast, the number of services operating to London remained fairly constant. In 1839 eight out of Halstead’s 35 carriers travelled to London, in 1845 the number was seven out of 10. Likewise the number of London bound carriers for Braintree fell from 19 to 16, whilst the total dropped far more dramatically from 68 to 38. Nevertheless, examination of the 1851 *Directory* lists suggests the long distance carrying service was being undermined by the

81. For full references see footnote 72.



railways. By this date only three carriers operated between London and Halstead. The same figure for Braintree and Bocking was six, and for Coggeshall two a week.

Brown has suggested that the number of carrier services were quite unaffected by the railways.<sup>82</sup> The trends outlined above suggest otherwise for the case study towns, an assessment reinforced by closer consideration of Braintree and Bocking. In 1845 nine carriers were operating from Braintree to Chelmsford, the *Directory* records that their carriage was then sent by rail to London. By 1851, when the railhead extended to Braintree, the carrier service to Chelmsford had, with the exception of market day traffic, gone and the number of carriers by road to London fallen to the six mentioned earlier.<sup>83</sup>

Perhaps, however, the decline of the carrier services depicted in figure 4.10 reveals more about the nature of the source than the fate of the carrier system operating around these north Essex towns. Long-distance carrier services between the case study towns and the area's larger urban centres, as well as London, appear to have been the principal concern of the directories.<sup>84</sup> The decline of these services, however, was likely to have been offset by the expansion of local services. Indeed, numbers of these increased throughout the 19th century. Whilst in the directories of the first half of the century the operations of these services may have remained hidden, later editions record them, as Everitt's study of Victorian Leicester demonstrated.<sup>85</sup> In this respect, the 1851 *Post Office Directory*'s coverage of Braintree and Bocking may reveal the change of emphasis. For the first time services operating between the town and places such as Cavendish, Dunmow, and Finchingfield appear. The fact that it is in Braintree and Bocking where they are recorded perhaps reflects the fact that, as the business analysis demonstrated, this town was the most dynamic marketing centre.

## Conclusion

It has been argued that in constituting registers of urban businesses, directories of the first half of the 19th century represent a valuable source in the analysis of the urban economies of small towns. To illustrate how this information could be employed two methodologies were devised, both using the biographical details of businesses collected over a series of comparable directories. The findings from the case study towns confirmed the feasibility of such an exercise. They also showed that, as business registers, directories are able to reveal aspects of the urban economy earlier sources fail to disclose. In this respect analysis of regional directories takes investigation of small

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82. Brown, *The English Market Towns*, 107.

83. The decline of longer-distance services as a result of railway development is identified by Freeman. Freeman, 'The carrier system of south Hampshire', 69.

84. For a summary of the limitations of directories in recording carrier operations, including those involved in the London trade, see Gerhold, 'The growth of the London carrying trade', 392-94.

85. See A. Everitt, 'Town and country in Victorian Leicestershire: the role of the village carrier', in idem (ed.), *Perspectives in English Urban History* (London, 1973), 213-240.



towns economies on from the point reached through examination of the first generation of directories.

For the three towns under investigation the results of the durability and entry/exit analysis offer support for the assessment made from analysis of the directories produced by Bailey, Barfoot and Wilkes, and Holden. Although variously described as silk towns by modern historians, as well as contemporaries, and held up as Essex's only examples of industrialised centres, business community analysis showed their economies to be oriented towards marketing and trade rather than textile manufacture. In this respect the durability study identified those businesses associated with marketing and thoroughfare functions as dominant. By contrast, few silk concerns were returned enjoying long-run commercial success. The idea that businesses in the marketing sector were static and unchanging was dismissed with evidence that, amongst their number, were concerns displaying clear signs of vertical and horizontal integration. The results from the entry/exit study confirmed the dynamism of the marketing sector and the comparative inactivity of silk. In general businesses belonging to the former experienced the greatest rates of turnover, in addition to enjoying, over the 30 year period, an absolute and relative increase in numbers. Beyond this, examination of new entries revealed strong evidence that marketing was the one class where external economies of scale were operating.

Combining the results from both the durability and entry/exit studies suggests trade and marketing offered the best opportunities for commercial success in the urban economies of the case study towns. Businesses involved in such activities enjoyed easy entry, whilst also possessing good prospects for long-run commercial success. By contrast, entry into silk was far more restricted, whilst offering only moderate prospects for long-term success. Straw hat making, on the other hand, offered easy entry but negligible chances of long-term commercial success. This profile may reflect the fact that these concerns were operating on the margins of profitability, where low returns failed to ensure the resources necessary to afford protection against fluctuating market conditions. In almost direct contrast, entry into the two professional groups appears to have been very limited, perhaps restricted by the need for training, whilst prospects for long-run success were high.

The finding that marketing was the most dynamic sector in north Essex was reinforced by comparison of the performances of each of the three case study towns in investigation of carrier and coach links. Coggeshall's comparatively poor performance may be explained in terms of its location which was away from the major north-south road network. In this respect the town may have been the victim of a process of rationalisation in marketing which favoured the better placed towns, such as Halstead



and, even more so, Braintree and Bocking.<sup>86</sup> This may also help explain why, of the three towns, manufacturing businesses appear to have been more prominent in Coggeshall. However, it is to be doubted whether the larger number of manufacturing concerns in this town, coupled with the larger numbers in the straw hat making class, were able to generate a comparable level of prosperity. Many of the latter appear to have enjoyed only very short term success, and to have been very modest undertakings which, although recorded by the *County Directory*, failed in many instances to receive coverage in either of the two straddling Post Office publications.<sup>87</sup>

However, analysing business communities in this way does have a serious limitation. The numbers employed by businesses appearing in the directories remains unknown. Although returning relatively few businesses, silk might still be the dominant sector in terms of employment if these were the largest concerns and if, together, they accounted for the largest proportion of the workforce. Indeed, there are reasons to believe that silk concerns were substantially larger than those involved in marketing and trade. First, there is the circumstantial evidence from the directory entries. As noted earlier, silk concerns were more likely to be partnerships, often involving partners with non-familial names which would suggest the introduction of outside capital. Beyond this, there is the more substantial quantitative evidence from the unpublished 1851 census enumerators' returns.<sup>88</sup> In this census employers were asked to record the numbers they employed. Although many failed to do so some did oblige. Those of Coggeshall appear to have been more co-operative in this regard than their counterparts in Halstead and Braintree and Bocking. A consideration of those employers whose firms featured in the trade directories for this town suggests that silk businesses were, indeed, large employers.

The silk throwster, John Hall of West Street, Coggeshall, was recorded as employing a total of 419 hands. Thomas Westmacott, a silk manufacturer, appears as employing 56 hands, and John Clark, also a silk manufacturer, 64 hands (comprising 16 men, 48 boys and girls). In addition, businesses in the straw hat making class appear to have been amongst the larger employers. James Spurge, described as a tambour worker, was recorded with 100 hands. Whilst no evidence for numbers employed by any of the town's professions appear, those in marketing and thoroughfare functions generally emerge as comparatively modest sized employers. They ranged from Thomas Swinbourne, tanner, with 27 hands and Matthias Gardner, builder, with 24 men, to

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86. E.J.T. Collins, 'Servicing and processing industries', in G.E. Mingay (ed.), *The Agrarian History of England and Wales, 1750-1850*, Vol. VI (Cambridge, 1989), 384-397; P. Corfield, *The Impact of English Towns, 1700-1800* (Oxford, 1982), 19-21.

87. However, more detailed examination of the membership of these classes is necessary before these impressions can be substantiated. A topic addressed in chapter 5.

88. ERO HO 107/1785, 1851 census enumerators' schedules for Braintree and Bocking; ERO HO 107/1783, 1851 census enumerators' schedules for Coggeshall; and ERO HO 107/1784, 1851 census enumerators' schedules for Halstead.



William Goody, master butcher, with two men, and Daniel Leaper, cabinet maker, with one man. The need this generates for closer examination is met in the next chapter.



## CHAPTER 5

### THE MID VICTORIAN CLOTH TOWN ECONOMIES

#### Introduction

Chapter 4 showed that the most successful business groups in the study towns - in terms of durability and generation - were associated with trade and marketing, not manufacturing. These findings support the underlying thesis: that marketing and thoroughfare functions formed the staple economic activities of the north Essex cloth towns during the late 18th and first half of the 19th centuries and that this represented a structural difference between Essex's cloth towns and those which experienced rapid urban expansion. Moreover, evidence of vertical and horizontal integration amongst marketing and thoroughfare businesses, as well as the operation of external economies of scale, supports the proposition that these constituted a dynamic sector.

However, whilst early 19th century trade directory evidence supports the assessment that alternative commercial activities to manufacturing were pre-eminent, it is not conclusive. It was acknowledged in the last section of chapter 4 that analysis of rates of business survival and entry and exit reveals little about the size of individual enterprises. Strong evidence exists for considering silk manufacture to have been undertaken on a comparatively large scale. The circumstantial evidence for this derived from the directory entries themselves in which silk concerns were amongst the few given addresses suggestive of large outlays of capital - noticeably references to mills. The more substantial evidence came from examination of the employers' replies in the 1851 census enumerators' returns. Although offering only very partial coverage, those silk manufacturers that completed the appropriate section appeared to be far larger employers than their craft and trading counterparts.

These findings raise the possibility that business community analysis using trade directories affords a rather distorted view of the economies of the case study towns. Since no account was taken of the scale of enterprises, a small business would have been judged by the same criteria as a large one. Consequently, crafts and trades may seem dynamic because of their numbers but, in terms of their contribution to the urban economy as employers, and generators of income and wealth, they may have been of secondary importance to silk. If this were the case it would seriously undermine the argument that these towns were principally marketing and thoroughfare centres. In so doing it would also discredit the developing thesis that structural differences may be used to account for the comparatively restrained extent to which the manufactories of these towns grew.



The first concern of this chapter, therefore, is to determine which sectors occupied the largest proportion of the working population in the three towns and, more specifically, whether marketing and trades were bigger employers than silk. However, whilst such an approach goes some way in evaluating the trade directory results, it will be argued that to determine the relative importance of different sectors consideration must also be given to the composition of each occupational class. To this end the chapter will explore a new qualitative methodology for assessing the importance of different sectors to the urban economy. It will be argued that the results from this qualitative analysis not only shed more light on the trade directory study, and the comparative importance of manufacturing in these towns, but also on the plausibility of the 'structural' thesis.

### Approaches and Sources

The 1851 census enumerators' returns will be used to assess the occupational composition of the case study towns. Although the first enumerators' returns date from 1801 few of the original schedules for the first four decades of census recording survive. What remains are the far less detailed published returns, based upon parishes and townships. In 1801 these classed people into three groups - those chiefly employed in agriculture, those chiefly employed in commerce, and a residue group. The same groups were adopted for the returns of 1811 and 1821, although the unit of measurement had become the family. In 1831 the returns became slightly more detailed. Families chiefly employed in agriculture, commerce or other were still used, however, in addition, males aged 20 or above were sub-divided into eight classes,<sup>1</sup> whilst male servants under the age of 20, along with female servants, were also identified. Yet, in terms of the nature of descriptions the classes used in 1831 remain far too general to contribute to advance analysis of the urban economies of the case study towns.

The 1841 returns represent a noticeable development in the evolution of the census enumerations; not only were the published returns more detailed but the unpublished ones - based on schedules, which covered districts within parishes - survive. Lee used 1841 as the first census to begin examination of 19th century occupational structure.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, there was still considerable under-recording of occupations, most particularly for women and children.<sup>3</sup> In consequence, any activities with a reasonable degree of age and gender specificity were likely to be either under-represented, if they were predominantly undertaken by women and children, or over-represented, if primarily

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1. These comprised three agricultural classes (occupiers employing labourers, occupiers not employing labourers, and labourers employed in agriculture), along with those employed in manufacture, in retail trade (as masters or workmen), capitalists, bankers, professionals and other educated men, non-agricultural labourers, other males, and male servants. Census 1801, Enumeration, 101-113; Census 1811, Enumeration and Parish Register, 97-107; Census 1821, Enumeration and Parish Register, 93-103; and Census 1831, Enumeration, Vol. I, 180-199.
  2. C.H. Lee, *British Regional Employment Statistics, 1841-1971* (Cambridge, 1979).
  3. See S. Horrell and J. Humphries, 'Women's labour force participation and the transition to the male-breadwinner family, 1790-1865', *Economic History Review*, 48 (1995), 94-95.



pursued by adult males. Beyond this, any noticeable short-fall in the coverage of female and child employment would prevent analysis of the operation and character of the household - the basic economic unit. For these reasons the 1841 census returns were not analysed.

By the 1851 census many of the most glaring short-comings had been alleviated. In consequence, it is widely considered to be a more comprehensive survey.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, there is still evidence of some under-recording of female and child employment.<sup>5</sup> Similarly there was the lingering problem that, because the census was collected during one day in March, the more transient members of the population were likely to have gone unrecorded. Finally, as observed in chapter 4, compared to trade labels in the early and mid century directories, those in the census tended to be less detailed.<sup>6</sup>

### Data Collection

It was decided that since, in aggregate, the three towns contained over 17,000 people by 1851, a sample of the population for each would be collected from the census. In his study of York Armstrong took a systematic one in 10 sample of households.<sup>7</sup> His recording of the household, rather than the individual, has been generally endorsed since it is considered to represent the basic economic unit - from which decisions on employment would have been made. In keeping with this the present study based collection on the household.

Similarly, the principle behind Armstrong's decision to record the details of every tenth household have been accepted, since this rests on the firm foundations that it produced a sufficiently large population for statistical analysis of each occupational class to be conducted. Since the towns in this case study were considerably smaller than York a one in five sample is preferable. For Braintree and Bocking this produced 346 households totalling 1,539 individuals, for Halstead 197 households and 978 individuals and for Coggeshall 147 households containing 685 individuals.

By contrast, Armstrong's decision to adopt a systematic method of collection has received criticism concerning the representative nature of the sample it produced.<sup>8</sup> On

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4. In collecting occupational data the National Small Towns Project, at Leicester University, gave preference to the 1851 census enumerations. See P. Clark and J. Hosking, *Population Estimates of English Small Towns, 1550-1851* (Leicester, 1993).
  5. E. Higgs, *Making Sense of the Census: The Manuscript Returns for England and Wales, 1801-1901* (London, 1989); E. Higgs, 'Occupational censuses and the agricultural workforce in Victorian England and Wales', *Economic History Review*, 48 (1995), 700-16. See also sections II and III below.
  6. See chapter 4.
  7. W.A. Armstrong, *Stability and Change in an English Country Town: A Social Study of York, 1801-1851* (London, 1974).
  8. R.C. Floud and R.S. Schofield, 'Social structure from the early census returns: comment', *Economic History Review*, 21 (1968), 607-09; W.A. Armstrong, 'rejoinder', *Economic History Review*, 21 (1968), 609-613.



consultation with Professor Armstrong it was decided that some random element be incorporated into the collection procedure. In consequence, the initial selection for each new schedule was determined using a random number table. In practice, Braintree and Bocking consisted of 18 schedules, Coggeshall nine, and Halstead 12. As with Armstrong, if the fifth household fell on an institution, as defined by the presence of more than 10 non-family members, another choice was made. Armstrong took the next household, for which he was criticised.<sup>9</sup> To avoid this, the decision was made to revert to the random number table in deciding the next household. In practice this procedure was adopted only once in all the three town collections.

### **Occupational Classification Schemes**

The range of occupations represented in the sampled populations of each town necessitated the adoption of a classification scheme which could group them into a manageable number of classes. The Booth/Armstrong scheme represents the most widely used for occupational analysis of the 19th century censuses. It has been adopted in a revised form by the National Small Towns Project. The occupational structure of Braintree and Bocking using this revised Booth/Armstrong scheme is presented in figure 5.1.

The major concern with adopting Booth/Armstrong is that, as a general classification scheme, it is not always sensitive to the economic contours of particular communities. The very poor distribution of Braintree and Bocking's population across the classes, which figure 5.1 illustrates, is a clear manifestation of this. In fact, based on the principle that for a class to be statistically meaningful it has to return at least 20 entries, six out of the 14 become redundant. These included: fishing with no entries; brick making with six; transport with nine; industrial service with four; labour with seven; and independents with 15.

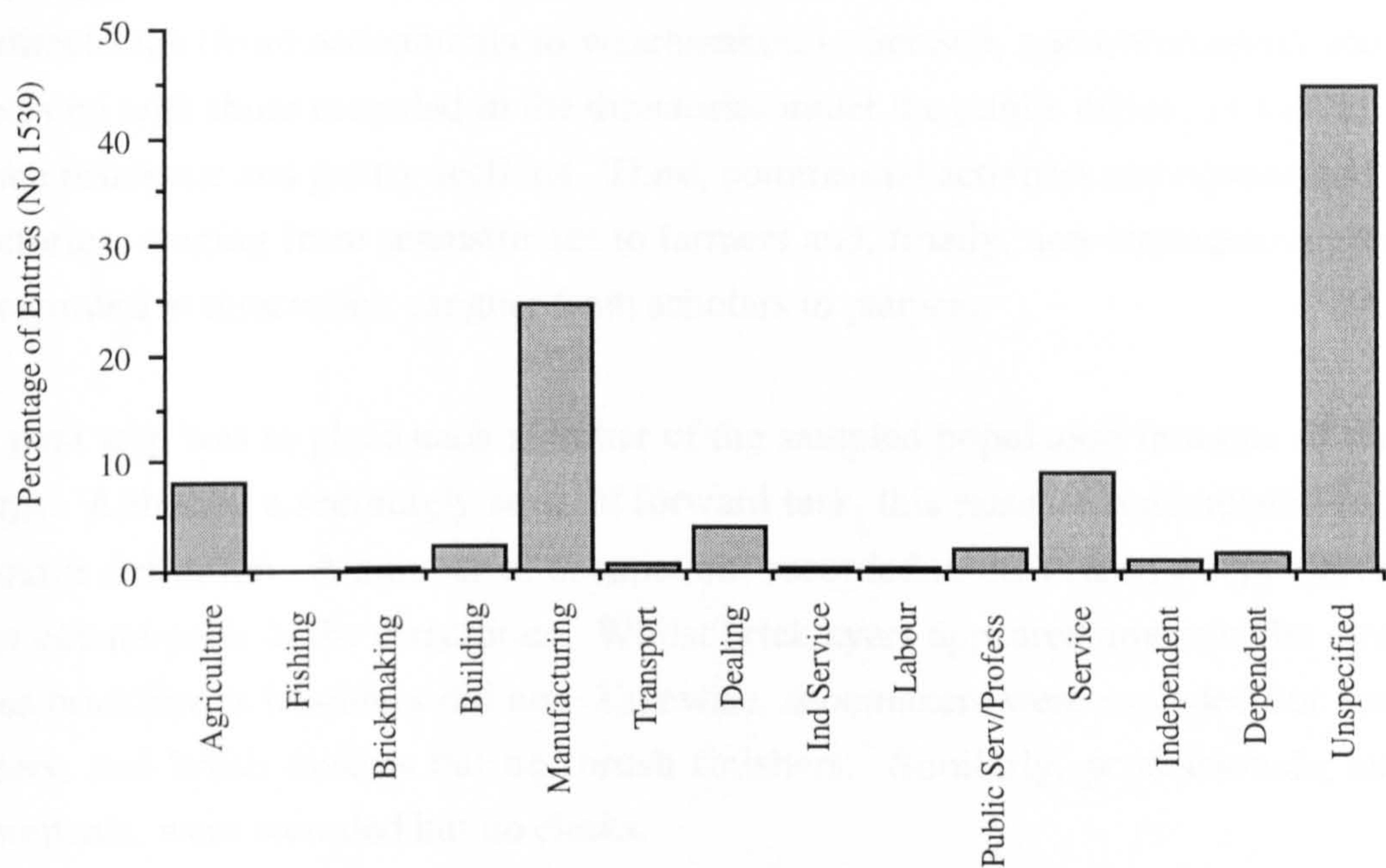
The same problem occurs at the other end of the spectrum, amongst the class to return the largest number of entries - unspecified. Over 45 percent, or 700 out of the sample population of 1,539, appear in this class. Closer examination highlights the economic diversity of those appearing amongst the unspecified of Braintree and Bocking. A large proportion were probably the casualties of the enumerators' tendency to under-record female occupations. Others, however, may genuinely not have been occupied, some as a

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9. Floud and Schofield, 'Social structure', 607-09.



Figure 5.1 Occupational structure of Braintree and Bocking: Booth/Armstrong scheme



*Source:* 1851 Census Enumerators’ Schedules (Essex Record Office, HO 107/1785).<sup>10</sup>

consequence of the failure of the labour market, others, in more affluent households, as a result of conforming to middle class conventions of female respectability.<sup>11</sup> In addition, the unspecified class appears to be the most appropriate place to locate those recorded in the census as scholars. First, by definition, they lacked an occupation and, second, they were likely to be amongst their peers. Children were amongst those frequently returned with no occupation by the enumerators.

Given these shortcomings it was decided to devise a new occupational classification scheme, one whose principle requirement was that it could better represent the economic contours of the towns under examination. This was judged most likely to be achieved if the scheme was based upon contemporary perceptions and accounts of the economic structure of these towns. The most obvious source for this purpose were the trade directories. Such a scheme would enable direct comparison to be made with the directory coverage of chapter 4, as well as enable further assessment of the hypothesis that crafts and trades were of greater economic importance than manufacturing.

10. Hereafter Essex Record Office will be referred to as ERO.  
11. See section II for a discussion of this.



## An Alternative Classification Scheme

The first stage in designing an alternative classification scheme was identifying a number of occupational groups into which the more specific classes would fit. The directory study suggested four. First, commercial activities associated with the traders featured in the directories (from accountants to watchmakers). Second, non-commercial activities associated with those recorded in the directories under the public office, as well as in the private residence and gentry sections. Third, commercial activities not represented in the directories, ranging from seamstresses to farmers and, finally, non-commercial activities not recorded in directories, ranging from scholars to paupers.

The next step was to place each member of the sampled population into one of the four groups. Although a seemingly straight forward task, this raised a fundamental problem of source definition. A number of occupations recorded in the census did not have their exact counterparts in the directories. Whilst bricklayers appeared amongst the directory trades bricklayer's labourers did not. Likewise, shoemakers were recorded but not shoe binders, and brush makers but not brush finishers. Similarly, professionals, such as accountants, were recorded but no clerks.

This approach differed from that adopted in chapter 4 since the anonymity of the sampled population meant that, for instance, all brick makers would be counted, whether they were masters, journeymen or proprietors of businesses too small to appear in the directories. The results of the distribution, expressed in percentages of the sampled populations of each town between the four groups, are illustrated in figure 5.2.

The three towns showed similar trends in the distribution of their sampled populations between the four groups. As might be expected, the largest percentage of entries belonged to the non-trade directory, non-commercial group, consisting of those with no recorded occupation, as well as scholars and those described as formerly employed.<sup>12</sup> In all three towns this group accounted for around half the sample. The comparison with the trade directory non-commercial group is potentially misleading, however, since this comprised a narrow range of individuals with occupations in the 'public sector', or whose title and status placed them amongst the private residents.

For our purposes the two most important groups - those the study will subsequently concentrate on - were trade directory commercial and non-trade directory commercial. Figure 5.2 illustrates that, between them, these two represented over 90 percent of the occupied population in each of the towns. This highlights that the commercial sector would have been paramount in determining the fate and economic character of all three towns. The fact that all three were unincorporated, small towns explains why the non-

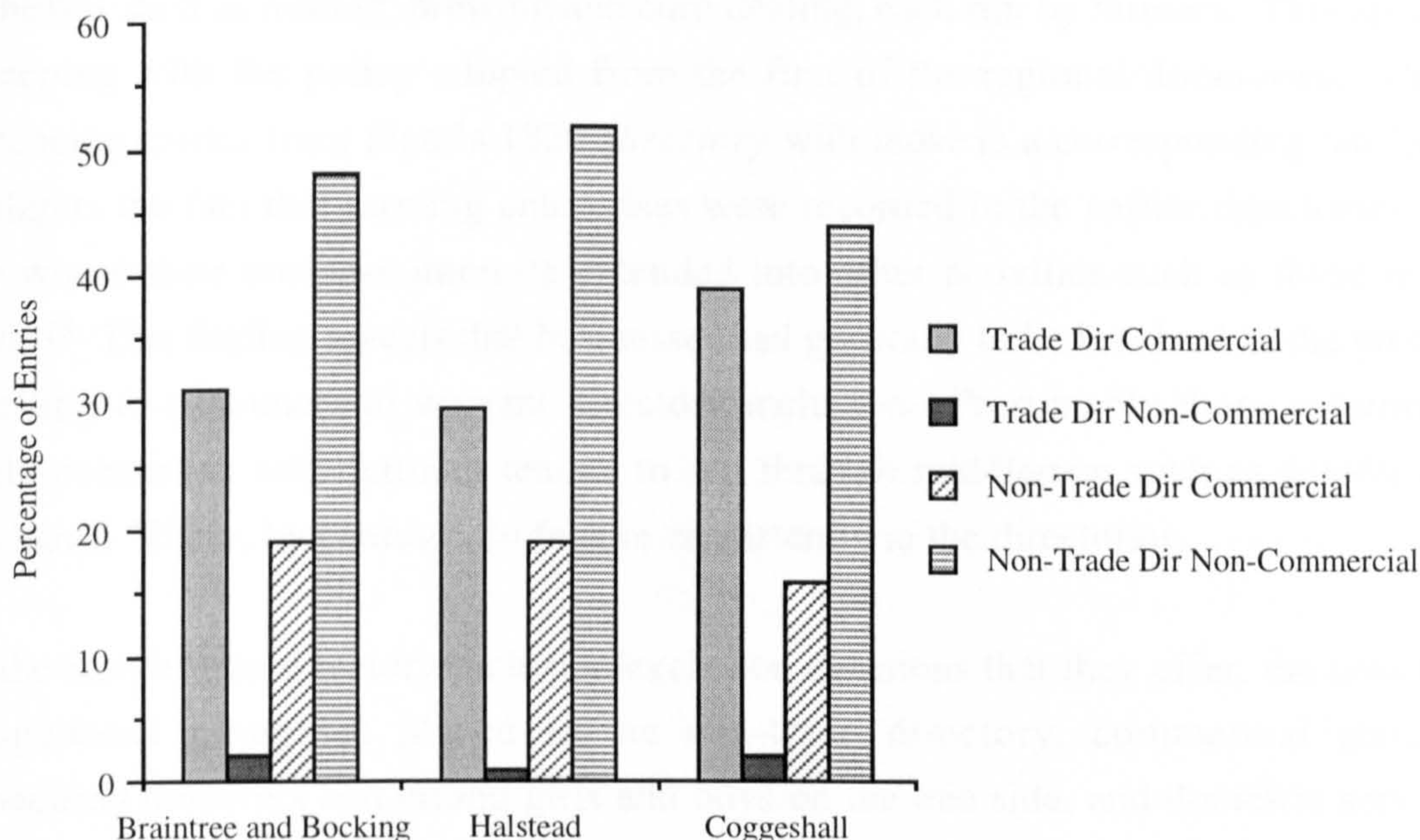
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12. More will be said about this presently.



commercial, administrative sectors - represented by the trade directory, non-commercial group - were so small. The marginally larger percentage recorded in Braintree and Bocking may be largely explained by the fact that it headed a poor law union.

Figure 5.2 Distribution of town populations by occupational group



Sources: ERO HO 107/1785 for Braintree and Bocking; HO 107/1784 Halstead; HO 107/1783 Coggeshall.

A consideration of the range of occupations featuring amongst the 40 percent of the sampled population in the non-trade directory commercial group offers a further insight into directory coverage. This presents the opportunity to consider the criteria the compilers may have used in determining the range of commercial activities to include.<sup>13</sup> Agricultural occupations, amongst them farmers, farm hands and agricultural labourers, featured strongly in the activities not generally included in the directories. They were accompanied by a range of unspecified, probably unskilled occupations, including labourers, jobbers, errand boys and girls, a host of domestic servants, along with hawkers, washerwomen, charwomen, needlewomen and seamstresses.

Considering agricultural occupations first, their inclusion amongst the non-trade directory commercial group requires explanation since in the two Post Office directories farmers were recorded.<sup>14</sup> However, the considerable difference in the numbers identified between them suggests that in the earlier of these directories the majority of farmers went unrecorded. By contrast, there is a complete absence of farmers in all three Pigot

13. These findings should compliment those from chapter 4, which considered the depth of coverage - what proportion of the town's businesses were recorded in the directories.

14. E. Kelly, *Post Office Directory* (London, 1845); E. Kelly, *Post Office Directory* (London, 1851).



directories. It is because of their exclusion from the majority of directory lists that the decision was made to place farmers, along with their employees, in group three.

This does not, however, mean the total exclusion of farming involvement from those featuring amongst the trade directory commercial group. Included in this group were businesses such as milling, brewing and corn dealing, each run by farmers. This appears in keeping with the policy adopted from the first of the regional directories. Cross referencing entries from Pigot's 1826 *Directory* with those in a corresponding rate book highlights the fact that farming enterprises were recorded in the earlier directories, but only where their business interests extended into other activities such as those noted above.<sup>15</sup> This finding reveals that businesses had generally to be involved in the process of selling to customers to warrant directory inclusion. Presumably those enterprises purely concerned with farming tended to sell through middlemen such as dealers and merchants. These, by contrast, do feature consistently in the directories.

For the insight into directory inclusion/exclusion decisions that they offer, the next two occupational groupings placed in the non-trade directory, commercial group - unspecified labourers and errand girls and boys on the one side, and domestic servants on the other - can be dealt with together. Almost by definition all those featuring in these two groupings were employees, whether in private households, workshops, or on a more casual basis of sending messages and making deliveries. Their complete absence from the directories, along with those the census describes as 'agricultural labourers', reinforces the perception that entries appearing in the trader's section refer to businesses, the particular names relating to proprietors.

This observation, however, highlights an unavoidable inconsistency in the way employees are organised into the four groups, and subsequently into more specific classes - born itself from inconsistencies in the enumerators' labelling of occupations. Where a full 'industrial' and occupational description is given, for example bricklayer's labourer, it has been possible to include them amongst group one. By contrast, where no reference is given to the particular activity they are employed in the only option is to keep them in group three, under what will be called the unspecified labouring class.

Lastly, we turn to what might be learnt of directory coverage policy from those in the occupational grouping comprising of hawkers, washerwomen, charwomen, needlewomen and seamstresses. Unlike unspecified labourers, or domestic servants, those featuring in this grouping were probably self-employed and in receipt of payment for the goods or services they offered, rather than for their labour. Knowledge of these

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15. Pigot & Co., *London and Provincial Commercial Directory* (London, 1826), 536-537; Halstead overseers rate book, 1826 (ERO D/P 96/11/87).



activities suggests they were generally poorly remunerated and of low social status.<sup>16</sup> Their impoverished state would probably have prevented them from advertising in a regional directory. Since they were probably serving a purely local market there would have been no commercial incentive to 'advertise' anyway.

In summary, in complementing the findings from an examination of the depth of directory coverage in chapter 4, consideration of the types of occupation appearing in group three confirms that trade directories are a robust source in the representation of the number, as well as the range, of a town's principal commercial activities. Those excluded were found to be employees, those involved with primary activities in which middlemen would link them to the market, or the proprietors and workers of very modest undertakings serving a purely local market. In consequence, this analysis of breadth of coverage, made possible by cross referencing directory entries with the census, underpins the approach adopted in chapter 4, as well as the general conclusions concerning the character of the business community. However, closer examination of the numbers occupied in more specific occupational classes is required before judgement can be passed upon whether manufacturing or marketing and thoroughfare functions represented the staple economic activity of the towns.

### Occupational Classes

Taking the spectrum of occupations appearing in the trade directory commercial group first, four classes were identified. For purposes of comparability and authenticity with the previously identified economic contours, these were organised to match the broader business-type divisions observed in chapter 4. The first of these classes, *crafts and trades*, included all those trades identified in business classes 1 to 10, as well as 15. The second consisted of *professionals* and included those activities appearing in classes 13 and 14. *Silk and crape manufacturers and workers* constituted the third, matching those included in business class 12. Finally, what were described as *peripheral commercial activities*, including milliners, dressmakers, lace workers, tambour workers, straw bonnet makers and plaiters, (business class 11) made up class 4.

The comparatively small number of entries returned in the non-commercial activities group in the directories necessitated the adoption of a single class. The occupations appearing in this class, to be referred to as public officials/private residents, embraced churchmen and property owners, parish clerks and poor law officers, as well as those with titles. Group three, commercial activities not recorded in the directories, was subdivided along the lines suggested in the preceding discussion. These being: first, low

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16. For instance, in Armstrong's social classification scheme hawkers appear in class V alongside errand boys, labourers and scavengers, whilst in class IV washerwomen rank with housemaids and laundresses. W.A. Armstrong, 'The use of information about occupation', in E.A. Wrigley (ed.), *Nineteenth Century Society* (Cambridge, 1972), 226-310.



status self-employed undertakings such as seamstressing and hawking; second, those in agriculture; third, domestic servants; and, fourth, unspecified labourers, jobbers and errand girls and boys.

Finally, group four (non-commercial activities not appearing in the directories), was subdivided into three classes. First, those with no recorded occupation (referred to in the graphs as 'unrecorded'). To this class were added 'wives of...' and 'sons of...' husbands and fathers with occupations. The latter were considered too small a group to warrant the creation of a class of their own. The reason for including them with this particular class was based on certain common characteristics. First, wives and children featured strongly amongst entries described with no occupation. Beyond this, both shared a certain ambiguity in their status. It has long been debated whether describing someone as, for example, the wife of a boot maker, implied some involvement in the husband's business.<sup>17</sup> Similarly, it remains unclear whether not recording an occupation meant that no occupation was being pursued, or whether in some instances it was more the consequence of the enumerators' failure to record. Certainly, as noted earlier, the problem of occupational under-recording was most acute amongst women and children. The other two classes that featured in this group were first, scholars and, second, a cocktail of paupers, annuitants, pensioners and those described as retired or formerly occupied. The common feature which justified combining the latter into one class was that they were no longer actively occupied. The results produced for Braintree and Bocking, using this alternative classification scheme, are illustrated in figure 5.3, and can be compared with those based on the Booth/Armstrong classes in figure 5.1.

The first observation to make is the more even distribution of the sampled populations amongst the 12 classes of the revised scheme compared to that across Booth/Armstrong's 14. This feature has important analytical implications. Whereas six classes in Booth/Armstrong failed to reach the statistically meaningful quota of 20 or more cases, only one, that of professionals with six members, failed in the revised scheme.

The second observation relates to differences in the percentage of entries appearing in the two classes that both schemes feature - agricultural and service. Whilst 8.1 percent of the sampled population were recorded in Booth/Armstrong's agricultural class, 7.6 percent appeared in the trade directory derived one. Similarly, 9.2 percent of entries qualified for Booth/Armstrong's service class, against 5.2 percent in the revised one. These variations can be used to highlight differences in the way the revised scheme classed some entries. The lower proportion in the revised agricultural class, amounting to eight entries, can be accounted for in the different treatment of retired farmers. Whilst these feature in Booth/Armstrong's agricultural class, in the revised scheme they have

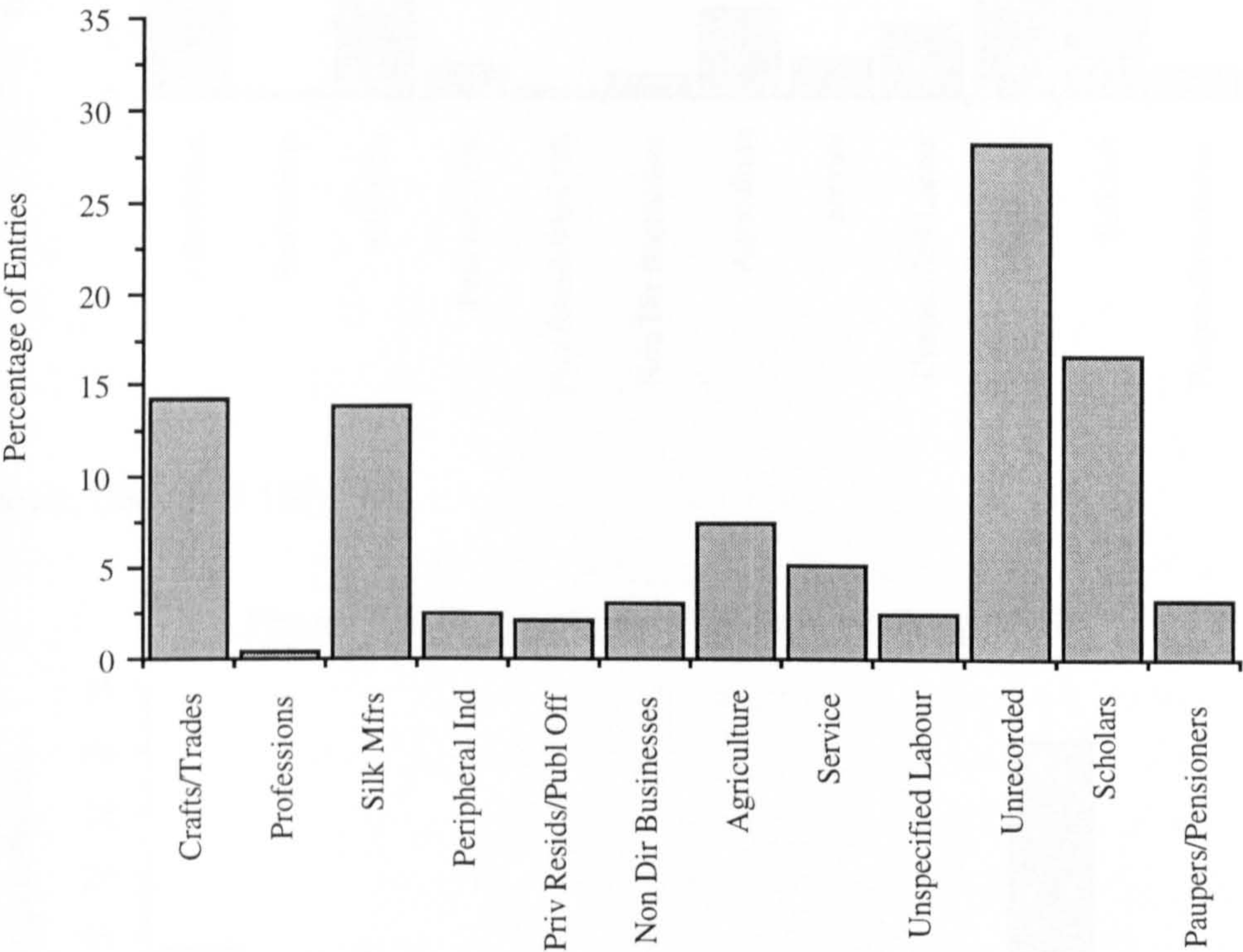
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17. See Horrell and Humphries, 'Women's labour force participation', 94-95.



been judged no longer economically active and accordingly placed in class 12. To ensure consistency the same principle has been adopted for those described as ‘former’ and ‘retired’ in other occupations.

Figure 5.3 Occupational structure of Braintree and Bocking: revised classification scheme



Source: ERO HO 107/1785

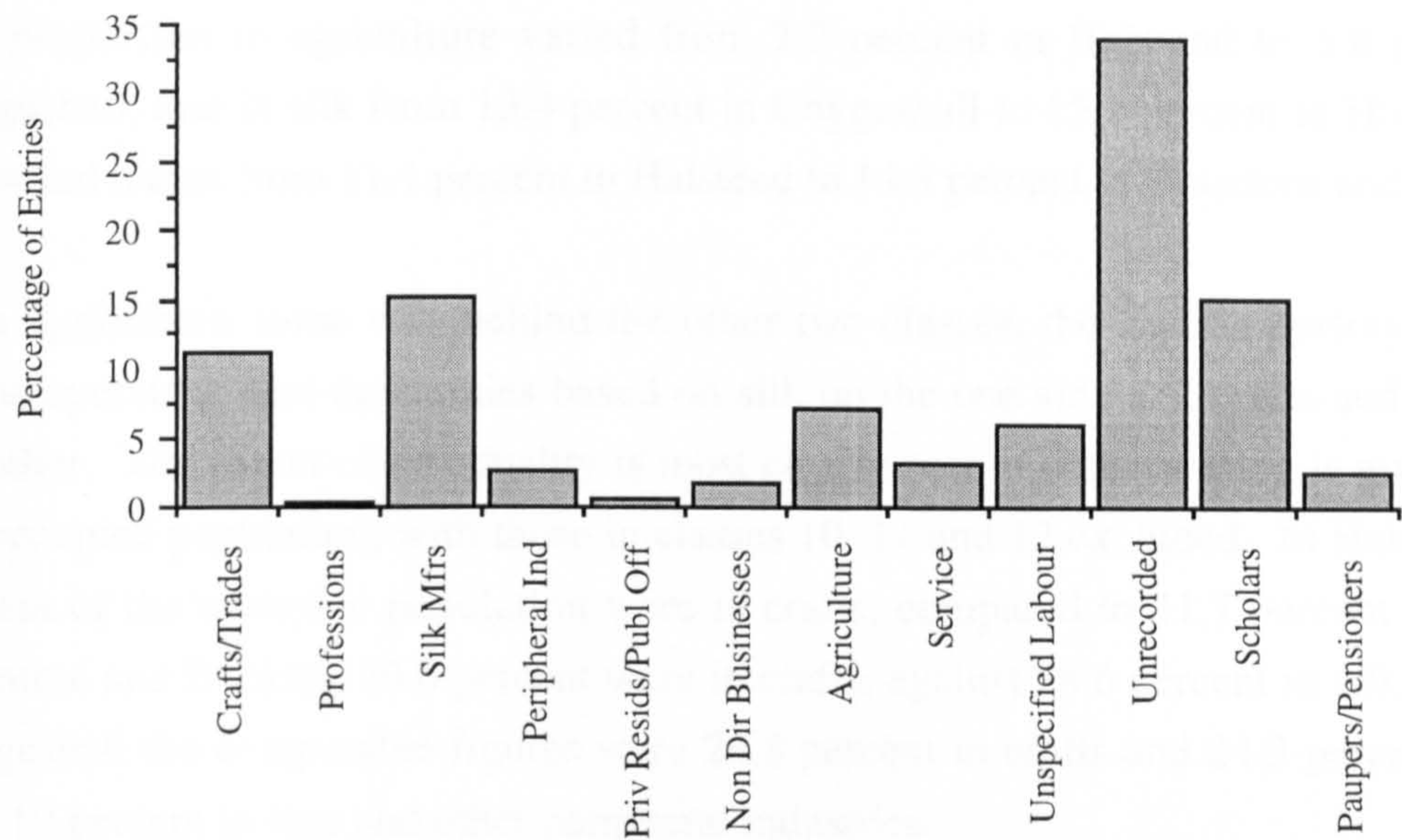
Turning to differences in the service class, whilst 141 individuals qualified for the Booth/Armstrong version, only 80 did so for the revised one. This discrepancy can be accounted for by the inclusion of washerwomen and charwomen in class 6 of the revised scheme. The rationale behind this decision was that they were running their own concerns, offering a service to a number of households, not employed in just one. In consequence, it was considered that they had more in common with the likes of seamstresses and needlewomen. In general, these adjustments reflect the different orientation of the revised scheme with its concern on relations with the market.

Results

The results the application of this alternative classification scheme generates for each of the three communities are illustrated in figures 5.4 and 5.5, below for Halstead and Coggeshall and in figure 5.3 above for Braintree and Bocking.

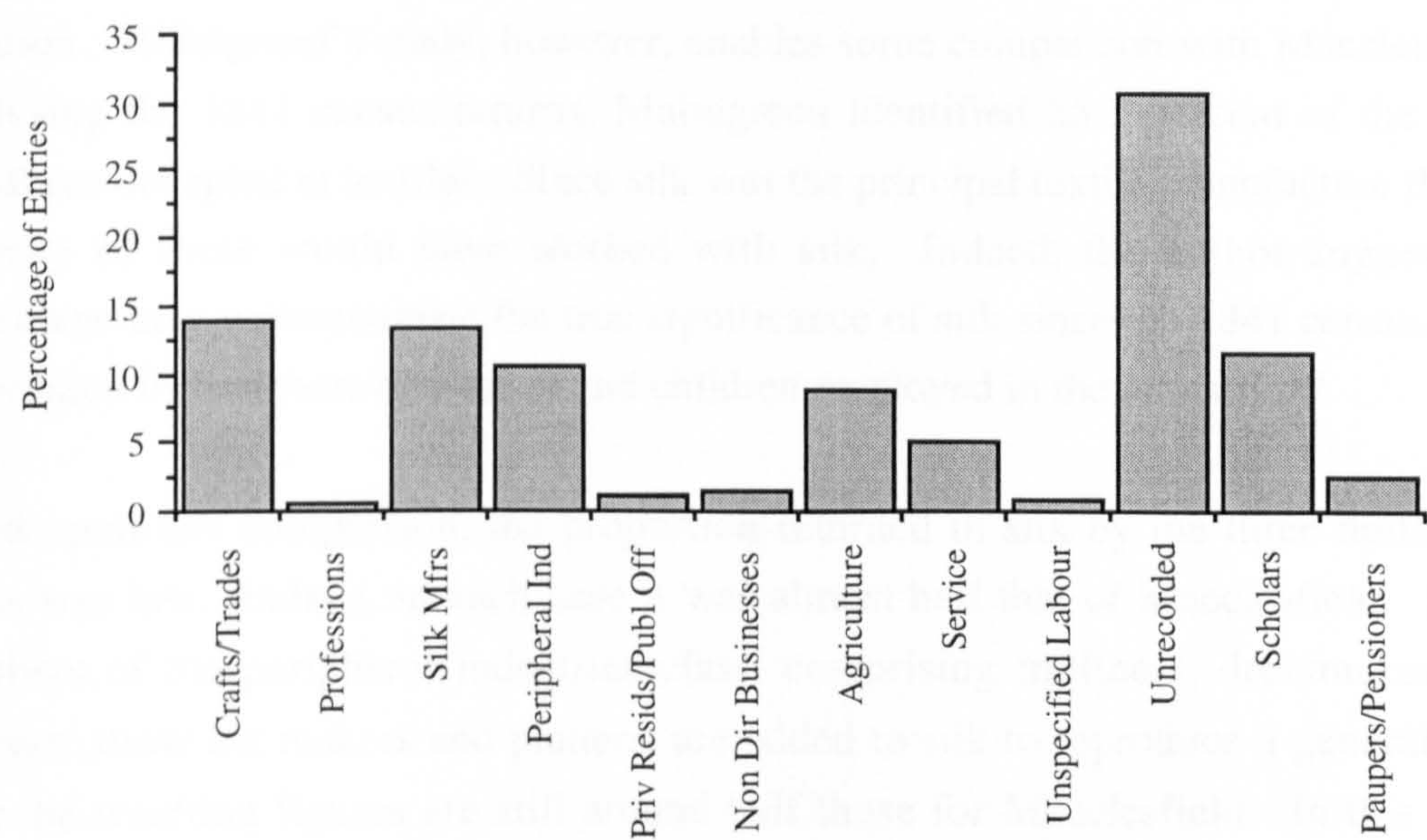


Figure 5.4 Occupational Structure of Halstead



Source: ERO HO 107/1784

Figure 5.5 Occupational Structure of Coggeshall



Source: ERO HO 107/1783

The distribution of the sampled populations across the 12 classes was similar in each of the towns. The largest percentages were, predictably enough, returned for classes 10 and 11 - those with no occupation and scholars respectively. Amongst the occupied population, four classes visibly headed the rest - crafts and trades, silk, agriculture and service. In the case of Coggeshall a fifth can be added, that of peripheral industries. This can be largely accounted for by Coggeshall's lace industry. Lace appears better represented in the census than straw plaiting which, according to the published returns and descriptions, featured more prominently in the other two towns.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, the

18. Census 1851, Enumerations, Vol. I (London, 1852).



percentages returned in the largest classes were very similar in each of the three towns. The proportion in agriculture varied from 7.3 percent in Halstead to 8.8 percent in Coggeshall, that in silk from 13.4 percent in Coggeshall to 15.2 percent in Halstead and crafts and trades from 11.1 percent in Halstead to 14.3 percent in Braintree and Bocking.

With agriculture some way behind the other two classes, the figures portray the three towns operating dual economies based on silk on the one side and crafts and trades on the other. The extent of this duality is most clearly seen if consideration is given just to the occupied population, with those in classes 10, 11 and 12 excluded. In Halstead 23.1 percent of the occupied population were in crafts, compared to 31.7 percent in silk, in Braintree and Bocking 29.6 percent were in crafts, against 28.6 percent in silk, whilst in Coggeshall the comparable figures were 24.8 percent in crafts and 24.3 percent in silk, with 19 percent in lace and other peripheral industries.

How did these results compare with the occupational structures of other mid-Victorian textile towns and, particularly, the south-west Pennine silk towns of Macclesfield, Congleton and Leek? Surprisingly, the latter two towns have received very little attention. Malmgreen's study, however, enables some comparison with Macclesfield.<sup>19</sup> Analysing the 1841 census returns, Malmgreen identified 65.7 percent of the town's workforce occupied in textiles. Since silk was the principal textile manufacture the huge majority of these would have worked with silk. Indeed, the author suggests this percentage may underestimate the true significance of silk since the 1841 census under-represented the numbers of women and children employed in the industry.<sup>20</sup>

Based upon this comparison, the proportion returned in silk by the three north Essex towns was low. Indeed, in each case it was almost half that of Macclesfield. Even if members of the peripheral industries class, comprising milliners, dressmakers, lace workers, straw hat makers and plaiters, are added to silk to reproduce a general textile class the resulting figures are still around half those for Macclesfield. In this respect Braintree and Bocking's combined percentage is calculated at 32 and Halstead's 35; even Coggeshall, with its more substantial representation of peripheral industries, produced only 43 percent.

This raises the question of which classes were comparatively better represented in the case study towns than in Macclesfield. Agriculture appears to have been one. In Macclesfield 2.5 percent of the working population were in this class. Although Malmgreen does not identify the occupations featuring in this class, so differences in

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19. G. Malmgreen, *A Town Built on Silk: Industry and Culture in Macclesfield, 1750-1835* (Hull, 1985), 44-45.

20. In this respect, the results for the case study towns probably offer a better representation of female employment since the 1851 census constituted an improvement in coverage of female occupations, although still falling short of affording a comprehensive survey.



classification may exist, the same class for the case study towns accounted for 14 to 16 percent. By contrast, the proportion in [domestic] service appears very similar at around six to seven percent. Likewise, professionals appear to have represented a small proportion of the occupied population in the Cheshire town as well as the north Essex towns, at around 1 to 2 percent. However, the greatest difference is associated with crafts and trades. By combining those classified by Malmgreen in commerce, along with trades people and artisans, building trades, metals and chemicals and engineering, around 16 percent of Macclesfield's population can be assigned to this class. In contrast, in the case study towns the craft and trade sector comprised between 23 and 29 percent of the occupied population.

How might these findings be interpreted? Although, in comparison with Macclesfield, the case study towns appear to have had a significantly smaller proportion of their active populations in silk, the work of Goose suggests a third of the population in one industry may still represent a high level of specialisation. Similar proportions were returned in the cotton industry of Oldham - a town referred to as a textile centre.<sup>21</sup> Based upon this standard the north Essex towns might still qualify as specialist silk centres. However, it can be argued that for this to be acceptable silk would need to be shown as the leading sector of the urban economy - the principal generator of income and wealth. In the case of the north Essex towns, however, trade directory evidence presented a rather different picture. Driven by the benefits of proximity to London, the most dynamic enterprises were associated with trades and crafts. However, the question this raises is whether the impression gained from the directories is consistent with a wider assessment of the occupied population. Which of the two leading occupational classes possessed the wealthiest, most dynamic members of the working population; those able to command the greatest purchasing power and to make the greatest contribution to urban finances?

To summarise, the principal finding from this 'weight of numbers approach' is the similarity in all three towns of the numbers occupied in crafts and trades and those returned with silk occupations. This finding dismisses the suggestion made, against the findings of the trade directory analysis, that in terms of their contribution to urban employment, crafts and trades were of marginal importance. However, it is also evident that the significance of silk as an employer may have been underestimated in the same analysis, because it was characterised by a few large businesses. Thus, sharing similar percentages of the workforce, the central question of which was the dominant sector remains unclear. To answer this question consideration must be given to the composition of each occupational class - to assess which activities attracted and also created the wealthiest members of the occupied population. In other words, it is

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21. N. Goose, 'Pre-industrial urban economies', *Urban History Yearbook* (1982), 24-30.



necessary to qualify the quantitative. This goes beyond conventional usage of the census and demands a new methodology which will now be advanced.

## II. Qualifying the Quantitative

### The Approach

Examination of wills and property valuations can afford some insight into the wealth of different occupational classes. However, the former of these would only identify a minority of the population, most after the end of their working lives, whilst the latter would only reveal information for the owners and occupiers of property. Wage rates are another potentially useful source in this regard. However, the evidence on wages available for the case study towns is partial and general. The wages earned by most are not recorded and, anyway, other factors, such as payments in kind and income from other sources of earnings, limit the value of wage based assessments.<sup>22</sup>

An alternative approach is to return to the census enumerations and cross-reference occupational details given to each entry with those relating: first, to age; second, gender; third, place of birth; fourth, relation to head; and fifth, to a number of household features such as the distribution of employment amongst family members, and practices such as the taking in of lodgers and the employment of servants and apprentices. Whilst it is of general interest to know how, for instance, the age composition of different classes varied, the contention here is that certain qualitative judgements about the income generating potential, wealth and, perhaps, even the social standing of occupational classes can be deduced from these differences.

Beginning with age, it seems reasonable to assert that the most important classes would have been those possessing the largest proportion of individuals of 'prime working age'. These individuals would have been at the height of their physical and mental powers and, consequently, able to command the highest earnings. Initially, it was considered adequate to define prime working age as being from 20 to 45. However, this definition does not consider the specific employment conditions of each town. It was decided, therefore, to adopt a slightly different approach; one that would identify which occupational classes were able to attract individuals from the age groups in highest demand. It was considered those classes best able to do this would have offered the highest wages and the best employment opportunities.

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22. The problem with wage based analysis for the early 19th century is exemplified in the standard of living debate. For one of the most recent contributions see N.F.R. Crafts, 'Some dimensions of the 'quality of life' during the British industrial revolution', *Economic History Review*, 50 (1997), 617-639.



To undertake this analysis five year age bands were used, the first of these included those aged five years and under, the last, 76 year old and above. Each age group was then placed in one of three classes depending upon what proportion of its membership were returned with an occupation. The first class were for those returning the highest percentage in employment. To qualify over 50 percent of entries had to be employed. The second, an intermediate class, covered age groups returning between 40 and 50 percent of employed entries. The third concerned those with less than 40 percent in employment. The distribution of age groups within these three classes demonstrated some variation between the towns as table 5.1 illustrates. The reasons behind these variations will be explored in the results section.

Table 5.1 Distribution of age groups by levels of employment

| % Employed and Class | Braintree and Bocking | Halstead           | Coggeshall         |
|----------------------|-----------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| 1s (50 % plus)       | 16-60 inclusive       | 16-65 inclusive    | 11-65 inclusive    |
| 2s (40-50%)          | 11-15, 61-75          | 11-15, 66-75 inc.  | 66-75 inclusive    |
| 3s (Below 40 %)      | 1-10 inc., 76 plus    | 1-10 inc., 76 plus | 1-10 inc., 76 plus |

Sources: ERO HO 107/1785 for Braintree and Bocking; HO 107/1784 Halstead; HO 107/1783 Coggeshall

The three age group classes were distinguished by number, with 1 representing those with the highest percentages occupied, 2 the middle ranking and 3 those with the lowest percentage. The same numbering system was adopted for the other four measures, with 1s representing what were considered the most important entries in each case. Not only did this seem the simplest to apply but it was also compatible with the operation of SPSS, the statistical package used to calculate the composition of occupational classes by these qualitative measures, as will be illustrated shortly.

Turning to gender, given what is known of wage differentials, it was decided that the most important classes would comprise of men. It was the man in the mid-Victorian household who was considered to be the family bread winner, and the one able to command the highest wages. Along these lines it can also be suggested that the gender composition of occupational classes may reveal something about their social standing. Female employment was, as a whole, associated with less skilled, lower status undertakings. Accordingly, males were classed as 1s, females 2s.<sup>23</sup>

Considering place of birth, the most important classes here were judged to have been those able to exercise the strongest pulling power, that is, to attract workers from outside

23. See J. Burnette, 'An investigation of the female-male wage gap during the industrial revolution in Britain', *Economic History Review*, 50 (1997), 257-281. Whilst this study suggests the reasons for wage differences were complex, the female-male wage ratio is suggested to have been in the order of one-third to two-thirds. See also Horrell and Humphries, 'Women's labour force participation', 89-117.



the immediate locality.<sup>24</sup> Again, analysing the composition of occupational classes by this measure was judged to afford some guide to comparative employment opportunities and earnings. Those occupations best able to attract migrants would have had to offer wages sufficient to overcome local labour market competition, as well as the social costs involved in uprooting house and home. On this basis three standards emerged, in ascending order of importance they were: those born in the parishes that comprised the case study towns (3s); those born outside the towns but within a 20 mile radius (2s); and those whose birth places from beyond 20 miles (1s).

The choice of 20 miles as the dividing distance was based on the view that this represented the reasonable limits of a daily trek. The figure is somewhat arbitrary, for 17th century Suffolk, Patten, for example, chose 15 miles as the delimiting distance.<sup>25</sup> However, in consultation with Peter Clark it was decided that a figure of 20 miles was more appropriate for the mid 19th century, given the considerable amount of road improvement that had occurred during the intervening period. The decision to travel beyond a days journey to settle in these towns must have been based on strong forces. It may, in part, have been cultural, kinship links were also likely to be influential, however, since most migrants were young, employment opportunities and potential earnings must have been the dominant factors.<sup>26</sup> This said, a consideration of the major settlements located within a 20 mile radius of each of these towns suggests that fairly strong forces must have been operating to attract those born within a days journey of them. What special qualities did these towns possess? Did these relate to their role as silk centres, or to their marketing and thoroughfare functions?<sup>27</sup>

Classification of information relating to household position was rather easier to devise. The most important classes were considered to be those returning more heads of household, as opposed to family members. In this scheme the head of household was judged to be the main earner, with other family members representing supplementary

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24. Place of birth is not the ideal measure of assessing occupation-related pulling power. An individual may return with an alien birth place who, in being moved early in life, learnt his/her trade in the town of their subsequent residence. However, no alternative measures are available that cover a majority of the occupied population. Besides, the use of place of birth information for such purposes has its precedents in other studies on migration. See M.A. Anderson, *Family Structure in Nineteenth Century Lancashire* (Cambridge, 1971), 34-42; and S.A. Royle, 'Aspects of nineteenth-century small town society: a comparative study from Leicestershire', *Midland History*, 5 (1979-80), 50-62.
  25. J. Patten, *English Towns 1500 -1700: Studies in Historical Geography* (Folkestone, 1978).
  26. J. Williamson, 'Coping with city growth', in R.S. Floud and D. McCloskey, *The Economic History of Britain Since 1700*, Vol. I: 1700-1860 (Cambridge, 1994), 338.
  27. For all three these other major settlements within a 20 mile radius included Sudbury, Hadleigh, Haverhill in Suffolk, as well as, on the Essex side, Dedham, Thaxted, Stansted, Saffron Walden, Witham, Great Dunmow, Maldon, along with Chelmsford and Colchester. In the case of Coggeshall they also comprised a few more easterly settlements, including Manningtree. For Braintree and Bocking, they included a number of more westerly settlements, amongst the largest of whom were Brentwood, Harlow and Bishops Stortford. The latter also came within Halstead's 20 mile arena, along with some more northerly settlements, principal amongst these being Bury St Edmunds.



income earners. Accordingly, heads were identified as 1s and non-heads 2s. It was also decided that non-family members, such as lodgers and servants, should, similarly, be considered junior to heads and classed as 2s, since residence in another household would appear to be evidence that they did not command the resources necessary to head their own.

Finally, considering household behaviour, the contention here was that two types of household could be distinguished. The *lower* group, 2s, were identified where wives and/or children were employed, and/or where lodgers were taken in. Each of these has been considered as a strategy to supplement the inadequate income of the head of household. To elaborate, whilst the employment of wives was determined by a combination of necessity - to supplement the income of the head of household - and choice, in the early 19th century the latter is considered to have been the dominant force.<sup>28</sup> Based upon this premise, it can be suggested that the occupations recorded by those heads of household whose wives were employed can be judged of a lower income generating ability. The same logic can be applied to children. Those appearing with occupations were similarly serving a need to supplement the income of the head of household. Exceptions in both instances were made for small business households, in which wives and/or children followed the same trade as the head.<sup>29</sup> Likewise, the taking in of lodgers was judged a further strategy for increasing household earnings.<sup>30</sup> Indeed, for single member households it may have offered the only strategy. Out of the 19 Braintree and Bocking households taking in lodgers six were headed by loan spinsters and widows.<sup>31</sup>

By contrast, *upper* group households were defined where the wife and, if present, children were not occupied and/or where servants, apprentices or hands were employed. Indeed, in his revision of Booth/Armstrong's social classification scheme Royle includes the employment of servants as an indicator of higher status.<sup>32</sup> Again, the one general

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28. See O. Saito, 'Gender, work and the family economy in comparative perspective', *Towards a New History of Industrialisation in Britain* (Arguments presented by panel members at a session organised by the Women's Committee of the Economic History Society, Economic History Society conference, Nottingham, 1994), 10-13. Likewise, Archer in her study of Detroit concluded that, 'The labour of secondary workers within the family, especially sons and daughters, was frequently used to supplement family income. Occupational status and economic wealth was negatively related to the propensity of wives and children to enter the labour force.' M. Archer, 'The entrepreneurial family economy: family strategies and self-employment in Detroit, 1880', *Journal of Family History*, 15 (1990), 261-283.
  29. 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* (Basingstoke, 1994), 181-207.
  30. M.A. Anderson, *Approaches to the History of the Western Family 1500-1914* (London, 1980), 81; and E. Roberts, *Women and Families: An Oral History, 1940-1970* (Oxford, 1995), 123.
  31. Indeed, the presence of households headed by widows could be used as a further indicator of poorer households. In his study of the poor of early 19th century Braintree, Sokoll found that almost 70 percent of pauper households were headed by widows, compared to just over 10 percent for non-pauper households. T. Sokoll, *Household and Family*, (Bochum, 1993), 245.
  32. Royle, 'Aspects of the social geography', 50-62. Similarly, Sokoll observed the absence of servants in pauper households. T. Sokoll, *Household and Family*, 244.



exception to the above definition was where the wife and, if present, children worked in a family business. It should, however, be added that the behaviour which characterises upper households did not just relate to the earning power of the head of household, but also to the adoption of middle class aspirations. By the middle of the 19th century the employment of wives and children were not judged suitable practices amongst those with aspirations to middle class respectability.<sup>33</sup> By these measures the most ‘important’ classes would be judged those returning the largest proportion of members from upper households. The way each of the sampled populations broke down into these five measures are presented, as percentages, in tables 5.2, 5.3, 5.4, 5.5 and 5.6.

Table 5.2 Composition of town population by age group

| Age | Braintree and Bocking | Halstead | Coggeshall |
|-----|-----------------------|----------|------------|
| 1   | 55.7                  | 56.0     | 66.9       |
| 2   | 17.7                  | 13.9     | 3.1        |
| 3   | 26.6                  | 30.1     | 30.1       |

Notes: 1- Age groups with over 50 percent of membership employed; 2 - Age groups with 40-50 percent of membership employed; 3 - Age groups with less than 40 percent of membership employed.

Table 5.3 Composition of town population by gender

| Gender | Braintree and Bocking | Halstead | Coggeshall |
|--------|-----------------------|----------|------------|
| 1      | 46.8                  | 47.8     | 46.1       |
| 2      | 53.2                  | 52.2     | 53.9       |

Notes: 1 - Males; 2 - Females.

Table 5.4 Composition of town population by place of birth

| Place of Birth | Braintree and Bocking | Halstead  | Coggeshall |
|----------------|-----------------------|-----------|------------|
| 1              | 10                    | 5.7       | 7.4        |
| 2              | 29.7 (39.7)           | 24.2 (30) | 22.6 (30)  |
| 3              | 60.3                  | 70        | 70         |

Notes: Figures in brackets are the combined percentages of those in class 1 and 2; 1 - Born beyond 20 miles of the case study town; 2 - Born outside the case study town, but within a 20 mile radius; 3 - Born in the case study town

33. In this respect, Davidoff and Hall consider one growing feature of middle class respectability to have been the non-employment of wives and children. L. Davidoff and C. Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780-1850* (London, 1992).



Table 5.5 Composition of town population by relation to head

| Rel to Head | Braintree and Bocking | Halstead | Coggeshall |
|-------------|-----------------------|----------|------------|
| 1           | 22.6                  | 20.2     | 21.5       |
| 2           | 77.4                  | 79.8     | 78.5       |

Notes: 1 - Heads of household; 2 - Non heads of household.

Table 5.6 Composition of town population by household status

| Household Status | Braintree and Bocking | Halstead | Coggeshall |
|------------------|-----------------------|----------|------------|
| 1                | 37.9                  | 32.4     | 27.6       |
| 2                | 62.1                  | 67.6     | 72.4       |

Notes: 1 - Households in which the wife and, if present, children were not occupied, and/or where servants, apprentices, or hands were employed; 2 - Households in which the wife and/or children were employed, and/or where lodgers were taken in.  
 Sources: ERO HO 107/1785 for Braintree and Bocking; HO 107/1784 Halstead; HO 107/1783 Coggeshall.

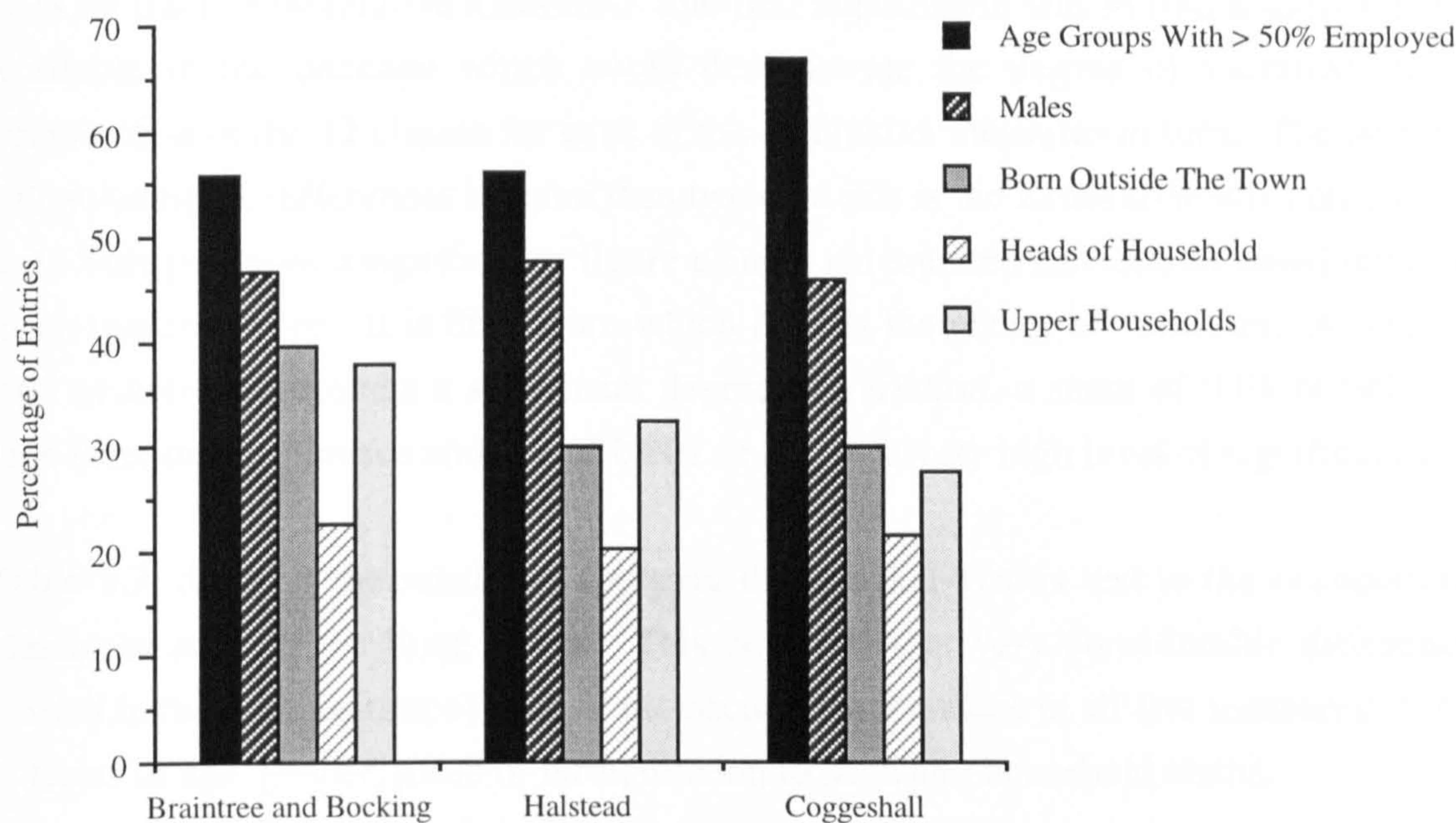
It can be argued that household status, relation to head and place of birth, in that order, appear most discerning of *quality*. In these three instances 1s comprise the minority of cases, as opposed to around half for age and gender, about 20 percent for relation to head and between 27 and 38 percent for household status.<sup>34</sup> Possessing three measures place of birth is slightly different here, with those born beyond 20 miles of the towns accounting for only between 5.7 and 10 percent of the sample. However, if 2s are added to 1s then the percentages range from 30 to 40 percent. The percentage of 1s in gender and relation to head were similar amongst all three towns, with males accounting for just under half the population and heads of household between 20.2 and 22.6 percent. As figure 5.6. illustrates, however, some variations appear in the percentage of 1s returned by the towns for the other three measures.

With regard to age, Coggeshall returned the highest percentage of those in the most heavily occupied age groups. The difference was primarily made up by the inclusion of the younger age group, 11-15, amongst those with the highest percentage of occupied entries. This can be accounted for by Coggeshall's lace industry, with its predominantly youthful workforce, and the fact that the census enumerators appear to have been more diligent in the recording of such occupations than for straw plaiting. The latter was found in the other two towns and possessed a similar age structure to Coggeshall's lace industry.<sup>35</sup>

34. The contention that these three offer the best guides to the quality of the workforce in terms of likely income generating potential is further developed in the results section.  
 35. G.F.R. Spenceley, 'The health and disciplining of children in the pillow lace industry in the nineteenth century', *Textile History*, 7 (1976), 154-171.



Figure 5.6 Composition of town populations by five qualitative measures



Source: ERO HO 107/1785; HO 107/1784; HO 107/1783

In terms of place of birth, out of the three towns Braintree and Bocking returned 10 percent more 1s and 2s - that is individuals born outside the town. The same town also recorded the highest proportion of population in the upper flight of households - five percent ahead of Halstead, which in turn, was some five percent ahead of Coggeshall. These variations may, in part, relate to source coverage. A number of entries do not include place of birth. However, the percentages of missing cases was similar for each town and, ranging from 1.7 percent in Halstead to 1.0 percent in Braintree and Bocking, were far too small to alter greatly the results. Moreover, for household status all cases were assessed. This would suggest explanation rests principally with the differences in the wealth and dynamism of the urban economies of the three towns. Accordingly, Braintree and Bocking appears slightly ahead of Halstead which, based upon the percentage of households in the upper echelon, was, in turn, ahead of Coggeshall.<sup>36</sup>

These findings prompt two broad questions. First, how did the occupational classes fare by each measure - more specifically which of the two major classes emerge as economically the more important. Was it silk or crafts and trades? Second, do the slight variations in the performance of each of the towns reflect differences in the proportion of their occupied population found in the more important classes?

36. This seems a rather more adequate and meaningful measure of prosperity than that suggested by Booker, based on the proportion of empty houses to inhabited. J. Booker, *Essex and the Industrial Revolution* (Chelmsford, 1974), 201.



Methodology

The statistical package SPSS was used to calculate the composition of each occupational class by the five qualitative measures. The first requirement was to find a statistical test available in the package which could demonstrate the degree of variation in the composition of the 12 classes for each of the qualitative measures in turn. The only test able to compare differences in more than two data sets is the Kruskal-Wallis non-parallel test. This produces a significance figure using a chi-squared calculation based upon the mean ranking score. It is this figure which reveals the extent of variation. A score of 0.05 or below represents a significant degree of variation, a score of 0.01 or below, a high level of significance and one of 0.001 or below, a very high level of significance.

Table 5.7. displays the results of applying the Kruskal-Wallis test to the occupational classes in each of the three towns. This confirms that very considerable differences existed in the composition of each of the occupational classes in all five measures; that is in terms of age, gender, place of birth, relation to head and household status.

Table 5.7 Significance of variation in the composition of the 12 occupational classes in each town by five qualitative measurers

| Qualitative Measure | Braintree and Bocking | Halstead | Coggeshall |
|---------------------|-----------------------|----------|------------|
| Age                 | .0000                 | .0000    | .0000      |
| Gender              | .0000                 | .0000    | .0000      |
| Place of Birth      | .0000                 | .0163    | .0007      |
| Rel to Head         | .0000                 | .0000    | .0000      |
| Household Status    | .0000                 | .0000    | .0000      |

Source: ERO HO 107/1785; HO 107/1784; HO 107/1783

These results offer statistical support for the premise underlying this qualitative examination of occupational classes: that substantial differences will exist in the composition of occupational classes in terms of age, gender, place of birth, relation to head and household status. From another view point, these findings offer statistical support for the revised classification scheme. It can be suggested that one measure of the validity of a classification scheme is the ability to produce classes with their own distinct characteristics. This said, significance results advance the analysis only so far, they do not reveal anything about the ways in which the occupational classes varied in their composition by any of the five measures. After consulting a statistician it was decided the best way to illustrate this was to employ percentages. Given the size of the populations involved, this was most efficiently done using a cross-tabs command on SPSS.



The cross-tabs calculation produced a table of the percentage break down of the occupational classes by each of the five measures. Four figures appeared in each table cell. The first was described in the print out as a 'count'. This was the total number of cases in that occupational class to have a particular value. If we take, for example, the percentage break down of occupational classes in Braintree and Bocking by relation to head, class 7 was identified as possessing 58 cases in value 1, which related to heads of household. The next figure to appear related to 'row percentage'. In the same example this was given as 50. This identified the percentage of all cases in class 7 to be given a value of 1. In other words, the percentage of all agricultural entries that were heads. The next figure referred to the column percentage. The column total, which appears beneath the table, is the total number of entries in the sampled population given that particular value. In the same case this meant that 16.8 percent of all recorded heads in Braintree and Bocking were to be found in occupational class 7. Finally, the total percentage figure is recorded. This gives the percentage of all valid cases in the town that appeared in that class with that value. For Braintree and Bocking this meant that 3.8 percent of all heads and non-heads to be identified were heads of household in class 7.

Within each of these tables, therefore, is a substantial amount of information with which to build up a profile of the composition of each occupational class by the five measures. From this comparisons can be made with other occupational classes, most particularly, between silk, on the one hand, and crafts and trades, on the other. However, in examining the results it should be noted that certain occupational classes, fortunately excluding the two main classes the study is concerned with, failed to acquire the minimum number of cases to make their results statistically meaningful. In Braintree and Bocking this applied to class 2, professions, in Halstead to classes 2 and 5, the latter being private residents and public officials and, in Coggeshall, to classes 2 and 5 along with 6 (non trade-directory concerns), 9 (unspecified labourers) and 12 (paupers/retired). This may suggest a case for combining classes 2 and 5, but such action would undermine the rationale behind the scheme, based on trade directory coverage. In any case, in both Halstead and Coggeshall combining these would still produce a total of less than 20 cases - in the former nine, in the latter 11. In fact, it can be argued that the low coverage of these classes is representative of the fact that none of the three towns were large administrative centres. For reasons of statistical integrity, therefore, the figures in the following analysis exclude those classes in each town with less than 20 entries.

## Results

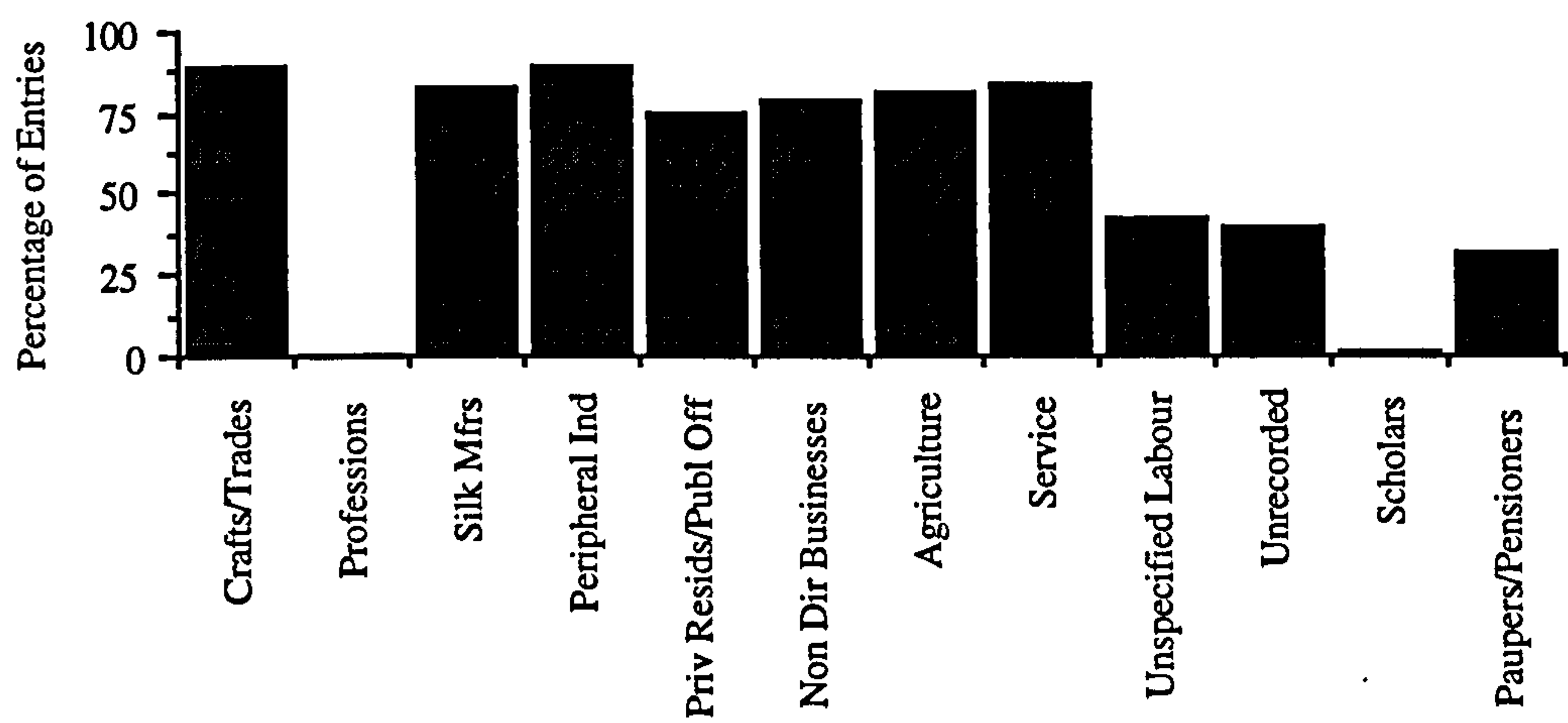
### Age

Figures 5.7, 5.8 and 5.9 display the percentage of entries in each occupational class returned in the age groups with the highest rates of employment. A similar pattern in the age group composition of the occupational classes is revealed in all three towns.



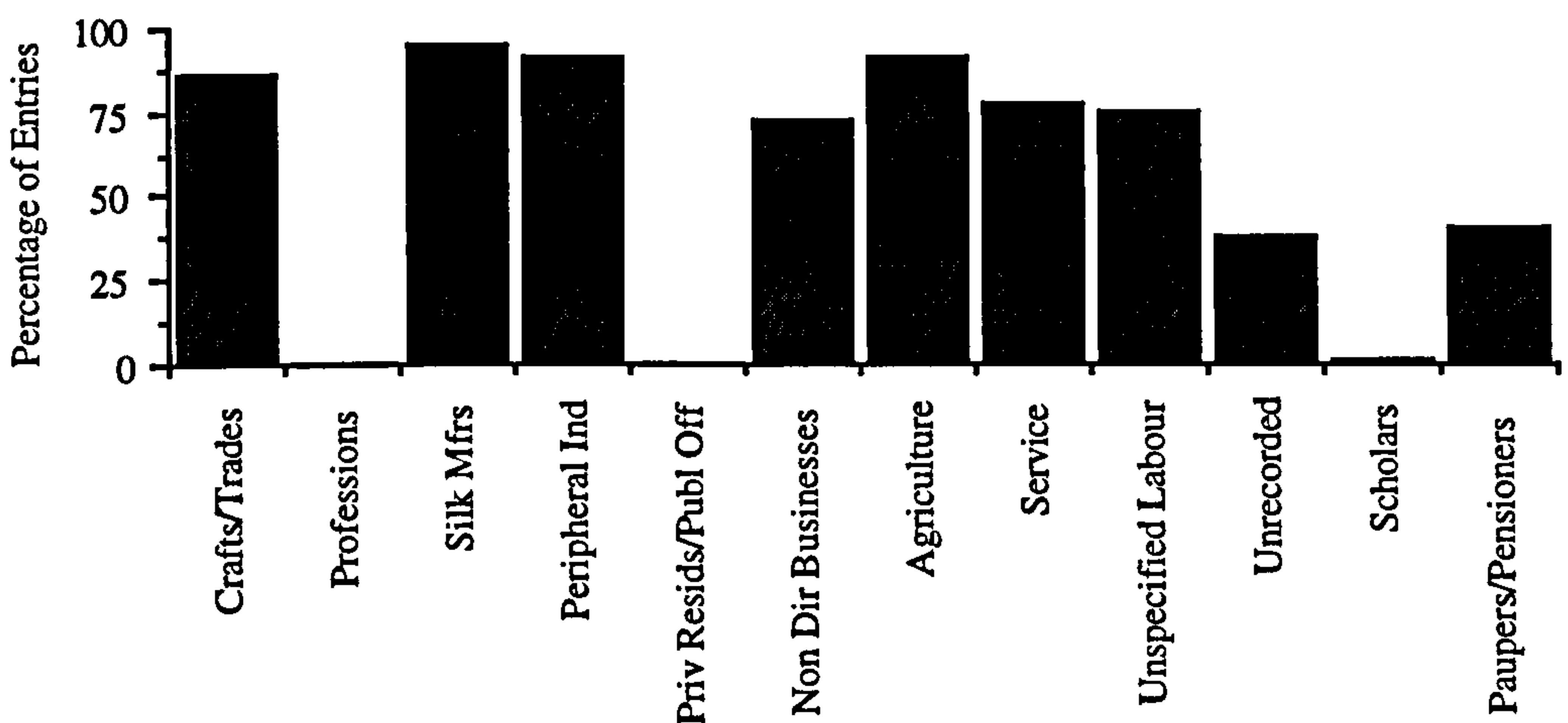
Composition of occupational classes by age (expressed as a percentage of those in age groups with the highest rates of employment)

Figure 5.7 Braintree and Bocking



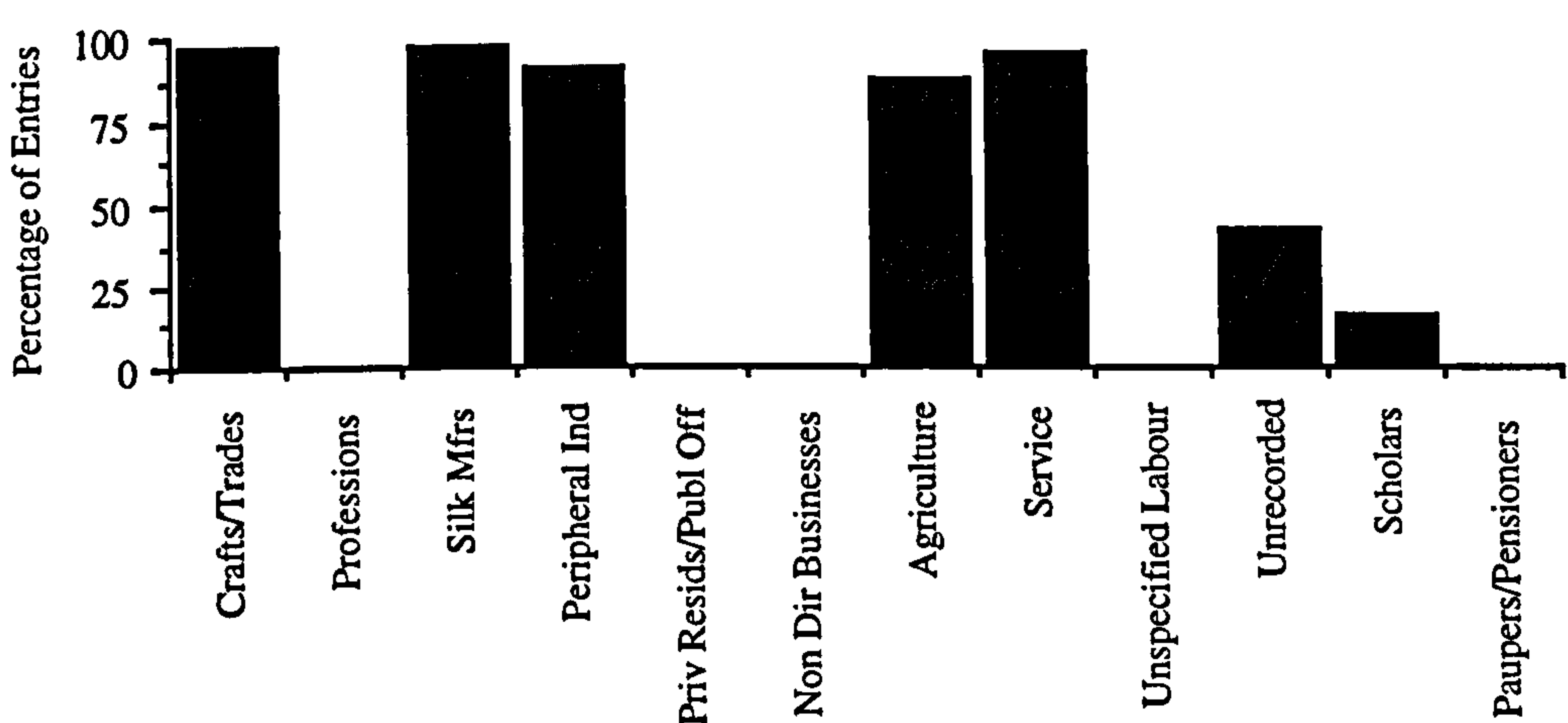
Source: ERO HO 107/1785

Figure 5.8 Halstead



Source: ERO HO 107/1784

Figure 5.9 Coggeshall



Source: ERO HO 107/1783



The biggest differences in percentage composition for all three towns were between, on the one side, classes 1 (crafts) to 9 (unspecified labourers) inclusive and, on the other, classes 10 to 12. In other words, and perhaps not surprisingly, between the economically active classes and those with no recorded occupations, scholars and pensioners and paupers. In Braintree and Bocking, for example, 89.5 percent of craft and trade entries were from age groups returning the highest proportion of occupied members. By contrast, the same figure for class 12 was 31.4 and for class 11 just 1.6 percent.

This analysis throws some light onto the mysterious class 10, whose membership consisted of entries without recorded occupations. Keeping with Braintree and Bocking, almost half of these, 47.8 percent, were 3s - that is from age groups returning the smallest proportion of occupied entries. Most of these came from age groups at the younger end of the low occupied spectrum, from ages 1 to 10. This can be seen in the mean rank score of each class which is calculated from the original ages.

The mean rank score is identified by listing in order of age, from youngest to oldest, all of the town's sampled population. In Braintree and Bocking these will range from a score of one to 1,537. The class with the score nearest one will have, on average, the youngest membership, that with a score nearest to 1,537 the oldest. In Braintree and Bocking, as in the other two towns, class 10 returned the second lowest mean rank score behind class 11, scholars. Many described without an occupation would, therefore, appear to have been children. As such the absence of an occupation may reflect the reality of their dependency. However, as we shall see, some children from eight years of age do appear with occupations. The absence of an occupation may, in some instances, be the consequence of under-recording.

Amongst the occupied classes the only noticeable differences emerged in class 5, private residents and public officials and, 9, unspecified labourers. In Braintree and Bocking, the only town for which numbers were statistically significant, 75 percent of class 5 derived from the most highly occupied age groups, whilst the same figure for unspecified labourers was 42.5 percent. These compare to scores of 78 percent plus in the other occupied classes. In both cases the middle ranking age groups, with between 40 and 50 percent occupied, accounted for the majority of other entries - 21.9 percent in class 5 and 52.5 percent in class 9.

An examination of mean rank scores suggests, however, that whilst most of class 5s middle ranking entries derived from older age groups, 61-75, a larger proportion in class 9 came from those in age group 11-15. (Whilst class 5's mean rank score of 1179.88 was only lower than that for paupers and the retired at 1397.42, class 9's, at 718.99, was at the other end of the spectrum and only higher than scholars and those returned without an occupation). Both findings seem consistent with previously identified features in



each class. In this respect, amongst the private residents would be individuals effectively retired from business, perhaps living off interest or property. By contrast, class 9 included errand boys and girls.

With regard to the two largest occupational classes with which the main concern of this study rests, figures 5.7 to 5.9, point to their similarities. The great majority of those occupied in both - over 80 percent in all three towns - were from the age groups returning the largest occupied percentages. In the case of Halstead the percentage figures were 86.2, and 94.6 respectively. In terms of the relative importance of these two classes the findings from this analysis suggest little difference. However, it is possible to explore the age composition of each in greater depth. This affords some clues to the relative importance of each.

First, an examination of mean rank scores based upon original ages suggests that, in all three towns, those occupied in silk were, on average, younger. Accordingly, this class possessed more representatives from the younger high scoring age groups - for example, those in age groups 11-15 and 16-20, rather than in the 31-35, 36-40 bands. In this regard, as table 5.8 illustrates, Halstead's silk class returned a mean rank score of 564.12, compared to 668.39 in crafts and trades. These figures compare with the minimum of 209.30 for scholars and maximum of 905.90 for paupers and retired.<sup>37</sup>

Table 5.8 Mean rank score for age by occupational class in Halstead

| Occupational Class       | Mean Rank Score (range 0-978) |
|--------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Craft and Trade          | 668.39                        |
| Silk                     | 564.12                        |
| Peripheral Industries    | 595.74                        |
| Non Directory Businesses | 704.86                        |
| Agriculture              | 699.44                        |
| Service                  | 549.00                        |
| Unspecified Labour       | 566.25                        |
| Unrecorded               | 399.33                        |
| Scholars                 | 209.30                        |
| Paupers/Pensioners       | 905.90                        |

Source: ERO HO 107/1784

These more subtle variations may hint at 'qualitative' differences in the fortunes of those occupied in each class. It can be suggested that classes with a larger representation of middle-aged entries may be displaying a greater potential for life-long employment, whilst those with a younger age profile hint at the decline of opportunities with age. However, beyond this the former may also point to more opportunities for individual advancement. In contrast, a predominantly young membership suggests a level of skill

37. To clarify, if class 12 possessed all the oldest inhabitants the mean rank score would be very close to the total number of cases, that is 978. In fact, it was only 7.9 percent away from this figure.



and competence that could be attained at an early age. Similarly, at the other end of the age spectrum, those classes whose membership consisted heavily of individuals in their 50s, 60s and beyond may represent undertakings that were within the diminished capabilities of those in relative old age.

Considering the silk class first, little can be said for those recorded as silk and crape finishers, dressers, drawers and warpers because their numbers were too small. However, some accordance with the above thesis is met amongst the more frequently occurring occupations of handloom weaver and silk/crape winder. The large majority of these were in the younger age groups. The first weaver to be found amongst the sampled population of Braintree and Bocking was aged nine. Although weavers were to be found in their 30s, 40s and 50s, with the oldest recorded at 67, there is no evidence of a change in occupational description with age. Not only does this profile suggest little career development, but also diminished employment opportunities for those in adulthood. The most probable reason for this would be that the young were cheaper to employ.<sup>38</sup>

By contrast, from its higher mean rank score it appears that a greater proportion of entries in the craft and trade class were from the older end of the high demand age-group spectrum, that is individuals in their 30s and 40s. The greater potential for career development this more mature age profile suggests finds some support when age is compared with occupational description and, more particularly, the denomination classification that accompanied these descriptions. Early representatives of this class, found in their teens, are regularly denoted as apprentices. In Coggeshall, for example, the first apprentice, a tailor, appears at the age of 14. By the late teens and early 20s 'journeyman' becomes a more regular affix. In Coggeshall three journeymen appear aged 19 - a cabinet maker, a miller, and a tanner - whilst in Braintree and Bocking one of the first to appear was a journeyman brewer, aged 17. From the mid to late 20s masters begin to emerge. The first master in Coggeshall, a shoemaker, was aged 24. Masters continued to feature regularly throughout the 30, 40 and 50 year age groups. The oldest in Coggeshall's sample was a plumber of 60.

Nevertheless, other entries suggest that not all those appearing in this class followed the 'career path' from young apprentice to journeyman and on to master. First, craft and trade labourers appear throughout the age range. Similarly, many remained journeymen throughout their working lives. In Coggeshall the last journeymen to appear was a carpenter and sawyer aged 54; whilst in Braintree and Bocking, a brewer journeyman, aged 73, was the oldest recorded member of the class. Moreover, almost half of the entries in this class lacked a denomination classification that would help determine their

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38. This argument is developed further in chapter 6.



status. In consequence the picture of career development outlined above is a necessarily partial one.

However, the additional information available for some of those with denomination classifications does afford further evidence of a career structure in which masters were of the highest standing. As observed in chapter 4, the 1851 census did attempt to identify employers. Accordingly, a number of masters in the sampled population were recorded as employers. In Braintree and Bocking one of the youngest masters was a 25 year old cooper, employing two men. No journeyman, however, in any of the towns was returned as an employer.

Another measure may relate to age at marriage. It can be suggested that the timing of marriage was, in part, influenced by the need to acquire a certain level of resources. In accordance, examination of journeymen in the three towns suggests, in general, they married later than craftsmen, implying a slower accumulation of the necessary finances. In fact, the youngest married journeymen in Braintree and Bocking were a maltster and tailor, both aged 29. By contrast, the town's youngest married master was a 23 year old basket maker (employing one man), followed by a 26 year old cordwainer (employing three men).

Examination of classes 4 and 6, peripheral industries and non-trade directory enterprises respectively, suggests that they conform to the framework outlined at the start. Class 4 appears to have possessed a youthful age profile, similar to that of silk, with the majority of entries derived from the younger high demand age groups. Dress making was one of the most prominent occupations to appear in this class and most of those returned with this occupation were in their teens and early 20s. This suggests that the dominant influence on the structure of this class may have been the relative cheapness of the young.

Nevertheless, a hint of a career structure is evident. One of the teenagers in Braintree and Bocking was returned as a 14 year old apprentice, whilst amongst the few older dressmakers was a 48 year old mistress and two assistants, aged 40 and 43. The fact that only three entries are returned with such affixes prevents any real assessments about career structure from being drawn, particularly when closer examination reveals the mistresses and two assistants to have resided in the same household.

Another significant occupation in this class, notably in Coggeshall, was lace and tambour lace making. The town's high reading in class 4 is principally the consequence of the presence of 59 lace makers/workers. Indeed, these accounted for 82 percent of all those appearing in Coggeshall's class 4. In accordance with the age profile of dress makers, the largest number of lace workers were found in their pre-teens, teens and 20s. In fact,



86 percent of lace workers were under 30 years old. Whilst this suggests that the comparative cheapness of youthful labour may have been the dominant factor in determining the age structure of this class, it does show some employment opportunities were available for older workers. In fact the oldest lace worker in Coggeshall was 47. It is also evident that lace workers could continue with their trade into marriage.<sup>39</sup> Sixteen of Coggeshall's workers were married women. In these two respects lace and tambour workers were similar to dress makers but different, as will be shown below, from domestic servants. However, unlike dress making, no references were made to lace apprentices, assistants and mistresses. Instead a 40 year old lace agent is recorded along with a 29 year old lace manufacturer.

The third occupation to feature quite commonly in class 4, particularly in Braintree and Bocking and Halstead, was that of straw bonnet maker or straw plaiter. Initial examination of the age structure of this occupation suggests it was fairly evenly spread throughout the ages. The youngest straw plaiter/bonnet maker to appear in Braintree and Bocking was aged 11, others appeared in their teens, 20s, 30s and 40s, with the oldest aged 54. However, this profile is likely to be principally the cause of under-recording at the local, schedule, level. The published returns of 1851 suggest that the great majority of straw plaiters and bonnet makers in the hundreds which embraced these two towns were under the age of 20. In this respect the age profile of straw plaiters and bonnet makers may have resembled that of lace makers.

The reason for poorer census coverage of straw bonnet makers and plaiters may be due to the more informal way their trade was organised. There was a noticeable seasonable element to the trade, whilst none of the older straw workers was described as manufacturers. An additional reason may relate to the more rural nature of straw plating and bonnet making. For reasons of supply and proximity to raw materials, this would have been an occupation most likely to be pursued by the daughters and wives of agricultural labourers.<sup>40</sup> As observed earlier, as a class households headed by agricultural labourers suffered particularly from the tendency to under-record the occupations of other family members.<sup>41</sup>

Class 6 displays a rather older age profile. Indeed, amongst those classes in Halstead to return a sufficient number of entries class 6 was responsible for the second highest mean rank score, behind paupers. Whilst in Braintree and Bocking, the other town for which numbers in class 6 were sufficiently high, it returned the third highest score behind paupers as well as private residence. Evidence that occupations in this class were being

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39. G.F.R. Spenceley, 'The English pillow lace industry 1840-1880: a rural industry in competition with machinery', *Business History*, 19 (1977), 68-87.

40. P. Sharpe, 'Women's harvest: straw-plaiting and the representation of labouring women's employment, c.1793-1885', *Rural History*, 5 (1994), 129-142.

41. Higgs, 'Occupational censuses and the agricultural workforce', 700-16.



pursued by those beyond their prime can be seen in two of the more frequently occurring occupations. First, the youngest washerwoman to appear in Braintree and Bocking was aged 52. Similarly, the youngest charwoman amongst the sampled population of this town was 40. Most of the others were in their mid 40s to late 50s, with the oldest aged 77. Other occupations in this class, laundresses, seamstresses, needlewomen, and hawkers, were too few in number for trends to be identified.

Turning to domestic service, as with silk and peripheral industries, the majority in this class derived from the younger high-demand age groups. To this end, those in numerically the two largest occupations, nurse girls and maids and house servants, were predominantly young. Amongst the former the first to appear was aged 12, the last 16. A slightly wider age range was evident amongst general and house servants. In Braintree and Bocking the youngest house servant was 12, the oldest 34. Nevertheless, consideration of the age structure of the other, though numerically much smaller, occupations appearing in this class suggests, theoretically at least, some potential for remaining in service, and perhaps advancing ones position. Housekeepers ranged in age from 32 to 52. Given the far larger numbers of nurse maids and general and house servants it is perhaps more likely that in Braintree and Bocking, as in other towns, domestic service was, predominantly, an employment for girls and unmarried young women.

The above assessment seems to be supported by a consideration of the number of unmarried domestic servants. Out of a total of 80 servants identified in Braintree and Bocking's sample population only nine, or 11.25 percent, were, or had been, married. Even more telling, of those married one was a 52 year old housekeeper, one a 44 year old cook and another a 48 year old washerwoman. The other six were grooms. Grooms also appear to have been the exception in terms of age; the youngest recorded in Braintree and Bocking was 13, the oldest 50. These two features suggest the occupation was pursued as a career (by men as will be shown shortly). In considering employment opportunities, it can be suggested that upon reaching adulthood and marriage one possible course for those formerly occupied as domestic servants would have been to become seamstress, needlewomen, or charwomen, taking in the laundry from a number of houses. In this respect, the first married seamstress to appear in Braintree and Bocking was aged 37, the first needlewoman 34 and the first dress maker 23.

The final class to be considered in terms of age structure, and the one that appears to conflict with the earlier assessment, is that of agriculture. This class possessed the most similar characteristics to craft and trades in terms of the majority of entries deriving from the older high demand age groups. Nevertheless, a comparison between age and occupational description affords little evidence of career advancement amongst the occupation that returned the great majority of cases in this class - that of agricultural



labourer. The first agricultural labourer in Braintree and Bocking's sample appears at the age of 10, the occupation appears regularly for those in their teens, 20s, 30s and so on, with the oldest identified agricultural labourer aged 79. Whilst less frequently recorded the description of farm labourer similarly appears throughout the age range. The only evidence of any age-specificity here is with 'farm boy' and 'farmer's assistant' - both relate to individuals in their early teens.

To summarise, a high proportion of entries in all the economically active classes comprised individuals from age groups enjoying the highest levels of employment. The only slight variations from this were found amongst private residents and public officers and unspecified labourers. Beyond this, a comparison of mean rank scores based on the actual ages of entries pointed to the possibility that two classes, crafts and trades and agriculture, with their higher scores signifying a slightly older age profile, may have offered the best life-long employment opportunities, as well as steady advancement with the acquisition of experience, skill and capital. Upon closer examination, however, this proved not to have been the case for the latter. By contrast, a comparison between age and full occupational description suggested that, for a significant number of cases, this was true of the craft and trade class. Here there was evidence of progression from apprentice to journeyman to master. The idea that these changes in description reflected economic advancement was confirmed by evidence on employers and age of marriage.

These findings suggest that of the occupational classes craft and trades offered the greatest chance of economic and, indeed, social 'progress' with age as the opportunity to become an employer arose. In so doing, this class emerges as the most dynamic in terms of the potential for advancement. However, whilst hinting, these findings fall short of confirming that of the two largest occupational classes crafts and trades were, in terms of income and wealth generating potential, the more important. Whilst offering little chance of visible advancement in terms of description, those working in silk may have been affluent. They may have been able to command high returns, to set up their own homes, to head their own houses, to employ their own servants and to attract a workforce from further afield. To assess these possibilities we need to consider the other four qualitative measures, beginning with gender.

## Gender

The premise for considering the gender composition of occupational classes is that wage and, indeed, status differentials existed between males and females. In general, males commanded higher incomes.<sup>42</sup> In addition, in an age when females were often restricted to lower status occupations, levels of male involvement may also reveal something about the 'social' standing of such activities. A comparatively high proportion of males may

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42. Burnette, 'An investigation of the female-male wage gap', 257-281.



denote a class characterised by a high income generating ability and status. Undoubtedly complicating this scenario are cultural factors, but it is conceivable that these would have operated to reinforce and, in part, create status differences. The findings of this second, qualitative analysis on the composition of the occupational classes are presented in figures 5.10, 5.11 and 5.12 which display the percentage of males appearing in each of the classes for each town.

Only in class 11, scholars, do the proportions of males to females resemble those found in the towns as a whole. In the case of Braintree and Bocking 47.3 percent of scholars were returned as males, compared to 46.8 percent in the total sampled population. The other classes were, therefore, characterised by high levels of gender specificity.

Considering first the mysterious unrecorded class, in Braintree and Bocking 73.7 percent of this class were females. Similar proportions were displayed in the other two towns. Combining these findings with those from the age group and mean rank age scores, this class emerges as one made up of a large proportion of girls and young women. As such it may reflect the tendency of the census enumerators to under-record the occupations of females in general and of young women, in their capacity as daughters or wives, in particular. With regard to status and earnings, this may reflect the lower standing awarded to female occupations by the enumerators themselves.

Moving on to the economically active classes, the very lowest percentage of males in Braintree and Bocking were found in peripheral industries, with 2.6 percent and non-trade directory industries, with 6.5 percent.<sup>43</sup> The same trends were evident in Coggeshall and Halstead. The low income generating ability and status suggested by these results are supported by the fact that, as observed earlier, the former was considerably under-recorded in the directories and the latter completely ignored.

A consideration of occupational descriptions for the few males identified in each of these classes offers support for the contention that males tended to be in higher status, and probably better remunerated, occupations. The only male to appear in Braintree and Bocking's class 4 was a 'plait dealer', a 54 year old widowed head of household. Meanwhile, all those occupied in lace production in Coggeshall were females, including the one lace manufacturer to appear in the sample. Similarly, in Braintree and Bocking's class 6 all were females except for two of the three hawkers, a flax spinner, a stay maker and coat weaver.

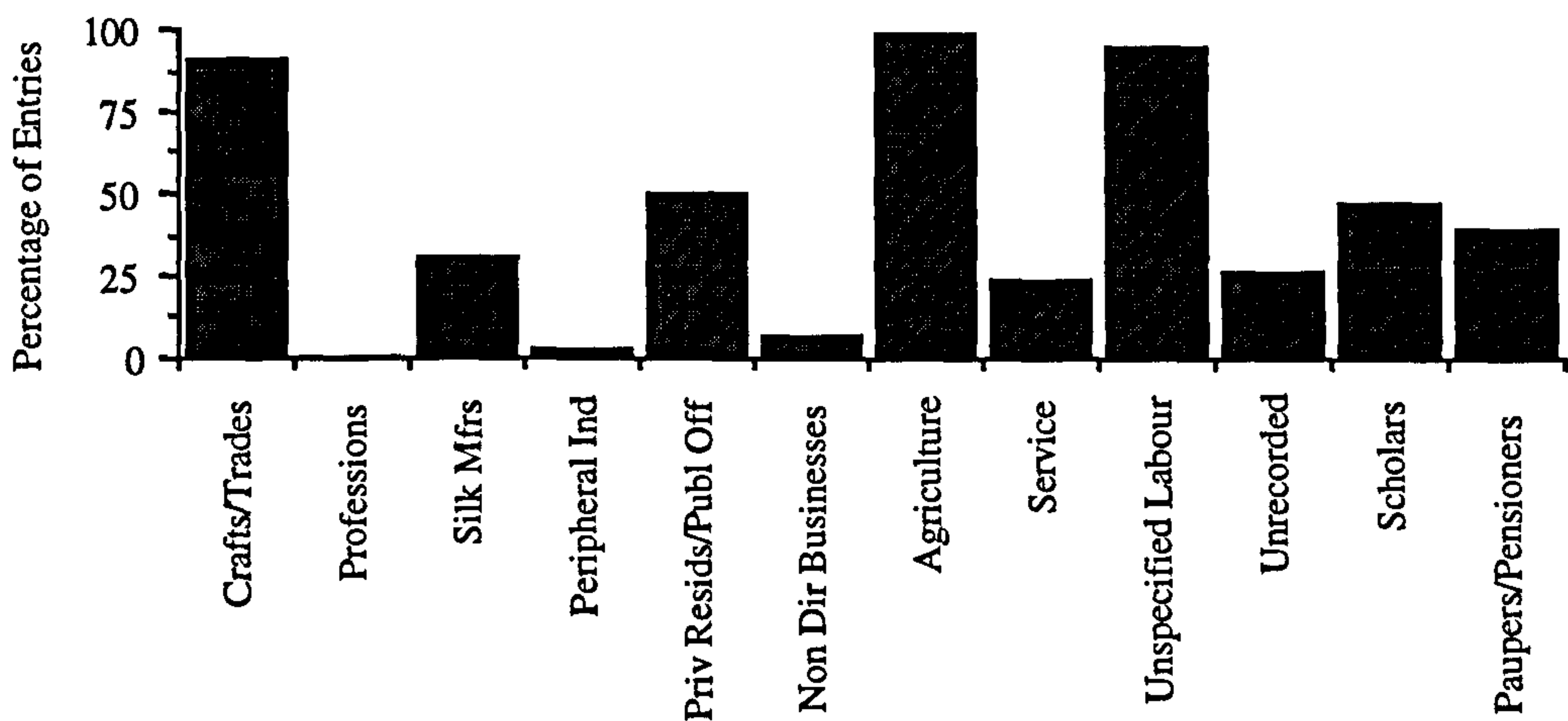
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43. Sharpe, 'Women's harvest', 129-142.



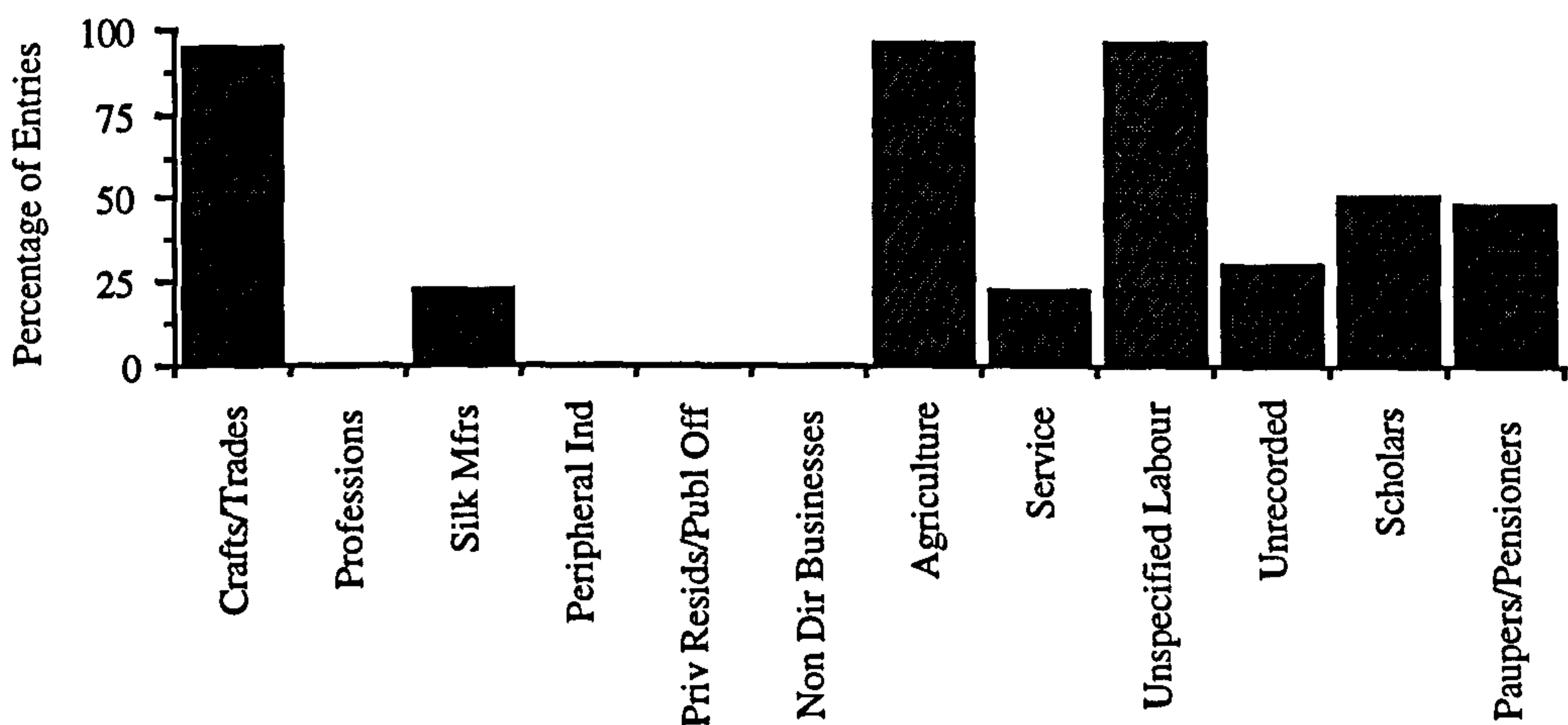
Composition of occupational classes by gender (expressed as a percentage of males)

Figure 5.10 Braintree and Bocking



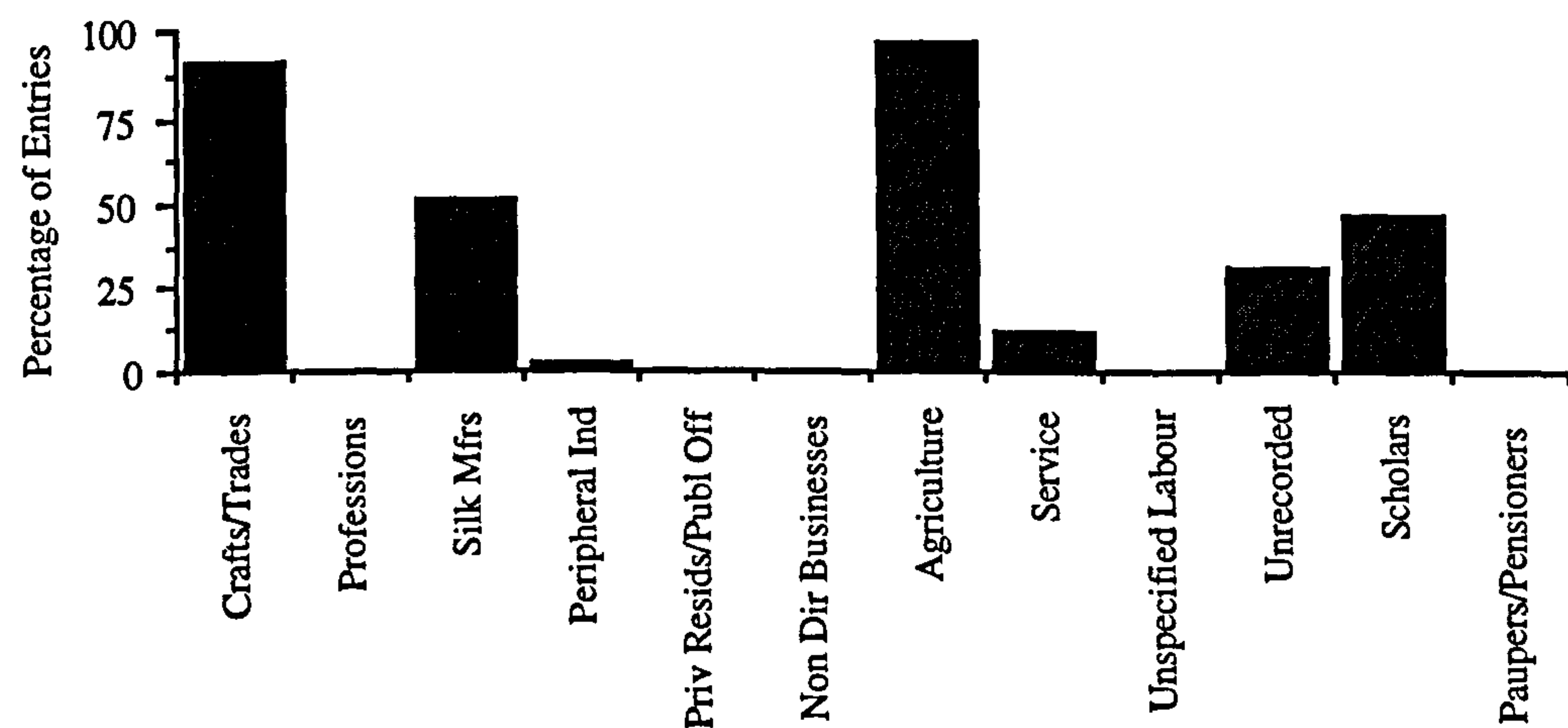
Source: ERO HO 107/1785

Figure 5.11 Halstead



Source: ERO HO 107/1784

Figure 5.12 Coggeshall



Source: ERO HO 107/1783



The class to return the next lowest percentage of males in each town was that of service. In Braintree and Bocking the figure was 23.8 percent. Within this female dominated class the notable exception were grooms. This seems to have been a male preserve and, in support of the arguments associated with age, grooms were also the exception amongst service occupations in covering a wide age spectrum, suggesting the opportunity to pursue careers.

Compared with the three classes already considered, silk returned a higher proportion of males. In Braintree and Bocking the figure was 30.7 percent and in Halstead 22.8 percent. However, in Coggeshall it exceeded 50 percent - a level of male involvement that warrants separate investigation.<sup>44</sup> In general, with its larger percentage of males, silk would appear to have offered greater income generating potential and have been organised on a more formal basis. To this end, a comparison of occupational descriptions to sex shows considerable gender specificity within the silk industry. While in Braintree and Bocking male and female handloom weavers can to be identified, silk winding, drawing, and dressing appear to have been almost exclusively female activities, with the occupations of silk porter, dyer and overseer assigned to males.<sup>45</sup>

However, by the measure of gender, as with age, silk's performance in the case study towns, including Coggeshall, was some way behind that of crafts and trades. In Braintree and Bocking over 90 percent of this class consisted of males. Of the females amongst the craft and trade class of this town, only 10 different occupations were recorded, they included: three tailoresses; three shoe-binders; a shop assistant; a fruiterer; a grocer and fruiterer; two bakers; a brushmaker; a Chandler; a beershop keeper; and an innkeeper. Closer examination of the households these appeared in supports the earlier premise that males tended to be employed in higher status positions. First, five of these appear to have been wives and daughters occupied in a family business headed by the husband or father. For example, the husbands of all three shoe binders were described as shoemakers. Similarly, the two female fruiterers were the daughter and wife of a baker and gardener. Second, three other cases, those of the two bakers, the Chandler and shop assistant, and the innkeeper, probably represented cases in which the husband had left the business to his widow and/or children. Indeed, out of the 10, the only exceptions appear to have been the two tailoresses and it is possible that this occupation was of a lower status anyway and more akin to that of seamstress or needlewoman. In one case the head was a handloom weaver, in the other the tailoress was described as a lodger.

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44. Which will be undertaken shortly.

45. See J. Lown's study which identifies the same distinction based on larger numbers. This thesis also explores in greater detail the gender differentials in Halstead's silk industry. J. Lown, 'Gender and class during industrialisation: a study of the Halstead silk industry in Essex, 1825-1900' (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Essex, 1984). See also J. Lown, *Women and Industrialisation: Gender at Work in Nineteenth Century England* (Oxford, 1990), esp. chapter 2, 43-63.



A similarly high percentage of males were found in the agricultural and unspecified labouring classes for each of the towns. In the case of Braintree and Bocking the figures were 98.3 and 95 percent respectively.<sup>46</sup> Although the wages and local standing of the agricultural labour force associated with the three towns is open to question,<sup>47</sup> the fact remains that they seem to have been in receipt of higher wages than local female or, indeed, male silk workers.<sup>48</sup> Similarly, according to Snell, the growing surplus of male agricultural labourers in the 19th century may well have led to the demise of female employment on the land.<sup>49</sup>

Amongst the results of this gender analysis, the only partial exception to the premise that a class returning a majority of males may constitute one with greater income generating ability and a higher status is that of Coggeshall's silk industry. In contrast to the other two towns, the gender profile produced for Coggeshall suggests that it was rather more affluent and of higher status, since it was able to afford and attract a work force of over 50 percent males. Indeed, this result lends itself to the idea that Coggeshall's silk industry was characterised by more small manufactures and independent craftsmen such as handkerchief makers.

Yet, examination of the actual occupational descriptions awarded to Coggeshall's male silk entries highlights the limitations of a gender based qualitative analysis. This reveals them to have been in the same occupations found in the other two towns. No small ancillary businesses or occupations were evident.<sup>50</sup> The majority were weavers, accompanied by a silk factory labourer, an overseer and a superintendent. As regards the age measure, the idea that the gender composition of Coggeshall's silk industry was due to the recruiting of a larger proportion of boys - whose status and wage cost may have been comparable to girls and young women - is not supported in the age profile of the sampled population. Some 58 percent of male silk entries were over 20 years of age. This anomaly will be revisited in subsequent sections.

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46. The fact that the level of gender homogeneity in crafts and trades was comparable to that in a more widely recognised occupational class, like agriculture, offers support for the decision to consider the former as a single, coherent class. A similar case could be made at the opposite end of the spectrum for service with its predominance of female entries.

47. Essex's farm labourers at this time were considered to have been amongst the lowest paid of their class in the country. T.L. Richardson, 'Agricultural labourers' wages and the cost of living in Essex, 1790-1840: a contribution to the standard of living debate', in B.A. Holderness and M. Turner (eds), *Land, Labour and Agriculture, 1700-1920* (London, 1991), 69-90; see also W.A. Armstrong, *Farm Workers: A Social and Economic History 1770-1980*, (London, 1988), 4; and E.H. Hunt, 'Industrialisation and regional wage inequality: wages in Britain, 1760-1914', *Journal of Economic History*, 46 (1986), 935-966.

48. See chapter 6.

49. K.D.M. Snell, 'Agricultural seasonal unemployment, the standard of living, and womens' work in the south and east, 1690-1860', *Economic History Review*, 34 (1981), 407-437; K.D.M. Snell, *Annals of the Labouring Poor* (Cambridge, 1985), 15-66. Although this interpretation has been revised by Sharpe, it is maintained that by the close of the 18th century female under- and unemployment were widespread. P. Sharpe, *Adapting to Capitalism: Working Women in the English Economy, 1700-1850* (London, 1996), 71-100.

50. This accords with the earlier trade directory based business community analysis.



To summarise, analysis of the gender make-up of the occupational classes in each of the towns broadly supports the findings derived from investigation of age. If the premise that females were paid lower wages and associated with lower status activities is accepted, those classes returning a majority of females and, therefore, in general, of low income generating ability and standing were: peripheral industries; non-trade directory enterprises; service; and silk. Conversely, crafts and trades, agriculture and unspecified labour emerge as the more important classes. Indeed, the high level of gender specificity to occupation found in each class reinforces this premise. For example, the few males in peripheral industries appeared in supervisory or dealing capacities. This was also true for many males in silk.<sup>51</sup> By the same token, females appearing in male dominated crafts tended to be in junior positions. Nevertheless, the case of Coggeshall's silk industry, with its higher percentage of male workers, may offer a warning to the limitations of this gender based qualitative analysis. Both age and gender may afford broad outlines but, as suggested at the start of part II, the other three measures may be better thermometers of relative economic importance.

### Place of Birth

Figures 5.13, 5.14 and 5.15 display the percentage of those born outside the towns. Similar profiles emerge in each town. At one end of the spectrum were, as would be expected, scholars. In Braintree and Bocking 75 percent of scholars were born in the town.<sup>52</sup> At the other end of the range were domestic servants. Here only 31.6 percent were born in the town. Of the other principal classes a slight majority of Braintree and Bocking's craftsmen were born outside the town. By contrast, under 40 percent of silk entries, 37 percent of those in peripheral industries and under 34 percent in agriculture, originated from outside the town. Taking a closer examination of those born outside Braintree and Bocking, the great majority of silk workers and agricultural labourers derived from parishes within the 20 mile radius. In fact, only 10.8 percent of silk workers and 10.3 percent of those in agriculture came from places over 20 miles away. By contrast, 16.2 percent of craftsmen and traders and 21.9 percent of private residents and public officials were born beyond 20 miles of the town. As illustrated, these figures are consistent with those for the other two towns.

In evaluating these results the assumption has been made that the most important classes - in terms of wages and employment opportunities - were those able to attract workers from beyond the immediate locality. This is based on the principle that to attract outside workers employment opportunities and wage rates in the receiving centre would have needed to be greater than those available locally, and of a sufficient magnitude to

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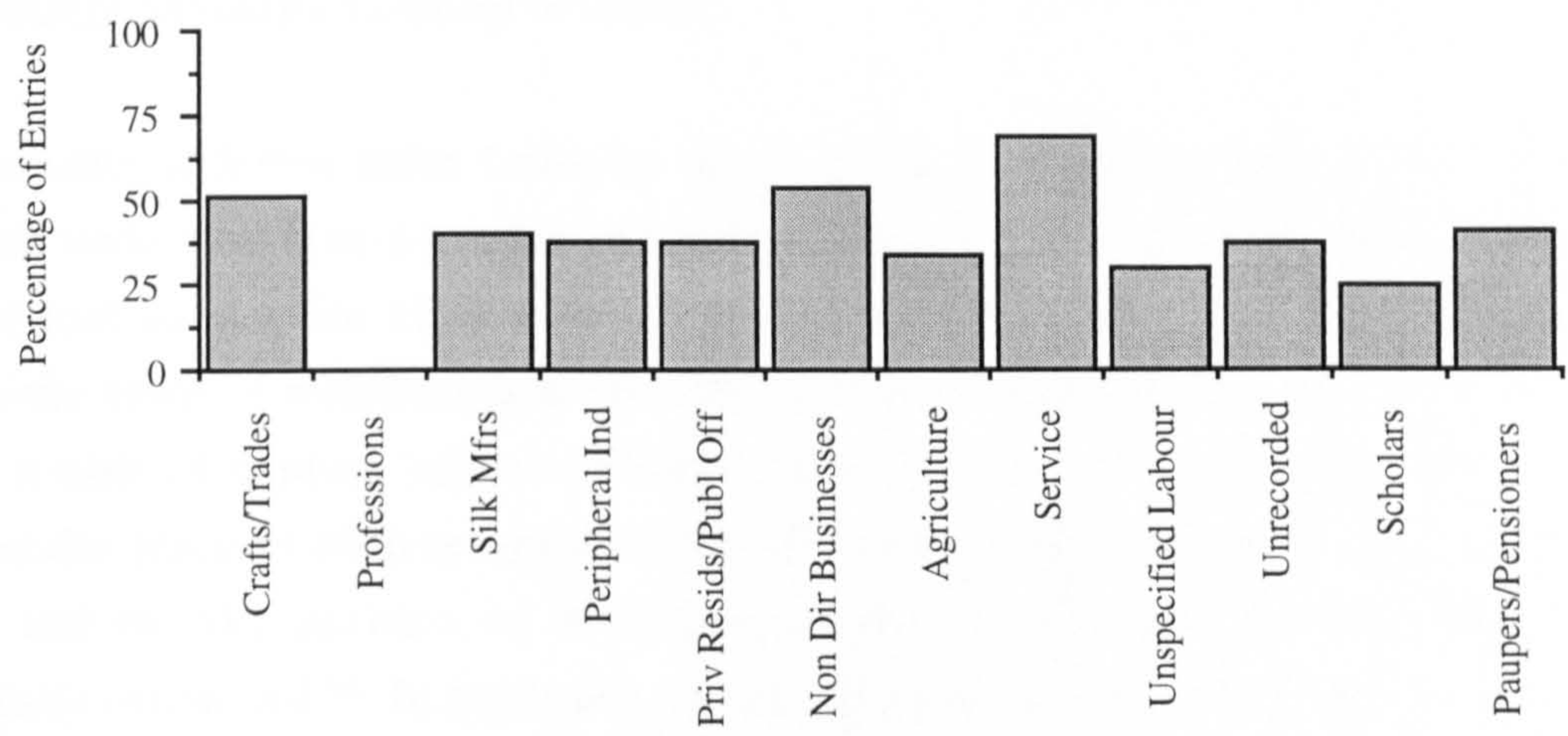
51 Lown, *Women and industrialisation*, 49.

52. The examples from which will be used most frequently since all but one class had a statistically valid number of entries in it.



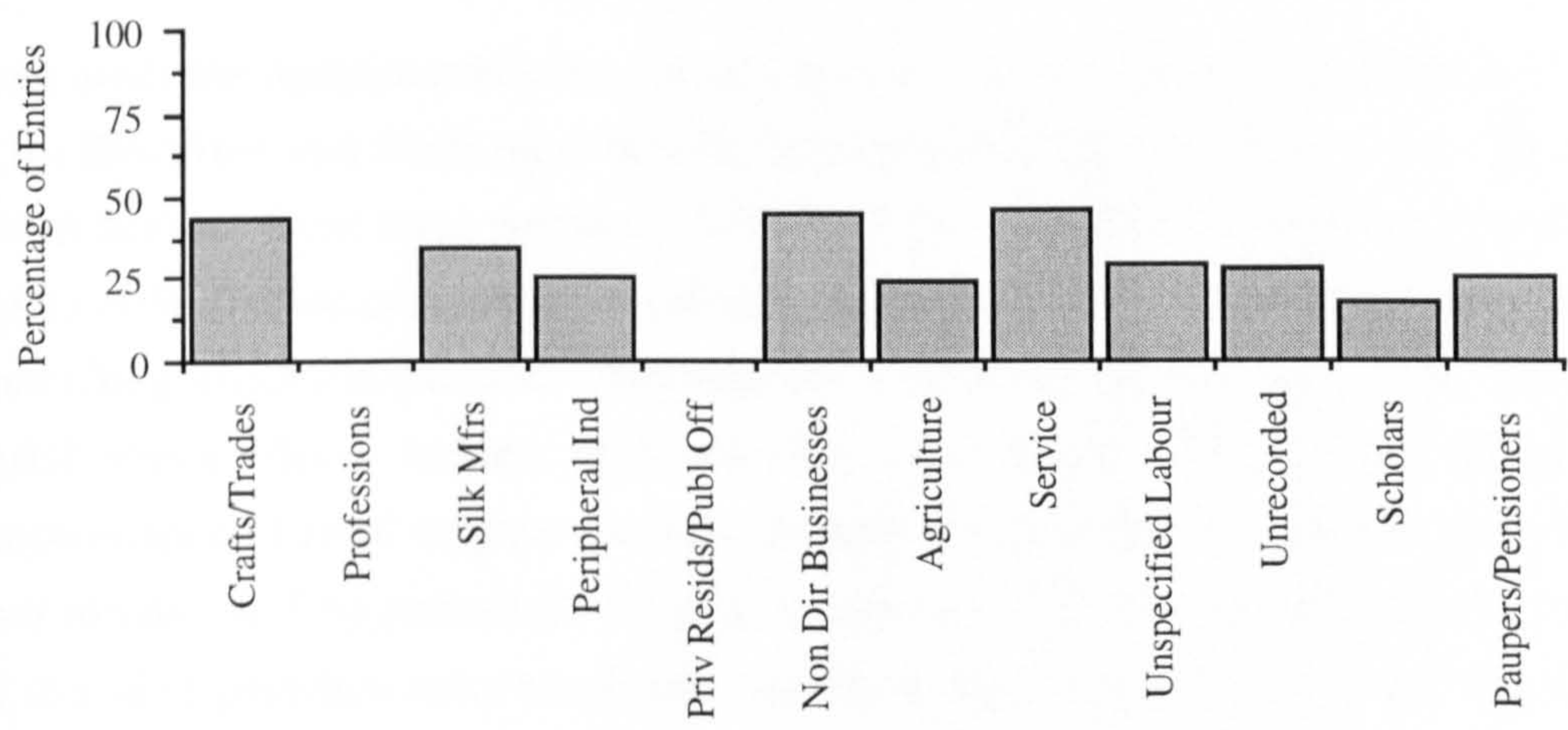
Composition of occupational classes by place of birth (expressed as a percentage of those born outside the town)

Figure 5.13 Braintree and Bocking



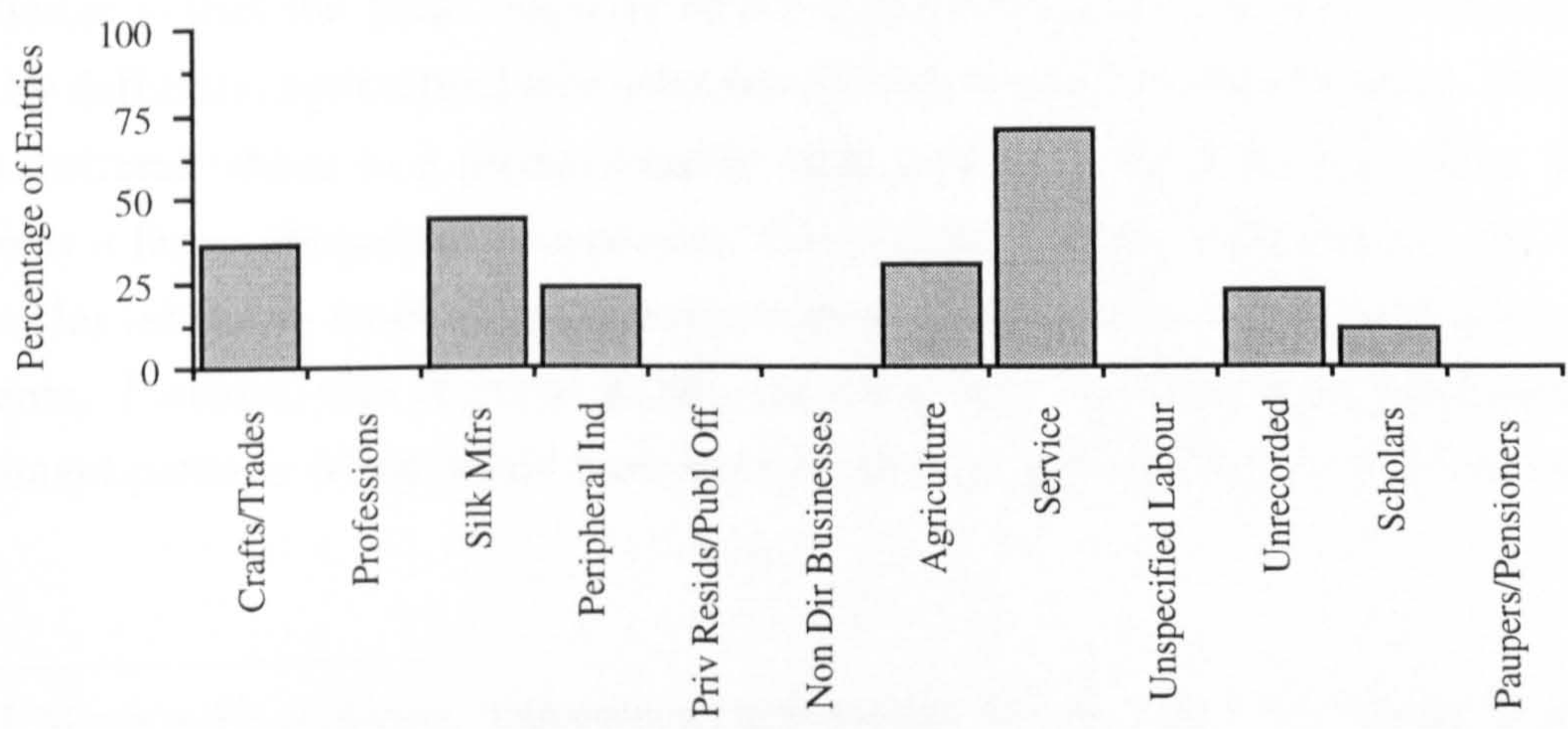
Source: ERO HO 107/1785

Figure 5.14 Halstead



Source: ERO HO 107/1784

Figure 5.15 Coggeshall



Source: ERO HO 107/1783



overcoming any latent inertia.<sup>53</sup> This accepted, the results suggest that crafts and trades and private residents and public officials were the most dynamic of the occupational classes. By comparison, agriculture and silk emerge as the least dynamic with memberships primarily made up of locals.

These results underpin those from the age and gender analyses in suggesting that the craft and trade class was a greater generator of income and wealth than silk. However, the fact that the service class returned the very highest proportion of members born outside the town of residence and non-trade directory enterprises recorded the second, strikes a note of caution when evaluating these findings. This suggests the need to examine the place of birth results for each of the major occupational classes in greater detail, and to take account of the character of the settlements from which these individuals originated.<sup>54</sup> In particular, to consider whether the place of birth was a rural settlement or a town. In the latter employment opportunities were likely to have been greater so that to overcome these required greater pulling power; that is higher wages and better employment opportunities on the part of the receiving centres.

Beginning with the agricultural class, what becomes apparent from examination of the records for Braintree and Bocking is that the great majority of those born within 20 miles of the town derived from rural parishes. In fact, of the 35 individuals which qualified in this respect only five originated from urban settlements - three from Halstead, and one each from Coggeshall and Maldon. Amongst the rest no obvious concentration from one rural parish was evident. Indeed, no fewer than 14 different villages were mentioned. The predominance of rural origins was also evident amongst the agricultural class in the other two towns. In Coggeshall all 12 places mentioned were villages and in Halstead eight of the nine parishes were rural, the one exception being Coggeshall from which only one entry derived.

In explaining the local, rural nature of migrants in the agricultural class the first thing to acknowledge is that the great majority of this class comprised agricultural labourers. Almost by definition agricultural labourers would have derived from rural areas. Beyond this, agricultural labour in a predominantly rural area, like that surrounding the three towns, was a fairly ubiquitous occupation. Consequently, there would have been little incentive for labourers from more distant parishes to migrate to those of the case study settlements. Farmers, also featured in this class, but they may well have conformed to the dominant pattern. Most would have been local in origin because, in most instances,

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53. R.J. Morris and R.G. Rodger, 'Introduction', in idem (eds), *The Victorian City: A Reader in British Urban History 1820-1914* (London, 1993), 4.

54. Many existing studies of migration fail to take account of the nature of the originating settlement. See, for example, Royle, 'Aspects of the social geography', 50-62.



farms would have been passed down from previous generations, with expansion through the acquisition of nearby acres.

Turning to the peripheral industries class, the great majority of those born outside Braintree and Bocking, numbering 14 and representing 39 percent of all entries, came from the surrounding rural parishes. With the exception of Bishops Stortford and Hadleigh, which were responsible for one each, the rest derived from five villages, of these three were born in Stisted and two in Great Tey. These findings are not that dissimilar to those for agriculture and, similarly, highlight the local, rural nature of the labour market. It can be suggested that, within these communities, there would have been little employment open to females. The local town, therefore, offered better opportunities.<sup>55</sup>

Worth highlighting amongst this class, however, were the lace entries of Coggeshall. Examination of place of birth amongst these conforms to the predominantly local/rural origins of the non-town born members in this class. Out of 59 lace workers identified in the sample for Coggeshall, only 9.15 percent derived from outside the town. Of these only two were born beyond the 20 miles. The rest came from nearby villages including Great Tey, Kelvedon, Earls Colne, Feering and White Colne.

A similar profile emerges for those from class 6, non-trade directory concerns. Of the 25 to be born outside Braintree and Bocking - representing a slight majority of all in this small class - 19 came from surrounding villages. Of these four derived from the village of Rayne.

As observed above, the place of birth results for those in the service class - which suggest this to have been the most dynamic class - appear to conflict with the earlier assessments based upon age and gender. It is possible, however, that the attachment of the great majority in this class to affluent households may offer an explanation for this. If this interpretation were true domestic servants would be expected to derive from the same parishes as their employers. Evidence from Braintree and Bocking suggests this was not the case. Over 87 percent of domestic servants were born in different places to their heads of household, and in virtually all the 12.8 percent of matching cases the place of birth was Braintree and Bocking. It appears, therefore, that domestic servants born outside the town migrated there in search of employment. Consideration of the nature of the place of origin reveals that most born within 20 miles of Braintree and Bocking, numbering 44, derived from the surrounding parishes. No less than 32 different places were given and all, with the exception of Coggeshall and Halstead, were villages. This suggests that the attractions of domestic service were fairly general amongst nearby rural

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55. This was a situation likely to have been replicated amongst the other towns of the district and does not constitute a feature distinct to those of the case study.



settlements and, conversely, that in general local employment opportunities for young females were few in such places.

The findings for silk workers are quite distinct from the other classes so far considered. Amongst those originating from outside the town, but within 20 miles, totalling 74, most came from neighbouring silk towns. Of the 74 workers born within 20 miles of Braintree and Bocking, 23 percent derived from Sudbury, over 25 percent came from Coggeshall and over nine percent from Halstead. Together, these three towns accounted for over 35 percent of Braintree and Bocking's silk workers born within 20 miles of the town. The rest came from the surrounding villages, including three from Gosfield, three from Stisted, four from Haverhill and two from Weathersfield. Interestingly, only two entries were born in Colchester, despite the presence of a number of silk establishments in the town. This would suggest that Colchester operated in a different local economy; one distinct from the cluster of small towns to its west. This is a feature reminiscent of the geographical organisation of the woollen cloth industry.<sup>56</sup> Amongst those born beyond 20 miles of Braintree and Bocking, a similar trend emerges. The silk centres of Coventry and Norwich, as well as London - Middlesex's Bethnal Green and Surrey's Camberwell - predominant.

The same trends were evident amongst those in the silk class of the other two towns. In Coggeshall, for example, of the 34 born within a 20 mile radius over 17 percent came from Sudbury and, between them, nearly 12 percent came from the two other case study towns. Again, Colchester does not appear as the birth place for any of the town's silk entries. Also, like Braintree and Bocking, those places listed for the few born beyond 20 miles tended to be silk centres themselves, including Bethnal Green.

In contrast to silk and agriculture, a large number of places were recorded for those of Braintree and Bocking's craft and trade class who were born within 20 miles of the town. In fact, 45 different settlements were given. Indeed, this number far exceeds that for service and suggests the wider pulling power this class was able to exert. Moreover, Braintree and Bocking's craft and trade class included individuals born in most of the urban centres within the 20 mile radius without, however, any one of these towns being responsible for more than four percent of the total. These places included Sudbury, Coggeshall and Halstead with three individuals each, Witham and Colchester with two and Bishops Stortford, Maldon, Saffron Walden and Chelmsford with one each. By comparison, four towns are covered in the silk class, two in service and three in agriculture. Turning to craft members born beyond 20 miles of Braintree and Bocking, a similar pattern of diversity emerges. The 35 individuals that made up this population derived from no less than 24 different places. Nine of these came from London, six from

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56. The wool trade of the case study towns appears to have operated quite independently from that of Colchester. See chapter 2.



five different Suffolk settlements including Bury and Ipswich and three from three Norfolk settlements.

To summarise, based upon the premise that the most important classes were able to attract the greatest proportion of migrants through offering higher wages and better employment opportunities, the results from analysis of place of birth appear broadly consistent with those of age and gender. Prominent here was the private resident/public official class along with crafts and trades. By contrast, the agriculture and silk classes depended more heavily upon the immediate locality for their labour.

However, in contrast to the previous qualitative measures, the service and non-trade directory classes also performed well; in both cases a majority of members derived from outside their towns of residence. This raised the need to consider the nature of the place of origin. In this more detailed investigation, both service and non-trade directory classes produced profiles similar to those for agriculture and peripheral industries, with the great majority of migrants coming from nearby rural settlements. These findings contrasted with those for both silk and crafts and trades. Both these classes returned many individuals from neighbouring urban centres. However, it was the latter whose migrants derived from the greatest number and variety of settlements, both urban and rural, which suggested a greater pulling power.

Closer examination of the findings from this more detailed case study for the two largest classes reveals a further distinguishing feature. In silk most migrants originated from either one of the two other case study towns or from Sudbury. In crafts and trades migrants derived from a greater range of towns, with no town emerging as the primary sending centre. This suggests differences in levels of occupational transferability. Silk workers derived from a narrow band of urban centres, which were themselves silk centres. In this respect, we see shades of a cluster of silk textile towns similar in range and content to that of woollen cloth.<sup>57</sup> By comparison, the greater range of towns recorded amongst crafts and trades migrants hints at a wider commercial urban network.

According to age, gender and now place of birth, it appears that, of the two main occupational classes, craft and trades were of greater importance to the economic prosperity and welfare of the case study towns. However, it is necessary to consider what are arguably the two most important measures of quality before this can be said with a high degree of confidence. As we shall see, the differences between the classes that these measures highlight were very pronounced.

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57. See chapters 2 and 3.



## Relation to Head

The premise that underlines examination of this measure is that the head of household would have constituted the main income earner, with the earnings of other occupied members of the household acting to supplement these. Indeed, it seems reasonable to assert that to become a head of household demanded a certain level of resources. Beyond this, it can be suggested that being head of household held a certain status, or position of responsibility. This was evident in administration of the census; it was the role of the head to complete the returns.

The first observation to be made is that heads of household represented a minority of all entries, between 20 and 22 percent. Yet, as figures 5.16, 5.17, and 5.18 show, the distribution of heads amongst the various occupational classes varied considerably, although the same trends appear in all three towns.

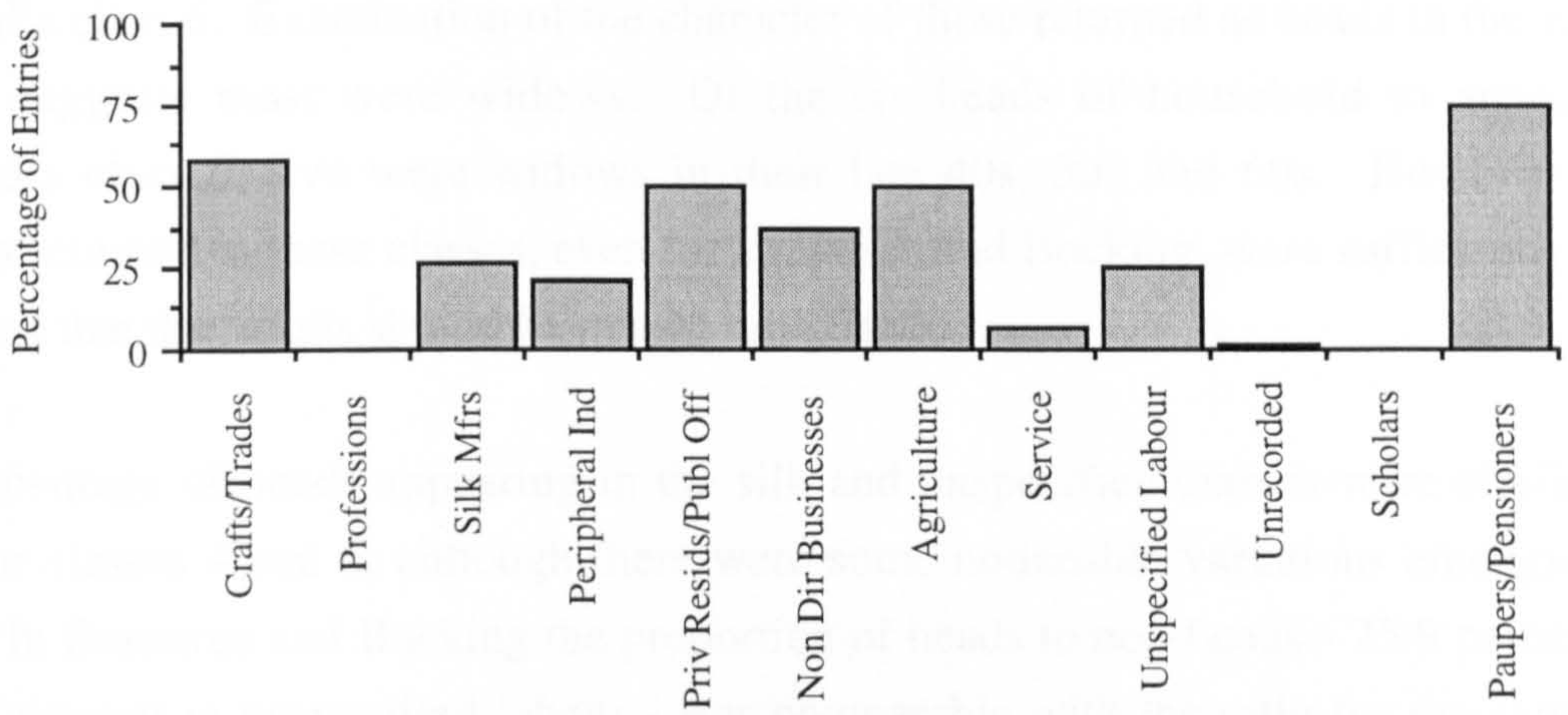
Almost by definition, no heads of household appeared amongst members of class 11 - scholars. Similarly, of those registering a score, the very lowest figures were returned for the unrecorded occupation class. In Braintree and Bocking a mere 1.8 percent were heads. This figure tallies with the 1.2 for Halstead and 2.4 percent for Coggeshall. Taking Braintree and Bocking, this 1.8 percent comprised 8 individuals. Of these, five were females, three of whom were widows and another was described as a lath-render's wife. If we add these findings to the age and gender analysis it would appear that the majority in this class were young, female dependants.

Of the occupied classes, service returned the lowest percentage of heads - 6.3 percent in Braintree and Bocking, 10.0 per cent in Halstead and 5.9 percent in Coggeshall. Most in this class were either domestic servants living-in, or daughters and sons resident in the parental home. The fact that some heads appeared was principally the consequence of this class including grooms. As the age and gender analysis revealed, these were males who were able to enter the occupation at a young age, but could remain in it into adulthood and married life.



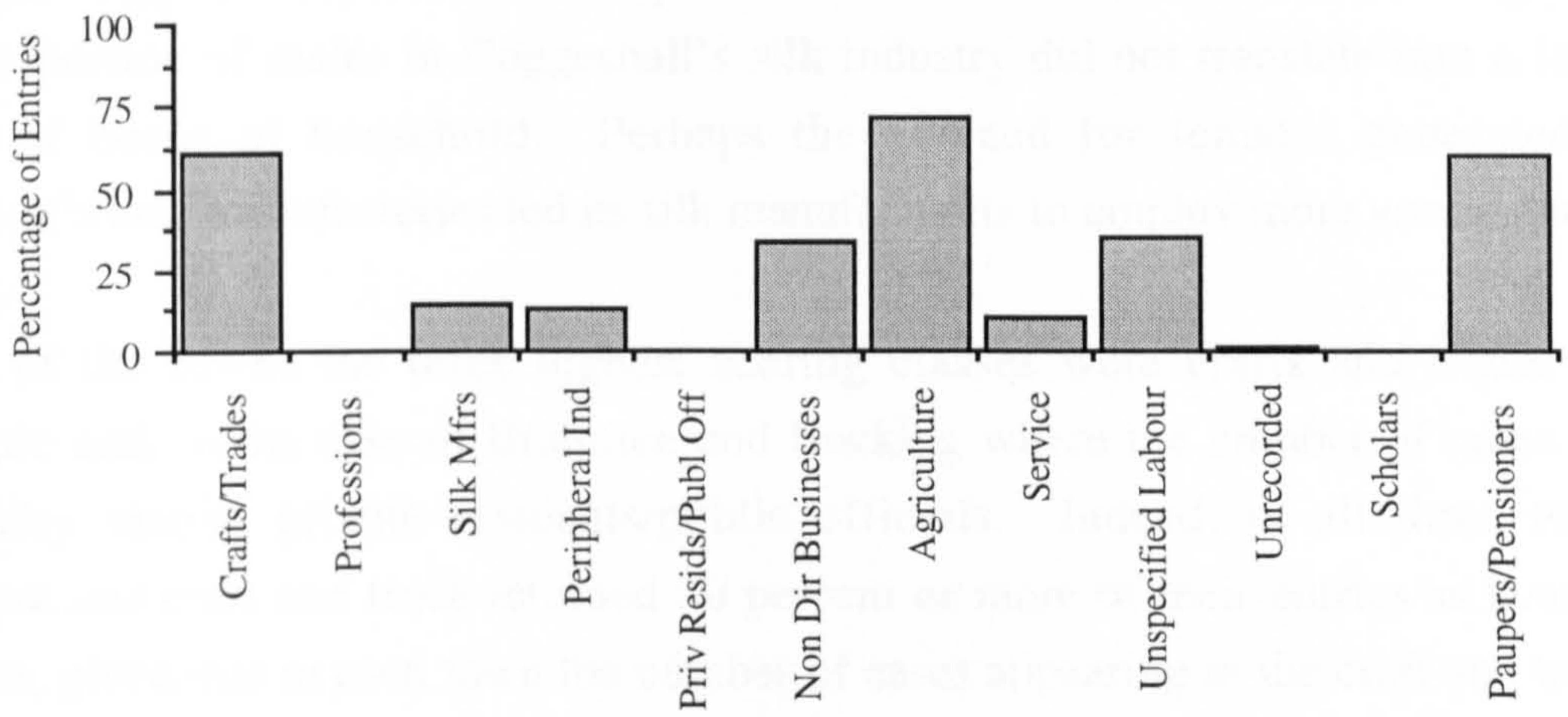
Composition of occupational classes by relation to head (expressed as a percentage of heads)

Figure 5.16 Braintree and Bocking



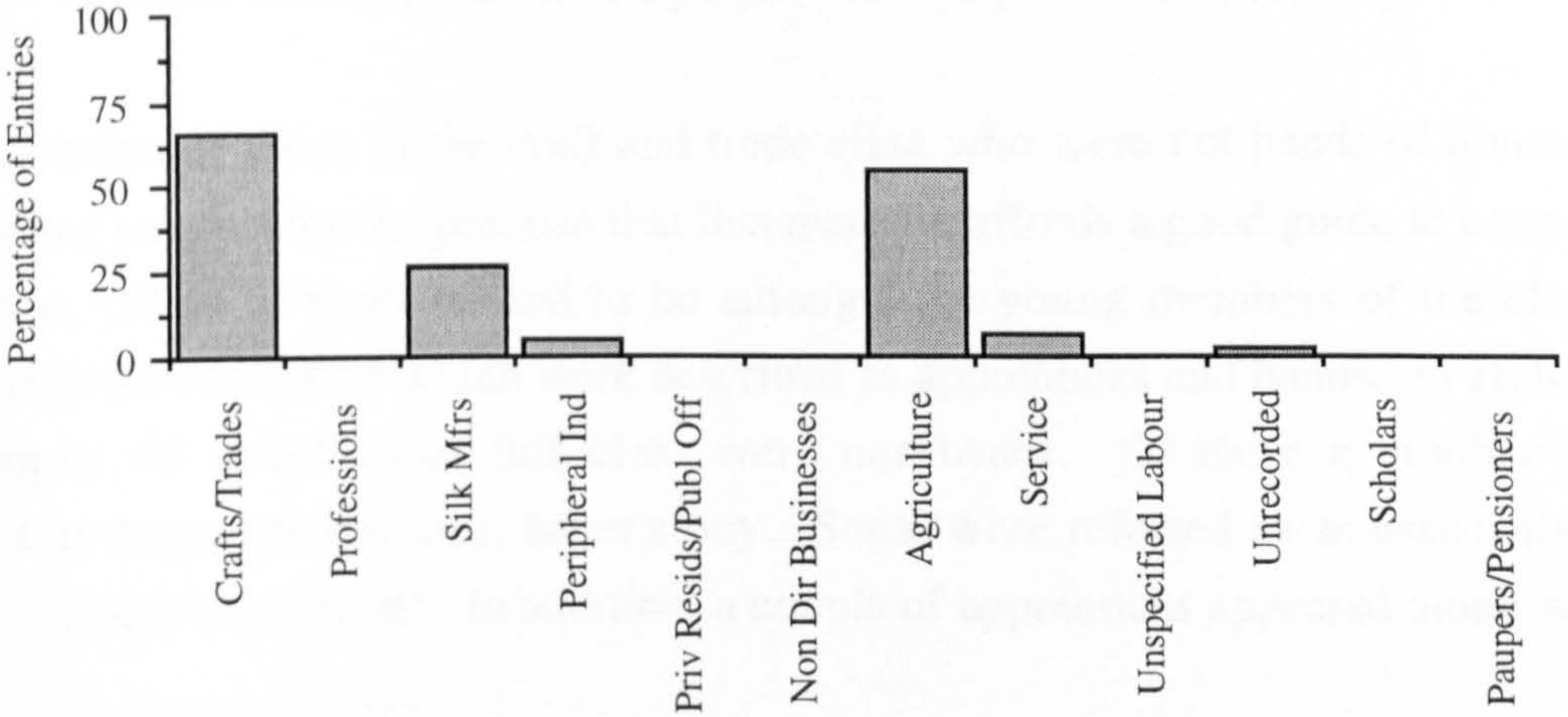
Source: ERO HO 107/1785

Figure 5.17 Halstead



Source: ERO HO 107/1784

Figure 5.18 Coggeshall



Source: ERO HO 107/1783



The next lowest set of scores were from the peripheral industries and non-trade directory classes. In Braintree and Bocking, the only town to possess a statistically significant number of entries in both, the percentage of heads in the peripheral class was 21.1, whilst in the non-trade directory class it was 37 percent. This compares to 33 percent for Halstead's class 6. Examination of the character of those returned as heads in these two classes suggests most were widows. Of the six heads of household to appear in Halstead's class 6, five were widows in their late 40s, 50s and 60s. However, the numbers returned in these classes, even for Braintree and Bocking, were sufficiently low to suggest that the results should be treated with caution.

The percentage of heads appearing in the silk and unspecified classes were similar to those for classes 4 and 6, although there were some noticeable variations amongst the towns. In Braintree and Bocking the proportion of heads to non-heads - 25.9 percent in silk, 25 percent in unspecified labour - was comparable with the ratio for the sampled population as a whole. In Halstead the percentage of heads that comprised the unspecified labouring class was slightly higher at 35.6, whilst for silk it was rather lower at 14.3. In Coggeshall, silk returned 26 percent of heads of household. Interestingly, the larger proportion of males in Coggeshall's silk industry did not translate into a larger number of heads of household. Perhaps the demand for females generated by Coggeshall's lace manufactories led its silk manufacturers to employ more young males.

In each of the towns the three highest scoring classes were crafts and trades and agriculture and, in the case of Braintree and Bocking where the number of cases was statistically viable, private residents/public officials. Indeed, in all three towns agriculture and craft and trade returned 50 percent or more of their entries as heads.<sup>58</sup> Moreover, given that in each town the number of cases appearing in the craft and trades class was substantially larger than in agriculture, this class was responsible for returning the highest percentage of all recorded heads. In fact, 37 percent of all Braintree and Bocking's heads of household were occupied in crafts and trades, with the corresponding figures for Halstead and Coggeshall being 33.5 and 42.2 percent respectively.

An examination of those in the craft and trade class who were not heads of household offers further support for the premise that this measure affords a good guide to economic importance. Most of these tended to be amongst the young members of the class, a considerable percentage of which were described as apprentices and hands. In Halstead, for example, 43 members of this class were non-heads. Of these a number were described as boys, for instance, baker's boy. Some were referred to as assistants, for example, 'grocer's assistant'. In addition, a couple of apprentices appeared along with a

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58. As with gender, this variable also portrays *crafts and trades* as a homogeneous class, comparable to that of agriculture, or conversely, with its very low proportion of recorded heads, to service, a finding which, again, underpins the decision to treat it as a single, coherent class.



porter merchant's servant. The rest were given a variety of craft and trade occupations, ranging from shoemaker and tanner to blacksmith and cabinet maker. However, consistent with the age analysis, not one of the 43 was described as a master.

In summary, out of the two major occupational classes the discussion is principally concerned with, crafts and trades returned a far larger proportion of heads of household than silk. Indeed, for all three towns this class was responsible for the largest proportion of all heads. Beyond this, the case of Coggeshall's silk industry affords evidence that consideration of heads of households offers a valuable indicator of economic importance. It was observed in the gender analysis that just over half the town's silk entries were males, a figure far higher than in the other two towns. Moreover, the majority of these individuals were above the age of 20, thereby also dismissing the idea that this gender differential may have been cancelled out by employment of boys. This raised the idea that Coggeshall's silk industry may have been a greater income generator. Consideration of relation to head, however, revealed that Coggeshall's industry did not produce a larger proportion of heads. Indeed, Coggeshall's figure of 26 percent is the same as that returned in Braintree and Bocking. Whilst it is 16 percent higher than Halstead's, this differential is far less than that for gender. This said, the fact that one of the other classes to return a high proportion of heads was agriculture suggests that as a guide to the comparative status and wealth of a class this measure has its limitations. With this in mind we turn to the final and most discerning of the five measures - household status.

### **Household Status**

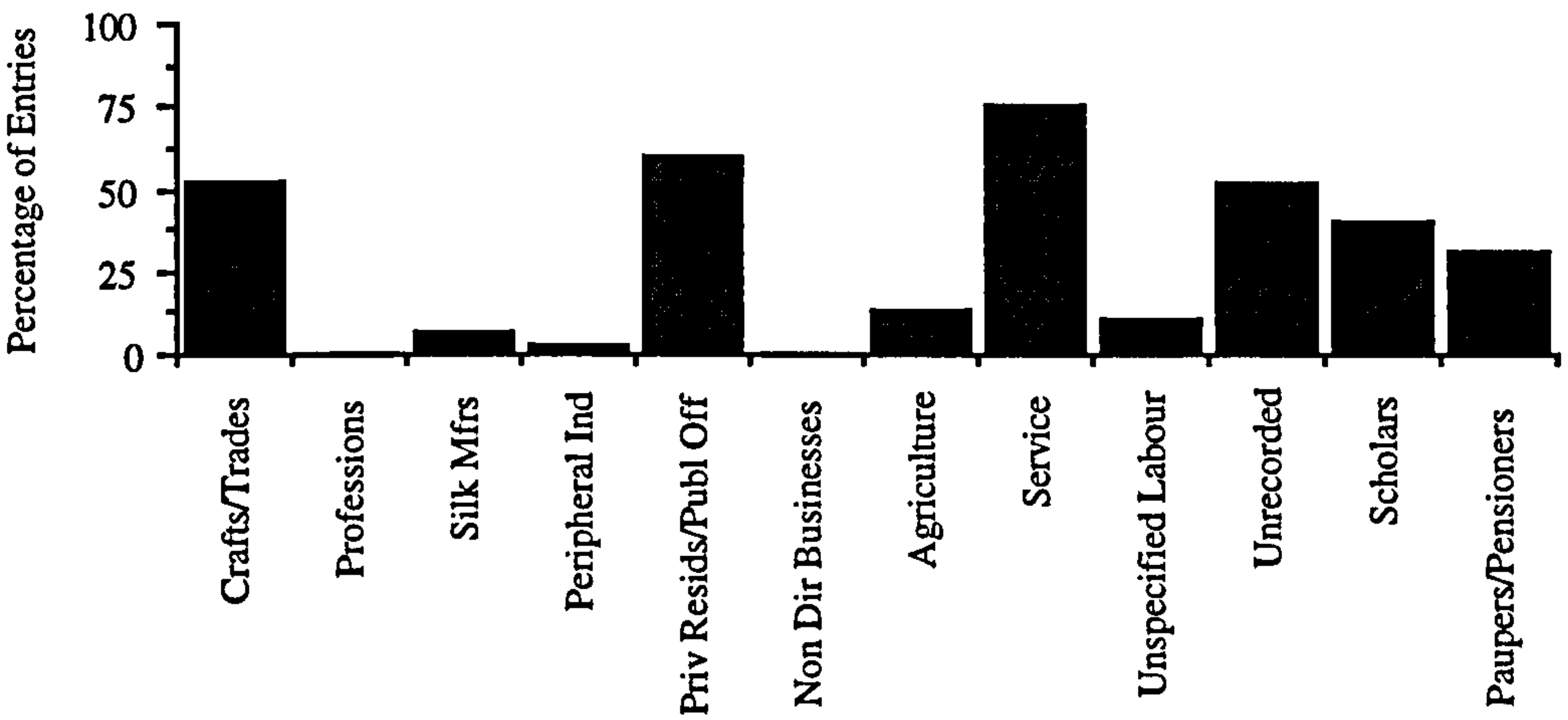
The premise used here is that the most important classes will be those with the largest proportion of entries residing in affluent households - as defined by the behavioural characteristics outlined earlier. Figures 5.19, 5.20 and 5.21 display the percentage of affluent household residents found in each class. As with heads, those identified as residing in affluent households comprised a minority of cases, amounting to around a third of the sampled population in each town. Similarly, the distribution of residents in this upper tier of households was very unevenly spread across the 12 occupational classes. At one extreme none appeared, at the other some 75 percent of entries consisted of residents from such households. In all three towns similar trends were evident.

Agriculture, silk and peripheral industries returned the lowest proportion of entries from affluent or upper level households. Amongst these, however, some variations occurred. In all three towns silk failed to breach the 10 percent mark. Similarly, only in Halstead did peripheral industries acquire double figures. By small contrast, 12.9 percent of those with agricultural occupations in Braintree and Bocking, and 21.5 percent in Halstead, derived from affluent households. Two explanations may account for this. First, in all three towns a small number in this class would have consisted of more wealthy farmers.



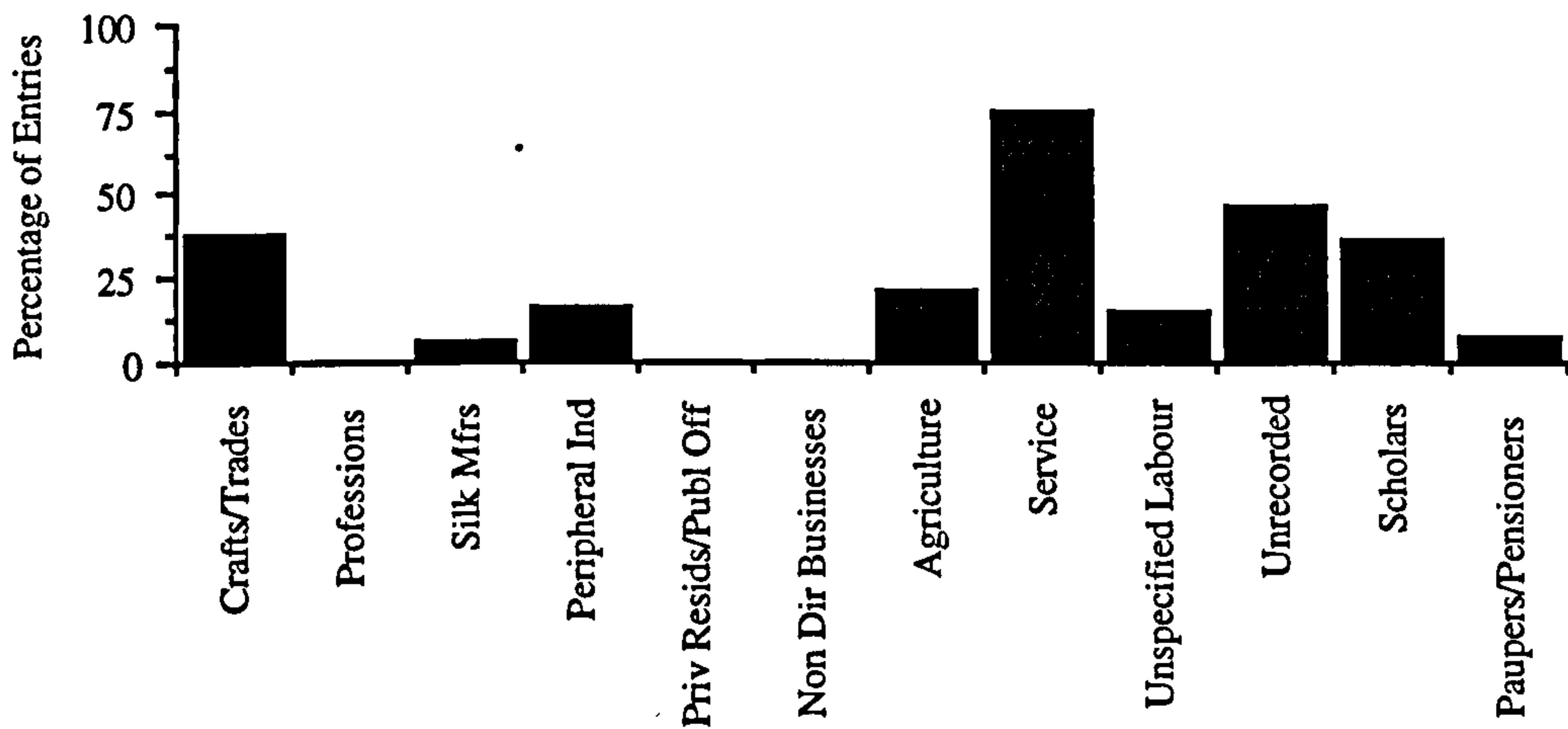
Composition of occupational classes by household status (expressed as a percentage of affluent households)

Figure 5.19 Braintree and Bocking



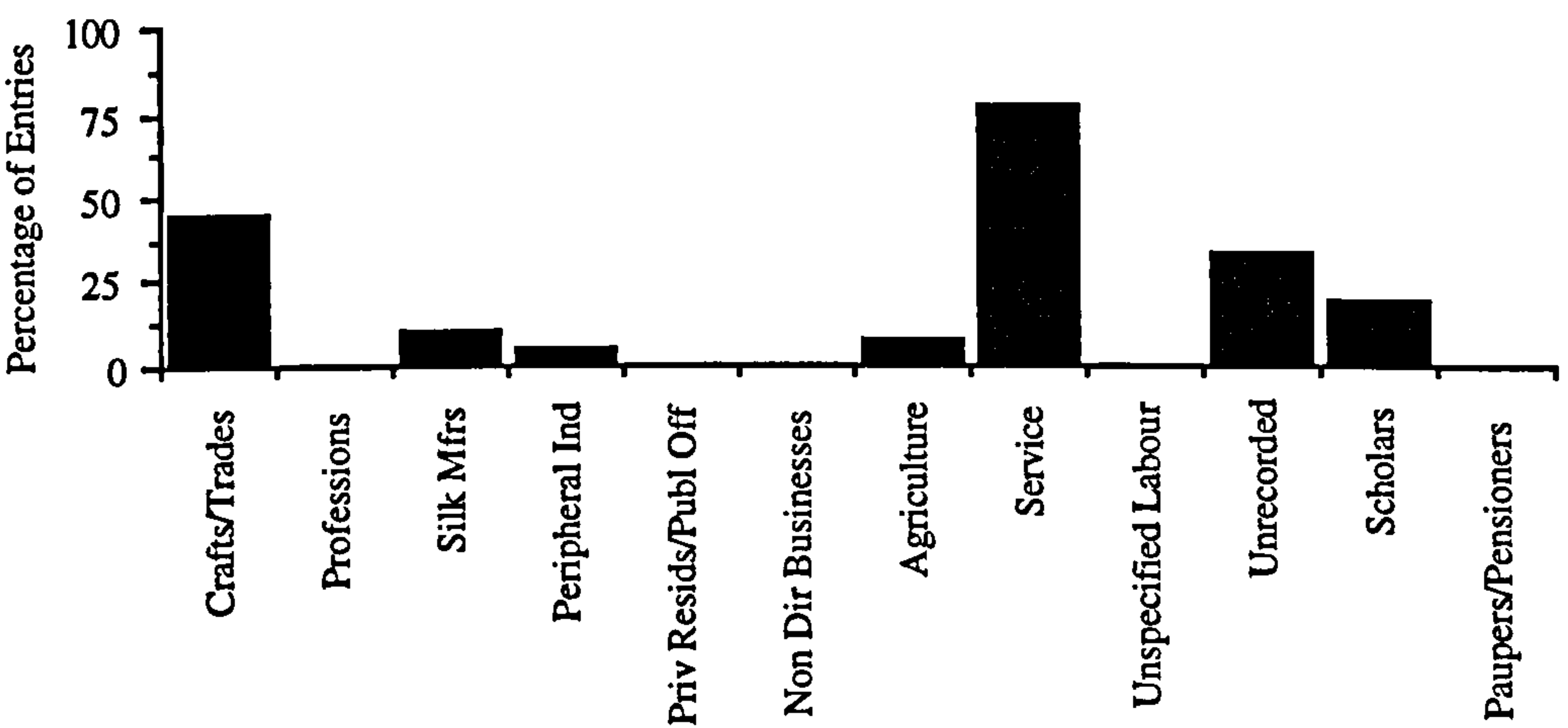
Source: ERO HO 107/1785

Figure 5.20 Halstead



Source: ERO HO 107/1784

Figure 5.21 Coggeshall



Source: ERO HO 107/1783



These households displayed middle-class behaviour in terms of the employment of servants and/or non-employment of family members. A second reason may relate to the tendency to under-record the occupations of agricultural labourer's wives and children and, consequently, reflect a source-based deficiency. The case of Coggeshall, however, suggests the situation was slightly more complex than this. It may have been influenced by the nature of employment undertaken by the wives and children of agricultural labourers. The lower percentage figure returned by the agricultural class in this town may reflect the better recording of lace and tambour employment than straw plaiting in Braintree and Bocking and Halstead. In Coggeshall over a third of lace and tambour workers were the wives and children - primarily daughters - of agricultural labourers.<sup>59</sup>

The limitations of using this measure alone are highlighted in the peculiarities of the service, unrecorded and scholar classes. The high rating each of these received can be explained in terms of definition. Wealthy households were identified by either the employment of servants or the non-employment of wives and children. In the results for each town, the reason why the service category does not produce a 100 percent figure for residents in affluent households is due to the existence of grooms and coachmen residing in their own households. Similarly, over half the scholars recorded in each town were in households in which either their mothers or older siblings were occupied. The same explanation also accounts for the considerable minority of those with no recorded occupation residing in less affluent households.

Amongst the commercial classes, it was the private residents/public official class of Braintree and Bocking, the only town where their number was sufficient to draw some statistical meaning, that returned the highest percentage of residents from affluent households, numbering 19, or 59.4 percent, of the entries in this class. Of these 10, or 52.6 percent, qualified because they were family members in households employing domestic servants. Most of the rest did so because the head of household was the sole income earner. However, since even in Braintree and Bocking the number in this class totalled only 32, its contribution to the overall proportion of wealthy households was small, at 3.3 percent.

The other class to possess the highest percentage of residents in affluent households has very considerable implications for our assessment of economic importance since, in each town, it was the craft and trade class. In Halstead 37.6 percent of this class derived from affluent households, in Coggeshall the figure was 44.7 percent and in Braintree and Bocking it was over 52 percent. In terms of this class's share of all residents of affluent households, the figure for Halstead was 12.9 percent, for Coggeshall 22.2 and for Braintree and Bocking 19.9 percent.

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59. This accords with Spenceley's study of the south-east Midlands. Spenceley, 'The English pillow lace industry', 68-87.



Consideration of those craft and trade entries from Braintree and Bocking not appearing amongst affluent households does much to verify this measure as a guide to economic importance. Over one third (33.9 percent) were described as journeymen, just under 10 percent were jobbers or labourers and over seven percent were paupers or pensioners. However, the fact that five masters were also identified - amounting to 7.5 percent - suggests that, even amongst the commercial classes, this measure has its limitations. This seems particularly so in one case where the master, a carpenter, was recorded in the census as an employer, although only of one man. However, it is still feasible that these individuals were amongst the poorer members of the 'profession'. Being a master was no certain guarantee of wealth and status.

In summary, in all three towns a far larger proportion of residents of affluent households were found in the craft and trade class than silk. Indeed, along with agriculture and peripheral industries, silk returned the lowest proportion of entries from affluent households. Support that this measure offers a good guide to the comparative wealth and status of an occupational class was evidenced in a consideration of those in the craft and trade class that did not reside in affluent households. In Braintree and Bocking the majority were associated with positions of lower status and remuneration, such as journeymen, jobbers and labourers. Very few were returned as masters. This said, the high ratings amongst the service class, along with those for the unrecorded and scholars, draws attention to the limitations of a method of classification based upon appearance in an affluent household and not the generation of one. It is in correcting this anomaly that the penultimate part of the chapter will be concerned.

### **Heads of Affluent Households**

Combining the results from the head of household survey with those of household status offers the best guide to the economic importance of each occupational class and, in particular, to a comparison of the craft and trade class with that of silk. This is because heads of affluent households are the ones being identified, in other words, those responsible for creating these households rather than merely appearing in them. In identifying the generators of these households it can be argued that this measure also affords a gauge to the most 'dynamic' occupational classes.

What becomes evident from applying this composite measure is the pre-eminence of the trade and craft class. In Braintree and Bocking the number of heads of affluent household in this class was 74. This was out of a total of 128 affluent households. Expressed as a percentage, this meant that 57.8 of all those heading affluent households in Braintree and Bocking were occupied in crafts and trades. The same was evident in the other two towns. In Coggeshall the figure was 28 out of 47, or 59.6 percent and in Halstead it was 43 out of 83, or 52 percent.



This contrasts with the silk class. In all three towns this class created less than 10 percent of affluent households. With reference to the comparatively high showing of adult males in Coggeshall's industry, the examination of household position reveals only a slight difference between Coggeshall and the other two towns in this regard. Despite returning a far larger number of adult male silk workers, Coggeshall's industry failed to convert this into the creation of more wealthy households. In Coggeshall 9.8 percent of affluent households were headed by silk workers. In both Braintree and Bocking and Halstead the figure was 6 percent.

### **Other Observations**

Household analysis also reveals that, despite being the two largest occupational classes, accounting between them for over 25 percent of the total sampled population in each town and over 50 percent of the occupied population, a very small number of households were found to contain family members occupied in both craft and silk classes. In Coggeshall only 9.9 percent of households, numbering 15 out of 151, possessed representatives from both classes. The corresponding figure for Halstead was 9.7 percent (30 out of 279 households) and for Braintree and Bocking 5.2 percent (18 out of 346). In fact, most households registering a silk worker consisted of only silk workers. In Braintree and Bocking the figure was 35.8 percent, in Halstead 19.8 percent and in Coggeshall 36.2 percent. Outside this class, the most common occupation found with a silk worker was that of agricultural or farm labourer. In Braintree and Bocking, out of the households in which silk appeared amongst family members 27.5 percent included agricultural labourers. For Halstead and Coggeshall it was just over 19 percent.

Interesting parallels can be drawn between the fact that few craft and trade workers were to be found in the same households as silk workers and observations made in chapters 3 and 4. In the former, few principal inhabitants were found combining occupations in wool with crafts and trades. In the latter, no businesses were identified involved in both silk and craft and trade activities. This behaviour amongst principal inhabitants and businesses was suggested to indicate that each operated in a distinct market. The above findings signify the same was true from a supply side perspective; that some households supplied the labour for activities associated with marketing and trade, whilst others did so for silk. The household analysis would, therefore, reinforce the impression of a dual economy based upon textile manufacture on the one hand and crafts and trade on the other.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter has shown that the mid Victorian census enumerators' returns are of greater value to the study of small town urban economies than is generally assumed. Beyond counting the numbers appearing in different occupational classes, consideration of other information contained in household schedules was shown to afford insights into the



composition of each class. The study identified five ways in which the composition of each class could be considered. The first of these was age, the second of gender, third, place of birth, fourth, relation to head and, fifth, household type. To this a sixth can also be added, combining the findings of the last two. Whilst knowledge of, for example, where most agricultural workers were born may, on its own be of interest, the study advanced the idea that it could also afford insight into the economic importance of the class - as a generator of income and wealth. In the case of place of birth, this would relate to the pulling power of each occupational class; the ability to attract labour from outside the town being examined by means of employment opportunities and earnings. In accordance, the class(s) with the largest proportion of non-locals would be judged the most important. Given the large number of cases in the study, the composition of each occupational classes was analysed using the computerised statistical package SPSS and the Kruskal-Wallis non-parallel test, as well as a cross-tabs calculation - the procedures and methodology for which have been outlined in the chapter.

Turning to the towns of the case study, consideration of the distribution of the occupied population revealed the crafts and trades class to be a large employer. This finding dismissed the trade directory critique that, in aggregate, the businesses involved in this sector occupied a small proportion of the working population. Indeed, between 23 and 29 percent of the occupied population in each town appeared in this class. However, the same analysis also revealed a very similar proportion to be employed in silk. In consequence, these two emerged as the largest occupational classes in each town. In order to establish which of these two classes was economically the more significant, consideration needed to be given to the make up of their working population. Whose constituents were likely to have commanded the greatest incomes and, consequently, generated the greatest demand and contributed most to urban finances, as well as exercised the highest social standing?

Analysis of the composition of each occupational class using the new methodology confirmed the hypothesis that the craft and trade sector was the more important generator of incomes and wealth. It was this class that occupied a larger proportion of males of prime working age and that returned a greater proportion of heads of household. Moreover, of all the classes crafts and trades returned the greatest number of affluent household members, whilst also attracting workers from the largest range of settlements, including the widest array of towns. Furthermore, examination of the composition of the crafts and trades class revealed the clearest evidence of dynamism. With perhaps the exception of the poorly represented private resident/public officials, membership in this class displayed the clearest signs of a career structure. Beyond this, in the most telling measure of dynamism - the ability to generate affluent households - it was this class that predominated. Indeed, in all three towns over 50 percent of affluent households were generated by members of the craft and trade class.



The prominence of this class in contributing to urban economic welfare was also demonstrated when the fortunes of the three towns were compared. In accordance with findings from the two previous chapters, a hierarchy emerged. When the composition of the populations of each town was assessed - without reference to occupations - Braintree and Bocking emerged as the most dynamic, with the highest proportion of heads of household, people born outside the town and affluent households. Halstead appeared slightly behind, with Coggeshall third. When consideration was taken of differences in occupational structure, Braintree and Bocking was found to possess the highest percentage of population in crafts and trades, with Halstead and Coggeshall some six to seven percent behind. The fact that silk and, more generally, the textiles sector was not the main generator of urban economic wealth amongst the three towns, was witnessed by Coggeshall returning the highest percentages in silk and peripheral industries.

Evidence that the occupations associated with marketing and thoroughfare functions were economically the most important and dynamic raises the question of influence. Did the dominance and dynamism of the marketing and trade sector influence the behaviour of manufacturing? Can it account for the comparatively restrained way in which wool and later the silk industry developed in the case study towns? It is in explaining this association that we now turn to chapter 6, which comprises the final part of the investigation.



# Part III



## CHAPTER 6

### THE NORTH ESSEX URBAN ECONOMIES AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF SILK MANUFACTORIES

#### Introduction

Chapter 2 argued that much early modern woollen cloth manufacturing was centred on groups, or clusters, of small towns. These were to be found in many of the principal manufacturing regions of pre-modern England. Often they were amongst the largest settlements in their respective districts and counties. In our case study the cloth towns constituted part of the most 'urbanised' area of Essex. However, by the late 18th and early 19th centuries differences were emerging in the demographic performances of cloth towns in various districts. Whilst those in the West Riding began to expand rapidly, others, notably in Essex, Suffolk, Dorset and, slightly later on, in the South West, grew at far more subdued rates. This divergence of urban fortunes has been explained by the processes of industrialisation for those towns undergoing rapid demographic growth, and de-industrialisation for those experiencing little growth, and sometimes absolute decline.<sup>1</sup> The former has received considerably more attention than the latter. This de-industrialisation has been explained by Jones, and more recently by Collins, in terms of the South's comparative advantage in agriculture.<sup>2</sup>

However, the previous chapters have argued that in the case study of north Essex no wholesale industrial failure occurred; there was not even industrial stagnation. Instead, woollen textiles were superseded by the manufacture of silk. An alternative explanation for the subdued demographic growth of north Essex's cloth towns must therefore be sought. To this end the urban economies of the case study towns were found to have been oriented to marketing and trade. These functions were responsible for the largest number of principal inhabitants, the greatest amount of business generation, and the highest proportion of affluent households. By contrast, manufacturing - woollen cloth and subsequently silk - emerged as secondary in importance.

In comparison, amongst the expanding cloth towns of the West Riding of Yorkshire and those of the south-west Pennines, manufacturing emerged as the dominant activity, whilst their commercial and marketing sectors were found to be smaller than those of

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1. For example, Brown accounts for the 'retarded expansion' of towns in East Anglia, southern England and the West Country in terms of 'stagnating or declining textile manufacture'. R. Brown, *Society and Economy in Modern Britain 1700-1850* (London, 1991), 403.
  2. E.L. Jones, 'Agriculture and economic growth in England, 1660-1750: agricultural change', *Journal of Economic History*, 25 (1965), 1-18; idem, 'Agricultural origins of industry', *Past and Present*, 40 (1968), 58-71; idem, *Agriculture and the Industrial Revolution* (Oxford, 1974), 85-127; idem, 'Environment, agriculture, and industrialisation in Europe', *Agricultural History*, 51 (1977), 491-502; idem, 'De-industrialisation as economic adjustment: the case of south-west England', *Economics Discussion Papers*, 13 (1987); and E.J.T. Collins, 'Servicing and processing industries', in G.E. Mingay (ed.), *The Agrarian History of England and Wales 1750-1850* Vol. VI (Cambridge, 1989), 384-397. Section III offers a more detailed account and criticism of this explanation.



north Essex, both in relative and absolute terms. This prompted the suggestion that the case study towns were displaying degrees of specialisation in marketing and commerce and that, consequently, they could be more accurately described as 'marketing and thoroughfare centres'. Comparison between the three north Essex towns also revealed differences in their importance as marketing and trading centres. Braintree and Bocking emerged as the most dynamic, followed by Halstead and then Coggeshall. The comparative dynamism of the commercial sector in these towns was explained in similar terms to those adopted by the few other investigations conducted into urban development in southern England. Located along main roads all three were well connected with the large provincial centres, ports and rich farm lands of the Eastern Counties, as well as to London's huge metropolitan market less than 45 miles away.<sup>3</sup> The differentials between the three towns were explained in the same way. Whilst Braintree and Bocking was situated on a heavily used overland road that linked 'London to the more Eastern Counties', Coggeshall was the most removed from the main commercial arteries running north-south.

These findings raise the hypothesis that it was the character of the urban economic régimes of these north Essex small towns - geared to marketing and trade - that restrained the development and expansion of manufactories and, in consequence, kept rates of urban growth below those experienced in the north. In this scenario it is not industry that impacts on towns but towns that impact on industry. Whilst this ordering may contrast with many explanations of industrialisation and urban growth, the hypothesis is supported by both current research and chronological evidence. First, recent research suggests early modern manufactories adapted to - rather than transformed - existing societies.<sup>4</sup> Second, in the great majority of instances manufactories were established in existing urban settlements.<sup>5</sup> The regional dimension to industrial induced urban growth can be explained in this hypothesis by the variations in the extent to which manufactories had to adapt to different urban economies. The more developed and

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3. See M. Reed, 'Decline and recovery in a provincial urban network: Buckinghamshire towns 1350-1800', in idem (ed.), *English Towns in Decline, 1350-1800* (Leicester, 1986), unnumbered; P. Glennie, *Distinguishing Men's Trades: Occupational Sources and Debates for Pre-Census England* (1990), 66-95. For a consideration of the growth of London's regional economy in this period see C.H. Lee, 'Regional growth and structural change in Victorian Britain', *Economic History Review*, 34 (1981), 438-452. Lee discusses the development of a service-based regional economy centred on London and the home counties and distinct from those displaying a marked orientation to textile manufacture, to mining and metal working or to agriculture. See also C.H. Lee, *The British Economy Since 1700: A Macroeconomic Perspective* (Cambridge, 1986), 125-141.
  4. Hudson, for example, notes that 'research ... emphasises that the industrialisation of rural and semi-rural communities should not be seen solely as a destructive process: destroying old-established structures, institutions and patterns of economic and social life ... Rather, the durable culture of everyday life and the established structures of local society had some direct and immediate influences on the pace and nature of economic change'. P. Hudson, 'Beyond proto-industrialisation: recent research on the economic and social history of 18th century industrialising localities in England', (unpublished paper presented at the Economic History Society Annual Conference, Lancaster, 1996).
  5. P. Clark, 'Small towns in England 1550-1850: national and regional population trends', in idem (ed.), *Small Towns in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, 1995), 90; M. Berg, P. Hudson and M. Sonenscher (eds), *Manufacture in Town and Country before the Factory* (Cambridge, 1983), 26.



dynamic the existing sectors of the urban economy were the more restrained the manufactories may have been. In this respect, it can be argued that in the pre-modern age the urban sector of north Essex, and perhaps that of southern England more generally, was rather more developed than that in much of the north. A range of factors may account for this: a topography that made overland communication between settlements easier and thereby facilitated trade and commerce, a climate and geology more compatible with settlement and cultivation, as well as proximity to continental markets and, of course, to London.

The aim of this final chapter is to seek evidence which supports this hypothesis: to establish links between business behaviour and local economic conditions. The chapter will begin by advocating a qualitative approach to the study. This will be followed by detailed consideration of the policies pursued by the north Essex silk manufacturers. Links will then be established between these policies and the suppression of urban growth rates. Finally, the case will be made that this behaviour was influenced by the conditions the manufactories found in these towns.

### Sources and Approach

What has so far been presented on the structure and organisation of manufactories in the case study towns derives from town descriptions, late 18th century national and early 19th century commercial directories, along with the 1851 census enumerators' schedules. Consequently, we know little more about them than their names and trades, their number and duration, along with the numbers employed by some of them and the proportion of the urban population they employed as a class. The only insights into the policies they pursued have been inferred from this evidence. The picture these sources are able to create is too sketchy to establish links between behaviour and environment. A source is required that can offer greater detail into the organisation of these manufactories, along with the policies they pursued. These demands call for a qualitative approach and various sources have been considered.

One source used to examine the character of businesses, their organisation and development, are business diaries and papers.<sup>6</sup> However, few such records exist, or have survived for north Essex manufacturers.<sup>7</sup> Beyond this, there is the general problem with such documents that the authors often failed to offer explicit accounts of why they took particular business decisions. Their motives, therefore, remain open to interpretation. Newspapers have also been used, chiefly for the insight they offer into the kinds of

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6. See J. Hoppit, *Risk and Failure in English Business 1700-1800* (Cambridge, 1987), 1-17.

7. The exception here are the records of Courtaulds. See D.C. Coleman, *Courtaulds: An Economic and Social History*, Vol. I: *The Nineteenth Century, Silk and Crape* (Oxford, 1969); C. Adams, P. Bartley, J. Lown, and C. Loxton, *Under Control: Life in a Nineteenth Century Silk Factory* (Cambridge, 1983); and J. Lown, *Women and Industrialisation: Gender at Work in Nineteenth Century England* (Oxford, 1990).



products and services supplied by local businesses.<sup>8</sup> Sharpe, for example, uses both the *Colchester Gazette* and the *Essex Standard* to show the types of product sold by various Colchester shoe and boot manufacturers and tailors in the first half of the 19th century. Although no locally published newspapers appear in the case study towns before 1857, and the *Halstead Gazette*, advertisements relating to a range of local businesses feature amongst the pages of the *Chelmsford Chronicle*.<sup>9</sup> These include references to commercial services and products. On 24th January, 1823, for example, Bocking's drawing master, T. Parker, informed the public of his 'intention to give lessons in the towns and villages within ten miles of his residence'. They also include notices of the sale of property, from which some guide to the extent of commercial premises is possible. On 31st January, and again on 7th February, 1823, Thomas Walford advertised his freehold residence at Braintree, 'suitable for coachmakers, builders, and others', with buildings including a smith's shop and stables. Newspapers are, however, limited as a business source. Beside issues of source survival, and the fact that not all businesses would have chosen to publicise their products in local newspapers, little can be learnt about commercial behaviour and decision making processes from advertising columns.

However, a source does exist with the potential to offer considerable insight into the organisation and behaviour of a number of manufactories in the case study towns. These are Parliamentary Papers comprising House of Lords and House of Commons committee reports, as well as Royal Commissions. The historical value of these has long been recognised.<sup>10</sup> However, business historians have tended to overlook them in favour of diaries and records. Yet, amongst the subjects the Georgian and early Victorian Parliament took interest in was the state of the nation's manufactories. Examples of reports concerning the wool and silk trade are given below. Witnesses brought before these commissions and committees included manufacturers. The answers they furnished their inquisitors with offer insights into the organisation of their businesses, along with accounts of the policies they pursued and their motives and objectives; features of the late 18th and early 19th century business world that would otherwise remain largely undisclosed. To offer an example, in the minutes of evidence taken before the 1832 Commons Select Committee on the Silk Trade, Mr John Hall, a Coggeshall silk manufacture and throwster, was asked questions relating to the nature of his trade, the class and number of persons he employed and the condition of his labour force, as well

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8. P. Sharpe, 'De-industrialisation and re-industrialisation: women's employment and the changing character of Colchester, 1700-1850', *Urban History*, 21 (1994), 77-96; and idem, 'Cheapness and economy: manufacturing and retailing ready-made clothing in London and Essex 1830-1850', *Textile History*, 26 (1995), 203-13.

9. Following the *Halstead Gazette*, the *Braintree and Bocking Advertiser* commenced publication in 1859.

10. See, for example, D.C. Coleman, 'Growth and decay during the industrial revolution: the case of East Anglia', *Scandinavian Economic History Review*, 10 (1962), 115-127.



as the state of his business, the prices he charged, the profits he made, how these compared to manufacturers in other towns and his business plans for the future.<sup>11</sup>

Employing Parliamentary Papers as the principal source, however, imposes certain limitations. The bulk of evidence derives from the 1830s and 1840s and, therefore, relates to the manufacturers of silk in the case study towns rather than those of wool operating a generation earlier. One earlier and notable exception to this is a report of 1800 in which the bay manufacturer Josias Nottige junior, of Bocking, presented brief evidence.<sup>12</sup> There may be a number of reasons for this 'bias'. First, in part, it reflects the actual timing of the growth of Government interest in industry. The earliest reports date from the late 18th century. Also, however, the general absence of north Essex woollen manufacturers amongst witnesses in such reports may reflect the rapidly declining state of the district's wool trade during the later 18th century. By the time the Government began investigating, the industry in Essex was in an advanced state of decline. As directories suggest, it may still have been operating but the quantity of cloth produced, both in absolute and relative terms, meant that north Essex was no longer an important player in the national or international woollen textile trade.

This said, the period covered by the reports coincides with a crucial phase in the development of the silk industry in the case study towns. That is the period shortly after their initial establishment and one that encompasses their growth and subsequent fortunes.<sup>13</sup> The businesses from which most evidence was offered, and with which the

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11. 'In what business are you engaged? How long have you been in the silk trade? What description of silk do you throw, and where have you your mills? What are the class of persons you employ in your mills; are they grown up persons or children? What are the range of wages from the time they enter, until they are able to do full work? Have the goodness to say whether any of your hands receive parochial relief? Can you state what are the prices you pay no, and what are the prices paid at Coventry? Are the goods made in your looms as good as those at Coventry? Would you erect another mill at Coggeshall? Report from the Select Committee on the Present State of the Silk Trade: Parliamentary Papers 1831-32, (678.) XIX, 372-384.
  12. Minutes of Evidence Relating to the Woollen Manufactory: Parliamentary Papers, 1799-1800. 11.65. Lords Papers. 1020, 38.
  13. The reports Essex silk manufacturers presented evidence in were:
    - \* Wages of Persons Employed in the Manufacture of Silk, and of Silk Mixed with other Materials. Lords Committee. Minutes of Evidence: Parliamentary Papers 1823 (HL. 86) CLVI.
    - \* Report from the Select Committee on the Present State of the Silk Trade: Parliamentary Papers 1831-32 (678.) XIX.
    - \* Report from the Select Committee to whom the Bill to Regulate the Labour of Children in Mills and Factories of the United Kingdom was referred: Parliamentary Papers 1831-32 (706.) XV.1.
    - \* Supplementary Reports from Commissioners Appointed to Collect Information in the Manufacturing Districts, Relative to Employment of Children in Factories: Parliamentary Papers 1834 (2530) XX.1.
    - \* Supplementary Reports of Commissioners Appointed to Collect Information in the Manufacturing Districts, Relative to Employment of Children in Factories: with Minutes of Evidence and Reports of District Commissioners: Parliamentary Papers 1834 (167) XIX.
    - \* Return of Mills and Factories specifying the Number of Persons Employed in Cotton, Woollen, Worsted, Flax, and Silk Factories of the United Kingdom: Parliamentary Papers 1839 (41) XLII. 1.
    - \* Handloom Weavers: Assistant Commissioners' Reports: Parliamentary Papers 1840 (43. 1.) XXIII 49.367.
    - \* Second Report of the Commissioners for Inquiring into the Employment and Condition of Children in Trades and Manufactures: Parliamentary Papers 1843 (430) XIII. 307.



study will be principally concerned, are those of John Hall and John Beckwith for Coggeshall and the Courtaulds for Halstead and Braintree and Bocking. However, others are mentioned, principally by witnesses commissioned to collect evidence, such as Dr James Mitchell, and will also be referred to.<sup>14</sup>

Weighted against their coverage of only silk manufacturers is the advantage that a number of other reports exist which afford insights into general economic conditions within these towns for the same period.<sup>15</sup> The Poor Law Report of 1834, for example, furnishes useful evidence on female and child employment opportunities, details of poor-rate levels, as well as observations on the state of local trade, average weekly wages of agricultural labourers, their regularity of employment and moral character.<sup>16</sup> As will be shown, such evidence can be of great value in determining the extent and nature of links between the small town economic environment and manufacturing business behaviour.

## I

It will be argued here that, unlike their northern counterparts, the silk manufacturers of Essex did not pursue a wage policy that would attract the labour needed for the sustained expansion of production in a single town. In order to expand, industry required labour. Once indigenous urban reserves had been tapped other sources of labour had to be harnessed. It is at this point differences between the policies pursued by the Essex silk manufacturers and those in other industrialising towns emerge. In most instances the response of manufacturers was to use wage rates. Wages were raised to levels that would attract labour from surrounding villages and smaller towns.<sup>17</sup> To achieve this not only did the wages on offer have to be higher than those earned on the land, they also had to be sufficient to overcome 'the fact that cities were more expensive,

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14. Handloom Weavers Reports: P.P. 1840 (43. 1.) XXIII, 285-292.

15. These included:

\* Report from Commissioners for Inquiring into the Administration and Practical Operation of the Poor Laws. Appendix (A.). Part 1: Assistant Commissioners' Reports: Parliamentary Papers 1834 (44) XXVIII.

\* Report from Commissioners on the Administration and Practical Operation of the Poor Laws. Appendix (B.1). Part 1: Answers to Rural Queries: Parliamentary Papers 1834, XXX.

\* Reports and Memorandum to the Poor Law Board on Settlement and Poor Removal: Parliamentary Papers 1850 (1152), XXVI. In addition, use is also made of the published census enumerations for 1801, 1811, 1821 and 1831.

16. Amongst the questions asked were: 'Have you any and what employment for women and children? 'What can women and children under 16 earn per week, in summer, in winter, and harvest, and how employed? What are the 'weekly wages [of agricultural labourers], with or without beer or cyder, in summer and in winter?' Report on the Administration of the Poor Laws. Appendix (B.1). Part 1: Answers to Rural Queries: Parliamentary Papers 1834, XXX., 162a-172a.

17. During the early 19th century most of the demand for labour generated by industrial expansion was met through the process of immigration from the countryside and smaller urban settlements. See R.J. Morris and R.G. Rodger 'An introduction to British urban history 1820-1914', in idem (eds), *The Victorian City: A Reader in British Urban History 1820-1914*, (London, 1993), 3 and 4; J. Williamson, 'Coping with city growth', in R.C. Floud and D. McCloskey, *The Economic History of Britain Since 1700*, Vol. I: 1700-1860 (Cambridge, 1994), 338.



environmentally unattractive and that poor relief was used to augment workers incomes in the countryside during slack seasons'.<sup>18</sup>

By contrast, evidence from Parliamentary Papers suggests that this was not a policy pursued by the Essex silk manufacturers. Indeed, the insights offered by this source do much to reinforce, and develop, the interpretations made in chapter 5. Here those returning silk occupations were judged to represent a comparatively poor section of the urban population. First, the evidence presented to the committees and commissions revealed wages in the Essex silk industry to have been lower than those received in London. Commenting on the situation amongst the Essex silk weavers, the Handloom Weavers Commission recorded that,

'During the existence of the Spitalfields Act, ... the price paid to the weavers was two-thirds the price paid in Spitalfields. Since the repeal of the Spitalfields Act there has not been any fixed rule in these towns, but it is uniformly found on inquiry that the price is greatly below that of Spitalfields.'<sup>19</sup>

Beyond this, wage rates offered in the Essex silk industry were low by provincial standards. John Hall, for example, noted that he paid rates at two-thirds of those awarded in Coventry. 'Are you at all acquainted with the manner in which the same kind of work is got up at Coventry? - I pay two-thirds of the Coventry prices.'<sup>20</sup>

Some idea of the actual range of wages paid in Essex can be gained from figures supplied in Dr Mitchell's Report of 1833. These are illustrated in figure 6.1. They relate to average wages by age for females and males working in the silk factories of Essex, Suffolk and Norfolk.<sup>21</sup>

Female silk workers reached their maximum earning potential very early whilst still in their teens. This is an observation which appears consistent with the comments made by a Colchester silk manufacturer, 'For one process in the [silk] mill, girls of from nine to fourteen are preferred; and for another process, girls of from 14 to 19. Some remain in the factory after that age, but they do not become more useful, they do not receive any rise of wages.'<sup>22</sup>

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18. Even when these features are taken into account, Williamson calculates that urban wages were in the region of 33 percent higher. Despite this, however, the author suggests that the rates of industrial expansion enjoyed in the 19th century may have been restrained by an inability to attract sufficient quantities of labour. Williamson, 'Coping with city growth', 338

19. Handloom Weavers Reports: P.P. 1840 (43. 1.) XXIII, 285. See also *The Spitalfields Acts: Seven Pamphlets, 1818-1828* (New York, 1971).

20. Silk Trade: P.P. 1831-32 (678.) XIX, 377. Similarly, commenting on the wages paid to females working for Courtaulds in the middle of the century, Lown observed that they 'compared unfavourably with those of their counterparts in other branches of the textile industry in the north of England'. J. Lown, *Women and Industrialisation: Gender at Work in Nineteenth Century England* (Oxford, 1990), 47-48.

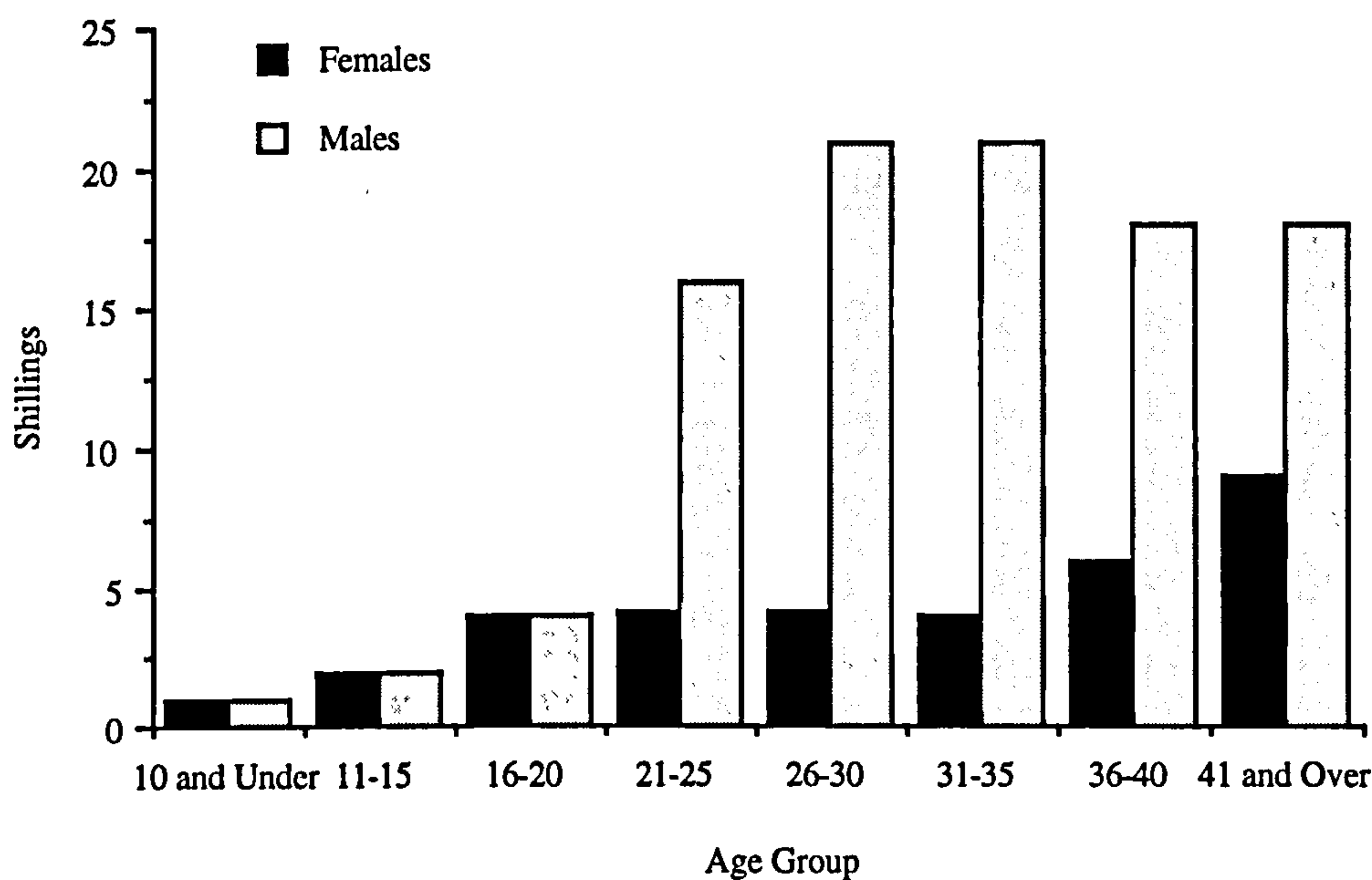
21. Employment of Children in Factories: P.P. 1834 (167) XIX, 287.

22. Handloom Weavers Reports: P.P. 1840 (43.1.) XXIII, 309.



This also tallies with the interpretation in chapter 5 (based on the age profile of silk workers identified in the census), that there was little in the way of career prospects for females working in silk. As to their actual earnings, figure 6.1 shows that in all age groups below 36-40 rates of average pay remained less than 5s. per week. This is consistent with evidence given by Essex silk manufacturers to the 1832 Committee on the Silk Trade. John Hall calculated that the average wage for children in his Coggeshall mill was 3s. a week, whilst that for women was 5s. per week.

Figure 6.1 Average weekly wages in East Anglian silk factories, 1833



*Source:* Average Wages of Girls and Young Women in Silk and Cotton Factories: Parliamentary Papers 1834, Vol. XIX, 287.

For the male silk factory workforce prospects appear to have been rather different. Wage rates increased with age until around 26, when the maximum weekly earning potential of around 20 shillings was reached. This hints at more of a career structure as argued in chapter 5. However, in this regard, it should be recalled that relatively few adult males worked in the silk mills. The only men Hall employed in his mill were ‘one for each room, to overlook and keep them in order’.<sup>23</sup>

On their own, wage rates mean little. They need to be placed in context, that is compared against other local rates of pay and prices. On both counts Essex silk workers

23. Silk Trade: P.P. 1831-32 (678.) XIX. 372, 376 and 377. Similarly, Dr Mitchell noted that in an examination of the books of Messrs Courtauld & Co. ‘it was found that the average wages for the first 12 men and of the first 12 women ... for work done in the end of 1837 and beginning of 1838, was as follows: for men 7s 2d. a week, and for women 5s 1d a week. The looms are found for the weavers, and their warp is beamed on at the mill, and their shute is wound for them, so that there is no direct deduction except for light’. He adding that two-thirds of those on the books were females. Handloom Weavers Reports: P.P. 1840 (43.1.) XXIII, 287.



were poorly paid. First, male handloom weavers appear to have been in receipt of less wages than bricklayer's labourers as the Handloom Weavers Report illustrates.

The weavers [of Braintree and Bocking] were in general in employment; they considered that 9s. or 10s. were the average wages, from which expenses had to be deducted, and then about 8s. might be taken as the average wage on the whole year, allowing for the time lost by want of employment. These were not so good wages as those of a bricklayer's labourer, who had 9s. a week, and three pints of porter a day.<sup>24</sup>

Moreover, these weavers appear to have earned less than the local agricultural labouring population.

... the weavers in some branches are at all times in the receipt of less wages than the agricultural labourers, and in other branches, whilst the weavers when employed earn somewhat higher wages than the agricultural labourers, yet, taking into account the time out of employment for some years past, the pecuniary condition of the weavers is below that of the agricultural labourers.<sup>25</sup>

More detailed comparison comes from the evidence relating to Colchester,

The weavers working at the other branches (excluding umbrellas, best hands 8s week plus deductions), at the very outside, could not earn above 10s. a week, and that was rare. The average was not above 8s. During the working of a cane there was generally about a fortnight's 'play', waiting for shute. They considered the agricultural labourer as better off, as his wages a week were as high as theirs; there were no expenses to be deducted, and he had additional wages in hay-time and harvest-time; besides which, he had the benefit of gleaning by his wife and family, had some fire-wood, might keep a pig, grow some potatoes and cabbage, and now and then could get a boiling of turnips.<sup>26</sup>

To add further context, it is worth noting that, as a group, agricultural labourers in the south-east were very poorly paid,<sup>27</sup> and those of Essex especially so. Richardson considered Essex farm labourers working during the 1820s and 30s, that is at the time of these reports, to be 'very poor'. They were frequently under employed and, based on evidence derived from Audley End, their real wages languished below those 'enjoyed' by their predecessors in the 1790s.<sup>28</sup>

With regard to female wage rates, there were few occupations available with which to make comparisons. Nevertheless, the lowness of their wages was commented upon by the 1834 Poor Law Report. Responding to the question, 'Have you any and what

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24. *Ibid.*, 286.

25. *Ibid.*, 285.

26. *Ibid.*, 290.

27. K.D.M. Snell, 'Agricultural seasonal unemployment, the standard of living, and women's work in the south and east, 1690-1860', *Economic History Review*, 34 (1981), 407-437.

28. L. Richardson, 'Agricultural labourers' wages and the cost of living in Essex, 1790-1840: a contribution to the standard of living debate', in B.A. Holderness and M. Turner, *Land, labour and Agriculture, 1700-1920* (London, 1991), 69-90.



employment for women and children?', the answer for Braintree was, 'There are silk manufactories in the town and neighbourhood, at which women and children work; but there is not sufficient employment for them, and they are badly paid for what they do.'<sup>29</sup>

However, there was one trade with which comparisons were made - that of lace making in Coggeshall. In this respect the 1843 Report on Children's Employment stated that lace was 'preferred', 'first, because parents objected on moral considerations to send their children to the silk mill; and secondly, because when the tambour-work is properly learnt, it affords more profitable employment'.<sup>30</sup>

Considering the cost of living, one indicator that wage rates in the Essex silk industry were inadequately low, certainly by local contemporary standards, is offered by a consideration of poor-rate levels. These were used to supplement inadequate incomes. From both observations in poor law reports and evidence presented by manufacturers silk workers appear, generally, to have had their wages made up out of the poor rates. The comment made in the 1834 Poor Law Report for Bocking and Braintree that 'The wages of manufacturers are made up out of the poor rates' is representative of the other two towns.<sup>31</sup>

Beyond this, some comparison with other silk manufacturing districts is possible through examination of average county rates. Table 6.1 reproduces the 1833 Factory Report covering counties 'in which the factories are situated'.<sup>32</sup> This shows that throughout the first 30 years of the 19th century Essex was amongst those returning the highest expenditure on poor relief per head of population.

Whilst affording an interesting insight, serious problems exist in making such county comparisons. The level of rates in a particular county may reveal as much about the nature and generosity of the poor law relief system as the extent of impoverishment. In Essex the Speenhamland system was in operation. This is considered to have been a fairly generous scheme.<sup>33</sup> Indeed, it has been suggested that it may have functioned to impair the movement of labour to areas of greater employment and higher wages.<sup>34</sup>

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29. Report on the Administration of the Poor Laws. Appendix (B.1). Part 1: Answers to Rural Queries: Parliamentary Papers 1834, XXX, 168a.

30. Employment and Condition of Children in Trades and Manufactures: P.P. 1843 (430) XIII, 307, 259.

31. Report into the Administration of the Poor Laws. Appendix (A.). Part 1: Assistant Commissioners' Reports: Parliamentary Papers 1834 (44) XXVIII, 229a.

32. From 'which Returns have been obtained'. Employment of Children in Factories: P.P. 1834, (167) XIX, 299.

33. T. Sokoll, 'Household and family among the poor: the case of two Essex communities in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries' (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Cambridge, 1989). See also idem, *Household and Family Among the Poor*, (Bochum, 1993).

34. Williamson, 'Coping with city growth'. See also P.M. Solar, 'Poor relief and English economic development before the industrial revolution', *Economic History Review*, 48 (1995), 1-22; idem, 'Poor relief and English economic development: a renewed plea for comparative history', *Economic History Review*, 50 (1997), 369-374; S. King, 'Poor relief and English economic development



Whatever the comparative costs of the poor law system operating in Essex, James Mitchell, compiler of the table, was in no doubt about the comparatively low level of wages in the county's silk industry: 'in Norfolk, Suffolk, and Essex ... the wages are far lower than in Somerset, and are indeed so low, that, but for much unquestionable evidence as these returns afford, we could scarcely have believed it possible'.<sup>35</sup>

Table 6.1 Poor relief per head of population for counties with factory based textile manufactories, 1833

|                    | 1801    | 1811    | 1821    | 1831   |
|--------------------|---------|---------|---------|--------|
| Counties           | £ s d   | £ s d   | £ s d   | £ s d  |
| Lancaster          | 0 4 4   | 0 7 4   | 0 4 8   | 0 4 4  |
| York (West Riding) | 0 6 7   | 0 10 0  | 0 6 9   | 0 5 7  |
| Derby              | 0 6 9   | 0 10 1  | 0 8 2   | 0 6 7  |
| Stafford           | 0 6 1   | 0 8 5   | 0 7 10  | 0 6 5  |
| Leicester          | 0 12 3  | 0 14 8  | 0 14 2  | 0 11 6 |
| Nottingham         | 0 6 3   | 0 10 9  | 0 7 10  | 0 6 5  |
| Norfolk            | 0 12 5  | 0 19 11 | 0 14 16 | 0 15 4 |
| Suffolk            | 0 11 4  | 0 19 3  | 0 17 9  | 0 18 3 |
| Essex              | 0 12 1  | 0 24 8  | 0 17 7  | 0 17 2 |
| Gloucester         | 0 8 8   | 0 11 7  | 0 9 1   | 0 8 8  |
| Somerset           | 0 8 10  | 0 12 2  | 0 8 7   | 0 8 9  |
| Wilts              | 0 13 10 | 0 24 2  | 0 14 8  | 0 16 6 |

Source: Average Wages of Girls and Young Women in Silk and Cotton Factories: Parliamentary Papers 1834, Vol. XIX, 287.

The fact that few weavers belonged to local benefit societies may be taken as further evidence for the lowly state of real wages in the Essex silk industry. In this respect the Handloom Weavers Commission identified the reason for their low membership as an inability to pay the contributions.<sup>36</sup>

More substantial evidence derives from a further enquiry made by the same report which, having established that wages in Essex were very much lower than in London, compared rent and food prices in the city with those for Braintree and Bocking. In terms of house rent Braintree's weavers were said to have had an advantage but, the report added,

they denied that they had any advantage in regard to bread and wheat. It is usual for working people at Braintree to buy their own flour, and bake their bread at home; but this was not so cheap as getting bread from the under-price bakers in London. As to meat in a place like London, where there was a great demand for prime joints, working men could get the other joints at a cheaper rate; but not so in small country towns and villages. Also, in London, after 10 o'clock on Saturday nights, meat could generally be had on advantageous terms.

reappraisal', *Economic History Review*, 50 (1997), 360-368; and E.H. Hunt, *Regional Wage Variations in Britain, 1850-1914*. (Oxford, 1973), 246-264.

35. Employment of Children in Factories: P.P. 1834 (167) XIX, 299a.

36. Handloom Weavers Reports: P.P. 1840 (43.1.) XXIII, 285.



These findings appear in agreement with calculations made by Richardson. Comparing agricultural wage rates with prices for the late 18th and early 19th centuries he concluded that the cost of living in Essex was much higher than in London.<sup>37</sup> This prompts the question, how were the silk manufacturers of Essex able to pay such low wages? Certainly, there is some evidence from the reports of protest at the lowliness of wages and of hostility to further wage reductions. Beckwith, for example, recalled before the 1832 Select Committee on the Silk Trade that on making a reduction two years earlier he 'received a letter signed 'Swing', stating that if I did not advance my labour in two days, my factory should be burnt down'.<sup>38</sup>

Nevertheless, it appears that Essex's silk workforce were rather more malleable than their counterparts in the north. Hall, for example, commented that whilst he was able to introduce new looms into his Coggeshall factory, the workers in Coventry mounted such strong opposition that manufacturers feared their property would be destroyed, and their persons insulted.<sup>39</sup>

One reason for the comparatively docile nature of the Essex workforce was suggested by Daniel Fraser. Presenting to the 1832 Committee on Children's Employment the findings of his investigation into conditions in the silk mills of Essex, Suffolk and Hertfordshire, Fraser stated, 'In a great many of those places which I have seen round about ... they are so far reduced and degraded, that they are really unable to exert themselves on their own behalf'.<sup>40</sup>

This reply, however, offers only a partial account. The question remains why were they prepared to accept their lot? First, the operation of the poor relief system may have been influential. Manufacturers were able to pursue a low wage policy because the poor relief system made up the deficit. The evidence presented by John Hall makes clear that manufacturers were aware of the system. However, the idea that they may have been using poor relief to their advantage would probably have been strongly disputed. Hall went as far as to claim that without his manufactory the situation would have been a great deal worse. That, in effect, the employment he offered reduced the poor rate burden. 'You say if it was not for that mill a great many children would be out of

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37. Richardson, 'Agricultural labourers', 75-76. Similarly, the Handloom Weavers Report stated that Essex was in the London price vortex, and that prices did not fall until further away from the city. Handloom Weavers Reports: P.P. 1840 (43. 1.) XXIII, 288.

38. Silk Trade: P.P. 1831-32 (678.) XIX, 841-2.

39. *Ibid.*, 377.

40. Report from the Select Committee to whom the Bill to Regulate the Labour of Children in Mills and Factories of the United Kingdom was referred: Parliamentary Papers 1831-32 (706.) XV.1, 535. See also P. Sharpe, *Adapting to Capitalism: Working Women in the English Economy, 1700-1850* (London, 1996), 42-53.

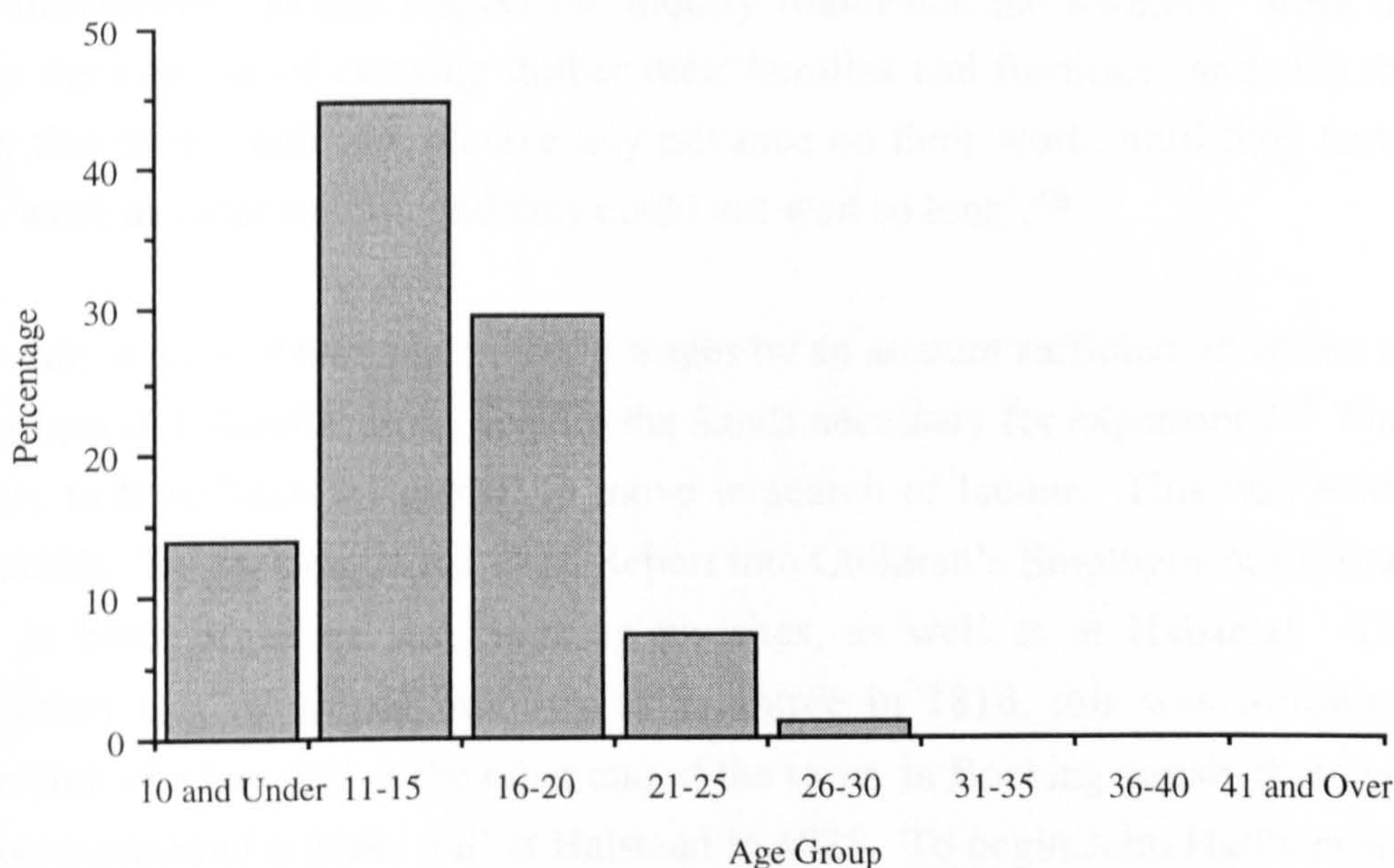


employ and thrown upon the parish? - I believe so: so I found them when I went to Coggeshall.’<sup>41</sup>

Whatever the reality, it appears that poor relief did, on occasions, prove very inadequate and that silk workers were forced to develop their own survival strategies. Asked how his men lived when they were out of work Beckwith replied, ‘By parish rates, begging, thieving, poaching, &c.; it is no uncommon thing for me to have two or three hares offered me at a time; they would steal any thing at an hour's notice when they are out of work: as to the poor girls, they are prostitutes by dozens.’<sup>42</sup>

Perhaps, however, the principal explanation of how the manufacturers were able to succeed with paying such low wages lies in consideration of the age and gender composition of the workforce. Females accounted for over 95 percent of the factory workforce in the silk mills of Essex, Suffolk and Norfolk. Moreover, as figure 6.2 illustrates, the great majority of these females were girls and young women under 20 years old. Compared to other silk manufacturing districts it has been suggested East Anglia was more dependent on young females.<sup>43</sup>

Figure 6.2 Age distribution of female silk factory workers in East Anglia, 1833



*Source:* Average Wages of Girls and Young Women in Silk and Cotton Factories: Parliamentary Papers 1834, Vol. XIX, 287.

These findings suggest that manufacture of silk was a supplementary activity. This is confirmed by Hall's response to the question of whether the children he employed could

41. Silk Trade: P.P. 1831-32 (678.) XIX, 376.

42. *Ibid.*, 844.

43. D.C. Coleman, 'Growth and decline', 123.



really live on 3s a week, 'Yes; 3s. a week, in our parish, will keep a child if lodged by its parents.'<sup>44</sup> It also tallies with the census enumerators' evidence presented in chapter 5. Here it was found that those recorded with silk occupations were often the wives and/or children of heads of households who were themselves occupied. Evidence presented before the Committee on the Silk Trade also concurs with the census in identifying that many of these heads were agricultural labourers.<sup>45</sup> It may well be that in an area of such low agricultural earners the opportunity presented by silk to boost household incomes was a welcomed one.

## II

Having argued for the operation of a low wage policy in the Essex silk industry, the question that now demands addressing is: why would such a policy have suppressed urban demographic expansion without, however, preventing the industrial developments identified in chapter 2? The point from which to begin this consideration is that low wages would not have operated to attract large numbers of additional workers. This was confirmed by examination of the place of birth evidence derived from the census enumerators' returns. Those recorded with silk occupations appear to have originated from a smaller geographical area than craftsmen and traders. Indeed, as the Handloom Weavers Commission discovered, even differences in the wage rates between the towns of Coggeshall and Halstead, only eight miles apart, were insufficient to encourage wide scale movement. In this respect the inquiry found that the workers, 'were unable to defray the expense of carrying thither their families and furniture, and also they were aware that they would not receive any advance on their work, until they had done as much work as came to 25s., and they could not wait so long'.<sup>46</sup>

Since they did not contemplate raising wages by an amount sufficient to attract non-local labour how did manufacturers acquire the hands necessary for expansion?<sup>47</sup> The answer appears to have been for capital to move in search of labour. This was evident with Courtaulds. By the time of the 1838 Report into Children's Employment Courtaulds had mills in both Braintree and Bocking parishes, as well as at Halstead. Their first acquisition was of an old building at Braintree in 1816, this was followed by the conversion of a bay mill at the other end of the town, in Bocking parish, three years later and the erection of a water mill at Halstead in 1825. To begin John Hall's business was smaller, however if we venture outside the period the study is concerned with the same policy can be seen. This time expansion involved establishing in other Essex towns outside those of the case study. These included mills at Inworth and Maldon, both constructed in the mid 1850s, as well as Tiptree and Chelmsford. The former, Booker

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44. Silk Trade: P.P. 1831-32 (678.) XIX, 377.

45. *Ibid.*, 376.

46. Handloom Weavers Reports: P.P. 1840 (43. 1.) XXIII, 289.

47. Indeed, from the evidence presented above the tendency was, if anything, to make further reductions in the wage bill.



dates at 1859.<sup>48</sup> It is conceivable the reason why Hall did not establish factories in the other two cloth towns was because the available labour had already been harnessed by Courtaulds and the other businesses operating from the towns which were identified in chapter 2.<sup>49</sup>

Explicit evidence that this policy was driven by available local reserves of labour can be gained from the exchange of questions and answers that took place between, on the one side, the 1832 Committee on the Silk Trade and the 1843 Report on Children's Employment and, on the other, John Hall. Summarising Hall's position as silk manufacturer in Coggeshall his inquisitor on the 1831-2 Committee stated:

As you have stated that you live in a small parish, where you have only 4,000 inhabitants, and also you have stated that you have reduced the wages twenty per cent., and the parents of many of these children receive parochial relief, yet you have a difficulty in getting hands, and in getting them at so reasonable rate as they do in other places ?

- The supply is not sufficient for my demand.<sup>50</sup>

How this labour shortage came to manifest itself was outlined in the 1843 Report. This observed that, 'nearly one-third part of Mr. Hall's machinery is standing still for want of the necessary hands'.<sup>51</sup> Hall's proposed method of responding to this situation was voiced in the earlier report. Asked 'would you erect another mill at Coggeshall ?', he replied: 'No, but I would erect one in a situation where I should have more hands.'<sup>52</sup> True to his reply, by the mid 1850s Hall had factories in two other places, with plans afoot to build further mills at Tiptree and Chelmsford.

Not only would the practice of spreading production over a number of settlements have the effect of limiting levels of demographic concentration in any one place, it would also limit the contribution industry made to the physical fabric of the town. Instead of displaying a mid century townscape featuring all six of Hall's factories, Coggeshall could claim only two. It is also feasible that the concentration of large units of production in one town would have generated the kinds of small customer and service

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48. J. Booker, *Essex and the Industrial Revolution* (Chelmsford, 1974), 58.

49. This same policy was also practised by manufacturers based in Colchester. The Handloom Weavers Report observed that Messrs. Brown and Moy possessed a large silk-throwing mill in Colchester and had also established a mill at Hadleigh, Suffolk. Handloom Weavers Reports: P.P. 1840 (43.1.) XXIII, 291.

50. Silk Trade: P.P. 1831-32 (678.) XIX, 376. Again, the same reason is offered by the Handloom Weavers Report for the Colchester manufacturers, Messrs. Brown and Moy. 'From the difficulty of obtaining a sufficient number of hands at Colchester, they have established a mill at Hadleigh in Suffolk.' Handloom Weavers Reports: P.P. 1840 (43.1.) XXIII, 291.

51. Employment and Condition of Children in Trades and Manufactures: P.P. 1843 (430) XIII, 307, 259.

52. Silk Trade: P.P. 1831-32 (678.) XIX, 373



enterprises that were absent in Essex but mentioned by Rodger and Morris in association with industrial-induced urban expansion.<sup>53</sup>

Beyond this, there may have been other ways in which a low-wage policy would have impinged upon urban growth. First, few silk workers were likely to have contributed to urban finances. In this respect William Gentry Dennis in his report to the Poor Law Board of 1850 noted, 'Coggeshall is a manufacturing town; and the consequence is, that out of 800 houses assessed to the poor-rate there are about 500 occupied by labourers, from whom a very large amount of rate is uncollected'.<sup>54</sup>

In this respect consideration should also be given to the impact of high poor rates on urban expansion, although this is a more contentious issue. It could be argued that the high rates charged in the case study towns would have acted as a restraint on local business development. Businesses represented the principal rate payers.<sup>55</sup> In consequence, high rate payments may have diverted resources away from commercial investment which, in turn, would have reduced levels of growth and ultimately the creation of jobs. Against this may be set the claim, made by Hall, that the establishment of silk manufactories in the towns actively reduced the rates bill. Certainly, if we consider evidence brought before the Poor Law Report dealing with levels of poor rates in Braintree it does appear that the bill was falling during the 1820s and 1830s. This, however, may say more about changes in the administration of the system of relief. There is also the fact that, following their establishment, manufacturers, including Hall, made successive wage reductions. Asked by the 1832 Committee on the Silk Trade how he had managed to reduce his expenses Hall replied, 'A great and principal reduction in my annual expense arises in the first instance from a reduction of about twenty per cent. on wages'.<sup>56</sup> Any resulting deficiencies in earnings were likely to have been made up by the poor relief system. The whole subject, however, remains open to debate. Hall may well have responded by arguing that without such cuts he would not have remained competitive and been forced to make closures and lay off workers.

To summarise, the case study settlements were associated with industrial development but not industrial-induced demographic growth because of a low wage policy practised by their manufacturers. Whilst it can be argued that those on low wages would have suppressed urban growth due to their low purchasing power, failure to contribute to

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53. Morris and Rodger, 'Introduction', 5-6.

54. Reports to the Poor Law Board on Settlement and Poor Removal: P.P. 1850 (1152) XXVII, 77. Statement of William Gentry Dennis, of Howell's Farm, Great Coggeshall.

55. Evidence of this comes from cross referencing entries appearing in Pigot's 1826 *Directory* for Halstead with those appearing in a rate book for the same year. This exercise found a very strong match between traders and principal rate payers - as defined by those with valuations above the minimum of £1 (see chapter 5 for more details). Pigot & Co., *London and Provincial Commercial Directory* (London, 1826), 536-37; Halstead rate book, 1826, ERO D/P 96/11/87.

56. Silk Trade: P.P. 1831-32 (678.) XIX, 372.



urban finances and, possibly, the burden they imposed on the poor relief system, the main reason lies elsewhere. It appears that local reserves of low wage labour were limited and once exhausted - perhaps as early as the 1830s - commercial expansion was only possible by establishing new plants in other places. It is a policy that contrasts with that pursued by the manufacturers of Macclesfield. Here relatively high wages were used to attract additional labour. In consequence, industrial production and resulting demographic growth were focused on the borough and its two adjoining settlements.<sup>57</sup> The question raised at this juncture is why did the manufacturers of north Essex pursue such a policy?

### III

In response to the above question it will be argued that by pursuing a low wage policy the silk manufacturers of north Essex were able to compete with producers in other regions. Producers in places such the south-west Pennines frequently had the advantages of proximity to coal deposits, as well as access to various external economies of scale.

In comparison to its northern counterparts the Essex silk industry has tended to be portrayed as rather backward. Those that do not consider it to have operated on a domestic basis,<sup>58</sup> characterised Essex's silk industry as comprising a few 'small, remote, old-fashioned mills and handloom weavers working on traditional designs'.<sup>59</sup> Similarly, Jones considered the existence of such manufactories in the 'agricultural' South to be in defiance of the principals of neo-classical economics. By the late 18th and early 19th centuries, if not earlier, southern England's comparative advantage lay in agriculture, not large scale manufacturing industry. The presence of such entities was considered the consequence of imperfect market information. This, Jones argued, 'impaired the basis of calculations about the future. Not every group of investors would calculate correctly' adding 'local conditions did not always signal clearly to every hopeful investor that southern manufacturing labour would not prove cheap enough and that he might in the end do better elsewhere'.<sup>60</sup> In the long-run, however, such manufacturers would realise the error of their ways. Their level of profits would not be sufficient to cover the cost of replacing damaged and out-dated equipment, their ability to compete would be further compromised and eventually they would cease production.

Against this interpretation chapter 2 illustrated that large, 'modern' factories were found in the Essex silk industry and that a number of the companies associated with the area

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57. See chapter 2.

58. R. Houston and K.D.M. Snell, 'Proto-industrialisation? Cottage industry, social change, and industrial revolution', *Historical Journal*, 27 (1984), 473-492; P. Hudson in 'Proto-industrialisation', *ReFRESH*, 10 (1990). Amongst the cases of domestic manufacture mentioned by Hudson were Essex silks.

59. See D.C. Coleman, 'Growth and decay', 122.

60. E.L. Jones, 'De-industrialisation as economic adjustment'.



proved to be long-run successes. Not merely did they manufacture over successive years, decades and even generations, they also expanded: building new mills, applying steam power and introducing and patenting new equipment. In addition, as both chapters 2 and 4 illustrated, throughout the first half of the 19th century new silk businesses were establishing manufactories in these towns.

Further evidence that these concerns were profitable, and that north Essex' conditions were conducive to expansion, is offered by John Hall's answer to a question put to him by the 1832 Committee on the Silk Trade.

Do you think you would erect a mill now with all your experience, at the amount at which you value this mill, at the present moment, sufficient to throw the quantity you do at the same rate, and yet have a profit?

- If things are permitted to remain as they are, I would invest 10,000*l.* in another mill, double the size of my present one.<sup>61</sup>

Similarly, Essex silk manufacturers were far from being considered by their contemporaries as small, marginal producers. Instead, as the lengthy discussion conducted by James Mitchell with Samuel Courtauld showed, their views and opinions as successful businessmen were sought.<sup>62</sup>

Moreover, evidence proffered by John Hall does much to undermine the accusation that southern manufacturers were ignorant of conditions elsewhere. Before settling in Coggeshall, Hall had been in partnership with a Mr Sawyer. This company had comprised not only of a mill in the north Essex town and a London warehouse but also a manufactory in Coventry.<sup>63</sup> In other evidence Hall revealed that he had over 10 years experience of manufacturing in Coventry, and that he still retained contacts with manufacturers based there.<sup>64</sup>

This raises the question why did the likes of John Hall decide to establish in north Essex, and, in doing so, forego various external economies associated with manufacturing in a large town, including the presence of supplies of skilled labour? The answer, evident in the various replies Hall gave, suggests manufacturing in north Essex had certain advantages that compensated for these failings. First, as suggested in section I, the labour force was rather more malleable. Asked by the 1832 Committee on the Silk Trade whether he possessed any advantages in manufacturing over Coventry, Hall replied: 'I should prefer working these looms in Coventry to any other place if they

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61. Silk Trade: P.P. 1831-32 (678.) XIX, 373.

62. Handloom Weavers Reports: P.P. 1840 (43.1.) XXIII, 384-7.

63. As Hall noted, 'we agreed to divide the concern; I took the mills and manufactory, and he the London warehouse and Coventry manufactory'. Silk Trade: P.P. 1831-32 (678.) XIX, 378-379.

64. Asked 'Are you acquainted with any Coventry manufacturers?', Hall replied, 'I know many.' *Ibid.*, 377.



could be introduced with safety; but I have a letter from a friend there, stating that he dare not attach his name to that advertisement lest they should injure his person or destroy his property.’<sup>65</sup>

Beyond this, there were savings to be made by the fact that no undertaker system operated in the Essex towns - ‘When I have stated that the business at Coventry is done by undertakers, the prices I have named include all the expenses. I get the profit upon the winding and warping here, and the manufacturer in Coventry gives that to the undertaker.’<sup>66</sup>

According to Hall, undertaking was an ‘old system of manufacturing, whereby they keep totally clear of all machinery’.<sup>67</sup> Malmgreen offers a more informative account for Macclesfield, where the system was also in operation. Here merchants were contracted by London dealers either to twist, dye and weave the raw silk themselves or to let it out to domestic workers. In partial accord with Hall’s assessment Malmgreen notes that not only did this arrangement considerably reduce the amount of available capital but also created a ‘multi-tiered system of contractors and a hierarchy of workshops’.<sup>68</sup>

Above and beyond this, however, were the savings to be made on the wages bill, as Hall explained to the same committee, ‘Are the Committee to understand, that you can afford to sell the same kinds of goods for one-third less than the people at Coventry can? - By no means; there is only the reduction of labour; the material costs me as much; it may make five per cent. difference upon the goods when manufactured.’<sup>69</sup>

In summary, the evidence presented to the various Parliamentary committees clearly shows that the silk manufacturers of north Essex were aware of developments in the ‘north’. They were able to successfully compete by exploiting local reserves of cheap and flexible labour. Jones’s contention that southern manufacturing labour would not prove to be cheap enough for industry to succeed would not have been endorsed by the likes of John Hall and the Courtaulds. Retaining Jones’s neo-classical approach it can be advanced that, far from behaving in an irrational way, what the pursuit of a low wage policy demonstrates is that the silk businesses of north Essex were responding to relative factor prices.<sup>70</sup> In other words, they were making use of the comparative advantage the area held in cheap, flexible labour.

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65. *Ibid.*, 380.

66. *Ibid.*, 380.

67. *Ibid.*, 377.

68. G. Malmgreen, *A Town built on Silk: Industry and Culture in Macclesfield, 1750-1835* (Hull, 1985), 25.

69. Silk Trade: P.P. 1831-32 (678.) XIX, 377.

70. S. Pollard, ‘Entrepreneurship, 1870-1914’, in R.C. Floud and D. McCloskey, *The Economic History of Britain Since 1700, Vol. II: 1860-1939* (Cambridge, 1994), 62-89. In neo-classical economics businesses adopt rational, profit maximising behaviour. The actual form this takes will be



Having established that the pursuit of a low wage policy was a rational, and successful, response to local conditions the final, and pivotal, question that needs addressing is what generated such a labour market?

#### IV

This final part argues that the operation of these towns as southern agricultural marketing and thoroughfare centres created a situation where there was an abundant supply of female employment. A claim that, if substantiated, would establish a strong link between the principal economic functions of these towns and the behaviour of their manufacturers.

Some evidence that in their role as marketing and thoroughfare centres these towns offered very little female employment was presented in chapter 5. Whilst very few females were found amongst the craft and trade, professional, general labouring and agricultural classes, they constituted the large majority of those returned without any occupation. Evidence that, as a consequence of this, the supply of female employment was high is rather more circumstantial. Since the 1851 census enumerators' schedules were examined interpretations are based upon the situation once silk was firmly established. Nevertheless, given that employment of wives and/or children is considered to have been undertaken out of necessity, some insight into the level of supply, and sectors from which it derived, is feasible. Generally, craftsmen and traders appear to have been sufficiently well remunerated that there was little need for other household members to seek employment. By contrast, households headed by agricultural (and unspecified labourers) appear to have included working wives and/or children. These made up over 45 percent of all the households in Braintree and Bocking, and 50 percent in Halstead. In Coggeshall, where only the figures for agricultural labourers can be used, over 33 percent were returned as heads of household.<sup>71</sup> By this yardstick supply would appear to have been high.<sup>72</sup>

However, evidence is needed for the existence of this situation earlier in the century, when the silk manufactories were becoming established. The first census enumerations date from 1801. Unfortunately, none of the original household schedules survive for this, the 1811 or 1831 census. The exception here, alluded to in chapter 4, is an 1821 enumerators' booklet for Braintree parish. Examination of the household schedules in this reinforces the view that female and child employment was heavily under-recorded in the first four censuses. However, what a brief consideration of these earlier returns can

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conditioned by the available resource endowments - such as access to coal, along with relative factor prices including that of labour.

71. Too few entries were returned in Coggeshall's unspecified labouring class for any meaningful statistical analysis to be undertaken.

72. Indeed, higher, for example, than in Macclesfield. See chapter 5 for a comparison.



show is the presence, in significant numbers, of those male occupations - notably agricultural labourers - associated with employment of wives and children.

Table 6.2 Proportion of persons or families in the Essex towns ‘chiefly employed in agriculture’, 1801-1831

| Year                  | 1801 (P) | 1811(F) | 1821(F) | 1831(F) |
|-----------------------|----------|---------|---------|---------|
| Braintree and Bocking | 6.1      | 31.8    | 32.1    | 20.6    |
| Halstead              | 48.9     | 35.8    | 43.1    | 38.4    |
| Coggeshall            | 3.4      | 29.1    | 22.5    | 30.7    |

*Note:* P - Persons chiefly employed; F - Families chiefly employed.  
*Source:* Census Enumerations 1801, 1811, 1821 and 1831.<sup>73</sup>

The proportion of persons, or families, in each town ‘chiefly employed in agriculture’ is displayed in table 6.2, though data for 1801 should be viewed with scepticism. Thereafter, some consistency in the percentages emerge. Between a fifth and over one-third of families in each town were chiefly employed in agriculture. Since the tendency was to identify the occupation of the head of the family, these percentages can be considered to offer a good proxy for the proportion of families headed by those occupied in agriculture. Included amongst these, however, will be farmers as well as labourers. The wives and children of the former, as the findings from examination of the 1851 census enumerations showed, were rarely occupied. It is, therefore, of some importance to know what proportion of heads of agricultural families were likely to have been labourers.

In 1831 males of 20 years and over appearing amongst the agricultural class were subdivided into occupiers of land (either employing or not employing labourers) and ‘labourers employed in agriculture’. Comparing the numbers appearing in each of these two categories offers some indication of the proportion of agricultural families headed by labourers. In Braintree and Bocking almost 92 percent of adult males in agriculture were labourers, the same figure for Halstead was just over 90 percent and for Coggeshall 86 percent. Of course, the resulting figures can offer no more than a very rough guide. First, not every male aged 20 years and over will be the head of a family; second, not every family would have been headed by a male; and third, the term family is rather vague. Lodgers, for example, may be considered separate and returned as families themselves.<sup>74</sup> This said, the figures from these earlier censuses are the best available,

73. Census,1801, Enumeration, 101-113; Census 1811, Enumeration and Parish Register 97-107; Census 1821, Enumeration and Parish Register, 93-103; Census 1831, Enumeration, Vol. I, 180-199. By comparison, Macclesfield in 1811 had 244 families in agriculture (representing 8.9 percent of the total), 2,458 in trade (90 percent of the total), and 26 in other (less than one percent of the total). In 1821 it had 99 families in agriculture, 3240 in trade, and 323 in other (representing in percentage terms 2.7, 88 and 8.8 respectively). Malmgreen, *A Town Built on Silk* , 46

74. In this respect ‘family’ as a unit of measurement would differ from that of household used in the 1851 analysis.



and the following interpretations seem reasonable: first, some 20 to 40 percent of families in these towns were headed by someone employed in agriculture; and second, the majority of these heads - perhaps up to 90 percent - would have been agriculture labourers.

There may have been a number of reasons why agricultural labourers congregated in local market towns. By this date the practice of 'living in' with a farmer's family had declined. Whilst some labourers may have rented a cottage from their employer the majority were left to find their own abodes. The housing stock in nearby towns was likely to have been more plentiful and possibly cheaper. Beyond this, the operation of the poor relief system may have had an impact. In his report to the Poor Law Board Mr Oliver referred to what may have been an established practice in the Witham Union - the pulling down of labourers cottages in their own villages. The motive behind this was to force labourers to move to the nearby town.

Numbers of men go out from Coggeshall every morning to work in the surrounding parishes, come home at eventide, and in the event of illness or accident, they fall on us. It is notorious that many cottages have been pulled down, so as to drive the labourer into the town ... Whilst we were paying at the rate of 8s. 6d. in the pound for poor-rates, some of the surrounding parishes in our Union exceeded 4s. 6d., and some few half that amount.<sup>75</sup>

Although on presenting evidence to the same board William Gentry Dennis, of Howell's Farm, Great Coggeshall, denied knowledge of this practice, he acknowledged that, 'under the present law, the owners in agricultural parishes refrain from building cottages in order to avoid the expense of the poor becoming chargeable by residence'. The effect of this, as Dennis went on to describe, would amount to much the same thing - of large numbers of field labourers residing in nearby towns.

There are several of the agricultural parishes within this Union, as well as other Unions with which I am acquainted, the labourers employed upon which live in the small towns and largely populated villages where, in case of illness, or of their being otherwise disabled, they become chargeable and are an expense to those parishes.'<sup>76</sup>

The question that cannot be answered by these earlier censuses, however, is whether, amongst the households of agricultural, as well as other labourers, there was a strong desire for supplementary earnings. For this we need to return to the Parliamentary reports and, particularly, those concerned with the poor law and what they reveal of local conditions during this crucial period. The evidence they afford suggests that the desire would have been high.

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75. Communication from Mr L. Oliver, Overseer of Great Coggeshall, in the Witham Union. Reports to the Poor Law Board on Settlement and Poor Removal: P.P. 1850 (1152) XXVII, 76.

76. *Ibid.*, 77.



The evidence derived from the 1804 Returns on the Expense and Maintenance of the Poor offers a suitable starting point. This shows that a large number of adults in each of the case study towns were either in permanent or occasional receipt of poor relief. In Braintree and Bocking the figures were 808 and 146, respectively, out of a population in 1801 of 5,501. In Halstead the same figures were 298 and 266 out of 3,380, whilst in Coggeshall they were 223 and 132 out of 2,802 people. To these figures can be added the children, aged up to 14 years, of those in permanent relief: 933 in Braintree and Bocking; 217 in Halstead; and 145 in Coggeshall.<sup>77</sup> Compared with the population totals for 1801 it is evident that a considerable proportion of the population in each of the towns were either directly, as adults, or indirectly, as children, in receipt of poor relief. In Braintree and Bocking the figure was over 34 percent, in Halstead 23 percent and in Coggeshall just under 18 percent. Since no category appeared, these figures do not include the dependants of those in receipt of occasional relief.

The likelihood that agricultural labourers made up a considerable proportion of heads of household in receipt of this relief appears consistent with Snell's examination of agricultural unemployment and women's work in southern and eastern England during the 18th and early 19th centuries.<sup>78</sup> First, a decline in female employment on the land - formerly a valuable source of supplementary earnings for farm labouring households - appears to have occurred during this period. In the south east Snell argued its origins could be traced back to the period before 1793 and 'almost certainly between 1750 and 1790.'<sup>79</sup> The reasons for this he explained in terms of 'a continuing transition ... to greater concentration on grain production', in which female employment was of less importance.<sup>80</sup> Recently this interpretation has been challenged. Using farm estate accounts Sharpe has argued that female farm work altered little during the course of the 18th century. Women continued to be employed in gleaning, weeding and hay making. However, evidence does suggest that in one important respect at least female employment was in decline. During the 16th and 17th centuries hops were grown throughout Essex. The cultivation of this crop represented an important source of female employment between March and September. However, the late 18th century witnessed a great decline in hop growing as more land was devoted to grains.<sup>81</sup>

The evidence available in the returns for the 1834 Poor Law Report would certainly appear to support the view that little female employment was available on early 19th century Essex farmland. For example, in reply to the question 'Have you any and what

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77. Abstract of the Answers and Returns made pursuant to Act 43 Geo 3, Relative to the Poor in England: Parliamentary Papers. 1803-4 (175) XIII.

78. K.D.M. Snell, 'Agricultural seasonal unemployment, the standard of living, and women's work in the south and east, 1690-1860', *Economic History Review*, 34 (1981), 407-437.

79. Snell, 'Agricultural seasonal unemployment', 413.

80. *Ibid.*, 421.

81. Sharpe, *Adapting to Capitalism*, 71-100.



employment for women and children?' the respondents at Little Bardfield stated 'No employment, that can do any good, except in harvest.' Similarly, for Gestingthorpe the answer was, 'We have no employment for women and children.'<sup>82</sup> The reasons for this, expressed by the officers of Sible Hedingham, that the men were so numerous, suggests the role played by the general growth in the county's population from the later 18th century should also be considered.<sup>83</sup> Amongst the most populated districts was that around the case study towns. The 1834 Report recorded that the Hinckford Hundred, in which both Halstead and Braintree and Bocking were located, was very densely populated.<sup>84</sup>

Returns for the county's market towns illustrate that this lack of female employment was very much a feature of their labour markets. The responses from Great Dunmow, that 'We have no employment for them', and Maldon, St Mary, 'No constant employment', are fairly typical. Despite their more varied economies, there appear to have been few alternative employment opportunities for the wives and children of the large contingent of resident agricultural labourers. Domestic service was likely to have afforded only a small number of openings for young single women. Employment prospects would have been rather greater around the more gentrified county town of Chelmsford. This is evident from the answer of the Springfield officers to the question of female employment, 'Occasional employment might be found for women on land, however [they are] usually engaged in washing, charring, other home work - arising out of our contiguity to a large town.' A similar situation was also likely to have existed amongst the towns and villages closer to London where many merchants and wealthy metropolitan citizens took residence to escape the rush and smoke of the city.

Second, this decline in the opportunities for females to contribute to household earnings from work on the land, along with the lack of alternative female employment in the towns, does not seem to have been accompanied by any noticeable improvement in male agricultural wages. In this regard Snell remarked upon the very poor wages associated with the agricultural labourers of south-eastern England. This is reinforced by evidence already presented, that whilst wages were far lower the cost of living was higher in Essex than London. Certainly contemporaries were aware that Essex was within the London price vortex. 'With the exception of house-rent, the working people of Braintree and Bocking have little advantage in regard to the expense of living above the working

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82. Report on the Administration of the Poor Laws. Appendix (B.1). Part 1: Answers to Rural Queries: P.P. 1834, XXX, 167a-190a.

83. See chapter 2.

84. 'These two adjoining parishes of Braintree and Bocking have a very dense population dependent upon the land.' Report into the Administration of the Poor Laws. Appendix (A.). Part 1: Assistant Commissioners' Reports: Parliamentary Papers 1834 (44) XXVIII, 229a.



people of London. The town is sufficiently near London to be within the vortex; cheapness is not felt until farther down in the country'.<sup>85</sup>

To complete this section a consideration of the spatial distribution of Essex silk manufactories by the mid-19th century can be used to underpin the case that manufacturers were responding to labour market conditions generated by agricultural marketing functions. First, in this regard, the conditions that have been described as leading to a high supply of female labour were applicable to some of the county's other market towns. In accordance, by the mid-19th century silk manufactories were found in a number of other towns including Maldon, Witham and Hadleigh. However, as demonstrated earlier, what distinguished the case study towns was the extent of manufacturing activity found within their confines. They received a greater number of firms and possessed a larger number of silk workers amongst their populations - both in relative and absolute terms.

To verify the claim that agricultural marketing functions were responsible for these conditions, it is arguable that the forces creating high supplies of female labour should be found in greater measure amongst the case study towns. To this end, in terms of the demand for supplementing earnings that derived from farm labourer's households, male agricultural wages in north Essex appear to have been amongst the very lowest in the county throughout the period in which silk manufactories were being established.

In his *General View of the Agriculture of Essex*, in 1795, Vancouver distinguished 14 districts. In each he recorded the average weekly wages of labourers (agricultural) in summer and winter. Three groups of districts emerged. In the first, and lowest paying group, average weekly wages for the summer were 9s., for the winter months they varied from 7s. to 7s. 6d. In the second, an intermediary group, summer wages varied from 9s. to 9s. 6d., whilst in winter they were set at 9s. In the third, the highest paying group, summer wages were calculated at 10s. to 10s. 6d., with winter ones from 10s 6d. to 9s.

District one, which included all three case study towns, along with Thaxted, Great Dunmow, Witham and the Hedinghams appeared amongst the first, lowest wage group. It was accompanied by districts embracing the other north-western towns of Saffron Walden and Hatfield Broad Oak, as well as those in the north-east, including Dedham, Bradfield and Harwich, along with St. Oysth and Great and Little Clacton. The intermediary group also consisted of five districts and embraced most of central Essex, including the towns of Maldon, Chelmsford, Rayleigh and Rochford, along with Mersea Island, Bradwell, Burnham and Fambridge. Group three consisted of four districts. These were located in the south-western third of the county - that nearest London. They

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85. Handloom Weavers Reports: P.P. 1840 (43.1.) XXIII, 288.



included the towns of Grays Thurrock, Romford, Harlow, Epping, and Barking, along with Dagenham, Woodford and East and West Ham.<sup>86</sup>

Evidence that these differences persisted into the fourth decade of the 19th century is presented in the 1834 Poor Law Reports. Although in this case no distinction is made between summer and winter rates. Amongst settlements in group one to be included here were: Thaxted, where weekly wages, at day work, were recorded at 8s.; Dunmow, at 8s. day work, 9s. to 10s. piece work; and Braintree, with weekly wages at 9s. For group two Chelmsford's weekly wages were observed as ranging between 9s. and 12s., and Rochford's between 10s. and 12s. In group three Harlow was recorded with labourer's weekly wages at 10s., and Barking with rates varying from between 12s. and 14s.

At the same time, the success of the case study towns as agricultural marketing centres helped to ensure that local food prices were comparable with those in districts geographically closer to the great food markets of London. In this respect Richardson noted that, 'Many market towns, such as Dunmow, Braintree [and Bocking], Thaxted, and Coggershall [Coggeshall] prospered as a result of the large scale movement of farm produce across the Essex countryside.' Adding, 'High demand from London ... meant that prices were similar throughout the county'.<sup>87</sup> In accordance, as commented upon in chapter 3, all three case study towns were identified by Arthur Young to be amongst the county's 10 'chief markets', selling corn, butter, eggs, poultry, and occasionally cattle and livestock of all sorts.<sup>88</sup>

Finally, with regard to the impact of the decline of hop cultivation on local supplies of female labour, whilst it has been claimed that the crop was grown throughout Essex, Muilman's observations suggest that the parishes around the case study towns were particularly important for the cultivation of this crop, certainly until the 1770s. Amongst the hop growing parishes the author of *A History of Essex* identified were Cressing, White and Black Notley, Panfield, Pebmarsh, Lanmarsh, Sible Hedingham, Great Maplestead, Wickham St. Paul, Twinstead, Gestingthorpe, and Great Yeldham. Indeed, the soils of Halstead parish itself were considered to be very fertile, producing many hops, 'for the excellency of which commodity this town is famous'.<sup>89</sup> By the time of Pigot and Wright's visits in the 1820s and 1830s, however, no mention is made to the

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86. C. Vancouver, *General View of the Agriculture in the County of Essex* (London, 1795), 36-115.

87. Richardson, 'Agricultural labourers', 71-2.

88. A. Young, *General View of the Agriculture of the County of Essex*. Vol. II (London, 1813), 386. The nature of the products also demonstrates the generally arable character of their hinterlands - a feature that indicates the relevance of north Essex to Snell's assessment of the fate of female employment in arable districts, which was discussed earlier.

89. *A New and Complete History of Essex from a Late Survey by a Gentleman*, Vol. II (Chelmsford, 1769), 48-49.



commodity that had represented such an important source of female employment a generation earlier.<sup>90</sup>

In summary, the operation of these towns as agricultural marketing and thoroughfare centres created a labour market characterised by high levels of female unemployment. This supply arose most notably from the households of the agricultural labouring population. These constituted around a third of the urban population. Opportunities for females to supplement household earnings appear to have declined from the later 18th century. Whilst males dominated the craft and trade sector and domestic service remained an option open to only a relatively small number of young women, female employment on neighbouring farmland appears to have dwindled. At the same time, however, the desire for supplementary earnings from female members of agricultural labouring households was likely to have been great. The success of their host communities as marketing centres with London raised food prices to levels comparable with those in the metropolis. Moreover, the agricultural labourer's experiences of seasonal under-employment may well have increased. First, as more land was put under the plough and, second, as the growth in the population, evident from the later 18th century, added to an already plentiful supply of farm labour.

The reason why the case study towns witnessed the greatest concentration of silk manufactories may be accounted for in the particularly high level of demand for supplementing earnings amongst their labouring population. The district in which the towns were located was one of very low wages throughout the early 19th century. At the same time food prices were comparable with those across the county, including in districts far closer to London. More contentiously, the generosity of the poor relief system administered in the towns of Essex, and particularly in those of the case study, may have operated to dissuade labourers from migrating to areas where employment opportunities may have been greater.<sup>91</sup>

## ii

The argument that the Essex silk industry was shaped by the operation of Braintree and Bocking, Coggeshall and Halstead as market towns and thoroughfares contrasts with the view expressed by the Spitalfields silk manufacturer, William Hale, in one of the answers presented to the Report of 1823. In this Hale linked the development of the provincial silk industry to the presence of an earlier textile tradition.

At the same Time the Trade has been increasing in Spitalfields to a certain Extent, it has been increasing to a still greater Degree in the Country?

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90. Pigot & Co., *London and Provincial New Commercial Directory* (London, 1823-4), 294; T. Wright, *The History and Topography of the County of Essex*, Vol. II (London, 1836), 16-30.

91. E.H. Hunt, *Regional Wage Variations in Britain, 1850-1914* (Oxford, 1973), 246-264.



Yes; in those Districts where they work Woollen Cloths or Worsted, and those where they are in the Habit of printing Cotton, they have gone easily from one Manufacture to the other, from working their Cotton to working Half Silk and Half Cotton, or Half Worsted and Half Silk. Fashions have changed; and the Manufacturers formerly employed in Worsted and Cotton Manufacture have a Facility of turning their Manufacture to mixed Articles, and from that to entire Silk.<sup>92</sup>

If this were the case for Essex the argument developed in the preceding pages would be considerably undermined. The character that the silk industry developed would, instead, be heavily influenced by the attitudes and outlook of those formerly involved in woollen cloth manufacture.

Evidence that this was the case for Macclesfield derives from the links between the old button making industry and silk identified by Malmgreen. The 'falling off of the button trade' during the course of the 18th century is considered to have left the town with 'substantial capital for re-deployment, a distribution network and valuable contacts with silk merchants in London and elsewhere.' Evidence of firms shifting towards silk are offered in Pigot's *Directory* of 1817. This, Malmgreen noted, listed four button dealers operating in the town and surrounding countryside, all of whom were described as 'button and twist manufacturers...' a 'course followed by many button manufacturers to salvage their prosperity'.<sup>93</sup>

The question addressed in this penultimate section is did such links exist between the declining woollen textile trade of the case study towns and the new silk industry? First, in terms of large scale capital transfer, it was observed earlier that the silk manufacturers identified in the Parliamentary Report of 1832 and the Commission of 1840 derived from outside the locality. Similarly, from the other side of the equation, there is no evidence of local woollen bay makers and merchants moving into silk. It can be argued that if there were to have been such a transferral it was most likely to have occurred in the case of John Savill. Not only was his one of the largest of Braintree and Bocking's woollen manufacturing firms, it was also one of the most enduring, continuing to operate until 1819. By that date Savill would have observed the establishment of a number of early silk manufactories and, therefore, was likely to have been aware of their successes. From his diary entries, however, it is clear that he did not turn to silk. Instead, faced with the declining fortunes of the wool trade Savill continued his long-established involvement with farming whilst also establishing a hemp manufactory in partnership with another local woollen manufacturer - Josias Nottidge.<sup>94</sup> Subsequently, Savill

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92. Wages of Persons Employed in the Manufacture of Silk: P.P. 1823 (HL. 86) CLVI, 6

93. In this respect Malmgreen talks of local entrepreneurs developing useful contacts with London traders, 'who would supply raw silk or twist (i.e. silk thread) on credit and contract for the finished product'. Malmgreen, *A Town Built on Silk*, 10 and 13.

94. 'Commenced the Manufacture of Hemp with Josias Nottidge for the employment of the Poor.' Savill Diary Entry Feb. 5, 1800, taken from W.F. Quin, *A History of Braintree and Bocking* (Lavenham, 1981), 67. The Savill Diaries were written by Joseph Savill and his son, John. They



appears to have given up this manufactory, selling some of his stock and machinery to John Hubbard (or Hubbert) of Bradford Street. Hubbert also appears to have been involved in the wool trade but had subsequently turned to blanket manufacture and, by the time of the 1832 *Directory*, was described as a rope and twine as well as hemp manufacturer.<sup>95</sup> The only links between the large woollen cloth merchants of the case study towns and later industrial activity, therefore, appears to have been associated with hemp and blankets. With regard to the latter Vancouver observed, for late 18th century Halstead, that the manufacture of baize and says was being supplemented by that of blankets.<sup>96</sup>

However, it is still possible that links between the wool and silk industries may have existed amongst the ranks of the smaller artisans and skilled bay and say weavers. The fate of these individuals was not recorded in dairies. To identify whether any connections existed alternative avenues of inquiry must be sought.

The fact that from 1813 baptism registers were legally required to include the father's 'quality, trade or professional', presents the opportunity to follow the fate of individuals identified in Bocking's 1807 census as bay and say weavers.<sup>97</sup> In undertaking such an investigation it was recognised that coverage was likely to be limited. Some of those in the 1807 census would have been beyond the age of fatherhood by 1813. There was also the fact that, as the census identified, a number of weavers were non-conformists. As such they were unlikely to appear in baptism registers of the Church of England to which the legislation applied. These restraints accepted, it was hoped that some weavers of 1807 would be identified.

Whilst no connections were found for 1813, 14 and 15, the possibility that the trade of any 1807 weaver would be identified after this time was removed by the practices of Charles Barton, incumbent from 1816 to 1830. He decided to classify the trade of most fathers as that of 'labourer'. This included those recorded as weavers before 1816 whose children were baptised after 1816. One such case was William Bullock. He appeared as a weaver in Bocking's baptism register on June 30th, 1815, but was described as a labourer in his subsequent entry on April 1818.<sup>98</sup> Interestingly, however, a number of occupations appear to have been exempt from this rule and continued to be recorded throughout Burton's period in office. These comprised innkeepers, schoolmasters, millers, butchers, physicians, glaziers, solicitors, surgeons, farmers, shopkeepers, bakers,

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cover the period from the late 18th to the early 19th century. The entire dairies are held in the Essex Record Office, ERO D/Dcd A1-6, 27.

95. Pigot & Co., *London and Provincial Commercial Directory* (London, 1832), 685-60.

96. Vancouver, *General View*, 28.

97. A survey of the inhabitants of the town and parish of Bocking, ERO D/P 268/18/1; Bocking baptism register, ERO D/P 268/1/8.

98. To make a positive identification between entries appearing in different years in the baptism registers, not only did the father's first and surname have to match, but also those of the mother.



thatchers, tailors and shoemakers. What this practice indicates is a particular contemporary's judgement on the standing and status of certain occupations. Weavers appear to have been considered to rank along side labourers and below those of thatcher and shoemaker. Although very circumstantial, this feature suggests that the male silk workforce, which by the 1820s and 30s must have consisted of some 100 or so individuals, were not considered to be skilled artisans. The idea that Burton just failed to acknowledge the arrival of silk in general is dismissed by the fact that he considered silk throwsters, such as Henry Smith, worthy of identification.

Faced with these short-comings Coggeshall's baptism registers were examined for the same period, 1813 to 1830.<sup>99</sup> Based on an examination of the types of occupation recorded, these 17 years appeared to capture the final period in the demise of Coggeshall's wool trade and the subsequent rise of silk. At the start of the period the occupation of baize weaver was identified along with that of ribbon weaver, later on silk weavers begin to be listed.

However, tracing the fate of particular individuals in this manner offered no evidence that wool weavers were turning to silk. First, the baize weaver did not appear after 1813. Second, none of those identified during the 1810s as weavers - a term that might have referred to wool weavers - subsequently appeared as silk weavers. In fact, the only examples of silk and unspecified weavers whose occupational labels altered during the course of successive baptisms suggests that, if there was a link, it occurred between weaving and labouring and could go in either direction. In this respect, the only example of a weaver identified in the early 1810s to appear subsequently with a different occupation was that of George Harris. In 1818 he was labelled as a weaver, in his two subsequent entries, in 1820 and 1823, he was described as a labourer.

Similarly, when considering the origins of those described as silk weavers between 1820 and 1825, only one appeared to have had a child baptised earlier - Uriah Gage. On this occasion, 1818, he was described as a labourer. The same was also true of Thomas Clark. In 1821 he was described as a weaver. The first time he appeared in the register was in 1817, as a labourer. Given that only a handful of cases were able to be followed, coupled with the unspecified nature of the label 'weaver', the findings from this baptism register analysis were considered to be rather inconclusive. It was, therefore, decided to revert to an examination of marriage registers in the hope that more substantial evidence could be discovered concerning links between wool and silk weavers.

Only from 1837 were marriage registers required to record occupations. Unfortunately this relates to a period sometime after the general decay of the wool trade. Nevertheless,

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99. Coggeshall baptism register, ERO D/P 36/1/10-15.



the findings from an examination of this source may still be important. By identifying both the occupations of the bride and groom and those of their respective fathers it is possible to assess the occupational background from which both male and female silk weavers derived. If weaving was a skill developed over time then it should be possible to identify the practice being passed down the generations. If, on the other hand, silk weavers derived from other occupational backgrounds associated with agricultural marketing then the importance of a weaving tradition in shaping the behaviour of silk would be small.

Examination was undertaken of Coggeshall's marriage register from 8th May 1838 to the end of 1851.<sup>100</sup> Twenty-nine cases were identified of sons or daughters recorded with the '*rank or profession*' of a silk weaver or weaver. Of these it was found that 10 (six male, four female) had fathers also described as weavers or silk weavers. The rest, amounting to almost two-thirds, came from non-textile backgrounds. This suggests that the importance of a textile background in recruiting new silk workers was not dominant. Closer examination identified that amongst the two-thirds from non-weaving backgrounds the most common occupation for a father was that of labourer. Indeed, weavers were as likely to derive from labouring backgrounds as weaving ones.

The fact that a considerable proportion of weavers came from labouring rather than independent artisan backgrounds also suggests that little capital was required to become a silk weaver. Likewise, it indicates silk weaving was not a trade that attracted the sons and daughters of artisans. This discovery underpins the findings made in the trade directory examination which identified a lack of small weaving and other silk working establishments in the three towns. It was a situation that contrasted with Macclesfield.<sup>101</sup> It also concurred with the interpretation, derived from the same trade directory analysis, that local capital in the Essex towns was directed into other non-textile sectors.

Examination of the background of those identified with craft and trade occupations for the same period reinforces these findings. Fifty-six were identified, all being male. Whilst in 12.5 percent of cases (7) the father's occupation was not recorded, amongst the rest 21.4 percent out of the 56 (12) were in exactly the same trade as their fathers and 36.3 percent (22) were in trades similar to their fathers. For example, a basket-maker whose father was recorded as a fellmonger. By contrast, only 26.8 percent had fathers with entirely different, non-trade and craft, occupations. Only one of these was a silk weaver.

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100. Coggeshall marriage register, ERO D/P 36/1/10-15.

101. Malmgreen, *A Town Built on Silk*, 11. According to Pigot's 1834 *Directory of Cheshire*, Macclesfield possessed: 55 spinning firms (throwsters and twisters); 54 manufacturers of silk and cotton; 10 dyers; 7 smallware manufacturers (including button, trimmings, ribbons and hat bands); 9 hat manufacturers; as well as 3 cotton mills proprietors. This made a total of 138 silk and cotton enterprises.



In summary, evidence from baptism and marriage registers reinforces the view that the role of a textile tradition played little part in influencing the behaviour of the silk manufacturers that came to reside in north Essex. Examination of the baptism registers failed to identify a link between wool and silk in terms of changes in the occupational descriptions of particular individuals over a series of entries. Indeed, the only incidence of occupational change associated with weavers linked them to labouring, both as an earlier and subsequent career. Beyond this, marriage register evidence illustrated that silk manufacturers were able to operate within the labour market generated by these towns as agricultural marketing centres. This was revealed by the fact that in a clear majority of cases silk weavers derived from non-textile backgrounds - as defined by the occupational description of their fathers. The most noticeable occupations for fathers in this regard were those of unspecified labourer, along with the likes of bricklayer's labourer.

Evidence that links between wool and silk were very weak accord with the different gender compositions associated with weavers in the two industries. Whilst only 4.2 percent of weavers recorded in Bocking's 1807 occupational census were females, the Handloom Weavers Commission recorded that around two thirds of the 441 handloom weavers employed by 'Messrs. Courtauld & Co.' were female.<sup>102</sup> The same report also observed that nearly all the 260 people employed in Courtauld's Halstead power-loom weaving factory were female.<sup>103</sup> Similarly, the 1834 Poor Law Report recorded that in Coggeshall women were employed in silk weaving.<sup>104</sup>

### iii

Comparison of manufacturers replies in the 1823 Report on the Wages of Persons Employed in Silk, with those appearing in later investigations, offers further evidence that these manufacturers were adapting to local market-town conditions. This reveals a policy difference between, on the one side, members of the first wave of silk manufacturers to establish in north Essex and, on the other, subsequent generations of manufacturers, along with the more enduring from the first wave.

In discussing the development of provincial manufactories, Ambrose Moore referred to 'The firm of the House of Rutter, Spieres and Field', and that of a Mr Smith. The former had established a manufactory at Halstead, the latter was said to have carried on a manufactory at Coggeshall.<sup>105</sup> Although the years during which they manufactured in

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102. A survey of Bocking, ERO D/P 268/18/1.

103. Handloom Weavers Reports: P.P. 1840 (43. 1.) XXIII, 287 and 293.

104. Report on the Administration of the Poor Laws. Appendix (B.1). Part 1: Answers to Rural Queries: Parliamentary Papers 1834 XXX, 172a.

105. Wages of Persons Employed in the Manufacture of Silk: Parliamentary Papers 1823 (HL. 86) CLVI, 164, 167. In this respect it can be noted that Coggeshall baptism registers recorded ribbon weavers appearing between 1813 and 1821.



the two towns were not made explicit, from accounts given by Moore it appears both had established manufactories by the later 1810s. This suggests the first generation of manufacturers to establish in these towns may not have appeared before the Parliamentary committees (unless that is they survived into the 1830s).<sup>106</sup> Similarly, they may not have been recorded in early trade directories.<sup>107</sup> However, as alluded to previously, the existence of these earlier, short-lived enterprises can be identified from parish registers. Amongst the fathers appearing in Coggeshall's baptism registers of early 1824 was John May, silk manufacturer.

The account in the 1823 Report for Rutters and Smith suggests that these two concerns operated along rather different lines to those described in the 1832 and 1840 reports. First, they appear to have paid high wages, 'The Firm of the House [of] Rutter, Spieres, and Field; I believe, at the Time they were manufacturing there, they gave very good Wages.'<sup>108</sup> Second, they seem to have employed indigenous male weavers. It is amongst these early manufacturers that the link between wool and silk can be discerned. In this respect Moore referred to villages in Oxford and elsewhere where linen weavers, or other unemployed weavers, could be put to work.<sup>109</sup>

It can be argued that the reason why firms such as Rutters failed to survive into the later 1820s - to feature in directories, or as witnesses before Parliamentary committees - was due to their failure to adapt to local market town conditions. Basing production on a few former wool weavers imposed considerable limitations on the extent to which production could be expanded. Moreover, by treating their north Essex manufactories as mere extensions of their London undertakings, both concerns laid themselves open to prosecution under the Spitalfields' Acts.<sup>110</sup> These outlawed the employment of country weavers to undertake work done in the city. The penalties incurred by the former business amounted to about £350, which forced Rutters, Spieres and Field to give up their manufactory. Smith's fate was even worse. The costs he incurred were in the order of 'Five or Six hundred Pounds'. He also gave up his Coggeshall manufactory and, according to Moore, 'Twelve Months afterwards ... became insolvent.'<sup>111</sup> In contrast, the longer-term success of Hall and Courtauld's businesses, amongst others, appears to have derived from their ability to adapt to the labour market conditions they encountered in north Essex - to have recognised the greater potential afforded by large supplies of cheap, female labour.<sup>112</sup>

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106. Essex manufacturers did not appear as witnesses until 1832.

107. As seen previously, after Holden's directory of 1811 there was a 13 year gap before Pigot & Co. began their coverage.

108. Wages in Silk. Lords Cttee. Minutes of Evidence: P.P. 1823 (HL. 86) CLVI, 164.

109. Although he added that the weavers of Spitalfields would endeavour to prevent him from doing so.

110. *The Spitalfields Acts*.

111. Wages in Silk. Lords Cttee. Minutes of Evidence: P.P. 1823 (HL. 86) CLVI, 164.

112. Colchester's re-industrialisation following the decline of its woollen cloth manufactories and centred upon silk, shoe making and tailoring, would, similarly, appear to have been based on the exploitation of cheap female labour. See P. Sharpe, 'De-industrialisation and re-industrialisation:



Furthermore, the straw plait and lace industries of the three towns appear to have similarly adapted to these conditions. As chapter 5 discussed, large numbers of young females were occupied in both. A Parliamentary report of 1841 offered the following description of Coggeshall's lace industry: it is 'carried on by numerous small masters and mistresses, who work by contract for the manufacturers and warehouses in London, and employ many hands. These parties engage principally children and a few young women, who work in shops or rooms at their employer's houses, or which are hired for the purpose'.<sup>113</sup>

## Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated that Parliamentary papers are a valuable source in the study of early Victorian small town economies. Considering employment opportunities, poor rate levels and average weekly wages of agricultural labourers, Poor Law Reports afford detailed insights into the general urban economic conditions. Meanwhile, those covering agriculture and various industries, such as silk and lace, reveal aspects of the organisation of businesses and the policies pursued, along with the motives and objectives of their proprietors, that few other sources divulge. Moreover, the chapter has presented examples of how such information might be supplemented by that from sources such as parish registers and local censuses.

The evidence these sources have furnished for the case study towns supports the thesis that local market town conditions influenced the behaviour of their silk manufactories. These conditions created a labour market characterised by a high supply of cheap, female labour. Whilst rational - in terms of fostering long-run commercial success - the low wage policy these manufacturers adopted in response to these labour market conditions had the effect of limiting the extent to which production could develop in one town. Once local supplies of cheap labour were harnessed, further expansion could only be achieved through the establishment of manufactories in neighbouring centres. The case of John Hall affords a suitable example.

Shortly after the middle of the century Hall could lay claim to having created a considerable silk throwing enterprise, boasting no fewer than six factories. Moreover the title deeds and plans for one of these have survived. These are dated August 1838 and afford evidence of a factory complex valued at £18,500 and comprising engine house, boiler house, packing warehouse, picking and washing rooms, as well as the silk mill itself which measured 180 by 45 feet, with two stories and possessed some of the earliest

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women's employment and the changing character of Colchester 1700-1850', *Urban History* 21 (1994), 77-96.

113. Employment of Children: P.P. 1843 (430) XIII, 307, 259.



cast iron window frames and sashes.<sup>114</sup> Yet, these mills were located in no fewer than five different settlements, with the bulk of production undertaken at Coggeshall.

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114. Covering letter by John Hall, referring to his title deeds to freehold property consisting of a silk mill situated at Coggeshall. ERO D/DC 27/685. Estimated valuation of John Hall's Orchard Mill, Coggeshall, with ground plan of the building and adjacent property. ERO D/DC 27/285.



## CONCLUSIONS

This thesis has sought to contribute to the study of England's small towns from the later 18th to the mid 19th century. Throughout this time small towns continued to represent the most common urban form. One estimate suggests some 600 settlements could be defined as such in 1811.<sup>1</sup> This, however, excludes those places still constituting small towns in the eyes of contemporaries, but with populations exceeding 5,000 in 1811. Whatever their true number, little is known about the fate of these smaller members of the urban fraternity during this period of rapid economic change, particularly those of southern England. A review of the literature, conducted in chapter 1, identified the character of this neglect; a consideration of entries appearing in the 'urban economic structure' section of the *Consolidated Bibliography of Urban History* and, more recently, the bibliographies featured in the journal *Urban History*, helps quantify it.<sup>2</sup> In total 185 entries from these bibliographies were identified as suitable for an assessment of the literature.<sup>3</sup>

Table 7.1 records the number and percentage of these entries by town type.<sup>4</sup> As might be expected, the largest number of books and articles relate to industrial cities. Amongst these Leeds received 12 entries, Manchester 10, Birmingham eight, Sheffield six and Liverpool four. In total 12 different towns were identified. Perhaps rather surprisingly, given that the industrial revolution is often perceived to have 'passed over it', London also received a fair amount of attention. Schwarz's interpretation that London played an active role during this period appears to be borne out, not merely in terms of the number of books and articles dealing with the metropolis, but also in terms of their subject matter.<sup>5</sup> Amongst the themes considered are the city and the Stock Exchange during the early and mid 19th century, the standard of living in London from the 18th century to 1860, as well as a study of London and the industrial revolution.<sup>6</sup>

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1. P. Clark, 'Small towns in England, 1550-1850: national and regional population trends', in idem (ed.), *Small Towns in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, 1995), 90.
  2. R. Rodger *A Consolidated Bibliography of Urban History*, (Hants, 1996); I. Backouche, L. Faire, and N. Wood, 'Current bibliography of urban history', *Urban History*, 23 (1996), 402-443; I. Backouche, L. Faire, N. Wood, and C. Fogg, 'Current bibliography of urban history', *Urban History*, 24 (1997), 388-441. In these bibliographies economic structure is sub-divided into a number of categories. Those consulted for this exercise consisted of economic activity, agriculture, industry, external and internal trade, consumption, working conditions and labour organisation. In total 2,221 entries appeared under these groupings.
  3. To qualify reference had to be given in the title to at least some part of the period between 1750 to 1850. Moreover, the name of the town(s) under consideration had to be given, or at least a reference to the character of the settlement as, for instance, a market town or city, in order to offer some indication of size.
  4. The typology used is based upon the distinctions identified by Glennie and others in chapter 1, with two exceptions. First, country towns and provincial centres were placed together and, second, reflecting the period under consideration, the category of industrial city was added.
  5. L. Schwarz, *London in the Age of Industrialisation: Entrepreneurs, Labour Force, and Living Conditions, 1700-1850* (Cambridge, 1992).
  6. Rodger, *Bibliography*, No. 14376, 561; No. 14532, 568; No. 13047, 507.



By contrast, the 100 or so places qualifying as county and provincial centres, which constituting the 'urban backbone' of early modern England, received only 18 percent of entries. Amongst the 17 named towns in this category Bristol received most attention, with nine entries, followed by Northampton with five and Leicester with three. However, in relation to their number small towns were the least well represented, attaining only 30 percent of all entries. In part this relatively poor level of coverage is reflected in the fact that, with the exception of Kidderminster, Halifax, Todmorden, Grimsby, Preston and Banbury, the other 43 towns mentioned received only one entry each.

Table 7.1 Bibliographical coverage of towns by type

| Town Type                               | Number of Entries | Percentage of Total |
|---|-------------------|---------------------|
| London                                  | 35                | 18.9                |
| Industrial Cities                       | 60                | 32.4                |
| Country Towns and<br>Provincial Centres | 34                | 18.4                |
| Small Towns                             | 56                | 30.3                |

*Sources:* R. Rodger *A Consolidated Bibliography of Urban History*; I. Backouche, L. Faire, and N. Wood, 'Current bibliography of urban history', *Urban History*, 23 (1996), 402-443; I. Backouche, L. Faire, N. Wood, and C. Fogg, 'Current bibliography of urban history', *Urban History*, 24 (1997), 388-441.

The comparative neglect of the small town urban economy during the later 18th and early 19th century can also be seen in the character of the journals these articles appeared in. Of the 185 entries under examination 123 were journal articles. Table 7.2 records for each town type the proportion of articles that appeared in local and national journals. A journal was identified as *local* where reference was given in its title to a particular town, district or county. The two exceptions to this rule concerned, first, those publications dealing with a wider region, such as *Northern History* and, second, the *London Journal*. These were included with the 'nationals' because they were considered to enjoy a national level of coverage.

Industrial cities received the greatest coverage in national journals, both in absolute and comparative terms, with almost 82 per cent of articles appearing in nationally circulated publications. London also featured strongly, with articles in the *Economic History Review*, as well as *History Today*, *Business History* and *Textile History*. By contrast, articles referring to small towns, and to a slightly lesser degree county and provincial towns, were more likely to feature in locally produced publications with smaller circulations, such as the *Essex Journal* and the *North Staffordshire Journal of Field*



*Studies*. What these findings demonstrate is that, to borrow Shaw and Coles’ phrase, the fate of England’s Georgian and early Victorian small towns remains largely ‘hidden away in local publications.’<sup>7</sup>

Table 7.2 Coverage of town type by local and national journals

| Town Type               | National | Local | Percentage National |
|-------------------------|----------|-------|---------------------|
| London                  | 18       | 8     | 69                  |
| Industrial Cities       | 31       | 7     | 81.6                |
| County/Provincial Towns | 10       | 12    | 45.5                |
| Small Towns             | 16       | 21    | 43                  |

*Sources:* Rodger A *Consolidated Bibliography* ; Backouche, Faire, and Wood, ‘Current bibliography’, in *Urban History*, 23 (1996); Backouche, Faire, Wood, and Fogg, ‘Current bibliography’, *Urban History*, 24 (1997).

Closer examination of the 56 book and article entries dealing with small towns confirms another observation made in the literature review, that coverage is particularly poor for the towns of southern England. Table 7.3 compares the number and percentage of bibliography entries covering small towns in the north, the midlands and the south. Less than one-fifth covered small towns located in the southern counties.

Table 7.3 Coverage of small towns in books and articles by region

| Region   | Number | Percentage of Entries |
|----------|--------|-----------------------|
| North    | 25     | 44.6                  |
| Midlands | 20     | 35.7                  |
| South    | 11     | 19.6                  |

*Sources:* Rodger A *Consolidated Bibliography* ; Backouche, Faire, and Wood, ‘Current bibliography’, in *Urban History*, 23 (1996); Backouche, Faire, Wood, and Fogg, ‘Current bibliography’, *Urban History*, 24 (1997).

Not only were the small towns of southern England the most poorly represented of a generally under investigated class, those journal articles that did consider them were more likely to be local. Table 7.4 shows half the small towns referred to in national journal articles were found in northern England, whilst another 37 percent covered small towns in the midlands. Amongst the former were Barnsley and its linen industry of the 18th and

7. G. Shaw and T. Coles, ‘European directories: a universal source for urban historians’, *Urban History*, 22 (1995), 87.



19th centuries, Oldham and its early Victorian working class, and carpet manufacturing in Halifax.<sup>8</sup>

Table 7.4 Small town coverage in national journals by region

| Region   | Number | Percentage of National Entries |
|----------|--------|--------------------------------|
| North    | 8      | 50                             |
| Midlands | 6      | 37.5                           |
| South    | 2      | 12.5                           |

*Sources:* Rodger *A Consolidated Bibliography* ; Backouche, Faire, and Wood, ‘Current bibliography’, in *Urban History*, 23 (1996); Backouche, Faire, Wood, and Fogg, ‘Current bibliography’, *Urban History*, 24 (1997).

For the midlands, the industrial organisation of Kidderminster, 1780-1850, was explored, along with working conditions in Victorian Stourbridge, and the brewing industry in 19th century Grimsby.<sup>9</sup> By contrast, only 12 percent of articles published in national journals on small towns, numbering two, considered places in the south. These comprised an examination of the cross-channel trade from Weymouth, Dorset, 1794-1914, and an investigation into the decline of Deal’s boatmen during the 19th century.<sup>10</sup>

ii

The final section of Chapter 1 sought to explain why the Georgian and early Victorian small towns of England and, in particular, those of the south, have received such scant attention from historians. Clark has suggested the answer can be traced back to contemporary observers and their interests in the burgeoning industrial cities. In contrast, the traditional urban system, consisting of provincial centres and country towns, as well as the plethora of small, slow growing market towns, may have appeared antiquated and worthy of little comment. Lewis, in turn, has identified the more practical problem that the later 18th and early 19th century was a period associated with a dearth of primary source material with which to examine the urban economies of England’s small towns. By the second half of the 18th century sources used by early modern historians, such as wills, freeman’s lists and apprenticeship indentures, become less readily available.

However, one of the two major aims of the thesis has been to suggest that both these explanations are unfounded. The thesis identified the growing trend, by both private concerns and central government, to catalogue and classify economic activity, not merely

8. Rodger, *Bibliography*, No. 13569, 529; No. 14803, 579; No. 13858, 540.  
9. *Ibid.*, No. 13793, 538; No. 14608, 571; Backouche, Faire, Wood and Fogg, ‘Current bibliography’, 866, *Urban History* 24 (1997), 424.  
10. Rodger, *Bibliography*, No. 14001, 546; Backouche, Faire, and Wood, ‘Current bibliography’, 597, *Urban History* 23 (1996), 429.



for the large and rapidly expanding centres of the age but also for small, slow growing places. Norton has traced the origins of this phenomenon to late 16th century London.<sup>11</sup> The first list of merchants was published here in 1677, with a far more extensive directory of principal traders produced in 1732. The next phase in this process occurred from the 1760s with the appearance of provincial directories for larger centres including Birmingham and Liverpool. Coverage of smaller towns, however, began with the publication of Bailey's *British Directory* of 1781, followed by the *Universal British Directory* in the 1790s and Holden's *London and Country Directory* in 1811. All three made explicit reference to smaller urban centres. From the later 1810s these national directories were superseded by the more extensive coverage offered by the regional directories of Pigot and Co. and Frederick Kelly, amongst others. It is arguable that the same forces of enquiry were influential in two other contemporary developments, both again encompassing aspects of small town economies. First, central government investigation into trade, industry, agriculture and the poor - although other considerations such as national security and wealth were probably of at least equal importance, second, Rickman's decennial census enumerators' returns. Although dating from 1801, it was from the middle of the 19th century that the census enumerators' returns became sufficiently reliable and comprehensive to afford detailed insight into the occupational composition of local communities. A chapter was devoted to exploring the character of each of these four source types. Chapter 3 considered national directories, chapter 4 early 19th century commercial directories, chapter 5 the 1851 census enumerators' returns and chapter 6 Parliamentary Papers.

Despite their existence, the value of these primary sources, particularly directories, has been questioned. Some of the criticisms were considered in chapters 3, 4, 5 and 6. They will also be explored, from a slightly different angle, in the final section of these conclusions.<sup>12</sup> However, chapter 2 identified a number of studies into small towns during this period that demonstrated the degree to which such material can be used to illuminate the subject. Moreover, the methodology sections in each of the four chapters suggested ways in which the sources could be employed to reveal new insights into the urban economies of small towns.

Brown has identified an alternative explanation for the neglect of these small, slow growing towns - the modern urban historian's pre-occupation with growth.<sup>13</sup> This would appear consistent with Weber's influential agenda for historians, compiled at the end of the

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11. J.E. Norton, *Guide to National and Provincial Directories of England and Wales, Excluding London Published Before 1856* (London, 1950).

12. They have also been addressed in a recently published article. N.D. Raven, 'The trade directory: a source for the study of early 19th century urban economies', *Business Archives Sources and History*, 74 (1997), 13-30.

13. S.M. Brown, C.A. Dyhouse, J.D. Marshall, A. Palmer and D.W. Twiss, 'A small town study: an experiment in teamwork', *Urban History Yearbook* (1974), 19-23.



19th century.<sup>14</sup> A further explanation, however, was ventured in chapter 2. Perhaps the small towns of southern England have, in particular, been overlooked because, in a period dominated by discussion and debate on industrialisation, this region is judged to have been a predominantly agrarian one. In fact, southern England and its towns are often considered to have lost much of the industry they once possessed. To this end, Clark has recently argued that small town urban industry in southern England was suffering by the early 19th century. Those in the south-east were feeling the negative impact of the 'metropolitan effect'. London's high prices and labour costs were spreading into the surrounding counties encouraging industry to migrate to cheaper areas. At the same time agricultural specialisation in the south was diverting resources away from industry and into agriculture. The picture Clark creates of southern England's urban economies in the early 19th century is generally gloomy. Not only were their industries in decline, they also had to endure the effects of the post-war agricultural depression, as well as a run on their banks in the 1820s.<sup>15</sup>

The perception that the urban industrial history of England occurred outside the south appears consistent with the subjects discussed in the articles published by national journals and considered in the previous section. The same general observations can also be made for those articles published in local journals. In the north, the lime kiln company of Bradford is examined, along with the export of industrial technology from Stockport, the slate business of Northwich, the wool trade and the industrial revolution in Addingham, child employment in Warrington's pin making industry and commerce in Todmorden, 1782-1849.<sup>16</sup> In the midlands, the Victorian industrial structure of the Potteries, the worsted industry of Kettering, brewing in Burton on Trent and framework knitting in Ilkeston, 1775-1850, were amongst the subjects investigated.<sup>17</sup> In contrast, in the south the only reference to industry concerns 19th century pipe making in Portchester and, less directly, a study of some 18th century apprentices in Banbury.<sup>18</sup>

### iii

Against the perception that the small towns of the Georgian and early Victorian south were de-industrialising are the findings from the case study, introduced in chapter 2, and comprising the three north Essex towns of Coggeshall, Halstead and Braintree and Bocking. Throughout the early modern period all three operated as woollen textile manufacturing centres. According to Berg and Langton, as well as Johnson writing on

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14. See chapter 1.

15. Clark, 'Small towns in England', 90-120. See also P. Clark, 'Conclusion', in idem (ed.), *Cambridge Urban History of Britain*, Vol. II, 1560-1840, esp. 1369. Forthcoming. 'Smaller towns in the more agrarian and traditional south west and East Anglia witnessed the draining away of their older industrial specialities, and were forced into a greater dependence on the agrarian economy.'

16. Rodger, *Bibliography*, No. 13553, 528; No. 13568, 529; No. 13617, 531; No. 13681, 534; No. 14584, 570; Backouche, Faire, and Wood, 'Current bibliography', *Urban History* 23 (1996), No. 603, 429.

17. Rodger, *Bibliography*, No. 13708, 535; No. 13746, 536; No. 14342, 560; No. 14838, 581.

18. *Ibid.*, No. 13421, 523; No. 14593, 571.



Coggeshall, this long industrial tradition came to an end during the late 17th and early 18th centuries. In this respect north Essex represented one of a number of southern England's old manufacturing districts that experienced de-industrialisation. The same fate befell the towns of Berkshire and Hampshire. However, closer examination of settlement descriptions and evidence derived from Parliamentary Papers revealed a different story. The decaying woollen textile manufactories of these north Essex towns were replaced by new industries, most noticeably silk. Far from representing modest short-lived concerns, as E.L. Jones has suggested, a number of these silk businesses proved to be enduring. Similarly, contrary to Berg's claim that these amounted to only primitive undertakings, evidence showed that some were producing from factories. The title deeds and plan for one of these - John Hall's Orchard Mill at Coggeshall - revealed it to have constituted a building of comparatively advanced construction. The industrialists of these towns were also shown to have applied steam power, introduced machinery rejected by hostile labour elsewhere, successfully patented new equipment and, during the course of the first half of the century, expanded production at very respectable rates.

However, as chapter 2 also demonstrated, despite these industrial developments, none of the three north Essex towns experienced the radical urban expansion witnessed by their industrialising counterparts in the south-west Pennines and the West Riding of Yorkshire. Instead their mid-Victorian townscape's comprised one or two factories, amidst a host of small workshops and artisan's establishments, along with the market area and, in the case of both Halstead and Braintree and Bocking, large, handsome corn-exchanges. It is hardly surprising that, diluted by the farmers who would have regularly visited these towns, the agricultural labourers who were often found living in town cottages and the numerous craftsmen and traders, the silk throwers and weavers, along with the lace works who comprised the industrial workforce, were not considered by contemporaries to form a distinct and visible class.<sup>19</sup> The proximity and influence of the land may also have accounted for the fact that, as noted in chapter 6, one protest mentioned by a Coggeshall silk factory owner took the form of a threatening Swing letter.

Underpinning these observations were the findings of chapters 3, 4 and 5. In contrast to their rapidly growing counterparts in the north, industry did not dominate the economies of the Essex cloth towns. Instead activities arising from their role as thoroughfare and marketing centres accounted for the largest number of principal inhabitants, the most enduring and dynamic businesses and the most affluent households. To this end the *Victoria County History* in 1907 commented on the presence of numerous traders in these towns during the first half of the 19th century. Although acknowledging the number of workmen each master employed was small, it added that 'collectively the employees were

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19. Amongst these contemporaries was Dr James Mitchell, one of the contributors to the 1840 Handloom Weavers Report. See chapter 6,



numerous' and that, in receipt of good wages, they and their families were able to contribute greatly to the life and prosperity of these towns.<sup>20</sup>

The economic dominance of these aspects of the urban economy was explained in terms of the strong commercial links these towns enjoyed with the region's major urban centres. These included the provincial towns of Colchester, Cambridge and Norwich, as well as the ports of the Hythe, Harwich and Ipswich and, above all, London, which was a mere 40 miles south-west along two heavily used, early turnpiked roads. The resulting prosperity of the town markets and their thoroughfares received comment from various contemporaries. Arthur Young considered the three north Essex towns to rank amongst the county's chief markets, whilst Pigot made particular reference to the handsome houses of traders made affluent by commerce arising from the passage of goods between London and the 'more eastern counties'.

#### iv

How the dominance of marketing and thoroughfare activities influenced the development of industries in the case study towns, including their comparatively subdued rates of demographic growth, was investigated in chapter 6. The industries were found to depend heavily upon low wage, female and child labour. Indeed, in comparison to the silk workforce of towns such as Coventry, the proportion of female and child labourers was judged significantly higher, whilst the wages paid to the Essex industrial workforce were around a third lower. The presence of this pool of cheap, flexible labour was considered influential in attracting industry to the towns. Moreover, the lower cost of the wages bill, coupled with the ease with which new machinery could be introduced, helped ensure the long running success of a number of these businesses, including the Courtaulds at Halstead and Braintree and Bocking, and John Hall at Coggeshall.

However, chapter 6 also argued that the pursuit of this low-wage policy determined the extent to which industrial development occurred in each town. Once the available pool of cheap labour had been harnessed further expansion required the establishment of new manufactories elsewhere. In consequence, John Hall was shown to have established additional mills at Maldon, Chelmsford and Tiptree. The alternative strategy would have been to adopt a higher wage policy, attracting labour from further afield and concentrating production in one town. Such a strategy would have been more in keeping with that pursued by the manufacturers of the south-west Pennine silk towns. However, it would have erased the one cost advantage the likes of John Hall had over his northern counterparts.

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20. W. Page and J.H. Round (eds), *Victoria County History of Essex*, Vol. II (London, 1907), 356.



In support of the rationality of this commercial strategy, reference can be made to the behaviour of merchant clothiers in the putting-out system, including those operating from the urban textile manufactories of early modern Essex. Here too emphasis was on cheap labour, with expansion of production achieved through the employment of additional hands in the surrounding countryside.<sup>21</sup> Similarly, capital is behaving in comparable ways in parts of the developing and third world today. Indeed, some multinationals have established plants in parts of Britain to take advantage of the comparatively cheap labour available.<sup>22</sup>

Chapter 6 also sought to demonstrate that the low wage, female labour market existing in the case study towns was the consequence of their operation as thoroughfare and marketing centres. During the second half of the 18th century female and child employment in the surrounding countryside experienced some decline. As local commercial centres these towns attracted many females. The fact that housing tended to be more readily available in these places, which, in part, may have been the consequence of some villages allegedly knocking down labourer's cottages, further encouraged the movement of poor agricultural labouring families to the towns. However, outside domestic service the prospects for female employment in these places proved to be very limited. Businesses associated with trade and marketing were largely male preserves. The supply of female labour these circumstances created was only to be exacerbated by the high prices of food and provisions found in these places which, again, was the consequence of their strong links to the metropolitan economy. Finally, the poor relief system administered in these towns, two of which were heads of poor law unions, may well have contributed to this labour market situation by operating to retain impoverished families who, under a less generous scheme, might have migrated from the area.<sup>23</sup>

A further distinguishing characteristic of industry in the north Essex towns, and one that also helps explain the extent to which it was likely to impact upon these places, was discussed in chapters 4 and 5. In contrast to the silk towns of the south-west Pennines, no

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21. By the later 17th century Burley notes that the unskilled occupations of carding and spinning were 'widely dispersed in rural Essex'. She adds that merchants would often be prepared to send yarn for spinning up to 30 miles away from their head quarters. K. Burley, 'The economic development of Essex in the later 17th and early 18th centuries' (unpublished PhD thesis, University of London, 1957), 101-113.
  22. N.D. Raven, 'City and countryside: London and the market town economies of southern England c.1770-1851' (paper given in New Researchers session of the Economic History Society conference, Nottingham University, April, 1994).
  23. The potential role played by the decaying woollen industry of the case study towns in nurturing these labour market conditions was further explored in N.D. Raven, 'Local experiences of de-industrialisation: the decline of manufacturing in a north Essex township, c1790 to c1810', (paper given at Local Population Studies Society conference on 'Changing Communities', University of Derby, September, 1998); see also idem 'De-industrialisation or industrial transition: the case of Bocking parish, north Essex, c1790-c1810', *Local Population Studies Journal*. Forthcoming. This issue is also discussed briefly by Sokoll. He suggests that the demise of Braintree and Bocking woollen industry left the town with 'a large reservoir of cheap labour. It was on such 'hands' with a long collective experience in proto-industrial employment that the new industry could draw.' T. Sokoll, *Household and Family Among the Poor* (Bochum, 1993), 199-201.



allied and ancillary trades, such as silk merchants, dealers and loom makers, were recorded in the directories for the case study towns nor, indeed, in their enumerators' returns. The absence of an undertaker system may, as John Hall claimed, have lowered costs by removing the middleman, but it also reveals the operation of a quite distinct urban industrial network. The three north Essex towns appear to have operated as part of a 'production-line' that, in the case of both silk and lace, begun in London, was transferred to the Essex towns and returned to the capital for finishing and marketing. Directory entries for certain silk manufacturers that include second, London, addresses supports this, as does the appearance of non-local partners in these businesses and references to agents and managers running the north Essex branch of these enterprises.

Again, the operation of the towns as principally marketing and thoroughfare centres offers an explanation. Perhaps indigenous silk-related concerns failed to emerge because the marketing and thoroughfare sectors of these three towns offered wider, more lucrative opportunities for commercial success. Certainly, as chapter 5 demonstrated, these sectors were responsible for a very considerable amount of business formation. Indeed, these marketing and thoroughfare businesses offered a wider range of services than their counterparts in the West Riding or south-west Pennines. Moreover, the concerns involved with these activities in the north Essex towns also possessed the best opportunities of long-run success and displayed the clearest signs of growth.

Perhaps local social and cultural forces also influenced the character of business formation in these towns. Certain family names appear to have dominated particular trades. For example, out of nine butchering enterprises operating in Braintree and Bocking in 1826 four belonged to the Medcalfs. Likewise, successive generations of the same family were found in the same areas of business. The Beards of Coggeshall, for instance, were associated with ironmongering throughout the 1820s, 1830s, 1840s, and, indeed, into the 1850s. Such prominent individuals and families may have exercised considerable influence over the local business community. Certainly, as sources of regular employment, important rate payers and probably voters, they would have wielded considerable political power. It is undoubtedly an area worthy of closer examination, as is that concerning local views and perceptions of industry in these towns and the possibility that anti-industrial sentiments may have influenced levels of industrial development. In this respect, as early as the 1760s the reverend Philip Morant observed that some wished to see the woollen industry leave Colchester.<sup>24</sup> Subsequently, contemporaries such as Arthur Young expressed reservations about the benefits that the silk, lace and straw plait manufactories brought to the towns, whilst the Coggeshall silk manufacture John Hall sought to defend his establishment by arguing that its absence would have a detrimental

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24. Against these sentiments Morant argued that the town's wool manufacturers were far more valuable than 'such dealers ... as are only subservient to people's luxury and pride...and manage their businesses ... only with three or four hands.' P. Morant, *The History and Antiquities of the County of Essex* (1763-1768: West Yorkshire, 1978) Colchester, 1970), 79-80.



impact on the poor of the town. Whatever the findings of future studies into the influence of local attitudes towards industry may reveal, it can be suggested that the absence of any allied or ancillary businesses probably influenced the decision to spread production into other settlements rather than concentrate in one. Had such supporting businesses developed then it may have made commercial sense to adopt a strategy similar to that practised by manufacturers in the south-west Pennine towns. The decision to spread production may also have been influenced by the manufacturers of these towns retaining close ties with London and, conversely, lacking strong associations with the case study towns. Perhaps this allowed them to perceive these places as manufacturing outposts, to be added to, or even perhaps abandoned, when necessary.

Given these observations, the question of describing the nature of the relationship between the case study towns, in their capacity as manufacturing centres, and London, arises. It can be suggested that the theory of comparative advantage appears to offer the best fit, with the north Essex towns possessing a comparative advantage over London in the cost and flexibility of their labour force. The fact that many of the silk manufacturers found in these towns derived from the Spitalfields area and some, including the Courtaulds, maintained warehouses there, supports this claim. Likewise, at least one of the early lace manufacturers of Coggeshall also originated from Cheapside, London. The timing of the emergence of silk manufactories in north Essex also fits Schwarz's chronology on London's 'de-industrialisation' and the migration of this industry from the capital.<sup>25</sup> The fact that the three north Essex towns were only 40 miles away from London and enjoyed good communication links with it, as thoroughfares and marketing centres, may well have been influential in this development.

This application of the theory of comparative advantage, however, contrasts with that of E.L. Jones. As outlined in chapters 2 and 6, Jones used the concept to explain the 'de-industrialisation' of the south. He considered the climate, labour supply situation and soils of southern England to have given it a comparative advantage over the north in agricultural production. There are, however, reasons to question Jones's application of this neo-classical model. In fact the continued existence of industry in north Essex points to the underlying weakness of his thesis - its failure to appreciate the nature and, perhaps, extent of regional integration by the early 19th century. For Jones's thesis to work the major axis along which labour and capital moved should have been north/south. In fact, the findings from the case study suggests major movement of industrial capital took place between districts within the same region. This observation also fits with work on regional wages and labour movement. Hunt found that agricultural labours in Essex and other parts of the south rarely contemplated moving to the north, a region they knew little about, but, instead, were more likely to migrate towards London. More recently, Boyer and Hatton

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25. L. Schwarz, 'De-industrialisation of 18th century London?' (paper given at the colloquium on Industry and the 18th Century Town, University of London, 1994).



found that the agricultural labour markets in the south-west, as well as the east, were 'very poorly integrated with labour markets in other regions'. Easterners migrated 'overwhelmingly ... in the direction of London'.<sup>26</sup> Similarly, developments in Yorkshire in the early 19th century suggest comparative advantage is best applied at a more local level, to the trading relationship between the industrialising West Riding on one hand, and the growing prosperity of the agricultural sector in the East Riding on the other.<sup>27</sup> The de-industrialisation of the towns of the North Riding, discussed in chapter 2 and revisited shortly, and their revival as agricultural marketing centres serving the industrial towns of the West Riding, suggests the development of a similar relationship within the same region.

## II

These, then, are the findings and interpretations offered for the economic history of north Essex's three cloth towns during later 18th and first half of the 19th century. They were places that acquired some of the characteristics of industrial centres but in which marketing and thoroughfare functions constituted the most important economic activities. For those concerned with the economic history of 18th and 19th century Essex, the perception of these places as old, declining cloth towns may now be open to debate.<sup>28</sup> Throughout this investigation, however, these three towns have been presented as a case study. In order to establish the extent to which the economic history of other towns in southern England may have resembled that of Braintree and Bocking, Coggeshall and Halstead and, also, to what extent a network of small manufacturing towns linked into the metropolitan economy operated in the south, demands further detailed research. However, the preliminary findings from a wider geographical study enables some speculative observations to be made, and some directions for further research identified. The final section of these conclusions attempts such an exercise.

### i

Of the various sources considered throughout the thesis, trade directories lend themselves most readily to cursory investigation of small town urban economies. They represent an accessible source from which information on particular small towns is easily acquired. Given their widespread coverage, this data should also be available for small towns throughout the country. Moreover, if the directories of the later 18th century are included, the same source-type can embrace the whole period under investigation, enabling changes over time to be recorded.

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26. G.R. Boyer and T.J. Hatton, 'Regional labour market integration in England and Wales, 1850-1913', in G. Grantham and M. MacKinnon (eds), *Labour Market Evolution* (London, 1994), chapter 5.

27. My thanks to Steve Caunce, University of Leeds, for drawing my attention to this.

28. Johnson, for example, is one who considers Coggeshall to have de-industrialised and, by the second half of the 18th century, to have become little more than an 'agrarian village'. C. Johnson, 'A proto-industrial community study: Coggeshall in Essex c1500-c1750' (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Essex, 1989), 55-122.



Despite this potential, however, little use has been made of directories in comparing urban economies in different regions. The majority of studies utilising late 18th and/or early 19th century directories have focused either on a single settlement, or a group of towns in the same locality. Timmin's study of Sheffield, Duggan's of Birmingham, Rimmer's of Leeds and Page's of Ashby conform to the first.<sup>29</sup> Wilde's consideration of the south-west Pennine towns, Walton's of Oxford and my one for the towns of the North Riding of Yorkshire, represent examples of the latter.<sup>30</sup> This failure to employ directories in regional comparisons seems all the more surprising given Shaw and Coles' project on town directories.<sup>31</sup> This seeks to facilitate comparative urban history research across Europe. The limitations of these more ambitious national and regional directories, as opposed to the single town ones considered by Shaw and Cole, may, in part at least, explain the absence of inter-regional studies.

Reservations expressed about regional and national directory coverage take four forms. The first of these is the claim that the information they proffer is unreliable. This accusation has been raised by Chilton in his discussion of the *Universal British Directory's* coverage of Hull.<sup>32</sup> This appears to have been lifted from an earlier publication and led Chilton to conclude that the UBD is of no value to the study of Hull's commercial history during the 1790s.<sup>33</sup> The second reservation concerns the limited coverage directories offer of commercial activity. This has been directed at both 18th and early 19th century directories. Shaw has claimed that 18th century directories were principally concerned with the recording of the local nobility and clergy, rather than the commercial activities of towns.<sup>34</sup> Similarly, in his study of 18th century Oxfordshire, Walton argued that provincial newspapers offer more extensive coverage of economic activity than either Bailey's *Directory*, or the UBD, and that reliance on directories to 'chart developments in trade, commerce and industry' is, consequently, 'hazardous'.<sup>35</sup> For 19th century publications, Duggan's investigation of Birmingham led him to admit that directories were 'far from complete', failing to include many very small operations.<sup>36</sup> The third type of concern relates to the variable levels of coverage different publications awarded to

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29. G. Timmins, 'Measuring industrial growth from trade directories', *Local Historian*, 13 (1979), 349-52; E.P. Duggan, 'Industrialisation and the development of urban business communities: research problems, sources and techniques', *Local Historian*, 8 (1975), 457-465; W.G. Rimmer, 'The industrial profile of Leeds, 1740-1840', *Thoresby Society*, 14 (1967), 134-157; D. Page, 'Commercial directories and market towns', *Local Historian*, 2 (1974), 85-88.

30. P. Wilde, 'The use of directories in comparing the industrial structure of towns', *Local Historian*, 12 (1976), 152-6; J.R. Walton, 'Trades and professions in late 18th century England: assessing the evidence of directories', in *Local Historian*, 17 (1987), 343-50; N.D. Raven, 'De-industrialisation and the urban response: the small towns of the North Riding of Yorkshire c1790-1850', in R. Weedon and A. Milne, *Aspects of English Small Towns in the 18th and 19th Centuries*, (Leicester, 1993), 46-69.

31. Shaw and Coles, 'European directories', 85-106.

32. Hereafter referred to as the UBD.

33. C.W. Chilton, 'The Universal British Directory - a warning', *Local Historian*, 15 (1982), 144-146.

34. G. Shaw, 'The content and reliability of 18th century trade directories', *Local Historian*, 13 (1978), 205.

35. Walton, 'Trades and professions', 343-50.

36. Duggan, 'Industrialisation and the development', 457-465.



commercial undertakings. In this respect Wilde's study of the south-west Pennine towns found that the system of classifying silk-related activities differed from one directory to the next.<sup>37</sup> Finally, there is the claim that directories offer insufficient detail in their descriptions of businesses to afford any insight into size and scale. This assessment was made by Timmins in his investigation of the Sheffield steel industry.<sup>38</sup> The same judgement was also made by Lewis and Lloyd-Jones in their study of the early Manchester cotton industry. Indeed, this finding led Lewis and Lloyd-Jones to employ rate books instead.<sup>39</sup>

However, some of these reservations can be questioned. Chilton's warning of unreliability is not so applicable to smaller towns, since these were far less likely to have been the subject of earlier directory analysis. Wilkins-Jones, in his foreword to the UBD, points out that 'of 1,600 towns and villages listed in the UBD over 1,500 had never appeared in a directory before.'<sup>40</sup> In addition, whilst the nobility and clergy were prominent in the UBD's coverage of Essex's towns, reference was also made to a range of traders and professionals. Indeed, inclusion of these individuals represented one of Barfoot and Wilke's primary aims - to provide 'a general register of the names and places of abode of the gentlemen, tradesmen, and manufacturers in each city, town and principal village'. The supply of this information, they hoped, would facilitate business transactions by alleviating 'the necessity of long and fatiguing journeys or vague enquiries'.<sup>41</sup>

Turning to Walton's claims that newspapers offer rather more information than the UBD, closer examination of his findings reveals this is only true if consideration is given to coverage of the whole county. If analysis is confined to the towns recorded by the directory, then the number of traders and professionals found in the UBD is significantly higher than those collected from the newspaper.<sup>42</sup> Furthermore, the criteria for inclusion in the directory, based on the definition of 'principal inhabitant', is likely to have been more systematic and better able to promote spatial comparison of urban economies than one based on 'fortuitous appearance ... in news and advertising columns'.<sup>43</sup> Similarly, although Duggan admitted that coverage in his directories of 1777, 1830 and 1860 was not comprehensive, he claimed that it was sufficient to inform. Those excluded he considered

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37. Wilde, 'The use of directories', 152-6.

38. Timmins, 'Measuring industrial growth', 349-52.

39. M.J. Lewis and R. Lloyd-Jones 'Rate books: a technique of reconstructing the local economy', *The Local Historian*, 17 (1987), 277-280.

40. C. Wilkins-Jones, 'Forward and index', *The Universal British Directory 1793-1798*, (Norfolk, 1993). Unnumbered.

41. Indeed, there is some evidence for suggesting that the extent and depth of the UBD's coverage may have been best in the south, particularly around London. It was the district that both Barfoot and Wilkes were most familiar with. The former resided in Hampshire, the latter was the printer and published of a History of Winchester, as well as being the proprietor of the Hampshire Chronicle. Moreover the UBD was published and printed in London. Wilkins-Jones, 'Forward and index'.

42. Walton, 'Trades and professions', 347.

43. *Ibid.*, 345.



to have chosen not to advertise either because they were 'strictly local', or because they 'could not afford it.'<sup>44</sup> Moreover, with regard to Walton's claims for newspapers there is the issue of what is practical. Walton acknowledges that the indexing and synopsis carried out over several years on Jackson's *Oxford Journal* was a 'painstaking exercise'.<sup>45</sup> In comparison, the extraction of data from the directories is an easy task. What is more Walton does not consider the value of descriptions recorded in the UBD, as well as its regional successors. In their introduction to the UBD Barfoot and Wilkes stated that, 'An account is prefixed to the directory of every city and provincial town explaining the nature of their trade and manufactures.'<sup>46</sup> Although these settlement descriptions must be treated with caution, their value was demonstrated in chapter 3.

Moving on to Wilde's concerns over variable levels of coverage, it can be suggested that this was principally the consequence of employing directories produced by a variety of companies. In his coverage of Leek, for example, Wilde used six surveys derived from the directories of six different companies: Bailey (1784), Holden (1809), Parsons and Bradshaw (1818), Pigot (1828), White (1834), and Williams (1846).<sup>47</sup> More consistency would have been gained had Wilde kept to directories published by one or two of the more reputable companies, such as Pigot and Slater. Both of these, according to Shaw, 'employed full-time professional agents who were responsible for systematically collecting, classifying and recording the information.'<sup>48</sup>

Finally, the claim by Timmins, and Lewis and Lloyd-Jones, that directories lack sufficient detail to enable assessments on size and scale, may also be challenged. From the analysis undertaken in chapters 3, 4 and 5, qualitative differences appear to have existed between enterprises described as 'makers' and those termed 'manufacturers', as well as between single proprietorships and partnerships (and, within partnerships, between those comprising family names and those including non-familial partners). In addition, some guide to comparative size is also possible from consideration of addresses. Sometimes reference is made to factories or mills (which, on occasions, also include reference to the application of steam power). Similarly, in some instances second addresses are given, implying the concern operated from more than one outlet, sometimes the address is that of a different town and, on occasions, a manager or agent is identified. Finally, some idea of size and importance can be derived from the directories' settlement descriptions. Reference may be given to the 'principal employment of the town', the fact that large numbers were occupied in a particular industry or, perhaps, the naming of the leading firms of the town. Indeed it can be suggested that where investigation involves examination of many urban economies, directories supply the only practical way of

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44. Duggan, 'Industrialisation and the development', 345.

45. Walton, 'Trades and professions', 348.

46. Wilkins-Jones, 'Forward and index'.

47. Wilde, 'The use of directories', 152-6.

48. Shaw, 'The content and reliability of directories', 205-209.



establishing the rough scale of enterprises and industries. Rate book analysis, though probably more discerning, is also far more time consuming. In addition, there is also the problem, not faced by Lewis and Lloyd-Jones for Manchester, that many early 19th century rate books for smaller urban communities only record occupiers, not owners of property.<sup>49</sup>

Based on these observations a simple methodology can be devised for provisional investigation into the small towns of southern England during the classic industrial period. This involves a consideration of their urban economies at three dates: the 1790s, the early 1820s and the 1840s. The UBD, which represents the more extensive and detailed of the two late 18th century national directories, will supply information for the first of these. Pigot & Co.'s *London & Provincial New Commercial Directory* for 1823-4, which forms part of the company's first national survey, will proffer information on the second. Finally, directories from Pigot's fourth national survey, undertaken between 1841 and 1847, will supply data for the third date. For each date information on trade and industry will be collected from the settlement descriptions, as well as the lists of principal inhabitants and traders. The findings will then be examined to discover whether other southern small towns bore the same characteristics as those of the case study. Throughout the consequent analysis the limitations of the directories, as identified in chapters 3 and 4, should be kept in mind, with the findings constituting no more than the first set of preliminary observations.

Before commencing with the investigation the area of study needs defining. The term 'southern England' is well established. Jones employs it in his thesis of comparative advantage. Yet, which counties comprised the south is not clearly stated. Under these conditions of uncertainty it was decided to adopt a broad definition embracing those counties located in an area from Suffolk down to Kent, across to Devon and Cornwall and up to Gloucestershire. In addition, three sub-regions within this area were distinguished. Membership of each of these was determined by proximity to London, since the metropolis played a crucial part in shaping the economies of the case study towns. The first sub-region consisted of counties, like Essex, which adjoined London. They included Surrey, Berkshire, Hertfordshire, Buckinghamshire, Kent, and Middlesex. The second were those counties separated from the capital by an adjoining county. These also numbered seven and included Hampshire, Bedfordshire, Oxfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Huntingdonshire, Sussex and Suffolk. The final group comprised the counties most distant from London, namely Wiltshire, Dorset, Somerset, Gloucestershire, Devon and Cornwall.

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49. This is the case with those for the three north Essex towns at the end of the 18th century and the early decades of the 19th. See, for example, the Coggeshall overseer's rate books, June 1784 and June 1826, ERO D/P36/11/8.



Given the extent of the region and the very large number of small towns located within it, the decision was made to concentrate investigation on two counties from each of the three sub-regions. Berkshire and Buckinghamshire were chosen as examples from the adjoining counties, Oxfordshire and Hampshire from those once removed from London, and Devon and Dorset for the more distant counties. The location of each of these counties is presented on map 7.1. This approach should generate sufficient data to determine whether other southern small towns portrayed similar urban economies to those of the case study. It should also help reveal the geographical extent of metropolitan influence in fostering the conditions for small town industrialisation.<sup>50</sup>

## ii

Map 7.2 records those small towns in each of the six counties examined possessing manufacturing and industrial concerns throughout the period under investigation. In each the presence of industry has been identified either from their settlement descriptions, or from the lists of traders where reference was made to a manufacturing establishment. In Berkshire two towns were identified, Abingdon and Newbury, and in Buckinghamshire no fewer than 11 were revealed, comprising Amersham, Aylesbury, Chesham, Great Marlow, Newport Pagnell, Olney, Princes Risborough, Stoney Stratford, Wendover, Winslow and High Wycombe. In the intermediate counties Oxford returned six, including Banbury, Barford, Chipping Norton, Henley-on-Thames, Witney and Woodstock, whilst four towns were identified in Hampshire, Andover, Christchurch, Fordingbridge and Whitchurch. A number of small towns possessing industrial and manufacturing concerns were also located in the two more distant counties. In Dorset they comprised Sherborne, Beaminster, and Blandford, and in Devon, Honiton, Axminster, Ottery St. Mary and Tiverton.

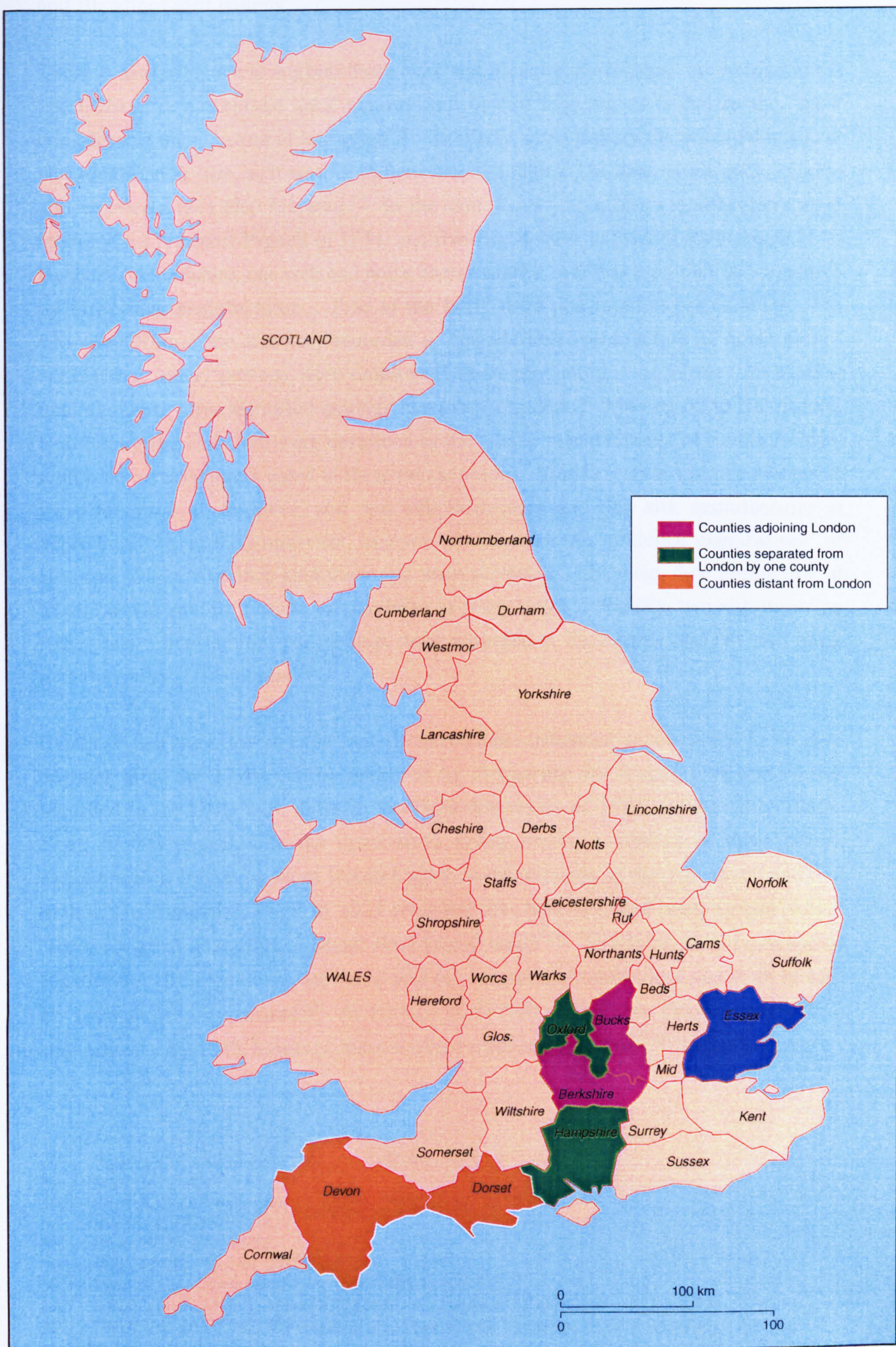
The directories also revealed the range of products being manufactured in these towns. Sack manufacturing featured in both Berkshire towns, whilst lace was being produced in Amersham, Newport Pagnell and the other Buckinghamshire towns, with Chesham also producing silk. In Banbury plush and horse cloth manufactories were identified, in Witney and Barford it was blankets, at Chipping Norton horse cloth, at Henley silk, and in Woodstock gloves. Amongst the Hampshire towns, Andover and Whitchurch were producing silk, with the latter also manufacturing serges, at Fordingbridge it was sail-cloth, and in Christchurch chains. In Devon lace manufactories were recorded at both Honiton and Tiverton, whilst silk was manufactured at Ottery St Mary, and carpets at

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50. The directories used to investigate the small towns of each of these six counties were: the UBD; Pigot & Co.'s *London & Provincial New Commercial Directory* for 1823-4, [Containing London, Middlesex and places within 12 miles of London and 300 places in Bedfordshire, Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, Cambridgeshire, Cornwall, Devon, Dorset, Essex, Hampshire, Hertfordshire, Huntingdon, Kent, Northamptonshire, Oxfordshire, Suffolk, Surrey and Sussex]; Pigot & Co.'s *National and Commercial Directory*, July 1842, [including Dorsetshire, Gloucestershire, Somerset and Wiltshire]; and Pigot & Co.'s *National and Commercial Directory*, 1844, [including Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, Hampshire, Oxfordshire, and Devonshire].



Map 7.1. The six southern counties chosen for small town investigation





Axminster. Finally, in Dorset, Sherborne was manufacturing silk, Beaminster sail-cloth and Blandford shirt buttons.

There is also evidence to suggest these were significant undertakings. At Abingdon the 1823 *Directory* observed sack making and biscuit bagging to comprise the ‘most considerable manufacture of late years’.<sup>51</sup> Similarly, in Aylesbury the principal business was identified as lace, as it was for Amersham, although in the latter straw plait, sacking and wooden chairs also featured.<sup>52</sup> In the same county five lace manufacturers were recorded for Newport Pagnell in 1844, and five lace dealers in Princes Risborough.<sup>53</sup> In Banbury, Oxfordshire, one web and horse cloth manufacturer was recorded, accompanied by three shag manufacturers. Two of the latter were non-familial partnerships. For Chipping Norton the directory recorded a ‘considerable manufacture of horse cloth’, adding that ‘many persons were employed’ in its production. At Witney 10 blanket manufacturers were identified amongst the town’s traders.<sup>54</sup> Moving on to Hampshire, bed-ticking and sail cloth were described as the ‘staple manufactures’ of Fordingbridge, with nine manufacturers listed in these two activities. Similarly, two silk manufacturers were recorded at Andover, and two silk throwsters and one silk manufacturer at Whitchurch.<sup>55</sup> In the south-west, lace was described as the ‘principal manufacture’ of Honiton, where five lace manufacturers were recorded. Likewise, lace production at Tiverton was said to furnish ‘employment to many hands’. Finally, two silk throwing firms, one a non-familial partnership, were recorded at Sherborne, and two sail cloth manufacturers at Beaminster.<sup>56</sup>

Evidence that these towns experienced considerable industrial development in the five decades after the 1790s can be observed by comparing the descriptions and entries recorded in the UBD with those in the Pigot directories of 1823 and the early 1840s. First, in this regard, like the three north Essex towns, a number of these places experienced a transition from woollen cloth manufacturing to the industries outlined earlier. In Berkshire, Pigot in 1823 recorded that Newbury had been a place where ‘formerly great quantities of broad cloth [were] made’.<sup>57</sup> Similarly, in its coverage of Barford the UBD mentions one broad weaver, one worsted maker and one cloth maker. By 1823 all had disappeared.<sup>58</sup> At the time of the UBD Henley-on-Thames boasted two stay makers. By 1823, however, there were no wool-related entries.<sup>59</sup> Likewise, for

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51. Pigot & Co., *Commercial Directory* 1823-4, 123-125.

52. *Ibid.*, 148, 147.

53. Pigot & Co., *Commercial Directory*, 1844, 22-24, 27-28.

54. *Ibid.*, 3-8, 14-16, 36-38.

55. *Ibid.*, 19-20, 6-9, 94-95.

56. *Ibid.*, 67-70, 145-148, 24-27, 2-4.

57. Pigot & Co., *Commercial Directory* 1823-4, 129-132.

58. UBD, Vol. II, (1797), 411-413; Pigot & Co., *Commercial Directory* 1823-4, 439.

59. UBD, Vol. III (1794), 366; Pigot & Co., *Commercial Directory* 1823-4, 441-443.







Andover, Hampshire, the UBD recorded one shallon maker and three clothiers. Again, no mention is made of any wool-related trades in Pigot's *Directory* 30 years later.<sup>60</sup>

A similar transition appears to have occurred to the south-western towns, although the evidence would suggest that, in some instances at least, this process was still in chain during the 1810s, with woollen trades receiving mention in the 1823 *Directory*. Honiton, according to the UBD, was the first serge manufactory in Devonshire, and although it considered that lace had become the chief employment the two lace manufacturers it listed were accompanied by four serge makers. Three serge manufacturers were still in business in 1823, although none remained by 1844.<sup>61</sup> Similarly, Pigot in 1823 judged the 'chief employment' of Ottery St. Mary to be the 'manufacture of coarse woollen cloth', for which one woollen manufacturer was recorded. By 1844, however, the 'manufacture of wool' was considered to have been 'superseded by silk works'. The list of traders appearing in the *Directory* included one silk manufacturer but none involved in wool.<sup>62</sup> As late as 1823 Tiverton also possessed some woollen trades, with four serge makers and four worsted manufacturers recorded. By 1844, only one woollen manufacturer remained.<sup>63</sup> Similarly, amongst Beaminster's traders of 1823 was a bay manufacturer. By 1844 no remnants of the wool manufacturing past remained.<sup>64</sup>

Further evidence of industrial dynamism during the half century after c1790 derives from the expansion many of these newer industries appear to have experienced. In Abingdon, for example, the UBD listed six sack-cloth makers amongst the towns principal inhabitants, by 1823 20 sacking manufacturers were identified and in 1844 32, a number of which were also described as carpet manufacturers.<sup>65</sup> Indeed, in a number of instances there is evidence of a transition to factory-based production. At Henley-on-Thames the 1823 *Directory* recorded two silk mills, in one the mill manager was named.<sup>66</sup> Similarly, the 1844 *Directory* recorded one of Witney's blanket manufacturers operating from a mill. The same directory also observed the industry to have become increasingly capitalistic. Formerly, it had been in the hands of small masters, but was now controlled by a few large capitalists.<sup>67</sup> Fordingbridge was also recorded as possessing a mill, described as 'End Mills', and occupied in the spinning of linen yarn. Likewise, at Whitchurch the *Directory* observed a mill located on the river for the throwing of silk.<sup>68</sup> Moving into the south-west, at Ottery St. Mary a silk manufacturer was identified with a factory, whilst a

60. UBD, Vol. II, (1797), 47-48; Pigot & Co., *Commercial Directory* 1823-4, 307-308.

61. UBD, Vol. III (1794), 388; Pigot & Co., *Commercial Directory* 1823-4, 226-228; idem, *Commercial Directory*, 1844, 67-70.

62. Pigot & Co., *Commercial Directory* 1823-4, 233-234; idem, *Commercial Directory*, 1844, 83-84.

63. Pigot & Co., *Commercial Directory* 1823-4, 254-257; idem, *Commercial Directory*, 1844, 145-148.

64. Pigot & Co., *Commercial Directory* 1823-4, 261-262; idem, *Commercial Directory*, 1844, 2-4.

65. UBD, Vol. II (1797), 10-12; Pigot & Co., *Commercial Directory*, 1823-4, 123-125; idem, *Commercial Directory*, 1844, 2-7.

66. Pigot & Co., *Commercial Directory* 1823-4, 441-443.

67. Pigot & Co., *Commercial Directory*, 1844, 36-38.

68. *Ibid.*, 19-20, 94-95.



'large lace manufactory' was described at Tiverton.<sup>69</sup> Finally, in Sherborne the two silk throwsters were recorded with mills, whilst one of Beaminster's flax spinning enterprises also operated from a mill.<sup>70</sup>

However, over the same period some of these towns did witness a decay in their manufactories. By 1823 the lace industry of Olney, Buckinghamshire, was considered to be in 'decline'. Accordingly, the nine manufacturers listed in 1823 had shrunk to five by 1844.<sup>71</sup> The glove industry in Woodstock, Oxfordshire, also appears to have experienced some decay. In 1823 16 glovers were entered, by 1844, when the manufacture was described as having 'decreased', only 11 glovers were returned.<sup>72</sup> The same process was also found in the western counties. The carpet and tape trade of Axminster, Devon, had by 1844 'almost become extinct'.<sup>73</sup>

Yet, even when the relative decline of these three towns is acknowledged, the industrial fortunes of the southern towns considered in this study contrasts dramatically with the experiences of those in the North Riding of Yorkshire. This region offers a clear case of small town de-industrialisation.<sup>74</sup> During the 1820s the North Riding's linen cloth industry went into rapid decay. As late as 1823 Baines's *Directory* recorded linen manufactures and weavers, along with flax dressers and flaxmen, in a number of the county's towns, including Yarm, Richmond, Kirkby, Thirsk, Stokesley and Easingwold. However, by 1840, and White's *Directory*, the linen industry had completely disappeared from the first four, whilst in Stokesley and Easingwold the numbers involved in the industry had been greatly reduced. In 1823 Easingwold had possessed three linen manufactures and weavers, along with six flax dressers, by 1840 only one flax dresser remained. Moreover, in a number of settlement descriptions White makes direct reference to the recent destruction of the industry.<sup>75</sup>

The three north Essex towns, therefore, do not appear to have been alone amongst southern small towns in possessing significant industrial undertakings. A number of others also boasted manufactories employing large numbers. Like their Essex counterparts, their industries also experienced growth during the half century after 1790, which, in a number of cases, involved the transition to factory-based production. The

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69. *Ibid.*, 83-84, 145-148.

70. Pigot & Co., *Commercial Directory*, 1842, 24-27, 2-4.

71. Pigot & Co., *Commercial Directory* 1823-4, 155; idem, *Commercial Directory*, 1844, 25.

72. Pigot & Co., *Commercial Directory* 1823-4, 453-454; idem, *Commercial Directory*, 1844, 39-40.

73. Pigot & Co., *Commercial Directory*, 1844, 6-7.

74. Raven, 'De-industrialisation and the urban response', 46-69. Three directories were used comprising the UBD, Baines, *History, Directory and Gazetteer of the County of York* (1823), and White, *History, Gazetteer and Directory of the East and North Ridings of Yorkshire* (1840).

75. The cause of this de-industrialisation appears to have been a combination of remoteness from the main market, coupled with high transport and fuel costs. These factors, it is suggested, meant the North Riding towns were unable to sustain competition against the growing manufactories of the West Riding, or the cheap imports from Scotland and Ireland. Raven, 'De-industrialisation and the urban response' 62-62.



impression of the industrial fortunes of these places gained from directories contrasts with that for the small towns of the North Riding of Yorkshire during the same period.

These findings raise two further sets of questions. First, to what extent do the industries in these other southern towns share the same characteristics as those in north Essex? Despite the presence of industry do these towns also experience only modest rates of growth during the first half of the 19th century? Is there evidence to suggest that, like Braintree and Bocking, Coggeshall and Halstead, other economic functions were of greater importance? Second, if these prove to be the case, then were the industries of these other southern towns also dependent upon cheap, predominantly female and child labour, did they lack ancillary and allied industrial trades, and did they portray a comparable relationship of comparative advantage with London?

### iii

In reply to the question of early 19th century demographic growth none of the towns identified in the six counties grew at rates comparable with those profiled for Huddersfield and Macclesfield in chapter 2. Indeed, the majority had populations of under 10,000 in 1851. Amongst the largest at this date was the Buckinghamshire town of High Wycombe with 7,179 inhabitants, Banbury, in Oxfordshire, with 8,206, and the 'large market town' of Tiverton, Devon, with 11,144.<sup>76</sup> At the other end of the spectrum, a number possessed less than 3,000 by the mid century mark. The 'small market town' of Princes Risborough, Buckinghamshire, returned only 2,317 inhabitants in 1851, whilst Woodstock, in Oxfordshire, returned a population of 1,262.<sup>77</sup> Similarly, in Dorset Beaminster's inhabitants totalled 2,832 at the same census.<sup>78</sup>

Moreover, despite the presence of industry none appear to have radically improved their position within the urban hierarchies of their respective counties. The fortunes of Andover, Christchurch, Fordingbridge and Whitchurch demonstrate this point. In 1811 Christchurch ranked as the fourth largest town in Hampshire, Andover as fifth, Fordingbridge as 11th and Whitchurch as 17th. By 1851 Christchurch and Fordingbridge had stepped up one place and Andover dropped one place, whilst Whitchurch's ranking remained unchanged.<sup>79</sup>

Furthermore, as with the north Essex towns, industry does not appear to have dominated the urban economies of these other southern towns. The directories identify a number possessing considerable markets. Pigot's 1823 *Directory* describes Newbury as a large market town, boasting the largest corn market in the county. The 1844 *Directory* adds to

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76. Pigot & Co., *Commercial Directory*, 1844, 145-148.

77. *Ibid.*, 27-28.

78. P. Clark and J. Hosking, *Population Estimates of English Small Towns 1550-1851*, (Leicester, 1993).

79. *Ibid.*, 61-65.



this description by observing the 'extensive traffic in corn' that the town conducted.<sup>80</sup> In Buckinghamshire, Pigot in 1823 noted the presence of a weekly market at High Wycombe, adding that trade in malt was 'considerable'. Likewise, Banbury's weekly market was considered by the same directory to generate 'considerable business', whilst Barford was still judged to possess a large market in 1844, as was Henley on Thames.<sup>81</sup> Moving into Hampshire, Andover was described as a considerable market town as early as 1797.<sup>82</sup> In Devon, Honiton's market in 1823 was considered to be 'extremely well supplied', as was Axminster's market. Indeed, in 1844 Pigot noted the fact that Axminster's market was held on three days a week, Tuesday, Friday and Saturday.<sup>83</sup> Similarly, Tiverton was described in 1823 to possess two weekly markets which, again, were judged to have been 'well supplied'. Finally, in Dorset Blandford was observed in 1823 to possess an 'excellent weekly market'.<sup>84</sup>

A number of these towns were also noted for their thoroughfares. In Berkshire Abingdon was described in the early 1840s as a 'great thoroughfare'.<sup>85</sup> The principal trade in Stoney Stratford, Buckinghamshire, was judged in 1823 to be that which 'arises from the thoroughfare situation'. Likewise, High Wycombe in 1844 was described as a 'great thoroughfare'.<sup>86</sup> In Oxfordshire Pigot in 1844 considered Banbury to possess a 'considerable thoroughfare noted for malting'. Similarly, the 1823 *Directory* observed that Henley on Thames was involved in 'considerable inland trade in corn etc.'<sup>87</sup> In Hampshire the 1844 *Directory* noted that Andover enjoyed 'considerable trade, most noticeably in corn and hops etc.'<sup>88</sup> The same observations were also found amongst the towns of the south-west. In Dorset, Blandford was observed in 1823 to boast 'handsome shops ... catering ... for the town's 'influx of strangers'. Accordingly, in 1842 the town's 'principal trade' was judged to have 'derived from the passage of travellers'.<sup>89</sup>

As with those of north Essex, much of the prosperity of these towns, as marketing and thoroughfare centres, appears to have derived from their connections with London. As early as 1793 the UBD observed that much of the produce at Abingdon's market was sent to London.<sup>90</sup> Similarly, Pigot in 1823 noted that Henley on Thames was involved in a 'considerable inland trade in corn etc'. The same comment was also made in the 1840s

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80. Pigot & Co., *Commercial Directory* 1823-4, 129-132; idem, *Commercial Directory*, 1844, 18-25.

81. Pigot & Co., *Commercial Directory* 1823-4, 159-160, 3-8; idem, *Commercial Directory*, 1844, 11-12, 18-20.

82. UBD, Vol. II (1797), 47-48.

83. Pigot & Co., *Commercial Directory* 1823-4, 226-228, 203-204; idem, *Commercial Directory*, 1844, 76-78.

84. Pigot & Co., *Commercial Directory* 1823-4, 254-257, 262-264.

85. Pigot & Co., *Commercial Directory* 1844, 2-7.

86. Pigot & Co., *Commercial Directory* 1823-4, 157-158; idem, *Commercial Directory*, 1844, 32-36.

87. Pigot & Co., *Commercial Directory*, 1844, 3-8; idem, *Commercial Directory* 1823-4, 441-443.

88. Pigot & Co., *Commercial Directory*, 1844, 6-9.

89. Pigot & Co., *Commercial Directory* 1823-4, 262-264; idem, *Commercial Directory*, 1842, 4-6.

90. UBD, Vol. II, (1797), 10-11.



with the addition that this corn was sent to the capital.<sup>91</sup> London's influence was also felt in the south-west. The UBD was the first to observe that butter was sent from Honiton to London. The same remark was made in the 1844 *Directory*, which added that considerable amounts of poultry were also sent to the capital.<sup>92</sup>

#### iv

Turning to the second set of questions, given the dominance of marketing and thoroughfare functions, was industry in these other southern towns also dependent upon low waged labour in general, and that of females in particular? The directory observations for Abingdon hint that this was, indeed, the case. Pigot in 1823 recorded that sack making and biscuit bagging were the 'chief employment of the lower orders'. The evidence for Amersham is more conclusive. The same directory observed that women and children were employed in the manufacture of lace, as well as straw plait.<sup>93</sup> Similarly, lace making in Stoney Stratford was considered in 1823 to be the 'chief employment' of the town's female inhabitants, with the 1844 *Directory* elaborating this observation to record that lace occupied many of the 'humbler, industrious, class of female'. Similar observations were made of Winslow, Buckinghamshire, in the early 1840s.<sup>94</sup> Whilst in High Wycombe, the 1823 *Directory* recorded that the manufacture of fine thread and cotton lace 'occupies the lower class of females'.<sup>95</sup> The same feature also appears amongst the towns of the south-west. Although it was subsequently to experience decline, Pigot in 1823 noted that carpet making in Axminster afforded 'employment to [a] large number of [the] lower classes'.<sup>96</sup> Likewise, it was considered in 1842 that Sherborne's silk industry 'furnishes employment to a considerable number of the working class, of both sexes'.<sup>97</sup> In addition, the *Directory* of 1823 observed that the manufacture of thread, waistcoat and shirt buttons at Blandford 'employs several hundred women and children', with the 1842 *Directory* adding that shirt buttons offered employment to a 'considerable number of females in [the] town', as well as in 'adjacent villages'.<sup>98</sup>

Beyond this, indirect evidence can also be brought to bear on the presence of cheap, female labour in these towns. Findings from the north Essex towns suggested that the location of straw hat and plait making owed much to the existence of such a pool of labour. This also appears consistent with the work of Sharpe.<sup>99</sup> Accordingly, female straw hat makers featured amongst the traders of Newbury and Abingdon. Whilst at Amersham and Chesham straw plait was considered to be a large employer in the

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91. Pigot & Co., *Commercial Directory* 1823-4, 441-443; idem, *Commercial Directory*, 1844, 18-20.

92. UBD, Vol. III (1794), 388-390; Pigot & Co., *Commercial Directory* 1844, 67-70.

93. Pigot & Co., *Commercial Directory* 1823-4, 123-125, 147-148.

94. *Ibid.*, 157-158; Pigot & Co., *Commercial Directory*, 1844, 28-29, 31-32.

95. Pigot & Co., *Commercial Directory* 1823-4, 159-160.

96. *Ibid.*, 203-204.

97. Pigot & Co., *Commercial Directory* 1842, 24-27.

98. Pigot & Co., *Commercial Directory* 1823-4, 262-264; idem, *Commercial Directory*, 1842, 4-6.

99. P. Sharpe, *Adapting to Capitalism: Working Women in the English Economy, 1700-1850* (London, 1996), 38-70.



1840s.<sup>100</sup> Similarly, at Great Marlow in 1844 seven straw hat makers and one straw plait dealer were listed.<sup>101</sup> Likewise, numbers of female straw hat makers and plaiters were recorded at the other Buckinghamshire towns of Newport Pagnell, Olney, Princes Risborough, Stoney Stratford, Wendover, Winslow and High Wycombe. They also featured amongst the traders of the Oxfordshire towns of Banbury, Barford, Chipping Norton and Witney, along with Andover and Fordingbridge in Hampshire where, in the latter case, eight straw hat makers were recorded.<sup>102</sup> Finally, females pursuing the same trade were also identified in Honiton, Ottery St.Mary, Tiverton and in Sherborne where, in 1842, five straw hat makers were named.<sup>103</sup>

Accompanying the dependency upon cheap, female labour, there is also evidence of the spread of capital over a number of centres. Unfortunately, at this juncture, the evidence is of a circumstantial nature, based upon the strong tendency of towns involved in the same industry to be found in close proximity to each other. Both Abingdon and Newbury, some 12 miles apart, were involved in sack manufacturing. Likewise, in Buckinghamshire the two silk towns, Amersham and Chesham, were located in the south-eastern corner of the county, whilst three clusters of lace making towns can be discerned in the same county. First, Newport Pagnell, Olney and Stoney Stratford in the north-east, second, Princes Risborough, Wendover, and Aylesbury in the centre of the county and, third, High Wycombe and Great Marlow in the south-west. Similarly, the two blanket making towns of Oxfordshire were both located in the west of the county, whilst the silk manufacturing towns of Andover and Whitchurch were located in the north-western part of Hampshire. Finally, a cluster can also be discerned in north-east Devon, comprising Honiton, Tiverton and Ottery St.Mary, all three of which possessed lace manufactories.

More research is required to determine the relationship between the manufacturers in the towns of each cluster. However, from examining the lists of traders present in these settlements it is evident that, as with the case study towns, there was a clear absence of businesses allied and ancillary to these industries. Two examples may suffice. The significance of Witney's blanket manufacture was acknowledged by Pigot in 1823. The town, he considered, to be famous for this manufacture, adding that the recent increase in the settlement's population was 'owing, in no small degree' to this industry.<sup>104</sup> Similarly, in 1844 Pigot claimed the industry gave 'employment to more than two thousand hands', at a time when the parish population was given as 3,400. He also observed the construction of a 'handsome blanket hall' some years earlier. Yet, despite this, the only reference to the blanket industry in the 1844 list of traders was to 10 manufacturers. No merchants, dealers or specialist makers were recorded, although in its coverage the

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100. Pigot & Co., *Commercial Directory*, 1844, 2-3, 12-14.

101. *Ibid.*, 19-22.

102. *Ibid.*, 19-20.

103. Pigot & Co., *Commercial Directory*, 1842, 24-27.

104. Pigot & Co., *Commercial Directory* 1823-4, 451-452.



*Directory* embraced no fewer than 104 other trades, from auctioneers and appraisers, basket makers and bark dealers, to lime burners, slaters and tallow chandlers. Moreover, representatives of what chapter 4 considered to be the more transient trades also feature. Five milliners and dress makers were mentioned, accompanied by four straw hat makers and two stay making concerns.<sup>105</sup> Given this breadth and depth of coverage, it seems reasonable to assume that, had they operated, specialist businesses serving the blanket industry such as merchants and loom makers would have been identified.

The second example is that of Sherborne, Dorset, where, according to both Pigot directories, silk was the principal manufacture. By 1844 the town boasted over 4,700 inhabitants, with the *Directory* listing some 88 different trades, including milliners and dress makers. However, again, the only reference to the silk industry is the silk throwing enterprises of John and Robert Wilmot, of Market Street, and Rawling and Robinson, of Abbey Mills.<sup>106</sup>

Finally, the directories also offer evidence of the links the industries in these southern towns possessed with London. Sometimes, as with Witney, this is fairly circumstantial. In 1844 more of Witney's carriers journeyed to London than any other town. Moreover, two of the four businesses carrying to London were substantial concerns, operating from their own warehouses on the High Street, with one, Budd and Co., using wagons rather than the smaller 'market or errand carts'. Although no mention is made, it seems plausible that amongst the goods these carriers transported, perhaps even loaded and unloaded from their warehouses, would have been some of the blankets manufactured in the town, along with some of the 6,000 packs of wool which, the *Directory* claimed, were consumed by this manufacture each year.<sup>107</sup> More substantial evidence of metropolitan links derives from reference to second, London, addresses, as well as direct mentions of London as the principal market. With regard to the former, one of the three shag manufacturers operating in Banbury in 1844 had a second, London Cheapside address.<sup>108</sup> Further afield, one lace manufacturer at Tiverton, in 1823 and 1844, was returned with a second, Cheapside address.<sup>109</sup> Turning to the latter, Pigot in 1844 observed that large quantities of Honiton's lace were sent to the metropolis.<sup>110</sup>

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105. Pigot & Co., *Commercial Directory*, 1844, 36-38.

106. Pigot & Co., *Commercial Directory*, 1842, 24-27.

107. Pigot & Co., *Commercial Directory*, 1844, 36-38.

108. *Ibid.*, 3-8

109. Pigot & Co., *Commercial Directory* 1823-4, 254-257; idem, *Commercial Directory*, 1844, 145-148.

110. *Ibid.*, 67-70.



### III

The UBD, along with the directories produced by the more respectable publishers of the early 19th century, appear detailed and sensitive enough to afford valuable comparative insights into the economic experiences of small towns across different regions for a period of considerable economic change. Moreover, in utilising these directories the results of a preliminary examination into the urban economies of small towns in Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire, Hampshire, Devon and Dorset, supports the claim that the three north Essex towns of the thesis were representative of a number of other small towns found in the southern counties at this time.

Like Braintree and Bocking, Coggeshall and Halstead, towns such as Abingdon, High Wycombe, Barford, Witney, Whitchurch, Honiton and Sherborne, also possessed significant industries throughout the period. While they varied in character, the majority were textiles, and most experienced significant expansion during this period. In a number of instances a transition occurred from wool to the manufacture of products such as blankets, silk and lace. In some cases an accompanying move to factory-based production was also witnessed. By the early 1840s, if not before, these industries represented large employers, with markets beyond the immediate locality. Despite these developments, however, as with the north Essex towns, none experienced rapid demographic expansion. They continued as small towns whose appearance, with the exception of one or two factories, remained largely unchanged from that described by observers in the 1790s.

These findings suggest that reference can be made to a distinct form of industrial development occurring in southern England during the late Georgian and early Victorian period. In terms of its scale, rate of expansion and impact upon individual towns, it was quite different from what directory examination of Halifax or Macclesfield has revealed. Equally, however, it contrasts with the experience of industrial decline witnessed by towns such as Yarm, Easingwold and Richmond in the North Riding of Yorkshire. However, the differences between the industrial developments occurring in these southern towns and those in places such as Bradford were not merely in terms of scale, they also differed in kind.

In southern England industry appears to have developed in towns whose urban economies were oriented towards marketing and thoroughfare functions, as a consequence of their close network associations with the region's larger provincial centres and, in particular, with London. As a result, industry in these towns came to depend upon a cheap, predominantly female labour force, and upon the maintenance of a close association with London as the finishing and marketing centre. These findings suggest the industrial development of these southern towns was based upon their possession of a comparative advantage over the London in reserves of cheap, flexible labour. Whilst this fits evidence



of persistent low-wage districts in southern England, it contrasts with E.L. Jones' use of the concept to explain the south's de-industrialisation.

What, however, remains to be tested is the full geographical extent of this comparative relationship between the city and the southern small town. The findings for Dorset and Devon suggest this relationship extended beyond towns located in the counties immediately adjoining London. They are also consistent with the findings of John Chartres, who demonstrated strong commercial links in agricultural marketing between London and western counties for the 18th century.<sup>111</sup> However, dictated in part by source availability, the six sample counties do not represent all parts of the south. Whilst districts to the north of London, along with the north-west, the south-west and, if Essex is added, the north east, are covered there is a notable absence of representatives from the south-east, including Kent, Surrey and, at least in part, Middlesex. Although these must await further research, it is possible to speculate upon probable findings.

Lee's work on regional growth and structural change identified Middlesex, Surrey and Kent as part of a high income metropolitan economy by the early 19th century.<sup>112</sup> It can be suggested that if the comparative advantage thesis is to be proved, one would expect an absence of industrial development amongst the small towns in these counties in the half century after 1790. Indeed, Ormrod's examination of Kentish industry is supportive of this. By the 18th century London's influence was already felt strongly in the northern half of the county which had emerged as a high-wage district. Here there does appear to have been an absence of the kind of industrial development found in Essex and the small towns of the six sample counties. The reason Ormrod offers for this absence derives from Coleman's observation that high wages operated to discourage those industries where the wage bill made up a large percentage of total costs.<sup>113</sup>

From these observations it is also possible to speculate on the forces that led to the decline of cloth manufactories in the case study towns during the closing decades of the 19th

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111. J. Chartres, 'Markets and marketing in metropolitan western England in the late 17th and 18th centuries', in M.A. Havinden (ed.), *Husbandry and Marketing in the South West, 1500-1800*, (Exeter, 1973), 63-74.

112. C.H. Lee, 'Regional growth and structural change in Victorian Britain', *Economic History Review*, 24, (1981), 438-452.

113. It is also evident that the decline of old industries in Wealdon towns, such as Cranbrook, was not followed by new industrial development, as occurred in Essex, and many of the other southern towns considered in this conclusion. This difference was noted in a discussion following a paper I presented at a seminar at the University of Kent, 1994. One explanation is suggested in Ormrod's study of Kentish industry, 1640 to 1800. Labour appears to have been very mobile in central and eastern Kent. Following the decline of the clothing industry in the Weald, labour moved to the higher wage areas of the 'Medway towns and the Thames-side towns of the London fringe'. This, in turn, raises the question of why labour was more mobile in Kent than Essex. One area of possible investigation, already outlined, might be the operation of the poor law. N.D. Raven, 'City and countryside: London and the urban economies of Essex, c1770-1851' (unpublished paper presented to the Staff/Student Seminar in Economic and Social History, University of Kent, Canterbury, 1994); D. Ormrod, 'Industry, 1640-1800', in W.A. Armstrong (ed.), *The Economy of Kent, 1640-1914* (Kent, 1996), 87-109.



century. The growth of foreign competition may have been influential, however, the timing of decline also coincided with Essex's absorption into the high-wage metropolitan economy. Certainly further research is needed on this subject, but it may be that the decline of this type of manufacturing in Hampshire, Bedfordshire, Berkshire, Oxfordshire, Buckinghamshire and Hertfordshire also fits the timing of their absorption into this burgeoning metropolitan economy. If closer investigation supports this interpretation then this period of absorption takes on very significant dimensions. It would mark not just the end of silk and lace manufactories in these places, but the close of an era in which these towns operated as low-wage manufacturing centres, possessing a comparative advantage over London. It is an era that may well stretch back to the start of the early modern period, perhaps even to the middle ages, and the origins of woollen textile manufacturing.

As these last points demonstrate, a study of this kind, perhaps inevitably, produces more questions than answers. From the perspective of the three case study towns possible avenues for future enquiry might involve: more detailed consideration of the role of marketing and thoroughfare businesses in influencing the way their urban economies developed; of the relations between such enterprises and the new industries; of the role of the old poor law in fostering industry; and of the transition from wool to silk, particularly in regard to the likely shift in female labour from one to the other. Similarly, whilst the general contours may have been sketched out, there is a great deal still to be learnt about the relationship between these towns, as manufacturing sites, and London, as the finishing and marketing centre. Moving away from north Essex, as chapter 2 and the first section of these conclusions demonstrated, the histories of towns such as Abingdon and Newbury in Berkshire, Princes Risborough and Stoney Stratford in Buckinghamshire, Beaminster and Blandford in Dorset, have yet to be written. Whilst they remained modest in size during the period of industrialisation, the provisional findings from this study suggest that, like the three case study towns, they were far from representing rural backwaters, out of touch with the realities of the contemporary world. It is to be hoped, therefore, that the study of England's small towns during this period of change will not remain neglected for much longer.



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