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Trade and Social Structure of Gloucester, 1600-1640

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The Trade and Social Structure of Gloucester, 1600—1640

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THE HISTORY of English towns in the early modern period has deservedly received increased attention over the past decade, but it is still a subject about which too little is known.¹ The present study of Gloucester in the early 17th century deals with three questions in particular. What were the occupations of its inhabitants? Where did rich and poor live? What were the distinguishing characteristics of the governing class and other sections of the community?

A valuable source which reveals the occupation of many of Gloucester's male inhabitants in 1608 is the muster of able-bodied men carried out for the lord lieutenant, Henry, lord Berkeley.² This return was used by A. J. and R. H. Tawney in 1934, and its detail enabled them to prepare a table for the distribution of trades in Gloucester, Tewkesbury and Cirencester.³ However, as there is no analysis for Gloucester alone, this is supplied below, using the categories employed by the Tawneys.

TABLE I
Occupations of the able-bodied inhabitants of Gloucester in 1608.⁴

Category	Number	Percentage of total
Agriculture	20	4.1
Fishing, mining and quarrying	0	—
Textiles	50	10.2
Leatherwork	33	6.7
Making of articles of dress	64	13.1
Woodwork	25	4.7
Building	8	1.6
Metalwork	37	7.6
Making of food and drink	40	8.2
Dealing and retail trade	102	20.8
Transport	1	0.2
Miscellaneous	10	2.0
Gentry, professional and official	17	3.5
Servants, household	0	—
Servants, unspecified	19	3.9
Labourers, non-agricultural	6	1.2
Unspecified	60	12.2
	490	100.0

As can be seen from Tables I and II, Gloucester possessed artisans who could finish products sold by countrymen in its markets. In addition, its tradesmen accumulated goods obtained from London,

1. P. Clark and P. Slack, ed., *Crisis and Order in English Towns, 1500-1700* (1972).

2. John Smith, *Men and Armour in Gloucestershire in 1608* (1902).

3. A. J. and R. H. Tawney, 'An occupational census of the seventeenth century', *Economic History Review*, First Series, v, 1, 25-64.

4. The analysis is restricted to the able-bodied, and differs from that of the Tawneys in that it excludes those who were only responsible for providing arms and armour. In most cases the occupations of the latter are not stated.

husbandmen resident in the east and north wards remind us that the city sent workers into the fields beyond the walls. Wills show that there was mixed farming in the neighbourhood, for testators made bequests of cattle, sheep and plough tackle.

An important feature of the economic life of the city in this period was its role as a port, a status it achieved during the reign of Elizabeth I, and for which the port book of Christmas 1618-Christmas 1619 provides evidence.⁶ Sixty-one outward voyages probably began in the city as distinct from other Severn towns within the area encompassed by Gloucester as head port. 1,173 weys of malt and 1,295 calf-skins composed the greater part of the cargoes. Less significant were 24 dickers of leather, two hides of clout leather and a single butt of the bark essential to tanners. Other commodities carried, often as a small element of shipments, were 40 reams of brown paper, eight bags of hops, fourteen tuns of Gascon wine, one ton of pewter and brass, 40 bags of nails, eight packs of wool, 20 pieces of fustian, two packs of 'Larrymans' ware, two packs of linen cloth, one fardel of kersey and 280 pounds of wax. Some of these miscellaneous goods, the Gascon wine for example, were re-exports; others had probably been carried from the upper Severn and left on the quay at Gloucester for transport further downstream.

Twenty men acted as shippers and each was responsible on average for three voyages. Although the port book uses the description 'merchant' to describe a few shippers, most of the exporters were small men engaged in the coasting trade and cannot be compared with the tycoons of Bristol. Ten of the shippers were maltsters, two merchants, and two tanners; the only other shipper whose occupation was described was a baker. The governing class of the city directed a substantial part of this trade. Six men responsible for five voyages or more served at some time as aldermen or councilmen: John Reade, maltster, John Brewer, merchant, William Lugg, tanner, Thomas Russell, merchant, and Thomas Morse, tanner.

Let us now turn to the subject of distribution of population within Gloucester's boundaries. Studies of Leicester and other towns have revealed that the most valuable properties were concentrated in urban centres, and that the poor lived near the limits.⁷ A survey of dean and chapter property land in Gloucester carried out in 1649 throws light on this question, for it provides a list of messuages, tenements and houses, their rents and the names of lessees for the three decades before the outbreak of civil war.⁸

TABLE III
Dean and chapter properties in Gloucester

<i>Parish</i>	<i>Number of messuages, tenements or houses</i>	<i>Total value of rents (£)</i>	<i>Average value of rents (£)</i>
St Mary, Grace Lane	8	11.07	1.38
All Saints	9	12.25	1.36
St John	24	17.24	0.72
Holy Trinity	8	5.27	0.66
St Nicholas	37	22.16	0.60
St Michael	18	7.18	0.40
St Catharine	8	2.70	0.34
St Mary de Crypt	24	7.59	0.32
St Mary de Lode	63	17.25	0.27

Table III shows that the most valuable properties were those clustered to the west of the Cross in the parishes of St Mary, Grace Lane and All Saints. Thomas Pury became lessee in 1630 of two tenements in All Saints for the annual rent of £4 13s. 4d. This property in Mercers' Row he sublet among two haberdashers, a draper and a butcher. The transaction in which the future alderman was involved illustrates a feature of development common to Gloucester and other towns in the early modern period: the sub-division of property close to commercial centres. So great was competition

6. P.R.O., E 190 1247/8.

8. Glos. R.O., D 956 E/1.

7. W. G. Hoskins, *Provincial England* (1963), 92.

for sites close to the Cross that the corporation could secure in 1627 a rental of £1 a year for a shop adjacent to the Tolsey measuring four yards by three yards and three-quarters.⁹

Beyond the main business complex, buildings enjoyed a more spacious setting. In Speed's map Friars' Orchard appears within the walls of the south-eastern quarter and Maribon Park with its palings adjoins the castle. Deep plots with outhouses, stables and gardens run back from the road-front of Longsmith Street and from the south side of Westgate Street below the Booth Hall. During this period there was energetic development of the riverside near the quay, and the corporation made available vacant ground on which lessees undertook to build warehouses.¹⁰

Parts of the city near the northern and southern boundaries were crowded, and contained the squalid housing of the poor. Many of the inhabitants of the parishes of St Owen, St Aldate, St Catharine and St Mary de Lode lived close to subsistence level, and during seasons of dearth became a burden to be supported by substantial citizens. Within the suburbs there was a contrast between the hovels of the needy and the pleasant residences of the well-to-do.

The dominant social group was that of the aldermen, whose civic pride was expressed by John Dorney in a speech at the election to the various corporation offices in October 1643: 'Each of you with St Paul may say, "I am a citizen of no mean or obscure city."' ¹¹ In his speech on the same occasion in other years he voiced similar sentiments and boasted that Gloucester's institutions resembled Roman models. Symbolic of the office-holder's regard for his position is the tomb of Thomas Machen in the north aisle of the cathedral. Like many a Jacobean worthy portrayed in sculpture, his kneeling figure is accompanied by those of his wife and children, but the scarlet robe of a mayor of Gloucester distinguishes him from his contemporaries.

During the years 1600-1640 31 aldermen served as mayor, John Brown, brewer, and William Hill, mercer, on three occasions, six men twice and twenty-three once. Among this number were eleven mercers, three tanners, two clothiers, two brewers, two drapers, two maltsters, two professional men and one each in the trades of furrier, baker and goldsmith, while the occupations of four men cannot be identified.¹² Living at the centre of a see, two of Gloucester's aldermen profited from a connection with the church. John Jones was principal registrar of the diocese and Anthony Robinson served as chapter clerk.

A close understanding of this group is difficult to achieve because the evidence is incomplete. During the period 1600-1640 there were 41 aldermen, but wills survive for only about half, the collection at the Public Record Office being much larger than that dealt with at the Gloucester consistory court. As observations based on all the documents might attribute to the aldermen greater wealth than they possessed, the following observations are based on five wills from both courts: a selection at London for John Baugh, Richard Beard, Edmund Clements, Luke Garnons and Lawrence Wilshire;¹³ documents at Gloucester for Thomas Addams, John Cowdall, William Hill, Matthew Price and John Walton.¹⁴

It is difficult to reach any firm conclusions about the wealth of these men, but suggestions can be hazarded. Each individual left money to relatives. These sums average out at £359 if the annuities bequeathed by Luke Garnons, William Hill and Lawrence Wilshire are excluded. If a life expectation of 20 years is posited for the beneficiaries of these men and if the annuities are added, the average rises to £709. To these figures must now be added the money left to friends and servants, charitable donations and other bequests. Seven aldermen left £283 to persons other than relatives. Nine aldermen left bequests to the poor, illustrating the feelings of duty and compassion displayed by men of this age.

9. Glos. R.O., GBR 1406/1521, f. 195.

10. *Ibid.*, ff. 37, 106, 140.

11. John Dorney, *Certain speeches made upon the day of the yearly election of officials in the city of Gloucester*, 1653, 3.

12. A comment about the occupational descriptions needs to be made. The terms refer mainly to trade at early manhood, and do not embrace the range of activities which were characteristic later in life of the most successful members of the community.

13. P.R.O., Prob. 11, 17/Dale, 71/Lee, 113/Seager, 102/Rudd, 76/Fenner.

14. Glos. R.O., Wills, 144/1621, 73/1607, 120/1636, 118/1635, 85/1627.

The legacies to the poor amounted to £160 in all. One of the wealthiest aldermen of the period, the mercer William Hill, gave £80 to endow an almshouse for six inmates drawn from the south ward, making the proviso that they should be freemen. Two other bequests amounting to £6 10s. *od.* also went to fellow burgesses. Five remembered the poor of the parishes with which they were associated, leaving £14 10s. *od.* for this purpose. But almost as notable as concern for freemen and neighbours in the same parish was an intelligent interest in the city poor as a whole. John Walton singled out the needy in the parishes which always presented a problem to the civic authorities. Altogether seven men allotted £46 10s. *od.* to be distributed in doles of money and £2 10s. *od.* in bread. Richard Beard assigned £10 to purchase stock for setting the poor to work.

There were four miscellaneous bequests amounting to £124 which will be described below. When all the bequests which can be measured in money are taken into consideration, the aldermen left an average of £766.

This does not exhaust the list of assets. The wills are vague about real property, which is often identified by place-name only. Even when the type of property is identified, this is rarely a guide to the value of land and buildings. But imprecise as the wills are, they do allow certain conclusions to be made. All the aldermen held property in the city. There are indications that some exploited their position to secure leases from local institutions: two rented property from both the corporation and the dean and chapter; two from the corporation, and one from the dean and chapter. While all had an anchor in the city, a minority of four had holdings in the county. One of these four, John Baugh, also owned a tenement in Guildford.

In the absence of probate inventories it is not possible to gauge the standard of domestic comfort enjoyed. The wills give very little information. William Hill's house boasted wainscoting, cloth hangings and glass windows, and he had a satin doublet in his wardrobe. Luke Garnons's will makes mention of a feather mattress, a type of bedding one would expect of a member of his class. Rings or money to make rings were a popular gift to relatives and close friends. In one case, gilt tankards were given. The single piece of evidence suggesting cultural interests lies in the £2 assigned by Luke Garnons to a grandson for the purchase of books. It would seem that this section of the city's society lived comfortably but unostentatiously.

During this period certain formulae hint at the religious opinions of testators. Two men in the sample were probably conservative in belief, John Cowdall pleading that God should place his soul 'in the company of his blessed angels and saints'. Seven left wills of a fairly pronounced Protestant nature. Luke Garnons's will employs wording typical of this group: 'First I bequeath my soul unto almighty God hoping to be saved by the merit death and passion of Jesus Christ my only saviour and redeemer.'

One of the preoccupations of burgesses was the attainment and then the preservation of gentle status. In the wills the terms 'gentleman' and 'alderman' are used, and none is described by his trade. As the individual prospered association with his original occupation was often less significant, and his enhanced standing was reflected in the change of title. In the group being considered only Thomas Addams and Lawrence Wilshire can be connected with a trade; the former left two looms, one in his shop, while Wilshire had four weavers in his employment.

If a connection with a trade was not the hallmark of the aspiring gentleman, a link with the land was. Striking visual testimony to this is provided by a map of 1624 delineating the city and the county of the city; within easy reach of the town are the rural seats of four aldermen. Another means by which a man won recognition for his family was through gifts to the community. John Baugh gave instructions for £12 to be spent on a dozen apostle spoons, these to be engraved with the letters 'JB' and presented to the corporation. The same testator left £2 towards the furnishing of the church of St Mary, Grace Lane. A more valuable legacy was that of Lawrence Wilshire whose endowment of £100 provided Christ's School with the service of an usher. Wilshire, a resident of Barton Street, also gave £10 to the corporation for the repair of the road which ran outside his house.

W. T. MacCaffrey has shown in his study of Exeter how members of the leading families used

intermarriage as a device for preserving their interests.¹⁵ Examining the Gloucester aldermen, one can detect a similar pattern. The children of John Baugh and Richard Beard allied themselves with the Caples, a family which had produced in Richard Caple a Puritan of note. Luke Garnons had Henry Hassard as a son-in-law. One of William Hill's daughters married Richard Beard. Of the ten men considered, most appear to have sprung from Gloucestershire families, although John Baugh and William Hill had relatives in Worcestershire. Hill's brother in London was probably one of the succession of men from provincial towns who made their way to the capital to create or to increase wealth.

The class from which the majority of the aldermen had sprung was that of the tradesmen. These were freemen and as such were treated with deference by the other inhabitants of Gloucester. They only were eligible for civic office; they alone could graze cattle upon the common meadows; when old age approached they only could obtain entry into the almshouses maintained for their benefit. As with the aldermen the main source of information lies in wills, and the following remarks are based on those proved in the Gloucester consistory court.

It is proposed to discuss the estates of those in the two leading occupational groups, dealing and retail trade, and the making of articles of dress. The documents have been examined to secure particulars about bequests of money to relatives and friends, donations to charity, real property and movable goods. When a testator owned or held property other than the house he occupied at the time of his own death, this is stated. Most of the tradesmen lived soberly but comfortably: furniture was sparse with cupboards and coffers being rarities worth mention; meals were served on pewter; about an equal number slept on feather or flock mattresses. Any movables distinct from the usual are noted. As we are concerned with an age when donations to charity are a sign both of social awareness and the status of the individual, these are noted.

The dealers and retailers who left wills were eleven innholders, three drapers, two apothecaries, two haberdashers, two mercers, two vintners, a butcher, a chandler, a milliner and a victualler. The innholders made bequests totalling £606 18s. 4d. Four held real property, much of it in the county of the city. Henry Prichard owned lands and tenements in Herefordshire, and bequeathed a silver goblet, and a stone cup bound with gold and silver.¹⁶ Jasper James gave to a friend 'my book of entries Powltons abridgment and Kitchnies Court Baron and a manuscript book of cases of law'.¹⁷ Six made bequests to the poor, three leaving £3 25s. 0d. in money and three £10 in bread. John Morris, who remembered the poor of Cirencester with £1 in bread, set aside £10 for the use of a needy freeman of Gloucester.¹⁸ The three drapers left £459 18s. 4d. John Morse had considerable holdings of land in the city and the county of the city.¹⁹ Stephen Cooke enjoyed the lease of a house in the city, and gave 10s. to the poor of St Aldate.²⁰ Thomas Webley gave lengths of cloth for coats to twelve aged paupers and asked that £4 be distributed among the indigent of nine city parishes.²¹ Robert Rowles, apothecary, appears to have been one of the city's most affluent burgesses, leaving £440 17s. 8d., and remembering his friends with money for rings and herbals.²² Robert Whittington, apothecary, left £180 10s. 0d., and was owner of messuages and tenements at Minsterworth and St Briavels where he had relatives.²³ The two haberdashers and two mercers made cash bequests of £60 14s. 0d. and £251 12s. 6d. respectively. William Sawle, mercer, gave 10s. to the parishes most in need and 3s. 8d. for the repair of the church of St Mary, Grace Lane.²⁴ The two vintners gave £206 to relatives and friends. John Price made a gift of 240 loaves to the poor of two parishes.²⁵ Timothy Gray, butcher, left £200, and a stable and garden.²⁶ John Shaile, milliner, gave £121 to relatives and friends, and £1 to the poor of St Catharine's. He also had at his disposal a messuage and tenement in Bromsberrow, and a lease in Podmarsh Field.²⁷

The makers of articles of dress were represented by sixteen cordwainers, nine tailors, three

15. W. T. MacCaffrey, *Exeter, 1540-1640*, (1958), 255.

17. *Ibid.*, 142/1626.

20. *Ibid.*, 105/1636.

23. *Ibid.*, 175/1626.

26. *Ibid.*, 149/1624.

18. *Ibid.*, 111/1626.

21. *Ibid.*, 152/1628.

24. *Ibid.*, 265/1612.

27. *Ibid.*, 88/1627.

16. *Glos. R. O., Wills*, 30/1608.

19. *Ibid.*, 93/1615.

22. *Ibid.*, 147/1635.

25. *Ibid.*, 94/1638.

glovers, two cappers and a hosier. Ten cordwainers made bequests amounting to £459 16s. 6d., and John Highnam was responsible for £265 of the total.²⁸ Five left £4 12s. 0d. to the poor, three specifying the parishes to receive the charity, and two making bequests to the city. John Elbridge made a gift of 10s. to the Company of Shoemakers.²⁹ Seven tailors left £215 5s. 8d. Walter Watkins was able to settle £4 per annum on his daughters from the profit of a lease at Sandhurst³⁰ John Whitter was lessee from the dean and chapter of tenements in Smith Street and King Edward's Lane. He was owner of a Bible and green linen rug, and gave 10s. to the poor of Holy Trinity parish.³¹ Francis Yarnold, glover, left £3 10s. 0d., and contributed 10s. to his gild's stock. He asked his overseers to arrange for fifteen dozen loaves to be given to the poor of four parishes and 3s. 4d. to St Bartholomew's Hospital.³²

The wills reveal that the tradesmen left an average of £57 to relatives and friends, and suggest that they belonged to a social class distinct from the aldermen. But in other ways they bore a striking resemblance to their superiors. The predominant majority probably sprang from the city or from towns and villages within a ten-mile radius; a minority came from nearer the borders, and one testator came from Herefordshire. In an inclination to invest in city housing or farms in the county they imitated the aldermen. Like the governors of the city, they were concerned with the unfortunate; about half of the total given by seventeen donors to charity went either to the poorer parishes or to the use of the indigent of the town as a whole. There are few signs of tradesmen forming close-knit social groups: only two made contributions to their gilds; in choosing overseers for their wills many selected men whose occupation differed from their own.

Ideally one would conclude this survey by discussing all sections of the community, but a comprehensive account cannot be given for the reason that the majority of inhabitants did not leave wills, and there is an absence of other sources which might fill the gap. However, a few impressionistic strokes may give some picture of the variety of the townsmen. The books on cosmography, astronomy and geography of John Gray, instrument-maker, reflect the intellectual excitement of the age.³³ David Wright left the surprising sum of over £40 for a labourer, and his small cash gift to the tapster at the Booth Hall and two other friends 'being all fellowes at the house' has the flavour of conviviality about it.³⁴ In the ruinous upper storey of the converted infirmary of St Peter's Abbey, nicknamed Babylon, lived some of the cathedral's singing men.³⁵ William Guise, member of the well-known Elmore family and town clerk, was representative of the gentry who used the city as a means of furthering their interests.

The structure of the opposition to Charles I during the civil war has received intensive study from historians, and recent research suggests that the governing class of English towns was cautious, delaying commitment to king or parliament to the last possible moment. Certainly Gloucester had no strong material motive to explain its opposition to the Stuarts: the port was a source of prosperity; the crown was taking no action to curb its other economic activities.

Religion provides the key. There had been resentment of William Laud as dean of Gloucester. Later, when the Court of High Commission was engaged in suppressing the activities of John Workman as Puritan lecturer, a party within the common council fought on for twenty months before submitting. Thomas Pury spoke with feeling against the authority of bishops in the debate on the Root and Branch Bill. As one of Gloucester's representatives in the Long Parliament, he was able to voice opinions which had long been expressed in the city. Like other townsmen, the burgesses of Gloucester were proud of their privileges. In common with their contemporaries, they were not willing to fight for the abstract principle of corporate independence; their deep-seated interests had first to be affected. When Charles I's bishops and ministers circumscribed the religious activities of Englishmen, they provided influential figures in Gloucester with the motive for resistance.

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28. *Ibid.*, 82/1638.

31. *Ibid.*, 73/1640.

34. *Ibid.*, 21/1618.

29. *Ibid.*, 99/1640.

32. *Ibid.*, 59/1635.

35. *Glos. R.O.*, D 956 E/1, f. 260.

30. *Ibid.*, 200/1615.

33. *Ibid.*, 33/1604.