

# The Leather Crafts in Tudor and Stuart England<sup>1</sup>

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IN the predominantly agrarian economy of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England, the most important industries were those associated with agriculture. They used raw materials from the farms, supplied essential consumer goods to the agrarian population, and, not infrequently, provided by-employments for agricultural workers. The most important was the woollen textile industry, for it was valuable not only to the domestic economy but also to England's overseas trade. Of other industries we have only scanty knowledge, and those that have attracted attention, such as the 'heavy' industries which form the basis of Professor Nef's 'early industrial revolution', were not typical.

Contemporaries usually took the leather industry for granted, with the result that historians have largely ignored it. Yet there are good grounds for regarding this industry as second or third only to the manufacture of woollen cloth as an industrial occupation.<sup>2</sup> Certainly Macpherson, writing of the late eighteenth century, thought so at a time when the relative importance of the industry was probably declining and occasionally a seventeenth-century writer remarked on its importance.<sup>3</sup> But the clearest indication of the rôle of the industry in Tudor and Stuart England was the existence of a large body of legislation controlling the manufacture and sale of leather and leather goods. Only the cloth industry attracted comparable attention from the government; and the Leather Act of 1563 was, with the Statute of Artificers and the Cloth Act of 1552, the foundation of Tudor industrial policy.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> I am greatly indebted to Dr Joan Thirsk and Dr A. Everitt of the Department of English Local History, Leicester University, for many helpful comments on this paper.

<sup>2</sup> Possibly building employed more than the leather industry, and the building crafts must have been more widespread than the leather crafts. However, we still know very little about the magnitude of the building industry throughout the country. See W. G. Hoskins, 'The Rebuilding of Rural England, 1570-1640', in *Provincial England*, London, 1963, pp. 131-48.

<sup>3</sup> D. Macpherson, *Annals of Commerce*, IV, 1805, p. 254; H. B [elasyse], *An English Traveller's First Curiosity . . .* (1657), *Hist. MSS. Comm.*, Various Collections, II, p. 200; *Leather: A Discourse tendered to the High Court of Parliament*, 1629, reprinted in E. Arber, *An English Garner*, IV, 1897, pp. 215-16.

<sup>4</sup> The regulation of the leather industry is discussed in L. A. Clarkson, 'English Economic Policy in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries: The Case of the Leather Industry', *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research*, XXXVIII, 1965, pp. 149-62.

The leather industry in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was important for the reasons already summarized. It provided the farmer with the goods he needed: "... boots and shoes for himself and children, and leather for saddles, cart saddles, horse collars and other accommodations about husbandry. . ."<sup>1</sup> The manufacture of leather and leather goods was often combined with farming, although farming was usually the subsidiary occupation; and hides and skins used by tanners and leather-dressers came from farmers and butchers.<sup>2</sup>

The sale of hides and skins presented farmers with a useful source of income and it has even been suggested that the hide and skin market was, on occasions, more important to them than the sale of meat.<sup>3</sup> However, this does not seem very likely. The value of a beef carcass in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was perhaps ten times that of the hide, and with sheep the skin was less important than the wool and meat.<sup>4</sup> From time to time in the seventeenth century the supply of hides and skins increased because of increasing meat consumption and not because of an increased demand for hides. The result was that prices of hides and skins fell and surplus supplies were buried.<sup>5</sup>

"In most villages of the realme there is some one dresser or worker of leather, and for the supplies of such as have not there are in most of the market townes iij, iiij, or v, and in many great townes and cities x or xxte."<sup>6</sup> Leather and leather goods were made throughout the country; but to some extent leather manufacturing was an urban occupation since supplies and hides were available in the towns as a by-product of meat consumption, and the towns were markets for leather goods. The larger the town the more numerous the leather workers. London was "the place of greatest concourse

<sup>1</sup> *An Humble Petition . . . concerning the . . . Transportation of Leather*, 1641, Thomason Tracts, British Museum, E168 (4), p. 3.

<sup>2</sup> An analysis of tanners' inventories from various parts of the country suggests that on an average the value of farm stock was about 12 per cent of the value of tanning stock. Tanning was the treatment of hides with a vegetable tanning agent, usually oak bark and water. Leather-dressing was the preparation of skins with train oil, egg yolks, alum, and other materials. The two methods of preparing leather divided the industry into the heavy and light leather crafts, the former making and using tanned leather, the latter working with dressed leather. See L. A. Clarkson, 'The Organization of the English Leather Industry in the late Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries', *Economic History Review*, 2nd series, XIII, 1960, pp. 246-7.

<sup>3</sup> W. G. Hoskins, 'English Provincial Towns in the Early Sixteenth Century', *Trans. Royal Historical Society*, 5th series, 6, 1956, p. 15; also T. S. Ashton, *The Industrial Revolution, 1760-1830*, 1948, p. 24.

<sup>4</sup> Estimate from prices in J. E. T. Rogers, *A History of Agriculture and Prices*, v, 1887, p. 411; and W. Beveridge, *Prices and Wages in England*, 1939, pp. 30, 32, 81, 83.

<sup>5</sup> P.R.O. P.C. 2:58, 71; *Cal. S.P.D.*, 1675, pp. 369-70.

<sup>6</sup> B.M. Lans. MS. 74, fo. 154.

for tradesmen dealing in leather."<sup>1</sup> There were about 3,000 shoemakers in the city and suburbs in the early seventeenth century, the same number of leather-dressers and glovers, and many other craftsmen using leather. There were about eighty tan yards in Bermondsey and Southwark alone in the late seventeenth century,<sup>2</sup> and in the early eighteenth century the metropolitan area provided 10 per cent of the revenue raised from an excise duty imposed on English leather, much more than was raised in any other district.<sup>3</sup>

In many parts of the country the leather industry was relatively much more important than in London. Some areas in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries had developed as specialized producing regions conducting a national trade in leather or leather products, and in other districts the leather crafts formed one of the most important groups of industrial occupations, even though their importance may have been confined to their own locality. In general, the leather crafts in these areas were associated with pastoral and grazing activities.

The leather crafts were very numerous in the pastoral regions of western England. Following the imposition of an excise duty on leather in 1697, many towns and villages of England sent petitions of protest to Parliament.<sup>4</sup> Sixty of the 154 petitions received came from a large, roughly triangular, area with its base on the Cotswolds from Bristol to Oxford, its apex at the Mersey, and embracing Cheshire, Shropshire, Herefordshire, Gloucestershire, Worcestershire, and parts of Oxfordshire, Warwickshire, and Staffordshire.

In the north of this region Chester was an important manufacturing and trading centre. Between the mid-sixteenth and the mid-seventeenth centuries one-fifth of the annual new admissions to the freedom of the city were leather workers, although later in the seventeenth century the proportion declined. The merchants of Chester exported large quantities of dressed calf skins from the port under licence, claiming that "the countrey adjoyneinge [did not afford] anie other commodities transportable."<sup>5</sup> The dressing of skins and the manufacture of gloves were common occupations not only in Chester but throughout Cheshire, Shropshire, and Herefordshire. At Nantwich,

<sup>1</sup> Minute Book of the Company of Curriers, 1628-56, Guild Hall MSS. 6112:1, p. 77.

<sup>2</sup> P.R.O. S.P. 14:7, no. 88; B.M. Add. MS. 12,504, fo. 112; *Commons' Journals*, XII, p. 18.

<sup>3</sup> Calculated from P.R.O. E.351:1481. The excise duty of 15 per cent *ad valorem* was first imposed in 1697 for three years and continued in 1710 and 1711. The above account is for June 1717-June 1718, the earliest in which receipts are presented on a regional basis.

<sup>4</sup> *Commons' Journals*, XI, p. 758 *et seq.*, *passim*; XII, *passim*.

<sup>5</sup> *The Rolls of the Freemen of the City of Chester, Part 1, 1392-1700*, Lancs. and Cheshire Records Society, LI, 1906; P.R.O. S.P. 12:185, no. 71; S.P. Docket, 11 March 1604-5; P.C. 2:39, 543; B.M. Harleian MS. 2004, fos. 5-10, 76-132; Cotton MS. Titus B IV, fo. 301; *Acts of the Privy Council, 1616*, II, p. 651.

glove-making maintained "a great Number of Poor, many of which are incapable of following any other Employ."<sup>1</sup> "An abundance of poor people" were employed at making gloves in the Kington-Weobley-Pembridge district of Herefordshire, while in the town of Hereford "many hundred families" were supported by the same occupation.<sup>2</sup> Similarly at Ludlow leather-dressing and glove-making "hath been for many years last past a great support to the poor people dwelling in or near the said Town."<sup>3</sup> Glove-making was also important in parts of Oxfordshire, especially in the Oxford-Woodstock-Witney district which had "always been famous for dressing Alum Leather and making gloves."<sup>4</sup>

Glovers and leather-dressers of western England supplied a national market. London merchants bought leather and gloves at Chester and Bristol; glovers at Hereford, Ross-on-Wye, and Brecon had a "wholesale trade to London" which was probably identical with that of other towns in the region.<sup>5</sup> In addition, a good deal of production must have been sold locally in towns such as Bristol, Chester, Gloucester, and Oxford.

Several factors explain the specialization of this region in the production of light leather and gloves. First, the region was, generally, a pastoral one and supplies of calf skins and sheep skins were available locally for the leather manufacturers. These were supplemented by imports of skins—especially sheep and lamb—from Ireland. The light leather workers of Chester claimed at the end of the seventeenth century that "time out of mind [they] used to import great quantities of sheep skins and lamb skins from Ireland; the manufacturing thereof employed many thousand people. . ."—a claim borne out by an examination of the town's port books. Skins were also imported into Bristol and other western ports. Local manufacturers claimed that Irish skins were "more fit for gloves than those of England," but it is more likely that the light leather industry of western England had outgrown local supplies of skins.<sup>6</sup>

A second reason for the presence of the light leather crafts in some parts

<sup>1</sup> *Commons' Journals*, XI, pp. 766-7.      <sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, XII, pp. 18, 20.      <sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, XI, p. 764.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, XII, pp. 20, 22, 30. See also T. E. Schulz, 'The Woodstock Glove Industry', *Oxoniensia*, III, p. 142.

<sup>5</sup> P.R.O. S.P. 16:377, no. 38; S.P. 14:31; *Commons' Journals*, XII, pp. 20, 482, 547.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, XII, p. 11; P.R.O. E. 190:1324:17; 1332:1. See also A. K. Longfield, *Anglo-Irish Trade in the Sixteenth Century*, 1929, p. 222; P. McGrath (ed.), *Merchants and Merchandise in Seventeenth Century Bristol*, Bristol Records Society, XIX, 1955, pp. 282-5, 286-7, 289-90; T. S. Willan, *Studies in Elizabethan Foreign Trade*, 1959, pp. 83, 86. For the total imports of skins from Ireland in the later seventeenth century, see R. Dunlop, 'A Note on the Export Trade of Ireland in 1641, 1665, and 1669', *Eng. Hist. Rev.*, XXII, 1907, p. 755; *Commons' Journals*, XII, p. 37.

of western England may have been the quality of the water supplies. In the Oxford district the water was such that "all skins of a more delicate kind . . . are so well seasoned with it for the making of white leather, that more whiter, softer nor better is hardly found."<sup>1</sup>

But these considerations were not sufficient to explain the growth of leather-dressing and particularly glove-making serving a national market. On strictly economic grounds it might have been cheaper to carry leather in bulk to London to be manufactured into gloves rather than transport it in the form of made-up goods. However, the social structure of the glove-making regions favoured the development of a local industry. In the words of Dr Thirsk, these regions contained "a populous community of small farmers . . . pursuing a pastoral economy."<sup>2</sup> A non-farming occupation was necessary to supplement the small incomes from agriculture, and the supply of skins from local sources and Ireland, together with the suitability of local leather-dressing materials, and the existence of a national demand for gloves, provided the conditions for a growth of glove-making as a small-scale handicraft. From all accounts glove-making in the west of England was a craft followed by poor workers. Glovers in Shrewsbury eked out "a bare subsistence." Those in Montgomeryshire explained to parliament that their "trades are mean and [provide] but a bare subsistence being dispersed in many hands. . ." Glovers at Chester in the late sixteenth century could afford to buy leather only in small quantities, "never more than 20s. together at one time," and could not expect to make more than four shillings profit a week.<sup>3</sup>

By contrast with light leather manufacturers, tanners in western England seem to have found their markets locally. Nevertheless, they made an important contribution to the local economy, using hides from the surrounding countryside and also Irish imports. In Bristol in the early sixteenth century light leather workers, tanners, and other craftsmen working with heavy leather comprised 17 per cent of the labour force; in Gloucester in the early seventeenth century they comprised about 11 per cent. In both places tanners were able to buy oak bark from iron workers in the Forest of Dean, and it is likely that the existence of iron manufacturing nearby encouraged the growth of tanning. There is also a case for suspecting some connection between leather working and iron working in parts of Shropshire between the

<sup>1</sup> A. Wood, *Survey of the Antiquities of the City of Oxford*, 1661-2, ed. A. Clark, Oxford Historical Society, 1889, p. 395.

<sup>2</sup> Joan Thirsk, 'Industries in the Countryside', *Essays in the Economic and Social History of Tudor and Stuart England*, ed. F. J. Fisher, 1961, pp. 70-1, 86.

<sup>3</sup> *Commons' Journals*, XII, pp. 11, 52; B.M. Harleian MS. 1996, fos. 248-9. The reference is certainly to gross profit.

Severn and Teme Rivers and in the Birmingham–Walsall–Wolverhampton district, where the manufacture of saddles and harnesses created a joint demand for leather and metal goods such as bits, buckles, and stirrup irons. Tanning was one of the leading occupations in sixteenth-century Birmingham, although it was gradually overshadowed by the faster growth of the metal crafts.<sup>1</sup>

In eastern England the leather industry was important in several districts, although probably on a less extensive scale than in the west. One region in which the manufacture of leather was carried on for a national market was the pastoral district of High Suffolk where the industry was ancillary to dairying. Throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries large quantities of tanned hides and calf skins were sent yearly around the coast from East Anglian ports, particularly Ipswich and Woodbridge, to London, where, it was said, the leather was much valued by shoemakers, because it was stronger than any other leather.<sup>2</sup> Far more leather came to London by this route than in any other recorded way.

There were some differences between the Suffolk leather industry and that of the pastoral districts of western England. Suffolk specialized in tanning rather than leather-dressing and glove-making, perhaps because supplies of sheep and lamb skins were not easily obtainable from Ireland to supplement local calf skins. Secondly, there were no outstanding urban centres where the leather crafts were carried on. Ipswich was an important regional market for hides and leather, but in the main tanning was done in the villages of the Suffolk countryside where hides and other tanning materials were readily available. The evidence is sparse, but it seems likely that tanning, as well as the manufacture of cloth, was an important supplement to the pastoral activities of a population consisting mainly of small freeholders.<sup>3</sup>

Moving northwards, Norwich provides an interesting example of the importance of the leather crafts in a large industrial town. Although Norwich

<sup>1</sup> *Commons' Journals*, xi, pp. 758–9; P.R.O. Exchequer Depositions, E. 134:5 Car. I Mich. 14; Longfield, *op. cit.*, p. 222; McGrath, *op. cit.*, pp. 86–7; *Calendar of the Bristol Apprenticeship Book, pt. 1, 1532–42*, Bristol Records Society Publications, xiv, 1949, pp. 199–200; figures for Gloucester recalculated from R. H. and A. J. Tawney, 'An Occupational Census of the Seventeenth Century', *Econ. Hist. Rev.*, v, 1934–5, pp. 36–8; P.R.O. Exchequer, Special Commissions, E. 178:929; E. 178:5304; for the iron industry in Shropshire see H. R. Schubert, *History of the British Iron and Steel Industry*, 1957, pp. 179–80; for Birmingham industries see W. H. B. Court, *The Rise of the Midland Industries*, 1938, pp. 31–2, 34–5; C. Gill, *History of Birmingham*, I, 1952, p. 45.

<sup>2</sup> P.R.O. London Coastal Books. References as in Table I; *Cal. S.P.D. Eliz.*, ccl, p. 561.

<sup>3</sup> P.R.O. Exchequer Depositions, E. 134:43 Eliz. Hil. 18; Exchequer Depositions, E. 134:11. Car. I. Trinity 11 shows the existence of tanning as an occupation in small Suffolk villages; Joan Thirsk, 'Industries in the Countryside', *loc. cit.*, pp. 75–8, 86.

was predominantly a cloth town, it nevertheless contained a large number of leather workers. Between 1548 and 1719, 1,079 leather craftsmen were made freemen of the city—that is just over 10 per cent of the new enrolments; and worsted weavers and leather workers between them formed about 40 per cent of the industrial and commercial population of the city.<sup>1</sup> Over half the leather craftsmen were shoemakers, and it is apparent that most of the leather produced in the city went to meet the demands of the local population for footwear and other leather goods. There was no shortage of hides and skins. Norwich was the second city of the kingdom and consequently a large meat-consuming centre. A “prodigious number of black cattle” were fattened between the Yare and the Waveney for the London and Norwich markets, while the wood-pasture region south-west of Norwich produced calf skins and hides which may have been used by the city’s leather workers.<sup>2</sup>

Farther north again, the leather crafts were of considerable importance in parts of Lincolnshire. Dr Thirsk has remarked that the “marketing of bullocks, calves and leather . . . was one of the pillars of the economy” of the Lincolnshire claylands, and leather was also an important business in the marshlands and fens.<sup>3</sup> The prominence of the industry at Stamford is reflected in the Hall Book. Between 1657 and 1721, eighty of the 637 freemen whose occupations can be identified were associated with the leather industry, nearly half of them being shoemakers.<sup>4</sup> Elsewhere leather workers were to be found in many towns and villages of the country, and numerous inventories of tanners, shoemakers, leather-dressers, and other leather workers have survived.<sup>5</sup> The industry was clearly associated with the grazing and cattle-fattening activities in many parts of the county. There is no evidence that the Lincolnshire leather workers supplied distant markets, although it is possible that they did so.

The West Riding of Yorkshire was a leather-manufacturing district of note in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Although the industry may have started by using local hides, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries tan-

<sup>1</sup> Calculated from *Register of the Freemen of Norwich, 1548-1713*, ed. P. Millican, *passim*.

<sup>2</sup> D. Defoe, *A Tour Through England and Wales*, Everyman ed., 1928, II, pp. 64-5; K. J. Allison, ‘The Sheep-Corn Husbandry of Norfolk in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries,’ *Agric. Hist. Rev.*, v, 1957, pp. 12-13. The Norfolk wood pasture area might well repay study as a possible leather-manufacturing district.

<sup>3</sup> Joan Thirsk, *English Peasant Farming*, 1957, pp. 30, 70-1, 105-6.

<sup>4</sup> Stamford Hall Book, 1657-1721, Stamford Town Hall. This information was kindly supplied by Dr Thirsk.

<sup>5</sup> A by no means exhaustive examination of the inventories kept at the Lincolnshire Archives Office revealed 57 inventories of leather craftsmen, mainly of heavy leather workers. With the cataloguing of inventories on an occupational basis at the L.A.O., it should be possible to conduct some kind of occupational census for the county.

ners were dependent on supplies imported from London. Large quantities of raw hides were carried every year to Hull, and then "vpp Humber and the fresh rivers there to Turnbridge and Bawtrey, and hence by land to our seuerall dwellings within the said West Riding of Yorkshire." This trade was stopped temporarily in 1626 by a proclamation prohibiting the coastal trade in hides and leather. The West Riding tanners then explained that, in the preceding year, they had shipped nearly 5,000 hides from London, which "did much exceed the number which we bought in former years."

"The reason thereof was the great visitacon wch was in London the next yeare before wch hindred vs from buying hides there and so made a great scarcity thereof, and deereness of leather amongst vs . . . and so enforced vs to buy more the last yeare for storing and replenishing of our tan pittes and better serving of our Neighbours with Leather."

Eventually the Yorkshire tanners were permitted to carry 4,000 hides annually from London.<sup>1</sup>

About a sixth of the hides shipped in 1626 was taken to Sheffield where, in the late seventeenth century, leather workers were only less numerous than metal, cloth, and agricultural workers.<sup>2</sup> More information is necessary before it can be said with certainty what was the basis of the West Riding leather industry, but there was probably a connection with iron working which provided a plentiful supply of oak bark. The leather produced seems to have been used locally, and it is probable that the semi-industrial nature of the region with its many cloth and metal workers created a demand for leather for domestic and industrial purposes that could not be met by local supplies of hides.

Elsewhere in Yorkshire the leather crafts were more obviously linked with local agriculture. In many ways Beverley and York were typical of those towns in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries that lacked a distinctive industrial character and where, consequently, the leather industry provided a large proportion of the employment. It was observed of Beverley in the late seventeenth century that the "principal trade of the town is making malt, oatmeal, and tann'd leather." Defoe repeated the remark a few years later and added significantly that he could "find no considerable manufacture carried on there." At one time Beverley had been a prosperous cloth-working town, but this activity had declined during the fifteenth century, leaving the

<sup>1</sup> For the coastal trade in hides between London and Hull see the London Port Books, references as in Table I; P.R.O. S.P. 16:65, no. 45; *Acts of the Privy Council, Dec. 1626, part 1*, pp. 401-2; P.R.O. S.P. 16:65, no. 45; P.C. 2:39, fos. 705, 717-19.

<sup>2</sup> P.R.O. S.P. 16:65, no. 45; E. J. Buckatzsch, 'Occupations in the Parish Registers of Sheffield, 1655-1719', *Econ. Hist. Rev.*, 2nd series, I, 1949, p. 145.

processing of agricultural products from the surrounding countryside as the basis of the town's economy.<sup>1</sup> A similar situation obtained at York. Roughly 20 per cent of the new admissions to the freedom of the city in the second half of the sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries were leather workers. Even when the cloth industry was at its height before the sixteenth century, textile workers did not furnish so large a proportion of freemen as this. York was still one of the largest English cities in the sixteenth century, and most leather and leather goods made there seem to have been used locally. Hides were bought from local butchers, who in turn obtained animals from the mixed farming areas round about, and probably also from the nearby pastoral region of the Galtres forest.<sup>2</sup>

The leather industry played an important part in the economy of Midland England, which specialized in sheep- and cattle-grazing in both enclosed and common fields. Animals were fattened on locally grown grain since transport difficulties restricted the development of corn growing for a national market.<sup>3</sup> As the result of the work of Professor W. G. Hoskins, the importance of tanning in Leicester is well known. By the mid-sixteenth century tanners and other leather craftsmen were the largest industrial group in the town, a position they retained until the mid-seventeenth century, after which their relative importance declined. Both tanners and butchers increased in number during the sixteenth century as grazing was extended in the countryside following enclosure.<sup>4</sup> It is not clear where the leather workers of the city found their markets. No doubt much leather was used locally, but the high proportion of leather workers in the town suggests that they also served more distant markets, as did their neighbours at Northampton.

Like Leicester, Northampton was situated in a sheep- and cattle-raising area and was an important centre of the leather crafts in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. It developed notably as a shoemaking town. Accord-

<sup>1</sup> W. Camden, *Britannia* (republished with additions by E. Gibson, 1695), p. 745; Defoe, *Tours*, II, pp. 236, 238; H. Heaton, *The Yorkshire Woollen and Worsted Industry*, 1920, p. 49. There were extensive cattle grazings near Beverley, on the marshes of the Ouse and Humber, and along the East Riding coast.

<sup>2</sup> *The Freemen of York*, I, 1272-1558; II, 1558-1759, Surtees Society, xcvi, cii; J. N. Bartlett, 'The Expansion and Decline of York in the later Middle Ages', *Econ. Hist. Rev.*, 2nd series, XII, 1959, p. 25; *York City Records*, III, Yorks. Arch. Soc., 1953, p. 7.

<sup>3</sup> J. D. Gould, 'Mr. Beresford and the Lost Villages', *Agric. Hist. Rev.*, III, 1955, p. 112. Also personal communication with Dr Thirsk.

<sup>4</sup> W. G. Hoskins, 'Provincial Towns', *loc. cit.*, pp. 13-15; *Idem*, 'An Elizabethan Butcher in Leicester', *Essays in Leicestershire History*, 1950, p. 114; *Register of the Freemen of Leicester, 1196-1739*, ed. H. Hartopp, 1927, *passim*; *V.C.H. Leicester*, IV, pp. 76, 78, 158. See also Professor Hoskins's review of R. Trow-Smith, *A History of British Livestock Husbandry to 1700*, London, 1957, in *Econ. Hist. Rev.*, 2nd series, X, 1958, pp. 480-2.

ing to the subsidy of 1524 shoemaking was already the leading industrial occupation of the town, but there is no other supporting evidence to suggest that the craft was particularly important before the 1640's. However, by the late seventeenth century the town had become renowned for its footwear; and Fuller commented that "the town of Northampton may be said to stand chiefly on other men's legs; where (if not the best) the most and cheapest boots and stockings are bought in England."<sup>1</sup>

The explanation of this development was not economic, but military and even religious. The town had a long history of puritanism, it occupied a strategic position commanding the land routes between north and south, and between east and west, and it became a vital garrison town for the parliamentary cause in the Civil War. It also possessed shoemakers adequately supplied with local leather. It was natural, therefore, that the shoemakers of the town should receive orders to supply boots and shoes for the New Model Army. Later in the seventeenth century, the town continued to receive military orders to supply the army in Ireland with boots and shoes, for the town was on the direct road route between London and Chester.<sup>2</sup>

The other leather crafts such as tanning and leather-dressing flourished in Northampton and the town contained some fairly wealthy tanners and leather-dressers in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Hides and skins came from the "mani notable sheep pastures and rich feedings for cattle . . .," and oak bark was also found locally. The many tanners and leather-dressers in the town constituted a threat to public health, and throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the local authorities waged war on leather manufacturers who polluted water supplies and left carcasses about in public places. Markets for Northampton leather were found at places as far afield as Stourbridge Fair near Cambridge, and in London.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> I am grateful to Dr A. Everitt for providing me with information about Northampton; Hoskins, 'Provincial Towns', *op. cit.*, p. 13; Inventory evidence; *V.C.H. Northants.*, II, p. 318; *Fuller's Worthies of England*, ed. P. A. Nuttall, 1840, II, p. 498.

<sup>2</sup> For examples of these orders see *Records of the Borough of Northampton*, ed. J. C. Cox, 1898, II, pp. 294-5; *Cal. S.P.D. 1689*, pp. 276, 300.

<sup>3</sup> Information from Dr Everitt, based upon probate inventories; 'The Diary of the Rev. J. Ward, 1648-79', quoted by G. E. Fussell, 'Farming Methods in the Early Stuart Period', *Jnl of Mod. Hist.*, III, no. 1, p. 15; *V.C.H. Northants.*, II, p. 310. In the early seventeenth century the sale of oak bark provided part of the annual revenue from the woodlands on the estates of Lord Brudenell in Northamptonshire and elsewhere.—M. E. Finch, *The Wealth of Five Northamptonshire Families, 1540-1640*, Northants. Rec. Soc. Publications, XIX, 1956, p. 163, n. 4; *Northampton Records*, II, pp. 217, 262, 264, 289, 297-8; P.R.O. Exchequer Memoranda Rolls, E. 159:360, membrane 6. The London trade was of long standing, going back to the fourteenth century. See G. Unwin, *Industrial Organization in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, 1904, p. 19.

In the north Midlands, tanning was a considerable industry at Nottingham in the seventeenth century. There were 47 tanneries by the river Leen in 1667 (compared with 80 in Bermondsey and Southwark a little later), but only 21 in 1707. There was obviously substance in Throsby's comment made in 1790 that "the tanning business was carried on here formerly also, with great advantage to the place; but now in a comparative point of view, that business is of little importance." As in Leicester, Northampton and other Midland towns, the number of butchers in Nottingham was high in relation to the population and there were no difficulties in obtaining hides. Cattle were grazed in pastures near the town and enclosure may have helped to increase the supply of cattle. There was at least one case of a tanner enclosing land for grazing purposes. In the nearby town of Newark, too, tanning was an important occupation in the sixteenth century as a consequence of the prevalence of cattle-grazing in the neighbouring fields.<sup>1</sup>

Turning to the south of England, there is some evidence for believing that the Weald of Kent and Sussex, another well-populated wood-pasture region, was also a leather-manufacturing district. Local grazing provided hides and skins, and supplies were supplemented by occasional shipments from London into Rochester and Maidstone. In addition, there was plenty of oak bark available from the local iron masters, although on occasions tanners became worried that the iron masters might fell oaks too rapidly and so threaten future supplies of bark. Sussex bark was especially suitable for tanning since it had a rather higher tanning content than usual. Leather manufacture seems to have been widely scattered throughout the east Sussex district. A good deal of leather and the leather goods made in this area was exported from Rye and other east Sussex ports, and in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries the Privy Council was frequently occupied with the problem of leather being smuggled from east Sussex ports by tanners. Leather was also taken overland to markets as far distant as Reading.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *V.C.H. Notts.*, II, p. 328; *Thoroton's History of Nottinghamshire* (republished with additions by J. Throsby, 1790), II, p. 131. A similar picture was provided by another local historian, Deering. See J. D. Chambers, *Nottinghamshire in the Eighteenth Century*, 1932, pp. 83-4, 152-3; M. W. Beresford, *The Lost Villages of England*, 1954, p. 189; C. Brown, *History of Newark*, 1904, I, p. 190.

<sup>2</sup> P.R.O. E. 190:2:3; 6:6; 9:1; 48:1; 51:5; 53:2; *Hist. MSS. Comm., Hatfield MSS.*, XIII, p. 24; F. N. Howes, *Vegetable Tanning Materials*, 1953, pp. 85-6; *V.C.H. Sussex*, II, pp. 259-60, lists the chief tanning centres as Henfield, Hurstpierpoint, Cuckfield, Lewes, Barcombe, Mayfield, and Winchelsea. In 1698 the east Sussex leather workers combined to protest against the leather duty of the previous year.—*Commons' Journals*, XII, p. 96. For leather working in Kent see *V.C.H. Kent*, III, p. 375; Willan, *Elizabethan Trade*, p. 77; *Cal. S.P.D.*, 1593-4, pp. 372, 385, 388, 393, 490, 491; P.R.O. P.C. 2:40, fos. 243, 542, 551; *Records of the Borough of Reading*, III, p. 105.

In north-east Kent leather was produced for the London market and raw hides were brought from London for tanning. During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries there was a fairly regular trade between London and Faversham, raw hides being brought into Faversham and tanned hides and calf skins being sent to the metropolis (see Table I). Unfortunately, there is no evidence to show what happened to the hides once they reached Faversham. Conceivably they were carried into the eastern Weald some fifteen miles distant. More likely they were tanned in the Faversham district, which had easy access to supplies of oak bark from the Blean Forest and other woodlands on the Downs. The Faversham region was devoted to corn- and fruit-growing and may not have produced sufficient hides to keep local tanners at work. There can be little doubt that hides were being sent to this region because of a shortage of bark in the metropolitan area. Possibly London tanners were putting work out to the tanners of north-east Kent on a commission

TABLE I<sup>1</sup>

Year	<i>Tanned leather from Faversham to London</i>	<i>Tanned calf skins from Kent ports to London</i>	<i>Raw hides from London to Faversham</i>
	<i>Tanned hides and pieces</i>	<i>Dozens</i>	<i>Hides</i>
Michaelmas 1566-7	—	—	—
„ 1569-70	50	84	—
„ 1573-4	—	—	—
„ 1577-8	710	14	198
„ 1579-80	237	30	549
„ 1582-3	270	7	112
„ 1591-2	—	—	728
„ 1597-8	32	—	—
Christmas 1605-6	—	—	248
„ 1620-1	—	—	350
„ 1636-7	152	—	—
„ 1638-9	252	80	—
„ 1661-2	55	—	382
„ 1665-6	256	—	—
„ 1671-2	59	72	338
„ 1676-7	111	10	330
„ 1680-1	20	43	409
„ 1694-5	31	8½	—

<sup>1</sup> P.R.O. Port Books, E. 190:2:3; 4:3; 6:2; 6:5; 6:6; 7:4; 9:1; 10:6; 13:2; 25:8; 41:2; 42:5; 48:1; 51:5; 53:2; 67:1; 95:10; 151:8.

basis, a type of arrangement that certainly existed in the eighteenth century.<sup>1</sup>

The areas discussed so far do not exhaust those places where the leather crafts figured prominently in the local economy. For example, in Kendal in north-western England six of the twelve guilds in the sixteenth century were directly associated with leather working, and the town was an important regional market for hides and leather.<sup>2</sup> In Durham, to the north-east, four of the town's twelve guilds in the early seventeenth century represented leather workers. Nearby Barnard Castle boasted a considerable manufacture of horse harnesses. There was a double connection with horse-breeding in the district, for as well as manufacturing harnesses, local tanners also worked with horse hides.<sup>3</sup> In Northumberland, the leather crafts were numerous in the seventeenth century at Hexham and a leather market was established in the town in 1662.<sup>4</sup> The basis of the industry was cattle-raising in the pastures of the surrounding countryside. Turning to southern England, Reading was a flourishing manufacturing and trading centre, local supplies of skins being supplemented by supplies bought from London.<sup>5</sup> In south-west England there is reason for believing that the leather crafts played an important part in the local economy and the region would repay detailed examination.<sup>6</sup> In fact, there seems little doubt that a study of several other parts of the country would reveal further the widespread importance of the leather industry in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

Despite the superficial and incomplete nature of this survey, a number of conclusions may be stated. It is obvious that the leather industry was much more important in the economy of Tudor and Stuart England than has generally been supposed. Wherever any kind of statistical examination has been possible the leather crafts—including tanning, leather-dressing, shoemak-

<sup>1</sup> Information from Dr Everitt. Symptomatic of the difficulties of obtaining bark in the London area was the development of specialized bark dealers in the later seventeenth century, collecting bark from the outlying districts. See P.R.O. Chancery Masters' Exhibits, C. 107:110; *V.C.H. Surrey*, II, p. 337.

<sup>2</sup> *Hist. MSS. Com.*, 10th Report, Appendix 4, p. 302; 'A Boke of Recorde of the Burgh of Kirkby Kendal', *Westmorland Antiq. and Arch. Society*, Extra Series 7, 1892, p. 145.

<sup>3</sup> *Durham Civic Memorials*, ed. C. E. Whiting, Surtees Society, 1945, pp. xiv-xv. According to a writer in the *V.C.H. Durham*, II, p. 276, Durham had a "world wide" reputation in leather at the beginning of the nineteenth century; Defoe, *Tours*, II, pp. 223-4.

<sup>4</sup> A. B. Hinds, 'Hexhamshire, pt. i', *A History of Northumberland*, III, 1896, pp. 268-70.

<sup>5</sup> P.R.O. Early Chancery Proceedings, C. 1:1059:70; *Records of the Borough of Reading*, II, pp. 173, 439; III, pp. 35-6. In 1623-8 27 per cent of the new freemen of Reading were leather workers; in 1630-7, 13 per cent.—*Ibid.*, II, pp. 422-32; III, pp. 372-81.

<sup>6</sup> *V.C.H. Wiltshire*, IV, pp. 233-6. In Exeter leather workers formed 8 per cent of the new admissions to the freedom of the city between 1620 and 1640. They were the third largest industrial group after textile workers and building workers, but trading was much more important than industry.—W. T. MacCaffrey, *Exeter 1540-1640*, 1958, p. 163.

ing, currying, glove-making, saddle- and harness-making—appear to have employed not less than about 8–10 per cent of the working population of urban centres; and in some places the proportion was considerably higher and the leather crafts were supplying a national market. The more important leather-manufacturing towns were normally located in stock-producing areas, such as Chester, Leicester, and Northampton. But we also find towns, such as York, located in general agricultural regions, where the leather crafts assumed a large importance in the absence of any other dominant industrial activity. Other towns like London, Norwich, Sheffield, and Coventry contained large numbers of leather craftsmen, but they did not form a particularly large proportion of the work force because of the presence of other industrial and commercial activities.<sup>1</sup> In addition to urban centres, there were some regions where the leather crafts were numerous in the countryside. These included grazing districts in western England, High Suffolk, parts of Lincolnshire, and the Midlands, where hides and skins were freely available. There were obvious advantages in treating hides and skins where they became available, for leather was more durable and lighter than the raw hides and skins from which it was manufactured. There were, in addition, other regions where the location of the leather crafts was determined not merely by the ease of obtaining hides and skins, but also by the supply of oak bark. The leather industry in north-east Kent and the West Riding seems to have been based on this factor, and it may have influenced its location in parts of western England too. It is also possible that the quality of water supplies may have influenced the location of tanning and leather-dressing in one or two places.<sup>2</sup>

The growth of areas specializing in the production of leather or leather goods for a national market cannot be accounted for solely in economic or geographic terms. The growth of shoemaking in Northampton was due more to military and religious factors than anything else. The development of glove-making in western England certainly owed something to the fact that

<sup>1</sup> For Coventry see Hoskins, 'Provincial Towns', pp. 13–14. Despite the relatively minor rôle of the leather crafts in the town, Coventry tanners conducted a trade with London. See P.R.O. Exchequer Memoranda Rolls E. 159:418, membrane 97.

<sup>2</sup> The case of Oxford has been mentioned above. Tanning was said to be absent from the south-east portion of Worcestershire because the water was too hard for leather manufacture. See K. McP. Buchanan, 'Studies in the Localisation of Seventeenth Century Worcestershire Industries, 1600–1650', *Trans. Worcs. Arch. Soc.*, xvii, pp. 42–8. But the evidence is ambiguous. In 1575 it was remarked that "the Chalkie waters of the Chilton hills hath no fellowe [for tanning]."—B.M. Lans. MS. 20, fo. 10. In any case the basic operations for tanning could be modified to suit local water supplies. See J. A. Wilson, *Modern Practice in Leather Manufacture*, 1941, p. 142.

there were plentiful supplies of skins, but it also grew out of the social structure of the region. This was only one pastoral district possessing leather crafts supplying a wide market. In at least two others a similar situation obtained; the wood-pasture district of Suffolk supplied London with tanned leather, and the Weald of east Sussex and west Kent produced leather for export. The evidence, as far as it goes, supports Dr Thirsk's recent thesis on the location of industries in the countryside. However, only detailed local research can adequately reveal the full importance of the leather crafts and explain their location.

One problem that local research might illuminate is whether the importance of the leather industry in the economy waned in the late seventeenth century. This was the case, for example, in Leicester, Chester, and Nottingham, and Macpherson commented on a relative decline in the late eighteenth century. If this decline was general as far back as the late seventeenth century, it possibly reflected a faster growth of other occupations, a precursor, perhaps, of the quickening pace of economic development in the eighteenth century. Certainly as the industrial revolution gained momentum the leather industry gradually slipped from its leading place in the economy. Not only did new and expanding industries eventually produce substitutes for leather for some purposes but the industry did not benefit from new methods of production until after the Napoleonic wars.<sup>1</sup> Even so, the relative decline was slow, and in the early nineteenth century the industry was on the verge of profound changes in organization and techniques.<sup>2</sup> But this is beyond the period of this study. In the 'pre-industrial' England of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the manufacture of leather and leather goods provided employment for large numbers of people and satisfied the demand for a wide range of clothing, household, farm, and industrial goods. The industry relied heavily on English agriculture for its raw materials and was a vital industry in the economy.

<sup>1</sup> Notably rubber in the nineteenth century, but also cheap glass for bottles, and clay for pipes etc. The development of precision engineering also obviated the need to use leather as washers and sleeves in pistons, etc.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, W. G. Rimmer, 'Leeds Leather Industry in the Nineteenth Century', *Publications of the Thoresby Society*, XLVI, Part 2, no. 108 (*Miscellany*, no. 13, part 2), 1961, pp. 119-22.